

MWSS wants Angat water share retained at 52 cms

THE Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) said it is seeking to retain its water allocation at 52 cubic meters per second (cms) for July.

“Our request was 52 cms during our meeting last Monday with the Angat TWG (Technical Working Group),” Patrick James B. Dizon, manager of the MWSS

water and sewerage management department, said on Thursday via Viber.

The request will be presented during the board meeting with the National Water Resources Board next week for its approval, he said.

For June 1-15, the MWSS was given a water allocation of 51

cms, rising to 52 cms for June 16 to 30.

Angat Dam is the primary water source for Metro Manila, providing approximately 90% of the capital’s potable water.

As of early Thursday, the water level at Angat Dam was 175.90 meters, against 175.55 meters the previous day.

Mr. Dizon said the average daily decrease in the water level was around 14 centimeters since June 1.

“Looking at the historical elevation of Angat Reservoir for the second half of the year, the reservoir will start to refill. We need this refill in preparation for next year,” he said. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

Travel, tourism seen exceeding 2019 GDP contribution this year

THE Philippine travel and tourism industry is expected to surpass its pre-pandemic performance with an over P5.4 trillion contribution to the economy in 2024, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) said.

Citing its 2024 Economic Impact Research, WTTC said that 2024 will be a record-breaking year for the industry’s economic contribution, job generation, and visitor spending.

“According to the latest data, the sector’s contribution to the national economy is set to surpass P5.4 trillion this year, marking almost 25% year-on-year growth and soaring 7.1% above the previous 2019 peak,” the WTTC said.

It said travel and tourism currently represented 21.3% of gross domestic product (GDP).

“This data also signals a remarkable year for employment, growing beyond the 2019 peak to surpass 9.5 million jobs, or 20% of the national workforce,” it added.

The WTTC said international and domestic visitor spending is expected to beat records in 2024, exceeding 2019 levels by 5.7% and 1.8%, respectively.

“The remarkable progress of the Philippines’ travel and tourism sector highlights the government’s dedication, putting it at the forefront of its national agenda and continuing to improve infrastructure,” WTTC President and Chief Executive Officer Julia Simpson said.

“This unwavering commitment has not only driven economic growth but also enhanced the global standing of the Philippines as a top travel destination,” she added.

In the next decade, the WTTC forecasts Philippine travel and tourism to increase its annual GDP contribution to P9.5 trillion, or nearly 22% of the economy.

Meanwhile, employment in the industry is projected to exceed 11.9 million by 2034.

Travel and tourism accounted for P4.34 trillion in economic output last year, 14% below 2019 levels.

In 2023, the industry created more than 608,000 jobs, bringing the total to 9 million, also still below 2019 level.

“Domestic demand... was sluggish, while the late reopening of borders resulted in a slower than expected recovery last year,” the WTTC said.

Last year, international and domestic spending grew 104.2% and 83.4% to P630 billion and P2.9 trillion, respectively.

As a region, WTTC expects travel and tourism in Southeast Asia to grow by 20.6% to P21 trillion this year, accounting for 9.7% of the region’s economy, while jobs are expected to reach over 42.4 million.

Although domestic visitor spending is expected to surpass 2019 levels and grow 15.8% to P10.3 trillion in the region, international spending is seen to grow 33.2% to P8.6 trillion, still below 2019 levels.

“WTTC is forecasting that travel and tourism across the region will continue to grow over the next decade, with the GDP contribution set to reach almost P36 trillion,” WTTC said.

“Jobs are forecast to exceed 56.5 million, creating more than 14 million new jobs,” it added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Pre-shipment inspection regime ordered for agricultural imports

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it will require pre-shipment inspections for selected countries’ farm products that are due to be shipped to the Philippines.

“What we will do is release an administrative order (AO), requiring pre-shipment inspection. But we will choose countries,” Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. told reporters late Wednesday.

He added that the administrative order will be implemented in the next three months.

Mr. Laurel said pre-shipment inspections are necessary as the Philippines still lacks the means to inspect imported farm goods at the border.

The DA’s cold examination facilities in agriculture (CEFA) are intended to ensure imported agricultural goods are disease-free and to minimize the risks from smuggling.

Imported agri-fishery products need to undergo examination by food regulators overseeing the animal, plant, meat, and fisheries industries.

He added that the DA has four planned facilities in Bulacan, Manila, Subic, and General Santos.

The Angat, Bulacan facility is set to start operations during the first two months of next year.

“The one in Angat was done by a private company... maybe by January or February next year, it will be running,” Mr. Laurel said.

The DA signed a memorandum of agreement with Pacific Roadlink Logistics, Inc. to construct the facility in Bulacan.

