

# Policy approaches to COVID-19 crisis 'not well orchestrated,' resigned NEDA chief says

*By CNN Philippines Staff*

**Metro Manila (CNN Philippines, April 18)** - Newly resigned Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto Pernia says he quit because of differences with other government officials involved in designing policy approaches to shoring up the economy amid the raging COVID-19 crisis.

Pernia told CNN Philippines in an exclusive interview Saturday that he would have wanted to continue the fight against the COVID-19 crisis, but poor orchestration within the government prompted him to resign.

"When the orchestra is not well orchestrated, then you have a little problem," Pernia said.

"Since I seem to be a dissonant voice among others, I thought I should just quit," he added.

The Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases is currently leading the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Playing key roles in the task force are Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles and Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea, along with Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez and Health Secretary Francisco Duque.

Pernia was tapped to join the government's inter-agency body and was tasked to lead the crafting of policies that will define the "new normal" amid the COVID-19 pandemic. That task is now done and is ready to be submitted.

The seasoned economist was among the Cabinet officials pushing for a relaxation of the stringent restrictions under the current enhanced community quarantine into a "modified quarantine" after April 30.

Under that proposed easing, some industries and public services would be allowed to resume operations and get the economy going. But other government officials are said to be arguing for containing first the COVID-19 spread.

"My training in economics is that in a market economy like ours, the private sector is the engine for economic growth, while the government provides the kind of policy environment that encourages the private sector to thrive," Pernia told CNN Philippines.

**READ:** [Economists propose 'modified' quarantine after April 30 to restart local economy](#)

Pernia said he was not alone in calling on government to slowly ease restrictions under the community quarantine.

"I'm not a lone voice because, for example, there have been proposals to get on with some critical infrastructure projects, like the maintenance of the MRT (metro rail transit system)," Pernia said.

However, the proposal to resume infrastructure work was denied by the government's inter-agency task force, Pernia said.

"It is understandable that there would be differences in national development philosophy, given that different people have different educational and disciplinal backgrounds," Pernia added.

But Pernia admitted such differences in opinions could have been better handled by those in charge of the Cabinet members at this time.

"So yes, there are indeed difference in approaches and in such a critical time for the country, it is best that the government doesn't get bogged down internally," Pernia said.

Pernia told CNN Philippines he filed his resignation on April 13, five days before Malacañang made the announcement.

The former Cabinet member said, during this time, he was never able to speak to President Rodrigo Duterte about the issues surrounding his resignation, since speaking over the phone was not an option, and the sustained spread of the COVID-19 virus made it difficult for him to physically access the President.

"The Presidential security guards have really cordoned off the President so that he doesn't interact with visitors," Pernia said in an interview on CNN Philippines.

On April 17, Medialdea said President Rodrigo Duterte accepted Pernia's resignation and named Finance Undersecretary Karl Kendrick Chua as his replacement.

**READ:** [DOF's Karl Chua is new NEDA chief as Ernesto Pernia resigns](#)

Despite this, Pernia said he is confident that the members of the policy-setting National Economic and Development Authority, which he headed as director-general, are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to keep the good work going.

"NEDA has very good technical people there and whoever takes over should be able to do just as well," Pernia said.

When asked what the future holds for him after public service, the resigned NEDA chief said he needs a long break.

"I'm writing a little book on issues of public interest, and I can do some lectureships," Pernia said.