



VOLUME 002,
ISSUE 001

VIRTUAL CLASSROOMS, REAL DISCIPLINE

URS TAYTAY REIMAGINES THE ONLINE CAMPUS EXPERIENCE

Written by: ***Mary Yllana Kim Villanueva*** *| News Writer*

Photo by: ***Darlene Shane Garcia*** */ Lead Photojournalist*

The **University of Rizal System (URS) Taytay Campus has officially entered a new phase of virtual learning**, with a twist that brings the discipline of the physical classroom into the digital way. January 7, 2026, under the Campus Director Lourdes T. Tejada, Ed. D., the administration released Campus Office Advisory No. 01, s. 01-2026, establishing a quality and disciplined framework for how students and faculty must conduct themselves behind the screen. This move signals a firm stance on maintaining academic integrity despite the physical distance.

The **campus's continuous infrastructure expansion is the main driver of this change**. The university building's third and fourth floors are now undergoing extensive renovations, which temporarily prevents in-person education from taking place there. Instead of pausing the education, the institution has switched to a temporary online system, guaranteeing that the advancement of the student body is not disrupted by the noises of hammering and construction.

A standout feature of the new advisory is the ***"Cameras On, Uniforms On"*** policy. In an effort to preserve the professional atmosphere of a cooperative environment, the administration has mandated that the prescribed university uniform must be worn by all students during their online sessions. **This requirement aims to bridge the gap between the comforts of home and the responsibilities of a student, fostering a mindset of readiness and institutional pride even from a bedroom or a living room.**

Beyond attire, the university is taking a proactive approach to student behavior through strict decorum guidelines. Students are expected to sit properly and remain fully attentive, treating their digital interface with the same respect they would accord a physical lecture hall.

The implementation rests heavily on the shoulders of the faculty members. Both permanent and part-time instructors have been directed to act as the primary monitors of these new standards. This role aims to protect the quality of education during a period of potential disruption.

Students who fail to adhere to the uniform policy or who display inappropriate behavior will not just receive a warning; they will be referred directly to their respective College Deans and the Campus OSDS Coordinator. These offices are responsible for tracking compliance and submitting progress reports, ensuring that the advisory is more than just a suggestion.

This shift represents URS Taytay's commitment to "Nurturing Tomorrow's Noblest" by refusing to let standards slip during times of change. By enforcing these rules, the administration seeks to create a synchronized learning environment for the students of the campus where the physical absence of a teacher does not equate to a lack of supervision. It is a bold experiment in digital discipline that tests the adaptability of the entire academic community.



URS President Engages Student Federation Leaders in Boardroom Meeting

Written by: ***Eizhel Roma*** *| Associate Editor*

On January 14, 2026, at the University of Rizal System–Morong Campus, URS President Dr. Nancy T. Pascual held a meeting with student leaders from various URS campuses, including representatives from the University of Rizal System Student Federation (URSSF). The meeting focused on proposed projects and plans for upcoming university events.

Following the meeting, the Official Publication of URS Taytay, Pluma Publication, conducted an interview to share selected information discussed during the discussion. According to the President of the University of Rizal System Supreme Student Government (USSG), Mr. Clarenz San Juan, the URS President provided valuable updates and feedback regarding URSSF's plans for 2026. She expressed appreciation for the numerous initiatives prepared for the year and conveyed gratitude for the President's recognition of URSSF's active involvement and efforts.

Regarding the tangible changes and benefits that the "URS GIANTS" can expect from these initiatives, President San Juan stated that the organization is currently planning collaborative projects aimed at strengthening students' skills and literacy, while ensuring a more effective allocation of the budget.

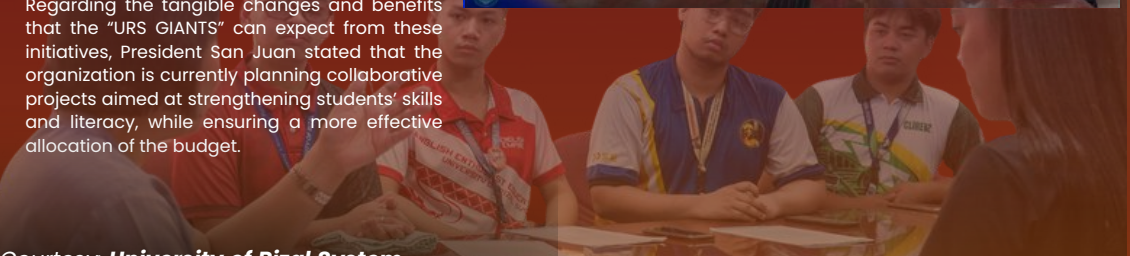
The discussion also highlighted that a significant number of URS students across campuses are still unfamiliar with URSSF. In response, the organization plans to implement online postings and propose projects designed to increase awareness and accessibility for students. This initiative aims to ensure that students know where to seek assistance when needed. Additionally, URSSF proposed plans to enhance facilities across URS campuses.

The meeting marked a proactive step toward stronger student engagement and inter-campus collaboration, paving the way for inclusive and impactful initiatives for URS GIANTS in 2026.

