

BIR attributes high collection to 'enforcement activities'

MANILA -- The Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) on Wednesday said many enforcement activities have been conducted in order to attain high collection in 2018.

BIR spokesperson and Deputy Commissioner for Legal Affairs, Atty. Marissa Cabrerros said the bureau was able to collect PHP1.952 trillion for 2018 or 96 percent of the PHP2.042-trillion target.

"We were able to achieve 96 percent ng ating (of our) collection because we supplemented it with a lot of enforcement activities so that we arrest na mas maging malaki pa iyong maging (bigger) shortfall," Cabrerros said in a weekly economic briefing in Malacañang.

Some of the enforcement activities the BIR con-

ducted include the checking of reported sales of taxpayers using Point of Sales and Cash Register Machines and the investigation by the Regional District Offices of unregistered establishments.

Cabrerros said the BIR has set a target collection of PHP2.271 trillion for 2019, 11 percent higher than the last year's goal.

She said the BIR missed last year's target due to petroleum industry's decision to shift from production to importation and failure to meet expected collection in the excise tax on sugary beverage and cosmetic procedures.

"Ang goal po ng (The goal of the) BIR is being set po by the DBCC (Development Budget Coordination Committee) every year, and

unfortunately with the economic conditions of 2018, the assumptions po ng ating economists (of our economists) did not materialize for 2018 because of a lot of factors," she said.

Cabrerros explained that cosmetic procedures are hard to monitor.

"That is one area na medyo (which is quite) hard to monitor because these are the cosmetic procedures, the doctors are -- they don't voluntarily flaunt that their clients did some cosmetic procedures and even those clients will not openly flaunt that they did some augmentation," she said.

Cabrerros said the BIR did not get the expected collection from value added tax (VAT) because of the increase in threshold of those exempt from VAT. (PNA)

DND urges military to beef up cybersecurity

MANILA -- The Department of National Defense (DND) on Thursday urged the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to beef up its cyber and network security, in the wake of reports claiming that the website of the training school of the First Scout Ranger Regiment, one of the Philippine Army's (PA) elite units, was hacked last year.

"We are taking this seriously and are advising the AFP and our other bureaus to strengthen their cyber and network security," DND spokesperson Arsenio Andolong said in a message to the Philippine News Agency (PNA).

Information on 20,000 soldiers was reportedly stolen in the hacking incident.

As this developed, AFP public affairs office chief Col. Noel Detoyato said investigations on the alleged hacking incident revealed that the AFP Network remains secure.

"Initial investigation on the alleged hacking incident that transpired on 01 April 2019 indicates that the

AFP Network (AFPNET) is unaffected and remains secure as it is a closed network inaccessible from the internet," Detoyato said.

The AFP official noted that suspected files that were forcibly accessed came from third party servers that are already being vacated.

"These are considered loose ends that have already been migrated to the AFPNET," he said, noting that the files do not contain highly-classified information but data that are already available at the Scout Ranger Training School registry books and in the internet.

"Operational data are not compromised because of this incident. The AFP already addressed the alleged hacking incident through the AFP Computer Emergency Response Team under the AFP Cyber Group. Nevertheless, our cybersecurity systems are constantly being reviewed and assessed of its critical vulnerabilities and augmented further with more stringent security mea-

sures," Detoyato said.

Before this alleged hacking incident, he said, the Philippine Navy has already completed a critical review of its cybersecurity.

The Philippine Army, Air Force and the general headquarters will follow suit in conducting the security assessment.

Meanwhile, Philippine Army spokesperson, Lt. Col. Ramon Zagala, earlier said the data extracted from the exposed dump files of an old database was being migrated from a third party Internet service provider to the Army network in December 2018.

"These files were already addressed as early as January 1, 2019 but was only leaked recently to make it appear that the hacker was able to commemorate their yearly mischief on April 1st. Rest assured that all other data in our network is secured and that further security assessments are being done to prevent a repeat of this incident," he said. (PNA)

DepEd to continue SHS voucher program for SY 2019-2020

MANILA -- The Department of Education (DepEd) on Wednesday assured the public of its commitment to continue with the Senior High School Voucher Program (SHS VP) for school year (SY) 2019-2020 amid challenges in its implementation.

In a statement, the DepEd said its engagement of the services of private educational institutions and non-DepEd public schools offering SHS through the voucher program under the Expanded Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education will continue in compliance with section 10 of Republic Act 10533.

