

DOLE execs slam 'smear drive' vs. Bello

MANILA -- Top officials of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) on Thursday expressed support to Secretary Silvestre Bello III amid the issues hurled against him.

In a manifesto, the DOLE officials said they are alarmed by "the manner (Bello) is yet again being pilloried with a slew of charges that are unfounded, and at best ludicrous."

The document was signed by four of the five department undersecretaries, five assistant secretaries, and the directors of bureaus and offices who are all career officials of DOLE.

"We are convinced that most of which were resurrected allegations first brought to public attention last year and dismissed by the Presidential Anti-Corruption Commission (PACC) sans an iota of merit," the officials' manifesto read.

It added that the issues being raised against the labor chief have been damaging the image of the department and its officials.

Last week, separate complaints were filed in the Ombudsman and the PACC against Bello for graft, dishonesty, and treason for his alleged excessive overseas travels and meeting with Communist Party of the Philippines founder Jose Ma. Sison in the Netherlands.

Bello is also accused of usurpation of authority for designating officers-in-charge (OICs) to vacant positions in the department.

"While the sinister attacks may be directed against Secretary Bello, we believe that his tormentors are willfully destroying the institution by maliciously implying that its officials merely kowtow to the Secretary's alleged 'unauthorized' acts in the

performance of his duties," the manifesto said.

"If only to protect the integrity of the institution we serve, we stand strong against the evil designs propelled by obsession and wicked personal interests to destroy it. We stand firmly by the probity of Secretary Bello in leading us, and in the conduct of the affairs of the Department," it added.

On December 6, the DOLE will be celebrating its 86th anniversary which will be graced by President Rodrigo Duterte.

"In the coming days, the institution will observe 86 years of service to the Filipino workers and the people. We will not allow such overzealous machinations to stand in the way of our pursuit of "mahusay, mabilis at malinis na serbisyo, (excellent, fast and clean service)" the manifesto said. (PNA)

Cayetano slams Aquino, Drilon for hypocrisy, crab mentality

MANILA -- House Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano on Thursday slammed opposition leaders for their "hypocrisy" and "crab mentality" in criticizing the government's expenditures to host the 30th Southeast Asian Games in the Philippines.

Earlier, former president Benigno Aquino III and Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon said the PHP 50-million cauldron that will be used for the opening of the SEA Games was an "unnecessary extravagance."

In a press conference during the inspection of the SEA Games sports facilities at the New Clark City in Capas, Tarlac, Cayetano pointed out that when he was Senate Majority Leader, the Aquino administration asked for a PHP10-billion budget to host the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in Ma-

nila in 2015.

"Ang sinasabi ko lang yung hypocrisy na nung PHP10 billion ang hiningi nila sa Kongreso, para sa APEC, para sa bayan ito, representasyon ito, karanalan ito (What I am saying is the hypocrisy that when they asked Congress for PHP10 billion for the APEC, it was for the country, for representation, for honor). We have to spend on known artists and singers. We have to serve good food para maganda representasyon (for good representation)," Cayetano said.

"Yun nakita nila at justified nila pero yung PHP50-million na priceless work of art na forever pagmamay-aring gobyerno, sasabihin nila sana 50 classrooms na lang (They recognized and justified that, but for the PHP50-million priceless work of art that will be forever owned by the government, they are saying we should have 50 classrooms instead)," the Speaker and chair of the Philippine Southeast Asian Games Organizing Committee (Phisgoc) said.

Instead of criticizing, Cayetano said it would have been better if Aquino was proud that his home province of Tarlac was the main venue of the international event.

"I was expecting na sasabihin niya na may issues, pag-usapan natin later, pero proud kaming mga Kapampangan na dito itinayo sa Tarlac (that he will say that there are issues, let's talk about it later, but we Pangangueños are proud that the facilities were built in Tarlac)," Cayetano said.

"E hindi eh, 'yung crab mentality pa rin. Akala nila SEA Games, seafood, kaya panay crab mentality, talangka ang inaabot natin (But no, it's still the crab

mentality. They thought the SEA games is seafood, that's why it's always crab mentality, we only get crabs)," he said.

The House leader also tweeted Drilon for bringing up the classroom issue since it was during Aquino's time that the shortage worsened.

"I think Sen. Drilon forgot na (that) it's their administration na nagpilit ng K-12 kaya nagkulang na naman ng classroom (that insisted on implementing the K-12 program which again led to classroom shortages)," Cayetano said.

