

DICT seeking to establish over 15,000 free WiFi sites in 2024

THE Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) said it has set a target of over 15,000 free WiFi sites in 2024.

Its other goals include the implementation of a National Broadband Plan calling for up to 2,800 kilometers of dark fiber reaching parts of Mindanao by December 2024, the DICT said in a statement.

This plan ensures "cost-effective internet" connectivity for National Government agencies and local government units, Heherson M. Asiddao, Information and Communications Technology Undersecretary, said in a statement.

Mr. Asiddao said the DICT also hopes to launch operations at two data centers next year.

The DICT is proposing a 2024 budget of P8.73 billion, Secretary Ivan John E. Uy told the House appropriations committee on Thursday.

"The department firmly believes that digitalization is one of the greatest, most powerful tools — not just to improve the ease of doing business but as a means to eliminate graft and corruption," Mr. Uy said.

Under the National Expenditure Program (NEP), the DICT plus its associated agencies



were allocated funding of P9.86 billion, with P355.77 million going to its Cybercrime Investigation and Coordinating Center; P347.95 million to the National Privacy Commission; and about P453.65 million to the National Telecommunications Commission.

The DICT's proposed budget had been cut from its 2023 funding level of P10.88 billion due to underspending.

"We have implemented a catch-up plan for the department to efficiently utilize its budget," My. Uy said. — Ashley Erika O. Jose

Energy dep't awards 77 offshore wind contracts

THE Department of Energy (DoE) said it has awarded 77 offshore wind energy contracts to date, as well as eight contracts to develop ocean, tidal, and wave energy projects.

"Right now, we have awarded 77 offshore wind energy contracts with a potential capacity of 60 gigawatts," Energy Assistant Secretary Mylene C. Capongcol said on Tuesday during the Energy Smart Forum organized by the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines.

She said of the eight marine resource service contracts, one developer is in the process of engaging an engineering procurement contractor.

"As of June 2023, a total of 1,087 service contracts with a potential capacity of 113 GW (gigawatts) have been awarded and are in various development stages," Ms. Capongcol said.

Citing various DoE studies and assessments, Ms. Capongcol said the Philippines has a potential renewable energy (RE) capacity of about 500 GW.

Wind projects — both onshore and offshore — accounted for 254 GW of the potential capacity, while ocean and marine

energy accounted for 170 GW, with solar amounting to 58 GW. Combined potential capacity for biomass, geothermal, and hydropower is estimated at about 10 GW.

Ms. Capongcol said on the sidelines of the event that the DoE is looking to amend the guidelines governing the awarding of RE contracts of offshore wind technology.

"We are now currently revising the omnibus guidelines for the award of contract, specifically on offshore wind, magkakaroon siya ng (there will be) differentiation with onshore wind," she said.

The DoE is looking to implement a pre-development period for offshore wind projects of eight years, from five years previously, she said. The changes are subject to public consultation in September.

RE accounted for about 22% of the Philippines' energy mix, with coal-fired power plants providing nearly 60% as of the end of 2022.

The government hopes to increase the share of RE to 35% by 2030 and to 50% by 2040. — Sheldeen Joy Talavera

Power Maintenance Updates by MERALCO ADVISORY. The following are scheduled power interruptions necessary for the regular maintenance and upgrade of our power distribution facilities... SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2023. CAVITE. BETWEEN 2:00AM AND 2:30AM AND THEN BETWEEN 7:00AM AND 7:30AM... TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2023. LAGUNA (CALAMBA CITY). BETWEEN 10:00AM AND 2:00PM... TUESDAY TO WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5-6, 2023. CAVITE (BACOR CITY). BETWEEN 11:00PM (TUE., 09/05/23) AND 4:00AM (WED., 09/06/23)... WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2023. RIZAL PROVINCE (PILILLA). BETWEEN 12:01AM AND 12:30AM AND THEN BETWEEN 4:30AM AND 5:00AM... FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2023. CAVITE (TERNATE; MARAGONDON; NAIC; AND GEN. EMILIO AGUINALDO). BETWEEN 9:30AM AND 10:00AM AND THEN BETWEEN 3:00PM AND 3:30PM... MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2023. RIZAL PROVINCE (ANTIPOLO CITY). BETWEEN 9:00AM AND 2:00PM... Register now to receive FREE texts about our Power Maintenance Schedules! Text MERALCO <space> ON <space> your Service ID Number... For more updates, follow us on Facebook and Twitter. facebook /meralco @meralco For emergencies, call: 16211