Interview conducted by Ashley Tapulao, Broadcaster, Pluma Publication – URS Taytay



Photo Courtesy: ***University of Rizal System***



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BA"ZERO": Rizal Province Promotes YES Program For Zero Waste Month

Written by: ***Sofia Marie Guarnes*** *| News Editor*



As the Philippines observes **National Zero Waste Month** this January under Proclamation No. 706, the Rizal Province has reaffirmed its commitment to environmental sustainability through the implementation of the **YES (Ynares Eco System) Program**, an initiative of Rizal Provincial Governor Ynares.

Proclamation No. 706 declares every month of January as Zero Waste Month, an annual observance that highlights the importance of reducing waste generation and promoting sustainable waste management practices. The zero waste advocacy promotes designing and managing products and processes to systematically avoid and eliminate the volume and toxicity of waste and materials, and to conserve and recover all resources, and not indiscriminately dispose or burn them.

In line with this, the provincial government of Rizal continues to strengthen its environmental programs through the YES Program, which focuses on greening, cleaning, and recycling to fight environmental issues. Where it promotes eco-friendly practices, responsible waste segregation, and community participation across the province.

This initiative is significant as the alarming data from the World Bank's What a Waste 2025 global database report, which ranked the Philippines 27th among 50 countries generating the most municipal solid waste at 14.6 million tons annually.

Experts are warning the public that the growing amount of waste volume is a serious threat to public health, urban resilience, and the country's climate adaptation efforts in areas like Rizal Province.

In recent posts of Governor Nina Ynares' official Facebook page, she uplifts Rizaleños to level up their less waste lifestyle as the new year begins. Additionally, she encourages the community to support the YES Program, emphasizing that "every small act counts." Governor Ynares further expressed her vision of a "greener Rizal" and a more sustainable future for the Rizaleños.

Through continuous support for a greener future, instilling greener projects, and engaging the community, we can fully achieve Zero Waste, proving that environmental responsibility begins at the local level.

Source:
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Photo Courtesy: ***PhilStar***


Photo Courtesy: ***PhilStar***

Monitoring of Super Flu and Safety Reminders

Written by: ***Norika Casingal*** *| News Writer*

According to the Department of Health (DOH), as reported by Untalan (2026), the "Super Flu" known as Subclade K, a specific variant of the Influenza A virus, has recorded 63 cases nationwide as of 2025. The DOH stated that the super flu remains at a seasonal level and is not a new disease, as there has been no drastic increase in the number of cases in the country. It has also not caused an alarming rise in severe respiratory infections. In addition, the existing flu vaccine is effective against Subclade K.

However, the DOH continues to remind the public to remain cautious, as the super flu can still cause serious illness with severe symptoms, such as:

- Fever
- Cough
- Nasal congestion
- Body aches
- Extreme fatigue
- Headaches

Like other flu viruses, it spreads through droplets from coughing, sneezing, talking and through contact with contaminated objects or surfaces. Social interaction and visiting crowded places increase the risk of transmission.

To prevent the super flu, It is important to follow basic health measures:

- Wash hands regularly with soap and water.
- Wear a face mask, especially in crowded places or when experiencing symptoms.
- Cover the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid close contact with others when sick and stay at home.
- Strengthen immunity through adequate rest, proper nutrition and sufficient water intake.

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Source: **Moonton Games Championship Award** (via ABS-CBN)

Aurora Gaming PH Takes Crown in M7 World Championship

Written by: ***Maria Justine Angeli T. Conwi*** | *Sports Writer*

Sunday, January 25, 2026 — Aurora Gaming PH are like tigers in the wild after flawlessly sweeping Alter Ego Esports with the score of 4-0, becoming the kings of the M7 World Championship in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Aurora Gaming lit up the flying clouds map with their incredible hero lineup soaring fiery ultimates against the lineup of Alter Ego. The first game started with both teams trying to read each other's minds, but Aurora wasted no time and led the early game. As the clash continues, Aurora also continues to pile up kills and objectives like hungry tigers. And with their burning ultimates and telepathic minds, Aurora intensely wiped out Alter Ego, ending the game with the score of 15-8 in 15 minutes and 7 seconds, securing their first game win.

The second game became more intense with both teams' level of eagerness. It started with Aurora players sticking with their heroes' lanes and planning an attack against Alter Ego. Around mid-game, players started to fire up their ultimates, and player Light turned his bullseye and set in a blind spot, effortlessly locking three heroes in Alter Ego with Grock as his hero. The fire keeps on burning as Aurora keeps on controlling the game. After the intense skirmish from both teams, the second game ended with Aurora winning with the score of 5-20 within 16 minutes of game time.

After the second game, both teams are already on their way for the third game. The third game had a calm start, but Aurora ignited the first 2 minutes of the game as player Light attacked resulting in first blood. The game keeps on going, and every player keeps on burning. As the match heated up, player Domengkite went on a rampage, together with player Light racking up enemies' eliminations. The finishing touch came with Aurora teaming up with the lord and ending the light on Alter Ego's base with the score of 2-15 in nearly 11 minutes of game.

The final game comes, and it is the last step for Aurora and the last hope for Alter Ego. After the thrilling and nail-biting clashes. Aurora successfully etched their name in the history of M-Series as they closed out the M7 world championship with a commanding victory in the fourth and final game with the score of 7-17 with 11 minutes and 24 seconds, securing a perfect 4-0 sweep over Alter Ego.


