

'Industrial peace' achieved in 2023 — DoLE

THE Department of Labor and Employment (DoLE) said labor relations were generally peaceful this year, due to the quick resolution of disputes and the dearth of strikes.

Labor Secretary Bienvenido E. Laguesma told reporters that the disposition rate — the percentage of resolved cases — posted by the National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC) was about 90%.

Mr. Laguesma said that among the 207 labor disputes managed by the National Conciliation Mediation Board, only three deteriorated to strike action.

"Generally, we can say that we have industrial peace," he said.

According to the NLRC accomplishment report as of October, which was released to media this week, the commission and its Regional Arbitration Branches (RABs) resolved 30,974 cases within the process cycle time of six to nine months. This translates to a 95% accomplishment rate, which exceeded the 82% overall target for the year.

Additionally, the report said Project SpeEd (Speedy and Efficient Delivery of Labor Justice), which seeks to efficiently resolve

issues put forward by Philippine-based and migrant workers, RABs posted a 99% disposition rate in resolving 23,914 labor cases. The NLRC, on the other hand, reported a rate of 99.7% across 8,609 cases.

Regarding conciliation and mediation of labor disputes, the commission said in its report that it recorded 20,108 settlements as of October involving P2.69 billion, to the benefit of 26,420 workers.

The NLRC, an arm of the Labor department, is a quasi-judicial body tasked with resolving labor

and management disputes, including those involving overseas workers.

Referring to the department's 2023-2028 labor and employment plan, Mr. Laguesma said: "This plan is a tripartite document; it is not a government document alone," citing DoLE's intention to continue with the tripartite consultation approach.

He said DoLE received additional funding to implement programs focused on youth employment and additional assistance for vulnerable workers. — **Jomel R. Paguian**

Latin America joblessness near decade low in 2023

UNEMPLOYMENT in Latin America and the Caribbean fell in 2023 to its lowest level since 2014, the International Labor Organization (ILO) said, but an expected economic slowdown in 2024 could reverse recent post-pandemic gains.

In a report, the ILO estimates unemployment in 2023 at 6.3%, below last year's 7.2% and a major rebound from the 10.6% unemployment rate in 2020, when COVID-19 lockdowns left millions without jobs.

Regional joblessness was the lowest since 2014, when unemployment was at 6.0%, according to past ILO reports.

The UN agency said the average unemployment rate in this year's first three quarters was 6.5%.

"By including the seasonal effects of the regional labor market," the unemployment rate through 2023 is estimated to be 6.3%, it said.

An economic slowdown in the coming year could spike unemployment, the ILO cautioned, citing forecasts from the International Monetary Fund and the UN's Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), which both see growth waning.

ECLAC sees the region's economies growing just 1.9% next year, below the 2.2% growth forecast for 2023.

"This would mark a second consecutive year of sluggish economic activity for Latin America and the Caribbean, which would resemble the situation that the region experienced in the years prior to the pandemic," the ILO report said.

In this context, "it is likely" that the regional unemployment rate for 2024 will tick up to between 6.5% and 6.8%, the report said. — **Reuters**

OPINION

Issues and answers on holiday party raffle

While our employees welcome the Christmas party primarily due to the raffle, still, we are beset by complaints about participation being limited to those with perfect attendance records. This is the first year we have imposed this restriction. Is this a good use of management prerogative? Can you help us anticipate and resolve any issues arising out of yearend parties? — White Rose.

Management prerogative is not absolute. There are many legal exceptions that limit its use. Even if it's your prerogative to manage a business, it doesn't mean you can disregard employee complaints. The best way, therefore, is to find a middle ground. People management is not a zero-sum game where management must win over its employees or vice versa.

There are win-win solutions that can serve the best interests of the organization. So, let's take a good look at your policy of excluding those with imperfect attendance records. Let me just say from the start that it is a petty issue.

The bottom line is how it would adversely affect an important company event like a Christmas party. It's the time we celebrate all the good things that happened in our work life. It should not be treated as a platform for bickering, especially if the issue is so low-stakes.

It's also unfair to those who have logged in one or two reasonable and approved absences due to emergencies, like illness, accidents, or a death in the family. Besides, the logic behind rewarding perfect attendance is flawed. Why recognize employees who are required to be punctual and physically present every single working day?

Thus, there is no need to agonize and waste time explaining a flawed policy to employees. Let me repeat myself: It's a petty

issue that should not consume the time of both labor and management. Imagine a situation where employee discontent destroys the party's atmosphere, before, during and after the event.

OTHER ISSUES

Yearend parties must offer positive vibes among employees and its management. Extra care should be taken to eliminate or minimize all issues arising from incoherent and illogical policies. The intention is to improve camaraderie and prepare everyone for the New Year. This should be the main focus of management.

Now, to anticipate other issues, explore the following:

One, is the top raffle prize cash or non-cash? Cash prizes are taxable income, unless the company covers it. I prefer the non-cash approach that includes home appliances, electronic devices, grocery baskets, and the like. Television sets, mini-refrigerators or mobile devices represent more tangible memories of the good times for the winners than cash prizes.

To avoid the administrative burden of hauling around heavy and fragile appliances, you can use gift checks to give winners the flexibility in claiming their prizes from the stores. One caveat though. Whether it's done via a gift certificate or actual appliances, watch out for employees selling their raffle prizes at a discount. They may be applying the proceeds to vices like drugs, drinking, gambling, and womanizing.

Two, would you prevent workers with performance issues from attending the party? No. It's better to make the party inclusive, regardless of their work performance or status, which includes probationary, project-based and regular workers. What's the point of discriminating, anyway? It's the season to be happy, and a year-end gathering should not be cause for creating friction among your workers.

Even those who have been penalized with reprimands or suspensions for violating company policy must be included in the party as well.

Three, what's your view on suppliers donating raffle prizes? This arrangement could raise integrity issues. Therefore, establish a policy that purchasing executives and their workers should donate their gifts to a prize pool to be raffled off during the party. Be sure to consider high-ranking officials as well.

Security guards must play an active role in enforcing this policy to keep recipients from struggling over accepting or rejecting gifts. Consider that suppliers can always deliver the goods to locations nominated by the intended recipient. Still, it's better to have a policy than having no policy at all.

Four, how do you view companies soliciting prizes from suppliers? Don't do it. It's a pitiful sight for companies to act like beggars. Every organization must have a budget for year-end merry-making. Regardless of size, a company must ensure it prepares a little something for the workers, including the giving away of modest prizes not sourced from suppliers, unless the prizes are voluntarily given.

Five, how about companies soliciting contributions from workers? My answer to that is the same to my answer to number four above: Don't.

In conclusion, you must realize that in planning a year-end party, consider all the possible irritants that could affect employee morale. If you're unsure of what to do next year, conduct a simple, anonymous survey to determine the best approach to organizing the Christmas party. Do this five months before the scheduled party.

Bring REY ELBO's popular leadership program, "Superior Subordinate Supervision," to your organization. And find out the best way to prevent recurring issues. Chat with him on Facebook, LinkedIn, or X (Twitter), e-mail elbonomics@gmail.com or via <https://reyelbo.com>



IN THE WORKPLACE

REY ELBO

ELBONOMICS: People management is not a zero-sum game where one side must lose.

Doing business in the place with America's highest minimum wage

WEST HOLLYWOOD, Calif. — Josiah Citrin, the owner and chef of a Santa Monica restaurant with two Michelin stars, opened a new steakhouse a few months ago off the Sunset Strip. He is already concerned about whether the restaurant can survive.

The reason, Mr. Citrin said, is singular: a West Hollywood city mandate that workers be paid at least \$19.08 an hour, the highest minimum wage in the country.

"It's very challenging," Mr. Citrin, 55, said of the new minimum wage, which took effect about two weeks before he opened his doors in July. "Really, it's almost impossible to operate."

His sentiment is widely shared among business owners in West Hollywood, a city of 35,000 known for restaurants, boutiques and progressive politics. In recent weeks, many owners have written to lawmakers, pleading for a moratorium on further increases to the minimum wage; another is scheduled for July, based on inflation. And last month, several marched to a local government building carrying signs that read, "My WeHo" and "R.I.P. Restaurants in West Hollywood."

Their sense of duress arises partly from geography. The jaggedly shaped city is bordered by Beverly Hills to the west and Los Angeles to the north, south and east. Some streets begin in Los Angeles, slice through West Hollywood and end in Beverly Hills. You can be in three cities — bar-

ring, of course, traffic — in a matter of minutes.

And that means West Hollywood's small businesses have competitors down the street with lower costs.

Beyond raising the minimum wage, the West Hollywood ordinance, which the City Council approved in 2021, requires that all full-time employees receive at least 96 hours a year of paid time off for sick leave, vacation or other personal necessities, as well as 80 hours that they can take off without pay.

The state of California's hourly minimum wage is \$15.50, the third highest in the nation, trailing only the District of Columbia at \$17 and Washington state at \$15.74. But just as each state's minimum wage can supersede the federal minimum of \$7.25 an hour, more than two dozen cities across California, including West Hollywood and several in the Bay Area, have higher minimum wages than the state, according to the Economic Policy Institute, a nonpartisan think tank.

In San Francisco, it's \$18.07; in Los Angeles, \$16.78.

Chris Tilly, a professor at UCLA who studies labor markets and public policies that shape the workplace, said research had shown that gradual and moderate increases to the minimum wage had no significant impact on employment levels.

"The claim that minimum wage increases are job-killers is overblown," Mr. Tilly said. But

"there are possible downsides," he added. "One is that economic theory tells us an overly large increase in the minimum is bound to deter businesses from hiring."

Over the past year, workers in several California industries have seen significant pay raises due, in many instances, to wins by organized labor. Healthcare workers at Kaiser Permanente facilities secured a contract that includes a \$25-an-hour minimum wage in the state. Fast food workers across the state will soon make a minimum wage of \$20 per hour, and hotel workers have received significant pay bumps across Southern California.

Until recently, West Hollywood followed the state's minimum wage increases, which have risen every year since 2017, often by a dollar at a time. But that changed with the new ordinance, which included a series of increases.

Genevieve Morrill, president of the West Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, said that while her group wanted workers to earn a living wage in an increasingly expensive part of the country, she felt that the ordinance had done more to hurt workers, who have lost hours or, in some cases, their jobs after places have shuttered.

Around the time the recent wage bump took effect, Ms. Morrill helped more than 50 local businesses, including Mr. Citrin's restaurant, write a letter to the City Council outlining their con-

cerns. They called for a moratorium on further minimum wage increases through 2025 or until the rate aligns with the Los Angeles rate. They also asked that the city roll back the mandated paid time-off policy.

Mayor Sepi Shyne, who was sworn in this year, said businesses had long been a part of the fabric of the community.

"Our businesses are also the backbone of support for workers: Lifting workers with fair pay is part of securing economic justice and a brighter future for everyone," said Ms. Shyne, who supports the minimum wage ordinance but said she was seriously listening to resistance from the business community.

Last month, the City Council, of which Ms. Shyne is a member, approved about \$2.8 million in waivers, credits and marketing dollars to help the business community. The City Council, she said, has also directed staff members to get feedback from workers about the effect of paid time off.

A major supporter of the ordinance was UNITE HERE Local 11, which represents 30,000 workers at hotels and restaurants across Southern California.

