Exporters see weak agriculture, tensions with China as drags to growth

EXPORTERS said a weak agriculture sector and tensions with China are serving as a drag on export performance, alongside high-power prices.

The Philippine Exporters Confederation, Inc. (Philexport) said the year began on a positive note, but a slowdown gradually set in.

"During the beginning of the year, (exporters) were very enthusiastic. They raised their targets, but towards the end of the year, they have had to catch up on orders and deliveries. When the first quarter came, things sort of tapered off," Philexport President Sergio R. Ortiz-Luis, Jr. told reporters on the sidelines of an event.

Exports in March declined 7.3% to $6.13 billion, from a year earlier the weakest reading since the 13% contraction in November.

In the first quarter, exports rose 4.8% to $17.98 billion, the Philippine Statistics Authority reported.

"Slowly but surely, (exports) will increase, but not to the level that we would like to be," Mr. Ortiz-Luis said, noting that investors are deterred by issues with agriculture as well as the South China Sea dispute.

When asked if the Philippines can still hit its P143.4-billion export target under the Philippine Export Development Plan (PEDP), he said: "Not in the original time frame. It will take quite a while."

Mr. Ortiz-Luis has said the Philippines may hit its export target in three years.

Under the Philippine Development Plan, exports are expected to hit $107 billion this year, with $61.58 billion in merchandise exports and $45.42 billion in services exports.

Last year, Philippine exports amounted to $103.6 billion, below the $126.8-billion goal set in the PEDP. It also failed to hit the 5% growth target set by the Department of Trade and Industry last year. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

'Goods passport' scheme seen cutting shipment release time

THE Bureau of Customs (BoC) said a "goods passport" system is expected to reduce the processing time for the temporary entry and exit of goods to one day.

"Some complain (that it takes) two weeks," Customs Assistant Commissioner Vincent Philip C. Maronilla told reporters on the sidelines of an event on Monday, noting that importers in that situation are "forced to actually pay the duties and taxes just to be able to have the items released" in time for events like exhibitions. "And then when the goods are re-exported, the refund is another tedious process."

The ATA Carnet system, so called because it facilitates "admission temporaire," serves as a "passport" that temporarily allows the entry of goods free of duty and tax within participating countries.

The ATA Carnet aims to streamline and unify customs border crossing regulations and formalities, provided that the goods are returned to its country of origin within the period approved by the receiving country.

ATA Carnet does away with the need for importers to post a bond to cover the temporary entry of their goods.

"What the ATA Carnet actually addresses is the tedious process that we have right now and the burden of the importer or the one who's going to use the goods having to post a bond," he said.

Under the new system, the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) will guarantee the firm's obligation to allow the freer movement of goods.

Goods covered under the system include commercial samples, items for display or use at international exhibitions, trade shows and similar events, and professional equipment, PCCI said.

On the other hand, the "goods passport" does not cover consumables, perishables or disposables, as well as items considered sold, for processing, repair, or to be given away. It also does not cover alcoholic beverages, tobacco and fuel, and unmounted gems or gemstones.

The faster movement of goods under the ATA Carnet will also help cut shipping, handling or port charges, Mr. Maronilla added.

"Key players can now streamline the cross-border business transactions with ease and conserve time and resources while complying with international trade agreements," PCCI President Enunina V. Mangio said in a speech.

The ATA Carnet will be in force for a year. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

Infrastructure projects completed in Iloilo, Isabela

THE Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) said on Monday that it completed rehabilitation projects involving a road in Iloilo and a bridge in Isabela, which are expected to enhance farmer connectivity with their markets.

The DPWH said it upgraded for P38.7 million a three-kilometer portion of an access road to Barotac Viejo, Iloilo.

The project involved a 6.70-meter-wide paved road with 1.50-meter-wide shoulder on each side, the DPWH said.

The DPWH said part of the road will provide easier access to farming areas in Iloilo.

The DPWH added that it completed the rehabilitation of Lullutan Bridge in Ilagan City, Isabela, for P13.3 million.

The bridge's rehabilitation is expected to enhance connectivity in the Cagayan Valley, reducing the risk of bridge failure or disruption, the DPWH said.

The DPWH added that public works in Mindanao involving 174.50 kilometers of road development and improvement is moving forward.

It said that detailed engineering design for major projects have been approved, with competitive bidding to proceed shortly. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

La Niña expected late in rice, corn harvest, minimizing crop damage

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said most of the rice and corn crop will have been harvested by the time La Niña sets in by October.

"By that time, many parts of the country will have harvested their rice and corn," Assistant Secretary and Spokesman Arnel V. de Mesa said in a briefing on Monday.

He added that the DA is advising rice and corn farmers to harvest early to minimize damage to their crops.

Last week, the government weather service, known as PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration) said that there was a 70% chance La Niña will set in by October.

The Agriculture department is projecting palay (unmilled rice) production of 20.44 million MT this year.

