

# Congress approves bicameral committee report on vaping regulation

THE bicameral conference committee report on a bill seeking to regulate vaporized nicotine products was approved by the Senate late Tuesday and by the House of Representatives on Wednesday.

Senate President Pro Tempore Ralph G. Recto, who led the Senate contingent to the bicameral session reconciling the House and Senate versions of the bill, presented the conference committee report harmonizing House Bill 9007 and Senate Bill 2239.

"This bill is meant to regulate Vaporized Nicotine Products, Non-Nicotine Products and Novel Tobacco Products. It is expected to encourage the shift from smoking unhealthy cigarettes to these alternative, less harmful products," he said during the plenary session.

"This bill was never intended to (encourage people to) adopt a new lifestyle (particularly) minors who are prohibited from having access to these products," he added.

Separately, the House, sitting in plenary session, approved the bicameral report, according to video of the session streamed on social media.

Under the consolidated measure, the term novel tobacco products, which was adopted from the House version, will refer to "all non-combusted substances in solid or liquid form, and innovations, either made partly of tobacco leaf as raw material or containing nicotine from tobacco intended to be used as a substi-

tute for cigarettes or other combusted tobacco products."

Thirty days after the effectiveness of the measure when it becomes law, the Health department will be required to issue a template with guidelines on the illustrations, design, and information required to appear on the graphic health warning on the product packaging. This will apply to all such products, whether manufactured in the Philippines or imported and introduced in the domestic market.

A provision adopted from the Senate version bans markings or characters that are likely to appeal to persons under 18 years of age, such as cartoons, personalities, and the like.

A provision that was added at bicameral level bans medicinal or therapeutic claims in marketing materials or packaging unless approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

Violators face a maximum fine of P20,000. If a minor is caught selling,

buying, or using such products, the minor will be required to participate in a Social Welfare department in an intervention program, which can include counseling sessions with their guardian.

The maximum fine for manufacturers, distributors or retailers is P400,000, imprisonment of up to three years, or both, if they do not verify the customer's age or follow the rules on display and product communication restrictions. — **Alyssa Nicole O. Tan, Jaspearl Emerald G. Tan**

# NGCP needs about 1,800 MW in firm contracts for full coverage

By Marielle C. Lucenio

THE National Grid Corp. of the Philippines (NGCP) said it currently has firm contracts amounting to 809.3 megawatts (MW), and needs 1,776.7 MW more to fully cover the grid's reserve requirements, though it considers itself adequately covered if non-firm contracts are counted.

The NGCP's firm contract estimates were made in a Dec. 29 letter to the Department of Energy (DoE).

"If you have noticed, we are over contracted if you consider the non-firm contracts," NGCP Assistant Vice-President and spokeswoman Cynthia D. Perez-

Alabanza told *BusinessWorld* in a Viber message on Wednesday.

The grid operator has 2,807.2 MW worth of non-firm contracted capacity, which costs less than firm contracts because generators charge more to fully commit their power on a standby basis. The NGCP has said that full coverage on a firm-contract basis will cause power prices to rise.

The DoE said on Tuesday that rotating blackouts are possible on two key dates on the Luzon grid within two weeks after the May 9 elections.

"We have separate firm and non-firm contracts because the need is not constant, so why buy the maximum required?" Ms. Perez-Alabanza said.

At a news conference on Tuesday, the DoE pressed the NGCP to make all its contracts for power reserves — known as ancillary services — firm contracts to present a clearer picture of the available power reserve level.

"We have to dissociate the requirement for ancillary services from the energy market so the distributing utilities know that there's a supply that's not available," the DoE's Electric Power Industry Management Bureau Director Mario C. Marasigan said at a virtual briefing.

The DoE, Ms. Perez-Alabanza said, has always taken the position that power supply issues can be addressed through firm contracting of ancillary services.

"It's not. What's lacking is the supply and not the power for balancing the supply," she added.

Ms. Perez-Alabanza added: "When you don't have enough power, NGCP is not going to hold on to these capacities."

Nevertheless, the grid operator is in the process of converting more of its contracts to firm, though Ms. Perez-Alabanza said the DoE must issue "clarification(s)" with regard to its policies.

"They did not take into account the variable nature of ancillary service needs, and the existing contracts which NGCP is also duty bound to honor. At any rate, we are complying and we've already applied for the approval of several firm contracts with the Energy Regulatory Commission," she said.



# Maynilad expects water service interruptions to continue into February

MAYNILAD WATER Services, Inc. said that the ongoing water service interruptions in its concession area will last until Feb. 15, citing unusual levels of sediment being taken in by a processing plant on Laguna de Bay.

"Our first concern is that the water we service must pass the standards of drinking water," Maynilad Head of Water Supply Operations Rolando C. Padua said in a television interview.

"What's been happening these past weeks is that the strong winds from turbulent weather have been directed towards our plant, causing sediment from the bed of Laguna Lake to affect the turbidity levels of our water," he added.

On Monday, the regulatory office of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System said it launched an investigation into the prolonged water service interruptions at the Putatan Water Treatment Plant in Muntinlupa.

"It just so happened that there are multiple external factors affecting our capacity to treat water," Mr. Padua said.

Maynilad cited factors like the weather, low levels at Angat Dam, and the upcoming dry season as hampering its operations.

"The volume of water we are able to produce at the plant has decreased because we have to secure the quality of water," he added.

The water concessionaire said it is working on multiple projects to improve its efficiency, from upgrading its filtration systems to installing new treatment processes.

It is currently working on the construction of a third water treatment plant, which will be ready for commercial operations by 2023.

"Slowly, our water production is going back to normal. We are actually grateful to our regulators, because they can give us a chance to explain what is going on in our plants and what augmentation work we are doing to (reduce) the impact on our customers," Mr. Padua added.

Maynilad serves Metro Manila's west zone, which supplies water to over 230,000 commercial and residential customers. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

# Slow internet, caps on foreign equity seen deterring FDI

POOR INTERNET connectivity is keeping foreign investors away, as are restrictions on foreign equity and the high cost of doing business, the Department of Finance (DoF) said.

The DoF was citing a report by investment promotion agencies (IPAs) to the Fiscal Incentives Review Board. The IPAs also noted that the effects of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic have also had an impact on business activity in economic zones.

"Some investment promotion agencies also stated the lack of basic utilities and quality internet connectivity as a

hindrance to investment," the DoF said in a statement on Wednesday.

Philippine mobile internet speeds improved in December, climbing one place to 89<sup>th</sup> out of 138 countries in a global ranking by Ookla, the network testing company behind Speedtest.

Median download speeds for mobile internet increased to 19.20 megabits per second (Mbps) in December from 18.68 Mbps a month earlier. Meanwhile, mobile upload speeds slipped to 5.60 Mbps from 5.64 Mbps.

"To address the restrictions (on) foreign equity, the Duterte administration has

strongly supported the amendments to the Public Service Act, Retail Trade Liberalization Act, and Foreign Investment Act, which will responsibly open up our economy to more foreign investment that will benefit our people in the form of more quality jobs, products, and services," Finance Secretary Carlos G. Dominguez III said.

"This, by the way, will also help investors and Filipino families have access to faster and more reliable internet connections. That is why it is critical that we liberalize the telco industry."

Mr. Dominguez added that the government will continue to roll out CO-

VID-19 vaccines. The government plans to fully vaccinate 77 million Filipinos by the end of the first quarter.

"The vaccination of our people against COVID-19 will allow us to remove the pandemic as a determinant of how the Philippine economy performs and allow more businesses to confidently invest in the country," he said.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) net inflows in the first 10 months of last year hit \$8.1 billion, up 48.1% from a year earlier, according to the central bank. — **Jenina P. Ibañez**

# 'Green' business growth to ultimately depend on economic motives as awareness broadens — DTI

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said participation in the green economy will ultimately depend on the viability of such businesses, though opportunities are growing because of growing public awareness of sustainability issues.

Trade Secretary Ramon M. Lopez said during a webinar on Wednesday that a ready market exists for green

and recycled products, with consumers becoming more aware of the need for zero-waste living.

"The basic incentive is to make (green businesses) economically rewarding to all participants in the so-called value chain. So far, there is money for all from the collectors, sorters, the trading of these products, and bringing it to where

it would be processed and recycled," Mr. Lopez said.

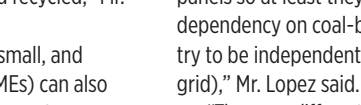
Mr. Lopez said micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) can also look into tapping solar energy to power their businesses.

"If MSMEs can start looking into solar energy as their (power) source, those with small operations, can put up solar

panels so at least they can reduce their dependency on coal-based electricity and try to be independent (from the power grid)," Mr. Lopez said.

