THE PIONEER

OFFICIAL UNIVERSITY PUBLICATION OF ANGELES UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION

VOLUME LI ISSUE NO. 1

98%
AUF PASSING RATE

86.98%
NATIONAL PASSING RATE

AUF BS Psychology alumnae ace 2025 Psychometrician licensure exam

Ellisse Sangria

Angeles University Foundation (AUF) BS Psychology graduates secured top spots in the September 2025 Board Licensure Examination for Psychologists and Psychometricians (BLEPP) last September 24 and 25.

Hailie Jade Gopez led the roster of Angelenean achievers after placing 7th with a rating of 88.20%, sharing the rank with 17 other examinees. Nicole Elizabeth Moran followed in 9th place with 87.80%, and Lira Eunice Samonte who claimed the 10th spot with 87.60%.

AUF posted a 98.73% institutional passing rate, surpassing the national average of 86.98% and improving from its previous national performance of 69.78%.

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AUF students remain doubtful of Marcos admin after 3 years

Eeman Petrasanta

Students from Angeles University Foundation (AUF) remain unconvinced that the Marcos Administration has fulfilled its campaign promises, according to an online survey The Pioneer conducted in November 2025.

Out of 222 Angeleans who responded, 213 (95.9%) believed the administration had fallen short on its promises, while 9 (4.1%) said otherwise.

The survey also showed a high dissatisfaction rate of 83.7% among participating students.

Bare minimum actions

After three years in office, dissatisfaction with President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.'s administration continues to intensify among students.

Despite pledges of unity and a "Bagong Pilipinas," respondents said they have yet to witness remarkable changes in the country, some characterizing his leadership "performative" and its progress "underwhelming" and "incompetent."

Continue to page 2...

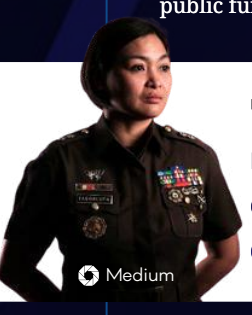
P545B flood spending fails, ghost projects exposed

Julia Bucad

The Philippine government poured over P545 billion into flood control projects during the first three years of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s administration, yet communities across the nation continue to suffer devastating floods while investigators uncover a trail of ghost structures, corruption, and systemic failures.

Investigators uncover 252 ghost projects in nationwide inspection.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) identified 252 ghost flood control projects after inspecting 10,000 infrastructure sites nationwide, revealing a pattern of missing structures that exist only on paper while claiming billions in public funds.



"From the 30,000, 10,000 na po ang ating na-inspect for the side of the AFP. It turned out that a total of 252 ng mga naikot na namin are ghost projects from 2016 to present,"

Military spokesperson Col. Francel Margareth Padilla announced at Camp Aguinaldo.DPWH Secretary Dizon announced the agency will accept the P529 billion budget approved by Congress—P300 billion lower than originally proposed—and promised transparency through a newly launched portal publishing all projects with detailed cost information.

The Commission on Audit (COA) filed four fraud audit reports on Bulacan flood control projects worth over P330 million, flagging ghost structures never built at approved sites, unauthorized relocations without proper documentation, and major gaps in key supporting documents.

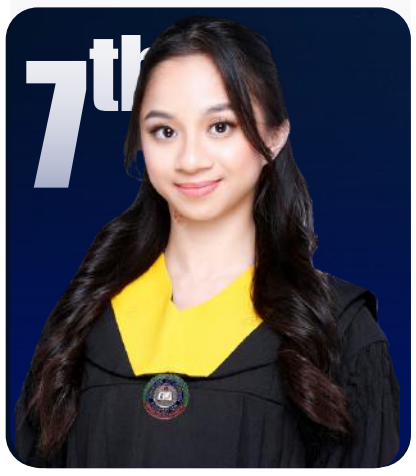
Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) Secretary Vince Dizon admitted his agency recommended criminal and administrative charges against 87 individuals, including former House Speaker Martin Romualdez, while 90 individuals within the department faced dismissal or suspension over the flood control corruption scandal.

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Alyssa Lusung & Sean Nabong









AUF BS Psychology alumnae ace 2025 Psychometrician licensure exam

From Page 1 *Ellisse Sangria* *KASAUF*

In sharing their experiences, the topnotchers revealed the strategies that helped them succeed.

"I realized I couldn't study like a machine. I learned to listen to myself and take things at my own pace, and that helped me focus and stay grounded," she said. "Believing in myself made the difference."

Similarly, Moran described her journey as challenging but rewarding, relying on both her review center and personal strategies:

"Even though I struggled with consistency while working, attending review classes and using drills helped me stay motivated. The key was to focus on what I could do at the moment and trust the foundation AUF gave me," she shared.

Meanwhile, Samonte emphasized courage and persistence for future examinees.

"I never felt fully prepared, but you just have to do it—do it scared, do it anxious. Make the most of your resources. Attend review classes even when tired, and trust your foundation at AUF. You will overcome the challenges," she said.

The Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) administers the BLEPP to evaluate the competence and readiness of aspiring Psychologists and Psychometricians before entering professional practice.

AUF-CON receives nat'l excellence award for healthcare education



Julia Bucad *AUF*

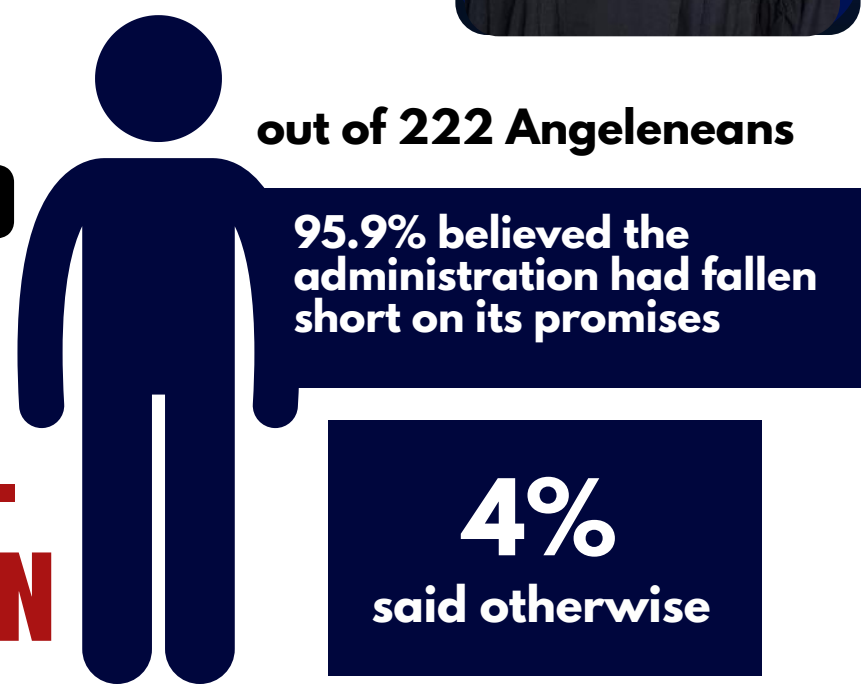
Angeles University Foundation College of Nursing (AUF-CON) earned the Gawad Galing 2025 National Excellence Achievement Award from the T.O.P. Group of Companies on October 1 at City of Dreams Manila.

The award recognizes AUF-CON's significant contributions to nursing education and community leadership in the Philippines.

AUF-CON Dean Zenaida S. Fernandez, Ph.D., Assistant Dean Debbie Q. Ramirez, Ph.D., Level 4 Academic Coordinator Ma. Corazon M. Tanhueco, and Level 4 RLE Coordinator Angela G. Pineda-Apostol accepted the honor at the ceremony.

The Gawad Galing: Global Award of Excellence in Healthcare ceremony brought together healthcare leaders, professionals and institutions from across the country under the leadership of Roland D. Villegas, President and CEO of the T.O.P. Group of Companies.

AUF shared the National Excellence Achievement Award category with two other institutions, Ateneo de Davao University and Gordon College.



AUF students remain doubtful of Marcos admin after 3 years

From Page 1 *Eeman Petrasanta*

Utilization of resources

Angeleneans raised concerns on the government's heavy budget allocations on infrastructure, while other critical sectors lag behind.

Students also observed a lack of safety-focused projects that help during destructive calamities such as strong typhoons and earthquakes, which leads to a surge in casualties.

Some shared worries over the administration's reliance on foreign business and relations to boost the economy, arguing that officials overlook key concerns on education and healthcare.

"Education remains in crisis, with overcrowded classrooms and unfulfilled promises of new facilities. The healthcare system is still fragile, showing little improvement in accessibility or quality," an Angelenean said.

Corruption scandals

Students report numerous corruption controversies under the Marcos Administration, citing lavish lifestyles of public officials during its term.

"The lack of intervention is increasingly frustrating due to piling issues that are not being solved," one student said.

Even with ongoing allegations, Angeleneans said the government fails to hold officials accountable, allowing corruption to continue without formal charges, similar to patterns seen in previous administrations.

Call for reforms

With the high dissatisfaction rates, AUF students reflect on the deepening crises brought by the current administration and urged voters to choose wisely in the next election.

Students agreed that many promises in Marcos' leadership were unfulfilled, with several programs failing to achieve their goals.

For some, the current administration serves as a "lesson" and "reminder," reinforcing concerns that elected officials prioritize self-interest rather than public service.



AUF heightens precautions as influenza-like illness cases rise nationwide

Ellisse Sangria *Chianne Tiglao*

With influenza-like illness (ILI) cases increasing across the country, Angeles University Foundation (AUF) strengthened their health measures to ensure safety of students and staff.

On October 15, the university shifted all classes and work to online modality and suspended on-site campus activities from October 16-18 to conduct institution-wide disinfection and sanitation. The university implemented an alternative learning setup to maintain academic continuity amid health concerns.

According to a student, “The alternative learning setup has been a big help, but it’s also difficult at times, especially with unstable internet and less personal interaction with classmates and professors.”

Prior to this advisory, the University Health Services (UHS) issued a “No Face Mask, No Entry” policy and encouraged the observance of minimum health standards such as frequent handwashing, observing respiratory etiquette and physical distancing when possible.

The university advised individuals who showed flu-like symptoms to stay home and immediately report their condition to their adviser, department head or the UHS for monitoring and proper response.

According to the UHS, there has been a gradual decrease in the number of reported ILI cases as students and employees have become more mindful of proper hygiene, mask-wearing, and staying home when unwell.

This aligns with data from the Department of Health–Region III, which reported that influenza-like illness cases in Central Luzon decreased by 33 percent compared to the same period last year.

The UHS also noted an increase in vaccination interest and greater awareness of the importance of early medical consultation among the AUF community.

Even with the decline in cases, the UHS continues to encourage everyone to practice proper respiratory hygiene, frequent handwashing, and maintain a healthy lifestyle to strengthen immunity.

It also emphasized the importance of staying updated on vaccinations and seeking medical advice promptly for any flu-like symptoms to prevent another rise in infections.

Human Biology student shares journey in AUF’s newest accelerated program

Raissa Mandani *Chianne Tiglao*

Human biology kicked off its first year as a new program at Angeles University Foundation (AUF) under the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) with students sharing their experiences as the pioneer batch of the said program.

AUF introduced BS Human Biology as its new accelerated pre-med program just this academic year, which will only require learners two academic years with three semesters each for them to obtain a bachelor’s degree and be eligible to enroll in the School of Medicine.

With 41 students selected, Human Biology’s pioneer batch set off this year with an aim to “set a course toward medical school and a career in healthcare,” as stated in a November 2024 Facebook post on the university’s page.

In an interview with Caleb Jon Marquez, a Human Biology student, he mentioned the nuances that came with being a student of a new program, including experiencing “lots of schoolwork and multiple quizzes daily across different workloads.”

Marquez also noted that he was still adjusting to biology and medicine-related lessons, along with STEM topics like chemistry, physics and mathematics throughout the semester.

“I know I will have a good background knowing na mag NMAT (National Medical Admissions Test) kami, and eventually mag-med school,” (I know that I will have a good background knowing that we will be taking the NMAT, and eventually be going to medical school,) said Marquez who expressed his confidence in the course and its ability to meet its aim.

Despite these, he still recognized the challenges the course faced in its first year, such as the heavy workloads, yet for Marquez, he still took them as a way to further hone his capabilities as a future doctor.



CCJE, CON, CAMP seal championship titles in annual cultural competitions

Eeman Petrasanta *The Pioneer*

The College of Criminal Justice Education (CCJE), College of Nursing (CON) and College of Allied Medical Professions (CAMP) emerged as champions in the Vocal Solo, Vocal Ensemble, and Dance categories, respectively, during the 2025 Intercollegiate Cultural Competitions on October 29 at the AUF Sports and Cultural Center (SCC)

CCJE’s rhythms of triumph

Vocal Solo Champion, Rosemarie Dizon of CCJE captured the hearts of the judges with her rendition of the Kapampangan folk song, “Maring Mareng,” showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the Kapampangan people.

Dizon reflected on her second-time journey as both challenging and rewarding, saying it taught her resilience and discipline while she balanced practice, academics, and her internship.

“There [were] moments of doubt and pressure, if mananalo po ba ako, because they expect [na] matatalo po [ako] kasi ganun po ang college namin taun-taon,” Dizon said. (There were moments of doubt and pressure if I would win, because they expect that I will lose since that’s how it goes in our college every year.)

“Nung practice ko, no support [from] the councils, as in zero. Nagka-support lang po sila [noong] mismong competition na, which is sana ma-improve nila,” she recalled. (During my practice, there was no support from the councils, like literally zero. They only have support during the actual competition, which I hope they can improve on.)

Dizon’s triumph earned CCJE's first-ever title in the Vocal Ensemble category after the resumption of competitions since the pandemic, making the awarding ceremony emotional for her.

“But personally, this championship means a lot to me… It’s not just about winning, but it’s about proving to myself that persistence and camaraderie truly pay[s] off,” Dizon reflected.

CON’s reclaimed crown

The Vocal iCONs under the guidance of Marjorie Celis, conquered the stage with their Kapampangan performance, clinching the Vocal Ensemble title. The team consisted of Melissa Ferguson, Megan Lorein Pelayo, Joseph Mary Manalili, Geryk Aidan Nulud, Eric Dale Zapanta and Xamantha Romelle Paras.

“We had to live the stories behind each piece to honor our Kapampangan roots… Once you know the songs by heart, everything else will follow,” Nulud stated. “What kept me motivated was the passion we all shared for music and our heritage, and the drive to give our best,” he added.

As the team captain, Ferguson felt the pressure to bring victory back to their college since their last win in the category was in 2023.

Throughout their journey, the members said their team built strong relationships, memorable moments and friendships that nurtured their growth as performers.

“To us, this championship is a reminder of how far we’ve come and how powerful we can be when we sing as one,” Paras said. “We are the Vocal iCONs and together we soar high,” Zapanta continued.

Paras emphasized that the support of their college fueled the team and reminded them that their singing was not only for themselves, but also for everyone who stood by them.

CAMP’s grooves to success

CAMP’s ALYAD dominated the dance stage as they secured the championship in the dance category with their performance of Minalin, Pampanga’s Aguman Sanduk Festival choreographed by John Vincent Sugay.

Jimmy Dimla Jr., CAMP’S Performing Arts Head recalled that their journey made him learn the real meaning of teamwork and discipline, balancing academics with practices, especially as someone who resides in Tarlac province.

“Puno ng sakripisyo… Puno rin ng exhaustion… But through those challenges, together with the CAMP CSC, we learned to trust and [uplift] each other, not just to dance better,” Dimla reflected.

(Full of sacrifices… Full of exhaustion… But through those challenges, together with the CAMP CSC, we learned to trust and uplift each other, not just to dance better.)

ALYAD continued their performance, representing their festival with pride and confidence.

Through their support systems, the cheers boosted the performers’ energy and gave them strength to push through and give their all on stage.

Looking back, ALYAD viewed this championship as a living testament that that hard work and collective effort pays off and is worth it.

“For ALYAD, it means unity and fulfillment. The trophy does not only mean a win for us, but it is the representation of our shared journey and the passion we all have for dancing,” Dimla concluded.



NHCP rejects Oct. 13 holiday plea in AC

Raissa Mandani Sunstar

The National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP) has denied the request of the City Government of Angeles to declare October 13—the Monday following the celebration of Fiestang La Naval—as a special non-working holiday, the Angeles City Information Office revealed in a post.

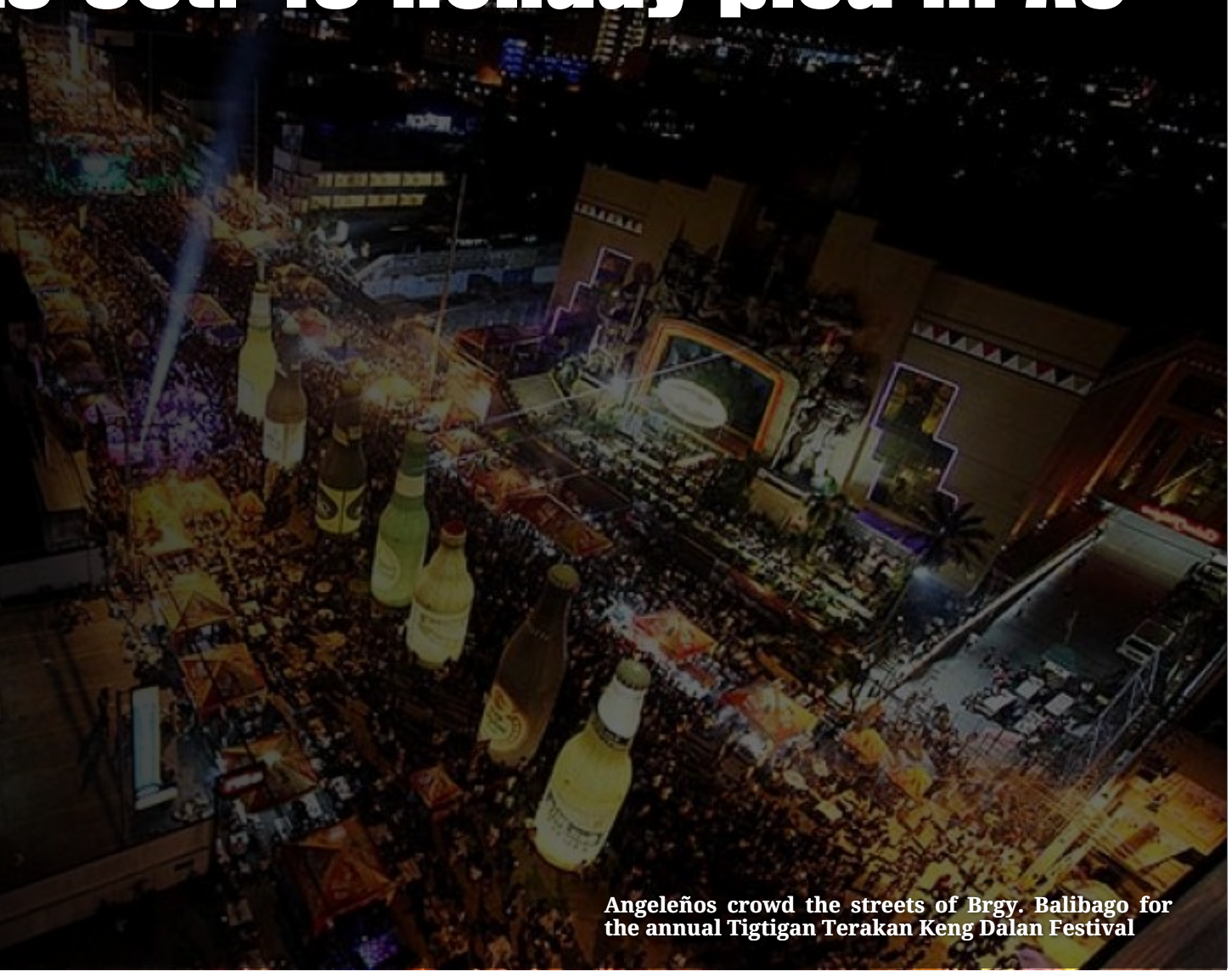
The decision drew outrage from netizens who expressed their disappointment in the comment section of the post, many stating that this is the "first time" the day after the fiesta was not considered a non-working holiday.

Some schools, however, suspended classes in light of the festival, including Holy Angel University, Systems Plus College Foundation, STI College Angeles, and Noblesse International School.

The celebration, held every second Sunday of October, honors Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary of La Naval that has long been a tradition in Angeles City—dating back to the early 1800s and is part of the month-long Fiestang Kuliat which began in 1992.

The request to NHCP included the Apung Mamacalulu Festival, part of Fiestang Kuliat held on October 24, was also not approved by the agency.

As of press time, there have been no statements from the NHCP explaining the reason for its decision.



Angeleños crowd the streets of Brgy. Balibago for the annual Tigtigan Terakan Keng Dalan Festival

THREAT ARREST

Bomb threat hoaxes rock Pampanga schools

Fiona Espinosa National Bureau of Investigation

Multiple bomb threats targeted various schools and universities across Pampanga during the first two weeks of October, including campuses in Angeles City and City of San Fernando Pampanga.

