

Red, yellow alerts raised over Luzon, Visayas grids

THE Luzon and Visayas power grids were placed on red and yellow alerts on Thursday with more than 3,000 megawatts (MW) of capacity unavailable, according to the National Grid Corp. of the Philippines (NGCP).

In an advisory early Thursday, the NGCP said a red alert was in force over Luzon between 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. and 10 p.m.

Yellow alerts were raised between 12 noon and 1 p.m., 5 p.m. and 6 p.m., and 10 p.m. and 12 midnight.

On Thursday peak demand hit 13,597 MW, exceeding the available capacity of 13,531 MW.

A total of 18 power plants are on forced outage, while three are running derated, leaving 2,525.5 MW unavailable to the grid.

The major plants on forced outage are Sual coal fired power plant 1 with a capacity of 647 MW. Derated plants include Sual coal fired power plant 2 with output of 550 MW and GNPower Dinginin Ltd. with 600 MW.

Yellow alerts are issued when the supply available to the grid falls below a designated safety threshold. If the

supply-demand balance deteriorates further, a red alert is declared.

The Visayas grid was on red alert between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m., 4 p.m. and 6 p.m., and 7 p.m.

A yellow alert was raised between 12 noon and 2 p.m., 4 p.m. and 6 p.m., and 7 p.m. and 10 p.m.

Peak demand was 2,537 MW, just under the available capacity of 2,588 MW.

The grid operator said that a total of 21 power plants are on forced outage, while three are operating at limited capacity, for a total of 553.1 MW unavailable to the grid.

To date, red alerts have been raised over Luzon and Visayas for seven and eight days, respectively.

The NGCP issued yellow alerts on Luzon for 20 days, in the Visayas 22 days, and in Mindanao two days.

In a statement on Thursday afternoon, Manila Electric Co. (Meralco) said it obtained commitments from major customers participating in its Interruptible Load Program to take more than 300 MW of their demand off the grid while they use their own generating facilities.

“We are also ready in the event the implementation of manual load dropping (MLD) or rotating power interruptions will be needed as part of our responsibility to manage the system,” Meralco spokesperson and head of corporate communications Joe R. Zaldivia said.

The Department of Energy (DoE) said that tight power supply conditions have persisted due to the sustained high peak demands in both the Luzon and Visayas grids.

The DoE said that the Energy Regulatory Commission suspended the operations of the Wholesale Electricity Spot Market (WESM) starting at trading intervals 1:05 p.m. for the Luzon grid and 2:05 p.m. for the Visayas grid.

“The operations of the WESM shall remain suspended until issuance of the notice of market resumption by the Commission,” the Energy department said.

With hydroelectric plants in Luzon still constrained, the DoE has called on the other generation plants on forced outage to “ensure that these facilities are back online as soon as possible.” — **Sheldean Joy Talavera**

Discrepancy in PSA rice tally points to ‘overstated’ domestic output — farmers

A DISCREPANCY between rice import and inventory data leaves some 800,000 metric tons of the staple grain unaccounted for, suggesting that domestic rice production may have been overstated, a farmers’ group said.

“The discrepancy of about 800,000 metric tons (MT), equivalent to about 22 days’ supply, is very significant,” Raul Q. Montemayor, national manager of the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) said in a statement on Thursday.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported a national rice inventory of 1.64 million MT in early April, sufficient for 44 days of consumption.

The FFF said that the actual stock levels, when factoring in the Jan. 1 starting inventory, domestic rice output, and import arrivals in the first quarter should be about 2.46 million MT.

“If the PSA data are correct, it means that our palay output has been overstated all along,” Mr. Montemayor added.

“They also imply that our rice supply will tighten in the coming months, especially since El Niño’s impact on the second quarter harvest is expected to be more serious,” he said.

According to a PSA report, palay or unmilled rice production dropped 2% to 4.69 million MT during the first quarter due to El Niño.



PHILIPPINE STAR/MIGUEL DE GUZMAN

“Inexplicably however, rainfed areas appear to have been less affected than irrigated farms despite the lack of rain. The percentage reduction in output and yield in irrigated areas was about double that in areas dependent on rainfall,” he added.

On average yields dropped 1.8%, while harvested area decreased by only 0.13% during the period.

The FFF further called on the PSA to review its data gathering methods and harmonize them with the practices of the Department of Agriculture. — **Adrian H. Halili**

Hog weights falling due to hot weather

HOG WEIGHTS have declined due to the intense heat brought by El Niño, farmers said.

“The performance of our pigs, of course, is also falling. So, instead of being able to grow them to 120 to 150 kilograms live weight, now, maybe, it’s like 90 to 100 (kilos) now,” National Federation of Hog Farmers, Inc. Vice-Chairman Alfred Ng told reporters.

