

## Smart partners with DTI to help 1M mom-and-pop stores

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and Smart Communications, Inc. have signed a deal that seeks to bridge the digital divide by teaching more than a million mom-and-pop store owners in the Philippines to better manage their business.

In a statement on Tuesday, Smart said it would help the DTI in its Tindahan Mo, e-Level Up Mo Sari-Sari Store Advancement program, which holds free webinars for store owners.

“The *sari-sari* stores have been our key partner since day one, particularly in Smart electronic load distribution,” Jac N. Bocalan, vice-president and head of channel management at Smart, said in the statement.

She added that the PLDT Inc. wireless unit wants to support initiatives that could boost its electronic channel.

“Together with industry partners and the DTI, we share the mission of empowering our *sari-sari* store owners and customers by assisting them in their digital transformation journey.”

“The [program] adopts a multifaceted approach to uplift our micro retailers, focusing on digital transformation, financial literacy, sustainable business practices and consumer protection,” Trade Undersecretary Jose Edgardo G. Sunico said in the statement.

“Our goal is clear: to make our *sari-sari* stores more resilient, innovative and competitive in the digital economy,” he added.

Under the agreement, Smart and Maya representatives will take part in the program by teaching store owners how to expand capital through digital products and services, particularly Smart e-load.

Smart said its e-load platform is one of the fastest-selling products among mom-and-pop stores since it was launched in 2003.

Ms. Bocalan said they want to teach store owners how to level up and use digital devices with a smartphone to boost their income. “We are also looking forward to working with the DTI and industry partners to push forward these progressive programs that uplift the lives of Filipinos.” — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

# Wider internet access may boost esports industry

THE GOVERNMENT should boost internet access in the countryside to make the esports landscape more inclusive, according to the top executive of a Philippine esports company.

“It is very important to reach everyone,” Ronald Robins, founder of Manila-based Mineski Global, said in an interview. “How can we get better at esports games if we don’t have internet?”

Mr. Robins recalled his struggles in Cebu province in central Philippines when he was younger, as he faced difficulties in joining big esports tournaments in the absence of support for aspiring esports players.

Several local groups have sought more government support for the Philippine esports industry, including seeing it as a legitimate creative sector and sport.

That playing video games competitively could be a salaried profession was nonsense a few years ago. Now, professional gamers make a decent living and turn into millionaires on some occasions.

Salaried pro gamers in the United States earn as much as \$60,000 yearly, while tournament prize money can go as high as \$50,000, according to Esports Grizzly. Video game streamers earn as much as \$2,000 a month.

Internet access in regions outside Metro Manila, particularly in the Visayas and Mindanao, ranged from 28.5% to 51.3% last year, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority. In contrast, seven of 10 households in Metro Manila had internet access.

Mr. Robins’ company has introduced the GG Truck (Good Game Truck), which seeks to “gamify” the country’s 42,000 barangays or villages by providing a literal truck with



MPL PHILIPPINES

a gaming setup including an LED display, generator set, stage lights, wi-fi internet and an operating crew.

Using the truck, a gamer can enjoy the services of an operating crew and the ability to stream his game on Facebook.

The initiative aims to provide internet access and discover talent in rural communities.

“We have a very specific approach to inclusivity,” Mr. Robins told *BusinessWorld*. “We believe everybody should have a chance and GG Truck allows us to execute tournaments anywhere.”

The GG Truck is equipped with a sizable high-gain antenna where cell towers in remote areas can gain fast internet access for casual gaming events and esports tournaments.

“Instead of asking everybody to come to Metro Manila or Metro Cebu, we reached out to all of these communities, and it allows us to open it up as an internet café and still have all of these tournaments for mobile gamers,” Mr. Robins said.

Aside from the GG Truck, Mineski brings reliable internet access closer to remote areas by setting up more than 100 internet cafés at P30 per hour.

Mr. Robins thinks the local esports industry is unstoppable as it continues to gain traction each year, backed by 43 million active Filipino gamers.

Mr. Robins said timing is crucial to an entrepreneur’s success.

“Where you there at the right time or were you there too early or too late?” he said. “You learn from all your failures, allowing you to sense when is the right time is to do something,” he added.

“The most important thing in your entrepreneurial journey is learning how to bounce back when you fall,” Mr. Robins said. “That’s sounds like cliché, but it’s true.”

An entrepreneur should be around people who will make them uncomfortable because they will push you out of your comfort zone and open new learning opportunities, he added. — **Edg Adrian A. Eva**

## Google hires top talent from startup Character.AI, signs licensing deal

STARTUP Character.AI has signed an agreement with Alphabet’s Google that grants the search engine giant a nonexclusive license to the chatbot maker’s large language model technology.

The deal, echoing ones struck by Microsoft and Amazon in the past few months, will see Character.AI cofounders Noam Shazeer and Daniel De Freitas rejoin Google, where they were formerly employees.

Those other deals are being scrutinized by regulators, reflecting a growing concern in both the US and Europe about how artificial intelligence (AI) deals are put together by tech giants who are funneling billions into bolstering their AI infrastructure and hiring the best researchers from startups.

Character.AI will get more funding as part of the deal with Google, the startup said in a blog, without disclosing the amount. Dominic Perella, Character.AI’s general

counsel, will become its interim chief executive officer effective immediately.

“We’re particularly thrilled to welcome back Noam, a preeminent researcher in machine learning, who is joining Google DeepMind’s research team, along with a small number of his colleagues,” a Google spokesperson said in an e-mail.

In March, Microsoft paid \$650 million to bring on the cofounders and dozens of staff from AI startup Inflection. In June, Amazon hired several cofound-

ers and employees from Adept, another AI startup.

Character.AI earlier raised \$193 million in venture capital from investors including Andreessen Horowitz. It was in talks to raise hundreds of millions of dollars from Google, Reuters reported in November.

Inflection and Adept raised \$1.3 billion and \$415 million, respectively.

Law firm Sullivan & Cromwell advised Character.AI on the deal. — **Reuters**

### Inflation, from S1/1

“The latest inflation outturn is consistent with the BSP’s latest assessment that inflation will temporarily settle above the target range in July 2024 due mainly to higher electricity rates and positive base effects but will likely follow a general downtrend beginning in August 2024,” the central bank said in a statement.

National Statistician Claire Dennis S. Mapa said that the main source of faster inflation in July was the housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels index which rose to 2.3% in July from 0.1% in June.

“For power, we really expected that, because Meralco (Manila Electric Co.) adjusted rates in July. That’s where we saw a significant contribution to inflation,” Mr. Mapa said in mixed English and Filipino.

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

Inflation of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) surged to 20.2% in July from 14.7% in the previous month, as LPG prices rose by P0.55 per kilogram.

Mr. Mapa also noted the heavily weighted food and non-alcoholic beverages index, which increased to 6.4% in July from 6.1% a month earlier and 6.3% a year ago.

Food inflation accelerated to 6.7% from 6.5% in June. This was primarily driven by faster prices in meat and other parts of slaughtered land animals (4.8% in July from 3.1% in June) and fruits and nuts (8.4% from 5.6%).

Meanwhile, rice inflation further eased to 20.9% in July from 22.5% a month prior, marking the fourth straight month of slower rice inflation.

PSA data showed that the average price of regular milled rice fell to P50.90 per kilogram in July from P51.10 in June; while well-milled rice declined to P55.85 per kilo from P55.96 in June.

While it is possible that Typhoon Carina hurt food prices in July, Mr. Mapa said its impact will be most likely reflected in August inflation.

“It’s possible that the impact of the storm has started, normally based on our historical data, prices of vegetables rise after a typhoon. That is the expectation we have, that this could rise in August.”

Agricultural damage due to Typhoon Carina and the southwest monsoon, which hit Metro Manila and nearby provinces in late July, stood at P3.04 billion.

Transport inflation was also one of the main drivers to the uptick in July inflation, Mr. Mapa said.

In July, transport inflation picked up to 3.6% from 3.1% a month ago.

“This increase was driven by increasing global petroleum prices due to the unexpected large withdrawals of United States gasoline stocks, optimistic fuel demand forecasts, and the ongoing geopolitical tension in the Middle East,” the National Economic and Development Authority said in a statement.

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

Meanwhile, the inflation rate for the bottom 30% of income households accelerated to 5.8% in July from 5.5% in June and 5.2% a year ago.

In the seven months to July, the inflation rate for the bottom 30% averaged 4.9%.

In the National Capital Region (NCR), inflation eased to 3.7% in July from 5.6% a year prior. Inflation in areas outside NCR averaged 4.6%, faster than 4.4% a year ago.

### OUTLOOK

The BSP said that risks to the inflation outlook have shifted to the downside for this year and the next, primarily due to the tariff cut on rice imports.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. in June signed an executive order which slashed tariffs on rice imports to 15% from 35% previously, until 2028.

“Nonetheless, higher prices of food items other than rice, as well as higher transport and electricity charges con-

tinue to pose upside risks to inflation,” the central bank added.

Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto said that the uptick in July inflation is only temporary.

“Inflation rate is expected to stabilize and fall within target for the rest of the year as the impact of government interventions, particularly the reduced rice tariffs, will be more pronounced starting this August,” he said in a statement.

PSA’s Mr. Mapa said that rice inflation could continue to ease in the coming months, which would support slower headline inflation.

He said the reduction in tariffs on rice imports could “significantly” bring down rice prices in August. Rice inflation could possibly be slower than 20% in August, he added.

### RATE CUT OFF THE TABLE?

The BSP said that it will consider the latest inflation data and upcoming second-quarter gross domestic product (GDP) data at its Aug. 15 meeting.

“Moving forward, the BSP will ensure that monetary policy settings remain in line with its primary mandate to safeguard price stability conducive to sustainable economic growth,” it said.

Pantheon Macroeconomics Chief Emerging Asia Economist Miguel Chanco said that the “bigger-than-expected jump” in inflation may prompt the BSP to keep rates steady next week.

“In terms of the outlook for monetary policy, the July breach of the BSP’s target range, while well within the range of outcomes projected by the (central) bank, likely means that an August rate cut is now off the table,” he said in an e-mail note.

Bank of the Philippine Islands Lead Economist Emilio S. Neri, Jr. said in a report that the probability of a rate cut in August has declined as inflation breached the target band.

On Tuesday, BSP Governor Eli M. Remolona, Jr. said the central bank

### JOB VACANCY

**40 Vacant Positions**  
10 Chinese Speaking Sales Marketing Specialist  
10 Chinese Speaking Digital Marketing Specialist  
10 Chinese Speaking Brand Marketing Specialist  
10 Chinese Speaking Trade Marketing Specialist

#### REQUIREMENTS

1. At least 18 years old
2. Proficiency in Handling customer questions about services and products
3. Excellent Mandarin verbal Communication Skills
4. Knowledgeable in computer
5. Knows how to recommend potential products or services by collecting customer information and analyzing customer needs

Interested applicants may submit their application thru email at [kaiserdynastytradingcorp@gmail.com](mailto:kaiserdynastytradingcorp@gmail.com)

Company: **KAISER DYNASTY TRADING CORP.**  
Address: **Unit 722 Cityland Herrera Tower, V.A. Rufino St., Makati City**

### JOB VACANCY

**10 Vacant Positions**  
5 Mandarin Speaking Finance Specialist  
5 Mandarin Speaking Admin Associate

#### REQUIREMENTS

1. At least 18 years old
2. Proficiency in Handling customer questions about services and products
3. Excellent Mandarin verbal Communication Skills
4. Knowledgeable in computer
5. Knows how to recommend potential products or services by collecting customer information and analyzing customer needs

Interested applicants may submit their application thru email at [visionalliance.inc@gmail.com](mailto:visionalliance.inc@gmail.com)

Company: **VISION-ALLIANCE INCORPORATED**  
Address: **606B, 607B, 6th Floor, East Tower, 8912 Asean Avenue Building, Aseana Avenue, Barangay Tambo, City of Parañaque Fourth District, NCR, Philippines, 1701**

### JOB VACANCY

**40 Vacant Positions**  
10 Chinese Speaking Sales Marketing Specialist  
10 Chinese Speaking Digital Marketing Specialist  
10 Chinese Speaking Brand Marketing Specialist  
10 Chinese Speaking Trade Marketing Specialist

#### REQUIREMENTS

1. At least 18 years old
2. Proficiency in Handling customer questions about services and products
3. Excellent Mandarin verbal Communication Skills
4. Knowledgeable in computer
5. Knows how to recommend potential products or services by collecting customer information and analyzing customer needs

Interested applicants may submit their application thru email at [kaiserdynastytradingcorp@gmail.com](mailto:kaiserdynastytradingcorp@gmail.com)

Company: **SPRITZER TRADING CORP**  
Address: **Unit 722 Cityland Herrera Tower, V.A. Rufino St., Makati City**

### JOB VACANCY

**60 Vacant Positions**  
15 CHINESE SPEAKING TECHNICAL CONSULTANT  
15 CHINESE SPEAKING SOLUTIONS CONSULTANT  
15 CHINESE SPEAKING MARKETING CONSULTANT  
15 CHINESE SPEAKING BUSINESS CONSULTANT

