

## Australia vows to rein in any H5N1 bird flu after confirming 1<sup>st</sup> case

SYDNEY — Australia will do all it can to curb any spread of H5N1 bird flu, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said, as the first mainland infection was confirmed in a seabird a day after being detected in a remote southwestern region.

Until now, Australia has been the only continent without a confirmed mainland case, although the virus was detected in late 2025 on the sub-Antarctic territory of Heard Island, about 4,100 km (2,550 miles) from continental Australia.

“This is concerning,” Mr. Albanese told reporters in Sydney, adding that his center-left government would do “whatever we can to restrict any spread.”

Testing had confirmed the bird, found sick near Esperance, a town about 570 km (350 miles) southeast of Perth, the capital of Western Australia, had the deadly strain, the government said.

Human infections of the virus remain rare, although the highly pathogenic avian influenza has led to the culling of hundreds of millions of birds in the past few years, disrupting food supplies and driving up prices.

The virus had yet to show up in Australia’s poultry or agriculture, however, said Agriculture Minister Julie Collins, though a giant petrel, another sick bird found in the same area, also tested positive.

“There’s no evidence of any mass mortalities and there’s no evidence that it’s in our poultry or agriculture system at this stage,” she added in televised remarks from the capital, Canberra. — **Reuters**

# Detailed damage assessment ordered for GenSan fishport following quake

AGRICULTURE Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said he ordered a structural assessment of the damage done to the General Santos Fish Port Complex after several sections of the facility were temporarily closed following the 7.8 earthquake that struck off southern Mindanao on June 8.

Three of the fishport’s market halls were closed following initial assess-

ments conducted on June 8 and 9, with one market hall put to limited use pending further evaluation.

A geotechnical investigation and additional inspections will take place to supplement the preliminary findings in light of subsequent aftershocks, with Philippine Fisheries Development Authority Acting General Manager Glen A. Pangapalan saying that a more detailed

assessment would further validate the port’s condition.

Mr. Pangapalan had reported that the fishport remained structurally sound and that there were no casualties among employees, traders, and other fishport users.

Mr. Laurel said a more comprehensive assessment of the port must be completed as soon as possible, noting the

port’s importance to the tuna industry.

“Although the wharf generally appeared structurally sound, we should expedite further inspection of subsurface conditions,” Mr. Laurel said in a statement issued by the Department of Agriculture.

“We cannot risk the lives of our people who rely on this fishport for their livelihood,” he added. — **Marron Joshua F. Mendoza**

## Growers fear tobacco glut after strong prices last year

PHILIPPINE Tobacco Growers’ Association President Saturnino Distor said non-government organizations and local officials are encouraging tobacco farmers to plant more following last year’s attractive prices, though he doubts such prices will be replicated this year because of the international supply situation.

Mr. Distor said producers like Malawi reported output of hundreds of millions of kilograms, well above Philippine production of 45-50 million. Malawi also responded to the strong prices by planting more, threatening to swamp the market.

The National Tobacco Administration (NTA) is planning information campaigns to mitigate overproduction and protect farmers from a possible price crash. It added that the oversupply conditions could last for two to three more years.

Nestor C. Casela, NTA deputy administrator for Operations, told reporters that the regulator has been receiving

### Tobacco farmers urged to plant early as El Niño looms

THE National Tobacco Administration (NTA) said it plans to adjust the start of the tobacco farming season this year from November to October to avoid the impact of El Niño.

NTA Deputy Administrator for Operations Nestor C. Casela told reporters that the regulator is seeking wrap up planting by mid-December targeting an early March harvest to avoid the worst of the dry spell during the dry-season months.

“We are advocating planting early so that when summer comes, there would still be moisture in the soil,” Mr. Casela told reporters.

Mr. Casela also said that the NTA is prepared to provide material and cash assistance to tobacco farmers who might be heavily impacted by El Niño, with affected contract farmers set to receive subsidies of 40% of their costs.

He also noted that while tobacco crops are resilient to drought, intense heat could impact the crop as long

exposure of tobacco leaves to the sun could reduce quality.

Philippine Tobacco Growers’ Association President Saturnino Distor said that with elevated temperatures, Virginia tobacco visibly changes color while Burley tobacco can experience changes in size, impacting quality.

“Tobacco is not like palay that needs a lot of water. Tobacco only requires minimal water, so surely it would not be heavily impacted,” Mr. Distor told reporters. — **Marron Joshua F. Mendoza**

market signals from tobacco buyers of reluctance to procure leaf while surplus conditions prevail.

Mr. Casela clarified that overproduction was an issue for Virginia tobacco,

while Burley and native tobacco continue to benefit from steady demand.

The NTA projected tobacco production in 2026 of around 51 million kilograms, with production of Virginia tobacco esti-

mated at 20 million kilograms. It also set prices for higher grades of tobacco at P98 per kilogram, while reject and lower-grade tobacco were priced at P62 per kilogram. — **Marron Joshua F. Mendoza**

# SM and DOLE Bring Thousands of Job Opportunities Closer to more than 22,000 Filipinos Through Araw ng Kalayaan Job Fairs

More than 22,000 Filipinos flocked to SM Supermalls nationwide this Independence Day in pursuit of better opportunities, as SM Supermalls and the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) brought thousands of local and overseas job opportunities closer to communities through one of the country’s largest coordinated Araw ng Kalayaan Job Fair initiatives.

