

JFC completes acquisition of brand's Hong Kong franchisee

JOLLIBEE Foods Corp. (JFC) has completed the acquisition of the majority stake in the Jollibee brand's master franchisee in Hong Kong, which it considers an important market.

In a stock exchange disclosure on Monday, JFC said its Singapore-based unit Golden Plate Pte. Ltd. finalized the deal on Sept. 1 to acquire 60% of master franchisee Meko Holdings Ltd. for \$16.08 million.

Golden Plate is a wholly owned subsidiary of Jollibee Worldwide Pte. Ltd., which is owned by JFC.

The remaining 40% of Meko's shares will still be owned by the franchisee's shareholders.

JFC announced the acquisition in April, saying that Hong Kong is an important market for the brand. With the final-

ized transaction, JFC gets 60% ownership in the once 100% franchised market.

In a previous disclosure, the company said Hong Kong is an important part of JFC China's strategy "to elevate the Jollibee brand in a general population or mainstream market. Hong Kong is renowned for its relationship with a vast variety of food and attracts both a strong base of local consumers and tourists."

As of June, the JFC store network increased by 5.1%. The group has 6,617 stores worldwide, with 3,287 stores in the Philippines and 3,330 international stores across various brands.

On Monday, shares of JFC at the stock exchange dropped P1.20 or 0.5% to finish at P238.80 each. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

MPIC keen on handling MRT-3, cable cars for urban transport

By Revin Mikhael D. Ochave
Reporter

METRO Pacific Investments Corp. (MPIC) is considering cable car systems for tourism and urban transport while proposing to operate a metro rail transit system but declining a project to upgrade an international airport.

Manuel V. Pangilinan, MPIC chairman, president and chief executive officer, said in a briefing on Monday that the company is forging a partnership with Malaysian infrastructure firm Hartasuma Sdn Bhd.

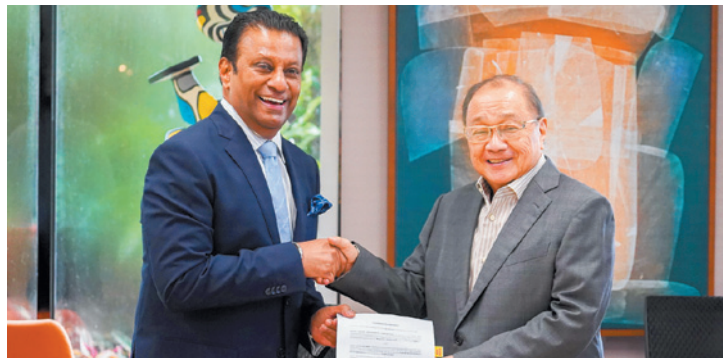
"If you look at other modes of transport, the cable cars... that is also a good opportunity. It's a start today when we signed a partnership agreement with Hartasuma. The country should be open to more efficient modes of transportation with the traffic situation in the Philippines," Mr. Pangilinan said.

Some of the areas considered for cable car systems are those that have challenging terrains such as Tagaytay, Baguio, and Antipolo.

MPIC's partnership with Hartasuma involves the refurbishment of existing cars used by Light Rail Transit Line 1 (LRT-1).

In July, Malacañang announced that a three-day visit of President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. to Malaysia had accelerated the finalization of the P3-billion agreement between MPIC and Hartasuma.

Tan Sri Ravindran Menon, the Hartasuma group's executive director, said the company is looking at the value of the collaboration while assisting MPIC in achieving its goals.



Manuel V. Pangilinan (right), MPIC chairman, president and chief executive officer, signs a memorandum of agreement with Tan Sri Ravindran Menon, Hartasuma's group executive director.

"The construction market in the Philippines is expected to grow by some 7% in 2023 following a growth of 12.1% in 2022," he said.

"There is a lot of demand and interest in rail infrastructure projects as the government looks to improve regional connectivity through the development of transport infrastructure. We look forward to participating in some of this growth," he added.

In the same briefing, Mr. Pangilinan said MPIC is not keen on participating in the public bidding for the rehabilitation of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA).

He said the company is generally not interested in an airport after he was asked about whether it would bid for the NAIA project.

"No. But it doesn't mean that other groups cannot bid. They should. It is up to them to do that," Mr. Pangilinan said.

Last month, the government invited bidders for the P170.6-billion public-private partnership to upgrade and operate the aging airport.

The contract term for the project is 15 years and is extendable by another 10 years. The rehabilitation project seeks to increase the airport's annual passenger capacity to at least 62 million from 35 million.

In 2020, MPIC pulled out of the consortium consisting of conglomerates that aimed to rehabilitate NAIA, which was then pegged at P102 billion, citing issues faced by the proposal.

In July, the National Economic and Development Authority approved NAIA's rehabilitation under a solicited proposal scheme, superseding an unsolicited bid by the Manila International Airport Consortium (MIAC) valued at P267 billion.

MIAC consists of Aboitiz InfraCapital, Inc., AC Infrastructure Holdings Corp., Asia's Emerging Dragon Corp., Alliance Global-InfraCorp Development, Inc., Filinvest Development Corp., JG Summit Infrastructure Holdings Corp., and US-based Global Infrastructure Partners.

Meanwhile, Mr. Pangilinan said MPIC had submitted an unsolicited proposal to the Department of Transportation (DoTr) for the operations and maintenance (O&M) of Metro Rail Transit 3 (MRT-3).

"I think about a week ago or so," he said about when the company put in an unsolicited proposal to handle MRT-3.

Juan F. Alfonso, Light Rail Manila Corp. (LRMC) president and chief executive officer, said the unsolicited proposal involves the MRT 3's O&M.

He added that MPIC partnered with Japan's Sumitomo Corp. for the proposal. He declined to disclose specific figures.

Jointly owned by MPIC and Ayala Corp., LRMC has a 32-year concession to operate and maintain the 20.7-kilometer LRT-1 in Metro Manila with 20 stations.

In November last year, Mr. Pangilinan said MPIC was interested in taking over the O&M of MRT-3 and LRT-2 if the government opted to bid out the contracts.

In 2017, the DoTr gave the consortium consisting of MPIC, Ayala, and Macquarie Infrastructure Holdings (Philippines) Pte. Ltd., the original proponent status for its unsolicited proposal for MRT-3's O&M. The consortium withdrew the proposal in 2020.

On Monday, shares of MPIC at the local bourse dropped one centavo or 0.19% to finish at P5.16 apiece.

MPIC is one of the three key Philippine units of Hong Kong-based First Pacific Co. Ltd., the others being Philex Mining Corp. and PLDT Inc.

ACEN expects faster RE expansion by raising P25B

AYALA-LED ACEN Corp. expects to hasten its renewable energy (RE) expansion after raising P25 billion by issuing perpetual preferred shares.

"We are very thankful for the exceptional support that we received from investors. The additional capital further strengthens the company's balance sheet and helps us accelerate our renewables expansion," ACEN President and Chief Executive Officer Eric T. Francia said in a statement on Monday.

The shares make up the first tranche of the

company's shelf registration of up to 50 million preferred shares, which was cleared by the Securities and Exchange Commission on Aug. 10, 2023.

The first tranche was offered from Aug. 11 to 23 and attracted strong demand from both institutional and retail investors, the company said, allowing it to fully exercise its oversubscription option of up to P12.5 billion on top of the base offer of P12.5 billion. — **Shelden Joy Talavera**

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DISRUPTIONS AMIDST GLOBAL TRANSITIONS

Global conflicts are escalating, but there are also shifts in alliances that can be viewed with optimism. Countries are redefining recovery in terms of greater regional cooperation, and this is evident in the rise of more engaged regional trading blocs.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) counts ten (10) member-states, and their combined resources and markets are economic forces to be reckoned with.

How will the geopolitical shifts and global realignments affect the ASEAN positioning? How should business prepare for these developments?

The Secretary-General of ASEAN, H.E. Dr Kao Kim Hourn, will deliver the opening keynote in this Conference and he will be joined by guest speakers from ASEAN member-states to weigh in and share their insights and country experiences. Expanding the discussion in the Asia-Pacific context will be a most fitting round-up of the morning session.