Privacy commission issues warning against sale of registered SIM cards

THE National Privacy Commission (NPC), in an advisory issued on Thursday, warned against the sale of registered SIM (subscriber identity module) cards for mobile devices.

"Recent developments have drawn our attention to alarming instances wherein certain individuals, ostensibly acting as agents of malevolent entities, are enticing unsuspecting individuals with monetary offers, averaging P1,000.00, in exchange for SIM cards that have been registered," the NPC said.

The NPC said the trade in SIM cards is prohibited under the SIM Registration Act (Republic Act No. 11934). The law states that the practice exposes data subjects to potential legal repercussions, risks and harms.

Violators are liable for imprisonment of between six months

and six years, or a fine of P100,000 to P300,000, or both.

"The NPC earnestly urges all data subjects to take heed of this advisory and to remain vigilant against participating in any actions that may put at risk their personal data," it said.

It added that it will take action against those who disregard and violate the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

The National Telecommunications Commission recorded SIM card registrations of 113.97 million, equivalent to 67.83% of the estimated 168.02 million cards in circulation.

Globe Telecom, Inc. had 53.73 million registered subscribers or 61.9% of its total. Smart Communications, Inc. registered 52.5 million or 79.18% of its users, while DITO Telecommunity Corp. registered 7.74 million users or 51.72% of its users. — Justine Irish D. Tabile

Pension reform to leave benefits of current personnel untouched

THE Department of Finance (DoF) said current military and uniformed personnel (MUP) will retain the same retirement benefits after their pension system is reformed.

"We're not reducing the pension or changing the benefits. In our latest proposal, there's no changes made to the pension. In fact, for the military, we are even raising it. Now, the maximum pension they can get is 85% of their base pay and (long-service) pay. We are making this 90%," Finance Undersecretary Cielo D. Magno said at the Pandesal Forum on Thursday.

The bill proposing reform to the MUP pension system was recently approved by a House ad hoc committee and is currently up for debate at plenary level.

The MUP pension reform bill is on the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) list of priority measures targeted for approval by Congress by the end of the year.

"The benefits they get from retirement are still the same. We aren't changing that. It's important to clarify this," she added, though the reforms will allow active-duty personnel to contribute more to their pensions going forward.

Ms. Magno also noted that the proposed reforms do not impact the pensions of retired MUPs.

"If you're retired, don't worry. We agree that we will keep the indexation for the retired," she said, referring to retiree payouts indexed against active-duty pay.

"That's their vested right and we don't want to reduce their vested right," she added.

Last week, Albay Rep. Jose Maria Clemente S. Salceda, who also chairs the ad hoc committee, announced that the House will introduce Defense Secretary Gilberto C. Teodoro's proposals to the bill as floor amendments.

Mr. Teodoro's proposals seek the full indexation of pensions to the salaries of active-duty personnel. Mr. Teodoro also expressed concerns over the mandatory contributions to be required under the proposed bill.

Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno has expressed concern about indexation for current active-duty personnel and new entrants.

"The pensioners and the active-duty personnel have different needs. It is therefore necessary to ensure that the pension and wages have different bases for adjustment. Removing automatic indexation... gives us flexibility to respond to the unique needs of the pensioners and the active-duty personnel," Mr. Diokno has said.

Under the current system, funding for the pensions is drawn from the annual budget.

"The pension has to be sustainable, not because we want to reduce the budget earmarked by the government for pensions, but we want to make sure that when they retire, we have money to fund their pensions," Ms. Magno said. — Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsion

