

TUCP seeking P480 hike in Calabarzon minimum wage

THE Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP) on Tuesday filed a petition for a P480 increase in the daily minimum wage in the Calabarzon region, more than two weeks after it refiled a wage hike petition in the National Capital Region.

In a statement, the TUCP said the purchasing power of P303-P400, the daily minimum wage in the provinces near Metro Manila, has been eroded by inflation to about P268-P353, depending on the province.

The Calabarzon region consists of Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon provinces, which lie to the south and east of Metro Manila.

The TUCP said that the impact of the last minimum wage increases in the region, in 2018, "has long dissipated."

"How can workers and their families cope with skyrocketing prices of food and commodities with such ridiculously low wages?" it added.

The TUCP said the take-home pay of a minimum wage earner in the region is currently between P279 and P371 per day after deductions. "Minimum wages have been below poverty thresholds in Calabarzon, and the gaps have been widening."

It said current take home pay levels imply that families of minimum wage workers can

spend P11-P14 per meal. "Clearly, the amounts cannot provide for the recommended nutritional requirements for a family of five, not by any stretch of the imagination."

Calabarzon is a key industrial region, "hosting the highest concentration of manufacturing activity with automotive assemblers predominantly located in Laguna, semiconductors, high-tech industries and electronics in Cavite and Batangas, and garments manufacturers in Rizal," according to a study published by Oxford Business Group.

The region accounted for 14.5% of the country's economic output in 2020.

The TUCP on April 5 refiled its petition for a P470 increase in the minimum wage for Metro Manila, after the wage board dismissed an earlier filing due to jurisdiction issues.

The TUCP also filed a P440 minimum wage hike petition in the Bicol region.

The organization noted that Bicol's last wage board decision was in August 2018. Wage boards typically start hearing new petitions on the anniversary of the last board action.

"After three years and eight months since (the wage order was issued), the measly P20 increase has long dissipated." — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

Japanese model maker Tamiya expected to invest P2 billion in expanding Cebu facility

TAMIYA, Inc., a Japanese manufacturer of plastic scale models and radio-control products for hobbyists, confirmed plans to invest P2 billion in an expansion of its Cebu operation this year, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said.

In a statement on Tuesday, the DTI said Tamiya Chairman and President Shunsaku Tamiya confirmed the company's widely reported decision to set up a new facility at the Cebu Light Industrial Park, which is targeted to start operations by September 2023. The facility will add to the

company's current operation in Cebu.

Previous reports had estimated the planned investment at P1.5 billion.

The DTI said the decision to invest was reported by Commercial Counselor Dita Angara-Mathay of the Philippine Trade and Investment Center in Tokyo.

"The new plant and building (will be) 22,579 and 30,765 square meters (sq.m.) respectively, which will generate 300 additional jobs and increase output by 5% over three years and overall capacity by 20%," the DTI said.

According to the DTI, Tamiya's annual production for export is valued at \$30 million, of which 80% is produced in the Philippines.

"While Tamiya's sizeable overseas regional operations span the United States (California) and Europe (Germany), Tamiya has only one production facility outside of Japan. The company's factory in the Philippines, specifically in Mactan, Cebu is housed inside a 40,000 sq.m. facility with over 1,200 workers engaged in model assembly," the DTI said.

Trade Secretary Ramon M. Lopez said Tamiya's planned investment showcases the quality and efficiency of Filipino workers.

"The fact that Tamiya has been operating in the country for about 30 years and is now moving forward with expansion plans despite the challenges of the pandemic, is testament to the enabling environment that President Rodrigo R. Duterte together with his economic managers have set up for foreign direct investors," Mr. Lopez said. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

Anakpawis party-list presses for price controls on oil products

A PARTY-LIST organization said on Tuesday that the government needs to impose price controls on oil products to aid agricultural workers, adding that fisherfolk are losing their livelihoods because of expensive fuel.

"There have been significant numbers of our fisherfolk seeking different occupations which they perceive as more sustainable sources of income than fishing," Anakpawis National Vice-President Ariel B. Casilao said in a statement.

"This trend of labor out-migration in the fishing sector should compel the government to immediately impose price controls on oil products to encourage our fisherfolk to return to their livelihood," he added.

Anakpawis estimated that the latest oil price hike of about P4 per liter means that fisherfolk consuming

an average of 12 liters per trip will need to spend P876, up from P840 last week when diesel was still at P70 per liter.

Mr. Casilao noted that Republic Act 7581 or the Price Act, authorizes the imposition of "automatic price controls against illegal manipulation, including profiteering or the sale or offering for sale of any basic necessity or prime commodity at a price grossly in excess of its true worth."

"Any increase in the cost of production furthers the plight of our ailing rural sectors. Production costs are constantly rising yet income continues to drop drastically," he said.

"We demand that the government immediately impose measures to correct these fraudulent practices of oil companies in price manipulation and overpricing," he added. —

Alyssa Nicole O. Tan

Foreign visitor arrivals hit 313,050 since reopening of borders

THE PHILIPPINES has admitted more than 300,000 foreign visitors since reopening its borders on Feb. 10, according to the Department of Tourism.

"From Feb. 10 to April 25, we surpassed the 300,000 mark. We received about 313,050 international arrivals," Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat said in a Laging Handa briefing on Tuesday.

According to Ms. Puyat, the leading country of origin for such visitors was the US, followed by Canada and South Korea.

"In terms of pre-pandemic levels with regard to international tourist arrivals, we are still far off because in 2019, we received 8.26 million tourists. But we are happy with the current levels," Ms. Puyat said.

