

Gov't 10-year jobs masterplan must include AI courses — NEDA

THE government's jobs masterplan should help workers keep up with emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) said on Tuesday.

"The other challenge (that the) Trabaho Para Sa Bayan Act (seeks to address) mismatches in the labor market, because technology is evolving very fast, and yet the skills of our workers are lagging behind," NEDA Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said at a briefing.

"Because we see these technologies, while they threaten some, when we position ourselves properly, they are opportunities. In fact, I am not so worried at all," he said.

The Department of Trade and Industry has said that AI could contribute as much as \$90 billion to the economy by 2030.

However, only 17% of organizations are ready to employ AI, with the majority of them citing concerns about their inability to handle these technologies.

The Philippines ranked 65th out of 193 countries — down 11 places — in the 2023 Government AI Readiness Index compiled by Oxford Insights.

Mr. Balisacan cited how the public eventually adopted the internet amid initial misgivings.

"We have to retool. We have to use these as new tools rather than things that will replace us."

The NEDA, as well as the Trade and Labor departments, will begin drafting a 10-year jobs masterplan that will focus on the creative and service sectors.

The three agencies signed the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of the Republic Act No. 19962 or the Trabaho Para Sa Bayan Act on Tuesday.

The jobs masterplan includes three-year, six-year and 10-year development timelines.

"We recognize that we have much to do in our efforts if we wish to further equip our workers with emerging and in-demand skills that are adaptive to the fast-paced and ever-changing domestic and global economy," Mr. Balisacan said during the IRR signing.

The number of jobless rose to 2.15 million or 4.5% of the employment-aged population in January from 3.1% in December. The reading in January 2023 had been 4.8%. —

Beatriz Marie D. Cruz

BIR rules out deduction for stores honoring senior, PWD discounts

THE Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) said retailers who plan to honor the expanded discounts planned for senior citizens and persons with disabilities (PWDs) have no legal basis at the moment to claim tax deductions.

Speaking at a consultation organized by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) this week, Ron Mikhail Uy, representing the BIR, said: "We cannot give additional (tax deductions) without basis in the law. As of now, that is the stand of BIR."

Agencies including the DTI are currently drafting a joint administrative order (JAO) increasing the discount entitlement for seniors and PWDs purchasing basic necessities and prime commodities (BNPCs).

Mr. Uy said the current laws governing such deductions are Republic Act (RA) 9994 and RA 10754, which outline specific requirements for deducting items from gross income.

Under Section 4 of RA 9994, or the Expanded Senior Citizens Act of 2010, establishments may only claim the discounts granted under subsections A and C as tax deductions based on the cost of the goods sold or services rendered.

Subsection A of Section 4 grants seniors a 20% discount and exemption from value-added tax on the sale of goods and services such as medicine, hospital fees, medical supplies, fares, hotel, lodging, restaurant meals, theater admissions, and funeral services.

Meanwhile, Subsection C of Section 4 governs the 5% discount on water and electricity supplied by public utilities.

"This has already been suggested and discussed with the technical working group of the Ways and Means of the Congress to add the deductibility of the 5% discount under BNPCs," Mr. Uy said.



PHILIPPINE STAR/WALTER BOLLOZOS

RETAILERS who plan to honor the expanded discounts planned for senior citizens and persons with disabilities have no legal basis at the moment to claim tax deductions.

Officer-in-Charge and Assistant Director Cheryl G. Carbonell of the DTI's Consumer Protection and Advocacy Bureau (CPAB) said that the department has already proposed to include the 5% discount as tax-deductible in a bill that aims to harmonize all the discounts.

"As of now, we are still trying to work it out, but really, there is no legal basis in the law. That is our status right now," Ms. Carbonell said.

Steven T. Cua, president of the Philippine Amalgamated Supermarkets Association, Inc., told *BusinessWorld* that without deductibility, "retailers will have to resort to jacking up the prices to accommodate this expanded privilege accorded to a few."

He questioned why the private sector needs to bear the burden for "privileges extended to 10% of the population."

"The government is trying to tame inflation yet comes up with proposals that are inflationary in nature, as the extension of discounts adds to the retailer's cost of operations," he added.

He said judging from the BIR's input, he doubted the CPAB's ability to make progress with the effort to make the expanded discounts deductible.

Last month, Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez announced plans to make seniors and PWDs eligible for a P500 discount each month on BNPCs, starting in March.

The proposal will entitle seniors and PWDs to a special discount of 5% on their BNPC purchases, not to exceed P125 per week, with no carrying over of unused amounts.

Asked about how much retailers might raise prices in response to the proposal, Mr. Cua said: "Pricing is a management decision; it is a strategy to (be) competitive. It really depends on the many factors considered by the concerned outlet," he said.

"Do they want to please their owners and retain the same earnings? Do they see it as a chance to eat into its neighbors' market share and delay an increase in prices? How much earnings are currently affected by the purchases of SCs and PWDs at a particular store? In the final analysis, sooner or later, stores will have to adjust their margins," he added.

The DTI, Department of Agriculture, and Department of Energy plan to publish the JAO on the additional discounts within the month, which will be effective immediately. —

Justine Irish D. Tabile

Open-access power, green energy option to be offered in Mindanao this month

QUALIFIED POWER end-users in Mindanao will be allowed to choose their own electricity supplier with the launch of the Retail Competition and Open Access (RCOA) within the month.

In a circular dated March 1, the Department of Energy (DoE) said that it will start commercial operations of RCOA, as well as the Green Energy Option Program (GEOP) on March 26.

"All electricity end-users whose average peak demand falls within the threshold for contestability set by the ERC (Energy Regulatory Commission) shall be allowed, on a voluntary basis, to source their electricity supply from a retail electricity supplier (RES)," according to the circular.

Under the Electric Power Industry Reform Act of 2001, qualified contestable customers, or end-users consuming at least 500 kilowatts (kW) a month, may choose their own power suppliers through the RCOA scheme.

Interested customers whose consumption does not fall within the threshold may still participate

as part of an aggregated group in accordance with ERC's rules.

All electricity end-users in the Mindanao grid with monthly average peak demand of between 100 kW and 300 kW over the next 12 months will be allowed to choose a power supplier.

They should also have historical monthly peak demand of at least 100 kW for three consecutive months.

"The migration of eligible electricity end-users under the RCOA or GEOP shall be governed by applicable procedures under the WESM (Wholesale Electricity Spot Market) Rules, Retail Rules, and Market Manuals, and other relevant issuances by the DoE and ERC," according to the circular.

Distribution utilities with excess contracted capacity arising from the migration of customers taking advantage of the programs are required to notify the ERC.

The ERC has been tasked with providing regulatory support to ensure the success of the RCOA and GEOP commercial operations in Mindanao. —

Sheldeen Joy Talavera

Expanding EO 12 tariff coverage seen helping achieve EV targets

THE expansion of the coverage of Executive Order (EO) No. 12, which grants favorable tariffs to encourage electric vehicle (EV) adoption, will help the industry catch up with the targets set in the Comprehensive Roadmap for the Electric Vehicle Industry (CREVI), the Department of Energy (DoE) said.

In an online consultation on Wednesday, Energy Utilization Management Bureau Supervising Science Research Specialist Andre Reyes said that the current EV sales are still far behind the targets.

"The coverage expansion will greatly assist in achieving the targets under the CREVI ... Under which it is required that the total fleet by 2040 (account for an EV share of 10%, which

is around 311,700 units, from 2023 to 2028," Mr. Reyes said.

Under a high clean-energy adoption scenario, the DoE hopes to increase EV share to 50% of the vehicle fleet, equivalent to 2.4 million units.

"This proposed coverage expansion will send a clear price signal for consumers to switch to EVs, which are more efficient and cheaper to run per kilometer, and assist in energy self-sufficiency," he added.

The DoE rates hybrid EVs or plug-in EVs at 20 kilometers per liter, with internal combustion engine vehicles averaging 14 kilometers.

Mr. Reyes said the favorable conditions for imports may start showing up in vehicle import numbers by 2026-2027. —

Justine Irish D. Tabile

FULL STORY



Read the full story by scanning the QR code with your smartphone or by typing the link tinyurl.com/2v72f2eo

JOB OPENING

CHIEF LENDING OFFICER

Minimum of twenty (20) years of experience in senior management roles in international financial institutions with experience in business and lending. Strong knowledge of risk assessment methodologies.

PROCREDIT FINANCING CORP.

Unit 2203 Cityland 10 Tower One,
156 Dela Costa St., Salcedo Village, Makati City
kim@procredit.ph

JOB OPENING

Mandarin Speaking Shipping Coordinator (2 vacancy)
Service and Parts Coordinator – Mandarin Speaking (2 vacancy)
Purchasing Assistant – Mandarin Speaking (2 vacancy)
Shipping Executive for Mandarin Accounts (2 vacancy)
Mandarin Speaking Freight Forwarding Specialist- (2 vacancy)

Job Requirements:

- Fluent in Mandarin
- Any nationality who can speak and write Chinese
- Preferably 1-year experience
- With Shipping and equipment background

GE SHIPPING CORP.

1205 One Global Place, 5th Avenue cor. 25th Street,
Fort Bonifacio, Global City
EMAIL: geshippingcorp@gmail.com

JOB OPENING

Company Name GE Power Philippines, Inc.

Company Address
27th Floor WeWork Menarco Tower, 32nd Street,
Taguig City 1634

Contact Details of the Company

Name: Laarni Bulaun

Email address: laarnirenae.bulaun@ge.com

Contact number: 8877-7000

Available Job Vacancy

Balance of Plant Installation and Commissioning Supervisor

Job Description

- Being knowledgeable in commissioning at least in BOP (E) package
- Being experienced in Advanced Construction & Commissioning of hydropower project especially in refurbishment & renovation of Hydro project.
- Delivering strong knowledge in installation & commissioning of BOP and Protection Relay Testing of hydropower project.
- Liaising with Client & Partner / subcontractor.
- Delivering training to the Client personnel as & when needed.

Basic Qualification

- Knowledge level must be comparable to a bachelor's degree from an accredited university or college (or a high school diploma with relevant experience).
- Strong oral and written communication skills.
- Demonstrate ability to analyze and resolve problems.
- Quick and thorough decision making.
- Ability to document, plan, market and execute programs.
- Establish project management skills.

Salary Range (Annually) PHP 950,000 – PHP 1M

OPINION

Digital nomad visas: Redefining the workation

FOLLOWING an announcement made in May, the Bureau of Immigration (BI) is set to launch its new digital nomad visa program in 2024.

Digital nomad visas give individuals the right to live and work remotely outside their home country. With such a visa, individuals will be allowed to reside in a foreign country while being employed elsewhere.

Currently, over 50 countries offer similar remote work visas to attract remote workers and freelancers. While not all countries have specific visas tailored for remote workers, some offer options that can accommodate them. Thailand, for instance, has the Thailand Elite Visa for extended stays, which is not explicitly designed for digital nomads. Indonesia's Social Budaya Visa is geared towards cultural or educational purposes, while Malaysia's MM2H Program is for long-term stays. Taiwan's Gold Card Visa targets skilled professionals but can facilitate remote work arrangements. The Working Holiday Visa of Japan and the H-1 Visa of South Korea may be utilized by remote workers under certain conditions.

While the landscape for digital nomad visas in Asia is still evolving, these options reflect a growing recognition of the needs of remote workers in the region.

However, the success of the digital nomad visa is contingent on effective implementation and the provision of essential infrastructure. Reliable high-speed internet, a cornerstone of remote work, must be readily available across the country. While urban areas, especially in Metro Manila, generally enjoy relatively reliable high-speed internet, rural and remote areas often suffer from slow internet speeds, frequent service interruptions and other challenges with connectivity. Apart from stable internet connections, conducive and safe co-working spaces and facilities that cater to the specific needs of digital nomads would further enhance the attractiveness of the Philippines as a remote work destination.

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the Philippines, they bring much more than their professional skills and experiences. These individuals contribute significantly to the economy, stimulating revenue generation through their spending habits, particularly on accommodation, food, transportation and entertainment services. Their presence fuels tourism when they engage in leisure activities such as exploring cultural sites and local attractions. They may also choose to invest in real estate and other business opportunities.

The increasing presence of digital nomads can also serve as a catalyst for innovation, encouraging knowledge exchange, and providing a substantial boost to local businesses and service providers.

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CREATING A CONDUCTIVE ECOSYSTEM FOR REMOTE WORK

The visa program should be more than a mere bureaucratic procedure. It should foster an environment that genuinely supports remote work. This requires collaboration between the public and private sectors not only in addressing the essential infrastructural needs but also in actively cultivating a dynamic digital nomad community. This can involve creating networking events, workshops and educational programs tailored to the remote workers' upskilling. Additionally, streamlining visa processes and offering long-term visa options for remote workers can attract more talent from overseas. By providing clear pathways for remote workers to relocate, the government can encourage the influx of skilled professionals and enrich the local economy.

The Philippines needs to actively position itself as a premier destination for remote work, leveraging its unique selling points — affordability, English proficiency, and a favorable climate. Cultural integration can further enhance the digital nomad experience. Beyond professional pursuits, the country offers a rich cultural heritage, diverse cuisine, and stunning landscapes.

For digital nomads, the Philippines presents a tantalizing mix of urban sophistication and natural wonders. From the bustling energy of Manila to the pristine beaches of Palawan, there's something to suit all preferences. The digital nomad visa program offers not only the chance to experience the Philippines but also serves as a gateway to explore the broader Southeast Asian region.

The views or opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Isla Lipana & Co. The content is for general information purposes only, and should not be used as a substitute for specific advice.

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