

ERC to expedite applications considered 'critical'

THE Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) said it will identify pending applications that it deems critical and subject them to expedited approval processes.

"We will do everything we can to accelerate the resolution of ap-

plications filed before the ERC. Streamlining our processes is key to fulfilling our commitment to a more responsive and revitalized ERC," ERC Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Francis Saturnino C. Juan said in a statement on Wednesday.

In a three-page resolution promulgated on Sept. 29, the ERC said it will resort to summary proceedings for critical applications instead of making them go through the regular process.

The summary proceedings apply to applications seeking

authority to develop and own or operate dedicated point-to-point limited transmission facilities, capex project proposals, and confirmation of over/under recoveries.

The critical category also includes power supply agreements,

issuance of certificates of public convenience and necessity, and business separation and unbundling plans.

The ERC noted, however, that summary proceedings will only apply in situations when applications require no intervenors or

are not being contested. When there are intervenors, parties involved must agree to submit to summary proceedings.

Summary proceedings are authorized by the ERC's Revised Rules of Practice and Procedures.

— **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

Voluntary tuition scheme for financially capable SUC students questioned

By Almira Louise S. Martinez
Reporter

THE practicality of allowing financially capable students of State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) to pay tuition voluntarily is under scrutiny after the University of the Philippines (UP) reported that 10% or less of its students made such payments.

UP President Angelo A. Jimenez noted that in 2024, the university recorded that 10% of its students paid tuition in the first semester and 9% paid in the second semester.

"Very few opted out (of the free SUC tuition scheme) although

they are qualified. Many of these are those who exceeded (the duration of their program), or are taking their second degree. There are limits," he said at a Senate budget hearing.

Mr. Jimenez's income breakdown for families of UP students was about 50% earning P500,000 a year, with the families of 10% earning more than P1 million. Those with no income records account for 10%.

SUCs offer free tuition under Republic Act 10931 or the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act. Section 4 of the law requires SUCs, including those backed by local governments, to develop a "mechanism" that enables the financially capable to

"voluntarily opt out of the tuition and other school fees subsidy or make a contribution to the school."

Senator Paolo Benigno A. Aquino IV, one of RA 10931's authors, said at the hearing on Sept. 27 that he expects UP to take the lead on voluntary payments, because "many students enrolled are financially capable," and that the premier state university "must be the first to implement an opt-out program."

"If you drive or have a driver going to UP or Batangas State University, maybe (such students) can opt out," he said. "The social pressure should be that if you can afford the tuition fee, you should pay it."

The opt-out "was created for that small set of students who are well-off who are in SUCs, but it should always be voluntary," he added. "It was not meant to create another set of students who will pay. That's not the intention of the opt-out provision."

Youth and student organizations rejected the premise of the opt-out, taking the position that the government must fund public education.

According to Kabataan Party-list, the government can raise "more than enough funds for free, accessible and quality education" if it makes it a priority.

"The government should not be choosing who to give services to,"

Kabataan Party-list Rep. Renee Louise M. Co said on Facebook statement. "The government should not pass up its responsibility of ensuring that students and families have access to education."

"And students should also not have to prove that they are poorer than others to enjoy free education," she added.

The Student Council Alliance of the Philippines (SCAP) called the implementation of opt-out scheme "problematic."

"In several SUCs and LUCs, students are pressured to pay tuition before they can enroll, reducing what should be a voluntary option into a coercive practice," it said.

"This undermines the spirit of the law and risks opening the door back to systems where access to education depends on one's capacity to pay or endure bureaucratic hurdles," it added.

Among the private schools, Karel S. San Juan, president of Ateneo de Davao University, said the opt-out can be used to redirect funds to support poor students.

"If the student can fund his or her education, why not use the resources set aside for that student to a poorer student," Mr. San Juan told *BusinessWorld*.

"That seems to be an idea worth exploring to make the distribution of educational resources more equitable," he added.

