

Italian parliament approves prohibition on food grown in labs

ROME — Italy's lower house of parliament gave final approval for a law banning the use of laboratory-produced food and animal feed as angry farmers confronted a group of centrist lawmakers opposed to the bill.

The proposal, already approved by the Senate, passed by 159 votes in favor to 53 against, prohibiting the use, sale, import and export of food and feed "from cell cultures or tissue derived from vertebrate animals."

Factories breaching such rules can be subject to fines of up to 150,000 euros and risk being shut down, while owners may lose their right to obtain public funding for up to three years.

The proposal of Agriculture Minister Francesco Lollobrigida, a close aide of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, is seen as part of a broader bid by the rightist coalition to safeguard tradition.

As the debate in parliament was under way, tensions erupted between demonstrators from agricultural lobby group Coldiretti and two opposition lawmakers, one of whom claimed the president of the lobby group, Ettore Prandini, had assaulted him.

"I believe it is subversive that the president of Coldiretti be-

lieves he can assault a lawmaker," lawmaker Benedetto Della Vedova said, adding he would report Mr. Prandini to police.

Mr. Della Vedova appeared to have been pushed in the chest in the incident but was not hurt.

Mr. Prandini told Reuters the lawmakers had provoked the farmers with offensive banners, and played down the confrontation.

The +Europa party and other opposition groups depicted the right-wing's administration move as an attempt to please farmers and breeders' lobbies, as lab-grown food is not yet available in the European Union (EU).

Critics of the bill say producing meat without breeding animals would limit greenhouse gas emissions and provide an option for consumers who would appreciate eating a product that does not involve slaughter.

The opposition warned the government risked breaching EU single market rules by unilaterally banning the product in case the bloc ever decided to make lab food available.

Minister Lollobrigida reiterated the ban was needed to protect the food industry. — **Reuters**



Germany to increase VAT on food in restaurants

BERLIN — The German government coalition is likely to raise value-added tax (VAT) on food in restaurants back to 19% from 7%, after reducing it during the energy crisis and COVID-19 pandemic, two sources told Reuters.

Negotiations continued over the coalition's draft budget to be reviewed in the German parliament.

The budget will be passed at the start of December to take effect from the start of 2024.

The newspaper *Bild* initially reported that the coalition would not extend the reduction in VAT. The coalition government will also row back on planned cuts to parental allowance for higher earners, Social Democrat MP Felix Doring said.

The cabinet had approved a draft budget in July to halve the income limit for couples eligible to receive parental leave compensation to 150,000 euros, from 300,000 euros previously.

However, in negotiations, the government agreed the limit would instead fall to 200,000 euros from April 1, 2024, and to 175,000 euros from April 1, 2025. — **Reuters**

PHL may enlist TikTok to train farmers in e-commerce sales

THE GOVERNMENT is considering including farmers in an e-commerce training program for small businesses using short-form video app TikTok, according to Malacañang.

TikTok, developed by Chinese company ByteDance Ltd., will conduct training with the Department of Trade and Industry and "possibly" the Department of Agriculture "for small business owners and farmers on how to use TikTok and other platforms to promote their products," Presidential Communications Office Secretary Cheloy Velicaria-Garafil said in a Viber message on Saturday.

The partnership was discussed during President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.'s meeting with TikTok, Inc. CEO Shou Zi Chew at the sidelines

of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in San Francisco.

"We want to give more resources and highlight and train the local sellers in the more rural parts of the country because that's one thing interesting on the platform," Mr. Chew told Mr. Marcos.

"What we want to do is highlight local products, especially from smaller (sellers)," he added. Mr. Chew said TikTok has provided sellers in Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia "a platform to sell around the country and export around the world."

"That's the plan (for the Philippines)," he said.

Amid growing cybersecurity concerns, many governments have banned TikTok from devices issued to public sector employees.



stuff being done," NSC Assistant Director Jonathan Malaya said at the time. "If there is a need for banning, it would not be for public school teachers, it would not be for those in the civilian, it would be for the security sector."

TikTok was introduced to the Philippines in May 2017. In April last year, the video platform launched its online market, TikTok Shop, in the Philippines.

"TikTok sees Southeast Asia as its biggest emerging market outside the US, with its 325 million monthly active users covering nearly half the region's population," the Palace said.

TikTok Shop generated gross merchandise value in Southeast Asia of \$4.4 billion in 2022. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

Study identifying viable sites for offshore wind due in first quarter

A STUDY identifying the most suitable sites for offshore wind projects is expected to be released "very soon," the US Agency for International Development (USAID) said.

"We are in the process and waiting for the results of the marine spatial planning study which would basically define eligible areas for offshore wind. We hope that comes out very soon," Divina B. Chingcuanco, chief of party of the USAID Energy Secure Philippines program, said at an energy forum last week.

The study, which is expected to provide guidance on how to integrate offshore wind energy with the power grid, is expected to be released by the first quarter of 2024, she said.

The Energy department has said that 79 offshore wind service

contracts were awarded this year with a combined capacity of 61.93 gigawatts (GW). The government's Offshore Wind Roadmap estimates a Philippine potential capacity of 178 GW in offshore wind resources.

In October, the Department of Energy and the Asian Development Bank identified at least nine ports including Iloilo City which can be repurposed to service offshore wind operations.

"We have requested local government units (LGUs) to identify potential sources of renewable energy. The LGUs are now actually looking into that, they are now considering and identifying areas," said Rolando B. Distura a board member for Iloilo province. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

Expanded US chip collaboration could relegate Philippines to lower-value products

By **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**
Reporter

A PROPOSAL to expand the Philippines' role in US semiconductor value chains could significantly reduce the value of Philippine exports, an economist warned.

Leonardo A. Lanzona, an economics professor with the Ateneo de Manila, said the price of semiconductors could significantly fall "once increased domestic production begins."

"The Philippines will become just a source of cheap semiconductor imports for the US especially as countries like China, Taiwan and Singapore are already giving up these products and developing other higher value-added products," he said in a Facebook Messenger chat.

Last week, the US announced that it will collaborate with the Philippines "to explore opportunities to grow and diversify the global semiconductor ecosystem" under the US CHIPS Act's International Technology Security and Innovation Fund, a \$52-billion subsidy program for US semiconductor manufacturers and research.

The initial phase will involve a comprehensive assessment of the Philippines' semiconductor ecosystem and regulatory framework, as well as workforce and infrastructure needs. It was not immediately clear whether the partnership would involve technology transfer.

The US, through the CHIPS Act, is seeking to incentivize chipmakers to relocate from China back to the US or to other friendly countries. It is also concerned about the vulnerability of Taiwan's advanced chip industry to disruption from China.

While semiconductors involve complex manufacturing processes and advanced technology in their production, "these products are just inputs to higher value-added products such as consumer electronics, industrial automation and renewable energy," Mr. Lanzona said, noting that prices have decreased by almost 45% since the 1990s.

"We have learned enough technology from the production of (semiconductors). It is time to fly our own balloon and create our own global value chains."

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