THURSDAY • JULY 6, 2023 • www.bworldonline.com PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE'S 10 MOST ACTIVE STOCKS BY VALUE TURNOVER • JULY 5, 2023 (PSEi snapshot on S1/4; article on S2/2)

MPI P4.980 AC P630.000 **BDO** P137.600 SM P932.000 P33.650 ALI P24.700 P3.680 BPI P108.000 **ICT** P203.000 GLO P1,762.000 **SMPH** P417,108,020 Value P278,587,375 P275,885,345 Value P252,286,845 Value P185,180,145 Value P184,293,735 P177,970,480 P162,448,655 P140,924,592 P130,236,605 Value -P0.100 **▼** -0.073% -P6.000 ▼ -0.640% -P0.050 ∇ -0.148% P0.000 0.000% P0.250 P1.200 1.124% P2.200 -1.254%

Inflation further decelerates in June

By Keisha B. Ta-asan Reporter

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HEADLINE INFLATION slowed for a fifth straight month in June, the lowest in 14 months as food and transport prices eased, the state sta-

However, the potential impact of El Niño and wage hikes may fuel price increases in the second half of the year, analysts said.

Preliminary data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed the consumer price index (CPI) eased to 5.4% in June from 6.1% both in May 2023 and June 2022.

This was the slowest in 14 months or since the 4.9% clip in April last year. It was also the first time inflation fell below 6% since the 5.4% print in May 2022.

The June print was below the 5.5% median estimate in a Rusiness World poll conducted last week, and at the low end of the 5.3-6.1% forecast range of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP).

Seasonally adjusted inflation slowed to 0.1% in June from 0.3%

Year-to-date inflation settled at 7.2%, still higher than the revised 5.4% forecast by the central bank. It also marked the 15th straight month of inflation

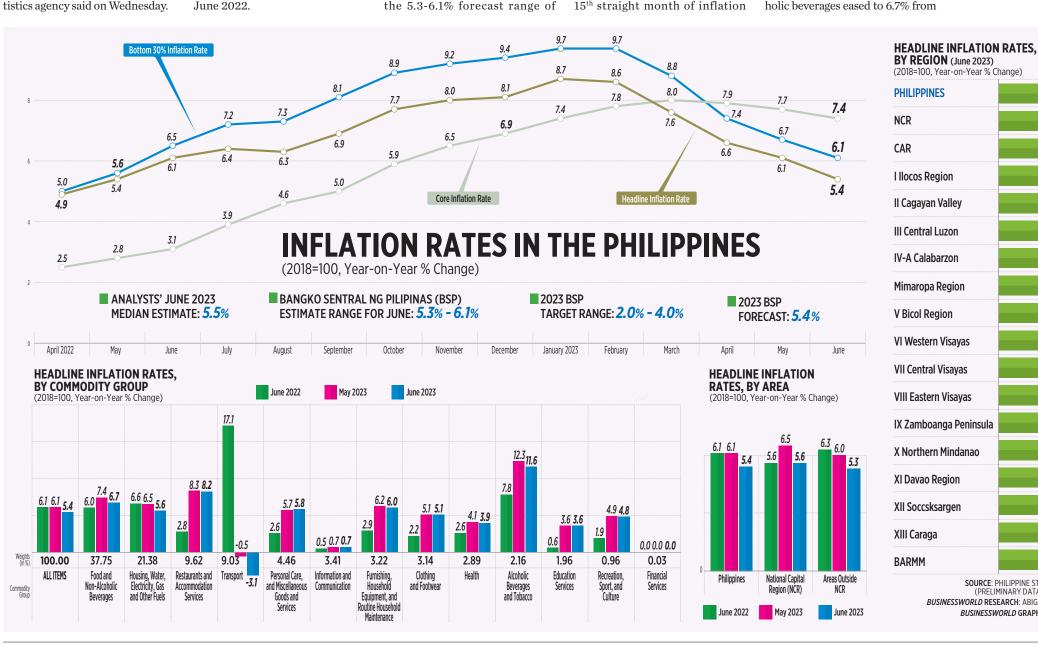
exceeding the BSP's 2-4% target band.