#### REQUIREMENTS:

1. Atleast 18 years old
2. Proficiency in Handling customer questions about services and products
3. Excellent Mandarin verbal Communication Skills
4. Knowledgeable in computer
5. Knows how to recommend potential products or services by collecting customer information and analyzing customer needs

Interested applicants may submit their application thru email at [macroexcelconsultancy@gmail.com](mailto:macroexcelconsultancy@gmail.com)

Company: **MACRO EXCEL CONSULTANCY INC.**  
Address: **UNIT 606 6/F VICENTE MADRIGAL BLDG., 6793 AYALA AVENUE, BEL-AIR, MAKATI CITY**

### JOB VACANCY

**60 Vacant Positions**  
20 Chinese Speaking Customer Financial Officer  
20 Chinese Speaking Business Financial Officer  
20 Chinese Speaking Admin Financial Officer

#### REQUIREMENTS:

1. At least 18 years old.
2. Proficiency in Handling customer questions about services and products
3. Excellent Mandarin verbal Communication Skills
4. Knowledgeable in computer
5. Knows how to recommend potential products or services by collecting customer information and analyzing customer needs

Interested applicants may submit their application thru email at [grandeverestholdings@gmail.com](mailto:grandeverestholdings@gmail.com)

Company: **GRAND EVEREST HOLDINGS INC.**  
Address: **17/F M1 TOWER, 141 N.V. DELA COSTA ST., BEL-AIR 79MAKATI CITY**

### JOB VACANCY

**40 Vacant Positions**  
CHINESE SPEAKING TECHNICAL CONSULTANT  
CHINESE SPEAKING SOLUTIONS CONSULTANT  
CHINESE SPEAKING MARKETING CONSULTANT  
CHINESE SPEAKING BUSINESS CONSULTANT

#### REQUIREMENTS:

1. Atleast 18 years old.
2. Proficiency in Handling customer questions about services and products
3. Excellent Mandarin verbal Communication Skills
4. Knowledgeable in computer
5. Knows how to recommend potential products or services by collecting customer information and analyzing customer needs

Interested applicants may submit their application thru email at [acevelocityconsultancy2021@gmail.com](mailto:acevelocityconsultancy2021@gmail.com)

COMPANY: **ACE VELOCITY CONSULTANCY INC.**  
ADDRESS: **UNIT 406, 4th FLOOR OF VICENTE MADRIGAL BUILDING, 6793 AYALA AVENUE, MAKATI CITY**

### JOB VACANCY

**40 Vacant Positions**  
3 Chinese Speaking Marketing Manager  
3 Chinese Speaking Service Manager  
34 Chinese Speaking Service Specialist

#### REQUIREMENTS:

1. At least 18 years old
2. Proficiency in Handling customer questions about services and products
3. Excellent Mandarin verbal Communication Skills
4. Knowledgeable in computer
5. Knows how to recommend potential products or services by collecting customer information and analyzing customer needs

Interested applicants may submit their application thru email at [acautomobileserviceinc@gmail.com](mailto:acautomobileserviceinc@gmail.com)

Company: **AC AUTOMOBILE SERVICE INC.**  
Address: **2316 MIAA BLDG., AURORA BLVD. TRAMO BRGY. 178 DISTRICT 07, PASAY CITY**

### JOB VACANCY

**27 Vacant Positions**  
5 Mandarin Speaking Finance Specialist  
5 Mandarin Speaking Marketing Specialist  
2 Mandarin Speaking Admin Associate  
5 Mandarin Speaking Visa Specialist  
10 Chinese Speaking Visa Consultant

#### REQUIREMENTS

1. At least 18 years old
2. Proficiency in Handling customer questions about services and products
3. Excellent Mandarin verbal Communication Skills
4. Knowledgeable in computer
5. Knows how to recommend potential products or services by collecting customer information and analyzing customer needs

Interested applicants may submit their application thru email at [consultancyjoyvisa@gmail.com](mailto:consultancyjoyvisa@gmail.com)

Company: **JOY VISA CONSULTANCY INC.**  
Address: **608B, 609B, 610B, 6th Floor, East Tower, 8912 Asean Avenue Building, Aseana Avenue, Barangay Tambo, City of Parañaque Fourth District, NCR, Philippines, 1701**