

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
News and Information Bureau

MALACAÑANG PRESS BRIEFING
HOSTED BY PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
(PCO) ASSISTANT SECRETARY DALE DE VERA
WITH EXECUTIVE SECRETARY LUCAS BERSAMIN,
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY JAIME BAUTISTA,
AND DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY
SECRETARY IVAN JOHN UY
JANUARY 07, 2024 [12:08 P.M. – 1:02 P.M.]

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Magandang hapon, Malacañang Press Corps. Welcome muli sa ating press briefing ngayong araw, January 7.

Pinangunahan ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. kanina ang unang full cabinet meeting ngayong taon. Pinag-usapan sa cabinet meeting ang implementasyon ng 2025 General Appropriations Act at infrastructure flagship programs ng pamahalaan. Kabilang din sa tinalakay ang mga proyektong may kinalaman sa food security at environmental protection.

Makakasama natin ngayon sina Executive Secretary Lucas P. Bersamin, Department of Transportation Secretary Jaime Bautista at Department of Information and Communications Technology Secretary Ivan John Uy – good afternoon, secretaries.

May we request Executive Secretary Bersamin for an opening statement?

EXEC. SEC. BERSAMIN: Magandang hapon po sa inyong lahat. Salamat at napagbigyan ninyo na naman kami ng pagkakataon na makasalamuha kayo.

The meeting today was very long. It started at 10 and we did not... we were not able to tackle all the scheduled items because of lack of time. But we can assure you that whatever was discussed, we discussed with thoroughness as the President usually does 'no. He has been very targeted in his approach to all these matters that were reported.

Actually, there were only two of the four items of the agenda that were tackled and these referred to the implementation of the GAA and the delays in the implementation of infrastructure flagship programs which were reported on by Secretary Bautista. So, as far as the cabinet is concerned, this was the first in the year that the full cabinet was convened by the President.

That's all for now.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you, Executive Secretary. May we ask Secretary Bautista?

DOTR SEC. BAUTISTA: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining this press conference 'no. As mentioned earlier by Executive Secretary, we had a very fruitful discussion of issues 'no, especially on flagship infrastructure projects of the Department of Transportation. We talked about, I think around 15 or 16 infrastructure flagship projects and briefly we discussed issues, concerns and ways forward on how to proceed so that we can implement all these important projects of the administration. Thank you.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you, Secretary Bautista. Secretary Uy?

DICT SEC. UY: Well, good morning everyone. Actually, in our discussion, most of what we've really identified is the priority projects of the President that need to be funded 'no. And, so we really looked into where the funding gaps occurred especially after the bicameral and identify the areas where the President vetoed, where we will be able to now generate or access certain funds.

There may be some funds that might be available only in the second half of the year because of that situation. And so, we need to readjust our programs to address the reality of the availability of the funds for those programs.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you, Secretary Uy. We're now opening the floor for questions. Harley Valbuena, DZME.

HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME: Hi, good afternoon. Secretary Bautista, you said earlier that you talked about 15 or 16 infra flagship projects and you also discussed some issues and concerns. So, may we know ano po iyong issues and concerns na iyon?

DOTR SEC. BAUTISTA: As I mentioned earlier 'no, we have many infrastructure flagship projects 'no. The Department of Transportation is handling around 69 infrastructure flagship projects out of 186; this was approved by the NEDA Board 'no. And out of these 69, there are major projects that need to be implemented as soon as possible 'no, these include the North-South Commuter Railway, the Metro Manila Subway Project, MRT 4, MRT 7, LRT Line 1 Extension, the New Cebu International Container Port, PNR South Long Haul, Mindanao Railway, Metro Manila... as I've Metro Manila Subway Project 'no and the New Dumaguete Airport Development 'no.

But the major projects really are the rail projects 'no – the North-South Commuter Railway, it's a 147-kilometer railway system that spans from Clark Airport to Calamba, Laguna. It started during the previous administration. We are now working to complete this so that we can have a partial operation by end of 2028 'no.

