

4Ps beneficiaries to get construction training

A REGIONAL OFFICE of the Social Welfare department said it has partnered with Knauf Gypsum Philippines, Inc. to train beneficiaries of the government's cash transfer program in construction work.

Mark Dewey Sergio, managing director of Knauf Gypsum Philippines, said that the partnership with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Field Office IV-A Calabarzon targets beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) cash transfer program.

The program will feature training in Knauf Academy, the company's gypsum board installation training center for construction workers. Mr. Sergio

said the academy will select from both beginners and experienced construction workers.

"We will look at those who have less or no skills to assess their subsistence and survival. We will slowly build their skills," DSWD IV-A project development officer Nellibeth V. Mercado said.

Jenny Ronna Dimaculangan, program development officer at DSWD IV-A, said that the agency will recruit beneficiaries who are 18 years old and above from barangays near its training centers.

"We will find out who is easier to train... and then refer them for employment," Ms. Dimaculangan said.

Barry R. Chua, DSWD IV-A regional director, said the project

will help enhance construction workers' skills and provide livelihood opportunities.

Knauf manufactures materials used in ceilings, jointing, and walls, as well as finishing compounds. It also makes acoustic panels, ceiling tiles, and acoustic suspension systems. The company operates in Asia, Europe, the US, Russia, Africa, Australia, and South America.

Republic Act 11310, or the 4Ps law, provides conditional cash grants to the poorest households to improve their nutrition, health, as well as education for children up to 18 years old. There are 340,000 registered beneficiaries in Calabarzon. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

AFL-CIO wants bigger say in US digital trade deals

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration has made digital trade the centerpiece of its trade negotiations, and the AFL-CIO wants a bigger say in how the US Trade Representative's (USTR) office sets goals in this area, arguing they are too often dictated by big technology companies.

The largest US labor organization on Tuesday issued a set of principles that it says is needed to protect workers, the public's privacy and governments' ability to regulate a rapidly evolving sector as the USTR negotiates digital trade agreements.

The USTR is expected to soon propose text on the digital chapter in negotiations for the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, the Biden administration's signature economic agreement. US Trade Representative Katherine Tai has pledged to create a "worker-centric" trade policy, but the AFL-CIO said digital trade negotiations too often make no mention of labor standards nor the workers who write software or support networks.

"To date, US 'digital trade' agreements have sought to expand market access for large technology companies by granting broad digital data and intellectual property rights while narrowly constraining the ability of governments (of both the United States and our trade partners) to adopt measures to adopt measures to address the economic transformation," the AFL-CIO said in its plan.

The heart of the organization's demands involve ensuring that digital trade agreements are subject to strong and enforceable labor standards, the AFL-CIO said, discouraging the "exploitative" use of "gig" workers who often are deprived of benefits and subjected to difficult working conditions, and discouraging the offshoring of back-office or telemedicine jobs to countries with low labor standards.

But the AFL-CIO's demands also push back against a key component of recent US trade deals that

prohibit countries from imposing "data localization" policies to require data to be stored locally.

The renegotiated North American free trade deal, which went into effect in 2020, included such provisions, and USTR has sparred in recent years with countries including India over their plans for such policies, arguing that US-based data platforms should be free to operate anywhere in the world.

The AFL-CIO said that not all data is created equal and in some cases, governments should have the ability to require that individuals' sensitive personal information, such as medical or biometric data, be kept onshore to ensure it is safe.

The principles also call for negotiating strong safeguards against misappropriations of voices, images or likenesses that could be used in digital content generated by artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. — **Reuters**

FULL STORY



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OPINION

A guide to dealing with character references

We were told that you (the columnist) are personally known to a job applicant. She passed a series of interviews and other tests resulting in her becoming one of our three shortlisted candidates. In her curriculum vitae (CV), you were listed as one of her character references who can vouch for her. Please confirm. — **Orange Juice**.

Since the rise of social media, I've interacted with hundreds of people who have contacted me for various reasons, mainly to seek advice about their workplace issues. I've not met them personally except for about 2% who agreed to pay for my services for a lengthy in-person and deep dive management consultation.

Your applicant is one of 98% who asked me for my insights on certain issues about human resources and other related issues. I gave her answers based on my experience. She often reciprocates by liking and sharing my posts.

Other than that, I can't remember meeting her in person or dealing with her for long, especially during the last three years of the pandemic.

With that in mind, I can't give you any positive or negative impressions about her. I wish I could help her but I just can't do it, other than what I have said above. But don't take my word for it. Don't decide by relying solely on my statements. Give her a chance by vetting her credentials through other means.

Also, everything depends much on her ranking in your shortlist of three candidates. If she's number one on your list and the rest are kilometers away, then it's better to double check her experience and capacity with her other character references. Conversely, if she's number two or three in your list, then better to consider the number one candidate, subject to your usual screening process.

RIGHT QUESTIONS

Common sense dictates that you start doing background verification of your number one candidate. You don't jump to checking the background of the number two or three candidates unless the number one choice is disqualified for some reason.

The best character reference is someone who can give objective information about the applicant. That person could be a third party like a former boss, a work colleague or a university teacher. The more recent the relationship between the job applicant and the character reference, the better.

Much depends on the identity of the character references, who can be anyone other than a family member or

best friend. However, the bigger issue in checking character references is not the answers they'll give you, but rather the questions that you're posing to them.

If you don't ask the right questions, you'll only get the wrong answers. Fortunately, there are a lot of people out there who are willing to help applicants if the circumstances are right. That's why, it's imperative for applicants to secure first the permission of their character references before naming them in their CVs so that there are no surprises.

In the case of your applicant, she failed to obtain my permission. If she had approached me, I would have discouraged her from naming me as one of her references.

Moving on, what are the right questions that a prospective employer should ask from the applicant's character reference? There are only four basic questions. The fewer questions you ask, the better as most people are too busy to answer queries even by telephone or e-mail.

The key questions are as follows:

One, what is your professional relationship with the applicant? This question provides the context for the recommendation. If it's a boss-subordinate relationship, the expected answer should relate to the capacity and work performance of the applicant. Also, it validates the information given by the applicant to the prospective employer.

Two, how would you describe the applicant's capacity to do the job? This question should be linked to your job vacancy at hand. Be specific as much as possible as to the job content and specific job title. Trust begets trust. If you're truthful, you can expect to get accurate and detailed answers from the character reference.

Three, would you rehire the applicant in your organization? If not, would you hire the person in your current company or elsewhere? This is the real test for the character, integrity and employability of the job applicant.

Last, is there something that you would like to tell us regarding the applicant? This is the joker in the pack; it's also known as the shotgun clause question. It allows the character references to conclude their statements by giving related information not covered by the first three questions.

Don't force the issue by requiring the character reference to execute a formal document.

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SEC removes 33 online lending platforms from Google Play Store

THE SECURITIES and Exchange Commission (SEC) was able to remove 33 online lending platforms or OLPs from Google Play Store in its campaign against illegal lending, it said on Thursday.

"These OLPs have not been reported to the SEC, in violation of SEC Memorandum Circular No. 19, Series of 2019 or the Disclosure Requirements on Advertisements of Financing Companies and Lending Companies and Reporting of OLPs," the SEC said in a press release.

The regulator's action against the OLP applications

was with the assistance of Google Philippines.

Under the SEC circular, financing and lending companies are required to register their OLPs as business names and include their corporate names, SEC registration numbers and certificate of authority numbers in their advertisements.

A memorandum circular posted in November 2021 states that only OLPs registered as of Nov. 21, 2021 may operate and be used for online lending, subject to strict monitoring.

In line with the directive, Google adopted a policy in May

2022 that requires developers of OLPs in the Philippines to submit a personal loan application declaration and other necessary documentation before they are allowed to publish on the platform.

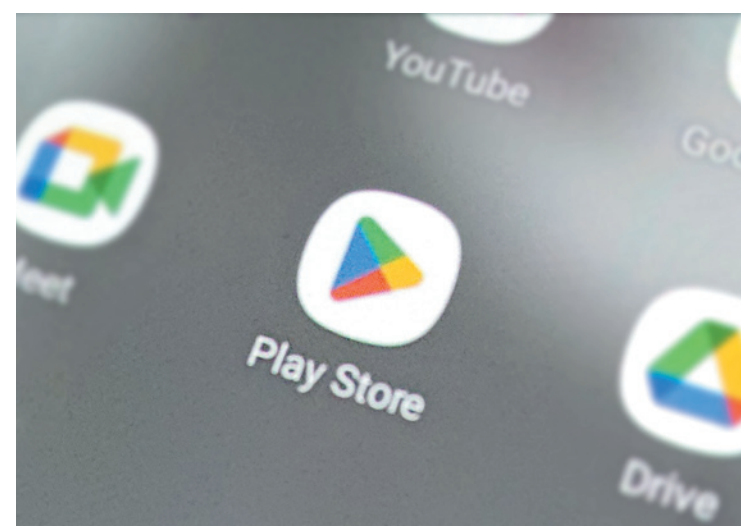
The policy allows the platform to remove OLPs from Google Play Store. It also requires OLPs to promptly remove their applications if their registration is no longer valid.

"The SEC will continue its efforts to protect existing and prospective borrowers from abusive, unethical, and illegal lenders," the regulator said.

