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BICAMERAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEE MEETING

COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/ DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Bicameral Conference Committee	HB 5792 & SB 1533	Rep. Yu and Senator Aquino	Institutionalizing the Balik Scientist Program and appropriating funds therefor	<p>The Bicameral Conference Committee, co-chaired by Rep. Erico Aristotle Aumentado (2nd District, Bohol), Chair of the House Committee on Science and Technology, and Senator Paolo Benigno "Bam" Aquino IV, Chair of the Senate Committee on Science and Technology, reconciled the disagreeing provisions of HB 5792 and SB 1533.</p> <p>Other conferees present during the bicameral conference committee meeting were the following: On the part of the House, Reps. Divina Grace Yu (1st District, Zamboanga del Sur), Arlene Arcillas (1st District, Laguna), John Marvin "Yul Servo" Nieto (3rd District, Manila), Mariano Michael Velarde Jr. (Party-List, BUHAY), Rodante Marcoleta (Party-List, SAGIP), and Salvador Belaro Jr. (Party-List, 1-ANG EDUKASYON); on the part of the Senate, Senator Maria Lourdes Nancy Binay.</p>

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Agriculture and Food	HBs 3908, 4173, 6555 & 6954	Deputy Speaker Villarica, Rep. Aglipay-Villar, Deputy Speaker Garin, and Rep. Macapagal-Arroyo	Promoting the production, processing, marketing and distribution of <i>Moringa oleifera</i> or malunggay, mandating the creation of a framework for development plan, providing funds therefor	The Committee, chaired by Rep. Jose Panganiban Jr. (Party-List, ANAC-IP), agreed to come up with a substitute bill to the four measures.
	HBs 1043 & 6042	Reps. Casilao and Villafuerte	Strengthening sustainable agriculture and enhancing support for small organic farmers, amending for the purpose certain sections of RA 10068 or the Organic Agriculture Act of 2010	The Committee agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to study the bills further.
	HB 4013	Rep. Olivarez	Providing incentives to the manufacture of organic fertilizers	Rep. Luis Raymund "LRay" Villafuerte Jr. (2 nd District, Camarines Sur), author of HB 6042, stressed the importance of organic farming in guaranteeing a sustainable agriculture practice needed to combat undernourishment and child mortality, and to achieve food security and self-sufficiency for the country.
	HBs 5412 & 6460	Rep. Panganiban and Deputy Speaker Garin	Strengthening the implementation of the National Organic Agriculture Program by enhancing regulatory capacity, establishing coordinating offices,	Likewise, Deputy Speaker Sharon Garin

Continuation... Agriculture and Food			augmenting human resource complement, and repealing RA 10068, appropriating funds therefor	(Party-List, AAMBIS-OWA), author of HB 6460, underscored the need to instill in the minds of the younger generations the advantages of organic farming.
	HB 6566	Rep. Zarate	Recognizing the participatory guarantee system (PGS) as a form for certification for labelling organic products, amending for the purpose RA 10068	<p>Rep. Panganiban, author of HB 5412, manifested that the explanatory note attached to his bill be included in the record as his sponsorship speech.</p> <p>Department of Agriculture (DA) Undersecretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat agreed that the Organic Agriculture Act of 2010 should be amended in order to improve the quality and increase the production of organic agricultural products. Puyat explained that one of the problems that discourage would-be organic farmers is the high cost of third party accreditation. As an alternative, some farmers have instead opted for the participatory guarantee system (PGS), she added.</p> <p>PGS is a locally-based quality assurance system that offers certification to small-scale farmers at a more affordable rate. PGS Philippines coordinator Rowena Buena said that the PGS is more reliable since it is locally-based, allowing for a closer monitoring of the producers.</p> <p>Farmers present during the meeting also expressed their support for the bills. One of the farmers, Alberto Baniqued, confirmed that the cost of third-party accreditation is prohibitive and suggested that third-party accreditation be applicable only to products that are for export. He also suggested the inclusion in the proposed law of provisions imposing penalties against violators and granting police powers to implementing agencies such as the DA.</p>
Banks and Financial Intermediaries	HB 5629	Rep. Villafuerte	Enabling banks to expand service delivery channels through cash agents and providing guidelines therefor	<p>The Committee, chaired by Eastern Samar Rep. Ben Evardone, agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to fine-tune the bill.</p> <p>Rep. Henry Oaminal (2nd District, Misamis Occidental) will act as the TWG Chair.</p>
Good Government and Public Accountability jt. w/ Foreign Affairs	HR 1608	Rep. Zarate	Investigation into the alleged anomalies behind the slow passport processing of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA)	<p>The Joint Committee, co-chaired by Rep. Johnny Ty Pimentel (2nd District, Surigao del Sur), Chair of the Committee on Good Government and Public Accountability, and Rep. Ana Cristina Siquian Go (2nd District, Isabela), Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, will deliberate further on the issues raised in HR 1608 and Privilege Speech 339 in its next meeting.</p> <p>Rep. Go manifested that the inquiry should focus on the legality of the joint venture agreement (JVA) between APO Production Unit, Inc. (APO) and the United Graphic Expression Corporation (UGEC), particularly</p>
	Privilege Speech 339	Rep. Bravo (A.)	On the problems concerning the process for applying for or renewing Philippine passport at the DFA	

