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Pay hikes for teachers, other gov't personnel

AS early as 2016, during the May presidential election campaign, President Duterte spoke of doubling the pay of soldiers and policemen. Hopes among the uniformed personnel soared when he was elected in May, 2016, but it was only last November, 2017, that the House of Representatives approved a joint resolution for their salary increases, followed by Senate action in December.

On the very first day of this new year 2018, President signed Joint Resolution No. 1, authorizing increases in the base pay, allowances, benefits, and incentives of personnel of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP).

They are sizeable pay increases. The P14,834 monthly pay of an AFP private and a PNP Police Officer 1 was doubled to P29,668. The chiefs of the AFP and the PNP now getting P67,500 a month will get P121,143 in 2018 and P149,785 in 2019. The salary increases were generally welcomed by the public for, as Resolution No. 1 stated, there is need to make their pay "more commensurate with their critical role in maintaining national security and peace and order." This was a view shared by the general public in the wake of the just-concluded fighting in Marawi City in which the AFP and PNP fought and defeated the Maute rebellion which was supported by ISIS extremists.

The pay increases have understandably moved other sectors of the government bureaucracy to ask for their own increases. The agitation has been greatest in the ranks of the nation's teachers. An entry-level Teacher 1 now earns P20,179 a month;

with bonuses and allowances at various times of the year, the average monthly pay could reach P26,375, according to Secretary Benjamin Diokno of the Department of Budget and Management.

Secretary Diokno stressed that he is not against teachers' salary increases, but the government simply does not have the funds at this time. To double the nation's 600,000 teachers' salaries, like those of the AFP's 172,500 active personnel and the PNP's 170,000. PNP men, he said, a total of P343.7 billion would be needed. The government would have to either reduce other items in the budget or raise more taxes, he said.

The numbers are indeed formidable, but Malacañang has promised that the nation's public school teachers will be the next beneficiaries of a pay increase. Last January 11, presidential spokesman Harry Roque assured that the teachers will get their raises within the term of President Duterte, who has until 2022 in Malacañang.

There are many other thousands of government personnel who should get pay increases but the government has only so much available for salaries. Most of the funds have to go to maintain ongoing programs and projects and launch new ones like the "Build, Build, Build" infrastructure program.

The AFP-PNP pay increases were made possible because of President Duterte's special concern for the nation's security forces. The teachers, whose task is to prepare the next generation of Filipino citizens, will have their own increases in time. Now that the government has started focusing its attention on salaries, the rest of the bureaucracy can hope that they too will have their turn and get better pay that will allow them to lead better lives.

* TEACHERS
* WAGES