

MRT-7 to be partially operational by 2021: DOTr

MANILA—The Department of Transportation (DOTr) on Wednesday announced the Metro Rail Transit-7 (MRT-7) will be partially operational by 2021 following its concessionaire's report of the project being 44.98 percent complete.

During a tour of the construction of an MRT-7 station at the Quezon City Memorial Circle, San Miguel Corporation MRT-7 Inc. (SMC MRT-7) Infrastructure Technical head Norberto Conti said the civil works, such as the construction of stations, guideway works, the foundation works, of the project is 37.49 percent complete.

Meanwhile, the project's rolling stock and train cars and rails, among others, is 53.09 percent complete, Conti said.

Conti noted that all 108 cars, equivalent to 36 trainsets of the project, are 100 percent completed by its South Korean contractor.

DOTr Undersec-

retary for Railways Timothy John Batan said by end of 2021, the first station of the MRT-7, North Avenue station, up to the Sacred Heart station in Caloocan City will be partially operational.

He added the project will be fully operational from North Avenue station up to San Jose del Monte station in Bulacan by 2022.

Once finished, Conti said the 23-kilometer rail transit system will cut travel time from North Avenue to San Jose del Monte from four hours to only 34 minutes and has the capacity to serve 500,000 daily passengers.

In his welcome remarks, Batan lauded the SMC MRT-7 as the project's concessionaire for their "work on all workable areas" approach that means construction of the project continues even through setbacks such as right-of-way issues.

"Ginagamit po tala-ga natin example itong proyektong ito, itong MRT-7, sa iba po nam-

ing contractors. Na bakit hindi niyo gayahin yung approach na ginagawa sa MRT-7? (We use this project as an example, the MRT-7, in our other contractors. We ask why don't they copy the concessionaire's approach in MRT-7?)," Batan said.

He compared this to the traditional approach of other concessionaires wherein they wait until all deliverables of the government are done before beginning the construction.

"Meron kaming deliverables, meron deliverables yung concessionaire, yung contractor namin. Hintayan po hanggang matapos lahat ng deliverables. Habang naghihintayan, hindi po umuusad yung proyekto (We have deliverables, the concessionaire has deliverables. It becomes a waiting game until all deliverables are done)," Batan said.

The DOTr also toured the members of the media at the Quezon City Memorial Circle station, Quezon City common

station and the LRT-2 Emerald station on Marcos Highway in Cainta, Rizal.

Batan said the tour was the second of media tours arranged by the DOTr with the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) on "Build, Build, Build" projects to mark the second half of President Rodrigo Duterte's term.

"Ito po ang unang buwan ng pangalawang yugto, second half ng termino ng ating pangulo.

At mahalaga po na itong puntong ito ay bisitahin kung nasaan na batayo, hindi lang po para kilalanin yung mga nagawa na, ngunit para magising sila driver po satin na ipagpatuloy yung progress ng proyekto natin (This is the first month of the second half of our president's term. It is important at this point in time that we visit where we are, not only to know what's finished but to have our accomplishments drive us to continue our projects)," Batan said. (PNA)

Manila mayor warns public vs. 'hot meat'

MANILA -- Manila Mayor Francisco "Isko" Moreno Domagoso on Wednesday warned the public to be vigilant when shopping for meat in line with the local government's anti-bocha campaign.

In a statement, Domagoso said the Manila Veterinary Inspection Board (MVIB) brought to his office about 532 kilograms of beef shank tagged as "hot meat" during a surprise inspection along Elcano Street in Divisoria, Manila.

Hot meat means carcass or parts of a carcass of cattle and hogs that were slaugh-

tered by unaccredited meat establishments. These are usually spoiled and unsafe to eat.

According to the MVIB, the confiscated hot meat amounted to PHP80,000.

"Basta hindi ininspeksyon ng accredited slaughterhouse, hindi ito safe. We cannot just send these to our markets. Kinakain ito ng tao, kaligtasan ang nakataya dito (These [hot meat] are not safe if they're not inspected by an accredited slaughterhouse.

