

Solon pushes for Pasig River ferry system revival

MANILA -- Senator Sonny Angara said on Thursday there is the need to revive the Pasig River ferry service as an alternative for commuters to ease the traffic congestion problem in Metro Manila.

Angara, who chairs the Senate Committee on Finance, said efforts should be made to make the ferry system financially buoyant again, noting that next year's proposed PHP74-million government subsidy to the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) for running a ferry along parts of the Pasig River's original 15-kilometer service route "is clearly not enough."

Angara said a master plan with yearly expansion, funding, and performance targets is required to revive the service, adding that he is open to increasing the subsidy for its operations.

"We are open to increasing the subsidy if the MMDA can submit a program on where the additional subsidy would be spent," Angara said.

The senator said a maritime highway that is wider than the Epifanio delos Santos Avenue (Edsa) should be fully optimized given the traffic congestion in Metro Manila.

He said the Pasig ferry subsidy for a whole year is worth only five days to subsidize MRT-3 operations.

"Yang PHP74 million na proposed subsidy for 2020, may nakapagsabi na limang kilometro lang 'yang asphalt overlay sa isang lane ng Edsa (The PHP74 million proposed subsidy for 2020 is just equivalent to five kilometers of asphalt overlay in one Edsa lane)," Angara added.

He cited that in August 2016, the Department of Transportation pegged at PHP2.65 billion the cost of 20 new 100-passenger vessels, rehabilitating 10 passenger terminals, and annual river dredging. (PNA)

DOJ eyes Interpol help in going after Manila 'drug queen'

MANILA -- The Department of Justice (DOJ) on Thursday said it plans to seek assistance from the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) in going after Guia Gomez-Castro, the alleged drug queen of Metro Manila, who fled the country over the weekend.

"We'll issue an immigration lookout bulletin (ILBO) order even if she has left the country so we can monitor her whereabouts abroad," Justice Undersecretary and spokesperson Markk Perete told newsmen. "Once the ILBO is issued, we can request monitoring through the Interpol."

He added that the DOJ is also verifying if Castro has pending cases before Philippine courts.

The Bureau of Immigration

(BI) on Wednesday confirmed that Castro flew out of the country and was not prevented from doing so since she has no derogatory records.

National Capital Region Police Office chief, Maj. Gen. Guillermo Eleazar, named Castro as the mastermind in the recycling of seized illegal drugs by 'ninja cops'.

Castro, former chairwoman of Barangay 484, Zone 48 in Sampaloc, Manila, was the same drug queen being referred to by Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) Director General Aaron Aquino, who he claimed as selling at least PHP13.6 million of shabu weekly in just two streets in Metro Manila.

Castro left the country on September 21 on board a Cebu Pacific flight bound for Bangkok, Thailand. (PNA)

Alleged terrorist gets 40-year jail term for illegal arms raps

MANILA -- A Quezon City court on Wednesday sentenced an alleged member of the Maute terror group, which laid siege to Marawi City two years ago, to 40 years imprisonment for illegal possession of firearms and explosives.

In a 25-page decision, Quezon City Regional Trial Court Branch 92 Judge Eleuterio Bathan found Unday Macadato a.k.a. Solaiman Omar guilty of the crime.

Macadato was arrested in his house in

Manalo St., Cubao, Quezon City by elements of the Regional Police Intelligence Operations Unit, National Capital Region Police Office (RPIOU-NCRPO) on May 7, 2018.

Authorities seized from Macadato a Colt pistol, a black Isis flag and an M26A1 hand grenade.

Macadato, who claimed to be a sidewalk vendor, initially denied the accusations and claimed that he could not speak Tagalog but had relatives

in Cubao and Fairview.

In the course of the trial, the defense could not produce the said relatives, however, which the court noted could have testified that he was a law-abiding citizen.

"Denial is inherently a weak defense which cannot outweigh positive testimony. As between a categorical statement that has the earmarks of truth on the one hand and bare denial, on the other, the former is generally held to prevail," the court ruled. (PNA)

DOH acts to stop rise in vaccine-preventable diseases

MANILA -- The Department of Health (DOH) is doing everything it can to prevent the rise in vaccine-preventable diseases from spreading in the country, Malacañang said on Thursday.

Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo made this remark following reports that a 10-year-old girl in Manila died within hours after being diagnosed with diphtheria last Sept. 20.

Data from the DOH showed that cases of diphtheria rose to 167, including 40 deaths, from January to September this year. Last year, there were 122 cases, including 30 deaths.

DOH Undersecre-

tary Eric Domingo said despite this increase, there is no outbreak of diphtheria in the country.

"Naniniwala ako na ginagawa niya ang lahat ng kaniyang makakaya upang alagaan ang kalusugan ng sambayanang Pilipino (I believe that he is doing everything he can to ensure the health of all Filipinos)," Panelo said in a Palace briefing.

Panelo said Health Secretary Francisco Duque III has assured that his agency has got the situation "under control."

"Kausap ko si Secretary Duque nung isang araw, sinasabi niya (I spoke to Secretary Duque

the other day, he said) 'the situation is under control,'" Panelo said.

"Meron tayong mga programa sa mga (We have programs for) vaccination all over. Kahit sa mga barangay meron tayo (Even in villages, we have them)," he added.

