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Business chambers welcome Konektadong Pinoy enactment

BUSINESS CHAMBERS said on Tuesday that the Konektadong Pinoy Act will improve the economy's competitiveness and hasten the Philippines' digital transition.

The Joint Foreign Chambers, the EU-ASEAN Business Council, the IT and Business Process Association of the Philippines, and the US-ASEAN Business Council welcomed the new measure in a joint statement.

"We see this as a landmark achievement that will significantly improve internet access, boost the Philippines' economic competitiveness, and strengthen its digital ecosystem as ASEAN develops its regional Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA)," the groups said.

However, they said the "law's success will be dependent on the development of implementing rules and regulations (IRR) that protect the free and seamless flow of data across borders."

In particular, they said that the IRR needs to ensure that businesses are able to innovate and scale to fully harness the potential of the digital economy.

"We remain committed to supporting the Philippines' digital transformation and look forward to the full and immediate implementation of this law," they added.

The Konektadong Pinoy bill, which lapsed into law on Sunday, relaxes the entry requirements for investing in the data transmission industry, thereby increasing internet access and the development of digital infrastructure.

Opponents of the law cited the risks it poses to national security, with incumbents threatening to mount legal challenges.

One of the sticking points is a provision in the law allowing new data transmission entrants to operate without obtaining a legislative franchise or a certificate of public convenience and necessity.

The Department of Information and Communications Technology said it is currently working on the draft IRR which will be presented in a public consultation. The final IRR is due to be released within 60 days. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Brief La Niña could bring more typhoons by September

A POTENTIAL La Niña could start influencing weather patterns as early as September, mainly in the form of more typhoons, the government weather service, known as PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), said.

In a statement, PAGASA said the prevailing weather pattern in the tropical Pacific, known as the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO)-neutral, is most likely to persist until October.

However, climate models indicate an increasing probability of a brief La Niña episode emerging between September and December.

La Niña, the cool phase of ENSO, is characterized by unusually cool sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific.

PAGASA said a La Niña Watch is issued when conditions are favorable for the development of La Niña within the next six months, and the probability rises to above 55%.

It said La Niña typically result in an above-average number of tropical cyclones towards the end of the year and above-normal rainfall in most of the Philippines, possibly bringing floods and landslides to vulnerable areas, it added.

PAGASA said it will continue to "closely monitor the ongoing El Niño, its effect on the local climate, and the possibility of La Niña." — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

Rice-importing powers pushed for FTI, Planters

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) proposed to legislators that Food Terminal, Inc. (FTI) and Planters Products, Inc. be granted the power to import rice on behalf of the government.

The proposal follows efforts to amend the Rice Tariffication Law, which had stripped the National Food Authority (NFA) of its import powers and opened up the import trade to private traders.

In a statement, the DA cited the need to exert regulatory power over rice imports to prevent oversupply, which it said has "depressed" farmgate prices earned by domestic farmers.

"We must regain control," Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said. "Rice is a commodity imbued with too much public interest to leave entirely to the private sector."

At present, the NFA is required to build up its rice reserves by procuring domestic rice, but it can only purchase about 5% of the palay (unmilled rice) harvest "due to limited warehousing and drying capacity," the DA noted.

It added that the NFA's impact on the market is limited to releasing rice during calamities.

The DA said if needed, government corporations under its umbrella like FTI and the Planters Products "could import on behalf of the government."

"The proposed changes aim to strike a balance between ensuring affordable rice for consumers and protecting the livelihoods of Filipino rice farmers," it said.

The DA, however, clarified that the rice import function will remain largely with the private sector.

Mr. Laurel has told the Senate that private importers should be required to share the responsibility of maintaining the country's rice reserves.

"If we aim to have a 20-day rice buffer stock, we're thinking of a 50-50 split between the NFA and the private sector," he said.

Under the proposed setup, rice imports will follow the sugar import model, under which the Sugar Regulatory Administration issues import allocations only to qualified importers.

Rice importers will also be required to maintain their reserves by procuring palay from domestic farmers at fair prices.

A private sector role in maintaining the buffer stock, sourced from local rice farmers, will also reduce the cost to the government of maintaining its rice reserve, Mr. Laurel said. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**


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PHILIPPINE STAR/RYAN BALDEMOR

Vehicles procured via e-portal valued at nearly P290 million

VARIOUS agencies have taken possession of nearly P290 million worth of motor vehicles (MVs) procured via the e-Marketplace platform, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) said on Tuesday.

The DBM's Procurement Service (PS) reported that 153 vehicles have been delivered to 50 government agencies as of Aug. 26. The vehicles were acquired for a combined P289.936 million.

The DBM also reported that 30 more agencies are awaiting the delivery of 56 vehicles, valued at P115.72 million.

"When compared to the Authority to Purchase Motor Vehicle — a documentary requirement for procuring entities to procure MVs which indicates the budget ceiling for purchase — the savings shoot up to P27.43 million," the DBM said via Viber.

The e-Marketplace is an official electronic commerce platform where agencies can directly procure supplies and equipment from vetted suppliers.

The PS said only motor vehicles are currently available on the e-Marketplace but expects to add airline tickets, cloud computing services, and software and licenses soon.

The e-Marketplace currently lists 83 vehicle models available for procurement, including multi-purpose vehicles, passenger vans, utility vans, sport utility vehicles, sedans, buses, mini buses, and pick-up trucks.

The e-Marketplace had been projected to process at least P320 million in transactions this year.

The e-Marketplace is a feature of the New Government Procurement Act, which was signed into law by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. in July 2024. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

Aramco acquisition of 25% stake in Unioil cleared by competition regulator

THE Philippine Competition Commission (PCC) said it cleared the proposed acquisition by Aramco Asia Singapore Pte. Ltd. of a 25% stake in Unioil Petroleum Philippines, Inc. and Unioil Energy Pte. Ltd.

In a statement, the regulator said it does not see the transaction resulting in a substantial reduction of competition in the relevant markets.

The PCC noted that "the parties have limited shares, there is substantial competition from other established players, and the entry of new players is likely, timely, and sufficient due to low barriers to entry."

Aramco Asia is an affiliate of Saudi Arabian Oil Co. (Saudi Aramco) and renders sales, marketing, procurement, and logistics services out of Singapore.

Unioil Petroleum is a fuel retailer while Unioil Energy is a trading company that ships in gasoline and diesel to the Philippines.

In February, Aramco Asia and Unioil Petroleum announced a definitive agreement for a stake sale, marking Saudi Aramco's return to the Philippine market.

Saudi Aramco used to own 40% of Petron Corp. but divested in 1994.

Under the Philippine Competition Act, the PCC is tasked with reviewing mergers and acquisitions (M&As), including foreign transactions, that meet notification thresholds, to ensure that the deals do not harm competition. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**