

Singapore-based AECO Energy starts PHL operations

SINGAPORE-based energy technology and services firm Asia Energy Co. (AECO Energy) has launched its operations in the Philippines and targets to partner with contestable power users and retail electricity suppliers (RES).

"We are optimistic about the prospects that await us here in the Philippines. I'm sure our 14 years of experience in delivering energy services and solutions in mature deregulated markets will be critical to our success," Alan Jones, chairman of AECO Energy, said in a media briefing last week.

Contestable customers have reached a power consumption threshold that allows them to buy electricity from their chosen RES under the retail competition and open access (ROA) program. Their option to switch from a distribution utility is authorized by Republic Act No. 9136 or the Electric Power Industry Reform Act of 2001.

Mr. Jones said AECO Energy's expansion to the Philippines will bring customer-centric market platforms to Filipinos.

The market and technology solutions company will offer an assisted, end-to-end electricity management service as well as a bidding platform exclusively developed for retail electricity suppliers to automate bidding requests from contestable customers.

"With the understanding that contestable customers' needs are unique for every organization, our energy experts will work closely with customers to help them reduce their costs, drive efficiency, and make better buying decisions. By providing technology-based, data-led energy technology solutions, we want to create a profound impact on our customers' business to better position them for sustainable growth in the long-term," said Debbie Alfonso, general manager of AECO Energy.

ROA, which introduced retail competition to the energy industry, allows a consumer with a monthly average usage of at least 500 kilowatts over the past 12 months to forge a supply contract with a RES. Energy consumers can also customize their supply contracts according to dispatch, technology, or power plant. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

SEC readies 'blue' bond framework

THE Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is set to release a "blue" bond framework that could drive funds to support the sustainability of water resources, a commissioner said.

"It's similar to the green bond framework but it's more blue-based, meaning more water [and] water resources. That's something coming up soon," SEC Commissioner Kelvin Lester K. Lee told *BusinessWorld* on the sidelines of a press briefing on Friday.

Mr. Lee said the blue bond framework comes as the commission continues to move for wider adoption of sustainability standards.

He said the SEC aims to release the framework by the second quarter of the year. The commission previously set guidelines for the issuance of green bonds, which allowed companies to raise funds for climate and environment projects.

The proposed framework follows the securities regulator's release of a draft circular adopting the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Sustainable and Responsible Fund



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Standards (SRFS), which seeks to align with ASEAN member states in establishing and promoting sustainable and responsible investment funds.

"The point is, in this day and age, sustainability [and] sustainable finances are important already. We want to drive money and flows of funds towards green investments to support the whole net-zero issue," Mr. Lee said.

The ASEAN SRFS applies to investment companies including the sub-funds of umbrella funds and companies seeking to offer investments locally or across borders in other ASEAN member states.

According to the draft, the commission requires investment companies to be registered under the Investment Company Act and the Securities Regulation Code, and comply with rules relating to sustainable and responsible investment (SR) funds and ASEAN SRFS.

Additionally, the required payment is P10,000 for local companies and P80,000 for foreign companies, plus 1% of the said fee as a legal research fee.

The SEC's Memorandum Circular No. 11, Series of 2022, or the Rules on Sustainable and Responsible Investment Funds, provides guidelines for investment companies that qualify as SRIs.

Foreign companies are also required to present proof of their qualifications as an ASEAN SRF. They also need to disclose the percentage of net asset value (NAV) that would be devoted to non-environmental, social, and governance matters.

Companies are also required to submit their strategies and objectives for attaining sustainable investments.

"The ASEAN SRF should primarily invest in securities which are in accordance with its sustainable investment objectives and strategies, with a minimum asset allocation of at least two-thirds of its NAV, at all times," the SEC said.

A violation of the rules translates to a penalty of between P20,000 and P100,000, depending on the provisions violated. A violator could incur a fine of P400 to P1,200 per day for continued violations.

According to Mr. Lee, the draft circular was released for public dissemination and is set for release in two to three weeks. — **Adrian H. Halili**

New San Jose Builders expects P7B from Malate project

REAL estate developer New San Jose Builders, Inc. (NSJBI) is expecting to generate P7 billion in revenues from its flagship Manila project, Victoria de Malate, a company official said.

"We already sold around P5 billion. The balance left would be around P2 billion, which is more than 50% of sales," NSJBI Chief Operating Officer Leo A. Barrosa told reporters at a topping-off ceremony on Friday.

The 45-storey residential condominium, which has a total project of P3 billion, stands on a lot

size of 3,480.5 square meters. Each of its unit cost around P3 million to P4 million.

Victoria de Malate's amenities include a swimming pool, gymnasium, playground, function room, and commercial areas such as shops and restaurants.

"Today's ceremony represents a major milestone for NSJBI and the future residents of this building. We are very excited about the future as we are for the present. We look forward to the victory of full completion of this project," Mr. Barrosa said in a speech during the event.

Turnover of the condominium units is set to start by the end of June until December this year. Victoria de Malate is located on Angel Linao St. in Malate, Manila.

