

Nickel industry asks gov't to reduce barriers to entry for foreign investors

THE nickel mining industry said the government needs to reduce barriers to entry for foreign investors if the Philippines is to play a major role in supplying key minerals for the green energy transition.

"The industry needs a lot of support from the government, be more open to exploration, and make it easy for foreign investors to come in. We need to map out what we have and what we don't have," Dante R. Bravo, president of the Philippine Nickel Industry Association (PNIA), said in a statement.

Mr. Bravo said that the overall outlook for the nickel industry "remains compelling" with rising demand for clean energy technologies such as batteries for electric vehicles (EVs), solar panels, power grid systems, wind turbines, and hydrogen-based energy.

"Currently, we have the capability to mine nickel, but there is a whole value chain... leading to the manufacturing of batteries that needs to be enabled (via) the right government policies and programs," he added.

The Philippines has substantial reserves to service global nickel demand, he said, adding that more investment is needed to enable exploration and processing, and to further develop its nickel resources.

According to Mr. Bravo, investment in the EV industry is estimated at \$300 billion, and is expected to rise to \$1 trillion as EV sales double within the next five years.

In the first quarter, metal output by value rose 22.83% to P58.92 billion, supported by stronger prices and higher

output of gold, nickel ore, and chromite, according to the Mines and Geosciences Bureau.

Output of nickel direct shipping ore rose 5% to 3,997,829 dry metric tons, valued at P23.85 billion.

"We can expect significant growth in production if we start to attract investment in mining exploration and there is a clear viable track towards value-added processing," he said.

Separately, Mr. Bravo said the PNIA will conduct further roundtable discus-

sions in August during the Nickel Initiative 2023 Business Conference.

It will be attended by government, private sector, and other non-government nickel industry stakeholders.

Mr. Bravo said, "the discussions have been productive so far and we look forward to zooming in on action points that raise the competitiveness of the Philippine nickel mining sector and make it a veritable driver of responsible mining and inclusive economic development." — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

Higher subsidy proposed for PUV modernization program

TRANSPORTATION regulators have reached consensus on the need to increase the equity subsidy for the public utility vehicle (PUV) modernization program, officials said on Tuesday.

In a briefing on Tuesday, Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board Chairman Teofilo E. Guadiz III said the proposed subsidy would more than double the current subsidy.

"We are planning to increase the subsidy from P160,000 to our proposal of roughly about P360,000," he said.

Office of Transportation Cooperatives Chairman Jesus Ferdinand D. Ortigas said that the specific terms of the planned subsidy increase cannot yet be discussed pending the issuance of a memorandum circular when it is approved.

"Part of the program is to provide subsidies. There is a certain

amount that the government will give to each cooperative or corporation that will use to buy modernized jeepneys," Mr. Ortega said. "I cannot talk about it in detail right now, as we need to wait for the formal announcements."

He added however that "agencies under the Department of Transportation (DoTr) have already agreed to the increase."

He gave no specific timeline for the increase other than to say

that it could be implemented in a month's time.

"In principle the DoTr has already agreed. So, it is just a matter of completing the paperwork. (The memorandum circular) could be released after a week or a month. What is important is that it will be retroactive, meaning we will be able to cover everyone who will apply for a loan," Mr. Ortega said. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Palay output growth estimated at 1.4% in 2nd quarter

PRODUCTION of palay, or unmilled rice, is estimated to have grown 1.4% year on year during the second quarter, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.

In a report on Tuesday, the PSA estimated palay output during the period at 4.26 million metric tons (MT), based on the standing crop as of May 1.

The estimate is 0.4% lower than the initial forecast issued on April 1, which put production at 4.28 million MT.

The harvest area for the quarter is estimated to have risen 0.8% year on year to 961.14 thousand hectares, while the assumed yield per hectare is estimated to have grown 0.5% to 4.43 MT.

The PSA reported that about 603.24 thousand hectares or 62.8% of the updated standing crop have been harvested.

Production at the harvested area was 2.76 million MT.

"The total area to be harvested was 357.90 thousand hectares as

of May 1. About 69.7% of standing palay was at the maturing stage, 28.9% at the reproductive stage, and 1.4% at the vegetative stage," the PSA said.

The PSA added that its corn production estimate for the second quarter was 1.46 million MT, down 1.7% from a year earlier.