Mounted across 20 participating SM malls nationwide, the program brought together 819 employers and 22,037 jobseekers, resulting in 2,196 hired-on-the-spot (HOTS) — turning Independence Day into a day of new beginnings for thousands of Filipinos.

The initiative highlights the enduring partnership between SM Supermalls and DOLE, united by a shared commitment to making employment opportunities more accessible to Filipinos. Beyond serving as venues, SM malls have evolved into opportunity hubs where communities can access jobs, government services, livelihood programs, and skills development initiatives that help improve lives and strengthen local economies.

At SM City East Ortigas in Pasig City, hundreds of applicants arrived throughout the day to explore job openings, submit applications, and participate in interviews. The crowd included fresh graduates entering the workforce, career shifters seeking new opportunities, and individuals looking to supplement their income.

Participating employers conducted on-the-spot interviews, allowing qualified applicants to move immediately through the recruitment process. Some companies also offered on-the-spot hiring opportunities,



Thousands of jobseekers filled SM Supermalls nationwide during the Araw ng Kalayaan Job Fairs, highlighting the impact of the long-standing partnership between SM and DOLE in bringing meaningful employment opportunities closer to Filipino communities.



Pasig City Mayor Vico Sotto, Vice Mayor Dodot Jaworski, Councilors Angelou De Leon, Simon Tantoco, Boyie Raymundo, Ryan Enriquez, Warren Incencio, and Paul Senogat join Jobstreet by SEEK’s Dannah Majarocon and SM Supermalls executives Allan Brosas, Pats Dy, Jesse Herrera, Royce Cabunag, Cedrik Forbes, and Aimee Ramirez lead in advancing jobs, skills development, and workforce opportunities during the SM Araw ng Kalayaan Job Fair.

which allowed individuals to secure employment the same day.

For many attendees, the job fair represented more than a chance to submit resumes—it was an opportunity to change the course of their future.

Among them was Ma. Jamaica R. Pabunan, who secured a position as a Pharmacy Assistant through the hired-on-the-spot process.

“Naghahanap po talaga ako ng trabaho at alam ko po dito may HOTS, kaya pinagdasal ko po talaga na makuha din ako ngayon. Answered prayer po,” she shared.

Having previously found employment through an SM Job Fair, Ms. Pabunan said programs like these continue to provide meaningful opportunities for job seekers looking to improve their lives and support their families.

### BRINGING OPPORTUNITIES CLOSER TO COMMUNITIES

The job fair also functioned as a one-stop hub where applicants could process requirements and access support services from government agencies.

Representatives from the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), Social Security System (SSS), PhilHealth, Pag-IBIG Fund, and other partner agencies provided services that helped applicants obtain documents and complete employment-related requirements more conveniently.

The integrated setup reduced the need for applicants to visit multiple offices and allowed them to focus on securing employment opportunities while processing requirements in a single venue.

### BEYOND HIRING: JOBS TODAY, SKILLS FOR TOMORROW

Beyond immediate employment opportunities, this year’s Independence Day Job Fairs also highlighted workforce readiness and lifelong learning.

Selected SM malls featured upskilling opportunities in partnership with the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) introducing participants to learning opportunities in future-ready skills, such as, AI-powered Canva, Introduction to AI, and cybersecurity awareness.

These initiatives reflect SM’s continuing commitment to helping Filipinos not only find jobs today but also prepare for the evolving demands of tomorrow’s workforce.

“Aside from being a shopping mall, we also bring together government agencies and private sector partners to create opportunities for the community. Part of our corporate social responsibility is helping generate employment while providing training and seminars that help people upskill and develop their talents,” Aimee M. Ramirez, mall manager of SM City East Ortigas, said.

She also noted that SM City East Ortigas alone hosted more than 40 participating companies, including local and overseas employers, as well as SM-affiliated businesses.

She added that job fairs are conducted throughout the year across the SM network, helping ensure that employment opportunities remain accessible to communities beyond major calendar events.

More than a one-day hiring event, the Araw ng Kalayaan Job Fairs served as a platform where employers found talent, jobseekers found hope, government agencies delivered services, and communities gained access to opportunities that can change lives.

Through their enduring partnership, SM Supermalls and DOLE continue to bring jobs, skills, and essential services closer to Filipinos—helping more people build careers, support their families, and move toward a brighter future.

Because when opportunities become more accessible, communities thrive, livelihoods grow, and the nation moves forward.



Upskilling for the future: DICT conducted free in-person lecture in Basic Canva and AI Prompting during the job fair.



Job seekers access over 800 employers in a convenient venue that assembles employment and upskilling opportunities with one-stop government services for crucial employment requirements.



Power in public-private partnerships: Through the Araw ng Kalayaan Job Fairs, SM supports the DOLE’s efforts to extend employment opportunities to Filipinos all over the country through ease and convenience