

## BARMM, Central Luzon exploration contracts attract potential bidders

INTERNATIONAL and Philippine companies have submitted applications for contracts to explore for petroleum and hydrogen in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and in Central Luzon, the Department of Energy (DoE) said.

"We are very pleased that well-known international players in hydrogen and petroleum exploration and production have shown interest and participated in this year's bid round," Energy Undersecretary Alessandro O. Sales said in a statement on Wednesday.

At the opening of application documents on Tuesday, the DoE and the BARMM's Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources, and Energy announced the receipt of three applications for the 1<sup>st</sup> BARMM Conventional Energy Bid Round. The contract areas on offer are a pre-determined area (PDA) in the Cotabato Basin and two PDAs in the Sulu Sea Basin.

All applications were deemed qualified for further substantive evaluation following an initial completeness check.

Meanwhile, for the 2024 Philippine Bid Round, the DoE received five applications for service contracts for hydrogen exploration in Central Luzon.

These applications also passed the completeness check and are eligible for further evaluation.

An application for PDA in Cebu's Alegria Field was disqualified due to incomplete documentation.

"The comprehensive legal, technical, and financial evaluation of all qualified applications will be completed in the fourth quarter of 2024. The highest-ranking applicants from this evaluation will be endorsed to the Office of the President," the DoE said.

The next phase will determine whether these applicants will be awarded service contracts.

"This activity marks the beginning of a transformative journey that may span several years. If we do not embark on this activity now, it will never come to fruition," Mr. Sales said. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

# DoE seeks P10B in funding for energy management program

THE Department of Energy (DoE) is arranging financing of about P10 billion to accelerate a program that will reduce power consumption at government agencies.

Energy Undersecretary Felix William B. Fuenteabella said the DoE expects an outlay of around P2 billion per year starting 2026 to expedite the rollout of the Government Energy Management Program (GEMP).

"We have the strategies in place so what we're working on is the financing. So, we're trying to come up with a facility through the DoF (Department of Finance) with our development partners," Mr. Fuenteabella told

reporters on the sidelines of a forum on Wednesday.

The DoF is guiding the DoE in preparing a financing proposal, he said.

Mr. Fuenteabella said financing for GEMP could be a combination of official development assistance and concessional loans, with the DoF studying what would be the "best blend."

"We have spoken to ADB (Asian Development Bank) and then we will also talk with the others. If it doesn't (work), we'll have to look for (other options)," he said.

He said the program involves retrofitting, upgrading for enhanced energy efficiency and conservation,

raising the share of electric vehicles in the government fleet, and their charging stations.

GEMP is a government-wide program aimed at reducing the government's electricity and fuel consumption by at least 10%.

The program is authorized by Republic Act 11285 or the Energy Efficiency and Conservation (EEC) Act and supervised by the Inter-Agency Energy Efficiency and Conservation Committee.

In January, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. issued Administrative Order (AO) 15 directing government agencies to accelerate implementation of GEMP.

AO 15 operationalizes the EEC Act for all government entities under the executive branch, including government-owned and -controlled corporations, government financial institutions, their subsidiaries, and state universities and colleges.

In the initial stages of implementing GEMP, the DoE said the government saved more than P300 million, equivalent to more than 30 million kilowatt-hours in 2023. Fuel savings were valued at P25 million.

For 2024, the DoE expects GEMP in accelerated implementation to generate nearly P2 billion in savings for electricity and fuel combined. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

## ASF fears scaring consumers away from pork, farmers say

THE farmgate price of pork has declined because consumers have been deterred by the surge in African Swine Fever (ASF) cases, farmers said.

"The farmgate price for hogs, unfortunately, dropped by P30 to P40 per kilogram. I hope (this translates) to a drop in market prices," Jayson H. Cainglet, executive director of the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura, told reporters on the sidelines of a poultry and livestock event on Wednesday.

A kilo of pork *kasim* (shoulder) was selling for between P260 and P370, while pork *liempo* (belly) fetched P290 to P400 in Metro Manila markets, according to Department of Agriculture (DA) price monitors as of Aug. 28.

He added that hog prices dropped to about P160 to P180 per kilo.

"There are reports that many are avoiding (buying pork)," Mr. Cainglet said, noting that current supply remains ample.

According to the Bureau of Animal Industry, 15 municipalities had active ASF cases across 32 provinces as of Aug. 21. ASF was first detected in the Philippines in 2019.

"It has been with us for the past 3-4 years, *palipat-lipat ang ASF* (ASF is moving around). So, let's not be afraid of the reports, that's actually normal for the hog industry," he added.

The DA has said it will kick off hog vaccinations by Friday, beginning in Batangas where ASF has spiked in recent weeks.

"If there are any delays it might just be for one or two days more, but the target is Friday," Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. told reporters. — **Adrian H. Halili**

## 15 drugs added to VAT-exempt list

FIFTEEN additional drugs treating cancer, high cholesterol, hypertension, and mental illness have been added to the value-added tax (VAT) exempt list, the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) said.

In a circular, the seven cancer medicines declared exempt were Avelumab, Acalabrutinib, Olaparib (100 and 150 milligrams), Trastuzumab (150 and 440 mg), and Trastuzumab deruxtecan.

Rosuvastatin (as Calcium), a treatment for high cholesterol, was also added to the VAT-exempt list.

The BIR also waived VAT on five medicines for hypertension: Olmesartan medoxomil, Perindopril (as arginine) for both the 5 mg and 10 mg varieties, and the

for 1.5 mg/5 mg and 1.5 mg/10 mg varieties of Indapamide + Amlodipine (as besilate).

Also declared VAT-exempt were the mental illness drugs Sodium Valproate and Valproic Acid.

Under the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises Act, drugs, medicines, vaccines and medical devices identified by the Food and Drug Administration will receive VAT exemptions.

BIR Commissioner Romeo D. Lumagui, Jr. said in a statement that "the BIR supports the government... in helping the public have access to more affordable healthcare and medicine." — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

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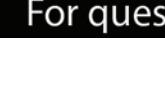
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Lead Economist and Program Leader of the Equitable Growth, Finance and Institutions Practice Group for Brunei, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines World Bank

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