

## Megaworld dangles P24-million condo to Filipino gold medalists

LISTED property developer Megaworld Corp. said it will award a two-bedroom residential condominium unit worth P24 million to each Filipino gold medalist at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

The fully furnished condo unit is located in the 50-hectare McKinley Hill township within Bonifacio Global City (BGC) in Taguig City, Megaworld said in a statement on Thursday.

"This 2024, we are celebrating our 100th year of participating in the Olympic Games, and what a way to celebrate this milestone than by recognizing the superb competitive spirit of our newest Olympic gold medalist and welcoming them to McKinley Hill," Megaworld President Lourdes T. Gutierrez-Alfonso said.

"As one of the most celebrated addresses in Fort Bonifacio, McKinley Hill is home to several world-class athletes, including members of the Philippine national teams for basketball and football. This makes it a perfect home for Filipino champions who live a life of passion and excellence through and through," she added.

McKinley Hill is one of four Megaworld townships within Fort Bonifacio, along with Forbes Town, McKinley West, and Uptown Bonifacio. It hosts the McKinley Hill Village, residential condominiums and villas, office towers, schools, foreign embassies, and the McKinley Hill Football Stadium.

The Philippine delegation to the Paris Olympics consists of 22 athletes, including EJ Obiena (athletics), Lauren Hoffman (athletics), John Cabang-Tolentino (athletics), Carlos Yulo (gymnastics), Levi Jung-Ruivivar (gymnastics), Aleah Finnegan (gymnastics), Emma Malabuyo (gymnastics), Elrene Ando (weight lifting), John Cenizo (weight lifting), Vanessa Sarno (weight lifting), Joanie Delgaco (rowing), Eumir Marcial (boxing), Nesthy Petecio (boxing), Carlo Paalam (boxing), Hergie Bacayad (boxing), Aira Villegas (boxing), Jarod Hatch (swimming), Kayla Sanchez (swimming), Dottie Ardina (golf), Bianca Pagdanganan (golf), Sam Catantan (fencing), and Kiyomi Watanabe (judo). —

**Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

# Ayala Corp. exploring minority stake sale in AC Health — sources

SINGAPORE — Ayala Corp., the Philippines' oldest conglomerate, is exploring selling a minority stake in Ayala Healthcare Holdings (AC Health) in a potential deal that could value its healthcare arm at up to \$500 million, two people said.

Ayala has hired Bank of America to explore the sale of the minority stake AC Health to strategic investors or partners that will help further expand the business of the healthcare arm, the people added.

The people, who have knowledge of the matter, declined to be named as the deliberations were private.

The exact minority stake size to be potentially put on sale was not immediately certain. No final decision has been made on the sale, the people said.

In a response to Reuters on Thursday, Ayala said in a statement AC Health is looking to continue to build its portfolio and has a healthy pipeline of potential targets.

"With this, AC Health continues to explore all options, including engaging with a partner at different organizational levels, for

its next stage of growth," it added.

Bank of America did not immediately respond to request seeking comment.

Southeast Asian healthcare assets are gaining favor as global investors bet on the region's growing affluence and aging population and the sector's ability to weather the current challenging economic environment.

In November, Australia's Ramsay Health Care and Malaysian conglomerate Sime Darby agreed to sell their stakes in their hospital joint venture, Ramsay Sime Darby Health Care, to Columbia Asia Healthcare for RM5.7 billion (\$1.25 billion).

Established in 2015, AC Health has grown steadily and has a portfolio that includes drugstore chains Generika and St. Joseph Drug, and pharmaceutical importer and distributor IE Medica and MedEthix, according to its websites.

It also counts Healthway and QualiMed, a network of multispecialty clinics, ambulatory centers, and full-service hospitals, and KonsultaMD, a health-



ACHEALTH.COM.PH

care aggregator app, under its portfolio, its websites showed.

For 2023, AC Health posted a 19% jump in revenue to P8.6 billion (\$147.51 million), driven by higher contributions from pharma, clinics, and hospitals businesses, according to the company's presentation posted on its website.

AC Health's core earnings before interest, taxes, depre-

ciation, and amortization, or EBITDA, jumped 23% to P722 million, the presentation showed.

Besides healthcare business, Makati City-headquartered Ayala has interests including in property, banking, telecommunications, and power and is one of the largest conglomerates in the Philippines, its website showed. — **Reuters**

## Inflation, from SI/1

Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto separately said July inflation was expected to have accelerated though still within target.

