

Israeli firms eye investments in PHL infrastructure, water sectors

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Reporters

ISRAELI FIRMS are interested in investing in the infrastructure, agriculture and water, and business process outsourcing (BPO) sectors in the Philippines.

Israel Head of Economic and Trade Mission to the Philippines Tomer Heyvi said that Israeli firms are awaiting the law amending the Public Services Act.

“BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) projects, agriculture, and water are definitely interesting,” he said in a roundtable discussion with *BusinessWorld* editors and reporters on Feb. 28.

For the water sector, Mr. Heyvi said Israeli firms are looking at desalination projects.

Congress last month ratified the measure amending the PSA Act, which was forwarded to Malacañang for President Rodrigo R. Duterte's signature.

Once signed, telecommunications, domestic shipping, railways and subways, airlines, expressways and tollways, and airports will no longer be subject to the 40% foreign ownership cap under the Constitution.

However, distribution and transmission of electricity; petroleum pipeline transmission sys-



A WORKER balances on steel frames as he works on a public infrastructure project in Metro Manila, Dec. 23, 2016.

REUTERS/ROMEO RANOCO

tems; water distribution systems; seaports and public utility vehicles will continue to be subjected to the 40% foreign ownership cap.

At the same time, Israeli Ambassador Ilan Fluss said Israeli firms are interested in expanding in the BPO sector in the Philippines.

“I think in terms of investments, it will be mainly in the BPO sectors so we have here Israeli companies that do BPO services and they found (that the) Philippines is a good place to outsource and I think it will only increase,” he said during the same interview.

Mr. Fluss said that Israel's priority is to advance the relations between the two countries by focusing on economic development and innovation.

“What I would like to do is create what I call ‘innovation bridges’ between Israel and the Philippines,” he said.

Israel is known for its expertise on technology and innovation, with 13% of its gross domestic product coming from the high-tech industry. More than 300 multinational corporations have research and development centers in Israel. It also houses nearly 4,000 startup companies.

Total bilateral trade between Israel and Philippines reached a value of \$338 million in 2019. Some of the trade between the two countries include agricultural products, semiconductors, BPO services, and tourism.

Meanwhile, an agreement seeking to improve economic and investment relations between Philippines and Israel is almost completed.

Nir Balzam, deputy chief of Mission at the Embassy of Israel

in Manila, said the Philippine-Israel Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (IPPA) is almost finished and may be signed before the Duterte administration ends in June.

“We just finished the negotiation last Thursday. There are a few internal issues that they have to resolve, both Israel and Philippines. Hopefully, it will happen in the second quarter and probably during this administration,” Mr. Balzam said.

Mr. Fluss said the agreement will “give a really strong signal to the private sector.” He said the IPPA would ensure investors from both sides are protected, and there will be no interference in business interactions involving huge investments.

“The agreement provides how do you protect investors on both sides in case something goes wrong, how do you prevent governments from interfering in business interactions, and how do you make sure that this money is protected,” he said.

“I think the most important thing here when we sign this agreement is it's a message from both governments, assuring investors that they are welcome, they are protected, their money is protected, and the two governments want to see more business interaction between the two countries,” he added.



RLC expands Antipolo mall

ROBINSONS Land Corp. (RLC) is expanding its mall in Antipolo, Rizal, in anticipation of increased foot traffic during the summer months.

In a statement, the Gokongwei-led developer said the expansion of Robinsons Place Antipolo will open by May 2022. This will increase the mall's gross floor area by 40%.

Arlene Magtibay, RLC senior vice-president and general manager for Robinsons Malls, said the mall is being expanded to target the “young and upwardly mobile market.”

“We are opening the expansion mall in the summer which is when a lot of people visit Antipolo. We are excited to welcome our shoppers to this new wing that will surely make their malling experience at Robinsons Place Antipolo even more delightful,” she said.

Robinsons Place Antipolo will have more international and local retail shops, restaurants, clinics, courier services, pet grooming shop, and select government agencies.

Robinsons Movieworld, kids' amusement centers, and hobby shops will also open as restrictions ease.

“The new wing will provide our customers an experience that goes beyond traditional shopping. It will address their desire for more global fashion brands as well as elevate their dining experience with must-try restaurants,” Ms. Magtibay said.

RLC reported a 47% rise in net income to P6.44 billion in the first nine months of 2021, as the government eased lockdown restrictions.

Last year, the company opened Robinsons Place La Union, the 53rd Robinsons Mall in the country.

Hotels welcome ‘super commuters’

JOU-YIE CHOU is among a new breed of late-stage pandemic hotel regulars: the super commuter.

