

# Dry season capacity additions to power grid seen topping 300 MW

THE Department of Energy (DoE) said it is expecting more than 300 megawatts (MW) of additional capacity from various facilities to come online during the dry months.

"We see that we will have approximately more than 300 megawatts of additional supply of electricity. These power plants will enter operations this summer," Energy Assistant Secretary Mario C. Marasigan said on government network PTV.

The new facilities include a coal-fired project with output of about 150 MW. The rest will be supplied by renewables like solar

energy, biomass, and hydropower, he said.

Mr. Marasigan said that the DoE is helping the system operator, the National Grid Corp. of the Philippines (NGCP), with all the issues and concerns surrounding its interconnection projects.

He said that the DoE received assurances from the NGCP that the Cebu-Negros-Panay project's stage 3 (CNP3) is operating at full transfer capacity.

"This means that we have an additional 400 megawatts of transfer capacity brought by the new line built by our system operator and transmission net-

work provider," Mr. Marasigan said.

CNP3 will link the islands of Negros and Cebu via overhead lines from Bacolod City to San Carlos City in Negros Occidental and a submarine cable to Toledo City in Cebu.

While the DoE has said that it is forecasting yellow alerts in April and May, Mr. Marasigan said the power supply balance will not deteriorate to an outright shortage.

"In our monitoring and assessment, we have not seen a shortage yet in electricity supply and our demand has not yet reached our projected peak demand for this year," he said.

Currently, the Luzon grid has an operating margin of 2,000 MW while the Visayas and Mindanao has a gap of around 200-500 MW.

With El Niño showing signs of weakening, as reported by the government weather service, known as PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), Mr. Marasigan said that hydropower plants are expected to return soon from preventive maintenance.

Rainfall will bring additional water, enabling hydropower plants to generate more power, he said. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

# PHL wholesale, NCR retail price growth slower in February

WHOLESALE price growth in the Philippines and retail price growth in Metro Manila both eased in February, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

In preliminary data released on Monday, the PSA said the general wholesale price index (GWPI) rose 2.8% year on year in February, slowing from the 3.5% posted in January and the 6.8% in February 2023.

The February reading was the weakest rise in bulk prices in 32 months, or since the 2.2% posted in June 2021.

Year to date, wholesale price growth averaged 3.2%, easing from 6.9% in the first two months of 2023.

Slower growth in the GWPI was primarily driven by the manufactured goods classified chiefly by materials sub-index, the PSA said in a statement. The sub-index reading in February was 2.2%, slowing from 4.6% in January.

"The slowdown can be attributed to the slowdown in headline inflation experienced during these months driven by the alleviation of supply chain constraints, and more relaxed demand due to high interest rates," John Paolo R. Rivera, Oikonomia Advisory & Research, Inc. president and chief economist, said in an e-mail.

Mr. Rivera said the slowdown in manufactured good prices was caused by weaken-

ing demand coming off the holiday season.

Luzon wholesale price growth eased to 2.6% in February from 3.4% in January and 7% in February 2023. Meanwhile, wholesale price growth in the Visayas and Mindanao came in at 6.1% and 2.4%, respectively.

In a separate statement, the PSA said the National Capital Region's (NCR) general retail price index (GRPI) further declined to 2.1% from 6.6% a year earlier and the 2.5% reading in January.

The February outcome was the weakest in 25 months, or since the 1.9% increase in January 2022.

In the year to date, Metro Manila retail price growth averaged 2.3%, against 6.4% at the end of February 2023.

According to the PSA, the slowdown in the GRPI was mainly caused by weakness in the food index, where price growth decelerated to 3% from 3.7% in January.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Chief Economist Michael L. Ricafort said in an e-mail that improved agricultural output, caused by benign weather conditions, flowed on to slower year-on-year increases in wholesale and retail prices.

"The food index has slowed down due to food supply constraints being addressed and weaker demand," Mr. Rivera said. — **Karis Kasarinlan Paolo D. Mendoza**

# Labor groups expect upskilling from US firms to enhance competitiveness of PHL workforce

By **John Victor D. Ordoñez**  
Reporter

DIGITAL upskilling partnerships with US companies are expected to enhance the employment prospects and qualifications of the Philippine workforce, labor groups said.

