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More PH farmers to benefit from NFA's eased palay buying standards

MANILA – More Filipino rice farmers are expected to benefit as the National Food Authority (NFA) eased its requirements for palay (unhusked rice) procurement following a public consultation with local farmers,

millers, field officials, and other stakeholders on Feb. 23.

In a phone interview on Thursday, NFA Administrator Larry Lacson said the eased standards would allow the NFA to procure more palay and provide local farmers with

higher income.

Lacson said this is in line with the directive of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to support local farmers as the country approaches the peak harvest for the dry season next month.

(Turn to p. 2)

DepEd allows responsible AI use among learners, teachers nationwide

MANILA –The Department of Education (DepEd) on Wednesday said the use of artificial intelligence (AI) will be allowed in public schools following the issuance of Department Order No. 003, series of 2026, or the Foundational Guidelines on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Basic Education.

In an ambush interview, DepEd Secretary Sonny Angara said AI will be used as

a support tool in learning and teaching.

“May (There’s an) ethical use of AI. Tapos hindi naman natin ipagbabawal ang (We will not prohibit the use of) AI,” he told the Philippine News Agency.

Under the general guidelines issued on Feb. 20, all teaching and non-teaching personnel, as well as learners, will be allowed to explore new tools and methods as

long as they align with “ethical, pedagogical, and human-centered standards” to ensure the overall safety of users.

AI must “strictly function” as an auxiliary tool, and not “replace” the essential role of teachers in the evaluation of learners; and human judgment must remain “paramount” in all educational matters in public schools.

AI tools may also be utilized for the cre-

ation and enhancement of educators’ instructional materials, and serve as an ancillary support for analyzing data, grammar check and citation verification in research and data gathering.

It can also be used in the development of assessment tools for examinations, quizzes, activities and other evaluations, subject to strict supervision, validation and judgment of (Turn to p. 2)



RESPONSIBLE AI USE. Education Secretary Sonny Angara and Valenzuela Mayor Wes Gatchalian visit learners at the Malinta Elementary School in Valenzuela City on Wednesday (Feb. 25, 2026). Angara said the use of artificial intelligence (AI) will be allowed in public schools as long as they align with ethical, pedagogical, and human-centered standards to ensure the overall safety of users. (Photo courtesy of DepEd)

Santa Rosa leads implementation of electronic CRVS system



CALAMBA CITY, Laguna (PIA) — The city government of Santa Rosa, Laguna, has taken the lead in

modernizing civil registration services in the province by implementing electronic Civil Registration

and Vital Statistics (CRVS) system.

The program is being carried out in coordination with the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), which continues to spearhead efforts to modernize civil registration services nationwide.

PSA Laguna Registration Officer Aldrin Salud highlighted that the initiative is part

of the agency’s response to the evolving demands of the time, prioritizing convenience and ease of doing business within the government.

“At our agency, to address the needs of modern times, we have selected municipalities, like Santa Rosa City, that are conducting the pilot implementation (Turn to p.2)

Pag-IBIG investment income jumps to P9.43B in 2025, assets hit P1.23T

MANILA – Pag-IBIG Fund’s investment income rose nearly 50 percent to PHP9.43 billion in 2025, bolstering the agency’s financial position and supporting affordable home financing and growing member savings.

In a news release on Wednesday, the state-run home lender said the stronger earnings lifted its overall fi-

nancial standing, with total assets reaching PHP1.23 trillion as of end-2025.

Its gross investment portfolio climbed to PHP190.13 billion, up PHP55.27 billion, or 41 percent, from year-end 2024.

A significant portion of the portfolio was invested in government securities, while the remainder was placed (Turn to p.4)

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public school teachers.

In terms of classification, AI applications used for grading, admissions, scholarship, and disciplinary actions are considered “high-risk” and must only be permitted under strict safeguards and human oversight.

AI applications with learners and staff interaction, such as chatbots for administrative queries, and AI tools for spam filters, grammar correction and IT automation, are considered limited to minimal risk AI, respectively.

Responsible use

Angara said the direction would entail a more responsible use for both learners and teachers.

“We just need the students to disclose how they use AI para ma-integrate siya (so that it can be integrated) into their learning,” he said.

As a result, learners must submit their outputs alongside citations of AI tools and how they were used in their brainstorming, writing, research, creation of presentations, and even homework support.

Some of these applications are ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Grammarly, Quillbot, Canva, Tome and Khanmigo, among others.

“It’s a graduated policy; the more independent learners will be given greater latitude,” Angara said.

The DepEd, however, imposes a prohibition

against the use of AI applications that pose significant risks to the rights, safety, and well-being of learners and education stakeholders.

Among the prohibited applications are AI systems using biometric or emotion recognition, biometric categorization, manipulative chatbots for minors, social scoring, and untargeted facial recognition scraping or the indiscriminate collection and use of facial images from public and private sources.

Overall, the DepEd deems it inappropriate if AI tools are used as a substitute for human participation and decision-making, as a sole source of data, and as a mechanism for biometric emotion recognition and other related features that might compromise the safety and privacy of learners.

In January, the DepEd launched the Project AGAP.AI (Accelerating Governance and Adaptive Pedagogy through Artificial Intelligence) to raise awareness and advanced AI literacy for its integration in basic education.

At least 1.05 million learners, 300,000 teachers, and 150,000 parents in the country are targeted to be reached for a funded AI skills training program in partnership with the ASEAN Foundation and Google.org. (PNA)

MORE PH. . . FR. P. 1

“Sabi nila, ‘Bakit naman ang higpit-higpit ng requirements ni NFA?’ So, ito ‘yung tugon, ginawan natin ng pagbabago para mas maging acceptable yung maraming palay (They asked, ‘Why are NFA’s requirements so rigid?’ This is our response. We made changes to ensure that more palay would be acceptable),” he told the Philippine News Agency.

The NFA recalibrated its acceptable moisture content from the current 12 percent to 14 percent, to a minimum of 11 percent for clean and dry palay.

The acceptable moisture content for fresh and wet palay, meanwhile, is at 22 percent to 29.9 percent.

Lacson said the moisture content refers to the weight of water within the palay grains, and the current benchmark often leads to rejected or delayed palay deliveries from local farmers.

“May corresponding increase ‘yung (pre-syo) ng ibang category ng palay dahil sa bagong sistema... Lesser ang mare-reject sa mga magsasaka (There will be a corresponding increase in price for the other palay categories because of the new system... There will be less rejected palay from farmers),” he said.

The NFA currently buys clean and dry palay for PHP21 per kg., and PHP17 per kg. for fresh and wet palay.

Lacson, however, explained that the new standard will use a “graduated” table with a corresponding price reduction, depending on the weight of wet palay, particularly in NFA warehouses with dryers.

“Imagine the hassle na babalik pa ang magsasaka, patutuyuin pa tapos ibebenta. So, iyon ‘yung sinolve na-

tin. Ngayon, hindi na siya pauuwin. Kunwari, 14.5 percent, bawasan na lang weight, ‘yung 0.5 percent, ibawas lang. So, hindi siya PHP17 – probably magiging PHP20 or PHP19.50. Mayroon tayong table na susundan (Imagine the hassle if the farmer needs to go back to dry the palay first, and then sell it again. That is what we solved. Now, they don’t need to go home. For instance, the moisture content is 14.5 percent, so just reduce the weight, the 0.5 percent. It will not be PHP17 per kg., probably it will be PHP20 or PHP19.50. We have a table to refer to),” he said.

“Mas magkakaroon sila ng additional na kita kung ikukumpara mo sa current system namin ngayon (they have additional income compared to the current system).”

Besides a more flexible moisture content requirement, the NFA also relaxed its pest standards.

Lacson said they will now allow the purchase of palay that is “visibly-free” from pests.

