Local Roundup
From A2

444 Pinoys on ship face Clark isolation

A TOTAL of 444 Filipinos—438 crew members and six passengers—of the MV Grand Princess who docked in the Port of Oakland in California were set to be repatriated by the Department of Foreign Affairs on March 15, 2020. The Filipinos to be brought home are expected to arrive at the Haribon Hangar in Clark Airbase, Pampanga. The repatriates underwent health screening upon disembarkation facilitated by the US Department of Health and Human Services. Upon arrival, the group will be transported on chartered buses and subjected to a 14-day quarantine at the Athletes’ Village in New Clark City under the attention of health professionals from the Health department.

Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea and three other Cabinet members were tested negative for COVID-19. Also negative for the novel coronavirus were Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III, Transportation Secretary Arthur Tugade and Public Works Secretary Mark Villar. However, Medialdea will continue to work from home as he monitors and acts on important matters relating to the Executive branch.

14-day quarantine for Villar
Justice Undersecretary Emmeline Aglipay-Villar decided to undergo a 14-day self-quarantine period after her husband, Public Works Secretary Mark Villar, earlier subjected himself to self-quarantine after interacting with a person who tested positive COVID-19.

Justice Secretary Menardo Guerra confirmed this on Sunday and said Villar had been on quarantine since March 12.

He said Villar had not manifested any COVID-19 symptoms. But he said Villar’s 14-day absence would not affect his functions and responsibilities at the department since the tasks assigned to him had been delegated.

Enough funds
TWO Cabinet officials assured the public on Sunday that the government had enough funds for the production of testing kits to detect COVID-19.

Presidentiel Spokesman Salvador Panelo and Technology Secretary Fortunato dela Peña gave the assurance to belie the “false narratives” circulating on social media that the government had insufficient funds to address the COVID-19 outbreak.

In a joint press statement, Panelo and dela Peña slammed the spread of fake news that they said merely created apprehension and panic among the public.

“We wish to assure our countrymen that the Office of the President is providing the needed funds of the DOH [Department of Health], DOST [Department of Science and Technology] and UP [University of the Philippines] and Manila’s National Institutes of Health [NIH] in the production of the diagnostic kits for the COVID-19 tests,” they said.

Detection kits
Amid the rising number of confirmed novel coronavirus cases in the country, the Food and Drug Administration has allowed the use of detection kits that were developed by UP-NIH for COVID-19 testing.

UP President Danilo Concepcion said Friday around 6,000 COVID-19 test kits developed by UP scientists were now in stock.

The detection kit being manufactured and stockpiled by Manila HealthTek Inc. will cost around P1,320 per test, or less expensive than the foreign kit that costs around P8,500 per test.

Virtual sessions
CAGAYAN de Oro Rep. Rufus Rodriguez said Congress may convene a “virtual session” through video-conferencing and other similar means to be able to pass a supplemental budget to curb the spread of COVID-19.

“I am suggesting that the House and the Senate meet in a special session through video-conferencing and other technological means since President [Rodrigo Duterte] has prohibited mass gatherings and banned travel from the provinces to Metro Manila,” he said.

He filed three bills seeking P23 billion in assistance—P3 billion for distressed workers, P10 billion for small tourism-oriented establishments, and another P10 billion for other small- and medium-scale businesses.

“If we wait for May 4 to consider these measures, it might be too late to help the affected sectors,” he said.

Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Ray Villafuerte backed a special session to allow them to legislate urgent measures in fighting the disease. Macon Ramos-Araneta, Ray E. Requejo, PNA and Rio N. Araja