He added that the heat brought about by El Niño has hampered feeding, resulting in lower live weights.

“This is the first time that we experienced this kind of heat. The heat index is through the roof,” Mr. Ng said.

He added that farmgate price for hogs was between 200 to 205 per kilo liveweight.

The government weather service, known as PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), said El Niño-related heat and dry conditions are expected to continue despite the ongoing transition to La Niña.

Mr. Ng said farmers have no choice but to release hogs to the market when they are old enough.

“Even if you feed them, (they) don’t eat much, and they don’t grow. That’s a waste of performance,” he said.

The heat is also affecting the hogs’ resistance to disease, according to Mr. Ng.

“If they don’t eat, the pig’s immune system is also compromised. So, *pag merong...mga* bacterial infections *na pumapasok, natamaan din sila* (they are more vulnerable to bacterial infections),” he said.

Hog production declined 4.3% during the first quarter, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority. Output was around 419.94 thousand metric tons.

He added that hog farmers are continuing their repopulation efforts through the aid of the Integrated National Swine Production Initiatives for Recovery and Expansion program, following major culls to contain African Swine Fever.

The hog numbers “are just holding steady now because the weather is hot,” he said.

“It doesn’t make sense to bring animals into a farm that is too hot because the animals will only suffer,” he added. — **Adrian H. Halili**

Manufacturing held back by difficulty in starting business

By **Justine Irish D. Tabile**
Reporter

MANUFACTURERS could contribute more to the economy if the business environment were more friendly to new companies, the head of a distilling company said.

In a panel discussion at the BusinessWorld Economic Forum on Wednesday, Destileria Limtuaco & Co., Inc. President Olivia Limpe-Aw said manufacturing companies have to deal with many government agencies just to start their businesses.

“There’s really a lot of potential for manufacturing to grow in the Philippines. I think we just need to make it easier for would-be entrepreneurs and existing entrepreneurs to expand,” Ms. Limpe-Aw said.

“There’s already a lot of risk (in manufacturing) so if we make it more conducive and simpler for businesses,

I think there’s no reason why we can’t be bigger than what we are doing now,” she added.

Manufacturing accounted for 19.9% of gross domestic product, compared with the 61.1% share of the service sector in the first quarter, the Philippine Statistics Authority said.

“Definitely, 20% is really not good for us. We should really grow that number and be bigger than that given our domestic market and our potential export market,” she said.

“That is why our Department of Trade and Industry has to really streamline and work with other agencies to provide trade facilitation,” she added.

Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) Deputy Director for Finance and Administration Maria Veronica F. Magsino said that the investment promotion agency believes that manufacturing shows potential for significant growth despite the challenges.



“We at PEZA believe that we have strong pull factors in the country that enable us to attract investments, and because of our huge market potential and favorable business regulations, the Philippines remains an attractive base for offshore activities,” Ms. Magsino said.

She said that recent surveys showed that the Philippines remains an attractive manufacturing hub, particularly for exporting products to Japan.

The surveys, she said, cited the country’s low cost of labor, growing domestic market, tax incentives, and regulatory support as among its advantages.

More digitalization needed to achieve ‘scale’ to compete in global markets

By **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**
Reporter

DIGITALIZATION needs to be expanded further to more areas and more industries to give the Philippines the scale to compete globally, participants at a BusinessWorld Economic Forum panel said on Wednesday.

Mitch Padua, Maya Group chief product officer, said one of those paths to achieving scale is more financial inclusion, which will help drive economic growth.

“It will help build the nation and uplift society. It will bring opportunities and jobs. And at the same time, it will build wealth for our people and our nation,” he added.

“Everyone and everything should be digital right now. And, when you look at different sectors, be it healthcare, agriculture, government, there are still so many industries that need to be digitalized,” Mr. Padua said.

“Until we’re able to digitize everything, we can’t facilitate global commerce, we can’t really bring that scale down to the global markets,” Mr. Padua said.

“Digitalization is a driving force for greater opportunities and equality. It tends to level the playing field,” Lazada Philippines chief executive officer Carlos Barrera said.

The Philippine Statistics Authority estimates that the digital economy’s share of gross domestic product was 8.4% in 2023.

In terms of gross value added, the digital sector grew 7.7% to P2.05 trillion last year.

“What we really need to do is go to the next level. What we really need to do is

to be able to capitalize. A lot of the digital economy right now (involves the) gig economy, provides capability and democratizes things. We need to be able to capitalize on this opportunity,” East West Banking Corp. Chief Executive Officer Jerry Ngo said.

“Filipinos are amazing users of online products and it’s only fair that they also benefit from them. Ten years ago, if you ask anyone, they would hardly have thought of doing business online. It seemed unthinkable,” Mr. Barrera said.

Grab Philippines Country Head Grace Vera Cruz called for a push to bring digital services outside of Metro Manila.

“Over the past years we’ve made significant investments in (going) outside of the National Capital Region and right now it’s becoming a larger part of our business,” she said.

The shift to digital is also now a necessity for businesses post-pandemic.

“All businesses have to go online. So today, there’s pretty much 100% availability of anything,” Mr. Barrera added.

Ms. Vera Cruz also noted that the digital economy should benefit all Filipinos.

“The Philippines is full of digital natives. The question I have is how can we ensure that these digital natives and all of us use technology for the good of everyone,” she said.

“I believe in the Filipino entrepreneurial spirit, that we will work together to solve each problem one by one through digital technology... because of digital technology, no one is left behind. It’s really very important for us to carry one another,” she added.

Google, Temasek Holdings and Bain & Co. said in a report that the Philippines’ digital economy could grow to \$150 billion by 2030.

Microsoft, LinkedIn see rapid growth in use of AI tools like ChatGPT

WORKERS in the Philippines are using artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT in their workplaces, in a phenomenon called “Bring Your Own AI” (BYOAI) by Microsoft Corp. and LinkedIn Corp. in their Work Trend Index 2024 report.

According to the report, 83% of Filipinos are practicing BYOAI to the workplace, against the 78% global and 79% regional average.

“A lot of these people use ChatGPT or others, (which are) out on the internet and open. They’re very accessible and there are free versions,” Microsoft Philippines Chief Executive Officer Peter Maquera said in a briefing on Thursday.

Mr. Maquera said companies should harness worker enthusiasm to achieve a more controlled, disciplined, and responsible approach to AI practices, especially in terms of cybersecurity and data privacy.

Mr. Maquera also sees the young Philippine median age of 25 years as a factor behind the rapid adoption of AI.

“It’s not just Generation Z. It’s not skewed, it’s a very broad spectrum,” Microsoft Philippines Head of PR and Communication Josh Aquino added.

Globally, 85% of Gen Z and 73% of Baby Boomers bring their own AI tools to work.

Overall, the study reported that 86% of knowledge workers in the Philippines use generative AI at work, also higher than

the 83% regional and 75% global average.

Meanwhile, 55% of Filipino leaders worry that their organization lacks a plan to implement AI, compared to the 60% global average.

The Work Trend Index also noted that employees see AI raising the bar for achieving employment, with 70% of Filipino leaders saying they weight AI skills highly in hiring.

Some 68% of Filipino leaders say they would prefer a less experienced candidate with AI skills than a more experienced one without.

“We expect that over the next six years... we will need to upskill ourselves by 68% which means the skills needed to do our same jobs,” LinkedIn Regional Business Head, Growth Markets Atul Harkisanka said.

This aligns with the surge of demand for AI in the hiring market. Mentions in LinkedIn job posts grew 17%, and 142 times more users globally added AI skills to their profiles as of last year.

However, Mr. Harkisanka said six of the top 10 in-demand skills remain soft skills.

Mr. Harkisanka cited the Philippines’ high mobile penetration and proficiency in English.

“We need to collaborate and communicate in teams and put on our creative hats to think when the tools and AI technologies do part of our jobs,” he added. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

JOB VACANCY

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Position: Manager

Role Overview:

- Project release planning, scheduling, cross-functional team coordination including development, testing, and operations then execution of software releases and updates.
- Risk management, change management, Version Control management, Incident management, Environment management, Continuous Improvement, Stakeholder engagement & communication.
- Agile Methodologies: Agile and DevOps practices, including continuous integration, continuous delivery (CI/CD), and iterative development process implementation.
- Solid experience and knowledge in CASA/CC/Payments Project implementation and high level of knowledge in End-to-End development activities and Life cycles.
- Hands on experience in JIRA, Confluence, SharePoint setup, Microsoft office (Excel/PowerPoint) and Project management tools skills.
- Requires leadership and negotiation skills and experience/in-depth knowledge of the business, business requirements analysis and processes.
- Good interpersonal, communication and presentation skills. With supervisory, organizational, and analytical skills.
- Must be able to work independently. Good problem-solving and critical-thinking skills.
- Ability to establish strong collaborative working relationships with cross matrix stakeholders, at all levels, across the organization.

Qualifications:

- 5+ Years experience of Release Management in Fintech domain especially Banking web/app solution releases.
- Onshore/Offshore experience in large transformation solutions with geographically distributed multi country implementation team as Release Manager.