“Meaning kapag may makita na talagang negligible naman, isa o dalawang piraso e pwede na ring tanggapin, hindi (If it is negligible, one or two pieces, that would be acceptable. It will no longer be an outright rejection.”

Meanwhile, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the NFA’s procurement changes align with the food security targets of the Marcos administration.

“President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has been clear. We want farmers to be profitable, not perpetually vulnerable to price swings. A food-secure Philippines starts with farmers who earn fairly from their harvest,” he said in a statement. (PNA)

STA ROSA . . . FR. P. 1

of the E-CRVS, or what we call the electronic CRVS, which aims to speed up the civil registration process.

Likewise, we are strengthening internet connections in our offices to make PSA services more efficient,” Salus stated during the Philippine Information Agency’s radio program.

Under the electronic CRVS system, civil registry documents are digitized and stored in a centralized database, allowing authorized personnel to retrieve and verify records in real time. This reduces manual paperwork, minimizes errors, and shortens processing time for applicants.

Santa Rosa’s shift to a digital platform is part of the city’s broader push for e-governance and smart city initiatives. By adopting electronic CRVS, the local government ensures better data management, improved records security, and enhanced coordination

with national agencies.

“In the province of Laguna, the City of Santa Rosa is included in the first batch of implementation, and they are the very first in the province to roll it out,” Salud adds.

Through the upgraded system, residents can expect reduced waiting times and more reliable access to their civil documents. The digital records also support government planning and policymaking, as accurate and up-to-date vital statistics are essential for designing social services, healthcare programs, and educational initiatives.

With Santa Rosa at the forefront of electronic CRVS implementation in Laguna, other local government units in the province are expected to follow suit, paving the way for a more efficient and technology-driven civil registration system across the region. (AM/PIA CALABARZON)

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**A joyful heart is good
medicine, But a crushed spirit
saps one’s strength**

Proverbs 17:22



Cavite Career Caravan offers expanded opportunities for Caviteños

The Office of the Provincial Public Employment Service Manager (OP-PESM), headed by Ms. Rizalie Pinpin-Enero, collaborated with the local government of Cavite City, under the leadership of Mayor Denver R. Chua, for the successful run of the Cavite Career Caravan in Cavite City on February 19, offering a wide-array of opportunities for Caviteño jobseekers.

The initiative successfully brought together 330 registered job seekers, 40 local, and 3 international companies offering a total of 12,419 job vacancies. A total of 30 applicants were hired on the spot. Additionally, 11 national government agencies were present to assist participants in updating their records. These agencies included the Philippine Statistics Authority, Social Security System, PAGIBIG Fund, Department of Trade and Industry, Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth), National Bureau of Investigation, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, Bureau of Internal Revenue, Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Integrated Bar of the Philippines, and the Office of the Provincial Cooperatives Development Officer for those interested in cooperative, livelihood and entrepreneurial programs.

Career coaching was also provided for jobseekers, covering topics such as resume writing, acing job interviews, and avoiding illegal recruitment practices. The initiative was particularly valuable for recent graduates, offering them a strong start in their job search.

The event was supported by Ms. Marivic B. Martinez, Director II of the DOLE-Cavite Provincial Office, and City Councilor Emily Misenas Tirona, Chairperson on the Committee on Labor and Employment.--- OPIO



Gentriseños benefit from medical and dental mission in Javalera

A total of 436 residents benefitted from free health services during the Medical and Dental Mission conducted by the Provincial Government of Cavite on February 18, at Javalera Elementary School in Brgy. Javalera, City of General Trias.

The outreach program was organized by the Provincial Government of Cavite through the Office of the Provincial Governor, in coordination with the Office of the Provincial Health Officer. The GEAMH Team led the medical services, while the General Trias Dental Team provided dental



1st Quarter RMFPC Meeting strengthens forest and environmental protection efforts

The 1st Quarter Meeting of the Regional Multi-sectoral Forest Protection Committee (RMFPC) was successfully held on February 19 at the New Provincial Government Center, Trece Martires City, reaffirming the region’s collective commitment to forest and environmental protection.

Governor Francisco Gabriel “Abeng” Remulla delivered his message of support, emphasizing the importance of sustained collaboration among national agencies, local government units, and partner stakeholders in safeguarding the province’s natural resources. He underscored that protecting forests is a shared responsibility that requires proactive action, strong enforcement, and community participation.

Cavite PENRO Januel R. Peras also conveyed his message, highlighting the continuing initiatives and collaborative efforts being undertaken to strengthen environmental programs and forest protection strategies in the region.

The meeting was formally opened by OPENRO Anabelle L. Cayabyab, Chairperson of the RMFPC, setting the tone for a productive and action-oriented discussion.

A key highlight of the meeting was the presentation of accomplishment reports from the different sub-committees in relation to Forest and Environmental Protection. The Philippine Coast Guard and the Philippine Air Force reported their intensified law enforcement operations and monitoring activities aimed at curbing illegal environmental practices. Meanwhile, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) highlighted livelihood initiatives designed to provide sustainable economic opportunities to communities, reducing dependence on forest resources. The Provincial Government Environment and Natural Resources Office - Laguna (PGENRO - Laguna) shared updates on its Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) campaigns that promote environmental awareness and responsible stewardship. Additionally, the Department of Justice Region IV-A presented policy review measures to ensure that legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms remain responsive and effective in addressing environmental concerns.

The meeting concluded with a renewed commitment from member agencies to further strengthen coordination, enhance enforcement strategies, and promote sustainable programs that will safeguard forest resources and preserve the environment for future generations.--- OPIO

care. The activity was supported by the AMIGA District Hospital, Barangay Health Workers, and Punong Barangay Teodulo Romero.

Of the total beneficiaries, 337 residents received medical consultations, while 39 availed of dental services. Fifty-two individuals underwent Fasting Blood Sugar (FBS) testing, and four patients each received X-ray and ECG procedures. Free medicines were likewise distributed to all qualified beneficiaries.

The activity forms part of the provincial government’s continuing efforts to bring essential health services closer to communities and to ensure that every Caviteño has access to timely and quality medical care.--- OPIO

Proposed open finance bill to address inequities in education sector

MANILA – The Tingog Party-list on Wednesday expressed its full support for the immediate passage of the proposed Philippine Open Finance Act, joining the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) and leaders in the financial technology sector in advancing a reform aimed at broadening access to financial services for millions of Filipinos – including students, faculty and personnel in higher education institutions nationwide.

Tingog Party-list Rep. Jude Acidre, chairperson of the House Committee on Higher and Technical Education, said open finance is not merely a financial sector reform but also a structural reform that addresses inequities long felt in the education sector.

“Financial inclusion is educational inclusion. When students, teachers, and university personnel gain fair access to credit, savings, insurance, and digital financial platforms, we remove structural barriers that limit their ability to pursue education, research, innovation, and professional advancement,” Acidre said in a statement.

The BSP has emphasized that open finance will promote transparent, customer-centric and interoperable financial services.

Stakeholders in the fintech sector have likewise called for a clear statutory framework that enables secure, consumer-authorized data sharing to



FINANCIAL AID. College students from various tertiary schools in Albay receive financial assistance from the provincial government of Albay on March 7, 2025. The Tingog Party-list on Wednesday (Feb. 25, 2026) calls for the immediate passage of the proposed Philippine Open Finance Act that seeks to broaden access to financial services for millions of Filipinos – including students, faculty and personnel in higher education institutions nationwide (Photo courtesy of Albay Provincial Information

unlock more responsive and competitive financial products.

The proposed measure establishes a secure, interoperable system for consent-driven financial data sharing. It codifies consumer data rights, mandates the use of secure application programming interfaces (APIs), and promotes competition and innovation while safeguarding data privacy and security.

Acidre said the higher education community stands to benefit significantly.