He added that the three other facilities will start construction by September, taking about a year to complete. — **Adrian H. Halili**

New cybersecurity tech needs to drive policy evolution, experts say

CYBERSECURITY POLICY must evolve with the emergence of new technology, experts said, noting also the importance of automatic reporting from organizations experiencing data breaches.

“The policy should evolve with the emergence of new cybersecurity technology because it affects the landscape as

well,” ePLDT Enterprise Field CISO and Head of Enterprise Consulting Practice Alex Bernardino said during a panel discussion at a BusinessWorld Insights event on June 25.

He noted the PLDT network threats have evolved from denial-of-service attacks to ransomware during the pandemic.

National Privacy Commission Director of Data Security and Compliance Office Aubin Arn R. Nieva cited the progress made in legislation, such as the Cybercrime Prevention Act, the Data Privacy Act, the Consumer Protection Act, and the Internet Transactions Act.

“As you remember, back in 2012, our congressmen in Batasan Hills rushed to pass the Data Privacy Act because overseas investors did not want to invest in the Philippines because we had no data privacy regime here,” he said.

Mr. Bernardino expressed support for more “ironclad legislation” like the Cybercrime Prevention Act and the Data Privacy Law.

“We have to implement it strictly... I think that’s the missing piece now,” he said, noting that violators must be made an example of.

On June 21, the National Bureau of Investigation arrested a *Manila Bulletin* data security officer who admitted to hacking about 93 websites of government agencies, private companies, and overseas organizations.

The hacks involved the website of the Armed Forces

of the Philippines, the mail server of the National Security Council, and an Army recruitment website.

Other government websites that were recently compromised include those of the Maritime Industry Authority, while the

list of private-company victims included Jollibee Foods Corp., Maxicare Corp., and Toyota Motor Philippines Corp.

“It should not be only The National Privacy Commission that discloses the breach to the public. It was the duty of Maxicare in the first place to disclose that and inform their members that were affected,” Information and Communications Technology Assistant Secretary for Legal Affairs Renato A. Paraiso said.

Mr. Nieva said organizations that were breached should not be stigmatized and instead held up as case studies for future learning.

“The learnings should become part of our best practices,” he said.

Asked about making cybersecurity less daunting for small business owners, Mr. Nieva said the solution involves a solid privacy management program.

Mr. Nieva said negligent employees not observing the correct procedures in using company infrastructure could expose the company to threats and risks.

He also cited the need for data protection measures.

“Are we going to use artificial intelligence, machine learning, blockchain technology, neural networks in the pursuit of the company’s purpose?” he added, citing the risk posed by the technologies to client data.

“Artificial intelligence tunnels into the data you collect. The golden rule is, do not collect if you cannot protect,” he said. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

Philippine content creation industry urged to address gaps in technology, training

By Justine Irish D. Tabile Reporter

THE content creation industry is being hampered by shortcomings in technology adoption and professional training, technology-focused media company Hepmil Philippines said.

Hepmil Philippines General Manager Erwin Razon told *BusinessWorld* via e-mail that such shortcomings are limiting the quality and competitiveness of the industry.

“There is a notable gap in access to advanced technology and professional training, which limits the quality and competitiveness of content produced by local creators,” he said. “Additionally, many creators struggle with securing sustainable income and protecting their work from piracy and unauthorized use,” he added.

He said that the Philippines will need a conducive policy environment that will encourage investment in the creative industries and protect intellectual property rights.

Mr. Razon said nevertheless, the outlook for the content creation and influencer industry remains positive, amid rising demand for localized and culturally relevant content.

“Furthermore, the expansion of digital infrastructure and increased internet penetration are critical, enabling content creators to reach wider audiences,” he said.

“Our recent investments in a new production hub and content programs illustrate our commitment to capitalizing on these opportunities, aiming to foster a vibrant ecosystem for content creators,” he added.

Hepmil Philippines recently opened a 400-square-meter production hub in Makati that features studios, workstations, lounges, and a wardrobe department, with plans to integrate livestreaming capabilities.

“This new production hub responds to the growing demand for virtual production services. As highlighted by the 2024 Global Digital Report, 64.5% of consumers do online brand research and are becoming more selective about online content,” it said.

“With its expanded capabilities, Hepmil Philippines aims to lead in innovative content creation, ensuring that brands can effectively engage their audiences with captivating and relevant content,” it added.

Aside from the hub, Hepmil Philippines also launched a new show, “We The Future,” a comedic documentary series featuring stories and voices from various Filipino communities.

Hepmil Philippines runs the digital platform PGAG and currently has 500 content creators in its network.

Potential RE adopters urged to weigh benefits of incentives

THE Department of Trade and Industry said manufacturers considering renewable energy (RE) investments stand to benefit from incentives apart from realizing power savings.

