



Good News

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Updates from Government Agencies

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Diretso sa Tao

Your government is now putting the finishing touches on the proposed National Budget for 2012. The Development Budget Coordination Committee (DBCC) met last week and announced there is a proposed 8 to 12 percent increase in the 2012 expenditure plan. It envisions reducing the fiscal deficit from 3.2 to 2.6 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). There's a proposed allocation of 30 percent for the social services sector or P500 billion, with an 8 to 12 percent increase in outlays for social protection, basic education and public health.

EDITORIAL

About 25 percent will be for economic services or about P400 billion, with a 20 percent increase for infrastructure and other capital spending. The country's economic managers are targeting to reduce the debt burden in the national budget by 2 to 4 percentage points from the current 22.6 percent in 2011.

Taken as a whole, the funding focus is on the five Key Result Areas (KRAs) of the administration's Social Contract with the Filipino People:

- Anti-corruption, and transparent, accountable and participatory governance;
- Poverty reduction and empowerment of the poor;
- Rapid, equitable and sustained economic growth;
- Just, inclusive and lasting peace and the rule of law, and
- Integrity of the environment, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

As Budget and Management Secretary Butch Abad has pointed out, the zero-based budgeting approach continues to be used to reduce or even eliminate funding for programs and projects that are irrelevant, inefficient or that are not aligned with the KRAs. If 2010 was the year of "Paggugol na Matuwid," this year, as zero-budgeting becomes a habit, we can say the national budget's orientation will be to make sure funding and services will be "diretso sa tao."

Lifeliners continue to enjoy discount in energy rate

THE Department of Energy (DOE) expressed its full support for the signing of the extension of the Lifeline Rate for marginalized power customers, and the extension of the term of the Joint Congressional Power Commission (JCPC), as the President signed it into law last June 21, 2011 at Malacanang.

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Budget Secretary Florencio Abad speaks during the Association of Government Accountants of the Philippines National Convention. (PIA)

Social services, infrastructure spending to get boost in 2012 budget

Abad: Sustained "Paggugol na Matuwid" to achieve fiscal consolidation

BUDGET and Management Secretary Florencio B. Abad has disclosed that spending on social services and on infrastructure will get a significant boost in the proposed National Budget for 2012, consistent with President Aquino's Social Contract with the Filipino People.

Abad said the 2012 expenditure plan—which will increase from 8 to 12 percent year-on-year—will remain consistent with the government's fiscal consolidation efforts, reducing the fiscal deficit from 3.2 percent of gross domestic product this year to 2.6 percent in 2012.

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Robredo establishes special units within PNP, BFP and BJMP to manage retirement benefits of personnel

THIS week, Interior and Local Government Secretary Jesse M. Robredo established a special unit within the Philippine National Police, the Bureau of Fire Protection, and the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology. The unit, named the Retirement and Benefits Administrative Service, will focus on managing and administering fund releases for retirement, separation, and pension benefits of retirees from the said offices. It shall be under the functional supervision of the respective Directorates for Personnel of the PNP, BFP, and BJMP.

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Paje outlines more clean air efforts as PhI scores international high marks for controlling air pollution

LAST June 14-15, a 2-day forum, dubbed "Clean Air 10+2," was held in the DENR Social Hall in Quezon City, as part of the celebration of Environment Month. It was attended by representatives of other government agencies, local government units (LGUs), members of the Partnerships for Clean Air (PCA), businesses, non-government organizations and the academe.

Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Ramon J.P. Paje said that the Philippines has gained international high marks for its efforts to control air pollution. As the country has made a lot of progress in its efforts to clean the air since the enactment of the Philippine Clean Air Act (Republic Act 8749), Paje said that, "It is no surprise, then, that Yale University in 2010 gave us a fairly high grade in the air pollution criterion of its annual Environmental Performance Index (EPI)."

The secretary reported that the country's EPI of 71.7 points in the air pollution criterion is higher than the Asia-Pacific regional average of 54.3. The Philippines ranks third to Malaysia and Singapore in Southeast Asia, while ranking 50th place (tied with Australia), out of 163 countries ranked.