The Palace official said Duque will continue to ensure that free immunization will be given to all Filipinos.

The symptoms of diphtheria, a bacterial infection that affects the throat and upper airways, include weakness, sore throat, fever, and swollen glands in the neck and is spread through sneezing, coughing, and close personal contact.

762 cops under close watch for drug links: PNP

MANILA -- The Philippine National Police (PNP) on Thursday said a total of 762 policemen are being monitored for their alleged links to illegal drug activities.

PNP chief Gen. Oscar Albayalde said the matter is among the issues he discussed in a meeting with President Rodrigo Duterte on Wednesday night.

"We provided him (President Duterte) the names and I also briefed him on the status of what we call as ninja cops. That's one. I also briefed him on the status of our campaign on these scallawags in uniform, as well as our internal cleansing program," Albayalde said in a press conference in Camp Crame.

The country's top cop also said he discussed rumors of his alleged involvement in illegal drugs during his meeting with the President.

"As you all know, there are intrigues going around so I briefed the President on the status of our war on drugs in the PNP," he added.

Albayalde noted that the cops being monitored are either involved in the recycling of illegal drugs or under the payroll of illegal drugs syndicates operating in the country.

He said it is up to the President to decide on the list of ninja cops submitted by the PNP.

"We leave that up to the President. Let's give him space, we leave that to wisdom of the President. He said that he will decide in due time," said Albayalde.

"The PNP's internal cleansing will be relentless and will continue on until all rogue cops especially those involved in illegal drugs will be weeded out from the service and charged in court," Albayalde said.

Since July 2016, the PNP has already filed administrative cases against 8,733 uniformed and non-uniformed personnel involved in different illegal activities. Of these cases, 448 PNP personnel have been dismissed after they were found involved in illegal drugs.

Albayalde said the PNP supports the President's desire to impose stiffer sanctions against police officers found to be engaged in recycling of drug evidence.

"Pilferage and recycling of drug evidence by members of law enforcement is certainly worse than the crime committed by drug traffickers and therefore should be treated differently, possibly with stiffer punishment," Albayalde said.

Former Criminal Investigation and Detection Group and now Baguio City mayor Benjamin Magalong reportedly identified the cops and police officials involved in the recycling of illegal drugs in an executive session in the Senate last week.

In a Senate budget hearing last week, Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency Director General Aaron Aquino admitted that the recycling of seized illegal drugs remains rampant and rogue anti-nar-

cotics operatives either sell the drugs or use them as planted evidence in bogus operations.

Cop nabbed in Muntinlupa buy-bust

On Wednesday, authorities nabbed a police officer in a buy-bust operation in Muntinlupa City.

Col. Romeo Caramat, director of the PNP-Integrity Monitoring and Enforcement Group (IMEG), identified the suspect as S/Sgt. Raphael Aves Justo, who was collared at the New Bilibid Prison Reservation in Barangay Poblacion at around 2:15 p.m.

The operation stemmed from intelligence information, which was obtained by IMEG from various reports on the rampant involvement of Justo in illegal drugs and 'hulidap' activities in Muntinlupa City, Caramat said.

Seized from him were cash and a sachet of shabu.

Caramat said Justo was monitored to be using and selling illegal drugs, one of them was through a video wherein he was using shabu with two young women.

Records showed that Justo was suspended several times, the latest of which is a 41-day suspension from Aug. 30 to Oct. 9, 2019 issued by the National Capital Region Police Office.

The suspect was brought and placed under the custody of IMEG for further investigation and proper disposition prior to the filing of appropriate administrative and criminal charges. (PNA)

NBI files raps vs. 2 'Kapa-like' firms

MANILA -- The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) on Wednesday filed criminal charges against firms that had set up businesses a stone's throw away from the offices of the Kapa-Community Ministry, which is also engaged in unauthorized "investment" operations.

Charges of syndicated estafa and violation of the Securities Regulation Code were filed by the NBI against 39 officials and individuals connected with the Alabel Maasim Mining Corp. (ALMAMICO) and the Alabel-Maasim Credit Cooperative (ALAMCCO) based in Sarangani province, General Santos City, Koronadal

City and Panabo City.

Among those named in the NBI were the firm's chairperson, religious pastor Jerson Alba Cagang, 36, vice-chairperson Conrado Mancao, 60, and directors Albert Cagang, Juanito Castillo, Benigno Cereño and Tirso Cereño.

In its letter to Prosecutor General Benedicto Malcontento, the NBI said the two firms were discovered as "emerging investment entities" operating alongside with Kapa.

"The modus operandi of Almamico/Alamcco is basically solicitation of money/investment from the public with a promise of 35 percent return / interest per month. Almami-

co/Alamcco recruits its victims in the guise of a credit cooperative and once a person becomes a member, one should make a deposit in the guise of contribution which would, in turn, earn interest or profit in such a short period of time," the NBI said in its complaint.

"This is a pyramiding scam considering that in common and ordinary experiences in life, no business has ever survived and will last in this kind of business set up" the NBI said, adding that "the victims here are made to believe that the interest /return that they get came from a legitimate source without knowing that the same really came from their co-investors".