

Balangay bill passage seen before Victory in Mactan revelry

MANILA -- A lawmaker on Thursday lauded the early approval of a bill declaring the Balangay as the national boat of the Philippines as it came right in time for the launch of the 500-day countdown to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Victory in Mactan and the First Circumnavigation of the World in 2021.

Agusan del Norte Rep. Lawrence Fortun, the principal author of House Bill 4953, said the measure aims to recognize the historical and cultural significance of the Balangay, as well as the ideals, values, and traditions it embodies.

"We are most hopeful that once the bill reaches the Senate, our good Senators will promptly approve the measure next year, just in time for the Quincentennial celebration in 2021," Fortun said.

"The Balangay shall now have its rightful place not only in the museums but most importantly, in the hearts and minds of every Filipino. The Balangay, from which the word 'barangay' was derived will now be an official symbol of community, camaraderie, courage, bravery, ingenuity, and resilience that every Filipino can identify with," Fortun added.

The bill seeks to declare the Balangay, also known as the Butuan Boat, including all other similar boats that may be discovered later elsewhere in the country, as the national boat of the Philippines.

The Balangay was the first-ever and the oldest wooden watercraft excavated in Southeast Asia demonstrating early Filipinos' boatbuilding genius and seafaring expertise in the pre-colonial times.

The ancient boat was utilized by early Filipinos to maintain trade relations and friendship with neighboring

countries and empires in Southeast Asia and as far as China as early as the 10th and 11th centuries.

Replicas of the Balangay will sail on a symbolic voyage as part of the launch of the 500-day countdown to the quincentennial celebration where the boat has been officially included part of the program by the Philippine National Quincentennial Committee.

The House of Representatives also approved on final reading a bill declaring the Walingwaling orchid as the National Orchid of the

MANILA -- The Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) and the newly-established Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) have signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) on the provision of decent and affordable housing to farmers and farm workers.

In a media interview Wednesday, DAR Secretary John Castriaciones said the plan, dubbed as Building Adequate, Livable, Affordable and Inclusive Filipino Communities Program (BALAI), stemmed from the pressing issue on "halfhearted farmers who would rather wish to work abroad than continue farming."

"When you go to the countryside, you will see a lot of our farmers live in barung-barong. They would like to leave farming already kaya mas gusto nila mamasukan or mag abroad kasi their lives aren't improving (they would rather work abroad because their lives are not improving)," he said.

"Kapag ang pamilya ay may bahay siguradong mag iiba ang pananaw (If farmers

have their own homes, they would change their perspectives), housing for the farmers might change the situation of our country. [As what the president said], the weakest link in our economy is the agricultural sector, most of the farmers are halfhearted," he added.

The program is in compliance with the directive of President Rodrigo R. Duterte under Executive Order No. 5 issued on Oct. 11, 2016, ordering all government departments, among others, to have their plans consistent with "Ambisyon Natin 2040".

The DSHUD will act as the primary national government entity responsible for the management of housing, human settlements, and urban development, primarily focusing on the access to and the affordability of basic human needs.

DSHUD Secretary Eduardo del Rosario said the department shall develop and adopt a national strategy to immediately address the provision of adequate and affordable housing to all Filipinos.

Lawyer Emily Padil-

la, Agrarian Reform Undersecretary for Support and Services, said the proposed housing plan for the farmers is designed by the United Architects of the Philippines and Philippine Institute of Architects.

The cost of the proposed housing units, that were designed to be disaster resilient, range from PHP250,000 to PHP580,000. However, the farmers can design their own houses according to their preferences and at any cost, she added.

"There are six pilot areas for the project including Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya; San Leonardo, Nueva Ecija; Tuy, Batangas; Daet, Camarines Norte; Argaon, Cebu; and Davao City," she said.

The farmer-beneficiaries will apply for housing loans in Pag-IBIG payable in the maximum period of 30 years.

She also called on other farmers to enlist in the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA) and join organizations to access agriculture-related programs and services, including the

"The majestic plant perched atop a tall tree and enjoying the elements of the earth symbolizes the high aspirations of the Filipino. It is never choosy in its growing environs," Garcia said.

"Such quality can be a resiliency of the Filipinos. It does not shy away from symbolic relationships with the dipterocarps (tall forest trees). Such characteristics are symbolic of Filipino independence," he added.

Both bills were unanimously approved on third reading on Wednesday. (PNA)

Eleazar gets 3-star rank; vows strong anti-drug drive

MANILA -- Philippine National Police (PNP) Directorial Staff chief Guillermo Eleazar on Thursday vowed to further intensify the anti-drug campaign as he formally received the rank of Lieutenant General (three-star).

"Having seen the success of the President's war against illegal drugs, I, in my personnel and current official capacity shall intensify my efforts to win as many battles in this war (against illegal drugs)," Eleazar said in his speech after the oath-taking and donning ceremonies in Camp Crame.

Eleazar cited the crackdown not only on the drug suspects but also against the narco cops.

"Today, after decades of uncertainty, fear, and terror, the Filipino is beginning to enjoy peace of mind, a priceless commodity, a constitutional right, a heavenly gift that has

can scan only 25 containers per hour, or 600 containers per day, and one pallet and cargo X-ray used for scanning boxes and crates.

MICP District Collector Guillermo Pedro Francia IV said with this enhanced inspection capacity, the MICP is ever more ready to protect the Philippine borders from illicit trade, illegal drugs, and contraband.

With about three thousand shipments passing through the MICP every day, he said the new X-ray machine will ensure a balance between trade facilitation and stringent border protection.

The BOC said the portal design allows container trucks to move through the X-ray machine as opposed to the mobile X-ray design where the machine has to move along the length of a container.

eluded us for a long, long time," he said.

One of his accomplishments as NCRPO chief was the alliance among the government's anti-illegal drugs law enforcement groups through the Quad-Intel Force -- composed of the NCRPO, Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA)-NCR, National Bureau of Investigation (NBI)-NCR, and the military's Joint Task Force NCR against drug lords operating in Metro Manila, particularly convicted drug lords who are detained at the New Bilibid Prison (NBP).

"I personally declared war against the big-time drug lords and cartels when I joined hands with BuCor [Bureau of Corrections] Director General Gerald Bantag in demolishing the 'kubols' in the Bilibid a few months back," Eleazar said in his speech.

"In the process,

BOC installs 2 new X-ray machines at MICP

MANILA -- The Bureau of Customs (BOC) on Thursday installed two portal-type X-ray machines at the Manila International Container Port (MICP).

Customs Commissioner Rey Leonardo Guerrero led the opening of the newly-installed machines that will increase the port's maximum inspection capacity with an additional 7,680 containers per day more than its previous capacity.

He said one X-ray machine has the capacity to scan 160 containers per hour.

Previously, the MICP was only equipped with seven mobile-type X-rays, used in rotation, which

Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) to keep abreast of government programs and projects. (PNA)

General Bantag and myself must now be in the top of the hit list of the drug cartels," he added.

Eleazar said he gave particular attention to government detention facilities, particularly the NBP, as they have become both a comfort zone and a war room of big-time drug lords in the country with the help of corrupt prison officials.

This is one of the reasons, Eleazar said, why the Philippines was plagued by illegal drug problems.

When Bantag was appointed as BuCor chief, he immediately requested for back up from Eleazar, then Metro Manila police chief, after he implemented a purging of corrupt prison guards at the NBP.

Eleazar, with a go-signal from Interior Secretary Eduardo Año, sent more than 500 policemen to act as prison guards.

"I told myself that this is the opportunity I have been waiting to finally put a stop to the glory days of these drug lords because almost all of the big operations in Metro Manila pointed to the Bilibid as the location where the command and control of drug circulation emanate," Eleazar said.

"I am up to the challenge even if it means risking my life. I shall work to wipe out all the kubols in all other penal colonies in the country. This will be my war," he added.

Eleazar is one of the top contenders for the country's next PNP chief which remains vacant after the resignation of Oscar Albayalde.

The other two contenders are current PNP officer-in-charge, Lt. Gen. Archie Francisco Gamboa and deputy chief for operations, Lt. Gen. Camilo Cascolan, both members of the PMA Class 1986. (PNA)