Customs seeks talks with AmCham, US Embassy over corruption issues

THE Bureau of Customs (BoC) said it is seeking a dialogue with the American Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (AmCham) and the US Embassy after the agency was tagged in a US report as among the Philippines' "most corrupt."

"We have provided information through the proper diplomatic channels to clarify our ongoing reforms and have requested a dialogue with the American Chamber of Commerce and the US Embassy to further strengthen cooperation," the BoC said in a statement on Tuesday.

The BoC hopes to further discuss the findings of the 2025 State Department Investment Climate Statements report and explore future cooperation in promoting good governance and facilitating trade.

In its September 2025 report, the State Department said the BoC is "still considered one of the most corrupt agencies in the country," calling corruption a major barrier to attracting investments.

It added that the US embassy has received multiple reports from US firms of overly invasive searches, inconsistent customs charges, and demands for "facilitation fees" from BoC personnel. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

PHL requires $1.79 billion in smart-grid investment — Ember


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THE PHILIPPINES will need $1.79 billion in smart-grid investment to follow through on its renewable energy (RE) ambitions, according to energy think tank Ember.

In a report on Tuesday, Ember said upgrading grid infrastructure will be needed if the Philippines and Vietnam are to sustain the momentum of their clean-energy rollouts.

"Vietnam and the Philippines are expected to lead deployment, followed by Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia. This growth signals a strong commitment to clean energy but also unprecedented operational complexity," Ember said.

The think tank said that ASEAN economies share the same challenges in building power systems that can support the rapid demand growth and huge influx of renewable energy.

According to Ember, smart grids are crucial to ASEAN's clean energy transition, but require substation upfront investment.

A smart grid digitalizes electricity networks, enabling two-way communication between suppliers and users.

It said that a smart grid could deliver the flexibility needed for "high-renewables futures."

"As the Philippines pursues its RE targets of 35% by 2030 and 50% by 2040, smart grid deployment will be vital in shaping a cleaner and more resilient energy future, delivering reliable, flexible, and secure electricity to both growing industries and households," according to Alnie Demoral, Asia energy analyst at Ember and lead author of the report.

Ember said the rapid growth driven by digital industries, advanced manufacturing, and data-driven services will depend on reliable electricity. Even short outages can translate into "major economic losses and weakened competitiveness."

Across ASEAN, the average value of lost load (VOLL) — a planning metric that estimates the economic cost of electricity outages — is estimated at $2.4 per kilowatt-hour (kWh).

Among the ASEAN countries, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Indonesia are exposed to higher risks with their VOLL exceeding $3 per kWh.

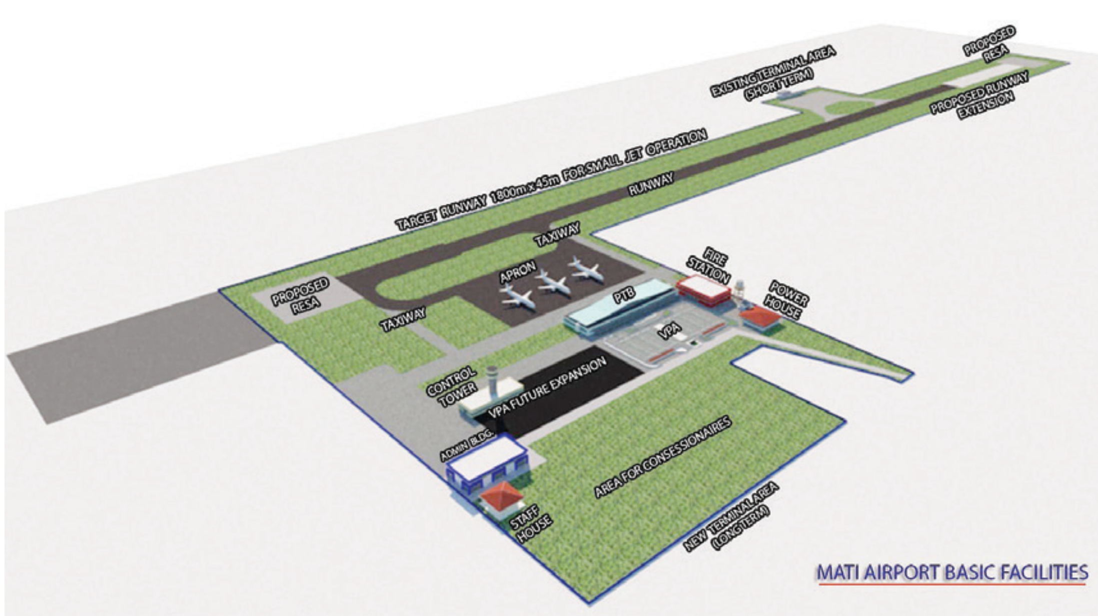
Ember said the power interruption on Panay Island in January 2024 was reported to have caused daily losses to the economy of around P400-500 million.

"While such a scale of blackout is uncommon for the island, it illustrates how grid disruptions can have material impacts on local economies and livelihoods," the report said.

The think tank said that reliability could lead ASEAN to lose nearly $2.3 billion in annual outage-related losses by 2040, through foregone investment, missed industrial production, and a decline in regional competitiveness.

"Nonetheless, the message is clear: modernizing grids is essential to secure growth, unlock renewable potential, and safeguard its place in the global economy," Ember said. "Delay, by contrast, risks billions in annual losses and erodes the resilience the region has worked hard to build." — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

Mati Airport set for expedited development



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THE Department of Transportation (DoTr) said it is expediting the construction and upgrade of Mati Airport in the Davao region, with plans for it to accommodate turboprop aircraft by 2027.

"We are working to expedite the construction of the airport... For 2026, CAAP (the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines) allotted a P700-million budget for Mati Airport," Transportation Acting Secretary Giovanni Z. Lopez said in a statement on Tuesday.

The DoTr aims to complete the airport's passenger terminal building by 2026. Turboprop aircraft operations are expected to begin in 2027, to be followed by the introduction of jet services after further upgrades.

Mati Airport is being positioned as an alternative to Davao International Airport, the DoTr said.

Work on the airport started in February after being granted funding for site and runway development.

In 2023, the provincial government of Davao Oriental pushed for the revival of the mothballed airport to boost tourism.

Initially built in the 1970s, the airport was left unused and has not hosted commercial operations due to land transfer disputes. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

Agencies urged to directly procure rice ahead of farmer protest in QC

THE Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) said it is asking government agencies and corporations to directly procure rice from farmers to support them during a time of weak farmgate prices of palay (unmilled rice).

Agrarian Reform Secretary Conrado M. Estrella III said in a statement: "We are appealing to all National Government agencies, including Government-Owned and -Controlled Corporations (GOCCs), to rally behind our farmers and directly procure their rice."

Mr. Estrella made the appeal at a meeting he convened of officials from various parts of the government, including Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr., Speaker Faustino Dy III, National Food Authority Administrator Larry Lacson, House Committee on Agriculture chair Rep. Mark Enverga, House Agrarian Reform Committee chair Rep. Eleanor Bulut-Begtang, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform chair Senator Francisco Pancratius N. Pangilinan, and local government executives from rice-producing provinces.

The meeting was convened a day ahead of planned protests at the DAR in Quezon City (QC) by rice farmers from Central Luzon, who are saying government has not acted sufficiently to address low farmgate prices.

The "caucus" of officials will submit a recommendation detailing the government procurement plan to the Palace.

This proposed directive aims to create immediate demand for local palay harvests, offer price stability, and ensure government-led support for agriculture.

Mr. Dy was quoted as saying in the statement: "We will continue to push for policies and budget support that ensure fair farmgate prices and national food security."


FREEPIK

P349 temporary safeguard duty imposed on imported cement

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said it will be imposing a temporary safeguard duty of P349 per metric ton on imported cement for three years.

The DTI said it will be adopting the Tariff Commission's (TC) recommendation to impose a safeguard duty of P14 per 40-kilogram bag of ordinary Portland cement Type 1 and blended cement.

"The imposition of the safeguard duty will be subjected to dynamic monitoring and review to ensure that prices remain stable and supply stays sufficient to cover demand at any given time," Trade Secretary Ma. Cristina A. Roque said in a statement on Tuesday.

According to the DTI, the TC recommendation is equivalent to only 3-4% of the prevailing retail price and will level the playing field between domestic manufacturers and importers. It does not expect the extra cost to be passed on to consumers.

It said the excess cash bond paid by importers, or the difference between the provisional and final duty assessed, will be refunded once the DTI issues the corresponding order.

Ms. Roque said recent earthquakes underscore the need to ensure an adequate and affordable supply of cement.

"The DTI will regularly review the safeguard duty to adjust its scope and intensity in response to market conditions," she added.

"The department will actively regulate the effects of safeguard tariffs to maintain a balanced environment where both local manufacturers and cement importers can adapt, compete, and thrive, particularly during periods of calamities or supply disruptions," she said. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

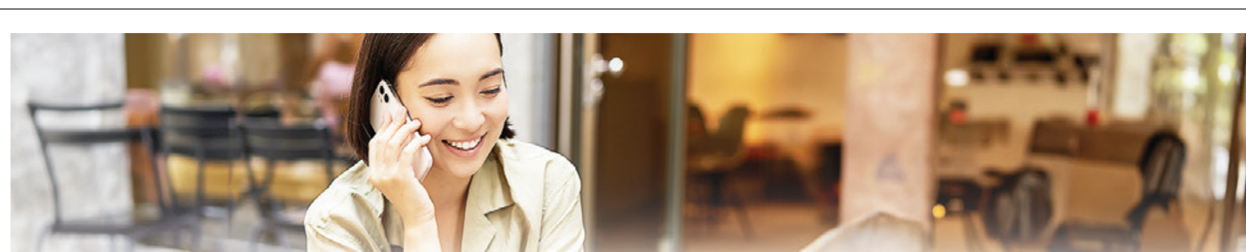
Farm drone demos planned via 'learning hubs'

THE Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) said it will begin its rice farming drone rollout via demonstrations at a network of "learning hubs."

Drone program leader Dindo King Donayre said in an e-mail that these sites will "showcase the effectiveness of digital and precise technologies in real-field farming conditions."

He added that the sites will be training centers staffed by PhilRice and nearby universities and local governments.

"As the technologies prove their value and usability, training-of-trainers programs and other scaling approaches will help local technicians and farm leaders to become multipliers of innovation within their community," Mr. Donayre said. — **Andre Christopher H. Alampay**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Scam calls in the Philippines rise over 78% in Q3

SCAM CALLS in the Philippines rose 78.44% quarter on quarter to 62,390 in the three months to September, anti-scam application Whoscall reported.

According to the Whoscall Scam Report, the scam callers "are taking advantage of legitimate promotional calls like credit card limit upgrades, making their scams sound more believable to unsuspecting consumers," according to Mel Migriño, the Gogolook Philippines country head and general manager, at a briefing on Tuesday. Gogolook developed the Whoscall app.

She noted that scam callers typically impersonate banks or businesses offering fake rewards or loans to mobile users. These scams are expected to surge until the end of the year in the runup to the holidays.

On a year-on-year basis, scam calls fell 62.24% during the third quarter.

Scam texts declined 42.17% from a quarter earlier to 37,609 in the three months to September, it said. They were down 97.71% year on year.

Ms. Migriño said there was now a greater wariness of scams by text recipients.

"In our assessment, the public now has a significant level of awareness that if they receive a message that has link in it; in most cases, that message is malicious," she added.

Malicious links, or hyperlinks aimed at directing users to fraudulent websites, jumped 31.65% quarter on quarter to 27,510 in the three months to September, Whoscall said.

"We continue to urge the public to report scam incidents, as these serve as leads for further investigation and as the foundation for various initiatives that raise public awareness against online scams," Cybercrime Investigation and Coordinating Center Acting Executive Director Renato A. Paraiso said. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

PCC clears Metanoia-Copper Smelting deal

THE Philippine Competition Commission (PCC) said it approved the transaction between Metanoia South Pte. Ltd. (Metanoia) and Copper Smelting Investments, Ltd. (Copper Smelting).

"The commission found that the transaction is unlikely to harm competition, citing customers' strong buying power, strict quality standards, and the limited production capacity of the parties involved," the PCC said in a statement on Tuesday.

The PCC said the transaction's impact on the global supply of doré, a semi-pure alloy of gold and silver used in refining, is unlikely to disrupt market dynamics.

"The review included consultations with the Notifying Parties, stakeholders, trade associations, and relevant sector regulators," the PCC said.

"With no significant change in market power resulting from the transaction, the PCC's clearance enables the parties to move forward while maintaining a level playing field for industry participants," it added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**