

## Study on ferry service plying Metro Manila waterways targeted for completion this year

THE Department of Transportation hopes to complete a feasibility study within the year on the Manila Bay-Pasig River-Laguna Lake (MAPALLA) Ferry System Project.

"This is something that's currently under study. This is part of the administration's initiative to really enhance the Pasig

River and make it really liveable again," Leonel Cray P. de Velez, assistant secretary for planning and project development, told reporters on the sidelines of an Asia and the Pacific Transport Forum on Tuesday.

The MAPALLA ferry system aims to establish a high-capacity, high-frequency and low-carbon ferry system.

The Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Center said the project as envisioned will involve private-sector construction and development of the infrastructure and facilities, include landings and passenger terminals.

The first phase of the project will serve the Pasig and Marikina rivers while the second phase is a possible extension of

ferry services into Laguna de Bay and Manila Bay.

For now, the feasibility study "is currently ongoing with the PPP Center. So we hope to have the study within the year," Mr. De Velez said.

The project could be bid out to interested parties next year, Mr. De Velez said,

adding that the project cost is still being determined.

"To be determined. That is currently what we are doing; it will all stem from demand. The number of passengers will determine the number of ferry stations and boats," he added. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

## Procurement modernization to launch with vehicle e-market

THE Philippine government on Tuesday said it will launch a virtual procurement platform in the second quarter with vehicles the initial product category to be bid on.

The proposed e-marketplace of the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) digitalizes procurement, which is the "biggest bottleneck or hurdle in the budget utilization of our agencies," Secretary Amenah F. Pangandaman said at a Palace briefing.

The platform, which was approved by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. earlier in the day, could cut the procurement process to as fast as three days from the usual 26-136 days, according to Dennis S. Santiago, executive director of the DBM's Procurement Service (PS).

"You have products already in the system then the government procuring entities will have to select from those products and

then already put in an order right there and then," he said.

Procuring entities could save 8% to 10% using the e-marketplace, which will bypass the need for a bids and awards committee, he added.

Ms. Pangandaman said the virtual platform will be among the Government Electronic Procurement System's new features, which also include reverse auctions, advanced data analytics, and system integration.

"We're focusing on the e-marketplace that we will launch around the end of July or early August this year to allow for ease of the procurement in government."

The proposed platform was first unveiled in August as a means of modernizing its procurement system. The Marcos administration has included a bill seeking to amend the 2003 procurement law in its priority legislation.

With the e-marketplace, the government may attract new bidders, especially foreign entities, according to Terry L. Ridon, a public investment analyst and convener of InfraWatchPH.

"But they will have to build their track record and financial capacity as well, in order to bid for higher, more substantial budgets for goods or services," he said via chat.

He said the government will ensure that procurement safeguards remain in place despite digitalization, "ensuring the lowest cost for a particular set of goods or services."

For the initial vehicle procurement, Mr. Santiago said, "We will not be dealing with dealerships. We will be dealing with manufacturers and distributors of motor vehicles," he said, noting that the PS will look at suppliers who can provide volume and low prices.

"Can they deliver on time? Do they have the stock in a certain

period of time — 30 days, 60 days or 34 to 5 days?"

In the first quarter, government entities including local government units procured about 2,000 vehicles worth P8 billion, he said.

The DBM said local government units may choose to procure motor vehicles outside the e-marketplace pending the issuance of a certificate of non-availability.

"If (the items in the) e-marketplace are either expensive or not available, they can go ahead and make their purchases."

Under a letter of instruction adopted by the National Government in 1978 to ensure supplies and materials are procured in the most economical and efficient way, common-use supplies and equipment must be obtained from bulk purchases made by the PS. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

## House panel approves bill expanding road tax to some three-wheeler types

A HOUSE of Representatives committee on Tuesday approved a bill that seeks to extend the road users' tax to include some types of "unconventional" three-wheeled vehicles, with the measure expected to generate P17 billion in revenue for the government over the next four years.

Under House Bill No. 10038, owners of such vehicles would have to pay a road user's tax amounting to P2,080 in 2024, P2,560 in 2025, and P3,040 in 2026. The bill prescribes a 5% increase from the 2026 tax rate for the following years.

The measure sets into law a Land Transportation Office (LTO) memorandum issued four years ago prescribing tax rates on three-wheeled vehicles.