In the three months to June, The PSA reduced its estimate for harvest area by 2.6% to 409 thousand hectares, while the expected yield per hectare estimated to have risen 0.9% year on year to 3.57 MT.

The PSA also reported that about 234.35 thousand hectares or 57.3% of the updated standing crop have been harvested, producing 969.24 thousand MT.

"Of the total area of 174.66 thousand hectares of standing corn yet to be harvested as of May 1, 59.2% were at the maturing stage, 33.9% at the reproductive stage, and 6.9% were at the vegetative stage," the PSA said. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**



FREEMIX

Approval of more ancillary contracts sought by NGCP

THE National Grid Corp. of the Philippines (NGCP) said it submitted ancillary services (AS) contracts for the approval of the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC).

In separate filings posted on ERC's website, NGCP is asking the ERC to provisionally approve four AS procurement agreements (ASPAs) entered into with three companies — Mapalad Power Corp.; Western Mindanao Power Corp., and SN-Aboitiz Power-Benguet, Inc.

According to Republic Act No. 9136 or the Electric Power Industry Reform Act of 2001, ancillary services are "services that are necessary to support the transmission of capacity and energy from resources to loads while maintaining reliable operation of the transmission system in accordance

with good utility practice and the Grid Code."

AS contracts are on call to be tapped when needed to augment the power supply, and are critical in ensuring the reliability of the transmission system.

In June, the ERC said it is processing the approval of 36 ASPAs entered into by the NGCP. The contracts were signed according to the competitive selection process prescribed by the Department of Energy.

The ERC said that the grid operator issued notices of award for 36 ASPAs on April 18, of which 14 applications have been filed with the ERC and are awaiting hearing.

Others have not yet paid filing fees, which are needed for the application to be deemed filed, and must still undergo pre-filing review, the ERC said. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

House bill proposes palm oil dev't agency

A BILL filed in the House of Representatives is proposing to establish the Palm Oil Development Authority, overseen by the Office of the President, to gear up the industry for possible exports.

House Bill No. 8326 seeks to take advantage of the Philippines' "wide potential area for the production of palm oil. The industry has in place production technology and best practices that can be adopted by the small holders/growers and new investors," according to the bill's explanatory note.

The bill was filed by North Cotabato Rep. Joselito S. Saccalan. The proposed agency will be organized as a government-owned and -controlled corporation with an annual budget of P100 million.

The bill proposes a governing board headed by the Secretary

of Agriculture and Trade and Industry.

The Philippine Palm Oil Development Council, Inc. and the Department of Trade and Industry's Caraga Regional Office currently oversee the palm oil industry.

Mr. Saccalan said the industry would prefer a more specialized and focused regulator.

"It is the desire of stakeholders, planters and farmers that the industry be fully developed/supported, as its economic potential/contribution to the country's gross domestic product is high," he said.

The Philippine Coconut Authority and several business groups in March launched an investigation over the alleged smuggling of palm oil. Albay Rep. Jose Ma. Clemente S. Salceda said smuggled palm oil led to P45 billion worth of foregone government revenue. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

PLDT and Smart celebrate Ookla Speedtest Award™ Wins



how we are able to evolve with our customers' increasingly digital lifestyles and enable meaningful connections — as attested by our awards from Ookla. As the driving force behind these recognitions, our Fixed, Mobile, and Enterprise customers can rest assured that they can count on us to continuously provide them with the best network possible," Panillio said.

"We extend our sincere congratulations to PLDT for their remarkable 5-year streak of winning the Speedtest Award for Fastest Fixed Network, and to Smart for their outstanding achievement of winning the Speedtest Award for Best Mobile Network three times in a row," said Bye. "These notable victories demonstrate both companies' unwavering commitment to improving connectivity in the market and providing consumers with the best internet experience. This recognition reaffirms their industry leadership and dedication to improving the future of connectivity in the Philippines."

PLDT and Smart's continuous initiatives to enhance their integrated fixed and wireless networks are part of the Group's aspirational multi-year transformation, which identifies leveling up customer experience as among the key priorities.

PLDT Chairman Manuel V. Pangilinan and PLDT and Smart President and CEO Alfredo S. Panillio recently met with Stephen Bye, President and CEO of Ookla®, a division of Ziff Davis, and other executives from the company, in a courtesy visit on July 13 in the Philippines.

