

Converge expects tourism to boost entry in Boracay

CONVERGE ICT Solutions, Inc. has formally launched its entry in Boracay island where it projects tourists and transients to be the base market for its product offerings.

"The biggest potential here is the tourism areas. But the transient areas will have a market here also, but for prepaid products," Converge Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer Dennis Anthony H. Uy told reporters on the sidelines of the media launch on Wednesday.

He said that the company's Boracay entry is part of its P2-billion underground infrastructure investment in Panay in Western Visayas.

"The infrastructure we built here covers the entire Panay island. It does not only cover Boracay, it covers the entire five provinces," Mr. Uy said.

"We just selected Boracay because it is a tourist destination and there were a lot of complaints here regarding connection service and the like," he added.

The company's rollout in the area will initially be for businesses and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

"As of today, we are targeting the enterprise market which are the big hotels and then the SMEs. Next month, we can open residential, low-end postpaid, and prepaid offerings," Mr. Uy said.

Aside from these, Mr. Uy said that the company sees potential in the condominium owners in Boracay who use their units as vacation homes.

For its next rollout, the company is targeting another tourism destination located in Palawan.

"The next would be Palawan, it will be in a tourism area. This is in El Nido. It's actually up and running, we will just formally launch it," Mr. Uy said.

"The marketing team is just working on the schedule. But I think in June this year, we will try to launch it," he added.

PREPAID OFFERING

Mr. Uy said that Converge is looking into more offerings under its prepaid segment, after reaching 30,000 subscribers.

"The traction is very strong; I think we already have 30,000 subscribers. But we want to see our customer's behaviors to see how many percent are loading and how many percent have complaints," he said.

The company has yet to study its prepaid customers' behavior as all of the services offered for this segment are online and do not have a call center, Mr. Uy said.

"I think we need to increase our banners to really make this available nationwide. Slowly we'll go there," he said.

Previously, the company launched its first low-cost prepaid fiber product which aims to make fiber connectivity affordable to the masses.

Called Surf2Sawa, the product allows subscribers to make use of unlimited fiber internet at a 25-megabyte-per-second speed for as low as P50 per day to P700 for 30 days. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Megaworld says Iloilo residential building to bring P4-billion sales

MEGAWORLD Corp. expects to generate up to P4 billion in sales as it launches a 22-storey residential building in Iloilo City, the company said on Thursday.

In a press release, the listed real estate developer said that the Firenze residential building will offer 415 "smart home" units and will be located at its 72-hectare development at the Iloilo Business Park in Mandurriao, Iloilo.

The company said that the construction of the building was inspired by the city of Florence, Italy. It expects completion of the Firenze residential building by 2028.

"We have chosen Florence as the inspiration of this new development because of its charm and interesting character that truly reflect what Iloilo Business Park has become through the years," Megaworld Visayas First Vice-President for Sales and Marketing Jennifer Palmares-Fong said in a statement.

"This is the first time that we have a particular city as an inspiration for our condo in the township — not just Italian, but truly Florentine," Ms. Palmares-Fong added.

Units would range from an up to 32 square meters (sq.m.) junior one-bedroom to a 60 sq.m. one-bedroom loft with balcony; two-

bedroom units from 62 sq.m. up to 90 sq.m.; and 108 sq.m. to 132 sq.m. for the three-bedroom unit.

"Firenze will rise beside The Paladium at the northern portion of Megaworld Boulevard, just a short walk to and from Festive Walk Mall and Festive Walk Parade as well as the Iloilo Museum of Contemporary Art," the company said.

The township developer said that amenities would include a pool area for adults and children, a hot tub, gardens, pavilion, playground, and an outdoor fitness area on the fifth floor.

"Future residents will also enjoy their time relaxing with their families or friends at the outdoor

lounge located on the 21st floor of the tower," it added.

Meanwhile, the company is also set to construct the 405-room Belmont Hotel Iloilo, its third hotel development within the Iloilo Business Park. The project adds to the 149-room Richmond Hotel Iloilo, and the 326-room Courtyard by Marriott Iloilo.

Megaworld has launched six residential developments in the township and 11 office buildings offering about 182,000 sq.m. of leasable office spaces, of which three are still being constructed.

Shares in the company fell 1.47% or P0.03 to finish at 2.01 on Thursday. — **Adrian H. Halili**

Manila Water reports 12.7% nonrevenue water, targets further cut

MANILA WATER Co., Inc. is aiming to further minimize its level of nonrevenue water (NRW) after reporting a 12.7% water loss last year.

"Manila Water is on par with water utilities in developed countries when it comes to the level of water losses, or nonrevenue water," Manila Water said in a media release on Thursday.

In 2022, Manila Water said its NRW averaged 12.7%. NRW refers to water that is not billed and is lost through leaks or illegal connections.

