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Sec. Lopez: Stay the course



Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) DTI Secretary Ramon M. Lopez addressed the DTI Family with a message of gratitude and hope as he graced the Department's flag raising ceremony on Monday, 17 January 2022 via virtual platform.

Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Secretary Ramon M. Lopez graced the virtual flag raising ceremony on Monday, 17 January 2022, and warmly thanked the DTI Family for continuing to be at the forefront of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Philippine economy, he said, has already seen some recovery as the Department continues to keep the balance in addressing the pandemic while protecting the lives and livelihood of Filipinos.

"I'd like to thank the whole team of the DTI for being one with us in our advocacy to fight back, to recover, and do our share in making sure na ma-balance 'yung pag-address dito sa problema ng pandemya," the Secretary said.

Sharing his optimism with the DTI Family, Secretary Lopez cited some of the good news for the economy, including the gross domestic product (GDP) growth of close to 5% year-to-date in the third quarter of 2021 despite the pandemic, along with the foreign direct investments (FDIs) that jumped by 48%.

He also noted of the country's USD 68 billion exports revenue as of November 2021 which expanded by 15% compared with the same period in the previous year, and even by 5% before the COVID-19 pandemic.

On top of it all, he said, the economy can expect to see a continuous recovery except for some challenges brought about by the lingering effects of the pandemic, emphasizing that there is no need for lockdowns despite the surge in Omicron cases.

"The approach has been changing as well, dahil tumaas na ang ating vaccination rate. If you notice, kahit mataas 'yung number, 39,000, hindi tayo nag-lockdown up to Alert Level 4. We kept it at Alert Level 3. We try to convince the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) na hindi kailangan mag-lockdown dahil kahit tumataas ang cases, ibang kaso itong Omicron," he said.

He personally called for intensifying the vaccination efforts to further improve the fight against COVID-19. *"Kaya napaka-importante magpabakuna tayong lahat. 'Yung mga kamag-anak natin, i-encourage na natin na magpabakuna lahat. Tamaan man tayo nito ay hindi masyadong maging severe,"* the Secretary advised.

The Secretary further highlighted the active role of DTI in the government's fight against COVID-19. *"At least masasabi ninyo na ang inyong departamento, ang DTI, has been very actively involved in the IATF and all these discussions,"* he said. It should be noted that the DTI Management Services Group (MSG), led by **Undersecretary Ireneo V. Vizmonte**, has been vigorously involved in implementing COVID-19 initiatives, especially in developing key policies and the rollout of the Safety Seal Certification program, among others.

He said the DTI will continue to work on economic reforms to ease the foreign restrictions and encourage more investments, and therefore create jobs. Some of these reforms include the Retail Trade Liberalization Act, Foreign Investment Act, as well as the Public Service Act.

"For every job that we make, we generate, talagang nababawasan ng poverty ang isang pamilya. Dapat nakatuon tayo on creating jobs. Balik tayo sa ating mantra "Trabaho, Negosyo at Konsyumer," the Secretary said.

Recognizing that his term will end in the next six months of this year, he rallied the DTI Family to continue to finish the work that the Department has started with him. *"Stay the course,"* he said.

Among others, he said, Typhoon Odette initiatives should continue, especially the finalization of the Typhoon Rehab Plan, to help typhoon victims in the Visayas and North Mindanao to recover.

He said the DTI will continue with the MSME push, passionately thanking the DTI-Regional Operations Group (ROG) from **Undersecretary Blesila A. Lantayona** to all the Assistant Secretaries and Regional Directors, Assistant Regional Directors, and Provincial Directors.

"Lahat po sa ROG, tuloy-tuloy ang ating serbisyo para sa pag-ahon, pagpapalakas ng micro SMEs. Ito ang passion natin at tuloy-tuloy nating palalakasin ang MSME sector," the Trade Chief said.

Secretary Lopez also cited other programs including the Rural Agro-Enterprise Partnership for Inclusive Development and Growth (RAPID Growth) project; One Town, One Product law; Go Lokal FlexFridays; Revitalizing Businesses, Investments,

Livelihood, Domestic Demand (REBUILD); Strategic Investment Priority Plan (SIPP); and the Export Development Plan, among others. These efforts will be steered by **ROG Undersecretary Lantayona; Competitiveness and Innovation Group (CIG) Undersecretary Rafaelita M. Aldaba; Industry Development and Trade Policy Group (IDTPG) Undersecretary Ceferino S. Rodolfo, and Trade Promotions Group (TPG) Undersecretary Abdulgani M. Macatoman.**

He also mentioned the initiatives on expanding the electric vehicle industry as well as the field on Artificial Intelligence (AI), with the intention of making the Philippines the AI Hub Center for Excellence in the region.

To strengthen the start-up sectors, he cited National Development Company's (NDC) Php 250 million fund. Along with this is to push for financial technology (fintech) initiatives for ease in business transactions.

The Department, in addition, continues to push for the ratification of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement and the finalization of other free trade agreements (FTAs).

The sustainability plan is also being driven, particularly on the Internet Transaction Act. On the consumer side, the drive against profiteers and hoarders will be pursued under the guidance of **Consumer Protection Group (CPG) Undersecretary Ruth B. Castelo.**

He particularly noted of the importance of local preferences for government procurement as a way to revive and strengthen the domestic demand to bring back economic activities and more jobs.

DTI attached agencies and corporations, he said, are all part of the FlexFridays to support local products. On micro financing, Small Business Corporation's Bayanihan COVID-19 Assistance to Restart Enterprises (CARES) program will have Php 200 million to assist affected MSMEs.

"Tulong-tulong tayong lahat dito," the Secretary said, emphasizing the important roles and contributions of all DTI functional groups in realizing the abovementioned efforts.

Secretary Lopez ended his message for the DTI Family looking for a better year ahead.

"Again, thank you for your support. We're doing this not for us, not for me, not for all of us but para sa bayan talaga ito. Finally, as Martin Luther King Jr. said, 'Everyone can be great because everyone can serve'. Tayo pong lahat iyon, sa lahat ng kanta natin kanina, mga pangako natin, it's all about service. Salamat sa DTI, kayo po na nagbibigay ng serbisyo na higit pa sa inaasahan."