# PHL offers 'denuded' forest land to investors

THE PHILIPPINES will open 1.2 million hectares of "denuded" forest land to private investors, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said.

Half of the 1.2 million hectares of land to be offered to the private sector beginning June 26 has been set aside for reforestation ventures, Environment Undersecretary Carlos Primo David told *BusinessWorld* on the sidelines of a biodiversity forum.

"You need to reforest the half, and then you utilize the other half," he said.

The government will open another one million hectares of land every year until 2027.

The government's previous purely conservation-focused approach does not work, Mr. David said, noting that it is impossible for the government to reforest one million hectares a year.

"This is now a scheme wherein we involve the private sector and other groups... to reforest the area," he said. "And for some, they need some economic activity to sustain that."

Asked whether private partners will need to obtain free, prior and informed consent, a prerequisite for building on indigenous land, Mr. David said: "Half of the 1.2 million hectares is outside IP (indigenous people) areas."

The DENR said in March that the national greening program had targeted the planting of 1.5 billion seedlings between 2011 and 2015.

"However, data shows that between 2011 and 2023, 1.8 billion seedlings had been planted," it said. "Sadly, survivability was at best between 60% to 80%."

The DENR seeks to grow five million trees from non-invasive species by 2028.

Mr. David said the private firms participating in the new reforestation program are involved in agro-forestry, timber production, and the carbon credits market, he said.

Participants also include businesses involved in eco-tourism and renewable energy, he added.

He said the parcels of land available will be posted on an online portal. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

# Gov't 'satisfied' with progress of trade negotiations with US

THE PHILIPPINES is "satisfied" with the progress of trade talks with the US weeks ahead of Washington's deadline to wrap up talks by mid-July, Undersecretary Clarissa A. Castro of the Presidential Communications Office said.

She could provide no details at a briefing on Thursday, because the talks are covered by a confidentiality agreement, other than to say that the two sides are in "constant communication."

The US government on Wednesday asked its trading partners to submit their best offers, including tariff and quota commitments for US industrial and agricultural products, as well as proposals to address non-tariff barriers, Reuters reported.

The US will evaluate the responses within days and offer "a possible landing zone" that could include a reciprocal tariff rate, according to the letter.

Asked whether the Philippines had received any such official communication, Ms. Castro said the Department of Trade and Industry and the Office of the Special Assistant to the President for Investment and Economic Affairs declined to comment.

"There is a deadline (on the 90-day pause), but we cannot discuss the other deadline (on the best-offer proposals)due to the confidentiality agreements," Ms. Castro said. "But talks are constant."

Manila has expressed a commitment to securing a favorable agreement that will support its economic priorities and strengthen bilateral trade relations with Washington.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., noted that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations does not support retaliatory measures.

He said "unexpected trade barriers" could disrupt communities, supply chains and the regional bloc's hard-earned progress.

Last month, Philippine officials met with the US Trade Representative to negotiate the 17% reciprocal tariff assigned to the Philippines.

In early April, US President Donald J. Trump announced reciprocal tariffs on most trading partners. The reciprocal tariffs have since been paused for 90 days. A baseline 10% tariff remains in effect for most countries.

The US was the Philippines' top export market last year, receiving $12.12 billion worth of Philippine goods. It was also the Philippines' fifth-largest source of imports, accounting for $8.17 billion.

The Philippines' top exports to the US are semiconductors, electronic integrated circuits, and insulated wire and other insulated electric conductors.

Top imports from the US are soybeans, electronic integrated circuits, and wheat and meslin. — **Chloe Marie A. Hufana**

# 13 green-lane projects currently operational

THE Board of Investments (BoI) said 13 green-lane projects worth a combined P207.985 billion are currently operational, of the 211 projects endorsed to the One Stop Action Center for Strategic Investments (OSACSI).

Of the 13 that started operations, four are renewable energy (RE) projects, two are digital infrastructure and public-private partnership (PPP) projects, six are food security projects, and one is a manufacturing project.

"The 13 operational projects currently utilizing the green lane initiative offer valuable insights into its effectiveness," BoI Investment Assistant Service and OSACSI Director Ernesto C. delos Reyes, Jr. said via Viber.

He said the endorsement for expedited permit processing and the support provided by the OSACSI and the designated green-lane officer from the relevant agency, "significantly accelerates the process of obtaining permits and clearances."

"This comprehensive assistance not only streamlines bureaucratic procedures but also fosters a more efficient workflow, enabling timely project execution and enhancing overall productivity," he added.

Meanwhile, four projects are in pre-operational status; these include two RE projects, one food security project, and one manufacturing project.

Some 34 projects are under construction, including 20 RE projects, four digital infrastructure and PPP projects, seven food security projects, and three manufacturing projects.

The majority of the projects are in pre-development, including 139 RE projects, three digital infrastructure and PPP projects, 17 food security projects, and one manufacturing project.

As of June 5, Mr. Delos Reyes said the OSACSI has approved P5.239 trillion worth of projects for green-lane treatment.

"This endorsement highlights a strong emphasis on RE, demonstrating the country's commitment to global climate goals," he said.

"Additionally, the strategic integration of initiatives focused on enhancing digital infrastructure and ensuring food security aims to strengthen the nation's resilience and advance its digital transformation agenda," he added.

RE projects still account for 78.20%, of the list, with a total project cost of P4.788 trillion. These comprise 165 projects.

Meanwhile, nine are digital infrastructure and PPP projects worth P364.877 billion, followed by 31 food security projects worth P18.698 billion and six manufacturing projects worth P66.955 billion.

"The emphasis on food security, along with a renewed focus on manufacturing, is expected to foster a diverse and future-ready economy," Mr. Delos Reyes said.

"Overall, these projects are anticipated to create over 309,000 jobs, and with P1.66 trillion in foreign investment, global investors are showing strong confidence in the Philippines," he added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

# PEZA sees Chinese interest in locating, expanding in PHL

THE Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) said some Chinese companies have expressed interest in expanding current operations or locating in the Philippines.

"PEZA has received numerous inquiries lately, and we see the same sentiments coming from the companies we met in Shenzhen," PEZA Director General Tereso O. Panga said in a statement on Thursday.

"Surely, this is the best time for the Philippines to host their operations, and we in PEZA assure that with the President at the forefront of this move, we will make it happen in the Philippines," he added.

PEZA participated in a three-day investment mission organized by the Philippine Consulate General in Guangzhou and the American Chamber of Commerce in South China in partnership with the Philippine Trade and Investment Center (PTIC) in Guangzhou.

PEZA participated in a business forum and business-to-business (B2B) meetings during the event.

"Apart from the forum, PTIC Guangzhou also organized B2B meetings for the PEZA team to meet with companies interested in transferring their operations to the Philippines due to its proximity to China and the impact of the US-China trade war, among many other reasons," PEZA said.

"These companies are into medical device manufacturing, garments, e-commerce, and electronics sectors and are yet to make any concrete decisions as they are still in the exploratory phase," it added.

PEZA also conducted a facility tour with Shenzhen Grandsun Electronic Co., Ltd. which has a unit currently operating at the Lima Technology Center in Batangas.

"Grandsun reaffirmed its commitment to expanding operations in the Philippines in the coming years, with plans to bring their whole supply chain to the country and eventually manufacture their full product line domestically," it said.

Meanwhile, PEZA also met with the China Chamber of International Commerce (CCOIC) Dongguan to discuss collaboration with Dongguan's business community.

"Noteworthy, some members of CCOIC have conducted an exploratory business mission to the Philippines on April 25-26 to learn more about the business environment of the Philippines and to visit selected ecozones in Laguna and Batangas," PEZA said.

PEZA said that it is bullish on the entry of multinational companies, especially those with operations in China.

"With the growing interest in the Philippines as the new 'plus one' preferred destination in ASEAN by relocating companies from China, we are confident that we can do a quick turnover and welcome these companies as new locators," said Mr. Panga.

"We must not further delay the relocation of these companies from China to the Philippines in order to secure our position in this evolving regional market."

According to PEZA, China remains one of the country's top investment partners, accounting for 22% of total foreign investments.

Within economic zones, Chinese companies accounted for $406 million in exports and 16,000 jobs.

PEZA has achieved 24% of its approval target for the year, after greenlighting P66.34 billion worth of investment pledges in the first five months.

These investments feature companies from South Korea, the US, China, Japan, and the Netherlands. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

# Gov't-funded vessel to bring fish buyers to WPS fisherfolk

THE GOVERNMENT will fund a vessel, the *MV Mamalakaya*, that will carry fish buyers seeking to directly purchase the West Philippine Sea (WPS) catch.

The buyers on board will be ready "to purchase the fresh catch of Filipino fishermen at sea," the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) said in a statement.

The program is designed to reduce post-harvest losses and increase fisherfolk income, it added.

"In addition, fisherfolk will benefit from fuel and ice subsidies, enabling them to continue fishing activities in the WPS amid operational and environmental challenges."

The BFAR said the WPS plays "a crucial role in national security and food sovereignty." — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

# CAB seeking to expand India air service agreement

THE Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) wants to expand its air service agreement with India, as Air India launches a Delhi-Manila service by October.

"Air India is flying, that is good because India is a big market, a growing economy with a lot of outbound travelers," CAB Executive Director Carmelo L. Arcilla told reporters on the sidelines of a briefing this week.

Air India announced that it is launching direct service five times a week between the two countries' capitals starting Oct. 1.

Mr. Arcilla said the CAB is also in talks with India for possible air service to other destinations in India.

"I think that when the main gateway is developed, the secondary gateways will follow. It takes a lot of resources to develop secondary gateways," he said.

The CAAP has said that Air India is optimistic about the possible economic and cultural impact of direct services.

The Department of Transportation has said that it is undertaking consultations for further air service agreements with India, the US, Australia, Thailand, the UK, Uzbekistan, Qatar, Ethiopia, Oman and the Seychelles. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

# La Union court rejects claim on Poro Point property

A REGIONAL trial court in San Fernando, La Union has dismissed a petition to register a parcel of land within the Poro Point Freeport Zone, the Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) said.

"The BCDA welcomes the favorable decision of the Regional Trial Court of San Fernando in La Union, which dismissed the Petition for Land Registration filed by Shipside, Inc.," the BCDA said in a statement on Thursday.

"This legal affirmation strengthens the BCDA's mandate over the property and paves the way for the continued advancement of its strategic development in Poro Point Freeport Zone.

The BCDA is planning to revitalize the San Fernando Seaport and enhance the freeport zone.

"Central to this vision is the San Fernando Seaport, whose continued operation and planned upgrades are vital to generating jobs, supporting livelihoods, and driving inclusive progress," it added.

According to the BCDA, Shipside's petition covers 543 square meters of land within the freeport zone.

"The court's decision marks a critical milestone in unlocking the full potential of Northern Luzon," BCDA said.

"With PPFZ poised to become a key hub for tourism, logistics, and investment, the region is set to benefit from increased economic activity and long-term growth," it added.

BCDA oversees the Poro Point Freeport Zone through its subsidiary Poro Point Management Corp. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

# Food and beverage tops list of leading FMCG products

FOOD and beverage brands continued to dominate the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) segment, according to the 2025 Brand Footprint Report of Worldpanel by Kantar.

Laurice P. Obana, shopper insight director at Worldpanel by Kantar, said at a briefing on Thursday that the "economy is driven by a large socio-economic class D. Of course the preference is for the basics, which would be food and beverages," she said.

Ms. Obana noted that mobility has improved with daily road traffic volume and Metro Rail Transit Line 3 ridership increasing.

She said this is reflected in household expenditures involving recreation, travel, and going out.

"We are seeing a bustling economy where Filipinos are more on-the-go and exposed to many options in the market. While shoppers are purchasing FMCG goods from multiple channels, they have become more discriminating with the brands they are buying," she said.

"Filipinos look for packaged goods that are consistently available and accessible in the right format, at the right price, and for the right consumption occasion," she added.

In 2024, she said shoppers visited more stores and shopped more frequently, with total shopping trips hitting 10.5 billion.

These frequent visits led to an increased number of occasions when shoppers were offered a choice to buy a brand. Such occasions rose 4% to approximately 16.9 billion in 2024.

"Competition in the marketplace is just so intense. So, there are more stores to cover, more buying occasions to win, but ultimately there are now fewer brands that are being purchased," she said.

She said it is important for brands to carry products that consistently meet both customer and shopper needs, to put out the products in various channels, and maintain visibility and availability across these channels, and to deliver the right products.

"Based on data from Worldpanel by Kantar, FMCG brands that are bought by more homes and continue to increase penetration have a higher potential to drive growth," Ms. Obana said.

"To reach more homes, accessibility is key. Brands which have presence in five or more channels set themselves up for success with more shopper touchpoints," she added.

The 2025 Brand Footprint Report is based on a Worldpanel metric known as consumer reach points (CRP), which combines penetration and frequency. It represents a single instance of a shopper choosing a brand.

In the report, Lucky Me came out on top for most chosen FMCG brand, with a total of 903 million CRP.

It was followed by Nescafé with 785 million CRP, Kopiko (631 million), Coca-Cola (594 million), and Silver Swan (564 million).

The other most-chosen brands are Bear Brand, Surf, Maggi, Datu Puti, and Great Taste. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**