

Lenovo sees strong market for PHL data solutions

LENOVO GROUP LTD. is hoping to offer its analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), and other solutions in the Philippines as businesses digitize, generating more demand for data centers.

Citing the growing need for businesses and public services to be customer-centric, Lenovo believes in the strength of demand for “smarter solutions through technologies like cloud computing, analytics and AI, edge computing, and infrastructure-as-a-service,”

Lenovo Data Center Group’s Asia-Pacific President Sumir Bhatia said at a recent media briefing.

The company said its solutions are being used in the Philippines by corporations, banks, and small and medium businesses (SMBs).

One of these is TruScale, a data center solution that modernizes applications to address data storage issues.

Mr. Bhatia said: “The Philippines was one of the first countries to adopt TruScale, with our example being a local premier fi-

nanial institution that upgraded their data environment.”

Lenovo Asia-Pacific said there is great interest in the service, and it plans to use it as a springboard for expanding its smart infrastructure offerings.

“We are talking to more banks and conglomerates, and the government as of now is almost on board,” said Clark Popple, Lenovo Infrastructure Solutions Group country manager.

“In fact, eight out of 10 of our customers ask about TruScale.”

The company also sees the Philippines as an attractive market post-pandemic, especially with private and public spending on the rise.

“We’ve seen infrastructure being invested in... from tourism to the medical industry. The market is growing and that makes it very attractive. We want to make sure that we are also helping, using smarter technology to solve humanity’s greatest challenges,” Mr. Bhatia said.

Lenovo’s growth strategy includes investing more in research

and development (R&D). Of the 75,000 Lenovo employees globally, one in five are R&D specialists.

Its partnerships with emergent technology companies in the region also help it get to more customers, who are now more aware of the importance of digital transformation.

Kumar Mitra, Lenovo Central & Asia-Pacific regional general manager, said: “The Philippines is such a huge opportunity market for us from a growth perspective as we think the greatest sector that will grow here will be

data center reorganization. The Philippines is investing in data center modernization and edge-based computing use cases.”

On selling to Filipino businesses of all sizes, Mr. Popple added: “We approach customers directly with our partners and talk about these solutions that laymen don’t hear of.”

“There is competition but we are bullish in the market, so we’re trying to capture as many customers as we can bring into the market,” he said. — **Bronté H. Lacsamana**

US picks team to oversee \$52.7 billion in funding for building chip capacity

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration on Tuesday named a team of senior advisers to oversee \$52.7 billion in government funding to boost semiconductor manufacturing and research.

Commerce department Chief Economist Aaron Chatterji will serve as White House Coordinator for CHIPS Implementation at the National Economic Council (NEC) and will manage the work of the CHIPS Implementation Steering Council created by President Joseph R. Biden’s chips executive order signed last month.

In August, Congress approved \$52.7 billion for semiconductor manufacturing and research and a 25% investment tax credit for chip plants that is estimated to be worth \$24 billion.

NEC Director Brian Deese said Mr. Chatterji “will help coordinate a unified approach to our key implementation priorities while ensuring that we have guardrails and oversight in place to responsibly spend taxpayer dollars.”

The legislation championed by Biden aims to boost efforts to make the US more competitive with China and alleviate a persistent chips shortage that has affected everything from cars to washing machines to video games and weapons.

At Commerce, Treasury official Michael Schmidt will serve as CHIPS Program Office director. Mr. Schmidt previously served as New York State Department of Taxation and Finance commissioner.

Eric Lin, director of the government’s Material Measurement Laboratory, will be interim director of the CHIPS Research and Development Office.

The chips law includes \$11 billion for research spending.

Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said the chips team would consist of about 50 people. “These leaders bring decades of experience in government, industry and the R&D space, with a special emphasis on standing up and implementing large-scale programs,” Ms. Raimondo said.

Also named Tuesday is Todd Fisher, a Commerce department economic official who will serve as CHIPS Program office interim senior advisor in the CHIPS Program Office.

Former Palm Computing Chief Executive Officer Donna Dubinsky is Ms. Raimondo’s senior counselor for CHIPS implementation and Commerce official J.D. Grom will serve as senior advisor on CHIPS implementation. — **Reuters**

Elon Musk faces skeptics as Tesla gets ready to unveil ‘Optimus’ robot

SAN FRANCISCO — Tesla Chief Executive Elon Musk blamed overreliance on factory robots for sending the electric carmaker to “production hell” four years ago, saying humans were better at certain jobs.

My, how times have changed. Mr. Musk’s Texas company now is floating ambitious plans to deploy thousands of humanoid robots, known as “Tesla Bot” or “Optimus,” within its factories, expanding eventually to millions around the world, according to job postings.

Buzz is building within the company as Tesla is having more internal meetings on robots, a person familiar with the matter said.

Longer term, Mr. Musk said at a TED Talk robots could be used in homes, making dinner, mowing the lawn and caring for the elderly people, and even becoming a “buddy” or a “catgirl” sex partner.

The robot business eventually may be worth more than Tesla’s car revenue, according to Mr. Musk, who is now touting a vision for the company that goes well beyond making self-driving electric vehicles.