60-day freeze ordered on Cebu prices after quake

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said it imposed a 60-day price freeze on basic necessities in Cebu following the magnitude 6.9 earthquake on Tuesday.

Trade Secretary Ma. Cristina A. Roque said the DTI is focused on ensuring the affordability and steady supply of essential goods.

"We recognized the heavy toll this disaster has taken on families. Beyond enforcing the price freeze, our priority is to ensure that prices and supplies are affordable and stable," she said in a statement on Wednesday.

"The DTI will be vigilant in (protecting) consumers from undue price increase," she added.

The price freeze automatically took effect after the declaration of a state of calamity in the province.

In a separate statement, the Department of Tourism (DoT) advised tourists to verify the state of their destinations before traveling.

"Several tourist sites in affected areas may be closed while safety inspections are ongoing," the DoT said on Wednesday.

"The department, through its regional offices, is working closely with concerned agencies and local government units to assess the safety of access roads and bridges, as well as the condition of affected tourism establishments and workers," it added.

In a separate Facebook post, Tourism Secretary Ma. Esperanza Christina G. Frasco said she has directed TIEZA to deploy inspectors to assess the damage to heritage churches and key establishments in Cebu.

— **Justine Irish D. Table**

PHL international investment position net liability widens 9.8%

THE Philippines' international investment position (IIP) came in at a net liability position of \$68.3 billion at the end of June, up 9.8% from a quarter earlier, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said.

Year on year, the net liability widened 44.1% to \$47.4 billion.

"This increase was driven by inward foreign investments outpacing the country's own investments abroad," the central bank said in a statement.

The IIP is a gauge of the economy's external exposure.

The net position refers to the difference between assets and liabilities and represents either a net claim on or a net liability to the rest of the world.

External financial liabilities rose 2.7% quarter on quarter to \$325.2 billion and by 11.8% from a year earlier.

Foreign direct investment rose 3.1% from a quarter earlier to \$134.2 billion at the end of June, the BSP said.

"Nonresidents' net investments in equity capital expanded

3.5% to \$62 billion largely due to valuation adjustments from a broad decline of the dollar. Additionally, nonresidents' net investments in debt instruments issued by residents increased 2.7% to \$72.1 billion," it added.

Foreign portfolio investment (FPI) rose 4.2% from a quarter earlier to \$94.7 billion at the end of June.

Outstanding external financial assets rose 0.9% quarter on quarter to \$256.9 billion and expanded 5.5% from a year earlier.

"The country's external financial holdings rose by 0.9%, led by a 15.7% increase in loans extended by domestic banks to nonresidents, reaching \$13.2 billion. Residents' equity capital investments in their foreign affiliates likewise grew by 4.6% to \$34.1 billion," the BSP said.

The central bank held external financial assets worth \$111.2 billion or 43.3% of the total, while the "other" category held \$105.5 billion (41.1%) and banks \$40.2 billion (15.7%). — **Katherine K. Chan**

OPINION

My two cents on the Trillion Peso March against corruption

While guiding clients through their Bureau of Internal Revenue audits, I've been struck by an unsettling truth: congressional investigations into flood control corruption could erode taxpayers' willingness to do their duty in funding vital public services. Allegations of collusion between contractors and officials to siphon off as much as 70% of project costs appears to turn every compliance initiative into an exercise in futility. When the very architecture designed to deter fraud instead abets it, even the most robust technical defenses can feel hollow.

While I wasn't able to join the Trillion Peso March on Sept. 21, I was there in spirit. Driven by both technical curiosity and growing unease, I flipped through the audited financial statements of some of these government contractors that are publicly available on the Securities and Exchange Commission's website (for a fee). Allegedly, up to 70% of a flood control project's awarded cost is funneled into the pockets of various government officials and other co-conspirators. I wonder how they presented these government transactions in their financial reports.

