

Biz groups support moderated teachers' pay hike

MANILA -- Business and professional groups on Wednesday endorsed the proposal of fiscal and education authorities for moderated adjustments in the pay of public school teachers.

"We believe that better education is a top national priority. We recognize, appreciate, and value public school teachers as central to this goal, aside from being important leaders of our communities, including during election time, and they deserve to be compensated better and given better training opportunities and tools," the groups said in a statement.

The groups include the Action for Economic Reforms, Financial Executives Institute of the Philippines, Foundation for Economic Freedom, Makati Business Club, Management Association of the Philippines and the Philippine Business for Education.

"In light of recent demands for an immediate PHP10,000 a month increase, however, we ask President Duterte and the teachers to phase this over time considering fairness and equity of public school teachers' pay compared to other civil servants, and the recent increases in their pay," they said.

Citing that educators with Teacher I position earn 58 percent more their private school counterparts and Associate Professors earn 109 percent more than those in private universities, the groups said "raising the disparity in pay between public and private school teachers would further fuel the migration of private school teachers to public schools, and exert financial pressures on private schools whose tuition fees are regulated by government".

They said there are other issues which must be considered to ensure quality education nationwide -- teachers' training opportunities, teaching

tools, and classrooms.

"On the macro impact on the fiscal sector, the PHP150 billion annual cost of the salary increase is roughly 1 percent of GDP (gross domestic product). To appreciate the magnitude of this, we note that the entire annual budget for the CCT (conditional cash transfer) program, which benefits 4.3 million households and promises to break inter-generational poverty, will cost less than half of this," the statement read.

Referring to Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion law or TRAIN 1, the groups noted that "there is no identified recurring source of funding for the requested salary increase".

"As such, it will raise the national government annual fiscal deficit from 3 percent to 4 percent of GDP. The last time our fiscal deficit to GDP breached 4 percent was in 2002 and 2003, driving the country's credit ratings down by two rungs and this led to higher borrowing cost to both government and private sectors, and lower investments," they said.

They added unmanaged salary increases and poorly targeted subsidies could lead to "economic collapse which recently happened in Venezuela".

"We thus commend the efforts of the Secretaries of Finance, Education, and Budget to improve the pay of our public school teachers while preserving the country's economic gains. And we fully endorse the proposal of fiscal and education authorities for moderated adjustments in pay which are phased, reflect recent salary adjustments made, benchmarked to the market and other civil service employee comparators, count the benefits of TRAIN 1 on their take-home pay, and are matched by new revenue," the groups said. (PNA)

Palace to 22 fishermen: ‘We will not abandon you’

MANILA -- Malacañang assured the 22 fishermen whose boat was allegedly rammed and abandoned by a Chinese vessel off the Recto Bank (Reed Bank) in the West Philippine Sea that justice will be served and that the Duterte administration is not turning its back on them.

Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo made this remark following criticism that President Rodrigo Duterte is turning a deaf ear on the sentiments of the fishermen who nearly drowned until a Vietnamese vessel rescued them.

"We would like to assure our fishermen na hindi namin kayo

pababayaan at hindi namin kayo pinapabayaan (that we will not abandon you and we are not abandoning you)," Panelo said in an interview at ANC.

Panelo pointed out that the economic and security clusters of the Cabinet even agreed to deploy additional Coast Guards in the Recto Bank to ensure the safety of fishermen during their meeting on Monday (June 17).

Panelo also reiterated that government will file charges against the Chinese crew if proven that the alleged ramming and abandonment was done intentionally.

"Yes, we will not allow absence of responsibility on the part

of the wrongdoers. And in fact, even the Chinese government said so itself na hindi rin sila papayag na ganoon (that they won't tolerate it)," Panelo said.

Diplomacy working

For his part, Presidential Communications Assistant Secretary for the Office of Brand Integration Ramon Cualoping III stressed that government has done so much as it filed a diplomatic protest against China over the Recto Bank incident.

Cualoping noted that Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. has also raised the issue during the recent 29th Meeting of States Par-

ties to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on Monday (June 17).