The EPI ranks countries on 25 performance indicators tracked across ten policy categories, one of which is air pollution's impact on humans, covering both environmental public health and ecosystem vitality. Higher EPI points mean that a country – or region – is closer to achieving its established goals in environmental policy. (The rankings can be viewed on the website: epi.yale.edu.)

Paje cited the different programs that contributed to the favorable ranking, such as the enhancement of anti-smoke belching operations in Metro Manila; the adoption of more stringent emission standards for all types of motor vehicles; and stricter monitoring of private emission testing centers and motor vehicle inspection centers with the use of closed-circuit television or CCTV cameras.

The implications, he said, are that administrative and regulatory efforts of the government can bring down levels of total suspended particulates (TSP), as evidenced by the decrease in the level of Total Suspended Particulate from 166 micrograms per normal cubic meter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{ncM}$) in December 2010 to 121 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ncM}$ in April 2011. TSP levels indicate the amount of dust and other pollutants in the air.

He stressed, however, that government still needs "interventions from its partners" to further bring TSP

levels much closer to the annual standard level of 90 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ncM}$. Such interventions may be in the form of technology, such as electric tricycles, which are currently being piloted by the DENR, the Department of Energy, and the Asian Development Bank in Mandaluyong City. "We will be popularizing electric tricycles not only in Metro Manila but in other major cities. The ultimate aim is for our country's five million tricycles, of which 2.8 million are in Metro Manila, to become zero-emission vehicles," he said.

He added that the Aquino administration is also looking into the possibility of converting current diesel-run jeepneys into electric jeepneys. This would keep the cultural identity of the jeepney uniquely Filipino, while at the same time lessening its air polluting qualities.

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Robredo establishes...(continued)

Secretary Robredo said that the goal of this project is to consolidate the existing policies and monitoring systems in the administration of retirement benefits and pensions in the said agencies and to fast track their release to the beneficiaries.

"The establishment of such an administrative service is necessary to fill-in the organizational and functional gaps existing in the current system and to harmonize the efforts of the different offices involved," he said. "The new unit will systematically and promptly process and monitor the claims and requests of all beneficiaries and maintain and update a list of eligible personnel."

Relative to the fund monitoring system, Robredo said the Directorate for Personnel of the PNP, BFP and BJMP will be required to prepare and submit a roster of active uniformed personnel to the Department of Budget and Management, which will be used to counter-check special budget requests for gratuity or terminal leave benefits.

The guidelines also provide that the payment of terminal leave benefits shall be subject to pre-audit in compliance with COA Circular 2009-002.

"Aside from this, all pensioners are required to submit a Pensioner Update Form to the national headquarters and regional RBAS units, which shall, in turn, conduct an annual beneficiary inventory via home visitations," Robredo said.

Under existing laws, the retirement age of uniformed personnel in the police force, the fire departments, and in correction facilities is 56 years old. 



DOLE hails law lifting night work prohibition for women, says it is in line with PNoy's labor agenda

THE Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) welcomed the signing into law of the version of a bill lifting the night work prohibition for women workers, therefore giving women equal access to employment opportunities.

The bill, entitled, "An Act Allowing the Employment of Night Workers, Thereby Repealing Articles 130 and 131 of PD 442, As Amended, Otherwise Known as the Labor Code of the Philippines" was authored by Senators Jinggoy Ejercito-Estrada, Francis Pangilinan, Manuel Villar, Ramon Revilla Jr., Lito Lapid, Loren Legarda, and Miriam Defensor Santiago. It had been jointly adopted by the Senate and the House of Representatives, paving the way for its submission to the Office of the President, before the first regular session of the 15th Congress adjourned last week.

Secretary Baldoz wrote President Aquino to endorse the bill before leaving for Geneva last week to attend the 100th ILO Conference. In her letter, she said that, "after a careful study and review by the stakeholders concerned... we find the Senate version strategic as it is broader in scope, generally more adhering to international instruments like the Philippines-ratified Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and to Republic Act 3710, or the Magna Carta for Women Act of 2009."