"We are continually preparing (for La Niña) in our regional offices and here at the central office," Mr. De Mesa said.

He added that the DA is fast-tracking the construction of drying, post-harvest, and water impounding facilities.

"We are also on standby with our Quick Response Fund, credit, and buffer stock of seed. These are the immediate measures that farmers can get from the DA," he said.

Mr. De Mesa added that the department has also stocked fertilizer for handing out to calamity-hit farmers. — **Adrian H. Halili**

A new era in innovation and sustainability in the logistics industry

Federal Land NRE Global Inc. (FNG), a joint venture between Federal Land Inc. of the Philippines and Nomura Real Estate Development Co., Ltd. of Japan, has revealed plans for a new innovative logistics facility in collaboration with Fast Retailing Philippines, the Philippine arm of the global company that operates multiple fashion brands including UNIQLO.

On June 20, FNG and Fast Retailing Philippines came together for a groundbreaking ceremony to inaugurate the commencement of the UNIQLO Logistics Facility at Riverpark, Cavite.

Riverpark, Federal Land Community's upcoming vibrant and dynamic community, is swiftly emerging as an economic activity and innovation hub. The introduction of the UNIQLO Logistics Facility is poised to further elevate the standards of living and working in the region. By doing so, it will create fresh opportunities and nurture a culture of sustainability and technological advancement within the area.

UNIQLO Logistics Facility Groundbreaking Ceremony led by Fast Retailing Philippines, Federal Land NRE Global, and Federal Land Inc.

Executives from left to right: Chief Financial Officer of Fast Retailing Philippines Ryo Watanabe, Group Senior Vice-President of Fast Retailing Japan Hidetsugu Asada, Chief Operating Officer of UNIQLO Philippines Geraldine Sia, Cavite Congressman Hon. Antonio "Ony" Ferrer, President of Federal Land NRE Global Thomas Mirasol, General Trias City Mayor Hon. Luis "Jon-Jon" Ferrer IV, Vice-Chairman of Federal Land NRE Global Yusuke Hirano, General Trias City Vice-Mayor Hon. Jonas Labuguen, Technical Execution Group Head of Federal Land Alvin U. Ty, General Manager of the Overseas Business Division of Nomura Real Estate Masao Toba, and Project Development Head of Federal Land Stephen Comia

UNIQLO Logistics Facility (Artist's Perspective)

Warehouse for Everyone

The upcoming logistics hub is expected to revolutionize regional logistics operations by incorporating technologies and sustainable practices, aiming to set a new standard for the industry. This initiative demonstrates a forward-thinking approach of two industry leaders, in line with the overarching goal of improving efficiency, minimizing environmental impact, and promoting responsible practices in the logistics sector.

Moreover, this initiative is in line with the objective of reducing environmental impact and encouraging responsible practices in the logistics industry. It demonstrates a dedication to sustainability and efficiency. One of the standout features of the facility will be the incorporation of solar panels, which will power specific areas of the building that will reduce its carbon footprint and promote renewable energy use in its operations.

"With the opening of our new facility, we are delighted to integrate the logistical and technological expertise of our partner, Federal Land NRE Global Inc. (FNG), to elevate the first-mile experience of delivering LifeWear to our Filipino customers. With its strategic location within the Southern Tagalog region, establishing this new facility enables us to deliver our LifeWear items to other parts of the Philippines seamlessly and more efficiently," Geraldine Sia, chief operating officer at UNIQLO Philippines, said at the groundbreaking ceremony.

"In addition, this new facility will also employ hundreds of local people to support our operations, offering a comfortable work environment that helps all workers thrive. We believe this partnership is a great start to continue elevating the UNIQLO customer shopping experience for all Filipinos."

A MODEL FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY

Located within the 600-hectare Riverpark estate along the Cavite-Laguna Expressway (CALAX), the upcoming UNIQLO Logistics Facility benefits from excellent connectivity that ensures seamless logistics operations. This strategic positioning within the evolving community sets new standards for smart city concepts and sustainable development.

The establishment of the UNIQLO Logistics Facility is also poised to bring substantial economic benefits to the Riverpark area. The project is expected to create job opportunities, fostering economic vitality and providing a significant boost to the local labor market. This initiative aligns with FNG's commitment to driving economic growth and enhancing community development through strategic investments.

The partnership between Fast Retailing Philippines and FNG has been characterized by mutual enthusiasm and a shared vision for the future. Both parties expressed their excitement about the ongoing project.

This groundbreaking event is just the first step in what promises to be a fruitful and transformative partnership and is expected to pave the way for more collaborative ventures.

By leveraging their combined strengths, Fast Retailing Philippines and Federal Land NRE Global Inc. intend to improve their business relationship and create innovative logistics and real estate solutions that will benefit both the industry and the community. After all, the partnership not only unites two industry leaders but also reflects a shared commitment to innovation, sustainability, and economic growth.

For more information about this groundbreaking project, visit *www.fng.ph*.