

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
News and Information Bureau

**PRESS BRIEFING WITH NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (NEDA)
UNDERSECRETARY ROSEMARIE EDILLON, DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND
EMPLOYMENT (DOLE) SECRETARY BIENVENIDO LAGUESMA, AND DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE (DA) SECRETARY FRANCISCO TIU LAUREL**
February 10, 2025 [11:02 A.M. – 11:57 A.M.]

ASEC. DE VERA: Magandang umaga, Malacañang Press Corps. Welcome sa ating press briefing ngayong araw, February 10.

Base sa pinakahuling labor force survey, bumaba sa 3.8% nitong December 2024 ang unemployment rate sa bansa – pinakamababang naitala mula 2005. Para bigyan pa tayo ng detalye tungkol sa mga ito, kasama natin ngayon sina Department of Labor and Employment Secretary Bienvenido Laguesma, at National Economic and Development Authority Undersecretary Rosemarie G. Edillon. Kasama rin natin si Department of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. para pag-usapan naman ang mga direktiba ng Pangulo kaugnay sa ilang agricultural products.

Good morning, secretaries and Usec. May we request Usec. Edillon for an opening statement.

NEDA USEC. EDILLON: Friends from the media, colleagues in government, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

Marcos administration is pleased to announce positive developments in the Philippine labor market as we concluded 2024 with stable employment and improving job quality. These achievements reflect the progress that we have accomplished as we continue to implement the strategies outlined in the Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028. They also reflect our sustained economic momentum toward creating more and better job opportunities for our fellow Filipinos.

So, as reported last week, the country's unemployment remained at 3.1% in December 2024 which is actually the same rate that it was in December of 2023, and this is actually the lowest since 2005. So ibig sabihin, if we have a thousand individuals in the labor force, mayroon tayong nakikita na 31 lamang sa kanila ang walang trabaho or pinagkakakitaan.

So, meanwhile, the underemployment rate decreased as well to 10.9% from 11.9%. So, this is again December 2024 versus December 2023. Actually, isa itong indikasyon na tumataas din ang kalidad ng mga trabaho sa ating bansa kasi nababawasan iyong mga bilang ng tao na may trabaho tapos naghahanap pa ng ibang pagkakakitaan or dagdag na oras ng trabaho.

The Labor Force Participation Rate in December 2024 stood at 65.1% which is lower actually than the previous year at 66.6%. And for the LFPR, we are actually closely monitoring two people groups. So, one would be the youth where actually iyong Youth LFPR fell to 31.9% from 34.9%. And then for the Female Labor Force Participation, it also dropped to 54.7% from 56.3%. On the part of the Youth LFPR, the reduction in the Youth LFPR is mainly due to schooling. Sa female naman is mainly due to household responsibilities as a barrier to employment.

So, looking at this information, we actually would like to push for more responsive strategies to address labor and employment issues. So, to align with the workforce trends and industry demands, we continue to promote inclusive work arrangements to meet the needs of individuals from diverse backgrounds and reduce barriers to labor for participation.

So, isusulong din natin iyong pagpapatupad ng enterprise-based education and training, iyong EBET framework upang bigyan ang ating mga mamamayan ng mga industry relevant skills na makakatulong para mas madali silang makahanap ng trabaho pagkatapos nilang mag-aral.

So, as you know, may sinasabi na job-skills mismatch. But when we look at those different skills that are in demand, marami kasi dito can be actually obtained while in a work environment. So, ang pinakamaganda talaga would be an enterprise-based education and training or internship din.

Now, while much has been achieved, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has reiterated that there is no room for complacency, and we are committed to bringing in high-quality jobs for Filipinos. So, we recently released the Philippine Development Report 2024 which highlights the importance of pursuing strategies to support our labor market. We will continue to push for supply and demand-side strategies to create a dynamic labor environment and achieve the targets that we have set in the PDP.

Patuloy nating isusulong ang ating economic transformation agenda, at sisiguraduhin ang katatagan ng ating ekonomiya sa pamamagitan ng pagpaparami ng ating mga growth drivers. Sa pamamagitan ng innovation, actually, paggamit ng teknolohiya at mga strategic investments, layunin natin na paunlarin ang mga bagong sektor at industriya upang maging isang competitive at alternatibo ang ating bansa sa global supply chains. So, amid external uncertainties and the looming trade war, the country can actually benefit as an alternative product source by strengthening relevant sector such as, let's say, the chip and the semiconductor industry among others.

And we will continue to reinforce reintegration efforts for anticipated returning Overseas Filipino Workers particularly in light of shifting immigration policies abroad. Ang ating Department of Migrant Workers at ang Overseas Workers Welfare Administration ay isusulong ang mga programa kagaya ng agarang kalinga at saklolo para sa ating mga OFW. Ito iyong tinatawag natin na Aksyon Fund at Emergency Repatriation Fund upang magbigay ng agarang financial welfare assistance sa ating mga apektadong kababayan. To further support our returning workers, the National Reintegration Center for OFWs or the NRCO is implementing programs that address economic, social and even psychological aspects of the reintegration. And we will also consider expanding our action centers in key regions to expand service accessibility ensuring that OFWs have the necessary support as they transition back into the labor workforce in our country.

By fostering a dynamic and inclusive labor market and harnessing our people's enormous potential, we ensure that economic gains benefit all Filipinos as we create a workforce that is resilient and future-ready. So, our goal is to sustain job creating, improve the quality of employment, and provide every Filipino with opportunities for long-term economic security, so the kind of Bagong Pilipinas that we long for.

