

**PRESS BRIEFING OF MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ
WITH NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (NEDA)
SECRETARY ARSENIO BALISACAN
SEPTEMBER 21, 2023 [4:29 P.M. – 4:45 P.M.]**

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Magandang hapon, Malacañang Press Corps. Welcome sa ating press briefing ngayong araw, September 21st.

This afternoon, the National Economic and Development Authority or the NEDA Board held its ninth meeting chaired by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. Members of the Board discussed matters related to the review and implementation of the country's infrastructure projects.

In line with this, the Board presented salient provisions of a proposed executive order that aims to expedite the processing of documents for infrastructure flagship projects or IFPs. The Board also endorsed an executive order on modifying the rates of import on natural gypsum and anhydrite.

And to give us more details about the meeting of the NEDA Board, we have with us today, NEDA Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan. Good afternoon, Secretary. Go ahead, sir.

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Good afternoon, Daphne. Good afternoon, everyone.

I am pleased to announce that the National Economic Development Authority Board chaired by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. convened and approved several high-impact initiatives during its 9th meeting today.

First, the NEDA Board confirmed the proposed executive order that will enable the expeditious processing of licenses, clearances, permits, certifications and authorizations for the Marcos administration's infrastructure flagship projects or IFPs. The primary goal of this proposed EO is to minimize, if not, eliminate delays in the implementation of IFPs. This EO will require all government offices, agencies and instrumentalities, including LGUs to streamline the standard procedure and requirements for the IFPs. The simplified requirements will be applicable to both pending and new applications within the NEDA Board-approved list of IFPs as well as any additions to the updated IFP list.

Additionally, the EO facilitates electronic applications or applications submissions to the concerned agencies and local government units or LGUs including the payments and issuance of receipts. This EO encourages a whole-of-government approach by directing national government agencies to automate and computerize their databases. This will promote data sharing among government agencies in order to eliminate the unnecessary duplication of documents submission. LGUs are also mandated to establish business one-stop shops and are highly encourage to coordinate with the Department of Information and Communication to adopt interoperable ICT platforms.

In line with this, the Anti-Red Tape Authority or ARTA in coordination with NEDA shall establish a reporting framework to track agency's compliance.

Second, the Board approved the reconstitution of the NEDA Board Committee on Infrastructure or InfraCom to include the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the DICT as integral members of the committee. The DENR's inclusion in the InfraCom underscores the government's commitment to ensuring that infrastructure development takes into account critical elements such as ecosystem protection, rehabilitation and management sustainability and resilience. Additionally, it ensures representation of the water sector considering the recently established Water Resources Management Office within the DENR.

Furthermore, as we recognized the continued significance of ICT in the overall infrastructure development, DICT will play a vital role in appropriately integrating ICT-related considerations in the committee's deliberations and decisions.

Third, the NEDA Board confirmed the overall principles and general recommendations for the proposed national government-local government unit co-sharing or co-sharing schemes for financing infrastructure projects. This aims to delineate the roles of the national government in the LGUs particularly in resourceful areas or for resources may be needed to carry out the devolved functions and shared between the national government and LGUs.

Lastly, the NEDA Board endorsed the proposal to reduce tariffs on gypsum and anhydrite from 3.0 to zero percent. It is worth noting that natural gypsum anhydrite are not produced locally. These raw materials are used in the production of plaster board and cement which are commonly used in construction. With the reduction in tariffs, we anticipate a decrease in production cost and an improvement in the industry's competitiveness as we ramp up our infrastructure drive.

With these policy updates, the Marcos administration reaffirms its commitment to aggressive advance in infrastructure development in order to enable social and economic transformation and support the attainment of our development goals in the medium term.

Thank you and good afternoon once again.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Are there any questions? Harley Valbuena.

HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME: Good afternoon po, Sec. Signed na po ba ni PBBM iyong EO that will expedite the processing of documents and permits of flagship projects?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: The Office of the Executive Secretary will still have to scrub the draft EO for technicalities. So, it will be issued very soon.

Q: Sir, just on another issue. What is NEDA's position on the Senate report recommending for the permanent ban of POGOs in the country?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Well, it says an appreciation of what the long-term benefits are versus the cost. Our position at NEDA which we have submitted some time ago, even in Congress, was the cost especially social costs are quite high, and we don't think that the benefits in terms of the revenues generated and the additional ... and the impact on the economy are worth the cost 'no. So I think that what we want to encourage are very legitimate, you know, that's legitimate investments, good investments in the sense good quality investments, those investments that will produce goods and services and not ones that promote negative externalities to society such as those alleged crimes and related issues.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Alexis Romero, Philippine Star.

