For instance, top firm San Miguel Corp.'s net profit was down 73% to P10.75 billion in the nine months to September this year. Likewise, consolidated revenues were lower by 30% to P531.13 billion compared with the same period last year.

San Miguel's fuel business, through Petron Corp. (No. 3), posted a consolidated net loss of P12.61 billion as of the third quarter of 2020, compared with last year's P3.6-billion net income. Gross revenues were also down by 43.3% during the period.

The SM Group was likewise not exempted from the effects of the lockdown restrictions. For the first nine months of 2020, SM Investments Corp. (No. 4) saw its revenues decline 18.3% to P286.67 billion, as well as a 53.9% contraction in net income to P23.38 billion.

It's the same case for banks as they boosted loan provisions amid the COVID-19 crisis. As of the third quarter of 2020, lenders such as BDO Unibank, Inc. (rank No. 10), Metropolitan Bank & Trust Co. (No. 22), and Bank of the Philippine Islands (No. 29) saw their respective bottom lines contract by 48.3%, 49.5%, and 22.1% on a year-on-year basis.

The air-travel sector was also a clear casualty. PAL Holdings, Inc. (No. 21), operator of flag-carrier Philippine Airlines, saw its nine-month total revenues plummet 61.6% to P45.29 billion from last year's P117.85 billion. Cebu Pacific operator Cebu Air, Inc. (No. 38) was similarly hit with a sharp 69.6% decline in revenue to P19.34 billion from P63.62 billion.

Amid the drive to digitalization, it is no surprise telecommunication firms were relatively insulated. As of the third quarter, Globe Telecom, Inc.'s (No. 16) service revenues were down one percent year on year. On the other hand, PLDT, Inc. (No. 15), reported a seven-percent growth in consolidated revenue.

China Bank Securities' Mr. Mercado expects the placement of the top firms to "shuffle a bit" due to the business impact of COVID-19 and the consequent quarantine restrictions on firms' operations, especially for those with significant exposures to vulnerable sectors such as commercial leasing, banking, restaurants, transportation, services, and tourism.

"We expect companies in defensive sectors such as retailers of consumer staples, telecommunication service providers, and food manufacturers to improve their rankings in the Top 200 as they saw lower declines in revenues (with some companies even posting growth) since they were able to operate with relatively minimal disruption in light of quarantine restrictions, and demand for their products remained stable (or in the case of some, even improved)," he said.

OUTLOOK

As lockdown restrictions are eased, analysts believed the economy may have already bottomed out, but noted the pace of recovery remains uncertain.

"For 2020… we see continuing improvement in [fourth quarter 2020] results as lockdown measures continued to be eased and as demand continues to recover. However, the strength in [fourth-quarter] prospects is unlikely to significantly reverse the weakness in [the previous three quarters]," China Bank Securities' Mr. Mercado said.

"For 2021, it is still uncertain whether the rankings will remain the same as developments are still very fluid and remain very dependent on developments around the pandemic. While there are prevailing expectations of a recovery in demand, downside risks remain," he explained.

Mr. Mercado also noted that markets appear to be pricing in a "sooner-than-expected recovery" due to positive vaccine developments.

"A faster-than-expected rollout of a vaccine and widespread immunization may hasten the expected recovery of hard-hit sectors," he said.

For Regina Capital's Mr. Limlingan, it would "still take more time" for firms before they can get back to pre-pandemic levels.

Asked on what indicators are of interest for market analysts and investors, Mr. Limlingan said to check on firms' liquidity and solvency to see if they have enough cash to cover for their obligations and that they have a healthy leverage level.

PNB's Mr. Arogo said that to check the financial health of companies amid the pandemic, their current (ratio of current assets to current liabilities) and the net debt-to-equity ratios should be monitored.

For China Bank Securities' Mr. Mercado, investors should look at what businesses or sectors the corporations are investing in, as well as how they address their clients' needs against the backdrop of a "new normal" to determine forward prospects.

"A good example is that there has been a more prevalent adoption of e-commerce channels during the pandemic, which may persist moving forward. Down the line, this development may adversely impact mall vacancies and foot traffic, which is similar to what happened to mall operators in the US a few years ago," Mr. Mercado explained.

The recovery in consumer confidence is also important, Mr. Mercado said, as positive developments that may impact this such as improvement in remittances and jobs will "likely improve" growth prospects.

"Furthermore, firmer signs of a recovery in domestic demand is likely to lead to more aggressive capex (capital expenditure) deployment as businesses build out more capacity to cater to the uptick in demand. These improvements, once realized, should provide tailwinds to GDP growth, considering that private consumption and business investment contracted by 8.2% and 38.3% as of the third quarter of 2020, respectively," he said. BW

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