

Broaden Japan, PH cooperation within ASEAN, latter urged

MANILA -- With the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) striving towards regional integration to create a cohesive economy, the Philippines is urged to further broaden its cooperation with Japan, a supporter of this goal and a key player in the ASEAN Plus Three (APT).

"Even as cooperation between Japan and the Philippines has brought about positive outcomes, there are areas to further deepen and broaden this cooperation, including within the region and the ASEAN," former Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas governor Amando Tetangco Jr. said

during a reception in Makati last Wednesday.

"Our strong ties put us in a good position to take advantage of the opportunities of ASEAN integration," Tetangco added.

ASEAN integration translates to stronger cooperation and the narrowing of the development gap within Southeast Asia.

Expanding the scope outside the region, Japan has long been a "strong partner in creating a more stable and safer economic neighborhood" with ASEAN, Tetangco said.

Among others, it serves as a key player in the APT, a cooperation process along with South Korea and China, which fosters East

Asian regionalism.

According to the 2019 ASEAN Integration report, the Japanese economy is one of the top five worldwide with a global share of 5.9 percent in 2018. ASEAN trailed behind at 3.5 percent.

Tetangco, who recently received the prestigious Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star from the Japanese government, has participated in the APT Finance Ministers' and Central Bank Governors' Meetings since 2012 and has actively played his part in regional finance stabilization by promoting both regional and bilateral financial cooperation led by Japan. (PNA)

After 17 years, NSTP gets a revamp

MANILA -- With an administration banking on the youth, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has partnered with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) and the Department of National Defense (DND) to roll out an improved and strengthened National Service Training Program (NSTP).

The partnership aims to produce students with civic consciousness, defense preparedness and will act as first responders during national emergencies.

CHED chairman J. Prospero de Vera III, TESDA Secretary Isidro S. Lapeña and DND Secretary Delfin Lorenzana jointly signed an agreement at the DND office to create an NSTP-Technical Working Group (TWG).

The NSTP-TWG will review the existing implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of the Republic Act 9163 or the "National Service Training Program Act of 2001".

As in the previous 17 years, the NSTP program was not closely monitored and was not uniformly implemented across higher education institutions (HEIs).

In a CHED statement on Friday, it said it resulted in the high turn-over of NSTP coordinators, noting the concerns about the "safety and security of the students during the community immersion,

and weak sanctions for HEIs that violated the law and its IRR".

"In many areas, NSTP students did not have insurance coverage during their out of school activities, and many HEIs did not offer the full range of NSTP options, particularly Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC)," it added.

"There is a need for CHED, DND, and TESDA to work together to review what has happened in the past years and craft new guidelines that can be issued to all HEIs in order to realize the objective of the NSTP law to produce an active National Service Reserve Corps that will serve the nation," de Vera said in the statement on Friday.

"Recent developments, such as the implementation of the Republic Act 10931 or the 'Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act' and its effect on the NSTP fund, the shift in the academic calendar, impact of the K to 12 Basic Education Program, and current national security concerns, makes the review and revision of the IRR an urgent imperative," he added.

CHED will issue a Memorandum Order (CMO) on the NSTP guidelines and standards for the common and enhanced modules for non-military programs under the NSTP.

"The Commission is serious in making the NSTP supportive to the initiatives of the government and the needs of our country. The draft CMO is now being subjected to zonal consultation," de Vera said.

CHED, DND, and TESDA will work together to review the ROTC Program of Instruction (POI), recasting of the non-military NSTP components -- Civil Welfare Training Service and Literacy Training Service-- to be disaster response-oriented to operationalize the National Service Reserve Corps as a complement to the AFP Reserves. (PNA)

Duterte's 2018 SALN available at Ombudsman: Palace

MANILA — Public can request for a copy of President Rodrigo Duterte's Statement of Assets, Liabilities and Net Worth (SALN) for 2018 at the Office of the Ombudsman, Malacañang said on Friday.

Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo made the statement, in response to the "baseless" and "malicious" Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism's (PCIJ) claim that the President has yet to release his 2018 SALN.

Panelo told PCIJ to directly go to Ombudsman to furnish a copy of the President's SALN for 2018.