Kurt Petersen, co-president of the local, said West Hollywood was setting a standard that should be replicated across California and the country. "It has raised living standards and given workers the security of paid time off," he said. — © 2023 The New York Times

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE BIDDING PROCESS ("IPBP") (Public Bidding)

The Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corporation ("PSALM") Privatization Bids and Awards Committee (the "Committee" or "PBAC") invites interested parties to participate and bid for the selection and appointment of the Independent Power Producer Administrator for the administration of the contracted capacity and privatization of the Caliraya-Botocan-Kalayaan Hydroelectric Power Plants ("CBK HEPP" or the "Project") located in Lumban, Majajjay, and Kalayaan, Laguna. The Project is being privatized on an "as is, where is" basis.

An interested party must submit to the Committee a Letter of Interest ("LOI"). The sample LOI template may be downloaded from the PSALM website at www.psalm.gov.ph/privatization/pa.

The LOI shall be submitted either by hand delivery or by electronic mail ("e-mail") not later than 5:00 p.m. on 1 February 2024 (the "LOI Submission Deadline").

If delivered by hand, the LOI shall be delivered to:

Address: Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corporation
24th Floor Vertis North Corporate Center 1
Astra corner Lux Drives, North Avenue
1105 Quezon City, Philippines

If submitted by e-mail, the LOI shall be sent to:

E-mail Address: pbacsecretariat@psalm.gov.ph
Subject: Letter of Interest_CBK HEPP Privatization

A LOI submitted by e-mail must be in PDF file.

The LOI shall be deemed received and effective as follows: If delivered by hand, upon receipt of the LOI by the Committee which shall be stamped 'RECEIVED' and indicating the date and time of receipt. If sent by e-mail, upon the sender's receipt of an acknowledgment by the Committee with the time and date of receipt of the LOI.

An automatic "read receipt" does not constitute acknowledgment of an e-mail. If the LOI is submitted through e-mail, the interested party acknowledges and accepts the risks in doing so. Risks associated with submitting by e-mail include: delays between servers, rejection of e-mail due to size or incorrect procedure, rejection due to suspected spam, virus, or malware, or e-mail not clearly identified as a submission of the LOI. It is recommended that e-mailed submissions are prepared and transmitted with sufficient time for receipt. Neither PSALM or the Committee shall be responsible for delays or issues causing a submission of the LOI to be received late. Interested parties will not have the opportunity to resubmit after the LOI Submission Deadline due to late submissions or corrupted files.

Only interested parties that submit an LOI by the LOI Submission Deadline shall be allowed to receive the Request for Qualification ("RFQ").

Interested parties that have submitted a LOI and are allowed to participate in the RFQ Stage will be given the RFQ and access to a virtual data room.

Interested parties which have submitted the LOI shall be the party allowed to participate in the Bidding Process including the submission of the bid and entering into the pertinent agreements. Once the interested party has submitted the LOI, such interested party can no longer be substituted in the Bidding Process, except for the substitution of a consortium formed by the interested party in accordance with the terms and conditions of the RFQ and the Request for Proposal.

The indicative schedule of the RFQ Stage shall be as follows:

Activity	Deadline
Issuance of the IPBP and RFQ	20 December 2023
Pre-Documentary Deliverables Conference	15 January 2024
Clarification Request Deadline	8 February 2024 (5:00 PM)
Documentary Deliverables Deadline	29 February 2024 (5:00 PM)
Hardcopy Documentary Deliverables Deadline	21 March 2024 (5:00 PM)
Issuance of Notice to Qualified Bidders	To be announced

References to the dates and times shall be based on Philippine Standard Time. Should any of the above dates fall on a holiday, the deadline shall be extended to the same time of the immediately succeeding business day in Quezon City, Philippines.

Inquiries such as requests for clarification shall be addressed to the Chairperson, PBAC and e-mailed to the PBAC Secretariat at pbacsecretariat@psalm.gov.ph and cbkhepp_priva@psalm.gov.ph.

For more information, interested parties may visit the PSALM website at www.psalm.gov.ph/privatization/pa.

(SGD) DENNIS EDWARD A. DELA SERNA
Chairperson
PSALM Privatization Bids and Awards Committee
20, 21, and 22 December 2023