So, there are many issues, one of which is the acquisition of properties, the right-of-way... we call it a ROWSA or a Right-of-Way and Site Acquisition. We have issues also on some funding 'no. There are issues about relocation of ISF, relocation of utilities. There are issues about registration of properties 'no. So, these are being discussed and we have presented to the cabinet our ways forward so that we will be able to implement all these projects before the end of the term of the President.

HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME: Sir, follow up lang po. With some billions of pesos worth of items that the President vetoed in the 2025 budget along with the upcoming election spending ban, so are we confident that this will not affect the delivery of our projects and we will hit our targets?

DOTR SEC. BAUTISTA: Well, as far as the Department of Transportation is concerned, we should be able to continue our projects 'no. There were some reductions in our budget but we should be able to fund these from the loan proceeds 'no. We're happy that the government's share of most of our infrastructure projects were not reduced 'no, so we will continue to implement these programs.

The ones that were reduced basically are the loan proceeds but these are foreign-assisted projects. But in spite of that not being included in the budget, we can still avail of the loans so that we can fund these major projects like the Metro Manila Subway and the North-South Commuter Railway.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Jean Mangaluz, Philstar.com.

JEAN MANGALUZ/PHILSTAR.COM: Good afternoon po. Sir, comparing the NEP to the GAA, the DOTr had a near 100 billion budget cut. How can you assure us that all of the projects will proceed on time?

DOTR SEC. BAUTISTA: As I mentioned earlier 'no, the reduction was from the foreign-assisted projects. The loan proceeds were not included in the budget 'no, in the approved GAA, part of it. But as I've mentioned earlier, we can still draw on the loan 'no. We just need support from the Department of Budget and Management. And we have also discussed this with our development partners and they will continue to provide the loans to DOTr.

JEAN MANGALUZ/PHILSTAR.COM: So, no effect po iyong decision ng Congress?

DOTR SEC. BAUTISTA: Sa amin, it's a very minor effect.

JEAN MANGALUZ/PHILSTAR.COM: Sir, nakita po namin na napunta rin sa unprogrammed funds iyong iba sa mga assistance to foreign projects. What conditions need to be met so that the DOTr can avail of them?

DOTR SEC. BAUTISTA: Well, for unprogrammed appropriation, there should be excess revenue of government. And normally, we can avail of this in the second quarter of the year 'no.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you. Alvin Baltazar, Radyo Pilipinas.

ALVIN BALTAZAR/RADYO PILIPINAS: Secretary Bautista, good afternoon po. Secretary, malapit na iyong election ban. Ilan iyong mga projected projects natin na pupuwedeng matapos bago iyong election ban?

DOTR SEC. BAUTISTA: Iyong election ban natin is in a few days 'no. You know, most of the projects of the Department of Transportation are to be implemented long-term 'no. So, we will continue to implement the program 'no. Siguro hindi naman kami maku-cover election ban because we have started all these projects already, so we don't think the election ban will affect the implementation of any of our projects in DOTr.

ALVIN BALTAZAR/RADYO PILIPINAS: Follow-up lang doon sa budget. Kasi I believe that one of the agendas dito sa full Cabinet meeting ay tungkol doon sa implementation of GAA, mayroon bang directive si Presidente tungkol doon sa pagpapatupad ng GAA, in particular?

EXEC. SEC. BERSAMIN: Ang gusto mong malaman kung may directive tungkol sa pagpapatupad sa—?

ALVIN BALTAZAR/RADYO PILIPINAS: Sa GAA natin.

EXEC. SEC. BERSAMIN: Well, you remember that the President vetoed some items, made line-item vetoes. Ang effect ng line-item veto is just to reduce the potential deficit, okay. We cannot transfer what we vetoed to other items. So, the important thing to remember is the President said maximize on what you can do for those that were approved, the program. And then the unprogrammed, maybe we could give prioritization there when the available funds will come.

Does that answer your question?

ALVIN BALTAZAR/RADYO PILIPINAS: Thank you, ES.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Magandang hapon po. ES, clarification lang po doon sa budget. I understand, nasa 288 billion po iyong insertion ng bicam, ano po, doon sa unprogrammed appropriations – 300% increase compared doon sa NEP. So, bakit po nasa 26 bilang iyong na-veto ni Presidente? Ano po iyong logic nang natira doon sa 288?