Source: **Marlo Cueto** (via INQUIRER.net) & **PHILTA** (Philippine Women's Open)

Eala Overcomes Sakatsume to Reach WTA 125 Philippine Open Quarterfinals

Written by: ***Rexsie A. Chavez*** | *Sports Editor*

Alex Eala continued her impressive run at the World Tennis Association (WTA) 125 Philippine Women's Open on January 28, advancing to the quarterfinals with a commanding 6-4, 6-0 victory over Japan's Himeno Sakatsume at the Rizal Memorial Sports Complex in Manila.

The match was a rematch of their first-ever encounter in Osaka in 2023, when Sakatsume defeated Eala 6-0, 6-3. While Eala faced challenging moments, particularly in the opening set, the Filipina ace said the hometown support gave her a boost.

"I think it definitely helped," Eala told ABS-CBN. "People were excited, but when I'm in those moments, I'm really just alone on the court. It's me versus me. And I'm happy that I was able to step up to the occasion."

Eala, who has surged into the WTA Top 50 following a standout 2025 season, had earlier cruised past Alina Charaeva in her WTA 125 debut at home, 6-1, 6-2. Sakatsume, now 24 and ranked a career-high World No. 140, had advanced to face Eala after holding off a late challenge from compatriot Nao Hibino, winning 6-3, 7-5.

Sakatsume praised Eala's growth since their first meeting. "She was maybe around 200 at that time. She really improved her rankings and her play," the Japanese player said in interview with Inquirer.

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The Manila crowd has drawn praise from other players as well, including Croatian star Donna Vekic, a 2024 Wimbledon semifinalist and Olympic silver medalist. Vekic, who faced Eala twice this month at the ASB Classic in Auckland and the Kooyong Classic exhibition in Melbourne, said she has enjoyed the atmosphere in the Philippines.

"I've played her two times, I lost two times, but she seems like a really sweet girl," Vekic told Inquirer. "I enjoy it when it's a big crowd, good atmosphere. Even if they're not cheering for me, it's nice."

Eala will now face Colombian tennis player Camila Osorio, she looks to continue her strong run in front of a home crowd that has turned the Philippine Women's Open into a showcase of local and international tennis talent.

"PIT SEÑOR!": *Faith, Grit and Rhythm at the 32nd Sinulog Festival*

Written by: **Jenrick M. Cervantes** | Feature Writer



Caption from SunStar Cebu: Lumad Basakanon, the Sinulog sa Dakbayan 2026 Street Dance Champion, performs at the Sinulog Festival Grand Parade along Osmeña Boulevard, Cebu City, on January 18, 2026. | via Juan Carlo de Vela

Dek: From dancing contingents to cheering crowds, Cebu City came alive as devotees, tourists, and performers shared devotion, joy, and the vibrant spirit of the Santo Niño.

This year's Sinulog Festival in Cebu, celebrating the 461st feast of the Santo Niño de Cebu, turned the city into a kaleidoscope of color, rhythm, and devotion. Even before the first parade step, streets buzzed with anticipation as devotees, performers, and early spectators readied themselves for a day that would bring millions together in faith and festivity.

By midday, temperatures climbed between 25 and 30 degrees Celsius, yet the crowd stayed. Drumbeats grew louder, attention shifted to performers stepping onto the main parade routes, and phones rose briefly to capture each colorful contingent before dropping again.

This year's Sinulog featured 40 dancing contingents, 31 floats, nine higantes, and three puppeteers (ABS-CBN News, January 19, 2026), turning large sections of Cebu City into a continuous procession. Applause began before each group reached the main stretch, and the city streets pulsed with rhythm, color, and devotion; an unmistakable heartbeat of the festival.

The festival's energy impressed even first-time attendees. According to an interview conducted by ABS-CBN News, Shom Anatawa from Japan shared his amazement at the scale of the celebration:

"I'm very surprised! In Japan, we don't show up like this; that is why I'm so impressed," he said.

Another visitor, Eva Boloc, who learned about Sinulog online, said:

"There are so many people smiling and enjoying themselves. It's wonderful to see," she shared.

Filipinos from different regions also traveled to Cebu to witness the festival. JC Juanero from Palompon, Leyte, said:

"We really wanted to experience Sinulog because it is the grandest Mardi Gras in the Philippines."

Behind the colorful performances were dancers who endured hours under the sun, offering their energy as a form of devotion. Yet the struggle itself was turned meaningful. Carla Flores from Pundok Nagkahiusa, Barangay Luz, Cebu City, said: "It's not easy because it is very hot today, but it is our offering to the Santo Niño.
The celebrations also recognized outstanding performances. According to The Manila Times, the Tagbilaran City, Bohol contingent placed first in the Ritual Showdown Competition (Sinulog-Based Category) and won Best in Musicality, while Tribu Masadyaon of Toledo City claimed first place in the Free Interpretation Category, also earning Best in Musicality and topping the street dancing competition. (The Manila Times, January 20, 2026)

Despite the massive crowd, the festival remained generally peaceful. Authorities recorded 152 minor injuries, mostly fainting and minor wounds, and Police Lt. Col. Franco Oriol said no major incidents were reported, crediting preparation and the deployment of 9,370 security personnel. A liquor ban was also enforced throughout the city.

Cebu City Mayor Nestor Archival described the event as a success, noting that the streets were already full at the start of the festivities. Visiting officials, including San Juan Mayor Francis Zamora, also praised the city's peace and order, with Zamora expressing interest in applying similar measures in his own city.