"I know because there are only two senators who objected, myself and Senator (Antonio) Trillanes. So don't talk to me about classrooms because you created the classroom shortage. Dapat we're on track na magiging 45-40 per classroom kung hindi muna natin pinilit 'yung (We would have been on track for 40-45 students per classroom if we had not insisted on the) K-12. We were asking for 5 years before implementing K-12," he added.

The Speaker also blasted the Senate Minority Leader in his speech earlier in the day.

He said before bringing up the cauldron-classroom issue, Drilon was asking for PHP50 million for the Cultural Center of the Philippine (CCP), for the Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra to conduct a world tour.

"We supported that because that's about Filipino values and culture. Wala naman nagsabi 'wag ilagay sa PhilHarmonic dahil 50 classrooms ang PHP50 million (Nobody said: 'Don't put it to PhilHarmonic because PHP 50 million is 50 classrooms')," Cayetano said.

Over 260 kilos of 'hot meat' seized in Manila

MANILA -- The Manila City government on Thursday seized at least 263.3 kilograms of pork ribs suspected to be "botcha" or double-dead meat at the New Antipolo Market in Blumentritt.

Dr. Nick Santos, chief of the Manila Veterinary Inspection Board (VIB), said the pork ribs emitted "foul odor and discoloration" and were also "improperly handled and stored".

Santos said this was a clear violation of Republic Act No. 10611 or the Food Safety Act, as well as Republic Act No. 10536 or the "Meat Inspection Code of the Philippines".

The seizure of suspected "botcha" was carried out by the Manila VIB and the National Meat Inspection Service Enforcement Team.

"The VIB Enforcement Squad Team is intensifying its campaign against unscrupulous individuals who will take advantage of the Christmas Season for their illegal activities, victimizing the consuming public, particularly our Manileños," Santos said.

The Manila VIB has been active in the past few months also tightening its watch on ports amid fears over the African Swine Fever.

Last September, it seized more than 20 tons of imported contraband meat from China worth more than PHP20 million. (PNA)

He also pointed out that it was Drilon himself who said the cauldron may not be overpriced.

"Walang nagsasabi na (Nobody is saying that) it's excessive or overpriced. E 'di anong issue (So, what is the issue)?," Cayetano said.

Trees planted at La Mesa Watershed to fight climate change

MANILA-- Showing its commitment to battling climate change within the member-states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), particularly the Philippines, Norway led on Tuesday a tree-planting ceremony at the La Mesa Watershed in Quezon City.

The activity was attended by no less than Norwegian Ambassador to the Philippines Bjørn Jahnsen, together with the Norwegian Ambassador to the Asean orten Høglund.

"By planting 500 seedlings this year, we are offsetting roughly 74 tons of carbon footprint equivalent to the projected carbon footprint that the embassy is producing per annum," Jahnsen said.

At the event, the embassy committed to plant 500 indigenous seedlings in La Mesa Nature Reserve, covering one hectare of land in the watershed, in partnership with the Asean Center for Biodiversity (ACB) and ABS-CBN Lingkod Kapamilya Foundation.

La Mesa Watershed has been chosen as the project site as it serves as the carbon dioxide sink of Metro Manila. The watershed is also a major source of water for some 12 million residents of Metro Manila.

"With land conversion and degradation rapidly gobbling up forests and other vital ecosystems, any effort to conserve the last standing forests that we have deserves praise. I am glad that we are not alone in protecting and preserving the remaining biodiversity in the region," ACB executive director Mundita Lim said.

"The Royal Norwegian Embassy's commit-

ment to support our fight against climate change, specifically the Embassy's pledge to plant an estimate of 500 trees, could not have come at a better time. This supports the Asean's latest undertaking the Asean Green Initiative, which was introduced during the 15th Asean Ministerial Meeting on the Environment in Siem Reap, Cambodia, last October," Lim added.

The Royal Norwegian Embassy in Manila continues to look for possibilities to reduce carbon footprint in the Philippines and the tree planting is part of the said cause.

Since 2015, Norway was invited as a sectoral dialogue partner of Asean, promoting cooperation in many areas such as peace and reconciliation, energy, trade, and private sector development, and climate change and biodiversity.

For Høglund, the tree planting activity is a way to reaffirm Norway's commitments to strengthen cooperation in the conservation of biodiversity in the Asean region.

"We urge countries to act together to tackle the global challenge of climate change, and focus on the impact of these changing conditions in Asean and its international relations," he added.

This year, Norway signed an agreement with the Asean to protect the environment and human wellbeing from plastic pollution. It also hosted the Our Ocean Conference in Oslo where USD64 billion of the total was pledged to protect the oceans. (PNA)