

Philippine Stock Exchange index (PSEi)

6,198.83 ▼67.51 PTS. ▼1.07%

PSEI MEMBER STOCKS

AC Ayala Corp. P611.00 -P4.00 -0.65%	ACEN ACEN Corp. P5.21 +P0.03 +0.58%	AEV Aboitiz Equity Ventures, Inc. P49.70 ---	AGI Alliance Global Group, Inc. P11.80 ---	ALI Ayala Land, Inc. P28.85 -P0.45 -1.54%	BDO BDO Unibank, Inc. P135.20 -P1.40 -1.02%	BLOOM Bloomerry Resorts Corp. P10.30 -P0.28 -2.65%	BPI Bank of the Philippine Islands P106.20 -P1.50 -1.39%	CNPF Century Pacific Food, Inc. P29.50 +P0.05 +0.17%	CNVRG Converge ICT Solutions, Inc. P9.83 -P0.02 -0.2%
DMC DMCI Holdings, Inc. P10.44 -P0.04 -0.38%	EMI Emperador, Inc. P20.75 -P0.15 -0.72%	GLO Globe Telecom, Inc. P1,790.00 -P4.00 -0.22%	GTCAP GT Capital Holdings, Inc. P561.50 -P8.50 -1.49%	ICT International Container Terminal Services, Inc. P209.00 ---	JFC Jollibee Foods Corp. P218.00 -P2.60 -1.18%	JGS JG Summit Holdings, Inc. P37.85 -P0.50 -1.3%	LTG LT Group, Inc. P9.01 +P0.01 +0.11%	MBT Metropolitan Bank & Trust Co. P52.90 -P1.00 -1.86%	MER Manila Electric Co. P376.40 +P0.20 +0.05%
MONDE Monde Nissin Corp. P8.25 -P0.34 -3.96%	NIKL Nickel Asia Corp. P5.94 +P0.04 +0.68%	PGOLD Puregold Price Club, Inc. P29.20 -P0.55 -1.85%	SCC Semirara Mining and Power Corp. P35.80 -P0.20 -0.56%	SM SM Investments Corp. P802.00 -P23.00 -2.79%	SMC San Miguel Corp. P103.00 -P0.50 -0.48%	SMPH SM Prime Holdings, Inc. P30.90 -P0.10 -0.32%	TEL PLDT Inc. P1,217.00 ---	URC Universal Robina Corp. P113.80 -P0.90 -0.78%	WLCON Wilcon Depot, Inc. P22.00 +P0.10 +0.46%

Figaro's income more than doubles to P463 million

LISTED food and beverage company Figaro Coffee Group, Inc. logged a 133% increase in net income to P462.56 million for its fiscal year ending June 30 amid higher revenues.

"This remarkable growth was attributed to increasing volume and efficient management of overhead costs, demonstrating the company's commitment to enhancing both production and productivity," Figaro said in a regulatory filing on Monday.

Figaro's latest annual profit is a big improvement over its P198.19 million net income in the previous fiscal year.

Figaro's revenues rose 75% to P4.28 billion from P2.44 billion. The company said same-store sales rose 6%, without giving comparative numbers. It currently has 186 stores across its brands, with more under construction.

The company's gross margin declined to 45% from 49% while

its operating margin rose to 14% from 10%.

"While the company experienced a slight dip in its gross margin, declining from 49% to 45% due to [an] increase in raw ingredients costs, its operating margin improved from 10% to 14% due to prudent cost management and improvement in operational efficiencies," Figaro said.

Meanwhile, Figaro said its improved financial position

was also complemented by the investment from Monde Nissin Corp., further bolstering the proceeds from the company's initial public offering proceeds.

In January, Monde Nissin acquired a 15% stake in Figaro Coffee for about P820.27 million as it pursued growth opportunities.

Meanwhile, Figaro Coffee said it recently launched new products to improve its menu lineup such as the creamy spinach sushi

bake pizza for the Angel's Pizza brand as well as new all-natural drinks for Figaro Coffee.

"We are very humbled by the patronage of old and new customers to our brands and we are excited to continue our prudent expansion and product innovation," Figaro Coffee Chief Executive Officer Divine G. Cabuloy said, adding that despite the challenges, the group "will press on" to give the best

product and value-for-money options for its customers.

Figaro has one subsidiary, Figaro Coffee Systems, Inc., through which it operates various brands such as Figaro Coffee, Angel's Pizza, Tien Ma's, and Café Portofino.

