

PAGCOR first-half gross gaming revenue hits P215B

THE Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp. (PAGCOR) said on Thursday that gross gaming revenue (GGR) hit P215 billion in the first half.

“Of the P93.36 billion generated by the integrated resort casinos, P16 billion was paid to PAGCOR as license fees, ensuring funding for government social services and driving the country’s economic growth,” PAGCOR Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Alejandro H. Tengco said in a speech during the Philippine Hotel Connect 2025 event.

GGR was 26% higher year on year. Integrated resorts revenue fell 5.86% from a year earlier.

As the online gaming comes under attack from supporters of stricter regulation, the outlook for integrated resorts remains bullish, industry officials said.

“I would say there is natural or organic demand for an online gaming experience, which is complementary to bricks-and-mortar gaming demand,” Gregory Francis Hawkins, president and chief operating officer of Bloomberry Resorts Corp. said at a panel discussion.

Mr. Hawkins sees a likely reduction in the contribution from the junket segment, with the mass-market and premium mass-market both growing slightly.

Jeffrey Rodrigo L. Evora, president and chief operating officer of Winford Resort & Casino Manila said his company is partnering with a junket operator to grow its VIP segment.

“We’re very excited about this mainly because we’ve never had a VIP market. We are really mass, premium mass, but the advantage of having this is that the segment is less volatile,” Mr. Evora said. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**



Davao bus project targeted for pilot operations in 2027

THE Department of Transportation (DoTr) said it hopes to launch pilot operations for the Davao Bus project in 2027.

In a statement on Thursday, Transportation Secretary Vivencio B. Dizon said the pilot will cover the Catalunan Pequeño-Ulas-Bangkal-Martina-Bankerohan-Quirino-Bajada-Lanang-Buhangin-Sasa routes.

The DoTr said it is also launching the Davao Bus Driving academy to help staff with the 672-kilometer Davao Bus project.

The Davao Bus project, or the Davao Public Transport Modernization Program is valued at P73.38 billion, funded by loans from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the government.

The DoTr has said that it was targeting to operate the Davao

Public Transport Modernization project by 2026.

The project is designed around a core service lane connecting major commercial centers; feeder routes to inner urban areas; and links between outer rural areas and terminals in Davao City.

The project has three main components — the establishment of a high priority bus system; the

strengthening of institutional capacity to execute the project; and the delivery of social development programs.

The project is a network of over 100 kilometers of core routes and more than 500 kilometers of feeder routes.

In April, the DoTr bid out the contract for the project’s general administrative consultancy services. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

Hotel industry urges traveler-safety focus in promoting PHL destinations

THE HOTEL industry said the Philippines needs to be actively positioned as a safe destination, noting the negative impact of safety rankings that portray the Philippines as unsafe.

“I think we also need to work with the government on a concerted effort in reintroducing the Philippines to all of our key markets, reminding everybody why we are different from Thailand, from Indonesia, and from the rest,” Fran-

cis Nathaniel C. Gotianun, senior vice-president at Filinvest Hospitality Corp., said during Philippine Hotel Connect 2025, organized by the Philippine Hotel Owners Association, Inc. on Thursday.

HelloSafe released findings based on travel insurance data designating the Philippines as “the latest safe country on the planet,” but later withdrew the results of its study pending a review of its methodology.

Mr. Gotianun noted that the report negatively affected the hospitality industry.

“Of course we want to tell people, ‘Yes, you have to be careful but we need to put things in perspective,’ and we have a duty as you know leaders in our various areas to take that up and make sure that the right messages get out,” he added.

To attract more visitors, the hospitality industry must put

the spotlight on the uniqueness of the Philippines, according to Ayala Land Hospitality Creative Director Paloma Urquijo Zobel De Ayala.

“Instead of... always chasing world-class, let’s just be exceptionally Filipino,” she said at a panel discussion during the event.

She also cited the need for more visitor options within driving distance from Manila. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

SES in talks to bring satellite telco coverage to rural areas

SATELLITE communications provider SES said it is in talks with telecommunications firms in the Philippines to bring direct-to-device services to close the connectivity gaps in rural areas.

“We’re now understanding where we could deploy this service, maybe in the Mindanao region where there are internet connectivity gaps,” Harsh Verma, vice-president of sales for the Asia-Pacific, said at a virtual media briefing on Thursday.

Mr. Verma said that the company is in talks with PLDT Inc.’s Smart Communications, Inc. unit; Globe, Inc.; and DITO Telecommunity Corp.

“We’re trying to get into the mainstream of 4G and 5G deployments in rural areas, bring direct-to-device capability into Philippines,” he said.

Instead of carriers putting up infrastructure, Mr. Verma said SES can use satellites in Medium Earth Orbit (MEO), a region of space that allows sufficiently high enough data transmission rates.

“So they basically send the traffic to our O3b mPower satellite, and we just have one O3b mPower Gateway doing not only Medium Earth Orbit but also bringing the direct-to-device capability using the same infrastructure,” he said.