“We are encouraging these companies that are setting up their factories in the Philippines (to invest in RE),” Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual told reporters in a recent briefing.

Mr. Pascual touted an incentive that allows RE investors to recover 50% of the cost of their investment.

He said the cost argument is also compelling for companies setting up their own power-generating facilities.

“Some companies have already done that; some Japanese companies have set up solar farms, and they are able to get their own supply of power,” Mr. Pascual said.

“With the incentive, they are able to recover the cost of the investment over the years,” he added.

Mr. Pascual said the government will also support such companies with manpower development to

ensure a workforce that can function with new technology.

“Since we are inviting so many technology companies, we need to keep up with the training, education, and development of our workforce,” he said.

“We have to strengthen our education system so that we are able to encourage our students to go into STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and information technology courses,” he added.

According to Trade Undersecretary and Board of Investments

(BoI) Managing Head Ceferino S. Rodolfo, at least two project proponents are interested in the RE incentive.

“There is one in telco and another one in manufacturing — specifically pharmaceuticals,” Mr. Rodolfo said.

Currently, only one project has applied with the BoI for the incentives attached to installing RE facilities. This involves a 10-megawatt solar energy facility in which P500 million will be invested. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Building permit approvals decline in 2023

APPROVED building permits fell 3.4% in 2023, reversing the 4.2% growth recorded in 2022, though the value of overall projects rose, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported on Wednesday.

Building permits totaled 163,663, covering 39.54 million square meters of floor area.

Projects covered by the approved permits were valued at P457.36 billion, up 6%.

“Although permits fell in 2023, the increase in construction cost boosted the value of building construction. Also, there were more big-ticket building construction projects that boosted value,” Cid

L. Terosa, senior economist at the University of Asia and the Pacific, said in an e-mail.

Permits for residential projects, which accounted for 67.5% of the totals, fell 8.7%. These permits were valued at P200.85 billion.

Of the residential permits, single homes accounted for 86% (valued at P146.08 billion), followed by apartment homes (12.6%, P32.25 billion), and duplex or quadruplex homes (1.2%, P2.44 billion).

Meanwhile, nonresidential permits increased 18.6% year on year to 35,162. Nonresidential permits accounted for 21.5% of approved building permits and were valued at P219.56 billion.

Approved commercial construction applications accounted for 70.7% of all nonresidential permits, totaling 24,851 permits, up 20.9% year on year. These permits were valued at P108.08 billion.

Institutional and industrial permits rose 10.2% and 23% to 5,325 and 2,835, respectively.

Permits for additions to an existing building rose 16.8% to 5,872 and were valued at P5.44 billion while alteration and repair permits totaled 12,097, down 11.4%. They were valued at P31.51 billion.

Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon) had the most approved building projects, making up 24.6% of the total with 40,332 per-

mits, followed by the Central Visayas (18,631), and Central Luzon (18,583).

Mr. Terosa expects the number of permits to continue to decrease this year while the value of building projects rises.

“I think that this trend will persist, but there could be an increase in permits and value once interest rates are cut,” he said.

The PSA said that construction statistics are compiled from the copies of original application forms of approved building permits as well as from the demolition and fencing permits collected every month by the agency’s field personnel from the offices of local building officials. — **Karis Kasarinlan Paolo D. Mendoza**

PHL, Indonesia adopt e-Phyto certificate system, BoC says

THE Bureau of Customs (BoC) said that the Philippines and Indonesia have adopted an electronic Phytosanitary (e-Phyto) certificate system to ensure the security of the trade in agricultural goods within the region.

“This initiative not only enhances trade efficiency but also strengthens economic ties among member states, paving the way for a more unified and prosperous ASEAN region,” Customs Commissioner Bienvenido Y. Rubio said in a statement.

The e-Phyto certificate is the electronic version of a phytosanitary import certificate, which

certifies that agricultural goods are pest and disease-free.

The exchange was done through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Single Window (ASW). The Philippines joined the regional platform in 2019, which connects each country’s National Single Window (NSW) to transact and exchange customs documents.

“The BoC e-Phyto Portal also has access to the e-Phyto certificates issued by the Department of Agriculture - Bureau of Plant Industry, the National Plant Protection Organization (NPPO), as

well as to e-Phyto certificates issued by the respective NPPOs of exporting countries,” the BoC added.

The Philippines and Thailand hope to begin their exchange by the end of the month.

The BoC said that it will continue to “collaborate with ASEAN counterparts to support its priority program on conducting the study of the new generation of the ASW.”

It also said it will continue to pursue exchanges with other trade partners and work on the implementation of new customs documents and forms. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsen**