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ASSISTANT SECRETARY JOEY VILLARAMA WITH NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND
DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (NEDA) SECRETARY ARSENIO BALISACAN
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PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Current developments, presidential directives, accurate and reliable updates straight from the Palace. Sitting in for Daphne Oseña-Paez, I'm Assistant Secretary Joey Villarama for Malacañang Insider.

The implementation of fully integrated socioeconomic policies, plans and programs with the goal of providing equal access to opportunities to achieve zero poverty for Filipinos is among the top priorities of the administration of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.

To give us more details on this, we have with us today National Economic and Development Authority Secretary Arsenio Balisacan. Magandang tanghali, Sec., welcome po sa ating program.

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Magandang tanghali, Joey.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Sir, katatapos lamang po ng 20th NEDA Board Meeting. So, ano po iyong naging highlight? Siguro we can discuss kung ano po iyong pinakanatumbok at na-approve po ng Pangulo na mga issues po.

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Naaprubahan ng Pangulo natin at ng NEDA Board iyong... a number of projects particularly iyong Philippine Civil Service Modernization Project ng Civil Service Commission; pangalawa, iyong approval ng upgrade, expansion and operation and maintenance ng dalawang projects na Bohol International Airport at saka iyong Laguindingan International Airport 'no. These are just to confirm the *ad referendum* decision or approval of the NEDA Board 'no.

Other projects that we reviewed, the NEDA Board reviewed/discussed – ito iyong mga tinatawag nating IFPs, iyong Infrastructure Flagship Projects na ang total na ngayon is 186, about 9.6 trillion pesos worth of projects 'no na priority ng administration at doon tinukoy iyong mga developments, iyong mga issues lalo na doon sa mga tinatawag natin na problematic projects because nagkakaroon ng some issues 'no, implementation issues at tinugunan naman ng mga iba-ibang ahensiya at saka ng NEDA Board 'no.

At iyong isa pa, iyong pag-include ng Department of Education at saka Department of Agriculture doon sa composition ng NEDA Board para mabigyan ng mas malawak pang pansin ang problema natin sa agrikultura lalo na iyong objective natin na food security; at saka doon naman sa education, because education particularly iyong our attempt to recover learning losses and also enhance our capacity to compete as a nation in the global marketplace – kinakailangan very competitive iyong products that are coming from our schools. So, iyon ang isang step natin na ma-improve iyong participation ng social sector at saka iyong agriculture doon sa NEDA Board.

Isang napakaimportanteng project pa na na-discuss ngayon iyong Metro Manila Priority Bridges Seismic Improvement Project 'no. Ito ay napakaimportante dahil ito ay tutugon sa mga safety ng bridges natin at tutulong din sa pag-improve eventually ng traffic conditions sa Metro Manila.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Sige po. Nabanggit ninyo, Sec., na ang dami pong priorities at projects na natalakay sa NEDA Board Meeting. Unahin na po natin iyong pinakahuli ninyong nabanggit which is the Priority Bridges Seismic Improvement Project. So, kailan po natin mai-expect na magsimula ito at would you be able to mention kung ano po iyong mga proyektong sisimulan in the coming months or years?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Ini-expect na mai-start ito next year at dalawang bridges iyon – iyong Guadalupe Bridge at saka iyong Lambingan Bridge over Pasig River 'no. At ang purpose nito is para ma-strengthen iyong bridges natin, ma-retrofit, ma-reconstruct iyong mga ibang parts ng bridges para maging more safe ito sa ating mga citizens who are using those bridges because those bridges have been long... many years, decades ago lalo na sa Guadalupe Bridge 'no.

At hindi [unclear] mangyari itong... you know, in other words, that standards for earthquakes at the time where according to Secretary Bonoan ay mga intensity six lang iyon 'no. Eh, pero iyong standard natin ngayon is intensity 8 'no so kinakailangang ma-beat iyong standard na iyon sa mga bridges natin to ensure that we are all safe whenever, you know, there's... hopefully it will not happen. But if something happened like that na big shocks, at least we know that our infrastructure are resilient.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Obviously, Sec., kapag pinag-uusapan po iyong retrofitting, iyong pag-repair ng mga tulay natin – ang immediate issue na niri-resolve is iyong safety. Pero, in the long run, ano po iyong magiging impact ng mga ganitong retrofitting at saka rehabilitation projects sa ekonomiya natin?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Of course, kapag nasira iyong bridge, that will not only [bring] inconvenience to people but it also will reduce productivity kasi iyong length of travel, you know, iyong runabout ways of moving from one place to another. Malaki iyong impact sa productivity ng population natin especially those living in Metro Manila.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Balikan natin, Sec., iyong unang nabanggit ninyo sa listahan kanina na nasa agenda noong NEDA Board meeting which is the Philippine Civil Service Modernization Project. Can you please tell us more about this? Bakit ito mahalaga at paano po ito i-implement?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Ang purpose ng project na ito is to improve the efficiency of our civil service 'no lalo na doon sa human resource management ng mga government personnel natin 'no. The public sector is almost like two million people 'no and they obviously make a lot of difference in the provisional services to our people. So, kung hindi maganda iyong... very inefficient iyong system as it is, as we are seeing now dahil iyong mga ahensiya hindi konektado, hindi digitalized iyong pag-handle ng pera o pag-fill up ng vacancies.

For example, narinig natin si Chair Nograles for example ng Civil Service Commission, it takes them months to go na ano iyong vacancy at any given point in time. And, marami rin sa atin na nakaeksperyensya ng pag-fill up lang ng vacancy, months ang hihintayin mo bago ma-ascertain ni Civil Service kung vacant nga iyan o hindi. So, napaka-inefficient!

In the meantime, hindi mo ma-fill up-an iyong position, hindi tayo makapagbigay ng tamang serbisyo sa publiko – kulang tayo ng tao, iyong productivity ng mga workers natin ay hindi optimal,

hindi nama-maximize dahil sa kakulangan ng sistema sa personnel 'no, iyon. Malaking tulong iyan lalo na iyong doon sa fund management natin kasi iyong payroll natin sa gobyerno, iba-ibang ahensiya siya ay hindi konektado. So, kahit si BBM, hindi niya alam kung ano iyong mga funds out there in the various agencies kasi hindi nga konektado. So part of that project is to get that connection and so that funds can be handled properly and, you know, services are provided on time.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Digitalization nabanggit ninyo, Sec., is just one aspect of these projects to streamline the processes and procedures. Ano pa po iyong nakikita ninyong challenges na maa-address nitong project na ito once fully implemented?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Well, iyong most immediate is I think the response of our public sector to respond to the demands of the public 'no and the services. Ngayon ang sinabi ko kung matagal tayo sa pag-fill up ng vacancy dahil iyong sistema natin is manual, manu-mano, hindi konektado iyong mga ahensiyang involved, halimbawa the Department of Education, ang dami-dami nilang pi-fill up-an doon 'no pero kung imanu-mano mo lahat iyan to work with the civil service eh sa palagay ko hindi mo masu-solve iyong problema na iyon na faced by the DepEd within this administration.

So, kinakailangan natin ng aid ng technology. The technology will help facilitate the improvement in processes doon sa human resource deployment natin, recruitment and even the payroll 'no.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: So, once this project is implemented obviously mayroon talaga tayong makikitang changes and improvements in the system pero how does this figure po in the bigger picture iyong in terms of the Philippine Development Plan?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Of course, nandoon sa Philippine Development na priority iyong pag-improve ng quality of service ng public sector. Of course, iyong human resource natin that's our front face eh doon sa public. If our agencies are not able to provide the services demanded by our public timely, adequately and properly then you won't expect our public to be happy with us, right? And you lose a lot of productivity and economic opportunities as well.

So, this improvement in the technological processes and human resource processes in the civil service as a result of this project will raise productivity and improve economic opportunities as a result because the public sector is able to respond to demands of our citizens.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Nagbigay din po, kanina nabanggit ninyo, Sec., ng updates on iyong IFPs. So, ano po iyong highlights or milestones in terms of iyong second quarter achievements in terms of IFPs? Ano po iyong mga status ng mga proyektong ito at ano po iyong umusad na?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Oo. Nakita natin doon sa report ng NEDA for the second quarter na maraming mga projects ang nagmo-move as expected 'no but there are also projects that are moving at slower phase than we expected or planned because they hence encountered implementation issues. Pinaka-common nito, ng mga implementation issues is iyong mga right-of-way problems 'no na ngayon ay tinututukan naman ng DPWH with the help of the OSG at saka ngayon iyong LEDAC na rin because it's a high priority now of LEDAC to amend our law regarding right-of-way para mas mabilis iyong proseso nang pag-acquire ng land when these are needed by our infrastructure projects 'no.

