

Gov't releases P4.13B for cash transfer program



PHILIPPINE STAR/MICHAEL VARGAS

[The] Targeted Cash Transfer program, proposed by the previous administration, will be continued by this government as rising fuel prices remain a burden to their daily lives," Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno said in the DoF statement.

THE second tranche of the Targeted Cash Transfer (TCT) program has been released to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) for distribution, the Departments of Finance (DoF) and Budget and Management (DBM) said.

The program is intended to address the impact of rising prices on vulnerable households, according to statements issued by both departments.

A Special Allotment Release Order amounting to P4.13 billion was approved on Monday after a request from the DoF, the DBM said.

"The economic team has made sure that we have enough resources to provide targeted assistance to the most vulnerable households and sectors. This Targeted Cash Transfer program, proposed by the previous administration, will be continued by this government as rising fuel prices remain a burden to their daily lives," Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno said in the DoF statement.

The budget allotment for the second tranche will be distributed to over four million beneficiaries identified by the DSWD, with each non-Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) re-

ipient receiving P500 each month for two months.

The DSWD recently published its Listahanan survey, which recognized 5.59 million Filipino families as belonging to the "poorest of the poor."

This will be the basis for the new list of beneficiaries that will replace the 1.3 million former 4Ps recipients who are now classified as "non-poor" as opposed to "very poor."

"This is good news, especially for the most vulnerable households, who will be the beneficiaries of the second tranche of the TCT Program. These are our countrymen who are mostly affected by the rising costs of gasoline and other goods. We want them to know and feel that their government is here for them. We are ready to help them," Budget Secretary Amenah F. Pangandaman said.

A *BusinessWorld* poll of 14 economists last week yielded a median estimate of 6.2% for July headline inflation, against the 6.1% reading in June, which was approaching a four-year high.

Pump prices of diesel, gasoline, and kerosene have risen by P32.95, P18.90, and P28.05, respectively, from the start

of the year to July 26, according to the Department of Energy.

In June, the DSWD distributed the first tranche of TCT cash aid to an initial 1.2 million households. The subsidy amounted to P500 per month for six months.

The first tranche of the TCT included those with existing cash cards and registered for the 4Ps, as well as some former recipients of the unconditional cash transfer program between 2018 and 2020.

State-owned Land Bank of the Philippines (LANDBANK) is responsible for distributing the cash subsidy through various mediums, including cash cards, other banks, electronic money issuers, and remittance centers.

LANDBANK reported in early July that it had disbursed P3.8 billion in cash aid to 3.8 million households.

On Monday, the DBM also released P8.05 billion worth of subsidies to rice farmers for distribution by the Department of Agriculture in the third and fourth quarters.

The subsidy is targeted at 1.56 million farmers, who will receive P5,000 each. — **Diego Gabriel C. Robles**

NAIA T2 needs more boarding gates, DoTr says

THE Transportation department said on Tuesday more boarding gates are needed at Terminal 2 (T2) of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) to maximize its flight-handling potential.

Transportation Secretary Jaime J. Bautista said the limited boarding gates at Terminal 2 serve as a constraint on the number of flights that can operate out of the terminal.

There is also a "need for adequate lighting and air-conditioning at the pre-departure area as well as reliable free internet

connection," the Department of Transportation (DoTr) quoted him as saying in a statement.

Mr. Bautista conducted an inspection of Terminal 2 on Aug. 1.

Mr. Bautista, a former executive of Philippine Airlines, said he will "prioritize the enhancements of various airports and elevate them to global standards."

"We will build upon the dozens of aviation-related projects completed in the past administration and identify areas for technical upgrade to allow them to enhance their operational capabilities,"

he said recently, in response to President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.'s order delivered during the State of the Nation Address to improve the country's transport facilities.

"The President's order to the DoTr is clear — it's full speed ahead for our transport projects," he added.

Philippine Airlines and AirAsia Philippines have said the administration's plan to upgrade and build new international airports will open up new growth opportunities for the industry.

"The construction of new international airports will help boost tourism targets, generate economic growth, and create employment opportunities in the aviation, travel, and tourism industries," PAL President and Chief Operating Officer Stanley K. Ng said in a statement.

Mr. Marcos said his administration aims to boost the tourism industry.

A new international airport is being built in Bulacan, while Cavite province is currently working to start the planned Sangley airport. — **Arjay L. Balinbin**



MATHILDE LANGENHUNZ/PLASH

More sugar could be diverted to consumer use — Agri department

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is considering allocating more sugar for the consumer market, Undersecretary Kristine Y. Evangelista said.

"We know our sugar demand is halved into household and industrial (use). What we are looking at right now is the supply at hand... We are looking to see if (more volume) needs to be reclassified for household consumption," she told People's Television Network (PTV).

Ms. Evangelista added that the department will consult the sugar industry to assess the current inventory and develop plans to make more sugar available to households.

The department will also use the consultations to determine an appropriate volume for sugar import if needed.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., meanwhile, has given orders to fast-track the needs of coconut farmers by raising the value-added content of their products, according to Ms. Evangelista.

"We are looking at shared facilities that our farmers need and (are discussing) scholarships for

dependents of coconut farmers. We were directed to fast-track all the programs for the farmers," she said.

The DA is looking into developing programs that will boost access to private financing institutions.

"We also discussed credit and financing, this is important for farmers. We are looking into how to make credit and loans more accessible," she added.

Ms. Evangelista said that the department is also gearing up for the Masagana 150 and 200 programs, which are aimed at raising rice production.

"We are talking to different farmers organizations to start preparations for Masagana. It's not only fertilizer, seed or mechanization, but there are also parallel efforts for social preparations. This is what is being prioritized by our National Rice Program," she said.

