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BUDGET BRIEFINGS

COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Appropriations	<p>Briefing on the proposed FY 2021 budget, plans and programs, and major accomplishments of the following government offices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) 	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Eric Go Yap (Party-List, ACT-CIS), listened to the presentations on the proposed FY 2021 budget, plans and programs, and major accomplishments of the DOLE, DOST, DTI, and PCOO.</p> <p>Committee Vice Chair, Rep. David "Jay-Jay" Suarez (2nd District, Quezon), sat as the presiding officer during the DOLE's budget briefing.</p> <p>In the interest of time, the Committee agreed to dispense with the DOLE's presentation and proceeded with asking questions regarding specific items in the budget proposal.</p> <p>Based on the FY 2021 National Expenditure Program (NEP), the DOLE is set to receive a budget of P27.53 billion which is 53.7% higher than this year's budget of 17.91 billion. The bulk of DOLE's budget will go to maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE), P20.88 billion; and the rest will be distributed as follows: personnel services (PS), P6.57 billion; capital outlay (CO), P69.67 million; and financial expenses, P9.72 million.</p> <p>Minority Leader Bienvenido Abante Jr. (6th District, Manila) commended DOLE and its attached agencies, under the leadership of Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III, for addressing the concerns of the labor sector and the OFWs during the pandemic.</p> <p>Bello thanked the Minority Leader, expressing his commitment that DOLE will remain true to its mandate to serve the workers both in the formal and informal sectors, as well as the OFWs.</p> <p>Rep. Arlene Brosas (Party-List, GABRIELA) asked about the status of implementation of RA 11058 or the Occupational Safety and Health Standards (OSHS) Law amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>DOLE's Occupational Safety and Health Center Executive Director Noel Binag said that trainings and technical services on occupational safety are continuously being conducted amidst the pandemic by using appropriate online platforms. Compliance inspection of establishments and workplaces, including PEZA-registered enterprises, are also being conducted by the regional offices.</p> <p>DOLE Assistant Secretary and concurrent Bureau of Working Conditions Director Ma. Teresita Cucueco added that as early as April 30, the DOLE, together with the DTI, already issued interim guidelines on the minimum health standards that should be observed by establishments to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 disease. Supplemental guidelines were later issued in August. She said that inspections were conducted to ensure compliance with the OSHS Law and with the minimum health standard protocols starting May covering 45,000 establishments with about 1.5 million workers. Out of these, 31,000 establishments were found to be fully compliant while the rest were only 75% compliant.</p> <p>Rep. Geraldine Roman (1st District, Bataan) urged DOLE to fast-track the implementation of the Government Internship Program (GIP) given that there are a few months left in 2020.</p>

Continuation...
Appropriations

DOLE Assistant Secretary and concurrent Bureau of Local Employment Director Dominique Tutay said that the GIP for FY 2020, with an allotment of P473 million, has already benefited 11,102 youth beneficiaries, which is more than the target of 10,599. When asked by Rep. Roman why other intended areas have yet to be served by the Program, Tutay manifested that regional GIP funding is ready for downloading by the OSEC as quarantine restrictions are gradually being lifted.

Rep. Christopher de Venecia (4th District, Pangasinan) asked how DOLE will implement the cash-for-work program for freelancers which was included in the proposed Bayanihan to Recover as One Act (Bayanihan II).

DOLE's Bureau of Workers with Special Concerns Director Ma. Karina Perida-Trayvilla said that the list of freelance workers should be submitted to the Department so that they will be included in the "Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD) Program."

On the query of Rep. Ferdinand Gaité (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA), Tutay admitted that only a small portion of the workers who became unemployed because of the pandemic were given assistance by DOLE through its TUPAD and COVID-19 Adjustment Measures Program (CAMP). To address the gaps, Tutay said that affected workers who have not received assistance from DOLE under the Bayanihan To Heal as One Act (Bayanihan I) may be included in the implementation of the Bayanihan II once it is enacted.

TUPAD is a community-based package of assistance that provides emergency employment for displaced workers, underemployed, and seasonal workers for a minimum period of 10 days, but not to exceed a maximum of 30 days, depending on the nature of work to be performed. On the other hand, CAMP is a one-time financial assistance in the amount of P5,000 given to workers in private establishments to mitigate the adverse economic impacts and reduction of income brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. These two programs were given to affected workers under the Bayanihan I.

Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo (2nd District, Marikina City) asked if DOLE has assistance for workers in establishments that implemented flexible work arrangements because of the pandemic. She explained that although these workers are still employed, their salaries were reduced since their days of work were also reduced.

Tutay answered that these workers are covered under the CAMP. She added that DOLE is coordinating with the Department of Finance and Social Security System with regard to the implementation of the Small Business Wage Subsidy Program. Under this Program the government, through the SSS, shall provide a wage subsidy of between P5,000 and P8,000 (based on the regional minimum wage) per month per eligible employee to help mitigate the impact of the pandemic and the subsequent quarantines.

When asked if DOLE will continue with the labor export policy of the government amidst the pandemic, Bello said that the deployment of OFWs continues except for nurses and medical workers. The governing board of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) passed a resolution declaring a temporary suspension of the deployment of nurses and medical workers abroad, which was approved by the Inter-Agency Task Force for Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID). The deployment ban does not cover "all medical and allied healthcare professionals with perfected and signed overseas employment contracts as of March 8, 2020." However, because of the clamor from health workers' organizations, the DOLE and POEA recommended to the IATF-EID to extend the

Continuation...
Appropriations

- Department of Science and Technology (DOST)

exemption to those who have completed their deployment papers on or before August 31, 2020. The IATF-EID has not yet decided on the matter.

After addressing the specific concerns raised by the Members, DOLE was requested to submit to the Committee an updated report on the status of its programs.

The Committee terminated the briefing on the FY 2021 proposed budget of DOLE and its attached agencies.

Committee Vice Chair, Muntinlupa City Rep. Rozzano Rufino Biazon, sat as the presiding officer during the DOST's budget briefing.

DOST Secretary Fortunato de la Peña informed the body that the original budget proposal of the DOST System for FY 2021 is P36.27 billion but the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) only approved a budget of P23.89 billion under the NEP.

The DBM-approved budget of P23.89 billion will be distributed by expense class as follows: CO, P1.91 billion; MOOE, P17.67 billion; and PS, P4.31 billion.

Rep. Sarah Jane Elago (Party-List, KABATAAN) asked the DOST on the programs that will be affected due to the reduction in the DOST's budget by the DBM.

DOST Assistant Secretary for Finance and Strategic Planning Maridon Sahagun said that the research and development program and the capital outlay of the DOST are the ones that will be affected.

Secretary De la Peña cited the following research institutes that will operate on a reduced capacity: Metals Industry Research and Development Center (MIRDC), Philippine Nuclear Research Institute (PNRI), and the Philippine Textile Research Institute (PTRI). Fortunately, he said, the DBM approved the budget for the establishment of the Virology Science and Technology Institute which shall delve into the study of viruses or the field of virology and the development of diagnostics, vaccines and therapeutics, among others.

PNRI Director Carlo Arcilla said that had the budget of PNRI not been slashed, it was planning to procure new medical equipment that can provide an early diagnosis of cancer called the PET-CT (Positron Emission Tomography - Computed Tomography) Scan. He said it is so expensive to have a PET-CT scan that only rich patients can usually afford. Thus, procuring these machines and making it accessible and available in more hospitals or diagnostic centers would bring down the cost of using the machine from about P70,000 to P25,000.

Rep. Biazon inquired on the status of the "Tuklas Lunas Program" of the DOST. De la Peña said that the DOST is now collaborating with various research institutions to study and discover the potential of lagundi drug to treat patients with COVID-19. The focus of the study is on the drug's ability to regress the symptoms of patients from severe and moderate to mild.

The Tuklas Lunas Program aims to harness the potential of the country's own resources to develop locally sourced drugs in order to make them more accessible and affordable to communities. The Program also aims to help strengthen the capacities of both researchers and the local industry in drug discovery and development. (Source: DOST website)

Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) asked about the process of conducting clinical trial once a vaccine is discovered for

Continuation...
Appropriations

- Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), including the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA)

COVID-19. He also asked about the concrete steps taken by the DOST in preventing "brain drain" or the departure of Filipino scientists from the country to work abroad due to better professional opportunities.

De la Peña and DOST's Philippine Council for Health Research and Development Executive Director Jaime Montoya assured the body that prior to the conduct of clinical trials, several requirements have to be met to ensure the safety of those who will participate in the trial. He explained that a drug or vaccine that is developed by a certain institution or drug company has to be approved by its own ethics board or advisory committee. Upon such approval, the drug or vaccine will go through the technical evaluation of the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board of the DOST, which in turn will recommend the same to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for final approval.

Montoya emphasized the importance of conducting clinical trials in the Philippines especially if the vaccine was developed in another country. He said that vaccines may react differently depending on the genetic makeup of individuals, thus the vaccines that are proven to be effective in Western countries may not automatically be effective in the Philippines. He added that there is really a need to further develop the research capabilities of the country pertaining to emerging infectious diseases.

On the issue of brain drain, De la Peña said that the country should attract more foreign investors to establish technology-based industries in the country that would open up better job opportunities to Filipino scientists.

Rep. Rosanna "Ria" Vergara (3rd District, Nueva Ecija) asked about the P133.36 million budget cut of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) from its original budget proposal for FY 2021.

DOST Undersecretary Renato Solidum Jr. confirmed the budget cut. De la Peña said he is still hopeful that the 2021 budget of Phivolcs will be increased so that modern warning devices on volcanic eruptions can be procured. However, De la Peña assured the body that Phivolcs will still strive to effectively fulfill its functions despite the reduction in its budget.

Reps. De Venecia, Godofredo Guya (Party-List, RECOBODA), and Julienne Baronda (Iloilo City) expressed their support to augment the budget of the DOST particularly for its research and development programs.

The Committee terminated the briefing on the FY 2021 proposed budget of the DOST and its attached agencies.

Committee Vice Chair, Rep. Manuel Zubiri (3rd District, Bukidnon) presided over the proposed budget of DTI, including TESDA.

DTI Secretary Ramon Lopez said that under the NEP, the DTI and its attached agencies and corporations will get a total budget of P22.40 billion which is 4% lower than its 2020 budget of P23.30 billion.

The proposed P22.40 billion budget will be distributed as follows:

- Office of the DTI Secretary - P5.35 billion;
- TESDA - P13.5 billion;
- Small Business Corporation (SB Corp) - P1.5 billion;
- Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) - P611.5 million;
- Board of Investments (BOI) - P383.06 million;
- Aurora Pacific and Economic Zone Authority (APECO) - P168.72 million;
- Center for International Trade Expositions and Missions

Continuation...
Appropriations

(CITEM) - P141.88 million;

- Construction Industry Authority of the Philippines (CIAP) - 124.57 million;
- Design Center of the Philippines (DCP) - P110.7 million; and
- Philippine Trade Training Center (PTTC) - P69.19 million.

Also included are the automatic appropriations for Retirement and Life Insurance Premiums (RLIP), P407.62 million, and Special Account, P23.42 million.

Deputy Speaker Loren Legarda (Antique) asked why the DTI's Shared Service Facilities (SSF) Project is being given a budget of only P500 million. She emphasized the importance of SSF on the stability of MSMEs which play a vital role in the country's economic recovery especially in this time of pandemic.

The Trade Secretary said that the budget allocated for SSF for 2021 is in fact a welcome development as he explained that the SSF's budget for this year was not released to the Department but instead utilized by the government for programs in response to COVID-19. The SSF is a flagship project of the DTI aimed at improving the competitiveness of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) by providing them with the necessary machineries, equipment, tools, systems, skills, and knowledge under a shared system.

Minority Leader Abante and several Members were disappointed with the decrease in the budget of the DTI especially the allocation for MSMEs. The Minority Leader stressed that the year 2021 is a crucial period for the economy considering the losses suffered this year when COVID-19 came about. He said that the MSMEs need assistance to be able to bounce back and continue to provide jobs and contribute to the country's economy.

Rep. Wes Gatchalian (1st District, Valenzuela City), who is the chair of the Committee on Trade and Industry, recommended an increase in the budget of the DTI, particularly to provide assistance to the 1.3 million registered MSMEs nationwide.

Rep. Brosas inquired how the government intends to help local manufacturers of personal protective equipment (PPEs) increase their production and sales.

Lopez admitted that during the early stage of the pandemic, government has relied on the importation of PPEs because at that time, local manufacturers were just starting to comply with the requirements of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). But now that local manufacturers of PPEs have gained ground, Lopez said the DTI and the Board of Investments (BOI) have been tapping them for the domestic requirements of PPEs.

Rep. Janette Garin (1st District, Iloilo) called on government to regulate the price of PPEs and other medical products especially during this time of pandemic when certain suppliers tend to take advantage of the situation.

Lopez agreed that there had been spikes in the prices of medical supplies at the onset of the pandemic which can be attributed to the increase in demand, lack of suppliers, and inability to produce them locally. However, he assured the Committee that the situation has normalized. The DTI has reverted to its policy on the suggested retail price (SRP) for basic commodities after the 60-day "price freeze" it imposed has expired last May 15.

Meanwhile, Deputy Speaker Deogracias Victor "DV" Savellano (1st District, Ilocos Sur) noted that there was no budget allocated for the development of the bamboo industry for 2021. He said that with the

<p>Continuation... Appropriations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) 	<p>abundance of bamboo in the country, TESDA should introduce courses relating to the manufacture of products derived from this material which could very well provide livelihood to the people, especially to those who lost their jobs during the pandemic.</p> <p>Rep. Garin suggested to TESDA to be more innovative in designing its training programs that will help graduates land jobs or start their own business.</p> <p>TESDA Director General Isidro Lapeña said the prioritization of the TESDA courses is based on the guidelines set by the government and on the requirements of the different regions of the country.</p> <p>All Members present supported the call for an increase in the budget of the DTI.</p> <p>The DTI and TESDA were requested to submit pertinent documents required by the Members during the budget briefing.</p> <p>The Committee terminated the briefing on the FY 2021 proposed budget of the DTI and its attached agencies.</p> <p>The Committee suspended the budget briefing of the PCOO until further notice.</p> <p>Rep. France Castro (Party-List, ACT-TEACHERS) recommended the suspension of the hearing on PCOO's proposed budget until Undersecretary Lorraine Badoy presents herself before the Committee and explains under oath her actions maligning her and other party-list lawmakers.</p> <p>Reps. Castro and Zarate were dismayed that a high-ranking PCOO official such as Badoy would spread lies about them and red-tag or brand them and other lawmakers from the MAKABAYAN bloc as terrorists in her social media posts.</p> <p>PCOO Secretary Jose Ruperto Martin Andanar explained that the alleged red-tagging by Badoy was posted online using her personal facebook account, thus it does not reflect the official position or opinion of the PCOO and the government. He said that since none of the platforms of PCOO were used to post or distribute these contents, the budget of the PCOO should not be affected especially at this time of the pandemic when the dissemination of information is crucial in stemming the spread of COVID-19.</p>
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COMMITTEE MEETINGS ON HOUSE MEASURES				
COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Housing and Urban Development	Substitute Bill to HBs 42, 156, 236, 2861, 3041, 3227, 4245 & 4869	Reps. Benitez, Belmonte, Vargas, Salo, Bainto-Aguinaldo, Nieto, Abaya, and Rodriguez	Establishing an on-site, in-city, or near-city strategy for the resettlement of ISFs in accordance with a people's plan, amending for the purpose RA 7279, as amended, otherwise known as the Urban Development and Housing Act of 1992	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Strike Revilla (2nd District, Cavite), approved the Substitute Bill to the eight measures subject to style and amendment. The Secretariat was directed to prepare the Committee Report.</p> <p>Rep. Francisco "Kiko" Benitez (3rd District, Negros Occidental), author of HB 42, said that a bill with similar subject matter was approved on Third Reading by the House of Representatives during the 17th Congress.</p> <p>The proposed law seeks to institutionalize on-site, in-city, or near-city resettlement to uphold</p>

