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Samsung on track to equip all KFC stores with self-service devices

By Aubrey Rose A. Inosante

SAMSUNG Electronics Philippines Corp. (SEPCO) is likely to reach its target to deploy its Kiosk self-service device in all KFC stores nationwide within this year, an official said.

"Samsung Kiosks have been deployed to more than 50% of KFC stores nationwide. The plan is to complete installations for the remaining branches within 2024," SEPCO Head of Display Solutions Jasmel Lacosta said in an e-mail.

The fast-food chain KFC currently has 380 stores nationwide.

KFC is the first global brand carrying the self-service Kiosk, Samsung's Display Solutions Retail Operations Specialist Consumer Electronics Jescille Rubio told *BusinessWorld* during Samsung's Business Expo on March 21.

Samsung's 24-inch all-in-one Kiosk solution aims to streamline concession ordering and increase ticket transactions.

The device runs on platforms Tizen OS and Windows IoT that software providers can choose from.

Mr. Lacosta added that the self-ordering device has flexible installation options. Establishments can opt to have it tabletop, wall-mounted, or with a stand.

It has improved productivity and efficiency in KFC branches, he said, as having the devices has led to the reallocation of cashier staff to other tasks.

"They can help to minimize queues and increase order accuracy so as to further elevate customer experiences," Mr. Lacosta said.

Samsung has also deployed its Kiosks to some healthcare institutions for their patient queueing systems.

Mr. Lacosta added that the company is in talks with 7-Eleven to deploy Kiosks in its branches nationwide.

"We are working with 7-Eleven to provide cost-effective Kiosk solutions, and we are definitely working towards ensuring that more companies are able to benefit from our technology," he said.

PHL PC shipments to rebound

THE PHILIPPINE personal computer (PC) market is forecast to grow 26.5% to 2.4 million shipments this year led by purchases for the education sector, according to the International Data Corp. (IDC).

This will reverse the year-on-year declines seen in 2022 and 2023, when shipments stood at 2.5 million and 1.89 million, respectively.

The five brands expected to lead the market this year will be Acer, Lenovo, HP, ASUS, and Dell, which are awardees of the Department of Education's (DepEd) Computerization Program (DCP) in 2022, IDC Philippines Associate Research Analyst for Devices Research Roben Victor M. Dispo said in an e-mail.

IDC also expects Acer to retain its spot as the top performer by market share, Mr. Dispo added.

Acer Group led the Philippine market in 2023 with a 26.5% share selling 501,000 units in 2023. Lenovo followed with a 21.5% share, selling 408,000 units, while HP, Inc. and Dell Technologies held 12.8% and 7.6% shares, respectively shipping 243,000 and 145,000 units.

DCP is a government initiative that aims to provide public school teachers with laptops to enhance the teaching-learning experience.

Based on IDC's latest Worldwide Quarterly Personal Computing Device Tracker report, more than 490,000 laptops are expected to be delivered under the DCP via multiple deals announced since the end of last year.

Asked if last year's Senate probe into the DepEd's supposedly overpriced and outdated laptop purchases will affect 2024 shipments, Mr. Dispo said the DCP deals that will ship this year have already been awarded.

"DCP 2022 budget was already awarded last December and is already shipping during the first quarter of 2024. Unless DepEd calls for a rebid, the estimated projected shipments will stay the same," he said.

Meanwhile, PC prices are expected to remain competitive as vendors will try to boost demand, but the actual impact of costs depends more on market dynamics, competitive pressures, and consumer behavior, Mr. Dispo said.

"However, a substantial rebound in both consumer and commercial sectors is unlikely due to ongoing macroeconomic uncertainty dampening demand," he added. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

Google's contemplated mega deal would prompt new fight with regulators

GOOGLE parent Alphabet's contemplated acquisition of marketing software company HubSpot would likely spark opposition from regulators even as many experts agree it would not curb competition, and would require the technology giant to open a new front in its battle with antitrust watchdogs.

Reuters reported last week that Google was mulling an offer for HubSpot, which has a market value of $34 billion. Google has been weighing the antitrust risks of a potential deal and has yet to decide if it will make an offer.

Nearly a dozen antitrust experts and industry analysts said in interviews and analyst notes that it was unlikely that an acquisition by Google would hamper competition.

They said this is because the so-called customer relationship management (CRM) software sector in which HubSpot operates is already served by several major players, including Salesforce, Adobe, Microsoft, and Oracle. Google does not compete in CRM, and the acquisition could make HubSpot a more formidable player thanks to Google's cloud-computing resources, improving offerings and prices for customers, they added.

According to technology researcher Gartner, HubSpot, which focuses on smaller customers, had a 4.9% market share in 2022 in the CRM marketing software industry, while Salesforce and Adobe each held a 15% share.

Yet these experts also said it is very likely that a Google deal for HubSpot would trigger challenges from US and European antitrust regulators, given their growing aversion to technology giants getting bigger through acquisitions.

They added that Google would have to be willing to argue for the merits of the deal in a long court battle, and would need to convince HubSpot to do the same.

"My initial reaction is such a deal would face a pretty tough reception from the antitrust regulators," said Seth Bloom, a former general counsel of the US Senate antitrust subcommittee who now runs his own advisory firm.

Google and HubSpot did not respond to requests for comment.

Google already faces several antitrust challenges, including two lawsuits from the US Department of Justice. One accuses it of abusing its position as online search leader, while the other alleges it is monopolizing the market for digital advertising.

A Department of Justice spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The regulatory terrain for Google is also hostile in Europe. It is among technology firms probed by the European Union (EU) for potential breaches of the new Digital Markets Act, a directive that makes it easier for people to move between competing online services like social media platforms, internet browsers, and app stores.

"This transaction has not been formally notified to the Commission. If a transaction constitutes a concentration and has an EU dimension, it is always up to the companies to notify it to the Commission," said a spokesperson for the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, which has fined Google in the past for anticompetitive practices in online search.

CASH PILE

The intensity of the antitrust scrutiny has dissuaded most technology giants from pursuing mega deals. The last major acquisition completed was Microsoft's $69-billion deal to buy *Call of Duty* maker Activision Blizzard, which the maker of the Xbox console managed to get past Britain's regulators only after it agreed to give up streaming rights for Activision's games. — ***Reuters***

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FDI,
from S1/1

"Increased FDIs could have also partly been brought about by some realized investment commitments made for more than a year already during the various foreign trips of the administration," Mr. Ricafort added.

For the coming months, he said that FDIs could pick up further if rate cuts materialize in the latter half of the year.

BSP Governor Eli M. Remolona, Jr. said that if inflation continues to ease and economic growth turns out weaker than expected, the Monetary Board could cut rates as early as the third quarter.

The BSP expects to record FDI net inflows of $9 billion at end-2024.


REUTERS

RRR,
from S1/1

"However, it will cause inflationary pressures. Perhaps it can be done once inflation has stabilized and there is indication that economic growth figures will fall short of target," he added.

Headline inflation quickened for a second straight month to 3.7% in March from 3.4% in February.

The central bank has said that inflation may temporarily accelerate above the 2-4% target over the next two quarters as upside risks remain.

The BSP expects inflation to average 3.8% this year, higher than its earlier projection of 3.6%. It also raised its risk-adjusted inflation forecast to 4% from 3.9% previously.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Chief Economist Michael L. Ricafort said that the central bank must effectively manage liquidity in the financial system by "properly timing future RRR cuts to eventually align with other Asian countries, to prevent source of inflationary pressures."

Mr. Ricafort said an RRR cut is also still possible this year or next year if economic and monetary conditions are right.

"Reserve requirement cuts would increase banks' loanable funds and would also help reduce intermediation costs, (which) would help stimulate more demand for loans and credit that would increase investments and other economic activities," he added. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

Goal,
from S1/1

Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) Governor Eli M. Remolona, Jr. on Monday said that upside risks to inflation have "become worse," prompting policy makers to adopt a more hawkish stance.

The BSP raised its baseline inflation forecast to 3.8% this year from 3.6% previously. It also hiked its risk-adjusted inflation forecast to 4% for 2024 from 3.9% previously.

"The government could boost spending to shore up growth, but then this will further push up the government deficit this year," Mr. Tsuchiya said.

The DBCC raised its budget deficit ceiling to P1.48 trillion this year from the P1.39-trillion ceiling previously. The deficit as a share of GDP is expected to stand at -5.6% this year from -5.1%.

The government is targeting to collect P4.27 trillion in revenues this year, 11.78% up from P3.82 trillion in actual collection last year. It is aiming to spend P5.75 trillion this year, up from P5.23 trillion last year.

"The upwardly revised deficit ceiling provides fiscal space for growth-oriented spending. Achieving these targets requires strong performance from key sectors and prudent fiscal management to ensure debt sustainability," Mr. Roces said.

Zy-za Nadine M. Suzara, a public finance expert and executive director of the Institute for Leadership, Empowerment, and Democracy, said the government should rein in unnecessary spending to avoid breaching the deficit ceiling.

"The focus shouldn't only be on revenue collections but improving how public funds are allocated and utilized... Part of the reason why the deficit is higher is due to wasteful government spending. It is a result of misprioritization of the budget, weak planning and budgeting linkage, and poor targeting of government programs and projects," she said in a Viber message.

Ms. Suzara said these problems are compounded by "massive allocations for non-strategic and patronage-drive pork projects" and rising unprogrammed appropriations.

Albay Rep. Jose Ma. Clemente S. Salceda, who also heads the House Committee on Ways and Means, said the government would have to ensure fund releases are fast-tracked to ensure economic growth momentum continues.

"The most important room for growth in that aspect is unprogrammed appropriations. The faster the DBCC's members can get loan proceeds, certify the availability of excess funds, or get dividends from government agencies, the better for growth," he said in a Viber message.