

Projects worth P183 billion certified as eligible for expedited permits

THE Board of Investments (BoI) said it has issued green lane certificates to projects valued at P183 billion since the program was launched on July 13.

BoI Chairman and Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual told reporters in a Viber message that the one-stop action center for strategic investments (OSAC-SI) has received 12 applications for green lane processing, of which four were approved.

Mr. Pascual said the four approved projects involve investments in renewable energy and digital infrastructure.

In a separate statement, the BoI said the approved projects are SunAsia Energy, Inc.'s P66-billion 1,300-megawatt (MW) floating solar project in Laguna de Bay; NK Solar One, Inc.'s P15-billion 250-MW floating solar project in Caliraya, Laguna; Phil-Tower Consortium, Inc.'s P52 billion to erect 7,907 Common Towers; and Narra Technology Development Park's P50-billion Hyperscale Data Center in New Clark City, Tarlac.



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The BoI said the remaining eight projects valued at P78.5 billion are currently under evaluation for green lane certification, which would make them eligible for expedited permit processing.

"Among the projects being evaluated are five more floating solar projects, a micro-hydroelectric plant, a reinforcing steel bar producer, and a section mill project," the BoI said.

Mr. Pascual said the 12 projects are expected to generate 19,250 jobs.

The one-stop shop was authorized by Executive Order (EO) No. 18 issued by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. on Feb. 23, which gave strategic investments an expedited approval path. The OSAC-SI serves as the single point of entry for all strategic investments and has the power to endorse investors to National Government

agencies, local government units, and quasi-judicial bodies for processing permits and licenses.

EO 18 seeks to expedite, streamline, and automate government processes for strategic investments with the goal of attracting more foreign investors.

The BoI classifies as strategic investments the investment pledges made to Mr. Marcos during his travels, as well as those recommended by the Fiscal Incentives Review Board to the Office of the President, foreign direct investment projects endorsed by the Inter-agency Investment Promotion Coordination Committee, and priority projects or activities listed in the Strategic Investment Priority Plan.

For 2023, the BoI has set a target of P1.5 trillion in approved investments. At the end of June, the agency has approved P698 billion worth of investments, up 203% from a year earlier. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

GSIS considering farm mechanization investments

THE Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) said it is considering investing in sustainable agricultural mechanization projects to help the Philippines achieve food security.

GSIS President and General Manager Jose Arnulfo A. Veloso met with the Department of Agriculture's Undersecretary for Rice Industry Development Leocadio S. Sebastian to discuss the possible investments, the pension fund said in a statement on Thursday.

Mr. Veloso said GSIS is looking to invest in sustainable agricultural mechanization that uses farming tools which are environment-friendly, reasonably priced, adaptable to local conditions, and durable.

"The President stressed in his SONA (State of the Nation Address) that among the flagship programs to boost agricultural production is agricultural mechanization," the GSIS said.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. said in his second SONA that the government has given 28,000 units of machinery to farmers. — **Aaron Michael C. Sy**



ALEX KOTLIARSKY/UNSPASH

Contact centers confident of meeting staffing goals

THE Contact Center Association of the Philippines (CCAP) said it expects to hit its employment targets, adding that the emergence of generative artificial intelligence (AI) will not hinder it from achieving its goal.

CCAP Managing Director Rosario Cajucom-Bradbury said in a statement on Thursday that the goals set out in the 2028 information technology-business process management (IT-BPM) industry roadmap include 2.3 million full-time employees (FTEs) within the 2.5 million workforce of the broader IT-BPM industry by 2028.

"We are confident that the target employment figure will be achieved even with the emergence of generative AI. Contrary to common assumptions, our group believes that the new technology will bolster the sector's productivity instead of threaten jobs," Ms. Cajucom-Bradbury said.

"Generative AI can enhance the strengths of our Filipino agents who can then focus on active listening and become more

empathetic and engaging when rendering service to our customers," she added.

The industry is also expected to account for \$49 billion of the \$59-billion projected industry revenue by 2028.

"The CCAP is confident that the industry will (grow in line with) targets in the 2028 IT-BPM roadmap," it added.

The CCAP is currently holding its annual Contact Islands Conference in Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu, between July 26 and 28.

According to Ms. Cajucom-Bradbury, the industry's agents are also being upskilled to meet the changing nature of jobs in the industry.

"Agents can be redeployed and upskilled to make them always relevant to the future business model," she said.

In terms of labor, Ms. Cajucom-Bradbury said the Philippines is "no longer just a labor arbitrage" site, adding that labor cost is just one of the various factors considered by clients when signing up for outsourcing services. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

NCR retail price growth eases to 13-month low in June

RETAIL price growth in Metro Manila came in at 4.4%, in June, the lowest reading in 13 months, the Philippine Statistics Authority said on Thursday.

Price growth in the National Capital Region (NCR), as measured by the general retail price index (GRPI) eased to 4.4% year on year in June, from 4.9% in May and 4.7% a year earlier.

The June reading is the lowest since the 4.1% posted in May 2022.

ING Bank N.V. Manila Senior Economist Nicholas Antonio T.

Mapa said slowing retail price growth is in line with easing inflation in June.

"Favorable base effects on top of moderating global commodity prices helped nudge GRPI lower," Mr. Mapa said in an e-mail.

Headline inflation in June eased for a fifth straight month to 5.4%.

Food inflation, likewise, slowed to 6.7%, led by sugar prices.

The slowdown in the GRPI was driven by the lower growth posted

by the food index of 9.5% against 10% in the previous month.

Slower price growth was also seen in the indices for beverages and tobacco (6.4% in June from 6.9% in May); crude materials, inedible except fuels (4.5% from 7.1%); manufactured goods classified chiefly by materials (2.6% from 2.8%); and miscellaneous manufactured articles (1.7% from 1.9%).

Price growth in chemicals, including animal and vegetable oils and fats and machinery and

transport equipment, was 3.7% and 1.4% in June from 3.5% and 1.3% in the previous month, respectively.

Mineral fuels, lubricants and related materials, posted a 16.1% contraction in June from the 12.8% fall in the previous month.

Mr. Mapa expects the index to continue easing in July "with base effects continuing to feed through on to inflation while global commodity prices remain subdued relative to last year." — **Mariedel Irish U. Catilogo**

Customs seizes P30B worth of smuggled goods

THE Bureau of Customs (BoC) said its seizures of smuggled goods have totaled P30.1 billion as of July 25.

In a statement, the BoC said that the goods were seized in 654 separate operations. They include over P2.9 billion worth of agricultural products.

The BoC has said it generated collections of P434.169 billion in the six months to June, beating its target by 3.21%.

The BoC's collections in the half represent around 48% of its P901.3-billion full-year target.

Measures taken to improve collections include enhancing pre-arrival and post-arrival technical targeting and fraud detection for imported goods.

"Investing in additional equipment and providing capacity building for our personnel that will further strengthen our intelligence and enforcement capabilities," it added.

The agency also said it is working on intensifying "collaboration, joint operations, and information sharing with local and international law enforcement and regulatory agencies."

Pasay raids yield smuggled frozen meat from China valued at P2M

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it has seized frozen meat products from China valued at P2 million following raids conducted in Pasay City.

In a statement, the DA said it confiscated around 1,034 kilos of frozen meat products, including Peking ducks, black chickens, and doves in three establishments on July 21.

In a joint operation with Pasay City authorities, the National Meat Inspection Service, and the Philippine Coast Guard, the seizures included 700 kilos of smuggled frozen Peking

ducks, black chickens, doves, and other meat products from a restaurant and mini-mart.

The team also found 334 kilos of imported frozen Peking ducks, rabbits, doves, yellow chickens, suckling pigs, and other meat in a restaurant.

The restaurant could present no legal documentation attesting that the meat products were properly imported.

The seized products are subject to immediate destruction "in order to prevent them from posing health hazards to the public," the DA said.

"All-in-all, the apprehended smuggled products were valued at P2 million — a clear violation of the Republic Act No. 10845 or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016," it said.

Under the law, large-scale agricultural smuggling occurs when at least P1 million worth of sugar, corn, pork, poultry, garlic, onion, carrots, fish, and cruciferous vegetables — either raw, processed, or preserved — is illegally brought into the country. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

"The BoC is committed to expedite the prosecution of filed cases before the Department of Justice (DoJ) and Professional Regulation Commission (PRC). Additionally, through the DoJ, we will strive to increase the conviction

rate of smugglers, serving as a deterrent to others involved in such illicit activities," it said.

As of July 25, the agency has processed the accreditation of 7,733 importers and 1,263 Customs brokers.

Some 95 importers and 36 Customs brokers have had their accreditation revoked "due to violations of customs laws, rules, and regulations." — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

Road tax not expected to adequately fund jeepney modernization program

MINORITY LEGISLATORS said on Thursday that a bill raising the motor vehicle user charge (MVUC) will not raise sufficient revenue to support the government's modernization program for public transport, while unduly burdening the middle class.

"It is important to note that a modern (jeepney replacement) will cost more," Assistant Minority Leader and Gabriela Party-list Representative Arlene D. Brosas said, citing a cost estimate of P2.6 million.

Minority Leader and ACT Teachers' Party-list Rep. France L. Castro added at a briefing that the MVUC will add to the burdens of vehicle owners, many of which borrowed to acquire their automobiles.

The MVUC bill seeks to amend Republic Act No. 8794 or the Motor Vehicle Users' Charge law.

According to the bill, for-hire vehicles like cars, PUVs, buses, trucks and trailers are to receive a 50% discount on the

MVUC, while motorcycles and tricycles will be exempt.

The House ways and means committee approved the bill on Tuesday.

Albay Rep. Jose Ma. Clemente S. Salceda, who chairs the committee, said revenue from the MVUC will finance the public utility vehicle (PUV) modernization program, providing 45% of incremental revenue, as well as the government's road infrastructure and safety programs, which get 5%.

Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno has said that the MVUC will raise up to P15.8 billion in revenue during its first year and P48.6 billion by the third year.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. urged Congress to pass the MVUC bill in his State of the Nation Address on Monday.

Ms. Castro called instead for action to lower inflation by reducing the number of products subject to value-added tax. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

Q4 building permit approvals fall 9.2%

APPROVED building permits fell 9.2% in the fourth quarter with inflation dampening construction spending, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said on Wednesday.

According to preliminary data, the PSA said building projects covered by the permits numbered 37,329 in the fourth quarter. These projects covered 8.43 million square meters (sq.m.) of floor area valued at P98.23 billion.

The contraction represents a turnaround from the gains of 20.4% and 13.6% posted in the previous quarter and the fourth quarter of 2021, respectively.

"Increased prices of building materials likely deterred potential developers, reducing the applications for building permits," Security Bank Corp. Chief Economist Robert Dan J. Roces said in an e-mail.

Headline inflation during the three months to December accelerated to 8.1%, the highest level since the Global Financial Crisis in November 2008.

Permits for residential projects, which accounted for 70.9% of the total, fell 12% to 26,483. These projects were valued at P47.85 billion with a combined floor area of 4.42 million sq.m.

Single homes made up 85.1% of the residential category. Approved permits here declined 10.4% to 22,529. Apartments and residential buildings declined 22.8% (to 3,478) and 60% (to 10), respectively.

Approved applications for duplex or quadruplex homes, meanwhile, rose 8% to 420 permits.

Permits for other residential projects tallied 46, up 64.3%.

Non-residential projects accounted for 7,175 approvals during the fourth quarter, up 12.9%. These projects were valued at P41.29 with a combined floor area of 3.90 million sq.m.

Commercial construction, which accounted for 70.5% of non-residential projects, rose 20.5% to 5,056 building permits while industrial projects rose 3.9% to 565.

The Calabarzon region — composed of the provinces of Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon — accounted for 24.3% of all approved building permits in the fourth quarter with 9,069, followed by Central Visayas with 11.3% or 4,235 and Central Luzon with 10.9% or 4,058.

By value, construction projects in the National Capital Region amounted to P19.052 billion, followed by Calabarzon with P17.672 billion, and Central Luzon with P12.840 billion.

Mr. Roces said that construction costs in the first quarter may continue to rise, but will moderate over the remainder of the year.

"Elevated policy rates may also have tempered the appetite for building permits and these likely will remain flat until rate cuts take place," Mr. Roces added.

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas paused its key policy rate at 6.25 for two consecutive meetings, after hiking a total of 425 basis points between May 2022 and March 2023. — **Mariedel Irish U. Catilogo**