

National ID 36-M backlog may lead to decentralized printing

THE Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said its backlog of 36 million Philippine Identification System (PhilSys) or National ID cards will require a resort to decentralized printing, for which additional funds will be needed.

“We are working on decentralized printing. We will try to wipe out that backlog if given additional funds because the approved funding cannot support the full

printing of the 36 million cards,” Deputy National Statistician Rosalinda P. Bautista told reporters on Thursday.

She said there is no new supplier yet for the cards after the contract with AllCard, Inc. was terminated in August.

The PSA reported that as of Dec. 20, it has signed up 91.7 million persons for the National ID, missing the sign-up target of 92.16 million.

Meanwhile, 55.5 million physical cards have been dispatched.

She also blamed the typhoons that prevented some regions from carrying out on-site registration.

According to the 2025 General Appropriations Act, the PSA has been allotted P8.516 billion for its operations.

Some P1.92 billion was appropriated for the Philippine Identification System to carry

out the mandate of Republic Act No. 11055.

“The Philippine Statistics Authority shall set a timetable for the proper implementation of the Philippine Identification System, including the printing and issuance of 115.67 million PhilSys IDs within the agency’s committed timeline of not later than Dec. 31, 2028,” according to the 2025 GAA. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

NGCP reiterates it is Filipino-controlled

THE National Grid Corp. of the Philippines (NGCP) reiterated that it is Filipino-controlled, allaying concerns about its Chinese shareholder’s role in operations.

“The State Grid Corp. of China (SGCC) does not exercise control over the power grid nor over NGCP,” NGCP Vice Chairman Henry Sy, Jr. told the House committee on legislative franchises in an opening statement, which was delivered by NGCP President and Chief Executive Officer Anthony L. Almeda.

Mr. Sy said domestic corporations Monte Oro Grid Resources Corp. and Calaca High Power Corp. each hold 30%, or a total of 60% of the outstanding capital stock of NGCP.

State Grid, on the other hand, holds a minority share of 40%.

On the matter of NGCP’s partnership with State Grid, he said the Chinese state-owned company was already on board and a shareholder agreement in place when he purchased his shares in 2010.

Mr. Sy also rejected reports that the Chinese can shut down the Philippine grid, saying that “it

is NGCP alone, through its Filipino directors and personnel, and not the Chinese, which has control over the system operations.”

“The Chinese do not have control over the grid,” he said, adding “there is no proverbial single red button that can instantly turn off the grid” and there are protocols that actually prevent this.

He also said NGCP’s Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition system is a “secure stand-alone, isolated system not connected to any other network or internet,” thus making it safe from remote hacking.

On the sidelines of the House hearing, NGCP Assistant Vice-President and head of Public Relations Leonor Felipa Cynthia P. Alabanza told reporters that the NGCP system is “not connected to third-party service providers. We have our own system that is not connected to the World Wide Web or any internet service provider.”

All of NGCP’s engineers are Filipinos, she said, adding that “tight” security is enforced at all facilities.

Ms. Alabanza said the NGCP is open to a national security review

as authorized by a 2022 law that liberalized foreign ownership in select domestic industries.

The three-year-old Public Services Act allowed full foreign ownership of telecommunications, shipping, airlines, and railway companies, among others. Foreign investments are subject to a national security review if their entry has national security implications, according to the law’s implementing rules and regulations.

“We have never shirked our responsibility to comply with all pertinent laws, rules, and regulations as well as the concession agreement. If that is what the government seeks to do, then we will seek redress elsewhere,” Ms. Alabanza said. “But certainly, we will comply if that is the case.”

Meanwhile, Mr. Sy in his statement said stability is required not just in the power supply, but in law, policy and regulation, for a more robust power industry.

“I strongly urge our DoE (Department of Energy) to look at the problem as a whole. The data are clear — 97% of the power inter-

ruptions from 2016 to 2023 were caused by problems in supply,” he said.

“We need stable, affordable baseload power. We need a comprehensive, aligned plan that considers the needs of all sectors. We are willing to be part of the solution, but transmission should not be the solution to everyone’s problems,” he added.

Mr. Sy sits on the NGCP board, whose other members include Robert G. Coyiuto, Jr., Jose T. Pardo, Francis Chua, Anthony L. Almeda, Zhu Guangchao, Paul P. Sagayo, Jr., Yao Yousheng, Wang Lijin, and Liu Xinhua.

The NGCP officially started operations as a power transmission service provider in 2009, it said.

Under a congressionally granted 50-year franchise, the company has the right to operate and maintain the transmission system and related facilities, and to exercise the right of eminent domain as needed to construct, expand, maintain, and operate the transmission system. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera, Kenneth Christiane L. Basilio**



New SIPP to be released in H1

THE Board of Investments (BoI) said it is set to release the 2025-2028 Strategic Investment Priority Plan (SIPP) in the first half, with the new edition expected to rationalize the sector and tier listings of the government’s preferred investments.

At the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines Doing Business in the Philippines 2025 Press Launch, BoI Managing Head and Trade Undersecretary Ceferino S. Rodolfo said that the BoI, “in consultation with other investment promotion agencies, government agencies, and stakeholders, is finalizing the 2025-2028 SIPP.”

“The projects identified have a high impact on job creation, value creation through innovation, upgrading, moving up the value chain, and providing essential support to sectors critical to industrial development,” he added.

He said that consultations revealed that some industries have requested that they be reclassified into higher tiers.

“But I think it will be more of the same. If there are any (changes), they may be just articulating further tiers 1, 2, and 3. If there are any industries we are going to look at, we (will focus the review) on the manufacturing sector,” he added.

He said the new SIPP will seek to harmonize with the provisions of the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises (CREATE) Act and the CREATE to Maximize Opportunities for

Reinvigorating the Economy (CREATE MORE) Act.

“There are guidelines provided under CREATE and CREATE MORE on which items should be classified as Tier 1, 2, and 3. In CREATE MORE, I think it specified that data centers and cyber security are under Tier 3,” he said.

“So we will adjust the tiers. And then looking at the sectors, we will check who need more incentives, who can go without incentives, or who need enhanced incentives,” he added.

Regarding CREATE MORE, he said that the government will be releasing the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) by the end of January.

“But even as we are still to release the IRR within this month, it’s also very important to note that we have already issued the interim IRR. So, you are not prejudiced by not still having the IRR released,” he added.

The interim IRR allow investment promotion agencies to accept applications for registration under CREATE MORE.

As part of the government’s initiatives in highlighting the advantages of CREATE MORE, the BoI, together with other investment promotion agencies, is organizing roadshows.

He said that the roadshow will visit East Asia, particularly Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea, as well as the European Union and the US. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Next subway could rise in Cebu

THE Department of Transportation (DoTr) said it has embarked on a feasibility study for a new subway project in Cebu.

“We are conducting an assessment to determine demand and a ridership forecast for the Cebu subway,” Transportation Undersecretary for Planning and Project Development Timothy John R. Batan said on Radyo Pilipinas.

The plan to construct an underground rail line in Cebu was first put forward in 2024, Mr. Batan said, adding that the project was designed to help decongest the road network in Metro Cebu.

“The limited roads in (Cebu) make it harder to expand the road network. While there is room for road-based transport like the BRT (bus rapid transit) system and jeepneys, once we reach this kind of situation... the only solution is to build a rail or train system,” he said.

Unlike Metro Manila, Metro Cebu does not have long stretches of wide roads, Mr. Batan said, noting that constructing an elevated rail line is not feasible and might result in a curvy rail alignment.

“When we looked at Cebu, it does not have a long and wide road to construct an elevated rail line,” he said. “The plan is just to construct a subway.”

The country’s first subway in Metro Manila is under construction and is expected to be fully operational between 2030 and

2031, slipping from the initial target of 2029. The DoTr said that the Metro Manila Subway is currently deemed 50% complete.

“We hope the local government will be directly involved in the project,” Mr. Batan said.

According to Cebu’s master plan, the Metro Cebu subway will run for 67.5 kilometers between Danao City and Carcar City.

According to the Cebu Provincial Government website, its Economic Enterprise Council is proposing to execute the project as a public-private partnership (PPP).

Nigel Paul C. Villarete, senior adviser on PPP at the technical advisory group Libra Konsult, Inc., said underground transport infrastructure is more difficult and expensive to construct.

He said the possibility of an elevated rail line should still be considered rather than resorting to underground rail line right away.

“There will be places where elevated structures might be difficult or even impossible, in which case, we need to go underground... Within Metro Cebu, we may have to go a mix of elevated and underground or fully one or the other,” he said.

“Any proposal for a Cebu subway needs further study, particularly a technical, demand and feasibility study, as this appears to be a province-wide rail line,” Terry L. Ridon, convenor of think tank InfraWatch, said. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

P29 rice eyed for broader distribution in groceries

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it is seeking to expand the distribution of its P29 and Rice for All programs to include retail outlets in Metro Manila.

“The program will be piloted in Metro Manila, where rice prices remain high despite tariff reductions and falling global rates” the DA said in a statement on Thursday.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said he has met with representatives from the supermarket, grocery, and convenience store industries to expand the program.

“With over 3,200 retail outlets, including SM, Robinsons, 7-Eleven, Puregold, and

MerryMart, the DA sees these networks as crucial in reaching millions of consumers daily,” the DA added.

The DA said participating establishments will sell subsidized P29 rice, which are taken from ageing stocks held by the National Food Authority. The intended beneficiaries are vulnerable members of society.

Rice for All offers various rice grades ranging from 5% broken rice to 100% broken rice.

“This is a solution that we believe will stabilize rice prices faster and more efficiently,” Mr. Laurel said.

“But we need to find the right balance to operationalize this properly and secure everyone’s cooperation,” he added.

Food Terminal, Inc. will handle the supply and packaging of rice distributed through participating retail chains.

Mr. Laurel said that the program’s Metro Manila results will be reviewed before expanding to other regions.

“The DA is optimistic that this collaboration will serve as a model for future efforts to enhance food security and affordability,” Mr. Laurel added. — **Adrian H. Halili**

Coconut yields could fall 20% due to El Niño stress

COCONUT yields are estimated to have declined 20% in 2024 due to the dry conditions brought on by El Niño, according to the United Coconut Association of the Philippines (UCAP).

“Reduced rainfall can stress coconut trees, leading to decreased fruit yields as water scarcity affects the productivity of the plants. El Niño’s result in about 20% reduction in yield,” UCAP said in a statement on Thursday.

Rainfall was weaker than usual in the first half of 2024 due to El Niño, leading to drought and dry spells.

Agricultural damage caused by El Niño was estimated at P15.3

billion on lost volume of 330,717 metric tons (MT), across 109,481 hectares of farmland, according to the DA’s final estimate.

UCAP added that global demand continues to increase with coconut oil prices rising to a 24-month high in 2024.

About 70% of Philippine coconut oil production is exported.

“The combination of diminished supply due to El Niño and the persistent growth in global demand for coconut products have created the perfect storm for a spike in coconut oil prices in recent months,” it said.

The US Department of Agriculture said in a report that El

Niño dampened coconut oil exports last year due to declining production.

Exports were estimated to drop to 900,000 MT during the 2024 to 2025 market year, from 1.14 million MT the prior year.

“The Philippines is a price taker for crude coconut oil, with prices largely determined in Rotterdam where commodity brokers exert market forces beyond the country’s influence,” it added.

In October, the Department of Energy ordered the increase in the coconut oil content of biofuel to 3% or B3.

UCAP said coconut oil demand continues to rise as it is seen as a

more sustainable, organic, and natural alternative for applications in food, nutrition and personal and home care.

It added that the higher biodiesel blend may have a short-term impact on domestic supply. However, it could potentially stimulate long-term growth in the coconut oil industry.

“The increase in demand coming from biodiesel encourages the industry to be more productive and efficient. It is the much-needed catalyst for a long-overlooked industry to enter a new growth supercycle,” it said. — **Adrian H. Halili**

PEZA investor visas hit 21,585 by end of 2024 as project registrations mount

THE Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) said it has issued 21,585 visas for investors and foreign nationals employed within economic zones as of the end of 2024, which it said reflect the increasing number of PEZA registrations.

“The implication of increasing visa issuances is that more new and expansion projects are being registered by PEZA. Multi-national corporations account for 60% of the total registered business enterprises (RBEs),” PEZA

Director General Tereso O. Panga said via Viber on Thursday.

“Other than the increasing number of ecozone foreign nationals, we see the same trend with the increasing number of ecozone expats’ immediate dependent family members applying for PEZA visas. This is good for both local and international schools where the dependent children go to study,” he added.

In a statement on Thursday, PEZA said that it has issued 16,299 visas to principals of

PEZA-registered business enterprises (RBEs) and 5,286 dependents since 2021.

Last year, PEZA approved 255 new and expansion projects worth P214.18 billion, reflecting a 21.89% increase from the P175.71 billion worth of investment pledges approved in 2023.

To make the issuance of PEZA visas more efficient while safeguarding national security, PEZA signed a data-sharing agreement with the Bureau of Immigration (BI) on Tuesday.

“This collaboration is essential in facilitating trade and investment as it is anchored not just in the cross-border movement of goods or capital, but equally important is the movement of people,” Mr. Panga said.

“These are your locator company foreign nationals — top executives, production and R&D engineers, machine technicians, and knowledge workers who form part of the ecozone supply and value chains,” he added.

BI Commissioner Joel Anthony M. Viado said that the agreement will facilitate effective collaboration, enhance data integrity, and contribute to the overall security and efficiency of the issuance of PEZA visas.

The memorandum of agreement PEZA signed with BI follows the agreement the investment promotion agency signed with the Department of Labor on Dec. 16.

“This agreement is part of a broader initiative to enhance

the efficiency and effectiveness of information exchange, which is essential for the seamless implementation of PEZA Visas for foreign nationals working within ecozones,” PEZA said.

“This reduction in bureaucratic hurdles will enable foreign investors to better navigate the regulatory landscape with greater ease and allow them to commence their projects without unnecessary delays,” it added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**