

# SC rejects final appeal of Camp John Hay ruling

THE Supreme Court (SC) has issued a ruling "denying with finality" all appeals filed by CJH Development Corp. in connection with the court's ruling allowing the Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) to recover a 247-hectare property in the John Hay Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

Citing a resolution dated Oct. 22, the BCDA said that the Supreme Court En Banc ruled to "deny with finality the said motions for reconsideration as no substantial arguments were presented to warrant the reversal of the questioned decision ... No further pleadings or motions will be entertained."

According to BCDA, the decision affirms the 2015 arbitral award and reinstates the writ of execution and notice ordering CJH Development to vacate the leased premises within Camp John Hay, a former recreational area for US service men in Baguio.

The decision in favor of BCDA has become final and executory and has been

recorded in the book of entries of judgments," the BCDA said.

"The BCDA assures the public that businesses will continue to operate in Camp John Hay. The BCDA is closely coordinating with all stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition," it added.

The BCDA and CJH Development had entered into a lease agreement covering

247 hectares after the conversion of Camp John Hay into the 625-hectare John Hay SEZ.

BCDA administers former military installations being converted into commercial and industrial zones, including bases formerly operated by the US military. — **Justine Irish D. Tabilo**

## Fil-Chinese companies cite high power costs, red tape as leading deterrents to investment

FILIPINO-Chinese businesses said they continue to view high power costs and red tape as the leading deterrents to expanding their operations.

"There are issues which are of major concern to businessmen. Number one is our cost of electricity... there is also the ease of doing business," Cecilio K. Pedro, president of the Federation of Filipino Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, told reporters on Thursday.

"Number one is our cost of electricity, one of the highest in Asia-Pacific. Sometimes big industries can't enter because

they can't get enough power," he said.

Regarding the onerous process of obtaining business permits, he added: "We need to bring our permits together... You have to go to every department and meet their requirements. *Pahihirapan pa sa mga requirements. So, pag-isipan natin kung paano tulungan itong investors* (It's difficult to gather all the requirements. We need to think of how to help investors)," he added.

"Investors create jobs... jobs will be key for the country to move forward," he said.

Separately, Mr. Pedro said the Philippines will remain reliant on Chinese goods even amid China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea.

"Trade between Philippines and China is favoring China because they export a lot to the Philippines, and we cannot replace (their goods)," he added.

Manila and Beijing have repeatedly clashed in the disputed waterway, with both sides accusing each other of raising tensions.

China claims over 80% of the waterway, but the Permanent Court of Arbitration voided its claim in 2016.

"Most of the products we buy from China are still the lowest priced in the world, *mahirap sila palitan* (they are difficult to replace)," he said.

"China also needs our products, because we have minerals and agricultural products," Mr. Pedro said.

China is among the Philippines' top export destinations for bananas, avocados, and pineapples, among others. It is also the Philippines' main market for nickel ore.

"What we have to improve on is the relationship between Philippines and China," he added. — **Adrian H. Halili**

"Sweden is advanced in terms of technology transfer through partnering with the local ecosystem. A Swedish company, Ericsson, is the leading innovator for connectivity," Mr. Jevrell said.

## Sweden interested in PHL mining, healthcare tie-ups

THE Swedish government has expressed interest in collaborating with the Philippines in mining, healthcare, transportation, digitalization, and defense, the Board of Investments (BoI) said.

In a statement on Tuesday, the BoI said that Trade Undersecretary and BoI Managing Head Ceferino S. Rodolfo recently met with Håkan Jevrell, Sweden's State Secretary to the Minister for International Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade.

"The two officials discussed priority areas in trade and investments with the aim of establishing a platform for the two economies to discuss and exchange information on mutually identified priority areas through a Joint Economic Commission," the BoI said.

During the meeting, Mr. Jevrell expressed interest in possible ventures in mining, defense, healthcare, transportation, and digitalization, citing the need for such tieups to involve sustainable practices.

Meanwhile, Mr. Jevrell said that Sweden is also open to supporting the Philippines in introducing renewables into the grid.

"Companies like ABB have strong interest in working more with the Philippines in this area," he added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabilo**

## British chamber backs passage of Konektadong Pinoy measure

THE British Chamber of Commerce Philippines (BCCP) said it supports the passage of the Open Access in Data Transmission bill, also known as the Konektadong Pinoy bill, as well as further economic liberalization.

"The British Chamber will remain at the forefront of supporting key legislation to continue opening up the economy while promoting multiple areas of cooperation," BCCP Executive Director Chris Nelson said at a briefing on Thursday.

"This aligns with our goal of further increasing UK-Philippines trade and the overall drive to boost its competitiveness in Southeast Asia," he added.

The chamber also sought the passage of the proposed Cybersecurity Act and the E-Governance Act.

"We have also been very concerned and advocating for cybersecurity. Cybersecurity is an issue across the world... And the UK is a known source of expertise on cybersecurity," said Mr. Nelson.

"Cybersecurity is not only important for banks; it is going to be important for all companies and for everybody because, as we get more digitized, security is going to be more critical in the future," he added.

He said that the proposed Cybersecurity Act will help extend the obligation to maintain secure systems across the private sector.

"Why is that important? Because once you start to extend it, it becomes everybody's responsibility. And you can only protect yourself then when more people are aware of what guidance and what is needed," he said.

"So we're looking very much forward to having that bill passed, and as we said, we'd like to see a swift pass, hopefully by the beginning of the next Congress," he added.