"Coming from a low base, inflation will be higher, but still within target (2-4%)," he told reporters late Tuesday.

However, Mr. Remolona noted that the full impact of Super Typhoon Carina and the southwest monsoon would not yet be reflected in the July print.

"It won't affect the July number. Usually, the effects come with a lag so it may not even affect August in terms of the aggregate CPI basket."

Mr. Recto likewise said July inflation would be spared from the impact of typhoon losses. "Most likely, the impact will be seen in August. It won't be in July."

The latest data from the Agriculture department showed that agricultural damage due to the typhoon and southwest monsoon had hit P1.21 billion as of July 31. Rice was the most affected crop, accounting for more than half of the damage.

## RISING FOOD PRICES

On the other hand, HSBC economist for ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Aris D. Dacanay said there could be a "slight uptick" in food prices due to the typhoon's impact on logistical costs.

Sarah Tan, an economist from Moody's Analytics, said the immediate impact of the storm might not register yet in July but could still potentially stoke inflation.

"However, given that the typhoon destroyed crop harvests in agricultural provinces like Pampanga, where the agricultural damage reportedly totaled more than P300 million, the impact on food supply could add price pressures in the coming months," she said in an e-mail.

Ruben Carlo O. Asuncion, chief economist at Union Bank of the Philippines, Inc., said inflation likely accelerated to 4.6% due to higher prices of some food items, particularly vegetables, fruits and condiments.

Price pressures will also come from higher electricity rates, analysts said.

"Headline inflation may have also jumped month on month due to the steep increase in Metro Manila's electricity rates after being deliberately kept low in June," Mr. Dacanay said.

In July, Manila Electric Co. raised rates by P2.1496 per kilowatt-hour (kWh) to bring the overall rate for a typical household to P11.6012 per kWh.

"For July, higher electricity rates, elevated agricultural commodity prices and increased domestic oil costs drove inflation, and this was partially offset by lower rice and fruit prices, as well as the peso's appreciation," Security Bank Corp. Chief Economist Robert Dan J. Roces said in an e-mail.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Chief Economist Michael L. Ricafort said the stronger peso and the rollback in fuel prices could have offset inflationary pressures during the month.

Pump price adjustments stood at a net increase of P1.30 a liter for gasoline for the month of July. Diesel and kerosene had a net decrease of P0.90 and P1.70, respectively, per liter.

The potential breach of July inflation would be temporary, Mr. Roces said.

"Despite the recent typhoon's possible, albeit transitory, impact on food prices, inflation is expected to return to target in August due to favorable base effects," he said.

"Inflation is still expected to immediately return to within the 2-4% target band once base effects fade and then ease to the range of 2-3% once the lower tariff rates on rice eventually begin to bring rice prices down," Mr. Dacanay added.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. in June signed an executive order that slashed tariffs on rice imports to 15% from 35% until 2028. It is widely expected to bring down the retail price of rice.

Mr. Remolona said the tariff cut would "significantly moderate inflation" in the coming months. "That's a good thing that will help us ease monetary policy."

## RATE CUT

The BSP chief again signaled cutting rates as early as this month. "I think Aug. 15 is still a possibility. Of course, it will depend on the numbers," Mr. Remolona said.

He said they could cut possibly by 25 basis points (bps) at their Aug. 15 meeting, and by another 25 bps later in the year. The Monetary Board's (MB) last two policy meetings for the year are scheduled for Oct. 17 and Dec. 19.

"Less hawkish is the term that we've been using. So, it's still hawkish, which means we will still remain tight, but maybe less tight than before," Mr. Remolona said.

"It's a tricky thing because we're so close to the point where we might be getting to below capacity. We want to reduce demand so that income falls just to the level of capacity of the economy," he added.

On the other hand, analysts noted that the central bank could keep rates steady amid continued risks.

"Softer-than-expected inflation for July could prompt BSP to pull the trigger when the Monetary Board meets in August, but risks to food inflation and a weak peso could make them lean towards a rate hold," Ms. Tan said.

"We maintain our expectation that the BSP is unlikely to leapfrog the Fed, keeping the policy rate at 6.5% in August," she added.

Philippine National Bank economist Alvin Joseph A. Arogo said inflation breaching the target could derail the central bank's planned rate cuts.