At its “AI Day” on Sept. 30, Mr. Musk said Tesla will unveil a prototype from its project Optimus, an allusion to the powerful and benevolent leader of the Autobots in the Transformers series.

Production could start next year, he said. Tesla faces skepticism that it can show technological advances that would justify the expense of “general purpose” robots in factories, homes and elsewhere, according to robotics experts, investors and analysts.

Tesla already employs hundreds of robots designed for specific jobs for production of its cars. Humanoid robots have been in development for decades by Honda Motor Co and Hyundai Motor Co’s Boston Dynamics unit.

Like self-driving cars, the robots have trouble with unpredictable situations. “Self-driving cars weren’t really proved to be as easy as anyone

thought. And it’s the same way with humanoid robots to some extent,” the lead of NASA’s Dexterous Robotics Team, Shaun Azimi, told Reuters.

“If something unexpected happens, being flexible and robust to those kinds of changes is very difficult.”

At an “Autonomy” event in 2019, Mr. Musk promised 1 million robotaxis by 2020 but has yet to deliver such a car. Mr. Musk’s robots may be able to demonstrate basic capabilities at the event, but it would be hard for them to impress public expectations of robots that are as capable as humans, experts say.

To succeed, Tesla will need to show robots doing multiple, unscripted actions, said Nancy Cooke, a professor in human systems engineering at Arizona State University. Such proof could provide a boost to Tesla stock, which is down 25% from its 2021 peak.

“If he just gets the robot to walk around, or he gets the robots to dance, that’s already been done. That’s not that impressive,” she said.

Tesla did not respond to Reuters’ request for comment, but Mr. Musk in the past proved skeptics wrong, jump-starting the electric car market and building a rocket company, SpaceX, although some product launches were behind schedule.

Initially, Optimus will perform boring or dangerous jobs, including moving parts around its factories, according to Mr. Musk.

Mr. Musk acknowledged that humanoid robots do not have enough intelligence to navigate the real world without being explicitly instructed. But he said Tesla can leverage its expertise in AI and key components to develop and produce smart, yet less expensive, humanoid robots at scale.

Tesla is on a hiring spree for people to work on humanoid bi-pedal robots, with about 20 job postings on “Tesla Bot” including jobs for designing key robot parts like actuators.

“The code you will write will at term run in millions of humanoid robots across the world, and will therefore be held to high-quality standards,” one of the job postings said.

Tesla has over 2 million vehicles on the road. Jonathan Hurst, chief technology officer at Agility Robotics, a humanoid robot firm founded in 2015 said the technology “is right now starting to turn the corner.”

“Certainly, an important measure of success is do they make money from it,” he told Reuters, referring to Tesla’s humanoid robot efforts.

Analysts see more pageant than product. “It’s all part of distracting people and giving them the next shiny object to chase after,” Guidehouse Insights analyst Sam Abuelsamid said.

“Investors are not excited about Optimus,” said Gene Munster, managing partner at venture capital firm Loup Ventures, which holds Tesla stocks. “It’s just such a low probability that it works at scale,” he added, saying it is “infinitely harder than self-driving cars.”

And then there is Mr. Musk’s own experience with robots in the factory. During the 2018 production hell, Mr. Musk specifically noted the problems of the “fluff bot,” an assembly robot that failed to perform simple tasks that human hands can do — picking up pieces of “fluff” and placing them on batteries.

He said the cost of having technicians maintain the complicated robot far exceeded that of hiring someone to do the assembly.

The fluff bot is “a funny example but drives home the point that autonomy often doesn’t generalize well, and so handling soft fluffy material that isn’t as predictable as a rigid part was causing a huge problem,” Aaron Johnson, a mechanical engineering professor at Carnegie Mellon University, said.

“Human hands are way better at doing that,” Mr. Musk said. — **Reuters**

IKEA says holidays to boost foot traffic, sales

SWEDISH furniture retailer IKEA is expecting more foot traffic and sales in its Philippine store as the holiday season approaches, its local manager said, as the popular brand marks nearly a year of doing business in the country.

“We are well prepared, stocked up for a very good Christmas business. We’re looking forward to it,” said Georg Platzer, IKEA Philippines store manager, in an interview on the sidelines of a seminar organized by the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (ECCP) in Pasay City on Wednesday.

IKEA opened its Philippine store in Pasay City on Nov. 25 last year.

“We are now better prepared than ever for a good business. Supply chain issues are much more under control now. We really had challenges in the beginning after opening. The months of February, March, and April were not really looking good because of so many factors that were not under our control. It’s going to be much better now,” Mr. Platzer said.

He said the retail industry is waiting the whole year for the holiday season, and that IKEA is “ready to go.”

“We have beautiful new products, a lot of fantastic gift ideas for [the] lowest possible price. We will also have a Christmas line for decorating your home. We are

good to go and we are expecting good business,” he added.

Further, Mr. Platzer expects stronger foot traffic after recent heavy rains dampened mobility.

“[Foot traffic] in August was really good... The rainy season always has an impact on the mobility of people. We feel that now. But it is nothing to be worried about... I am positive that as soon as the rain is over, people will come back shopping,” Mr. Platzer said.

“Foot traffic during the weekdays is moderate,” he said. “Weekends are a bit more crowded but still under control. It is crowded because this is the time when families go out, including the kids. We are really satisfied with the foot traffic.”

Mr. Platzer said that the company is projecting 7 million visitors for its financial year, which is from September 2022 until August 2023.

According to him, the store recorded 3.8 million visitors from Nov. 25 last year until Aug. 31 this year.

“We had to control the crowd in the beginning,” Mr. Platzer said. “We are quite positive that for the next full year, we are reaching 7 million visitors.”

“Seven million is a very challenging goal but there are not many restrictions anymore and people are going out and shopping,” he added. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochoa**



STOREHUB.COM/PH

Tech firm StoreHub aims to strengthen PHL presence with new funds

SOUTHEAST Asian technology firm StoreHub, which helps restaurants and retailers automate, has raised \$13.5 million in new funding, a company official announced on Wednesday.

The amount will be used to improve StoreHub’s operations in the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries, it said in an e-mailed statement.

Venture capital firm 500 Global led the pre-Series B funding round, with participation from existing investors Vertex Ventures Southeast Asia and India, OSK, and others.

“In the post-COVID rush to reopen, businesses have had to make new changes to adapt to the new normal. In line with this, the Philippines and the region have had to accelerate the adoption of digital technologies to meet the demands of the time,” StoreHub Chief Executive Officer and Co-Founder Wai Hong Fong said.

“With ‘reverse travel’ and ‘reverse dining,’ retail and F&B

business owners are looking for ways to improve operational efficiency and maximize their revenue per customer.”

StoreHub started as a cloud-based point-of-sale system in Southeast Asia in 2013.

In the Philippines, StoreHub is one of the point-of-sale system providers accredited by the Bureau of Internal Revenue.

“Today, the platform powers over 15,000 paying retail and restaurant outlets in Southeast Asia and has expanded its offering to include QR-based table ordering, loyalty, automated customer engagement, and more,” the company said.

StoreHub noted that it processed over 128 million transactions worth over \$1.6 billion in the past 12 months, a 40% rise from the prior year.

“The latest funding round will be used to continue fueling healthy growth and technology innovation to deepen the value of each customer,” the company said. — **Arjay L. Balinbin**

URC opens two collection sites to attain ‘plastic neutrality’

UNIVERSAL Robina Corp. (URC) announced on Wednesday that it opened two more collection sites as part of its recycling initiative.

The news sites located in Sambat in Balayan, Batangas, and Nagasi in La Carlota, Negros Occidental are collecting used bottles and recyclable plastic waste.

URC said that around 281 kilos of polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles were collected at its site in Sambat, while in Nagasi, more than 700 kilos of plastic waste were collected.

Some 1,300 pieces of PET bottles were collected at URC’s collection site in La Carlota.

URC’s recycling initiative is part of the company’s goal to achieve “plastic neutrality,” or to recover and repurpose the same amount of plastic it generated.

The company said it is also collecting plastic waste in Bagong Ilog, Pasig, and General Mariano Alvarez, Cavite in exchange for “environmental points,” which is a scheme for exchanging plastic waste for cash, or matching plastic weight for points.

URC said on its website that these environmental points can be used to redeem URC products.

Other URC collection sites are located in Robinsons Malls Galleria, Ermita, Las Pinas, Magnolia, and Starmills Pampanga, where collection booths are set up and being conducted in partnership with Robinsons Land Corp., which offers a drop-weight-redeem scheme for clean and dry plastic waste. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

Villar’s ALLTV tries to expand reach via cable operators

VILLAR-LED Advanced Media Broadcasting System (AMBS) channel ALLTV has signed a partnership deal with a cable operators group to expand its reach, a company official announced on Wednesday.

ALLTV recently “inked a partnership with the Philippine Cable and Telecommunications Association, Inc. (PCTA) for the network’s airing expansion to more cable operators across the country,” AMBS said in an e-mailed statement.

The partnership will allow ALLTV to be streamed to nearly 300 more cable operators.

“Currently, viewers can watch ALLTV on Channel 2 on Free TV and Planet Cable, Channel 35 on Sky or SignalTV, Channel 32 on GSAT, Channel 23 on Cablelink, and Channel 2 on other cable TV providers,” AMBS said.

AMBS President Maribeth C. Tolentino said ALLTV targets to reach homes in remote areas.

“This collaboration between AMBS and PCTA is very timely and I’d like to say that cable TV still plays an important role as far as distributing content or programs like this as we are the last mile in delivering content to the most far-flung areas across the country,” PCTA President Venancio Lo said.

ALLTV is under Prime Assets Ventures, Inc. led by businessman Manuel Paolo A. Villar.

The media company has also signed a content license partnership deal with CNN Philippines, a commercial, broadcast, cable, and satellite TV network owned and operated by Nine Media Corp., together with RPN, under a license from Warner Bros. Discovery. — **Arjay L. Balinbin**