Online messages warning potential explosions targeted several institutions on October 6, including Pampanga State University's Bacolor and Mexico campus, Pampanga Colleges in Macabebe, Holy Cross College in Sta. Ana and Our Lady of Fatima University in the City of San Fernando.

The following days saw similar hoax threats affecting National University Clark, City College of Angeles and other schools within the vicinity of Pampanga.

Law enforcement teams, including the Pampanga Police Provincial Office (PPO) and Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD) K9 units, immediately cleared buildings and secured the locations.

Police investigators did not find any explosives in any of the campuses they inspected, according to reports from the PPO and the Philippine Information Agency (PIA).

The National Bureau of Investigation - Central Luzon Regional Office arrested a 21-year old woman in Brgy. Pandan, Angeles City, for allegedly posting bomb threats using a fake social media account on October 13.

Authorities charged her with violating Presidential Decree 1727 (P.D. No. 1727), the "Bomb Prank Law," penalizing malicious dissemination of false information on bombs or explosives.

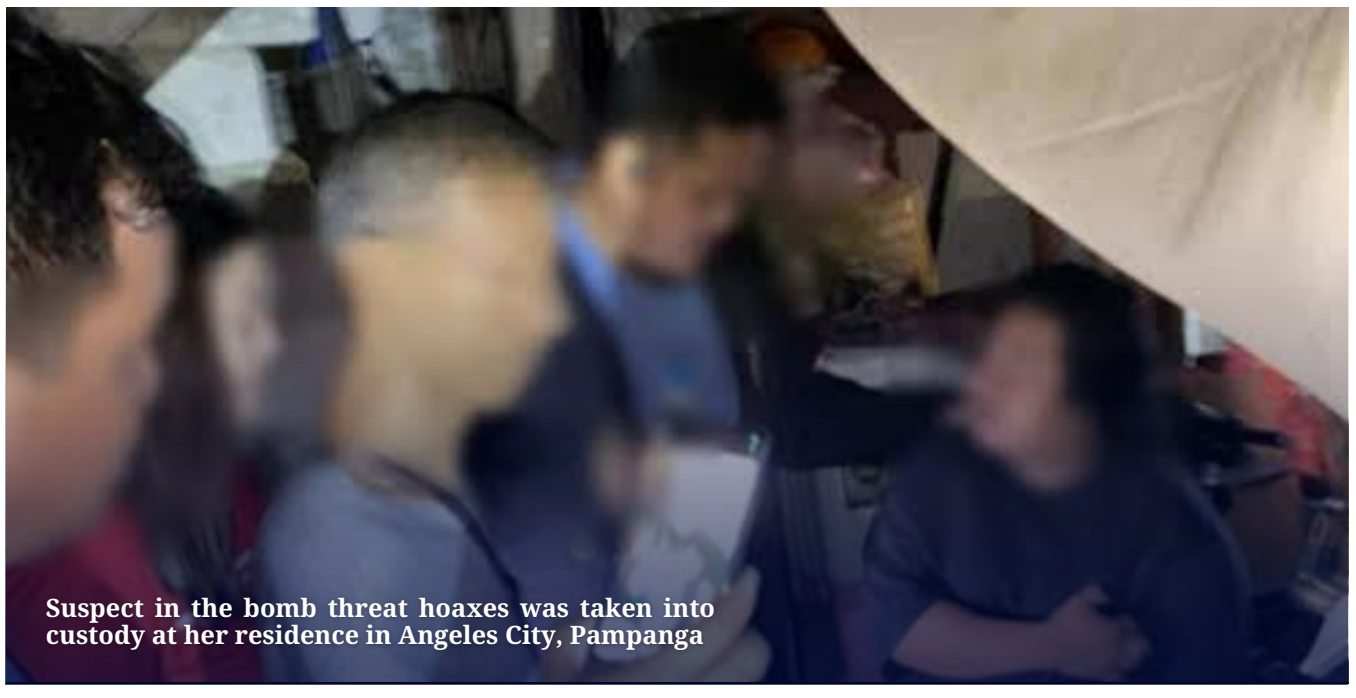
Authorities confirmed the hoax threats caused significant disruption to academic activities and widespread anxiety among students and parents.

The Pampanga Police have since conducted safety-awareness seminars and coordination meetings with school administrators to strengthen emergency preparedness and digital-security awareness.

Officials warned the public that spreading false bomb threats is a serious crime penalized by law, including imprisonment under P.D. No. 1727.

They also urged students and social media users to avoid sharing unverified information online, as it could worsen panic and interfere with investigations.

PIA declared all campuses safe after conducting thorough inspections, as authorities continued digital-forensic investigation to trace origins of the online messages and prevent future hoaxes.



Suspect in the bomb threat hoaxes was taken into custody at her residence in Angeles City, Pampanga



Rep. Lazatin meet with officials from NBI, PNP, Anti-Cybercrime Group and DepEd First District representatives to discuss recent bomb threat incidents

Rep. Lazatin pushes 2-week class suspension amid earthquakes

Lark Gatbunton iOrbit News

Pampanga First District Representative Carmelo "Pogi" Lazatin, Jr. urged the Department of Education (DepEd) to postpone face-to-face classes and opt for alternative learning delivery on October 13, following a series of earthquakes in the country.

Through the House Resolution No. 368, Lazatin proposed a two-week suspension of classes in public and private schools nationwide, to give DepEd and educational institutions time to formulate disaster preparedness guidelines, ensuring student, faculty and staff safety.

Lazatin acknowledged that the country is prone to natural disasters and said the recent earthquakes showed that semi-regular drills are insufficient preparation.

In his press release, he claimed reports and videos online have shown unpreparedness of students, teachers and school personnel by exhibiting unawareness in emergency responses during the earthquake.

In line with this, he asserted the need for clear guidelines specifying actions and response of the school administrators, school personnel and teachers during disasters and emergencies.



Angeles City residents join nationwide anti-corruption protests

Fiona Espinosa *CLTV36*

Hundreds of residents, members of civic groups and youth organizations gathered in Angeles City on September 21, joining a series of nationwide anti-corruption protests demanding accountability and transparency in government infrastructure projects.

The Koalisyon Kontra Kurakot (KKK) and the Inter-Fraternity Sorority Solidarity (IFSS), organized separate but simultaneous demonstrations, each calling attention to alleged irregularities in local and national flood-control projects, carrying various banners against corruption.

The rally began at the Old Public Market and concluded at the Heritage District, drawing hundreds of participants and approximately 1,000 spectators from various civic and sectoral groups.

Multiple news sites present at the rally reported the event as peaceful and closely monitored by the Angeles City police for crowd safety and traffic control.

Protesters expressed their call for better public service and dismay on corruption.

“We came here not for politics but for honesty in public service,” one protester from the KKK organization said.

“Flooding remains a major problem, yet billions are spent on projects that don’t exist,” they added.

On September 23, KKK clarified that its Angeles City protest was not affiliated with another rally in the city held the same day, emphasizing that their movement was locally organized and issue-based.

As the rally concluded, both KKK and IFSS leaders vowed to sustain their citizen-led monitoring of local government projects and organize public forums to promote integrity in governance.

“This is not the end. Citizens have the right to know where their taxes go—and we will keep demanding that truth,” an IFSS representative conveyed.

Across the country, similar rallies took place as part of a broader campaign for the war on corruption.

Philippines hit by multiple major quakes in two weeks

Raissa Mandani

A series of strong earthquakes scattered across the Philippines’ main islands shook the country from September 30 to October 11, affecting thousands of households in less than two weeks.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS) announced that the magnitude 6.9 earthquake struck northern Cebu on September 30 at around 10 P.M. followed by 722 documented aftershocks—including a magnitude 5.7 tremor 13 days later, reaching Intensity VII near its epicenter in Bogo City and in nearby towns

According to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), the death toll for the said earthquake reached 79, with at least 1,271 injured, while 134,229 houses were reported to be destroyed with the cost of damages amounting to P6,765,661.

Ten days after the Cebu earthquake, on October 10, a doublet earthquake with magnitudes of 7.4 for the first and 6.7 to 6.8 for the next hit Davao Oriental, forcing 212,246 families to flee their homes, costing P100 million in infrastructure damage.

The NDRRMC has reported 8 deaths across five days, while 395 were injured as over 1,387 aftershocks were recorded and an issued tsunami warning by PHIVOLCS from the epicentre’s location in the offshore of Manay, Davao Oriental.

A day later, a 5.1-magnitude earthquake rocked Zambales, with the highest recorded at Intensity IV around Olongapo City—although minor tremors occur in some cities in the National Capital Region (NCR), Bulacan and Cavite, with no damages or casualties documented by NDRRMC.



WHAT LIES BENEATH. Members of the Philippine Coast Guard deploy in the waters of Taal Lake off Talisay town in Batangas province



Families of missing ‘sabungeros’ cling to hope as DOJ evaluates complaints

Eeman Petrasanta *Rappler*

Families of the 34 missing “sabungeros” (cockfighting enthusiasts) remained hopeful as the Department of Justice (DOJ) continued to review filed complaints against gaming tycoon and businessman Charlie “Atong” Ang and 60 other individuals behind their disappearances in seven different incidents between April 2021 to late 2022.

DOJ Prosecutors are currently evaluating whether there is enough evidence to file the case in court for trial, otherwise the complaints may be dismissed.

Julie “Dondon” Patidongan, both the accused and key whistleblower in the case identified Ang as the alleged “mastermind” behind the disappearance of the sabungeros.

High-profile figures who were allegedly involved including Gretchen Barretto, Col. Jacinto Malinao, Jr., Lt. Col. Ryan Jay Orapa, retired Lt. Gen. Jonnel Estomo, the former chief of the Philippine National Police (PNP) National Capital Region Police Office and other unnamed police officers.

The National Police Commission (NAPOLCOM) also filed administrative charges against 11 accused police officers, who will face two counts of grave misconduct and unbecoming of a police officer for the disappearance of two sabungeros, separate from filed criminal cases.

Complaints filed against the 61 individuals on October 21—57 of them filing their counter-affidavits within the period allowed by the DOJ, outlining their defenses and disputes.

In Patidongan’s interview, he claimed that the missing sabungeros were abducted, killed and dumped in Taal Lake.

Since July 10, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) has conducted a total of 60 operations and recovered 981 bones as of November 5—887 were confirmed human remains such as a skull and ribs inside sacks weighted with sand bags intended to sink them.

Including the 981 bones recovered, 3 sets of human remains were recovered from the cemetery.

Authorities will submit the recovered remains for DNA testing and will compare them with reference samples provided by families of the missing, although they have not conducted the tests yet.

However, PCG suspended all its operations on their search due to the recent volcanic activity of Taal Volcano, resulting in bad weather and poor water visibility on October 27.

According to DOJ spokesman Polo Martinez, PCG remains on standby awaiting clearance to resume operations.



P545B flood spending fails, ghost projects exposed

From Page 1

Julia Bucad Asha Mercer

Communities bear the cost of failed infrastructure

The human cost manifests daily in communities like Barangay Sipat in Plaridel, Bulacan, where residents like Josephine Dela Cruz watch soil erode with every storm as flood waters threaten her family's home.

"We were really disappointed when we heard how big the funds were for flood control, and we were left behind," said Dela Cruz, who has lived by the Angat River for more than 40 years while waiting for promised flood protection that never materialized.

Oscar Gabriel, chief of Sipat village in Plaridel, expressed the frustration of communities caught between natural disasters and human-made corruption after learning his village's flood protection project had been marked complete in 2024 despite no visible work until August 2025.

"I was shocked when I recently learned about this ghost project, and I felt pity for my community. We were happy that a project like this came to us, but we were tricked and lied to," Gabriel said.

Political connections drive contractor selection

The investigation revealed connections between political power and construction contracts, with at least 18 members of the 20th Congress having ownership or connections to companies receiving public works contracts from the government.

Billionaire couple Pacifico "Curlee" II and Cezarah "Sarah" Discaya emerged as the biggest beneficiaries, with their companies and linked firms bagging 421 projects totaling P31 billion—more than the annual net revenues of major Philippine corporations.

The Co family of Bicol, whose member Elizaldy Co chaired the powerful House appropriations committee, secured companies linked to them P15.7 billion in flood-control contracts, allowing family members to display lavish lifestyles that include luxury vehicles and international property hunting.

Agencies fail to create national master plan despite P545 billion spending

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Government pledges reforms and transparency measures

President Marcos addressed accountability in his State of the Nation Address, directing his message to those involved in the scandal:

"Mahiya naman kayo," he said,

addressing contractors and officials involved in kickbacks linked to failed flood-control projects.

DPWH Secretary Dizon announced the agency will accept the P529 billion budget Congress approved, which is P300 billion lower than the original proposal, and promised transparency through a newly launched portal publishing all projects with detailed cost information.

"We will properly use the budget that was given to us by our Congress," Dizon pledged, while announcing plans for massive recruitment tours in schools to find "young, dynamic, and idealistic engineers and accountants" as part of reform measures.

The Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) and Bureau of Customs (BOC) launched investigations into the financial records of implicated contractors while the Independent Commission for Infrastructure (ICI) fast-tracks its probe.

House refuses to zero out P243B unprogrammed funds

Julia Bucad

The House of Representatives approved P243 billion in unprogrammed appropriations (UA) for the proposed 2026 national budget, rejecting calls from opposition lawmakers to completely remove the funds amid an ongoing corruption concern.

Lawmakers trimmed only P6.766 billion (2.61%) from the original P249.9 billion that the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) proposed, maintaining what critics call "standby pork" in the national spending plan.

The reduction came mainly from removing the P6.766-billion unprogrammed allocation for Public Health Emergency Benefits and Allowances for Health Care and Non-Health Care Workers.

At least 12 House members manifested their dissent during the passage of the 2026 General Appropriations Bill, signaling internal opposition to keeping the unprogrammed funds.

The Senate later slashed the allocation to P174.56 billion, removing P68.77 billion (28.23%) from the House version by cutting programs like SAGIP and the Marawi Siege Victims Compensation Program.

The Senate also reduced the unprogrammed allocation for the Revised Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Modernization Program from P50 billion to P30 billion.

Rep. Robert Nazal of Bagong Henerasyon party-list warned that the mechanism remains "prone to abuse" and strengthens his group's call for complete removal.

"Justice Hernando's opinion makes clear what we have been warning all along – this mechanism is prone to abuse and should no longer appear in the 2026 budget," Nazal said.

Supreme Court Associate Justice Ramon Paul Hernando “warned” that UA "create an unregulated space where discretion replaces discipline and where the temptations of greed and corruption inevitably find room to operate" in his separate concurring and dissenting opinion on the PhilHealth funds case.

The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) reported that UA funded billions for flood control and infrastructure projects under the Marcos administration.

When the Marcos administration started, UA soared from P251.64 billion in 2022 to P807.16 billion in the 2023 budget before decreasing to P731.4 billion in 2024 and P531.7 billion in 2025.

Opposition lawmakers have called UA "standby pork," with Liberal Party members questioning its constitutionality before the Supreme Court in 2024.

Both chambers will now enter a bicameral conference committee to finalize the 2026 budget, as civil society organizations renew calls for the talks to be opened to the public—a transparency measure both the House and the Senate have pledged but have yet to institutionalize.



Israeli air and missile strikes leave southern Gaza devastated in dust

Israeli strikes continue after Gaza ceasefire

Lark Gatbunton EPA/ Mohammed Saber

Israeli military operations in Gaza remained despite the signed Israel-Hamas ceasefire agreement, killing over 230 Palestinians near the “Yellow Line” demarcation.

On October 10, a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas took effect as part of the first phase of a US-backed 20-point peace plan, facilitating the release of living Israeli hostages by Hamas in exchange for living and deceased Palestinian prisoners.

Despite the truce, reports of agreement violations surfaced as Israeli forces conducted 190 post-ceasefire operations in Gaza, focusing on areas beyond the “Yellow Line” demarcation, which includes Rafah and northern Gaza, giving them control over half of the territory.

Following the death of three Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers and accusations of failing to return the expected number of deceased hostages against Hamas, Israel employed two waves of remote attacks as retaliation, leaving major fatalities in October.

The following operations included the destruction of more than 1,500 buildings in Gaza and airstrikes, spanning from October to November.

In November, violence intensified as Israelis raided the West Bank, including Tubas and Jenin, which imposed curfews and school closures in the area.

More than 130 settler attacks injured over 90 Palestinians amid new settlement outposts that heightened displacement risks among Palestinians.

The UN also reported over 1,000 Palestinian deaths in the West Bank since October 2023, while the Gaza Health Ministry confirmed that the death toll exceeded 69,700.



Next Stop, Influenza





Trick or Tax







Relief for Sale? The The ₱20 Rice Controversy







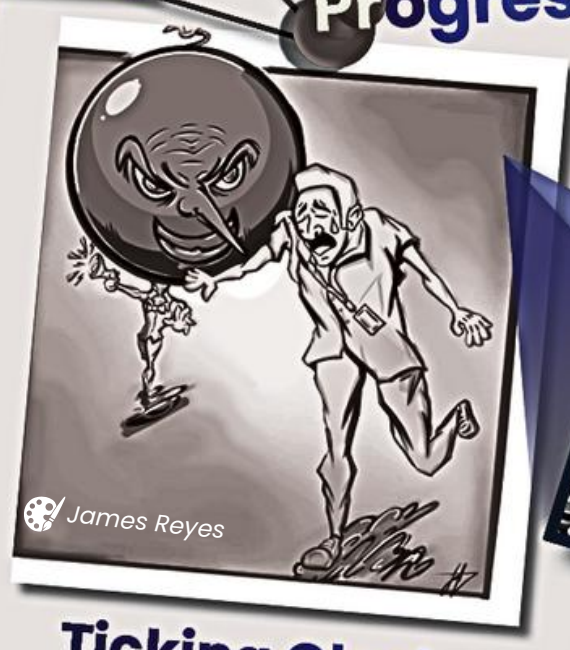






From 111 to 105: PH Peace Progress...ish?

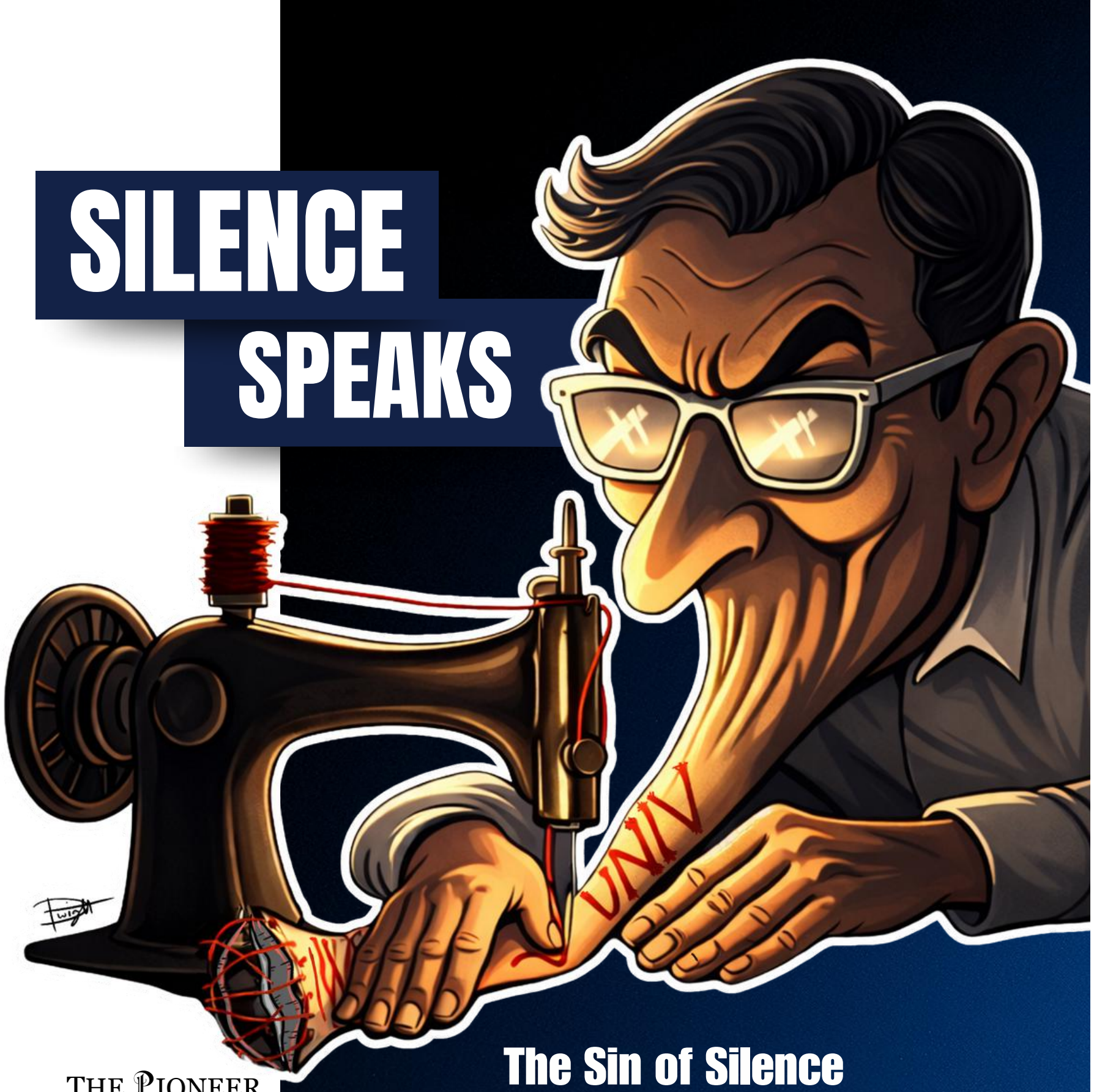
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Ticking Clocks and Nerves

SILENCE SPEAKS



The Sin of Silence

There is dignity in restraint, but there is danger in silence.

