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Neda survey results validate our experience under ECQ, MECQ

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5-6 minutes

With the modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ) in Metro Manila ending next week, there are talks about another extension or a downgrade to the general community quarantine (GCQ).

Our experiences under enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) and MECQ are validated in the recent National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) ECQ survey with over 390,000 respondents.

Based on the results, family income declined by 40 percent during ECQ. Second, 70 percent of respondents said they lost their source of livelihood.

Third, as a coping mechanism, almost 60 percent reduced their food consumption, while 13 percent borrowed money from relatives and friends. Fourth, only about 50 percent got some form of support, mostly relief goods.

And fifth, respondents found it difficult to access groceries, wet markets, banks and drugstores.

The survey also spelled out their expectations with the lifting of the

ECQ. The majority said their family income would deteriorate, particularly the “low-income group,” due to low consumer confidence and adjustments to the “new normal.”

More than 80 percent of the respondents do not intend to buy “durables” while only 23 percent say they will definitely travel within a year either domestically or abroad. Most believe that the key to rebuilding consumer confidence is solving the inadequacies of the country’s health-care system and the inefficiency of the supply chain and logistics system.

Government leaders should take the results of the survey as a challenge to do their best to help the people. But for many of us, dealing with the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) under the ECQ/MECQ/GCQ has left us all spent and in a state akin to shell shock.

* * *

I got separate calls from Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III and Health Secretary Francisco Duque III on Monday.

Bello was emphatic in saying that all 24,000 returning overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) who underwent swab tests and quarantine would be sent home upon the President’s orders.

The first batch of 7,806 left yesterday by land or air while the other batches will depart today or tomorrow. Most of the returning 44,000 OFWs this week will directly land in regional airports where they will undergo quarantine and swab tests. This means the OFW congestion problem was solved instantly by one directive.

On the other hand, Duque told me that we have already “flattened the curve.”

Whether we are in the first wave or second wave, it won't matter as the numbers are down like the "lower doubling time" of infections. Duque also said he was investigating the allegations about PhilHealth's "overpriced" real-time reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) tests—considered the "gold standard" of COVID-19 testing.

Later, Philippine Health Insurance Corp. president Ricardo Morales called me and said there had been no payout yet to hospitals for RT-PCR swab tests. He insisted that critics had failed to mention that RT-PCR testing for COVID-19 fall into three price categories: P2,710 (if the equipment was donated), P5,450 (for another type) and P8,150 (for the "gold standard" purchased and used by the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine.

Now, because of cheaper global prices for RT-PCR procedures, the cost of the gold standard test should drop.

* * *

The increase in electric bills during the ECQ has been resolved by all stakeholders, including Energy Regulatory Commission chair Agnes Devanadera, Manila Electric Co.'s (Meralco) assistant vice president Joe Zaldarriaga and Laban Konsyumer Inc. president Vic Dimagiba.

Meter readings will now be based on "actual consumption" and we must wait for the official notice or explanation from Meralco and other distribution facilities before we pay our bills.

For those consuming 200 kwh and below, you can settle within six months. If above 200 kwh, payment should be within four months.

All's well that ends well.

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