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COMMITTEE MEETINGS ON HOUSE MEASURES

COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Good Government and Public Accountability	HR 879	Rep. Zarate	Investigation into the sudden big spike in Manila Electric Company (MERALCO) electricity rates and bills despite the overcapacity of electricity supply	The Committee, chaired by Rep. "Kuya" Jose Antonio Sy-Alvarado (1 st District, Bulacan), will continue its inquiry relative to HRs 879 and 882 in its next meeting.
	HR 882	Rep. Lacson	Inquiry into the sudden increase in electricity rates and interruptions during the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) and general community quarantine (GCQ)	<p>At the outset, Rep. Sy-Alvarado said that numerous complaints were raised against MERALCO for the alleged spike in electricity bills during the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ). Although MERALCO has already given its explanation on the issue in previous meetings, the Committee wants to be apprised of the developments since then. Rep. Sy-Alvarado also said the Committee wants to ensure that electricity rates remain fair and that the pandemic does not become an opportunity for electric companies and cooperatives to overcharge consumers.</p> <p>In previous meetings, MERALCO explained that the company was unable to do actual meter-reading and resorted to using estimates in determining the electric bills during the ECQ and GCQ period. Because of this, many consumers received bills that were a lot higher than their usual electric bills prior to the pandemic. MERALCO promised to immediately conduct meter-reading to determine the actual consumption and adjust the billing of the consumers for the periods involved.</p> <p>MERALCO President and Chief Executive Officer Ray Espinosa assured the Committee and the public that MERALCO bills are now based on meter readings and reflect consumers' actual electricity consumption. He also reported that the company has made a number of initiatives to help alleviate the situation of its consumers during the pandemic including waving the guaranteed minimum billing demand (GMBD) for some 87,000 business customers, most of which are small and medium enterprises, corresponding to savings for these businesses amounting to a total of P1.65 billion. MERALCO also invoked the provision of <i>force majeure</i> in some of its power supply agreements with generation companies to lower generation charges resulting in a total of P1.9 billion worth of savings for all customers; and waived and refunded the convenience fee for online transactions. (The Convenience Fee is charged to customers who settle their bills through Meralco's online payment platform, PayMaya.)</p>

<p>Continuation... Good Government and Public Accountability</p>				<p>Espinosa likewise informed the Committee that MERALCO heeded the request of Speaker Alan Peter “Compañero” Cayetano (1st District, Taguig City-Pateros) to extend relief to lifeline customers or those whose electric consumption is 100 kilowatt per hour and below. He said that MERALCO is setting aside P101 million to assist 2.77 million lifeline customers in the form of discount on distribution charges.</p> <p>Upon the request of the Committee, Espinosa agreed to extend the moratorium on the issuance of disconnection notices and disconnection of services due to unpaid bills until the end of October 2020. Initially it was only until September 30.</p> <p>Several lawmakers gave their suggestions on how electricity costs could further be reduced.</p> <p>Senior Deputy Majority Leader Jesus Crispin Remulla (7th District, Cavite) asked the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) if it would be possible for distribution utilities to unbundle/disaggregate systems loss and to prevent electric companies from passing the cost of technical systems loss to consumers.</p> <p>ERC Commissioner Agnes Devanadera said that disaggregating technical from non-technical systems loss is difficult and was the reason why the ERC only put a cap on the amount of systems loss that electric companies could pass on to their consumers. In light of this, Deputy Speaker Rodante Marcoleta (Party-List, SAGIP) suggested for the ERC to disallow power companies from passing on systems loss to consumers instead.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Deputy Speaker Dan Fernandez (1st District, Laguna) raised the issue on the computation of MERALCO’s profit using the weighted average cost of capital (WACC). At present, MERALCO is allowed a WACC of 14.9% as its risk-free rate since 2015 which should have been “reset” by the ERC at a much lower rate in 2019, as mandated by law. With a WACC of 14.9% even up to this time is questionable, Deputy Speaker Fernandez averred.</p> <p>WACC is a firm's cost of capital in which each category of capital is proportionately weighted. An increase in WACC denotes an increase in risk that the company may incur. (Source: Investopedia)</p> <p>Devanadera could not explain the reason why the WACC for MERALCO was not adjusted. Nevertheless, she said that the ERC is already addressing the matter and committed that the WACC will be adjusted before the year ends. She also said that the ERC could direct the MERALCO to refund the overcharges should there be a need to do the same as a result of the adjusted WACC.</p>
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Overseas Workers Affairs	HB No. 530	Rep. Paduano	Creating the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) Sovereign Fund	The Committee, chaired by Rep. Raymond Democrito Mendoza (Party-List, TUCP), approved the Committee Report on HB 530.
Ways and Means	Substitute Bill to HBs 191, 3671 & 1043	Reps. Suansing (E.), Garin (S.), and Singson-Meehan	Enhancing revenue administration and collection by granting amnesty on all unpaid impositions levied by government for taxable year 2018 and prior years	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Joey Sarte Salceda (2nd District, Albay), approved with amendments the Substitute Bill to HBs 191, 3671 and 1043.</p> <p>During the meeting, the Committee agreed to adopt the recommendation of the Department of Finance (DOF) that an individual or corporate taxpayer will only be subjected to a one-year examination of pertinent documents if at least 20% tax will be levied on the taxpayer's total assets as of December 31, 2018 as declared in the Statement of Total Assets (STA).</p> <p>Rep. Salceda added that the proposal to not extend the proposed general tax amnesty to business entities with pending cases in courts pertaining to smuggling and other violations of customs laws should just be discussed during the Substitute Bill's deliberation in the plenary.</p>
	Substitute Bill to HB 5982	Rep. Romulo	Establishing the Philippine High School for Creative Arts (PHSCA) System and appropriating funds therefor	<p>The Committee approved the tax provisions of the Substitute Bill to HB 5982 subject to style and amendment.</p> <p>Rep. Salceda recommended that the exemption from customs duties be extended to the importation of equipment relating to creative industry, provided that these are of international standards and are not available from local manufacturers and that the importation shall only be in such numbers as may be required in the development of programs and/or training of the students of the PHSCA System.</p>
	Substitute Bill to HBs 6449, 1855 & 1936	Reps. Go (M.), Rodriguez, and Deputy Speaker Romero	Strengthening the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), amending for the purpose RA 7722, otherwise known as the Higher Education Act of 1994 and appropriating funds therefor	<p>The Committee approved with amendments the tax provisions of the Substitute Bill to HBs 6449, 1855 and 1936.</p> <p>Rep. Salceda recommended that the Bureau of the Treasury (BTr) be designated as the portfolio manager of CHED's Trust Fund instead of a "reputable government financial institution" as stated in Section 16 (Management and Administration of the Trust Fund) of the Substitute Bill.</p>
	Substitute Bill to HB 6795	Rep. Junie Cua	Providing for Government Financial Institutions Unified Initiatives to Distressed Enterprises for Economic Recovery (GUIDE)	<p>The Committee approved the tax provisions of the Substitute Bill to HB 6795. It was agreed that the comments and recommendations of the Members and the resource persons be attached to the Committee Report.</p> <p>Rep. Arlene Brosas (Party-List, GABRIELA) said that the proposed law should ensure that the plight of the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) amidst the pandemic are taken into consideration.</p> <p>Rep. Salceda and Quirino Rep. Junie Cua, author of HB 6795, agreed that further</p>

Continuation... Ways and Means				discussions on the contentious issues of the Substitute Bill should just be held during the Substitute Bill's deliberation in the plenary.
	HB 826	Deputy Speaker Gonzales (A.)	Providing for protection of the remittances of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs)	<p>The Committee will continue to discuss the tax provisions of HB 826 in another meeting.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Aurelio "Dong" Gonzales Jr. (3rd District, Pampanga), author of HB 826, explained that his bill seeks to put a limit on the amount of remittance fees and charges in order to safeguard the remittances sent by OFWs. He explained that apart from the remittance fees paid by OFWs to remittance centers abroad, local banks and non-bank financial institutions also collect service fees from the beneficiary or receiver of the remittance. In the course of the fund transfer, the amount remitted becomes depleted to the detriment of the beneficiaries.</p> <p>The President and Trustee of the Association of Remittance Company Compliance Officers of the Philippines, Guada Vergel de Dios, said that there already exists a market-driven framework being implemented by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) and the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) that essentially brings down the cost of remittance of OFWs.</p> <p>Concurring with the statement of De Dios, the Association of Bank Remittance Officers, Inc. recommended that industry competition be allowed to prosper to naturally bring down the remittance fees.</p> <p>The DOF was requested to submit its calculation of the projected revenue loss of the government if the proposed law is enacted.</p>

TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP MEETING ON HOUSE MEASURES				
COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/ DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Health (Technical Working Group)	HBs 6096, 6383, 6633, 6651, 6655, 6711, 6718, 7013, 7243, 7283, 7290 & 7314	Reps. Salceda, Haresco, Tan (A), Garcia (J. E.), Deloso-Montalla, Chipeco, Deputy Speaker Hernandez, Reps. Vargas, Espino, Deputy Speaker Villafuerte, Reps. Tambunting and Rodriguez	Establishing the Philippine Center for Disease Control and Prevention	<p>The technical working group (TWG), chaired by Rep. Jose Enrique "Joet" Garcia III (2nd District, Bataan), will deliberate further on the 12 bills in its next meeting. The TWG agreed to consolidate the bills and come up with a working draft.</p> <p>Rep. Garcia, who is also the author of HB 6651, explained the need to build a public health system that will enhance, develop, and use scientific expertise to bring a new level of preparedness that can readily deal with infectious diseases, which may become an outbreak or pandemic.</p> <p>The Committee Chair and author of HB 6633, Rep. Angelina "Helen" Tan, M.D. (4th District, Quezon) underscored the importance of establishing the Center for Disease Prevention</p>

Continuation... Health (Technical Working Group)				<p>and Control (CDPC) which will serve as the principal agency mandated to develop and apply communicable disease prevention and control initiatives.</p> <p>Expressing support for the bills were representatives from the Departments of Health (DOH), the Interior and Local Government (DILG), Agriculture (DA), Justice (DOJ), National Defense (DND), and Labor and Employment (DOLE); and from the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine, World Health Organization, Philippine Medical Association, and Medical Action Group.</p> <p>Among the recommendations made by the Members and the resource persons were the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed CDPC shall be an independent agency with its own budget, organizational structure, and staffing pattern. It shall have regulatory functions and shall gather information on how to address outbreaks and pandemics, focusing on diseases with high mortality rate; • Government agencies with functions related to disease prevention and control shall be placed under the proposed CDC; • The local government units shall be empowered to manage epidemics in their respective localities through an efficient and effective system of coordination and implementation at the regional level; and • A national reference laboratory shall be established, which will be at the forefront in the diagnostic surveillance for notifiable diseases. <p>Rep. Garcia requested the resource persons to submit their respective position papers on the proposed law.</p>
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DISCUSSION WITH AGENCIES/ENTITIES		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Cooperatives Development	Discussion on the proposed FY 2021 budget of the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA)	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Sabiniano Canama (Party-List, COOP-NATCCO), discussed the 2021 proposed budget of the CDA.</p> <p>At the outset, Rep. Canama reminded the Members that the CDA's original budget proposal of P806 million was slashed by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to only around P600 million which was the agency's budget level in previous years. Rep. Canama expressed concern that with such a meager funding, the CDA will not be able to fully implement the provisions of RA 11364 or the CDA Charter of 2019. One of the salient provisions of the law is the reorganization of the CDA.</p> <p>DBM Budget and Management Bureau A OIC-Director Mary Grace delos Santos confirmed that under the 2021 National Expenditure Program (NEP), the CDA is set to receive P649 million. She explained</p>

<p>Continuation... Cooperatives Development</p>		<p>that because of the pandemic, government revenues have decreased, thus the government has to set its priorities and lower its expenditures. Delos Santos disclosed that the DBM has no basis for providing CDA the funding to implement RA 11364 because the latter was not able to submit the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the law. Hence, it was assumed that the law is not yet implementable.</p> <p>CDA Chairman Orlando Ravanera and CDA Executive Director Ray Elevazo explained that the IRR was already approved by the CDA Board as early as January of this year. However, Elevazo said that the CDA still conducted consultations with the cooperative sector and concerned government offices to discuss and review the IRR as the proposals from the cooperative sector were allegedly not incorporated. This, according to Elevazo caused the delay. Nevertheless, Ravanera promised to submit the final IRR and other documents needed by the DBM at the soonest possible time.</p> <p>Rep. Canama asked for the DBM's advice on how the CDA can get hold of additional funding. Delos Santos said that the CDA can request funding from the President's Contingency Fund which is available on a first come, first served basis and is subject to the approval of the President.</p> <p>The Committee agreed to request the DBM to increase the budget of the CDA.</p> <p>On the reorganization of the CDA, DBM Organization, Position Classification and Compensation Bureau Director Gerald Janda said that in June, the DBM sent a letter to CDA advising it to revisit its reorganizational plan and implement the plan in phases. He added that for the 2021 NEP, the DBM has included a certain amount under the Miscellaneous Personnel Benefits Fund that may be tapped for the creation of necessary positions in the CDA. To facilitate the evaluation of the proposed reorganizational plan, the DBM likewise advised that it should be approved first by the CDA Board and endorsed by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) considering that the CDA is an attached agency of the DTI.</p> <p>DTI Assistant Director for Small and Medium Enterprises Development Bureau Alicia Opeña mentioned that the cooperative sector could also benefit from DTI's Shared Service Facilities Program, which has a proposed budget of P578 million for FY 2021.</p>
<p>North Luzon Growth Quadrangle (Special Committee)</p>	<p>Consultative meeting with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) on its proposed FY 2021 budget, plans and programs, as well as programs implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic for Regions I & II and the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR)</p>	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Ramon Guico III (5th District, Pangasinan), discussed with the DOLE its proposed FY 2021 budget, plans and programs, as well as programs implemented in North Luzon in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>DOLE is implementing various programs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and in support of RA 11469 or the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act. Some of these are the: Covid-19 Adjustment Measures Program (CAMP); Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Displaced/Disadvantaged Workers Program #Barangay Ko, Bahay Ko Disinfecting/Sanitation Project (TUPAD #BKBK); AKAP for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs); DOLE Integrated Livelihood Program (DILP); Social Amelioration Program (SAP); and the Social Amelioration and Welfare Program-Adjustment Measure Initiative for Biofuel Workers (SAWP-AMin).</p> <p>The Department also crafted and monitors the compliance of businesses or employers with the DTI-DOLE Interim Guidelines on Workplace Prevention and Control of COVID-19, including the observance of minimum health protocols and standards.</p> <p>DOLE Region I Director Nathaniel Lacambra reported that DOLE's proposed budget for 2021 in Region I is P120.96 million, which is</p>

