

# 99-year lease bicam report approved

By Adrian H. Halili  
Reporter

THE SENATE and the House of Representatives approved a bicameral conference committee report late Monday on a measure extending the maximum land lease periods for foreigners.

“This is intended to provide a broad economic option for foreigners who can enter into business here without having to own land, which is prohibited by the Constitution,” Senate President Francis G. Escudero, the principal author of the Senate’s version of the bill, told reporters on Tuesday.

The measure was identified as a priority by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.’s Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council for passage before the 19th Congress adjourns.

The measure will extend the term of foreign leases to 99 years from the current 75, placing the country in line with the practice of Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

The version agreed upon by the bicam includes a provision authorizing the President to impose a shorter lease period for certain investors, with prior approval from the Fiscal Incentives Review Board (FIRB).

The measure allows foreign investors to sublet properties unless prohibited under their contract. Sublease contracts longer than 25 years or more must be registered with the Register of Deeds, while contracts of less than 25 years are exempt.

It also allows for foreigners to acquire land leases for purposes like industry, agro-industrial, commercial, tourism, agriculture, agroforestry and ecological conservation.

The measure will impose a fine of between P1 million to P10 million on foreign investors that enter a lease contract illegally, or prison time of up to six years.

The Implementing Rules and Regulations of the measure will be drafted by the Board of Investments, and the Land Registration Authority, with input from the FIRB and other agencies.

“Extending the land lease for foreign investors to 99 years can help attract long-term foreign investment, particularly in capital-intensive sectors such as manufacturing, renewable energy, logistics, and tourism,” John Paolo R. Rivera, a senior research fellow at the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, said via Viber.

He added that the measure offers investors predictability, security, and time to recoup their investments, making the Philippines a better investment destination.

Mr. Rivera said the measure must be accompanied by “complementary reforms,” like streamlined land titling, reduced red tape, improved infrastructure, and regulatory clarity.

“Without these, the extended lease alone may not be enough to significantly boost foreign investor confidence,” he added.

Terry L. Ridon, convenor of think tank InfraWatch, said via Viber that investors remain impeded by red tape, corruption and high power costs, which are “real and immediate burdens to businesses.”

“99-year land leases are effective land ownership which may entice foreign investment into the country, as land ownership by foreigners remains prohibited by the 1987 Constitution,” Mr. Ridon added.

Foundation for Economic Freedom President Calixto V. Chikiamco said that the measure could expand the investment scope to agro-forestry and environment ventures.

“It will give long-term security of rights to foreign investors. For example, foreign investors can lease private land to plant trees for carbon farming for 99 years,” Mr. Chikiamco said via Viber.

The measure addresses investor concerns about “uncertainty if the investment can be renewed,” he said.

The measure amends the 31-year-old Investors’ Lease Act or Republic Act No. 7652, which only allows foreign investors to lease private land for 50 years, renewable only once after 25 years.

Mr. Chikiamco added that the proposed law will also deter land speculation, or the purchase of land on the expectation that its value will increase.

## Farm goods trade deficit tops \$859M in April

THE agricultural goods trade deficit widened 12% year on year in April to \$859.04 million, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.

Agricultural exports in April rose 8.7% to \$743.22 million, the PSA said, accounting for 11% of total exports. As a share of the \$2.35 billion two-way trade in farm products, exports accounted for 31.7%.

Agricultural imports fell 3.5% year on year in April to \$1.60 billion. Farm goods accounted for 15.6% of all Philippine imports that month.

The \$2.35 billion in agriculture trade in April was up 1% year on year. In March 2025 and April 2024, trade had risen 16.5% and 25.6%, respectively.

“In March 2025 and April 2024, the trade deficit registered annual increases of 11.1% and 8.4%, respectively.”

The PSA said exports of animal, vegetable, or microbial fats and oils and their cleavage products, prepared edible fats, and animal or vegetable waxes were valued at \$256.47 million, accounting for 34.5% of agricultural exports for the period.

Agricultural shipments to ASEAN in April hit \$47.90 million, with Malaysia accounting for \$15.25 million or 31.8% of the total.

The Netherlands accounted for \$99.04 million or 63.6% of Philippine agricultural exports to the European Union (EU). EU purchases totaled \$155.82 million.

The PSA said cereals accounted for \$356.63 million or 22.3% of all agricultural imports in April.

Vietnam accounted for \$276.73 million or 39.9% of Philippine agricultural imports from ASEAN.

Spain was the Philippines’ top EU supplier of agricultural commodities, with imports valued at \$34.12 million.

The top agricultural commodities imported from the EU were meat and edible meat offal, dairy produce, birds’ eggs, natural honey, edible products of animal origin, and residues and waste from the food industries. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

## JICA to inventory potential large-scale hydro resources

THE Department of Energy (DoE) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) have entered into a three-year partnership to identify and assess potential large-scale hydropower sites.

In a statement on Tuesday, the DoE said Energy Secretary Raphael P.M. Lotilla and JICA Chief Representative Baba Takashi signed the Records of Discussion for the Project on Resource Inventory of Hydropower Potential Sites.

The project will begin in September and focus on developing a national inventory of hydropower sites suitable for impounding and pumped-storage technologies with capacities over 100 megawatts.

The project will be implemented in three phases, beginning with the gathering of data such as topographic maps, rainfall and flow data and conduct of field survey of four priority sites. These sites will serve as pilot areas for pre-feasibility studies and potential future investment opportunities.

“This project marks a crucial step toward harnessing the full potential of hydropower, particularly pumped storage, as a strategic enabler of a power system that is clean, flexible, and resilient,” Mr. Lotilla said.

He said JICA’s technical expertise will help identify and unlock untapped hydropower



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resources, laying a strong foundation for “long-term investments, rural development, and enhanced energy security.”

In a separate statement, JICA said it will deploy Japanese experts with specialized experience in hydropower development, who will work closely with the DoE officials and staff, offer technical assistance, and lead capacity-development activities.

JICA said that much of the country’s hydropower potential remains “either underutilized or insufficiently documented.”

“Upon its target completion in 2028, the hydropower inventory is envisioned as a valuable reference for future energy investments and policy decisions, laying the groundwork for a more secure, inclusive, and sustainable energy for the Philippines,” JICA said. — **Sheldeed Joy Talavera**

## Port electronic gates project allocated P1.35 billion — DBM

THE Department of Budget and Management (DBM) on Tuesday said it disbursed nearly P1.35 billion for the multi-phase program to modernize electronic gates (e-gates) in airports and seaports.

“The DBM released the budget allocation for the E-gates Project for 2025 amounting to P1.347 billion,” Budget Secretary Amenah F. Pangandaman said in a statement.

Last year, the Bureau of Immigration (BI) obtained P1.976 billion to procure phase 1 of the project.

“This year, we are in Phase 2 and we are appealing to the BI to complete the procurement process immediately so that the E-gates Project can become fully operational as soon as possible,” she said.

The project will enter its third phase in 2026.

The project aims to digitize primary inspection procedures at international gateways, with a view towards bolstering

national security, streamlining passenger processing, and addressing immigration congestion.

The previous generation of e-gates was installed at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA).

The government hopes to eventually replace 50% of the manned inspection counters.

The current level of funding allows for e-gates in key airports and one seaport.

These include NAIA Terminals I & III, Clark International Airport, Mactan Cebu International Airport, Davao International Airport, Kalibo International Airport, Boracay-Caticlan International Airport, Laoag International Airport, Bohol-Panglao International Airport and Puerto Princesa International Airport.

The project will also re-equip the Zamboanga International Seaport.

Full deployment of the e-gates is targeted by Dec. 15, the DBM said. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

## Aboitiz unit LIMA Infra enlisted as investment promotion partner

THE Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) has tapped LIMA Infrastructure, Inc. as its investment promotion partner to assist in attracting locators.

In a statement on Tuesday, PEZA said it signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Aboitiz InfraCapital Economic Estates subsidiary, which will work to enhance investor services, streamline regulatory processes, and accelerate economic zone (ecozone) development.

“This MoU is more than a partnership; it is a bold step

toward redefining how we attract and grow investments in the Philippines,” PEZA Director General Tereso O. Panga said.

“By aligning PEZA’s regulatory strength with LIMA’s innovation-driven investor services, we are creating a dynamic, future-ready ecosystem that goes beyond compliance to deliver true business empowerment,” he added.

Under the partnership, PEZA will leverage LIMA’s EaseBiz Program, which reduces administrative barriers for investors.

“Through the EaseBiz initiative, we address real challenges investors face, like regulatory delays and permit bottlenecks. It sends a clear message: The Philippines is not only open for business but actively working to make doing business easier,” Aboitiz InfraCapital Economic Estates President Rafael Fernandez de Mesa said.

According to PEZA, LIMA’s EaseBiz will initially be rolled out in LIMA Estate in Batangas and soon to Mactan Economic Processing Zone 2, West Cebu Estate, and TARI Estate.

“PEZA’s program on investment promotion partnership is designed to engage the private sector in enhancing ecozone investment promotion and facilitation, making the agency more agile and competitive in attracting particularly foreign investors,” PEZA said.

“As an investment promotion partner, LIMA will help PEZA attract new locators, host investment forums, and support market development, setting a model for future ecozone partnerships anchored in innovation and efficiency,” it added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

## Low-GI rice seed project to rise on 50-hectare site

THE GOVERNMENT and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) hope to designate a 50-hectare site to produce seed for rice with characteristics like a low glycemic index (GI) and protein enrichment, which they said holds the promise of boosting farmer incomes.

“That seed production is for farmers to test this material in their fields to see how it performs and if it performs, to begin to scale those operations,” IRRI Director General Yvonne Pinto told reporters.

IRRI first unveiled the low and ultra-low GI rice varieties project to President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. in 2023.

Most of the rice varieties sold in Philippine markets including Dinorado have GI levels of 70-72, which are considered high and can increase the risk of Type 2 Diabetes.

A low GI level for rice is less than 59 and ultra-low less than 45.

Ms. Pinto said aside from diabetes concerns, low-GI and high-protein rice is of “importance also in situations where you are delivering humanitarian aid.”

“The level of protein in those contexts is generally much lower, and it is more difficult to deliver,” she noted.

IRRI’s ultra-low GI rice “could be suitable as an ingredient in the manufacturing industry,” creating “food-processing opportunities,” she added.

Ms. Pinto said the actual cost of the seed for the new varieties is no more expensive than the seed Filipino farmers are currently using.

If the population values healthier options, the new varieties could earn farmers a “premium price.”

“The sale price will be higher because there is a willingness to pay in the market and that will be a net benefit for the farmers.”

Ms. Pinto said the traits responsible for the low GI rice were identified from IRRI’s gene bank in the Philippines.

The gene bank is the largest of its kind in the world, holding over 132,000 varieties from 132 countries. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

## BPOs expect EBET law to help address skills issues

THE Enterprise-Based Education and Training (EBET) law, as well as expanded internships, will help the information technology and business process management (IT-BPM) industry address issues regarding the workforce’s skills shortcomings.

IT & Business Process Association of the Philippines (IBPAP) Chief Operating Officer Celeste Ilagan said the partnership between industry and government in the upskilling and reskilling of workers has been around for some time, but 2025 will mark a milestone in terms of government funding.

“This year is quite special because the allocation of funds for the IT-BPM industry has been very clear. And we are now in the state of mobilizing our industry, so we are able to fully utilize within the year the allocation from the government,” she said.

In particular, she said that the industry received P500 million from the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) and P240 million from the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT).

IBPAP Executive Director for Talent Attraction and Development Frankie Antolin said the passage of the EBET law “empowers enterprises to take advantage of and leverage government partnership and support when it comes to training and development.”

“We are very happy that through our engagements with TESDA, we are going to be able to mobilize training and development, particularly for EBET. So that is intended to be implemented for this year,” she said.

“On the other hand, we’ve already had partnerships with the DICT for several years. These are more sector-specific kinds of training programs, and we find that DICT is a natural partner when it comes to implementing and executing training around those,” she added.

She said that the industry’s partnership with the government allows it to target various job profiles.

The Contact Center Association of the Philippines (CCAP) said 20 member-companies have committed to the upskilling initiative.

Their participation involves a combined 75,273 trainees, CCAP President Haidee Enriquez said.

“For this year we have P740 million. We need to show that we can utilize that funding. Actually, our goal is to show that it is not enough,” she added.

Meanwhile, Ms. Antolin said that the industry has been negatively evaluating graduates in terms of employability for years.

“This is actually not just true for senior high school graduates, but even in the higher education graduates. We are looking at anecdotally maybe a 10-15% employability rate, and that is really quite low,” she said.

To address this, she said that the industry has partnered with the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to try to embed as much of the industry and design curriculum into the education life cycle as early as possible.

“With DepEd, we got an expanded senior high work immersion program with a mandatory 80 hours currently. We have entered into

an agreement with DepEd so that we can bring that up to 640 hours,” she said.

“That is practically a semester so that we can couple the training and the theoretical foundational skills building together with practical application. That is still in the works; we’re still at a pilot stage, so we’re hoping that that will impact employability at the senior high level,” she added.

She said similar initiatives are ongoing with CHED in terms of curriculum development.

For this year, she said two northern schools will run trials, while another run is expected next year.

“We see that this is going to happen in stages. There are schools that are going to very easily accommodate this kind of change. There are others that we’re going to have to pace it out with them,” she said.

“After going through the enhanced curriculum, we will assess them for employability. Because that’s really the goal, to increase employability,” she added.

Meanwhile, IBPAP expressed concern regarding the last-minute additions to the Open Access and Konektadong Pinoy bills, which have both passed on third reading in the House of Representatives and Senate.

“IBPAP is concerned about a last-minute addition to the bills during the bicameral committee discussions — a provision related to data localization,” it said.

“This was not included in earlier versions and appears to have been inserted without full consultation or clarity,” it added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**