"We can say that this (US upskilling pledges) is a clear signal that the Philippines is becoming an increasingly attractive destination for global companies looking to invest in talent development and digital infrastructure," Jose G. Matula, who chairs the Nagkaka labor coalition, told *BusinessWorld* via Viber.

During her visit to Manila last month, US Secretary of

Commerce Gina Raimondo announced that US companies are expected to roll out digital upskilling programs with the government intended to benefit over 30 million workers.

The US Presidential Trade and Investment Mission also committed to invest over \$1 billion in the Philippines.

The Commerce department also announced that Google will roll out a career certificate program in 50 virtual campuses in partnership with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

Microsoft Corp. also committed to work with the DTI, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas and the Department of Budget and Management to train jobseekers and students in artificial intelligence.

Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa Secretary-General Josua T. Mata said the government must focus on ensuring these pledges materialize.

"Investors are motivated not solely by sovereign state promises, but by the profitability of their investments," he said in a Viber message.

"Hence, immediate attention must be given to recurring investor concerns" like expensive power and corruption.

Renato B. Magtubo, chairman of Partidong Manggagawa, said the Department of Labor and Employment must also follow through on the International Labor Organization's recommendation to investigate violations

of the right to freedom of association and other labor rights.

"These US investments are tied to the Biden administration's trade and investment policy centered on the protection of labor rights," he said in a Viber message.

The Asian Development Bank has said the Philippines should use education technology to bridge the skills gap or risk job losses due to rapid technological advancements.

It said 20% of Philippine workers face a "high risk of losing their jobs" due to automation.

"The investments demonstrate the potential benefits of international partnerships and investments in developing the digital economy and workforce of the Philippines," Mr. Matula said.

# NPC issues rules governing personal data protection, certification of data handlers



THE National Privacy Commission (NPC) said it issued two circulars outlining the tasks of data handling personnel and laying down the rules governing certification of organizations deemed compliant with data-handling rules.

In a statement on Monday, the regulator said NPC Circular 2023-06, or the Security of Personal Data in the Government and Private Sector, took effect on March 30, while NPC Circular 2023-05 or the Prerequisites for the Philippine Privacy Mark Certification Program took effect on March 15.

In the circular implemented last week, the NPC set the general obligations of personal information controllers (PICs) and personal information processors (PIPs).

These requirements include the designation of a data protection officer, the reg-

istration of data processing systems, the conduct of privacy impact assessments, the implementation of privacy management programs, the training of personnel, and compliance with NPC orders.

NPC 2023-06 also set provisions regarding the storage of personal data, limiting the storage for only a necessary duration, while outlining industry standards and best practices for protection.

The circular also provides that PICs and PIPs should have acceptable-use policies, secure authentication mechanisms, and measures for deleting data on mobile devices.

It also tasks PICs and PIPs with implementing a business continuity plan containing the organizations' mitigation efforts during potential disruptive events.

"(The plan) must indicate the process of personal data backup, restoration, and re-

medial time, including the periodic review of the plan taking into account disaster recovery, privacy, business impact assessment, a crisis communications plan, and telecommuting policy, among others," the NPC said.

Meanwhile, NPC Circular 2023-05 outlines the requirements for certifying PICs and PIPs and accrediting recipients of the Philippine Privacy Mark.

In this circular, PICs and PIPs seeking certification must attain the ISO/IEC 27001 and ISO/IEC 27701 standards for Information Security Management Systems and Privacy Information Management System, respectively.

Aside from meeting the standards for PICs and PIPs, certification bodies must also attain the ISO/IEC 17021-1 norm for accreditation. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

## OPINION

# Recent improvements in tax filing process

"To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often," said Winston Churchill.

The government has been proving this adage to be true, especially with the significant regulatory updates to taxation, the most recent iteration being the Ease of Paying Taxes (EoPT) Law. It would appear that we should continue to expect changes as Congress is continuously deliberating on new tax regulations, but change must not always be met with resistance; after all, change is a crucial element of progress. To the credit of the government and the Bureau of Internal Revenue, there have been significant efforts to improve the tax system, making compliance, including payment, easier for the taxpayers.

Taxpayers, on the other hand, must keep abreast of developments, not only to ensure compliance with their obligations, but also to be informed of how to go about compliance in the easiest way possible, as recent regulations allow.

As the April 15 deadline for the 2023 Income Tax Filing draws near, it's a good time to be reminded of the latest developments on tax filing.

### TAX PAYMENT VENUE

We begin with one of the most important updates introduced by the EoPT Law, which took effect on Jan. 22. Tax-

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payers can now file their Annual Income Tax Returns (AITR), either electronically or manually, and pay taxes due thereon through any Authorized Agent Bank (AAB), Revenue District Office, Revenue Collection Officer, or authorized tax software provider.

This above update must not, however, be confused with the requirement for taxpayers mandated to use the Electronic Filing and Payment System (eFPS) to file their AITRs electronically and pay the taxes due through the eFPS-AABs where they are enrolled, except in such cases where filing through eBIRForms is permitted.

Looking back, there was a time when taxpayers were required to do their filings in specific Revenue District Offices (RDOs) which have jurisdiction over their businesses. We were all witness to the administrative and logistical challenges this system posed. Thankfully, we are now moving past this chapter.

In 2023, even before the EoPT Law, the BIR, through RMC 32-2023, began to allow taxpayers to file and pay their income taxes through any AABs and RDOs. With the EoPT Law, this policy

has been institutionalized, allowing taxpayers to carry out their obligations efficiently and conveniently.

### UPDATED ELECTRONIC FILING SYSTEMS

Taxpayers are reminded of the availability of offline Electronic Bureau of Internal Revenue forms (eBIRForms) Package Version 7.9.4.2, which can be downloaded from the BIR's official website, [www.bir.gov.ph](http://www.bir.gov.ph) or [www.knowyourtaxes.ph/ebirforms](http://www.knowyourtaxes.ph/ebirforms). Notably, the new eBIRForms provide BIR Form No. 1702-RTv2018C with additional alphanumeric tax codes (ATC) IC, such as IC 101, IC 190 and IC 191 for Regional Operating Headquarters (ROHQs), Offshore Banking Units (OBUs), and Foreign Currency Deposit Units (FDCUs), respectively. Updated 2023 income tax rates were likewise made on BIR Form No. 1700v2018, BIR Form No. 1701v2018, and BIR Form No. 1701A. Bug fixers were also added for BIR Form No. 1702-MXv2018C.

Meanwhile, BIR Form No. 1701A, otherwise known as the Annual Income Tax Return for Individuals Earning Purely from Business/Profession under the graduated income tax rates with Optional Standard Deduction as the mode of deduction, with the option to avail of the 8% flat income tax rate; BIR Form No. 1702-EX January 2018 (ENCS) v2, or the

Annual Income Tax Return for entities EXEMPT under Sec. 30 and Sec. 27 of the Tax Code, as amended, and other special laws with no other taxable income; and BIR Form No. 1700, or the Annual Income Tax Return for Individuals Earning Purely Compensation Income, are now available on the Electronic Filing and Payment System (eFPS).

As a precaution, taxpayers who are mandated to use eFPS are advised to check the RDO they are registered with to make sure that the abovementioned returns are on the list of tax returns in their eFPS. If not, coordination with the BIR should be made as soon as possible to comply with the requirements of the concerned RDO for the uploading of the returns to the eFPS.

Mindful of the deadline to file the AITR, taxpayers are reminded that eBIRForms is required for taxpayers paying through the assistance of accredited tax agents/practitioners, accredited printers of principal and supplemental receipts/invoices, and those who file a "No-Payment Return," among others.

While eFPS applies to taxpayers such as large taxpayers, those in the Taxpayer Account Management Program (TAMP), importers and customs brokers, taxpayers enjoying fiscal incentives, the top 5,000 individuals, corporations with a paid-up capital

stock of 10 million and above, and those with complete computerized systems, among others.

These recent changes are definitely a welcome development aimed at making the tax processes easier, thus significantly affecting ease of doing business as well, which is commonly a pain point not only for Philippine businesses, but for foreign investors as well.

The enactment of the EoPT Law and the recent improvements within the BIR systems are testament to the government's commitment to modernizing the archaic processes of the past and making them responsive to the prevailing concerns of the present. While the system is not exactly perfect, it is now easier to comply with tax filing and payment obligations.

*Let's Talk Tax is a weekly newspaper column of P&A Grant Thornton that aims to keep the public informed of various developments in taxation. This article is not intended to be a substitute for competent professional advice.*

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