"We are happy that we are slowly getting back to normal. But we still really have to follow minimum health and safety protocols," she added.

On Feb. 10, the Philippines started admitting nationals who do not require a visa to enter the Philippines. Starting April 1, borders were opened to all nationalities.

Recently, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimated that the Philippine tourism industry contributed \$41 billion to the economy in 2021, up 129.5% from 2020 levels.

"Our expert analysis shows that the economy has turned a corner and is firmly on the road to recovery," WTTC President and Chief Executive Officer Julia Simpson said in a recent briefing. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

Duterte signs electric vehicle measure into law

PRESIDENT Rodrigo R. Duterte has signed into law a measure regulating and developing the Philippines' electric vehicle (EV) industry, including quotas for their adoption by various industries, the Palace said in a statement.

Republic Act No. 11697 was signed on April 15 and outlines the regulatory framework for the manufacturing and adoption of electric vehicles. Its main policy aim is to promote the industry as a "feasible mode of transportation to reduce dependence on fossil fuels."

Industries such as cargo logistics, food delivery companies, tour agencies, hotels, power utilities, and water utilities have been set a 5% EV quota for their vehicle fleets, whether owned or leased, on a timetable to be determined by an industry roadmap.

The law governs "the manufacture, assembly, importation, construction, in-

stallation, maintenance, trade and utilization, research and development, and regulation of electric vehicles."

The roadmap will feature an annual work plan to "accelerate the development, commercialization, and utilization of EVs" and recognizes preferential parking slots for EVs and charging stations in dedicated spaces as key to their adoption.

According to the law, establishments with 20 or more designated parking slots should dedicate 5% of their space for the use of EVs and provide charging points.

The law sets manufacturing standards for "EVs, batteries, and facilities, including recycling facilities, parts and components, and charging stations and related equipment."

The Department of Energy has been designated as the agency to lead the EV adoption campaign and the rollout of charging stations. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

Risks to PHL children from online activity seen as elevated

THE children of the Philippines are considered to be at significant risk of exposure to online threats, according to a study conducted by cybersecurity firm Surfshark.

Surfshark found that the risk profile of children in the Philippines was near the bottom of the countries studied. Thai children were considered most at risk. Turkey was behind the Philippines at third.

The study rated countries on a scale of "very low" risk (a 0-20 score) to "very high" (80-100). Japan was found to be the most secure.

Children in the Philippines "don't have the skills to deal with cyberbullying or other common cyber threats," the company said.

Surfshark's study found that 6 out of 10 children aged 8-12 are exposed to cyber risks. One in two children encounter cyberbullying, and one in three experience phishing or hacking.

"The number of cybercrimes against children steadily grew each year by 5-9% but sharply spiked by 144% in 2020, after roughly 1 billion school children worldwide were relocated online for remote learning," Surfshark said.

Surfshark found that low and lower-middle-income countries had better online safety education than more developed coun-

tries. Saudi Arabia and Uruguay, for example, had virtually nonexistent online safety education.

Children in the Asia-Pacific, meanwhile, had the strongest online risk management skills, Surfshark said.

"Through this study, we can see that educating children about cyberthreats plays a massive role in them knowing how to deal with any problems that may arise online," Cybershark Information Security Officer and Cybersecurity Expert Aleksandr Valentij said. "There is no one-size-fits-all approach to discussing online safety with your children. Instead, you must discover ways to converse with them and assist them in understanding what to do."

More generally, losses in the Philippines during the pandemic from bank fraud, such as unauthorized withdrawals or illegal transfers, amounted to P1 billion, the Bankers Association of the Philippines (BAP) said.

Cybersecurity company Kaspersky general manager for Southeast Asia Yeo Siang Tiong has said that the government and private sector should start working on cybersecurity awareness.

He added that users should be aware that cyberattacks can occur via social media and messaging apps, and should know how to respond. — **Tobias Jared Tomas**



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Gov't urged to crack down on quarries, other works around Masungi reserve

THE GOVERNMENT needs to cancel quarrying agreements and halt illegal construction around the Masungi Georeserve in Baras, Rizal, and focus on conserving the area, civil society organizations said.

Over 30 heads of environmental organizations and educational institutions signed a joint statement seeking an end to such activity at Masungi and the Upper Marikina Watershed, which they said risks degrading the environment around the portion of the Sierra Madre range to the east of Metro Manila.

"The conservation project, spanning 2,700 hectares of severely degraded and abused watershed areas around the Masungi limestone, seeks to stop illegal activities such as land grabbing, quarrying, and illegal construction, and rewind the landscape crucial to Metro Manila's disaster and water resilience," according to the joint statement.

Apart from being a conservation area and park, the Masungi project also aims to protect the Upper Marikina Watershed.

The joint statement urged the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to immediately cancel Mineral Production Sharing

Agreements (MPSA) in force within the Upper Marikina Watershed.

The group cited Republic Act No. 11038 or the Expanded National Integrated Protected Area Systems Act, which bans mineral exploration, mining, and quarrying inside protected areas.

"We believe these are more than enough grounds to merit the expeditious cancellation of the said MPSAs. We condemn the reported moves of certain officials to approve similarly harmful and contradictory activities inside the protected area, such as the construction and operation of certain swimming pool resorts that disrupt and divert waterways inside the critical watershed," according to the statement.

"It is ironic and disheartening that instead of canceling the quarrying agreements and removing illegal permanent structures, there are now threats of removing the award-winning reforestation work of the Masungi Georeserve Foundation in the area," it added.

The group said that studies estimate the remaining forest cover of the Upper Marikina Watershed at 11% as of 2021.

"This dire situation could significantly worsen the extent of flooding in