SES recently launched its ninth and tenth O3b mPower satellites using a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket.

In 2023, SES conducted a test of its MEO satellite system with the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), which delivered connectivity speeds of 500 Mbps (download) and 80 Mbps (upload).

“We have deployed this commercially for six months and now we’re looking with working with DICT for a long-term deployment,” Mr. Verma said. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

PHL corn output seen rising on improved pest controls

PHILIPPINE CORN production was projected at 8.30 million metric tons (MMT) in marketing year (MY) 2025/26 due to improved containment measures against the fall armyworm (FAW) pest and stable demand from the feed sector, according to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Citing its Foreign Agriculture Service post in Manila, the USDA said its forecast for MY 2025/26, if realized, would exceed its 8.20-MMT corn output projection for MY 2024/25. It also noted the impact of a less intense dry season in 2025 and “increased technical

knowledge of farmers in handling the fall armyworm.”

“Farmer contacts report that compared to the previous calendar year, they have gained technical expertise in handling FAW, specifically by using corn varieties which were identified to be more FAW-resistant,” it added.

The USDA also forecast an increase in the area to be harvested of 2% to 2.55 million hectares in MY 2025/26, against the adjusted estimate for MY 2024/25 of 2.50 million has.

The Philippine Statistics Agency reported that corn production in the first

quarter of the calendar year hit 2.40 MMT, against the year-earlier output of 2.53 MMT.

The USDA said corn consumption in the Philippines will hit 10 MMT due to increased demand for feed corn from the poultry, pet food, and aquaculture industry, alongside continuous demand for corn-based snacks.

Meanwhile, the USDA also increased its consumption estimate for MY 2024/25 by 1% to 9.90 MMT.

“Industry contacts report that the African Swine Fever (ASF) remains a

challenge in the country, affecting total feed demand,” the USDA said.

“However, those involved in feed milling report that the increased feed requirements from the expanding poultry and layer industries, along with pet food and aquaculture, are outpacing the decline in feed corn demand from the swine industry,” it added.

It said most farmers still prefer producing yellow corn over white corn due to its higher marketability for feed use.

It also noted a gradual increase in the use of white corn by snack manufacturers. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**



2024 healthcare spending rises to 5.9% of GDP

HEALTH spending as a proportion of the economy rose to 5.9% in 2024 as overall spending rose to its highest level in three years, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported on Thursday.

Citing preliminary data, the PSA said the share of national health expenditure to GDP had been revised 5.5% in 2023.

The 2024 reading was the highest since the 6.4% posted in 2021.

The increase in health expenditure was driven by higher household incomes, improved employment conditions, and increased prices of medical goods and services, Michael L. Ricafort, chief economist at Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., said via e-mail.

Also, factors were the modernization of medical facilities in more parts of the

country by both the private sector and by the government, he said.

He added that public health programs benefited from increased funding to support indigent patients.

In 2024, health expenditures rose nearly 19% to P1.44 trillion, against the revised P1.21 trillion in 2023.

Gross health capital formation expenditure rose 1.7% to P121.47 billion in 2024.

This brought total health spending growth to 17.1%, the highest since the 22% posted in 2021.

Government schemes and compulsory healthcare financing schemes accounted for 44.7% of expenditure in 2024, or P643.12 billion. This was 29.5% higher year on year.

Households accounted for 42.7% of the overall spending bill at P615.16 billion, up nearly 12%.

Voluntary healthcare schemes accounted for 12.6% of the health bill in 2024 at P181.12 billion, up 8.9%.

On a per capita basis, health expenditure rose 17.6% to P12,751 in 2024.

Hospitals received 39.2% of healthcare expenditure or P564.43 billion. Retailers and other providers of medical goods accounted for 31.5% at P453.88 billion, while providers of healthcare system administration and financing took in 9.2% or P132.60 billion.

Mr. Ricafort said that growth trends in healthcare expenditure has been consistent in recent periods and will extend to the coming years “as healthcare is one of the priority expenditures by individuals, households, government, and other institutions.” — **Matthew Miguel L. Castillo**

Chairman Lee, other officers take charge at FPI

THE Federation of Philippine Industries (FPI) said on Thursday a new set of officers has taken charge of the group, led by new chairman Elizabeth H. Lee.

In a statement, the FPI said Ms. Lee is “a pioneering figure in automotive and advanced manufacturing, known for her commitment to sustainability, innovation, and inclusive growth.” She becomes the first female FPI chairman.

It said former chairman Jesus L. Aranza has been appointed chairman emeritus.

The group also announced the election of John Reinier Dizon as the organization’s president.

“(He is) a respected industry leader dedicated to local manufacturing and close collaboration with both government and business sectors,” the FPI said.

The FPI will be convening Business Summit 2025 on Oct. 8 at the Manila Polo Club. Among the expected guests at the event are Trade Secretary Ma. Cristina A. Roque and Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto.

“This year’s summit will... push forward a bold agenda for reindustrialization — one that is fair, green, and future-ready,” Ms. Lee said. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**