He said Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol, chairman of the government response team to primarily focus on assisting the 22 fishermen, and his co-lead, Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi, are also on top of assisting the fishermen's needs.

He said the President himself has acknowledged the maritime incident and ordered a full investigation "to determine the next steps based on accepted legal frameworks."

"Sovereignty, intact. Rights, defended. Diplomacy, working," Cualoping said in a

EU states seek increased trade, business ties in Mindanao

MANILA-- A number of European Union (EU) envoys will visit Davao City to explore business opportunities in the southern Philippines, the EU Delegation in Manila said on Wednesday.

"Our visit is a reaffirmation of our commitment and willingness to identify possible investment ventures or trade partnerships between the EU and the Southern Philippines," said EU Ambassador Franz Jessen in a statement announcing their visit.

The envoy together with Hungarian Ambassador Jozsef Bencze, Dutch Ambassador Saskia de Lang, Swedish Ambassador Harald Fries, Romanian Charges de Affaires, a.i. Mihai Sion and Special Envoy to the EU Avelino Cruz will attend this year's Davao Investment Conference from June 20 to 21. Diplomats from the embassies of Belgium and France will also attend the said conference.

Jessen said the EU supports the government's focus on rural and regional economic development especially in regions such as in Mindanao.

He also highlighted the "very promising prospects" between the two partners in terms of business and trade relations.

"The EU continues to see the Philippines as a large, fast-growing market although there is further room for the latter to intensify and to mobilize EU traders and investors in line with the size and potentiality of the Philippine market," Jessen said.

Meanwhile, Jessen urged Filipino businessmen to take advantage of the trade benefits brought by the EU Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)+ preferential scheme for Filipino exports to EU member states.

In 2018 alone, the delegation bared that almost EU2 billion worth of Philippine products, mostly agri-food items, were exported to the EU at zero tariffs.

Under the GSP+ scheme, the Philippines is allowed tariff-free exports of over 6,000 local products to the EU since December 2014 under the condition that it would comply to 27 core international conventions that cover human and labor rights, environmental protection and good governance.

While in Davao, the European ambassadors and diplomats are expected to pay a courtesy meeting on Davao Mayor Sara Duterte and to discuss with business executives from Southern Mindanao Business Council led by chairperson Tony Peralta. (PNA)

Facebook post. China's side

Meanwhile, Panelo defended Duterte's decision to wait for results of the investigation conducted by both Philippine and Chinese authorities before deciding how to address the problem.

Panelo, who earlier said it was only fair to get China's side, emphasized that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

(UNCLOS) does not mandate the rescue of distressed mariners if they pose a security threat to their rescuers.

The Chinese Embassy earlier denied abandoning the Filipino fishermen claiming that the Chinese captain tried to rescue them but was "afraid of being besieged by other Filipino fishing boats."

"The Chinese government has to investi-

2 Filipinos killed, 3 others hurt in New Zealand train-car crash

MANILA-- Two Filipinos were killed while three others were injured following a train and car accident in New Zealand, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) reported on Wednesday.

"Two of the five Filipinos passed away due to the accident, while three were injured. The incident happened at the Bay of Plenty on Pongakawa School Road near Te Puke in northern New Zealand," the agency, through Assistant Secretary Emmanuel Fernandez, said in a bulletin.

The DFA assured that the Philippine embassy in Wellington is in close coordination with local authorities as it tries to ascertain the identities of the Filipinos.

"The embassy stands ready to provide the necessary assistance to the Filipinos and their families," it added.

According to local news, the crash was reported to local authorities at around 8:15 a.m. local time.

The two Filipinos were reportedly working as fruit pickers in Te Puke, and were riding the vehicle when it hit a train at the intersection with Pongakawa School Road. (PNA)

gate why they did it, 'di ba? We want to know bakit kayo natakot (why were you afraid)? Was this fear justified, 'di ba (right)?" Panelo said.

"Even under the UNCLOS, while you are required to give assistance to ship or passengers in a vessel in distress, if it endangers your own safety you are not required to do that," he added. (PNA)