

Nickel miners expect output to be little changed in 2023

THE Philippine Nickel Industry Association (PNIA) said nickel production is expected to be flat this year, with miners hoping to make up for a weak first half before the close of mining season in October.

At a briefing on Tuesday, PNIA President Dante R. Bravo said: "Production is basically the same. The areas (that are supplying nickel) right now are limited in their production."

Regarding the weak first half performance, he said: "We are trying to catch up this time around but some of the mines will be shutting down by October."

As such, he expects output "to be the same" as 2022's, Mr. Bravo added.

In 2022, nickel direct shipping ore output declined 11% to 29.27 million dry metric tons, according to the Mines and Geosciences Bureau.

Mr. Bravo added that the PNIA is urging the government to fast-track the approval of mining permits by establishing a "one-stop shop" for the application process. Such a streamlining of approvals, he said, will attract more investment to the industry.

"If we can streamline the process, it would be easier to convince investors," he said.

While the government is focused on attracting investment in value-added processing, industry development efforts should in-

clude exploration and extraction, he said.

He added that a nickel processing plant requires more than 100 million tons of raw nickel ore each year for at least 20 years to be considered viable.

Mr. Bravo said that the measures required would include a simplified fiscal regime, harmonized national and local mining regulations, and stepped-up environmental monitoring.

"To produce the minimum raw ore input requirement of one processing plant, mining permits need to be approved efficiently and awarded contracts should be allowed to operate with minimal disruption under a predictable,

rules-based regulatory regime," he said.

He said demand for nickel will continue to rise due to demand from battery producers, according to Mr. Bravo.

"We have a potential to supply beyond 40 million tons, probably even more, because of the take-up of nickel right now. (Demand from) the battery industry is increasing year in, year out," he said.

"The opportunity will come as we see that the price becoming more stable and it becomes more viable to access other mining areas," he added. "We have a chance to grow the supply here in the Philippines." — **Adrian H. Halili**

DENR declares support for 'critical minerals' exploration

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said it will provide support for efforts to discover deposits of "critical minerals" like iron, cobalt, rare earths, as well as nickel.

Speaking at a forum organized by the Philippine Nickel Industry Association, Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyza said on Tuesday that "starting in 2024 through the DENR's Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) and a new office for integrated environmental science, we will be concentrating on priority activities" like "extensive government led exploration for critical minerals."

She said that the DENR is also directing the MGB to focus on enabling mineral exploration

next year through partnerships with foreign investors.

"This effort would be augmented by technical support coming from our foreign development partners, including the Australian government and the US Geological Survey," she added.

Ms. Yulo-Loyza said that the DENR is seeking to "promote and enable" domestic mineral processing, particularly for laterite, a rock with high iron and aluminum content.

These initiatives "aim to maximize the value of our mineral resources... (for use in) our own energy transition and economic development," she said.

Ms. Yulo-Loyza also said that the DENR remains focused on pursuing a policy that assigns greater weight to "the avoidance of all possible environmental impact."

In a statement issued also on Tuesday, the DENR said it has signed a memorandum of agreement (MoA) with the Manila Observatory for a climate change information system.

Under the MoA, a digital database of climate and environment will be made available to the public, particularly to local government units, other National Government agencies, schools, civil society organizations, and the private sector. — **Adrian H. Halili**

Infra law TRO ban applicable to all procurements — DBM

THE Department of Budget and Management (DBM) said a law banning temporary restraining orders (TROs) against infrastructure projects has established a legal principle that can be applied more broadly to a blanket TRO ban on all procurement exercises.

Republic Act (RA) 8975, formally known as "An Act to Ensure the Expedient Implementation and Completion of Government Infrastructure Projects by Prohibiting Lower Courts From Issuing Temporary Restraining Orders, Preliminary Injunctions, or Preliminary Mandatory Injunctions, Providing Penalties for Violations Thereof, and for Other Purposes," can be applied to the procurement system in general, and not just to infrastructure projects, DBM Procurement Service (PS) Executive Director Dennis S. Santiago said in a Viber message.

The DBM is seeking "to apply the same legal principle in RA 8975 to procurement of goods and services, including consulting services, to address delays in government procurement, achieve early completion of projects, and deliver goods and services on time. Under the proposal, (only) the Supreme Court would have the jurisdiction to issue (a TRO)," he added.

The DBM is in the process of completing the proposed amendments to the Government Procurement Reform Act of 2007 for submission to Congress.

In his second State of the Nation Address, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. called for reforms to the procurement law "to make government procurement more attuned to these changing times."

The broadening of the TRO ban will "tackle possible delays

in the procurement process because of suits filed by losing bidders," according to the DBM.

Another proposed amendment by the DBM is to apply a no-bid process for goods and services worth around P250,000 or possibly less.

Mr. Santiago said that the threshold for no-bid procurement has yet to be determined. "The P250,000 figure is a proposal. The amount can be P50,000 or lower," he added.

"The 'direct acquisition' procurement modality is being proposed to enhance efficiency and timeliness in the procurement of goods that are essential and necessary in the proper conduct and performance of government agencies' functions and responsibilities," he added.

Mr. Santiago said the amendments aim to "fulfill the needs and demands of the agency within the time frame without having to go through the entire bidding process for procurement of goods of low value."

"As you may know, the bidding process takes some time, and there are also externalities that contribute to delays in government acquisition," he added.

Budget Secretary Amenah F. Pangandaman has said that procurement issues have had an "adverse impact" on public service delivery.

"Of our total National Government budget, up to 25% is (used on) procurement. These are the reasons that this reform has become necessary, tedious as the process may be," she added.

The reform of procurement law also aims to help government agencies accelerate spending. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsos**

House adopts Senate version of job creation master plan measure

THE House of Representatives on Tuesday adopted the Senate's version of a bill that would create a national employment master plan.

In plenary session, the adoption of Senate Bill (SB) No. 2035 or the proposed Trabaho Para sa Bayan Act, was adopted via voice vote. The bill effectively substitutes for House Bill No. 8400.

The proposed law calls for a job-creation plan with three-year, six-year, and ten-year timelines to aid the post-pandemic recovery.

"The Trabaho Para sa Bayan Plan shall serve as the State's master plan on employment generation and recovery to realize short-term and long-term goals and visions for the country," according to SB 2035.

The plan is expected to offer incentives to stimulate investment to address unemployment, underemployment, and the ris-

ing informality of work arrangements. It also seeks to provide skills training to enhance the employability of workers, and support micro, small, and medium enterprises.

The Senate bill includes incentives for offering training, technology, knowledge transfer, upskilling, reskilling, and enterprise-based training programs such as apprenticeship, work immersion, and on-the-job training. It also seeks to identify priority sectors and key and emerging industries with high employment potential with strong prospects for attracting direct investment.

The bill also calls for a national reintegration program for documented and undocumented overseas Filipino workers.

SB 2035 was approved in May while the House passed its bill on Aug. 22. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

Water wasted annually equivalent to half of Angat Dam capacity — LWUA

AROUND 488 million cubic meters of water a year is lost to waste, mainly in water districts outside Metro Manila, the Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA) said.

"We are averaging about 488 million (cubic meters of water) that we throw away yearly — that's half of Angat Dam," LWUA Chairman Ronnie L. Ong said in a televised interview on Tuesday.

The LWUA oversees 532 water districts, of which 244 have significant levels of non-

revenue water (NRW). NRW includes water that is not billed or lost through leaks or illegal connections.

"The worldwide NRW average is 20% but we are averaging around 30% nationwide," Mr. Ong said. Some water districts have NRW levels as high as 75%, he said.

The LWUA is a government-owned and -controlled corporation that manages the development of water systems outside of Metro Manila. — **Shelden Joy Talavera**



The ASEAN Economic Ministers join the ASEAN Business Advisory Council at the meeting last August 19 to 20 in Semarang Indonesia. The meetings are in preparation for the ASEAN Business Investment Summit in September, which will be attended by leaders of the ASEAN member states.

KALAP-INSPIRED AGRI-MSME DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM GAINS TRACTION IN ASEAN

Kapatid Angat Lahat sa Agri Program, the Agri MSME development program of Go Negosyo, is starting to gain traction in the ASEAN region. ASEAN Business Advisory Council Philippines chair Joey Concepcion shared this as the 55th ASEAN Economic Ministers Meeting was concluded last August 19, 2023 in Semarang, Indonesia.

In his speech before the ASEAN Economic Ministers, Concepcion said that the ASEAN BAC Philippines is now starting to forge partnerships among ASEAN member states to expand the KALAP initiative to address agricultural productivity in each country and ultimately contribute to the region's food security.

"KALAP is an agri MSME development program that builds on proven private sector block-farming models to enhance food security, boost farm productivity, and raise farmer incomes by enabling them to become entrepreneurs," he said in his speech.

KALAP signed the first of these agreements with Malaysia last July 27 during President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s state visit. Since then, five more member states have shown interest in participating, and Concepcion is confident that more ASEAN member-states will soon come onboard.

In addition, Concepcion said a region-wide implementation of the Agri-MSME development initiative might be a good time to revisit and expand the logistics ASEAN RO-RO Network Initiative, which was co-launched by President Joko Widodo during ASEAN50 in 2017.

"We are working towards bringing in as many ASEAN countries to collaborate, and we are grateful for the help of Indonesia, especially ASEAN BAC chair Arsjad Rasjid," he said.

Concepcion noted the synergy between ASEAN BAC Indonesia and ASEAN BAC Philippines in its prioritization of food security, as well as the need for the ASEAN to strengthen regional supply chains. Specifically, he noted the ASEAN BAC Indonesia's own agri-MSME development program which shares similar principles and objectives as KALAP.

The Inclusive Closed Loop Model is being implemented as one of the legacy programs of ASEAN BAC Indonesia to mark its chairmanship. The program aims to empower MSMEs and farmers with finance, knowledge, technology, and market access, and aligns with KALAP's aim of raising

farm productivity by integrating them into the value chain of large agriculture companies, also called big-brother companies.

The ASEAN BAC chair emphasized inclusiveness as a goal that is embodied in its chairmanship's theme of ASEAN Centrality. In previous interviews, Rasjid noted that ASEAN economy's great potential, and the importance of being innovative in its approaches to ensure that no one is left behind.

For his part, Concepcion reiterated the importance of private sector working side by side with government, as reflected in the ASEAN BAC's mandate to provide private sector feedback and guidance to boost ASEAN's efforts towards economic integration. "The region's bright economic future can be fully realized when government and private sector work together," he said.

Along with the KALAP agriculture MSME partnership, ASEAN-BAC Philippines also called on the ASEAN Economic Ministers to support the strengthening of the ASEAN Creative Economy Working Group and institutionalize its legacy project of its chairmanship, the AMEN mentorship program. The AMEN program has already completed Phases 1 and 2, and is readying the implementation of Phase 3.

The ASEAN-BAC meetings are in preparation for the ASEAN Business Investment Summit, which is scheduled to be held in Jakarta in September 2023. At this event, the results of the previous meetings will be communicated to the leaders of ASEAN countries.



ASEAN Business Advisory Council Philippines Chair Joey Concepcion (center) with Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry's George Barcelon (right) and Go Negosyo Senior Adviser Dr. William Dar discuss at the ASEAN - BAC meeting in Indonesia the agri MSME Development model of Kapatid Angat Lahat sa Agri Program (KALAP).

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