As the day drew to a close, the devotion and joy of millions remained unmistakable. Attendees tolerated the heat, the packed streets, and the long hours, all for a glimpse of the Santo Niño and to share in the festival's infectious cheer. Every dance step, every clap, every shout of "Pit Señor!" was a testament to their love and faith. Authorities and organizers, with thousands of security personnel and careful planning, ensured the event ran smoothly, making the celebration possible and safe for all. In every corner of Cebu City that day, the combination of faith, glee, and shared celebration proved why the Sinulog Festival is truly the grandest Mardi Gras in the Philippines

A DECADE PAST, A JOY THAT LASTS

Written by: **Nel Louise Soriano** | Feature Writer

In every scroll on social media nowadays, memories of 2016 gradually resurface—an era full of fun, laughter, and simple moments that, even today, still bring us happiness. One by one, old snapshots appear on the feed: selfies brimming with smiles and familiar Snapchat filters, pictures of friends wearing coordinated outfits, and quiet scenes carrying thoughtful recollections. Along with captions like "2016 me" or "throwback vibes," people join the trend of "2026 is the new 2016." These images are not just reminders of the past, but invitations to re-experience the joy and youthfulness they once held.

Back in 2016, every day seemed to have its own color. Simple hangouts with friends, shared laughter, or quiet moments spent at home watching the sunset now play vividly in our minds. In today's throwback photos, we see how spontaneous we were back then, how uncomplicated our joy was, and how we learned to love and cherish even the smallest things. Each picture seems to convey a subtle message: "I was just like this, unaware of how much I would later grow." There is something refreshing about looking back at ourselves and feeling the delight of that time once again.

What stands out most in these posts is how genuine the memories are. The photos people choose to share are filled with candid smiles, shared experiences, and everyday scenes that once seemed ordinary but now radiate warmth. These images capture who people truly were in those moments—open, carefree, and fully present. As the pictures and memories resurface, they quietly remind us of a version of ourselves that lived without pressure, where happiness was found in togetherness, laughter, and simply being exactly where we were meant to be.

In the end, the trend "2026 is the new 2016" is not about returning to the past. It is about recognizing growth while honoring cherished memories. I used to be like this—and in those photos lies the beginning of who I am now. Reminiscing is not sadness, but wholeness. It is a reminder that the joy we once experienced endures, preserved in memories that continue to illuminate our lives, even as time marches forward. Looking back at these photos from 10 years ago, we can feel the happiness and simplicity of who we were—a feeling that still remains in our hearts today.



Photo source: Sofia in Pinterest


Photo credits
https://paws.org.ph/cruelty-neglect/

FOUR-LEGGED JUSTICE

Written by:
Jeizeery Lhouise Pangilinan | Feature/Literary Editor

A friend.
A companion.
A child.

Three simple words, yet they perfectly describe how people with cats, dogs, and other animals see these creatures that shed light in their lives. These animals do not have a single clue about the harsh reality, and their only mission in life is to welcome their person with a cup of warmth and a wagging tail after an exhausting day. Bathed, fed, and tucked into bed. It is a dream to give these creatures a life full of rainbows as if they were babies. Their story in life is too short, and it is always a hope to give them wonderful chapters to tell. But not all dogs, cats, or other animals experience a golden privilege in life.

Look right, look left. In the Philippines, the fact that there are a lot of dogs and cats roaming unsupervised in different places cannot be hidden under the table. There are 13 million of them who do not have a roof to call home. Hungry and looking for arms that would cradle them. Echoes of cries are what can be heard when they are hurt, and wince are what covers the world when it is pouring, and they have nowhere to go. But the period ot their hardship does not end there. The number of abuses these cats and dogs are facing is increasing as fast as they are multiplying. Sometimes run over by a car and left behind, often picked upon and served as a viand. The reality of animal cruelty in the country is a topic that does not always ring a bell. There are times when it reaches the channels of television and the signals on the radios, but frequently, it is buried six feet underground.

One of the most recent cases of animal abuse in the country is the maltreatment of the cats inside the New Bilibid Prison (NBP) in Muntinlupa. According to reports, these cats face castration due to the inmates being scratched. In an article written by EJ Macababbad of The Philippine Star, Mark, an inmate of seven years, shared that cats are being sold to inmates and some Chinese customers. Additionally, he stated that some NBP personnel dump cats in sacks due to their population rising and impounding them at an undisclosed location. Mark also witnessed cats being decapitated, skinned, and disemboweled to be eaten.

Another report of animal abuse was the cutting of tounge of a dog named Kobe. It was former Valenzuela City Mayor Rex Gatchalian who raised the issue of a dog being sound bleeding along the Aratiles St., Barangay Balangkas in Valenzuela City on December 9, 2025.

In 2025, it was in talks within the Senate to revise the Animal Welfare Law. This revision aims to stitch the loopholes of the said law, such as giving a definition to the word animal and giving life to the Animal Welfare Bureau under the Department of Agriculture. For those with pets, this discussion in the Senate is a big step towards giving a brighter light and hope for dogs and cats that are not taken care of, do not have a roof to lean on, and are being abused.

A friend.
A companion.
A child.

These words should be the ones to be used when describing people's relationships with dogs, cats, and other animals. Like every human, they have the capacity to feel. They experience sadness, pain, and happiness. To respect, care, and love them does not make someone less of a person, but it helps in painting how pure of a heart a person has. Every person should be an instrument for why they have a good story to tell in heaven.

