

New Clark City to get EV-capable service station

THE Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) said it signed a deal with Double 11 Properties Corp. to establish a service station capable of recharging electric vehicles (EVs) on a one-hectare site in New Clark City.

"This partnership signals another milestone in the development of New Clark City as a smart and green metropolis, one that is ready for a future filled with

electric vehicles and eco-friendly cars," BCDA President and Chief Executive Officer Joshua M. Bingcang said in a statement on Wednesday.

"This is also a step towards our '15-minute city' vision for New Clark City, where basic amenities and facilities are easily accessible within walking or cycling distance," he added.

Under the contract, Double 11 will be investing at least P100

million for the development of the facility, which will include charging terminals for EVs, a mixed-use commercial complex, and retailers.

"With this engagement, we expect economic benefits, such as additional revenue for the government, employment opportunities for local residents and communities, and most importantly, increased foot traffic in New Clark City,"

BCDA Vice-President for Business Development Mark P. Torres said.

Double 11 also expressed interest in an additional P100-million investment for a phase 2 expansion on an additional hectare.

The service station is expected to house over 20 retailers and office tenants and is estimated to service 200,000 motorists annually. It is projected to create 500 direct jobs and generate

P100 million in revenue for the government.

"With BCDA, we are bringing our international brand partners here to provide excellent service to motorists," Ren Siccion, a Double 11 business development manager, said.

"Using our experience and expertise, we will not only be developing a super station but also a lifestyle development where people can park, dine, shop, and work," he added.

Double 11's other businesses are zoos and theme parks, and industrial parks.

Its projects include Northwalk Clark along M.A. Roxas Highway, Shell of Asia and Caltex Stations along the North Luzon Expressway, Northwalk 1 and 2 in San Fernando, Pampanga, and the PTT Station along the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Trade diversification strategies filtering down to PHL SMEs

SMALL- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are beginning to embrace the strategy of diversifying their global vendor networks, US financial services company Payoneer Global, Inc. said.

In a study, Payoneer said 63% of 252 surveyed Philippine respondents consider it important to diversify their supply chains to mitigate disruption in the flow of goods.

The strategy also carries with it the side effect of possibly opening the door to overseas markets, Payoneer said.

"The opportunity for SMEs to unlock growth from accessing global demand is enormous," Payoneer Chief Financial Officer Bea Ordóñez said.

"Our research shows that SMEs continue to expand their businesses across borders, extending their reach into new markets and trade corridors," she said.

"To do this, SMEs are embracing digitization and innovation and working with a range of technology-enabled vendors and partners who can empower and facilitate their global ambitions," she added.

"This is part of a larger trade diversification trend, where ongoing trade tensions between China and North America have made doing business more complicated," Payoneer said.

Some 86% of Philippine SMEs said they want to globalize but assign a high priority to employing local talent to support the Philippine economy.

Philippine SMEs said globalization provides them with a range of benefits, including innovation (62%), access to high-quality supply (57%), access to vendors (54%), financial performance (54%) and control over pricing (51%). — **Aaron Michael C. Sy**

Korean education-technology firm to set up remote-work agency business in Philippines

SOUTH KOREA's Tella, an English-language education technology company, said it is looking to set up a remote-work agency for workers in the Philippines.

"Although we've had made some success in the mission and the business side, we're now looking into the next phase of diversifying our business portfolio," Tella Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer Yuha Jin told *BusinessWorld* on the sidelines of the United Nations Development Programme's Youth Co:Lab forum last week.

Founded in 2014, Tella initially sought to provide English online tutoring jobs to Filipinos and Ugandans. It currently serves 100,000 users in 60 countries.

The expansion involves farming out remote work to users in the two countries to better serve clients in various time zones, Ms. Jin said.

"If we're just focused on one industry (English language tutoring), there's a limit to how many jobs that we can directly create. Whereas, if we're the agency or the platform to connect the talent to a variety of businesses, then there can be way more opportunities," Ms. Jin said.

Tella's target is to support up to a million jobseekers on its platform, Ms. Jin added.

It is also looking to establish a startup accelerator to help fund, mentor and link Filipino and Ugandan digital and IT (information technology) startups with foreign investors.

"Young people have even better skill sets these days," she said. "But in terms of entrepreneurship, like having industry insight or having network or connections, it doesn't come at a young age."

The Philippines, with one of the youngest working populations in the

East Asia-Pacific, has a 25-year window to utilize the benefits of having an agile workforce, the World Bank has said. This will require investing in health, skills and knowledge to maximize the potential economic benefits.

"Investors or government need to know where and who to invest in — the right people and right industries," Ms. Jin said.

