

IMF,  
from SI/1

The IMF sees growth in the region to be supported by sustained demand for semiconductors and electronics, as well as increasing investments in artificial intelligence (AI).

The IMF also expects Philippine GDP to expand by 6.3% until 2029, still the fastest in Southeast Asia, ahead of Cambodia (6%) and Vietnam (5.6%).

"Growth over the medium term at 6.3% is expected to be supported by investment, on the back of an acceleration in the implementation of PPP (public-private partnership) projects and FDI (foreign direct investments), following recent regulatory and administrative reforms," the IMF representative said.

However, the IMF representative said potential risks that could weigh on economic growth include new supply shocks, escalating geopolitical tensions, tighter-for-longer monetary policy and an unexpected slowdown in major economies.

"Domestically, the pickup in private investment may be weaker than projected if reform momentum stalls or payoffs from reforms generate lower-than-expected returns. On the upside, the pickup in investment and productivity gains from reforms could be higher," the IMF representative said.

Meanwhile, the IMF maintained the Philippine inflation forecast at 3.3% in 2024, which is above the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' (BSP) revised inflation projection of 3.1%.

For 2025, the IMF sees inflation at 3%, which is below the BSP's 3.2% projection.

**'ALMOST WON'**

The IMF said global growth would likely remain "stable yet underwhelming," as it kept GDP growth projections at 3.2% this year and next year.

It noted the global economy has remained "unusually resilient" and avoided a recession.

"The global battle against inflation has largely been won, even though price pressures persist in some countries," IMF Economic Counsellor Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas said in the WEO report.

Global inflation is forecast to reach 3.5% by end-2025, slightly

below the 3.6% average between 2000 and 2019.

In emerging Asia, inflation is projected at 2.1% this year and 2.7% in 2025, "in part thanks to early monetary tightening and price controls in many countries in the region," the IMF said.

"While the global decline in inflation is a major milestone, downside risks are rising and now dominate the outlook: an escalation in regional conflicts, monetary policy remaining tight for too long, a possible resurgence of financial market volatility with adverse effects on sovereign debt markets, and a deeper growth slowdown in China, and the continued ratcheting up of protectionist policies," he said.

With the return of inflation to near central bank targets, Mr. Gourinchas said a policy triple pivot is now needed.

The pivot on monetary policy has started, as major central banks began cutting policy rates, he said. However, vigilance is key amid a resurgence in inflationary pressures due to high food prices and supply disruptions, he added.

The Philippine central bank began its easing cycle in August with a 25-basis-point (bp) cut, followed by another 25-bp reduction at its Oct. 16 meeting. This brought the target reverse repurchase (RRP) rate to 6%.

BSP Governor Eli M. Remolona, Jr. has signaled another possible 25-bp rate cut at the Monetary Board's last meeting for the year on Dec. 19.

Mr. Gourinchas said the second pivot is on fiscal policy, as now is the time "to stabilize debt dynamics and rebuild much-needed fiscal buffers."

"The third pivot — and the hardest — is on structural reforms. Much more needs to be done to improve growth prospects and lift productivity, as this is the only way we can address the many challenges we face: rebuilding fiscal buffers, aging and declining populations in many parts of the world, young and growing populations in Africa in search of opportunity, tackling the climate transition, increasing resilience, and improving the lives of the most vulnerable," he said.

Sustainability,  
from SI/1

"These nations effectively manage carbon emissions, maintain low pollution levels, and prioritize renewable energy (RE) sources," it added.

The Philippines performed best in the environmental standards in trade (first), ecological footprint (fifth), and RE (sixth), which are indices under the environmental pillar.

However, the country scored lower in the areas of deforestation (19<sup>th</sup>) and air pollution (18<sup>th</sup>).

"Notably, the Philippines witnessed a significant improvement in carbon indicators, rising from 18<sup>th</sup>

to ninth place, and holds 10<sup>th</sup> place in energy intensity," the report said.

"Challenges for the Philippines include wastewater treatment, air pollution and deforestation. However, its overall strong performance underscores the country's commitment to environmentally sound trade practices," it added.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Chief Economist Michael L. Ricafort said the country's lower ranking this year could be a result of slower rollouts of RE projects, less developed infrastructure and higher power costs.

# GoGym to make app more interactive, eyes expansion

By Aubrey Rose A. Inosante  
Reporter

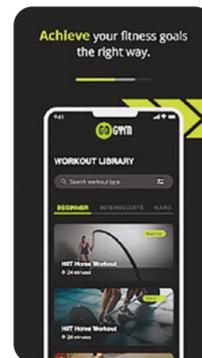
TECH-ENABLED fitness brand GoGym plans to expand interactive features on its mobile app by letting members track their progress and earn points, while also expanding its physical gym chain.

This will allow users to book sessions, generate quick response (QR) codes for check-in, access training videos and pause or cancel memberships within the app.

"In the fourth quarter, we're planning to gamify the mobile app so people start to get Go Coins or Go Points whenever they check in for a certain number of days in a week," Felicia Mirine P. Perez, chief product officer at GoGym, told *BusinessWorld* in a recent video call.

"We're currently building... the streaks and achievements and soon the leaderboards also," she added.

Much of GoGym's budget is dedicated to tech development, which the startup considers as its key differentiator from other gyms, eliminating the need for paperwork.



Ms. Perez said the company wants the app to become an extension of building habits and making fitness a lifestyle for its users. The app has 750 members.

GoGym has five branches, with their largest in McKinley Hill, Taguig City. The other branches are in Six NEO in Bonifacio Global City (BGC), Villena, Poblacion, MyTown Los Angeles in Kalayaan, and MyStay BGC East.

"We're optimistically hoping to build three additional gyms to bring our gyms to eight this year," said Kristoff Augustus J. Inocentes, head of sales and marketing at GoGym, adding that the

company aims to have at least 150 gyms by 2028.

Mr. Inocentes said there are no specific locations yet, but the company is considering Quezon City, Manila, Mandaluyong, and Las Piñas.

GoGym, which started in 2022 and has 4,500 active users. It was founded by Emma Anderson and Chief Executive Officer Andrew Phillips.

"When the pandemic ended, a lot of people that I talked to, customers also, found it more motivating to go to the gym, where they see more people around," Mr. Inocentes said. "I think they missed the interaction with other members."

GoGym offers a regular plan for a 12-month membership for P599 a month. GoGym Plus comes at P699 a month for a year. The membership options are one-month, two months and 12 months.

Other plans include Go Train, which lets customers upgrade to a personal training program with coaches, which costs P199 to P299 per session.

"Our main goal is to provide affordable, accessible fitness for all — to offer a place where people can come as they are, no judgments, no prejudices, and just work out and achieve their fitness goals in an inclusive environment," Mr. Inocentes said.

# Cebu farmers make Jollibee their key market

By Almira Louise S. Martinez

SMALL FARMERS from Cebu in central Philippines have boosted their income under an entrepreneurship program that lets them expand their market by supplying corporate buyers like Jollibee Foods Corp.

Ligaya Miras, cluster leader and a farmer under the Farmer Entrepreneurship Program, noted that before the partnership with the Lamac Multi-Purpose Cooperative and Jollibee Group, they had a small market that dictated prices.

"Many of our goods remained unpurchased because we only knew how to market them in our area," she told *BusinessWorld* in Filipino. "They were the ones who decided the price, and we didn't get a say in it."

Filipino farmers and fisherfolk were among the poorest in the country in 2021, with a poverty incidence of 30% and 30.06%, respectively, according to the local statistics agency.

Under a so-called agro-enterprise clustering approach program, Cebu farmers can sell their pro-



JOLLIBEE GROUP FOUNDATION

duce to companies like Jollibee, assuring them of a steady market.

Lamac Multi-Purpose Cooperative General Manager Ma. Elena C. Limocon said farmers who do not belong to clusters have lower incomes. "We can't assure them of a market if they are fragmented," she said in Filipino.

The average monthly net income of farmers under the program ranges from P20,000 to P50,000, depending on the season, Justine Lynn C. Limocon, business development manager at Lamac Cooperative, said.

This is 25% to 35% higher than the farmers' earnings before they

joined the cooperative, proof that there is money in agriculture, she said.

There are 584 farmers and 45 clusters in Cebu delivering produce to Jollibee restaurants, as well as Chowking.

Japo Vicente, senior program officer at Jollibee Group Foundation, said 23% of the requirements of the fast-food chain including onions, bell peppers, and ginger, are supplied by the farmers.

The company also buys lettuce, cabbage, spinach, tomatoes, spring onion, and assorted vegetables from them.

As of July, the cooperative had delivered 42 metric tons of vegetables, and seeks to surpass last year's record of 83 metric tons by the end of 2024, said L.A. Cruzat, foundation partnership and operations director.

Ms. Limocon said they plan to supply rice, their highest-grossing product in the area, once the Agriculture department's rice warehouse facility becomes operational. "We will send samples to them to see if we can start supplying next year."

The cooperative seeks to contribute at least 20% of Jollibee's rice requirements by 2025.

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