For instance, if a contractor is awarded a P100-million contract, and it only uses 30% for the actual project, the net profit should theoretically approximate 70% unless the total revenue of P100 million was not recorded, or the 70% kickback was concealed or claimed as deductions by filing ghost expenses. As expected, one of these contractors' net income accounts for only 5%-8% of service revenue. While such schemes can cover up bribes, understating the revenue would be more challenging due to publicly available information such as the DPWH's awarded projects database and Sumbong sa Pangulo websites, which enable us to perform reasonableness checks on their total revenue.

It would appear that somewhere in the reports, large sums are buried in vague accounts labeled as professional fees or overhead, perhaps with invoices lacking real support, or sudden spikes in subcontractor payments that do not match work progress, and bookkeeping entries that erase audit trails.

All the recent revelations erode confidence in the system. To my mind, plunderers are also tax evaders. Recent Senate hearings

TAXWISE OR OTHERWISE MAC KERWIN VISDA

also prompted questions on how these contractors managed to secure the tax clearances needed for government bidding. Most people assume that these clearances serve as proof that their books had been audited, and all taxes duly paid, fearing that the government might be barred from conducting further examinations should the need arise.

For clarity, a Tax Clearance for Bidding Purposes certifies only that a bidder:

- Has no unpaid annual registration fee;
- Has no open valid "stop-filer" cases;
- Is a regular user of the BIR's Electronic Filing and Payment System from the time of enrollment up to the time of filing of the renewal of Tax Clearance for those with previously issued Tax Clearance for Bidding Purposes.
- Is not tagged as a "Cannot Be Located (CBL)" taxpayer;
- Has no Accounts Receivable/Delinquent Accounts; and
- Has no pending criminal information filed in any court of competent jurisdiction arising from any tax or tax-related cases.

In other words, taxpayers can still be investigated even after securing a tax clearance. While our tax laws generally grant the BIR a period of three years from a return's due date to assess liability, this period can be extended to ten years in case of falsity or fraud, with the 10-year period counted from the date of discovery. The recent admissions from the Senate about systematic under-declaration satisfy the *prima facie* evidence test: a substantial understatement of taxable sales, receipts, or income, or a substantial overstatement of deductions. This constitutes *prima facie* evidence of a false or fraudulent return.

The BIR's aggressive Run After Fake Transactions (RAFT) campaign, launched in 2022, deserves commendation for cracking down on ghost-receipt schemes that have long eroded the country's tax base. Through coordinated audits, criminal complaints, and collaboration with the Department of Justice, the BIR has successfully collected over P4.3 billion — and expects that figure to grow to at least P8 billion once all current assessments conclude. This decisive action sends a clear message: tax evasion will not be tolerated, and our public revenue merits vigilant guardianship. As we applaud these successes, we anticipate that the next RAFT

will scrutinize these government contractors behind ghost and substandard projects, ensuring that public funds are safeguarded with equal rigor, if not more — so every alleged tax evader faces justice and is held accountable.

Fortunately, the previous President vetoed the general tax amnesty provisions of Republic Act No. 11213, recognizing that without lifting bank secrecy, incorporating exchange-of-information clauses, and embedding robust safeguards against untruthful asset declarations, such an amnesty would be vulnerable to exploitation by potential tax avoiders. His veto message underscored that a tax amnesty's success hinges on these protective measures to validate applications and deter evasion. In response, Senate Bill No. 60 now proposes a new general tax amnesty that enshrines these crucial safeguards (e.g., one-year window to inquire about bank deposits, and use exchange of information). I am hopeful that once implemented, the program achieves its revenue objectives and does not become a vehicle for a select few to escape their fair share of taxes.

Whether we are public officials or private citizens, we owe it to our nation to make corruption not just unlawful, but culturally repulsive and intolerable. It must be seen as grotesque, treasonous, and never normal. Let us keep marching, keep speaking, and keep holding the line until justice becomes no longer the exception, but the rule. Let the Trillion Peso March rise beyond a moment of outrage and become a relentless movement that demands real reform and refuses to be silenced. The voices calling for change must not fade. They must continue to resonate until the systems that enable corruption are dismantled, where trust and accountability become the standard, not the exception.