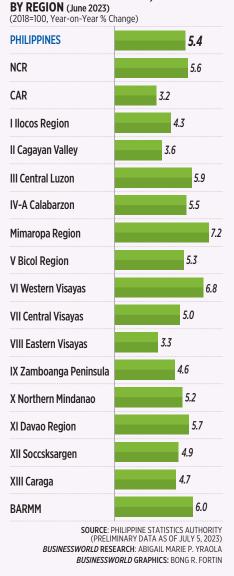
The slower annual increase in the food and transport index contributed to the deceleration in inflation, National Statistician Claire Dennis S. Mapa said at a press briefing on Wednesday.

The index for food and non-alcoholic beverages eased to 6.7% from 7.4% in the previous month. Food inflation alone decelerated to 6.7% in June from the 7.5% in May, due to the slower rise in prices of meat and other parts of slaughtered land animals (0.3% in June from 3.2% in May), fruits and nuts (11.4% from 14.3%), and sugar, confectionery and desserts (28.9% from 31.6%).

\$1/1-16 • 2 SECTIONS, 20 PAGES

Inflation, S1/9





LEDAC identifies 20 bills for Congress approval before the end of 2023

A BILL seeking to ease the Bank Secrecy Law and another proposing to regulate the use of financial accounts have been included in the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council's (LE-DAC) list of 20 priority measures targeted for Congress approval by December.

At its second meeting presided by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. on Wednesday, LEDAC members agreed to include the proposed amendments to the Bank Deposit Secrecy Law and the Anti-Financial Account Scamming Act to the list of 20 priority legislative measures.

Both bills were endorsed by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas

This after the Financial Action Task Force last month kept the Philippines in its "gray list" of countries under increased monitoring for money laundering and terrorism financing risks. The BSP is hoping the Philippines will be removed from the gray list by January 2024.

The LEDAC's priority list currently includes 20 measures, such as the proposed Property Valuation and Assessment Reform Act, the E-Governance Act, and a bill seeking to ease the payment of taxes.

The list also includes bills seeking to rightsize the National Government, reform the pension system for retired military and uniformed personnel, create a National Employment Action Plan, and institutionalize the automatic income classification of local government units.

The proposed New Philippine Passport Act, Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers, amendments to the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act, and the Waste-to-Energy bill were also included in the list.

The agenda for this year also includes bills seeking to revitalize the salt industry, regulate business transactions on the internet, amend the Build-Operate-Transfer law, create a National Disease Prevention Management Authority, establish a Virology Institute of the Philippines, reinstate the mandatory Reserve Officers' Training Corps, and establish the Medical Reserve Corps.

LEDAC, *S1/9*

EC proposes extension of GSP+ scheme for PHL

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION (EC) proposed to renew the Philippines' participation in the European Union's (EU) Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) by another four years, the Trade department said on Wednesday.

"With the extension of the GSP, it opens up tremendous opportunity for the Philippines to strengthen trade relations with the EU. We will seize this opportunity and work toward maximizing the benefits for our exporters and the overall economic development of our country," Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual said in a statement on Wednesday.

In an explanatory memorandum dated July 4, the European Commission proposed to extend the validity of the current EU-GSP regulation, which is set to expire by end-2023, until Dec. 31, 2027. However, this still needs the approval of the European Parliament and the European Council.

The Philippines participates in the EU's GSP+, a special incentive arrangement for low and lower middle-income countries. Under the scheme, the Philippines is required to uphold commitments to 27 international conventions on human rights, labor, good governance and climate action.

The Philippines has been threatened with the loss of GSP+ status during the Duterte administration over the war on drugs and alleged human rights violations.

The European Parliament in February last year passed a resolution asking the Philippines to act on human rights abuses or face losing trade perks under GSP+.

GSP+ allows the Philippines to enjoy zero tariffs on 6,274 products or 66% of all EU tariff lines. Some of the top Philippine GSP+ exports to the EU are crude coconut oil, vacuum cleaners, prepared or preserved tuna, hairdressing equipment, and prepared or preserved pineapple.

GSP+, S1/9

PHL needs to ramp up infrastructure program to boost competitiveness

THE PHILIPPINES needs to ramp up efforts to improve infrastructure and educational system if it wants to become more globally competitive, experts said.

Christopher Ed C. Caboverde, research manager at the Asian Institute of Management-Rizalino S. Navarro Policy Center for Competitiveness, said the Philippines has faced challenges in attracting foreign investors due to high energy costs and infrastructure issues.

"One problem in the Philippines is really infrastructure and it keeps us from attracting investors. If I'm not mistaken, the Philippines has one of the highest energy cost in Asia. So, it is a big deterrent in attracting investors," he told reporters on the sidelines of a forum in Makati City on Wednesday.

The Philippines fell four spots to 52nd out of 64 countries in the 2023 World Competitiveness Yearbook released by Switzerland-based International Institute for Management Development, from 48th spot in 2022.

The Philippines' lower ranking was due to weaker performances in three out of the four factors of competitiveness, namely business efficiency factor (40th from 39th), infrastructure (to 58th from 57th), and government efficiency (to 52nd from 48th). Its ranking in terms of economic performance improved to 40th in 2023, from 53rd in the previous year.

The government plans to spend 5.3% of the gross domestic product (GDP) or about P1.29 trillion on infrastructure this year.

Infrastructure spending is expected at 5-6% of GDP until 2028. Aside from infrastructure, Mr. Caboverde said the Philippines should also make efforts to up-

grade the skills of its workforce to

become more competitive.

"One thing is that the private sector can also help in terms of providing solutions such as upskilling and reskilling. The private sector also has the expertise in terms of education, so it can help the government provide those solutions," he said.

Competitiveness, S1/9





Customs exceeds first half collection target

THE Bureau of Customs (BoC) said it surpassed its collection target by 3.21% for the six months to June.

During the period, the agency collected P434.169 billion in duties and taxes, beating by P13.5 billion its P420.66 billion target for the period.

First-half collections were also up P37.434 billion from a year earlier.

"The increase in revenue was achieved despite the challenges in import volume, which (contracted) 2.8% this year for high-value commodities," the BoC said in a statement late Tuesday.

In June, the agency generated P74.861 billion in revenue, exceeding the P74.721 billion target for the month.

"Furthermore, although the volume of oil increased by 9.9%

this year as compared to last year, the revenue from said commodity declined due to decreasing value of oil." the BoC said.

The BoC also attributed its improved revenue collection to anti-smuggling efforts.

Collections from seizures of shipments were estimated at P23.8 billion. This included P15.54 billion from counterfeit goods, P2.9 billion from agricultural products, and P1.85 billion from cigarettes and tobacco.

The BoC's collections in the first six months represent around 48% of its P001 3-billion full year target

of its P901.3-billion full-year target. This year's collection target is 24.9% higher than the P721.5billion target set in 2022.

Last year, Customs collected P862.929 billion, exceeding the target by 19.6%. — Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson

Malampaya gas blended with imports seen lowering prices

PRIME ENERGY Resources Development B.V. (Prime Energy) officials met with President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. in Malacañang on Tuesday to brief the Palace on its "aggregator" business model that will trade imported liquefied natural gas (LNG) blended with gas from the Malampaya field.

During the meeting, the company also briefed Mr. Marcos on the progress of its projects under Malampaya Service Contract 38 (SC 38), the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) said in a statement.

The company said the "explore and develop" component of its planned business will be supplemented with imports of LNG, which it hopes will result in "the stability, competitiveness, and expansion of the country's gas market," the PCO said.

"An added feature is the blending of imported LNG with Malampaya gas... at a price below international prices," the PCO said, noting that the blended gas will be made available by Prime Energy and PNOC Exploration Corp. to all power plant users at the same price.

"It seems that this gas aggregator idea is the key. Again, we have work to do," Mr. Marcos told the Prime Energy delegation, led by Prime Infrastructure Capital, Inc. Chairman Enrique Razon, Jr., President and Chief Executive Officer Guillame Lucci, Senior Advisor Sebastian Quiniones and General Manager Donnabel Cruz.

