

Visitor arrival target set at 7.7 million for 2024

THE Department of Tourism said on Tuesday that it hopes to attract 7.7 million international visitors and book at least P440 billion in tourist receipts next year.

"We have now recovered 95% of our visitor receipts (from) international arrivals and in conjunction with our 7.7 million target for international visitors for 2024, we are hopeful that we can reach the P440 billion mark next year for international receipts," Tourism Secretary Maria Esperanza Christina G. Frasco said.

The 2024 target of at least P440 billion in tourist receipts would match the actual total for the year to date as of Dec. 12, 2023.

"I understand that this is not yet our pre-pandemic number of over 8.2 million international arrivals, but what I can assure you is that we will push as hard as we can and fully activate our convergences with other government agencies in order to reach this target and bring us closer to pre-pandemic numbers," she said.

Citing the United Nations World Tourism Organization, Ms. Frasco said that the Philippines posted a tourism industry recovery rate of 65.54%, exceeding the Asia and the Pacific average of 62% in the first nine months.

As of Dec. 12, the Philippines recorded 5.07 million international visitor arrivals.

"With the holiday break fast approaching we are confident that we will further reach the

target that was set this year at 4.8 million international arrivals, underscoring our commitment to continuous growth and transformation in Philippine tourism," Ms. Frasco said.

Asked whether 5.5 million international arrivals is achievable this year, she said: "It's a moving target, as they say. And we're hopeful that with the holiday rush, our international arrivals will be a little over 5 million."

In the year to date as of Dec. 12, the top source market of international arrivals was South Korea which accounted for 1.34 million visitors.

Rounding up the top five source markets were the US (836,694), Japan (285,655), China (252,171), and Australia (238,487).

Ms. Frasco said that she has requested more direct flights to and from Italy and the UK.

"We have proposed this to Philippine Airlines and we're hopeful that the organization will be able to provide the flights because they are in high demand," Ms. Frasco said.

She added that the department is also battling for more direct flights to the US and Europe.

"Meanwhile, we have also been in close collaboration with our international aviation partners that have actually added more flights to the country not just to Manila, but also to Cebu and Davao for certain international airlines," she added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

North-South rail expected to start operating in 2027 — DoTr

THE Department of Transportation (DoTr) said it is hoping to begin partial operations of the North-South Commuter Railway (NSCR) by 2027.

In a statement, Philippine National Railways (PNR) General Manager Jeremy S. Regino said the construction of the Tutuban-Malolos (N1) and Malolos-Clark (N2) segments

are on schedule, with full operations set for 2029.

Partial operations of the Malolos, Bulacan to Clark, section of the NSCR project were initially scheduled for 2026, according to the PNR website.

The DoTr said that the partial operations from West Valenzuela to Malolos are expected to begin by the second quarter of 2027,

while full operations will likely start in the third quarter of 2029.

The DoTr said right-of-way has been obtained by the contractor for four out of the six stations.

The 147-kilometer NSCR will connect Malolos, Bulacan with Clark International Airport, and Tutuban, Manila with Calamba, Laguna.

The P873-billion project is being co-financed by the Japanese

International Cooperation Agency and the Asian Development Bank. It will have 35 stations and three depots.

Once fully operational the entire NSCR system is projected to reduce travel time between Clark and Calamba to two hours, against the current four to 4.5 hours. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

Palace orders agencies to prepare plans to mitigate El Niño impact

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. has ordered the Department of Science and Technology, the Department of National Defense, and other agencies to prepare programs that will mitigate the impact of El Niño, which will bring about a dry spell that is expected to last until the second quarter of 2024.

Science and Technology Secretary Renato U. Solidum, Jr. said at a Palace briefing on Tuesday that the National Action Plan for El Niño "will include a comprehensive strategy covering water security, food security and energy security."

Mr. Solidum said its part of the plan, which will be executed with the Office of Civil Defense and the government weather service, known as PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), seeks to minimize power interruptions and the outbreak of illnesses resulting from the weather phenomenon.

He said moderate to severe drought conditions are likely to occur between February and May.

In a Dec. 6 advisory, PAGASA said a strong El Niño has intensified in the Tropi-

cal Pacific, with sea temperature anomalies exceeding 1.5 degrees centigrade from normal levels.