EXEC. SEC. BERSAMIN: As I recall, the President vetoed more than 26 billion. There were 190 billion that were vetoed. Ang vineto lang niya doon sa 26 yata was sa DPWH, okay. Ang basis for the veto is if these were not part of the NEP, iyong original proposal, then there must have been insertions – that is the assumption. So, vineto ko iyan because they have no supporting documents, or they were not part of the plan or the program of government.

But there were other areas. Now, you put more emphasis on this – there were a lot of items that came under conditional implementation. Very significant iyon, kasi kapag sinabi mong conditional, at this point, there is no certainty of them being implemented. It's like a veto but it's not a veto. We will just wait for the proper time to consider them again when the funds become available. And the President, through the recommendation of the Secretary of Budget, will consider that it is already timely to look at these items again. Iyon ang condition generally, may guidelines that will be adopted. Like the AKAP, sinabdyek [subjected] ni Presidente the guidelines to be jointly come up with by the NEDA, the DSWD and DBM. So, that is more like a ... hindi naman veto; it will be inaccurate to consider that as a veto, but you look for the conditions and you will understand.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: And, sir, just a clarification because the group of Cielo Magno is questioning iyong under ng education sector budget. Bakit daw nakasama even under doon sa education sector na budget iyong PNPA, iyong PMA which is kasama naman siya sa budget before ng PNP, ng AFP? So, bakit isinama doon? Kasi kapag hindi raw sila kasama, in effect, mas malaki pa rin iyong budget ng DPWH compared sa education sector.

EXEC. SEC. BERSAMIN: Alam ninyo, iyong language of the constitution is not that specific 'no, na sinabing education—you have to look at this with a broader understanding. If before, the treatment was ang budget ng education was only that allocated to DepEd. That was the wisdom at that time.

But then, so many things have happened. Iyong education responsibility has been shifted to other government agencies. So, is it fair for everyone to claim na hindi mo dapat ibilang iyan sa education sector dahil nandoon sa PNP or iyong nandoon sa AFP – hindi maganda iyon, okay.

Now, this is more a matter of looking at the situation. DepEd is not the only agency in the education sector, but it has the greater portion of the education pie, the budget for the education sector. Of course, you will also consider TESDA, hindi ba TESDA education iyan, okay? And then you have the SUCs o CHEd. CHEd, higher education iyan; SUCs. Now, if you add up this one, including also PMA, PNPA and other offices with primary responsibility for education in their particular areas that could add up to a bigger budget or bigger slice of the budget for the education sector. So, the veto na ginawa ni Presidente doon sa DPWH was malaki ang education; na-comply iyong constitution doon.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you, sir. Ivan Mayrina, GMA 7.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: Question for Secretary Uy. Sir, what can you tell us about the news report that the executive branch was allegedly hacked from 2023 up to middle of 2024 and military data was stolen?

DICT SEC. UY: Well, actually, we are constantly under attack from different sectors 'no, from hackers, from scammers, whether these are persistent threat actors over the years. And what we are looking at today is that we have detected significant increase in many of the probing and attacks especially as we come closer to the elections this coming May. What's happening is that there are more fake information or disinformation that are being perpetrated on social media. There are attempts at compromising certain infrastructure like websites, they are trying to deface some websites or trying to introduce malicious software in all of these sites.

We are repelling several hundred thousand attempts on a daily basis, and this cuts across not just the executive branch but it includes also for instance, the legislative branch 'no, sometimes itong mga websites ng mga kandidato sa congress or sa senate ay medyo binabanatan din.

So, this is how our department is addressing by making all the different sectors, not just the government sector but the private sector, be more aware of their cybersecurity preparedness, and at the same time, advising them on how to harden their respective infrastructure or information systems. Quite often, we detected that the vulnerabilities that were exploited were old systems, what we call the legacy systems. So, maaaring there are some agencies in government that have not updated their respective software, so doon napapasukan at doon nai-exploit. In most occasions, if ever there are any compromises, we've seen that the data are old data. Some of them are being reposted again.

So example, na-hack nila noong 2020, so may nakuha silang mga information tapos ipo-post nila ulit ngayon at sasabihin, "Oh, may na-hack kami." But when you look at it all that data are all four years ago data, nothing of the current data. So, we need to be more discriminating in entertaining some of these claims unless they show it. Marami ang nagki-claim na, "Oh, may na-hack namin itong ahensiya ng gobyerno," and then we pose the challenge to them, "Okay, na-hack ninyo at mayroon kayong nakuha – pakita ninyo." So, we challenge them, "Okay post it, what did you get?" And either they do not post anything because they did not get anything, they just claim to have done so; or if they post, we see that these are dated/old data. So, that's how we're helping all the different sectors.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA 7: But, Sec., I'd like to zero in on this particular story, ang title po niya "Chinese hackers target Philippine President and steal military data. Some stolen documents related to dispute over South China Sea." Can you confirm that such an attack happened?

DICT SEC. UY: Well, there are always attempts to do so and in many instances, for attacks like those, we're able to detect them early on and when we do so we are able to secure the database and we're able to secure the systems so that it remains just an attempt and not be able to compromise some of the more sensitive data.

In some instances, attacks occur on the public phasing sites. So example, we have help desk that are open to the public so that the public can regularly report let's say their concerns – so, those open sites are really designed with minimal security because you want to allow the public to easily communicate with different government agencies. So, in most instances iyon ang unang tina-target ng mga hackers and we detect it and we respond to it immediately. But as I said, if there

are any claims that there were any successful extraction of any data, just show it then we will be able to see whether these claims are actually authentic or not.

Other countries also experience the same things 'no – attacks or claimed attacks from different state actors or non-state actors and claims that there had been breaches on the data. But I'd like to reiterate that so far what we have seen is that no current information has been compromised. What we have seen so far are old data from many years ago that are being regurgitated, recycled just to make an impression that they were successful in doing so.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA 7: Sir, last from my end. How are we doing in this cat and mouse game with hackers and scammers, kasi ho napapansin natin for a while nanahimik pero nabuhay na naman ho ulit iyong mga text scam eh.

DICT SEC. UY: Yes. Actually, we're going after that. We are acquiring new systems and new equipment to do so because these scammers continually upgrade their game 'no and continually acquire new equipment.

So, itong mga scammers dati, they have to depend on the telecoms network – so, they get into the telecoms network in order to do the scams. Now, they've acquired new devices where they do not even have to go into the network – ang nangyayari niyan kumbaga parang man in the middle. So, when you open your cellphone, akala ng cellphone mo kumu-connect ka sa cell site ng telco, iyon pala kumo-connect ka sa cell site noong hacker.

Iyong hacker may dalang equipment na nagpapanggap na cell site at doon pumapasok iyong number mo, so nalalaman ngayon ng hacker, "Oh, itong number na ito active." All they have to do is just park their car with those equipment, marami na kaming nahuli noon 'no – we call it 'drive-by hacking' – they load those equipment in the vehicles and they drive around and then when they park it outside the building, often they park it outside malls lalo na noong Christmas dahil marami ang nagsa-shopping – they park it outside these malls na maraming tao and then they misdirect all the cellphones to think that it is a legitimate telco site and they capture all those numbers. Once they capture all those numbers, they now do a text blast to those numbers and they can put anything on their ano...they can put a bank's name, a telcos name, a credit card's name on that text making you believe that you actually are receiving a text from that.

Dati kasi, iyong mga letra na iyan, you know the names you need to be in the network and the telcos will have to give you the right to put those names on the network to send those texts blasting. But now this new equipment are very modern and they can do that. So, the deception is even more effective because of that.

So, what we're doing is again as you mentioned it's a cat and mouse thing, when they are going around and we receive those texts, we have to deploy assets to go around also and try to find them where they are located and intercept them and eventually capture them. Marami na tayong nahuling ganoon 'no. Most of these equipment are actually smuggled in because they are illegal. But sometimes ho kasi itong mga equipment ginagamit din ng mga politicians specially during campaign season dahil gusto nilang mag-text blast ng mga campaign ano nila. So, those are the same type of equipment that are currently being used by the scammers or the hackers.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Pia Gutierrez, ABS-CBN.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Balik po kay Secretary Bautista. Sir, could you tell us more about iyong ways forward na diniscuss [discuss] ninyo doon sa Cabinet meeting on addressing iyong

mga delays sa implementation noong mga flagship projects and may directive din po ba si Pangulo tungkol dito?

