Work starts on NSCR's underground FTI station

CONSTRUCTION has commenced on an underground station of the North-South Commuter Railway (NSCR) in Bicutan, Taguig City, a member of the contracting joint venture for the station said.

According to First Balfour, Inc., the engineering and construction arm of First Philippine Holdings Corp. (FPH), work started on the Food Terminal, Inc. (FTI) train station's reinforced concrete diaphragm wall, which will ensure the foundational stability of the station.

The underground FTI station will also serve as an intermodal transfer hub linking the ground-level and elevated sections of the NSCR with the Metro Manila Subway Project (MMSP).

First Balfour, Inc.'s joint venture partner for the project is Leighton Asia. The partnership is known as the Leighton-First Balfour Joint Venture (LFBJV). The FTI station is covered by the NSCR 03-B contract, awarded to LFBJV in 2023.

The project covers civil engineering, tunnel construction, and building works for a 6.1-kilometer railway segment consisting of 4.7-kilometer twin tube tunnels with cross passage and ground-level structures.

The 147-kilometer NSCR will connect Malolos, Bulacan with Clark International Airport, and Tutuban, Manila with Calamba, Laguna. The P873-billion project is co-financed by the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the ADB. It will have 35 stations and three depots. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

Economic dev't committee reviewing recommendations to adjust rice tariff


PHILIPPINE STAR/ MIGUEL DE GUZMAN

THE Economic Development Committee (EDCom) said it is seeking to strike a balance between protecting farmers and limiting the inflationary impact on consumers in adjusting rice import tariffs.

In a statement on Monday, the Department of Economy, Planning, and Development (DEPDev) said Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan, who co-chaired the 5th EDCom meeting, said the EDCom focused on the Tariff and Related Matters Committee's recommendation to revise the rice import tariff rate, currently at 15%.

"The meeting convened key economic managers to discuss important economic matters and policy recommendations to further strengthen the country's development agenda," it said.

Among the participants were Secretary Frederick D. Go, the EDCom Chairman and head of the Office of the Special Assistant to the President for Investment and Economic Affairs (OSAPIEA), as well as Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. has said that the government will extend the rice import suspension until the end of the year but keep tariffs at 15%. The 15% rate had been set by Executive Order No. 62, lowering it from the original 35% as an inflation-containment measure.

The Bureau of Customs has said the extension of the rice import ban from the original 60 days will result in up to P12 billion in foregone revenue.

Separately, DEPDev, which serves as the Secretariat of the National Innovation Council (NIC), said the Philippines is making "significant strides" toward becoming a smart and innovation-driven economy.

Citing the 2024 Progress Report on the Implementation of the Philippine Innovation Act, Mr. Balisacan said: "The Progress Report shows how our reforms are translating into stronger innovation governance, more responsive programs, and a growing culture of creativity and collaboration." — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

Masbate tourism workers granted emergency cash aid

TOURISM SECRETARY Christina G. Frasco and Social Welfare and Development Secretary Rexlon T. Gatchalian led the Emergency Cash Transfer (ECT) aid distribution on Monday to 677 tourism workers in Masbate, the Department of Tourism (DoT) said.

The cash aid was directed at tourism workers affected by Typhoon Opong (international name: Bulaoi) and drew funds from the Bayanihan sa Bukas na May Pag-asa sa Turismo (BBMT) program.

The DoT said BBMT is a joint program between the DoT and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) designed to provide relief to tourism workers affected by calamities.

Also present at the distribution were Special Assistant to the President Antonio Ernesto Floirendo Lagdameo, Jr.; Education Secretary Juan Edgardo M. Angara; and Agriculture Undersecretary Roger V. Navarro.

Ms. Frasco was quoted in the statement as saying: *"Ang laking ambag po (ng turismo) nito sa ating ekonomiya. Halos umabot na po sa* 9% *sa ating* GDP *'yung kontribusyon ng turismo, kasali po kayo diyan* (Tourism accounts for nearly 9% of the economy, and you are a part of it)."

Mr. Lagdameo Jr. conveyed the President's desire to deliver aid promptly to ensure that "*makabangon lahat*" (so everyone recovers).

Masbate Gov. Richard Kho said at the distribution ceremony: "*Marami pang nasalanta ng bagyo sa bansa, pero naglaan sila ng oras para sa* Masbate (There are many typhoon victims nationwide, but the government delegation made time for Masbate)."

