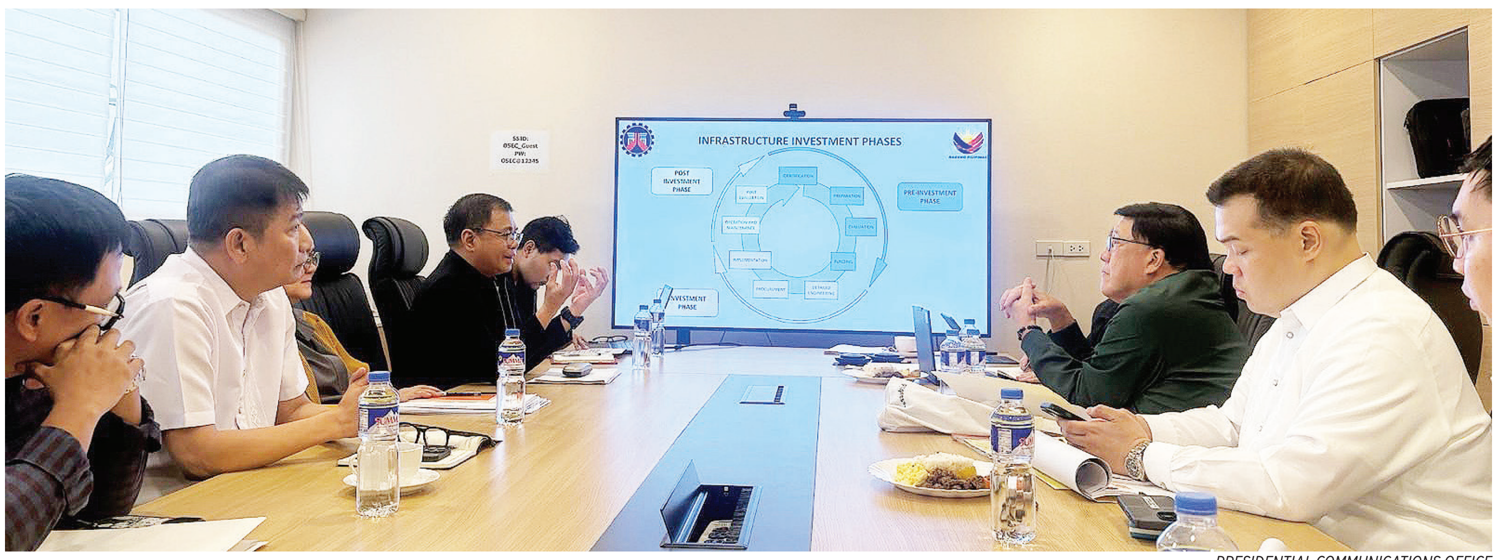

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

ICI begins work at DPWH Office in Manila on Sept. 16.

Business chamber says ICI needs subpoena powers in infra probe

THE PHILIPPINE Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) said the body investigating public works corruption lacks the subpoena powers to compel persons of interest to appear before it.

It also called for decisive action against corruption in infrastructure, warning that any cover-ups could damage business confidence.

"We feel that we need more, and we need decisive action and decisions. We don't want cover-ups and railroading," PCCI President Enunina V. Mangio said on the sidelines of the 51st Philippine Business Conference and Expo on Monday.

"Our recommendation is that President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. gives legal authority to ICI to really prosecute or to really find those that are really guilty," she said.

"We really want those responsible to be punished and to be identified," she added. "It was really very surprising to us that the corruption in flood control is of this magnitude."

According to a joint statement released Sunday by 34 business groups, including the PCCI, the Independent Commission for Infrastructure (ICI) needs to be granted full powers to investigate those responsible for the flood control corruption scandal.

In the joint statement, the groups called for prosecution of all those responsible, impartially and without regard to rank, position, political affiliation, or personal relationships. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**


PHILSTAR FILE PHOTO

House resolution seeks US talks to discuss call center reshoring

A CEBU legislator filed a resolution on Monday urging the government to initiate talks with the US over plans to bring the call-center industry back from overseas.

The Trade and Foreign Affairs departments should "immediately initiate dialogue" with their US counterparts to seek exemptions for US business process outsourcing (BPO) firms operating in the Philippines, according to Cebu Rep. Vincent Franco D. Frasco, who filed House Resolution No. 386.

"The urgency of the situation demands proactive and high-level diplomatic action and trade engagement to ensure that the interests of Filipino workers and US-affiliated firms operating in the Philippines are protected from the US bill's unintended economic consequences," he said, referring to US legislation known as the proposed Keep Call Centers in America Act

The US bill could penalize US companies for outsourcing call center operations by ruling them out for federal grants and loan guarantees.

The Philippines call center industry employs about 1.7 million, according to the House resolution.

Mr. Frasco described the US measure as posing a "direct threat" to the stability of the BPO industry and may discourage American firms from setting up shop in the country, leading to job losses and loss of investor confidence.

Trade Secretary Ma. Cristina A. Roque last week said her department will meet with industry representatives to map out responses to the US legislation.

The Information Technology and Business Process Association of the Philippines has said that 70% of its members are US-based. — **Kenneth Christiane L. Basilio**

PHL mangoes pitched to Italian market

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it promoted Philippine mangoes to Italian importers, hoping to establish an initial niche with the Filipino community in Italy and expanding to other exotic Philippine fruit.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. visited mango sellers at the "Serbisyo Caravan" in Rome, noting the potential for Philippine goods to "make a grand entrance on the global stage."

Rome-based Agriculture Attache Josyline C. Javelosa was quoted in the statement as saying that strategic government support at international events helps sustain Philippine products' commercial presence.

Ms. Javelosa said the plan for mango is to establish a foothold with the Filipino community in Rome, which "craves the authentic flavor, texture, aroma, and quality that only Philippine mangoes can deliver, something that cheaper alternatives just can't match."

Philippine Trade and Investment Center Chairman Dennis Carrascoso said the mangoes sold out "within a few hours" aided only by word-of-mouth.

Italian importers are currently planning to expand to other Philippine commodities like *lanzones* (lansium domesticum) and *pili* nuts. — **Andre Christopher H. Alampay**

Text, market access components of CEPA talks with Chile targeted for completion within the year

THE PHILIPPINES and Chile are hoping to conclude text-based and market access negotiations for a free trade agreement (FTA) within the year, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said.

"For the third round, we achieved substantial progress in the text-based negotiations, and we are hoping to conclude the same within the year," Trade Undersecretary Allan B. Gepty said via Viber.

"We also started negotiations on market access, and we target to finish the same also this year," he added.

The third round of negotiations for the Philippines-Chile Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) took place on Oct. 6 to 10.

The third round covered goods, services, transparency, digital trade, intellectual property, and technical cooperation, among others.

"We are considering another negotiation round in December. In the meantime, we will optimize virtual intersessional meetings to fast-track the negotiations," Mr. Gepty said.

According to the DTI's Bureau of International Trade Relations, both sides have committed to finalize the trade deal as soon as possible.

"Basically, we will negotiate to maximize market access for goods in Chile, especially for our top exports like storage units, personal care products, fishing nets, carrageenan, coconut products (desiccated), aero parts, and medicaments, among others," he said.

Mr. Gepty said a CEPA will also open up doors for services and investment.

"The CEPA will provide opportunities for our professionals, service providers, and companies who want to explore and seize business opportunities in Chile," he said.

"We will also establish a platform for collaboration and partnership on innovation, education, research and development, among others, so that we can entrench our presence in Latin America," he added.

Last month, the DTI said the CEPA will create up to $9 million in trade gains, including trade creation of $3.9 million, mostly in electronics, and then trade diversion of $4.68 million.

If realized, the agreement will be the Philippines' first FTA in Latin America. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

State-owned Planters Products imports 120,000 bags of fertilizer

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said Planters Products, Inc. (PPI), its trading and marketing arm, imported 120,000 bags of inorganic fertilizer from Vietnam.

The shipment marks the first time PPI, formerly the dominant fertilizer supplier in the Philippines with 70% of the market in the 1970s, has imported fertilizer in 43 years.

PPI Chief Operating Officer Roberto V. Antonio said the shipment will help it continue its mission of "providing affordable, high-quality fertilizer and farm inputs that help ensure food security and agricultural growth."

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said the shipment will help farmers save on production costs "At six bags per hectare, this initial volume can support about 20,000 hectares of rice fields," he added.

The fertilizer consists of a blend of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, helping with robust leaf growth, root development, grain formation, and resistance to pests and diseases. — **Andre Christopher H. Alampay**


FREEPIK

OPINION

A new era of digital governance for ecozone enterprises

LET'S TALK TAX
TONEE ROSE M. PALOMENO

Transacting with the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) for over two years, I have found its processes consistently convenient and efficient. One thing I particularly appreciate is PEZA's use of online processes and systems, such as e-mail submissions for applications and online payment portals. Even with the effectiveness of its previous systems, PEZA continues to push forward to further simplify and enhance the ease of doing business in the Philippines.

This is especially timely with the implementation of the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises to Maximize Opportunities for Reinvigorating the Economy (CREATE MORE) Act which broadens and enhances the tax incentives available to registered business entities (RBEs) while clearly specifying the requirements for availment.

This year, PEZA introduced PEZA – The One Portal System (PTOPS), a centralized database platform designed to automate and streamline core PEZA processes. To note, PTOPS has three modules to be rolled out in phases: (1) the Business Enterprise Registration Management System (BERMS); (2) the Permits Management System (PMS); and (3) the Logistics Management System (LMS).

PHASE 1: BERMS

On April 8, through Memorandum Circular No. 2025-021, PEZA officially launched BERMS, the Phase 1 Module of PTOPS. This web-based platform improves the registration and certification processes and record-keeping for ecozone enterprises, ecozone developers and service enterprises. It facilitates the issuance of electronic certificates, such as the Certificate of Registration, the VAT Zero-Rating Certificate, and the Certificate of Entitlement to Tax Incentive (CETI), among others, and supports online payments, application reviews and real-time monitoring.

To support the BERMS rollout, PEZA issued Memorandum Order Nos. 2025-006 and 2025-013 detailing the implementation guidelines, including user manuals and operational procedures. These issuances provide clear instructions for both existing and prospective ecozone enterprises on how to navigate the platform.

The mandatory use of BERMS for the issuance of VAT Zero-Rating Certificates and CETIs took effect on May 1, while its use for enterprise registration became mandatory on Aug. 16.

Below is an overview of the registration and certification process under the BERMS module of PTOPS.

1. Account activation/enrollment - To access the applications under BERMS, existing RBEs must activate their account in PTOPS, while proponent enterprises must complete the enrolment process.
2. Submission of application with supporting documents - Depending on the type of application, the enterprise-applicant needs to fill out the online application forms and upload the necessary supporting documents as provided under the PEZA Citizen's Charter. Once submitted, a QR code and reference number are generated, which can be used to check the status of the application.
3. Pre-screening - The application will be subject to pre-screening to ensure completeness of documents and correctness of information prior to official acceptance by PEZA.
4. Payment of fees - If the application is compliant, it will be tagged for payment of the applicable fees. On the other hand, if the application is incomplete or non-compliant, it will be deemed not filed and the enterprise-applicant will have to comply with the necessary documents and resubmit the application.
5. Further review and evaluation - After payment, the application will be subject to further review by the concerned division of PEZA depending on the type of application (ex. Enterprise Registration Division for registration applications).
6. Generation of certificates - If the application is approved, the enterprise-applicant will be able to generate the electronic copy of the certificates in PTOPS. Otherwise, PEZA will encode in PTOPS the corresponding remarks/comments explaining the disapproval.

Note that certain applications will be endorsed for PEZA Board approval (with investment capital of less than P15 billion) or to the Fiscal Incentives Review Board (with investment capital of more than P15 billion).

PHASE 2: PMS

Following BERMS, PEZA recently launched and provided guidelines for the implementation of Phase 2 or the PMS, under Memorandum Order No. 2025-014. The PMS integrates the three systems of PEZA, i.e., the Electronic Import Permit System (eIPS), the enhanced Automated Export Documentation System (eAEDS) and the electronic Zone Transfer System (eZTS), currently managed by three Value Added Service Providers involving the required permits for the movement of goods. The mandatory use of PMS for the approval of import permits began on Sept. 1.

CONCLUSION

With the anticipated release of the final module, i.e., LMS, PEZA's PTOPS is nearing full implementation. The centralization and automation of key processes, such as securing the VAT zero-rating certificate, which confirms the registered business enterprise's compliance with the conditions of VAT zero-rating on local purchases and must be applied every year, will significantly ease the compliance burden for RBEs.

PTOPS marks a transformative shift in PEZA's commitment to enhance transparency, reduce administrative burdens, and improve turnaround times for ecozone stakeholders.

Let's Talk Tax is a weekly newspaper column of P&A Grant Thornton that aims to keep the public informed of various developments in taxation. This article is not intended to be a substitute for competent professional

TONEE ROSE M. PALOMENO is a manager from the Tax Advisory & Compliance practice area of P&A Grant Thornton, the Philippine member firm of Grant Thornton International Ltd.
pagrantthornton@ph.gt.com