The "non-conventional" category includes three-wheeled single-chassis motor vehicles as well as light and heavy quadricycles.

"Memorandum Circular No. 2020-2227 of the LTO serves as a temporary solution in providing a framework for imposing a road user's tax on non-conventional vehicles which do not fall under current legislation," Rep. Jose Maria Clemente S. Salceda, who chairs the House Ways and Means Committee, said during the committee hearing.

The LTO issued the memorandum in response to the growing number of non-conventional vehicles on the roads with around 1.4 million units purchased since 2020, according to the bill's explanatory note.

The proposed measure harmonizes the tax rate for non-conventional vehicles by charging a flat rate.

"This proposal follows the user-pay principle which recommends that road users must be charged based on the wear and tear they cause to the roads," Department of Finance representative Charmaine B. Odicia told the panel.

Mr. Salceda also questioned the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) during the panel hearing, asking the department why it banned non-conventional vehicles from using national roads.

"Why (did the) DILG ban three-wheeled vehicles from the national roads unilaterally?" Mr. Salceda said.

The imposition of road user's tax on non-conventional vehicles should allow them to use the national roads. "It... disenfranchises a significant share of both users and taxpayer vehicle owners," Mr. Salceda said in a statement. — **Kenneth Christiane L. Basilio**

## Catch landed at fishports up 13% in Q1

THE catch landed at regional fishports (RFPs) rose 13% year on year during the first quarter, according to the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA).

In a report, the PFDA said the landed catch was 134,746.84 metric tons (MT) during the three-

month period, up from 118,419.49 MT a year earlier.

On a quarter-on-quarter basis, fish volumes fell 6.7% compared with the fourth quarter of 2023.

"This January to March 2024 period, the PFDA opened the year with significant numbers in terms of fish unloading and handling," it

said, citing the effects of the closed fishing season on fish volumes.

Republic Act No. 8550 or the Fisheries Code imposes a three-month closed fishing season to repopulate certain fish species. The season typically ends during the first two months of the following year. — **Adrian H. Halili**

## Project TRANSFORM: Building resilience through collaboration

Local government units (LGUs) across the Philippines are commending the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' (DENR) flagship program, Project TRANSFORM, a multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to empower communities to combat climate change and achieve sustainable development.

Project TRANSFORM has been launched in Ormoc City in Leyte; Malimono, San Francisco, and Burgos in Surigao del Norte; and Limay, Mariveles, and Orion in Bataan; Rizal province; and Quezon City.

Ormoc City Mayor Lucy Marie Torres-Gomez, highlighting the city's role as a pilot site, emphasized the program's effectiveness. Having personally experienced the devastation caused by typhoons and floods, Torres-Gomez has made climate change a top priority for her administration, noting that the program provides the city with useful resources like training on disaster management, greenhouse gas accounting, and biodiversity profiling.

"The ultimate gratification," said Torres-Gomez, "is not only seeing the environmental, social and economic improvement in the lives of our constituents, but being recognized by the DENR as a successful case study for LGU-based climate action that can be replicated across the nation."

Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte echoed this sentiment, expressing gratitude for national recognition of their environmental efforts and looking forward to more green, sustainable, and inclusive climate initiatives for QCitizens.

Surigao del Norte Rep. Francisco Jose "Bingo" Matugas II emphasized the project's importance in improving disaster preparedness and sustainable development through public-private partnerships.

Project TRANSFORM's pilot-testing areas include towns like Del Carmen, Burgos, Malimono, and San Francisco, which were severely damaged by Super-Typhoon "Odette," demonstrating how important the project is in helping communities who are at risk.

For her part, Rizal Governor Nina Ynares underscored the transformative impact of Project TRANSFORM on communities, saying, "It would help us based on the



Environment and Natural Resources Secretary **Mari Antonia Yulo-Loyza**

transformation of our communities into a more resilient and sustainable home, where our children, our future, and our dreams can be nourished and nurtured."

"Project TRANSFORM is one concrete application of how local governments may move together, and continuous consultation with the DENR and all the stakeholders in government and in the private sector as well as academia," Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Mari Antonia Yulo-Loyza emphasized.

The project's scope is broad, including land, air, and sea domains, with innovative land inventory systems and inclusivity-driven strategies.

Project TRANSFORM aligns with President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr.'s climate directives and represents a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to climate action and economic prosperity.

In order to ensure a sustainable future for the Philippines, Marcos pushes for cooperation between the public and private sectors, businesses, academic institutions, and foreign partners. He also underlined the alignment of economic and climate change objectives.

"The building blocks of progressive, livable and sustainable communities will never be complete without appropriate and responsible action to mitigate and to adapt to the effects of climate change," he said.

"Collaboration is the key: between and among government offices; between government and the private sector; between industries and the academe; between government and international partners. And most importantly, collaboration between and among our populace."

## SRA preparing to meet US export quota

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said it is undertaking the initial preparations to help the industry meet the US raw sugar export quota.

"Right now, there is a push from the (Private Sector Advisory Council) and from the refiners and millers, and also exporters, to meet the 24,700 metric tons (MT) quota," SRA Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona said in a briefing.

He added that the regulator is readying the initial paperwork to allow the export of sugar, with an initial shipment targeted for June.

"Our exporters have pre-qualified for the program because they participated in Sugar Order No. 2. These will be the same people who will be

involved in the export program if it happens," Mr. Azcona added.

Sugar Order No. 2 called for the voluntary purchase of domestically produced sugar in order to stabilize farmgate prices. Participants were eligible to avail of an allocation for a future import program.

The Philippines last shipped raw sugar to the US market during the crop year 2020-2021, amounting to 112,008 MT of commercial weight raw sugar.

The Philippines has not exported sugar to the US since, due to domestic supply concerns.

During the 2023-2024 crop year, raw sugar production hit 1.92 million MT as of May 5.

The US granted the Philippines an additional export quota of 25,300 metric tons raw value (MTRV) of raw sugar, on top of the 145,235 MTRV quota for the year.

Mr. Azcona said earlier that millers and traders were volunteering to export 30,000 or 60,000 MT of raw sugar to the US.

Last week, PSAC's agriculture group had also recommended importing raw sugar and refining it for export.

"If we ship to other countries who accept refined sugar and they don't specify where the raw sugar comes from, it's possible," Mr. Azcona added. — **Adrian H. Halili**

## ADB supports incentives for nurses settling, working in underserved areas

NURSES must be offered incentives to settle and work in rural and underserved areas, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said.

"With the ongoing escalation of health challenges across Asia and the Pacific, the nursing profession assumes an increasingly pivotal role in meeting the evolving healthcare needs," Ayesha Jamsaid de Lorenzo, health specialist at the ADB's Human and Social Development Sector Office, said in a blog.

She noted that the region's nurses are in short supply and an "overall decline in the dignity of the profession" amid "chronic underinvestment" in education and training, with their numbers not keeping up with population growth.

"Ultimately, investing in the nursing sector not only addresses immediate healthcare needs but also has the potential to create millions of new jobs, spur economic growth, and foster broader socioeconomic development across the region," Ms. De Lorenzo said.

Governments must invest in education and training, increase funding for nursing programs, and align such programs with each population's healthcare needs.

"Increasing nursing sector challenges in the context of the broader macro-trends require health systems

to review the effectiveness of past policies and strategies and adopt new, fit-for-purpose approaches to transform their health workforce from planning, education, deployment, managing, and rewarding workers," she added.

By 2030, the global health sector could face a shortage of 18 million healthcare workers, the World Health Organization estimates.

The Asia-Pacific region in particular faces an increasing demand for nurses amid aging populations, climate vulnerability, emerging diseases, and growing populations.

However, inadequate healthcare policy drives nurses to migrate to countries with more established healthcare systems.

"For example, despite the Philippines being a major provider of nurses abroad, it faces chronic understaffing in its own hospitals due to low pay, lack of tenure, and burnout," Ms. De Lorenzo said.

Filipino nurses are lowest paid among their Southeast Asian peers, according to data aggregator IPPrice. An experienced nurse is estimated to earn 57% less than an equivalently credentialed nurse in Vietnam, it added.

A total of 6,789 Filipino nursing graduates took the US licensure exam in the first three months of the year, Quezon City Rep. Marvin D. Rillo said in a statement.

"We expect a large number of Philippine nursing graduates to persist in pursuing their career aspirations in America and other foreign labor markets as long as we continue to underpay them here at home," said Mr. Rillo, who co-chairs the House Committee on Higher and Technical Education.

Outmigration, which boosts remittances to nurses' home countries, must be balanced with other strategies to help address the source countries' own growing demand for nurses, Ms. De Lorenzo said. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

