Philippine Stock Exchange index (PSEi) 6,245.18 ▲21.45 PTS. ▲0.34%

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PSEi MEMBER STOCKS

AC	Ayala Corp.	P655.00	-P9.00	-1.36%
ACEN	ACEN Corp.	P4.81	+P0.01	+0.21%
AEV	Aboitiz Equity Ventures, Inc.	P47.00	+P0.20	+0.43%
AGI	Alliance Global Group, Inc.	P9.61	-P0.19	-1.94%
ALI	Ayala Land, Inc.	P31.00	-P0.20	-0.64%
BDO	BDO Unibank, Inc.	P131.00	-P2.50	-1.87%
BLOOM	Bloomberry Resorts Corp.	P9.50	-P0.15	-1.55%
BPI	Bank of the Philippine Islands	P104.50	+P1.20	+1.16%
CNPF	Century Pacific Food, Inc.	P30.80	+P0.40	+1.32%
CNVRG	Converge ICT Solutions, Inc.	P8.49	+P0.28	+3.41%
DMC	DMCI Holdings, Inc.	P9.28	+P0.08	+0.87%
EMI	Emperador, Inc.	P20.90	-P0.05	-0.24%
GLO	Globe Telecom, Inc.	P1,719.00	+P9.00	+0.53%
GTCAP	GT Capital Holdings, Inc.	P535.00	-P7.50	-1.38%
ICT	International Container Terminal Services, Inc.	P219.80	+P4.00	+1.85%
JFC	Jollibee Foods Corp.	P233.80	+P7.20	+3.18%
JGS	JG Summit Holdings, Inc.	P39.00	+P0.50	+1.3%
LTG	LT Group, Inc.	P8.82	-P0.03	-0.34%
MBT	Metropolitan Bank & Trust Co.	P50.20	+P0.25	+0.5%
MER	Manila Electric Co.	P367.00	+P7.00	+1.94%
MONDE	Monde Nissin Corp.	P8.21	-P0.19	-2.26%
NIKL	Nickel Asia Corp.	P5.00	-P0.05	-0.99%
PGOLD	Puregold Price Club, Inc.	P27.45	+P0.25	+0.92%
SCC	Semirara Mining and Power Corp.	P28.55	-P0.40	-1.38%
SM	SM Investments Corp.	P825.00	+P6.00	+0.73%
SMC	San Miguel Corp.	P107.90	-P0.10	-0.09%
SMPH	SM Prime Holdings, Inc.	P33.00	+P0.70	+2.17%
TEL	PLDT Inc.	P1,259.00	-P29.00	-2.25%
URC	Universal Robina Corp.	P113.10	+P0.10	+0.09%
WLCON	Wilcon Depot, Inc.	P21.00	-P0.15	-0.71%

MPTC looks to tap local, foreign banks to reduce debt before IPO

METRO PACIFIC Tollways Corp. (MPTC) is looking to tap local and foreign banks as it seeks to raise fresh funds after putting its planned initial public offering (IPO) on hold, its top official said.

"The general outlook is we need to raise money to reduce our debt level. The problem is our debt level is huge — we have the highest level in MPIC, even higher than Meralco (Manila Electric Co.)," Rogelio L. Singson, president and chief executive officer of MPTC, told reporters on the sidelines of a forum last week.

MPTC, the tollways unit of Pangilinan-led Metro Pacific Investments Corp. (MPIC), earlier said it will defer its IPO to 2025 as the company studies its options amid a plan to form a joint venture company with San Miguel Corp. (SMC).

MPIC earlier announced it was planning to list MPTC on the stock market after its delisting from the Philippine Stock Exchange in October.

The joint venture company with SMC to build expressways could be the candidate to list at the Philippine Stock Exchange.

"Our (debt) level is about P145 billion to P150 billion but as we finish where revenues are coming, we're able to pay off. That is why we are looking at IPO or strategic investors," Mr. Singson said.

With the company postponing its planned IPO to 2025, the company is looking at tapping foreign and local banks, Mr. Singson said, adding that it needs to raise about 30% of its debt or between P40 billion to P45 billion.

Asked whether the MPTC is looking at a bond issuance, Mr. Singson said: "In what form, I do not know yet, but we need to raise funds to gap our debt level before the IPO."

"We need to reserve a portion for IPO. If we need to raise P45 billion, half of that will be from strategic investors, half IPO. We want the public to share," he added.