Lastly, please allow me to take this time briefly to promote the 2025 Filipinnovation Awards which is being organized by NEDA. So, it will be the first ever national and regional innovation awards and competition, and it has been officially opened for application since January of this year. So, this competition aims to highlight Filipino creativity, accelerate innovative solutions toward

commercialization, and foster transformative contributions to national development. And it is open to Filipino citizens and Filipino-owned enterprises seeking innovators in the early stages of commercialization who are registered with the Department of Trade and Industry or the Securities and Exchange Commission.

If you recall, kanina sinabi natin na we need new drivers of growth, and we think that this innovation is actually a key strategy to that. So, this is actually designed to ensure regional representation. So, there will be participants competing in NCR, Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. And the theme for this year, the focus will be “Learning and Education, Health and Wellness, Food and Agribusiness.” And the five winners actually will receive grants, mentorship, national recognition, of course, and opportunities to participate in international events, and access to investment opportunities to scale up their innovations. And so for more information, please visit our web portal: filipinnovation@neda.gov.ph. Iyong deadline po ay March 20, 2025, so I hope you can also spread the word around.

Maraming salamat po. Thank you.

ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you, Usec. Edillon. We are now opening the floor to questions from our media friends. Maricel Halili, News5.

MARICEL HALILI/NEWS5: Magandang umaga po. Secretary Laguesma, I understand, nasa trend naman natin na talagang bumababa iyong unemployment rate kapag holiday season, hindi po ba. So, ngayon na nasa first quarter po tayo of this year, what should we expect?

DOLE SEC. LAGUESMA: Una muna, isang magandang umaga sa ating mga kaibigan sa media. Well, DOLE will always expect that the continued employment of Filipinos can be sustained. Alam natin na mayroong mga activities especially ang ating mga exercises related to political exercises, makakatulong sa pagdagdag ng mga hanapbuhay.

Subalit hindi po iyan ang higit na pinag-uukulan ng pansin ng Department of Labor and Employment. As you are very familiar with, other than the Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028, the Department of Labor and Employment, mayroon din kaming labor and employment plan 2023-2028. At iyong mga nabanggit kani-kanina ni Usec. Rose, ito ngayon ay pino-formalize sa isang trabaho para sa bayan plan. We have under the Act, Trabaho sa Bayan Act, we have the so-called three-year plan, six-years plan and ten-year plan.

Iyong six-year plan, actually iyon iyong labor and employment plan at kada-taon ay mayroon kaming binabantayan, iyong mga may kinalaman sa mga emerging occupations and to address and be able to respond to changes and development, bahagi na iyan, iyong mga geopolitical events, iyong mga nangyayari sa ating kapaligiran and we continue to really focus also on ensuring iyong ating mga kabataan, iyong mga programa ng DOLE on youth employability can be sustained.

So, these are—gusto ko rin sigurong idagdag ‘no, hindi lang naman noong nakaraang taon mababa, nakita natin ang pagbaba ng unemployment rate, 2022, 2023 hanggang 2024, tatlong sunod na taon. So, I think the key o ang susi ay tuloy-tuloy na ipatupad iyong mga programa na binabalangkas doon sa tatlong plano na nabanggit ko. At siguro makita natin na mai-address natin ito and we can make our workforce ready especially if we see iyong realization ng mga pledges and commitment, vis-à-vis investment actually derived from the trips of the President abroad.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Sir, can you give us estimate, ano po iyong target natin na unemployment and underemployment rate for this quarter, considering na sabi nga po ninyo campaign season?

DOLE SEC. LAGUESMA: Kung kami ang tatanungin ninyo, gusto namin talaga lahat ng manggagawa o mamamayan na naghahanap ng trabaho makakita ng trabaho sa ating sariling bansa. But, I think we also have to be realistic that there are also factors that would actually have an impact. Una, mayroon tayong seasonality sa ating labor market. Ikalawa, marami din tayong mga competitors in the region who are actually vying for investments coming from those who have actually eyed our country as a destination of their investment. And thirdly, alam natin na tuwing pumapasok ang second and third quarter ng taon, maraming bagong entrants sa ating labor force.

So, we continue to really look at how we can cope up creation of employment through the help ng pribadong sektor. If you will recall last month, we have actually conducted two big jobs fair nationwide ito. Ang ka-partner natin dito, may kinalaman sa technological advancement, ang IT and Business Association of the Philippines. So, we continue to strengthen partnership in collaboration with the private sector. Because it's really the private sector that they can provide investments that will propel quality jobs and sustainable and remunerative employment.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Kaya po ba natin na mas mapababa sa 3.1?

DOLE SEC. LAGUESMA: Iyon ang aming target, gusto nga namin, alam ninyo, siguro kayo gusto rin ninyo makita na mapapababa natin ang unemployment level at tumaas ang ating employment rate at hindi lamang basta hanapbuhay. Kasi ang aspirasyon, ang direktiba ng Pangulo, makalikha tayo ng mas maraming quality jobs.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Kat Domingo, ABS-CBN.

KAT DOMINGO/ABS-CBN: Sir, just a follow-up question on the job generation during the election season. Around how many po iyong expected po natin na temporary jobs that will come up between now until May?

DOLE SEC. LAGUESMA: Wala akong estimate ngayon, baka si Usec. Rose, makapagbigay. Kasi kung titingnan natin, siguro puwedeng balikan-tanaw ninyo, noong nakaraang mga electoral exercises, gaano ba karami ang nadagdag na bilang doon sa atin pong nagkaroon ng hanapbuhay during that period na mayroong political exercises.

But again let me emphasize, the present administration is not banking or relying solely on political exercises. Puwedeng masabi ng karagdagang hanapbuhay diyan, siguro “bonus” pero tuloy-tuloy ang implementasyon ng mga programa, mga plano at mga proyekto ng pamahalaan, bahagi ang labor and employment na ma-sustain natin iyong level ng employment, mababa ang underemployment at saka ang ating unemployment rate irrespective kung mayroong political exercise o wala. Iyon iyong direksyon.

We are not banking solely na dahil may political exercise, dadami ang trabaho. Dahil alam naman natin, pansamantala lamang iyon eh, ang gusto pong makita ng pangkasalukuyang administrasyon, pangmatagalan an trabaho, sustainable at ang mga pakinabang ay masasabi natin na remunerative, kung hindi man kahalintulad ng mga ipinagkakaloob sa ating mga kababayang nagtatrabaho sa ibang bansa. At least magbibigay din sa kanila ng option na manatili dito kasama ang kanilang pamilya.

KAT DOMINGO/ABS-CBN: Usec. Rose, does NEDA have the numbers or is there a mechanism on how we can track how many Filipinos earned income, additional incomes and even get temporary jobs during the election season because most of these are very informal, when it comes to entering the contract between the politician and then whoever worker they recruit?

NEDA USEC. EDILLON: We have not crunched the numbers yet, but there is something that we can do and we can actually look at the number of hours work and it's just to say as well na tama iyong sabi kanina ng ating friend from the media that there is actually seasonality Kapag December tumataas.

But just to say that kung December 2023 versus December of 2024, ang nakita namin is pataas iyong quality of the jobs, actually tumaas din iyong mean hours work. So, dati, 40.6 hours per week, nitong December 2024, naging 40.9. so, in fact, nasa 70% na iyong full time na workers.

So, babantayan namin ito, tingnan namin kung ano ang nangyari for this year. But just to say that, kung halimbawa ang titingnan natin noong 2022, mataas actually ang unemployment natin noon 5.4. So, we will have to go back much further back, para makita natin kung mayroon nga talagang nagiging increase kapag ganitong may political exercise.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Tuesday Niu, DZBB.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Good morning po, Sirs and Ma'am. To Secretary Laguesma. Sir, ang sabi ninyo kanina, ang target natin ay makita iyong makakapasok ng trabaho, sustainable, base doon sa mga investments na nakuha ng ating Presidente sa iba't ibang bansa. Mayroon na po ba tayong figures o gumagana na po ba iyong mga investments na iyon na nakuha natin. Mayroon na bang actual na mga worker na napasok sa mga investments na iyan dahil sa mga investments na iyan?

DOLE SEC. LAGUESMA: Una lang siguro, gusto kong sabihin na ang paglalagak ng puhunan o pagsisimula ng isang bagong enterprise o kumpanya ay hindi ay hindi iyong parang nagpunta ka lamang sa supermart o ano, na nakakuha ka ng—pagdating mo rito ay nagsisimula na kaagad iyan.

Doon po sa huling ulat ng DTI, sila po ay nagmo-monitor ng more or less, 201 investment leads projects, worth more than \$76 billion or P4 trillion generated from the foreign trips of the President since he assumed office. Mayroon pong employment na nalikha, kasama po diyan humigit-kumulang mga dalawandaang libo.

Ang unang nakita po natin na sektor na mayroon pong pagkakaroon ng riyalisasyon, ang mga pangakong paglalagak ng puhunan, may kinalaman po sa power and renewable energy sector. Mayroon din po sa bahagi po ng electronics, manufacturing. At tuloy-tuloy po iyong pagpa-follow-up ng ating DTI, para lang sa ganoon, makita po talaga na magkaroon ng reyalisasyon. Marami pong bansa ang nagbigay po ng kanilang mga ika nga ay interes, nagpahayag ng kanilang pagnanais na maglagak ng puhunan.

Ang pinakahuli nga po diyan na nagpahayag ng kanilang interes at mayroon na kaagad silang pagpapa-abot ng pangangailangan sa vacancies eh, iyong Finland po. Kung natatandaan po ninyo iyong nakaraang linggo ay mayroon pong deligasyon dito, a powerhouse delegation and I had the opportunity na makausap po iyong minister of economic affairs and employment at noong mag-jobs fair po kami noong nakaraang buwan, mayroon na pong posting ng mga pangangailangan may kinalaman po sa tourism, food, healthcare services.

So, nagtutuloy-tuloy hindi lamang siguro masasabi natin na instant nandidiyan na, dahil nga may proseso na dinadaan. Pero, DTI as per hour discussion is actually given the instruction of follow through these commitments and so that, we will be able to know, what actually could make them really put in the promise investment para makalikha ng karagdagang trabaho.

TUESDAY NIU/ DZBB: Thank you, sir. Follow up din po din. Sabi ninyo iyong innovation iyong kailangan natin ngayon, kumusta po, ma'am, siguro sa NEDA 'no, nakakahabol po ba iyong mga Filipino workers sa innovative or innovations or techniques o mga bagong technology ngayon para masabi natin sila ay puwedeng mapasok kaagad dito sa mga magiging available na job opportunities?

NEDA USEC. EDILLON: Siguro, i-clarify ko muna iyong ano 'no, kung paano namin dine-define ang innovation and also in the context of the Filipino innovation award 'no. Mayroon kasing tayong parang tatlong proseso ito 'no, so una muna is the invention part. So, ito iyong talagang may bago, may research, may ano and iyong susunod this innovation, meaning, you take the invention, mayroon kang gagawing tweaking so that it becomes available commercially. Puwede mo siyang i-mass produce, puwedeng gamitin ang lahat, eh dito na iyong kikita ka talaga.

Tapos, pero ang gusto naming mangyari dito, dito sa innovation lahat ito dapat protected ng intellectual property, para noon, kahit na mapunta dito sa third, the third is actually diffusion, ito iyong may mga gumagaya ng produkto mo, iyan. So, kung halimbawa hindi pa—walang patent iyong produkto mo, wala iyon hindi ka kikita doon. Pero kung may patent iyon, kahit gayahin nila, kikita ka pa rin. And that is actually what we are banking on.

So, ang isang kailangan, mangyari muna is iyong sinasabi nga namin na ano, na an innovation culture. Tama iyong ano, iyong unang probably—ang unang entry point, is for everyone to be iyong tinatawag nating madiskarte and I think that is also innate 'no, in Filipinos. So, gusto namin dito, iyong diskarte na iyon, mai-translate mo into a commercially viable product para noon, magkakaroon pa tayo ng marami pang product offerings and that is how we can have many more growth drivers.

ASEC. DE VERA: Mariz Umali, GMA7.

MARIZ UMALI/ GMA7: Good morning. Secretary Laguesma, this question is for you. In the most recent tri-committee hearing at the House of Representatives, some groups have actually expressed concern and alarmed and even the congressmen have expressed alarmed regarding the use of AI in the spread of disinformation, especially in the upcoming elections. So, first of all, I would like to ask if DOLE is aware of reports that AI tools are being used to create and manage troll farms in the Philippines? And what steps are you taking, since these are all so additional employment for some people that's why they are actually entering into these kinds of jobs? So, first of all, are you aware of these reports? And does DOLE plan to regulate or do you have the power to regulate or monitor AI related jobs, particularly those that maybe involved in disinformation campaign?

DOLE SEC. LAGUESMA: Siguro iyong regulation na will be part if it is actually disastrous or hazardous to workers 'no, pero iyong monitoring that's how it's always been a part of the Department of Labor and Employment activities because the intention really ay mapangalagaan ang kalagayan ng ating mga manggagawa. Subalit siguro, having said that, alam po natin na marami ang nangangamba o kaya ay medyo cautious sa pag-embrace o pag-adopt ng bagong teknolohiya.

Pero, hindi po iyan maiiwasan ang—in fact, kung natatandaan ninyo and I think all of our friends from the media ay aware doon sa tinatawag na World Economic Forum Report ‘no na kung saan bahagi rin ng kanilang sinabi ay mayroon tinatayang humigit-kumulang 92 million jobs will be lost. But at the same time, saying na about 170 million jobs will be created ‘no for a period of time. Which means na mayroon pang balanse on the positive side na 78 million jobs.

Having said that, nakita rin doon sa pagkukonsulta at pagtatalakay na pinangungunahan naman ng NEDA, kabahagi ang Department of Labor and Employment, nakakakita naman tayo ng mga trabaho na lumalabas, kasama nga iyong nabanggit mo, at kailangan lang siguro ay masubaybayan nang mabuti dahil baka makapinsala sa ating mga manggagawa. Alam natin na dahil sa AI teknolohiya, iyong mga repetitive manual, administrative na trabaho talagang mapapalitan iyan. Pero ang challenge sa atin, kailangan magkaroon ng adaptation ang ating mga manggagawa at tuluy-tuloy din ang ginagawa ng ating departamento sa pamamagitan ng TESDA upang i-upskill/retool ang ating mga manggagawa.

So, the process is continuing. We’d like to—maybe regulation is something that a—the House, kasi sa sistema ng ating pamahalaan mayroon tatlong branches of government. Ang nagpapanukala ng batas na nakakita ng maaaring pangangalaga ay ang ating lehislatura. Ang nag-i-interpret ng batas ay ang ating judiciary. Pero ang nag-i-implement kung sakaling may batas, anuman iyong nilalaman ng batas, sabi nga sa mga nasa legal profession, the law is hard, but it is the law and then, ang executive ang siyang mag-i-implement ng batas just to protect.

MARIZ UMALI/ GMA7: But, are you alarmed with the increasing number of labor force in the AI used in disinformation?

DOLE SEC. LAGUESMA: Any development in the labor market and the labor force in particular will always be a concern of the Department of Labor and Employment. Puwedeng sabihin maliit pa sa ngayon iyan, pero lalaki. So, kaya nga bahagi ng aming tungkulin, aming mandato mag-monitor para matingnan din namin, how do we work within the framework of una sa eksekutibo. Pero kung may pangangailangan na magkaroon ng panukalang batas, mayroon naman tayong tinatawag na LEDAC (Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council) na kung saan puwedeng pag-usapan iyan at puwede rin maging bahagi sa pagsusulong niyan ang Department of Labor and Employment in particular, always the bottom line is look at how we can protect ang ating mga manggagawa.

NEDA USEC. EDILLON: With the indulgence of Sec. Benny ‘no, kasi just recently actually may nilabas ang NEDA na a policy brief on the AI. Tinitingnan nga natin kung papaano natin mama-maximize ang use nito at the same time looking at ano puwedeng maging harmful consequences nito. Baka kailangan nga ng ano, para doon sa regulation part so we can actually inform iyong, you know, going forward what should be the policy.

We think that there was a conference na I attended minsan, and then, tinanong sa kanila should we be worried iyong about AI, you know, replacing iyong job ko, ganiyan. Tapos ang sagot ng AI expert ‘no, ang sagot niya, “I think it should be the person who does not know about AI”, siya iyong dapat ma-ano matakot. And so, it’s really about, you know, knowing how to utilize; it’s actually a tool. But I agree that we need to look at the need for regulation and kaya may ginawa na policy brief ang NEDA and going forward within the year.

Ang balak namin is to go deep down and look at the IT-BPM (Information Technology and Business Process Management) and then, iyon nga, tingnan kung paano ba magagamit talaga

iyong AI. How can we transition, best transition 'no, lalo na iyong mga ... those iyon nga endanger of a displacements, ano iyong pinakamadaling transition na program for them.

MARIZ UMALI/GMA7: Thank you, ma'am. May I just divert of it for Secretary Tiu Laurel. Secretary, these questions are for you. Una po sa lahat, iyong reaction po ninyo sa criticism against onion importation kasi sabi po ng ilang mga farmer groups, harvest season na po so baka maapektuhan iyong benta nila? And the second question is bakit as of this weekend po, hindi pa raw po nagri-release ng bigas ang NFA sa LGUs na pagkatapos ng food emergency declaration?

DA SEC. TIU LAUREL JR.: Okay. Thank you and good morning 'no. Iyong sa onions, everyone is entitled to their own opinion but I'm here to manage. I am not a farmer. I am not an importer. I am the DA Secretary and here to manage the situation.

Sa data ng BPI natin, may deficit talaga for February ng 7,000 tons. And actually, in-open up lang natin iyong market for only 4,000 tons – 1,000 tons for white; 3,000 tons for red. So, it's not even enough to fill in the perceived gap or estimated gap, so there's nothing ... hindi dapat mag-worry. At saka mahirap naman na wala akong gawin at hayaan na lang maghintay ako ng sitwasyon na kung kailan ba talaga magha-harvest ang mga farmers.

Sa report nga ...I just received this morning after another survey that I had conducted yesterday sa Nueva Ecija, specifically Bongabon, Rizal, San Jose City, mga large-scale onion producers iyan, at ang sinasabi nila na talagang full harvest nila ay third week of March pa and even up to April 2025. So, kung wala akong gawin ngayon for this estimated na gap na ito at umakyat na sa Balintawak, from 110 lang ang red onion, ngayon 170 na eh, so maghihintay pa ba ako para gumawa ng desisyon. I have to think of the consumers also, not just the farmers.

But ang ginawa natin is very tactical – limited volume, limited quantity, limited time. So, it should address any spikes. At sana tama iyong aking—ang question ang naman ay gaano karami ang dapat i-import eh? Question of whether to import or not for February, kailangan talaga.

Q: [OFF MIC]

DA SEC. TIU LAUREL JR.: For the second question is, of course, nag-announce tayo ng food emergency last week, and sa ngayon ay marami ng LGUs nag-signify ng intent. But lumalabas kasi sa procedure, may documentation na kailangan na gawin 'no. So, hopefully, matapos lahat ng documentation between FTI, NFA to FTI, FTI to LGU, and by next week ay maro-roll out na hopefully iyan. Thank you.

ANNA BAJO/GMA NEWS ONLINE: Good morning po. Kay Sec. Laurel po. Sec., follow up lang po kay Ate Mariz. Ilan na po iyong LGUs na nag-express ng intent para po doon sa food security emergency?

DA SEC. TIU LAUREL JR.: Technically—sorry ha, I have the list with me. Medyo marami eh, more than 50 LGUs.

ANNA BAJO/GMA NEWS ONLINE: Saang areas po kaya ito?

DA SEC. TIU LAUREL JR.: If you allow me to look at my—actually, marami eh. It's all over the country, of course, all NCR, specifically. Ang mag-uumpisa dito sa Metro Manila will be San Juan, then Navotas. Iloilo is on the list. Sorry, ang dami kasing message, hindi ko maano but marami-rami na, marami-rami.

ANNA BAJO/GMA NEWS ONLINE: Pahingi na lang po kami, Sec.

DA SEC. TIU LAUREL JR.: Yeah, we can supply the list.

CLEIZL PARDILLA/PTV4: Good morning po, Secretary Laurel. Sir, pork belly po, iyong price ngayon ranges from 380 to 480 pesos. And sabi ninyo po, two weeks ago ay kinu-consider ninyo iyong SRP. Kumusta na po ngayon iyong status ng MSRP for pork?

DA SEC. TIU LAUREL JR.: Well, actually, this was discussed in the meeting with the President this morning. Among other products ay nagpa-review siya sa—nag-present kami sa kaniya ng situation sa food, ano, and iyong pork nga was ... at itlog medyo na-mention, at he took particular interest in. And I suggested nga na mukhang mayroong—kasi farm gate ngayon is 240 to 250 eh, bakit mayroong presyo na 380 to 420 sa palengke. So, mayroon akong nawawalang ... hinahanap ko na saan napunta iyong isandaang piso na gap na nakikita ko eh.

We're currently studying that and digging deep doon sa buong value chain ng pork 'no at makita na ...kung makita natin kung talagang may profiteering ba o wala. Kung if we have identified na may profiteering iyan, then definitely we will be doing an MSRP also for pork.

CLEIZL PARDILLA/PTV4: Sir, follow-up po. Mga kailan po matatapos iyong study? Safe to say po ba end of Feb?

DA SEC. TIU LAUREL JR.: Two weeks from now, probably, or end of Feb would be enough time.

CLEIZL PARDILLA/PTV4: Sir, tama iyong 380 to 480 pesos po is unreasonable for the DA?

DA SEC. TIU LAUREL JR.: Well, anything above 400, I think, is unreasonable. Three eighty maybe but I'm not yet sure, talagang nagdi-deep dive tayo diyan para makita natin na kung talagang tama—dapat kasi 'di ba walang profiteering. Kailangan enough lang iyong kita sa bawat stage eh so doon ang ating pag-aaralan nang mabuti.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: To Secretary Tiu Laurel, sir. Nakausap po namin si Asec. Arnel de Mesa, and nabanggit po niya na mayroon na silang namo-monitor sa mga palengke na pagbaba about five pesos sa imported rice. Saan po nanggagaling o ano po ang nag-ambag para bumaba ang presyo? Sabi ninyo, hindi pa naman nai-release iyong NFA rice.

DA SEC. TIU LAUREL JR.: Well, nakita na natin kasi na ang margin dapat mula importer hanggang retailer ay maximum dapat niyan, eight to ten pesos lang per kilo. Pero noong pag-ikut-ikot namin ni Sec. Roque since late November hanggang ano ... na-realize namin na iyong mga certain brands of rice na binibenta, ang margin ay nasa 14 to 16 pesos per kilo. So, kinausap natin, nag-general meeting tayo sa DA with the importers, the traders, the retailers, at nakausap tayo na puwede bang, you know, makatulong naman tayo sa mga consumers natin at maibaba natin iyan to reasonable levels.

And noong una nga ang suggestion ko sa kanila is eight pesos lang dapat ang spread mula importer hanggang retailer. May nag-request na kung puwedeng sampung piso dahil mayroong mga hidden costs na baka hindi raw kami nakikita, so which I accepted that proposal as an initial ano nga, then iyon, kaya nakapag-set tayo ng MSRP na 58 pesos.

But then, alam naman natin na since marami pa silang old stocks na mahal pa ang bili nila, so kailangan nilang ma-dispose iyan para hindi malugi, so we gave them some time. Pero ngayon

nasa 55 pesos tayo MSRP. By February 15 ngayon, ang MSRP natin will be 52 pesos. And by March 1, hopefully nakabili na sila ng bagong stocks mula sa Vietnam or Myanmar or Cambodia na mas mura kaya ang MSRP natin by March 1 is 49 pesos. So, iyong mga premium five percent broken na rice na dating 64 pesos, dapat iyan ay bumaba iyan ng 49 pesos by March 1 as MSRP.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: So, ang sinasabi ninyo, sir, ay iyong pagbaba ng presyo sa ibang bansa ang humatak?

DA SEC. TIU LAUREL JR.: Well, it's two-pronged. Iyong una is iyong excess profit nila na tingin ko at least four to six pesos per kilo, na-solve na natin iyon dahil sumunod naman kaagad lahat sa 58 eh to 55. Ngayon, majority sumusunod na sa NCR.

Ngayon, iyong pagbaba namin from 55 to 52 to 49, iyan naman ngayon ay resulta dapat ng pagbaba ng world prices. Thank you.

SAM MEDENILLA/BUSINESSMIRROR: For Sec. Laurel lang po. Sir, balik lang po ako doon sa MSRP for pork. Bale ngayon po ba ay mayroon po tayong tentative na price kung magkano siya—kung ano iyong tentative price ng MSRP for pork at saka kung kailan po kaya natin expected mag-start?

DA SEC. TIU LAUREL JR.: Wala pa. I have to consult the industry mismo 'no. But clearly, sinasabi ng mga growers, sila two forty, two fifty, okay na sila eh. So, ang question nila, magkano na lang iyong—kagaya kung sa bigas, sampung piso bawat kilo, sa pork ilan ba iyan? Isandaan ba? Kung isandaan iyan, then 350 dapat maximum. Kung 120 iyan, it should be 370. So, to be determined. I just don't want to commit now because I want to be fair to everybody, I will consult everybody, pati retailer at mapakinggan natin lahat ng stakeholders. Thank you.

SAM MEDENILLA/BUSINESSMIRROR: Tapos second question ko. Napansin po ng DA na medyo bumababa iyong price ng rice. Pinag-aaralan na po ba ng NEDA or ng DA iyong possible na pag-review doon sa 15% na tariff? Is there any plan to—

DA SEC. TIU LAUREL: Well, ang review niyan is every four months, as per the EO 62. So, we will be reviewing that, Although, nagkausap nga kami ni Sec. Balisacan, iyong review every four months is medyo nakakapagod talaga. Baka puwedeng every six months sana. But, anyway, it's mandated by the EO na every four months at ire-reviw iyan.

Of course, para sa DA naman since nandiyan na iyan, hangga't hindi bumaba ang presyo to a certain level, i-maintain na muna iyong taripa na iyan, since mukhang nagwo-work na, na bumababa kasi nga nakikita na natin kung bakit hindi siya bumaba noong umpisa. Ngayon nakikita na talagang pababa na eh.

SAM MEDENILLA BUSINESS MIRROR: Sir, ano iyong target price natin, para masabi natin na panahon na para i-adjust ulit iyong tariff for rice?

DA SEC. TIU LAUREL: Siguro, P42 to P45 per kilo, somewhere there. And puwede ng i-review at i-recommend for restoration or maybe not full restore it can be from 15 to 20 or 15 to 25 or full 35, depende na sa sitwasyon. Depende sa consultations with everybody, thank you.

SAM MEDENILLA BUSINESS MIRROR: For Ma'am Edillon and Sec. Laguesma. How many jobs do we need to create to hit our growth targets this year? And did we attain the job creation target last year?

NEDA USEC. EDILLON: Ah yeah. Sorry, hindi ko mabuksan ang aking Philippine Development Report. So, it's already uploaded in our website, so please look through it. With respect to the target na unemployment rate muna natin. Ang target unemployment rate natin for 2024, full-year is between 4.4 to 4.6%. Ang naging actual natin is actually a 4.3. So, ibig sabihin, mas maganda pa kaysa doon sa ating tinarget.

And in terms of the job creation, mas marami din, hindi ko lang matandaan iyong numero na iyon, pero mas marami rin siya. So, lahat ng mga growth targets na sinasabi natin, actually consistent siya doon sa ating employment targets, consistent siya sa mga iba pang target. So, if we actually meet the employment targets, then ang laki ng chances na, na-meet din natin iyong growth targets.

SAM MEDENILLA BUSINESS MIRROR: What are the possible threats to job generation this year and how can the government help prevent these threats from reducing jobs or slowing job creation?

NEDA USEC. EDILLON: Iyong threats, if we look at 2024 for instance, so those times na nagkaroon tayo ng mga temporary na increases in unemployment, we see that it's actually related to weather disturbances. So, especially in the agricultural sector, saka construction actually, iyon ang affected talaga eh. Kasi kapag halimbawa maulan, ganiyan, so wala silang magiging ano, hindi sila makakapagtanim o hindi makakapag-harvest o kaya kung construction hindi sila makakapagtuloy ng kanilang construction.

So, we are seeing that, ang isang nakikita namin dito, especially in the case of agriculture, kailangan natin ng parang modern planting methods. Kanina nabanggit din ni Sec. Tiu Laurel iyong sa briefing with the President, mga greenhouses sana para tuloy-tuloy kahit may bagyo, puwede ka pa naman doon sa loon ng greenhouse magtatrabaho. So, iyong mga ganoong klaseng out of the box solutions ang kailangan natin, especially as we face extreme weather disturbances.

SAM MEDENILLA BUSINESS MIRROR: How about, Ma'am, iyong expected a tariff war na initiated by the US, is this expected to affect employment this year?

NEDA USEC. EDILLON: Well, naka-wait and see pa tayo doon. Pero ang nakikita kasi namin with respect to the tariff war, if ever magkakaroon ng indirect na effect sa atin and it's actually through the exchange rate. Kasi kung halimbawa, dahil doon sa mataas na taripa sa US, magkakaroon sila ng inflation, tapos again, kung halimbawa magkakaroon ng aksyon ang federal reserve nila, so maraming mga kawing-kawing na dapat, kung ganoon ang mangyayari, magkaroon ng move ang kanilang federal reserve, makakaapekto iyon sa world interest rates and of course iyong ating interest rates.

So, iyon ang magiging epekto sa atin through the interest rates and then through the exchange rates, ganoon siya. Pero in terms of employment, wala naman kaming nakikita offhand. In fact, kung maipo-position natin ang ating bansa as a very attractive alternative source for these mga dating ini-export sa US, ganiyan.

So, actually, puwede pang ma-benefit tayo, we can really gain a lot from the regional na free trade agreements natin. So, we are assuming, like in the case, iyong mga let say Canada, Mexico, baka ang gagawin nila, ima-maximize nila iyong mga regional free trade agreements and this is where we can really benefit.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: John Ordoñez, Business World.

JOHN ORDOÑEZ/BUSINESS WORLD: This is for you, Usec. Edillon. Given the country's weaker than expected 5.6% growth to performance last year. Can we expect revisions whether higher or lower and the 6 to 8% target this year at the next DBCC meeting in March. And what are the government be keeping an eye on in adjusting or keeping its growth target?

NEDA USEC. EDILLON: Ah, yes. Like you said, there will be a meeting. In fact, it will be strategic planning workshop nga ang gagawin namin sa DBCC and really looking at the entire—up until 2028. And, whether we will revise it or not, we will have to wait until that time, kasi very collegial ang relationship namin sa DBCC, it's a very healthy deliberation. But, just to say as well, that iyong original na target, which is 6 to 8%, the reason why, that's a really medyo malaki na width, na interval is, it reflects the uncertainty that we are expecting for 2025. But over time, pwede naming mapaliit ito as we get more data.

JOHN ORDOÑEZ/BUSINESS WORLD: My second question is on the US' ongoing review of all foreign assistance programs and its impact on US Aid. So may you confirm the stop order has applied to? And will it affect US Aid Philippines as well, and will this affect ongoing projects?

NEDA USEC. EDILLON: Actually, sa US Aid, yes, naka-ano sila for 90-days, yeah 90-days na naka-hold sila. And that will also affect iyong mga projects natin with US Aid. But, just to say as well, naiba na rin kasi iyong situation natin noon kaysa iyong sa ngayon. Dati kasi, we even depend on US Aid for school buildings natin 'di ba ganoon.

Ngayon, hindi na tayo sa ganoong situation eh. So, it's really more of the technical assistance part, which actually pwede rin naman tayong mag-source from other development partners.

JOHN ORDOÑEZ/BUSINESS WORLD: So, Ma'am, how will we act with US aid, following the stop order and how will our relationship with the agency be affected?

NEDA USEC. EDILLON: We will have to wait until ma-resolve nila iyong isyu na iyon. But with respect to the ongoing na mga technical assistance, we are actually still continuing. So, kunwari sa amin may mga studies, we are still continuing with the studies and we also have good relationship naman with US Aid staff. So, marami rin naman sa kanila iyong, you know, nagbibigay din naman ng inputs, siyempre parang out of their goodwill na iyon.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Cleizl Pardilla, PTV4.

CLEIZL PARDILLA/PTV 4: Sir, for Secretary Laurel po. Sir, just recently BPI has filed a complaint against an importer for alleged involvement in vegetable smuggling. May we know the latest number of blacklisted importers? Thank you.

DA SEC. TIU LAUREL: Well, ang actual blacklisted is ten ngayon. But, ang list namin is actually 16. So, iniisa-isa na iyan. But confirmed na blacklist as of today is four, then there's six more to follow.

CLEIZL PARDILLA/PTV 4: Sir, importers of ano po.

DA SEC. TIU LAUREL: Iba-iba iyan eh. Basically vegetables and fish.

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

ALVIN BALTAZAR/RADYO PILIPINAS: Puwede po kay Secretary Laguesma or kay Usec. Edillon. Secretary, recently, sabi ni Pangulong Marcos, iyong tungkol sa pay hike, kinakailangan pag-aralan, kasi kino-consider dito iyong MSME eh. Ano ba iyong naiisip nating win-win solution para panalo iyong employer at saka iyong employees, particularly doon sa panig ng MSMEs?

DOLE SEC. LAGUESMA: Actually, iyon ang laging direksyon na laging pinupuntahan ng pamahalaan 'no, partikular iyong mekanismo may kinalaman sa pagtutugon doon sa umiiral na minimum wage 'no. Kasi ang layunin ay maging predictable at medyo resonable ang anumang adjustment sa minimum wage 'no, kasi iyan iyong delegated power na binigay ng kongreso, 36 years ago, 34 years ago. Lagi ko namang nababanggit 'no, kanina nasabi ko rin kanina sa isang gobyerno o isang bansa na nasa ilalim ng demokrasya mayroon tatlong branches of government 'no.

So, having said that, kami sa bahagi ng executive, bahagi ang NEDA, DTI, DA at saka DOLE nagbibigay kami ng mga pananaw, mga scenario kasi gusto namin ma-sustain. Tinatanong kanina, paano titiyakin na magtuluy-tuloy ang pagbaba ng unemployment, tataas ang employment, iyan iyong aming pinagtutuunan ng pansin. Kasi nag-i-impact anumang mga ika-nga'y mayroon mga unwanted at saka unintended consequences kung ang gagawin natin mayroon dalawang mekanismo na nag-a-address adjustment ng umiiral na minimum wage.

Kung nasusundan ninyo naman iyong deliberasyon sa Kongreso, iyong napasa sa committee on house—ng House sa labor and employment across the board iyong una, pero pagdating sa plenary, naging minimum wage na lang ang kanyang dinidirekta. So, mayroong mga unintended consequences, kaya iyong pagbabalanse napakahirap gawin, kaya nga ang mekanismo talaga dapat iyong teknikal hindi iyong political ang proseso, kasi medyo—that is unsettling, very unsettling to existing investor and even future investor. Gusto nilang makita ng predictability kasi hindi lang naman tayo ang bansa sa rehiyon na mayroon ganitong klaseng mekanismo. Iyong Regional Tripartite Wages and Productivity Boards (RTWRPB) mga kalapit na bansa mayroon din. Even Singapore 'no, pero Singapore is out of—ano siya eh, labas siya sa liga eh, dahil quality of life na siya 'no.

So, iyong pag-balance ginagawa doon sa mekanismo na iyon, na kung saan mayroon naman kinatawan ng manggagawa at saka namumuhunan na nagbibigay ng mga—nag-a-articulate ng mga concerns 'no. So, iyong nabanggit mo may kinalaman sa MSMEs batay sa tala ng mga nakarehistrong negosyo, existing businesses, mahigit nobenta'y nuwebe porsyento ay maliit.

Hindi naman natin ibig sabihin na dapat exempted sila, pero dapat iyong reasonableness na anumang adjustment magbibigay ng pagkakataon sa kanila para lumago at makalikha pa ng mas maraming hanapbuhay, iyon lagi direksyon. Kas, ako bagama't ako'y hindi ekonomista, naniniwala ako doon sa prinsipyo na supply and demand eh, 'pag marami ang supply medyo kailangan magkaroon ka ng adjustment. Pero kung ang demand ay mas malaki, kaya nga patuloy ang paghihikayat ng mga bagong investor o kaya mag-expand ang mga existing investment, kasi kapag mas marami na ang pangangailangan, hindi na tayo mag-uusap siguro ng mga minimum standards eh, puro over and above the minimum na ang usapan. Otherwise, hindi ka makakakuha ng manpower na magsu-sustain o susuporta sa negosyo mo.

So, it's always a difficult act, we—I have to be very candid, hindi ganoon kadali ang mag-balanse kasi kahit na anong gawin mo, mayroon siyang mga unintended consequences eh, either mayroon napinsala, mayroon napaburan. Pero always the direction is to strike a balance, which

could be beneficial doon sa sektor ng manggagawa at saka ng namumuhunan and always ang bottom line sa Department of Labor and Employment, reservation ng existing employment and promotion and creation of additional once.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you, very much secretaries. Last question from Tuesday Niu.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Pahabol lang po kay Secretary Tui Laurel. Sir, sabi ninyo kanina mayroon kayong 16 names of importers na blacklisted, apat dito ang confirmed and nakasuhan na, tama ba?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Well, sa blacklist, sampu 'no. Out of the 16, at nakasuhan na, yeah apat na nakasuhan.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Puwede ba natin pangalanan, sir, para at least alam?

DA SEC. LAUREL: We can give you the supply, the list, puwede naman.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Thank you, sir.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you very much. And that wraps our press briefing for today. Maraming salamat po, Secretary Laguesma, Secretary Tui Laurel and Undersecretary Edillon, at Malacañang Press Corps. Magandang tanghali po.

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