This expectation is not merely rhetorical. Under Article XIV, Section 3 of the Philippine Constitution, educational institutions are mandated to teach the rights and duties of citizenship, strengthen ethical and spiritual values, and develop moral character. Yet by remaining silent amid national unrest, universities betray this duty, enabling a culture that rewards excellence while excusing negligence.

Universities' selective silence kills credibility—quick to celebrate academic success, yet restrained when student welfare and social realities demand clarity. Urgent class suspensions that impact student welfare are dismissed, while other observances receive prompt announcements, resembling institutional evasion rather than professionalism.

An institution who glorifies compassion and civic engagement cannot remain publicly quiet when those values are tested within its own campus. This stark pattern reveals a reality: visibility is prioritized when it strengthens institutional image, while caution dominates when accountability is needed, reflecting a culture of risk avoidance rather than responsiveness.

During crises, students do not expect perfection—they expect presence, clarity, and warmth from the institution who vowed to ensure their safety. As seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, universities that failed to communicate effectively left students anxious and unsupported. Silence weakens trust and undermines moral leadership.

Concern cannot remain a slogan when its practice disappears precisely when it is most needed.

Defenders of institutional silence often argue that restraint is necessary: to avoid controversy, protect privacy, and prevent misinformation during sensitive situations. Yet, discretion is not the same as disappearance. Prolonged silence creates informational vacuums that invite rumor, anxiety, and distrust. Universities exist not only to manage risk, but to model accountability under pressure. Questioning policy gaps, communication failures, and value inconsistencies is not an act of disloyalty, but a courageous act to face uncomfortable truths.

Universities exist precisely to encourage critical inquiry, ethical reflection, and institutional self-correction. The power to amplify the voice of reason lies in the v ko ery hands of both the students and the university. Without it, scrutiny may only preserve short-term reputation, but will weaken long-term trust. The issue is not whether an institution speaks more often, but whether it speaks when it matters.

Silent universities cultivate bystander citizens. If an institution expects moral maturity from its students, it must reflect on how it communicates, operates, and takes responsibility. These institutions, framed as centers of excellence, will only remain an irony if learners continue to be unfazed in injustices that demand action. Students, as the core of the succeeding generation, must not be deafened by institutional silence, but rise as active citizens unafraid to challenge anomalies. Thus, it is the institution's duty to lead by example, not cower in the shadows of comfort.

THE PIONEER

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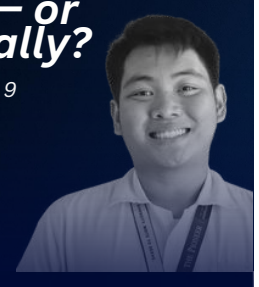
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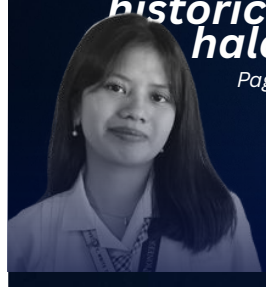
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Nvm, I 'fixed' it — or really?



PARAPET

Lark Joshua Gatbunton
Editor-In-Chief

Scrolling through social media these days feels like popping a floating bubble with every trend passing by as quickly as a Tiktok dance clip. But among these trends, the "how do I fit this into my header?" remains stubborn as ever, with its recent reemergence cementing these posts repeatedly on feeds. Likewise, the persistence of "Nvm I fixed it" flooded the internet with varying humor paired with frustrations.

Apparently, this trend is deeply rooted in the comedic approach known as bait-and-switch, the setup promises one thing, and the punchline delivers another. While it remains an effective humor tool that keeps the masses engaged, it also mirrors how Filipinos compromise with promises left unfulfilled. As such, making ourselves fit into the undeniably small 'header box' of government and its broken systems should never be the norm.

One encounter with this trend left me momentarily confused before the humor kicked in: an overly stretched image defying the header box "rules" upon opening OP's profile.

On closer look, it mirrors how we force ourselves to fit into real-life spaces and services, such as braving overcrowded rides under a poor public transportation system.

Even children have to endure a 1:50 classroom-to-student ratio, as opposed to the national target of 1:40. Worse, bending within the box is no longer an option. The COVID-19 pandemic made this clear, as some hospitals refused to admit more patients due to a lack of facilities. Yet, our response remains concerningly familiar: "Nvm, I fixed it," while our fundamental rights hang by a thread.

As I swipe further away from these systemic issues, another post attracts my finger like a magnet, expecting another funny overstretched header. To my surprise, the profile greeted me with a heartwarming one, soothing enough to offer a fleeting sense of solace. A few more scrolls led me to a short video of a typhoon victim overcoming the fierce currents with the brand "resiliency."

In that moment, the header and the video felt comparable, both revealing the easy romanticism of settling for less instead of admitting our need for a bigger box, one that will address our needs and ensure safety. Yet, in unison, we once again proclaim "Nvm, I got it," despite the glaring disservice of an anomalous governance.

Just when I thought I had seen every kind of header, a profile surprised me with a punchline: a joke dressed as a fix, earning a quick laugh before the next swipe.

This laughter reflects our response as we watch the country's chaotic "dramas" unfold — from political feuds to never-ending corruption.

Soon after a political blunder, our feeds are suddenly filled with memes, which show how we cope with humor, taking brief breaths inside the box we've jammed ourselves into. As expected, we once again return to "Nvm, I did it," at the expense of our welfare.

While some assert the familiar narrative of Filipino "resourcefulness," this attitude risks normalizing a flawed system fueled by greed and injustice. Some may argue that this trait was instrumental in surviving the hardships inflicted by those in power; however, these responses are merely short-term solutions driven by instinct rather than change. Thus, scrolling past these issues as if they were repetitive memes cultivates a culture built on masked realities instead of accountability.

Hence, Filipinos must keep demanding a better political system, while our national leaders must heed these calls. Real strength is not about shoving ourselves into a small space; it is about building a bigger one that meets our needs. Government officials must uphold accountability and act beyond electoral visibility; after all, expanding the "header box" is the bare minimum.

Checking every header left us expecting the unexpected—bringing laughter, solace, and even frustrations that reflect the compromises we endure. But as we keep swiping, when will we finally see a caption that reads, "Nvm, it's fixed fr!"?

In that moment, the header and the video felt comparable, both revealing the easy romanticism of settling for less instead of admitting our need for a bigger box, one that will address our needs and ensure safety. Yet, in unison, we once again proclaim "Nvm, I got it," despite the glaring disservice of an anomalous governance.

Beyond the historical halos



OBELISK

Kirsten Nicole De Vero
Associate Editor

Filipinos are natural devotees. As a country deeply rooted in Catholic tradition, seeking the divine has long been a source of comfort. Praying to saints, fascination with the supernatural, and belief in spiritual entities continue to shape Filipino life. In this culture, perfection becomes the standard for a role model—someone without mistakes, without flaws, incapable of wrongdoing.

Think back to your very first hero. Were they brave? Brilliant? Kind? A patriot who never wavered in their principles? These are the qualities we cling to, because admiration does more than inspire—it feeds a quiet longing to feel whole, accepted, and worthy ourselves.

Yet, beneath this admiration lies an uncomfortable truth that history has long tried to soften, perhaps to protect the innocence of children who dream of changing the world. We were taught that our independence was won by perfect patriots: pure, selfless individuals who devoted their entire lives to a freedom they would never live to experience.

This reaction was evident in the public response to the film Quezon. When the movie stripped Manuel Quezon of his polished image as the selfless president who saved Jews from Hitler and revealed his ambitious, scheming side, many chose to look away.

One of his descendants, Ricky Quezon-Avancena even called it disrespectful and discrediting their family's memory.

This was not unique to Quezon at all. When José Rizal's doubts about revolution, Andrés Bonifacio's political failures and execution by fellow Filipinos, or Emilio Aguinaldo's role in Bonifacio's death are discussed, the response is often the same—denial and outrage. Confronting these truths is treated as disrespect, as if admitting their humanity threatens the idea of heroism itself.

What history frequently omits is that the heroes revered like gods in textbooks once lived like us. They were humans—and deeply flawed. Perhaps, it was easier to unite a nation behind perfect figures than to confront the uncomfortable truth that the people who shaped our freedom were as complex and conflicted as we are.

When Filipinos are finally confronted with the human side of heroes–their careless mistakes, ambition, and questionable decisions, discomfort follows. People lose their minds when they realize that those they glorified are capable of the same faults they harshly condemn, or worse, quietly commit themselves.

Some argue that exposing a hero's flaws "ruins their legacy," while others believe they no longer deserve to be called heroes at all. These reactions reveal a deeper issue: the belief that heroism and humanity cannot coexist.

Isn't it ironic that such an imperfect country continues to thirst for perfect role models?

Here lies a harsh truth many refuse to face: Filipinos crave perfection because they fear that those who once gave them hope will become mirrors of their own imperfections—the very flaws they try so hard to escape.

Takot sa sariling multo. Afraid of seeing themselves reflected in the people they admire most.

Yet heroism, in hindsight, was never meant to diminish humanity. Before they were written into textbooks, our heroes were mere beings —with dreams, fears, and ambitions held close to their chests. They lived ordinary lives, made poor decisions, acted irrationally, and carried personal struggles. More than a worshipped figure, they were real people too.

Acknowledging this does not erase what they gave to the country. It does not lessen their sacrifices or invalidate their convictions. Instead, it reminds us that their courage existed despite their imperfections, not because they lacked them.

When heroes are stripped of their untouchable image, they become relatable. Their struggles mirror our doubts and failures, and we learn to empathize with them rather than worship them from a distance. In seeing their humanity, we realize that greatness does not require perfection—conviction, courage, and the willingness to act even when afraid. Heroes then become proof that ordinary people, like us, can make history too.

Philippine history should not be viewed through a single, glorified lens, and its complexity must be embraced. More than an ancient tale, it is a record of real lives lived by real people.

History is not merely a story of the past—it is a mirror of the present. And by learning from the mistakes of those who came before us, we learn to understand their consequences so they never happen again.

Filipinos crave perfection because they fear that those who once gave them hope will become mirrors of their own imperfections—the very flaws they try so hard to escape. Takot sa sariling multo. Afraid of seeing themselves reflected in the people they admire most.

A hotline that hangs up



PLINORA

Sophia Bernadette Briones
Managing Editor for Publication

The hardest calls to make are often the ones that are supposed to save you.

In the aftermath of a young woman's death, grief has pushed people to look for answers too quickly. Social media and online hate is framed as the culprit. From this certainty emerged proposed measures like the so-called Emman Atienza Bill and the Anti-Online Hate and Harassment Bill filed by Senator JV Ejercito, both presented as steps toward suicide prevention.

But suicide is rarely the result of a single cause, and pretending otherwise does more harm than good.

There is something unsettling about how quickly we cling to neat explanations when someone dies by suicide. One trigger. One platform. One final push. It comforts us to believe that the solution is just as simple. Regulate this, criminalize that, and then call it prevention. But suicidality is cumulative. It is shaped by untreated mental illness, financial strain, chronic stress, isolation, and systems that fail people long before they reach a breaking point.

Reducing a person's death to online hate alone does not honor them. It flattens a lifetime of struggle into an easier narrative to swallow.

This is why suicide-prevention rhetoric means nothing when it refuses to confront how unprepared our mental health systems already are. We do not lack laws. We already have legislation on libel, cybercrime, bullying, and mental health. What we lack is implementation. What we lack is funding. What we lack is follow-through.

For many Filipinos, government mental health hotlines are supposed to be the most immediate form of help. But what happens when even that line lets you down? When the voice on the other end sounds irritated? When the call ends in under a minute? When reaching out might even come with a charge?

A hotline that hangs up is more than bad service. It is a reflection of how little we value mental health in this country.

The irony is cruel. We constantly tell people to speak up, reach out, and ask for help—only to offer them a hollow response. We celebrate Mental Health Awareness Month with pubmats and hashtags, but awareness means very little when the system itself does not understand what compassion requires.

The truth is our mental health services are stretched thin. In 2023, the Department of Health acknowledged a severe shortage of mental health professionals, that there are less than one psychiatrist for every 100,000 Filipinos. The National Center for Mental Health hotline, while a step forward, can only do so much when responders are undertrained, underpaid, and emotionally burned out themselves.

This is not about blaming hotline workers. It is about asking why they are expected to carry a system that was never equipped to succeed. A hotline cannot fix what the government refuses to fund. You cannot tell people to seek help when help is unreliable, inaccessible, or not even free. Dialing a lifeline should not cost a peso. Or the last ounce of courage someone has left. And yet, instead of addressing these gaps, we are offered bills that frame punishment as prevention. You cannot claim to advocate for mental health while using the name of the deceased to champion legislation that ignores the conditions that made despair possible in the first place. Suicide prevention is not a branding exercise. It is not a political response to public outrage.

Real prevention is quieter and far less convenient. It looks like livable wages and a cost of living people can survive. It looks like accessible education and opportunities that do not feel permanently out of reach. It looks like free, responsive crisis hotlines staffed by people who are trained, supported, and allowed to care without burning out. It looks like mental health education that reaches communities before tragedy.

Most of all, it looks like accountability. From institutions, from policymakers, from a government that claims to care about mental health but hesitates to invest in it. Every dropped call carries a consequence we will never fully see. For someone already on the edge, one minute of indifference can be the difference between holding on and letting go. Turning tragedy into legislation without fixing these structural failures feels less like prevention and more like deflection.

A hotline that rings but no one truly answers is not help. A law that sounds compassionate but changes nothing is not justice.

If we are serious about preventing suicide, we must stop searching for a single villain and start confronting the systems that abandon people long before their final moments. Because the moment we stop listening, the line goes dead, and we will never know what it costs.

A hotline that hangs up is more than bad service. It is a reflection of how little we value mental health in this country.

Jian Donadillo



Dreaming is not governance



BUTTRESS

Julia Bucad
Managing Editor for Finance

John F. kennedy said “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.”

JFK’s words endure not because they inspire, but because they challenge. They refuse to fade into decoration, even after years of repetition. At their core lies a question many societies, including ours, continue to avoid: Is citizenship about visibility, or about responsibility?

Filipinos are, by nature and necessity, dreamers. Tayong mga Pilipino ay nananaginip at nangangarap—of better governance, fairer systems, safer communities, and a country that does not demand constant sacrifice just to function. These dreams surface in daily conversations and peak during election seasons, when hope is amplified, and promises are easily made.

Christmas, in particular, legitimizes dreaming. We imagine renewal, reconciliation, abundance, and rest. But beneath the lights and rituals lies a principle that becomes uncomfortable when applied beyond the holidays: Christmas is about giving, not getting. It centers on sacrifice, generosity, and responsibility to others, values that should not expire once the decorations come down.

Dreaming itself is not the problem. In fact, dreaming is necessary. No reform begins without imagination. No progress happens without belief. The danger arises when dreaming replaces effort, when hope becomes performance rather than commitment, and when intention is mistaken for service.

This disconnect is visible in how we respond to national crises. Each year, Filipinos brace for typhoons, floods, and displacement. Relief operations follow: food packs distributed, statements released, cameras rolling. Compassion becomes visible, if only briefly. But once the waters recede, familiar questions return: Why were drainage systems neglected? Why were communities still unprepared? Why does disaster response feel reactive instead of preventive?

Here, service is often reduced to spectacle. We praise resilience while tolerating neglect. We celebrate **bayanihan** after tragedy, but fail to demand preparation before it. Aid is framed as generosity instead of obligation. Integrity, the quiet work of planning, maintenance, and accountability, rarely earns the same attention as response.

Integrity is the unglamorous bridge between aspiration and action.

Integrity is what turns dreams into systems. It demands consistency long before calamity strikes and responsibility long after public attention fades. Integrity asks leaders to govern even when no one is watching and citizens to stay engaged beyond moments of outrage.

Yet modern civic life rewards image over integrity. We gravitate toward leaders who speak well rather than govern well, toward narratives that inspire rather than systems that endure. Visibility is often mistaken for competence; symbolism, for substance. Governance becomes a performance, not a discipline.

Some argue that optimism itself is a form of service, that believing in institutions and leaders sustains unity. There is truth in this. Cynicism alone builds nothing. But optimism without accountability becomes indulgent. When hope silences scrutiny, it does not strengthen democracy—it weakens it.

Civic duty does not require heroism. It requires consistency. It shows in how we vote, how we verify information, and how we engage with public issues once they stop trending. It demands that we read beyond headlines, measure leadership by preparedness rather than performance, and value competence over charisma.

This responsibility extends beyond voters. Institutions must reward integrity, not theatrics. Educators must teach discernment, not blind optimism. Media, including student publications, must resist amplifying image at the expense of substance.

Dreams deserve execution, not applause.

Christmas quietly reinforces this lesson. The season honors giving that expects nothing in return and effort that happens away from the spotlight. It reminds us that care—whether for family, community, or country—is proven through sustained action, not seasonal declarations.

The call, then, is not to abandon dreaming, but to mature in how we dream. To pair hope with responsibility. To demand integrity alongside inspiration. To treat citizenship as a year-round practice, not an occasional emotion.

A nation sustained only by dreams will always wake up disappointed. But a nation that anchors its dreams in integrity—where ambition meets duty—stands a real chance of becoming what it imagines.

Kennedy’s challenge remains unanswered, not because it is outdated, but because it is demanding. As another year unfolds, the question is no longer whether we can dream of a better Philippines. The question is whether we are willing to do the quiet, disciplined work required to make those dreams real—this Christmas, and long after the lights are gone.

> **Civic duty does not require heroism. It requires consistency. It shows in how we vote, how we verify information, and how we engage with public issues once they stop trending. It demands that we read beyond headlines, measure leadership by preparedness rather than performance, and value competence over charisma.**

The cost of being unbothered



CROSSBEAM

Francheska Joyce Ysabelle Esplago
Junior Managing Editor

In relationships, being nonchalant has become a badge that carries an appeal. “I don’t care.” “Bahala na.” “Wala akong pake.” It is the ability that suggests control, to stay calm even if everyone else panics. The same statements seep into how we deal with bigger things, what we show in relationships often mirrors how we treat our society. Nowadays, they call it composure, an act to choose peace, when often it's actually avoidance.

We pretend that indifference equates to emotional intelligence; however, what it really provokes is distance from people, responsibility, and increasingly, from our nation. Social media glorifies this attitude, flooding timelines with posts about being unbothered, that it took root in our social and even political culture.

Many Filipinos proudly declare their uninvolvement in the conversation about politics, stating that it's toxic or it will just be the same result over again. Instead of being involved and advocating for what is right as a citizen of this country, people opt to stay silent—to stay neutral, to be nonchalant.

The truth is what we call “peace of mind” sometimes borders on emotional escape. It is easier to stay calm and detached than to risk caring again, a way for us people to protect ourselves from disappointment—whether it is from someone who’s broken our hearts or from politicians that keep breaking our trust. **But love, just like being a good citizen of this country, asks for engagement. You can’t claim to care while staying uninvolved.**

The real issue isn’t just whether nonchalance makes us emotionally strong but whether it is turning us into individuals who mistake the lack of interest for maturity. When we stop caring, may it be in love or in politics, we don’t protect ourselves but rather we just allow the wrong people to take over, we start being negligent—in love, in life, and in the nation we call home.

We see this every election season. Some Filipinos choose not to vote as they believe that their single ballot doesn’t matter and will not change a thing. While others, despite scrolling through the deeds of incompetent politicians every day, do not bother to react. Others are witnesses to injustice and still refuse to speak up, saying it's not their problem or tired of hearing bad news. This kind of detachment from what is happening is disguised as maturity, and it benefits those in power. **Silence, after all, is the greatest ally of corruption.**

However, our tendency to stay nonchalant or unbothered is not entirely our fault. For years, we’ve been conditioned to think that being emotional or outspoken makes us dramatic, OA, and even Filipinos may call it “pakialamero/pakialamera.”

Hence, we have learned to bottle up feelings and disengage from issues to avoid conflict of being called such terms. In doing so, we lose the essence of empathy, the ability to care and act.

Nonchalance has its place; there is a fine line that protects our energy from unnecessary drama and toward things that matter, which need action. When it turns into indifference in situations that are vital, it becomes a form of surrender. To be calm is good, but to be numb is dangerous. In the face of injustice, silence is not peace; it is a permission to tolerate it.

Maturity is not measured by how unaffected we are, but by how responsible we respond. True nonchalance isn’t about caring, but rather it is about knowing when to care without losing peace. The kind of calmness that is felt deeply, shows concern, and chooses to act when it matters—it doesn’t make us weak, it’s what makes us human.

In love, relationships die when we stop communicating. In a nation, democracy dies when we stop caring. It may be tiring to care, but it is proof that we are alive, hopeful, and part of something bigger than ourselves. The Philippines, in its current state, doesn’t need people who are detached from issues; it needs people who are aware and involved.

For when we stop taking actions on our relationship, society, and for our country, peace will no longer be peace, and it will just be emptiness wearing a calm face—and that, in the end, is the cost of being unbothered.

> **Maturity is not measured by how unaffected we are, but by how responsible we respond. True nonchalance isn’t about caring, but rather it is about knowing when to care without losing peace. The kind of calmness that is felt deeply, shows concern, and chooses to act when it matters—it doesn’t make us weak, it’s what makes us human.**

WHEN PEOPLE SPEAK...: ANGELENEANS’ POV

WHO bears the burden when policies exist only in form but fail in implementation, and how does this gap redistribute accountability and risk among affected populations?

CATAQUIAN, Kristin
3rd Year, BS Physical Therapy

When there is a gap between policies and practice, the cost of this failure will continue to be paid by those least able to afford it. In healthcare, for example, patients shoulder unpaid costs, delays, and denied services, while clinicians absorb shortages through overwork and moral compromise. Those left in the gap, often the poor, rural, and chronically ill, must negotiate care that should have been guaranteed. In this space between policy and practice, rights become favors and access becomes conditional. The failure of the implementation does not fall on the system and the weight does not vanish, it shifts towards those who were left in the gap.

PONCE, Rafael
3rd Year, AB Communication

When rules exist only on paper, the bitter reality reveals a scene where those left in the gap are shunned to be quieter but end up carrying more weight. In such a realm, they learn to distrust and get burnt out, while some resist and face bigoted sanctions. In this scenario, the concept of accountability gradually diminishes as survival alters justice. And in this bleak clip unravels a depressing sight: a society where rules exist solely on paper, with the powerless paying the price.

CARLOS, Carry
2nd Year, BSEd Filipino

There is a quiet violence in laws that are beautifully written but rarely lived. In the Philippines, the distance between policy and practice is often bridged by sacrifice - by students, workers, and communities who absorb the consequences of inaction and selective enforcement. What should protect instead instructs people to endure, teaching them that justice depends on who you are and who you know. Power remains insulated, while accountability dissolves into procedure and delay. In that silence between promise and reality, the public learns that the law can exist - and still fail them.

IF you could change one thing about campus life knowing it might anger some, what would it be and why?

DATU, Deinber
2nd Year, BS Accountancy

If there is one thing I would change about campus life, it would be to abolish the “always available” culture and promote clear communication boundaries beyond academic hours, because learning should never come at the expense of mental and emotional well-being. Late-night messages do not enhance learning; they normalize burnout and diminish students’ performance. Productivity is not measured by responsiveness at midnight but by focus and engagement during academic hours, and a campus culture that respects rest fosters clearer thinking, effective performance, and sustained excellence.

ANONYMOUS
Angelenean

If I could change one thing about campus life, it would be the lack of mental health breaks and empathy toward students when it comes to academic workload. Many students feel overwhelmed, yet their struggles are often overlooked or minimized. Additionally, student voices are not truly heard, making it difficult for real concerns to lead to meaningful change. There is also a lack of accessible platforms where students can openly express their issues and feel supported.

ARDILLO, Xavier
4th Year, BS Computer Engineering

I would change how campus life approaches academic dishonesty or cheating. It is undeniable that cheating is unethical and unfair, especially to students who complete their work honestly, but the conversation often stops there. In reality, academic dishonesty is commonly caused by overlooked factors, such as overwhelming workloads, gaps in understanding, or misalignment between the curriculum and instructional methods. Addressing the issue requires shifting the focus from punishment and embarrassment to prevention through academic support and more responsive learning environments.

Free thought has a price



CORNERSTONE

Fiumme Fianna Navarro
Opinion Editor

Imagine discovering that your university has been blacklisted—not for misconduct, but for daring to teach ideas that make those in power uncomfortable. That is precisely what happened to Yale University. And we would be mistaken to dismiss it as someone else's problem, because what is truly on the line is academic freedom—the very foundation of serious learning. If AUF is to remain a university that forms not just graduates, but thinkers and leaders, then we must be willing to protect the right to question and to speak.

In July 2025, Russia officially labeled Yale University an "undesirable organization," accusing its Jackson School of Global Affairs of training opposition leaders that destabilize the country. The ban effectively cuts off all collaboration with Russian institutions and places Yale students and staff under potential legal risk in Russian territory. It marks the first time a globally respected academic institution was sanctioned purely for its educational activities.

This may sound distant or geopolitical, but AUF collaborates internationally too. We work with Fujian Normal University (FNU) to promote Chinese language and culture, including teacher training and curriculum development. We partner with Cisco Networking Academy, CompTIA, and Oracle Academy for IT and cybersecurity education. What's happening to Yale could easily happen elsewhere—and we must understand what's at stake.

AUF's reputation is built on rigorous research, health sciences, legal education, and values-based training. But none of these are possible without academic freedom—the right of students and professors to explore big ideas and tackle uncomfortable truths.

Without this freedom, even basic classroom discussions could be policed. A student asking about foreign policy, a thesis on human rights, or a debate on historical accountability could all be flagged as politically sensitive or influenced.

Some governments justify bans like Russia's as measures to protect national security. While safeguarding society from weaponized information is valid, banning knowledge entirely crosses the line. According to the 2025 Scholars at Risk Global Report, political interference in universities has risen by 37% in just two years, most targeting research in history, policy, and human rights. Over 20 international exchange programs were suspended or defunded this year alone due to "political exposure."

> **It's true that academic platforms can be misused—but the answer must never be censorship. There must be transparency and accountability.**

Some faculty at Yale, including Professor Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, even hailed the blacklist as a "badge of honor" for standing by global scholarly values. That kind of courage is what academic institutions must embody.

In 2025, over 60% of Filipino graduate students pursuing further studies abroad did so through international exchange programs or partnerships. Losing access to these opportunities because of politics is life-altering for students who have worked years to earn them. AUF students are future researchers, scientists, teachers, lawyers, and public servants.

For instance, India's Ministry of External Affairs recently issued a travel advisory urging students to reconsider applying to politically exposed universities like Yale. Russia has also expanded its blacklist to include several international NGOs. Who's to say that universities offering programs in global governance, anti-corruption, or conflict studies won't be next?

AUF is not under threat—but that should not excuse indifference. Academic freedom is not a privilege; it is a responsibility we must uphold before it is taken from us. As a Catholic University committed to truth and justice, AUF must protect the freedom to think, to question, and to teach without fear. Once we trade truth for safety, we cease to educate—we only indoctrinate.



Jian Donadillo

Lessons we never meant to teach



KEYSTONE

Chelsea Coleman
Opinion Writer

> **Corruption in the Philippines is often discussed as a problem of leadership, yet it is also shaped by the everyday choices we normalize. The institutions we criticize frequently mirror the values practiced in smaller spaces—at home and in classrooms.**

Corruption in the Philippines doesn't begin in office; it begins in childhood, when dishonesty passes for cleverness and silence for obedience. We've all seen it: a parent coaching a child to lie for a discount, a student bragging about "diskarte" in cheating, a teacher ignoring favoritism. What we call resourcefulness or respect often masks a deeper rot—it normalizes dishonesty and silence. Small acts may seem harmless, but they quietly train a nation in what it is willing to excuse.

Filipinos grow up in a culture that often rewards "diskarte," the Filipino term for resourcefulness, even when it means bending the rules. Children observe that clever cheating earns admiration, and that silence in the face of wrongdoing is read as respect. Without being told directly, they internalize a moral logic: rules are flexible, and speaking up is risky. These early lessons follow them into adulthood, shaping how power and responsibility are later excused.

Obedience, too, plays its part. From a young age, most of us are taught that respect means silence. While discipline is valuable, blind obedience breeds conformity. It discourages the will to speak up when something is wrong. In the classroom, it is a student staying quiet about a cheating classmate. In adulthood, it becomes a citizen who stays quiet about a corrupt official. What we often praise as humility is, in truth, fear—fear of punishment, fear of standing out, fear of consequence.

Corruption in the Philippines is often discussed as a problem of leadership, yet it is also shaped by the everyday choices we normalize. The institutions we criticize frequently mirror the values practiced in smaller spaces—at home and in classrooms. When dishonesty is framed as survival rather than questioned, it reshapes what integrity comes to mean in practice.

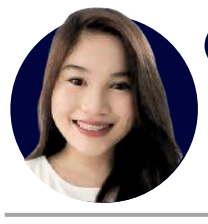
Breaking this cycle means re-educating ourselves and the next generation. Just as corruption begins at home, so should integrity. When parents choose truth over convenience, and teachers practice moral courage, truth-telling becomes leadership—the deliberate act of setting limits and modeling values.

Cleverness and obedience sit together; cleverness is creativity with integrity, not manipulation without consequence, and obedience is respect guided by conscience, not silence born of fear. When a child admits to a mistake, we should admire their honesty instead of scolding them for disobedience. Every small excuse becomes permission for corruption to take root.

In the end, corruption doesn't begin with greed—it starts when we allow it. Each time we excuse a lie, ignore a rule, or remain silent, we allow corruption to survive across generations. If we truly want a country led by honest leaders, we must first raise honest children. Reform does not begin in courts, Congress, or city halls; it begins at dining tables, in classrooms, and in every moment we choose truth over convenience. Fighting corruption is not political—it is moral, and it starts at home.

> **Cleverness and obedience sit together; cleverness is creativity with integrity, not manipulation without consequence, and obedience is respect guided by conscience, not silence born of fear.**

Punishing the invisible



PIER

Ellisse Sangria
Opinion Writer

How do you punish what you cannot see?

In a nation where corruption has learned to wear the face of normalcy, "ghost projects" are not mere anomalies. They are symptoms of a disease that festers in silence — one that thrives not in the shadows, but in plain sight.

The Department of Public Works and Highways' blacklisting of contractors behind phantom flood-control projects was meant to signal accountability, a statement that the government can still correct itself. Yet, beyond the announcement, what remains? Such measures often serve as temporary performances of integrity rather than catalysts for reform. Justice cannot exist when accountability itself becomes a ritual of appearances.

Corruption in public works does not thrive in secrecy, it thrives in invisibility. It hides in hastily signed documents, in bureaucratic layers meant to diffuse responsibility, in systems that discourage dissent and reward compliance instead of encouraging scrutiny.

For instance, in 2025, the Commission on Audit (COA) reported that several flood-control projects in Bulacan, worth a combined ₱309 million, were either incomplete, mismatched in site, or could not be located at all, despite being declared "completed."

Behind every unfinished road or phantom canal lies a chain of approvals and signatures that never meet the glare of consequence. We hear of investigations, but not convictions. We praise blacklists, but rarely see names. Accountability becomes a cycle of noise, not a pursuit of justice.

In a separate audit, the COA found 15 out of 160 DPWH flood-control projects to be "unlocated" or missing despite being marked as finished, according to a BusinessWorld report published on October 28, 2025.

This isn't simply about wasted funds, but about the erosion of trust. Behind every falsified completion report are communities left unprotected from the floods they were promised to be shielded from. What was meant to serve the public becomes a monument to betrayal.

This is the tragedy of a government fixated on optics — press conferences that command attention but achieve nothing. Each performance of accountability dulls public outrage and conditions citizens to mistake visibility for truth. A society that cheers every declaration of reform forgets that real, lasting justice must be visible to be credible.

When names slip quietly off the record, truth erodes. When "punishment" becomes performance, impunity becomes routine. Corruption does not die. It adapts, it evolves, it endures.

Every unchecked report reinforces a culture where silence is rewarded and exposure is punished. Each unpunished act teaches the next generation that deceit can thrive, so long as it looks legitimate. And perhaps the bigger tragedy is how easily we've learned to live with it.

Transparency must not be a promise, it must be a practice. It begins when we name the nameless, demand not just actions but results, and insist that accountability be seen, not staged. Because to punish the invisible, we must first have the courage to open our eyes, and never look away again.

> **When names slip quietly off the record, truth erodes. When "punishment" becomes performance, impunity becomes routine. Corruption does not die. It adapts, it evolves, it endures.**

TARA LAKAD

Kirsten De Vero

The afternoon sun beats down on the asphalt, the kind of heat that clings to your skin long after you stop walking. Yet along sidewalks—cracked, uneven, and sometimes disappearing entirely—groups of students have begun choosing to walk anyway.

The Chinito Walkers were among the first to popularize the trend back in 2023. Their signature tagline, "From DLSU to..." turned ordinary routes into shared adventures on TikTok. Each video is often paired with a Strava screenshot, a fitness tracking app that maps their route, capturing the distance, effort, and playful spontaneity behind their long walks.
Inspired by them, Angeleno students fully immersed themselves in the trend. Lexer Roque and Gian Enriquez dubbed themselves "Prinito Walkers," a playful nod to the Pampanga heat. "We were actually inspired by Chinito Walkers on TikTok. At first, I was unsure if people would even watch it. After about a week, I messaged Gian, 'Tara kaya lakad papunta kay Josh?' (What if we go walk to Josh's?) That's where it all started," Lexer said.

For the Prinito Walkers, Strava made every walk something more. What used to be just a "lakad-lakad lang" became something they could track, map, and show. More than just distance, it told a story. Every jagged line, loop, wrong turn, and accidental detour became a memory. Strava, more than just a fitness app, turned sidewalks into progress bars and everyday streets into milestones. When these routes were shared online, people didn't just see content. They saw effort, adventure, and connection. That's when others started wanting to walk too—not to go somewhere, but to experience it for themselves.

What began as a random idea became an escape—endless conversations, jokes, and quiet pauses where the city itself felt slower and more familiar. From a 6.3 km walk from HAU to SM Clark to a staggering 10.8 km trek to Porac, each route became part challenge, part therapy.

"It feels healing," Gian shared. "You don't even need a plan, just walk and talk about random stuff." With no fixed destination, the journey itself became the experience, letting thoughts and discussions flow naturally.

But their journey began to reveal something that is hard to ignore. "We realized how difficult and dangerous it is to walk in Pampanga," they said, reflecting on how many areas are not built for pedestrians: narrow, car-centered roads, broken sidewalks, minimal streetlights, and uneven pavements.

"There were even times when we had to walk in the rain, with no sidewalks and flooding everywhere. It was really tough."

Despite these challenges, the Prinito Walkers urge students like them to take their own walking journey. "Just enjoy the walk. Don't focus on how far it is, use it as a time to reflect on yourself or bond with your friends," they said. They added that walking without a fixed destination can do wonders for the mind seeking peace and the heart yearning for healing. "Because when it's all done, you'll look back and probably remember feeling a little miserable in the moment, but you'll be super thankful that you actually did something productive."

Both also made sure to include the most important reminder: do not forget to bring water!

For Kenneth Salvador, a BS Nursing student from AUF, walking became a personal refuge. "If I feel so stressed or just want some quiet time, I go more than once. It really depends on the time that I have," he said. His long walks allowed him to clear his thoughts and explore new routes and hidden spots in the city, making him more familiar and at ease with the place.

On one walk, he accompanied a young boy who had been left behind by his friends during a caroling in a village. They walked together until they arrived at a street the child could recognize. "He thanked me with a big smile and shook his little handmade bell before running off, waving goodbye." Kenneth held that interaction close to his heart, remembering how a small moment can leave a lasting memory.

Whether it's for physical fitness, building friendships, or simply finding a quiet escape, walking becomes more than just steps—it's a chance to reconnect with yourself, build meaningful connections, and find lasting joy through the small moments in the world around you. Beyond the exhaust and the distance, the experience brings people together and allows them to see their surroundings in a whole new way.

Each step reminds them, and us, of what we often overlook: the present moment, the world around us, and our capability to create our own path.

So, Angeleneans, what are you waiting for? Lace up your shoes, open Strava, and maybe today's the day you start your journey from AUF to ...

Ella Tabor and Ingrid Honawar

GATEKEEP KO TO: THE HIDDEN FOOD GEMS OF ANGELENEANS

saan tayo?

As the clock strikes 12 and lunchtime begins, students rush and huddle together as they decide where to eat. Some return to their tried and tested spots, while others prefer convenience and opt to pick the nearest stop. But if you've got time to spare and still can't decide where to spend it, buckle up and get ready to discover the hidden gems around AUF that Angeleneans swear by.

IYKYK: Tucked-Away Food Haven

Hidden away from the busy streets of the city, crowded karinderyas, and bustling cafeterias is a place of wonder—**This is Eat**, a food hub featuring various stalls. It is located in the Alta Claro building, just steps away from the AUF main campus. However, due to its location, this place is unfamiliar to some Angeleneans. With various stalls offering foods from different cuisines, wind coated with spices, overlapping voices, and fresh air, this al fresco spot has it all.

When one craves a brunch or a quick meryenda, stalls like Eggstop and Slizes n Brew are among the options to consider. Eggstop is perfect for those who suddenly crave the kimchi rice bowls they have seen in their current K-drama watch or the egg drop sandwiches that their bias raves about. While Slizes n Brew has it all, from pizza and pasta to waffles, takoyaki, and milk tea.

On the other hand, for those who wish to travel the world with every bite of food, there are a range of options, including Tapao and Peking Dynasty alongside stand-out stalls such as Maki Moto, 3Ps Curry & Grill House, and Cuatro.

Maki Moto is a Japanese sushi and ramen bar that serves rice bowls, ramen, and sushi. It is as if the breeze of the wind and the smell of cherry blossoms are felt with every bite. Although the stall is on the pricier side, the servings and the taste make everything worthwhile. For Rei Estomo, from BS Biology 4, this is her spot whenever she craves Japanese food: "Ang usual order ko ay ramen and takoyaki sa Maki Moto (My usual orders are ramen and takoyaki at Maki Moto)," she beams.



Dorm Diaries

Far from Home, Closer to Dreams

Gladys Roxas

Dear Diary,
It's my first night in the dorm, and everything feels unfamiliar. My parents' voices still echo in my head, reminding me to eat well and sleep early. Now it's just me, my suitcase, and a quiet I'm still learning to live with. It feels strange not to be home, but beneath the nervousness is a small thrill like I've just opened the first page of a new chapter in my life—college.

The first night in the dorm often feels like standing between two worlds: the comfort of what's familiar and the anticipation of what's ahead. The once-bustling routines of home are replaced by the steady hum of dorm life. Every student learns to adapt, to build small versions of home within shared walls and borrowed spaces. Independence, once an abstract idea, becomes something tangible—waking up to your own alarm, preparing your own meals, and managing your own time. It's both freeing and frightening, but that's what makes it real. This is where growth begins—not in grand moments, but in the quiet courage of learning how to stand on your own.

Dear Diary,
Tonight, the silence feels heavier than usual. I miss the sound of my mother's cooking, the warmth of our living room, and the laughter of my siblings that used to fill the house. The dorm lights are dim, and even the comfort of my blanket can't chase away the ache of being far from home. I didn't think missing ordinary things would hurt this much. But maybe homesickness is just proof of how much love I've left behind.

Homesickness, they say, visits quietly but stays longer than expected. It creeps in during the slow hours of the night, when the world outside the dorm has gone still and the only sound is the noise of the motorcycles and the distant bark of a stray dog. It's in those moments that the weight of distance feels heaviest—when the thought of a familiar meal, a parent's voice, or a sibling's laughter feels like a luxury you can't afford. Yet, amid the loneliness, there's a certain kind of strength being built—the kind that teaches you how to comfort yourself, how to keep going even when no one is there to remind you. Perhaps that's the hidden gift of homesickness: it hurts because it matters, and it matters because it comes from love.

Dear Diary,
Today, I finally felt proud of myself. After countless late nights reviewing under the weak light of my dorm lamp, I did well on my quiz! It may seem small, but it feels like a quiet victory. My friends and I laughed like we'd all passed a final exam. Moments like this remind me why I'm here and why every sleepless night and lonely meal are worth it. Maybe I'm starting to find my rhythm after all.

Small triumphs often shine the brightest in the simplicity of dorm life. Success feels different when it's earned far from home. Here, every achievement, no matter how small, carries the weight of effort, discipline, and quiet perseverance. It's in these victories that students rediscover their purpose and remind themselves why they chose this path in the first place. Each passing challenge becomes a stepping stone, and each success, a gentle assurance that they are exactly where they're meant to be—still learning, still growing, but steadily moving closer to their dreams. The dorm becomes more than a place to rest—it becomes a witness to your transformation, one late-night study session at a time.

Dear Diary,
After a week of deadlines and tired eyes, my friends and I decided to go out tonight. We didn't do anything grand—just ate at a fast food place, laughed too loud, and talked about life under the city lights. It felt good to forget our worries, even just for a while. Somewhere between the laughter and shared fries, I realized that home can also be found in the people who make you feel that you belong.