"There are different models right now for small solar infrastructure. You can scale it up if there are many SMEs in the area, you can also talk of a solar infrastructure grid," he added. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

**FULL STORY**



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## OPINION

# Toward a new sports reality

Sports have continually pushed the boundaries of innovation and humanity's physical limitations. Just like any business, professional athletes and organizations constantly look for new ways to reinvent themselves and surmount roadblocks to success.

Notwithstanding the impact of COVID-19 on the sports industry — especially live sporting events and player development — technology has provided opportunities for sports organizations and leagues to reimagine their operations.

Over the past two years, professional sports leagues have significantly invested in technology through partnerships with global tech giants.

Although the pandemic nearly halted the operations of these leagues, technologies such as cloud computing and the Internet of Things (IoT) have allowed them to enrich their fan experience and have permitted teams to harness the power of data by arriving at smarter decisions on and off the court.

### NEXT-LEVEL SPORTS ANALYTICS AND TRAINING

To wit, a major basketball association secured a multi-year partnership with a leading technology company to leverage their cloud capabilities in harnessing the power of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning to provide advanced metrics such as play type breakdowns,

player tracking data, detailed shot charts and hustle stats.

With all this information, teams can properly assess their strategy and player utilization, as well as how data and basketball knowledge complement one another.

But the best part is the conversation sparked among sports fanatics as they compare players' performances — for example, analyzing shooting efficiency by shot types from various distances and eventually identifying the best shotmakers in the game. It is widely believed that evaluating these data sets can help settle the debate on who the greatest players of all time are.

In the Philippines, a professional basketball team has continued to develop team strategy through an app that helps coaches teach basketball better, and also helps players understand tactics more efficiently. Management saw the benefits of harnessing technology due to the limitations of in-person practice and gatherings during the lockdown, especially when onboarding new team members.

The app allows players to study the team's playbook in the comfort of their own homes using their devices. All they need to do is download the app and for the coaching staff to upload the team's offensive and defensive schemes, along with scouting videos. The app also engages the players, testing their knowl-

edge and understanding of the team's game plan and designed plays.

The ballclub has reported huge improvements in practices, which are running more seamlessly as the players already have a good grasp of what to do, with players maximizing their idle time studying the plays and getting better.

Moreover, technology has greatly assisted and improved the fan experience. It has brought newer ways of engagement, whether through social media platforms, classic games playback, digital advertising on arena floors and online communication applications. Fans can also generate ideas and their own analysis by using the same applications used by the teams.

### ECO-FRIENDLY TECH IN LIVE SPORTS EVENTS

As we move towards a post-pandemic world, we see live sports events inching closer to full operations worldwide. Fans anticipate going to sports arenas, some of which are setting the bar for innovation and sustainability.

For instance, the Climate Pledge Arena, located in Seattle, is the world's first net-zero carbon arena. Its operations are fully powered by renewables — from on-site solar panels, off-site renewable energy, to reclaimed rainwater stored in an ice system ("Rain to Rink" technology).

This eco-friendly ice hockey arena has also implemented contactless transactions, where visitors can hover

their palms over devices to verify their identity and authorize transactions. This also allows the arena staff to serve food and beverages to their customers more efficiently. And emerging from our experiences with COVID-19, this contactless solution would help address current and future health concerns related to the spread of disease, a far cry from having to show vaccination cards and ID. Tech solutions will change the way sports venues will operate in the future.

### INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY AND BUSINESS

The continuing innovation in technology used by professional sports teams and organizations raises several questions and concerns about their ability to handle massive amounts of data. Despite all the benefits that the Cloud and newer technology bring, finding the right team, services and organization to optimize operations and strategies is crucial to success. This applies to any business, sports or otherwise.

Consider these when adopting technologies such as Cloud and IoT:

- Assess the value these technologies will bring to your organization, such as the cost of migrating or purchasing vendor services, and evaluating which provider will align with your company's needs.
- Understand the cost implications of using cloud-based technology.
- Strategize on the long-term use of these technologies and manage the risks

in buying resources such as sensors, cameras, and trackers.

- Integrate the latest technology and iterate or prototype how these services will complement your existing and future needs.

- Adopt a culture of upskilling and being future-forward on new technology.

- Exercise integrity and purpose in managing sensitive customer information.

- Comply with regulations on the storing and handling of information integrated into newer technologies such as palm recognition.

Just like how sports have transformed lives and cultures and held up a better version of ourselves for the world, sports industry innovation by leveraging modern technology is not going away anytime soon.

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