The World Bank has said that NRW should be at 25% or lower, Manila Water

said, also citing a study conducted by the agency saying NRW should be at 15% for developed countries such as Japan, Germany, England and Wales, and Singapore.

"Water is not unlimited. It is a finite resource; hence, we see to it that our NRW remains at manageable levels and at par with global standards, if not better," said Nestor Jeric T. Sevilla, Jr., Manila Water Group Director for Corporate Communications Affairs.

The company said that when it inherited the water network in 1997, NRW is at 67%, since then Manila Water

said it has been working on reducing water losses by developing long-term water sources, which also include the construction of infrastructure.

"Manila Water has remained persistent in cracking down on illegal connections, not merely to further minimize NRW but also to protect the public's health. Illegal connections are prone to breakages and, therefore, contamination since they are made with substandard materials," the company said.

The water company said its effort to reduce water losses includes a "multi-

pronged approach," which is a combination of proactive technical solutions, engineering and social interventions.

The company said that it had also adopted technical and engineering solutions such as reconfiguration of networks, measurement of supply volumes, and active leakage control and repairs.

With Manila Water's low NRW, it said that it was able to facilitate the installation of 33,309 new water service connections within its service area and Rizal in 2022, versus the 21,680 recorded a year earlier. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

Agricultural output, from SI/1

Farm output declined by 1% in the fourth quarter of 2022, reversing a 0.5% growth a year earlier and 1.6% growth in the third quarter of 2022.

Only the livestock and poultry subsectors posted increases in agriculture production in the fourth quarter, growing by 2.5% and 1.9%, respectively.

The DA sees agricultural output growing by 2.5% this year.

Data from the National Livestock Program showed the domestic production of chicken is expected to hit 2.08 million metric tons (MT) this year, live-weight, with demand at about 1.6 million MT.

Mr. Inciong said the resurgence of type H5N1 avian influenza outbreaks had a huge impact on the layers but not on the broilers.

"The production cycle of layers can reach up to more than 18 months, while for broilers it is only 35 days," he said. "The period for possible exposure to the virus is minimal for the latter."

The Bureau of Animal Industry said six barangays had avian influenza cases in nine regions as of April 28.

National Livestock Director Ruth S. Sonaco earlier said the poultry industry was recovering faster than the livestock industry.

Mr. Inciong said the African Swine Fever (ASF) is a "far more challenging virus" compared with avian influenza.

"The production of hog fatteners is about five to six months — longer exposure."

Meanwhile, Mr. Fausto said commercial hog farms are recovering after building their biosecurity protocols against ASF.

Latest data from the Animal Industry bureau showed ASF was still active in 78 villages in seven regions as of April 28.

Roehl M. Briones, a senior research fellow at the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, said by phone the ongoing clinical trials and field testing for vaccines showed slow progress.

"There were earlier hopes that the vaccine would be a game-changer but apparently, the efficacy wasn't that higher than earlier imagined," he said. "That's still a lot of trial that needs to be done on a really effective vaccine."

CROPS AND FISHERIES

Meanwhile, Mr. Fausto said

crops, in particular palay or unmilled rice, have seen a good harvest so far amid favorable weather conditions.

"Usually, the first quarter has good weather especially in crops. We harvest good especially in the irrigated area and in our vegetable area because of a good weather," he said.

Crop production, which accounts for more than half or 59.1% of total agricultural output, fell by 1% in the fourth quarter and full-year 2022, reversing the 2.6% and 2.2% expansion in the fourth quarter and full-year 2021.

PSA data showed fourth-quarter crop production declined by 2.5% for palay from 0.2% growth a year earlier and 6.9% for corn from 28.6% growth.

In terms of input costs, Mr. Fausto said fertilizer prices went down to P1,200 a bag of urea from about P3,000 a bag previously.

The Philippines imports most of its fertilizer needs.

However, he warned of the possible impact of El Niño in the second half. The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration this week said El Niño is likely to persist until the first quarter of 2024.

Meanwhile, Mr. Briones said the fishery sector's performance is "always an open question."

"It has always been difficult to predict exactly how it's going... It is highly erratic. I wouldn't know one way or another whether the fishery sector would finally grow or continue to contract,"

The production of commercial fisheries likely improved, while municipal fisheries could have been challenged by the lack of post-harvest facilities, Mr. Fausto said.

"We cannot expect an increase in fisheries because in the agriculture sector, it is only the fishery sector that is going down," he added.

PSA data showed fishery production slumped by 6.6% in the fourth quarter of 2022, worse than 1.1% growth a year earlier. It accounted for 13.8% of farm output during the period.

For the full year, fisheries shrank by 5%, reversing a 0.1% increase in 2021.

Mr. Briones said while the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro could affect the sector, the impact might not be severe. — **Sheldeon Joy Talavera**

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