DROWNING IN A BILLION FLOOD


Photo credits: Rappler.com

Written by: **Jeizeery Lhouise Pangilinan** | Feature/Literary Editor

Too complicated... such a mess...

The issue of flood control projects first reached the channels of television and the signals of radios in the State of the Nation Address of President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. in July of 2025. In his SONA, the President shed light on the alleged loss of P118 billion in government funds. Due to this loss, many Filipinos face the hardship following the flood. Cases of Leptospirosis rose to 2,396 in the June-August 2025 report of the Department of Health, causing a shortage of accommodation in various hospitals across the country. From schools to homes, no one was safe from the challenges found in the dirty waters of the flood.

23 days after the 2026 shoot its way into the lives of people, yet the issue of flood control is yet to be resolved. More and more evidence resurfaced from the dirty waters, and more and more names are getting involved. Hearings are commenced left and right, yet no one is held fully accountable.

According to a report laid out by Rappler to the masses on the 19th of January 2026, the investigation might be back to zero due to faulty reports handed out to them by the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), as the coordinates of allegedly ghost projects are not accurate. It is said that they have to revisit their mission of visiting 10,000 projects on top of thousands of others that are yet to be visited. On the other hand, one of the most talked-about names in the whole flood control mess, Cezarah Rowena "Sarah" Discaya, and her husband, Pacifico "Curlee" Discaya, pleaded not guilty to the charges of graft and malversation charges from the alleged P96.5 million ghost flood control project in Davao oriental. Alongside the Discayas are the president of the Disaya-owned St. Timothy Construction, Maria Roma Rimando, and eight officials of the DPWH. In addition to the long list of people involved in the flood control mess is then Senator Ramon "Bong" Revilla Jr., along with six former Bulacan public works engineers and employees, who were sued for allegedly corrupting a flood control project worth P92.8 million.

Too complicated... such a mess...

There is more to all of this. What people see is just the surface of the dirty waters trying to be drained to keep the streets clean. But the big question is, why must the people of the Philippines be the ones who suffer due to the greediness of those who have power?

ANG PAG-IBIG AY KANIBALISMO

Written by: **Jeizeery Lhouise Pangilinan** | Feature/Literary Editor

Ibabalik kita nang buong-buo... pangako 'yon sa'yo... sa'yo lang ang puso ko...
Pangungulila. Matinding pangungulila.
Pagmamahal. Matinding pagmamahal.

Kung bubuksan ang puso ng isang tao... marahil iyan ang makikita. Matinding pangungulila at matinding pagmamahal na unti-unting kinakain nang buong-buo ang kanyang pagkatao. Suntok sa buwan ang pagsubok na pigilan ang ganitong nararamdaman. Kahit anong pilit ay sadyang nakakaadik ang ganitong pakiramdam. Ang pag-ibig na ninanais... damdamin na kapanabik-nabik. Hindi na batid kung gaano kagulo... ka-delikado sapagkat ang puso ay tuluyang inalay at hinayaan na ang pag-ibig ay maging kanibalismo.

Pebrero 14, 2025. Saktong araw ng mga puso nang ilabas ng bandang fitterkarma ang kantang "Pag-Ibig ay Kanibalismo II." Patungo sa dulo ng taon ay tuluyan nitong nilamon ang atensyon ng masa, at naging isang sikat na kanta. Ang tema ng kanta ay binabalot ng kadiliman, malayo sa nakagisnan na tunog ng pag-ibig. Hindi literal na kanibalismo ang nais bigyang diin nito bagkus ang pakiramdam na sa oras na matikman ng isang tao ang pagmamahal, pangungulila ang tanging mananaig kapag nawala ito. Dinadala nito sa liwanag ang katotohanan na mayroong mga pagkakataon na kapag nagmahal ang isang tao, binibigay niya ang lahat-lahat para rito.

Ibabalik kita nang buong-buo... pangako 'yon sa'yo... sa'yo lang ang puso ko...
Pangungulila. Matinding pangungulila.
Pagmamahal. Matinding pagmamahal.

Ang pag-ibig ay isang kanibalismo. Sa pagkakataon na matikmain nito ang puso mo ay paulit-ulit na itong ikokonsumo. Sa ayaw man o sa gusto mo.



