

PHL digital quality of life worsens

THE Philippines' ranking in index measuring digital wellbeing went down seven places amid lower scores in Internet connection affordability, quality, and stability, as well as cybersecurity.

The country ranked 55th out of 117 countries in the Digital Quality of Life Index 2022 by virtual private network service provider Surfshark from 48th last year. This year's study includes seven countries more than the 2021 edition.

In Asia, the Philippines placed 14th out of 34 countries.

Surfshark said in a statement on Wednesday that the study covers 92% of the global population or 7.2 billion people and measures the digital quality of life based on Internet affordability and quality, e-infrastructure, e-security, and e-government.

It is based on the United Nations open-source information and data from the World Bank, Freedom House, and the International Communications Union, among others.

Out of the five categories, the Philippines performed the worst in internet affordability, ranking 98th globally, down 26 places from 72nd a year prior.

"Internet in the Philippines is not affordable compared to global standards," Surfshark said.

It said a 1 gigabyte (GB) mobile internet package costs 4 minutes and

51 seconds of work per month in the Philippines, 59 times more than the 5 seconds of work needed to buy a 1 GB package in Israel, which has the most affordable mobile Internet in the world, based on the index.

Still, mobile internet affordability in the Philippines improved from the previous year, with the work needed to afford the service dropping by 27 minutes and 3 seconds. The country placed 60th in terms of time to work to afford the cheapest mobile internet, up 44 places from 104th the prior year.

As for fixed broadband, Filipinos need to work around 11 hours and 5 minutes per month to afford the cheapest package available.

"To afford it, Filipinos have to work 34 times more than Israeli citizens, for whom the most affordable package costs only 19 minutes of work monthly," Surfshark said.

Broadband internet also became less affordable in the Philippines since the previous year, it said, as people now have to work 6 hours 4 minutes more per month to afford the same service, ranking 103rd in the world, down 31 places from 72nd last year.

Surfshark said the global digital divide is growing bigger as internet connections have become less affordable.

"With the current inflation, the pressure on low-income households that need the internet has become even heavier," it said. "Surfshark's study also found that countries with the poorest internet connection have to work for it the longest."

Meanwhile, the Philippines dropped 25 places to rank 45th for internet quality this year. While the average mobile Internet speed and stability improved, speed growth worsened from last year. As for broadband, average internet speed improved but stability and speed growth were worse.

"Regarding internet speed alone, Philippines' fixed broadband internet ranks higher than mobile in the global ranking, operating at 75.1 Megabits per second or Mbps (55th globally). Meanwhile, the mobile internet comes 61st (38.7 Mbps)," Surfshark said.

"Since last year, mobile internet speed in the Philippines has improved by 33% (9.6 Mbps), and fixed broadband speed has grown by 52.2% (25.8 Mbps)," it added.

The company said internet quality in the Philippines is "comparatively mediocre", with fixed broadband connections better than mobile globally.

In comparison, Singapore, which has the fastest internet in the world this

year, has mobile speeds of up to 104 Mbps and fixed broadband speed of at most 261 Mbps.

Meanwhile, for electronic security, which measures readiness to counter cybercrimes and its commitment to protecting online privacy, the Philippines ranked 44th, down from 30th last year.

The country also dropped two places to rank 65th globally for electronic infrastructure, which measures the number of individuals using the internet and network readiness.

Lastly, for electronic government, which determines how advanced and digitized a country's government services are, it rose five ranks to 62nd place.

"While countries with a strong digital quality of life tend to be those of advanced economies, our global study found that money doesn't always buy digital happiness," Gabriele Racaityte-Krasauske, head of PR at Surfshark, was quoted as saying.

"That is why, for the fourth year in a row, we continue analyzing the Digital Quality of Life to see how different nations keep up with providing the basic digital necessities for their citizens. Most importantly, our research seeks to show the full picture of the global digital divide that millions of people are suffering from," she said. — **A.N.O. Tan**

Leading local merchants get boost during Shopee's 9.9 sale event

E-COMMERCE platform Shopee on Tuesday said its top local merchants in the Philippines sold six times more items during its September sale period.

"Boosted by increased shopper traffic and support from Shopee's platform tools, top local sellers sold 6 times more items on 9 September than on an average day," Shopee said in a statement.

"Shoppers were treated to plentiful days of fun from Aug. 26, leading up to a star-studded TV special on Sept. 9," Shopee said.

As part of its preparations for 9.9 Super Shopping Day, Shopee worked with sellers to curate a wide assortment of P1 and P49 deals.

"Filipinos were keen to maximize the available deals in acquiring their daily necessities, with one shopper saving as much as P200,000 for essential back-to-school items like a new laptop, laptop accessories, and desk accessories," Shopee said.

It added that local sellers took advantage of 9.9 promo to grow their businesses.

"We are committed to benefit online shoppers, by bringing them more joy, value, and excitement every 9.9," Shopee Philippines Director Martin Yu said in a statement.

"This drives us to use our platform to deliver the best value for money with our 'Mas Mura sa Shopee' offers, and to explore other equally fulfilling possibilities that serve the evolving needs of customers and businesses alike, especially as we gear towards another meaningful year-end shopping season," Mr. Yu added.

One top local merchant from Valenzuela City sold over 400,000 packs of face masks on Sept. 9 alone, while a fashion accessories seller was able to gain 80,000 views for its livestream.

Brands like Uni-Care, Unilever Beauty, and Maybelline also saw a boost in orders as customers used Shopee for their go-to branded essentials.

Shopee said seller offerings in the period created more value for customers as they snapped up the best promotions and cheaper prices of products ranging from daily essentials to gadgets.

Throughout the period, Shopee users tuned in 87 million times to livestreams and the platform recorded 16 million total plays in its in-app games.

Shopee also reported that purchases of ShopeePay's P1 mobile load and data promos tripled within the period.

"Local shoppers also used ShopeePay to pay off their wish list items on mobile phone accessories, skincare products, and kitchenware sets while payment transactions with various billers doubled during the super shopping day," it added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Canva launches new suite of workplace products, features

By **Brontë H. Lacsamana** Reporter

VISUAL communications company Canva released on Wednesday a suite of new workplace products and features that can be accessed on any device as it aims to streamline design work systems for organizations of all sizes.

The new Visual Worksuite has Docs, Whiteboards, Websites, Video, and Data Visualization, all available on the platform for workplaces of various industries.

Canva Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer Melanie Perkins said in a statement that visual communication has become an increasingly critical skill for teams of every size across almost every industry.

"With the launch of our new Visual Worksuite, we're bringing simple design products to the workplace to empower every employee, at every organization and on every device," Ms. Perkins said.

The new suite marks a milestone for Canva as it has reached 85 million global users who produce more than 180 designs every second.

Its main products include:

1. Canva Docs

Built with the modern workplace in mind, Canva Docs aims to make traditional text documents more visually captivating and allows multiple people to comment and collaborate in real-time. Users can also access Canva's library of over 100 million design assets and embed them into their documents.

If the document needs to be presented, it can be converted into a full-fledged Canva Presentation with one click.

2. Canva Websites

Professionals can build simple to highly interactive websites using this new product. Catering even to those without technical skills, Canva Websites offers hundreds of templates, customizable domains, and adjustable page heights that one can use.

It also comes with Canva's new Design Insights analytics feature, which provides information on site visits and a quick look at audiences and interests that can be used to drive engagement.

3. Canva Whiteboards

Made for teams who want to explore ideas together, Canva Whiteboards is an infinite canvas for

brainstorming. It can contain sticky notes, images, diagrams, and even a synced timer to keep meetings on track. Canva's team shared at the launch that this was created to bolster productivity in a world of hybrid work.

4. Video Background Remover

The Canva Video Suite now has a feature that allows users to remove the background from any video. The Video Background Remover is for those who want to create professional-looking content without needing a big budget or complex software.

5. Data Visualization

To level up data storytelling, the Flourish function makes it possible to turn dense data and statistics into simple, clear, and easy to understand interactive visuals. There are many templates to choose from to make complex data accessible, such as animated bar races or drill-down sunbursts.

6. Remote Control for Presentations

Canva has also added remote presentation control to its Presentation product. This enables multiple presenters to control the flow of a presentation from any device using a new virtual clicker.

Israeli companies seek ICT cooperation with Philippine counterparts

ISRAEL has vowed to connect Israeli information communications technology (ICT) firms with Philippine stakeholders to strengthen trade relations and boost technological innovation between the two countries, the Israeli embassy said on Wednesday.

During a business-to-business networking event organized by the embassy at the New World Hotel in Makati City, Israeli

Ambassador Ilan Fluss said the delegation of Israeli ICT firms that participated in the networking opportunity was the largest since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

"I call our companies and the local partners, we should bring not only the very best of technologies but also aspects of knowledge transfer and job creation," he said at the event. "This will make our

long-term partnership beneficial for all parties."

The companies that participated in the event were primarily engaged in cybersecurity, 5G network development, and user prediction.

Appnext, an independent application discovery platform, was one of the several firms that pitched services to local stakeholders.

Alon Benami, the director of strategic partnerships for Ap-

pnext, said his firm has been working with local application developers for the past two years.

"We are working with 3,000 applications every day, and we partner with the world's top original equipment manufacturer (OEM) and telecommunications companies," he said.

Artificial Intelligence and big data prediction platform Tal-

amoos also presented how its service that anticipates a user's interests and preferences based on online behavior could increase a firm's revenues and engagements.

The networking event was a collaboration between the Israel Embassy and the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Representatives from the Department of Information and Communications Technology, local investors, and other

government representatives participated in the ICT roadshow event.

"Today technology and innovation is one of the key pillars in our relations with the Philippines," Mr. Fluss said. "Our priority and main effort is promoting the establishment of bridges of innovation and technology between our two countries." — **John Victor D. Ordoñez**

Smart aids law enforcers amid worsening text scams

SMART Communications, Inc. said on Wednesday that it is working with the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the coordinating council of the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) to track down the people behind text scams.

From June to August, Smart said that it had blocked a total of 167,000 numbers that were identified or have a connection to fraud activities, while it had also blocked around 342 million "smishing" messages in the same period.

"We are supporting government-led efforts to identify the scammers and to pin down where they're getting the SIMs that they're using to run their modus," PLDT, Inc. and Smart's First Vice-President and Chief Information Security Officer Angel T. Redoble said in a media release.

Mr. Redoble said that Smart is investigating sus-

picious subscriber identity module (SIM) card purchases that might be related to illegal activities.

"Our initial investigation has shown that the fraudulent messages are being sent phone-to-phone. They don't pass through aggregators. Most likely, the perpetrators have bought the SIMs in bulk. But through our blocking efforts, we are making it expensive for them to use this method," Mr. Redoble said.

The National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) has directed telecommunication companies to block or deactivate domains and uniform resource locators (URLs) in text messages, amid worsening text scams.

Hastings Holdings, Inc., a unit of PLDT Beneficial Trust Fund subsidiary MediaQuest Holdings, Inc., has a majority stake in *BusinessWorld* through the Philippine Star Group, which it controls. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

MRC Allied plans to acquire solutions provider 5G Security

MRC Allied, Inc. plans to acquire security solutions provider 5G Security, Inc., the holding firm said in a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange on Wednesday.

The company said that its board of directors approved the designation of Augusto M. Cosio, Jr., its president and chief executive officer, "to be the authorized representative in relation with the coordination, talk, transact and negotiate for the possible acquisition of 5G Security, Inc., subject with the due diligence of the company."

Mr. Cosio will also be authorized to sign, obtain, execute, deliver, file, and pro-

cess the documentary requirements of the transaction.

5G Security offers manned security, system, cyber and risk management for its clients.

MRC Allied said that the total asset of 5G Security to date is P248.85 million.

"The acquisition will depend on the result of the due diligence that shall be conducted whether to push through or not," it said. "The disclosure is being made to give the public the opportunity to understand the company's position in respect of the future."

In November 2020, MRC Allied signed a deal with 5G Security to acquire 75% of

Kerberus Corp. when it entered the holding industry.

Under the agreement, 5G Security increased the authorized capital stock of Kerberus to P300 million.

In the second quarter, MRC Allied's net loss narrowed to P3.87 million, lower by 45% than last year's P7.04 million.

The company's topline climbed to P1.24 million in the second quarter, almost twice the previous year's P652,500.

On the stock market on Wednesday, shares in MRC Allied closed 2.21% higher to P0.185 apiece. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

NLEX Corp. partners with youth welfare council for road safety

NLEX Corp. announced on Wednesday its partnership with Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council (JJWC) to address road incidents involving minors, as part of its road safety initiatives.

"Over the years, we have been coordinating with government agencies as part of our efforts to prevent stoning incidents and other prohibited acts along the NLEX-SCTEX (North Luzon Expressway-Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway) for the safety of the motorists traveling our expressways," said NLEX Corp. President J. Luigi L. Bautista in a press release.

NLEX Corp. said its partnership with JJWC will involve discussion of various policies and processes to protect the welfare of

children at risk and children in conflict with the law. They also gathered local officials from NLEX-SCTEX host communities in Metro Manila for an integrated care management protocol.

"This initiative by [NLEX Corp. and JJWC] will help balance safety in our city while advocating for the welfare of our children at risk and children in conflict with the law," Quezon City Mayor Maria Josefine "Joy" G. Belmonte.

The partnership also encouraged local government units to issue legislation involving minors.

Information from the NLEX website showed that in 2021, Municipal Ordinance No. 120 or the "Floridablanca Anti-Stoning

Ordinance" was issued. This intends to penalize stoning and other prohibited acts which is said to be committed by minors in SCTEX.

NLEX Corp. is part of Metro Pacific Tollways Corp., the tollway unit of Metro Pacific Investments Corp. (MPIC).

MPIC is one of three key Philippine units of Hong Kong-based First Pacific Co. Ltd., the others being Philex Mining Corp. and PLDT, Inc.

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