

Luzon corridor expected to create quality manufacturing jobs — Recto

THE proposed Luzon economic corridor is expected to result in the creation of high-quality manufacturing and construction jobs, Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto said.

"The massive transport proj-

ects that will be undertaken along the corridor as well as the opportunities for investment in key economic hubs will create high demand for both skilled and unskilled jobs in the construction and manufacturing sectors," he

said in a statement on Thursday.

"This will be an engine of growth that will further spread the fruits of inclusive development," he added.

The proposed corridor is an initiative of the G7 Partnership

for Global Infrastructure and Investment.

It is also the first of its kind in the Indo-Pacific region, according to the US State department.

The corridor will connect Subic Bay, Clark, Manila, and

Batangas and focus on investments in "high-impact infrastructure projects, including railways, ports modernization, clean energy, semiconductor supply chains, and agribusiness to drive economic growth in each hub."

Mr. Recto said the corridor will be a "prime location for export-manufacturing firms, positioning the Philippines as Asia's top destination for cutting-edge production and innovation." — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

House panel chairman promises RCEF support after rice tariff cut

LEADERS of the House of Representatives said on Thursday that they will continue to support farm modernization despite the potential loss of funding from rice import tariffs, which the government reduced to 15% from 35%.

The Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), which finances industry modernization, is by law the recipient of P10 billion a year from rice import tariffs. RCEF tariff support is authorized by the Rice Tariffication Law of 2019.

"Even at the higher allocation of P15 billion for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund

under the House version of the revised (Rice Tariffication Law), we are already assured it will be funded for next year," Quezon Rep. Wilfrido Mark M. Enverga said in a statement.

Mr. Enverga chairs the House Committee on Agriculture and Food.

The government earlier this week approved a revised tariff program for 2024 to 2028 — which includes a reduction of rice tariffs to 15% from 35%.

The 2019 law liberalized rice imports but charged a 35% tariff on imported grain. The 35% rate originally applied to rice from

Southeast Asia, but the government subsequently applied that rate to rice from any country of origin.

"We will make sure that our rice farmers aren't short-changed in this government effort to bring down the cost of rice," Mr. Enverga said. "So, even if tariff collection falls short for RCEF allocation, the government will provide funds to fill whatever deficiency to ensure sufficient financing for the Rice Fund."

Speaker and Leyte Rep. Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez described the tariff cut as a means of reducing the retail price of the

staple. "The reduction in tariffs will make imported rice cheaper," he said in a briefing.

Well-milled rice prices in late May averaged P48 to P55 per kilo while regular-milled rice sold for P45 to P52, according to Department of Agriculture price monitors.

Mr. Enverga urged the Department of Trade and Industry to monitor the entire rice supply chain to ensure that the benefits of cheaper rice are passed onto consumers and not captured by any one segment of the chain. — **Kenneth Christiane L. Basilio**

Meat imports rise 11% led by pork, chicken

MEAT IMPORTS rose 11.3% during the four months to April, led by increased shipments of pork, chicken, and beef, the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) reported.

The BAI tallied imports of 397 million kilograms of meat during the four-month period, against 356 million kilos the prior year.

Meat imports in April rose 35.6% to 122.74 million kilos.

Shipments of pork increased 17.99% to 193.15 million kilos during the period, accounting for 48.73% of the total.

"Importers are likely positioning in anticipation of higher prices abroad, a weaker peso, as well as lower hog production due to El Niño. It is noteworthy that offal volume decreased, perhaps indicating greater attractiveness of pork meat at the current import duty rate," Meat Importers and Traders Association President Emeritus Jesus C. Cham said in a Viber message.

The National Economic and Development Authority Board has approved a medium-term plan to lower tariffs on agricultural and industrial products. This included the extension of the reduced-tariff regime on pork imports.

Pork tariffs were retained at 15% for shipments within the minimum access volume and 25% for those exceeding the quota.

He added that as most imports are contracted three months in advance, "We will see how in the next few months how it will affect imports," Mr. Cham said.

Spain supplied around 50.9 million kilos of pork, followed by Brazil (44.4 million kilos), and Canada (26.2 million kilos) during the period.

Shipments of chicken totaled 134.47 million kilos in the four months to April. Shipments rose 2.41% and made up 33.9% of meat imports.

Brazil remained the top supplier of chicken with shipments of 70.5 million kilos, followed by the US (46.6 million kilos), and Australia (5.4 million kilos).

"This probably shows the continued demand for lower priced chicken," he said.

Making up 13% of total imports, beef shipments increased 21.9% during the period to 51.53 million kilos.

"The high retail price of pork is pushing consumers toward mid-range beef," he added.

Beef from Brazil amounted to 17.2 million kilos, followed by Australia (16.1 million), and Ireland (5.1 million).

Turkey imports, which accounted for 0.12% of the total, surged to 483 thousand kilos from 89.9 thousand a year earlier.

Meanwhile, duck, lamb, and buffalo meat imports declined during the period.

Buffalo imports, which accounted for 4.17%, fell 9.65% during the four months to April to 16.5 million kilos.

Shipments of duck declined 59.8% to 51 thousand kilos, while lamb imports fell 27.3% to 164 thousand kilos. — **Adrian H. Haili**



PHILIPPINE STAR/MIGUEL DE GUZMAN

PHL lands on ILO shortlist for curbing freedom of association

THE PHILIPPINES is among the 24 countries shortlisted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) for labor violations, specifically ILO Convention 87 or the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize.

The ILO is set to examine the Philippines' compliance with Convention 87 on Friday in Geneva for the 112th Session of the International Labour Conference (ILC).

Speaking virtually from Geneva, labor leader and President of the Federation of Free Workers Jose G. Matula urged the government to respect workers' freedom of association.

"Our country is one of the 24 countries shortlisted for not complying with ILO Conventions. Our focus now is the Philippines' compliance with ILO 87 or the Freedom of Association. Included here is the workers' right to unionize... most of the time, workers can't exercise their freedom of association," he said in a briefing on Thursday.

He cited the so-called red-tagging (alleging Communist links) of union organizers, forced disappearances, the killing of union leaders, and the termination of union members.

Labor groups claim that between 2016 and 2024, 72 workers were killed, 28 detained as political prisoners, 6 abducted, and 53 falsely charged.

Last year, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. signed Executive Order No. 23 or the Reinforcing and Protecting the Freedom of Association and Right to Organize of Workers, which Mr. Matula said was issued without consulting workers.

Joanna Bernice S. Coronation, the Workers' Head Delegate for the Philippines in Geneva, said: "The true test of compliance with freedom of association standards is unionization rates, and they remain stagnant. This is why wages have stagnated and job quality has not improved," she added.

The Philippines was also shortlisted in 2019 and 2023.

Separately, Labor Undersecretary Benjo Santos M. Benavidez, also in Geneva, said the Philippines is counting on the conference to acknowledge the contributions of Filipino healthcare workers and caregivers.

"For the past decade, Filipino medical professionals, teaching personnel, health carers, health allied services workers, medical technicians, home carers, and carers for the elderly and the young have become part of the care economy in foreign employers' families, facilities, and communities," Mr. Benavidez said in a statement on Thursday.

The ILC started on June 3 and will run until June 14.

Cambodia and Laos are the other Southeast Asian countries on the shortlist. — **Chloe Mari A. Hufana**



PHILIPPINE STAR/EDD GUMBAN

MWSS water allocation from NWRB up in first half of June

THE Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) said on Thursday that it received a higher water allocation from the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) for the June 1 to 15 period.

Patrick James B. Dizon, manager with the MWSS water and sewerage management department, said the Metro Manila was allocated 51 cubic meters per second (cms) for the period.

That new water allocation is "2 cms higher from the previous approval of 49 cms" from May 16 to 31, he said.

"The decrease of reservoir elevation is now minimal (around

10-20 cm per day) comparing it to the last months (around 40-50 cm per day). This is expected based from our historical records. This quarter it will start to refill," he said in a Viber message.

Angat Dam is the main source of water for Metro Manila, accounting for about 90% of the capital's potable water.

As of 8 a.m. on Thursday, the water level in Angat Dam was 178.13 meters, lower than the 178.26 meters the previous day.

Last month, the government weather service, known as PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration),

announced the onset of rainy season.

PAGASA has said there was a high probability of La Niña setting in between July and September, which "increases the likelihood of above-normal rainfall conditions in some areas of the country, especially towards end of the year."

Mr. Dizon said that MWSS supply outlook depends on the allocation provided by the NWRB.

"However, considering the projected rainfall in the coming months by PAGASA, we will maximize the inflows from the watershed to... mitigate water service interruptions," he said. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

TikTok being enlisted to push MSME e-commerce adoption

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said on Thursday that it is in discussions with TikTok to explore how to accelerate e-commerce adoption by micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).

In a statement, the DTI said that Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual led a discussion with TikTok representatives to explore potential collaboration to support the development of the digital economy.

"Our collaboration with TikTok represents a pivotal step in propelling e-commerce forward in the Philippines. This partnership is poised to significantly bolster the growth and development of the digital marketplace, benefiting businesses, consumers, and the overall economy," Mr. Pascual said.

"TikTok's influence in empowering local MSMEs is undeniable, and their accelerated adoption of e-commerce is crucial for revolutionizing production sectors, generating high-quality employment opportunities, and

elevating the competitiveness of Philippine products on the global stage," he added.

According to the DTI, TikTok, which was launched in the

Philippines in May 2017, now has 53 million users in the country. There are about 2 million sellers in the TikTok Shop.

In particular, the two parties

discussed collaboration in the establishment of a Content Creator Academy.

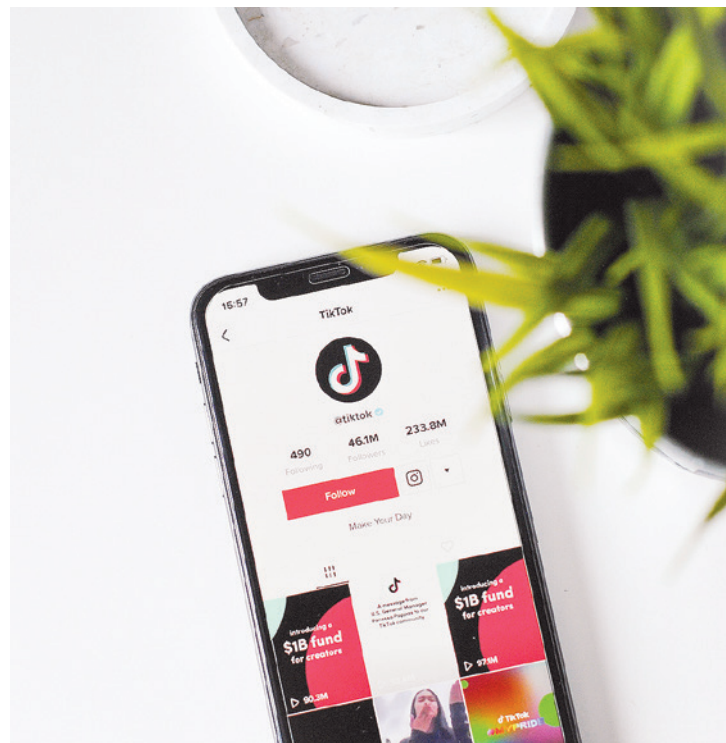
The DTI welcomed TikTok's Safety Enforcement Tool (TSET), a platform that protects consumers.

TSET aims to help verified government agencies and law enforcement representatives request and monitor the progress of a content takedown.

"While the DTI is eager to explore the implementation of TSET, it underscores the critical need for transparent information sharing regarding government reports," the DTI said.

"With the passage of the Internet Transactions Act, all platforms, including TikTok, are expected to adhere to the regulations outlined in the new law," it added.

TikTok has removed 570 items of user-generated content and 337 associated products after the DTI's Fair Trade Enforcement Bureau issued show cause orders over the sale of vape products. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**



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