This marks another milestone in PLDT, Smart and Ookla's long standing partnership aimed at helping to improve the quality of internet experience in the Philippines and assisting PLDT and Smart in their efforts to be the premier broadband and mobile service providers in the country. Also gracing the event were PLDT Network Head Eric Santiago, FVP and Head of PLDT Home Jeremiah de la Cruz, SVP and Head of Consumer Business Group — Individual Francis E. Flores, Mitch Locsin, First Vice President and Head of Enterprise and International Business Groups at PLDT

and Smart, Tom Opaczky, Head of APAC for Ookla, and Mohammad Salman, Technical Account Manager for Ookla's Philippines Operations.

In the same event, Smart was also awarded once more Ookla's Speedtest Award™ for the Best Mobile Network in the Philippines for Q1-Q2 2023, successfully achieving a 'three-peat' following Smart's back-to-back citation as the Philippines' Best Mobile Network for Q1-Q2 2022 and Q3-Q4 2022. To earn these citations, a mobile operator must lead in two crucial Ookla Speedtest Awards categories, namely Fastest Mobile Network and Best Mobile Coverage, for the same periods.

Recently, PLDT also won the Speedtest Award for Fastest Fixed Network 5 years in a row, a first for the Philippines.

"True to our Purpose at PLDT Group, I am proud of

WWF sets plastic waste reduction target of 30% by 2025

CONSERVATION GROUP World Wildlife Fund (WWF) said it has set a target for reducing plastic waste leakage into the oceans of 30% by 2025 via reduction in plastic use as well as improved recycling and collection.

"That involves a whole system-wide approach from reducing the use to increasing circularity and then improving our collection," WWF Philippines Executive Director Katherine P. Custodio said in a media conference on Tuesday.

According to Ms. Custodio, reducing plastic waste leaking into the oceans is "achievable" but the effort needs to be national.

"What we are seeing now, with the partnership we have with local government units (LGUs) and also with the ports, that these partners are committed to do their 30% reduction by 2025 and working towards eliminating leakage in nature," she said.

"We have long way to go because we are only working with 10 LGUs at present so it's really about how do we scale up that work because we need to reach so much," she added.

The WWF's Plastic Smart Cities program engages local organizations in reduction, reuse, and upcycling activities, as well as in building materials recovery facilities.

It is currently working with the city of Manila, Batangas City, Donsol, Sorsogon, Taytay, Palawan, Davao City, Samar province, San Isidro, Davao Oriental, the Siargao municipalities of Del Carmen and General Luna in Surigao del Norte, and Cagayan de Oro City.

Its port partners are Manila's North Harbor, the Port of Batangas, and the Port of Cagayan de Oro.

Gilbert C. Gonzales, assistant secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), said a combined effort is required to achieve the targeted reduction. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

Baguio to receive decentralized wastewater treatment system

THE Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) said it is introducing a decentralized wastewater treatment system to Baguio City.

"The launch of this new wastewater technology is an environmental win, especially for tourism hotspots like Baguio. As cities like it urbanize, wastewater management is a common and crucial issue that has to be addressed. Japanese companies through JICA can bring in the expertise and innovation, and the public sector can adopt the technology. We hope those innovative systems can contribute to the said crucial challenge, and will be widely spread in the entire country, too," JICA Chief Representative Sakamoto Takema said in a statement.

The project uses systems developed by FujiClean Co. Ltd.

"This onsite wastewater treatment system of FujiClean shows equivalent treatment performance to a centralized wastewater treatment plant. The company

adds that the onsite wastewater treatment can address water pollution in highly urbanized environments, and transform them into smart, sustainable cities," JICA said.

A JICA program taps Japanese small and medium enterprises (SMEs) for potential investment opportunities in overseas markets.

"It is expected that Japanese SME technologies and business models can address various development challenges in partner countries, such as the Philippines," it added.

The wastewater treatment plant in Baguio City currently serves 10% of the city's households while handling 67% of wastewater flow.

The inability to provide full coverage raises the likelihood of "sewage overflows into rivers, groundwater, and drainage systems in the city. Such a situation is becoming a serious risk of water contamination of Baguio's water supply resources," it added. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsan**