

PUV modernization to address PH transport sector woes

MANILA -- The government's public utility vehicle (PUV) modernization program is aimed at addressing issues hounding the country's transport sector.

This, as the Department of Transportation (DOTr) and the Land Transportation Franchising Board (LTFRB) on Thursday launched modern PUVs, which will be rolled out in several areas nationwide.

Dubbed as the 'One Road One Nation' Towards PUV Modernization' program, LTFRB chairperson Martin Delgra III said the modernization of PUVs is touted as the largest non-infrastructure project of the Duterte administration.

All modern PUVs, including jeepneys, buses, and taxis presented during the program were Euro 4-compliant, a standard set by the European Union (EU) in 2005 that define the limits for exhaust emissions.

"Not only are we going to provide safe and reliable transportation, they are environment-friendly too," Delgra told reporters at the launch of the program in the National Capital Region (NCR) in Alabang, Muntinlupa.

Aside from its environmental aspect, Toll Regulatory Board spokesperson and former LTFRB chair Alberto Suansing said the modernization program aims to provide better opportunities to those in the sector.

"Hindi natin aalisan ng hanapbuhay kundi aayusin pa natin ang hanapbuhay nila (We won't take away their livelihood and will improve it instead)," Suansing said.

Suansing enumerated some improvements brought by the modernization program, which include the organization of operators and drivers into

cooperatives that will allow a more organized and consistent dispatching of PUVs.

"Sa isang ruta, meron oras na nagsisiksikan sila. Meron naman oras na wala kang makikita na sasakyan, madalang yung sasakyan. Ibig sabihin natin niyan, in-aayos natin yung frequency nung serbisyo. Para maging reliable sila (In one route, they are congested. And then there are some hours when you won't see any vehicle or there are only a few. What we are saying is we want to make sure the frequency of the service. For them to be reliable)," Suansing said.

He said the moder-

nization program also promotes road safety as it aims to eliminate reckless driving among PUV drivers caused by the "boundary" system.

"Pati yung compensation nila masasabayos pa. Hindi yung nagka-karera sila sa kalsada, nag-uunahan sa pasahero (Their compensation will also be fixed. They should not be racing against each other in the streets in order to get passengers)," Suansing said.

For those unable to transition into driving or operating modern PUVs, the DOTr partnered with Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to provide skills training for the

transition of drivers and operators into a different livelihood.

"Nandiyan yung TESDA para mag-retooling. Kahit na medyo may katandaan na sila, ma-introduce sa kanila ang panibagong hanapbuhay (TESDA is there to conduct re-tooling. Even if some of them are already old, they will still be introduced to a new means of livelihood)," Suansing said.

Officials from the DOTr, LTFRB and the local government of Muntinlupa also awarded certificates of provisional authority to private corporations and cooperatives, allowing for the operation of modern PUVs nationwide. (PNA)

PH fertility rate drops despite population growth: NEDA

MANILA -- While the Filipino population continues to grow, the total fertility rate nationwide has dropped to 2.7 children per woman, Socioeconomic Planning Secretary and National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) director general Ernesto Pernia said on Thursday.

In a conference on World Population Day in Quezon City, Pernia said such significant progress in population management can be attributed to the continuous efforts of the government to promote family planning programs, 25 years after the Philippines took part of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

The ICPD in Cairo, Egypt has set a Programme of Action signed by 179 countries, embarking on a long and difficult jour-

ney to reproductive health, including voluntary family planning and safe pregnancy, women empowerment and gender equality.

"Our population has surpassed the 100 million mark, in fact, there are 100.9 million Filipinos in 2015, according to the census of population. We will be close to 110 million by the end of 2019, our global rank in the most populated countries, moved up a notch from 14th to 13th," he said, adding that Filipinos only make up 1.4 percent of the total world population this year.

Citing that more women in rural areas are using contraceptives now, Pernia said the country's total fertility rate from 4.1 children per woman of reproductive age average in 1993 has dropped to 2.7 children per woman in 2017.

"Our target is 2.1 children per woman of

fertility rate average and this is achievable if we can promote more the use of modern contraceptives," he added.

Through proper education, Pernia reported that the practice of modern family planning methods has been slowly progressing.

"From 25 percent in 1993, more Filipino women use modern family planning methods, and their number has increased to 40 percent in 2017," he said.

Pernia, referring to the World Economic Forum Global Report, said the Philippines remains one of the most gender-friendly economies in Asia.

"We're now 8th among 149 countries in terms of successfully closing the gender gap. This is something we can be proud of, but I think the country still needs to address sexual and reproductive

Public sentiment on lawmakers' term extension 'more relevant'

MANILA -- Malacañang distanced itself from making comments on Taguig Rep. Alan Peter Cayetano's proposal to push for longer term limits for lawmakers, stressing that public sentiment matters more.

Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo said he would not preempt the wisdom of the lawmakers on Cayetano's proposed measure.

"Well, the decision would always lie of the members of Congress, because they are the ones passing the bill," Panelo said in a Palace briefing on Thursday.

But when asked if the Palace will favor a term extension for lawmakers, Panelo described his opinion as "irrelevant" unlike the public sentiment.

"Mine is irrelevant at this stage. I think more relevant would be what the people want," Panelo said.

The President's spokesperson floated the idea of conducting a survey to find out whether or not Filipinos agreed to a longer term for lawmakers.

"I think they should

conduct a survey on the sentiments of the people, whether or not they agree on that proposal. And I'm sure since that has been floated, there will be opinions being expressed by many sectors," he added.

Cayetano said he wanted to extend the terms of members of the House of Representatives to either four years with no term limits or five years with term limits.

He explained that a term extension would make lawmakers more productive and give them more time to focus on crafting bills.

At present, members of the House can serve for three consecutive three-year terms.

President Rodrigo Duterte earlier endorsed Cayetano's bid for House speakership, in a term-sharing arrangement with Marinduque Rep. Lord Allan Velasco.

Emergency powers Panelo, meanwhile, welcomed the move of Senator Francis Tolentino, an ally of the President, to file a bill granting the government emergency powers to address the country's transport problems, in-

cluding traffic.

"Well, hindi ba (didn't) the President wanted that at the very inception of his presidency, but Congress did not. Di ba sabi niya, kung ayaw ninyo, di 'huwag (If you don't want to, then don't)," Panelo said.

Asked if the President would certify the bill as urgent, Panelo said he had no clue but noted that its passage would definitely solve a number of the country's transport problems.

"Well, we hope that it would pass, but then again, that is left to the wisdom of the members of Congress," he added.

Panelo also said the President never appealed to Tolentino to refile the measure, emphasizing that the senator has expressed his desire to do so even when he was still part of Duterte's Cabinet.

Tolentino was Duterte's former Presidential Adviser on Political Affairs and former chairman of Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) during the time of former President Benigno Aquino III. (PNA)

health rights including gender-based violence," he added.

To properly address the increasing cases of teenage pregnancies, Pernia suggested the youth must be given more focus when it comes to reproductive health education.

"Women aged 15 to 19 became pregnant with their first child have increased from 6.5 percent since 1993 to 8.6 percent in 2017. In terms of reduction of teenage pregnancies, we really haven't

moved much," he said.

"Many policies have been set in place since the Duterte administration began three years ago and we will continue to champion policies, programs, and projects that will empower and lift the lives of Filipinos out of poverty," he added.

The Philippines, led by Pernia, will renew its commitment to fulfilling its promise of the ICPD Agenda at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25: Accelerating the Promise on November 12 to 14 in

Nairobi, Kenya.

"It is a high-level conference organized to finish the unfinished agenda of the full implementation of ICPD Agenda Programme of Action as an integral way for sustainable development," said Iori Kato, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) representative in the Philippines.

"UNFPA congratulates the Philippine government in its achievements and commitment to fulfill the ICPD Agenda promise," Kato added. (PNA)