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

Hastings Holdings, Inc., a unit of PLDT Beneficial Trust Fund subsidiary MediaQuest Holdings, Inc., has a majority stake in *BusinessWorld* through the Philippine Star Group, which it controls. — **A.E.O. Jose**

OUTLIER

ICTSI shares rise on port expansion news

RAZON-LED International Container Terminal Services, Inc. (ICTSI) was the most actively traded stock last week as its share price increased following news of its port expansion in Melbourne and its operations in the South Pacific International Container Terminal (SPICT) managing its largest ship.

Data from the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE) showed the port operator had the most actively traded stock last week in terms of value turnover with P2.32-billion worth of 10.55 million shares exchanging hands from Nov. 28 to Dec. 1.

ICTSI shares closed at P219.80 apiece on Friday, inching up by 0.6% from its P218.40 close on Nov. 24.

Year to date, the stock has climbed by 9.9%.

The main reason for the port operator's price movement last week was its announcement that it handled the largest international vessel to call Papua New Guinea, Luis A. Limlingan, head of sales at Regina Capital Development Corp., said.

The listed operator's subsidiary at the SPICT in Lae and the Motukea International Terminal "logged a record" as they welcomed the largest boxship to ever dock in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands region,

Mr. Limlingan said in an e-mail. "Such feat was viewed positively by the market, as evidenced by the stock's price last Nov. 24."

The 2,754-TEU or twenty-foot equivalent units ship Kota Gabung made its first call in Lae on Nov. 12 and in Motukea, adjacent to Port Moresby, on Nov. 17, ICTSI said last month.

Meanwhile, ICTSI last week said the expansion of its unit in Australia, Victoria International Container Terminal, is expected to be completed by yearend.

Phase 3A of VICT in Melbourne is projected to be finished by this month, ICTSI said, adding that this would allow VICT to service larger vessels.

The project, which is valued at 235 million Australian dollars, is divided into two phases, the listed port operator said, noting that phase 3A will increase the terminal's capacity by 30% to 1.25 million TEUs or twenty-foot equivalent units.

The listed company said VICT's expansion includes three additional storage blocks, six auto container carriers, and six auto stacking cranes, which it said is part of the phase 3A expansion.

Meanwhile, phase 3B of the project is expected to be completed by 2025, which includes the acquisition of automated ship-to-shore cranes and construction of two additional storage blocks.

"I think [these] developments are positive as these would help the firm to expand its operating capacity and widen its reach," Mr. Limlingan said.

These could also help the port operator sustain its profit growth, he added.

"Investors may want to take a piece of [ICTSI] as it is one of the best performers, ranking 8th amongst the index members," Mr. Limlingan said.

"Immediate support is P215, but should this get broken, the next support is at P208.20. Meanwhile, its resistance can be found at P224.20 — its 52-week high," he said.

ICTSI's attributable net income inched up by 0.05% to reach $170.74 from $170.66 million in the third quarter, while consolidated revenues grew by 3.2% to $594.88 million.

In the January to September period, earnings increased by 4.2% to $484.54 million, while consolidated revenues grew by 7.3% to $1.76 billion. — **A.M.P. Yraola**

Development of energy, data center infrastructure expected to boost PHL real estate sector

THE DEVELOPMENT of renewable energy and data center infrastructure in the country is expected to drive the real estate sector's growth next year, according to real estate services firm Santos Knight Frank.

"Globally, the need for data centers is massive. In the Philippines, we have a number of data center groups and a number of telcos have been aggressive in that space. Renewables, there are also a number of big players in there. A lot of that would contribute to this growth," Rick Santos, chairman and chief executive officer of Santos Knight Frank, said in a briefing last week.

The construction of new infrastructure in the pipeline is also expected to support the appreciation of residential prices, Mr. Santos said.

The strong push for infrastructure development in these sectors, such as data hyperscalers and new renewable energy facilities, will help improve the real estate segment by increasing demand for warehousing, cold storage and distribution, he added.

The Philippines is seen as an attractive location for hyperscalers due to the country's strategic position in the Southeast Asian region, he said.

The Department of Information and Communications Technology expects data centers' capacities to increase by five times to 300 megawatts (MW) by 2025.

For renewable energy, the government is targeting to grow its capacity, with about 50,366.96 MW worth of renewables listed as indicative projects for years 2024 and 2026.

The real estate sector is expected to end this year strong amid contributions from the commercial and residential segments, Mr. Santos said.

