

P45,000 loan to open your very own internet business

DBP launches program to help workers tap growing demand for online services

Reggie Amigo in Hong Kong

Remember the old black telephone with the rotary dial that often caught your finger?

If you're too old to remember or too young to know, here's a clue: It delivered pulses in your ear as you dialed, and created a sound similar to that of a spring-loaded bicycle bell being pulled like mad.

It used to sit in a little corner in a sari-sari store, or just behind the chicken wire on the counter. You had to reach in through a hole, or ask someone to push it out, to use it.

There's still a few of the old black telephone around, but it won't be long before it goes the way of the jukebox, betamax and vinyl record.

"For the longest time, it was an indispensable service for small sari-sari store owners and it somehow helped them drive up sales," said Rey David, president and chief executive of the Development Bank of the Philippines.

"Now everybody has a cell phone and they can use it to call from even the most remote places."

Not everyone, however, has internet access. And the way things have changed around the sari-sari store concept has paved the way for a new kind of service – the internet cafe.

DBP was among the first to see its potential for small businesses.

Nine months ago, it launched its P1 billion I-Net program in Manila, and last month, it began pitching the project in Hong Kong.

With a P45,000 loan to be provided by DBP, an applicant can start an internet cafe. "The package includes one computer, software and wireless broadband. Installation and set-up are free," David said.

He said this is ideal for small sari-sari stores as a value-added service, or as a first step in setting up a standalone internet business.

"We can double, or even triple, the amount of the loan, depending on the paying capacity of the applicant," he said.

Hong Kong OFWs may apply at the bank's remittance center in Central and have the unit delivered



OFWs are driving growth in internet services with their increasing appetite for cheap, instant visual communication.

BY THE NUMBERS

Amount, in pesos, of microfinancing loans lent so far to small businesses

16B

free of charge in the Philippines once their application is approved.

Repayment is spread over 18 months, which works out to P2,700 a month, including interest.

"There are no other costs, but the operator will pay the local fees [licenses and business registration]," David said.

I-Net ties in with the bank's microfinancing program, which will make it possible for applicants for the internet business to tap extra

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REY DAVID

DBP president and chief executive

funding. The program lends P20,000 to P25,000 to each applicant, which will enable him to start a small business such as a sari-sari store. More than P16 billion has been released to small entrepreneurs.

David said an applicant can tap microfinancing to either start or grow his internet business.

Demand for internet services has taken off with the OFW phenomenon, driven by a growing appetite for cheap, instant visual communication.

"We always have a long waiting list on Sundays," said Cely Obregar, who helps run an internet shop in Central.

"These are from people who book a session at a specific time, which has been pre-arranged with their families in the Philippines."

Hong Kong-based Renz Valencia monitors his burgeoning internet shop in Tacloban using a special software for which he spent a small fortune. "I've been getting my money's worth," he said. "It's paying off."

ANGBANSA

Cagayan

Tuberculosis is no longer one of the 10 leading causes of death in the Cagayan Valley region.

Dr Tita Callueng, assistant regional director of the Department of Health, said local residents have been freed from the disease.

She attributed this to a change in lifestyle of the local population, coupled with a relentless drive by health authorities.

"People are now more conscious of their health than ever before," she said.

"They choose the kind of food they eat, work in a more healthy environment and have healthy lifestyles.

"Those who are afflicted with the disease come out into the open and submit themselves to treatment," Callueng told a health conference in Tuguegarao.

Davao

In a sudden change of heart, a man who had pleaded guilty to illegal possession of firearms withdrew his plea and decided to stand trial.

Marlon Tacang was facing sentencing when he asked for leave to change his plea, saying he was under severe stress when he admitted guilt.

He said he entered the guilty



plea despite his lawyer's advice to the contrary because he had not been in the right frame of mind. Tacang blamed his distress to his parents' failure to visit him in jail and attend the hearings.

Judge Virginia Europa of the regional trial court is studying Tacang's motion.

Defense lawyer John Zamora said his client has a strong chance of being cleared because the weapon in question (sumpak) is not among those listed as illegal firearms.

Nueva Ecija

Agriculture stakeholders in Nueva Ecija have pressed for a more systematic and advanced method of production to improve competitiveness.

Among the measures being considered will limit production to the top five products Novo Ecijanans can excellently produce, Presidential assistant for Luzon Rely Fajardo said.

He said clustering will also be introduced for more systematic production.

Among the agri-industries expected to benefit from the measures are hog, goat and poultry raising as well as mango, calamansi and vegetable farming.

Underscoring the clustering of production, Fajardo said the scheme will reduce input cost, which will translate to bigger income.

Mystery deepens over DB Pinay's death

FROM PAGE 1

Flores' elder sister, Erine Flores-Perez, arrived from the Philippines on April 16 to oversee the repatriation and claim the maid's belongings. The family have been promised help by the consulate.

The family said they know of no reason for Flores to take her own life. She had no known debts, they said, and had in fact built a comfortable home for her elderly parents.

The investigation, Roque said, was handled by the Hong Kong police's Missing Persons Unit and was focused on whether the death was due



The unexplained death has mystified residents of Discovery Bay.

to an accident or suicide.

While refusing to imply that foul play could be involved in the death, Roque nonetheless said the initial in-

vestigation into the incident has left a lot of questions unanswered.

"The consulate feels that the police should look deeper into the circum-

stances surrounding the case. Mahirap na puro rumors na lang 'yan. Otherwise wala nang pupuntahan ang imbestigasyon," he said.

"It's a bit strange that the body was found at the Tung Chung pier. And if the death was caused by drowning, what caused the drowning? There are a lot of questions that the police must find an answer to."

About 1,000 Discovery Bay residents, mostly Filipinos and foreigners, held a vigil on Thursday night outside the flat where Flores lived.

They lit candles and carried photographs of the deceased to a makeshift shrine.