Gerd Trogemann, manager of the Regional Programme and Global Policy Network at the UNDP's Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, cited the need to invest in youth-led startups.

"It is important to think about youth because it tells you where you need to make adjustments in terms of policy, regulations, and in creating opportunities for the next generation," he told *BusinessWorld* separately. "Policy is not made in a vacuum; it needs to be applied in reality." — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

Budget, from S1/1

"Tax and fiscal reform measures would be realistically needed to bring down the country's debt-to-GDP ratio to below the 60% international threshold, helping sustain the country's relatively favorable credit ratings," Mr. Ricafort said.

The government should intensify tax collections before considering new tax laws, he added.

"Priority would be to intensify tax collections from existing tax laws and encourage compliance with the payment of correct taxes," Mr. Ricafort said. "Last option would be new and higher taxes, especially if inflation stabilizes in the coming months and years." — **Kenneth Christiane L. Basilio**

Broadband, from S1/1

BMI said its forecasts reflect a consistent uptake for fiber broadband among households in metro and suburban areas.

"Execution and project management will be key for the success of the PDIP to boost stronger fiber uptake among Philippine-based households. By extensively co-financing last-mile area roll-out, wholesale network providers and internet service providers (ISPs) may be encouraged to further decrease prices on fiber bundles though at the expense of average revenue per user (ARPU) figures," it said.

BMI said fiber broadband providers that also own the infrastructure are tweaking their strategies to boost uptake.

"Consumer interest in fiber is evident and grounded in sizable mobile data traffic increases," it said.

For example, it cited Globe Telecom, Inc.'s mobile data traffic which grew to 1,600 exabytes (EB) in the fourth quarter of 2023 from 836 EB in the first quarter of 2021.

"That said, consumers have shown that they are not immediately able to (consistently) buy in long-term contracts with prices around P1,500 (\$25.5)."

BMI noted that there have been efforts to introduce low-cost fiber offerings, such as from Globe, PLDT Inc., and Converge ICT Solutions, Inc.

"Renewed government efforts to fiberize the Philippines' last-mile areas will be beneficial for the players with a large risk-seeking stance. Regardless, wider digital transformation ambitions and the attractiveness of the Philippines' ICT market are set to benefit from a stronger nationwide backbone and last-mile network density."

Meanwhile, National Campaigner of digital advocacy group Digital Pinoys Ronald B. Gustilo said that the PDIP will help has-

ten the government's efforts to provide internet connection to disadvantaged areas.

"We are hoping that this will also pave the way for the decrease in internet rates and the improvement of the quality of connectivity services," he said in a Viber message.

Sam Jacoba, founding president of the National Association of Data Protection Officers of the Philippines, said that upgrading the country's digital infrastructure is the "foundation for the country to remain competitive in the global digital economy."

"It is crucial that the investments will strategically target areas or segments in the country that will bolster digital economic activities, while bridging the digital divide," he said in a Viber message.

Mr. Jacoba said there must also be a focus on digital skills training and enablement. Digital content creation initiatives should also be targeted to growth areas such as artificial intelligence, he said.

"Hopefully, the digital economic impact of this loan-funded project will eventually pay for itself through the new digital businesses that it will create," he added.

Mr. Gustilo also called for the strict implementation of Executive Order No. 32, which streamlines the processes for the construction of telecommunications and internet infrastructure. This would cut red tape and ensure the delivery of internet services to geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas, he added.

The World Bank earlier reported that household penetration for fixed broadband in the Philippines stood at 33% in 2022.

The cost of fixed broadband was more than four times more expensive than Malaysia and Vietnam and more than double the Southeast Asian average, it added.

AI, from S1/1

"We should have done that earlier," he told reporters on the sidelines of the launch. "Just like any disruptive innovation, if you prepare well, it should be a boon. [If] you don't prepare well, it becomes a bane."

In 2023, the Philippines ranked 65th out of 193 countries in the Government AI Readiness Index by Oxford Insights.

The NEDA chief said that integrating AI in education will equip Filipinos with the necessary skills to "capitalize on emerging technologies, giving the country a competitive advantage, attracting more investments, and fueling economic growth."

"By integrating generative AI, the Philippines can take a leading role in creative industries, software development, and other high value-adding services, further boosting our economic potential."

Mr. Balisacan also said that the proposed Open Access in Data Transmission Act or the Konektadong Pinoy Bill would help the Philippines maximize the benefits of AI. The House of Representatives approved the bill in 2022, while a counterpart bill is still pending before a Senate committee.

"By promoting access to affordable and better-quality internet services, this legislation will allow the country to harness the full benefits of AI," he added.

Mr. Pascual said the DTI is also spearheading the formulation of a national AI governance framework in partnership with the Analytics Association of the Philippines. It is targeted for completion by the end of 2024.

"The ethical use of AI must be addressed. In public policy, the rapid diffusion of AI innovations calls for governance frameworks balancing AI innovation and responsible adoption," Mr. Pascual said.

The National AI Governance Framework will establish the approved scope and limitations of what developers and stakeholders can do, he said.

UPPER MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRY

Meanwhile, gross national income (GNI) per capita should grow by at least 6.7% this year to ensure the Philippines becomes an upper middle-income country by next year, Mr. Balisacan said.

"We are now \$4,230 [in terms of GNI]. So, you only need 6.7% (GNI) growth," he told reporters. According to the World Bank's latest income classification data, the Philippines remained a lower middle-income country with a GNI per capita of \$4,230 in 2023.

To become an upper middle-income country, the Philippines needs to have an estimated GNI per capita of \$4,516 to \$14,005, according to the World Bank.

Despite this, Mr. Balisacan said that achieving upper middle-income status by late 2025 or early 2026 is still "within reach" as the government is projecting 6-7% economic growth this year.

The World Bank has classified the Philippines as a lower middle-income country since 1987. It earlier said the country would likely cross the upper middle-income threshold by 2026. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz and Justine Irish D. Tabile**

8990 HOLDINGS, INC.

11th Floor, Liberty Center
104 HV Dela Costa Street, Salcedo Village, Makati City

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING OF STOCKHOLDERS

Please be advised that the Annual Meeting of the stockholders of **8990 HOLDINGS, INC.** (the "Company") for the year 2024 will be conducted online on 29 July 2024 at 11:00 a.m. Stockholders who wish to participate in the proceedings may do so by signing on at the following URL address: <https://registration.8990holdings.com>.

The Chairman and Chairman Emeritus will conduct the online meeting from the principal place of business of the Company at the 11th Floor, Liberty Center, 104 HV Dela Costa, Salcedo Village, Makati City. The Corporate Secretary will likewise participate in the online meeting from Makati City.

The following shall be the agenda of the meeting:

1. Call to Order
2. Certification of Notice and Quorum
3. Approval of the minutes of the last stockholders' meeting held on 31 July 2023;
4. Presentation and Adoption of the President's Report and Annual Report, Adoption of the Amended Audited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2022, and Approval of the Audited Financial Statements for the year 2023;
5. Ratification of all acts of the Board of Directors and Management since the last annual stockholders' meeting held on 31 July 2023;
6. Election of the Directors (including the Independent Directors) of the Company for the ensuing fiscal year;
7. Appointment of the external auditor of the Company for the fiscal year 2024; and
8. Adjournment

The Minutes of the 2023 Annual Meeting of Stockholders is available at the website of the Company, www.8990holdings.com, and will be appended to the Information Statement that will be distributed or disseminated to all stockholders as of the record date. An electronic copy of the Company's Information Statement, Management Report, SEC Form 17-A and other pertinent documents are available on the Company's website and the Philippine Stock Exchange Electronic Disclosure Generation Technology (PSE EDGE).

The Board of Directors has set 01 July 2024, as the record date for the determination of stockholders entitled to notice of and to vote at the Annual Stockholders' Meeting.

For the welfare and convenience of the Company's shareholders, the Company will dispense with the physical attendance of stockholders at the meeting. Consequently, attendance will only be by remote communication, with voting being accomplished *in absentia* through the Company's online voting system at <https://registration.8990holdings.com> or through the Chairman of the meeting, as proxy. In compliance with Section 15 of Mem. Circ. No. 6, series of 2020, the Chairman who is the presiding officer of the meeting shall call the meeting in Makati City, the city where the principal office of the Company is located.

Stockholders intending to participate by remote communication should pre-register with the Company via HOUSE's Electronic Registration and Online-voting (HERO) System at URL address: <https://registration.8990holdings.com> during the given registration period and in any case, no later than 28 July 2024.

Following such pre-registration and subject to validation procedures, stockholders may vote either electronically via the HERO System, no later than 29 July 2024 or submit duly accomplished proxies on or before 19 July 2024 to the Office of the Corporate Secretary at Picazo Buyco Tan Fider & Santos Law Office, Penthouse, Liberty Center, 104 H.V. Dela Costa Street, Salcedo Village, Makati City and/or by email to cpalmagil@picazolaw.com or molizarondo@picazolaw.com. Validation of proxies is set on 24 July 2024 at 2:00 p.m.

The detailed rules and procedures for participating in the meeting through remote communication and for casting their votes in absentia are set forth in Annex "A" to the Information Statement.

Very truly yours,



CRISTINA S. PALMA GIL-FERNANDEZ
CORPORATE SECRETARY