P1.19-T National Tax Allotment released to local governments

THE National Tax Allotment (NTA) of P1.19 trillion has been released to local government units (LGUs), the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) said.

Acting Budget Secretary Rolando U. Toledo approved the NTA Special Allotment Release Order and the corresponding Notices of Cash Allocation on Jan. 26.

The funds represent the LGU share of taxes earned by the National Government three years earlier.

"The timely release of the FY 2026 National Tax Allotment ensures that local governments have the resources they need to deliver services without delay," he said in a statement on Tuesday.

The NTA, which is directly credited to the authorized government service banks of LGUs, is intended to fund local services like healthcare, education support, disaster preparedness and response, and infrastructure upkeep, it said.

"By releasing the NTA in full and on time, we are enabling LGUs to act decisively, respond to local needs, and bring immediate benefits to their constituents," Mr. Toledo said.

The DBM also urged the LGUs to comply with reporting requirements, consistent with transparency and accountability standards, and use the NTA strictly for "authorized purposes."

Under the Local Government Code, LGUs are entitled to 40% of National Government tax revenue. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

THE FREEMAN FILE PHOTO

Landfill inspections to be completed this quarter

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said it hopes to complete a comprehensive national review of landfill facilities by the end of the first quarter, following the recent collapse of a landfill in Cebu City.

At a briefing on Tuesday, Environment Secretary Raphael P.M. Lotilla said the DENR is concerned about the impact of recent calamities on the stability and safety of waste disposal facilities.

"Inspections are conducted regularly at the regional and provincial levels, but in light of the Cebu incident and recent earthquakes and typhoons, we need a comprehensive nationwide review of all solid waste facilities to ensure this does not happen again," Mr. Lotilla said.

On Jan. 8, a garbage pile estimated by local officials to be as tall as a 20-storey building, collapsed in Binaliw, Cebu City, crushing a materials recovery facility and killing 36 workers.

The DENR has formed an investigative body to look into the Binaliw incident. It also directed regional offices to enforce safety protocols.

Assistant Secretary and Environmental Management Bureau Director Jacqueline A. Caancan said the review will be more in-depth and will involve the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB).

"We will be involving the MGB because of the needed technical expertise. Previous geological assessments will be revisited, as site conditions may have changed due to heavy rains and seismic activities," she said.

The DENR said the review is ongoing and is expected to be completed before the end of the first quarter.

Environmental groups have flagged insufficient monitoring of landfills, saying lax oversight has contributed to repeated safety and environmental risks.

Meanwhile, the DENR said it will also work closely with local government units (LGUs) to ensure compliance with Republic Act (RA) No. 9003, or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act, which requires LGUs to submit 10-year solid waste management plans.

While the number of LGUs with approved plans has increased in recent years, the degree of implementation still varies, the DENR said.

"Out of 1,642 LGUs, there is a high level of compliance at 1,515. That means 92% of them submitted their solid waste management plans. But the challenge is in implementation. We also have around 13,734 materials recovery facilities at the local level, but that does not cover all barangays," Mr. Lotilla said.

The DENR said it will assist LGUs in identifying landfill expansion areas, evaluating the suitability of new sites, and exploring options such as clustering facilities to improve waste management efficiency.

"The MGB will help the LGUs by examining the suitability of the geology of the area. The LGU is the one that identifies the area, and we examine it," Mr. Lotilla said.

The DENR said it is also exploring alternative waste disposal methods, including waste-to-energy projects and technologies that recycle or repurpose plastic waste.

Undersecretary Juan Miguel T. Cuna also told reporters that Pampanga Rep. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo plans to file an amendment to RA 9003, which she signed into law when she was president in 2001. Proposed changes could allow the use of waste-to-energy projects to help manage the disposal problem.

Mr. Lotilla said new incineration and waste-to-energy technologies developed since the law's passage can now meet current environmental standards. — **Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**

EDCOM II proposes education spending of at least 5.5% of GDP

THE Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) is pushing for a 10-year education development plan that will set minimum education spending at 5.5% of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2035.

In its final report, EDCOM II said the government needs to sustain the upward trajectory of education spending beyond current budget trends.

According to the Constitution, education receives the biggest budget allocation, which was set at P1.015 trillion in 2026, equivalent to 4.36% of GDP.

The report added that the 10-year National Education Plan (NatPlan) estimates an "indicative incremental cost... of P2.66 trillion over the plan period."

It proposes that basic education make up 60% of incremental investment, including funding for classroom construction and repair, teacher deployment and training, instructional materials, and programs to address issues like mass promotion and achieving functional literacy.

About 30% was proposed for higher education, mainly in expanded scholarships.

The rest will go to early childhood care and development along with technical-vocation education training.

The 10-year plan also proposes a timetable for education spending increases of 4% of GDP in 2028, 5% in 2031, and 5.5% by 2035. The target years are aligned with national political cycles and local government election cycles.

"It is envisioned to be a shared roadmap that unites government, schools, local leaders, and communities around one goal: to rebuild trust in our education system and prepare every Filipino to learn, work, and thrive," the commission said.

PHILIPPINE STAR/RYAN BALDEMOR

The report identified key priority areas that requires aggressive government action: early childhood development, functional literacy in early learners, critical thinking, digital skills, graduate readiness, and inclusive learning.

"This is intended to strengthen accountability, enable course corrections, and anchor reforms within realistic governance and budgeting windows," it added.

The plan also recommends the full implementation of the government's Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning Program, which provides free targeted interventions, tutorials, and resources for struggling learners. — **Adrian H. Halili**

Funding for vetoed RACE program still under discussion — Trade department

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said it is still in discussions for funding a vetoed incentive program known as Revitalizing the Automotive Industry for Competitiveness Enhancement (RACE).

"We're hoping for that, definitely. But I can't really say when, we need to finish the discussion first," Trade Secretary Ma. Cristina A. Roque told reporters on the sidelines of an event on Tuesday, when asked about the timetable for locking down the funding.

Nearly two weeks after the government restored funding for the Comprehensive Automotive Resurgence Strategy (CARS) program, its counterpart, funding for the RACE incentive scheme, remains unsettled.

Ms. Roque said CARS was given priority as the government still has obligations to enrolled investors, amounting to more than P4 billion.

The RACE program was designed to replicate CARS by providing fiscal support for capital expenditures on tooling and equipment, as well as for fixed investments.

Both incentive programs were to be funded by the unprogrammed appropriations vetoed by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. in the 2026 budget.

"We really have to continue giving the incentives to entice investors to the Philippines because they need to invest here," she said.

The Philippine Parts Makers Association said only P125 million is needed to initiate and operationalize RACE. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

Hog, poultry production up in Q4; cattle down

LIVESTOCK production was mixed in the fourth quarter of 2025, with hog, chicken, and chicken egg output growing on a seasonally adjusted basis and cattle production declining, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.

The PSA reported that the seasonally adjusted volume of hog production in the fourth quarter rose 2% to 419,549 metric tons (MT) on a liveweight basis. The total had been 411,133 MT in the previous quarter.

This is the biggest quarterly increase in the hog industry since the fourth quarter of 2023.

Seasonally adjusted volumes, which strip out the effect of factors like trader demand, disease outbreaks, and natural calamities, show the underlying trends in production, allowing for clearer comparisons across quarters.

Seasonally adjusted chicken production in the fourth quarter increased 0.5% to 585,260 MT (liveweight). The total had come in at 582,333 MT a quarter earlier.

The fourth-quarter increase in chicken production posted the slowest growth since the fourth quarter of 2024.

The PSA said seasonally adjusted chicken egg production in the fourth quarter was up 4% at 220,628 MT, after posting a total of 212,061 MT in the third quarter.

Meanwhile, cattle production declined on a seasonally adjusted basis, falling 2.5% to 56,852 MT (liveweight). The quarter-earlier total had been 58,308 MT. — **Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**

Power distributors' deadline for tariff proposals extended

THE Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) said private distribution utilities (PDUs) have been allowed more time to file their proposed electricity tariffs.

In a resolution approved on Jan. 14, the ERC directed all PDUs to file their actual weighted average tariff (AWAT) application by March 22.

The deadline was extended from 60 calendar days to 120 days from the effectivity of ERC Resolution No. 23, Series of 2025.

The ERC said that the extension was granted following the commission's review of its regulatory targets for the year and in consideration of requests from the industry.

The extra time is also meant to ensure "orderly and efficient regulatory processing."

Under the Electric Power Industry Reform Act, the ERC is responsible for establishing a method for setting transmission and distribution wheeling rates. The rates must be set in a way that allows the recovery of "just and reasonable costs and a reasonable return on rate base" to enable the entity to operate viably.

AWAT — the average distribution rates across customer classes — is calculated and approved during the rate reset process, a forward-looking exercise that requires the regulated entity to submit expenditure forecasts and proposed projects.

Last year, the ERC initiated a major regulatory overhaul to address a decade-long backlog in rate resets for PDUs under performance-based regulation by issuing the rationalized rules for setting distribution wheeling rates (RRDWR).

The RRDWR defines new entry groups for the PDUs and establishes the first regulatory period.

In the same resolution, the ERC also adjusted the deadlines for the filing of rate reset applications, by shortening the timeframe from 12 months to nine months before the start of their regulatory period.

"These amendments are intended to improve regulatory sequencing, facilitate the efficient conduct of hearings, and ensure the timely issuance of regulatory decisions, while upholding transparency and regulatory discipline," the ERC said. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

BIR establishes dedicated service counters for RBEs

THE Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) said it established dedicated service counters to streamline tax filing and payment by registered business enterprises (RBEs).

"We are launching Special RBE Express Counters at 20 Revenue District Offices nationwide and at the Large Taxpayers Service," BIR Commissioner Charlito Martin R. Mendoza said in a speech on Tuesday.

The Registered Business Enterprise Taxpayer Service (RBETS) will provide a centralized, consistent, and responsive approach to tax administration for RBEs, he said.

In preparation, the BIR trained personnel assigned to the new service counters, covering the RBE tax regime as outlined in the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises to Maximize Opportunities for Reinvigorating the Economy (CREATE MORE) Act.

"RBETS is not yet a full service as the necessary plantilla positions are still being finalized. But rather than wait, we move forward," Mr. Mendoza said.

Finance Secretary Frederick D. Go said RBETS will ensure the government's incentive system is implemented in a fair, efficient, and responsive manner.

"By providing a centralized end-to-end taxpayer service for Registered Business Enterprises, to ensure a single, consistent interpretation and application of incentive rules across the tax system," he said.

Mr. Go said the program will improve monitoring, enhance data quality, and curb revenue leakage.

"This allows the government to safeguard revenue collection, correctly identify high-risk cases, and focus enforcement where it matters most, while easing the burden on compliant taxpayers," he said.

Trade Secretary Ma. Cristina A. Roque said reforms that streamline compliance build trust within the business community and show the administration's commitment to an investor-friendly Philippines.

"We are currently finalizing the rules for the enhanced deduction regime alongside the BIR and the FIRB," she added, referring to the Fiscal Incentives Review Board.

The BIR also extended the deadline for the filing of tax returns and the payment of the corresponding value-added tax by nonresident digital service providers to Jan. 25. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

FPI says steel industry also under pressure from imports

THE Federation of Philippine Industries (FPI) said key domestic producers are facing competitive pressures which merit government intervention, following the safeguard measures imposed on cement imports.

In particular, FPI Chairperson Elizabeth H. Lee said in a statement on Tuesday that "steel is a foundation industry. Without a viable domestic base, downstream manufacturing — from machinery parts to wires, springs, and bearings — cannot compete."

"Bottom line: industry is united in calling for a trade remedy system that works at the speed of market injury," she added.

The group said the recently imposed safeguard duties on cement imports are a means of stabilizing the market. The Tariff Commission had ruled that surging imports have done serious injury to domestic cement manufacturers.

"This safeguard is a critical step to stabilize the market, protect local producers, and ensure Philippine cement is not displaced in government infrastructure projects," Ms. Lee added.

"International trade is vital to the Philippine economy, but when imports are dumped, subsidized, or arrive in disproportionate volumes that injure local producers, trade remedies are not only lawful — they are essential to safeguard industrial viability," she said. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**