

MRT-3 revenue declines due to fewer trains, safety issues

MANILA -- The decline in the revenue of the Metro Rail Transit-3 (MRT-3) in 2018 was due to the reduction of operating trains for safety issues, the Department of Transportation (DOTr) clarified.

The DOTr issued a statement in response to a Commission on Audit (COA) report released last week on the decrease in MRT-3 ridership from 140,152,161 in 2017 to 104,275,362 in 2018, resulting in a decrease of more than PHP700 million in revenue from ticket sales.

"The number of reliable and safe trains available to MRT 3 in 2018 went down due to years of neglect, bad maintenance practices, and failure to undertake scheduled overhaul and upgrading works," the statement read.

MRT-3's former maintenance contractor, Busan Universal Rail, Inc. (BURI), practiced "force deployment" of trains regardless of reliability and safety, causing hundreds of unloading incidents each year from 2012 to 2017, the DOTr said.

"Force deployment of unreliable and unsafe trains may have been caused by a policy of payment to maintenance providers based on the number of deployed trains, regardless of whether those trains break down during operations," it said.

The practice was stopped after the termination of BURI's contract in 2017 and the 26-month comprehensive rehabilitation by Sumitomo Heavy Industries started in May 2019.

"This is why since the MRT-3 Maintenance Transition Team (MTT) took over after the termination of BURI in November 2017, measures have been taken to only deploy trains that are safe and reliable," the statement read.

As a result, unloading incidents in the MRT-3 decreased to 57 in 2018 and only 19 incidents so far in 2019, as compared to 292 in 2012 to 453 in 2017.

Degraded tracks, obsolete systems
The proper maintenance of railway tracks was also ignored by earlier maintenance providers, which resulted in premature rail degradation from

the projected 80 to 100-year usability of the MRT-3 tracks.

The MRT-3's wheel lathe machine was also inoperable from 2014 up to BURI's termination in November 2017, which resulted in rough train wheels, further worsening rail degradation.

The MRT-3 MTT successfully restored the wheel lathe machine in March 2019.

Another failure, which the DOTr ascribed to BURI, was the failure to upgrade the railway's signaling system even though a budget for such upgrade was provided in the General Appropriations Act of 2014.

"BURI was supposed to implement the signaling upgrade, but had not even started doing so when it was terminated in November 2017," the DOTr said.

Degraded tracks compounded by an obsolete signaling system resulted in lower operating speed of 30 kph from the previous 60 kph and increased headway between trains of 7.5 to 10 minutes from the previous 3.5 minutes.

MRT-3 rehab

Through an Official Development Assistance loan with a 40-year, 0.1 percent interest per annum and a 12-year grace period from the Japanese government, Sumitomo was contracted to rehabilitate the MRT-3 which is expected to be completed by July 2021.

By then, the ridership of the beleaguered rail transit is expected to increase from the current workday average of 320,000 to 650,000.

Last July, 4,053 pieces of 18-meter rails arrived three months ahead of schedule from Nippon Steel Corp. in Fukuoka, Japan meant to replace all tracks along the MRT-3's 17-kilometer line as part of the MRT-3 rehabilitation project.

Under the project, Sumitomo will overhaul all 72 Light Rail Vehicles of the MRT-3, replace all mainline tracks, rehabilitate power and overhead catenary systems, upgrade the signaling system, communications and CCTV systems, and repair all of MRT-3's escalators and elevators, among other repairs and improvements. (PNA)

Reds twisting history to suit their needs: Parlade

MANILA -- Communist rebels and their allies really know history well as they spend much of their time twisting it to tar the government to suit their ideological needs, an official of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF ELCAC) said Wednesday.

Major Gen. Antonio Parlade made this remark in response to claims made by Kabataan Party-list Representative Sarah Elago that they are studying history and injustices being perpetrated in the country along with the malicious attacks allegedly being perpetrated by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

"Today (August 21) is a

holiday. What does history tell you about August 21 if you say you know your history which you use to agitate students and encourage dissent as part of academic freedom?" said Parlade, who is also AFP Deputy Chief-of-Staff for Civil-Military Operations, in a message to the Philippine News Agency.

Plaza Miranda bombing

On August 21, 1971, Plaza Miranda in Quiapo, Manila was bombed by suspected communist rebels, killing nine people and wounding 95 others, many of which were prominent members of the Liberal Party who was then conducting a political campaign rally in the area.

"Today is the day

when Plaza Miranda was bombed by the CPP-NPA (Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army) but was blamed on the government because of the CPP's expertise on deceit, lies, and propaganda. I bet your lectures continue to propagate those lies until this day so the youth will continue to mistrust their AFP and their government," he added.

Parlade said communists claim social media is full of fake news from the government in attacking progressive groups and suppressing dissent.

"Well here is the original fake news which until now you use, again to agitate the young to rise against the gov-

ernment -- the Jabidah Massacre," he said, adding that f Elago and her allies have really read their history, then they should have known that the Senate has a complete set of the late Senator Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr.'s investigation of the alleged massacre which reportedly took place in Corregidor Island on March 18, 1968.

Then-Senator Ninoy, he said, concluded that that Jabidah Massacre was a hoax, after seeing for himself in Sulu the young Muslim children alleged to have been killed by its military trainers.

"It is available to the public or to anyone who cares to know about the truth," he said.

PNP chief backs longer wiretapping period

MANILA -- Philippine National Police (PNP) Chief, Gen. Oscar Albayalde, said he supports the proposal to expand the wiretapping period to effectively address terrorism and other serious threats to national security.

"That is part of our amendment na pino-propose doon sa (we propose on the) Human Security Act," Albayalde said in a media interview on Tuesday.

"And we support that because in other countries, they can hold a person for as much as two years without any case, provided the case is strong against him for acts of terrorism," he said.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana earlier said the Cabinet cluster on security would recommend amendments to Republic Act 9372 or the Human Security Act of 2007.

Lorenzana said the proposal to extend the initial wiretapping period from the present 30 days to 60 days will provide ample time for investigators and other law enforcers to gather evidence against suspects.

Albayalde said it really takes time to monitor terrorists and their wide networks, "not only domestic but also abroad."

"So baka kulang 'yung 30 days dyan (So perhaps 30 days are not enough)," he added.

Albayalde urged the public to look at the positive side of the proposed amendments.

"We should look at this on a positive side because this is for everybody. We have to think of this because the problem of terrorism is not a joke," Albayalde said.

"These acts or laws are meant to address criminality, terrorism. Hindi po ito (This is not) to address political rivalry. Let us do away with this kind of mentality. There is no political color on this," he added.

Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra earlier also expressed support for the proposed amendments to the Human Security Act, which former president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo signed on March 6, 2007.

"Terrorism is a serious threat to national security and public safety. So if our security experts recommend that a longer period for permissible wiretapping is necessary, I will support it," Guevarra said.

Under the law, wiretapping may be done with the consent of the Court of Appeals exclusively for suspected terrorists.

However, the recording of privileged communication between journalists and their sources, lawyers and their clients, and doctors and their patients shall not be allowed. (PNA)

Another propaganda tactic

Parlade said Aquino highlighted these incidents to give the Filipino public in general an understanding of the propaganda being used by the CPP-NPA in recruiting and sending minors to their death during encounters with government troops.

The CPP-NPA is listed as a terrorist organization by the United States, European Union, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the Philippines.

"It is important for us to know this truth so we will understand that propaganda has been killing our vulnerable children, in the same manner, that CPP cadres hiding under Anakbayan, LFS (League of Filipino Students), NUPL (National Union of Peoples' Lawyers), Ibon Foundation, etc. are killing recruits because of falsehoods and deceit," he added.

Fake news about the Jabidah Massacre, he said, is still being used in Ibon Foundation manuals, to agitate indigenous peoples (IPs) children in Salugpungan schools, by saying that the military was responsible for the cold-blooded murder of 64 Muslim youths in Corregidor Island, thus triggering the Moro insurgency.

"Ibon propaganda materials are still using that parallelism to radicalize IP children into fighting again their AFP. The same Ibon manuals, by the way, teach the Salugpungan children that their national hero should be Father Pops Tentorio, an Italian priest who sponsored the studies of more than 700 IPs, 600 plus of them becoming NPAs," he added.

Parlade said Jabidah Massacre was used by the late Sen. Aquino in his privilege speech in 1968, not to correct the facts, but to expose a state secret

about retaking Sabah. "So believe it or not, Ms. Elago, your icon of democracy actually started the recruitment, training, and funding of Moro rebels, with the help of our Malay neighbor. That alliance of Otso Derecho's forbears started the violence in Mindanao, which killed some 150,000 Filipinos who knew nothing about this deceit," he added.

The ranking military official also dared the militant lawmaker and her allies to tell the truth and give the youth the chance to join either the armed communist rebels, their militant partners or the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC).

"Do you really want our children to be critical of their government so that they may contribute to nation-building? Then tell them the truth and then give them a choice whether to join Anakbayan and NPA, or ROTC to express their patriotism," he said. (PNA)