Photo Credits: Jeizeery Lhouise Pangilinan



Photo source: Senateph on Facebook

RLE, LEARN FOR FREE

Written by: **Nel Louise Soriano** | Feature Writer

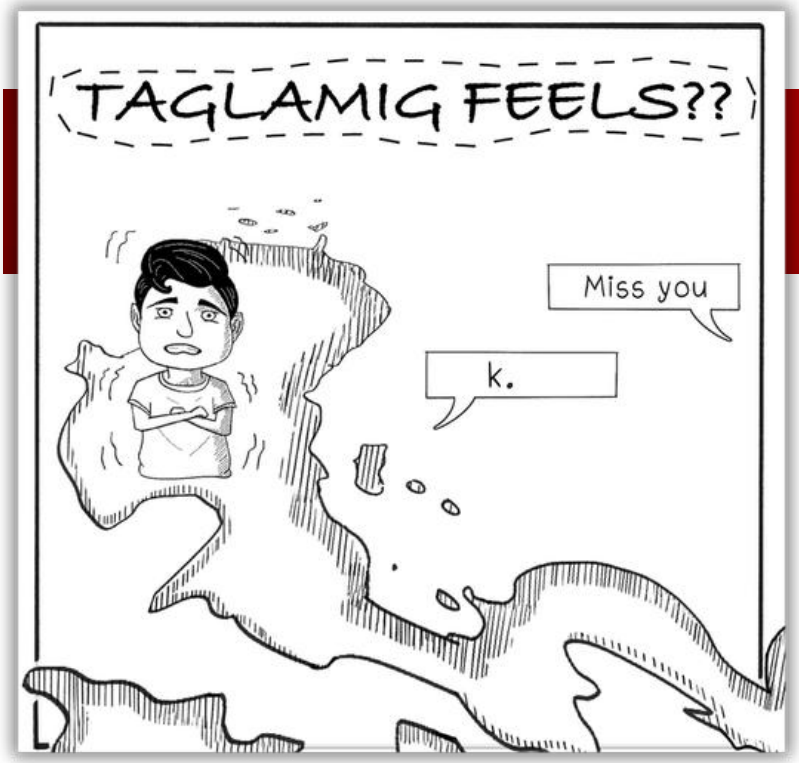
For most nursing students in the Philippines, the Related Learning Experience (RLE) is one of the most anticipated parts of their studies, as it is where they first experience actual hospital and community service. However, alongside this experience comes the burden of expenses that are not covered by the usual free tuition. Despite the Free College Law, RLE still involves fees, which is why many students are forced to take out loans, interrupt their studies, or even surrender their dream of becoming a nurse.

In response to this situation, Senator Paolo Benigno "Bam" Aquino IV filed Senate Bill No. 123, also known as the Libreng RLE Act. The bill proposes making RLE free for nursing students in State Universities and Colleges and Local Universities and Colleges, ensuring that it is no longer charged as a separate fee. Instead, the measure stipulates that the government, through the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), will allocate the necessary funds to support students' practical training.

At present, the Libreng RLE Act has not yet become law and remains a pending bill in the Senate. It is currently undergoing the required legislative processes, including committee discussions and subsequent levels of deliberation. Although its purpose and the support behind it are already evident, the measure must still complete these stages before it can be approved, enacted, and implemented as a permanent national policy.

While the bill is still awaiting passage, temporary measures have been included in the national budget to address the immediate needs of students. Funds have been allocated to provide financial assistance to nursing and allied health sciences students to help cover RLE-related expenses. These funds are expected to be implemented through CHED and UniFAST and will serve as short-term relief while a long-term solution is pursued through legislation.

In the broader context, the Libreng RLE Act goes beyond the issue of school fees. It recognizes the value of the country's future health workers and affirms the belief that training for health services should not become a barrier to education. As discussions on the bill continue, the goal remains clear: to create a fair, inclusive, and humane system that supports the development of the next generation of nurses in the Philippines.



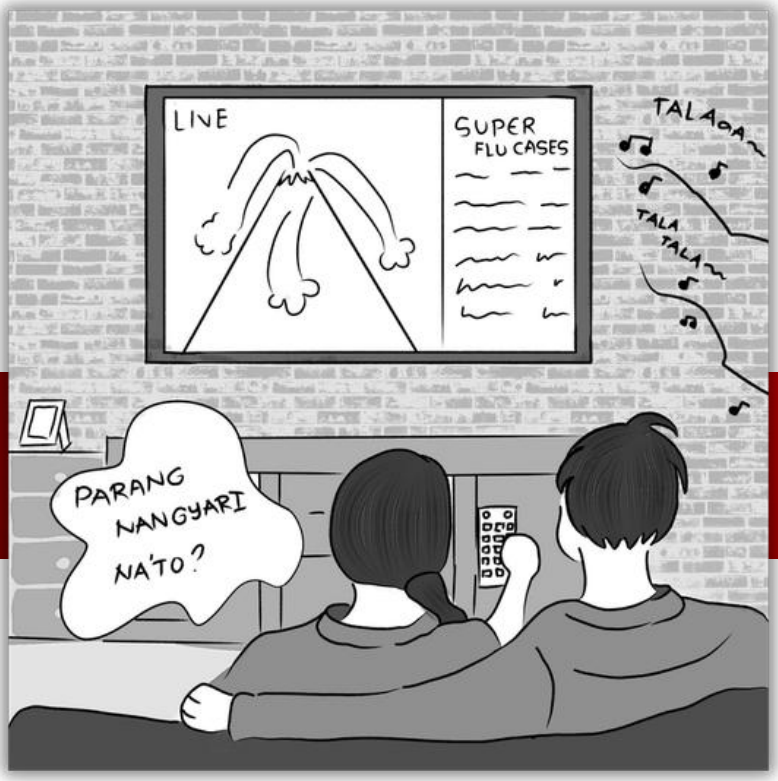
TAGLAMIG FEELS??