<p>Continuation... North Luzon Growth Quadrangle (Special Committee)</p>	<p>133% higher than its 2020 budget of P51.90 million. Lacambra explained that the huge increase in the budget for Region I is due to the needed funding for the construction of additional offices in the region and the implementation of programs in response to the pandemic.</p> <p>Lacambra reported that DOLE Region I made disbursements amounting to P160.72 million for the period April and August 2020 for its programs related to the government's fight against COVID-19.</p> <p>For AKAP for OFWs Program, Lacambra said that as of August 2020, his office has disbursed a total of P65.1 million benefitting almost 6,500 OFWs. The program is intended for OFWs who were displaced from their jobs and those who were repatriated due to the receiving country's imposition of lockdown or community quarantine.</p> <p>As regards to CAMP, Lacambra reported that as of April 2020, his office has disbursed P95.62 million to 19,048 worker beneficiaries in Region I.</p> <p>Lacambra sought the lawmakers' assistance to facilitate the implementation of DOLE programs in the different local government units (LGUs) which is being hampered by LGU-imposed COVID 19 health protocols.</p> <p>DOLE Region II Director Evelyn Ramos informed the Committee that DOLE Region II's proposed budget for next year is P444.44 million.</p> <p>Ramos said that her office has released a total of P459.79 million to 99,617 beneficiaries in the region severely affected by the pandemic under the various amelioration and assistance programs of DOLE.</p> <p>For CAR, Regional Director Ronnie de Guzman said that his office has proposed a budget next year of P40 million for the Special Program for Employment of Students (SPES) and P60 million for various livelihood programs.</p> <p>De Guzman also highlighted the total funds disbursed for DOLE-CAR's various programs amounting to P146.56 million.</p> <p>On the query of Rep. Kristine Singson-Meehan (2nd District, Ilocos Sur) relative to the guidelines on the allocation of funds under the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act or Bayanihan2, Lacambra explained that DOLE is still waiting for the enactment of the measure into law before the guidelines will be formulated.</p> <p>Asked by Nueva Vizcaya Rep. Luisa Lloren Cuaresma about the status of the SPES funds, Ramos replied that the funds were not utilized for the program because of the imposition of the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) and other quarantine measures. Instead, the funds were realigned to the TUPAD and Government Internship Program (GIP), Ramos said.</p> <p>Rep. Christopher de Venecia (4th District, Pangasinan) noted that majority of workers and employers in the private sector are not aware of the Interim Guidelines on Workplace Prevention and Control of COVID-19 signed by Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Secretary Ramon Lopez and DOLE Secretary Silvestre Bello III. Rep. De Venecia underscored the need for a massive information campaign regarding the guidelines.</p> <p>Lacambra said that DOLE is constantly coordinating with the private sector in the implementation of these guidelines.</p> <p>The regional directors responded to the queries raised by the Members of the Committee with regard to concerns specific to their</p>
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<p>Continuation... North Luzon Growth Quadrangle (Special Committee)</p>		<p>districts. They were requested to submit a detailed report on the disbursed funds per congressional district.</p>
<p>Overseas Workers Affairs</p>	<p>Continuation of discussion on matters affecting the rights and welfare of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) during the COVID-19 pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update on the number of OFWs affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the number of repatriated OFWs and those who will be repatriated in the coming months 	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Raymond Democrito Mendoza (Party-List, TUCP), continued its discussion with concerned government agencies on matters affecting the rights and welfare of OFWs during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs Sarah Lou Arriola reported that as of August 23, 9,984 OFWs were infected by COVID-19 worldwide with 5,953 recoveries, 733 deaths, and 3,298 active cases. Majority of the cases were OFWs working in the Middle East, particularly Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and in Africa. Most of the deaths that were reported also came from Saudi Arabia because its healthcare system is reportedly already overwhelmed by COVID-19 cases. The third continent with the highest number of OFWs with COVID illness is Europe which accounts for 1,158 cases, more than half of which came from the United Kingdom.