

PPP water project list expanded by 112 new sites

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said it will open up 112 more water projects for public-private investment this year.

"Last year, we started with... announcing 135 water projects ... We announce 112 more," Environment Undersecretary Carlos Primo C. David said in a forum on Tuesday.

Mr. David added that the sites being put up for private-public partnerships (PPPs) hold water rights via the National Irrigation Administration (NIA).

"You can find NIA facilities in almost all provinces," he said, putting the number of NIA sites at 505.

Mr. David said that the new PPP list involves a combined capacity of 100 to 170 million liters per day.

"They are a little bit smaller (than the first list of projects), but there is excess water in these facilities that can be converted into potable supply," he said.

The largest number of the sites are located in Calabarzon with 20, followed by Bicol Region (18) and Eastern Visayas (15).

Last year, the DENR offered 135 water projects to private investors to increase access to drinking water and expand hydropower capacity.

Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga has said that the projects will help mitigate the threat from El Niño, which is projected to affect 63 provinces with dry spells or droughts this year.

In October, the DENR and the NIA signed a memorandum of

agreement to repurpose surplus irrigation water.

The NIA said that the surplus water may now be used for power production, bulk water supply, aquaculture, recreation, and tourism.

Executive Order No. 22 created the Water Resources Management Office, which was tasked with integrating and harmonizing all government efforts and regulatory activity to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water resources.

"We also tried to package all these projects as much as we could. So that the potential investors... would have an easier time evaluating (the projects)," he said.

Mr. David told reporters that more than 60 water companies have expressed interest in investing in the DENR's initial list of 135 water projects.

Meanwhile, the DENR is planning to harness water within protected land and national parks to serve communities.

"There's a lot of water in protected areas in national parks... so (we) are now preparing guidelines for development within critical areas like protected areas. I think we can develop the water there (with minimal) impact in terms of deforestation and loss of biodiversity," Mr. David said on the sidelines.

He said that the water to be harnessed will also generate revenue to protect the critical sites.

— **Adrian H. Halili**

DoF sees PPP Code driving investment in water infra

THE Department of Finance (DoF) said it expects investments in water projects to be amply incentivized by the recently signed Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Code.

"The enactment of PPP Code is a resounding testament to our commitment to fostering stronger collaboration with the private sector," Finance Undersecretary Catherine L. Fong said.

Speaking on behalf of Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto at a forum on Tuesday, Ms. Fong said that despite the abundance of Philippine resources, "many of our communities still suffer from a lack of potable water while others endure the devastating effects of flooding year after year due to climate change."

Ms. Fong said that the government is urging collaboration with the private sector on "forging sustainable solutions through investments in surface water resources."

The government's infrastructure flagship program list includes 44 projects related to water resources valued at P839.2 billion.

"In December, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. signed Republic Act No. 11966 or the PPP Code which streamlines

the framework for PPPs at both national and local levels," she said.

"The government is actively pushing (for an) environment where PPP investments flourish even further," Ms. Fong said, citing the proposed amendments to the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises (CREATE) Act.

The DoF also noted the creation of the Department of Water Resources to better improve the management of water systems.

"At present, there are over 30 agencies with redundant roles, managing the country's water resources. There are overlapping functions resulting in disjointed planning, and uneven policy execution," Ms. Fong said.

"The proposed department will serve as a primary agency responsible for the comprehensive and integrated water resources development and management," she added.

She also said that the Finance department is working with the Energy department to attract more water infrastructure investors.

"We welcome investments that optimize the use of government assets for the betterment of our community," she said.

"Our collaboration will not only ensure water security, above all, it will bring us faster and farther on the road to inclusive growth and a good teacher for everything," she added.

Separately, British Ambassador to the Philippines and Palau Laure Beaufils said that strengthening water systems will be crucial due to the threat of climate change.

"Vulnerability to climate change also threatens infrastructure provision and operation," she said.

She said that some 2.2 million Filipino families have no access to safe drinking water while 1.6 million families do not have adequate access to basic sanitation.

"Exacerbating the challenge of efficient water resource management is the inescapable impact of climate change. We all know that the Philippines has been ranked as the most disaster-risk-prone country," she said.

Ms. Beaufils said that attaining universal water supply and sanitation coverage is within reach.

"We just need to ensure that the water gets to the right place at the right time at an affordable price," she said.

"We are committed to working with the government of the Philippines, with private sector partners, and with international partners on this," she added.

Ms. Beaufils also noted that the so-called "blue economy" are priorities for both the UK and the Philippines, opening up opportunities to share best practices.

"For example, how to improve the water quality of the sea, how to harvest the plentiful rainwater that falls on both our countries each year," she said. "How to promote tourism along our coastlines, including providing clean drinking water to tourist spots, how to ensure increasing urbanization with restricted space for those cities to grow, but not at the expense of sanitation."

She also cited strategies for optimizing offshore energy capacity.

The National Economic and Development Authority has valued the Philippine blue economy at potentially more than a trillion pesos.

In December, the House of Representatives approved on second reading a bill that seeks to establish a framework for a blue economy that would sustain marine ecosystems and resources. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsos**

NIA funding for new irrigation systems set at up to P40 billion

THE National Irrigation Administration (NIA) said it earmarked up to P40 billion for new irrigation projects this year.

"There will be P35 billion to P40 billion for new projects this year, to irrigate around 40 thousand hectares," NIA Administrator Eduardo G. Guillen told *BusinessWorld* on the sidelines of a water forum on Tuesday.

As of 2023, the NIA has completed 68% of its national irrigation development commitments, servicing an estimated 2.11 million hectares, with 1.1 million hectares still to be irrigated.

Mr. Guillen added that it is possible for up to a 2% increase in irrigated land this year, saying, "We need other ways to fast-track these projects."

NIA and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources recently signed an

agreement to grant water rights to private sector investors for multipurpose projects.

The government budgeted P70.22 billion for the NIA in 2024.

Mr. Guillen has said that the agency is also planning to build several solar-powered irrigation systems this year.

The NIA has about 183 solar-powered irrigation sites in the pipeline for 2024. It is budgeting about P1.72 billion to irrigate 2,168 hectares.

The NIA is also proposing an additional 791 potential sites across 39,694 hectares, which requires initial funding of P30 billion for solar-powered irrigation projects.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., has announced a solar irrigation program to help achieve rice self-sufficiency and mitigate the impact of El Niño. — **Adrian H. Halili**

House bill seeks to regulate vegetable farmgate prices

A BILL seeking to give the Department of Agriculture (DA) the authority to regulate farmgate prices for highly perishable vegetables has been filed in the House of Representatives.

"Considering the extremely low farmgate price of such highly perishable crops, not only are the livelihoods of farmers being killed, but these farmers are left to fend for themselves following the huge losses in revenue," Benguet Rep. Eric G. Yap wrote in House Bill No. 9889.

Citing a Jan. 9 GMA News report, Mr. Yap said farmers in Tublay, Benguet have been forced to sell cabbages for between P3 and P15 per kilogram due to oversupply.

The low prices typically are caused by overproduction ahead of major holidays, combined with rampant smuggling, he added.

Under the bill, the Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Standards, an arm of the DA, is tasked with devising standards on which to base the setting of farmgate prices for highly perishable vegetables.

"This Act shall not be interpreted with the intent of shunning prices above the standard farmgate price as this Act only seeks to impose a standard farmgate price which will only serve as a baseline for pricing," according to a copy of the bill.

In the event of a surplus, the DA must buy vegetables from registered farmers at the farmgate price to avoid waste and to effectively guarantee a certain income level for each harvest. When supplies are adequate, government agencies are also required to buy produce from farmers to supply their food-related programs.

The proposed law also requires farmers to register highly perishable vegetable crops for price and supply monitoring.

The bill calls for an inter-agency council to monitor farmgate prices, with the Secretary of Agriculture chairing. Other members of the council are the Secretaries of Trade and Industry, Interior and Local Government, and the National Economic and Development Authority.

The bill is with the House food and agriculture committee. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

Green-lane certificates issued for P244 billion worth of RE projects

THE Board of Investments (BoI) has issued green-lane certificates to six renewable energy (RE) projects which cost a combined P244.26 billion, the investment promotion agency said on Tuesday.

Two of the endorsed projects are 1.2-gigawatt (GW) joint wind power projects of Triconti Windkraft and Sea Wind Holdings AG worth P221.6 billion.

The projects, Guimaras Strait Wind Power Project (by Triconti Southwind Corp.) and Guimaras Strait II Wind Power Project (by Jet Stream Windkraft Corp.), are expected to operate offshore in Negros Occidental and Iloilo.

Projects are endorsed for green lane treatment if they are deemed of strategic importance, entitling them to expedited permit processing.

"The projects are being undertaken in partnership with Sea Wind, a Liechtenstein-based developer. Together, the Triconti-Seawind partnership is currently developing a total of over 1.65 GW of offshore wind capacity in Luzon and the Visayas," the BoI said in a statement.

The two projects are expected to generate 3,600 direct and indirect jobs

and to boost economic activity in the Negros provinces and Iloilo through the development of eco-tourism.

The BoI also endorsed a Burgos, Pangasinan Solar Energy Corp. (BPSEC) ground-mount solar power plant worth P2.7 billion which is projected to generate over 500 jobs.

Expected to operate by September 2026, the project will cover 71.5 hectares with peak capacity of 65 megawatts (MW).

BPSEC is a development company unit of Rising Renewables Holdings, Inc., a Filipino-owned RE platform holding RE assets for both foreign and local investors.

The BoI also awarded green lane certificates to three geothermal energy projects of Philippine Geothermal Production Co., Inc. (PGPC) and Pan Pacific Power Phils., Corp. (PPPPC).

Three PGPC projects are the 51-MW Daklan Geothermal Power Project in Benguet worth P6.66 billion, the 105-MW Mt. Labo Geothermal Power Project in Quezon, Camarines Norte and Camarines Sur worth P7.58 billion, and the 50-MW Mt. Malinao

Power Project in Camarines Sur and Albay worth P5.03 billion.

The projects of PGPC, a unit of SM Investments Corp., are expected to generate 1,500 jobs.

Aside from the three geothermal projects, PGPC also operates Tiwi and Mak-Ban Geothermal Steam Fields.

PPPPC is the developer of the P689.9-million Baua-Sikaw Geothermal Power Project in Cagayan Province which is projected to produce 61 MW during its 7-year exploration period contract.

"The Baua-Sikaw project will employ Filipinos for the duration of its contract as it aims to generate more than 500 job opportunities," the BoI said.

"In addition, as it continues its commitment to provide clean and renewable energy sources to meet the country's growing energy needs, the company has other new projects in the pipeline," it added.

In early 2023, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. issued Executive Order No. 18, which established the green lane system. As of Feb. 8, the BoI has granted green lane certification to 41 projects. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Ground broken on EDSA busway concourse

THE Department of Transportation (DoTr) broke ground on the EDSA Busway Concourse, signaling the start of the construction of the project in partnership with SM Prime Holdings, Inc. (SMPHI).

"We will be establishing convenient access to the EDSA Busway — right in the middle of overlapping transport infrastructure projects," Transportation Secretary Jaime J. Bautista said in a statement.

The DoTr said the project is expected to be completed by July 31.

The concourses will be constructed at SM North Edsa, SM Mega Mall and SM Mall of Asia.

Funding for the design and construction of the concourse will be provided by SMPHI, the DoTr said.

The company has disclosed that it had invested around P120 million in the project.

The EDSA Busway bridge with concourse features a ticketing booth, turnstiles for automatic fare collection, ramps and elevators.

The project is designed to provide convenient access to the stations of the EDSA busway. Once finished, the concourse is expected to serve around 300,000 commuters daily.

"This concourse leading to the busway should be counted as a (corporate

social responsibility) CSR initiative that addresses one of the DoTr's goals — accessibility," Mr. Bautista said.

In a separate statement, the DoTr said construction for the South Commuter Railway Project in Cabuyao, Laguna has started.

The South Commuter Railway is part of the P873.6-B North-South Commuter Railway (NSCR), which has been identified as a priority project by the government. The NSCR will connect New Clark City in Tarlac, and Calamba in Laguna via high-speed train.

The DoTr said the projected started boring for pilings. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

Shipping industry modernization plan sets 'retirement age' for older ships

THE Maritime Industry Authority (Marina) said its shipping modernization plan will limit the service life of vessels to 30 years at most, to ensure that the domestic fleet is regularly renewed with new ships.

It announced a maximum age for steel ships of 30 years; wooden-hulled ships 20 years; and motor bancas five years.

The fleet renewal rules are among the initiatives it is pur-

suing under the 2028 Maritime Industry Development Plan (MIDP).

On Tuesday, Marina said President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. approved updates to the 10-year MIDP.

"Marina recognizes the crucial role of the MIDP in charting the course towards a robust and sustainable maritime sector. The plan's focus on enhancing the Philippine Merchant Fleet,

expanding domestic and overseas shipping industries, and promoting a skilled maritime workforce aligns perfectly with our goals of economic growth and global competitiveness," Marina said in a statement on Tuesday.

The MIDP lays down the framework for upgrading the merchant fleet and expanding the domestic and international shipping industries, Marina said.

The updated MIDP also contains plans to modernize and expand shipbuilding and the ship repair industry and the enhancement of maritime transport safety and security.

"These initiatives will not only propel the growth of the maritime sector but also contribute to the overall welfare of our citizens and the protection of our marine resources," Marina said.

Marina is tasked with establishing additional domestic sea routes and shipping services. As of 2022, 181 Roll-On, Roll-Off services have been established under the Philippine Nautical Highway System.

On the condition of vessels, Marina said ships of excess age "shall be automatically de-listed from the Philippine registry. The operators of ships that have reached the maximum al-

lowable age shall have the option to have their ships classed, replaced with classed ships, or retired without replacement," it said.

Marina has also included plans for port and road rehabilitation and improvement; development of coastal and inland waterways transport systems, and the development of shipping services for tourist destination areas. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**