

Cyberbullying victims urged to come forward, file raps

MANILA -- The Philippine National Police (PNP) on Thursday urged victims of cyberbullying to report these incidents to the nearest police station and file charges against the suspects.

PNP spokesperson, Col. Bernard Banac said from January 2017 to March 2019, there were 22 recorded cases of cyberbullying with minors comprising most of the victims and the incidents happened mostly through social media.

He said this is the most common form of bullying among the youth.

"It is important for victims of cyberbullying to immediately report these to the nearest police station and give an account of the incident. They should be accompanied by their

parents or legal guardian," he told reporters during the press briefing on Thursday.

Through this, Banac said police officers will be able to investigate, gather pieces of evidence and eventually catch the suspects.

Citing that most bullying cases committed in person are mostly solved by school personnel, Banac urged parents of victims of bullying to report the cases to school authorities and to the police.

Meanwhile, to help address the problem of bullying in schools as part of the preparation for the school opening on Monday, the PNP had formed task units to address bullying in schools, among other threats to students, including kidnapping and presence of explosives in school premises.

PNP chief, Gen.

Oscar Albayalde, however, clarified that police officers must first get permission from school officials before they can intervene with campus bullying cases.

"We cannot just go inside any school. There must be coordination with school authorities," said Albayalde.

Banac said the PNP will deploy around 120,000 police officers to secure the opening of classes.

He said upon invitation by school authorities, the PNP may conduct an inspection of dormitories and school facilities.

"The PNP will be aggressive and intelligence-driven on our focused police operations and will also keep an eye on street criminals such as snatchers, robbers, and even drug dealers," Banac said. (PNA)

Speakership race crucial to PRRD's legislative agenda

MANILA -- The race for the House speakership is crucial in pushing for the legislative agenda of President Rodrigo R. Duterte, specifically on tax reform and federalism, a political analyst said on Wednesday.

"The Speakership race is crucial to the life of the nation because the President has already spoken that he will have an ambitious legislative agenda in his last three years," University of the Philippines (UP) political science professor Ranjit Rye said in an interview with the Philippine News Agency (PNA).

Rye said the tight House speakership race shows the passion of the Duterte administration allies to serve the country.

"It's healthy that the coalition of the President which just won a big midterm election is now passionate and

serious about serving," he said.

Rye said Malacañang should support a candidate for the House Speakership race who can influence the Senate.

"It's important that Malacañang support a candidate that is not just competent, not just experienced, but will have the gravitas to lead both the House and have influence on the Senate because of that person's personality and capability," he said.

Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo earlier said the President will not meddle in the selection of the next Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Rye said an experienced legislator should be preferred in the speakership race for stability.

"Not a neophyte, but somebody who has actual experience because winning the Speakership is one

thing, reigning in the House is another," he said.

Rye said Duterte's recent pronouncements that he will resign if his son and newly-elected Davao Rep. Paolo Duterte decides to run for the House Speaker is consistent with the President's stand of not forwarding self-serving familial interests.

"It's very reassuring that the President has that stand. I hope that he will influence his party to vote for somebody with experience, capacity, capability, and competence instead of somebody who is either close to his family, without those characteristics," he said.

Rye said the President's non-interference in the affairs of the legislative branch helps his administration. He also said this allay fears that the legislative branch will be less in-

dependent and will be a mere rubber-stamp.

"It's good for him because he loses nothing. Why? Because all of them are his allies. In fact, if he takes a side, he might break the coalition apart," he said.

The Senate and the House of Representatives earlier had conflicting provisions that delayed the passage of the PHP3.757-trillion national budget for 2019.

Some of the names floated to replace outgoing House Speaker Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo are former foreign affairs secretary and incoming Taguig City-Pateros Rep. Alan Peter Cayetano, Marinduque Rep. Lord Allan Velasco, former House Speaker and current Davao del Norte 1st District Representative Pantaleon Alvarez, and Leyte Representative-elect Martin Romualdez. (PNA)

PRRD order to eliminate red tape paying off: ARTA chief

MANILA -- President Rodrigo R. Duterte's directive to eliminate red tape in government has been paying off, the head of the Anti-Red Tape Authority (ARTA) said on Wednesday.

This, as the Philippines improved its ranking in the World Competitiveness Yearbook 2019 published by the International Institute for Management Development (IMD).

"The Authority sees our improved ranking as a positive indicator that the President's directive to eliminate the red tape problem and to promote the ease of doing business in the country is already paying off," ARTA officer-in-charge, Director General Ernesto V. Perez said in a statement.

Perez said the full implementation of Republic Act 11032 or the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery that created

ARTA will attract more economic activities, foster an enabling business environment, generate more jobs, and ensure an inclusive growth for the country.

"The Authority hustles to have the Ease of Doing Business Law fully implemented within the next three years," he said.

Perez said this will happen once the Implementing Rules and Regulations are approved by the permanent ARTA Director-General, Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Secretary, and the Civil Service Commission (CSC) Chairperson.

"The full implementation of the law is however premised on the issuance of the Implementing Rules and Regulations, the draft of which is ready for approval at any time by the regular Director General who is yet to be appointed by the Presi-

dent," he added.

Perez said the country still needs to catch up to be at par with the performance of its neighbors.

"As such, we are resolute in monitoring and ensuring the compliance of concerned government agencies to the Ease of Doing Business Law, which is pivotal to streamlining our current government services and procedures and to eliminating corruption," he said.

He expressed confidence that the full implementation of the law will further improve the country's chances to an improved competitiveness ranking in the coming years.

"With its passing, we look forward to shaping the Philippines as a competitive landscape where businesses, foreign and local alike, from SMEs (small, medium enterprises) to large busi-

nesses, can thrive with the help of a government they could trust," he said.

The President earlier issued Memorandum Circular 44 which hastened the processing time for government transactions, and Administrative Order 13 removing non-tariff barriers in importing agricultural products.

The President also signed Executive Order 43 creating Presidential Anti-Corruption Commission and later issued another EO (73), expanding the commission's powers to recommend to the ARTA the filing of charges against officials tagged in corruption for further investigation.

From last year's 50th spot, the Philippines jumped to 46th in terms of competitiveness, measured by using four factors: economic performance; government efficiency; business efficiency; and, infrastructure.

The country climbed to 38th from 50th in terms of economic

House ratifies 'Murang Kuryente' Act

MANILA -- The House of Representatives on Wednesday ratified the proposed "Murang Kuryente" Act which seeks to reduce electricity rates by allocating the net government share from the Malampaya fund to clear the huge debts of the National Power Corporation (Napocor) being charged to the monthly electric bill of consumers.

Under the consolidated version of House Bill 8869 and Senate Bill 1950, some PHP208 billion from the net government share of the Malampaya fund will be allocated to cover payment for stranded contract costs and stranded

performance, 41st from 44th in the government efficiency factor, to 32nd from 38th in business efficiency, and 59th from 60th in the infrastructure factor. (PNA)

debts of Napocor.

Stranded contract costs refer to the excess of NPC's contracted cost of electricity with independent power producers (IPPs) over the actual selling of the output.

On the other hand, stranded debts refer to any unpaid financial obligations which have not been liquidated by the proceeds from the sales and privatization of Napocor assets.

Payments for stranded contract costs and stranded debts are covered through the universal charge, a pass-on rate to consumers that is also used to finance missionary electrification and the environmental fund.

According to Marinduque Rep. Lord Allan Velasco, chair of the House committee on energy, the implementation of the measure will translate to a sav-

ings of PHP172 per household that consumes an average 200KwH per month.

"At least 16 million households will stand to benefit from the measure," he said.

"More importantly, this will lighten the burden of Filipinos from the high cost of electricity without hurting the government coffers," Velasco said.

Besides paying the huge debts of Napocor, the measure also seeks to further lower electricity rates by authorizing the use of Malampaya funds to finance further exploration, development and exploitation of other energy resources.

With the Senate ratifying the harmonized bill Tuesday, the Murang Kuryente Act now only needs the signature of President Rodrigo Duterte for the measure to be enacted into law. (PNA)