Continuation... Housing and Urban Development				<p>the urban poor's right to live in the city and allow them to stay near the place where they used to live and near their place of work or source of livelihood. Likewise, it promotes the process where ISFs design for themselves the development of their community, which is called the people's plan.</p> <p>Rep. Jose Christopher Belmonte (6th District, Quezon City), author of HB 156, agreed to the suggestion of Navotas City Rep. John Reynald Tiangco to amend Section 29 (Resettlement) of RA 7279 to also involve the concerned national government agencies, and not only the local government units (LGUs), in the implementation of resettlement projects in the localities.</p> <p>The Members also agreed to put safeguards in the proposed law to protect private land owners from unnecessary expropriations.</p>
	Substitute Bill to HBs 157, 2417, 3035, 4280, 7008, 7215, 7269, 7292 & 7364	Reps. Belmonte, Castelo, Nieto, Deputy Speakers Pimentel and Villafuerte, Reps. Vargas, Rodriguez, Tambunting, and Suansing (E.)	Establishing a rental housing subsidy program for informal settler families (ISFs) and appropriating funds therefor	<p>The Committee approved the Substitute Bill to the nine measures.</p> <p>Rep. Tiangco, Chair of the technical working group (TWG) that crafted the substitute bill, reported that the TWG members agreed that the proposed rental housing subsidy program shall be national in scope. Under the program, a monthly rental subsidy of up to a maximum of P3,500 (with variance depending on the region) will be given to each ISF beneficiary that will be affected by government national projects. For Metro Manila, the rental subsidy will be fixed at P3,500 per month.</p> <p>Rep. Rosanna "Ria" Vergara (3rd District, Nueva Ecija) inquired if the proposed law does not prevent LGUs from implementing their respective housing programs. Rep. Tiangco answered that the LGUs can do so.</p> <p>On the query of Rep. Revilla as to the number of years the rental subsidy will be provided to the ISF beneficiaries, Rep. Tiangco replied that it may be given for five years, but may be extended depending on the timeline of the housing project intended for them.</p>
Justice	Substitute Bill to HBs 4461, 4655 & 4683	Rep. Haresco, Deputy Speaker Villafuerte, and Majority Leader Romualdez	Establishing a separate facility for prisoners convicted of heinous crimes	The Committee, chaired by Rep. Vicente "Ching" Veloso III (3 rd District, Leyte), approved the Committee Report on the Substitute Bill to HBs 4461, 4655 and 4683.
	HB 2877	Majority Leader Romualdez	Granting Filipino citizenship to Mr. Patrick Francois Renucci, with all the rights, privileges and prerogatives appurtenant thereto	The Committee approved the Committee Report on HB 2877.
	HB 3075	Rep. Vergara	Granting Philippine citizenship to Joseph Sigelman	The Committee approved the Committee Report on HB 3075.
	HBs 6348 & 7588	Rep. Flores and Deputy Speaker	Granting survivorship benefits to the surviving legitimate spouse and dependent	The Committee approved HBs 6348 and 7588 in principle. The Secretariat was directed to

Continuation... Justice		Hernandez	children of a deceased retired member of the National Prosecution Service (NPS), appropriating funds therefor	<p>come up with a substitute bill to the two measures.</p> <p>Rep. Jonathan Keith Flores (2nd District, Bukidnon), author of HB 6348, said that survivorship benefits should be given to the surviving legitimate spouse and dependent children of a deceased retired member of the NPS just like those being enjoyed by the employees of the Office of the Ombudsman and the members of the Judiciary. This is in recognition of the vital role that prosecutors play in the country's criminal justice system, he added.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Ferdinand Hernandez (2nd District, South Cotabato), author of HB 7588, manifested that the explanatory note attached to his bill, be entered into the records as his sponsorship speech.</p> <p>Reps. Rufus Rodriguez (2nd District, Cagayan de Oro City), Lawrence "Law" Fortun (1st District, Agusan del Norte), and Stella Luz Quimbo (2nd District, Marikina City) manifested their support for the proposed law.</p> <p>Likewise, Senior Deputy State Prosecutor Joselita Mendoza and Regional State Prosecutor John Magdaraog from the Department of Justice expressed their support for the two bills.</p> <p>The Department of Budget and Management stated that it will submit its official position paper on the proposed law within 10 days.</p>
	HB 2946	Rep. Fariñas (R.C.G)	Penalizing the act of throwing hard objects at motor vehicles	<p>The Committee approved HB 2946 with amendment.</p> <p>Rep. Ria Christina Fariñas (1st District, Ilocos Norte), author of HB 2946, mentioned that a bill with similar subject matter was approved on Third Reading by the House of Representatives during the 17th Congress. Thus, she invoked Section 48, Rule 10 of the House Rules.</p> <p>Section 48, Rule 10 of the House Rules states that in case of bills or resolutions that are identified as priority measures of the House, which were previously filed in the immediately preceding Congress and have been approved thereat on Third Reading, the same may be disposed of as matters already reported, upon approval by majority of the Members present.</p> <p>Expressing support for the bill were representatives from the Land Transportation Office (LTO) and the Philippine National Police-Highway Patrol Group (HPG-PNP).</p>