He said that the E-governance Act will help investors see improvements in Philippine bureaucracy.

"Things have improved, but it could be much better. And one of them is if we enact the E-Governance Act. Anything you can digitalize will make the process quicker which would encourage more companies to come," he said.

Meanwhile, he said that the BCCP wants to also see further removal of Constitutional barriers to foreign investment.

"The Philippines is one of those countries that has what they call the 'negative investment list' which is actually in your Constitution," he said.

"This obviously means foreign companies cannot invest in certain sectors, so we want to see further liberalization," he added.

He said the Philippines has taken steps in opening some industries, such as renewable energy (RE).

The government saw an increase in RE projects after it allowed full foreign ownership in the industry. Foreign investment was previously capped at 40%.

"We have seen it in some other aspects, but we can continue to do more and further open up the economy. You are competing with other countries that may be more liberal," he added.

— **Justine Irish D. Tabilo**



## Offshore wind green energy auction set for late 2025

THE Department of Energy (DoE) said on Thursday that it will stage the fifth round of the green energy auction (GEA-5) in the third quarter of 2025, with the auction to focus on offshore wind projects.

"As a cornerstone of the Philippine Energy Plan 2023-2050, GEA-5 exemplifies the government's unwavering commitment to renewable energy deployment, energy security, and the energy transition agenda," the DoE said in a statement.

GEA-5 will ensure that offshore wind developers enjoy long-term demand for their output. The timing of the auction will help keep developers on track to start generating output by 2028.

The DoE will soon release the notice of auction and terms of reference, outlining the timeline, procedures, and guidelines for GEA-5 participation.

The DoE is currently evaluating position papers from stakeholders on the design of the auction.

"The launch of GEA-5 is expected to catalyze the development of offshore wind projects, solidifying the Philippines' position as

a renewable energy leader in the region," the DoE said.

To date, the DoE has awarded 92 offshore wind energy service contracts with a potential capacity of 68.66 gigawatts (GW).

Philippine offshore wind resources are estimated at potentially 178 GW, according to the World Bank's 2022 Offshore Wind Roadmap for the Philippines.

The GEA program establishes the framework for facilitating investment in new and additional renewable energy capacity, to ensure adequate supply under a competitive process.

The government first held GEA in 2022 and resulted in 1,996.93 megawatts (MW) worth of renewables being awarded. The second round was staged in 2023, with 3,440.76 MW awarded.

Aside from GEA-5, the DoE is set to hold an auction which involves 4,475 MW of impounding hydro, pumped-storage hydro, run-of-river hydro, and geothermal contracts, and another for integrated renewable energy and energy storage systems. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

## H5N2 bird flu transmission pathways being investigated

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Thursday that it is investigating how Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) Type A, Subtype H5N2 entered, because this is the first time that this strain of HPAI reached the country, after an outbreak at a Camarines Norte duck farm.

Right now, the investigation of the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) is ongoing to determine how the H5N2 subtype entered, because this is the first time that this strain of HPAI reached the country," Assistant Secretary and DA Spokesman Arnel V. de Mesa said at an online briefing.

On Wednesday, the BAI confirmed the first case of the subtype at a duck farm in Talisay, Camarines Norte. The ducks tested positive on Dec. 6.

"The most common subtype that hits us is H5N1, which is more virulent compared to H5N2," he added.

According to a report by the World Health Organization, the Mexican govern-

ment reported a fatal case of human infection with the H5N2 strain in May.

Mr. De Mesa said that the H5N2 strain is less likely to be transmitted to humans compared to the H5N1 subtype.

Bird flu infections in humans may cause mild to severe upper respiratory tract infections and can be fatal. Cases of conjunctivitis, gastrointestinal symptoms, encephalitis and encephalopathy have also been reported.

The BAI also said that it quarantined the affected farm, and had also culled and disposed of the infected birds.

The Camarines Norte outbreak makes it the second province with an active case of avian influenza, the other being Bulacan, according to a BAI report on Dec. 6. Both outbreaks involved duck farms.

There is currently no approved vaccine for Avian Influenza in the Philippines. — **Adrian H. Halili**



## PHL cyberattacks top 4,000 per week

CYBERSECURITY SOLUTIONS company Check Point Software Technologies Ltd. said on Wednesday that in the last six months, organizations in the Philippines experienced an average of 4,003 attacks per week, well above the Asia-Pacific average of 2,870.

"Cyberattacks in the Philippines are escalating both in frequency and sophistication, placing immense pressure on organizations to stay ahead of evolving threats," Teong Eng Guan, regional director of Southeast Asia & Korea at Check Point Software Technologies, said in a statement.

The report found that the exposure of sensitive data such as usernames, passwords, and encryption keys, has happened to 70% of Philippine organizations, with businesses "particularly susceptible to exploitation."

The National Privacy Commission (NPC) said the government logged 55 instances of

data breaches between January and August. In addition, 21 incidents were reported in education and financial services organizations, while 17 incidents were reported by manpower agencies.

On its website, the NPC highlighted malicious attacks, human error, and the combination of both as the top three causes of data breaches in the first eight months of the year.

According to the commission, 115 reports were classified as malicious attacks, including hacking the cloud, databases, e-mail accounts, infrastructure, and websites.

Human error cases involved undertrained staff, loss of equipment/documents, and misdelivered documents.

"As personal data breaches and security incidents come with digitalization, fortification of our cyber defenses and ensuring that our personal data and sensitive personal data is protected should be the top priority," it said.

— **Almira Louise S. Martinez**