2019 SEA Games preps 'on track': exec

MANILA -- Preparations for the 2019 Southeast Asian Games are "on track", an official of the Philippine Southeast Asian Games Organizing Committee (PHISGOC) said Thursday night.

Ramon Suzara, PHISGOC chief operating officer, said Manila is looking at the completion of all construction tasks by end of September or October.

"Again, we are trying to fast track the (construction of) competition venues especially the temporary ones. We are building a lot of temporary venues," he said. "We are working double time and triple time for the opening day in November."

On Thursday, Suzara and representatives from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, and Timor Leste met in Manila for the second SEA Games chefs de mission meeting.

In a media briefing, the CDMs also expressed confidence that PHISGOC would "successfully" achieve its targets prior to the biennial meet.

"I think under COO Ramon, I believe everything is on track," said Harry Warganegara of Indonesia. "We are here to see the progress, all the questions have been answered."

While admitting he was concerned about the situation within the organizing committee, Chris Chan of Singapore is confident the staging of the 56 sports and 530 events in November "is going to be fine".

"The last time the Philippines hosted the game was in 2005, today we have a big figure for the number of sports but I think when you compare it 40 sports 14 years ago, 56 is manageable," he said.

"Yes, we were a little disturbed when we heard about the stories of infighting going on in the NOC but today, I rest assured that everything is going on fine. At the end of it all it's about preparing the games for the athletes," he added.

P15-M misdeclared agri products seized in Manila

MANILA — The Bureau of Customs (BOC) on Thursday seized four shipments containing misdeclared agricultural products and other items worth PHP15.5 million at the Manila International Container Port (MICP).

In a statement, the bureau said the misdeclared shipments which arrived from China on separate dates in June were issued corresponding alert orders.

This after examinations conducted by BOC officials revealed that there are discrepancies in the weight and declared value of the shipments.

After the conduct of X-ray and physical inspections, Customs personnel found that one of the four shipments was declared as 3,300 boxes fresh apples but the container was actually found to contain red onions.

The misdeclared shipment has an estimated market value of PHP1.8 million.

On the other hand, two cargoes which were declared as red beans but were found to contain 5,300 sacks of refined sugar were estimated to be worth PHP9.6 million.

Another container was declared as 1,058 packages of t-shirts but actually contained different items worth PHP4.1 million.

Inspection revealed that the shipment contains 200 sacks of rice, 1,300 packages of other food products, 30 packages of medicine and 425 packages of other non-perishable items.

The BOC said that the seizure of the shipments was the result of its heightened efforts against the smuggling of agricultural products in a bid to improve revenue collection and protect local farmers. (PNA)

SoKor to increase trade with ASEAN

SEOUL, South Korea -- South Korea will increase its trade volume with the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) in the years ahead, according to Lee Hyuk, secretary general of the ASEAN Korea Centre (AKC).

In an interview with the Philippine News Agency (PNA) in his office here, Lee cited the good relations between ASEAN and the Republic of Korea (RoK) during the past 30 years.

Lee was formerly the ambassador of South Korea to the Philippines. Ambassador Han Dong-Man is currently the envoy of South Korea to the Philippines.

Lee said the ASEAN is the second largest trading reaching USD160 billion in 2018 and the third largest investment partner totaling USD6.1 billion during the same period.

"ASEAN and Korea have become key partners of economic cooperation," Lee said, adding that "ASEAN is the most popular destinations for Koreans with 8.9 million visitors in 2018.

The AKC will strive to continue playing a pivotal role in building a lasting and genuine partnership between the two sides," Lee said.

"In line with this, AKC will carry out a series of programs under the collective theme of 'Connecting People, (and) Sharing Prosperity,'"' he pointed out.

Lee said the AKC will focus on the following:

- Make efforts towards building a closer community between ASEAN and Korea for a stronger and prosperous partnership.

- Strengthen cooperation for innovation and creativity-driven growth with AKC supporting the empowerment of micro-small-and-medium sized enterprises with Korea helping embrace digital technologies as a new growth engine in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

- AKC will promote activities that connect the hearts and minds of people of ASEAN and Korea to foster greater cultural exchanges and strategic tourism development of ASEAN and Korea.

Lee also said the "AKC will serve as a networking hub where the youth, scholars, media and the general public of ASEAN and Korea can interact with one another through diverse communication medium…to foster friendship and raise mutual understanding."

The AKC will exert efforts to increase trade volume, accelerate investment, invigorate tourism, and enrich cultural and people-to-people exchanges, Lee said.

He also said 2019 marks the 30th anniversary of ASEAN and ROK dialogue relations, and the 10th anniversary of ASEAN and AKC, the only intergovernmental organization that is mandated to promote economic and socio-cultural cooperation between ASEAN and Korea.

The ASEAN is composed of Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Loa, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam. (PNA)

Public urged to support PRRD's anti-insurgency drive

MANILA -- The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) called on the public to support the Duterte's administration move to push for a whole-of-nation approach in addressing communist insurgency in the Philippines by declaring the New People's Army as persona non grata and at the same time, convincing them to lay down their arms and rejoin society.

"Help us convince the communist rebels that armed conflict is not the solution to the country's problems. Poverty, injustice, and corruption are the usual issues that they are exploiting and yet right from the start, this government under President Duterte has set these issues as top priorities to be addressed through good governance and focused efforts to improve the plight of the people," DILG Secretary Eduardo M. Año said during the PreSONA (State of the Nation Address) forum of the Participatory Governance Cluster (PGC) held in Cebu City Wednesday.

Based on records from the interagency Task Force Balik-Loob, more than 8,300 rebel surrenderers yielded to the government as of December 2018. A total of 2,129 former rebels — 1,505 NPAs and 624 Militia ng Bayan — have also been provided with benefits and assistance from 2018 and 2019 through the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP).

He said the government has also recently launched the Retooled Community Support Program which aims to address primary and secondary issues on the ground through a convergence of government initiatives and with the participation of the populace in development planning.

"Sa programang ito, ang gobyerno mismo ang bababa sa inyo para makinig at gumawa ng paraan upang maibsan ang mga problema ng inyong mga komunidad. Kaya naman huwag kayong mahiyang sabihin ang inyong mga suliranin dahil magiging matagumpay lamang ito kung magiging bukas kayo at makikipagtulungan sa amin (Through this program, the government will go down to you to listen and come up with ways to solve problems in your communities. Please do not hesitate to tell us your problems because this will only be successful if you will be open with us and are willing to cooperate)," said Año.

Año also reported that crime volume dipped by 11 percent and around 12,000 barangays are now drug-free as a result of "participatory governance" or the active collaboration between the government and the local government units (LGUs), citizens, and other stakeholders.

"Malaking bahagi kayo sa naging tagumpay ng mas pinaigting na (You played a big role in the success of intensified) peace and order councils (POCs), anti-drug abuse councils (ADACs) at people's law enforcement board (PLEB) sa labang tuluyan nang tapusin ang mga problema ng ating lipunan (to finally put an end to the different ills confronting our society)," the DILG Secretary said.

Año said that with the help and support of local based institutions like the POCs, ADACs, and PLEB,"law enforcement agencies successfully re-calibrated their anti-criminality operations" leading to a decrease in the crime volume from 488,644 for the period of July 2017 to June 2018 to 438,96 for the same period in 2018-2019.

"Through our partnership, we have proven that the government actually walks its talk and our efforts in participatory governance bear fruit and do not fall into the void of empty words and ineffective thrusts," he said.

In the campaign against illegal drugs, the DILG chief proudly said that 12,099 barangays have already been declared drug-free with the backing and support of a vigilant citizenry. Similarly, there are now 172 drug-free jail facilities as compared to only 74 in 2018 due to the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology's intensified efforts to clear jails of illegal substances.

"Nakamit natin ang tagumpay na ito dahil sa pinaigting na operasyon ng ating mga alagad ng batas at sa suporta ng mga mamamayan na siyang pinagmumulan ng mga impormasyon tungkol sa iligal na droga (We have achieved this victory because of the intensified operations of our law enforcers and through the support of the citizens who are the source of information on illegal drugs)," he added.

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