Nights like these remind students that college life isn't just about the long study hours or the weight of responsibilities—it's also about the fleeting, genuine moments that make the journey bearable. Amid the glow of neon signs and the sound of laughter spilling into the streets, friendships begin to take root. These small gatherings, often unplanned and imperfect, become the anchor that steadies you when everything else feels uncertain. In the chaos of deadlines and homesickness, it's the shared meals, the inside jokes, and the long walks back to the dorm that quietly build a sense of belonging. Over time, you start to realize that home isn't always a single place—it's a feeling, found in the warmth of people who understand your exhaustion, your dreams, and the quiet triumphs in between.

Dear Diary,
Classes are finally over, and my bags are packed again. But this time, I'm heading home. The thought of seeing my family makes me giddy. Home-cooked meals, my old bed, familiar streets. Yet, a part of me knows I'll miss this dorm too—the noise, the chaos, the friends who became family. Leaving feels different now. I may be going home, but I'm also taking a piece of this life with me—the independence, the memories, and the quiet reminder that I'm slowly becoming who I'm meant to be.

Going home after months of dorm life feels like closing a well-worn chapter—familiar, yet forever changed. The excitement of returning to family is softened by the quiet realization that you've built another kind of home elsewhere. The dorm, once a place of adjustment and longing, has become a space filled with stories. Leaving it behind isn't just about packing your things; it's about carrying the lessons that shaped you. You return home not as the same person who left, but as someone a little stronger, a little wiser, and a little more certain of the path ahead. Because in the end, being far from home isn't about losing your roots—it's about stretching them toward something greater. Every step away, every lonely night, and every quiet triumph brings you closer to your dreams.

As for the last stall on the left corner, 3Ps Curry & Grill House is known for its authentic homestyle Nepali curry. However, it might not be for everyone, especially those with low spice tolerance. Nevertheless, for some, like Josh Hernandez, from BS Biology 4, this place is their ultimate gatekeep pick: “Gusto ko yung pork curry, sobrang sarap, and malaki serving and may free drinks pa. Sulit na sulit! (I like the pork curry; it’s really delicious, and the serving is big, and there are free drinks too. It’s very worth it,” he shares. Last but not least, Cuatro, a Mexican-inspired brand with a menu such as birria tacos and quesadillas. It is located on the second floor of the building and usually opens at around 3 PM. As for Estomo, this is the place she’d like to gatekeep: “I love Cuatro so much, sobrang underrated! (It's really underrated.)” This spot is ideal for hanging out, particularly at night when the illuminating lights fill the space.

For Angeleneans, student-friendly and Filipino foods are staples in their everyday go-to meals. Ate Rica’s Bacsilog and Esting’s Bellychon are amongst the stalls at This Is Eat, representing Filipino food and culture. The first and original Ate Rica’s Bacsilog is a stall perfect for students, as it offers sulit and combo silog deals. But, for those who have extra money to spend and are willing to share their food with friends, the Capampanga boneless lechon of Esting’s Bellychon might be the ideal choice.

Despite hosting several stalls, This is Eat never feels crowded or overwhelming, with its spacious spot surrounded by greens, offering a fresh and natural atmosphere that no air conditioner could replicate. Hernandez mostly prefers this place because, aside from its fresh and calming air, it provides free Wi-Fi for two hours, allowing him to accomplish his tasks while eating: “Dito makakain ka na ng masarap, may free WIFI ka pa. So kung mayroon kang gustong gawin pwede mong gawin dito habang kumakain ka (Here you can eat delicious food; you even have free WIFI. So if you want to do something, you can do it here while you eat).” It is a library and a cafeteria in one! Besides, what makes this place even more special, beyond its delectable food and relaxing ambiance, are the memories and stories it holds. Estomo shares that eating with friends makes the experience more special: “Overall, nag-eenjoy naman kaming lahat kasi magkakasama kaming kumain (We all enjoyed it because we are together as we eat).” Indeed, though tucked away, this place is treasured by Angeleneans—a truly gatekeep-worthy spot!

The Cold that Brings Warmth

“Tara, ice cream? Deserve natin ‘to!” After a successful presentation or by simply surviving the challenging exam, many students reward themselves with ice cream. Iglu, an ice cream and yogurt shop tucked away at the back of the AUF Professional Schools building, is more than just a dessert place; it is also a place full of stories, chattering voices, and never-ending laughter. After a long and tiring day at the university,

Iglu is a place that offers peace and comfort, where some opt to rest their minds from the demands of their responsibilities as students as they eat their worries away with a spoonful of ice cream. The interior is bright but calming and warm, and aside from the whirring sound of the ice cream machine, the current trending playlist is playing in the background, adding to its charm.

Iglu is a place where students can indulge in self-rewarding activities such as adding multiple toppings, drizzling their favorite syrup, or filling the cup with yogurt. It gives people the freedom to reward themselves to their hearts' content. What’s unique about Iglu is its self-service policy, which allows customers to curate their cup with three soft-serve options: ice cream, frozen yogurt, and mixed. To make it more special, there are different syrups to choose from; Biscoff sauce might be perfect for yogurt, and Nutella for the ice cream—but what’s fun about it is that it is entirely your choice! To top it all off, there are twenty-one options for toppings, including almonds, Oreo bites, marshmallows, and fruits such as mangoes, grapes, and strawberries. This place allows for interactive and therapeutic creation of your perfect ice cream. The finished product, your delight in a cup, will be weighed to determine its price.

Beyond the interior and the services Iglu offers, it is also a special place for some. Iglu might be a place where someone confesses their feelings toward someone as they sit outside holding their curated ice cream with cold and trembling hands, or where a friend listens to another’s worries for the first time. Iglu is a place that witnessed happiness, comfort, victories, and quiet warmth—memories that are worth gatekeeping. Iglu proves that sometimes, cold brings the most warmth, just like the way a spoonful of ice cream can bring comfort to one's heart.

Wingin’ It Through College

After a long day of lectures, readings, and group work, many students around AUF look for a convenient place to eat. Along the nearby streets, food spots cater to this daily need, one of which has become especially familiar to Angeleneans. Often referred to by students as the “Wing Stop of Angeles City,” the place has become a regular stop for those looking to share a meal and take a short break from academic demands. It is commonly visited by students spending time with friends, catching up on conversations, and winding down after classes.

The menu offers comfort food staples such as pastas, fries, salads, soups, and wraps, but the wings remain the main draw. Popular flavors include Pretty Woman for its sweet-and-spicy balance, Wah Piang for its savory crunch, Soy Garli for its classic soy-and-garlic combination, and Boom Boom for those who prefer a spicier option. These flavors have become familiar favorites among students.

Beyond the food, the place has become part of students’ routines. It is where friends naturally end up, sitting around shared plates and talking about classes, deadlines, and everyday life.

These moments, though simple, offer a pause from the usual pressures of college. For Rihana Mohammed, a BSIT 1 student, one visit stood out. She recalled an October dinner with friends that turned into a surprise birthday celebration. What she expected to be an ordinary meal became a meaningful moment when her friends presented her with a cake that read, “Happy Birthday Riri! At may konting Ryan.” She shared that the experience made the night memorable and reminded her how small gestures can mean a lot during college. As for Ryan Butial of BS Architecture 1, the place serves as a consistent barkada spot. After long hours in class, he and his friends often go there to eat and unwind. While Pretty Woman is their usual order, he noted that what keeps them coming back is the chance to relax and spend time together after demanding days.

College life is not perfect—most days, we are just wingin’ it. But no matter how hectic things get, there is always a place to hit pause, take a bite, and let yourself be fried to heaven.

Beyond the University Gates: Budget Meals for Angeleneans

Ella Tabor and Ingrid Honawar



Tucked just a few steps from the AUF EYA Building, Royal Brews is quickly becoming a go-to spot for students seeking affordable comfort food, good coffee, and a cozy atmosphere. It has earned a reputation as a student-friendly haven, offering meals priced between ₱60 and ₱99

Asha Mercer



Just a few steps on the left from the AUF Professional Schools, the Pastil with Love stall stands below the scorching heat of the sun, selling pastil steamed rice topped with shredded chicken for as low as 20 pesos for one order and a promo order of three pieces for 50 pesos.

Ellysa Sibug



The Siomai Rice stall beside AUF Sports Cultural Center, known for its famous fried rice, a wide selection of siomai flavors, savory sauce, and fiery chili oil. For only 50 pesos, the meal is served in a bowl, composed of fried rice topped with a siomai of your choice.

Francesca Tolentino

COFFEE IS LIFE: The Three Brews of Support

Ethan Biagtan

Nothing beats going for a quick coffee pump to kick off the day. After grueling all-nighters, you’d end up just sipping off your anxieties and jitters. On some days, you’d take a creamy Latte, to sweeten up a bitter day. On another day, the balanced mouthfeels of a Cappuccino restores your equilibrium. Sometimes, you find yourself craving for an Espresso’s bitter punch, to send you back to your missing flow state! But, sometimes, these coffee varieties manifest as real-life fuels that power us up. Coffees that teach us to slow down and savor every sip. Coffees that wake us from our subtle slumbers. Coffees that wrap us with warm arms. Someone as your coffee feels warm, sound, and safe. Ultimately, it emanates the shared question we have heard once from a Nescafe commercial: para kanino ka bumabangon?

A life-sweetening Latte for comfort

It isn’t exaggerating when a student cries about their college tribulations: it really leaves a harsh aftertaste to remember after one’s battles with papers, sleep, and exams. While this bitter journey will be here to stay, life feels less insane with your Latte. Smooth enough to soothe your rough days, and sweet enough to cling to joy. A family, a friend, or a simple confidant may have begun from a gentle mix of similarities, that grew to a warm bond of trust. These people remind us that even a moment of comfort neutralizes a day’s worth of sourness and bitterness. On some days, we will feel as if life poured over a full shot espresso in our cup, but then again, just add a cup of steamed milk to the mix, the brew brings forth a sweet side to it. And that hint of sweetness doesn’t just leave in the middle, as every sip shares that sweet warmth of camaraderie. The kind of warmth that feels as if time marches by slower than usual. The kind of sweetness that draws a smile on us, unknowingly. So, when life feels quick... too quick that the way uphill seems too grueling, froth some milk on top, and take a sip of life’s sweet side when you need it.

Pushing forward with a bit of Espresso

Life doesn’t get easier, and college chimes us in a sneak peek of how far life can push us. There are nights that drown us with failures, frustrations, and anxieties difficult to conquer: that heavy weight pushing down on you, crippling you from moving forward. We can slumber off these feelings, and the next day may feel the same or even worse, but your Espresso keeps you going. Strong, bitter, and bold, these inspire strength and drive in you. Para kanino ka bumabangon? We are carried by the punch of vigor, to survive for our ambitions and goals. In times when we are just steps short from a milestone, a small shot of Espresso imbues the push of bravery to keep surviving. Life can lack sweetness, but also lack bitterness. Sometimes, it is this bite of bitterness that enlivens our grit for self-growth and strength. Thus, your Espresso is not always a person: it could be yourself and your goals that bring out the best in you. What’s even more beautiful about Espresso is that you brew it with several coffee varieties: Mocha, Macchiato, Latte. So, when you feel like life brews a little more slowly, quite stagnant, perhaps, finely ground yourself an espresso to shake up your day. You never know how far a bitter push can take you!

Keeping it steady with a pinch of Cappuccino

As we grow, we might pose curiosity over life’s nature: what is life, and what does it mean to live? Obviously, there is no single answer, as we all view it uniquely. But to know life is to live it, like how your Cappuccino brings you its variety. Life can be sweet to feel with a pinch of Latte, or can inspire a push forward with an Espresso’s bitterness, but ultimately, Cappuccino shares in both of these flavors. There are times when we miss the balance, overstepping on situations, and making mistakes from our own judgments, perhaps from brewing too much milk or espresso in the mix. Sometimes, a life too sweet or too bitter can leave us unsatisfied, unhappy. But our Cappuccino is a source of advice, a reminder for growth, or maybe, simply a listener to neutralize the soft or hard aromas.

It calms our intense sides. It can take both extremes, finding a balance, where comfort complements bravery. Cappuccino just wants to remind you that there will always be better days: just wait for the next grind, the next brew, and the next extraction. Life is not forever sweet or bitter. These push you forward, while bringing you comfort. Moreso, bringing the bittersweet balance to keep yourself real while grounded. Those that ensure you don’t lose yourself in your pursuit for ambitions. So, when life feels overbearing on one side or the other, mix up some milk and espresso to the brew, and voila, keep yourself steady!

Coffee can be many things: it can be prepared in dozens of ways and can taste differently for everyone. Life can also be many things: sweet, bitter, or a balance of both. But we can fill our cups with different aromas and flavors, be it a fun Latte, a tough Espresso, or a balanced Cappuccino. See this, coffee is simply life in a cup: sipping it is living it. And living it comes with experiencing its various flavors. Some people, things, or places grant us comfort, safety, and vulnerability, unleashed in a Latte’s sweet punch. Some inspire bravery and drive to stay awake for one’s battles, released in an Espresso’s bitter burst. And others give us a sense of both, promising better days, while calming intensities. When returned with the question, para kanino ka bumabangon? We all answer differently everyday, as life faces us with different flavors. But do know that you aren’t alone, and that you don’t need to endure the flavors as they are. We have our coffees that can shift these flavors to make our cups worth sipping. After all, we don’t have to drink coffee we don’t appreciate.In the same way, we can be someone else’s coffee: living life with comfort and freedom alike. And if you haven’t found your coffees yet, perhaps a brew is on the way, just finding the flavor you need at that very moment. Just sip slowly, savor the taste, and share the flavor. After all, coffee is life: make it worth sipping!





CARRYING THE WPS THROUGH A PAIL

Julia Bucad

The day has barely begun, but the heat in the streets of Purok 5, Dasol, Pangasinan is already alive. A step foot outside will make you want to go under a shade in seconds. Even under a shade will not exempt you from squinting your eyes due to the immense light.

But, down along the road, an elderly woman bringing a red pail suddenly appears. Despite having her umbrella shading her from the sun above, the heat cannot be escaped, as it is also reflected from the concrete cemented road below. Yet, she still continues her walk, smiling, emanating a light aura around her.

This elderly woman's name is Evelyn. People from Dasol call her Nanay Evelyn.

Nanay's story began elsewhere. She was born in Zambales but chose to grow old in Dasol, where she built a life with her husband, who is now gone. She had nine children, though only six remain. The others, three of them, are also gone. Her remaining children now live their own lives, each with their own families, except one.

Every morning before dawn, she walks to the shore to buy fish from the returning fisherfolk. By sunrise, she is already on her way back, pail full, and ready to set her foot again under the heat.

At home, a daughter awaits patiently. Digna is her name, she is 36 years old, and never has spoken. Her body lays still on a small papag (bamboo bed), with her eyes only starring on their rusty metal roofing that could easily be blown away by a simple storm. Before leaving, Nanay adjusts her daughter's pillow, which is only a folded towel, making sure that her daughter is comfortable as she waits. She does not say goodbye; she never does. She just closes the door quietly with her pail swinging by her side.

Nanay is seventy. The years sit gently on her. Her days revolve around caring for her daughter and selling fish under the scorching sun.

The neighborhood of Dasol all knows her, as she always greets people with her smile every morning along the road. She became a familiar figure. Her sons fish for a living too, but their catches already have buyers. So Nanay buys from others, depending on whatever the sea has to offer that morning. Some days, the pail is full. Some days, only half. Still, she walks. The irony does not escape anyone who knows her: how a woman carrying so much can appear so light.

When asked about her wish, Nanay did not have to think for a while.

"Gusto ko lang may matitirhan. Tulad niyan, binagyo ako—'yun lang ang kailangan ko sa buhay ko. Financial lang talaga. Kung magkasakit ako, wala—walang tutulong. 'Yung mga anak ko, may sari-sariling buhay." She said this while inside her little abode, walls patched with wood and tarpaulin, rusty metal roofing, and pairs of slippers resting by the door. Then she smiles again, as if the thought of it all is lighter than it sounds.

There are days when the heat feels too much, when her knees ache and her breath shortens. She always keeps medicine in her bag just in case she feels dizzy on the way home. Yet even in those moments, she prays—not for comfort, but for strength. Every night, she whispers a quiet plea: that someone might lend a hand, or that her body holds out a little longer.

When the sea grows quiet and fishermen bring in fewer catches, she prays even harder. "Huwag sana laging umulan para may isda," she often says. For her, a day without fish is a day without income—a day of worry, not for herself, but for her daughter who depends on her entirely.

When asked why she continues to work despite her age, her answer carries neither complaint nor hesitation. It is simply her truth.

Everything she does, she says, is "alang-alang sa anak kong ganiyan," for her daughter who cannot move or speak, who needs her every moment. She believes that if not for Digna, she might have already stopped working.

"Kung wala akong inaalagaan," she says with a light laugh, "baka pa-uga-uga lang ako diyan." As she answered, there was no weariness in her tone, only the certainty of someone who has long accepted what the coming days may bring.

Before noon, her route is almost done. The fish are fewer in the pail now, the sun still unrelenting. The pail swings with every step. It holds fish, yes—but also the weight of her daughter's needs, the cost of another roof repair, the quiet prayer that tomorrow the sea will yield enough.

She admits she does not know much about the West Philippine Sea, nor the conflicts often spoken of in the news.

"Wala naman akong ano, dahil hindi ko rin naman alam yan. Hindi ko na iyan iniintindi. Focus lang ako sa paglalako ng mga isda," she admits. Nanay does not ask for much and rarely speaks of politics or borders.

She does not know of maritime lines or coast guards. But when storms keep the fishermen from sailing, she feels it. When the sea offers less, her small world feels it all.

Unknowingly, Nanay's life serves as living proof of how the West Philippine Sea issues subtly affect people like her. Every fish in her pail shows that when the sea weakens, so do communities. When typhoons destroy boats and coastal livelihoods, when territorial disputes hinder fishing, when overfishing and degradation strip the waters bare, it is not only the fishermen who suffer.

It is also Nanay on the roadside. It is also Digna in her bed.

THE DELUGE OF THE DISILLUSIONED:

What happens after the Sept. 21 Rally?

Ethan Biagtan and Gladys Roxas

"Make corruption shameful again!"

The phrase kept flashing across my feed on September 21—on every social media. I scrolled through live videos, photos, and posts from journalists and protestors, I realized something bigger was unfolding. Streets were flooded not just with rain, but with people—students, workers, and ordinary Filipinos demanding accountability for the alleged "ghost" flood-control projects that had drained billions of pesos.

When memory marched for justice.

The decision to hold the rally on September 21 was purposeful, carrying deep historical resonance. The date commemorates the 1972 declaration of Martial Law by Ferdinand Marcos Sr.—a time marked by fear, repression, and the stifling of dissent. For many Filipinos, taking to the streets on this day was both a remembrance and a stand against history repeating itself. It reminded the nation that democracy, once lost, is never easily regained, and that the fight against corruption and tyranny remains an enduring part of the country's journey.

The September 21 rally quickly became one of the largest demonstrations in recent years. What began as outrage over "ghost" infrastructure projects worth billions of pesos turned into a broader call for transparency and accountability in government spending. The streets of Manila echoed with demands for reform, while hashtags like #BahaSaLuneta and #Sept21Protest trended across social media, amplifying the movement nationwide.

The call of a "man-made" flood

The rallies mounted on historically significant landmarks like Rizal Park and the EDSA monument, brimming with people from all walks of life. A symbol showing that amidst anomalies, the Filipino people, regardless of social status, fame, occupation, and individual differences, unite under a common ground for justice, transparency, and truth.

Jessica Soho's closing statement in her documentary rings even louder, "Hindi na pala baha ang magpapalubog sa ating bayan, kundi kasakiman." As the Philippines drowns in corruption, student activists, the Church, celebrities, lawmakers like Sen. Kiko Pangilinan, Sen. Bam Aquino, Sen. Risa Hontiveros, and Leila De Lima, and everyone who demands for better, also flooded voices of "Ikulong na 'yan, mga kurakot!" in fury for justice. Even rippling across Visayas and Mindanao, like the voices of Cebu, Iloilo, and Cagayan de Oro, the rallies marked the prevailing battle against corruption: an echoing reminder that we deserve better.

An abominably rough estimate of 99%

While peaceful for the most part, the rally was not free of conflict. Such as the Mendiola and Ayala Bridge clash that ended in arrests and injuries. The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility shared injuries of media personnel, such as Raffy Lerma, a photojournalist who documented Duterte's drug war, sustained injuries from tear gas and water cannons. Even students like Daniel Gio Caballes from the Polytechnic University of the Philippines was 'arrested for wearing black' as he merely documented the protests. The Department of the Interior and Local Government stating the rallies were 99% peaceful are a blurry spectacle, which is why the battle for justice never pauses.

Are we reaching for the stars?

But what comes next? As of writing, no one has been held accountable and no one has been arrested on flood control anomalies alone. While typhoons continue wreaking havoc at vulnerable populations, the convicted are comfortable, while the ordinary Filipino, always easily convicted. In a Davao rally, Karlos Isagani Zarate, former Bayan Muna representative, quoted in Cebuano, "Our call is to build a new system here in our country." Millions flocked with the same wish, in hopes that something will happen. Are we reaching too far? Hopefully not, but the nation has been and will keep trying for who knows how long.

The purpose lies beyond the streets, as the media persists in retaining attention. It is not enough to hear flamboyant call-to-actions from politicians, when we fail to see what the rally pushed for. Months have passed, and still, provinces are flooded, lives are drowned, and promises are out the drain. We do not need Pres. Marcos' "Mahiya naman kayo!" when no one seems to show remorse. The Discayas monger free, while people are trapped in their homes as Tino and Uwan storm the land. Zaldy Co is 'deathly afraid' to come home, while Filipinos tremble indefinitely under the plight of calamity, poverty, and injustice. The rallies pushed for justice, while politicians responded with rhetorics: we deserve more. Keep the rallies alive, voices amplified, eyes awake, and passion alight. What happens after the rallies? A more intense hope, voice, and fury. Echo your voices until the convicted drowns in them. The Filipinos will never stop marching the streets until corruption becomes shameful again.

"Ikulong na 'yan, mga kurakot!"



TOMORROW, WE'RE GOING TO DIE

Sophia Briones The 19th News

There's this thing in Psychology called the hopelessness theory which states that when a person feels like they have no control over what's to come, they may begin to believe that nothing they do will ever make a difference. For instance, a student who studies hard every exam but fails anyway might stop opening their books altogether, convinced that their efforts no longer matter. The theory captures the easier feeling of giving up rather than giving it your all and ultimately failing—a supposed theory that now seems like a reality in a world where exhaustion feels endless, and hope has become a rare occurrence. I mean, with everything happening in this world, it's easier to feign ignorance and scroll past the headlines than to believe you can still make a difference, right?

And yet, in the middle of guilt and helplessness, came a woman who walked into the wild and, somehow, proved the theory wrong and reminded the world how hope comes in different forms.

Hope in the form of hairy apes and a young blond woman

It was quite a sight for many to see a young blond English woman out in the jungle surrounded by hairy apes with nothing but curiosity and a notebook in hand. Imagine how absurd it was to leave the comforts of your home to study chimpanzees in the dense rainforest reserve at Gombe, in Tanzania. Yet she did it without a doubt, and in her true fashion, she took that absurdity to the next level as she changed our understanding of the natural world with her approach: soft, empathic, and associating herself so closely with the animals she studied–deeply unbothered to the cynicism and sexism she's about to face in a strongly male-dominated scientific establishment. That's Jane Goodall for you. And it was in that rainforest, among the chimpanzees, that she began rewriting what it means to be human.

Tarzan had his Jane, and we had ours. Unlike the fictional tale, this Jane followed no man, yet bravely followed her calling which resulted in a lifelong bond that changed the trajectory of the heartless pursuit of research and sciences back then. She watched the chimpanzees not as test subjects, but as beings with feelings, families, and intelligence that mirrored humans. She named them, learned from them, befriended them, and perhaps, more importantly, felt for them. Empathy became her biggest tool, long before science discovered it.

Hope from the forest to the frontlines

It must have been difficult to leave the wildlife that gave her peace, but she believed it must be done for peace to come back to the wildlife. Jane entered the forest as a researcher, but in 1986, at a conference gathering scientists who studied chimpanzees, something in her shifted. It was there where she realized the true cost of human progress. Deforestation that ruined habitats, exploitation that endangered her friends, and the harsh cruelty that was stereotyped in animals but is ironically performed by the people who were thought to know better—to be above all organisms. She said, "I went to that conference as a scientist, planning to carry on with that wonderful life, and I left as an activist," in her interview with National Geographic.

From then on, she wasn't just studying the chimps; she was speaking for them. She realized that she can try to make a difference and turned her life around from observation to advocacy. Many did not trust her passion in saving the animals that saved her, especially when she started working with controversial people. Yet, she proved that you can touch people by your words and inspire them to turn around for the better. Even in her advocacy, Jane never forgot the human heart.

She knew that to move people, she had to speak to them, not at them. "But if you don't talk to people," she once said, "how can you ever expect them to change?" It is that same philosophy that she managed to turn oil companies that exploit the environment into people who used the same resources to save it.

Hope in tiny hands and sharp minds

In 1991, she founded Roots & Shoots, a global youth program aimed at inspiring children to take small but meaningful actions for the planet. She believed that change begins with the young—that if you teach a child to care, they will grow into adults who protect. Her method was simple: go where hope begins. Jane knew that to create lasting change, she had to reach both ends of the spectrum—the high tables of government and the small desks of classrooms. And she did.

"When I'm gone, there are hundreds and hundreds of young people around the world, and already they are taking over," she mentioned, firmly reiterating that one of her reasons for hope is our intellect. Her advocacy was not a blind hope; it was hope with grit, hope that works hard, hope that takes action. She encouraged the young to do their "little bits," believing that those little bits, even if they seemed insignificant, are still bits that help improve the world. She did not view children as naive or controversial people as incapable of change, rather she viewed everyone with intelligence that could spark movement.

Hope, head, and heart that works hand in hand

Perhaps this is what made Jane Goodall different. She never separated logic from love or science from empathy. "I truly believe it's only when head and heart work in harmony that we can achieve our true human potential," she said. While most scientists don't talk about hope, she made sure to make rigorous science, human.

In an age that feels both burnt out and numb, she reminded us that saving the world doesn't begin with grand gestures–it begins with caring enough to try.

Maybe the hopelessness theory isn't wrong. Maybe it's just incomplete, maybe just unfinished. Maybe it just needs a heart to touch it. Because if Jane Goodall has shown us anything, it's that even in a world running out of hope, one person's compassion can start a chain reaction. And sometimes, that's all it takes for the world to breathe and hope that tomorrow, we will still be alive.

MAPUROL NA ANG ARARO

Daphne Ronquillo
James Reyes

Ika-13 ng Agosto, taong 2020.

“Basta marunong kang mag-araro, hindi ka magugutom.”

Nais kong maisulat ito bago pa man mawala ulit sa isip ko. Hindi ko na maalala kung ilang taon na ang lumipas mula nang una niyang sabihin sa’kin ‘yon, pero sing-init noon ang sikat ng araw ngayon. ‘Yon din siguro ang dahilan kung bakit bigla itong pumasok sa isip ko habang pinagmamasdan si Itay mula rito sa durungawan.

Gaya noong araw na ‘yon, nakayuko siya’t pinupunasan ang pawis sa noo gamit ang laylayan ng kamisa. Nakakunot muli ang noo niya, dahil siguro sa init. Pero wala namang araw na hindi ko nasilayan ang mga guhit doon. Kahit nasa loob ng bahay ay gano’n pa rin siya, biro ko pa nga’y parang lagi niyang pasan ang mundo. Ngunit iba na ang ekspresyon ng mukha niya ngayon, pati ang galaw ng mga kamay—mabagal na at may pag-aalangan, parang bawat hatak niya sa kalabaw ay may kasamang buntong-hininga.

Ika-2 ng Nobyembre, taong 2020

Tumila na nang bahagya ang magdamagang buhos ng ulan. Inabisuhan kaming lumikas dahil sa banta ng baha kaya narito kami ngayo’t nakikipagsiksikan kasama ang mga kapitbahay. Malamig ang sahig. Manipis lang din ang tela na nasa pagitan ng balat ko at ng semento. Amoy pawis at basang damit ang hangin, pero sino ba naman kami para magreklamo?

Dumating kanina ang mga taga-baranggay bitbit ang mga kahon ng delata at plastik ng bigas kaya naman nagkagulo ang mga tao, bawat isa’y nakikipag-unahan sa pila, takot silang maubusan. Sa gitna ng kaguluhan, nangingibabaw ang mga usapang may halong pagkadismaya. “Bagsak na naman ang presyo ng palay,” sabi ng isa. “Iyong ayuda, baka sa susunod na buwan pa raw,” dagdag naman ng isa. May pabiro ring nagsabi ng, “Baka hinihintay pa ang pangangampanya.” Hindi ko lubusang maintindihan ngunit nakita kong napayuko si Itay.

Noong bata ako, tuwing uulan, tuwang-tuwa siya. Sabi niya, biyaya raw ‘yon sa mga magsasaka. Pero habang pinagmamasdan ko siya ngayon, habang ang mga kamay niya’y nanginginig sa lamig, tila ibang anyo na ng ulan ang bumibisita sa amin.

Sa susunod na araw daw ay p’wede na kaming makabalik. Gusto kong maniwala na may babalikan pa kami, ngunit sa paraan ng pagkakahawak ni Itay sa sombrero niya, tila alam ko na ang sagot.

Ika-4 ng Nobyembre, taong 2020

Dalawang araw na ang nakalipas mula nang huli naming makita ang bahay. Ngayong gabi lang kami nakabalik, at kahit humupa na ang lakas ng hangin, may kakaibang bigat pa rin sa paligid. Nagsusulat ako ngayon sa tabi ng isang kandila, mamasa-masa pa rin ang mga pahina. Hindi ko alam saan magsisimula.

Pagpasok pa lang namin sa bakuran kanina, sinalubong na kami ng amoy ng putik at nakabibinging katahimikan. Tanaw mula roon ang mga palay na dati’y kulay ginto, ngayo’y halos nalunod na. Kahit sinong makakita sa sinapit ng aming kabuhayan ay matatahimik at mapapako sa kinatatayuan—walang kahit na anong salita ang makapaglalarawan sa ganitong uri ng pagkawala.

Si Itay, walang imik simula nang makarating kami. Hindi ko alam kung mahimbing na ba ang tulog niya ngayon ngunit hindi mawala-wala sa isip ko ang nasaksihan ko kanina. Pagkarating nami’y sinilip niya ang bubong at saka’y nilagyan ng balde ang mga parteng tinutuluan pa rin ng tubig. Pagkatapos ay tahimik siyang lumabas upang muling magmasid sa bukid. Ang tagal niyang tumayo roon bago bahagyang umupo upang mahawakan ang mga lanta at nagkapira-pirasong palay. Marahang niya ‘yong hinaplos habang ang mga balikat niya’y bahagyang gumagalaw. Pinanood ko lamang siya mula sa bukana ng pintuan. Sana’y lumapit ako at niyakap siya.

Ika-6 ng Nobyembre, taong 2020

Ngayong gabi, bago siya matulog, nakita kong umupo si Itay sa harap ng kalendaryong nakasabit sa pader ng kusina. Basa pa ang mga gilid nito, medyo lukot at nagdidikit-dikit ang ilang pahina, marahil naabutan ng tubig-baha. Kumalat na ang tinta ng mga bilog at guhit, halos hindi na rin mabasa ang ibang petsa. Bawat bilog ay tanda ng palay na nakatakda niyang anihin at ibenta, para sa matrikula ko, para sa pagkain sa hapag, at para sa bubong na matagal na nilang gustong ipaayos.

Gaya noon, pinanood ko siya habang dahan-dahang binubura ang mga marka sa mga petsang ‘yon. Tanda ko pa ang blangkong ekpresyon sa kaniyang mukha kanina, at bawat ekis na kaniyang ipinalit, alam kong may kapiraso ng pag-asa siyang isinusuko.

Ika-10 ng Nobyembre, taong 2020

Sabi ng guro ko noon sa eskwelahan, ang mga magsasaka raw ang bumubuhay sa Pilipinas. Madalas niya itong sabihin tuwing pinag-uusapan ang kahalagahan ng agrikultura sa bansa—kung paano raw walang kakain kung walang magtatanim. Pinagmamalaki ko ‘yon dati. Lagi kong iniisip na si Itay ang tinutukoy niya. Ngunit iba ang ihip ng hangin ngayong gabi habang pinapaalala sa akin ang mga katagang ‘yon.

Naririnig ko pa rin sa labas ang kaluskos ng kalabaw kasabay ng pagkiskis ng araro sa basang lupa.
Ang tunog na dati’y simbolo ng tiyaga, ngayo’y paalala ng siklong tila hindi magwawakas. Minsan iniisip ko, baka mali si Itay. Baka kahit gaano ka kahusay gumamit ng araro, lalamunin ka pa rin ng gutom, lalo na kung ang lupa ay pag-aari ng iba—kung ang nakatataas ay sumisilip lamang sa bintana, pinapanood ang pagbuhos ng ulan habang nalulunod ang pag-asa ng mga magsasaka.

Ika-19 ng Agosto, taong 2025

Limang taon na ang lumipas, marami na rin ang nagbago. Malayo na ang tirahan namin sa bukirin magmula nang tumuntong ako ng kolehiyo, ngunit minsan ay napapadaan pa rin ang dyip na sinasakyan ko malapit sa mga palayan sa baryo. May kung anong kapayapaan sa tanawing iyon—ang makitang unti-unting bumangon ang mga tangkay na minsan nang humalik sa lupa.

Sa ganoong mga pagkakataon, tulad na lamang kanina habang papunta ako sa bayan, bumubulong ang mga salitang binitawan ni Itay noon. Madalas kong isipin noon na isa lang ‘yon sa mga paraan upang patigasin ang loob namin sa hirap, ngunit ngayon, nakikita ko na kung gaano kalalim ang ugat ng mga salitang iyon. Dahil sa mga kamay niyang hindi tumigil sa pag-araro, nagawa naming magpatuloy—nakatuntong ako rito, sa lugar kung saan unti-unti kong nauunawaan kung paano huminga ang lupa, kung paanong bawat butil ng palay ay bunga ng mga sakripisyo.

Matagal na ring wala ang kalendaryo ni Itay, ngunit dala ko ito sa isipan ko saan man ako mapadpad. Sa tuwing maririnig ko ang patak ng ulan o ang pagaspas ng hangin sa palayan, para bang isa-isa ring nabubuo ang mga bilog sa alaala—hindi na sa dingding ng aming kusina, kundi sa loob ng pangarap kong ipagpatuloy ang kaniyang sinimulan.

September 16
2025; 23:13

Sean Laxamana

Charlie Kirk was shot about a week ago. Monday. Or Tuesday, I don’t know. I was sitting at the rear end of a jeep on my way to class when I saw the video on my feed. “Counting or not counting gang violence?” BANG. Before my eyes, the talking man was reduced to a rubber body, limp and sagging. Crimson blood, thick and spurting out its punctured neck. It all smelled of carbon and sweat inside that jeep. I shot an agitated glance to my side, only to find an older woman bobbing her drowsy head. She woke up momentarily to wipe her greasy forehead, then covered her muzzle against the infiltrating smoke from outside. Her head went back to bobbing shortly after, then I replayed the video about seven more times.

BANG. Limp. Spurt... rewind, then again. BANG. Limp. Spurt... down goes another player in the game.

I felt my heart drop on the first watch. Not so much after that... I think I felt nothing by the time I scrolled on to the next video. It was a brutal sight, sure, but it’s not exactly my first time seeing something like that online. Besides, I knew next to nothing about the man. I was able to promptly bury the image of his death at the back of my mind, where it could bother me no longer. Or so I thought... Since then, my morning commutes have always featured the scene of Kirk’s shooting intruding upon my consciousness. I’d be on my phone, scrolling on social media, and BANG. Limp. Spurt... and I’d try to shake the image away. I’d go back to scrolling, but at some point— BANG. It comes back. It seems I’ve underestimated that video’s impact on me.

There’s always something bad going on somewhere in this world. These days, my feed is littered with all kinds of horror stories. Kirk’s shooting is only one of them. The algorithm has determined that I shall know about these things, and I accept it. I don’t wish to neglect my duty to know. We have politicians robbing us blind in this country—we should know. Our funds continuously get misused—we should know. Even the antics of other countries have a direct impact on our daily lives—we should know. There are tangible reasons as to why we must face the sweltering heat and dirty air of our streets, why we experience more frequent and more intense calamities than ever before, why we receive little to no support when disaster strikes, why we—

It’s a bit distracting... The scene plays again and again in my head. I think I recognize a pattern to its intrusion now. Whenever I encounter some sort of bad news, especially inside those jeeps, in the heat of the morning commute, as I scroll through my feed... amidst the suffocating air of combustion and perspiration.

Just this morning, I learned that even more substandard flood control projects were found in QC and in LU. Here’s a story completely unrelated to Kirk, yet it pulled the trigger. BANG. In a flash, there it appeared to me again. The rubber body, flimsy and falling. Strings of blood ejecting violently, viscous and deep red, from its bloated neck. I’ve become aware of every gory detail by now. It becomes tiring after a week of the same thing.

Back to what I was saying. There are tangible reasons for all the unnecessary suffering that we go through each day, and we should know about them. If we don’t, how can we push for change? If we don’t, who will hold these criminal officials responsible? If we don’t, will there be anything left to stop our course toward collapse? In the next decade, what assurance do we have that Ukraine’s circumstances wouldn’t be our own? I don’t want to stick around for that. Without resistance, this country wouldn’t survive the century. It will be a Chinese province. A province of idiots roasting under the sun. I don’t want that for my country, so I stay informed.

...

It’s hard not to feel overwhelmed though.

I look back at all the news stories I’ve encountered this week, and I keep remembering the scene. A bullet flies swiftly after each story. The flood control corruption. The new Chinese project on the Scarborough Shoal. The massacred protesters in Nepal. The airstrikes over Qatar. The air pollution in Vietnam. The heavy flooding in Europe. Down to the actual bullet that killed Kirk in Utah.

I can smell it now. The acrid, sooty odor of smoke and the musty tang of sweat inside that jeep where I saw him get killed. In my head, his rubber body has been dead a thousandfold. A bullet for each piece of bad news I’ve come across. BANG. BANG. BANG. IT’S DEAD. Why keep shooting? Can the body even feel pain past the first bullet?

I feel some kind of connection with this rubber body inside my head.

About ten minutes have passed since I punctuated that last sentence. I found myself staring at the blank screen of my phone, which lies beside me now. All of a sudden, it seemed like the most accursed artifact in existence. I felt an incredible urge to hurl it flat on the ground—as if its destruction would cleanse all the problems in the world.

Sometimes, I feel like I’m losing my mind. For years, I have kept myself informed of all our affairs, in this country and the next, but what do I do with all this information? I do what I can... and I wake up the next morning to find the world unchanged. So what good is it to anyone? What good is any of this to me? I know I’m not supposed to... but I do sometimes question if I really need to know all this. The morning commute is a tour of human suffering, and sleep feels like a potion of ignorance I’m all too willing to take. I don’t want to know anything anymore. I just want to forget.

But I can’t. The smell of smoke and sweat invades my lungs, and everything comes back to me. The bullet. The corruption. The collapse of my country. It’s a reality I can’t escape.

I am the rubber body getting shot in my head.

September 19
2025; 23:11

Something different happened today.

Since my last entry, I’ve taken a break from using social media in my daily commutes. I’ve been listening to music instead. This morning, it was The Itchyworms playing in my earbuds when a group of three men climbed aboard the jeep, all wearing pink tops. Not something you see every day.

As the trio settled down, the jeep throttled to eject a cloud of grey smoke, and my nostrils were once again assaulted by the same sharp odor of combustion and perspiration. But this time, I didn’t think of the bullet.

Instead, I found myself recalling that jeepney ride I took about three years ago. The same smoky streets, the same sultry air in that packed vehicle. It might’ve been the last time I’ve seen more than one man in pink.

Almost everyone wore pink that day. We were all headed to a grand rally at the backyard of an old mall. God! I’ve never seen that mall so packed and animated until that very day. Thousands of people crowded the building. Outside, even more. A pink armada shouting in unison. The vigor with which they shouted! All those voices... booming and commanding. A chorus of dissatisfaction and yearning. Down with the corruption of this steaming country. There was a pink glimmer of hope on the horizon. I think we all believed things would change then and there.

I wonder how they’re doing now? When they inhale the smoky air of our streets, do they feel as suffocated as I do? Have their shouts been stifled since then? Or do they shout still? Maybe, if I listen close enough, I'll hear them once again...

Remembering this episode in my life, I realized that one of the voices in that chorus was my very own. At one point in time, I carried enough vigor in my heart to shout at the top of my lungs amidst a crowd of my countrymen who cared. We had a vision. We cried for change. We worked our way towards it, and we got ever so close.

”Ang matang namulat, ‘di na muling pipikit!”

I hear you. It’s a reality I can’t escape. I know, and I’ll never forget. I will never close my eyes in this lifetime again.

I’ll rest for a while, clear my mind a bit. I’ll forget about the bullet, but I’ll remember every wound. Let me get my head back in the game, and soon I’ll be shouting, once again, with you.

FALSE ALARMS, OPEN ARMS



If I were to answer the question, “What’s your greatest fear?” I might not be able to string a sentence that would be the greatest above all my fears in life. Should it be my family being gone, death, growing old alone, or not living up to my potential? So if I were to be asked by my peers, I’d simply say spiders, ghosts–or being ghosted.

The school is our second home, so they say. As a college student who chose to study in a university far from home, I had deliberately made the decision to live in a different city the moment I enrolled. Pampanga, my new home, the city where the air smelled of coffee and excellence–as well as kaparatutan, whatever that is!

“Oh, anak, always take care ha? Ingatan mo mga gamit mo sa dorm, lalo na’t ‘di natin kilala ‘yang mga kasama mo.” My dad would always say instead of saying goodbye in our video calls. A reminder I hear nightly, if time permits. Sometimes it would be my sister reminding me to study well and take a rest whenever I need to.

In a gentle tone she would tell me, “Mag-aral mabuti ha, so you can maintain your scholarship. Pero ‘wag mo namang sasagarin ang sarili mo.” And I would nod and smile enthusiastically to the screen, breathing in as I say to myself after ending the call, “Sana kayanin. Para sa amin.”

I would go to class with little to no interaction from my classmates. I know Kapampangans are friendly and manyaman? I don’t know… I just often hear and see the phrase, “Basta kapampangan, manyaman!” So I guess that means kind.

“Huy, dimdam yu na?” [Hey, have you guys heard?]
“Nanu na naman rugu?” [What now?/What is this time?]

“Guys, may bomba raw sa kabilang university. Pinapauwi mga students nila.” Our class president announced in a loud voice which caused the class to ramble with questions and expressions I can’t seem to follow.

“Nano, nokarin?” [What, where?]
“Tutu ba ‘yan? Pota galang fake news mo?” [Is it true? It could be another fake news]
“Sus, buri da kanyan milako king isip tamu ing issue king flood control!” [Tsk, they just want to divert our attention from the current flood control issue!]

The noise went off when our professor entered the room. “Class, I understand your anxiety right now with the current bomb threat news from the other university but rest assured that our campus is safe and that classes will proceed accordingly.” So we began the class and ended the day safely, as was assured to us.

That night, the topic of our family call was the bomb threat from the other university. “Naku, buti nalang false alarm lang ‘yun.”
“Oo nga Papa, pero hindi rin biro ‘yung takot na naramdaman ng mga students, for sure.”
“True, Ate. Balita nga namin pinauwi sila tapos andaming nagpapanic sa mga terminal, lahat nagmamadaling makauwi.” I said, thinking what would I do if I were one of those students in panic to go home especially when I’m far from mine.

Five days have passed since the news of the bomb threat. Some students are still not at ease, while most are focused on the upcoming midterm exam. Including me. Especially me. Being able to study in a big and well-known university is a big thing for me, and to have a full scholarship makes it extra worth it and adds more weight of pressure on my shoulders. My family believes I do sleep after our calls, but I pull extra hours to study and prepare for the next day, for the next quiz, for the next recitation–just to maintain the scholarship I’ve been blessed to be granted with.

In the wee hours of midnight, when all I see are scrambled words and faint figments of formulas I have yet to memorize, I long to see my Papa and Ate, the people whom I do this for. During those hours, I weep alone and feel lonely all the more when I go to class without a friend of my own.

Malapit na ang midterms, ni-isa wala pa rin. That’s when I miss my friends back from home who are all busy with college, just like me. Except they all see each other once in a while since they never left town, and go to the same university.

Today is the first day of our midterm exams. I received good luck messages from my family and friends, which made me miss them all more, as I was used to hearing those good luck and taking exams together with my friends. This is my life now. My life for four years.

As I entered the room, I was greeted by the ramble my classmates were all about. Some were exclaiming in Kapampangan–probably cursing, some were agitated, and I was here, confused about what was going on as my mind was still half asleep. Puyat kakareview.

‘Muli tana, e na siguru malaus ing exam.” [We'd better go home, the exam would probably not push through.]
“Tutu kaya yan?’ [Could that be real?]
“Huy please, nakakatakot!”
“May exam pamo tayo!”

I couldn’t understand what’s happening, and now is not the time for me to be shy and intimidated, as I’m getting anxious from what I’m hearing. “Gelo, what’s happening? Anong meron?” I asked our class president.

“Tayo naman ang naka receive ng bomb threat. Just this morning.” His voice was tensed.
I didn’t think I could search for the right words–or anything to say upon hearing that. But I was able to stutter another question, “Ta-talaga ba? May statement na ba kung matutuloy ang exam?”

Last week, yung kabilang university. Ngayon kami naman? Pero hindi naman din ‘to siguro totoo? Hindi ‘to magandang biro ha! Naku pano ba to, uuwi ba ko sa amin kung sakali?

Paano rin yung exam ngayon…

“As of now, wala pa rin announcement from the university,” Gelo announced, which gained more commotion and aggravated the class even more.

“‘Di pa ba nila nabalitaan?”
“E baka naman kasi fake news lang.”

“Grabe, nagrereview ka pa rin?” I was startled to see Gelo standing in front of me. “You’re more worried than the exam kaysa sa bomb threat?” I couldn’t tell him I didn’t have anyone to share my fear with, so I settled for, “I’m more afraid of losing my scholarship.” And gave him a weak smile. In all honesty, I feel a big lump in my throat and want to call my family. Kaya lang ayaw ko silang mag-alala.

“Halika nga, tara sa labas. Pahangin ka muna.”

… Ano nga ulit yung mnemonics ko for that

…. Year 1970 something
…That’s on page 5, nasa lower right

We are now sitting across from each other on one of the stone benches, and I am anxious about the exam and the possible bomb planted on the campus. Baka pag sinabihan ko sila Papa lalo lang ako ma-anxious. Baka mablanko ako kapag natuloy ang exam.

The air was breezy, as if blowing away my worries. Gelo saw that my gaze was fixed on The Struggle. “You know what, you amaze me. Ikaw palagi ang highest sa mga quizzes, and though you don’t often participate in class, you recite so eloquently when you do.”

“I’m sorry, ang random no? I just feel like I need to say it.”
“It’s okay. Thank you for saying that. I needed to hear it.” It takes a lot of courage to admit that I need to hear that. He seems friendly and sincere. “Ah Gelo–”

I was about to say something, but was cut off by the notification sound from his phone. “Ayan, makakahinga na tayo nang maluwag–or not. Dahil tuloy ang exam, hindi totoong may bomb sa campus.”

Please be informed that there is no bomb threat or any security risk on campus. The circulating news about a bomb being planted is false. The campus security office has thoroughly verified the situation and confirmed that the campus is safe.

All classes and examinations will proceed as scheduled.

Thank you for your cooperation and understanding.

“I’m sorry, you were saying earlier?”
“Ah, I just noticed some of our classmates are having a hard time sa ibang subjects, if they want, pwedi ko silang tulungan after class.” This could be a way for me to make friends. Gelo seemed surprised by my offer. He left out a light chuckle then said, “Alam mo bang gusto nilang magpatulong sayo or humingi ng notes mo. They’re just shy to reach out to you. Sabi ko nga ako nalang ang kakausap sayo e.”

“Really? Bakit naman sila nahihiya!”
“E hindi ka raw palakibo e.”
“E hindi ko naman kayo maintindihan when you guys speak in Kapampangan.”

Our conversation went on until we returned to our room. And I finally learned that manyaman means masarap and not mabait! I thought it was a way to say that Kapampangans are generous in giving food, as they are great cooks. Nakakahiya.

“Good luck, Miss Top 1,” Gelo said with a smile on his face.

–

Who would’ve thought that a bomb threat at our university would be the way for me to have a friend? I look forward to knowing more of my classmates as we begin our after-class study sessions. This way, I’m sure the load of pressure on my shoulders will be lighter, and laughter will replace the whine I let out whenever it gets hard. Who would’ve thought that it’s all because of a false alarm?

“Oh anak kamusta? Napa-aga ata ang tawag mo?”
“May kaibigan na po ako!”

Rachel Nacpil
Aaron Lachica



THE BOY WHO WATCHED

Akia Estepa
Maria Bao

A young boy lived inside a house of bricks and iron. The house was bare, with not a single piece of furniture. The decorations, perhaps, would be the others inside. The boy didn’t speak to the others, nor did the others speak to him. And he was fine with that.

His curious eyes preferred watching the world outside through the lone window of the house. He watched as people walked underneath the blistering sun of the dry seasons and the downpour of the wet seasons. Each day, he counted the people who hurried past the window with their heads bowed to the sun or rain and those whose heads were lifted to the sky. Many had their heads bowed.

Once bored of counting the running figures outside, his eyes would also turn to the singular door of the house. The robes that hugged him felt heavy, and his hands itched to tear them from his body as he watched the others stumble their way outside. His eyes followed those who were blindfolded on their way out. He tried to count them, but he eventually lost count as the clock above the door ticked by.

And to this clock above the door, his attention diverts, as it ticks the days away and his robes grow even itchier. He longed to feel anything that isn’t these robes. He continues counting the people outside the window and the people who exit the house to ignore the itching.

Finally, the itching stopped, and the robes that restrained him loosened. He hurriedly tore the robes from his body and ran to the door. He ignored the blindfolds, eyeglasses, and some eyepatches that hung on the wall of the door.

The sun was the first to greet him, its heat kissing his skin. The paths were the second to greet him, endless, twisting and curling beyond his sight. Counting them would be futile, and he would soon get tired of it. He was tired of counting.

He observed each path. A few paths were made with bricks, and some were concrete. A couple of them were bare, with the brown earth only painting, and a few had short grass woven through them. Different yet all the same, as he looked closely and saw how broken all of them were. Sharp stones littered each of them, cracks painted the ground, and indistinguishable trash decorated them.

The boy saw the people he watched through the window and door of the house. They each have chosen a path to follow. His eyes followed them, their figures walking through each path without a backward glance at the house. He watched as they tore through the path with careless laughter, ignoring the sharp stones, wide cracks, and odd trash. Many of them were the same people who had their heads raised to the sky, and those with the hapless, blindfolded people were knocked down to their knees.

Tearing his eyes from them, he lay upon those on their knees, their eyes unbounded by cloth. They crawled as they fixed each crack and picked up the stones and trash littering the paths. His heart jumped to his throat as the same people whose careless laughter continued echoing through this vast world jumped and kicked their way through the others, throwing more rocks and trash, and causing more cracks. Both people whose eyes only saw the sky above and the darkness of the cloth around them stepped on the hands of those who were on their knees.

His curious eyes that only longed to see the world outside his house of bricks and iron welled up with tears. His itching hands that tore the binding robes now itch to crawl their way back to the house. He tried to turn his feet back to the house, but they could only move forward. He could only watch the paths before him and the people before him.

DRY LANDS, DROWNED DREAMS

Rachel Nacpil

Can the waves crash and explode in dry areas,
Suddenly appearing before thirsty pharaohs?
Perhaps not—never in this lifetime
Will precipitated salt ever be their lifeline.

Shackled by the grave graces never given,
Imprisoned along with the idea of freedom
Never could they taste and see.
Homeless hearts, when will you be set free?

Famished for future forced upon foes
Their broken dreams, to these lie their woes
What am I in a fight for flight to the light
Carrying a dimmed bulb that never will be bright

Time flies and heals not all that aches.
But they would if they could:
Avenged the ravaged & restored the exhausted
So they remain lost in thought, forever a lost cause

ASUL NA WAGAYWAY

Kirsten De Vero

Jian Donadillo

Naririnig mo ba ang ingay
Na pumapalibot sa dapat na katahimikan?
Sigawan, alitan, hidwaan—
Gumuguhit na parang walang katapusan.

Gulo rito, bangayan doon.
Tila hindi na maayos sa pagiging mahinahon.
Mga alitang hindi na natapos,
Naligaw ang pagkakaisang pinangakong sa kaguluha'y uupos.

Kapayapaa'y hindi ko na halos maaninag—
Nalimutan na ba ang asul sa banderang dapat ay sumasagisag?
Pansariling kagustuhan, siyang nauuna,
Habang ang nakakataas ay taksil na tahimik—
Nakikinabang sa sigalot na sila naman ang lumikha.

Ito ba ang gustong bukas para sa bayan?
Pinangakong "peace and order" ay wala naman!
Paano makakamit ang totoong tagumpay,
Kung adhikai'y trono sa ibabaw ng patong-patong na bangkay?
"mata sa mata" wika nila—
Ngunit ang mga nais makakita ang siyang binubulag pa.
Nakapatong ang kamay sa mga mata,
Bingi sa halinghing ng mga biktima.
Platapormang "matapang," mas mabigat sa timbangan.
Asan na ang makabayang sumumpa sa lupang hinirang?

Sa gitna ng lahat ng ito,
Lumagablab nawa ang tibok ng makabayang puso—
Sa pagdagundong ng dalampasigan,
Sa pagtawag ng inabusong kabundukan.

Pilipino ka–
Pagkakakilanlang ilang buhay ang itinaya,
Ang pananahimik ay siya ring pagsasalita
Ang hindi pagpili ay pagpili na.

"Ang mamatay nang dahil sa'yo"—
Mga katagang binitawan mo sa sinumpaang pangako.
Nawa'y hindi manatili sa bibig,
Kundi maging sandata laban sa mga manlulupig.

At kung sumiklab man ang dilim,
Manatili sanang kumukumpay sa hangin
Ang asul na wagayway,
Panata ng liwanag na 'di magmamaliw.

KALAMPAG NG KAMPANA

Reynel Gonzales

Sa silid na nakakabulag ang mga ilaw,
Tumutunog na naman ang kampanang tila may saysay,
At mga bibig ay sabay-sabay na namang humihiyaw.
Ngunit bawat tugtog, buga't paikot, walang patunay.

Sa ibabaw ng mesang kahoy ng pag-uusisa,
May mga mata na tila salamin ng eksena.
May tinta, may inililista, at may papel na salita,
Ngunit ang diwa'y tulog sa kabaong ng dila.

Bawat kalampag ng kampana,
May ngiting nakabenda sa mukha ng madla.
Nagpapatigasan ang tunog ng mga kuro at wika,
Parang ulan na walang babagsakan sa lupa.

"Makinig!" sigaw ng tinig sa trono,
Saksi ang kisame sa bawat pare-parehong liriko,
Mga pangakong tila giniling na kapeng piraso,
Mainit sa simula, mapait sa dulo.

Kaya't tumahimik ang silid ng mga salita,
At sa dulo ng talumpating mahaba,
Iniwan ang mga matang puno ng pag-asa,
Walang narinig kun'di "hanggang sa muling pag-uusisa."

Sa labas, ang mga estudyanteng uhaw,
Nananatiling panaginip ang pangarap sa bawat araw.
Kahit anong dagundong ng mga sigaw,
Sila ang tinig na nilalamon ng alingawngaw.

Ang tunog ng katotohanan,
Ang hiyaw at katakawan sa mapitagang pamunuan,
Ay nabingi sa kalampag ng kampana,
At muling inilibing sa mabahong lupa.

Photojournal









Life outside AUF





BUSINA NG BUHAY

Frances Bondoc

Sa pag-usad at pagbusina ng mga sasakyan na walang humpay, tila repleksyon nito ang paggalaw ng buhay-maingay at magulo, subalit hitik sa pag-asa at kwento.



THE ART OF WAITING: "JEEPNEY"

Asha Mercer

Between the rush and the ride, patience paints its quiet lesson.



CHARRED WITH LOVE

Sophia Briones

The charred corn cobs that carried their grandchild's hope. Labor and love, in the form of Lolo Alfredo Agapito and Lola Teresita Agapito.



GO, GO, GO! TODA NA 'TO

Asha Mercer

Everyday heroes steering stories on three wheels and strong wills.



PAUWI NA

Ellysa Sibug

After long hours of lectures and activities, every Angelenean's reward is a way home, whether through wheels or feet.



BAWAT HAKBANG

Ella Tabor

Mula sa pag-sinag ng araw hanggang sa pag-alpas ng buwan, ito'y laging sumasalubong sa mga yabag ng mga paang pagod man, ngunit determinadong abutin ang dulo ng daan-para sa pangarap.



SEED OF HOPE

Chianne Tiglao

Seeds that grow together with the hopes and dreams of every Filipino, rooted in the land an eaching for a future shaped by resilience and quiet perseverance



MATAMIS NA TURON, MAPAIT NA SITWASYON

John Lansangan

Kahit ang pabalat ay makapal at matamis ang asukal, hindi ito maaaring ipantapal sa mapait na sistemang sagabal sa pag-unlad ng mga ordinaryong Pilipinong nagpapakapagal.



PAPUNTA KA PA LANG, PABALIK NA AKO

Francesca Tolentino

Umakyat na puno ng pag-asa, bumabang pasan ang hirap ng pinagdaanan.



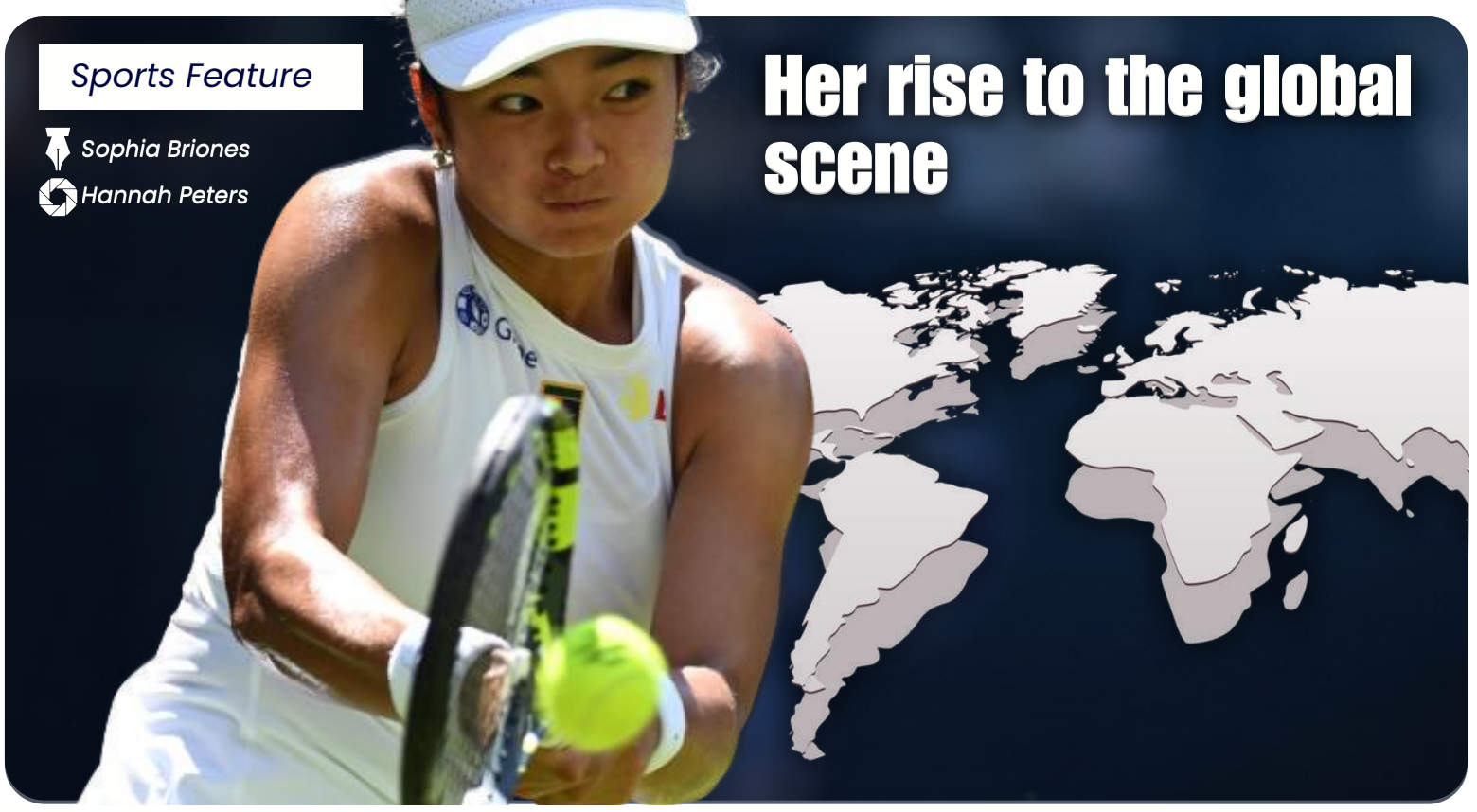
THE PIONEER

BY THE NUMBERS

Alex Eala's Career W/L Record as of January 2, 2025



EALA'S BECOMING



Sports Feature

Her rise to the global scene

Sophia Briones

Hannah Peters

They say twenty is the age of figuring yourself out, wondering what you'll become. You're learning how to live away from home, how to handle big girl decisions, or how to choose between what you want and what you need. Twenty is uncertainty; full of plans that fail and plans that lead to success. It is the age of risk, of feeling that the world is your playground, of being graced with time as you're young enough to believe and to try.

And so sometimes, at twenty, you find yourself representing an entire country while you dominate the world stage.

At only 20 years old, Alexandra Eala stands as the rising star of Philippine tennis. She began this journey at an early age of four, training under skilled coaches and fueled by her supportive family. Over the years, Eala learned to balance the demands of the international stage with the weight of representing a country that is still learning the ropes of tennis.

But her rise did not happen overnight. There were matches lost, rigorous training endured, and routines repeated for improvement. Yet each year, she returned stronger until it was her turn in the spotlight. In 2022, she made history by capturing the junior Grand Slam singles title at the US Open—the first Fiipina to ever do so. Since then, the possibilities have become endless. Suddenly, the dream felt less distant and more achievable.

Three years later, she stunned the tennis world as she reached the semifinals of the Miami Open, defeating former Grand Slam champions along the way. She carried that momentum into the Guadalajara 125 Open, where she claimed, once again, the first Filipina to win a Women's Tennis Association (WTA) singles title. Every play showed a version of her that grew bolder—a player who refused to be shunned by the limelight again, a player with purpose and stubborn determination.

But behind each victory are the unseen physical and mental practices, the long flights to unfamiliar cities you have to get used to, the hours spent fine-tuning a serve most Filipinos will never even get to see in person. In interviews, Eala often speaks not of triumph but of persistence—of playing the long game, of patience, of focus. Such can be seen through what she said on Town & Country last August 2025, "Short term, I'm just trying to maintain this level that I'm on. Long term, I want to be number one in the world, but [that's a] long way away. It's important to dream big."

When she finally stood on the court of the US Open, where she made history, her words revealed the quiet ache of being an athlete without a home ground. "It's so special," she said in her on-court interview after her 2024 US Open match. "They make me more and more special. To be Filipino is something I take so much pride in.

I don't have a home tournament, so to be able to have this community here at the US Open, I'm so grateful they made me feel like I'm home."

The Philippines has no grand tournaments to call her own and has few facilities to nurture her craft, yet she rose anyway. What could have been a limit became her drive, a testament that there will always be more if you are willing to push for more.

At twenty, Eala has already shown what it looks like to chase a dream with everything you have. Her story mirrors that of countless Filipino athletes who train unseen, underfunded, but unrelenting. But Eala represents more than success in sports; she embodies a mindset that dares to believe—to keep going. And maybe, twenty is not an age of uncertainty at all. Maybe it's the age when the world opens up for you to begin, and become.



SKIDDING FOR GOLD. Miki Pe Aguirre and the Philippine women's hockey team in action as they conquer the IIHF Asia Cup rink.

Ice flowing in their veins

Erith Valdez *PhilStar and ABC News*

In a tropical country where temperatures remain high year-round, sports are shaped by the sun. Courts are outdoors, seasons unchanged, and athletic traditions grow on concrete rather than ice. Winter feels almost mythical, and winter sports exist only in a few indoor rinks, where ice must be made and carefully kept. In a nation known for its heat and humidity, pursuing a sport on ice means facing obstacles long before competition begins.

The Philippine women's ice hockey team reflects this struggle, athletes drawn to a sport few Filipinos understood and even fewer had the opportunity to play.

Their first international tournament at the 2017 International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) Women's Challenge Cup of Asia marked a turning point, not for medals, but for visibility. Competing against countries with stronger hockey traditions, the team entered the international scene as underdogs, carrying limited experience but an undeniable hunger to learn and improve.

As the years progressed, the team gradually found its footing. Improved chemistry, more exposure to international play, and a growing support system helped turn raw potential into competitive strength. These victories were not just numbers on a scoreboard; they were proof that growth was possible even without the advantages of climate or tradition.

Everything came together in 2025. At the IIHF Women's Asia Cup, the Philippine women's ice hockey team delivered a flawless, dominant 5-game sweep, defeating Kyrgyzstan, the UAE, Malaysia, India, and Iran in the gold-medal match. Game after game, the PH Ice Hockey Eagles combined relentless offense with disciplined defense, opening the tournament with impressive victories and carrying that momentum to a hard-fought 4–2 win over Iran—clinching the historic gold.

For a country with no natural winter and only a handful of ice rinks, this historic triumph was exceptional, a bold statement that the Philippines had moved from merely participating to competing at the highest level in the region.

However, behind this success lies a reality often overlooked: the team's training ground. With limited facilities nationwide, the SM Mall of Asia Skating Rink became their refuge. Despite public sessions and limited ice time, the rink became a place where discipline was honed and aspirations kept alive. Training in a mall rather than a dedicated sports complex highlighted the challenges they faced, making their international achievements all the more meaningful.

The team's gold medal extends far beyond sports headlines. Ice hockey is neither a traditional nor widely followed sport in the Philippines, yet this victory highlights disciplines that often go unnoticed. It challenges the belief that Filipino excellence is confined to a narrow range of games and opens doors for investment, attention, and opportunities in less conventional sports.

For women in sports, the impact is even greater. Ice hockey has long been seen as male-dominated, while women are often expected to excel in artistic skating. Yet as one of the team's youngest members, Mikayla "Miki" Pe Aguirre, says, "we're here to prove that women belong on the ice just as much as anyone else. Our recent victory at the IIHF Asia Cup is proof of that."

The team's success sends a powerful message to young girls watching from the sidelines: strength and toughness are not reserved for men, and femininity is not a limit.

Against all odds, the Philippine women's ice hockey team has rewritten the playbook. From mall rinks to international gold, their breakthrough challenges what's considered "possible" for athletes from tropical nations. Their triumph shows that Filipinas can overcome barriers, defy expectations, and claim their place in arenas long thought to be out of reach.

SPORTS EDITORIAL

It is unsettling to note that the dominance of a certain few is viewed as a threat to the sport rather than something to look forward to.

PITTED WITH CROCS



First in Phnom Penh and now in Bangkok, it appears that the Southeast Asian Games has once again found a way to have its brightest stars done dirty.

Carlos Edriel Yulo has outshined every other artistic gymnast who he has shared the floor with in the SEA Games. His stellar five-medal romp in Hanoi, 2022, marked the genesis of a superstar in the gymnastics scene. However, when Cambodia, host for the 2023 SEAG, restricted gymnasts to competing in no more than two categories, a repeat of Yulo's haul in Hanoi was promptly averted.

Though the Golden Boy still dominated the biennial meet that year, the latter edition in Bangkok only proved more restrictive, allowing gymnasts to compete in only one category and leading Yulo to skip out on the competition entirely.

On paper, the rule imposed by the organizing committee of host country, Thailand, is likely geared towards increasing other players' chances of winning. Nevertheless such changes only show the arbitrary nature of the SEA Games —a reason for why it lags behind the International Olympic Committee and Asian Games Federation in terms of enforcement power and credibility.

Terms and conditions are highly dependent on the leniency of every host country. They follow standards for anti-doping, officiating, and events that are variable, thereby allowing for distortions, politics, and bias to take root into the selection of winners. As put by Philstar columnist Bill Velasco, this has become a "tired, old, and unfair story."

With Thailand hosting the 2025 edition of the SEA Games, multiple last-minute rule changes were employed that damaged the chances of delegations winning. At the last possible moment, naturalized players were rendered ineligible to compete in 5x5 basketball with the Philippines relying heavily on players like Justin Brownlee to carry its lineup.

Arnis and billiards altogether were excluded from the competition, and as discussed, artistic gymnastics rules were twisted to favor the disposition of the hosts.

On that note, restricting generational talents like Yulo to participating in a single event is akin to putting collars on our athletes who deserve to be free to join in any competition they wish. It is an act that penalizes the authenticity and versatility of these players and is an unnecessary redefinition of what gymnastics is—a craft that rewards mastery across multiple disciplines.

It is unsettling to note that the dominance of a certain few is viewed as a threat to the sport rather than something to look forward to. In the grand scheme of things, Yulo is the arrow that has pierced the ironclad system of the SEA Games. The success that the wunderkind has had in his profession unveiled the tendency that countries have to set progress aside and put pride at the forefront of their priorities.

Far too easy is it to abuse the power granted to host countries and multiple times has change been called for. Yet, the issue persists. Judges skew their decisions in favor of the hosts, bribes are hoisted, and match-fixing still remains a looming threat. This all boils down to the decentralized form of government that has taken hold of the event, and calls for the institution of a singular body that decides a schematic for which shall be universally followed in every installment of the SEA Games.

By doing so, variance in rule-setting can be averted, opportunities may be secured, players allowed to shine, and politics diminished in what should be an event that fosters sportsmanship, camaraderie, and fairness.

Altogether, we have charted a course towards a reality that has lost sight of what these games are supposed to represent: athletic excellence borne from hard work and a lifetime of dedication; and instead, what these athletes got is a system that twists rules in the myopic pursuit of a "level playing field."

Such is true, when one is put in a pit of crocs, it is not one's opponents he should be worried about. Rather, it is the failing system that has shunned him of the laurels he so rightfully deserves.

Yulo steps aside as 2025 SEA Games gymnastics format tightens

Erith Valdez

World champion Carlos Yulo has withdrawn from the 2025 Southeast Asian Games in Thailand after new gymnastics rules drastically cut the number of events he could enter, the Gymnastics Association of the Philippines (GAP) confirmed.

Under the revised technical regulations for men's artistic gymnastics, the 33rd SEA Games will only include apparatus finals, dropping both the team and individual all-around events for the first time in recent editions. Each country will be limited to only one entry per apparatus, and each gymnast can compete in a maximum of two events, a format that sharply cuts medal opportunities for top multi-event performers.

The decision is a big shift for the Philippines' top gymnast, who usually competes across multiple apparatuses like floor exercise, vault, and parallel bars, will now have at most two chances at medals instead of his usual five or six. The team and all-around events, where he earned most of his gold medals, have also been removed.

GAP president Cynthia Carrion said Yulo personally agreed to skip the 2025 Games after discussions with the federation, explaining that the new format did not offer fair or balanced chances for elite gymnasts like Yulo.

"Carlos respects the games and his fellow athletes, but with these limitations, he decided it was best to give way to younger teammates who can gain experience," Carrion said. "He remains fully committed to representing the country in world-level events."

Despite his absence, the Philippine gymnastics team is expected to continue performing well, with younger gymnasts ready to represent the country. The Philippine Olympic Committee (POC) is confident that Team Philippines can maintain its ranking at the Games.

Meanwhile, Thailand's 2025 SEA Games organizers have not explained the reasons for the gymnastics changes but have assured that overall preparations remain on schedule despite the country's period of mourning following the death of Queen Sirikit, the Queen Mother. Officials have stated that the Games will go on, though with toned-down celebrations to honor national sensitivities.

Yulo, fresh off a gold-medal performance in vault and a bronze in floor exercise at the 2025 World Artistic Gymnastics Championships, is now focusing on major international competitions and Olympic qualification events, setting his sights on Los Angeles 2028.



TLPH seals back-to-back MPL PH title via 4-0 Sweep

Francheska Esplago

In a stunning display of teamwork, precision, and high-stakes drama, Team Liquid Philippines (TLPH) reaffirms dominance in the stage of Mobile Legends: Bang Bang Professional League Philippines (MPL-PH) as they claim the Season 16 championship title, completing a clean 4-0 sweep against Aurora Gaming PH at the Cuneta Astrodome on October 26, 2025.

After failing to win in a match with Aurora in the Upper Bracket Finals, 3-1, TLPH conquered the Lower Bracket, defeating TNC Pro Team, 4-1, to earn a spot in the grand finals.

They left no doubt and flawlessly cemented their title in four games as the kings of the MLBB scene, marking TLPH's second consecutive MPL crown.

The five-man team consisting of Karl "KarlTzy" Nepomuceno (Jungler), Kiel "Oheb" Soriano (Gold Laner), Alston "Sanji" Pabico (Mid Laner), Sanford Vinuya (Exp Laner), and Jaypee Dela Cruz (Roamer) from start to finish, exhibited exceptional coordination, skills, and mental fortitude, never dropping a single mistake in the finals.

The defining moment of the championship came in Game 4, a match point for TLPH as Sanji, with Luo Yi's ultimate, made the call of his life, initiating a surprise teleport push to Aurora's base right after losing the team fight for the lord, catching the opposing team completely off guard. This split-second decision allowed TLPH to go straight for the crystal and seal the match, breaking Aurora's momentum.

Veteran roamer of the team, Jaypee, clinched the Finals MVP title, proving once again why he remains one of the most impactful players in the league. The consistent shot-calling, precise pick-offs, and map awareness earned him the said award.

With momentum on their side, TLPH's ticket to the M7 World Championship is secured, representing the Philippines on the global stage together with Aurora.

KINGS ANEW



Jarius Mendoza Rappler 2025

SMB seizes TNT's crown in 6 games

TOO BIG OF A THREAT. Kelly Williams and Jordan Heading lock up 6-foot-11-inch June Mar Fajardo in Game 3 of the Finals.

And they say history does not repeat itself.

Philippine basketball vet June Mar Fajardo showed a young Talk 'N Text Tropang 5G roster how it was done, putting up a near-perfect 11-for-12 shooting spree to snatch the San Miguel Beermen its 30th Grand Slam title .

Winning 107-96 in Game 6 of the PBA Season 49 Philippine Cup Finals at the PhilSports Arena, July 25, Fajardo racked up 23 points, 12 rebounds and 3 assists while Finals MVP CJ Perez totalled 24, 3 and 6, respectively, to oust the reigning champs, 4-2, and prove why they are the most successful franchise in league history.

Driven by the urge to renew their title, TNT delivered a high-octane performance from the get-go, pummeling the paint with Calvin Oftana's acrobatic lay-ups to swindle the first frame away from the Beermen's hands, 25-23.

However, the Beermen were quick to get back on their feet in the second canto, banking on CJ Perez's crucial four-point jumper in the waning moments of the quarter to lift San Miguel up 52-47.

With TNT hanging on for dear life, what was a closely-contested ball game slowly turned into a Beermen stampede, wreaking havoc in the third quarter and ending up leading by as much as 20 points.

With 8.3 seconds left in the frame, Don Trollano absorbed contact from two defenders to nab the and-one and send San Miguel to a comfortable 86-67 standing entering the final outing, as Fajardo left no room for a comeback by dominating the paint with 12 points and just one miss in the fourth quarter to close the best-of-seven series.

TNT Tropang 5G, just a few plays short of back-to-back championships, look to bolster their next run by revamping their lineup.

Fajardo was subsequently awarded his 12th Best Player of the Conference (BPC) and ninth regular season MVP titles for his dominant performance in PBA's 49th run.

Pacquiao confirms 2026 comeback bout in Las Vegas

Erith Valdez The Telegraph

Boxing legend Manny Pacquiao is lacing up the gloves once again, confirming his most-awaited return to the ring this January 24, 2026, in Las Vegas. The Filipino boxing icon, who will be 47 at the time, is gearing up for a full-fledged professional bout as he looks to add one more thrilling chapter to his legendary career.

The eight-division world champion has joined forces again with Top Rank, reuniting with his long-time advisor, Michael Koncz, and former promoter Bob Arum, the team behind many of his greatest nights, to hype up his next fight.

While the official venue and broadcast details remain undisclosed, all signs point to a big-arena showdown.

Pacquiao's opponent, meanwhile, is still under wraps, with negotiations said to be heating up. The Pac-Man himself says he's "waiting for the final negotiation" before the matchup becomes official.

Topping the list is a potential mega-rematch with Floyd Mayweather Jr., nearly eleven years after their record-breaking 2015 clash that captivated the world. Pacquiao has been clear that if it happens, this won't be a casual exhibition, it'll be the real thing, a full-scale professional showdown worthy of two all-time greats stepping through the ropes once more.

Another name that briefly entered the mix was Rolando "Rolly" Romero, though those talks stalled after the World Boxing Association (WBA) ordered him to face a mandatory challenger.

With the title scene now up in the air, Pacquiao's camp has set its sights on a high-stakes showdown, the kind of fight that could light up the Las Vegas strip and prove that the "Nation's Fist" still has plenty of bite left.

The Boxing Hall of Famer, who initially retired in September 2021 to pursue a presidential campaign in the Philippines, announced his return to the ring earlier this year. On July 19, 2025, he faced Mario Barrios for the WBC welterweight title, with the bout ending in a majority draw. His upcoming 2026 return marks another milestone in a career defined by comebacks and historic triumphs.



PINOY PRIDE. Pacman hoists his lineal welterweight championship belt and points at the fans after putting down Miguel Cotto.

Alas Pilipinas takes historic step as PH hosts FIVB Men's World Championship

Daphne Ronquillo

The global volleyball scene set foot on Philippine shores last September 12 to 28, as the country made its mark on the world stage by hosting the FIVB Men's World Championship 2025.

Held across two venues in Pasay and Quezon City, 32 powerhouses exchanged blows across 64 matches for the coveted world title.

Making its long-awaited debut, the Philippines became the second Asian nation to host the men's edition after Japan's 1998 and 2006 stagings.

As the host country, Alas Pilipinas earned an automatic berth, igniting a historic debut as they stepped into Pool A alongside Iran, Egypt and Tunisia.

Alas Pilipinas opened their campaign against Tunisia but struggled to find early footing, suffering a straight-sets defeat, 25-13, 25-17, 25-23, even as Bryan Bagunas attempted to rally the squad with late-game heroics down the stretch.

Undeterred by the opening loss, the team pulled off a 4-set upset over world No. 22 Egypt, cracking it open early with heated trades. Marck Espejo in definitive fashion mounted a decisive block that etched their first-ever win in World Championship history, 3-1.

Riding that momentum, Alas Pilipinas stormed back against top-seeded Iran in a point-for-point battle, standing at the cusp of victory with five match-point chances, but a successful challenge wiped the point off the board. Iran seized control to steal the five-set thriller, 22-20, leaving the Philippines just a point shy of a historic Round-of-16 berth.

Despite the setback, the team finished third in Pool A with a 1-2 record, and wrapped up their debut campaign with a standout 19th place finish.

The Philippine National Volleyball Federation hailed the milestone as a turning point for men's volleyball in the country. With a successful hosting now in the books, Philippine volleyball looks to build on the momentum and take the next step on the global stage.

SPORTS



‘Hoops for Hope’ tourney raises P120,000 for cancer patients, VAWC victims, PDLs

Jarius Mendoza Chianne Tiglao

Members of the University of the Philippines’ Upsilon Sigma Phi fraternity turned passion into Hoops for Hope, raising ₱120,000 for cancer patients, Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) victims, and Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) last October 25.

The event was a charity tourney hosted by Angeles University Foundation that combined basketball with community service. Proceeds from the event support Upsilon’s ongoing outreach programs, including cancer awareness drives for those admitted in the Philippine General Hospital and Lingkod Bayan for New Bilibid Prison detainees upon their release.

“It was the first event of its kind held outside Metro Manila,” AJ Arias, Hoops for Hope’s project head said. “Pampanga is a huge fan of basketball, and we wanted to conduct it there since it was never done before—the first in recent history,” he added, noting that the project marked a milestone for the fraternity’s outreach efforts.

The fraternity, which partnered with AUF and local schools to organize the tournament, drew strong participation and support from eight teams who hashed it out for the ladder-type derby.
With its strong community appeal, basketball became a convenient vehicle that reflected Upsilon’s mantra of “gathering light to scatter.”

“[Basketball] holds a universal appeal in the Philippines,” Arias said. “The values it teaches—discipline, teamwork, resilience—reflect what Upsilon stands for.”

The fraternity looks to hold more tournaments in Pampanga in the coming years, albeit in a grander scale that benefits a larger demographic.

“We plan on doing this annually,” Theo Angeles, head of the event’s logistics said. “Next year, we’re going to organize another basketball tournament with more incentives for participants and better promotion to reach more schools. We’re also looking to add other sports like volleyball, which has a big following in Pampanga.”

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KINGS ANEW: SMB seizes TNT’s crown in 6 games



Great Danes swindles UCLAA bronze from SPCF

Daphne Ronquillo Chianne Tiglao

Refusing to come home empty-handed after a crushing semifinal loss, the Great Danes ended their United Central Luzon Athletics Association (UCLAA) Season 10 campaign on a triumphant note after fending off the Systems Plus College Foundation (SPCF) Blue Panthers, 65-63, in a down-to-the-wire showdown that secured their bronze medal last October 2 at the SPCF Gymnasium.

The opening quarter had both teams struggling to find their rhythm as they traded empty possessions. Six minutes in, AUF trailed by six as turnovers piled up, but they quickly recovered to close the quarter in a 12-all deadlock.

Momentum swung early in the second frame as Bryan Puno drained a corner triple to snatch the lead, only for the Panthers to answer back with one of their own. In the final minute, SPCF’s Vijay Roxas buried a long bomb, yet a quick steal and conversion by Gian Cruz pushed AUF ahead, 30-26.

Pace picked up in the third as both teams traded shots from downtown, with CJ Buitison and Mavin Elospa splashing back-to-back threes before the Panthers retaliated with a late surge that handed them a slim 47-44 advantage entering the final quarter.

Elospa continued to torch the net in the fourth, opening with a cold-blooded triple and another from beyond the arc to keep AUF afloat, 60-56.

With a few ticks remaining on SPCF’s final possession, Yoj Cuison denied a last-gap shot with a decisive block that sealed the Great Danes’ bronze.

“Kahit bronze lang nakuha namin, napakahalaga pa rin nitong season para sa amin. Ipinakita ng team na kahit hindi umabot sa championship, kaya pa rin naming lumaban hanggang dulo at ipakita ang puso namin sa bawat laro.” said Elospa, one of the tourney’s Mythical Five, looking back on the team’s journey.

Earlier in the tournament, the Great Danes entered the semis with a 4-1 record but had their redemption bid cut short by last season’s rivals, the Pampanga State University (PSU) Honorians, whose blistering fourth-quarter run sealed a 96-87 victory and slammed the door on AUF’s finals berth.