</p> <p>Arriola also informed the body that as of August 23, the DFA facilitated the repatriation of 146,360 OFWs (land-based and sea-based) from over 80 countries and 135 cruise ships. For the months of July and August, the DFA was able to repatriate 50,887 and 30,567 OFWs, respectively, explaining that the decrease in the number of repatriated OFWs in August was due to the declaration of the modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ) in the National Capital Region. However, Arriola said that the number will most likely increase by the end of August since the MECQ was already lifted in the NCR.</p> <p>She added that 11,205 distressed OFWs were repatriated through 42 DFA-chartered flights using the Assistance-to-Nationals (ATN) Fund, reducing the funds to P79 million. However, the allocation of P820 million under the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act (Bayanihan 2) specifically for the repatriation of Filipinos would further expedite the repatriation process and finish the repatriation of the remaining stranded Filipinos by the end of September. An estimate of 78,787 Filipinos are still stranded worldwide according to Arriola.</p> <p>Department of Labor and Employment's (DOLE) Director of the International Labor Affairs Bureau Alice Visperas briefed the Committee on DOLE's COVID-19 Adjustment Measures Program - Abot Kamay and Pagtulong (CAMP-AKAP) for OFWs. The program provides financial assistance amounting to \$200 or P10,000 to qualified OFWs (on-site and those in the Philippines) who have been permanently or temporarily displaced from their work due to COVID-19. OFWs who have been repatriated and those categorized as "Balik Manggagawa" who could not return to their overseas jobs due to travel restrictions are also qualified for certain benefits under the program.</p> <p>Balik-Manggagawa are vacationing OFWs who are returning to the same employer and job site and have a record in the database of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA). <i>(source: POEA website)</i></p> <p>According to Visperas, a total of P2.5 billion was released in two tranches to DOLE for the CAMP-AKAP Program through the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act. Out of the 250,000 intended OFW beneficiaries, 239,788 have already received assistance amounting to P2.46 billion as of August 19.</p> <p>With regard to its own repatriation program, Visperas said that DOLE assisted the repatriation of 163,508 OFWs to date, and that 13,259</p>

<p>Continuation... Overseas Workers Affairs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarantine Procedure for returning OFWs upon their arrival at the airport/seaport and at their respective provinces, cities or municipalities 	<p>more are about to be repatriated soon. Meanwhile, 147,055 displaced OFWs decided to stay on-site (in the host country). An estimate of 150,000 to 200,000 OFWs are expected to be repatriated by the end of December.</p> <p>Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) Administrator Hans Leo Caddac confirmed the figures cited by DOLE. He also reported on how the OWWA fund is being utilized relative to the repatriation of OFWs. He explained that 97,000 OFWs were temporarily placed in hotels to comply with the 14-day mandatory quarantine.</p> <p>He also reported that the P5 billion additional budget to augment the emergency repatriation fund for returning displaced OFWs due to the COVID-19 pandemic were allocated as follows: P3 billion for hotel accommodation and quarantine of returning OFWs; P1 billion for financial assistance under the CAMP-AKAP Program; and P1 billion for transportation and food expenses as well as cremation and funeral expenses for deceased OFWs. A total of P892 million have already been spent on hotel expenses to date.</p> <p>POEA Administrator Bernard Olalia apprised the body of the status of overseas deployment of OFWs since January. Expectedly, the number drastically reduced from a high of 252,177 in January to a low of 14,825 in July. He said that the POEA is still consolidating its data for the month of August.</p> <p>Olalia also explained that the travel restrictions and lockdowns that were implemented by various countries because of the pandemic had a huge impact on OFW deployments this year. However, he said that the deployments have gradually increased particularly for seafarers since the implementation of the “green lane” last month.</p> <p>The establishment of the “Philippine Green Lane” would ensure that seafarers are accorded speedy and safe travel, subject to health protocols mandated by the Philippine government, including safe and swift disembarkation and crew change during the COVID-19 pandemic. It shall cover seafarers, licensed manning agencies, shipping companies, airlines, and other entities involved in facilitating the travel of seafarers for purposes of crew change and repatriation during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Source: DFA website)</p> <p>On the query of Rep. Arlene Brosas (Party-List, GABRIELA) on the main cause of delay in the repatriation of OFWs, Arriola said that it is the OFWs’ lack of exit visa which is a requirement in some host countries especially in the Middle East. She explained that OFWs find it difficult to secure their exit visas when they have pending cases filed against their employers or if their employers did not give them permission to leave. The DFA would intervene through a renegotiation or buying of contract which would take time to process.