She mentioned that in February this year, the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council, or LEDAC, had included a DOLE-endorsed bill on Exceptions to Nightwork Prohibition of Women as one of the administration's priority legislative measures.

"The bill further increases health protection for night workers. It also facilitates alignment of Philippine laws with international standards on night work for women, including the ratification of ILO Convention 171 on the elimination of night work for women, and our denunciation of ILO Convention 89," Baldoz added.

"We view that the law manifests a significant statement on the administration's firm resolve to ensure gender balance and gender equality in Philippine society," Baldoz finally said in her endorsement.

The law provides that suitable first-aid facilities shall be made available for night workers. It also requires employers to provide safe and healthful working conditions and sleeping or rest quarters in the establishment, as well as transportation from the work premises to the nearest point of the workers' residence, subject to guidelines that the DOLE shall formulate.

The law contains two salient features: (a) In repealing the prohibitions for night work for both men and women, it eliminates gender bias and thus gives men

and women equal access to employment opportunities; (b) it introduces a new chapter on employment of night workers—regardless of gender—as well as expands health, maternity, and wellness provisions to ensure adequate protection for women workers without diminution in pay and benefits under existing law.

Baldoz said the proposed law fulfills Items 3 and 7 of the President's 22-point labor and employment agenda which upholds workers' rights and seeks to align the country's labor policies with international treaties and International Labor Organization conventions that boosts the employability and competitiveness of workers. **GN**

Social services... (continued)

"The social services sector will continue to receive the lion's share of more than 30 percent of the national budget, or more than P500 billion. To support escalated efforts for social protection, basic education and public healthcare, the sector will receive a budgetary increase of 8 to 12 percent," he said. "To support rapid, inclusive and sustained economic growth, the economic services sector will receive about a quarter of the total budget, or more than P400 billion. In particular, infrastructure and other capital spending will be increased by more than 20 percent."

At the same time, Abad said that the share of the debt burden in the national budget will be reduced by about 2 to 4 percentage points from 22.6 percent in 2011.

Abad announced these after the Development Budget Coordination Committee (DBCC) held a meeting on the 2012 national budget on Saturday. Absolute figures may only be released to the public after President Benigno S. Aquino III and the Cabinet's approval of the proposed 2012 Budget, which will be submitted to Congress after the State of the Nation Address on July 26.

The Budget Secretary said the proposed 2012 national budget will achieve greater funding focus on the five Key Result Areas (KRAs) of the Aquino Social Contract:

- Anti-corruption, and transparent, accountable and participatory governance;
- Poverty reduction and empowerment of the poor;
- Rapid, equitable and sustained economic growth;
- Just, inclusive and lasting peace and the rule of law, and;
- Integrity of the environment, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The zero-based budgeting approach was used to reduce or even eliminate funding for programs and projects that were identified to be irrelevant, inefficient or unaligned with the KRAs. **GN**



Paje outlines...(continued)

These activities display the determination of the DENR to keep from resting on its laurels, and instead to plan to intensify air quality management programs with the help of its partners.

Other interventions mentioned by the DENR secretary include the retrofitting of engines to enable the use of alternative fuels such as compressed natural gas and liquefied petroleum gas in public transportation, and the full cooperation of LGUs in the implementation of clean air programs.

In line with this, Paje bared his proposal to the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) and the different Metro Manila mayors to adopt a “no exposed soil policy” to reduce the amount of dust in the air coming from streets and bare, open land especially during the dry season.

Additionally, Paje disclosed the existence of a P2 billion fund with the Road Board which is allocated for the environment. “Huwag nang ibigay [sa DENR] ang pera,” he said, adding that he is instead willing to endorse proposals from the PCA, the MMDA, or other partners for them to be able to access part of the fund for their clean air projects, including urban greening “to keep Metro

Manila perpetually green.”

Paje maintained the need for persistent efforts to clean the air through partnerships. “Never did I entertain in my mind the idea that we cannot solve problems for cleaner air without the help of stakeholders,” he said. At the same time, he asked stakeholders to be vigilant in checking the DENR “to keep our people on their toes.”