<p>Continuation... Good Government and Public Accountability jt. w/ Foreign Affairs</p>				<p>on the printing of e-passports. Rep. Go made this recommendation as she recalled that the Committee on Foreign Affairs already conducted an inquiry on the persistent delay in the issuance of passports pursuant to HR 646. The Committee Report on HR 646 was adopted in plenary on January 16, 2018, Rep. Go added.</p> <p>Rep. Anthony Bravo (Party-List, COOP-NATCCO), who pointed out the flaws in the passport application process in Privilege Speech 339, raised several issues in today's meeting including the question of whether or not APO or any consortium is truly capable of undertaking the printing of passports given the huge volume required and the highly sensitive nature of the document; and whether or not the law on procurement was strictly adhered to when the DFA contracted out the passport printing to APO, which in turn effectively subcontracted the job to UGEC.</p> <p>Former Foreign Affairs Secretary Perfecto Yasay Jr. claimed that the contract for the procurement of the e-passport system was intentionally subcontracted or substantially assigned to UGEC in the guise of the JVA. Under the JVA, UGEC has 90% control of the covered assets and heads the manufacturing operations, logistics, technical services, and human resources, among others.</p> <p>The JVA between APO and UGEC was signed in November 2014, for the conversion of APO's plant in Lima, Batangas into a high security printing facility for the production of accountable forms and other sensitive documents of various agencies of the government. APO's contract with the DFA for the printing of e-passports was entered into the following year or in 2015.</p> <p>Rep. Raul del Mar (1st District, Cebu City) asked Yasay whether APO is authorized to subcontract the printing of passports under the memorandum of agreement (MOA) between DFA and APO. Yasay answered in the negative.</p> <p>Atty. Arlene Sanguir, representative of the APO-UGEC JVA, clarified that under the 2013 guidelines of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), a government-owned and controlled corporation, such as APO, is allowed to enter into a joint venture with private entities.</p> <p>Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA), author of HR 1608, pointed out the need to safeguard the integrity of the security papers used in the printing of the Philippine passports. He disputed the claim of Sanguir that the procurement of security papers by UGEC is not covered by public</p>
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<p><i>Continuation...</i> Good Government and Public Accountability jt. w/ Foreign Affairs</p>				<p>bidding required under RA 9184 or the Government Procurement Reform Act.</p> <p>DFA Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano explained that the DFA has to find ways to meet the growing demand for passports, adding that from 2016 to 2017, the demand for passport increased by more than 600,000 or about 19%. He said the DFA expects to launch a new technology in 2019 that will allow Filipinos to renew their passports online. He also said that the DFA will open within the year eight new consular offices to be stationed in areas around the country to accommodate more passport applications.</p> <p>The Committee requested APO and UGEC to submit, among others, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certified true copy of the JVA between APO and UGEC and the latter's corporate papers; • Document signed by UGEC stating that it will be solidarily liable with APO; and • A sample of the security paper procured by APO from a Slovenian company to be compared with the security paper from Pura Barutama Indonesia, a potential supplier of security papers for the printing of passports. <p>The resource persons and other stakeholders present during the meeting were requested to submit their respective position papers on the measures and the issues raised.</p>
<p>Local Government jt. w/ Muslim Affairs and Peace, Reconciliation and Unity (Special Committee)</p>	<p>Draft Substitute Bill to HBs 92, 6121, 6263 & 6475</p>	<p>Deputy Speaker Sema, Reps. Macapagal-Arroyo & Dimaporo (M.K.), and Speaker Alvarez</p>	<p>Providing for the Basic Law for the Bangsamoro and abolishing the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), repealing for the purpose RA 9054, or the law strengthening and expanding the Organic Act for the ARMM, and RA 6734 or the law providing for an Organic Act for the ARMM</p>	<p>The Joint Committee, chaired by Reps. Pedro Acharon Jr. (1st District, South Cotabato and General Santos City), Mauyag "Jun" Papandayan Jr. (2nd District, Lanao del Sur), and Ruby Sahali (Tawi-Tawi), for the Committees on Local Government and on Muslim Affairs, and the Special Committee on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity, respectively, will deliberate further on the draft substitute bill in its next meeting.</p> <p>Former Justice Manuel Lazaro, now chair and CEO of the Philippine Constitution Association (Philconsa), presented his comments regarding the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). At the outset, Lazaro opined that the 17th Congress does not have the authority to abolish the ARMM, adding that the Constitution does not provide for the creation of another autonomous region by merely abolishing the existing one.</p> <p>Lazaro explained that the power to create the ARMM was vested on the First Congress pursuant to Section 19, Article X of the 1987 Philippine Constitution. The First Congress already complied with this mandate when it</p>

<p>Continuation... Local Government jt. w/ Muslim Affairs and Peace, Reconciliation and Unity (Special Committee)</p>				<p>enacted RA 6734 or the law providing for an Organic Act for the ARMM, Lazaro added. Thus, he said, the proposed BBL cannot be valid without amending the Constitution.</p> <p>Asked to comment on the Bangsamoro's "right to self-determination," as stated in the bill, Lazaro suggested that it should either be qualified as "internal self-determination" or be deleted from the bill. This will prevent future generations to interpret that secession is allowed under the proposed BBL, he said.</p> <p>Likewise, Lazaro pointed out the unconstitutionality of the BBL's provision on the delimitation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (BAR) allowing the holding of a periodic plebiscite in cities, municipalities and other areas wanting to be included in the BAR up to a period of 25 years.</p> <p>Rep. Celso Lobregat (1st District, Zamboanga City) said that the provinces of the ARMM should be given the right to choose whether or not they want to be part of the BAR, to which Lazaro agreed.</p> <p>Under Section 248 of the draft substitute bill, the provinces under the present ARMM will only be asked if they approve the BBL.</p> <p>Philippine Council for Foreign Relations (PCFR) President Allan Ortiz recommended that the areas of national defense and security, public safety, foreign policy and diplomacy, education, and justice be considered as reserved or exclusive powers of the national government.</p> <p>Ortiz further suggested the inclusion in the bill of a provision stating that "only the national government can sign treaties, covenants, and memoranda of agreement with other nations." He also welcomed the provision in the bill promoting the rights of the non-Moro indigenous peoples (IPs).</p> <p>On the other hand, Undersecretary Luis Meinrado Pañgulayan of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) recommended the creation of an Agrarian Reform Ministry in the proposed law.</p> <p>Representatives from the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Southern Philippines Development Authority (SPDA), Al-Amanah Islamic Investment Bank of the Philippines, and Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) expressed their support for the proposed law. (IID is a Philippine-based advocacy institution promoting human security, democratization and people-to-people solidarity.)</p>
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Continuation... Local Government jt. w/ Muslim Affairs and Peace, Reconciliation and Unity (Special Committee)				<p>Meanwhile, PCFA Chair Jose Romero commented that what ARMM only needs is fiscal independence, which can be achieved by just amending the Local Government Code of 1991, specifically increasing the local government units' (LGUs) share in the national internal revenues. He also recommended including Sabah in the expansion of the proposed BAR.</p> <p>The Secretariat was directed to get the position of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) with regard to PCFA's proposal to include Sabah in the proposed BAR.</p> <p>The Joint Committee will invite the Philippine National Police Maritime Group (PNP-MG), among other agencies and entities, in its next meeting.</p>
Natural Resources	HB 4375	Rep. Lee	Amending certain provisions of RA 9147, otherwise known as the Wildlife Conservation and Protection Act, increasing their penalties	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Arnel Ty (Party-List, LPGMA), agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to consolidate the four bills.</p> <p>The TWG will be co-chaired by Reps. Ty and Francisco Jose "Bingo" Matugas II (1st District, Surigao del Norte).</p> <p>Rep. Orestes Salon (Party-List, AGRI), who sponsored the bill in behalf of Rep. Delphine Gan Lee (Party-List, AGRI), underscored the intent of HB 4375 in providing protection to the country's diverse wildlife species by increasing the penalties to be imposed on illegal acts committed against these wildlife species.</p> <p>Expressing support for the bills were representatives from the Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) of the Department of Agriculture (DA), and the Tanggol Kalikasan, a non-government organization (NGO) involved in public interest environmental lawyering in the Philippines.</p> <p>Rep. Ty requested the stakeholders to submit their position papers on the bills.</p>
	HB 5892	Rep. Roque (H.)	Prohibiting certain conduct relating to exotic animals (prohibiting the transfer, transport or possession of exotic animals for the purpose of allowing it to be killed or injured for entertainment or for the collection of a trophy)	
	HB 6182	Rep. Nieto	Prohibiting the trade or export of wildlife, both flora and fauna of whatever species, whether dead or alive, providing penalty therefor	
	HB 6296	Rep. Romero	Amending RA 9147, by adopting a more comprehensive and effective policy to conserve and protect the country's wildlife resources and their habitats for sustainability, providing stiffer penalties and sanctions	

COMMITTEE MEETING		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Mindanao Affairs	Briefing by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) on the proposed 2019 budget for Mindanao	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Maximo Rodriguez Jr. (2nd District, Cagayan de Oro City), agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to study how the existing share of Mindanao in the national budget may be augmented, particularly ensuring that all major projects in Mindanao are funded.</p> <p>The TWG will be composed of representatives from the Committee on Mindanao Affairs, Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA), National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), and DBM.</p>

<p>Continuation... Mindanao Affairs</p>		<p>Rep. Rodriguez cited the report of the Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department of the House of Representatives (CPBRD-HOR) that although Mindanao has the highest poverty incidence of 40% as compared to Luzon and Visayas, it only gets 12.5% of the 2018 national budget.</p> <p>MinDA Assistant Secretary Romeo Montenegro expressed dismay over the imposition of a cap or allotment ceiling by the DBM on the budget of government agencies which prevents them from implementing important projects, such as those that are integral to the development of Mindanao.</p> <p>Director Amanella Arevalo of DBM's Budget Technical Bureau (BTB) reported that as per DBM's records, Mindanao has received 16.2% share of the 2018 national budget. She also said that in 2016, the allocation for Mindanao was P396.9 billion. However, post reports show that the total obligation only amounted to P285.8 billion leaving an unobligated budget amounting to P111.1 billion. Likewise, the unobligated fund for Mindanao in 2015 amounted to P69.9 billion. Arevalo pointed out that the significant amount of unobligated funds may be attributed to the non-performance of agencies that are supposed to implement their respective projects.</p> <p>The Committee Members underscored the need for Mindanao to obtain at least 21% share of the annual national budget in order to effect development in the whole of Mindanao.</p> <p>The Committee agreed to file resolutions requesting the reinstatement of the budget allocation for the Second District of Zamboanga del Sur which was included in the 2018 National Expenditure Program (NEP) but was excluded in the 2018 GAA; and requesting the DBM to submit a report on proposed projects for 2019 per agency for each region.</p> <p>It likewise agreed to invite DBM Secretary Benjamin Diokno in its next meeting to apprise the Committee of the proposed cash-based budgeting system that will be fully implemented by the DBM come 2019.</p>
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TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP MEETINGS				
COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/ DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Public Order and Safety (Technical Working Group)	Draft Substitute Bill to HBs 4109 & 5198	Reps. Chipeco and Olivarez	Strengthening the People's Law Enforcement Board (PLEB), further amending for the purpose RA 6975, as amended by RA 8551	<p>The technical working group (TWG), chaired by Rep. Renato "Kuya Jojo" Unico Jr. (1st District, Camarines Norte), agreed to finalize the substitute bill and subsequently submit the same to the mother Committee for its consideration and approval.</p> <p>Rep. Joaquin Chipeco Jr. (2nd District, Laguna), author of HB 4109, underscored the need to strengthen the PLEB as an institution in order for it to be effective in its role of helping instill discipline in the police force.</p> <p>Under Section 43 of RA 6975, as amended, the PLEB shall be created by the sangguniang panlungsod/bayan in every city and municipality which shall hear and decide citizen's complaints or cases filed before it against erring officers and members of the Philippine National Police (PNP).</p>

Continuation... Public Order and Safety (Technical Working Group)				<p>Representatives from the PLEB, PNP, National Police Commission (NAPOLCOM), and Office of the Ombudsman agreed to the provision in the bill which allows the PLEB to have original and concurrent jurisdiction over all administrative cases filed against any member of the PNP assigned in a particular city or municipality.</p> <p>Deputy Ombudsman Cyril Ramos also manifested his support to the grant of allowances to PLEB officers and employees and funds for operational expenses to PLEB.</p> <p>On the query of Rep. Unico with regard to the creation of plantilla positions in the PLEB, Ramos noted that the proposed law only provides for the creation of a permanent body, the PLEB, in every city or municipality.</p> <p>Commenting on the provision in the bill which allows the PLEB to order the superior of a police, who is the subject of a complaint, to impose preventive suspension against the latter, PNP's Director for Personnel and Records Management (DPRM) Rene Aspera explained that the preventive suspension order emanates from the PNP Chief and is coursed through the DPRM which has five days to execute the order upon receipt.</p> <p>The TWG agreed to solicit the comments and recommendations of the leagues of cities and municipalities before finalizing the substitute bill.</p>
Transportation jt. w/ Public Order and Safety (Technical Working Group)	Substitute Bill to HBs 5381, 5714, 5839 & 6226	Rep. Yap (V.), Deputy Speaker Hernandez, Reps. Umali and Villafuerte	Preventing the use of motorcycles in the commission of crimes through readable plate numbers and identification marks	<p>The joint technical working group (TWG), chaired by Muntinlupa City Rep. Rozzano Rufino Biazon, directed the Secretariat to draft the final version of the substitute bill incorporating therein the amendments agreed upon during the meeting.</p> <p>The substitute bill will be submitted later to the mother Committee for its consideration and approval.</p>

AGENCY BRIEFINGS		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Banks and Financial Intermediaries	Briefing by the Insurance Commission (IC) on the current state of the insurance industry	<p>The Committee, chaired by Eastern Samar Rep. Ben Evardone, listened to the briefing conducted by the Insurance Commission (IC) on the current state of the insurance industry.</p> <p>Focusing on the health insurance industry, IC Commissioner Dennis Funa reported that it continues to experience growth since the transfer of the regulation and supervision over health maintenance organizations (HMOs) from the Department of Health (DOH) to the IC. Among the positive effects were: combined assets of the insurance companies have continued to appreciate; no pre-need company has suffered financial impairment; and no pre-need product approved by the IC has failed.</p>