ALEXIS ROMERO/PHIL STAR: So, Secretary, just a follow on that. So, the NEDA is supportive of the Senate recommendation para paalisin na nang ganap ang mga POGO dito sa ating bansa?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Yeah, we have been moving around in many countries, cities, attracting an investment to the country; marketing our country as a good place to do business. We are not going around to attract business of this kind 'no. We want investment inflows that will promote not only the economic but also the social aspects of our development.

ALEXIS ROMERO/PHIL STAR: So are we optimistic 'no whatever revenues we will lose in case umalis sila can be replaced by new investments?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Yeah, I think we do. Look at Thailand, look at Indonesia, look at all these other countries around us, they don't depend on those you know, kinds of businesses.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Nestor Corrales.

NESTOR CORRALES/PDI: Just a follow-up, Secretary. Is this also the position of the President? Have you discussed this with him?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: This is our position, that we express our ... yeah.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Anyone? Jean Mangaluz, Inquirer.net.

JEAN MANGALUZ/[INQUIRER.NET](http://Inquirer.net): Hi, sir. Can I ask, what is the President's position on the DOF's proposal to cut import tariffs for rice?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: We haven't discussed this yet at the level of the President or even at the level of the committee. We have a meeting soon on that where we will present the

options. The issue is, basically, that world prices of rice are rising and have risen quite sharply in recent months. And so the question is: Do we allow those high prices to be reflected in our local markets, particularly for our consumers? What do we need to do to ensure that we can protect our consumers that we can still be rice-secured even as world prices are rising? So there are options to achieve that objective.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Ivan Mayrina, GMA 7.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA 7: Secretary, were there discussions on the lifting of the rice price cap? Or until when are we going to implement this?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: The mandated price ceiling, when that order was issued, that's very clear – it's temporary. So as soon as we can see a better option of addressing that and we have achieved already the objective, then it should be lifted.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: Are we far from achieving that objective?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: No, that's why we will meet soon to recommend other options. There are as I said earlier, there are options for example, we have made mention about reducing the tariff while world prices are rising. I think what's misunderstood was, we reduce the tariff regardless of the situation.

Of course, when the world prices are not rising, we don't want to reduce the tariff; but when the world prices are rising sharply and you don't want that to come down to the level of our markets like for example the retail or the wholesale or even at the farm gate of course, you have to find other options of protecting our people, and reducing the tariff temporarily would be such an option. But in doing so, the exercise that we will do is to ensure that farmers are protected, they are not going to be worse off – that is the objective, nobody should be worse off. The only worst off here will be government because there will be less revenue from the tariffs 'no. But you know, what is a few billion of losses compared to greater suffering of our population from high prices? We don't want that.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Jean Mangaluz, again.

JEAN MANGALUZ/INQUIRER.NET: Sir, follow-up question. You mentioned na na-reduce iyong tariffs on gypsum and hydride – these are construction materials, yes?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Yes, correct.

JEAN MANGALUZ/INQUIRER.NET: How will this be felt by common people, the masses?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Well, not directly because these are construction materials that will reduce the cost of construction and even with... will also have government because you know

we're ramping up on infrastructure development right which will require a lot of this cement and other plaster boards and other related materials, so that will temper the increases in cost on the cost of this infrastructure. For private citizens, that will also affect them because they construct their houses or they do some repairs.

But even the...you know when the cost of services are lower than the cost of goods for example, if the cost of road construction is lower and that's done either government or private sector then that will mean savings for government and government will have more resources for other things like for social protection, for health, for education. So, you know that's our important considerations.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: For consumers, anhydrite and gypsum is used for plaster boards and cement if you're renovating.

Tuesday Niu, DZBB.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Hi, sir. Iyong nabanggit ninyo, sir, na soon magmi-meet ulit kayo to recommend to the President iyong lifting ng price ceiling – within the month ba iyan bago matapos itong September?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: No, there's no specific thing about lifting 'no but we are saying that we will provide, look at the options and the current situations for example, we are monitoring closely what's happening in the global rice prices, what's happening to the volume of exports by major exporting countries because as you know India restricted exports of rice and India is now a major rice exporter. Of course, with the external pressure both the other exporting countries like Thailand and Vietnam would also want to protect their local population from this external pressure and they may also decrease their exports – so those are the ones that are causing prices in the global market to rise and initially that was induced by this expectation that El Niño will continue to intensify and will be there until the first quarter of next year. So, looking at the long period of elevated prices in the elevated global market.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Thank you so much, Secretary Balisacan. And thank you, Malacañang Press Corps. Have a good afternoon.

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