</p> <p>With regard to the quarantine procedures for OFWs, Arriola said that in the Middle East, RT-PCR (reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction) tests are being conducted on passengers prior to their departure. She suggested that the result of the test be recognized by the Philippine government so that the OFWs will not undergo the same test when they arrive in the country.</p> <p>Quarantine Medical Officer Edgar Maala of the Bureau of Quarantine, Department of Health said that there is no directive yet from the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF) on accepting OFWs’ RT-PCR results that were conducted overseas. However, Maala recommended that if the test results will be accepted in the Philippines, results of RT-PCR test conducted in the Philippines should also be accepted in other destination countries.</p>
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<p>Continuation... Overseas Workers Affairs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of "green lane" for crew change/deployment of seafarers • The case of the 96 repatriated fishers who were deprived of their salaries/benefits by their shipowner and manning agency (Global Maritime Crew, Inc.) 	<p>National Task Force against COVID-19 representative and Department of National Defense Undersecretary Cesar Yano said that OFWs undergoing the RT-PCR test twice is a waste of resources apart from it being an additional inconvenience for OFWs.</p> <p>League of Provinces President Presbitero Velasco explained that some local government units (LGUs) are imposing the conduct of the RT-PCR tests again on returning OFWs to ensure that the latter would not cause the spread of the virus in the provinces. He also cited reports that not all OFWs go home to their provinces immediately after their RT-PCR tests in Manila.</p> <p>Rep. Mendoza is amenable to the suggestion of the DFA that results of COVID tests done in the country of departure be accepted in the Philippines. He asked the IATF to consider the same in order to expedite the process for the return of OFWs to their respective provinces, and to minimize the costs of conducting these tests on the part of the government.</p> <p>Office for Transportation Security (OTS) Administrator Raul Del Rosario apprised the body that the "green lane" protocol was first implemented in the Port of Manila, followed by the Port of Capinpin in Bataan, and the Subic Bay Port just this month of August.</p> <p>Rep. Macnell Lusotan (Party-List, MARINO) suggested the deployment of more sea vessels to facilitate the dispatch of outbound seafarers who tested negative of COVID-19. He explained that outbound seafarers have a high risk of being infected prior to their departure if they will be transported using the same vessel that carried inbound seafarers who may have been infected by COVID-19.</p> <p>Jesus Gaboni, one of the repatriated fishers shared his experience as an employee of the Global Maritime Crew, Inc. which includes unpaid salaries, overtime pay, and bonuses. He added that he has not received yet the P10,000 financial assistance under DOLE's CAMP-AKAP Program. He also urged the government that the remains of his companion, one of the fishers who passed away, be immediately brought home and sent to his family.</p> <p>Rep. Ferdinand Gaité (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) inquired on the status of stranded seafarers aboard the ships of Global Maritime Crew Inc. which are currently stranded in China and Uruguay.</p> <p>Arriola answered that the DFA is still looking for the appropriate ports for the ships' disembarkation. With regard to the remains of one of the fishers, Arriola said that the DFA is coordinating with the Philippine Embassy in Santiago, Chile to expedite the transfer of the remains back to the Philippines. She explained that due to the health protocols being implemented by countries because of the pandemic, the transport of remains takes longer than usual.</p> <p>Olalia stated that the license of Global Maritime Crew Inc. has already expired, but the OFWs may still have recourse through the escrow bond of the agency if a monetary claim is filed with the National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC). He added that POEA will assist the fishers file their claims with the NLRC.</p>
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