He also mentioned the country’s accomplishments throughout the 12 years that have passed since the Clean Air Act was implemented, such as the phasing out of lead from gasoline in January 2001, as well as 94% of ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs); and the enactment of landmark environmental laws such as the Biofuels Act of 2006, the Renewable Energy Act of 2008, and the Climate Change Act of 2009.

The DENR has also led in the development and implementation of the National Air Quality Improvement Framework that saw the designation of 13 regular airsheds and five geothermal airsheds, as well as the establishment of stations to monitor particulate matter and gaseous pollutants in strategic places in Metro Manila and elsewhere in the country. **GN**

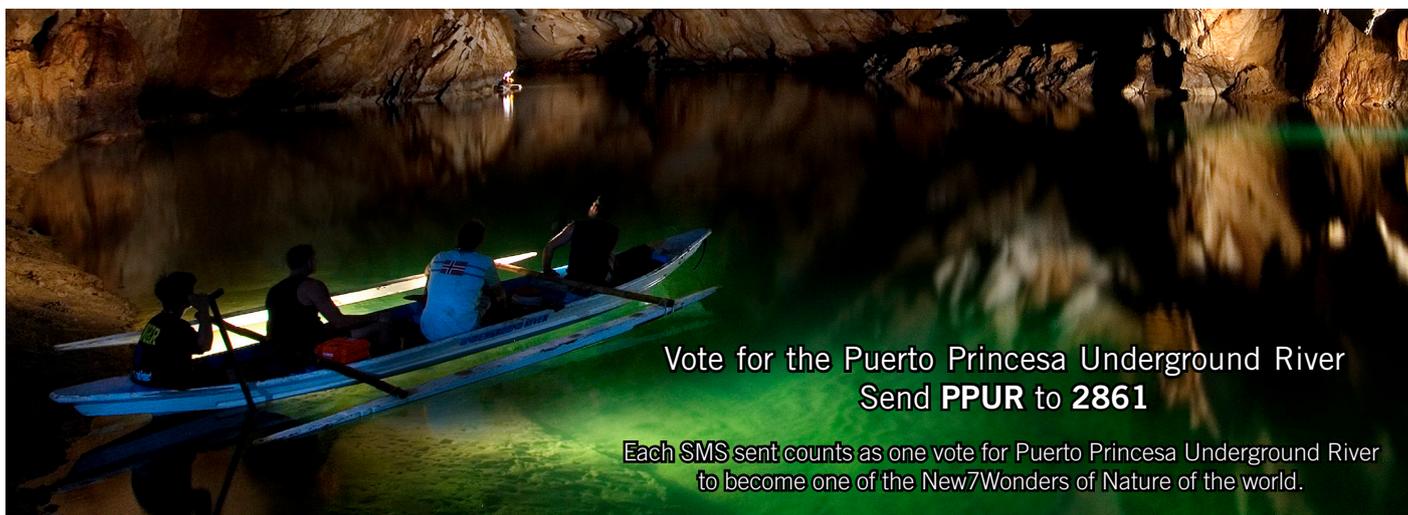
Lifeliners continue...(continued)

The extension of the lifeline rate will ensure that the underprivileged sector will be able to afford electricity services, and thus, is in line with the President’s anti-poverty programs.

The lifeline rate is a subsidized electricity rate given to low-income residential power customers who are not able to pay the full cost of electricity. DOE endorsed the extension of the lifeline rate to ensure that 2.02 million households nationwide will continue receiving discounted electricity rates. The provision was initially set to expire

on June 26, 2011, but with the enactment of the law, marginalized users are ensured of low-priced electricity up to 2021.

Meanwhile, the DOE also supports the enactment of the law that has extended the term of the JCPC for an additional ten (10) years. This will help ensure the continued partnership of the executive department and the legislative department in implementing the provisions not only of the Electric Power Industry Reform Act of 2001 (EPIRA), but of the Renewable Energy Act of 2008 as well. **GN**



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