

House may pass budget on final reading Friday: Ungab

MANILA -- The House of Representatives may pass the proposed PHP4.1 trillion national budget for 2020 on second and third reading on Friday, House Committee on Appropriations chair and Davao City 3rd District Rep. Isidro Ungab said Thursday. Ungab said this is possible after President Rodrigo Duterte certified the General Appropriations Bill (GAB) as urgent. The House leader said the passage of the budget bill on time is “of immense importance in helping boost the economy.” “Thus, it is possible that the GAB will be passed this Friday, since it was already certified as urgent,” Ungab said. Prior to Duterte’s certification, the House was planning to approve the 2020 budget on second reading on Friday, and approve it on third reading before Congress goes on recess on October 4. House Majority

Leader Martin Romualdez assured that the 2020 budget will be a reflection not only of the President’s vision but also of the people’s will. “As envisioned by the President, the 2020 national budget seeks to move the nation forward towards its aspired-for destination: a more peaceful and progressive Philippines,” he said in a statement. “We, in Congress, support the initiatives of the Duterte administration to empower the poor through increased subsidies and grants aimed at ending the inter-generational cycle of poverty in the country,” Romualdez said. Malacañang said Duterte certified next year’s proposed national budget as urgent to avoid a repeat of the delay in the passage of the PHP3.7 trillion 2019 budget, which slowed down the country’s economic growth in the first half of the year. Data released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) Thursday showed that this

year’s second quarter gross domestic product (GDP) growth slowed to a more than four-year low of 5.5 percent as the government was forced to underspend by at least PHP1 billion a day on public goods and services due to the late approval of the 2019 budget. Even industries were not spared from the impact of the delayed budget, it added. The PSA said earnings by major industries in the second quarter of 2019 slowed to 6.5 percent alongside a weaker growth in the economy still brought about by the budget delay. This was below the 9.6 percent expansion for the same period in 2018. Employment also took a hit, with construction companies shedding jobs by 2 percent as public construction projects came to a stop due to the election ban for mid-term polls, and the lack of budget to roll out the government’s infrastructure projects. (PNA)

Duterte OKs release of P78-M emergency fund vs. ASF

MANILA -- President Rodrigo Duterte has approved the release of PHP78-million emergency fund, which will be used to effectively manage, control, and contain the threat of African swine fever (ASF). In a statement, Agriculture Secretary William Dar said the fund will be utilized particularly for biosecurity and quarantine operations, disease monitoring and surveillance, upgrading of laboratories, capacity-building, and other disease control measures. Dar said the National ASF Task Force (NATF) will also convene to flesh out inter-agency coordination, in partnership with concerned local government units (LGUs) and the private sector. Chaired by the President and with the DA as vice-chair and lead agency, the NATF was initially composed of Secretaries Carlos Dominguez III (Department of Finance), Teodoro Locsin Jr. (Department of Foreign Affairs), Eduardo Año (Department of the Interior and Local Government), Francisco Duque (Department of Health), Roy Ci-

matu (DENR), Ramon Lopez (Department of Trade and Industry), Delfin Lorenzana (Department of National Defense), Wendel Avisado (Department of Budget and Management), Arthur Tugade (Department of Transportation), and National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) Undersecretary Ricardo Jalad. Dar directed other DA regional directors in Visayas and Mindanao to submit their respective disaster management plan to prevent the possible spread of ASF in their areas. The DA chief plans to meet with concerned governors and their respective veterinary officers to align the local government units (LGUs) local issuances and corresponding actions vis-à-vis national guidelines by the expanded crisis management team, which includes the private sector, for a concerted effort with the NATF. Dar said the DA during the meeting will present a geographic zoning plan to adjust government response to the developing situation on the ground and effectively prevent

further spread of ASF in other parts of the country. The DA also requested the NDRRMC to immediately operationalize and open a line of coordination between the DA and its relevant agencies with the LGU’s respective DRRMCs for quick response on the ground. Meanwhile, the Philippine Association of Meat Processors Inc. (PAMPI) appealed to the government to issue unified national guidelines for the transport of processed meat products after their shipments were disallowed in some provinces due to the ASF scare. PAMPI earlier submitted to the government their proposed guidelines to resolve the disruption in the local processed meat trade. Under its proposal, processed meat products that do not contain pork as raw material or ingredient, should be allowed unrestricted movement and distribution in all provinces. These products include corned beef, beef hot dogs, chicken nuggets, chicken hot dogs, among others. Meat processors will also be asked to present pertinent documents, such as the veterinary health certificate of the exporting country, and the sanitary phytosanitary import clearance issued by the Bureau of Animal Industry to prove that raw materials used in meat processing are sourced from ASF-free