DOTR SEC. BAUTISTA: Well, as there are so many issues for us to be able to implement this program 'no. One, as I've mentioned is resolution of issues relating to right-of-way 'no. So, ang instruction ng President is to coordinate with all government agencies so that all the issues are resolved. In fact, we have organized an inter-agency committee among certain departments like DPWH, DOJ, OSG, DHSUD and other government agencies for us to work together to resolve issues about right-of-way kasi ito ang isa sa mga pinakamalaking problem ng infrastructure implementation, right-of-way 'no. And sa pamamagitan ng pagtutulungan ng lahat ng mga departments we should be able to resolve these issues. But iyong Office of the Solicitor General will really help us, especially in pursuing expropriation cases so that we can take possession of those properties that we need, so that we can implement our projects.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sir, could you give us an idea, kung gaano kalaki po iyong problema natin on the delays and mayroon po ba tayong major infrastructure project na ini-expect po natin na madi-delay because of these problems?

DOTR SEC. BAUTISTA: Well, as we have discussed, may mga resolution naman. So, we are expecting that even with all these problems, we should be able to implement the projects still on time, iyon ang objective talaga namin for us to be able to implement this project on the newly established timetable. Kasi karamihan dito started during the previous administration, there are even projects that started during the Aquino administration and there are still issues that we need to resolve.

But with all those projects and ways forward plans that we will implement, we are expecting that we will be able to resolve these problems and implement the projects still on time.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Another question po kay Secretary Uy. Sir, some companies have sounded alarm iyong sa paggamit po ng mga scammers ng mga text hijacking devices where kahit po iyong legitimate number or iyong account na pinangti-text nila, naha-highjack po ng mga scammers. Are we doing something specifically to address this?

DICT SEC. UY: Yes, actually, we have been waiting with the telco providers as well as NTC in order to find a solution on how to identify the specific technique that they are using in hijacking. This is a very new methodology that we are seeing today. And the telcos are still analyzing their systems to see how the equipment is able to do that. We have confiscated some equipment and we are currently having our technical people analyze those equipment to see how that equipment is operating in order to be able to hijack.

What you are referring to is, you know, you have a series of communications coming from legitimate text and then suddenly there is a text that comes in, in that conversation. But actually it's not a legitimate text. It's coming from the hacker or the scammer that's able to infiltrate that conversation. So, bagong-bago iyong equipment na iyan at medyo pinag-aaralan pa ng mga experts how it's able to penetrate those conversations.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sir, can we say na iyong nangyaring SIM card registration, may epekto pa po ba iyon?

DICT SEC. UY: Well, malaking epekto iyong SIM card registration dahil as you would notice noong naging effective iyong SIM card registration, malaki ang ibinaba ng mga 'scammers' dahil

naputulan sila ng one main method of scamming. But then they shifted to other methods and in these methods that they are using now they do not need SIM, they operate on what we call over the top services like Telegram, Viber or Messenger, which do not require a SIM card. So some of them are using those methodologies.

But really, I think the most effective is really to increase our operatives on the ground in order to be deployed in different areas where we will be able to detect these operations. Because we know where they operate; they normally operate in crowded areas where they are able to maximize their fraudulent activity. And we are also addressing—so they have resorted to what we call guerilla tactics.

Dati kasi ang nangyayari, they are all located in one big building, they operate from that building. So, ngayon dahil marami tayong na-raid at na-dismantle na mga malalaking operations na ganoon, naging guerilla warfare ngayon. They have reduced them into smaller teams, very mobile, they moved around and so, we have to respond accordingly and also change our tactics in going after them.

So, it's really as, my tukayo has said, a cat and mouse thing na with these scammers and hackers. Thank you.

EDEN SANTOS/NET 25: Good morning po, ES. Natalakay din po ba doon sa full cabinet meeting iyong about food security, mayroon po bang directive si Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. since binabanggit po sa mga report na PBBM government tempers 2024 inflation, where in fact, iyon pong presyo ng kamatis ay napakataas po. Ano po iyong direktiba ng ating Pangulo pagdating po sa food security?

EXEC. SEC. BERSAMIN: Iyong tanong ay tungkol sa food security kung natalakay? Wala kaming oras na tinalakay iyong sa Department of Agriculture, pero kagaya ng pinauna namin kanina, si Presidente ay makikipag-confer na lang doon sa relevant secretaries later on doon sa kaniyang private office. But for the full cabinet discussion, iyong mga hindi natalakay ay ganoon ang mangyayari.

EDEN SANTOS/NET 25: Doon po sa inflation, sinasabi po na pababa iyong trend. Pero mukhang hindi naman po nararamdaman sa laylayan dahil po sa matataas pa rin iyong presyo ng mga bilihan, gaya nga po ng kamatis at iba pang mga gulay bukod po doon sa mga talagang nananatiling mataas na mga presyo na bigas, karne, isda?

EXEC. SEC. BERSAMIN: Huwag kayong mag-alala, ang gobyerno ay tinututukan lahat iyan. Parang natural na nangyayari kung minsan, per commodity. Right now, ang star of the moment is kamatis, napansin namin iyan; other times mostly bigas.

Mula noong umpisa ng paninilbihan ko sa gabinete, nagtataka kami, kung paano pa mangyari iyan. There is a sufficient supply, but the prices don't go down. They go up. So, we have been very active in prosecuting iyong mga hoarders. But that is only one part of the explanation.

Mayroong smuggling, mayroong ano, but we are looking at all these. Iyong kamatis is local production, bakit mataas. I was watching the broadcast last night and I wondered why this could happen to us, an agricultural country.

Pero huwag kayong mag-aalala, the NEDA is very confident that the inflation rate will be very, very low. I just don't know, kung how the respective departments who are responsible for their respective areas will address this issue of bringing down the rate of inflation.

ANNA BAJO/GMA NEWS ONLINE: Good afternoon po, sir. Question for ES Bersamin. Sir, other matter lang po. How does the Palace view the presence of China's monster ship in our Exclusive Economic Zone, sir?

EXEC. SEC. BERSAMIN: We view with concern. Ganito iyan: So far we have been challenging the presence of that monster ship. Our Coast Guard has always been very alert in following-up iyong presence of that monster ship, pasulpot-sulpot and it is within our Exclusive Economic Zone, so tsina-challenge iyan. If you look at the YouTube channel where there were many occasions na tsina-challenge ng ating mga Coast Guard vessels iyong kanila. Mayroon ding counter challenge iyong coast guard ng China but it all works well in the end kasi nothing confrontational happens. So, maaaring projection ang issue dito, but I'm not going to say anything more because that's a matter of operation no.

ANNA BAJO/. GMA NEWS ONLINE: Pero, sir, nagkaroon na po ba tayo ng high level mechanism na way para sabihin sa China or i-approach iyong China sa presence ng asset nila doon sa area natin?

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY BERSAMIN: Okay, to answer that question, dalawang bagay ang sasabihin ko: The first one is we have always been issuing protest, demarche. They call that demarche; and the other one is there is a permanent apparatus for that, the vice-ministerial level; every now and then nag-a-alternate ang Beijing at saka ang Manila to host that vice-ministerial level conference.

So, this is the precise issue that they address, iyong peaceful settlement of that dispute in the West Philippine Sea. Iyong West Philippine Sea is the one that covers our maritime domain, the EEZ and our territorial sea. Beyond that, wala tayong control doon, so we do not deal with that issue, that's international.

So, every now and then, nagmi-meeting iyong undersecretary natin si Undersecretary Lazaro on our part, and the other side is vice minister for this particular issue, that is there in Beijing, so nag-a-alternate iyan.

ANNA BAJO/. GMA NEWS ONLINE: Sir, sorry, other but her lang din po may information na po ba iyong Palace regarding sa pag-alis daw po ni hitman Edgar Matobato sa Pilipinas?