The Palace said the company will start drilling two deep wells under SC 38 in the last quarter of 2024, "with additional production from the Malampaya field

expected to start by the first half of 2026."

The SC 38 was originally set to expire on Feb. 22, 2024. Under an agreement signed by Mr. Marcos in May, the contract has been extended by another 15 years to Feb. 22, 2039.

"With the renewal of SC 38, Prime Energy plans to commence drilling activities by 2025 in the Camago and Malampaya East fields that are in close vicinity to the existing Malampaya Platform and participate in other Service Contracts," the PCO said. — Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza

Current account deficit seen narrowing in 2023

THE current account deficit will likely narrow this year due to declining imports and softer prices, though the shortfall will remain large as global growth slows, BMI Country Risk & Industry Research said.

In a report issued July 4, BMI said it expects the current account deficit as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) to narrow to 4% this year from 4.4% in 2022.

The forecast is less optimistic than that issued by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), which projects a \$15.1-billion deficit equivalent to 3.4% of GDP this year.

"The Philippines' external sector is likely to stabilize in 2023, but it will remain far from its usual health," BMI said, adding that the deficit will still be wider than historical norms. The deficit averaged 0.4% of GDP between 2015

The central bank estimates the current account deficit at \$4.3 billion (4.3% of GDP) in the first quarter, up from \$4 billion a year

earlier, as the trade in goods deficit widened.

BMI said demand for Philippine-made goods will remain weak this year and projects that, as a share of GDP, exports will fall to 23.4% this year from 24.3% in 2022.

"This is based on the key assumption that global growth will be lukewarm throughout the remainder of the year," it said.

BMI expects the global economy to expand by 2.2% in 2023, against the 3.1% growth posted last year.

"More specifically, we expect the US, which is the Philippines' largest trading partner, to enter a mild recession in late-2023. Mainland China's reopening has also failed to yield the much-anticipated boost to Philippine trade, especially as the economic recovery has started to show signs of stalling there," BMI said.

The Philippine Statistics Agency reported a trade deficit of \$4.53 billion in April, narrowing from the \$5.10-billion deficit a month earlier and the \$5.32-billion deficit a year earlier.

Exports declined 20.2% year on year to \$4.90 billion in April, more severe than the revised 9.1% decline in March and reversing the 6.2% increase a year earlier.

Merchandise imports fell 17.7% year on year to \$9.43 billion in April, accelerating a 1.2% decline in the prior month. This reading also reversed the 29.1% growth posted a year earlier.

"Meanwhile, we think imports will fall this

"Meanwhile, we think imports will fall this year, which will lead to a narrower current account deficit. As a consequence of aggressive monetary tightening, the outlook for domestic demand remains particularly lackluster," BMI said.

The BSP was one of the most aggressive central banks in the region, raising benchmark

rates by 425 basis points to a multi-year high of 6.25%. It began its hiking cycle in May last year.

The Monetary Board paused its policy tightening in March amid easing inflation. It is widely expected to keep rates on hold at least until the third quarter.

Inflation slowed to 5.4% in June from 6.1% in May, the lowest reading in 14 months, or since the 4.9% posted in April 2022. Year-to-date inflation settled at 7.2%, still above the revised 5.4% forecast by the central bank.

"Despite the central bank leaving rates on hold recently, we do not expect any cuts to materialize in 2023. Tight financing conditions will feed through to the economy and pose a major headwind to domestic activity," BMI said.

It added that it expects the Philippine economy to grow 5.9% this year, down from 7.6% in 2022. The forecast is lower than the government's 6-7% target.

"That said, we think that imports will still be kept elevated relative to historical standards. Overall, we forecast imports as a share of GDP to edge down slightly from 37.7% to 35.9%. But it will still be higher than the 2013-2019 average of 32.0% of GDP," BMI said.

It also sees remittance inflows remaining resilient this year, which will provide support for the current account. — **Keisha B. Ta-asan**

Green Energy Auction round hampered by transmission, pricing

THE Department of Energy (DoE) blamed the weak results of its second Green Energy Auction (GEA) on concerns about transmission lines available for the projects, with developers also lukewarm towards the reserve prices on offer.

