

# Recto does not expect budget surplus to last

FINANCE Secretary Ralph G. Recto said the budget surplus recorded in January is unlikely to continue in the following months.

Asked if the surplus will be sustained in the runup to the elections, Mr. Recto told *BusinessWorld*: "No. Our deficit target this year is 5.3% of the GDP (gross domestic product)."

The government in January posted a P68.4-billion budget surplus, down from the P88-billion

surplus a year earlier, the Bureau of the Treasury (BTr) reported on Tuesday.

The target deficit-to-GDP ratio is lower than the 5.7% target last year, and the government aims to further reduce this to 3.7% in 2028.

The midterm elections for national and local positions are scheduled for May 12.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Chief Economist Michael

L. Ricafort noted that the January surpluses of recent years typically follow "large deficits" in December.

The surplus will likely revert to a deficit in the following months.

The BTr also reported that revenue collection in January grew 10.75% to P467.1 billion, while government expenditure rose 19.45% to P398.8 billion.

Mr. Recto told reporters on Wednesday that the government

is on track with fiscal consolidation efforts.

"We're on the path. We surpassed our revenue targets. Last year, we had the highest revenue-to-GDP ratio in the last 27 years. That's very good."

Mr. Recto added that the Department of Finance will continue with its privatization efforts.

"We will be happy if we hit our target," Mr. Recto said on

Thursday via Viber when asked if the government will meet its P210.8-billion non-tax collection goal for 2025.

Non-tax revenue fell 19.16% to P29.6 billion, while tax collections rose 13.6% to P437.5 billion in January.

Mr. Recto said the proposed Excise Tax on Single-Use Plastics is still a priority.

The plastics tax is one of the priority bills in the Legis-

lative-Executive Development Advisory Council common legislative agenda for the 19th Congress.

Mr. Recto also said higher spending during the elections will help the government meet its growth target of at least 6%.

This is the lower end of the government's 6-8% target band for 2025, with the deficit projected at P1.534 trillion or 5.3% of GDP. —

**Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

## Cagayan Valley agriculturists develop zero-energy cooler to reduce vegetable waste

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said its Cagayan Valley office has developed a zero-energy cooling chamber designed to extend the shelf life of freshly harvested vegetables like tomatoes and eggplant.

The P45,000 ZEC-C or Zero Energy Cooling Chamber is capable of storing 500 kilos, with larger capacities becoming more cost effective, the DA said in a statement.

"An economic analysis showed a return on investment of at least 71% for tomatoes and 32% for eggplant over a five to 21-day storage cycle," it said.

ZEC-C, which took two years, was developed by researchers, farmers, cooperatives, and agribusinesses.

Principal technology author Mary Jane Ibarra of the Cagayan Valley Research Center in Ilagan City and her team conducted the trials comparing the performance of suitable materials, including coconut coir, charcoal, and a bricks-and-sand mix.

The trials in Aurora and Roxas, Isabela found that charcoal insulation effectively lowered temperatures by 5-10 degrees Celsius,

and maintained humidity levels of 85-90% that are deemed ideal for vegetable storage.

Rose Mary Aquino, regional executive director for the DA's Regional Field Office II, said ZEC-C preserved tomatoes for up to 21 days and eggplant for up to five days, based on initial freshness, firmness, and color.

The farmgate price of tomatoes in parts of the country in early March fell to as low as P4 per kilo due to excessive supply.

Due to lack of cold storage facilities, farmers in the Philippines either sell their excess at lower prices or dump them.

Ms. Aquino said other vegetables, such as bottle gourd (*upo*) and sponge gourd (*patola*) stayed in excellent condition for up to 6 days.

The ZEC-C technology launch and transfer are scheduled for late March at the Nueva Vizcaya Agricultural Trading Center, where two units with one-ton capacities will be awarded.

Additional units with capacities ranging from 200 kilos to one ton will be distributed to other towns in Isabela. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

## P7.5-B Acciona solar power plant breaks ground in Cebu a year after contract award

THE Board of Investments (BoI) said the green lane-certified P7.5-billion Daanbantayan Solar Power Plant in northern Cebu has commenced with construction.

With its 150-megawatt capacity that is expected to supply electricity to 300,000 people, the project, which is being developed by Spanish infrastructure company Acciona Energia Global, has the potential to significantly reduce electricity costs in Cebu, the investment promotion agency said on Thursday.

"This development is a crucial step towards achieving energy sustainability, particularly in a region that has historically lagged in renewable energy adoption compared to highly urbanized areas like Metro Manila," BoI said.

BoI Investment Assistant Service and One-Stop Action Center for Strategic Investments Director Ernesto C. Delos Reyes, Jr. said that the expedited processing due to the green lane treatment allowed the company to start project development this year.

"Typically, obtaining permits and clearances for a solar power plant takes nearly three years from the time they receive the service contract," Mr. Delos Reyes said via Viber.

"They received the service contract on March 15, 2024, and based on the standard



ACCIONA.COM

timetable, they would start project development three years later. However, the green lane certification issued on Aug. 1, 2024, helped expedite the necessary permits and clearances," he added.

In February 2023, the government established Executive Order No. 18, the "green lane" system, at all government offices, expediting approvals and permits for strategic investments.

Trade Secretary Ma. Cristina A. Roque said that Acciona's project reflects the impact of the green lane program and its success in attracting investors.

"It serves as a meaningful milestone, paving the way for more projects that advance our mission to promote green investments and create job opportunities," Ms. Roque said.

The project will serve as a major link between the eastern and central segments of the Visayas grid.

Commissioning is expected by late 2026 and is projected to save about 259,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions annually.

"This plant, with a peak capacity of 176 megawatts, 150 base, and a battery storage system, will begin operations in 2026, with expected production that is equivalent to the consumption of more than 300,000 people," according to José Manuel Entrecanales Domecq, chairman and chief executive officer of Acciona.

"This plant is Acciona Energia's first plant in the Philippines and the biggest under construction in the Visayas archipelago. This project supports the government's goal of increasing the share of renewables in the energy mix, ensuring energy security, and promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth," he added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

## Power Maintenance Updates

### by MERALCO ADVISORY

The following are scheduled power interruptions necessary for the regular maintenance and upgrade of our power distribution facilities, to ensure the delivery of safe and reliable electricity to your areas. Rest assured that Meralco is doing everything to quickly restore your electricity according to schedule.

**WEDNESDAY TO THURSDAY, MARCH 26 – 27, 2025**

**LAGUNA (SANTA ROSA CITY)**

BETWEEN 11:00PM (WED., 03/26/25) AND 4:00AM (THU., 03/27/25) – PORTION OF CIRCUIT BALIBAGO 45XV

Along Captain Perlas St. from Rizal Blvd. to near Southville 4 Subd. Phase 5 including Ang Bagong Santa Rosa Village Phases 1 & 2, Eastdrive Village, Ma. Jesusa Ville Subd., Villa Mercedes Subd., Espiritu Compound; Sky Cable Hub and Blessed Christian School De Sta. Rosa in Bgy. Pook.

**REASON:** Replacement of poles, installation of additional lightning protection devices and retirement of facilities in Bgy. Pook, Santa Rosa City, Laguna.

**CALOOCAN CITY (BAGONG SILANG – KANAN AND CAMARIN)**

BETWEEN 11:00PM (WED., 03/26/25) AND 6:00AM (THU., 03/27/25) – PORTION OF CIRCUITS CAMARIN 430TC AND 433TC

Portion of Franielle II Subd. in Camarin.

Portion of Old Zabarte Road from Barugo St. to and including Blocks 49, 55, 56 and 58 in Phase 1 Package 3; and Block 1 in Phase 3B, Bagong Silang – Kanan.

Portion of Langit Road from Old Zabarte Road to Katarungan Road including Metropiazza in Bagong Silang – Kanan.

Portion of Katarungan Road from Langit Road to and including Phase 5A Packages 1 & 2 in Bagong Silang – Kanan.

**REASON:** Replacement of poles and line reconductoring work along Old Zabarte Road in Bagong Silang – Kanan, Caloocan City.

**QUEZON CITY (HOLY SPIRIT)**

BETWEEN 11:00PM (WED., 03/26/25) AND 6:00AM (THU., 03/27/25) – PORTION OF CIRCUIT DILIMAN 434VU

Portion of Holy Spirit Drive from S. Benito St. to and including Puregold Jr., Panda Express, Jollibee, McDonald's and The Rock.

Portion of Don Faustino St. from Holy Spirit Drive to Don Primitivo Ext. St. including Kasiyahan, Don Pedro and Dora Isidora Sts.; and National Council on Disability

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## DoE encourages public to observe Earth Hour 2025

THE Department of Energy (DoE) encouraged the public to participate in the annual observance of Earth Hour and adopt responsible energy and water conservation practices.

In a statement on Thursday, the DoE said this year's Earth Hour focuses on the "vital connection between energy conservation and water security" in achieving sustainability.

The DoE encouraged the public to adopt practical and effective demand-side management strategies without compromising productivity.

Energy Secretary Raphael P.M. Lotilla cited the interdependence of energy and water, saying that "every kilowatt-hour of electricity consumed requires water — whether for cooling processes in thermal power plants, hydropower systems, or the energy needed to pump, treat, and distribute water."

"Using energy judiciously is not just about reducing consumption — it is about preserving life itself. Every watt saved is a drop of water protected, reinforcing the delicate balance of our environment," he said.

"By embracing energy efficiency and conservation, we do more than cutting emissions, we secure the future of our most vi-

tal resources for generations to come," he added.

Mr. Lotilla urged the public to observe in the Earth Hour on March 22, between 8:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., by switching off non-essential lights.

"Through small but consistent actions, individuals, businesses, and communities can make a lasting impact on energy and water conservation, strengthening climate resilience and promoting a more sustainable way of life," Mr. Lotilla said.

Speaking at Energy Efficiency Day 2025, Alexander D. Ablaiza, president of the Philippine Energy Efficiency Alliance, Inc., said that the Philippines should also focus on opportunities to advance energy efficiency beyond the grid.

"While it's all interesting to talk about energy on the grid, let's not forget that more than 50% of energy efficiency opportunities lie outside the grid, lie outside the power sector," he said.

"So let's also talk about energy efficiency in the maritime industry. Let's talk about electrification of land transport. Let's talk about sustainable fuels for aviation. Let's talk about what we can do to make our cities more walkable and demotorize our economy," he added. — **Sheldene Joy Talavera**