Illustration by: **John Adrian Ditchas** | Cartoonist



NEW YEAR, STILL ME

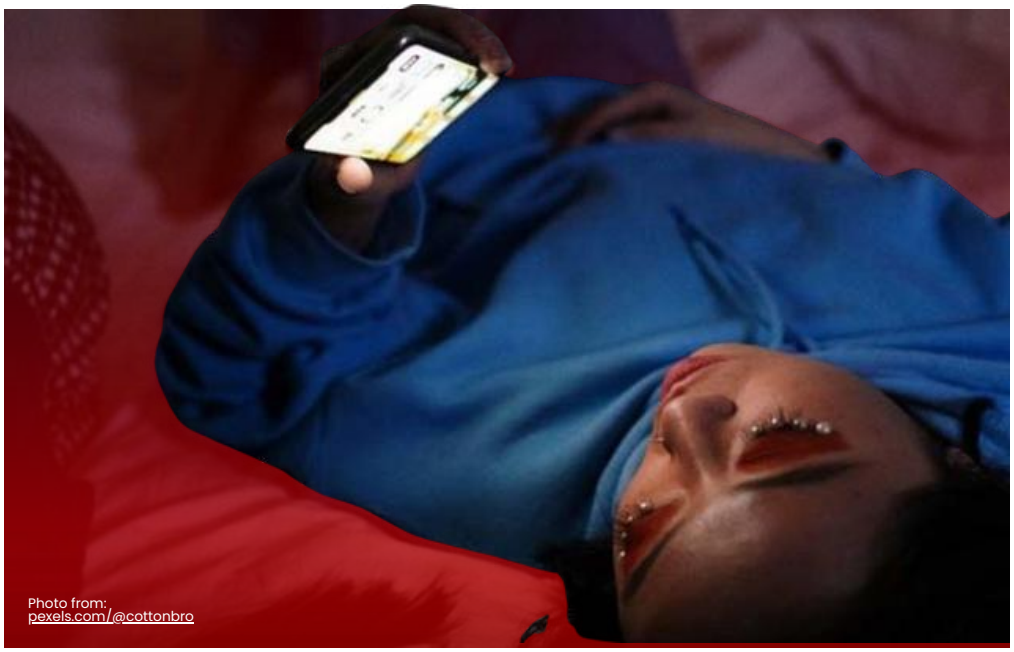
Illustration by: **Angelo Daneiel Egualada** | Cartoonist



DEJA VU?

Illustration by: **Iseyah Mae Mangmang** | Cartoonist

WHEN REST IS DELAYED BY THE SCREEN GLOW


Photo from: pexels.com/@cottonbro

Written by: **Jenrick M. Cervantes** | Feature Writer

Screens from portable electronic devices such as smartphones and tablets are often the last thing seen at night and the first thing reached for in the morning. For students and workers alike, constant screen exposure has quietly reshaped daily routines. Sleep schedules are disrupted, focus becomes scattered, and rest is delayed by the promise of just one more scroll. What was once introduced as a tool for productivity has slowly become a source of exhaustion.

I began noticing this pattern as a student myself. Some nights were extended by notifications that were not urgent, yet felt difficult to ignore. Mornings arrived with tired eyes, even after hours spent in bed. I rested, but the feeling of rest never came.

A similar experience was shared by Lorraine, a college student and a friend of mine. Her screen time was initially driven by academic demands. Online classes and digital submissions required her constant presence on her phone. Yet once schoolwork ended, the screen remained. What was meant to help her relax—messages, short videos, social media—only prolonged her wakefulness. Sleep, she shared, was not deliberately avoided. It was slowly sacrificed, minute by minute, through scrolling.

Studies show that Filipinos spend nearly nine hours a day on digital devices, leaving little time for rest or unplugged moments, according to a report by PhilStar. Local lifestyle coverage in the Manila Bulletin also notes that excessive screen use, especially before bedtime, can interfere with melatonin production, making it harder to fall asleep and reducing the quality of rest.

What makes this pattern harder to break is how normalized it has become. Constant availability is often expected from us, particularly in our academic and work settings. Messages are assumed to be urgent. Responses are expected to be immediate. Our breaks become optional, postponing our need for rest and turning it into "later". In the modern world we are living in, we sometimes prioritize digital presence, often more than our physical and mental limits, as if subtly ignoring them.

A digital detox comes in handy in cases like this. It acts as a conscious pause from constant connection. Screens are put down to allow sleep to return. Silence is permitted. Attention is redirected back to the body. Detox, in this sense, is not about disconnection but about balance. We can still use our technology, but boundaries should be introduced.

In a world that rarely logs off, choosing to rest has become an act of care. Sometimes, the most productive thing that can be done is to close the screen, lie down, and finally let sleep happen.



Photo source: @vicegandako on x

WHO GETS TO BE A MOTHER?

Written by: **Nel Louise Soriano** | Feature Writer

People often ask, "How exactly are children made?" as if the entire discussion of life and nurturing revolves around that single moment. However, ***Call Me Mother***—a film directed by Jun Robles Lana and starring Nadine Lustre, Lucas Andalio, and Vice Ganda—poses the opposite question: How exactly are mothers made? There is no exact process, no definite moment, and no clear guide. Motherhood is built gradually through quiet moments of caring, through responding to the needs of others, and through care that is not measured by time or results. In this way, motherhood is not just a state, but a flow that shapes relationships and nurtures love.

As time goes by, it becomes clear that being a mother is rooted in human experience—there is weariness, fear, and doubt—but through it all, the caring remains. Motherhood is seen in simple acts, in the moments you choose to listen, to guide, or to nurture, even when there is uncertainty. Love does not rely on perfect intentions; it emerges in feeling, in connection, and in the gentle acceptance of each day.

At the same time, there is a growing understanding that motherhood is not bound by gender, body, or tradition. True concern can come from anyone who is willing to embrace responsibility, emotional, moral, and mental—not because of societal norms, but because of an open and honest heart. Viewed through this reality, being a mother is more than a title or role; it is a presence and an affirmation that transcends any limitations of body or gender, offering understanding, compassion, and unwavering care in all circumstances.