"At the time that we announced the bids, not only were (there) no objections but (the GEA) was welcomed by the private sector," Energy Secretary Raphael P.M. Lotilla said at the Pandesal forum on Wednesday.

On Monday, the DoE announced that GEA-2 resulted in bids for 3,580.76 megawatts (MW) of renewable energy capacity, well below the target of 11,600 MW.

"We recognize that the markets have spoken that in terms of the attractiveness of the options based on the maximum price that was approved by the ERC (Energy Regulatory Commission), the bids were one-third of the volumes that were made available," Mr. Lotilla said.

In a statement, Theresa C. Capellan, president of SunAsia Energy, Inc. and chairperson of the Philippine Solar and Storage Energy Alliance, said that the ERC must revisit the tariff rates set for the GEA program.

"The rates are not reflecting the realities of the current demand and supply of electricity in the country, nor is it encouraging developers to build," Ms. Capellan said.

ERC Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer Monalisa C. Dimalanta said the Commission is determined to find a solution that satisfies investors while protecting consumers.

"We have and continue to value (developer) inputs to the price-setting exercise for the GEA. I look forward to learning, for example, why those who submitted bids found the rates viable while others did not," Ms. Dimalanta said in a Viber message.

Mr. Lotilla said that the availability of transmission lines was one of the other concerns raised with the system impact study experiencing delays.

The system impact study is conducted by the National Grid Corp. of the Philippines. It aims to assess whether the transmission system can absorb new capacity.

"The waiting time right now is ranging from one year to two years. If you have to wait that long before you can even be given a go signal then it can be a detriment

to those who would like to be able to offer their capacities on renewable energy," he said.

The GEA program aims to promote renewable energy as a primary source of energy through competitive selection.

This program is expected to help the government increase the share of renewables in the energy mix to 35% by 2030 and 50% by 2040.

The government is also examining the adoption of nuclear power to stabilize the energy supply.

Mr. Lotilla said the Energy department is working with other government agencies such as the Department of Science and Technology and the National Economic and Development Authority to include the private sector in nuclear power development.

"The government is prohibited from entering the power generation space but if there is a possibility for the private sector to do it, we should support it," he added.

"I do not want to second guess Congress... It is for Congress to decide whether or not we should go for nuclear power. Even the timing will be determined by them. But we intend to work with them so in the meantime, we can be sure that when that decision is made... we won't be starting from scratch," he said.

Mr. Lotilla said nuclear can be added to the energy mix "within the decade."

Meanwhile, Mr. Lotilla said that the Malampaya Consortium is on track with its drilling program within the Service Contract (SC) 38 which covers the Malampaya gas field.

In May, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. signed an agreement renewing the service contract for the Malampaya field until 2039.

The Malampaya field, which is experiencing dwindling supply, is the Philippines' only indigenous commercial source of natural gas.

"The good news that was shared with the President (on Tuesday) by the Malampaya consortium is that we are on track to having the first drilling for the nearby fields by the end of 2024 and we are looking forward to new or additional supply from the same service contract by 2026," Mr. Lotilla said.

The Malampaya Consortium's members are Prime Energy Resources Development B.V., UC38 LLC; and PNOC Exploration Corp. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

OPINION

eONETT: A more convenient way to secure an eCAR

Pursuant to Republic Act No. 11032 or the Ease of Doing Business Act, various government agencies, including the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), have made efforts to use technology to streamline their services.

Guided by its Digital Transformation Roadmap, the BIR successfully rolled out the eAFS System for the submission of attachments to the income tax returns, and the Online Registration and Update System (ORUS), which enables end-to-end taxpayer registration

online. And the BIR is at it once again with the rollout of the Electronic One-Time Transaction (eONETT) System.

According to Revenue Memorandum Circular

(RMC) No. 56-2023, the eONETT System allows taxpayers to file the relevant taxes and secure an electronic Certificate Authorizing Registration (eCAR) online. The web-based platform enables taxpayers to process their ONETT online, anytime, anywhere. It also allows the BIR to monitor and facilitate the assessment and collection of taxes from one-time transactions. As of this writing, only the applications for eCAR involving the sale of real property can be processed via eONETT.

