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DEPED TO IMPROVE EDUCATION QUALITY AFTER PH'S POOR PISA RANKING

MANILA -- The Department of Education (DepEd) seeks to improve the quality of basic education in the country after the Philippines got a poor ranking in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018.

In a statement Wednesday, the DepEd said the Philippines joined PISA for the first time in 2018 as part of their reform plans on quality basic education.

The results of the assessment program, it said, would be used to establish a baseline to global standards and benchmark the effectiveness of succeeding reforms on education.

"The PISA results, along with our own assessments and studies, will aid in policy formulation, planning, and programming," the DepEd said.

It said the PISA results, which reflected students' performance in the National Achievement Test, showed the "urgency of addressing issues and gaps in attaining quality basic education in the Philippines."

Launched on Wednesday, the "Sulong Edukalidad" program led by the DepEd would implement "aggressive reforms" to improve the country's quality of basic education.

The program, the DepEd said, would focus in four key areas—the review and updating of the K to 12 program, the improvement of learning facilities, upskilling and reskilling of teachers and school heads, and the engagement of stakeholders, such as parents and guardians of students, for support and collaboration.

To ensure no student gets left behind in any part of the country, the department also called for national involvement in the program.

"DepEd calls the entire nation to take active involvement, cooperation, and collaboration in advancing the quality of basic education in the Philippines," the agency aid.

On Tuesday, results of the PISA 2018, which compared the quality of basic education of the 79 member and partner countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), showed the Philippines ranking at the bottom for performance in reading, and second-lowest for both Mathematics and Science.

The Philippines scored 340 points in reading, below the average of 487 points of OECD member and partner countries, 353 points in Mathematical Literacy, below the average of 489 points, and 357 points in Science, below the average of 489 points.

The PISA, launched by the OECD in 1997, is an international study that surveys its member and partner countries every three years for comparative data on 15-year-olds' performance in reading, mathematics, and science.

According to the OECD website, each "cycle" of the study explores a distinct domain such as Collaborative Problem Solving (PISA 2015) and Global Competence (PISA 2018).

It added that the results of the study have informed policy discussions at the national and global level since its inception. (PNA)

Onerous water contracts 'bleeding our country dry': Palace

MANILA -- The onerous water concession agreements between the government and water concessionaires Manila Water Co. and Maynilad Water Services Inc. are "bleeding our country dry", Malacañang said on Wednesday.

Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo made this remark after President Rodrigo Duterte slammed the decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in Singapore directing the Philippine government to pay water concessionaires Manila Water and Maynilad billions of pesos for the non-implementation of water rate increases.

"It is apparent that some members of the government have not only looked the other way but have in fact purposely guided the hands of those who have raped our economy for their own personal aggrandizement," Panelo said in a statement.

"Worse, they are hellbent on bleeding our country dry. The proper delivery of basic services has not been fostered but thwarted to the outrageous detriment of the Filipinos," he added.

Manila Water is a subsidiary of Ayala Corporation while businessman Manuel V. Pangilinan's Metro Pacific Investments Corporation owns a controlling stake in Maynilad.

The two private companies distribute water in Metro Manila and other parts of the country under agreements signed with state regulator Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) in 1997.

In a speech on Tuesday night, Duterte lashed out at the water concessionaires after a review conducted by the Department of Justice (DOJ) showed the water contracts were "onerous and disadvantageous to the people, relative the terms or periods, government non-interference, as well as concessionaire indemnification for losses."

Due to the two provisions, the government was ordered by the Singapore arbitration court to pay Maynilad about PHP3.6 billion and, recently, PHP7.4 billion to Manila Water as compensation for losses and damages, Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra said.

The DOJ chief said another onerous provision is the extension of these contracts to 2037 considering that the extension was granted 12 to 13 years before the original expiration of the 25-year concession agreements in 2022.

Duterte directed the DOJ and Office of the Solicitor General, to draft a new water concession contract that is "favorable to the State and the Filipino people".

He also asked them to file economic sabotage cases against all those involved in the agreements including the latter's owners and legal counsels, and agents and lawyers of the government.

The President also said he is "ready to go down" for his decision but would drag with him the "oligarchs" who treated water as a "commodity" and not a natural resource.

"And we will expose them. And I will insist that they be tried for economic sabotage," Duterte said.

Echoing the President, Panelo said the water concessionaires not only "abused" the arrangement of delivering state-owned water to the citizens but have treated it as "a money-making venture."

"Under the Constitution, all natural resources of the Philippines, including water, belong to -- and are owned by -- the State. It is indisputable that water is intended for the use, enjoyment, and welfare of the citizens," Panelo, also Chief Presidential Legal Counsel, said.

The Palace official, meanwhile, assured that the Duterte administration will carry out measures to ensure that those involved in the onerous deals were penalized.

"We put everyone on notice that the constitutional command to the President to serve and protect the Filipino people shall be complied with passion and dedication, regardless of whatever power or influential groups are run over," Panelo said.

Prayer for Healing

JESUS, may Your pure and healthy blood circulate in my ailing organism, and may Your pure and healthy body transform my weak body, and may a healthy and vigorous life throb within me, if it is truly Your holy will. Amen.

O BLOOD AND WATER WHICH FLOWED OUT FROM THE HEART OF JESUS AS A FOUNTAIN OF MERCY FOR US, I TRUST IN YOU!

Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, Have Mercy on us and on the whole world. Amen.

3 O'CLOCK PRAYER

"You died Jesus, but the source of life flowed out for souls and the ocean of mercy opened up for the whole world. O Fountain of Life immeasurable Divine Mercy, cover the whole world and empty Yourself out upon us."

"O Blood and Water which flowed out from the heart of Jesus as a Fountain of Mercy for us, I trust in you!"

"Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One have mercy on us and on the whole world." (3x) Amen.

Jesus, King of Mercy, I trust in you!

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