The law is otherwise known as "An Act Enhancing the Philippine Basic Education System by Strengthening its Curriculum and Increasing the Number of Years for Basic Education, Appropriating Funds Therefore and for Other Purposes."

"It is the mandate of the Department to uphold the

right of every Filipino to quality basic education by providing access, whether through public programs or through arrangements based on the principles of public-private partnership," the statement read.

However, the application for the SHS VP for SY 2019-2020 is yet to be opened pending the issuance of the fiscal year (FY) 2019 GAA.

"Pending the issuance of the 2019 General Appropriations Act (GAA), the national budget for FY 2018 is deemed reenacted. The reenacted budget shall remain in force until such time that the GAA is passed into law by Congress. Subsequently, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) has released Circular Letter No. 2019-01 or Release of Funds for the First Quarter of FY 2019 stating that in the absence of the 2019 GAA, the budgetary support to cover the operations of all national agencies is equivalent to the appropriations based on the FY 2018 GAA or on the FY

2019 National Expenditure Program (NEP), whichever is lower," the statement read.

The DepEd said the total appropriation for the SHS VP in private and non-DepEd schools is PHP14.4 billion under the FY 2018 GAA, while the 2019 NEP is PHP20.3 billion. As a result, the program is short of funds amounting to PHP5.9 billion.

The DepEd also clarified that Grade 10 completers in SY 2018-2019 are automatically eligible and need to apply for the vouchers.

Also included are all Grade 10 completers in public schools operated by DepEd; all Grade 10 completers in state and local universities and colleges; and all Grade 10 completers in private schools that are Educational Service Contracting grantees.

"These automatic voucher recipients shall be accommodated in the program upon enrollment in any SHS VP-participating school," it added. (PNA)

CA affirms legality of 2014 WESM price spike

MANILA -- The Court of Appeals (CA) affirmed its decision voiding orders issued by the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) nullifying the increase in prices at the Wholesale Electricity Spot Market (WESM) imposed by power producers during the shutdown of the Malampaya gas facility in 2013.

In a 20-page resolution dated March 29 penned by Associate Justice Marlene Gonzales-Sison, the CA's Former Fifteenth Division denied the motions for reconsideration filed by the ERC and giant power distributor Manila Electric Company (Meralco).

The CA nullified the orders issued by the ERC in 2014 which declared WESM prices void for being uncompetitive and unreasonable.

In its decision, ERC said power producers -- San Miguel Energy Corporation, South Premiere Power Corporation, Strategic Power Development Corporation, SMC Powergen, Inc., and Petron Corporation, SN Aboitiz Power-Magat, Inc. and SN Aboitiz Power-Benguet, Inc., 1590 Energy Corporation, AP Renewables, Inc., Team (Phils.) Energy Corp., SEM-Calaca

Power Corp., Masinloc Power Partners Company, Ltd., Therma Luzon, Inc., Therma Mobile, Inc., and Northwind Power Development Corp. -- colluded to manipulate prices of electricity in the spot market during the Malampaya facility's scheduled maintenance.

The CA, in its ruling, however explained that the ERC does not has not have police power under the Electric Power Industry Reform Act (EPIRA) or even by the Constitution to intervene in the WESM and impose its own prices.

"It bears stressing that had the legislature intended the ERC to have such power, Congress would have expressly included the same in the plethora of prerogatives the EPIRA granted the ERC. However, the EPIRA is plainly silent on the matter," the CA ruled. "There is thus, no cogent reason to reverse Our ruling on this matter," it added.

The CA said the standards determining the validity of ERC's orders must be the provisions of the Constitution and applicable laws and not based on its effect on the consumers.

"The intervenor (Meralco)

would have us substantially infuse our decision with strands of concern for the populace. But these are simply matter invisible to the judicial eye. Contemplating further, we find that the urged consumers' welfare, along the spectrum of State prerogatives, instead belongs to the range exclusively recognizable by the legislature. This reveals the argument to be one advocating the validity of the power by urging its practical wisdom, rather than its legal existence," the CA said.

Meralco was supposed to impose a PHP4.15 per kilowatt-hour (kWh) power rate increase on its customers due to spike in WESM prices but this was stopped by the Supreme Court through a temporary restraining order (TRO) issued in 2013.

Meralco earlier attributed the abrupt increase in the generation cost to supposed maintenance shutdown of the Malampaya facility that supplies natural gas to three major power plants -- Ilijan, San Lorenzo and Sta Rita -- which supply an aggregate capacity of 2,700 MW electricity to its franchise area.