AGENCY BRIEFINGS		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Health	Briefing by the Department of Health (DOH) on its proposed budget for FY 2021	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Angelina "Helen" Tan, M.D. (4th District, Quezon), listened to the presentation on the proposed FY 2021 budget, thrusts, and major accomplishments of the DOH.</p> <p>DOH Undersecretary Mario Villaverde said that under the FY 2021 National Expenditure Program (NEP), the DOH and its attached agencies and corporations are set to receive a budget of P127.29 billion, which is 27% higher than their current budget of P100.56 billion. The DOH-Office of the Secretary will receive the biggest chunk of the DOH's proposed budget with P78.92 billion, followed by the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) with P44.55 billion.</p> <p>By expense class, DOH's 2021 budget will be distributed as follows: personnel services (PS), P61.14 billion; maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE), P56.07 billion; and capital outlay (CO), P10.08 billion.</p> <p>Villaverde explained that the increase in the budget of the DOH will cover the implementation of RA 11223 or the Universal Health Care (UHC) Act of 2019, COVID-19 initiatives and resilience measures, and other health-related proposals, and urgent and compelling needs of the Department.</p> <p>Villaverde also reported that 100% or 108 million Filipinos are already covered under the PhilHealth's National Health Insurance Program (NHIP) as of 2019. The target is to maintain 100% coverage by 2021, Villaverde said.</p> <p>In terms of medical assistance to indigent patients through the DOH's Medical Assistance for Indigent Patients Program (MAIP), Villaverde said that 1.36 million patients already benefitted from this Program in 2018 and 1.54 million in 2019. The target for 2021 is to cover 1.8 million indigent Filipinos.</p> <p>Villaverde said that in 2021, the DOH plans to hire more health workers through its Human Resources for Health Deployment (HRHD) Program to address the need for more health workers in priority areas throughout the country.</p> <p>Rep. Tan noticed the low utilization rate of the budget of the DOH for its Health Facilities Enhancement Program (HFEP). She urged the DOH to delegate the procurement of medical equipment to the regional offices and converge with the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) relative to the validation and identification of infrastructure projects. (The HFEP aims to upgrade health facilities, such as health centers, barangay health stations, and rural health units, to sufficiently provide for emergency and primary care services through investments in infrastructure and medical equipment.)</p> <p>Agreeing with Rep. Tan, DOH Secretary Francisco Duque III explained that the completion of projects under the HFEP was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Asked by Rep. Cheryl Deloso-Montalla (2nd District, Zambales) on the budget allocated for personal protective equipment (PPEs) and the manner of distribution, DOH Undersecretary Myrna Cabotaje said that the Department allocated P10.9 billion for the procurement of PPEs in 2021, however, only P2.7 billion was approved by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM). Cabotaje said that these PPEs will be distributed to COVID-19 referral hospitals and other health facilities and hotspot areas for use by frontline medical and healthcare workers and contact tracers.</p>