"The office market has continued its road to recovery post-COVID. The increased demand from conventional office tenants and flexible office operators has

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significantly contributed to the upswing in commercial leasing requirements. We are expecting this momentum to continue in 2024," he said.

Santos Knight Frank data showed Manila's current office vacancy rate is at 80%, improving in three straight quarters from the all-time low of 75% in the fourth quarter of 2022. Bonifacio Global City and Makati continue to post the highest occupancy rates at 89% and 80%, respectively.

"The increased demand from conventional office tenants and flexible office operators has significantly contributed to the upswing in commercial leasing requirements. We are expecting this momentum to continue in 2024," Mr. Santos said.

Santos Knight Frank noted occupiers in the Philippines still prefer quality buildings that provide good value.

In the third quarter, prime buildings' vacancy rate stood at 17%, lower than the 20% average office buildings' vacancy.

This, despite prime monthly lease rates (P1,244 per square meter or sq.m.) being higher than the market's P980 per sq.m., the data showed.

Makati City had the highest rate with weighted average lease rate of P1,143 per sq.m. a month, followed by Fort Bonifacio (P1,098 per sq.m.) and Bay Area at (P902 per sq.m.), based on the data. — **AEOJ**

BW FILE PHOTO

English competency gives Filipino business students edge in Asia

FILIPINO business students have an edge compared to those from other Asian countries owing to their English skills, which give them different opportunities, an industry expert said.

"One strength that Filipino students have is the command of the [English] language. That is a very important advantage if you're moving to internationalization," Mapúa University Enrique T. Yuchengco School of Business (ETYSB) Dean Jagdeep S. Jassel said in an online interview last week.

"There are some countries where the students want to be globally exposed, but their main hindrance or handicap is always the language… Filipino students speak very good English. They're able to understand. They're able to articulate, I think that… opens the door to many different opportunities," he added.

Mr. Jassel comes from Malaysia and has taught in other countries such as India, Japan, China, and Taiwan.

Based on his experience, Filipino business students are very eager to learn as they want to prove themselves, he said.

"It's best to give your attention to such kinds of characteristics: people who are looking for an opportunity so that they can prove themselves, rather than force feed," Mr. Jassel said.

He said they want the market to see that Mapúa University is "beyond engineering and architecture" and has a lot to offer, especially with the ongoing collaboration between ETYSB and Arizona State University (ASU).

"This partnership, it's not just an ordinary MOU (memorandum of understanding)… This is a very concerted effort — a very thoughtful, process-driven kind of partnership," he said.

The collaboration, which began two years ago, is aimed towards developing students through global immersion, exposure to real work experience, and digital mastery.

"Two years ago, it was more of a planting in a particular relationship. So, to speak, we were getting to know each other, we were understanding better, we looked into structures. But the first intake of students who came in is this year," Mr. Jassel said.

The business school has been able to develop five new programs for its about 300 students. The institution has access to ASU's repository of curricula, academic exchange either in person or virtually, and industry exposure.

"Their (ASU) benefit is to have access to this part of the [Asian] market and also to liberalize education — to provide opportunity for any Filipino student who would want to go to the US and eventually even work there or even leave the country," Mr. Jassel said.

As part of the partnership, ETYSB is also in contact with institutions in ASU's network, such as Esa Unggul University in Indonesia and Sunway University in Malaysia.

"There are about 20 universities within this network of partnership now. So, we are actually leveraging the strength of network," Mr. Jassel said.

"I would say one of the edges that Mapúa business students will have is that they will be able to hit the road running when they join any organization," he added. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

IGCC says its route for interconnection project is 'more economically viable'

ILOILO Grain Complex Corp.'s (IGCC) proposed route would be "more economically viable" for the 138-kilovolt (kV) Panay-Guimaras Interconnection Project proposed by the National Grid Corp. of the Philippines (NGCP), it said.

"IGCC believes that our company's proposed route for the project is not only technically feasible but is also more economically viable (following a direct route) than the proposed NGCP route (which follows a less direct, longer route)," IGCC Spokesperson Wigberto "Toby" Tañada, Jr. said in a statement over the weekend.

"Under our proposed route, the existing 69kV line can share posts/structures and right of way since it can be 'underbuilt' under the proposed 138kV transmission line," Mr. Tañada added.

Underbuilt lines are a more common practice in distribution systems in the country as well as transmission systems built by NGCP's state owned predecessor, which is the National Transmission Corp., according to IGCC. — **S.J. Talavera**

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