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# Semirara says court issued TRO halting duties on fuel imports

SEMIRARA Mining and Power Corp. (SMPC) said a regional trial court has granted its request for a 20-day temporary restraining order (TRO) against the government's collection of duties and taxes on its fuel imports.

"We disclose today that Semirara Mining and Power Corp. filed a Complaint for Injunction with prayer for Temporary Restraining Order and/or Writ of Preliminary Injunction... to enjoin the Department of Finance (DoF), BIR (Bureau of Internal Revenue), and BoC (Bureau of Customs) from collecting duties and taxes on the company's fuel imports," SMPC said in a regulatory filing on Wednesday.

The company said the Regional Trial Court of Makati Branch 234 issued the TRO on June 17, but has yet to publicly release a copy of the court order as of press time.

SMPC said its exemption is backed by Section 295(f) of the National Internal Revenue Code, as amended by the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises (CREATE) law.

It also cited Presidential Decree (PD) 972 or the Coal Development Act of 1976 and its Coal Operating Contract.

"The company maintains that it remains exempt from such charges under PD 972 and its Coal Operating Contract, which prevail over general laws and are protected by the Constitution's Non-impairment Clause," it said.

Sought for comment, Bureau of Customs Assistant Commissioner Vincent Philip C. Maronilla said the agency is awaiting the official copy of the TRO and the complaint.

He added that the BoC will coordinate with the Bureau of Internal Revenue and the Department of Finance on legal steps.

The BIR and DoF have yet to respond as of press time.

SMPC said the legal proceedings will have "no effect on its business operations."

The Consunji-led company is the country's largest coal producer, supplying fuel to domestic power plants, cement factories, and industrial users, and exporting to markets such as China, South Korea, and Brunei. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

# Vista Land secures funding for P10-B maturing bonds

VILLAR-LED property developer Vista Land & Lifescapes, Inc. has secured financing to settle P10 billion in retail bonds that matured on Wednesday.

The financing came in the form of shareholder advances, Vista Land said in a regulatory filing.

The P10-billion Series E fixed-rate retail bonds, which had a 5.5-year tenor with quarterly coupons priced at 5.6992% per annum, were issued in December 2019. The offering was twice oversubscribed compared to the initial P5-billion target.

In May, Vista Land subsidiary VLL International, Inc. obtained a \$150-million syndicated term loan facility from Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp. at an interest rate of 6.40509% per annum.

The proceeds from the loan facility will be used to finance, refinance, or reimburse (directly or indirectly) working capital and general corporate purposes of the Vista Land Group.

For the first quarter, Vista Land reported a 4% increase in attributable net income to P2.96 billion.

Total revenues rose by 3.9% to P10.65 billion, driven by a 5% increase in real estate sales to P5.85 billion.

"(The higher revenue from real estate sales) was primarily attributable to the increase in the overall completion rate of sold inventories of some of its business units as well as the recognition of the significant financing component for the period," Vista Land said.

On Wednesday, Vista Land shares gained 0.61% or one centavo to close at P1.64 each. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

# Gov't to extend Sumitomo's MRT-3 maintenance contract

By Ashley Erika O. Jose  
Reporter

THE Department of Transportation (DoTr) is set to extend the maintenance contract of Sumitomo Corp. for the Metro Rail Transit Line 3 (MRT-3).

"We are just extending the maintenance contract of Sumitomo," Transportation Undersecretary for Railways Timothy John R. Batan said in a Viber message to *BusinessWorld* on Wednesday.

The contract is scheduled to expire in July, coinciding with the end of the MRT-3's build-lease-transfer (BLT) agreement with the Sobrepeña-led Metro Rail Transit Corp. (MRTC).

In 2023, Sumitomo and the MHI Group signed a 26-month maintenance contract with the DoTr, covering June 2023 to July 2025.

Apart from maintenance services, the agreement also covers the extension of the rail line, signal installation to the common station, and the expansion of the pocket track to increase train capacity, according to Sumitomo's website.

Transportation Secretary Vivencio B. Dizon declined to disclose the duration of the extension, saying the government is still finalizing the terms.

Mr. Dizon said the government aims to conduct the bidding for MRT-3's privatization within the year.

"We will push through with the bidding. We need to PPP MRT-3. That is the goal for this year," he told reporters on the sidelines of a forum.

Under the current BLT concession, the DoTr holds the franchise and manages operations and fare collection, while MRTC built and maintains the system in exchange for regular payments from the government. Upon the contract's expiration next month, ownership and operations of MRT-3 will be transferred to the government.

The DoTr had previously targeted privatizing MRT-3's operations and maintenance before the MRTC contract lapses, but Mr. Dizon declined to provide a definitive timeline.

In January, the agency said it had tapped the Asian Development Bank to study privatization options for the MRT-3.

Rene S. Santiago, former president of the Transportation Science Society of the Philippines, said a solicited mode of procurement may not attract many bidders.

"DoTr has no choice but to bite the bullet. It could have been avoided, had the DoTr not rejected the proposal of Sumitomo-MPIC. Their consultant had boxed DoTr into solicited mode," he said.

To recall, the PPP Center said the DoTr rejected Metro Pacific Investments Corp.'s (MPIC) unsolicited proposal for the MRT-3 project in December last year.

Nigel Paul C. Villarete, senior adviser on PPP at Libra Konsult, Inc., said that while solicited procurement often garners fewer bidders, it attracts qualified ones.

"The capable ones with sufficient capacity in expertise and experience as well as financing will always be interested," he said in a Viber message.

For large-scale projects such as MRT-3's operations and maintenance, a solicited procurement mode is the most viable option, Mr. Villarete said.

"Solicited mode contracts are more transparent and allow the selection of the best operator. Unsolicited ones will bind the government to an operator who might not be the best that we can have," he said, noting that solicited procurement gives the government full control over the bidding process.

# PSE targets more overseas Filipinos to boost stock market participation

THE PHILIPPINE Stock Exchange, Inc. (PSE) is seeking to attract more overseas Filipinos to invest in the local stock market.

PSE President and Chief Executive Officer Ramon S. Monzon said that less than 1% of overseas Filipinos have stock market accounts.

Partnerships with government agencies could help encourage greater retail investor participation, he said in a statement on Tuesday.

The PSE has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) to implement programs aimed at empowering overseas Filipinos to become active participants in the Philippine capital markets.

"By partnering with CFO, PSE will now be able to reach Filipinos who have migrated overseas — specifically those who are permanent residents abroad, including their immediate family members," Mr. Monzon said.

"I hope PSE and CFO can amplify the shared mission of promoting the well-being, in this case their economic or financial well-being, of Filipinos across the globe," he added.

The MoU includes initiatives such as learning sessions and information campaigns. The PSE will showcase its PSE Academy website, along with its online and mobile app-based platforms for disclosures, market data, and initial public offering subscriptions, in the webinars and training sessions for overseas Filipinos.

The CFO is an agency under the Office of the President tasked with promoting and protecting the interests, rights, and welfare of overseas Filipinos.

The PSE recorded a 50.1% increase in the number of stock market accounts to 2.86 million in 2024 from 1.91 million in 2023. The growth was driven by a 62% rise in online accounts to 2.47 million. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

# Cebu Pacific to deploy A330neo flight simulator at Clark hub

CEBU PACIFIC, operated by Cebu Air, Inc., has expanded its partnership with Canada-based CAE, Inc. to include the deployment of an Airbus A330neo full-flight simulator at its training center in Clark.

"This new simulator will provide additional training capacity and heighten the safe operation of this state-of-the-art aircraft. The expansion will help meet the growing demand for pilot training as Cebu Pacific continues to grow its network and widebody fleet," Cebu Pacific Chief Operations Officer Javier Massot said in a disclosure on Wednesday.

The A330neo full-flight simulator is expected to be ready for training by December 2026, the airline said.

It will complement the existing A320 and ATR 72-600 simulators at Cebu Pacific's Clark training center, which was established in partnership with CAE in 2011.

CAE provides simulation technologies and pilot training services to airlines globally. It currently offers training on Airbus A320, A320neo, and ATR 72-600 aircraft for Cebu Pacific.

"The deployment of this new A330neo simulator strengthens our shared commitment to delivering world-class pilot training. We are happy to be expanding our longstanding partnership with Cebu Pacific and further enhancing our center's position as a key aviation training hub in the region," CAE Division President for Commercial Aviation Michel Azar-Hmouda said.

Cebu Pacific said it currently operates 11 A330neo aircraft, with more deliveries expected.

The airline operates a fleet of 98 aircraft, comprising Airbus A320, A321, A330, and ATR types. It serves 35 domestic and 26 international destinations across Asia, Australia, and the Middle East. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**