Through the measure, students may gain access to education loans, digital wallets, micro-savings, and insurance products—even without traditional banking history; faculty and researchers may access fair credit and financial tools to support academic work, innovation, and professional development; non-teaching personnel, many of whom remain financially underserved, can build credit profiles and access affordable financial services;

and state universities and colleges (SUCs) can adopt more efficient systems for scholarships, stipends, payroll, and broader financial inclusion initiatives.

Acidre said the proposed law incorporates strong safeguards consistent with the Constitution and the Data Privacy Act, ensuring that consumer consent, control, and protection remain central to implementation.

“Para sa Tingog Party-list, ang Open Finance Act ay batas ng pagkakataon at pagkakatantay-pantay. Nakikiisa kami sa Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas at sa fintech sector sa pagsusulong ng makabago at inklusibong sistemang pinansyal. Kapag mas inklusibo ang pananalapi, mas nagiging inklusibo rin ang edukasyon – at ito ang diwa ng Bagong Pilipinas (For Tingog Party-list, the Open Finance Act is a law on equal opportunity. We are on with the BSP and the fintech sector in pushing for a modern and inclu-

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in time deposits, corporate bonds and preferred shares.

Officials said these instruments are subjected to rigorous review and established safeguards.

Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development Secretary Jose Ramon Aliling, who also chairs the Pag-IBIG Fund Board of Trustees, said the agency’s investment growth reflects its commitment to responsible stewardship of members’ savings.

“Through sound governance and prudent financial management, we continue to strengthen Pag-IBIG Fund’s financial position and secure its long-term stability.

This allows us to grow our members’ savings, deliver competitive returns, and sustain affordable home loans under the Expanded 4PH program,” Aliling said.

Of the agency’s total assets, housing-related assets accounted for PHP922.07 billion, while PHP96.41 billion were in short-term loans.

Income-generating investments totaled PHP190 billion, with the remaining PHP25.98 billion in other assets such as property and equipment, cash, and intangible assets.

Pag-IBIG Fund Chief Executive Officer _____ sive financial system. If finance is inclusive, education will also be inclusive – and this is the spirit of the New Philippines,” Acidre said. (PNA)

Marilene Acosta said investment decisions are undertaken within a strong governance framework designed to protect members’ savings.

“All our investments are lawful, prudent, and fully compliant with our internal protocols and Board-granted authorities, with regular reporting to the Board to ensure transparency and accountability,” Acosta said.

She assured members that funds are managed with safety and sustainability in mind.

Stronger investment income supports the agency’s mandate to provide competitive dividends while sustaining housing and

SSS... FR. P. 5

more programs that can assist our members,” Finance Secretary Frederick Go said.

Last year, SSS announced that it will implement a Pension Reform Program that features a structured, three-year pension increase for all of its pensioners.

After three years, pensions will rise about 33 percent for retirement or disability pensioners and 16 percent for death or survivor pensioners.

Microloan program

On top of this, SSS will launch a microloan program.

“The microloan is really our answer to predatory lending,” Go said.

The board-approved program offers short-term loans at 8 percent annual interest and is set for rollout in the

short-term loan programs nationwide, she added.

Under its charter, Pag-IBIG Fund returns at least 70 percent of its annual net income to members as dividends.

In 2024, it declared dividend rates of 6.60 percent for Regular Savings and 7.10 percent for Modified Pag-IBIG 2 (MP2) Savings, which is the highest since the pandemic.

The agency is expected to announce its 2025 dividend rates on Friday.

Pag-IBIG Fund said it remains focused on growing members’ savings while keeping home financing accessible to more Filipino families. (PNA)

second quarter through partner banks.

“The strong performance of the SSS allows the SSS to come up with programs like this microloan,” Go said.

No contribution hike
Despite enhanced benefits, SSS said there will be no contribution hike.

“The last contribution increase was January last year. That was the last tranche in the increase that was part of RA (Republic Act) 1119 or the revised SSS law,” De Claro said.

