

# TUCP files petition for P820 daily minimum wage in Central Luzon

THE Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP) on Tuesday filed a petition seeking to increase the daily minimum wage in Central Luzon to P820 from P420, in line with petitions filed with other regional wage boards.

The TUCP said in a statement that the current P420 daily wage in Central Luzon is no longer sufficient to provide workers a decent living.

It said the region's current daily wage was set almost three years ago, "when the regional wage board granted a measly P20.00 increase in 2019 which had been long dissipated by the succeeding price increases since that year."

The TUCP said that with the rising prices of food and other essentials, the current minimum wage in the region "can only accord them and their families with nutritionally deficient survival meals."

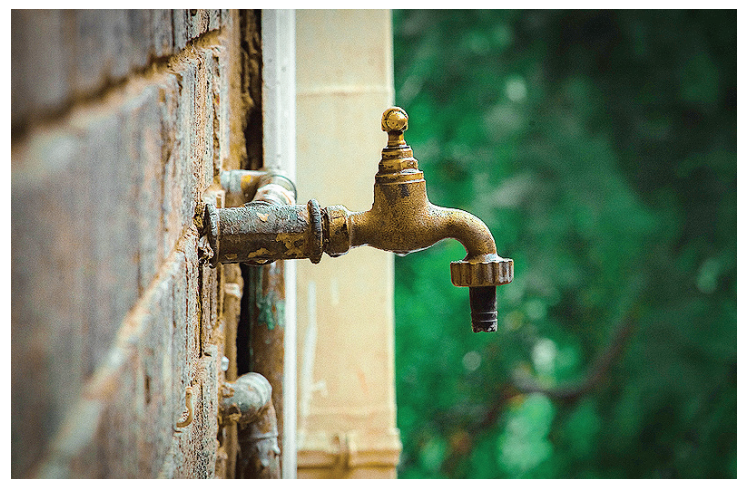
"With the current minimum wage in Region III, a measly P15 per meal can be allocated per member of the family," it said. "What kind of food can be bought for P15 nowadays?"

The TUCP said the minimum wage in Central Luzon puts earners and their families well below the poverty threshold of P16,226.00 per month. The minimum wage implies monthly income of P10,920.00,

or P9,570.55 when adjusted for inflation.

"Poverty incidence among families in Central Luzon is in the double digits except in Pampanga with 6.2% poverty rate," it said, citing government data.

It said that the poverty rate was estimated at 24% in Aurora, 12.8% in Bataan, 14.9% in Bulacan, 17% in Nueva Ecija, 13.2% in Tarlac, and 22% in Zambales. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**



## Manila Water targeting 'smart, lean' operations, signs Singapore tech deal

MANILA WATER Co., Inc. said it expects to exercise enhanced "cost discipline" this year as it undertakes major projects to supply its core East Zone water services business.

In a report, Manila Water President and Chief Executive Officer Jose Victor Emmanuel A. de Dios said: "We will streamline operations and rationalize operating expenses. Cost discipline will be reinforced to ensure the delivery of results through a smarter and leaner deployment of resources."

The company's main businesses are water services to Metro Manila's East Zone (EZ), Non-EZ Philippines, and Non-EZ international.

The major EZ projects the company is currently undertaking are the Wawa Calawis water treatment project in Antipolo with a capacity of 80 million liters of water per day (MLD), and the 250 MLD East Bay Water Treatment Plant along Laguna de Bay.

Phase 1 of the Wawa Calawis water treatment plant is currently under construction. Its output will augment the water supply for EZ customers upon completion.

The report did not provide an estimate of capital expenditure (capex) this year. In 2021, the company allocated capex of P16.9 billion, with P13.9 billion invested in EZ operations. The bulk of the projects it pursued involved wastewater treatment capacity expansion, network reliability improvements, and tapping new water sources.

The company has 41 EZ wastewater treatment facilities. It also broke ground on the 53-kilometer (km) Mandaluyong West Sewerage System Project and the Aglipay Sewage Treatment Plant (ATP) with a 60 MLD capacity, expandable up to 120 MLD.

Non-EZ initiatives include potential projects in Central and Northern Luzon.

"We will work to improve our financial performance as well and introduce innovations that are thoughtful, swift, effective and most importantly, long-lasting to ensure the continued enhancement of shareholder value," Mr. De Dios added.

Separately, Manila Water said it signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Enterprise Singapore (ESG) to pursue technology exchanges.

The partnership will involve water technology test deployments by Singapore companies in the East Zone as well as outside Metro Manila.

ESG is an arm of Singapore's Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI).

It aids startups, small firms, and high-growth companies by supporting new, productivity-enhancing technologies.

