

Marcos issues order to expedite rollout of offshore wind projects

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. has signed an executive order (EO) directing the Department of Energy (DoE) to draft a framework that will expedite the rollout of offshore wind (OSW) projects.

Executive Order No. 21, released on Thursday, calls for a fast-track approval process for offshore wind proponents

as they apply for licenses and permits.

“There is a need to adopt a whole-of-government approach by streamlining and expediting the approval process by the permitting agencies... and eliminate unnecessary delays in every stage of an offshore wind project,” the President said in the EO.

The DoE was ordered to establish a policy and administrative framework to efficiently develop the OSW resources.

The Department of the Interior and Local Government has also been required to submit to the DoE a complete list of permits required by all local government units.

Citing the Philippine Energy Plan 2020 to 2040, Mr. Marcos

said the government seeks to raise renewable energy's contribution to the power mix from 22% to 35% by 2030, and eventually to 50% by 2040.

In February, the Energy department said it has awarded 55 offshore wind service contracts with a combined capacity of 40.68 gigawatts. — **John Victor D. Ordoñez**

Review of corporate rehab law urged to improve ‘batting average’ in reviving troubled companies

THE Federation of Philippine Industries (FPI) is calling for a review of Republic Act No. 10142 or the Financial Rehabilitation and Insolvency Act (FRIA) to improve the chances of reviving companies that became distressed during the pandemic.

“We need this review of the efficacy of the corporate rehab law to... learn from actual cases how companies were successfully resuscitated or not. We need new investment, but we also need a better batting average on rehabilitation cases because this will save us a lot of economic wastage,”

FPI Chairman Jesus L. Arranza said in a statement on Thursday.

On March 23, the House Committee on Banks and Financial Intermediaries conducted an inquiry based on House Resolution No. 797 which called for an evaluation of the effectiveness of FRIA.

The legislators examined the outcomes of rehabilitation proceedings filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and regular courts, the duration of such rehab exercises, and the reasons for delay.

“Also to be scrutinized are successful and failed corporate rehabs

under the guidance of the SEC and courts to determine how the lapses in the existing law can be corrected and how the good provisions can be improved further,” Mr. Arranza said.

Mr. Arranza, who is also the chairman of Fight Illicit Trade group, said the actual cases to be reviewed include the failed rehabilitation of Uniwid Group of Companies, the rehabilitation of Hanjin Heavy Industries, and the rehabilitation of Victorias Milling Co.

Mr. Arranza was a former Uniwid president.

“I believe Uniwid will be a very good case study and will

provide Congress a wealth of information that they will need in introducing revisions to the FRIA, including the restructuring of bank loans and valuation of properties subjected to dacion en pago (transfer of ownership to settle a debt),” Mr. Arranza said.

“The FPI members share the view of the lawmakers that there shouldn't be more failed rehab cases to prevent economic wastage and the loss of jobs due to the closure of businesses. No business is immune to the impact of the pandemic, so this inquiry is really timely,” he added. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

NGCP upgrades North Luzon substations

THE National Grid Corp. of the Philippines (NGCP) said it has energized power transformers in several substations in northern Luzon.

In a statement on Thursday, the NGCP said that the upgrading of these substations “is being done to cater to the load growth and provide N-1 contingency to substations in NGCP's North Luzon Region. Without the project, power interruptions may be experienced by customers in the event of failure of existing transformers and power circuit breakers.”

According to the Philippine Grid Code, an N-1 contingency is the ability of the grid to withstand major system disturbances with minimal or without impact to the system.

The grid operator said that in February it energized its 100 megavolt-ampere (MVA) transformer 1 at its Tuguegarao substation in Cagayan and another 100 MVA transformer 1 at San Esteban substation in Ilocos Sur.

On March 15, the NGCP also energized a 100-MVA transformer at Laoag substation in Ilocos Norte.

The NGCP said the upgrading of the entire North Luzon 230-kilovolt substation stage 2 is expected to cost P9.93 billion.

The NGCP said that it is also set to upgrade substations in La Union, Nueva Vizcaya, Nueva Ecija, Isabela, Pangasinan, Tarlac, Pampanga and Zambales. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

USAID brought in to advise on energy industry restructuring

THE Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) said it is exploring with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) ways to restructure the energy industry.

The initiative involves a collaboration with the National Energy Authority of Papua New Guinea, with which the Philippines shares many common issues.

