ADB calls for stronger Asian integration as trade wars loom

ASIAN ECONOMIES must strengthen their cooperation and partnerships in the face of geopolitical tensions and global fragmentation, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said.

"Rising geoeconomic fragmentation due to continuing global policy shifts, while posing growing challenges, nonetheless offers new opportunities for the region to strengthen integration by facilitating intraregional flows of goods and services, capital, people, and knowledge," ADB Chief Economist Albert Park said in a report on Monday.

The Asian Economic Integration Report is an annual review of progress in various dimensions of economic integration, including trade, global value chains, cross-border investment, finance, migration and remittances, and tourism.

The ADB sees significant progress in Asia and the Pacific in terms of regional integration, surpassing other regions, although the pace remains uneven across subregions.

"Over the past two decades, Asia has significantly tightened its regional economic integration, surpassing other regions in foreign direct investment (FDI) and the movement of people," it said.

The bank estimated that the degree of Asia's trade integration is comparable to that of the European Union plus the United Kingdom.

Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Economics Associate Professor Yao Amber Li said geopolitical tensions also highlight the need for stronger integration.

"The second round of trade wars from Trump's administration, I think, provides more incentive for Asian economies to build regional blocs and making deeper commitments to trade agreement," she added.

The ADB noted the Philippine-South Korea free trade agreement that took effect in December as an example of the rise of preferential trade agreements in the region.

It also mentioned the Philippines as a major source of outmigrants from Asia and a major recipient of total remittances in 2024.

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas reported that money sent home by migrant Filipinos rose 2.9% to $2.92 billion in January. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

Former Camp John Hay concession holder backs rights of condominium owners, golf shareholders

CJH DEVELOPMENT Corp. (CJHDevCo) urged the Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) to respect the rights of condominium unit owners and golf shareholders.

"There are about 400 (condo owners), and zero have signed up with BCDA. Why is it zero? Because BCDA is not offering them anything. They just want to take over the condominiums and hotels," according to Robert John L. Sobrepeña, who chairs CJHDevCo, which formerly managed the Camp John Hay complex.

Speaking at the *Money Talks with Cathy Yang* program on One News Channel, Mr. Sobrepeña said there are three categories of ownership in Camp John Hay: estate lot owners, condo owners, and golf share buyers.

CJHDevCo said that there were about 400 condotel owners, 160 estate lot owners, and 1,900 golf club members affected by the BCDA takeover of Camp John Hay.

"In terms of investors, we have 1,900 golf shareholders, none of whom were given their rights to play in the golf course with their Securities and Exchange Commission-approved shares," Mr. Sobrepeña said.

"None of the 400 condominium owners has been renewed or offered any kind of deal, and out of the 160 homeowners, I believe they have offered to 80-90 homeowners," he added.

On March 10, BCDA President and Chief Executive Officer Joshua M. Bingcang said the government-owned corporation has signed fresh contracts with 95% of the estate lot owners.

For the hotel unit owners, he said that the BCDA is still studying what arrangements to make.

"I think the position of BCDA is they are not offering anything to the condominium and hotel owners; they are not offering any playing privileges to those who invested in golf shares many, many years ago," Mr. Sobrepeña said.

He said that the golf shareholders and hotel unit owners have written to President Ferdinand J. Marcos, Jr.

"He has been silent; he has not replied," he said. "So for CJHDevCo is about to write the President another letter, and hope for better luck than the homeowners and golf members."

He said that the company's letter to the President will ask for the government to respect the rights of the third parties in light of the Camp John Hay takeover.

"All these third parties have invested and trusted the public-private partnership of the government in Camp John Hay. They came in when the government enticed them to come in," he said.

"Now that they are in, their homes are being taken away without due process, and that is something that is really unacceptable to a lot of homeowners and investors," he added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

EDC to release downgraded export targets next month

THE Export Development Council (EDC) said it is hoping to release downgraded targets for the Philippine Export Development Plan (PEDP) next month.

"We convened the EDC executive committee weeks ago, where we had presented our simulations, assumptions, and mitigating measures," EDC Executive Director Bianca Pearl R. Sykimte said on the sidelines of the UK-Southeast Asia Tech Week in Manila.

"Unfortunately, we had a very long agenda, so we are soliciting comments from the executive committee members on the simulations. So, we cannot release the final figures yet," she added.

She said that there were a lot of headwinds in the last few years, which the EDC thought should be considered in setting the new targets.

"Definitely, we are downgrading the target. It has to be approved by the council. I think by April, when we have comments from the committee, we will release some figures," she said.

"But we will have to maintain our targets in the Philippine Development Plan (PDP), because that is our commitment," she added.

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas reported exports of $106.99 billion in 2024, up 3.3%.

Under the PDP, the target is for total exports to hit $107 billion in 2024. The PEDP, on the other hand, projects $143.4 billion.

"We have reached the $50 billion mark for services exports. I think we will have to factor that in," Ms. Sykimte said, noting that services exports have been driving overall export growth amid the "erratic or dwindling" performance of merchandise exports.

She said that the EDC is also considering the protectionist policies of US President Donald J. Trump in setting the new targets.

"Those are included in our considerations. But in terms of these US policies, we are quite confident that (the Philippines) will be the least of their worries in terms of reciprocal tariffs," she said.

"I think we are 30th in terms of their sources of trade deficits," she added.

Ms. Sykimte, who is also the Export Marketing Bureau Director, said the bureau is no longer focused on the usual contact services exports but on game development, animation, software development, and healthcare information management systems.

"In goods, semiconductors play a big role in our export strategy, but since our electronics sector is investment-driven we really need to work with our investment promotion agencies to attract investment in those value chains," she added.

Aside from semiconductors, she said that the other big exports are machinery and transport equipment, minerals, coconut, and bananas. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Vivant's income up 3% to P2.4 billion in 2024, driven by energy business

LISTED company Vivant Corp. reported an attributable net income of P2.4 billion for 2024, up 3% from the previous year, driven by growth in its energy business.

"The year 2024 was a record year for Vivant Corp., led by its energy business, which saw double-digit growth in earnings," Vivant Chief Executive Officer Arlo G. Sarmiento said in a media release on Monday.

"Meanwhile, our business development teams in both energy and water continued to lay the groundwork for the company's future growth," he added.

Consolidated core net income rose 20% to P2.3 billion from P1.9 billion in the previous year.

Power generation accounted for the bulk of net income, contributing 64% or P2.2 billion. Earnings from this segment grew 15%, driven by the participation of the company's power plants in the reserve market and the Wholesale Electricity Spot Market.

Last year, Vivant delivered a total of 4,965 gigawatt-hours of energy to its power generation customers.

The company's distribution utility business contributed P1.2 billion, while retail electricity accounted for P22.3 million.

Vivant said its water business is "still in its investment phase and is expected to meaningfully contribute in the medium term."

Consolidated revenues surged 48% to P12.2 billion, driven by higher sales volumes from certain power generation assets, retail electricity supply, and solar rooftop businesses.

Operating expenses climbed 59% to P1.6 billion, primarily due to increased manpower, consultancy service engagements for digital transformation and business expansion initiatives, and higher depreciation from asset acquisitions.

Mr. Sarmiento said Vivant has established a pipeline of projects, including plans for "a more balanced portfolio of conventional and renewable energy projects."

"In water, we have earmarked investments across the water value chain, centered on desalination and wastewater treatment to address the needs of the communities we serve," he said.

Vivant Water, the company's water infrastructure unit, is developing a P2-billion desalination plant in Cordova, Cebu, which is expected to produce up to 20 million liters per day of potable water upon completion this year.

For 2025, the company has allocated a P4.5-billion capital expenditure budget, primarily for renewable energy projects such as solar and wind power developments. It plans to roll out solar power projects with a total capacity of 115 megawatts (MW) and develop a 200-MW wind power project in Samar.

Vivant has investments in various companies engaged in electric power generation and distribution, as well as the retail electricity business. The company has also expanded into the water industry, with a diversified portfolio in bulk water supply, wastewater treatment, and water distribution. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

Topline secures final SEC approval for April PSE debut

CEBU-BASED fuel retailer Top Line Business Development Corp. (Topline) has secured approval from the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) for its planned initial public offering (IPO).

"Our listing is a key step to our continued expansion as part of our vertical integration strategy to sustain our rapid capital appreciation," Topline Chairman, President, and Chief Executive Officer Eugene Erik C. Laparasan Lim said in a media release on Monday.

The company said it obtained final regulatory approval from the SEC for the public sale of about 22% of its common shares, or 2.15 billion primary common shares, with an over-allotment option of up to 218.84 million secondary common shares.

Last month, the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE) issued a notice of approval allowing the company to list its common shares on the PSE main board.

The IPO offer period will run from March 24 to 31, 2025. The company's shares will be traded under the symbol "TOP" starting April 8.

The final offer price of 31 centavos per share was determined through a book-building process involving international and Philippine-based institutional investors, the company said.

Topline has designated Investment & Capital Corp. of the Philippines as the issue manager, joint lead underwriter, and joint bookrunner for the IPO, while PNB Capital and Investment Corp. will serve as the joint lead underwriter and joint bookrunner.

"We believe in Topline's strong growth potential and its ability to deliver on its commitments. Throughout the IPO process, we have seen firsthand the company's drive, passion, and strategic vision. With strong leadership at the helm, we are excited to see Top Line take this significant step toward its listing on the PSE," ICCP Senior Managing Director Jesus Mariano P. Ocampo said.

PHILIPPINE STAR/EHDA M. DAGOOC

Topline expects to raise about P624.6 million in net IPO proceeds, adding that it remains committed to its expansion plans, with P300 million allocated for the construction of 20 service stations and P180 million earmarked for fuel tanker acquisitions.

Due to the adjustment in its offer price, the company said it has also revised the allocation of IPO net proceeds, setting aside P134.6 million for working capital and P10 million for corporate purposes.

"We are fully committed to our IPO strategy, which focuses on integration, importation, and expansion to sustain our strong profit margins. This is why we are maintaining our allocation as initially planned for the construction of service stations and the acquisition of additional fuel tankers," Mr. Lim said. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

PHINMA board OKs investment in community housing unit

LISTED conglomerate PHINMA Corp. said its board of directors had approved an investment of P250 million in its community housing unit.

In a stock exchange disclosure on Monday, the company said its board approved investing in PHINMA Community Housing Corp. to fund capital expenditures, land acquisition, and other working capital needs.

The board also approved the appropriation of P500 million in retained earnings for investment in Construction Materials Group and P500 million in PHINMA Community Housing until Dec. 31, 2026.

For the nine months ending September last year, PHINMA's attributable net income plummeted by 84.5% to P122.73 million from P791.53 million in the same period a year earlier.

Gross revenue for the January-to-September period last year grew by 9.8% to P16.98 billion from P15.46 billion in the same period in 2023.

The company's gross expenses for the nine-month period rose by 12.6% to P15.1 billion from P13.41 billion previously.

At the stock exchange on Monday, shares in the company fell by 30 centavos, or 1.62%, to close at P18.18 per share.

PHINMA Corp. is a listed holding company that operates through its subsidiaries and has investments in education, steel products, housing, and property development. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**