"Although supply side-driven, a breach of the 2-4% target inflation band of the BSP could complicate the timing of the forthcoming easing cycle," he said in an e-mail.

Mr. Remolona said the BSP would also be taking into consideration the upcoming second-quarter gross domestic product (GDP) data, among other key data points.

The PSA is set to release second-quarter GDP data on Aug. 8.

"A weaker-than-expected second-quarter GDP print will more likely mean that the MB will start easing rather than remaining unchanged as the MB looks to longer-term economic growth prospects amid high borrowing costs," Mr. Asuncion said.

Metropolitan Bank & Trust Co. Chief Economist Nicholas Antonio T. Mapa said the BSP's anticipated easing cycle would "stimulate economic growth by encouraging new investments across various sectors."

"As a result of all this, a potential resurgence in investment momentum is expected to accelerate GDP growth in the medium term, likely pushing it beyond the 6% pace of expansion and possibly even higher," he said in a Wealth Insights report. "This increased investment activity is anticipated to have both immediate and long-term positive effects on the economy."

## Holcim Philippines names new president

CEMENT PRODUCER Holcim Philippines, Inc. has named Nicolas George as its new president and chief executive officer (CEO) effective Aug. 1.

Mr. George replaces outgoing president and CEO Horia Adrian, who will become the head of decarbonization for the Holcim Group in the Asia, Middle East, and Africa region, Holcim Philippines said in an e-mailed statement on Thursday.

Mr. Adrian served as president and CEO of Holcim Philippines for over three years, having been appointed in March 2021.

"I'm excited to lead the Philippine business and further raise its business performance and positive impact. The Philippines is an important market

for Holcim, and I am thrilled to work with our people, customers, and other partners to further raise results and deliver great value to all stakeholders," Mr. George said.

Prior to his appointment, Mr. George was the CEO of Holcim Group's operations in Algeria, where he focused on expanding the mortar and aggregates businesses, initiating the decarbonization roadmap, and improving industrial performance.

Mr. George joined Holcim in 2007 as a strategy manager in China and

has also served as the CEO of Holcim operations in Myanmar and Uganda.

He holds a degree in Industry Management, Innovation, and Performance from the Institut National Agronomique Paris-Grignon.

Holcim Philippines operates cement manufacturing facilities in La Union, Bulacan, Batangas, Misamis Oriental, and Davao, as well as aggregates and dry mix businesses and technical support facilities for building solutions. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**



## Sun Life bags No. 1 spot in Philippines' MDRT; sole PH firm in Global Top 50

Sun Life of Canada (Philippines), Inc. (Sun Life) once again bags the number one spot in the Million Dollar Round Table (MDRT) for having the highest number of financial advisors in this exclusive and prestigious organization. Having 540 financial advisors as members of the MDRT last 2023, Sun Life bested the competition, eclipsing the closest contender by 172 members.

MDRT is an association of life insurance agents and financial advisors that aims to promote ethical standards, best practices, and the promotion of the sales profession for life insurance as well as the health and long-term care industry. To become a member, a financial advisor must pass stringent membership requirements. With this, MDRT has become a hallmark of excellence in the life insurance industry and the financial services sector.

As the only Philippine-based company to land among the top 50 MDRT companies around the world, Sun Life ranks number one in the Philippines and 41<sup>st</sup> globally for having the most MDRT financial advisor members in the life insurance industry.

"Excellence is a cornerstone of Sun Life's commitment to its clients and the Filipino nation as a whole," says Alfonso Quitangon, Chief Distribution Officer of Sun Life. "This recognition from such a prestigious and exclusive association inspires us to further outdo ourselves in offering exemplary service and care to our dear Clients."

Sun Life Philippines CEO & Country Head Benedict Sison likewise lauded the Sun Life passion and dedication, "They make us proud and remind us that going the extra mile to help



Sun Life Chief Distribution Officer Alfonso Quitangon



Sun Life Philippines CEO & Country Head Benedict Sison

**Sun Life**

**Top 1 in the Philippines**

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**540**  
MDRT MEMBERS

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BANK	COMPANY	MEMBERS
1	SUN LIFE OF CANADA (PHILIPPINES), INC.	540
	Philippines Financial Services	368
	Philippines Health Insurance	273
	Philippines Life Insurance	231
	Philippines Retirement	118
	Philippines Wealth Management	104

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\*\*based on 2023 production

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