To date, the commission has revoked 2,084 certificates of registration of lending and financing companies that failed to secure the required certificate of authority.

The SEC has likewise canceled the certificates of authority of 39 financing and lending companies for violating applicable rules and regulations.

"The SEC is looking at engaging with other social media platforms for the adoption of a similar gatekeeping policy imposed by Google Philippines in the interest of customer protection," the commission said. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**



PNRI says Korean firm offers to revive BNPP in five years

A SOUTH Korean company has offered to rehabilitate the nuclear power plant in Bataan, an official of the Philippine Nuclear Research Institute (PNRI) said on Thursday.

Carlo A. Arcilla, PNRI director, told reporters on the sidelines of an energy forum that Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power Co., Ltd. (KHNP) made the offer to revive the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP) within five years for a cost of \$1.19 billion.

"The one that is really interested in the BNPP is Korea because Korea has an exact model and they said that they can revive it in five years," he said, referring to the Kori Nuclear Power Plant in South Korea.

The 621-megawatt BNPP was constructed as a response to the 1973 oil crisis. It was completed in 1984 but was never commissioned due to safety concerns.

Mr. Arcilla said KHNP is interested to revive the Bataan plant because almost everything in it is complete.

Last year, Sebin Cheon, senior manager at KHNP, said the company supports the rehabilitation of the BNPP while reinforcing its safety requirements.

The Department of Energy earlier estimated a timeline of 10 years before nuclear power can be integrated into the country's energy mix.

On Wednesday, an Energy official said the Chinese government had expressed its intent to work with the Philippines in possibly integrating nuclear power among local energy sources.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. had expressed interest in re-examining the feasibility of adding nuclear power as a solution to the country's energy supply problems. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

Metro Pacific unit inks construction deal for P6-B Candaba project

A UNIT of Metro Pacific Investments Corp. (MPIC) has partnered with CIMIC Group's Leighton Asia's Philippines branch for the Candaba third viaduct project, which it projected to cost P6.1 billion.

The five-kilometer project is under NLEX Corp., a subsidiary of the toll road arm of MPIC, Metro Pacific Tollways Corp.

NLEX Corp. President and General Manager Luigi L. Bautista said in a press release on Thursday that the company chose to award the project to CIMIC Group's construction business focused in Asia.

"We trust their knowledge and expertise when it comes to



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building safe and high-quality roads and bridges, having completed a lot of our major projects, with the NLEX Harbor Link as the most recent one," said Mr. Bautista.

The project located between Pulilan, Bulacan and Apalit,

Pampanga will be serving Metro Manila, and Central and North Luzon.

The third viaduct will be built in the middle of the two existing viaducts, with construction works to start within the first quarter of 2023 until 2024.

NLEX Corp. said the Candaba third viaduct project "will make travel safer and easier as it expands the road from three lanes without shoulder to three lanes with inner and outer shoulder in each direction."

Before the project, the tollway company upgraded the bridge's link slabs and columns and added lay-bys in both directions of the bridge.

The company is also undertaking a safety upgrade of the southbound portion of the viaduct, which it deemed necessary to ensure the safety of motorists. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Emerging Power renews supply deal with AboitizPower retail units

EMERGING Power, Inc. (EPI) on Thursday said it had renewed an agreement to supply power to the retail electricity units of Aboitiz Power Corp. (AboitizPower).

In a statement, EPI said its subsidiary Jobin-SQM, Inc. had signed a three-year deal to supply AboitizPower units Aboitiz Energy Solutions, Inc. (AESI), and Advent Energy, Inc.

"We also hope to continue strengthening our ties with other

industry players to achieve energy security. This partnership means better accessibility to renewable energy for the country and casting a wider net to reach customers and businesses that are taking a step toward a sustainable future," Sandro Aboitiz, senior vice-president for commercial operations of AboitizPower, said in a media release.

EPI said Jobin-SQM will source the power from its

100-megawatt-peak (MWp) Sta. Rita solar power plant in Subic, Zambales. The plant has completed the increase in its capacity from 62 MW, it added.

By yearend, EPI will have an additional 72-MW solar facility on the same site.

In 2020, EPI and AboitizPower forged a three-year power supply deal for AESI and Advent Energy.

EPI is the renewable energy arm of listed mining firm Nickel

Asia Corp. It targets to expand its portfolio to 1,000 MW by 2028, which will include the proposed projects under its partnership with Shell Overseas Investments B.V.

On Thursday, shares in Nickel Asia gained 13 centavos or 1.75% to end at P7.57 apiece, while shares in AboitizPower inched up by 5 centavos or 0.13% to close at P37.75 each. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**