Busway stations to be modeled after 2 stations donated by SM

PHILIPPINE STAR/EDD GUMBAN

By Ashley Erika O. Jose
Reporter

THE planned privatization of the EDSA Busway project is on hold for now as the Department of Transportation (DoTr) studies improvements that will be patterned on two "model" stations serving the SM group's malls in Quezon City and Mandaluyong.

Transportation Secretary Vivencio B. Dizon told reporters on Tuesday that the DoTr "will use the model stations of SM North EDSA and SM Megamall station," which will be donated by the SM Group.

"There is a budget for (overall system upgrades) but we are going to find out exactly how much we have for this year," he said, adding that the SM stations will serve as the "blueprint for the planned construction and improvements of the remaining 21 stations."

"We are confident that within the President's term, by 2026 or 2027, we will really have a proper, very modern busway carousel system."

The DoTr is planning to auction contracts for the upgrade of EDSA Busway's current stations, Mr. Dizon said, adding that the construction is projected to start within the second half of the year.

Mr. Dizon said in terms of immediate relief for commuters, the DoTr will fund some more immediate upgrades, for which the operations and maintenance contracts will be offered to bidders.

The EDSA Busway Project initially involved the financing, design, construction, procurement of low-carbon buses, route planning, and operations and maintenance of the busway, according to the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Center.

Mr. Dizon said the feasibility study for the EDSA Busway project is expected to be completed within the next few months pending finalization of the terms of reference by its consultant.

The project's privatization is now expected to take place by 2026, he said in a separate statement.

According to Nigel Paul C. Villarete, senior adviser on PPP at Libra Konsult, Inc., a transportation analyst, described the change of plan as in line with accepted practice.

"That model is a common arrangement for many cities in the world. In essence, the more permanent and fixed parts which will last for the long term are taken on by the government while the operations or moving parts are carried by private sector," he said via Viber.


FREEPIK

Drop in sugar yields stable since October

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration said the drop in sugar yields has been holding steady since October, adding that it nevertheless expects to hit its 1.78 million metric ton (MMT) target for the crop year.

"We are currently about 11% down on LKGTC (50-kilo bag of sugar per ton of cane), and we have not seen a significant change in the percentage," Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona told reporters.

Sugar production during the current crop year, was 1.01 MMT as of Feb. 16. The crop year runs from September to August, meaning that cane being grown starting last year experienced the tail end of the El Niño dry spells and the subsequent La Niña, which brought heavier-than-usual rains.

"The percentage decrease in yields has been the same since October," he added.

Mill production fell 27.68% year on year to 1.01 MMT between Sept. 1 and Feb. 16. Output during the previous full crop year had been 1.92 MMT.

"The main factor that we are anticipating is the El Niño damage," Mr. Azcona said.

He noted that the harvest in northern Negros has been delayed by rains, giving the final output numbers some upside that makes hitting the 1.78 MMT target possible.

"You move a bit south (in Negros), it's already dry," he said, facilitating the harvest there.

Mr. Azcona said big farms, which account for only 10% of the industry, are doing very well in terms of tonnage due to their access to water.

"The 85% do not have access to water. The other problem with the unirrigated farms is their costs this year are very high," he said, noting that such farms planted and fertilized twice.

"They planted let's say in October, and had to replant in May," he said. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

Amkor Technologies in further Palace visit amid hopes of relocating China operations

KEVIN ENGEL, CEO of US chipmaker Amkor Technology, paid a visit to President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. and heard a pitch from the Palace centered on helping the Philippines make higher-value products.

In a statement, the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) quoted Mr. Marcos as saying during the visit: "Your continued involvement in the Philippines is something certainly we would like to encourage as we are trying to move our semiconductor industry up the value chain from pure fabrication to design."

Amkor Technology is looking to pull manufacturing operations out of China. According to the PCO, the company sees potential in Philippine efforts in growing its chip workforce.

In December, the Office of the Special Assistant to the President for Investment and Economic Affairs (OSAPIEA) said US semiconductor companies are exploring local partnerships to transform Manila into an investment destination.

Amkor Technology, Allegro Microsystems, Analog Devices, Micro Technology and OnSemi also met with the President in December, exploring the possibility of setting up shop in the country.

In 2023, the Philippines generated about $50 billion in exports, with the industry supporting about 3 million direct and indirect jobs, according to OSAPIEA.

The Semiconductor and Electronics Industries in the Philippines Foundation, Inc. has said that exports of semiconductor and electronic products are likely to be flat in 2025.

OSAPIEA said the government is encouraged by opportunities presented by the US CHIPS and Science Act, which features a $500-million International Technology Security and Innovation Fund to be allocated to seven countries over five years, as the US moves to de-risk its technology supply chains. — **John Victor D. Ordoñez**

ECCP sees exit from FATF gray list strengthening Philippine argument for attracting investment

THE Philippines' removal from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) gray list is expected to improve the overall investment climate and enhance confidence, the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (ECCP) said.

"The ECCP believes that the Philippines' exit from the FATF gray list will significantly enhance its attractiveness as a prime destination for local and foreign investment, fostering a more stable and secure business climate," the ECCP said in a statement on Tuesday.

The FATF recently removed the Philippines from the category of jurisdictions requiring increased monitoring for "dirty money." The Philippines had been on the list since June 2021.

The ECCP noted substantial progress in the implementing policies to counter money laundering and terrorism financing.

In particular, the ECCP said that the Anti-Financial Account Scamming Act (AFASA) passed in July 2024 helps strengthen the integrity of financial accounts and the overall financial system.

"The chamber reiterates its support for the effective implementation of AFASA, which will further empower financial institutions to protect client accounts and combat financial account scamming," it said.

"The passage of AFASA demonstrates the government's proactive approach to addressing financial crimes and ensuring a secure financial environment," it added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

PAGCOR warns fake website is issuing gaming licenses

THE Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp. (PAGCOR) warned that a fake website is taking in applications for gaming licenses.

"We urge the public not to download anything or transact through the said fake website that uses the domain name *www.pagcorphilippines.com* because it is definitely not from PAGCOR and all its contents are spurious," PAGCOR Chairman and Chief Executive Alejandro H. Tengco said in a statement on Feb. 24.

Mr. Tengco said the legitimate and only PAGCOR website is *www.pagcor.ph*.

"We have reported this incident to the Department of Information and Communications Technology," Mr. Tengco said.

He said the fake website went live on Saturday, Feb. 22 when PAGCOR's head office was closed.

On Feb. 2, PAGCOR also warned of supposed official letters and text messages falsely claiming that Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators will reopen.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. ordered the ban of all offshore gaming operations during his State of the Nation Address in July last year. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

Instant noodle industry in push to reduce unhealthy ingredients

INSTANT noodle makers said they are developing healthier products with reduced salt, sugar, and fat content while adding essential nutrients.

At the World Instant Noodles Association (WINA) Summit on Tuesday, WINA said its WINA Challenge Target addresses nutrition and health, environmental sustainability, food safety, and resolving social issues.

"We hope the entire instant noodle industry will unite and cooperate with government agencies and other organizations to work on the various social issues we face," according to Mitsuru Tanaka, chief development officer at Nissin Foods Holdings.

Mr. Tanaka said that it is important to protect consumer health and improve their quality of life.

Monde Nissin Corp. Chief Executive Officer and Executive Vice-President Henry Soesanto said he expects instant noodles to remain a staple food in the Philippines.

"I think (instant noodles) will keep on being a staple food, but we will improve the health aspect so people can continue consuming them," he told reporters on the sidelines of the summit.

Asked about challenges faced by instant noodle makers, he said that there is a need to educate consumers on health.

National Nutrition Council Assistant Secretary Azucena Milana-Dayanghirang said that WINA can help improve nutrition through reformulation and fortification.

"WINA can transform the instant noodles nutrition profile first through reformulation, reducing sugar, salt, and trans fat, and second through fortification, so not only reformulation but also adding nutrients like iron and zinc," she said.

"This will make instant noodles very palatable, very nutritious, and make instant noodles a staple," she added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**


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Exporters to France urged to maximize use of trade deals

EXPORTERS are being encouraged to further explore market opportunities in France by making use of free trade and bilateral agreements, the World Trade Center Metro Manila (WTCMM) said.

"France is a significant trading partner of the Philippines. The trade relationship has shown growth over the years, with efforts to enhance trade ties continuing through business collaborations and economic engagements between the two countries," WTCMM Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Pamela D. Pascual said.

WTCMM recently organized an information workshop with the Department of Trade and Industry's Export Marketing Bureau to tackle the untapped potential of Philippine products in France and how to maximize trade deals.

Goods traded between the Philippines and France include machinery, electronics, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, and agri-food products, the WTCMM said.

The WTCMM said the untapped opportunities outside these industries "include business process outsourcing and information technology services, furniture and home decor, and textiles and apparel."

The Philippines currently participates in the European Union's (EU) Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+), which gives its products preferential access to the EU.

Under the GSP+ scheme, zero duties are collected on 6,274 Philippine-made products.

Meanwhile, the Philippines and the EU have resumed negotiations for a free trade agreement after talks were suspended in 2017.

The second round of negotiations took place in the second week of February in Manila, while the third round is expected to take place in June in Belgium.

The WTCMM also said that the 55th World Trade Centers Association Global Business Forum is expected to take place on April 6-9 in Marseille.

"This year, it provides a doorway to France, an economically refined nation with a large, diverse, and sophisticated consumer base, as well as the greater Mediterranean region with access to Southern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East," it said. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

NEA, DPWH to agree on rules for relocating displaced power lines

THE National Electrification Administration (NEA) and the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) will establish a procedure for the removal and relocation of power distribution facilities to be affected by DPWH projects.

According to a joint circular issued by the Department of Energy and DPWH dated Jan. 31, the joint guidelines will cover distribution facilities that are "likely or at risk of becoming an obstruction to future DPWH projects within the national road."

The guidelines will include an agreed formula for compensating electric cooperatives (ECs), as well as procedures for payment, which may be made by the NEA to the ECs in advance, for reimbursement by the DPWH later.

The rules will call for joint monitoring of the relocation process in line with the memorandum of understanding signed by DPWH's implementing office and the ECs.

The NEA will also "assist the ECs in seeking regulatory support for the recovery of costs of removal and relocation of affected distribution facilities which may not be covered by the compensation provided under the DPWH-NEA joint guidelines." — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**