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DOTR OK TO FARE HIKE BUT ONLY FOR UPGRADED JEEPNEYS

CITY OF MALOLOS—Transportation Secretary Arthur Tugade on Friday expressed no opposition to the demand by jeepney drivers to increase fare, but there's a catch—they have to modernize their vehicles.

Tugade, interviewed when he faced a group of jeepney drivers and operators in Bulacan province, said increasing fare goes with the condition that drivers and operators went along with the government's transport modernization plan.

Tugade drew applause from 1,000 members of the Bulacan Jeepney Drivers and Operators Federation when he said they could expect a P10-increase in fares.

"For as long as they are compliant with the modernization plan, we can discuss a fare increase and how much it can be raised," he told reporters on the sidelines of the meeting with the transport group.

Wi-Fi feature

Tugade asked Bulacan drivers and transport organizations to support the modern-

ization program which would require jeepneys to use environment-friendly Euro 4 engines and set up Wi-Fi connections, among other things.

The jeepneys should also be enclosed with a passenger cabin that has a high ceiling and with facilities to accommodate disabled motorists.

Tugade said the Land Bank

of the Philippines and the Development Bank of the Philippines would provide loan packages to help drivers and operators buy jeeps worth at least P1 million each. The loans would have a fixed 6 percent interest rate, payable in seven years, and with a government equity of P80,000.

But Tugade clarified that the loan packages embedded in the

modernization program would be available on a "first-come, first-served" basis.

TRAIN impact

He did not comment when asked if the program took into account the impact of the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law (Republic Act No. 10963). The law imposed excise taxes on fuel that increased gasoline prices this month.

According to Tugade, the modernization program does not prevent local suppliers from producing eco-friendly jeepneys and competing with those from established car manufacturers, provided they followed requirements set by the Department of Transportation.

In Cagayan Valley, the Land Transportation and Franchising Regulatory Board said it could not stop drivers and operators of vans being used as public utility vehicles from increasing fare as complaints mount over transport rates doubling. —CARMELA REYES-ESTROPE, WITH A REPORT FROM MELVIN GASCON INQ

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