

# ARTA: Many agencies not ready for flagship-project streamlining

THE Anti-Red Tape Authority (ARTA) said delays in digitizing the permit processes of National Government (NG) agencies and local government units (LGUs) are hindering the streamlining of applications for infrastructure flagship projects (IFPs).

On the sidelines of the signing of the implementing rules and regulations of Executive Order (EO) No. 59 on Tuesday, ARTA Secretary Ernesto V. Perez told *BusinessWorld*: "Right now, not all LGUs and National Government agencies are fully computerized or fully online," Mr. Perez said.

"This is why the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) is very keen on capacitating LGUs to comply with this requirement," he added.

EO 59 tasked ARTA with accelerating the progress of IFPs by simplifying the system for obtain-



**PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., (2nd from left) together with the Department of Information and Communications Technology and Department of the Interior and Local Government, leads the national launching of the Electronic Local Government Unit (eLGU) System and the People's Feedback Mechanism (eReport) in a ceremony at the President's Hall in Malacañan Palace on July 17, 2023.**

ing permits before the projects can proceed.

Mr. Perez also said EO 59 can also help ARTA speed up the take-up of its own electronic business

one-stop shop (eBOSS) system, by obliging NG agencies to also adopt eBOSS in some form.

"To me this is a test case. If we can be successful in the big-ticket

infrastructure projects, we can also apply this even to small businesses," he said.

Asked about the response of the private sector, he said that the Private Sector Advisory Council, Management Association of the Philippines and Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry have been very supportive.

"Even foreign chambers like the British Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines were upbeat," Mr. Perez said.

"Most of our investors are foreigners and they are very optimistic about EO 59," he added.

Signed on April 30, EO 59 aims to eliminate delays in the issuance of licenses, clearances, permits, certifications, or authorizations to ensure timely completion of the IFPs.

According to the National Economic and Development Authority, the government has a pipeline of 185 IFPs valued at P9.54 trillion. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**



## Fish production not seen affected by China threat to detain 'trespassers'

THE Chinese threat to detain fishing boat crews "intruding" on the territory it claims in the West Philippine Sea (WPS) is not expected to have a significant impact on fish production, according to the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR).

"In terms of production, yes, the contribution of the West Philippine Sea is significant... But we don't see the unilateral declaration of China actually having an impact," BFAR spokesman Nazario C. Briguera said in a briefing on Tuesday.

The Chinese government has authorized its coast guard to detain for 60 days without trial any boat crew members found in the disputed waters.

"First and foremost, the Philippines does not recognize this unilateral declaration of China," he said.

"The Philippines will continue to fish in the West Philippine Sea because it is part of our waters, as our exclusive economic zone (EEZ)," he added.

The Philippines continued to protest the illegal presence and actions of Chinese vessels within the EEZ.

Mr. Briguera said BFAR has yet to receive reports of China detaining any boat crews from the Philippines.

"We have not heard of any fishermen being arrested and if there is, it is a new provocation on the part of China and it can be considered a new violation of international law, particularly of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

China's coast guard has repeatedly used water cannons to turn Philippine vessels from entering contested areas within the EEZ, including Scarborough Shoal and Second Thomas Shoal.

Fish caught in the WPS amounted to 201,894.49 metric tons last year, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority. This was up 14.85% from 2022. — **Adrian H. Halili**

## Maxicare officially notifies NPC of data breach

THE National Privacy Commission (NPC) confirmed on Tuesday that it had received a data breach notification from Maxicare Healthcare Corp.

In a statement, the regulator said that the NPC Data Breach Notification Management System received a notification from the health maintenance organization on June 16.

The breach was first made public on Tuesday in a Facebook post by a cybersecurity advocacy known as Deep Web Konek. Deep Web Konek estimated the breach as having compromised 33 megabytes of Maxicare data.

Member details included 16-digit Maxicare card numbers, account types, dates of birth, sex, mobile numbers, and e-mail addresses, it said.

Separately, the NPC said that it has not received any data breach notification from the Maritime Industry Authority (Marina) as of Tuesday afternoon.

"As of 2 p.m. today, there has been no notification from Marina. But they have 72 hours upon knowledge of the breach to notify the NPC and their data subjects," the NPC said.

On June 17, Marina reported attacks on four of its web-based systems and said that it

was working with the Department of Information and Communications Technology to address the breach.

Marina said it does not expect the breach to have compromised the data of seafarers, adding that it hopes to restore normal operations as soon as possible.

Two weeks ago, the NPC also reported data breaches at Robinsons Land, Toyota Motors, and the Philippine National Police. It has yet to be officially notified of any data breach involving membership shopping club S&R. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

## Year-end rice inventory target set at 3.64 million metric tons

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it is aiming for a year-end national rice inventory level of 3.64 million metric tons (MMT), after a reading of just over 2 MMT in early May.

"At the end of the year we are looking at 3.64 MMT, equivalent to nearly 95 days' demand," Agriculture Assistant Secretary for Operations U-Nichols A. Manalo said in a briefing.

The national rice inventory rose 10.3% year on year in early May, while corn stocks were up 6.3%, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.

In a report, the PSA said the rice inventory was estimated at 2.08 MMT, noting declines in volume held by the National Food Authority and households.

Mr. Manalo added that palay or unmilled rice production was estimated at 8.8 MMT during the first half of the year.

The DA said overall palay production could hit 20.44 MMT this year. This was a downgrade from the initial 20.8 MMT projection to account for the possible effects of El Niño and La Niña.

In a separate report, the PSA said that palay production may have dropped 8.4% year on year to 3.89 MMT during the second quarter.

The government weather service, known as PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), has declared El Niño to have ended, and estimated the chances of La Niña setting in between July and September at 69%.

