

100-project pipeline to be left to next gov't; 12 BBB works finished

THE Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) said the infrastructure projects completed on the eve of the government handover is 12 major works and seven more due for completion by June 30, leaving a pipeline of 100 projects for the next administration.

“Coming up with a huge package of infrastructure projects is not an ordinary task. If you compare that with previous administrations, it entails huge effort, both technical and financial operations,” DPWH Undersecretary Emil K. Sadain said on the sidelines of the 5th Interagency Infrastructure Flagship Projects Forum.

The P8-trillion Build, Build, Build (BBB) program identified 119 infrastructure flagship projects, with seven completed in 2020, including the P18-billion New Clark City Phase 1 and the P14.97-billion Clark International Airport Expansion Project,

and five in 2021, including the P21.97-billion MRT-3 Rehabilitation Project.

“You cannot simply say that one project or a big project can be done or completed overnight. It has to consume much time, from the preparations of the design, procurement, the construction,” Mr. Sadain said.

National Economic and Development Authority Undersecretary Roderick M. Planta said at the briefing: “The headline metric is the public expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), and we’re consistently hitting at the minimum 5% of GDP, and this is at least twice what was spent or as compared to previous decades of infrastructure development.”

Asian Development Bank Country Director Kelly Bird said: “To sum it up, it’s been hugely successful to be able to get public spending above 5% more or less consistently... The

railway projects, the extension on road networks and bridges, and these are lifting up long term economic growth and creating jobs and are also important for economic recovery.”

Japan International Cooperation Agency Philippines chief representative Sakamoto Takema said: “I’m very positive for the Philippine BBB Policy, and we are very happy to support that.”

The DPWH is expecting the completion of seven more flagship projects by the end of President Rodrigo R. Duterte’s term on June 30. These projects include the P9.76-billion LRT 2 East Extension and the P7.51-billion Flood Risk Management Project in Cagayan, Tagoloan, and Imus Rivers.

The department is projecting the completion of 12 more major projects by December, including the P45.29-billion Southeast Metro Manila Expressway Project and the P75-billion MRT-7.

Mr. Sadain cited six major challenges the next government needs to address — contract management, planning and technical operation, acquisition of road right-of-way, fiscal management, utilization and expiration of loans, and strengthening of organizational structure.

The department said 35 big projects for which construction is ongoing are expected to be completed by 2023 onward. These include the NLEX-SLEX Connector Road, Boracay Circumferential Road, and Davao City Bypass Construction projects.

“The next administration should sustain the momentum,” Mr. Sadain said.

“The golden age of infrastructure does not stop with this administration. It goes beyond the succeeding administrations if we want to ensure there will be a closure in the infrastructure gap comparatively with neighboring countries,” he added. — **Arjay L. Balinbin**

UNESCO says girls outperforming male counterparts in math, reading

SCHOOLGIRLS are outperforming their male counterparts in key subjects, with the gap in the Philippines quantified at 1.4 percentage points in mathematics by Grade 8, according to a report issued on Wednesday by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

According to UNESCO’s Gender Report: Deepening the Debate on Those Still Left Behind, the broad conclusions were arrived at from data compiled from primary and secondary students in 120 countries.

In a statement, UNESCO said the gender gap in learning has closed in the poorest countries, with some countries even reversing the gap.

“For example, by Grade 8, the gap is in favor of girls in mathematics by 7 percentage points in Malaysia, by 3 points in Cambodia, by 1.7 points in Congo and by 1.4 points in the Philippines,” according to a UNESCO statement.

According to the report, girls outperform boys in reading in primary education, an advantage that increases with age.

It added that in subjects traditionally seen as unfriendly to girls, they tend to perform better in societies that recognize the importance of gender equality.

This outperformance extends to situations “where more girls study STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) subjects in tertiary education,” the report noted.

“This may also be one reason why girls tend to choose STEM-related subjects in universities,” UNESCO said.

Globally, the number of students enrolled in tertiary institutions increased to 235 million in 2020 from 100 million in 2000. The share of women in the student population rose from 48.8% to 51.9% during this period.

However, the report found that girls are still less likely to be top performers because of continuing biases and stereotypes. — **Keisha B. Ta-asan**

BARMM tops regions in 2021 agriculture growth by value

THE Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) posted the top growth rate in 2021 among the regions for agricultural output by value, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.

BARMM’s value of production in agriculture and fisheries grew 7.2% at constant 2018 prices, the PSA said. This was followed by the Central Visayas with a growth rate of 5%, Mimaropa 3.5%, Northern Mindanao 2.9%, Western Visayas 2.8%, Cagayan Valley 2.3%, and Zamboanga Peninsula 1.7%.

Meanwhile, Calabarzon output by value contracted by 13.3%, followed by Central Luzon (9.2%), Caraga (6.8%), Bicol (4.8%), Ilocos (3.4%), Cordillera Administrative Region (2.8%), Davao (0.9%), Eastern Visayas (0.7%), and Soccsksargen (0.6%).

In the crops subsector, Cagayan Valley posted growth of 5.9%, followed by Mimaropa and Central Visayas with 4.9% each.

In livestock and poultry, Mimaropa posted the top growth rates of 15.4% and 9.3% respectively.

The value of fisheries production was highest in BARMM at 22.8%, followed by Davao with 12.2% and Central Luzon 12.1%.

Central Luzon accounted for the largest share of the national total at 12.9%.

The region also accounted for the largest share of poultry and fisheries production at 27.6% and 16.9% respectively.

Northern Mindanao accounted for the largest share of the national total in the crops category (11.4%) and livestock (11.7%).

Federation of Free Farmers National Manager Raul Q. Montemayor said that the decline in agricultural production in Calabarzon was due mostly to the decline in livestock output of 40.9%, likely due to the lingering effects of African Swine Fever.

FULL STORY



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“On the other hand, BARMM’s 7.2% increase was due largely to the improvement in its gross value added (GVA) for fisheries with tilapia and mudfish exhibiting very large growth rates,” he said in a Viber message. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsos**

PAGCOR calls for separate online sabong regulator

PHILIPPINE AMUSEMENT and Gaming Corp. (PAGCOR) Chief Andrea D. Domingo said online cockfighting, known as e-sabong, needs a separate regulator with sufficient authority to deal with the local governments involved in the trade.

“I would really encourage that, that there will be an independent regulator away from PAGCOR for e-sabong,” Ms. Domingo said at an online forum organized by Kapihan sa Manila Bay.

“But because sabong is hybrid, there are traditional operations controlled by local government units

(LGUs), which means we have no oversight over the fights,” she said. “We only control online betting.”

Ms. Domingo also said cockfighting took place over the Easter weekend on the strength of mayors’ permits. “Sabong will happen in studios, then will be video streamed by operators. We have no control over that,” she added.

Last week, Senator Francis N. Tolentino received reports that e-sabong operator Pitmasters Live logged over 200 matches on April 15, Good Friday.

“So if only one regulator handles (e-sabong), if it is removed from PAGCOR, we can concentrate on our present offerings, on what we should regulate,” Ms. Domingo said. “Our responsible gaming policies would become more effective.”

She added that offshore betting on e-sabong was illegal, as PAGCOR has not licensed such activities.

As of April 25, Ms. Domingo said that PAGCOR reported P17 billion in gross gaming revenue (GGR), and projects earnings of P25 billion to P30 billion by June.

Casino operations regulated by PAGCOR posted GGR of P13.51 billion, while smaller operations, which include slot machines and gaming tables, earned P1.76 billion and over P1 billion respectively.

“It would be possible that by the end of the year, PAGCOR would have

P60 to P65 billion a year in GGR, almost twice as much as last year’s,” she added. “But for the next half of the year, we really think there won’t be any more upsurge, and if we continue operating at 90%, 100% capacity, PAGCOR should be able to make more in the last six months.”

Ms. Domingo also said that as of April 25, licensed casinos generated P8.16 billion in GGR, Bingo operations earned P2.43 billion, and online gaming operations posted P649.59 million.

“We had more than 800 (bingo stations), but after the pandemic, (this total fell to about) 400,” she added. “We had a lot of closures.”

Meanwhile, Philippine Offshore Gaming Operations earned P412.18 million in GGR, while e-sabong posted revenue of P1.8 billion. — **Tobias Jared Tomas**



OPINION

Waiving the surcharge for timely filers

At last, the tax filing season is over for most companies reporting on a calendar year basis. For some who are still hustling to finalize their balances for statutory reporting purposes, a recent Revenue Memorandum Circular (RMC) issued by the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) provides some much-needed respite.

SALIENT FEATURES OF RMC

RMC No. 42-2022 allows taxpayers to file an amended annual income tax return (AITR) on or before May 16 without the imposition of penalties. This gives ample time for taxpayers to finalize their balances and correct the AITRs filed last week for the April 18 deadline. To be clear, the RMC did not extend the deadline for filing the AITR but only allowed taxpayers to amend the return without penalties.

However, what if the taxpayer filed an AITR on 18 April 2022 but filed an amended AITR after the 16 May 2022 deadline? Will this warrant the imposition of penalties? Unlike the 12% interest penalty, which can be minimal if the late filing is only for a few days, the 25% surcharge could be costly since it is a fixed rate imposed on the additional tax due. Moreover, the 25% surcharge is not a deductible expense for income tax purposes, unlike the interest penalty.

Rightly, the BIR recently clarified this concern by issuing RMC 43-2022. This new RMC amended the previous guidelines (RMCs 46-99 and 54-2018) regarding the imposition of the 25% surcharge on deficiency taxes.

As a background, RMC 54-2018 provided that the 25% surcharge is to be imposed when an additional tax is due per amended return. On the other hand, RMC 46-99 provided that no surcharge will be imposed on a deficiency tax assessment resulting from a tax audit.

Based on these issuances, it would appear that taxpayers are unduly penalized for voluntarily amending their tax returns to pay the correct tax due but unintentionally rewarded if the deficiency tax is paid during a tax audit. Thus, some taxpayers opt not to amend their tax returns and instead wait for a BIR tax audit to avoid the surcharge.

Thus, RMC 43-2022 aims to reconcile this conflict by not imposing the 25% surcharge on an amended tax return if the taxpayer filed the initial tax return on or before the prescribed due date for its filing. On the other hand, the 25% surcharge is to be imposed

on a tax deficiency found during a tax audit if the audited tax return was filed beyond the due date. The same case also applies to other taxes (e.g., VAT, withholding taxes).

SCENARIOS FOR APPLYING THE RMC

To better appreciate the RMC, here are some scenarios where the 25% surcharge may or may not apply.

Scenario 1: A taxpayer filed an AITR on April 18 and subsequently filed an amended return on June 1. No surcharge will be imposed despite filing beyond the May 16 prescriptive period to file an amended return without penalties. Only the 12% interest (counted from May 17 until June 1) and compromise penalty will be imposed if any additional income tax is due.

Scenario 2: The 2021 AITR was filed on 1 June 2022 and the taxpayer subsequently received a Letter of Authority from the BIR to conduct a tax investigation covering the taxable year 2021 resulting in a deficiency income tax. In this case, the 25% surcharge will be imposed since the assessed tax return was filed beyond the April 18 deadline.

OTHER SCENARIOS

The two foregoing scenarios are clearly covered in the RMC. But what about other possible scenarios?

Scenario 3: Similar to scenario 2, deficiency income tax will be paid during an audit but the taxpayer timely filed a 2021 AITR.

Assuming the taxpayer received the Final Assessment Notice (FAN) requiring the payment of the deficiency income tax on or before Jan. 31, 2024, the taxpayer must settle the deficiency income tax on or before the prescribed deadline stated in the FAN. Otherwise, the 25% surcharge and 12% delinquency interest (counted from Feb. 1, 2024 until settlement) will be imposed on the total deficiency income tax due (inclusive of the 12% interest counted from May 17, 2022 until Jan. 31, 2024) despite filing the AITR on time. This is anchored on Section 248(A)(3) of the Tax Code, which imposes a 25% surcharge for failure to pay the deficiency tax within the time prescribed in the notice of assessment.

Scenario 4: If a taxpayer filed the AITR beyond the deadline and subsequently filed an amended return, will the surcharge apply on both returns and on the deficiency income tax during a tax audit? Taking the provision of the RMC as is, it seems that

this is the case for now. However, by doing so, it would counter the intention of the RMC — to give the taxpayers a chance to voluntarily correct their tax declarations without incurring a hefty penalty.

I believe a fair approach for both taxpayers and the BIR is to impose the surcharge only on the late filing of the return and during a tax audit if the belatedly filed return was found to have a deficiency tax reported; but not on the amended return in all cases (whether the original return was timely filed or otherwise). Hopefully, the BIR will clarify this matter in another issuance.

eFPS FILERS APPLYING THE RMC

From experience, it usually takes time for the BIR to update the electronic filing and payment system (eFPS), which is probably due to the pandemic and lack of manpower. While the BIR has yet to update the eFPS to remove the auto-computation of the 25% surcharge, eFPS taxpayers should still be able to take advantage of this new no-surcharge rule by manually removing or disregarding the surcharge in the final amount to be paid. Perhaps, the BIR can also include in a clarificatory issuance an express provision allowing e-filers to pay the additional tax due on their amended tax returns disregarding the automatically-computed surcharge.

While this is a welcome development for all taxpayers, prudence is still key in preparing tax returns. A thorough review of the tax returns prior to their filing is still best practice, to prevent unnecessary amendments. Also, any amendment should be carefully considered since it will also extend the three-year statute of limitations counted from the filing of the amended return.

While some may say better late than never, in most cases (such as in avoiding a surcharge), it is best to be right on time.

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JOB OPENING

5 Chinese Language Customer Service Representative
5 Bahasa Language Customer Service Representative
2 Thai Language Customer Service Representative

- Bachelor's/College Degree or with equivalent training and work experience
- Proficient in speaking, reading and writing in both English and Chinese/Bahasa/Thai

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BILINGUAL IT SUPPORT SPECIALIST

QUALIFICATION

- Must be Bachelor's/College Degree in any field
- Proficient in speaking, reading and writing in Mandarin and other Foreign Languages
- With significant experience in any related position
- Customer service-oriented, professional and enthusiastic
- Can work on holidays, weekend and shifting schedule
- Willing to work under supervision

RESPONSIBILITIES

- Perform business support or technical work using systematic data, organized and with coordination skills
- Perform other duties as compliance and assigned with all policies and standards
- Can assess calls to provide service immediately transferred to the respective client resolution
- Provide customer with information that specialized and communicated in a warm manner