“It is interesting to learn that the prevailing issues are not unique to the Philippines. There is so much to learn from this collaboration that will mutually benefit both regulators,” ERC Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer Monalisa C. Dimalanta said in a statement.

The ERC said it met with USAID and the New Guinea regulator to discuss energy security and approaches to reforming the energy industry.

“The Philippine energy sector was structured 22 years ago. With more than two decades, we are more than privileged to share our experience in hurdling the challenges in ERC's journey towards energy transition,” Ms. Dimalanta said.

The Electric Power Industry Reform Act (EPIRA) of 2001 de-regulated the industry and privatized most state-owned power generation and transmission assets.

The ERC has said that its priorities for this year are reviewing distribution utility and transmission rates and revising

the guidelines for the competitive selection process.

New Guinea's regulator is currently developing renewable resources and carrying out rural electrification.

Under the Philippine Energy Plan, the share of renewables in the energy mix is expected to rise to 35% by 2030 and 50% by 2040.

The National Electrification Administration (NEA) is targeting full electrification by 2028.

To date, the NEA said that about 600,000 households potentially serviceable by the main grid are still without power while another 23,000 households are located in off-grid areas. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

ASEAN framework seen building confidence in green finance

CONFIDENCE in supporting Southeast Asia's energy transition is expected to grow following the issuance of the second version of an ASEAN framework which is expected to unlock green financing for phasing out coal-fired power plants, Sustainable Fitch said in a report.

The ASEAN Taxonomy for Sustainable Finance adapts global sustainability standards to suit local conditions. Under the taxonomy, coal-fired power plants are eligible for green financing if they are retired early, with the

cap on their operating life set at 35 years.

“Coal accounts for about half of southeast Asia's energy mix, but the region faces pressure to reduce reliance on the carbon-intensive fossil fuel,” according to Sustainable Fitch, a specialist ESG unit of the Fitch Solutions group.

It said transition efforts are high on the region's list of sustainability priorities.

The framework “serves as a powerful signaling tool that transition efforts are high on

the region's list of sustainability priorities and helps to define transition activities and finance in the region,” Sustainable Fitch said.

“Sustainable Fitch expects this localized approach to promote more regional environmental, social and governance (ESG)-labeled debt issuances and support the funding needs for a scalable energy transition,” it said.

The report said that the ASEAN Taxonomy will help build confidence in the region, as it is an adaptation of the EU Taxonomy,

PHL to seek \$350-million China loan for preliminary Bataan-Cavite bridge works

THE PHILIPPINES is seeking a \$350-million loan from the Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to fund the first phase of the Bataan-Cavite Interlink Bridge project.

“Phase one of the project will finance a segment of the civil works component involving the navigation bridges, marine and land viaducts, and approach roads,” the AIIB said on its website.

The project connects Bataan and Cavite through a 32-kilometer-long bridge consisting of two long-span navigation bridges, 24-kilometers of marine and land viaducts, and five kilometers of approach roads.

It also includes a ramp connecting Corregidor Island, which sits at the mouth of Manila Bay, to the bridge.

Public Works and Highways Secretary Manuel M. Bonoan has said that the project is estimated to cost P175 billion.

Construction is set to begin in the latter part of 2023 with an expected completion time of five years.

“The project will be co-financed with the Asian Development Bank as lead co-financier, and the project's environmental and social (E&S) risks and impacts are being assessed in accordance with ADB's safeguard policy statement,” the AIIB said.

It noted that the project will involve involuntary resettlement that will likely be “significant.” It will also require mitigation measures for its environmental and social management plan and land acquisition and resettlement plan.

The AIIB said that the project will “contribute to efficiency improvements of road travel in Bataan, Cavite, and the National Capital Region (NCR).” — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

LANDBANK lending P6 billion to Pangasinan

THE Land Bank of the Philippines (LANDBANK) said on Thursday it approved a P6-billion loan to Pangasinan province for transportation, health, education, and tourism development projects.

“The P6-billion loan is in full support of Pangasinan's development agenda towards a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable local economy. This investment also underscores LANDBANK's collaborative efforts for the province's growth trajectory anchored on the efficient delivery of public service,” LANDBANK President and Chief Executive Officer Cecilia C. Borromeo said.

Some P2.85 billion will come in the form of an omnibus term loan agreement and will finance infrastructure projects to enhance mobility and upgrade healthcare services in Pangasinan, the bank said in a statement.

These include the 166-kilometer Pangasinan East-West Expressway (PEWEX), which will connect the province's easternmost municipality of Umin-

gan to the westernmost town of Infanta.

Terminals, land ports, and bus stops will be built along PEWEX to promote tourism along the expressway.

The government is also eyeing the construction of seaports, the expansion of Lingayen Airport, and the construction of a new airport in Bani, which will also support the development of a salt farm resort.

LANDBANK said the loan will also finance the establishment and upgrading of provincial hospitals in Urdaneta City, Tayug, San Carlos, Binalonan and Umingan.

Some P1.95 billion will go towards the renovation of the Capitol Resort Hotel and the construction of other resorts.

It will also be used to develop events and entertainment facilities, LANDBANK said.

“The remaining P1.2 billion of the loan is allocated for the establishment of the Pangasinan Polytechnic College and the enhancement of several government centers,” the bank said. — **Aaron Michael C. Sy**

Regulator defends review process after SC issues writ vs GM crops

THE Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) and Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) said on Thursday they “stand by” their processes for evaluating and approving genetically modified (GM) crops, after the Supreme Court (SC) issued a Writ of Kalikasan against the commercial cultivation of golden rice and Bt eggplant.

“We'll thoroughly review and comply (with the writ) as required and rest assured that we stand by our regulatory processes,” BPI Spokesman Jose Diego E. Roxas told reporters via Zoom.

“At the moment... we have yet to receive (a copy) of Writ of Kalikasan. We are not sure of its contents... as soon as we have the copy, we will comply,” he added.

In a statement on Wednesday, the High Court said acted on a petition filed by the Magsasaka at Siyentipiko Para sa Pag-Unlad ng Agrikultura (MASIPAG) against the two GM crops.

A Writ of Kalikasan is designed to protect the Constitutional right to a healthy environment.

Following the order, the secretaries of Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources, and Health were asked to file a response within 10 days.

The order to reply was also issued to the heads of the BPI, PhilRice, and University of the Philippines-Los Baños (UPLB).

PhilRice and the International Rice Research Institute developed Golden Rice while the UPLB Institute of Plant Breeding (IPB)

oversaw the Philippine trials of Bt eggplant.

Golden rice is biofortified with beta-carotene or vitamin A to address deficiencies in children which can lead to blindness.

Bt eggplant is designed to be more resistant to pests.

Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas Chairman Rafael V. Mariano, whose organization was among the petitioners, said other commodities that produce beta-carotene are available such as certain fruits and vegetables.

“We have many ways to combat any pest... we don't need genetically modified crops,” he added.

The BPI issued biosecurity permits for Golden Rice and Bt eggplant last year, authorized the varieties to be deployed to farms.

Mr. Roxas said the permits indicate that the crops are safe for propagation and human consumption.

“It undergoes a scrupulous and thorough process, and we require technical documents which the experts review. At the same time, we also asked the developers to prove that it has no adverse effects on the environment,” he said.

Mr. Roxas said genetically modified rice and eggplant have only been distributed to target beneficiaries and have yet to be released to the broader market.

Asked for comment, PhilRice Spokesperson Ronan G. Zagado told reporters via text that the institute will respond accordingly upon receipt of the copy

of the Writ. “In the meantime, all our activities will proceed as planned.”

According to PhilRice, provinces designated as “Malusog Rice” distribution areas are Quirino, Catanduanes, Samar, Antique, Lanao del Norte, Agusan del Sur, and Maguindanao.

Seed production for Golden Rice is underway in Isabela, Ilocos Norte, Pangasinan, Cagayan, Nueva Ecija, Albay, Samar, Iloilo, Antique, and Agusan del Sur.

“We are asking for a temporary environmental protection order to compel the agencies,” MASIPAG National Coordinator Alfie Palumbarit told reporters in a separate Zoom briefing.

Mr. Palumbarit cited the potential risks of GM rice and eggplant on the environment and public health.

He said that the GM crops can evolve and cross-pollinate with other plants in the area they are grown.

“GM crops should not just be discussed at the level of agencies and scientists. They should be a matter of public policy as these are public products that people will consume,” he said.

The IPB said it will issue an official statement within the week.

The departments of Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources, and UPLB were asked to comment but had not replied at the deadline. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**