<p>Continuation... Banks and Financial Intermediaries</p>		<p>According to Funa, the biggest challenge thus far experienced by pre-need companies is on the capitalization requirement which has caused seven companies to voluntarily surrender their licenses for failure to comply with the required capital. However, Funa clarified that these companies will only discontinue the selling of new policies but will continue to provide services to their existing contract holders.</p> <p>Rep. Cecilia Leonila Chavez (Party-List, BUTIL) reminded the IC that the protection of policyholders' interest is of paramount concern.</p> <p>Asked by Rep. Chavez as to what caused the delay in putting Provident Plans under "conservatorship" given its financial deficiency since 2012, Funa explained that at first, Provident Plans gave assurance that an investor (Export and Industry Bank) would cover the company's capital impairment and trust fund deficiencies. However, when IC realized that Provident Plans was still unable to address its financial problems despite being given ample time and opportunity to infuse additional capital, IC finally decided to put the company under conservatorship.</p> <p>Rep. Chavez chided IC for putting the interest of insurance companies over public interest. Funa promised to undertake steps to further protect the claimants' interests.</p> <p>On the proposal to come up with governing policies and code of conduct for HMOs, Funa said the IC will be submitting its proposal on the matter.</p>
<p>East ASEAN Growth Area (Special Committee)</p>	<p>Briefing on the strategic initiatives to accelerate trade and investment in the Philippine Halal Industry within Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines-East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA), with focus on Mindanao and Palawan</p>	<p>The Committee, chaired by Davao del Sur Rep. Mercedes "Didi" Cagas, listened to the briefing of Assistant Secretary Abdulgani Macatoman of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).</p> <p>Macatoman, who is also the country's Senior Official to the BIMP-EAGA, highlighted in his presentation that the global <i>halal</i> market is estimated at \$3.2 trillion and is projected to grow to \$10 trillion by 2030. For the Philippines, the major markets for Philippine <i>halal</i> food are Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. For the period January-April 2017, the Philippine Export Performance (PEP) in ASEAN Countries reached \$109.09 million.</p> <p>Macatoman also informed the Committee that there are four Philippine <i>halal</i> certifying bodies currently recognized by major markets.</p> <p>Rep. Mauyag "Jun" Papandayan Jr. (2nd District, Lanao del Sur) inquired if the Philippine Accreditation Bureau (PAB), which is the sole agency mandated to handle the accreditation of <i>halal</i> certifying bodies, follows a specific accreditation guideline.</p> <p>Assistant Division Chief Albino Ganchero of DTI's Export Marketing Bureau said the Philippine Halal Export Board is still in the process of formulating the national certification scheme and the national accreditation guidelines. He also mentioned that the certification of <i>halal</i> products is currently being done by non-government organizations (NGOs).</p> <p>Meanwhile, Atty. Mohammad Fyzee Alim, chief of staff of the Office of the Undersecretary for Special Concerns Ranibai Dilangalen, Department of Agriculture (DA), informed the Committee that the DA released the Philippine National Standards for <i>halal</i> in 2015, which is based on international standards for <i>halal</i> products. Alim also suggested the enactment of a law that will regulate domestic <i>halal</i> products.</p> <p>The resource persons were requested to submit their respective proposals on how to improve the <i>halal</i> industry in the Philippines.</p>

Continuation... East ASEAN Growth Area (Special Committee)		In the next meeting of the Committee, the Department of Tourism (DOT) and the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) will be invited to present their recommendations on the matter at hand.
	Initiatives to transport Philippine certified <i>halal</i> products by Philippine Air Asia, Inc. from Davao to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	<p>Desiree Bandal, head of Government Policy and ASEAN Affairs of Air Asia Philippines, expressed that many Muslims from other countries are eager to visit the Philippines but are hampered by the insufficient <i>halal</i>-certified facilities to cater to their needs. She added that most of the tourists are looking for domestic <i>halal</i> products, which the Philippines could not adequately provide at the moment.</p> <p>Karlo Sanchez, head of Ancillary Business of Air Asia Philippines, conveyed that the airline is willing to help the government promote local <i>halal</i> products to further boost the <i>halal</i> tourism.</p> <p>To encourage growth in the <i>halal</i> industry, Rep. Michael Romero, Ph.D. (Party-List, 1-PACMAN) recommended that tax incentives be given to those who will invest in the industry.</p> <p>On the other hand, Rep. Orestes Salon (Party-List, AGRI) recommended that the development of the <i>halal</i> industry be geared towards alleviating poverty in the BIMP-EAGA, primarily in Mindanao and Palawan.</p> <p>Likewise, Rep. Maximo Rodriguez Jr. (2nd District, Cagayan de Oro) suggested the inclusion of programs improving the <i>halal</i> industry in Mindanao in the 2019 plans and programs of concerned agencies, while Rep. Isagani Amatong (3rd District, Zamboanga del Norte) suggested the creation of an integrated economic development plan for Mindanao, incorporating therein strategies for the development of the <i>halal</i> industry.</p>

FORUM		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Women and Gender Equality	Forum on the political and economic empowerment of rural women	<p>The Committee on Women and Gender Equality, chaired by Rep. Bernadette Herrera-Dy (Party-List, BAGONG HENERASYON), in partnership with the Philippine Legislators' Committee on Population and Development Foundation, Inc. (PLCPD), conducted a forum entitled, "Women's Economic and Political Empowerment: Opportunities and Challenges" at the House of Representatives.</p> <p>Rep. Herrera-Dy, who welcomed the participants to the forum, said that the forum is expected to provide insights on the condition of Filipino women and the challenges they face in the economic and political spheres, and how women can effectively exercise and invoke their rights.</p> <p>Moreover, Rep. Herrera-Dy called on all government agencies to fully implement their respective Gender and Development (GAD) plans which has an allocation of five percent of their annual budget.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Sharon Garin (Party-List, AAMBIS-OWA), in her opening remarks, emphasized the need to provide assistance to women in the agriculture sector to empower them and help improve their economic condition.</p> <p>We Effect Philippines Country Director Jessica Soto said that the road to sustainable development is to address the needs of women in poverty which constitutes 70% of the world's poor population. Soto added that the rural women's access to land tenure and productive assets are key targets to attaining the 17 sustainable development goals set by the United Nations.</p>

<p><i>Continuation...</i> Women and Gender Equality</p>		<p>Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Undersecretary Luz Ilagan and Agricultural Credit Policy Council's (ACPC) Policy and Planning Division Chief Ma. Theresa Santos presented their respective agencies' plans and programs for the empowerment of women as well as the problems they encounter in implementing these programs.</p> <p>On the other hand, representatives from the women sector brought to the fore the discriminatory policy frameworks or inequitable social norms which limit the rural women's access to land tenure, agricultural inputs, and infrastructure and extension services.</p> <p>Dinagat Islands Rep. Kaka Bag-ao discussed several laws and bills that seek to address the inequality faced by Filipino women. However, she suggested crafting bills that would directly cater to the welfare and rights of rural women, explaining that the country lacks legislative measures on this aspect.</p> <p>Likewise, Rep. Deogracias Ramos Jr. (2nd District, Sorsogon), Chairperson of the Committee on Rural Development, reported his Committee's efforts geared towards helping the barangays in rural areas by laying the policies for the development of the following sectors: agriculture, fisheries, livelihood, social services, infrastructure, and nutrition. The developments in these sectors will benefit the rural women.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Ifugao Rep. Teddy Brawner Baguilat Jr. discussed the bills that champion women's rights but have yet to be enacted due to certain issues. He specifically cited the proposed Absolute Divorce Act of 2018 (HB 7303) and the bill increasing the maternity leave period to 100 days for female workers in both the government and private sectors (HB 4113). He urged the support of the forum participants, particularly the various women's organizations, in lobbying for the approval of the bills.</p> <p>During his closing remarks, PLCPD Executive Director Romeo Dongeto talked about PLCPD's policy initiatives in rural development and women empowerment.</p>
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