Mr. Solidum said that 77% of the provinces in the country might experience drought, while 65% of the provinces may see a dry spell.

PAGASA defines a drought as three consecutive months of below-normal rainfall or two straight months of significantly below-normal rainfall. A dry spell means two straight months of below-normal rainfall.

At a meeting with the President on Tuesday, Defense Secretary Gilberto C. Teodoro, Jr. presented an online database on the impact of El Niño, state-run Radio Television Malacañang said in a Facebook post.

"We need to further intensify our efforts to make sure that we are ready for this, especially in the various fields that were already mentioned like health, water, agriculture, sanitation, and of course, peace and order; and we also need to involve everyone in this effort," Mr. Solidum said. — **John Victor D. Ordoñez**

Study indicates broad skepticism over corporate climate projects

A STUDY has revealed a measure of skepticism towards companies declaring climate change objectives.

Communications firm Havas Ortega said in its Prosumer Report that only 5% of Filipinos believe that companies are putting in significant effort to reduce their environmental impact.

Havas Ortega defines "prosumers" as the 15-20% of the population with the power to shape new attitudes, behaviors, trends, and brands.

"Our findings are a dire warning for Filipino businesses and brands amid an escalating climate crisis," Havas Ortega President and Chief Executive Officer Jos Ortega said.

Mr. Ortega added that prosumers expect companies to take the lead in sustainable innovations to reduce their carbon footprint and are acutely aware of the environmental stakes.

The report said that 41% of respondents expect corporations and brands to tackle climate change.

"This gap exposes a harsh reality: mere acknowledgment of responsibility by corporations and brands is insufficient," Havas Ortega said.

It added that to satisfy the demands of eco-conscious consumers, companies should take bold and uncompromising steps in environmental leadership.

The firm said that about 60% of consumers avoid brands that are in conflict with their environmental beliefs.

"This change presents a dual-faced scenario: a formidable challenge and a golden opportunity for businesses to remodel their practices towards authentic sustainability and environmental guardianship," it added. — **Adrian H. Halili**

Supply of noche buena items sufficient for holidays — DTI

THE Department of Trade Industry (DTI) said the supply of items typically served in the Christmas feast — known in the Philippines as Noche Buena — will be adequate until the end of the holidays.

The DTI released this assessment of supply-demand conditions after meeting with the manufacturers on Monday.

"As part of our commitment to ensure that Noche Buena items remain affordable and of good quality this holiday season, we are intensifying our price monitoring efforts all over the country,"

Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual said in a statement on Wednesday.

"Through this meeting with manufacturers, we aim to assure consumers that the DTI remains at the forefront of ensuring that the rights of consumers are protected," he added.

The meeting was initially called to address reports of certain Christmas food products being sold above the prices indicated in the DTI's Noche Buena price guide.

These include the Edam-style cheese product known as queso de

bola, fruit cocktail, ham, all-purpose cream, and mayonnaise, the DTI said.

"In response, the manufacturers agreed to verify with their retail partners to address this concern," the department said.

"Further, some manufacturers in the meeting committed to intensify their own price and supply monitoring efforts to ensure that their products are sold in accordance with the Noche Buena price guide until the end of the year," it added.

The DTI said manufacturers had confirmed the sufficiency of supply of Noche Buena items at a previous meeting.

"The manufacturers assured DTI of the sufficient supply and stability of prices during their meeting held on Nov. 7 prior to the release of the price guide," the department said.

Mr. Pascual also called on manufacturers and retailers to adhere to the price guide, adding: "That is what the price guide is for — that consumers will be informed so they may exercise their right to choose."

"I also instructed our price monitors to ramp up their activities," he added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

PHL 9-month metal output value rises by 7.28% on high nickel prices

METAL production rose 7.28% year on year by value to P189.08 billion in the nine months to September, according to the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB).

In a report, the MGB said nickel ore and other nickel byproducts accounted for 47.6% of the total, generating P89.99 billion during the period.

By volume, nickel direct shipping ore rose 24.08% year on year to 28.9 million dry metric tons (DMT), valued at P53.54 billion.

"Caraga, the nickel capital of the Philippines, accounted for 62% with 17.75 million DMT, followed by Mimaropa with about 15% or 4.43 million DMT, while Regions VIII and III accounted for about 14% or 3.94 million DMT and 9% or 2.53 million DMT, respectively," it said.