Transacting through eONETT involves four simple steps: (1) creation of a user account; (2) submission of the eCAR application; (3) filing and payment of taxes and fees; and (4) claiming the eCAR.

CREATION OF THE TAXPAYER USER ACCOUNT

AUBREY GAYLE T. DIAZ

First, you must create a taxpayer user account at https://www.eonett.bir.gov.ph/ or through the eServices section of the BIR website and clicking the eON-ETT icon. Once the log-in page appears, click the "Create New Account" button. Fill out the necessary information, and make sure to provide a valid and active e-mail address. Click the "Sign Up" button and a confirmation link will be sent to your e-mail. Then, click the link received

through e-mail and simply follow the steps to confirm the creation of the user account.

After clicking the link, you will be directed to the eONETT Login Page

where you will input your e-mail address as the Username and your 12-digit password. Click the "LOGIN" button, and you will be directed to the eONETT homepage.

SUBMISSION OF THE eCAR APPLICATION

In the homepage, you may select either the "+ New CGT & DST Application" button for sale of real property classified as capital assets, or the "+ New EWT or DST Application" button in case of sale of real property classified as ordinary asset, according to the type of application/transaction you wish to process. You will then be redirected to the online application form. Fill out the form with the necessary information, and upload all the documentary requirements.

After clicking "Submit Application," the system will automatically assign a transaction number and the data will be transmitted electronically to the concerned BIR district office. The application will be evaluated by the Revenue Officer or Group Supervisor and will then be endorsed to the Revenue District Officer/Assistant Revenue District Officer/Chief of Assessment Section for the approval of the ONETT Computation Sheet (OCS).

All submitted applications can be viewed on the homepage. You may click the corresponding transaction number to view the status of the submitted application. The status could either be "Pending," meaning the OCS is awaiting approval, or "For Payment," which means that the OCS is approved and that the tax due reflected therein needs to be paid.

Once the OCS is approved, a pop-up notification message will let you know that you may now proceed with the payment of the computed tax due and convenience fee of P50.

FILING AND PAYMENT OF THE RELEVANT TAX RETURNS AND CONVENIENCE FEE

From the homepage, you will then download and print the relevant tax returns to be filed and paid.

Taxpayers may opt to pay using the following payment channels:

• For over-the-counter payment, proceed to any Authorized Agent Bank, present the downloaded BIR Forms and

pay the corresponding tax due and related fees.

• For online payment, under the "Proof of Payment" tab, you may click the "ePAY" icon and you will be directed to the various ePayment channels.

On the other hand, you may pay the applicable convenience fee by selecting from a broader range of payment methods available.

After successfully paying the required tax due and convenience fee, you may now proceed to submit the proof of payment. Click the "Proof of Payment" tab to encode the necessary payment details and upload the scanned documents/proof of payment, then click the "Submit" button.

You will be notified once the payment has been verified and may then download the Claim Slip for presentation to the concerned Revenue District Office (RDO) in claiming the eCAR.

CLAIMING THE eCAR

To claim the eCAR, taxpayers must present the actual/physical copies of the application documents together with the downloaded BIR Forms and Claim Slip to the concerned RDO where the application was filed. All original documents presented must be the same documents uploaded in the eONETT system. The taxpayer must then accomplish the ONETT Customer Satisfaction Survey Form (CSSF). After this step, you may now claim your eCAR.

Since the eONETT System is new, we have yet to see how the implementation

of this system would improve the turnaround time to complete the eCAR application's end-to-end process. As with any new processes, some birth pains can be expected, but I would expect that once the wrinkles have been sorted out, eCAR applications should be faster and more convenient than the traditional manual filing.

I look forward to the system soon accepting eCAR applications for the sale or transfer of shares. Transactions like these are also frequently encountered and processed with the BIR similar to transfers of real property. I believe the processing of eCAR for this type of transaction would likewise be more efficient through the eONETT system.

I look forward to the BIR's next milestone as it goes through its digital transformation with a view towards providing taxpayers with excellent service.

The views or opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Isla Lipana & Co. The content is for general information purposes only, and should not be used as a substitute for specific advice.

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