"Accordingly, PCIJ may want to direct its request to the Office of the Ombudsman. The Office of the President, cannot dictate upon the Office of the Ombudsman the course of action it wishes to undertake relative to such request given that the latter is a separate and independent institution that we have no control of," Panelo said in a statement.

"We take strong exception to the thoughts bordering to innuendo of a few that the failures of the PCIJ in getting a copy of the President's SALN can be ascribed to the President's policy on transparency. Such accusation is baseless if not malicious," he added.

The PCIJ, in its report titled "Duterte's secret SALN: The lie of his FOI (Freedom of Information)" and published on Dec. 11, accused Duterte of being a "most secretive President when it comes to the details of his wealth."

PCIJ's Malou Mangahas said in her report that eight months after the April 30 deadline for filing, Duterte's SALN for 2018 is still kept as a secret, an indication that the Chief Executive "sticks out as the lie of his own FOI edict."

"Duterte, a most secretive President when it comes to the details of his wealth, does not always do what he says," the PCIJ report said.

"This would be the

first time in the last 30 years that a President has not released a SALN. Since the SALN Law was enacted on Feb. 20, 1989, all five presidents before Duterte had publicly disclosed their annual SALNs without fail, year on year, via either the Office of the Ombudsman or the Office of the President," it added.

Duterte's office not repository of SALNs

Section 17 of the 1987 Constitution mandates a public officer or employees to submit a declaration under oath of his assets, liabilities and net worth.

Republic Act 6714 designates the Ombudsman's national office and the custodian of the SALNs of the President, Vice President, senior officials and star-rank military and police officers.

Panelo said it is "clear" that the Ombudsman is the "repository of the original SALNs of the President, the Vice President, and the Constitutional Officials."

"The Office of the President is not the repository of the SALNs of the President," he said.

"It is clear therefore that it is the Office of the Ombudsman where the said SALNs are kept and not the Office of the President," the Palace official added.

Panelo also noted that the anti-graft body has issued new guidelines on public access to SALN of government officials, restricting Duterte to release his SALN.

Hence, there is a "mandated procedure" under the law to access the SALNs of public officials, the Palace official noted.

"Meron namang sinasabi ang Ombudsman na kasi gumagawa pa ng mga bagong guideline. Eh di hintayin nila yung mga guidelines. Ang importante, nag-file si Presidente. Iyan naman ang batas (Ombudsman has issued new guidelines. Wait for the guidelines. What's important is the President already filed it, in compliance with

the law)," he said in an interview with CNN Philippines.

File a case

Panelo said the President has complied with "what the Constitution or law requires - the timely submission of a declaration under oath of his assets, liabilities, and net worth."

He then challenged the PCIJ to file a case against the Duterte, if it has evidence that the Chief Executive violates the Philippine laws in relation to the release of SALN.

"The law does not require the filer of SALN to produce a copy when he is requested to produce it. Iyan naman ang sinasabi ng batas (That's what the law says)," he said.

"So kung 'yung mga nagrereklamo, eh di mag-demanda sila kung sa akala nila na may nilalabag na batas ang Pangulo ng Pilipinas (So to those who are complaining, they can file a case if they think the Philippine President violates the law)," he added. (PNA)

PAO files another Dengvaxia case

MANILA -- The Public Attorney's Office (PAO) on Friday filed fresh complaints on the death of school children supposedly due to health complications arising from the Dengvaxia anti-dengue vaccine.

The latest charges filed by the relatives of victims Shekina Venice Arciaga, 13, and Levon Zirine Santos, 10, involved alleged reckless imprudence resulting in homicide; violation of a provision of Republic Act (RA) 9745 on torture resulting in the death of any person and torture committed against children; and violation of provisions of RA 7394 or the Consumer Act of the Philippines on "mislabelled drugs and devices" and "defective products".

Arciaga died on October 28 after suffering from severe dengue despite getting anti-dengue shots, while Santos died on November 18. Each of them got three shots of Dengvaxia.

Named in the charge sheet filed on Friday were officials of the pharmaceutical firms Zueellig Pharma Corp. and Sanofi Pasteur, Inc., along with public health officials, among them former health secretary Janette Garin and her successor Francisco Duque III.

PAO chief Persida Acosta earlier said other victims have died but their respective families were either hesitant to file suits or have settled with the PHP50,000 given to them by the government as support.

The PAO is mandated to assist victims in the controversy. (PNA)