Prices for nickel ore declined to \$10.39 per pound during the period from \$11.97 per pound a year earlier.

Gold accounted for 41.07% of metal output by value during the period with P77.65 billion. It was followed by copper at P18.79 billion and the combination of silver, chromite, and iron at P2.64 billion.

The price of gold increased 5.78% or \$105.6 from a year earlier to \$1,932.07 per troy ounce.

"The increased interest in gold investment brought about by the continued high inflation rate together with the economic slowdown pushed prices of these metals higher," the MGB said citing analysts.

Gold production increased to 22,935 kilograms (kg) for the nine-month period.

Cagayan Valley accounted for 21% or 4,829 kg of the gold produced, fol-



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TAGANITO MINING CORP.'s nickel operation in Surigao del Norte.

lowed by Bicol with 20% or 4,601 kg, and Davao region with 2,062 kg.

The average price of copper during the period fell to \$3.9 per pound from \$4.12 a year earlier.

The production of copper rose 2% to 195,533 DMT, with increased production accompanied by a decline in value to P18.79 billion.

Carmen Copper Corp. accounted for 56% of the total. The company reported an 11% increase in volume to 110,252 DMT.

"Both Philex Mining Corp. and OGP (OceanaGold Philippines, Inc.) sustained production shortfalls of 11% and 3%, respectively," the report said.

Silver prices rose 7.32% to \$23.55 per troy ounce. Output fell 14% to 35,784 kg.

"Backed up by industrial demand in the solar sector, the price of silver, on the other hand, is projected to stay high," it added.

Iron ore production rose 37% to 78,213 DMT, while chromite output grew to 67,877 DMT during the period.

The MGB said that due to the shift to renewable technology, critical minerals like gold, nickel, cobalt, copper, and iron, will continue to be in demand.

"Founded on this premise the outlook for the mining industry remains strong," it added.

Asked to comment, Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Chief Economist Michael L. Ricafort said that the supply chain for renewable energy and electric vehicles will continue to drive growth in the metallic minerals industry.

"Demand will be sustained by the shift towards renewable power from coal and other petroleum power sources amid the commitment by more companies and countries to reduce carbon emissions... these will sustain demand for mineral resources used as inputs," Mr. Ricafort said in a Viber message.

Regina Capital Development Corp. Head of Sales Luis A. Limlingan said that the recovery of the Chinese economy will drive demand for critical minerals.

"Many will be watching whether China's economy can recover heading into next year as they are one of the world's major consumers and drivers of demand for metal prices," Mr. Limlingan said in a Viber message.

The MGB also said that due to domestic nickel supply concerns in Indonesia, Chinese demand for nickel ore from the Philippines will rise.

It added that it expects 12 projects to start within the next six months, which could further boost exports given the high demand in global markets. — **Adrian H. Halili**



PhilHealth feted with ISO 9001:2015 certification

The Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) was recently awarded with the coveted ISO 9001:2015 certification for its Quality Management System (QMS) by third party auditor SOCOTEC Certification Philippines Inc. after a series of audit in its Head Office and Regional offices. The state agency has successfully complied with the QMS requirements of the certifying body.

ISO 9001:2015 is an internationally recognized standard for quality management. It helps organizations to improve performance, meet customer expectations, and demonstrate dedication to quality. Its requirements specify how to establish, implement, maintain, and continuously improve a QMS.

In his acceptance message, PhilHealth President and CEO

Emmanuel R. Ledesma, Jr. lauded the officers and employees, saying that the "certification is not just a badge of honor (but) a testament to our commitment to excellence, relentless pursuit of improvement, and dedication to creating a more streamlined and effective system for our fellow Filipinos."

In photo are Ledesma, Jr., (middle) while receiving the ISO 9001:2015 Certification from SOCOTEC Philippines Inc. Operations Director Gilmore Rivera during simple rites on December 4, 2023 in Pasig City. Ledesma is joined by (L-R) Acting Vice President for PRO III and Concurrent Senior Manager for Organization and Systems Development Office (OSDO) Henry V. Almanon, Senior Vice President for Legal Atty. Jose Mari F. Tolentino, and Vice President for Arbitration Atty. Jay R. Villegas.