<p>Continuation... Health</p>		<p>On the query of Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo (2nd District, Marikina City) on the budget allocated for information and communications technology (ICT) relative to the monitoring of COVID cases, Director Eric Tayag of the DOH's Knowledge Management and Information Technology Service reported that the budget for 2021 for ICT is only P91 million compared to P1.2 billion in 2020. Tayag went on to say that only P30 million of the P91 million is allocated for COVID-19 related activities that entail the support of ICT.</p> <p>Rep. Quimbo asked the DOH to provide the Committee with a breakdown of expenses for its ICT-related activities.</p> <p>Rep. Janette Garin (1st District, Iloilo) inquired on the status of vaccines for COVID-19. Duque replied that there are already six vaccines coming from different countries abroad that are undergoing clinical trials in the country.</p> <p>Cabotaje explained that COVID-19 vaccines requiring clinical trials are being handled by the sub-technical working group on vaccine development of the Inter Agency Task Force (IATF), which is chaired by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST). On the other hand, vaccines which will not require clinical trials will still have to comply with the requirements set by the Food and Drug Administration.</p> <p>The DOH responded to the questions asked by the Committee Members with regard to their respective districts. The DOH was also requested to submit pertinent documents required by the Members during the budget briefing.</p>
<p>Mindanao Affairs</p>	<p>Briefing by the Department of Tourism (DOT), Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA), and Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA) on the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry and status of completed, on-going, and proposed projects for Mindanao</p>	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Mohamad Khalid Dimaporo (1st District, Lanao del Norte), listened to the presentation of the DOT, TIEZA and MinDA on the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry and status of completed, on-going, and proposed projects for Mindanao.</p> <p>DOT Assistant Secretary for Mindanao and Palawan Myra Paz Abubakar discussed DOT's Tourism Response and Recovery Plan Strategic Framework amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and the strategies it adopted. Abubakar said that the DOT will give priority to the promotion of dive tourism, cultural and heritage tourism, adventure and sports tourism, faith tourism, eco-tourism, farm tourism, and food tourism.</p> <p>Abubakar said that as of September 4, the DOT has provided assistance to 3,508 foreign tourists and 2,294 domestic tourists who were stranded in Mindanao due to the lockdowns. The DOT regional offices in Mindanao also conducted 75 training courses and webinars on occupational health and safety protocols for its employees and stakeholders from March to August. New normal health and safety guidelines will also be issued soon by the DOT for the gradual opening of tourist spots nationwide.</p> <p>DOT Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat appealed to the Committee Members to support the gradual reopening of tourist destinations in their respective districts. She emphasized the contribution of the tourism sector in generating employment and uplifting the socio-economic life of the people in various communities.</p> <p>On the status of the Tourism Road Infrastructure Projects (TRIP) in Mindanao, the DOT Assistant Secretary reported that since 2016, a total of 408 road projects have been completed with a total cost of P65.34 billion.</p> <p>TIEZA General Manager and Chief Operating Officer Pocholo Paragas likewise reported that TIEZA completed 23 tourism</p>

<p>Continuation... Mindanao Affairs</p>		<p>infrastructure projects in Mindanao since 2016 costing P285.66 million. These include the repair, improvement, and rehabilitation of tourist sites and tourism zones and creation of tourism offices and information centers. He added that 18 projects are ongoing and 13 projects are about to be implemented with a total cost of P211.22 million and P110.59 million, respectively.</p> <p>MinDA Chair Emmanuel Piñol acknowledged the efforts of TIEZA and the DOT in continuously promoting tourism in Mindanao despite the challenges brought about by the pandemic. He said that MinDA is in close coordination with the DOT in reopening tourist destinations in Mindanao. He also shared that MinDA is taking advantage of its online platform to further promote Mindanao tourism. He said that several videos have been uploaded on its website showcasing the different tourist spots in Mindanao.</p> <p>Camiguin Rep. Xavier Jesus Romualdo recommended that testing centers for COVID-19 should be set up in strategic locations in Mindanao so that foreign and local tourists will feel safe in travelling to the region.</p> <p>Secretary Puyat said that the DOT is in the process of setting up testing centers and adopting the use of antigen tests. She said that antigen tests offer a cheaper and faster method of diagnosing COVID-19 compared to the RT-PCR (real-time polymerase chain reaction) tests. According to Puyat, the currently authorized antigen test devices can give results in approximately 15 minutes.</p> <p>Rep. Amihilda Sangcopan (Party-List, AMIN) requested the DOT to come up with a study on farm tourism which can be adopted in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).</p> <p>The TIEZA was requested to submit a report on how much of its budget was utilized for COVID-19 response while the DOT was requested to submit its list of TRIP projects in the country as well as statistical data on domestic tourism per region since 2019.</p>
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