"We are continuing to work... to increase yields and make sure agri-commodities reach our consumers at affordable prices," she added. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsos**

Bids for 3 railway infrastructure contracts to be opened this month

PHILIPPINE National Railways (PNR) is set to open bids on Aug. 18 for three projects, including the P1.8-billion design and build contract for track relocation works between the Solis and Sucat stations.

The Solis-Sucacat contracts cover pocket tracks, stations, box culverts, and other civil works, according to bid documents published by the PNR.

Completion is required within 850 calendar days, it said.

The works are part of the North-South Commuter Railway Extension (NSCR-EX) project from Solis in Manila to Calamba in Laguna, which is expected to provide a more convenient access to commuters to Metro Manila and vice versa.

The NSCR-EX project "will be approximately 56.5 kilometers using the existing right of way (ROW) of the PNR and will run on mostly elevated railway viaduct structures that will implement standard gauge track that is supe-

rior in safety, higher speeds, and reliability," the company said.

After the completion of the NSCR-EX project, trains will operate at maximum design speed of 120 kilometers per hour, which will cut travel time and increase line capacity compared to the current track system, it added.

It said the PNR track is proposed to be relocated as a single track within the PNR ROW, in close proximity to the NSCR-EX project.

The project has been divided into the following stages: long lead-time materials procurement; design and construction of the New PNR Pandacan Railway Bridge; design and construction of 13 steel bridges; design and construction of relocated PNR track and track laying including pocket tracks, platform stations and culverts — Solis to Sucat; and design and construction of relocated PNR track and track laying including pocket tracks, platform

stations and culverts — Sucat to Calamba.

The PNR will also open bids on Aug. 18 for the P733.5-million contract to design and construct 13 steel bridges.

Bids received for the P404.3-million design and construction of the New PNR Pandacan Railway Bridge will be opened on the same day.

In his first address to Congress, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. highlighted the need to "build upon already existing lines by modernizing these old railway systems."

"There are dozens of railway projects — on the ground, above the ground, below ground, not just in Manila, but in other regions — at various stages of implementation, and with a combined cost of P1.9 trillion," he said.

"It is clear in my mind that railways offer great potential as it continues to be the cheapest way of transporting goods and passengers." — **Arjay L. Balinbin**



BN FILE PHOTO

PHL pitches healthcare information services investment in Taiwan conference

THE Philippines is seeking to attract more investors from Taiwan to the healthcare information management services (HIMS) industry, a Taipei-based diplomat said.

Anthony B. Rivera, Philippine Trade and Investment Center (PTIC) — Taipei director for commercial affairs, told participants at the recent BIO Asia Taiwan International Conference and Exhibition in Taipei of "a great opportunity" in investing in Philippine healthcare services to bring the industry to a more prominent role in the Asian healthcare value chain.

"The Philippines is known globally as a significant source of quality and innovative healthcare-related services. We look forward to developing engagements with the Taiwan market as it connects to other global markets engaged in HIMS," Mr. Rivera said.

The Philippine delegation to the conference, which consisted of

representatives from the PTIC, the Department of Trade and Industry's Export Marketing Bureau (EMB), the Healthcare Information Management Association of the Philippines (HIMAP), and the Manila Economic and Cultural Office, met with their Taiwan counterparts to explore potential partnerships.

Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual has identified HIMS as a priority industry within health and life sciences, with the industry's revenue projected to grow between 7.3% and 10% to about \$5 billion in 2022.

HIMAP, represented by Pointwest Innovation Corp. and Pi Health, Inc. — PiVOT CRO, showcased healthcare solutions and services during the conference. Their services include clinical trial management for drugs and medical services, revenue cycle management, end-to-end pharmacovigilance services, clinical data

management, cloud migration, and robotic process automation services. Potential clients include the pharmaceutical, biotechnology, and contract research industries.

EMB Director Christopher Lawrence S. Arnuco said that the Philippines wants to be a top destination for integrated services within the information technology and business process management (IT-BPM) industry, including the healthcare segment.

"Our IT-BPM sector is expanding to life sciences, robotics, big data, etc. to support a proactive and world-class end-to-end customer service experience. Philippine service providers showcase an innate culture of care that complement their strong human resource capabilities, and we aim to venture into new markets starting with Taiwan," Mr. Arnuco said. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

PHL to participate in ASEAN program to jointly manage large marine ecosystems

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said it is preparing to participate in an ASEAN collaborative project on large marine ecosystems (LMEs), which is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

"The project is expected to complement our existing efforts in the Philippines towards productive partnerships with the neighboring countries in terms of scaling up management under the regional marine protected area network approach," DENR Foreign-Assisted and Special Projects Service Director Al O. Orolo said.

According to the DENR, ASEAN coastal and marine areas are home to 20% of the world's seagrass beds, a third of the world's mangrove forests with 45 to 75 true species, and a third of the world's coral reefs, with more than 75% of coral species and 40% of fish species.

The project aims to manage networks of marine protected areas in LMEs, which are a source of

livelihood for fishermen. LMEs are marine areas extending beyond national boundaries.

"It aims to develop and improve the management of networks of marine protected areas (MPAs) and marine corridors within selected LMEs in the ASEAN region for the conservation of globally significant biodiversity. It will support sustainable fisheries and other ecosystem goods and services," the DENR added.

The collaboration will involve the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand, with ultimate participation targeted at least five ASEAN members.

Mr. Orolo said the collaborative management approach hopes to address climate change, marine pollution and biodiversity loss.

The GEF tallies about 66 LMEs worldwide, with the program supporting the sustainable governance of 23. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsos**