Microsoft launches lower-priced AI laptops with Qualcomm chips

SAN FRANCISCO — Microsoft on Tuesday said it will release a new laptop and tablet with chips from Qualcomm at lower prices than before, aiming to get new artificial intelligence (AI) features to a broader set of customers.

The newest Surface 13-inch laptop and Surface Pro 12-inch tablet will go on sale on May 20, with the laptop starting at $899 and the tablet starting at $799.

Both will feature Qualcomm's Snapdragon X Plus chips, and they will be priced slightly between competing products from Apple such as its MacBook Air, which starts at $999 and its iPads, where Air Pro models start at $649 and $999.

But Microsoft's new offerings will be its lowest-priced yet with support for what it calls "Copilot+" features that it introduced last year. That bundle of features includes things like the ability to ask how to change the computer's settings as a natural language question rather than sifting through settings menus or the ability to ask for an AI-generated first draft of a word document.

Microsoft has set performance computing chip requirements for the new Copilot+ label, which has meant that most of those AI features are only available on machines that cost $1,000 or more.

Pavan Davuluri, corporate vice president of Windows and Devices at Microsoft, said the new Surface devices are aimed at getting those features to a broader set of users, especially students or young professionals at the start of their careers.

"We think these new Surface Pro and laptops are for a set of customers for whom affordability is going to be important," Mr. Davuluri told reporters during a press briefing on April 28. — ***Reuters***

Nat'l AI-powered identity security strategy to protect PHL from threats

THE PHILIPPINE government must develop a national artificial intelligence (AI)-powered identity security strategy and support the adoption of biometrics and fraud detection technologies to protect Filipinos from cybersecurity risks, according to technology company HID Global.

"There is a key opportunity to strengthen the country's security and identity infrastructure… The government can consider creating a national AI-powered security strategy to accelerate the adoption of biometrics, mobile identity verification and fraud detection across sectors," Prabhuraj Patil, HID Global senior director for Physical Access Control Solutions in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and India Subcontinent, said in an e-mail.

"By standardizing AI-driven identity solutions in e-governance, financial transactions, and critical infrastructure, the Philippines can enhance security while improving service efficiency."

AI can enhance existing security solutions through real-time anomaly detection, automate routine tasks, and facilitate predictive analytics for efficient and proactive threat management, Mr. Patil said.

About 35% of security leaders worldwide now use biometric technologies while 13% plan to, according to HID's 2025 State of Security and Identity Report.

According to HID's study, which surveyed 1,800 respondents worldwide including the Asia Pacific, the adoption of AI agents in companies' security operations has been rapid amid their improved efficiency and speed in security processes (50%) and ability to provide enhanced real-time data analysis (47%).

"Experts are moving away from traditional access methods, adopting mobile solutions and integrating biometric technologies like fingerprint and facial recognition. This transition enhances security and user convenience," Mr. Patil said.

Cloud-based identity management, mobile credentials, and AI-driven security analytics can also help lower energy consumption, reduce plastic waste, and optimize security efficiency, he added.

The Philippines' vulnerability to disasters has also been driving the adoption of sustainable security technologies such as solar-powered surveillance systems and disaster-proof cloud identity verification, the official said.

"These solutions ensure business continuity and environmental sustainability while reducing reliance on physical security infrastructure."

Mr. Patil also cited the need for a unified security framework to ensure interoperability between government agencies, banks, healthcare, and telecom providers and improve identity verification processes and cross-agency digital transactions.

The government must also strengthen public-private partnerships to leverage digital identity solutions, cyber resilience programs, and research and development grants, he added. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

Use of nonbank online lending apps rising among Filipinos

FILIPINOS spent about 1.54 billion seconds on nonbank digital lending applications in 2024, according to consumer finance company Digido.

Active users spent about 12 minutes and 14 seconds per month on average on these apps, with the average duration per session at 58 seconds, Digido said in a statement.

User activity seen in the apps rose by 16% year on year in 2024, it added.

The company's analysis covered 47 digital lending applications operating in the Philippines, including Digido.

Broken down, apps specializing in personal loans saw the most activity at 76.4% of the total, followed by those offering buy now, pay later (BNPL) services at 21.4%, and installment loans at 2.2%.

Downloads of online lending apps also surged by 42.4% to 127.69 million units in 2024 from 89.66 million a year prior, with the personal loan segment likewise being the main driver, Digido said.

Unique users jumped by 43% year on year to 67.84 million people, while the number of active users rose by 53% to 11.78 million individuals.

"Nonbank, digital-forward lenders maintain their current market growth rates despite the already high level of fintech (financial technology) penetration and saturation of offerings. Personal loans, in particular, remain a key driver of this industry due to its flexibility, ease of access, and competitive rates," Digido Business Development Manager Rose Arreco said.

"The growth in downloads, active and unique users, as well as the increase in total time spent in applications indicate continued consumer interest and high demand for such financial instruments while illustrating the industry's role in promoting financial inclusion and continuing towards increased access to formal credit," she added.

The Philippine digital lending market is likely to surpass $1 billion (about P56.33 billion) by the second half of the year amid increasing demand for online financial services, Digido earlier said.

This is bigger than its estimate of a $796-million value at end-2024 and the $693 million recorded in 2023. The Philippines' digital lending market has been growing at an average of 28% or $68 million annually from 2013 to 2023, it added.

Broken down, nonbank digital lenders are expected to make up 55.2% of the market by the second half of this year for a $556.5-million value.

On the other hand, digital banks are seen to have a 44.8% share equivalent to $451 million. — **B.M.D. Cruz**

AMD forecasts $1.5-billion revenue hit from US curbs on China chip exports

ADVANCED MICRO DEVICES (AMD) on Tuesday forecast a $1.5-billion hit to revenue this year due to new US curbs on chips, which require the company to obtain a license to ship advanced artificial-intelligence processors to China.

But it issued a second-quarter revenue forecast that topped Wall Street estimates, which analysts attributed to customers buying more chips ahead of tariffs. Its shares were last up about 1% in after-hours trading after rising as much as 6% and falling as much as 3.5%.

Under the Biden and Trump administrations, the US has pursued increasingly aggressive curbs on artificial intelligence (AI) chip exports to China. These controls are aimed at hobbling China's ability to build advanced AI models and applications that, according to the US, could have national security implications.

AMD Chief Executive Officer Lisa Su said on a conference call on Tuesday that most of the impact from the curbs would affect the second and third quarters this year. Despite the new controls, Ms. Su said she expects AI chip revenue from the company's data center business to grow this year by "strong double digits."

"It's certainly a headwind, but one which we think is well contained given everything else that we have going on," she said.

In April, AMD said it would record an $800-million charge from the new US tariffs on chip exports to China. On Tuesday, it forecast adjusted gross margin of 43%, which represents an 11 percentage-point drop from the gross margin excluding the charge.

Like AMD, Nvidia has also warned Wall Street that it will now need an export license to China. Nvidia faces a $5.5-billion charge as a result.

China accounts for roughly a quarter of AMD's total revenue, and the impact of the export controls would shave nearly 5% off the Wall Street forecast for revenue of $31.03 billion per LSEG data.

AMD finance chief Jean Hu said in the conference call following the results that the $1.5-billion revenue hit for 2025 was due to the new round of export controls from April.

"The subtext is hard to miss; big hyperscalers would rather accelerate purchase order dates than risk export-license roulette once the latest China rules bite," said Michael Schulman, chief investment officer at Running Point Capital.

"The flip side is that, once those safety-stock closets are full, Q3 could feel like the morning after a Red Bull binge… keep one eye on backlog burn rates and another on Washington's next tariff tweet," he said.

GROWTH DESPITE CHINA

Still, the optimistic forecast shows that demand for AMD's advanced processors remains strong as they power complex AI systems for Microsoft, Meta Platforms and other customers. These cloud giants recently reinforced hefty spending plans for building AI infrastructure.

On the conference call, Ms. Su said the company had not seen a lot of "tariff-related activity" in the first quarter.

The company expects revenue of about $7.4 billion for the second quarter, plus or minus $300 million, compared with analysts' average estimate of $7.25 billion.

In February, the company steered away from a practice of giving a specific sales forecast for its AI chips, but Ms. Su had said AMD expects "tens of billions" of dollars in sales "in the next couple of years."

AMD reported data center sales jumped 57% to $3.7 billion, which topped estimates of $3.62 billion. The company includes much of its AI hardware in its data center segment.

Total revenue jumped a better-than-expected 36% to $7.44 billion. Adjusted profit of 96 cents a share was ahead of estimates by 2 cents a share.

Chip maker Marvell Technology and server maker Super Micro both disappointed investors on Tuesday. Marvell pushed back a planned Investor Day to a later date in calendar 2026, citing the uncertain economy, and Super Micro trimmed its 2025 revenue forecast, adding to concerns about its position in the AI market. Marvell shares were down 4.5% after hours and Super Micro were down 5%. — ***Reuters***

MPIC Q1 net income jumps 48% to P9.1B on asset sale gain

METRO PACIFIC Investments Corp. (MPIC) reported a 48% increase in its first-quarter (Q1) net income to P9.1 billion from P6.1 billion a year earlier, driven by a gain from the divestment of its oil storage business.

"Reported net income surged 48% to P9.1 billion from P6.1 billion, driven by a gain from the sale of MPIC's oil storage company, Philippine Coastal Storage and Pipeline Corp. (PCSPC)," MPIC said in an e-mail statement on Wednesday.

In October last year, MPIC sold its 50% stake in PCSPC to an affiliate of global infrastructure investor I Squared Capital in a $296-million deal.

Operating revenue climbed to P19.29 billion, while consolidated core net income rose by 17% to P6.6 billion. Better performance across MPIC's portfolio led to a 16% increase in contribution from operations to P7.9 billion.

The power business contributed the largest share of net operating income at P4.9 billion or 62%. The water and toll road segments contributed P1.9 billion and P1.4 billion, respectively, representing 42% of net operating income.

"We are pleased with our strong start to 2025, marked by solid performance across our core businesses and improved earnings momentum. These results reflect the steady execution of our strategy and the strength of our foothold in power, water, toll roads, and healthcare," MPIC Chairman, President, and Chief Executive Officer Manuel V. Pangilinan said.

The power business, led by Manila Electric Co., posted a 9% growth in reported net income to P10.4 billion, as total revenue increased by 10% to P114.5 billion on higher energy sales.

Water provider Maynilad Water Services, Inc. grew its core net income by 17% to P3.6 billion on lower operating expenses. Revenue climbed by 6% to P8.6 billion due to an 8% tariff increase implemented in early January.

Toll road operator Metro Pacific Tollways Corp. saw a 15% decline in reported net income to P1.5 billion, as the prior-year figure benefited from the reversal of contingent considerations related to the Jakarta-Cikampek Elevated toll road acquisition.

Toll revenue increased by 16% to P8.7 billion on rate adjustments and domestic traffic growth. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

SMFB delivers 16% profit growth in first quarter

ANG-LED food and beverage manufacturer San Miguel Food and Beverage, Inc. (SMFB) reported a 16% increase in its first-quarter (Q1) net income to P11.6 billion, driven by sustained consumer demand.

Consolidated revenue for the January-to-March period rose by 4% to P98.9 billion, SMFB said in a regulatory filing on Wednesday.

Gross profit increased by 11% to P28.6 billion, while income from operations grew by 16% to P15.2 billion.

"Our results this quarter reflect the strength of our diversified portfolio and our continued focus on execution. We are optimistic about the rest of the year. Our continued investments in key growth areas, from expanding production capacities to strengthening our distribution network, are designed to meet the evolving needs of the Filipino consumer," SMFB Chairman Ramon S. Ang said.

"With our strong brands and disciplined execution, we are well-positioned to sustain our growth trajectory in 2025 and beyond," he added.

San Miguel Foods, the company's food segment, posted an 83% increase in net income to P3 billion as revenue rose by 8% to P46.3 billion, led by high-teens growth in poultry and steady performance across the Purefoods processed meats, Magnolia dairy and coffee, and flour categories.

The beer business, led by San Miguel Brewery, Inc., increased its net income to P6.6 billion, with sales reaching P36.3 billion. Domestic revenue stood at P32 billion, while international sales reached $74.9 million.

Meanwhile, the spirits segment, through Ginebra San Miguel, Inc., recorded an 11% rise in net income to P2.1 billion. Revenue grew by 8% to P16.3 billion, supported by sustained consumer demand and initiatives to reach a broader customer base.

On Wednesday, SMFB shares rose by 0.1% or five centavos to P51.35 apiece. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

Robinsons Land plans P125-B capex to hit 2030 goal

GOKONGWEI-LED real estate developer Robinsons Land Corp. (RLC) is allocating up to P125 billion in capital expenditure (capex) to fund its five-year plan of delivering P25 billion in net income by 2030.

RLC Chief Financial Officer Kerwin Max S. Tan said during a media briefing on Wednesday that more capex will be used for project development to reach the 2030 goal.

He added that RLC aims to increase earnings by 12% annually to achieve the 2030 target.

"Historically, our capex has been in the P20-25 billion range annually. I guess it would still be the same, except that previously, when we allocated P20-25 billion for capex, 20% was allocated for purchasing land," Mr. Tan said.

"As we have the land bank in place, and potentially some more, I think more of the capex will be allocated to project development," he added.

According to Mr. Tan, RLC's capex will be funded through internal funds and debt.

"We have internally generated funds. If we do undertake debt, we ensure that the yields are higher than the prevailing interest rates," he said.

RLC President and Chief Executive Officer Mybelle V. Aragon-GoBio said in the same briefing that the company has been efficient in utilizing its land assets.

"We balance it. We purchase land for say five to ten years' use, but mostly for immediate development because it drags down your balance sheet if you're not able to fully utilize it immediately," she said.

Earlier this week, RLC unveiled a roadmap that aims to deliver P25 billion in net income by 2030 in time for its 50th anniversary.

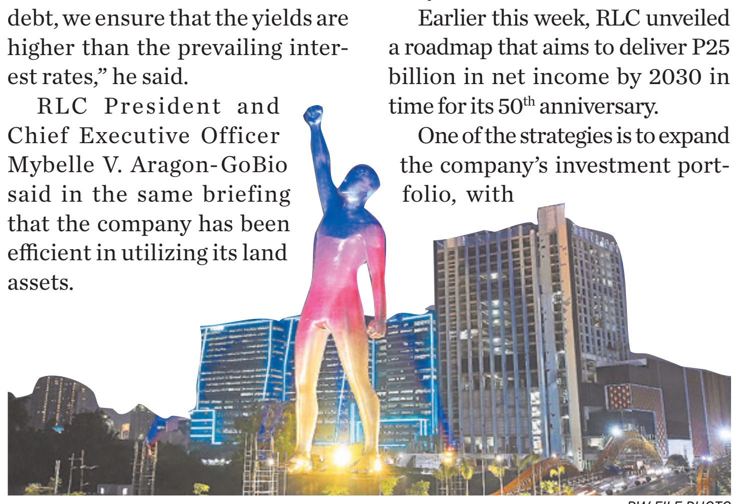
One of the strategies is to expand the company's investment portfolio, with plans to increase mall gross leasable area (GLA) by 50%, office space by 50%, hotel room keys by 25%, and double its logistics capacity by 2030.

RLC will also leverage its real estate investment trust platform, RL Commercial REIT, Inc. (RCR), to unlock capital.

The property developer will drive the premiumization of its offerings and forge new partnerships. It will also tap new business streams such as sports and entertainment centers, ecosystem synergies, and sustainability-driven customer services to enhance customer experience.

RLC recorded a 4% increase in its first-quarter attributable net income to P3.48 billion, while revenue was maintained at P11.03 billion.

On Wednesday, RLC shares closed unchanged at P12.20 per share. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**



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