“So hanggang doon na lang po ‘yan. So wala sa charter ng SSS ang mag-increase ka ng contribution (That’s it. The contribution increase is not in the SSS charter),” he added. (PNA)

Draw close to God and He will
Draw close to you

Veterinary post in every LGU key to curbing rabies – expert

MANILA – Ensuring that every local government unit (LGU) has a designated municipal veterinarian is crucial in lowering rabies cases and strengthening disease prevention efforts, a veterinary medicine specialist said Thursday.

University of the Philippines Los Baños College of Veterinary Medicine Dean Dr. Maria Amelita Estacio underscored that having a veterinarian at the municipal, city and provincial levels allows LGUs to plan and implement programs addressing animal welfare, prevention and treatment of animal diseases, including rabies, African swine fever and avian influenza.

“Una-una sa lahat, kaya maganda na may veterinarian sa municipal level, provinces and cities kasi (To start with, it’s beneficial to have veterinarians in every municipality, province, and city because) you can come up with different activities addressing animal welfare concerns and animal diseases,” Estacio told Philippine News Agency on the sidelines of the UP National Institutes of Health 28th Anniversary Conference at the Ramon Magsaysay Research Center in Manila.

She noted that rabies prevention, in particular, requires organized and sustained vaccination campaigns, which can only be effectively carried out if there is a designated point per-



DOCTOR IS IN. A veterinarian spays a domestic cat at the Camp Aguinaldo covered court on March 27, 2025, a project of the Quezon City local government. University of the Philippines Los Baños College of Veterinary Medicine Dean Dr. Maria Amelita Estacio on Thursday (Feb. 26, 2026) said having a veterinarian at the municipal, city and provincial levels allows local government units to plan and implement programs addressing animal welfare, prevention and treatment of animal diseases. (PNA photo by Joan Bondoc)

son in charge of animal health.

“With the veterinarian in a municipality, the doctor would be able to survey how many dogs and cats there are, plan how many vaccines are needed, and schedule vaccinations in the different barangays,” she said.

“The possibility of lowering the rabies cases is high with a veterinarian in the municipality.”

At present, veterinarian positions are commonly available in provinces, cities and first-class municipalities, following a circular from the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG).

However, many second- to sixth-class municipalities still lack permanent veterinary posts.

Without a municipal veterinarian, the expert said there is no dedicated official to plan and oversee

animal health programs, creating a gap in the so-called “One Health” approach that links animal health, human health and environmental health.

“If you do not have a point person for animal health in that municipality, then one important sector is missing in addressing overall public health,” she said.

The presence of a municipal veterinarian is also vital during disasters such as floods and volcanic eruptions, she added, citing the need for rescue, treatment and temporary shelter for affected animals.

Animal welfare responsibilities include stray dog and cat management, which has direct implications on rabies control.

The expert said LGUs should have ordinances requiring pet registration, vaccination, and responsible ownership, as well as animal shelters to manage strays.

SSS reserve fund on track to grow to P2 trillion by 2030

MANILA – The state-run Social Security System (SSS) is on track to grow its reserve fund to PHP2 trillion in three to four years, SSS President and CEO Robert Joseph de Claro said Thursday.

“I think we have that trajectory. As you know we came from the pandemic. The exponential growth after the pandemic is big,” De Claro said in a briefing.

“But I think the road to PHP2 trillion is getting nearer. I think we are on track within the next three to four years to reach PHP2 trillion,” he added.

“Risk din kasi ‘yan na pagala-gala ang strays. Mas maganda kung may shelter ang municipality at may measures kung paano aalagaan ang mga ito (Having strays roaming the streets is a risk. It’d be much better if the local government provided a shelter and a clear plan for their care),” she said, stressing the need for budget allocations for vaccination, deworming, feeding and health checks.

To attract and retain veterinarians in LGUs, the specialist emphasized the importance of competitive compensation, permanent or tenured positions, and strong support from local chief executives.

