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Gov't to push modernization plan despite transport strike

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The government on Monday stood firm that it would not back down from the implementation of its long-overdue jeepney modernization program and would continue to press charges against the transport leader who remained opposed to it.

Transportation Secretary Arthur Tugade said that protests notwithstanding, his agency "will not stop at anything" to give the public a better commuting experience.

"Modernization should be implemented now. We will not stop anyone from expressing their right," Tugade said in a statement.

The strike by the transport group Pinagkaisang Samahan ng mga Tsuper at Operator Nationwide (Piston) forced sever-

al schools and local governments to suspend classes and work on Monday, but the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) belittled the latest action.

Only 1,900 stranded

According to LTFRB board member Aileen Lizada, only 22 government vehicles and six private buses were dispatched by 3 p.m. to ferry 1,900 stranded passengers, mostly in Quezon City and Manila.

She said this number was not even 1 percent of about 4 million commuters in Metro Manila.

The Eastern Police District (EPD) said the transport strike did not affect commuters in the cities of San Juan, Pasig, Marikina and Mandaluyong.

The number of public utility vehicles plying the Pasig-Quiapo

route decreased by only 20 percent, according to Chief Supt. Reynaldo Biay, EPD director.

Earlier, National Capital Region Police Office Director Oscar Albayalde ordered deployment of security officers to prevent drivers from harassing fellow drivers who refused to join the protests.

Piston's transport strike on Monday was the fourth to be held by the group since February last year.

Dilapidated jeepneys

The group is protesting against the Department of Transportation's jeepney modernization program, which aims to replace jeepneys 15 years and older with units that are compliant with Euro-4 emission standards.

Lizada said the number of drivers who joined the protests

continued to decline.

But George San Mateo, Piston's national president, belied Lizada's assessment, saying the strike paralyzed "90 percent" of jeepney operations in Metro Manila.

In Cagayan de Oro City, Ringo Lago, secretary general of Starex-Piston Northern Mindanao, said about 70 percent of jeepney drivers joined the transport strike.

But Aminoden Guro, the LTFRB director for Northern Mindanao, denied Lago's claim, saying only a few drivers and operators joined the strike.

Guro said the strike had no effect on commuters, especially after the LTFRB fielded two buses and six e-jeepneys to ferry commuters. "We hauled commuters for free," he said. —WITH REPORTS FROM JODEE A. AGONCILLO AND JIGGER JERUSALEM INQ

* TRANSPORTATION
+ Jeepney MODERNIZATION
* DOTr (Dept. of Transportation)