"Historically, the damage is greater during La Niña ... during rains and typhoons (the damage can hit) 500 to 600 thousand MT," Agriculture Assistant Secretary and Spokesperson Arnel V. de Mesa said on the sidelines of the briefing.

La Niña event increases the likelihood of above-normal rainfall in parts of the country, especially towards the end of the year.

He added that water management may be difficult during the La Niña months.

"It is more difficult to control, especially if there is too much water (beyond the capacity of flood-control systems)," Mr. De Mesa said.

La Niña may also lead to increased rice imports.

"It is possible that there will be an increase (in imports) especially with a severe La Niña," he added.

Rice imports amounted to 2.17 MMT as of June 6, according to the Bureau of Plant Industry.

The US Department of Agriculture has upwardly revised its rice import forecast for the Philippines to 4.6 MMT this year, owing to higher consumption and lowered import tariffs.

The National Economic and Development Authority Board has approved a plan to lower tariffs on industrial and farm goods, including the further reduction of rice import tariffs to 15% from 35%, until 2028. — **Adrian H. Halili**



MARK POTTERTON-UNSPASH

## Metro Manila building materials price growth decelerates in May

GROWTH in the retail prices of construction materials in the National Capital Region (NCR) eased in May, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported.

Citing preliminary data, the PSA said the May construction materials retail price index (CMRPI) rose 1%, easing from 1.2% in April and 2.6% in May 2023.

In the first five months, growth in the NCR CMRPI averaged 1%.

The PSA attributed the easing in CMRPI growth to the slowdown in price growth of tinsmithry materials, whose sub-index rose 2.2% in May from 2.6%

in April. Tinsmithry materials account for 17.22% of the CMRPI.

Prices of painting materials and related compounds rose 1.6%, easing from 2.2% in April.

Of the seven commodity groups, only the index of carpentry materials posted stronger growth of 0.4% in May, compared with 0.3% in April.

Prices growth of all other categories were steady in May, including electrical materials (0.9%), miscellaneous construction materials (0.8%); plumbing materials (0.3%); and masonry materials (-3%). — **Andrea C. Abestano**

## Master plan contract for 10 ports could be awarded next month

THE Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) said it may award the master plan contract for developing 10 ports next month.

"Expected award of the contract is before the end of July 2024, after completion of the detailed evaluation of the technical proposal and opening of the financial proposal," the PPA said in a statement on Tuesday.

According to the PPA, only two of the initial five consultancy firms submitted bids for the feasibility study and development of the master plan for the 10 ports.

The PPA said after the screening conducted on June 5, consultants Science and Vision for Technology, Inc. and Syconsult, Inc. submitted a bid as a joint venture, which was declared eligible to bid for the project.

The eligible bidder will have until July 4 to submit a technical proposal for the P32.2-million contract.

The study aims to find ways to improve cargo movement and meet the increasing port services required for agro-industrial development.

The PPA identified the ports as Davila, Pasuquin, Ilocos Norte; Puerto Galera, Oriental Mindoro; Taytay, Palawan; Buenavista, Guimaras; San Carlos, Negros Occidental; Dumaguete, Negros Oriental; Lazi, Siquijor; Catbalogan, Samar; Zamboanga; and Cagadiano, Dinagat Islands.

The study is due one year after the winning bidder receives the notice to proceed. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**



**SOUVENIR ITEMS on display as tourists enjoy sight seeing at the world heritage Kalye Crisologo in Vigan, Ilocos Sur.**

PHILIPPINE STAR/ KJ ROSALES

## Tourism share of GDP rises to 8.6% in 2023

THE tourism industry accounted for 8.6% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023, up from 6.4% a year earlier, due to the post-pandemic reopening, the Philippine Statistics Agency (PSA) reported on Tuesday.

Citing preliminary data, the PSA said the industry's direct gross value added, which measures the value generated from various tourism-related activities, was P2.09 trillion in 2023, against the revised P1.41 trillion a year earlier.

Tourism-related spending by nonresidents grew 87.7% last year to P697.46 billion.

Spending by domestic tourists, including expenditures of nonresidents traveling domestically or as part of an international trip, expanded to P2.67 trillion in 2023, up 72.3%.

Spending on accommodation grew 143.2% to P347.97 billion, followed by food and beverage spending, which rose 131.4% to P568.35 billion.

Workers employed by the industry totaled 6.21 million last year, up 6.4%, and accounted for 12.9% of the overall workforce, the PSA said.

Leonardo A. Lanzona, who teaches economics at the Ateneo De Manila, cited the phenomenon of "revenge consumption" after the pandemic.

"What is more revealing is how the Philippines compares to its ASEAN neighbors. The Philippines in fact pales in comparison to these other countries whose international arrivals have always exceeded ours... with many citing poor

infrastructure and lack of smart ecosystems as the reasons for us to lag behind," he said via chat.

In 2023, Philippines attracted 5.45 million international visitors, well below the numbers posted by Thailand (23 million), Vietnam (12.6 million), and Indonesia (11.68 million).

Issues like overdevelopment in coastal areas, pollution, the degradation of natural attractions, and security concerns hamper the expansion of the tourism industry, Mr. Lanzona said.

"The general perception that we continue to be a poor country can make the Philippines less attractive compared to our more well-off neighbors," he added.

To expand the industry's contribution to the economy, Foundation for Economic Freedom President Calixto V. Chikiamco called for more investment in tourism-related infrastructure, improving law and order, and the relaxation of visa policies.

"The Philippines does have immense natural and cultural appeal, so with improved infrastructure, security, environmental protection and marketing, the tourism sector has great untapped potential to grow significantly," Mr. Lanzona said. "Hence, the problem stems really from mismanagement."

The government is aiming for 7.7 million foreign visitors this year. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**