On Monday, shares of Figaro Coffee dropped seven centavos or 9.46% to finish at 67 centavos each. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

Meralco seeking speedy resolution of issues over 'very crucial' 1,800-megawatt capacity

MANILA ELECTRIC Co. (Meralco) is seeking "a quick resolution" by regulators of any issues involving the procurement of its 1,800-megawatt (MW) capacity requirement.

Joe R. Zalardriaga, spokesperson and vice-president for corporate communication of Meralco, said the power distributor "will immediately" ask the bids and awards committee to start the competitive selection process (CSP), the mandated transparent bidding for power supply.

"After the CSP, the resulting PSA (power supply agreement) will be filed for approval before the regulator and we hope for a quick resolution of any petition to be filed," he said in a Viber message.

Meralco said it had submitted for approval the new terms of reference (TOR) to the Department of Energy (DoE) on Sept. 14 for the conduct of CSP to replace the capacity covered under terminated contracts.

"[The 1,800 MW supply is] very crucial as it will ensure that our supply requirements will be able to meet the growing demand of our customers," Mr. Zalardriaga said.

Energy Undersecretary Rowena Cristina L. Guevara confirmed that the DoE had received the proposed new terms from Meralco.

"However, the responsibility to review the TOR rests with the ERC (Energy Regulatory Commission) in accordance with the CSP guidelines," she said in a Viber message.

In the meantime, the DoE has advised Meralco to submit for review and evaluation its updated power supply procurement plan to include the 1,800 MW granted by the ERC for withdrawal or termination, Ms. Guevara said.

Last week, ERC Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer Monalisa C. Dimalanta said the regulator had approved the withdrawal of the PSA application

jointly filed by Meralco and San Miguel Corp.

The two companies under San Miguel's power arm San Miguel Global Power Holdings Corp. — Excellent Energy Resources, Inc. and Masinloc Power Partners Co. Ltd. (MPPCL) — were supposed to start delivering Meralco's needed capacity by 2024 and 2025 after bagging the supply contracts in 2021.

Excellent Energy had proposed to supply 1,200 MW from its natural gas power plant for P4.1462 per kilowatt-hour (kWh) by 2024, while MPPCL had offered to provide the remaining 600 MW from its coal-fired power plant for P4.2605 per kWh by 2025.

In March, Meralco said that SMC submitted the notices of termination of the PSAs.

Ms. Dimalanta said the PSA withdrawal had been approved as the long stop date — or the agreed time frame during which all conditions required for a transaction must be completed — had lapsed.

She said Meralco now needs to comply with the new CSP guide-

lines issued on Oct. 6, which is anchored on the policy framework issued by the DoE in June.

With the new guidelines, Ms. Dimalanta said the bidding process and rates are all subject to ERC guidelines, making it easier for distribution utilities (DUs) to comply "because they just look at the ERC rules to follow for CSP."

"We also provided PSA templates to guide DUs and facilitate the review at ERC level (since in a way, we already pre-cleared those terms and conditions)," she said, describing the process as "streamlined" and the evaluation "transparent."

Meralco's controlling stakeholder, Beacon Electric Asset Holdings, Inc., is partly owned by PLDT Inc.

Hastings Holdings, Inc., a unit of PLDT Beneficial Trust Fund subsidiary MediaQuest Holdings, Inc., has an interest in *BusinessWorld* through the Philippine Star Group, which it controls. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

Eastern Communications' cloud platform to block data breaches

TELECOMMUNICATIONS company Eastern Communications has launched its cloud-based security platform Sophos Central Intercept X Advanced (CIXA) which aims to prevent data breaches and block ransomware attacks.

"We're proud to introduce CIXA at a time when businesses need it most. With CIXA, businesses of all sizes can guarantee more proactive threat prevention, advanced malware protection, scalability, and flexibility toward cyber resilience," said Edsel C. Paglinawan, Eastern Communications vice-president and head of product and innovation, in a media release on Monday.

The platform aims to protect organizations from cyberattacks, Eastern Communications said, adding that CIXA uses combined advanced technology such as endpoint detection and response, anti-malware, and machine learning-based pro-

tection to detect and block malicious activity from affecting a system.

"As digital adoption becomes more crucial today, Eastern Communications continues to remain agile and innovative as we continue to encourage

businesses to evolve," Mr. Paglinawan said.

Aside from preventing data breaches and ransomware attacks, the platform offers technological advancements preventing phishing e-mails and advanced malware.

The company said that CIXA is compatible with industries and businesses that are looking for low-cost cybersecurity solutions that don't need new hardware.