Manila Water's East Zone covers Marikina, Pasig, Taguig, Makati, San Juan, Mandaluyong, parts of Quezon City and Manila, and Rizal province. — **Ram Christian S. Agustin with Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

## DTI seeks more resilient pharma supply chain

THE government has promised its support to make the pharmaceutical industry more competitive while making its supply chain more resilient to disruptions like the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

Trade Undersecretary Ceferino S. Rodolfo said during the first general membership meeting of the Philippine Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (PPMA) on April 8 that "by 2024, it is forecasted that the total pharmaceutical market will be valued at \$4.17 billion. Philippine health expenditure is on the rise, with consumer health expenditure posting double-digit

growth in the last three years with an average of 11%."

"The Philippine pharmaceutical market is dominated by a few key players in almost the entire value chain — from production to distribution and retail. While the Philippine pharmaceutical industry is dominated by multi-national companies (which) account for more than half the total value of sales (56.5%) — local companies are now putting up strong competition, specifically in the sale of generic drugs," he added.

Mr. Rodolfo pushed for the development of herbal medicine production.

"The growth of local production of herbal medicines will spur (their) development... as a robustly expanding wholesale and retail sector for herbal medicines will generate income and employment opportunities," Mr. Rodolfo said.

The Board of Investments (BoI), of which Mr. Rodolfo is the Managing Head, is encouraging investment in research and development and supply chain development for herbal products.

"The Philippines is making significant progress in developing nature-based products. Herbal drugs for COVID-19 and

dengue are being developed by the industry, while active pharmaceutical ingredients (API) in herbal drug products such as lagundi and sambong, are already being produced locally," the BoI said.

Recently, the BoI approved the registration of Lloyd Laboratories, Inc. for a project worth P24 million as a domestic producer of Molnupiravir, an oral drug for COVID-19 patients. The production facility is located in Malolos, Bulacan and has an annual capacity of 1 million 400-milligram capsules of Molnupiravir. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

## PHL seeking to join US-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework

THE Philippines is seeking to join the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) organized by the US, according to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

In a statement on Tuesday, the DTI said Trade Secretary Ramon M. Lopez led a Philippine trade delegation to Washington, DC in bilateral talks with US Trade Representative Katherine Tai.

Mr. Lopez expressed the Philippines' interest in joining the initiative during the meeting.

The DTI described the IPEF as a "vehicle" for improved US economic engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, focused on trade facilitation setting, standards for the digital

economy and technology, making the supply chain more resilient, pursuing initiatives in decarbonization and clean energy, infrastructure, and labor standards.

According to the DTI, the Philippines is interested in elements of the IPEF that have to do with micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME) promotion and development, the digital economy, supply chain resiliency, the environment, sustainability, and infrastructure investment.

Ms. Tai said during the meeting that the Philippines is welcome to join IPEF.

Meanwhile, Mr. Lopez also said the Philippines is interested in participating in the Alaskan seafood trade.

"The Philippines would be a good choice for processing... seafood from Alaska for re-export. The Philippines has extensive experience and a competitive edge in terms of processing and toll packing, as exemplified by our engagement with the European Union (EU). This may assist in boosting agricultural trade between the US and the Philippines," Mr. Lopez said.

The DTI said the two countries are further discussing Philippine plans to export pineapples to the US, with Mr. Lopez also noting the increased activity in the Philippines of US data center developers that cater to hyperscalers.

"These also lead to more renewable energy capacity since renewable energy is the required source of energy for these facilities. These efforts are underway and will support building stronger trade and investment ties with the US," Mr. Lopez said.

In 2021, the US was the Philippines' third largest trading partner, top export market, and fifth largest import supplier, according to the DTI. Bilateral trade with the US was \$19.6 billion, with the Philippines enjoying a modest trade surplus. The US was also the Philippines' fifth largest investor that year with approved investments worth \$77.64 million. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

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## IP protections touted as key benefit of RCEP participation

THE PHILIPPINES stands to benefit from the intellectual property (IP) provisions of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), according to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

Trade Assistant Secretary Allan B. Gepty said at a recent webinar organized by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-Japan Center that the RCEP's IP protections will help create a business environment that fosters competition and innovation.

"On the aspect of business, some of the benefits of a robust IP regime in the RCEP region, (include) streamlined procedures for IP applications, a level playing field in IP protection and enforcement, and a standard protection of the interests of inventors, authors and performers, particularly on digital platforms," Mr. Gepty said.

Mr. Gepty added that a solid IP regime encourages inventiveness and creativity while balancing the rights of IP owners and the public interest.

"We have to know, if not master, the utilization of our intellectual capabilities. The IP System is a great equalizer that can facilitate the generation of value from our creativity, inventiveness, and innovativeness. Let us therefore promote, protect, and respect intellectual property," Mr. Gepty said.

RCEP is a trade agreement involving Australia, China, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and the 10 members of the ASEAN. It started taking effect in many member countries on Jan. 1.

The Philippines has yet to sign on to RCEP after the Senate failed to ratify it before adjourning on Feb. 3 for the election break. President Rodrigo R. Duterte signed the trade agreement on Sept. 2. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

## Napocor missionary-area power capacity 88.53 MW at end of 2021

THE National Power Corp. (Napocor) said the power it generates in missionary areas rose to 88.53 megawatts (MW) at the end of 2021, from 13.66 MW in 2016.

In a report filed to Finance Secretary Carlos G. Dominguez, who also serves as the company's chairman, Napocor said it added 321.5 circuit kilometers of transmission lines over the same period in remote, missionary areas, which are served by an arm of Napocor known as the Small Power Utilities Group (SPUG).

The starting point in 2016 was 776.03 circuit kilometers, Napocor Officer-in-Charge Melchor P. Ridulme was quoted as saying in a statement issued by the Department of Finance (DoF).

Mr. Ridulme, who is also Napocor's Chief Operating Officer, also said the company hopes to increase the number of SPUG facilities to 296 by June from 285 at the end of 2021, servicing 240 missionary areas, from 229 at the end of 2021.

"Napocor plans to expand capacity additions in missionary areas to 106.58 megawatts and its transmission lines to 1,125.46 circuit kilometers, along with increasing substation capacity to 225 megawatts by June 2022," Mr. Ridulme said in his report.

The number of SPUG plants operating round the clock has also increased to 82, from 41 plants in 2016, he added.

"Napocor is also active in the reforestation of watershed open areas to support sustainable hydro and geothermal plant operations in the main grids," the DoF said in its statement.

Reforestation in watershed areas covered 4,419 hectares (has.) at the end of 2021, from 1,881 has. in 2016, Mr. Ridulme added.

Last month, Napocor sought approval from the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) to use P335.35 million from collected universal charges for watershed rehabilitation.

Under Republic Act (RA) No. 9136, or the Electric Power Industry Reform Act (EPIRA), Napocor is responsible for providing power to areas that are not connected to the transmission system.

Electrification projects in off-grid areas are funded by their own revenue supplemented by universal charges (UC) collected from all other consumers.

The National Transmission Corp. (Transco) also reported to Mr. Dominguez that it inspected 85 assets and four projects of the National Grid Corp. of the Philippines (NGCP) to ensure compliance with Department of Energy (DoE) policies.

Transco President and CEO Jainal A. Bahjin II said, however, that most of the inspections were virtual, due to mobility restrictions in force during the pandemic. Transco resumed physical inspections starting March 22, Mr. Bahjin said.

Under Republic Act No. 9136, or the Electric Power Industry Reform Act of 2001 (EPIRA), Napocor is responsible for power generation in areas not connected to the main grid.

Mr. Bahjin said Transco validated 173 right-of-way claims and filed expropriation cases or approved right-of-way claims involving the company's transmission lines and substations in 2021. — **Tobias Jared Tomas**

## IPOPHL signs piracy monitoring partnership with US movie trade association

THE Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines (IPOPHL) said it entered into a partnership to monitor piracy with the Motion Picture Association (MPA), the US trade group for the movie industry.

The IPOPHL said in a statement on Tuesday that the MPA committed to support the creation of a piracy monitoring system and a rolling site-blocking regime that will disrupt accessibility to piracy sites.

It said the memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed on April 12 to finalize the partnership.

"This newest partnership with MPA elevates IPOPHL's whole-of-society efforts in fostering a digital environment that respects intellectual property (IP) rights," IPOPHL Director General Rowel S. Barba said.

Mr. Barba said the pandemic worsened digital privacy, leading to billions

in lost revenue for legitimate content providers.

According to IPOPHL, the MOU allows for information-sharing to reduce digital piracy in the Philippines.

"The MPA also commits to conduct training on various piracy prevention measures. The group will also provide reasonable assistance to help IPOPHL and other relevant agencies effectively implement rolling site blocking and take down," IPOPHL said.

Jan van Voorn, MPA executive vice-president of global content protection, said piracy remained rampant in the Philippines, with a negative impact on job creation and the overall economy.

"A site blocking framework, which incorporates transparency and due process, can be incredibly effective at reducing levels of online piracy in key markets like the Philippines," Mr. Van Voorn said. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**