

# Data center firm Digital Edge enters the country

DIGITAL EDGE (Singapore) Holdings Pte. Ltd.'s new data center in Manila will be ready for service in March next year, it announced on Wednesday.

The completion of the 10-megawatt data center "marks the debut of Digital Edge into the Philippine market," the data center platform company said in an e-mailed statement.

Digital Edge said it hopes to bridge the digital divide in South East Asia's "high growth markets."

The facility, located in Biñan, Laguna, will be known as "NARRAI." It will have 2,200 cabinets.

The project is expected to be the "largest carrier-neutral facility in operation in the Philippines at the time of completion," the company said. It is being built

to meet the latest demands from cloud, network, digital media, and enterprise customers in terms of power specifications, reliability, security, and sustainability.

The new data center, a joint project with technology and real estate company Threadborne Group, is also expected "to plug unmet demand from the double-digit growth (22% compound

annual growth rate) of the Philippines' data center colocation market," Digital Edge added.

The company noted that it has received bookings for the new facility, including from major domestic internet service providers.

Digital Edge Chief Executive Officer Samuel Lee said: "The completion of NARRAI, our first

major greenfield design and build project since the company was established, is a landmark moment in the creation of our regional platform across Asia."

For his part, Charlie Rufino, chairman of the Threadborne Group, said the facility will provide critical infrastructure to domestic and international cloud, network, and enterprise

customers "without compromising on our environmental responsibilities."

"We look forward to further partnership with Digital Edge as we seek to capitalize on the ongoing digital transformation of the Philippines' economy and usher in a new era of world-class digital infrastructure," he added. — **Arjay L. Balinbin**

## Meta rolls out Instagram parental supervision tools in the Philippines

META Platforms, Inc., the owner of Facebook, last week launched new Instagram tools and resources to ensure the online safety of children in the Philippines.

The company launched Instagram Parental Supervision Tools and Family Center in the Philippines "after extensive consultation with experts, parents, guardians and young people including from the Department of Information and Communications Technology, UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) Philippines, and the De La Salle University Social Development Research Center," it said in a statement.

These are available in English and Filipino.

"We want young people to have an experience that is both fun and safe when using our apps, and we want to support their parents to assist them in doing this," Meta Philippine Public Policy Head Clare Amador was quoted as saying.

"Our intention is for these tools and resources to strike the right balance between young people's desire for autonomy online, whilst allowing for some involvement from parents and caregivers to help ensure their teen is having a safe experience online. Keeping young people safe online is one of our most important responsibilities, and we remain committed to continuing our investment in new tools, products and resources," Ms. Amador said.

Family Center is a platform where parents and guardians can access resources "to help young people build positive online habits."

"Through the Family Center, parents and guardians can now set up new tools to oversee the Instagram accounts of young people in their family," Meta said.

"Over time, the Family Center will become a key resource to help parents, guardians, and young people manage experiences across all Meta technologies."

Family Center can be accessed on the Instagram app. It features articles, videos and tips on online safety and tutorials on how to use Instagram Parental Supervision Tools.

The supervision tools allow parents and guardians to manage time spent on Instagram by setting screen time limits and scheduling breaks. They can also monitor new connections and reports.

"Parents and guardians can send invitations on Instagram to young people in their family to initiate Supervision tools, and vice versa," Meta said.

Meta said it held roundtables with experts from the government, the academe, and nonprofit organizations in the Philippines ahead of the launch. These discussions focused on "how to empower teens to make healthy decisions for self-supervision, how to build trusted networks of support, and how to support families to create boundaries for safe use together."

"Understanding Filipino teens' psychosocial and adolescent development and how the teen brain works can help us better know what measures to work with when dealing with social media supervision. We cannot impose rules without good relationships with your children. We need to make it balanced," Ma. Emma Llanto of the Society of Adolescent Medicine of the Philippines said.

## Apple scales back self-driving car and delays debut until 2026

APPLE, Inc. has scaled back ambitious self-driving plans for its future electric vehicle (EV) and postponed the car's target launch date by about a year to 2026, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

The car project, dubbed Titan inside the company, has been in limbo for the past several months as Apple executives grappled with the reality that its vision for a fully autonomous vehicle—without a steering wheel or pedals—isn't feasible with current technology.

In a significant shift for the project, the company is now planning a less-ambitious design that will include a steering wheel and pedals and only support full autonomous capabilities on highways, said the people, who asked not to be identified because the information is private.

The latest changes underscore the challenge Apple faces in pushing into an entirely new product category and taking on technological obstacles that have bedeviled some of the world's biggest companies. The secretive project, underway for years, is meant to provide Apple with another major moneymaker, but it also could test the limits of the iPhone maker's capabilities.

Apple currently plans to develop a vehicle that lets drivers conduct other tasks—say, watch a movie or play a game—on a freeway and be alerted with ample time to switch over to manual control if they reach city streets or encounter inclement weather. The company has discussed launching the feature in North America initially and then improving and expanding it over time.

A spokeswoman for Cupertino, California-based Apple declined to comment.