We cannot just send these to our markets. People eat these

and their safety depend on these)," Domagoso said.

He added the MVIB conducted the inspection after a concerned citizen sent information about hot meat sold in the streets via social media.

"Ayan, mga inire-report sa amin ng mga netizens, nagbubunga ng maganda. Maraming salamat po dahil tumutulong kayo sa pagsasaayos ng Lung-sod ng Maynila (The reports of netizens result in something good. Thank you for taking part in the rehabilitation of the City of Manila)," Domagoso said. (PNA)

10-year deal to boost PH-US scientific collaboration

MANILA-- The Philippine and the United States governments have signed a new agreement on science and technology, ensuring an increased scientific collaboration between the two nations.

of this, and find out the real personnel fetching (the arriving passengers)," he reiterated.

Less than 20 immigration officers are currently under investigation.

Apart from CCTV footages, the BI is also gathering other necessary proofs like documents and witnesses, if any.

Medina also noted that when it comes to escort services, the public's assumption is that BI officers are the ones doing this.

"There are other personnel at the airport. Just because the BI (officers) guard the border gates doesn't mean they are the ones involved in the act," he said. (PNA)

The agreement on scientific and technological cooperation was signed by US Ambassador Sung Kim and Science and Technology Secretary Fortunato de la Peña at the closing of the 8th Bilateral Strategic Dialogue (BSD) between Washington and Manila.

"The United States is proud to partner with the Philippines to promote scientific advancement and cultivate relationships based on open collaboration," Kim said in a statement on July 16 and was released by the embassy on Wednesday.

Kim believes the combined abilities of the two states' scientists, institutions, and communities "are more than a match for the shared challenges we face."

De la Peña, meanwhile, hailed the sign-

ing as he cited that a lot of work still needs to be done in this aspect of the Philippine and US relations.

"There is so much to work on together, particularly those problems that will affect ordinary people. Whether you are talking about the environment or innovation, there is much to gain by mutual cooperation," he said.

According to the embassy, the planned areas for cooperation under the agreement include public health, marine sciences, environmental protection, and energy.

The agreement, signed during National Science and Technology Week, will be in effect for 10 years.

During the BSD, the US also announced a new "Philippines-US Alliance Fellowship" for young Philippine scholars. (PNA)

BI to get to bottom of 'escort service' at NAIA

MANILA -- The Bureau of Immigration (BI) is currently investigating the apparent "escort service" that its officers accord to Chinese nationals at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA).

The Department of Justice recently ordered a probe of BI officers for allegedly escorting Chinese nationals, who would apparently work illegally in Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators (POGOs).

POGOs are believed to be paying thousands of pesos for the entry of every Chinese hire, according to reports.

"We will get to the

bottom of this, whether the BI or some (other) offices are involved," said BI Port Operations Division chief Grifton Medina, in an exclusive interview with the Philippine News Agency (PNA) on Tuesday.

He added that the BI is not tolerating any illegal act, and that it prohibits escorting.

"One would see in the CCTV if there are instances an officer would fetch someone. In the first place, they (officers) are not allowed to stand and leave their counters," he said.

Medina said that among Immigration officers, only those in the TCEU (Travel Control

and Enforcement Unit) are allowed to fetch people. These people, he emphasized, are diplomats and government officers on official travel.

The official noted that immigration officers would accept the Chinese, or anyone, as long as they have visas and other qualified documents, such as return tickets or proof of financial capability.

"What are the instances that we exclude the Chinese? For example, they don't have a return ticket, they don't have a lodging here. These are red flags that they may be illegal workers," he explained.

Also, the premise, he said, is that the Philippines is becoming a tourist hub among Koreans, Americans and Chinese. The BI projects that Chinese would surpass the number of American arrivals this year, according to Medina.

He explained, "How can we know if the Chinese have an intention to work here illegally? If he or she has presented the required documents, how can we know? If ever they have friends who would eventually encourage them to work illegally, how could an immigration officer know?"

"By all means, we will get into the bottom