The views or opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Isla Lipana & Co. The content is for general information purposes only and should not be used as a substitute for specific advice.

MAC KERWIN VISDA is a senior manager at the Tax Services department of Isla Lipana & Co., the Philippine member firm of the PwC network.
+63 (2) 8845-2728
mac.kerwin.visda@pwc.com

Career Opportunity in G-XCHANGE, INC.

Position title: **VICE PRESIDENT – HEAD OF OPERATIONS**

Job Description:

- The Vice President – Head of Operations will lead oversee the operational strategy and execution across critical functions at GXI. This pivotal leadership role will drive operational performance across Cyber Security Operations, Business Assurance Operations, and Application & DevOps.
- The vice president will bring a wealth of regional experience and expertise in scaling operations within multinational and dynamic environments, providing guidance and leadership to a growth and complex operational landscape.
- Possesses a unique combination of global strategic thinking, cross-functional leadership, and specialized expertise, particularly in the areas of IT Security Ops Service management and DevOps.
- A senior leadership who will influence both day-to-day operations and long-term strategic direction.

Qualifications:

- MBA or relevant postgraduate degree in Business, Operations or Technology.
- Certifications in operational excellence and governance frameworks.
- At least 15+ years of senior operational management experience, particularly in managing operations across various functions and business units.
- Proven success in leading large, diverse teams in multinational or regional settings, with a focus on driving high-performance culture and organizational growth.

Applications may be sent to: Josie Huella

Email address: josie.huella@gcash.com

COMPANY / EMPLOYER

NAME OF FOREIGN NATIONAL INTENDING TO APPLY FOR THE POSITION

Company Name: G-XCHANGE, INC.
Complete address: 8th Floor, W Global Center, 30th Street corner 9th Avenue, Bonifacio Global City, Taguig City
Nature of business: Software Development

Name: Vishnu Nambari Gopi Nathan
Address: 9th Avenue corner 28th Street
Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City
Nationality: Malaysian
Intended period of employment: Three (3) years

G-XChange, Inc. hereby declares that the above-named foreign national is able, willing, and qualified to perform the services and job description for this position. The company has the intention to employ the said foreign national and apply for an Alien Employment Permit with the Department of Labor and Employment - National Capital Region located at 967 Maligaya Street, Malate, Manila.

Career Opportunity in G-XCHANGE, INC.

Position title: **HEAD OF INFRASTRUCTURE TRANSFORMATION**

Job Description:

- Lead the strategic direction and execution of the company's fintech infrastructure initiatives with deep expertise in Security Engineering and DevSecOps to lead and drive the architecture, design, and operations of Gcash's infrastructure and security practices.
- In this senior leadership role, he will be responsible for the over-all IT infrastructure for the organization and for the developing and optimizing cutting-edge infrastructure strategies that support our fintech products and services, ensuring resilience, scalability, and integration of security into every part of the development pipeline.
- These include physical and virtual servers, various cloud based services such as load balancers and databases, physical data centers and network components.
- His deep exposure with global financial industry experience will allow him to drive innovative, scalable, and secure infrastructure solutions that cater to the evolving demands of the financial services landscape.
- He will be required to attend the regular CTOO executive meetings in his role as the Head of Infrastructure.

Qualifications:

- Minimum of 10-15 years in senior infrastructure roles, with significant experience in the financial industry.
- At least 3-5 years in a leadership position with deep expertise in security engineering and DevSecOps.
- Deep technical understanding and experience with cloud-based service providers, specifically AWS and Azure and Cloud and virtualization and containerization.
- Working experience in designing and setting up Kubernetes, Kong, Elasticsearch and Kafka clusters or related technologies.

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