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY BERSAMIN: Wala kaming masabi diyan dahil we have no connection with Mister Matobato 'no. whatever is his purpose in going out, we cannot control that. But if he intends to go to testify in another forum, that's also beyond our control 'no. Hindi namin siya ini-encourage, hindi rin namin siya dini-discourage.

ANNA BAJO/. GMA NEWS ONLINE: Thank you, sir.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Julie Aurelio, Inquirer.

JULIE AURELIO/INQUIRER: Hello, sir, good morning. Kay ES Bersamin po, earlier SSS President De Claro said that they will continue with the contribution hike of the SSS. May I ask if

call for the suspension of the said hike has reached the President and what are his thoughts on it? Thank you.

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY BERSAMIN: Actually, tungkol doon sa hike sa SSS, I think the SSS decided that last year pa, programmed kasi iyan eh. What I know is they increased iyong monthly minimum na benefit for P4,000 to P5,000; tapos they were other expansion of benefits and to the address that expansion dinagdagan nila ng one percent lang naman iyong contribution, that was long before this call was made.

Now, if your question is ano ang reaction ng Malacañang tungkol diyan sa call for suspension of the increase of one percent. You must understand kung kanino galing iyong call, kandidato eh, si Rolly Macasaet, who used to be president of SSS. I don't know if that is part of his way of complaining, pero we will consider seriously kung that issue ever is brought to us officially. We can understand where that call is being made.

JULIE AURELIO/INQUIRER: So, Sir, as of now, there are no official efforts or communication as to the..?

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY BERSAMIN: Wala. Pero ito ha, I want you to understand. Ang mga ganiyang increases, there are studied, well-studied based on actuarial consideration 'no, napakahirap na sabihin mo huwag kayong mag-increase. We cannot be that arbitrary. We have to recognize that this SSS has a very respected actuary, mayroon silang pag-aaral tungkol diyan. If you always meddle in the management of their affairs where they are very specialized, it will not work, it will not work. It may even be negative ang impact. So, pabayaang natin muna, na palagay ko maaaring iyong call na iyan is maybe good for next year, if it ever will be reviewed.

But right now, matagal na nilang pinag-aralan iyan, in-announce na nila long before that call was made and in fact, this benefits are being expanded now. So, why don't we just let that process continue and produce results that were predicted by actuarial studies?

JULIE AURELIO/INQUIRER: Thank you, sir. Another question sana for Secretary Bautista. Sir, you mentioned kanina that you've discussed 15 or 16 flagship projects, may we get details as to the status from implementation of those projects and maybe a brief rundown of the specific issues affecting issuance, like right of way lang ba, relocation of ISFs ba, et cetera, kung puwede lang po? Thank you.

DOTR SEC. BAUTISTA: Here, it took us more than one hour to discuss these problems no. There are so many issues as I mentioned earlier 'no, but you know in summary 'no, we were able to— ang position namin diyan is we have taken proactive measures to address each issue and we are working to keep the project on track.

Kung pag-uusapan natin iyan, baka abutin tayo ng another one hour, but basically these are normal issues that we encounter when we implement infrastructure projects no, right of way, funding, coordination minsan delay ng mga contractors 'no, sometime there are technical issues that need to implement redesign or we need to redesign the project 'no.

One area that we talk is the realignment of LRT-1 extension to Niog [Cavite], mayroon na tayong existing alignment but nagkaroon ng project ang DPWH, nagkaroon sila doon ng isang flyover and because of that, I will have to redesign again the project 'no.

Iyan ang mga issues that we need to address but kailangan nga iyong coordination with other agencies. Also iyong mga funding, we really need that there will be sufficient fund to support the right of way acquisition. May mga issues din hong pinag-usapan tungkol sa BIR kasi we have to pay our contractors—or the contractors need to pay mga taxes, VAT, And during the time that we buy properties, may mga capital gain stocks iyan na kailangang bayaran 'no. There are some issues that we need to also settle with the BIR 'no.

There are issues also about registration of titles of lands 'no, iyong mga binibili namin na properties, so we need to coordinate with the LRA for example, iyong Land Registration Administration. There are issues about some assets that are being questioned by local governments.