The Cabinet members also inspected the Masbate Center for Livestock Development in Asid, Masbate City; the Masbate Provincial Hospital; and the Masbate Comprehensive National High School and Nursery Elementary School, as well as school rehabilitation efforts. — **Andre Christopher H. Alampay**

Fisherfolk, Makabayan bloc bill to ban commercial fishing in municipal waters

A BILL being prepared by fisherfolk and the Makabayan bloc of Congress will seek to ban commercial fishing operations in municipal waters, citing the need to protect fishing communities.

The draft bill to be filed by the Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (PAMALAKAYA) and Makabayan sets a 15-kilometer zone from which large-scale fishing operations will be banned.

The bill's proponents claim that 90% of municipal waters are exhausted because of commercial fishing, leaving little for subsistence fisherfolk.

The draft bill follows a Supreme Court decision that struck down as unconstitutional previous rules granting preferential rights to fisherfolk in municipal waters.

PAMALAKAYA Chairman Fernando L. Hicap said "overfishing" by commercial operations threatens harm to fishing communities.

"*Kapag pinapasok pa natin iyan doon sa dapat* exclusively *para sa mga maliit na mangingisda, mauubos iyon at mawawala tayo ng produksyon. Malaki ang mawawala na kita at gutom*, compare *mo doon sa mga* commercial fishing (When commercial operations intrude into areas designated for fisherfolk, the fish will be depleted, leaving nothing for fishing communities, depriving them of earnings and leaving them hungry)."

Mr. Hicap said protecting fisherfolk will contribute to lower fish prices relative to fish shipped in from overseas.

Should the bill be passed, Mr. Hicap said municipal areas will need to be rehabilitated.

He said seaside rehabilitation could take over 50 years to repair, with coral reefs needing around a century to recover.

Mr. Hicap also called for a freeze on fish imports to support small-scale fisherfolk.

"*Ang tinutulungan natin sa pag-i*import *ay ang ibang bansa, hindi sa pagpapa-unlad ng ating industriya* (By importing, we only help foreigners and neglect our own industries)." — **Andre Christopher H. Alampay**

Digital transformation,
from S1/1

"We take away the power of corrupt leaders to manipulate public funds and capitalize on people's money for their personal interests, greed, and political ambition."

Technology can be used to "impose checks and balances, monitor paper trails, eliminate arbitrary and politically motivated decision-making, and prevent unconstitutional budget insertions to curry political favor at the expense of the people's money," she said.

However, the government should make sure that it develops and equips Filipinos so that the country can effectively leverage technology, she said.

"Digital transformation will be the bridge to the future, paving the way for inclusivity through training, upskilling, deep-dive mentoring, and industry exposure to equip our human resources," she said.

"The new skills and knowledge they acquire will prove useful as they figure into roles that require creative and innovative thinking, problem-solving, and leadership."

She added that the country should aspire to create future innovators, thinkers, producers, and entrepreneurs.

"Our goal is to maximize the potential of our human and natural resources, leveraging the power of technology and digital transformation to create growth centers that host competitive homegrown producers, service providers, and exporters," she said.

"These strategies will be significant economic drivers that will help create local jobs, increase domestic economic activities, and spur development and progress in domestic and microeconomies across the Philippines." — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

ERC,
from S1/1

The National Association of Electricity Consumers for Reforms (Nasecore) called for full transparency and accountability in FIT-All rate adjustments, saying that public consultations are not enough.

In a statement sent to *BusinessWorld*, the consumer group urged the ERC to release an annual audit of the FIT-All fund and provide detailed explanations of calculations used to determine any shortfall requiring rate adjustments.

Nasecore also called on the regulator to consider alternative measures to sustain RE funding without putting too much financial pressure on consumers.

"Transparency is not optional; it is a legal and moral obligation. If ERC fails to release the audit and provide proper documentation and accountability, it can only mean a failure of regulatory oversight. Consumers deserve to see how their money is collected and utilized," said Nasecore President Patronilo L. Ilagan.

ANOTHER HIKE

The ERC also approved the proposed new market fee of the Independent Electricity Market Operator of the Philippines (IEMOP) covering the period of 2025 to 2027 to improve the operations of the Wholesale Electricity Spot Market (WESM).


PHILSTAR FILE PHOTO

The new market fee of P0.0071 per kWh is the cost of administering and operating the WESM, which will be collected from generators transacting in the spot market.

The approved fee covers the operational, administrative, and capital expenditure budgets of both IEMOP as the market operator and the Philippine Electricity Market Corp. (PEMC), which is the WESM's governing body.

