

Cebu BRT full-operations timetable delayed to 2027

THE timeline for the launch of full operations at the Cebu Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line has been pushed back to 2027, the Department of Transportation said, with the department still aiming for partial operations by year's end.

"(For phase two) we are still working on the detailed engineering design. For full operations, our target is to operate it by 2027," Transportation Secretary Jaime J. Bautista told reporters last week.

The Cebu BRT is a 13.8-kilometer line with 17 stations, one terminal and one depot.

"You may be familiar with the EDSA Busway. We are replicating this concept of dedicated lanes for public buses in Cebu and Davao. We call it Bus Rapid Transit or BRT," Mr. Bautista said at a forum facilitated by German-Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

He said that the project's partial-operations timetable for this

quarter appears to be on track, and involves about three kilometers of the overall line.

"Phase one is short — a three-kilometer BRT. It is still ongoing. In fact, I was just speaking with the contractor and there was no problem. Hopefully it is on time," he said.

In February, the government broke ground for the first package of the project.

The project was initially scheduled for full operations by

the second quarter of 2025 with partial operations. Once completed, the Cebu BRT system is expected to serve up to 160,000 passengers a day.

The World Bank said in July that it is looking to further extend the expiration date of the financing package for Cebu BRT to allow time for the submission of a restructuring proposal.

The \$228.5-million Cebu BRT project was approved in 2014. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

Seed, fertilizer procurement to be digitalized

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it will digitalize the procurement and distribution of agricultural inputs to beneficiaries.

Digitalization is expected to cut down on the estimated three months it takes for the current process to get inputs into the hands of farmers, it said.

"The procurement and distribution of seed and fertilizers used to take 90 days to complete, but with the digitalization of the system, clustered farmers would now have nearly real-time payouts through cashless transactions," it added.

The DA said it will carry out pilot programs via 15 of its regional field offices (RFOs).

Farmers are to be issued Intervention Monitoring Cards (IMC) to purchase farming inputs from merchants in their areas.

"The IMC cards function just like an ATM or e-wallet, where money can be issued for every transaction," DA Undersecretary Leocadio S. Sebastian said.



GREENFORCE STAFFING-UNSPASH

Beneficiaries will also be able to choose their own fertilizer and seed, bypassing the traditional bulk procurement by DA field offices.

"This drastically departs from previous practice where farmers just had to accept whatever the DA RFOs supplied them, which some of them do not find useful for their farms," Mr. Sebastian said.

It added that the process of acquiring and distributing agricultural supplies in bulk will now involve more micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises that deal in these goods.

"Aside from being inclusive, this digital process empowers farmers to choose their own stocks of inputs and the merchants that offer them the best quality of goods at the best price," he added.

The DA said merchants can go to the Development Bank of the Philippines or the Universal Storefront Services Corp. to receive cash payments corresponding to farmer purchases.

It added that the digitalization exercise is a strategy being pursued under the Masagana Rice Industry Development Program.

The program is aimed at stabilizing the supply of rice at between 24.99 million metric tons (MT) and 26.86 million MT, in the process keeping the annual growth of rice prices at less than 1%, it said. — **Adrian H. Halili**

DA sees potato prices stabilizing this month

POTATO prices are expected to stabilize this month with the expansion of supply, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Tuesday.

"Prices rose slightly, but we are expecting them to stabilize in November, December, and until the first quarter (of next year)," Agriculture Assistant Secretary and Spokesperson Arnel V. de Mesa said on government television network PTV.

As of Oct. 30, the price of white potato was between P140 per kilogram (kg) and P240 per kg.

The average weekly price for white potatoes was P202.23 per kg between Oct. 23 and 27, against the P172.33 average on Oct. 2-6 and the P229.19 on Oct. 16-20.

Mr. De Mesa added that the potato harvest is coming in during the quarter.

He said that the uptick in prices was caused by typhoons during the third quarter.

"We expect the price to (stabilize) in November and December with the harvest," he added.

He added that onion and garlic prices are expected to remain stable until the end of the year.

"According to today's monitoring, the prices for onions and garlic are very stable," he said. "Prices for local red onions have (even) dropped by P10 to P130 (per kg)."

The DA reported that domestically grown red onion prices ranged from P120 to P190 per kg, while white onions were at P100 to P170 per kg. Domestic garlic was P500 per kg, while imported garlic was P120 to P160 per kg. — **Adrian H. Halili**

Austria seeking to narrow trade deficit with Philippines

THE Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (AFEC) said it will bring in more Austrian companies seeking to sell goods to the Philippines to address the imbalance in bilateral trade.

"During the last 10 years, Austrian imports from the Philippines have doubled, and exports of Austria to the Philippines (are equivalent to

only) 50% of imports. We have an overhang from Philippine exports to Austria," Karlheinz Kopf, secretary general of AFEC, or Wirtschaftskammer Österreich, said.

Christina Stieber, commercial counselor of Austria's trade promotion organization Advantage Austria, said the leading Austrian imports from the Philippines are semicon-

ductors, fruit, vegetables, and furniture.

"We are also looking into clothes. So, textiles will (also) be a strong import," Ms. Stieber said.

Asked what might attract Austrian companies to the Philippines, she noted "The huge population, consumer orientation and huge economic growth."

Mr. Kopf said Austria depends largely on exports and is interested in strengthening its trade relations in key markets.

"Our chamber is running about 100 outlets all over the world to support our exporters seeking to go outside," he said.

He said AFEC is interested in exporting more goods and investing in other countries.

"Therefore, we would want to try to bring Austrian companies here during the next months and years and bring businesses from the Philippines and Austria together," he said.

He said Austrian motorcycle, bicycle and sports car manufacturer KTM has a joint venture with a Philippine partner to produce electric vehicles here. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

DAP transfer to NEDA seen boosting efforts to raise government productivity

THE transfer of the Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP) to the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) is expected to sharpen the economic planning agency's focus on raising government productivity, the NEDA Secretary said.

"Our development plan for socioeconomic transformation emphasizes the need to enhance productivity frameworks across government sectors and transform them into cohesive capacity development programs and incentive structures. Thus, DAP's productivity capability development programs greatly contribute to this strategy," Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said in a statement.

NEDA sees the transfer as "enabling critical institutional synergies and strengthening the links between human resource development for the public sector and the implementation of the Philippine Development Plan (PDP)."

Last week, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. signed Executive Order No. 45, which transfers the DAP to NEDA. It was previously overseen by the Office of the President.

The DAP was created to "promote and support the country's development efforts through government human resource programs."

Other NEDA agencies include the Philippine Statistics Authority, the Philippine Statistical Research and Training Institute, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, the Public-Private Partnership Center, the Tariff Commission, the Philippine National Volunteer Services Coordinating Agency, and the Commission on Population and Development.

Separately, NEDA said it signed a grant agreement agent contract with the Japan International Cooperation Agency on Oct. 27 for the Human Resource Development Scholarship project.

"The grant aims to support the development of the Philippine government's human resources through scholarships for master's degrees in Japanese universities. Twenty slots are allocated annually for the Philippines under the program," NEDA said in a social media post.

As of October, the program had 439 fellows. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsos**

ADB says RE ocean resources underutilized

OCEAN RESOURCES, or the so-called "blue economy," can help drive investment and innovation with the generation of renewable energy (RE), but are largely untapped, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said.

"Within the mix of blue economy developments that aim to utilize, protect, and regenerate ocean resources, marine RE has an important and crosscutting role," it said in a report.

The ADB said oceans account for 90% of global trade and are a "largely untapped resource that contain enough energy to power and fuel our civilization, fight climate change, and continue to house and protect marine ecosystems."

"However, our marine spaces and the ecosystems, economies, and livelihoods that depend on them are undergoing rapidly increasing pressure," it added.

The bank cited stressors such as climate change, marine pollution, unregulated fishing, poor coastal development and rising sea levels.

It called for "ocean policies that foster economic growth while at the same time regenerating ocean health in a manner that is consistent with social equity and inclusion."

"A truly holistic blue economy approach will enable governments to deliver long-term socioeconomic benefits through sensitive marine stewardship, which will include targeted investment in regenerative ocean resources," it added.

The marine renewable energy, particularly wave energy, holds great potential, the bank said.

"Estimates suggest that the global annual potential of wave energy could meet global energy demand. Tidal energy alone has the potential to power over 20 million American homes," the ADB said.

Proper planning and development of marine renewable energy can support multiple industries, such as ecotourism, aquaculture, and seawater mineral extraction.

"Fish makes up more than 50% of the animal protein consumed in the Philippines; hence, aquaculture plays an important role in supplying the most basic nutrition a population that nevertheless experiences substantial involuntary hunger from time to time — and this before the shock of COVID-19 and the recent global cost-of-living crisis," the ADB added.

The ADB also sees potential in marine green hydrogen, which can be harnessed by smaller coastal and island states.

Marine green hydrogen is a "portable energy storage solution (that) could allow ocean states to utilize their significant coastal and marine areas not only to meet local energy demand, but also to convert excess marine renewable energy to exportable hydrogen."

"This promising market model, which did not exist before, could unlock the financing required to speed up adoption of these technologies and secure a key regenerative cornerstone of many nations' blue economies," it added. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsos**

JOB OPENING

Company Name: Glaxosmithkline Philippines, Inc.
Address: 23rd Floor The Finance Centre, 26th Street corner 9th Ave. Bonifacio Global City, Taguig City
Contact details of the company: Tel: +63 288920761
Job Position: FINANCE DIRECTOR
Available Job Vacancy: FINANCE DIRECTOR

JOB DESCRIPTION:

- Provide strategic leadership to the GM and LT of Philippines, drive strategic business plan
- Manage performance and risk management in order to deliver targets on sales, profit, working capital and headcount
- Identify and deliver opportunities to drive sales and profit growth, margin expansion and ensure resources are allocated accordingly
- Participate actively to all initiatives emphasizing safety and verify that safety organization is properly staffed and assisted by Construction Supervision Team
- Establish and maintain effective value add service from the extended One Finance teams
- Continue to drive efficiencies in marketed portfolio; process; or legal entities/cost centers
- Lead and Develop Finance team & drive GSK culture

BASIC QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE POSITION:

- Bachelor's Degree and/or professional finance qualification (e.g., ACCA, ACA, CIMA, CPA) with good understanding of accounting standards and principles
- Financial leadership experience at various levels in GSK or similar global organization with demonstrated ability to provide effective financial management and leadership
- Direct experience with financial software and systems
- Excellent English written & spoken
- Experience leading teams

Monthly Salary range: PHP 626,652.03

Winning geothermal, wind bids announced in 4th auction round

THE Department of Energy (DoE) said it selected four winning bidders in the fourth round of its open and competitive selection process (OCSP4) for hydropower, geothermal, and wind energy resources.

In an advisory on Tuesday, the DoE said that four applications were determined to have met the minimum evaluation

criteria out of the 20 predetermined areas (PDAs) it offered.

Energy Development Corp. won the bid for the Buguias-Tinoc Geothermal Power Project (GPP) with a potential capacity of 100 megawatts (MW). It was also declared the winner of the 20-MW Mt. Sembrano GPP.

Freya Renewables, Inc. and South Luzon Energy Solutions,

Inc. turned in successful bids for the Pantabangan Wind Power Project (WPP) and the Bagac WPP. The potential capacity for the two sites has yet to be determined.

"All OCSP4 participants will receive the corresponding formal notice on the results of their application and the next steps in the process," the DoE said.

The DoE had moved the deadline for the bidding round to Sept. 28 from Aug. 29 to ensure the "widest participation" possible and to provide time for prospective bidders to prepare their proposals.

According to the DoE, seven PDAs received no applications during the opening of bids.

The six potential hydroelectric power projects (HPP) that attracted no bids are the Sibalom (Upper Cascade) HPP with 4.2 MW potential capacity, Davildavilan River HPP (1 MW), Ruparan HPP (4 MW), Canayan HPP (5.65 MW), Three Rivers HPP (7 MW), and Buaa HPP (1.71 MW). — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

US, PHL biz chamber tie-up expected to address skilled-worker shortages

By Justine Irish D. Tabile
Reporter

A PARTNERSHIP between the US Chamber of Commerce and Industry (USCI) and the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (USCI) and the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry is expected to help address the shortage of skilled workers in many industries, a US chamber official said.

John Patrick Goyer, USCI executive director for Southeast Asia, told *BusinessWorld* that the partnership agreement, signed during the recent Philippine Business Conference and Expo, will focus on upskilling and workforce development.

"Both the Philippines and the US have a common challenge in that there is a lack of skilled workers in information technology (IT) and other knowledge-intensive sectors," Mr. Goyer said.

He said that in the US, "we have literally hundreds of thousands of jobs that go unfilled because we do not have qualified people to take those jobs on."

"I know that in the Philippines, there is also a concern about workforce skills keeping up with the demands of the marketplace. So that's in large

part what the memorandum of understanding (MoU) is all about," he added.

Mr. Goyer said that the partnership is the first time for the USCI to be undertaking a joint workforce and upskilling program.

Under the partnership, both entities are expected to share intelligence on skills in demand, Mr. Goyer said.

"We will talk about the challenges, specifically what are the kinds of skills needed? What kinds of programs are in place already? Where is the gap? What are the deficiencies?" he said.

"For our part, we will share what our experience has been in developing various workforce initiatives with states, municipalities and universities in the US and see where that experience might be relevant to the Philippines," he added.

He said that the partnership may also address the growing concerns about shifts in demand for talent with the advent of new technologies such as artificial intelligence.

"There is a concern that a lot of those jobs that are done right now by humans will be overtaken by technology. Therefore, the challenge is to keep the skills of the workforce on pace with how the market is evolving," he added.