As the pandemic drags into its third calendar year and remote work shifts to hybrid models, employees who moved to the suburbs or even farther are becoming fixtures at city hotels, where they are establishing comfortable bolt-holes after the commute in for meetings that can't be taken over Zoom. And some hotels, eager to tap into this new market while still having yet to recover from the blow of 2020, are crafting new packages designed specifically for them, with amenities like parking, conference rooms and low midweek rates to sweeten the deal.

Take Chou, who moved to Lakeville, Connecticut, from New York City with his wife, Bentley Beich, early in the pandemic. To take the sting out of the more than 100-mile drive to his job as a partner at the design agency Post Co., Chou, 40, has become a regular on Tuesday nights at Brooklyn's Ace Hotel (he is a former brand director for the hotel). He doesn't entirely mind.

“Being back in the city, there's still a liveliness to it that is pretty energizing. Being in and around that culture is a welcome change,” he said.

For hoteliers, regular stays by commuters like Chou offer one path back to recouping the massive losses they experienced during the pandemic. After dipping in the early weeks of 2022 as the Omicron surge ripped through the country, occupancy rates in the United States climbed past 50% in February, according to STR, a global hospitality data and analytics company (for comparison, 2019 occupancy rates were 66.1%). The growth was apparent across not just weekend stays, but also those logged from Monday to Wednesday.

PROMOTIONS FOR MIDWEEK GUESTS

While the Ace Hotel chain has Chou's loyalty, it hasn't rolled out any promotions for midweek commuters. But other brands have. In Britain, The Accor Group, whose hotels include The Savoy, Mama Shelter and the Pullman London St. Pancras, crafted a Commute and Stay promotion, which includes two midweek nights in a discounted room (up to 15% off) in a city-center hotel with flexible cancellation and assistance in booking venues for after-work drinks or entertaining clients.

The citizenM hotel chain, which has properties in cities like New York, Boston, San Francisco and London, recently started a monthly subscription deal for regulars, offering one stay per month at €99, or about \$119. “We're definitely seeing a new rhythm of one to two stays a month,” said Ernest Lee, the brand's chief growth officer. “We saw it a little bit before the pandemic, but not to this level.”

The Hoxton Chicago has a Work Stay Play package, which the general manager, Amos Kelsey, created to allow guests access to the facility's in-house co-working space after noticing an uptick in far-flung commuters booking midweek stays.

“That package has really been popular with suburbanites coming in from all corners of Chicago,” said Kelsey, who noted that midweek business at the Hoxton has outpaced other hotels in the city — at the end of 2021, corporate bookings were three times higher than the wider Chicago market.

At reStays Ottawa, a boutique hotel that opened in the Canadian capital in 2021, the marketing director, Claudine Hart, reports a pattern

of single or two-day stays, with business travelers comprising 80% of midweek guests.

At the San Francisco Proper Hotel, which is on Market Street, within walking distance of companies like Twitter and Uber, Mario Bevilacqua von Günderröde, the general manager, said midweek occupancy rates are climbing at the same pace as weekend rates. “We actually started to change the way we do business and the way we cater to our clients following this trend,” he said. The hotel has made sure their room service menu is available 24/7 and all of their food and beverage outlets are open; last month they also added a complimentary car service for trips to nearby offices.

CHEAPER THAN RENTING

Some former city dwellers now facing hourlong commutes have considered renting pied-à-terres in their former urban homes. But skyrocketing rent prices — nationally, the cost to lease an apartment is up more than 10%, and in cities like Boston and Orlando, they've jumped more than 25% — have made regular hotel stays a more affordable option.

Bob Schmidt, 61, is the co-founder of a New York City-based financial-technology company, The Guarantors. A lifelong New Yorker, he moved to Cape Cod with his wife in January 2021 when work was fully remote, but shortly after began commuting into the office for a few days at a time, once every three weeks. He's thought about buying a small apartment to use when he visits, but he crunched the numbers and realized it would cost much more than his hotel bills. And it would also force him to commute to the same neighborhood.

“If you're only staying four or five nights a month in New York City, it doesn't pay to have an apartment right now,” he said. By staying in hotels, he said, “I can move around as much as I want. I generally find a boutique hotel, go there for two or three months, and when I've had my fill, I pick another neighborhood and another hotel.”

Hotels in Manhattan are offering car commuters like Schmidt targeted deals. In Midtown Manhattan, the Crowne Plaza HY36 developed a parking package after staff noticed a significant uptick of midweek guests driving in from the tristate area. Parking in the hotel is generally \$67 per night; the package, which is now the hotel's most booked promotion, offers rates as low as \$20.

And nearby, both the Conrad New York Downtown and the Conrad New York Midtown have crafted commuter-focused packages for workers who don't have access to a conference room. At the Conrad New York Downtown, a package called “Work and Well” includes day use of a suite and room service delivery of breakfast, lunch and a 4 p.m. cocktail; at the Conrad New York Midtown, “Clock In at Conrad” allows up to eight colleagues to co-work in a sky suite with catered breakfast and lunch, and added perks, including fitness-center access and sessions with a wellness coach.

Some hotels are even offering employees who have grown accustomed to midday naps on the living room sofa a spot for a quick snooze. At Walker Hotels, which has two locations in New York City, nap pod memberships are available for weekday power naps; four sessions, each good for 90 minutes, cost \$199. — © 2022 The New York Times

DMCI Homes adds 4th building to Alder Residences

DMCI Project Developers, Inc. last month launched the fourth and last building of its Alder Residences project in Acacia Estates, Taguig City.

Sylvan is the fourth building at Alder Residences, which also includes the Andea, Manzuria, and Oregon buildings. Andea and Manzuria buildings are targeted for occupancy in June and September 2024, respectively, while Oregon is scheduled for March 2025 and Sylvan in December 2025.

Sylvan units feature layouts with two, three and four bedrooms, ranging from 64.5 square meters (sq.m.) to 151.5 sq.m.

Amenities include kiddie pool, leisure pool, lap pool, gardens, basketball court, children's play area, and coworking space. There is also a roof deck at Alder Residences' four 18-storey buildings.

DMCI Homes Vice-President for Project Development Dennis Yap said Alder Residences sells an average of 34 units per

month even with lingering concerns over the pandemic.

“Our Acacia Estates projects have always been consistent big sellers because of the township's advantageous location. You get to live in a serene and exclusive neighborhood while enjoying easy access to the airports and the BGC and Makati business districts,” Mr. Yap said.

Alder Residences units start at P7.28 million. DMCI is also offering flexible payment options for buyers.

Science Park of the Philippines: Embracing ESG for long-term sustainability

As one of the longest-standing private ecozone developers with strong environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices in the Philippines, we have always been committed to green and sustainable developments driven by industry-leading standards from site selection, to design, construction and operations.

Environmental Practices

Our commitment to minimize our carbon footprint in the day-to-day operations of our ecozone parks has earned us numerous recognitions over the years.



Awards received include PEZA Hall of Fame for pioneering environmental practices, 2020 PEZA Excellence Award for Green, Healthy, Smart and Sustainable Ecozone, 2021 DENR Best Environmental Practices of Private Sectors and the prestigious LEED Gold certification for our LISP IV administration building.



Notable undertakings of SPPI include masterplan designs considering the impact of climate change; generous and green open spaces; efficient operations towards resource conservation, pollution prevention, and waste minimization; use of renewable energy; adoption of smart technologies; and development of integrated townships.

Long before green efforts and sustainability became a mandate in the industrial park industry, we introduced the centralized wastewater treatment plant and this pioneering effort has become a standard requirement by PEZA for all parks since then.



We have pushed ourselves to improve our sustainability programs by setting reduction goals for greenhouse gas emissions by providing e-vehicles to

our locators and employees; by using energy efficient lighting fixtures, appliances and air conditioning systems; and installing solar panels and conducting periodic vehicle emission testing.

Social Factors

We conscientiously and proactively serve the social needs of our host communities, employees and locators through advocacy works on skills enhancement, literacy programs and providing education to the underprivileged. These programs are complemented by provision of transportation allowance to students, book donation as well as facilities improvements and school repairs.



Basic Entrepreneurial Training for community women in Malvar, Batangas

Trabaho Caravan in Calamba, Laguna employs hundreds from our host communities

We incentivize and provide trainings and sustainable livelihoods to our host communities in Laguna, Batangas, Pampanga, Bataan, Cagayan de Oro and Cebu.



Special humanitarian response such as donation of essential goods like sacks of rice, drinking water, and solar lamps which are distributed in active partnership with local government units and agencies, civil society organizations and other like-minded groups.

In response to the challenges of the present times, we have enforced company protocols and preventive measures like park wide vaccination to help achieve herd immunity for a safer working environment in all parks under the new normal.

Governance factors

SPPI adheres to the highest ethical and professional standards through its competent and experienced corporate leaders which results in transparency of operations as well as institution of organizational policies that promote employee integrity. Our Board is composed of Directors with a collective mix of competence, experience, gender representation and expertise, complemented by Independent Directors who provide guidance towards credible governance standards.