

Clark food hub private partner to be selected by end of 2025

By Justine Irish D. Tabile
Reporter

THE Clark International Airport Corp. (CIAC) said it hopes to award the National Food Hub project to a private partner by the end of 2025, keeping it on track for first-phase completion before the Marcos administration steps down.

CIAC President Joseph P. Alcazar said that the feasibility study being conducted by the Asian Development Bank is due for completion by March.

“After we get that, then we will steam ahead with the development and invite investors. The feasibility study is important for us to be able to do a proper tender

for the food hub,” Mr. Alcazar told reporters on Tuesday.

“After the feasibility study we will be entertaining public-private partnership proposals,” he added.

He said the project has received inquiries from foreign firms with local partners.

“Nothing is official... there are no letters of intent yet. But there are two or three groups trying to explore what needs to be done,” he said.

“There are foreign firms, and most of the foreign firms have local partners. I think with the amount of investment that is needed, there will definitely be foreign components,” he added.

He said studying the proposals takes around three to six months, including the Swiss challenges.

“Hopefully before 2025 ends, we have a partner already. That’s our timeline,” he said.

“The ultimate objective is to be able to launch at least a phase of it within the term of the President. But of course, we will push for as much infrastructure to be built. But at least the first phase should be there by that time,” he added.

He said that the food hub needs infrastructure like roads and access.

He said the CIAC is also battling for the passage of the Clark National Food Hub Act to establish a comprehensive program for the management and operation of the food hub and its strategic nationwide trading network.

“Part of (the bill) is the allocation of budget for the National

Food Hub and the additional incentives over and above CRE-ATE MORE for the investors and the locators of the food hub,” he added.

Signed into law by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., CRE-ATE MORE, or the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises to Maximize Opportunities for Reinvigorating the Economy Act, aims to attract more investment by lowering the corporate income tax to 20%, among others.

Written by Representatives Rufus B. Rodriguez, Maria Angela S. Garcia, and Anna Victoria Veloso-Tuazon, the food hub act, or House Bill 10678, is currently with the House Committee on Trade and Industry.



PHILIPPINE STAR/EDD GUMBAN
A SIGN announces the closure of the Island Cove POGO Hub in Binakayan, Kawit, Cavite.

POGO shutdown on track for end of year

THE Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp. (PAGCOR) said it is on track to shut down all Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators (POGO) by the end of the year.

“You can expect that there will be no more licensed POGOs operating by the end of this year,” PAGCOR Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Alejandro H. Tengco said on Tuesday.

In 2019, there were a total of 298 licensed POGOs. The regulator brought it down to 48 earlier this year.

“Today, we are proud to announce that only 17 POGOs remain in operation,” Mr. Tengco said.

During his State of the Nation Address in July, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. banned all offshore gaming operations, citing POGO links to illegal activities such as money laundering and financial scams.

“By Jan. 1, 2025, all these operators that will still continue to operate... will be deemed illegal. All their licenses will be canceled,” Mr. Tengco said.

He expects some companies continuing to operate “guerilla” style, he said.

“They will go to different provinces. In fact, a few months back, or even two weeks ago, we saw some renting resorts and hotels outside Manila, offering one-year advance rentals.”

“These are the problems that I believe will be the challenge for law enforcement agencies. We really have to be vigilant,” he added.

Mr. Tengco also clarified that all licenses will be canceled, be they for POGOs or Internet Gaming Licenses.

Meanwhile, Mr. Tengco said the POGO ban will have no effect on the gaming industry’s revenue.

He expects gross gaming revenue (GGR) to rise this year, primarily driven by electronic gaming.

GGR could top P350 billion this year, he said, which would be a record.

Meanwhile, PAGCOR revenue could double this year. “I think the net income of PAGCOR this year will be between P12 billion to P15 billion. I have a feeling it will almost double,” Mr. Tengco added.

Last year, the gaming regulator booked a net profit of P6.81 billion. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsan**

House approves electric vehicle zero-tariff measure

THE House of Representatives has approved on final reading a bill providing tax and duty exemptions on imported electric vehicles (EVs).

House Bill No. 10960 received approval from 196 lawmakers, with three against its passage and one abstention.

The tariff waiver covers imported two-, three- or four-wheeled EVs and their charging equipment from 2025 to 2030, bringing President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.’s order removing tariffs on EVs closer to becoming law.

The exemption is designed to boost EV adoption, while also helping the Philippines make its transportation greener.

The measure also calls for a review on the import of capital equipment used for the manufacture and assembly of EVs for possible inclusion in the strategic investment priority plan.

Last year, Mr. Marcos issued an executive order that removed import duties on EVs until 2028. It was expanded by the National Economic and Development Au-

thority Board in May to include electric motorcycles, tricycles, and hybrid EVs.

The Philippines is moving to decarbonize its transportation system, amid a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 75% by 2030, in line with commitments made under the 2021 Paris Agreement.

The Department of Energy’s (DoE) roadmap for the wider adoption of EVs sets “specific targets and activities” to guide the transition towards electrified transportation.

An electric vehicle incentives scheme will likely be endorsed to Mr. Marcos by year’s end, giving the EV adoption campaign more impetus. The scheme is expected to result in the domestic manufacture of about four million EVs in the coming decade.

The proposed policy will likely contain incentives for consumers, such as purchase subsidies through financial rebates, discounts, tax credits, or value-added tax exemptions, the DoE has said. — **Kenneth Christiane L. Basilio**

Kanlaon eruption raises sugarcane yield concerns

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said the eruption of Mount Kanlaon on Negros Island has raised concerns about sugarcane yields in the current crop year.

“If the farmers cannot push (the ash) away from their sugarcane, it will have a burning effect... that will lower yields,” SRA Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona said in a briefing on Tuesday.

Kanlaon erupted on Monday, emitting a column up to 3,000 meters high, according to the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs).

The volcano is located in Negros Occidental near the Negros Oriental border. Negros Island produces most of the country’s sugarcane.

The regulator is already projecting a 7.2% drop in sugar production from the 1.92 million metric tons reported during the previous crop year, citing crop damage sustained earlier during the dry conditions brought about by El Niño.

He said that the ashfall from the eruption could raise acidity levels in the areas planted to cane.

“So that’s the scary part... our buffer stock will be affected in the end,” Mr. Azcona added.

According to a report by the SRA’s research and development arm, the immediate impact of volcanic ash is physical damage to the leaves, reducing their capacity for photosynthesis, as well as disruption to the chemical makeup of the soil, which can both lead to reduced yields.

The SRA added that the long-term effects on crops could include nutrient imbalances in the soil, compaction, erosion and chemical leaching.

Phivolcs had raised Alert Level three in the immediate vicinity of the volcano, signifying a magmatic eruption in progress and the possibility of further explosive eruptions.

“We will try our best to save the affected sugarcane because we need every ton of it for this year,” he said.

SRA backs probe into sugar millgate price drop

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said on Tuesday that it supports an investigation after sugar producers reported that millers are offering them lower prices for their cane.

SRA Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona said sugar farmers are being offered millgate prices of as little as P2,400 per 50 kilograms. “So that amounts to about less than P50 per kilo.”

“If you look at the numbers, our wholesale price is constant, our retail price is constant. Only the farmgate price has fallen,” he said.

On Monday, a legislator urged the House of Representatives to investigate the drop in sugar millgate prices.

“Despite the low supply and the steady demand for sugar, the industry faces low and declining sugar millgate prices,” Negros

Occidental Rep. Emilio Bernardino L. Yulo said in his privilege speech late Monday.

“This defies any logical explanation and contradicts the fundamental principle of supply and demand,” he added.

Mr. Yulo also raised the potential of price manipulation.

“Let us investigate the factors behind this price instability and hold accountable those who are tasked to protect the sugar farmers and those who take advantage of the situation for an unimaginable profit,” he said.

According to Mr. Azcona, at the current millgate price farmers are breaking even or cannot recover their cost of production.

“We have to remember 85% to 90% of our farmers are small farmers of one to two hectares. Most of them, if not all, are land reform beneficiaries,” he said.

He added that the ideal range for millgate price should be between P2,650 to P2,728. “Then at least farmers could break even.”

He added that the cost of production is “very high for this year” mainly due to the effects of El Niño and La Niña.

On the other hand, the yield per hectare of sugarcane has also fallen.

The yield for sugarcane declined 16% to an average of 1.47 LKGTC (50-kg bag raw sugar per ton of cane) from 1.75 LKGTC a year earlier.

Mr. Azcona said that millgate prices have remained low despite drop in supply and the expected increased demand for sugar.

According to the SRA, as of Dec. 1, the raw sugar inventory was 171,736 metric tons (MT), while refined sugar stocks totaled 308,554 MT. — **Adrian H. Halili**

Consumers leaning on credit due to financial pressures, TransUnion says

THE increased use of credit is pointing to sustained financial strain on consumers, according to a study by TransUnion.

“In the face of sustained financial pressure, consumers in the Philippines have increasingly adjusted spending and saving behaviors. While more are shifting away from long-term savings, reliance on credit rose as almost one in five (17%) increased credit usage in Q4 during the holiday season,” TransUnion Principal of Research and Consulting for Asia Pacific Weihan Sun said in a statement on Tuesday.

TransUnion surveyed 938 adult consumers between Sept. 25 and Oct. 17.

A larger share of consumers is expecting rising bills and loan repayments (49%, up from 43% a year earlier) in the coming months, the study found.

In the fourth quarter, 42% of respondents cited difficulty paying bills

and loans in full, little changed from 43% a year earlier.

“This consistent trend underscores sustained financial strain across many of the population,” TransUnion said.

Some 44% of respondents said their income grew in the past three months, while 40% said income was unchanged.

Some 80% of respondents said the higher cost of everyday goods is the most pressing concern affecting their household finances in the next six months.

This was followed by worries over job security (59%) and interest rates (41%).

“These findings underscored the caution of consumers regarding financial resilience — possibly suggesting broader implications for household spending and debt management in the coming year,” TransUnion said. — **Aaron Michael C. Sy**

Full commercial operations of RE market targeted for Dec. 26

THE Department of Energy (DoE) said its target date to begin full commercial operations of the renewable energy market (REM) is Dec. 26.

In a circular dated Dec. 6, the DoE said that the RE market covers mandatory REM trading participants and REM generators, as well as voluntary REM generators.

Republic Act No. 9513 or the Renewable Energy Act of 2008 tasks the DoE with establishing the REM for the trading of RE Certificates (RECs), each of which is equivalent to one-megawatt-hour of RE, in compliance with the Renewable Portfolio Standards (RPS) Rules.

The market serves as the venue for trading RECs allowing mandatory participants to comply with their RPS obligations.

RPS requires distribution utilities, electric cooperatives, and retail electricity suppliers to source an agreed portion of their energy supply from eligible RE resources, contributing to the growth of the RE industry.

In 2022, the DoE required on-grid power suppliers to expand the share of RE in their output to 2.52% by 2023 from 1% previously.

The RE market launched interim commercial operations in 2022 with the Philippine Electricity Market Corp. as registrar.

Upon full commercial operations, its functions as registrar will be transferred to the Independent Electricity Market Operator of the Philippines, which operates the Wholesale Electricity Spot Market. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

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