

WB offers funding for RP projects

by PAOLO ROMERO
Philstar.com

THE World Bank (WB) has offered to finance some of the Philippines' social programs and big-ticket infrastructure projects as a sign of confidence in the country's economy, Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ralph Recto said Oct. 19.

Washington that were also attended by finance officials from Southeast Asia and heads of international financial institutions, including the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank.

"They (WB officials) are very much interested in funding public-private sectors projects, BOT (build-operate-transfer) projects

and our conditional cash transfer programs for the poor for social protection," Recto said in a telephone interview.

"They are very bullish on our economy so they think their investments in the country would be viable and (they can) make money out of it," he said, adding that part of the WB's mandate is to extend development loans.

He said among the big-ticket projects the WB wanted to fund was the LRT-1 Extension project that was previously estimated to cost at least \$700 million or over P40 billion.

The extension, which is a priority project of the Arroyo administration, would run from Monumento in Caloocan to Dasmariñas, Cavite.

As far as the conditional cash transfer program is concerned, the WB could assist in terms of grants, Recto said.

"If these (offers) would push through, we could free up our resources for education and infrastructure," he said, adding the loans would not be tied.

However, he said that the matter would still have to be discussed in detail in the Cabinet.

The government last year resorted to implementing a conditional cash transfer program, basically giving cash to poor families with certain social conditions, as fuel and food prices soared.

The "Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino" program would get a dramatic increase under the proposed P1.415-trillion national budget for next year, officials earlier said.

Budget Secretary Rolando Andaya Jr. earlier said that under the proposed 2009 budget, the program would have a funding of P5 billion, from a mere P300 million this year.

The increase in the allocation will fund the full implementation of the program, which targets around 300,000 poor families all over the country.

"This program will focus on chronically poor families whose education, health and nutrition indicators are among the worst of the population," Andaya said.

"The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino program is a continuing program, and it should not be confused with the one-time cash we earlier gave out for poor consumers of electricity," he said.

He said conditional cash transfer programs have also been adopted in other countries and have proven to be effective in uplifting the lives of the poor.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development said the program was not a dole out, as beneficiaries must meet certain conditions before they could avail of a maximum of P1,400 a month.

The conditions specify that pregnant women must get proper medical care before and after childbirth; parents must attend family planning and parental care seminars; children 0 to five years old must get regular medical check ups and vaccines; five-year-old children must attend pre-school classes 85 percent of the time, with the same requirement imposed on children in elementary and high schools. ■

ACROSS THE ISLANDS

Mayon trail run tackles global warming

LEGAZPI CITY—The first Mayon Trail Run (MTR) in Albay last Oct. 19. The event was part of an awareness campaign against global warming.

More than 150 runners negotiated a shaggy hill laden with manmade obstacles, a river crossing, and a pile of volcanic rocks in the 5-kilometer fun run and 18-km adventure foot race.

The race was organized by the Junior Chamber International (JCI) and Northface, an international brand of sports apparel and outdoor equipment. JCI is a worldwide federation of young leaders and entrepreneurs whose members are more popularly known as Jaycees.

Even for the most experienced runners, some of them holding national and international titles, the MTR was one of the most grueling and unusual races.

The race started from the Peñaranda Park in the city to the top of Lignon Hill in Daraga town, then down to a newly created back trail traversing the Yawa River to the Bonga Gully, one of the main pathways of volcanic debris swept by heavy rains.

Reaching the lava front, the racers made a U-turn and climbed back to Lignon.

Provincial tourism officer Joe Briones said the trail run could be held annually and could draw more tourists.

These days, many tourists are looking for new sites for ecotourism and adventure sports. Briones said it would be good to have them both. (Inquirer.net)



All Saints' Day Break: LTFRB to issue special trip permits to PUVs

BAYOMBONG, Nueva Vizcaya—To ensure the smooth travel of thousands of commuters and vehicles to and from Metro Manila during the All Saints' Day break, the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) is again issuing special trip permits to buses and other public utility vehicles (PUVs).

LTFRB Chairman Thompson Lantion said the issuance of special permits, which was first adopted last year, is part of the Department of Transportation and Communication's Oplan Kaluluwa.

Lantion said interested bus operators can now apply for these special trip permits, provided they have legitimate franchises.

He, however, warned all PUV owners and drivers, especially those who are set to apply for special permits, to be fair in charging fares and not engage in trip-cutting and other road violations which are usually rampant during the holiday season.

Last year, more than 300 special permits were granted to bus operators from the Bicol region, Southern Tagalog, Central Luzon, and Northern Luzon as well as to bus companies plying routes from Metro Manila to the south via roll-on, roll-off (ro-ro) ferries. (Philstar.com)

Global rice market to...

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are huge uncertainties regarding the source of future growth in global rice production," the institute said.

It said the annual rice yield growth rate has dropped to less than one percent in recent years, compared with two percent to three percent during the 1960s.

The report blamed declining investment in rice research and infrastructure development, including irrigation, while population and economic growth in many Asian and African countries continue to drive up rice consumption.

Per capita consumption in the most populous nations, China and India, is projected to decline, but total consumption is still expected to rise by 18 million tons because of population growth, the report said. ■

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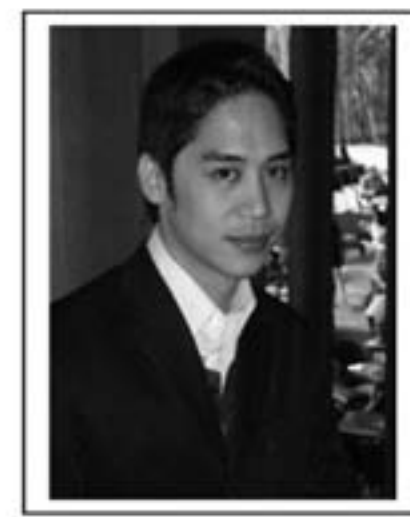
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