Mr. Barrosa said that the company has four projects lined up, including the Victoria Arts & Theater Tower along Timog Ave., Quezon City; Victoria de Hidalgo in Quiapo, Manila; and Victoria Sports Tower in Monumento, Caloocan City. — **Shelden Joy Talavera**

SMALL FARMERS TO BENEFIT FROM PPP AS GO NEGOSYO LAUNCHES KALAP



At the KALAP Ceremonial Signing in Malacanang Palace last March 6, 2023, were (standing, from left) Philippine Coconut Authority Administrator Bernie Cruz; National Tobacco Authority Administrator Belinda Sanchez; National Commission on Indigenous Peoples Chairperson Allen Capuyan; Go Negosyo Senior Adviser for KALAP Dr. William Dar; Lionheart Farms CEO & Co-Founder Christian Eyde Moeller; Universal Leaf Phils. Inc. CEO Winston Uy; Bounty Fresh President Tenyson Chen; Yovel East Agri Ventures CEO James Amparo; Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.; SL Agritech-Sterling Group of Companies CEO Henry Lim Bon Liong; Kennemer Foods CEO Simon Bakker; Central Azucarera De Tarlac COO Nando Cojuangco; Nestlé Philippines Chairman and CEO Kais Marzouki; and LT Group President & COO Michael Tan; and (seated, from left): Dept. of Agriculture Usec. Leocadio Sebastian; Dept. of the Interior and Local Government Sec. Benjamin Abalos Jr.; Dept. of Trade and Industry Sec. Alfredo Pascual; Private Sector Advisory Council Lead for Jobs and Go Negosyo founder Joey Concepcion; and Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources Usec. Atty. Jonas Leones.

Go Negosyo's Kapatid Angat Lahat Agri Program (KALAP), an initiative for private sector to help small farmers across the Philippines, was formalized with the signing of several Memorandums of Agreement and Memorandums of Understanding with several government agencies last March 6 at the Malacanang Palace. KALAP is seen to transform the country's agriculture industry by integrating small farmers into the value chain of large agribusiness companies. The ceremonial signing was led by Go Negosyo founder Joey Concepcion, and was witnessed by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

In his speech, the President noted how big corporations can help small farmers. "No one sector can manage it by itself," he said. Private sector help, he said, will "enable MSMEs to become profitable, sustainable, and globally competitive." He also emphasized the importance of giving back profit to the farmers. "In the end, this is about giving a decent living to our farmers, so they can live by the virtue of their hard work," he said.

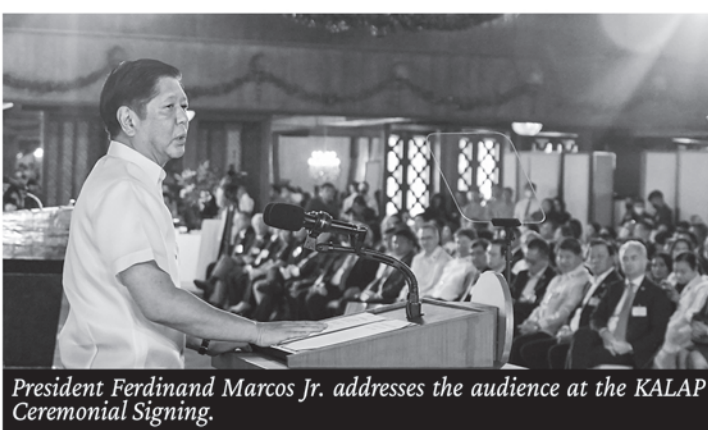
He also commended Concepcion, who he said, has "brought together this partnership, bringing together the synergies in our economy especially to help our MSMEs and



Go Negosyo founder Joey Concepcion was lauded by President Marcos for his efforts to help small Filipino farmers through KALAP.

in the process strengthening our middle class."

Among the signatories for the MOAs and MOUs were Go Negosyo, the Department of Agriculture, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of



President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. addresses the audience at the KALAP Ceremonial Signing.

Environment and Natural Resources, the Department of Trade and Industry, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, the National Irrigation Administration, Philippine Coconut Authority, and the National Tobacco Administration.

"KALAP is the platform where we hope to employ as many Filipinos as possible, and it will do so where our job creation efforts can have the most impact: in the agriculture sector," Concepcion said.

According to its proponents, which includes former Agriculture Secretary and now KALAP senior adviser Dr. William Dar, KALAP will promote inclusive growth, sustainability, competitiveness, and development in the Philippines by leveraging the potential of MSMEs, small-holder farmers, and fisherfolk.

KALAP will focus on primary agricultural commodities and industries, namely rice, coconut, tobacco, coffee, cacao, sugarcane and corn/feeds/livestock. Following Go Negosyo's advocacy, KALAP will provide MSMEs access to the three M's of successful entrepreneurship, namely mentorship, access to money, and market. Moreover, it will build partnerships with large companies (referred to as "big brothers"), and will emphasize government's role of providing the enabling environment. KALAP will become part of the larger Kapatid Angat Lahat initiative, which was first conceived by Go Negosyo in 2016.

During the ceremonial signing of KALAP, Lionheart Farms CEO and co-Founder Christian Eyde Moeller presented his model for sustainable transformation for KALAP, which included focusing on productivity and upskilling farmers, as well as improving both income and output. Lionheart Farms successfully implemented its inclusive model in coconut farming in Palawan. Ninety-eight-year old Maman Buano Layom—one of the farmers who benefited from its model—was present at the Ceremonial Signing.

Other companies have also implemented Inclusive and



The President Marcos talks to 98-year old coconut farmer Maman Buano Layom, one of the beneficiaries of KALAP big-brother company Lionheart Farms.

sustainable models, such as Universal Leaf Philippines Inc. in Ilocos. The company is among the first to become big-brother companies, along with SL Agritech, Bounty Fresh, The LT Group, Yovel East Research Development, Corporation, Kennemer Foods, Nestlé Philippines, Central Azucarera de Tarlac, and Metro Pacific Agroventures.

"KALAP is public-private partnership at work, and perhaps the most important PPP that we will undertake," said Concepcion. "It is in agriculture that we find a large number of the micro entrepreneurs – the micro farmers, and it is they who need the most help. It is where a multiplier effect of jobs and enterprises, growth in communities away from the urban centers, can happen," he added.