The telecommunications company offers cybersecurity solutions like next-generation firewalls, vulnerability assessment and penetration testing, endpoint security, and protection against distributed denial of service attacks. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**



FEU and CEU record improved financial performances

LISTED EDUCATIONAL institutions Far Eastern University, Inc. (FEU) and Centro Escolar University (CEU) reported improved financial performances in the first quarter of their fiscal years both ending in May.

In a stock exchange disclosure on Monday, FEU said it posted a P73.09-million net loss attributable to the owners of the parent company for the first quarter ending August, down from the P93.99-million net loss in the same period last year, due to higher revenues.

"The current period net loss was reduced on account of better operating results from core school operations. First quarter results are usually at the lowest due to the seasonality of tuition revenue recognition," FEU said.

FEU said its revenues rose 35% to P568.64 million from P421.95 million a year ago led by higher educational revenue, which increased 35% to P563.07 million.

"Educational revenues growth resulted from increase in student population coupled with a modest increase in tuition fees," FEU said.

FEU also disclosed that its operating loss dropped 46% to P76.30 million from P142.06 million due to higher revenues.

"Operating loss declined by 46% as revenues increased, backed by a 6% increase in student population and a modest increase in tuition fees," FEU said.

According to FEU, its operating expenses rose 17% to P657.55 million compared to P564.05 million.

"Salaries and employee benefits expense increased due to higher faculty head count as well as the upward salary rate adjustments that took effect at the start of the current year. Utilities and communication expense went up on account of increased electricity and water consumption," FEU said.

"Outside services expense increased mainly on account of increased service utilization for janitorial and security services, while finance cost surged as a result of higher interest rates on bank loans," the company added.

Meanwhile, FEU said it is optimistic that it would maintain a healthy financial position for the rest of the school year (SY) 2023-2024.

"The group is optimistic that it will sustain a healthy financial position and sound operating results for the SY 2023-2024, especially with an increase in group-wide student population during the first semester," FEU said.

In a separate regulatory filing, CEU said its first-quarter net income rose 106% to P147.41 million from P71.46 million last year.

The company's revenues also improved 21.5% to P500.91 million compared with P412.45 million a year ago led by higher tuition and other school fees, which jumped 23.3% to P444.23 million.

CEU's operating expenses climbed 3.67% to P353.50 million versus P340.99 million last year. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

ACEN secures P5-billion loan for corporate spending

ACEN Corp. has secured a P5-billion loan from a local bank to partly fund the Ayala-led energy company's renewables projects, it said on Monday.

"The proceeds will be used for general corporate purposes, including but not limited to capital expenditures for RE (renewable energy) projects of the ACEN Group," the company said in a message sent via Viber.

The loan was closed on Friday via a term loan facility with Metropolitan Bank & Trust Co., the company said in a disclosure to the stock exchange.

In March, ACEN said that its board had approved the procurement of additional credit facilities of up to P32 billion.

In August, it obtained a P10-billion term loan through credit facilities with China Bank-

ing Corp. of up to P5 billion, and omnibus credit lines with Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group of up to \$50 million.

To date, ACEN has around 4,200 megawatts of attributable capacity spread across the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, India, and Australia. The energy company is targeting to expand its renewable energy portfolio to 20 gigawatts by 2030. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

Philippine Seven's Paterno leads global convenience stores group

LISTED retailer Philippine Seven Corp. announced that its top official has been elected as the chair of the National Association of Convenience Stores (NACS) in the United States.

In a statement on Monday, the company said Jose Victor P. Paterno, its president and chief executive officer, is now chairman of the NACS, which is based in Alexandria, Virginia and represents 350,000 stores globally.

The NACS is a global trade association seeking to advance convenience and fuel retailing. It is led by a 30-member board of directors, which includes 7-Eleven US.

The election took place during the NACS board meeting on Oct. 3 on the sidelines of the annual NACS trade show in Atlanta, Georgia.

The company said Mr. Paterno is the second non-US retailer to assume the post as well as the first one from Asia.

His advocacies for NACS include building an industry-

wide technology platform that would allow retailers big and small to participate in growing digital ad spending from fast-moving consumer goods manufacturers.

Mr. Paterno said he is "deeply honored and humbled" to take on the role, calling it a "tremendous privilege" to represent the company and the broader convenience store industry.

"I take pride in what we've been able to accomplish in the Philippines with technology and market share, and am excited to take things to the next level in collaboration with some of the best retail and tech minds I've met at NACS and its partners," he said.

Philippine Seven currently oversees 3,600 7-Eleven stores operating across the country, of which 54% are operating under franchise agreements.

On Monday, its shares at the local bourse fell P1 or 1.25% to close at P79 apiece. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**