Apple shares, already down about 2% on Tuesday, dipped to a session low after Bloomberg News reported on the changes. They've declined 19% this year, though that's a better performance than most stocks in the tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite Index.

Apple's previous vision for the car was to offer "Level 5" autonomy—the pinnacle of self-driving technology, which no automaker has attained. The current plan is considered below that because of its more limited scope.

It's the latest strategy shift for the Apple car team, which has faced turnover in its executive ranks ever since its inception a decade ago. Current leader Kevin Lynch has aimed to bring more stability and a focus on practical goals after years of priority changes and even some layoffs.

Mr. Lynch, who also is in charge of the Apple Watch operating system and health software, took over at the end of 2021. He initially instructed the team working on the car, known as the Special Projects Group, to focus on a fully autonomous vehicle for a debut by 2025. Now he's dialing back those expectations, but with the goal of ensuring that a product actually reaches the market.

The heart of Apple's technology is a powerful onboard computer system—codenamed Denali after the tallest mountain peak in North America—and a custom array of sensors. The processor's performance is equal to about four of Apple's highest-end Mac chips combined and is being developed by the company's silicon engineering group. The chip has reached an advanced state and is considered nearly production-ready, though Apple may scale it down before the car's launch to lower costs.

Having an onboard computer to handle automated tasks is similar to an approach used by other carmakers, including Tesla, Inc. Apple, however, plans to differ from Tesla by using a combination of lidar and radar sensors, along with cameras. The setup helps the car determine its location, see driving lanes, and assess how far it is from other objects and people. Tesla relies on cameras, while Alphabet, Inc.'s Waymo and others use a combination.

In addition to the onboard hardware, the system has a cloud-based component for some arti-

ficial-intelligence (AI) processing. Apple is relying on Amazon Web Services for hosting, costing the iPhone maker about \$125 million per year. But that's just a sliver of the roughly \$1 billion the company is spending on the car project annually.

Apple is exploring the idea of a remote command center to assist drivers and control cars from afar during emergencies. The company is also discussing offering its own insurance program to customers.

Apple had expected each car to sell for more than \$120,000, but the company is now aiming to offer the vehicle to consumers for less than \$100,000, according to the people. That would put it in roughly the same price range as the entry-level version of the Model S from Tesla and the EQS from Mercedes-Benz.

Apple hasn't yet settled on a design for its car and the vehicle is considered to be in the "pre-prototype" stage. The company is aiming to ready the design by next year and have the features set by the end of 2024. It then plans to put the car through extensive testing in 2025.

Apple had previously discussed launching a car that looks similar to Canoo, Inc.'s Lifestyle Vehicle. The idea was to have a limousine-like interior where passengers could face each other. Now the plan is to produce something more like a traditional car, with a driver's seat.

The company has held discussions with a number of suppliers about obtaining an electric-vehicle platform, known in the industry as a "skateboard," but it's still seeking a partner. Apple earlier talked to several companies about licensing their platforms, but the only serious negotiations occurred with Volkswagen AG several years ago. EV platforms include the underlying base of the car, the wheel system and battery.

The design of the car is being led by Ulrich Kranz, the ex-chief

executive officer of Canoo, as well as former managers from Tesla, Lamborghini and Porsche. The software side of the system is led by former Tesla manager Stuart Bowers, while safety engineering, testing and regulatory matters are handled by ex-Ford Motor Co. executive Desi Ujkashevic.

The Apple car organization, made up of about 1,000 employees, is split across campuses in Sunnyvale, California; Ottawa, Zurich; and Arizona. Much of the underlying engineering work, industrial design and software development is done in Sunnyvale, while parts of the car's future operating system are developed in Ottawa, an area where the company poached workers from BlackBerry's QNX, a longtime maker of car software, in 2016.

The company's team in Zurich is developing a tool known as "Rocket Score" that grades the vehicle's autonomous system. That core team faced a setback earlier this year when Ian Goodfellow, a prominent developer of AI technology who helped lead the group, left Apple after complaining about its work-from-home policies.

Much of the testing work for the car is done at a former Chrysler track outside of Phoenix. The testing area, codenamed "Sahara," was purchased by a business representing Apple in 2021 for \$125 million. The company also continues to test its driving system on Lexus SUVs deployed in several states. Those cars, known internally as "Baja" vehicles, get their onboard systems refreshed every 6 to 12 months.

In Silicon Valley, Apple is aiming to consolidate several of its car teams in a new campus by the San Jose airport known as Orchard Parkway. The property will have about half a million square feet of space and may also house other Apple teams. The company bought the campus around 2015 and kicked off construction last year. — **Bloomberg**

## SEC warns public against OTCJKE, APower

THE Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has warned the public against the illegal solicitation of two investment-taking entities — OTCJKE and APower Power Bank Sharing Solution, OPC (APower).

In an advisory on Wednesday, the SEC said that APower — which also uses the names APower Pro, APower PH and APower Power Bank — has been enticing the public through social media and websites to invest in the company.

Invited investors must first register and choose from 15 advertising charging stations that range from P500 to P1 million. Investors are promised to earn

P12.50 to P120,000 daily or P375.12 to P3.6 million monthly.

"Investors can earn 10% from recharge commission and 10% up to 30% from product commission," the SEC said.

In a separate advisory, the SEC said that OTCJKE, which also operates as OTC Automated Trading Platform and JKE International Ltd., has been representing itself as a high-frequency trading encryption platform.

Investors of OTCJKE are promised 3% to 8% daily earnings, which can supposedly be withdrawn anytime through a cryptocurrency wallet or GCash.

Interested individuals are required to download OTCJKE's application to register and create an account. They will then be asked to deposit money in US dollars through Binance or GCash.

Once done, investors will be able to start using the company's mining bot on which their income would depend. Investors can deposit \$10 to \$2,000 and earn \$0.36 to \$120 a day. New accounts were also told to receive an extra two dollars after three days.

According to the SEC, although APower is registered as a one-person corporation, it is still not authorized to solicit invest-

ments from the public under the Securities and Regulation Code.

Meanwhile, the regulator said OTCJKE is not registered with the commission either as a corporation or a partnership and is also not authorized to solicit investments.

"Hence, the public is advised not to invest or stop investing in any investment scheme being offered by any individual or group of persons allegedly for or on behalf of and to exercise caution in dealing with any individuals or group of persons soliciting investments for and on behalf of it," the commission said. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

## ADB extends \$40-M loan to build telco towers for southern areas

TIGER Infrastructure Philippines, Inc. has secured a \$40-million loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to fund the construction of telecommunication towers that will cater to underserved areas in the Visayas and Mindanao.

"This project will improve access to the digital economy in the underserved regions of Visayas and Mindanao and have a tangible impact on the quality of life for local communities," said Suzanne Gaboury, ADB's private sector operations department director, said in a press release on Wednesday.

The loan will fund 380 telecommunication towers in the southern regions to support rural connectivity, the bank said, adding that the project will support common tower sharing, which will allow multiple mobile network operators to lease the same location.

"We are confident that by working with ADB, Tiger can strengthen our digital infrastructure

portfolio as we continue to respond to demand for reliable mobile network connectivity in Asia," said Simon Skouboe, the Tiger Infrastructure group's executive chairman.

Tiger Infrastructure is jointly owned by Cell Tower Services Pte. Ltd. and Daily Life Renewable Energy Pte. Ltd., which are both incorporated in Singapore.

Cell Tower Services is said to be well established in the telecommunications towers business with projects around the world, while its partner is in customized design, engineering, procurement, construction, installation, and commissioning services for renewable energy systems across Asia and the Pacific.

Of the loan extended by ADB, \$25 million will come from its ordinary capital resources, while \$15 million will be from Leading Asia's Private Infrastructure Fund — or LEAP — which is administered by the bank.

According to the press release, the project will support common tower sharing, allowing several mobile network operators to lease the same location. Tiger Infrastructure will handle construction, land leasing, operation, and maintenance. Telecommunication equipment installed on the towers will belong to the tenants, it added.

Established in 2016, LEAP is capitalized with a \$1.5 billion commitment by the Japan International Cooperation Agency and is focused on the delivery of private sector infrastructure projects.

ADB said that as of 2021, the Philippines had 27,000 telecom towers, or 164 towers per one million people, which it described as one of the lowest coverage rates in the region. Citing the government, it said an estimated 60,000 more towers are needed by 2031 in unserved and underserved areas. — **Aaron Michael C. Sy**

## PAL to link PHL, Western Australia with nonstop flights

FLAG carrier Philippine Airlines (PAL) said on Wednesday that it will launch regular services between Manila and Perth, the capital of Western Australia, starting in March next year.

PAL said it aims the move to link the Philippines and Western Australia with nonstop flights.

"The new PAL direct flights will allow travelers to reach Perth in just seven hours, saving them four to six hours in travel time compared to flying via other airlines that require a stopover and flight connections in a third country," it said in an e-mailed statement.

PAL's Perth-Manila services will operate every Monday, Thursday, and Saturday starting March 27, 2023. Perth is the carrier's fourth Australian gateway, joining Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane.

Philippine Airlines President and Chief Operating Officer Captain Stanley K. Ng said: "The new nonstop flights give Philippine Airlines and travel partners a great opportunity to promote

the Philippines as a prime tourist and business destination for travelers in Western Australia."

"Likewise, we invite Filipinos to do business in Perth or visit family members while discovering this dynamic Australian region and building new friendships," he added.

Perth Airport Chief Executive Officer Kevin Brown said the initiative is a "win for Western Australia business, tourism, and exports."

"This exciting new route will inject more than 52,000 seats into the market each year. We're keen to see more Filipino students choose to study in Perth to help the education sector as well as our tourism and hospitality markets. The same is true in reverse," he noted.

According to Philippine Ambassador to Australia Ma. Hellen B. De La Vega, the Philippines has a "strong relationship" with the State of Western Australia given its trade, investment, and people-to-people connections. — **Arjay L. Balinbin**