And when all the explanations have subsided, the focus gently shifts—it is no longer centralized on the movie alone, but on us. In those moments when someone stayed despite the hardships, someone, understood despite the chaos, and someone cared without asking for anything in return—that is where the true meaning of motherhood emerges. This is not a declaration, but a calm confession. If I am the person who truly nurtured you, who chose to stay and care for you to the best of my ability, can you—call me mother?



THERE ARE LESS STARS IN THE CITIES:

The silent toll of urban lights in life, wildlife, and astronomy

Written by: **Jenrick M. Cervantes** | Feature Writer

My family visited Manila during the Christmas season of 2025, hoping to feel the Christmas spirit. We spent most of our time moving between crowded streets—circling Divisoria, passing by Quiapo Church, and navigating the city. As the time reached evening, we made our way to Bonifacio Global City in Taguig, curious to experience the excitement surrounding it.

The city felt alive, almost breathing alongside us. Everything seemed to invite us to visit them: the glowing malls, luxury shops, and various Christmas decorations scattered around; it was a polished cityscape. But amid our wonder, one thought crossed my mind. The city is incredibly bright. Streetlights lined the road, headlights of vehicles flashed past us, and bright graphics of billboards illuminated to capture our attention. Their glow was mesmerizing, yet overwhelming. After hours of walking, my eyes felt tired, and I asked my family if we could sit for a while.

As I leaned back, I looked up.

"One, two, three..." I stopped counting. There were only a few stars above me. ***"It's not this few in the province"***, I recalled. On the way home, I remained dwelling upon the thought. How come there are fewer stars in these cities? Is there something concealing them? Not knowing that this realization will make me explore one of the most overlooked forms of pollution today.

The reason stars in the night sky are almost impossible to see in cities is largely due to light pollution, a subtle yet growing adversity we face today. Various local studies have shown that it occurs when artificial light is scattered into the atmosphere, brightening the night sky and concealing stars from view. Streetlights, billboards, and building illuminations flood urban environments at night, often with light that is unnecessary or poorly directed. According to DarkSky International, a nonprofit organization that studies night sky health, light pollution is essentially a side effect of our industrial civilization.

Aside from the concealment of stars, artificial light at night affects our health, too, more specifically, the residents of urban centers.

A report from Inquirer Technology highlights findings with reference to DarkSky International stated that artificial light disrupts the body's natural circadian rhythm by interfering with melatonin production. Repeated exposure has been linked to sleep disturbances, stress, and increased risks for chronic conditions such as depression, heart disease, and diabetes. (Inquirer Technology).

Light pollution is not just a human problem. According to Jelaine Gan, a biologist from the University of the Philippines Diliman, many nocturnal animals rely on darkness for survival, and artificial light disrupts their natural behaviors. Insects such as moths are drawn to bright lights, which interferes with their feeding and reproduction. Frogs also struggle to hunt or avoid predators under constant illumination. The bioluminescence signals of fireflies, which are crucial for mating, also become less effective in bright environments, contributing to population declines. Bats, which are important for pollination and pest control, change their foraging patterns when exposed to artificial lights. Light pollution affects the marine environment as well. Artificial lights can alter the behavior of marine organisms, disrupt species interactions and food webs, and impact marine ecosystems. Sea turtles, which naturally rely on moonlight for navigation during migration, can become disoriented and move inland, increasing their risk of predation or starvation (Gan, Impact of Light Pollution on Local Biodiversity, UP Diliman).

Moreover, Gan suggests some known alternatives to reduce light pollution. One is using smarter structural designs for streetlights and other outdoor lights, such as angling them downward and lowering their intensity just enough to serve their purpose. On a larger scale, there should be designated areas for wildlife and astronomical observations—like urban parks—which can provide dedicated spaces to enjoy the night sky while protecting nocturnal animals.

These lights illuminate the city as if nurturing the dreams, opportunities, and success here that carry on overnight. They complement the growing urbanization in our country, but in highlighting their support for the wonders of industrialization, their abundance and intensity also harm the environment on a large scale. As humans, we are responsible for creating objects for our comforts and ambitions, and in doing so, we use the environment and its resources, it is our duty to also restore and balance its natural state. Moreover, policymakers must continue to develop and uphold laws that control pollution and promote technologies that save energy while reducing light pollution.

When these lights are used mindfully without bringing harm in the long run, we preserve the wonder of these stars and give the opportunity to future generations to see their beauty— along with the wildlife, unaffected, thriving, and breathing under the evening glow of the cosmos and then put to sleep by the lullaby of darkness... We can hope that this gift of astronomy is valued, because if the stars were completely hidden, the night sky—once a source of curiosity, awe, and inspiration—would feel empty and dreadful, a thought heavier than the brightest city glow.

A MOTHER'S GAZE:

A glance of pure care and happiness comes from a mother who holds the shade, carries the brightest among the rest.



Captured by: **Karl Eros Tolentino** | Editor-in-Chief

CHILD'S FAITH

A profound window into the heart of smiles in faith. Captures the moment where innocence meets infinite love—a joy that doesn't ask for proof because it already feels the presence.



Captured by: **Karl Eros Tolentino** | Editor-in-Chief

Pluma Publication

The Official Student Publication of URS Taytay

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