“Bukod sa salary, dapat may budget din for activities. Mahirap kung may plano ka pero hindi naman ma-implement, (Aside



IMPROVED BENEFITS. Finance Secretary Fredrick Go (right) and SSS President and CEO Robert Joseph de Claro hold a press briefing at the SSS office in Quezon City on Thursday (Feb. 26, 2026). Go said SSS’ net income, which reached PHP142.9 billion, will allow the state-run social insurance program to further provide benefits to its members. (PNA photo by Leah Gonzales)

In 2025, SSS’ reserve fund reached PHP1.065 trillion, while total assets rose 22.1 percent to PHP1.261 trillion. Net income hit a record

PHP142.970 billion.

“It’s clear that because of all the good performance of the SSS, it gives the SSS the capacity to give (Turn to p.4)

from salary, there should also be a budget for activities. It’s difficult if you have plans but cannot implement them),” she said, adding that permanent plantilla positions ensure continuity of programs even with changes in administration.

She also recommended that a municipal veterinary office be composed of a senior veterinarian, junior veterinarians, and trained support staff to cover all barangays effectively.

While there is no fixed veterinarian-to-animal ratio due to varying animal populations across provinces, the expert said areas with dense livestock and poultry production require stronger veterinary presence to ensure food safety and disease control.

Ultimately, she said institutionalizing a

“one vet, one municipality” policy would significantly help reduce rabies incidence, especially during peak months.

Animals and communities can better be protected against rabies with an organized vaccination program and a dedicated team in place in LGUs, she added.

The Department of Health (DOH) has recorded 260 rabies cases nationwide from Jan. 1 to Sept. 20, 2025.

It noted that 95 percent of these infections were linked to animals that were unvaccinated or had unknown vaccination status.

From 2020 to 2024, the DOH logged a total of 1,750 rabies deaths.

The agency has yet to release updated nationwide data on rabies cases. (PNA)

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Gilas falls to New Zealand in FIBA WCQ clash

MANILA – A gallant endgame from Gilas Pilipinas fell short as New Zealand escaped with a 69-66 win in the FIBA World Cup Qualifiers on Thursday night at the SM Mall of Asia Arena.

Dwight Ramos' final hurrah was not enough as the Tall Blacks needed an escape, even if they did a great job holding down Justin Brownlee.

Down 57-66, Gilas went on a 7-0 run that cut the deficit down to two, 64-66, with 47 seconds remaining.

The Filipinos came close to a crucial stop when they forced New Zealand to a contested three from Sam Mennenga that he missed.

However, the Tall



Dwight Ramos and Justin Brownlee (File Photo)

Blacks secured crucial offensive rebounds, leading to a Yann Wetzell putback with 13.8 seconds left for a 68-64 count.

Ramos then scored a putback layup off a Calvin Oftana miss to cut the gap back to two with 8.1 seconds left, and Reuben Te Rangi kept the door open for Gilas when he split his charities.

Ramos tried to force overtime, but his long triple from beyond the PBA's four-point range rimmed out as time expired.

Max Darling led the Tall Blacks, who finally won a game in the qualifying phase after a 0-2 first window against Australia, with 11 points on 4-of-6 shooting.

Filipino IM beats Indian rival in Pacquiao International Open chess

MANILA – Filipino International Master (IM) Christian Gian Karlo Arca on Thursday defeated Indian Grandmaster Pa Inyan to gain a share of second place after six rounds in the Manny Pacquiao International Open at the Family Country Hotel in General Santos City.

The Zamboanga City-based Arca now has 4.5 points, the same score of Bulgarian GM Arkadij Naiditsch, Singaporean GM Tin Jingyao, Filipino IM Chito Garma, Swiss GM Peng Li Min, Swedish GMs Vitaly Sivuk and Platon Galperin and Indian GM Visakh N R.

Mennenga and Alex McNaught each scored 10 points, with Mennenga adding 14 rebounds.

Ramos ended up with 16 points, eight rebounds, one assist, two steals, and one block for Gilas in a game where Brownlee was held to only four points on 2-for-10 shooting. (PNA)



International Master Christian Gian Carlo Arca (Contributed photo)

"I hope I can sustain the momentum," said Arca, who split the points with top seed Norwegian GM Johan-Sebastian Christiansen in the fourth round before beating compatriot Sherwin Tiu in the fifth.

Indonesian GM Novendra Priasmoro set-

led for a draw with Indian GM Visakh N R to remain on top with 5.0 points.

Organized by Pacman Chess Association, the five-day Standard (90 minutes plus 30 seconds increment time control format) event offers USD20,000 to the champion. (PNA)

tics out of the environment."

For her part, Arugaan executive director Innes Fernandez said: "Consumers are advised to read the product label very carefully as some products marketed for cleaning the skin of young children, particularly the baby's hands, mouth and bottom, may contain allergy-causing substances."

Fernandez advised parents to opt for safer alternatives.

"Better stick to lukewarm water, mild soap, and cotton balls for routine diaper changes, saving wet wipes for when you're on the go and water isn't handy," she added.

Based on the groups' hazardous product monitoring on Feb. 22, these products were found to list MCI/MI as ingredients and were sold for as low as PHP15 to PHP53 per pack: Animo 123 Kid's Baby Wipes; Animo Baby Wipes; Animo Happy Baby Baby Wipes; Animo Magic Fresh Baby Wipes; Kim Best Baby Wipes; Mama Baby Wipes; and New Lovedcare Baby Tender Baby Wipes.

Of the seven products flagged, six are set to expire in 2028 and one in 2027.

MCI/MI, a preservative combination used against bacteria, molds and yeast in personal care products, is a known potent cause of allergic contact dermatitis.

According to the Philippine Dermatological Society, contact dermatitis is a skin inflammation or eczema triggered by substances that come in contact with the skin, which may be chemical, biological, or physical agents.

To reduce children's exposure to sensitizing chemicals, the groups advised parents to use lukewarm water, mild soap and cotton balls for cleaning babies, and to use wet wipes only when water is unavailable.

If opting for wet wipes, consumers should check for valid FDA authorization through the agency's product verification portal, read labels carefully, avoid products containing MCI/MI, reject items without ingredient lists or expiry dates, choose alcohol-free and unscented variants, avoid using wipes on broken skin, and rinse with water after use to remove possible chemical residues.

Consumers are also urged to properly dispose of used wipes to prevent clogged pipes, damaged recyclables and marine pollution. (PNA)

FDA urged to look into allergy-causing preservatives in wet wipes

MANILA – A breastfeeding advocacy group and environmental watchdog on Thursday reminded mothers and caregivers to scrutinize the ingredients of wet wipes, warning that some products being sold may contain banned preservatives linked to skin allergies.

The reminder came following discovery of seven brands of baby wipes containing methylchloroisothiazolinone (MCI) and methylisothiazolinone (MI) being sold in at least three retail establishments in Antipolo City.

The products were manufactured in 2025, beyond the 2018 grace period for the removal of

MCI/MI on leave-on cosmetics as provided under Food and Drug Authority (FDA) Circular 2017-006 and reiterated in FDA Advisory 2018-034.

The EcoWaste Coalition said it has already informed the FDA about the alleged breach of the ban on MCI/MI on leave-on cosmetics and requested appropriate action to protect young consumers from allergy-causing substances.

EcoWaste Coalition national coordinator Aileen Lucero urged the public to minimize the use of wet wipes in relation to environmental concerns.

"It's indeed better to minimize the use of wet wipes as most of them contain plastic fibers that



CAUTION ON BABY WIPES. Various brands of baby wipes are displayed alongside a "Caution" sign in this undated photo. Advocacy groups on Thursday (Feb. 26, 2026) warned that they contain methylchloroisothiazolinone and methylisothiazolinone which are preservatives linked to allergic contact dermatitis and banned on leave-on cosmetics. (Photo courtesy of EcoWaste Coalition)

don't break down easily, contributing to residual waste and the so-called 'fatbergs' in the sewer

system," Lucero said.

"Every wet wipe you don't use helps keep plastics and microplas-