According to the ERC, the market fee ensures "a reliable and transparent WESM," as it provides cost predictability for generators and guarantees the integrity of the market's critical functions like pricing, settlement, and data reporting.

The allocation includes critical IT and cybersecurity upgrades.

"This approval is a key step in the ongoing reform of the electricity market. It ensures IEMOP and PEMC can operate sustainably and fulfill their mandates, balancing industry needs with accountability to consumers," Mr. Juan said. "This decision is part of our continuing efforts to promote a secure, competitive, and consumer-oriented power industry."

WESM is where energy companies can purchase power when their long-term contracted power supply is insufficient for customer needs.

Maharlika,
from S1/1

"Institutions like the GSIS (Government Service Insurance System) and SSS (Social Security System), with their distinct mandates, are perhaps more suitable for direct market stimulation," Mr. Consing added.

Both state-run pension funds can invest in private equities and securities, as well as government securities, to help grow their investment incomes and extend their fund life.

The MIC chief also assured the public that the fund "is being managed with the highest standards of governance and transparency to deliver on both financial returns and our country's economic development and prosperity."

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. had flagged anomalous flood control projects during his State of the Nation Address in late July. This sparked several investigations into alleged corruption involving lawmakers, government officials, and private contractors.

State economic managers have said that the scandal could affect gross domestic product growth due to the likely slowdown in government spending amid increased scrutiny.

This month, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas also said that the issue has affected business sentiment, which partly led to its decision to deliver a fourth straight 25-basis-point cut to help stimulate domestic demand amid softening economic prospects.

As more details about the corruption mess surfaced in Congress hearings, the Philippine Stock Exchange index (PSEi) has gone down, settling at the 6,000 level as of last week from the 6,300 level recorded early in August, with analysts attributing the drop to both weak domestic sentiment and global trade policy developments.

On Monday, the PSEi edged down by 0.09% or 5.46 points to end at 6,084.07, while the broader all shares index slipped by 0.08% or 3.16 points to close at 3,661.92.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Chief Economist Michael L. Ricafort said in a Viber message that the MIC should stay focused on its mandate of pursuing long-term investments rather than deploying capital to buoy the market.

"(This is) in view of other more important investment priorities with bigger long-term benefits," he said.

Mr. Ricafort said the MIC's investment decisions should be guided by the highest risk-reward tradeoff and the biggest positive impact on the economy and society.

"The hurdle rate for return and benefit for the country is much higher in terms of economic growth and development. That is more inclusive." — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

BoP,
from S1/1

The Philippines' trade-in-goods balance has been in deficit for over a decade or since the $64.95-million surplus recorded in May 2015.

"September's BoP surplus was likely bolstered by net receipts in services trade, overseas Filipino remittance inflows, and net foreign equity investments that, combined, overshadowed trade-in-goods deficit and net foreign bond outflows. This led the third-quarter BoP to be in a surplus position," Angelo B. Taningco, research head and chief economist at Security Bank Corp., said in an e-mail.

BSP data showed that the country recorded a $274-million surplus in the July-September period. This was smaller than the $3.676-billion surfeit in the same quarter last year.

Mr. Taningco said they expect another surplus this quarter, which would help trim the end-2025 BoP deficit to $4.5 billion.

The BSP expects the overall BoP position to end at a $6.9-billion deficit this year or -1.4% of gross domestic product.

"The smaller BoP surplus reflects fewer one-off inflows and a still-wide trade gap, but the external position remains manageable with steady remittances, strong services exports, and solid reserves," Robert Dan J. Roces, economist at SM Investments Corp., said in a Viber message.

"As global rates ease and regional demand recovers, investment inflows may return and support liquidity and credit conditions, which should help firms with deep local roots and diverse sources of growth."

RESERVES

The BSP said the country's BoP position mirrored the increase in its gross international reserves (GIR) to $109.1 billion at end-September from $107.1 billion as of August.

"The level of GIR remains an adequate external liquidity buffer, equivalent to 7.3 months' worth of imports of goods and payments of services and primary income," it said. This is well above the three-month standard.

"Moreover, it covers about 3.8 times the country's short-term external debt based on residual maturity."

This ensures that the country has ample foreign exchange to meet its financing needs, such as import and debt payments, the central bank said.

The country's gross reserves are made up of foreign-denominated securities, foreign exchange, and other assets such as gold. Aside from financing its external obligations, these are used by the central bank to help stabilize the peso and also serve as a buffer against global economic disruptions.

The BSP expects dollar reserves to settle at $105 billion by end-2025.