The other one is of course iyong coordination naman ng executive branch at saka legislative branch to ensure that iyong mga projects doon sa IFPs, ODA projects are given priorities by our

Congress 'no. And we need to have that conversation to ensure that there is a good understanding how critical those projects are in the development of our country.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: You mentioned po, Sec., na one of the reasons for the delay is iyong resolution noong right-of-way. So, ano po iyong naging directive ng President sa concerned agencies para ma-expedite po itong prosesong ito?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Well, so you see DPWH is working with the office of the Executive Secretary and with some inputs from the Office of the Solicitor General toward coming up with a faster way of resolving issues in the right-of-way. But we are also looking into this amendment in the Right-of-Way Law 'no wherein the executive and the legislative during its last meeting had agreed to prioritize and got passed before the end of this session of Congress.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: So, aasahan natin, Sec., sa mga susunod sigurong buwan na mas mapapabilis pa iyong pag-implement or pagbuo nitong mga IFPs na ito once we get the right-of-way issues resolved.

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Yes, because these are very transformative projects 'no. As I said, worth 9.6 trillion pesos and these include projects like our subways; our so many railways and expressways that are being lined up; and the connectivity, digital connectivity as well as physical, I think this will enhance the productivity of our economy, this will enhance our competitiveness in the international marketplace, this will create a lot of jobs, a lot of opportunities and therefore, allow us to meet our poverty reduction targets before the end of this administration to single digit level.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: So, this really something which is worth looking forward to. So, up next aalamin natin ang mga hakbang at programang ginagawa ng NEDA upang mapanatili at mapalakas ang ekonomiya ng ating bansa. We'll be right back.

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Welcome back, you're still watching Malacañang Insider with NEDA Secretary Arsenio Balisacan.

Sir, a while ago we were talking about IFPs and one such IFP is iyong railway project. So, ano na po iyong progress natin sa Metro Manila Subway project at saka sa North-South Commuter Railway project?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Well, sana both projects are moving forward naman. Iyong Metro Manila Subway project, ang physical accomplishment ngayon niya as of June 2024 'no is about 22 percent; iyon namang Metro Manila Commuter Railway Systems project, ang physical accomplishment niyan is about 30 percent.

So, hopefully these two projects will be largely completed by the end of this administration.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: We will be looking forward to the progress ng dalawang projects talaga, Sec., kasi hindi lamang nito madi-decongest ang streets kundi it will contribute to the overall traffic management lalo na sa Metro Manila.

Iyong DICT has the Philippine digital infrastructure project which was also recently included as a part of the IFPs. So, ano na po ang update doon?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: The board of the World Bank is supposed to approve that project by tomorrow, I understand. And so with that approval and we are not seeing any hits there, we should be able to start drawing on the loan by next year because we are provided some funding for the deployment next year. So, hopefully the enhanced project will not suffer any hits.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Napag-usapan natin iyong digital infrastructure, mayroon tayong railways, balik naman tayo uli sa something tangible or physical, which is the airport. So, ano naman po iyong update sa Laguindingan International Airport Project, pati iyong Bohol-Panglao International Project at ano po iyong direktiba ng Pangulo with regard to these two projects?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Obviously, the NEDA Board, the President in particular would want these improvements that we are introducing and all in both the Bohol International Airport and the Laguindingan International Airport but as well as all the other airports to be completed and ensure that they do not suffer delays. Thus, the urgency of these projects is very much in the consciousness of everyone. These projects are expected to play a big boost to boost the economy of the regions concerned. And because connectivity is one of the major issues that our investors are always raising in many investment fora.