So napakaraming issue but as I've mentioned, we have discussed measures and programs so that we can implement the project on time.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you, sir. Tuesday Niu, DZBB.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Good afternoon, gentlemen. To Secretary Uy, please. Sir, sabi ninyo kanina ay naging effective naman iyong implementation ng SIM Registration Act, malaki ang ibinaba doon sa mga text scams. Pero nabanggit ninyo rin, sir, na nag-shift na ng methods ngayon ang scammers. So, may initiative po ba or move ang DICT sa congress na amyendahan itong batas na ito para makasabay din sa pagkontra doon sa mga scammer?

DICT SEC. UY: Ang strategy namin ngayon is to do it on the operational level dahil matagal ang legislative process at ang nangyayari kasi is napakabilis ng evolution ng mga methodologies on the scammers. So, if we go through that legislation, eh kapag lumabas na iyong batas nagbago na naman ng methodology niyon so marami tayong batas na ilalabas na naghahabol kumbaga sa teknolohiya.

So, what we are actually working on with congress is to amend the cybercrime law in order to have a more encompassing approach. Like in other countries, what they have legislated is a law against online harm. So, kung ma-address ninyo iyong online harm, that covers a lot... a wide swathe whether it's cybercrime, it's scamming, it's hacking, so long as you conduct activities that will cause harm to others online, then it is covered by that law.

So, we're trying to consolidate and come up with the more inclusive approach rather than addressing them on a per methodology basis kasi iyon nga, hindi tayo makakahabol niyan – pagkalabas noong batas, nagbago na naman iyong technology at iyong technique ng mga criminals na ito.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Thank you, sir.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Last question, Ace Romero, Philippine Star.

ACE ROMERO/PHILIPPINE STAR: Secretary Bersamin, sa ibang paksa naman po. The allies of former President Rodrigo Duterte are criticizing the reorganization of the National Security Council. Attorney Panelo claims it smacks of bad politics and it's meant to target the Vice President while Attorney Roque is questioning whether it is a prelude to martial law kasi tinanggal daw iyong mga vice president noong time noong unang Marcos admin. What do you say to those criticisms?

EXEC SEC. BERSAMIN: Dalawang bagay ano. Mayroon akong nabasa na something that reminded me that Panelo, during his time as Presidential Adviser also advocated the exclusion of then Vice President Leni Robredo 'no, so he has no moral authority to question the decision of the President.

But the second thing that I would like to emphasize here is this. Look at it this way, the National Security Council is an advisory body and this is an advisory body in relation to the President as the Commander-in-Chief. So, the President has the right, as well as the responsibility of seeing to it that whoever advises him is within his fullest trust and confidence.

Now, I'm not saying that the Vice President does not anymore deserved to be trusted. But I'm just saying that with the recent developments, it is not going to be good advice or good action on the part of the President to still have her onboard. Now, anyway, the President has the absolute power, the power of absolute reorganization – meaning, he can choose the people he listens to or he would listen to.

So, if the National Security Council is supposed to be including members who are trusted by the President then let it be understood in that line. Wala kaming personalan but my statement before was the Vice President has ceased to be relevant as far as the responsibilities of that membership in the National Security Council is concerned.

ACE ROMERO/PHILIPPINE STAR: Secretary, how about the question of Atty. Roque that the President is supposedly—whether the President is considering martial law because of these changes in the NSC?

EXEC. SEC. BERSAMIN: Alam mo, kung iniisip mo iyan lagi, that's malicious ano because the constitution is very clear when may a president declare martial law. I don't think it is in the mind of the President right now. What he has in mind is the economic prosperity of the country, the health and welfare of the people especially those of the lower classes and the prioritization of his legacy projects 'no. The President accepts that as the number one concern. It's the about martial law, it's not about extending himself in power – no! He has no thinking about that that. He does not even think in those terms. Malicious talaga si Mr. Harry Roque!

ACE ROMERO/PHILIPPINE STAR: Salamat po.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you very much, Executive Secretary Bersamin, Secretary Bautista and Secretary Uy.

That wraps our press briefing for today. Good afternoon and thank you.

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