countries. San Miguel Food, for its part, assured the public that its products are absolutely safe to eat and not affected by the ASF virus. This, as several provinces have started issuing total bans on the entry of live and processed pork products from various parts of Luzon. The food and beverage firm said it follows the strictest animal health and biosecurity protocols. Its chilled, frozen, and processed pork are produced from company-controlled hog breeding, growing, slaughtering, and manufacturing facilities. Its refrigerated and canned meats are cooked with heat above 70 degrees, thereby destroying harmful viruses, including ASF, it added. “Regular surveillance for diseases through laboratory testing of blood and tissue samples are done to detect any incidence of disease and develop prevention and control measures before each instance develops into an outbreak situation. Our slaughter plants are constantly monitored by the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS). Each hog is inspected before slaughter while each carcass is certified as disease-free before delivery to our meat shops and distributors,” San Miguel Foods further said in a statement. (PNA)

PNP, PDEA assure strong coordination vs. illegal drugs

MANILA -- The Philippine National Police (PNP) and the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) both assured that they are in constant coordination in line with President Duterte’s directive and campaign against illegal drugs. National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO) head, Maj. Gen. Guillermo Eleazar, on Thursday went personally to PDEA headquarters and talked to Director General Aaron Aquino to work on the identity of an alleged 'drug queen' and the 'ninja cops' involved in the recycling of illegal drugs. “Galing ako sa opi-

sina ni (I went to the office of PDEA Director) Gen. Aquino. We exchange notes and has assured working together against these ninja cops as they were monitoring policemen through the internal cleansing program,” Eleazar told Philippine News Agency Friday. He said that chiefs of police are accountable for the actions of their men. Eleazar bared that cohorts of the drug queen were arrested three times when he was the chief of the Quezon City Police District (QCPD). Eleazar also pointed out there may still be isolated and limited

cases of drug recycling among some members of the Metro police force, but he does not believe these are rampant enough to be tagged as the primary reason for the continuing drug trade in Metro Manila. “My strategy was to make sure that new, fresh and clean police officers will wage the honest battle against illegal drugs. All told, I gradually relieved close to 500 policemen from our ranks. Some were reassigned to other regions, while others were charged with administrative and criminal complaints for possible dismissal from the ranks,” Eleazar

said. “As a result of this policy, our police personnel in all levels now maintain a keen eye on their ‘companions for fear of getting penalized and their jobs jeopardized because of possible indiscriminate practices of the man next to him. No policeman now hesitates to come to us if they know of irregularities in their midst, especially on drugs. Every policeman is now alert and vigilant, and fully aware of his surroundings. As a result, the NCRPO has not recorded any drug-related incident involving its active members in the past several months,” he added.

Eleazar urged the participation of the public as it is also a significant factor in curtailng drug-related activities by policemen but added that the NCRPO has earned the trust and respect of the residents in Metro Manila, which is why residents do not hesitate to report scalawags and abusive cops through the police’s text hotlines. For his part, Aquino welcomed Eleazar’s gesture. During their conversation, Aquino revealed that he handed out his information to Eleazar about the existence of ninja cops assigned in Metro Manila and the alleged drug queen.

“We exchanged notes regarding the issue because it was like we were pitted against each other. It’s not like that. I gave him the information about the ninja cops and drug queen, Guillor (Eleazar as fondly called by friends) then told me, ‘Some of these ninja cops are already dead while some are on AWOL (absent without official leave) status). There are those ninja cops assigned at the MPD (Manila Police District) and QCPD and he assured that he will often visit to fix some issues (if needed),” Aquino told PNA in a

phone interview. “All is well. We do not have any hard feelings against each other,” he said. Aquino assured that the PDEA and NCRPO will plan to arrest the drug queen and the “ninja cops” involved in the recycling of illegal drugs once they get enough evidence. On Thursday, PDEA showed to reporters for the first time its evidence room containing PHP22 billion worth of illegal drugs confiscated from anti-narcotics operations. Biometrics is installed outside the room to control access to the facility. (PNA)