So, with the end of the challenge period, on September 13, as approved by the board, if there is no challenge, we expect the award to be made before the end of this September. If there is a challenge, per our rules in the PPA Code, that award is expected to be made about mid-December this year.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Hopefully, Makita na talaga natin iyong progress especially with regards to these two projects, kasi lalo na iyong turismo sa area na iyan talaga eh, inaasahan natin na tataas pa once these projects are completed. Sec., you have been mentioning, we have been talking about infrastructure. We have been talking about, iyan iyong digitalization, improving our processes in government para mas marami pa tayong maserbisyuhan. When we talk about economic development, we can't help but talk about other aspects like agrikultura, iyong proficiency natin in school. So, mahalaga din po ito para po sa overall development plan ng ating bansa. Pero, you were mentioning kanina na many were surprise na wala po pala ang Department of Agriculture at Department of Education sa NEDA Board, so ano po ang magiging aksiyon o magiging changes going forward?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Okay, let me clarify that. Both agencies, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Education are part of the NEDA Board committees. We have a social development committee under the NEDA Board. The DepEd is a member of that committee. In fact, it's the most senior cabinet there who serves as a chair. The Department of Agriculture is also a member of the investment coordination committee for example. The decisions made at this committees, which are also composed of cabinet member are elevated to the NEDA Board chaired by the President and that is where the final decision is made.

And an executive order issued in 1987 is the one that governs the membership in the NEDA Board. And we had to issue an amendment to ensure that the current composition of the board reflects the priorities and the programs and strategies defined in the Philippine Development Plan. And obviously, in the case of agriculture we have placed a very important role for food security as a determinant of our poverty reduction objective. There are so many projects that had to be made, as many things to do to push the development of the sector, particularly enhancing its productivity. That is where the importance of the Secretary of Agriculture to be also sitting in that board to articulate the needs of the sector and to help defend the decisions of the NEDA Board.

And with respect to the Department of Education naman, many of the projects that come into the NEDA Board have been focused on physical infrastructure. But we know that human capital is as important if not even more important than physical capital. So, we have got to give an equal focus on the social sector in the NEDA Board. And the development of skills, addressing learning issues, poverty that the World Bank has seen in the Philippines, for example our thrust to ensure that our labor force can compete internationally and are able to meet the very fast moving technologies, also the challenges that are faced by our human resource.

So, it's very important that that aspect of our development is well-represented in our NEDA Board decisions and so the Department of Education, being the biggest department not only in the social sector, but in the entire public sector has to be in there. Unfortunately, in the past, for some reason, it was not there. We felt the need to have this sector well represented in the decisions of the NEDA Board.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Sec., kapag pinag-uusapan po ang ekonomiya, many people tend to tune out kasi iniisip nila ay very academic, very high brow, hindi nila maintindihan. Pero binanggit ninyo, poverty alleviation, food security, edukasyon, so siguro ano na lang po iyong mensahe ninyo sa publiko para mas maunawaan po nila kung paano natin tatahakin iyong way forward and where our economy is headed given the priorities of the administration?

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: The report that we have provided to the President, the Philippine Development Report last year pointed out, that in so far as the implementation of the Philippine Development Plan, we are in the right direction. We have seen some issues, some problems that we need to correct, we need to address to ensure that at the end of this administration we are able to meet the development targets, especially doon sa pina-promise natin na the poverty must be reduced to single-digit level, the type of jobs that ordinary Filipinos will have are high quality jobs, that we are able to increase or generate massive employment opportunities and that growth and our development must be inclusive, meaning it must be felt everywhere in the country, and rural development and regional development are very important facets of that inclusivity so we must see development moving outward, not just from Metro Manila but in all the major areas of the country. So, we need to create more growth poles around the country and connectivity, that is why infrastructure and connectivity are major focus because that's how we can drive this generation of growth poles in many areas of the country.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Of course, we will be looking forward, Sec., to NEDA's updates to see if all our targets have been hits and achieved.

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: In fact, next year is our mid-term for this administration and NEDA will come-up with a mid-term reform to see where we are in the implementation of the Marcos administration's plans and programs and learn from the lessons that the first three years deployed as lessons effectively so that we can meet our development goals at least under this administration.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Aantabayanan po natin iyan, Sec. Balisacan. So, thank you very much for joining us, NEDA Secretary Arsenio Balisacan.

NEDA SEC. BALISACAN: Thank you so much.

PCO ASEC. VILLARAMA: Pagpapaunlad sa ekonomiya ng ating bansa at pagpapabuti sa estado ng buhay ng mamamayang Pilipino, ito ang mga adhikain ng pamahalaan upang tiyakin na makakamit ang inaasam nating matatag at maginhawang Bagong Pilipinas.

We bring you in-depth views of the latest issues and regular Palace updates, sitting in for Daphne Oseña-Paez, this is Assistant Secretary Joey Villarama for Malacañang Insider. Have a good day.

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