

Senior-citizen power subsidy costs seen rising as elderly ranks grow

THE government's electricity discount program for senior citizens is facing challenges due to the ageing population and overlaps with other energy subsidies, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) said.

"As the Philippine population ages, both the number of qualifying households and their average consumption levels will increase, escalating total subsidy costs," PIDS study authors Kris A. Francisco and Patricia Thea A. Basilio said in a report published on Dec. 21.

Republic Act 9994 provides for a minimum 5% electricity discount for citizens aged 60 and above who consume 100 kilowatt hours or less.

PIDS added that the demographic profile will likely increase the burden on non-senior consumers over time and affect government finances.

"The combination of expanding beneficiary populations consuming higher electricity volumes creates

compounding fiscal effects," it said.

According to a working paper from the Asian Development Bank, the elderly are expected to account for one-fifth of the Philippine population by 2066.

PIDS also said the program's annual renewal process increases the administrative burden, putting pressure on staffing costs.

"These recurring costs require sustained manpower and resource allocation, which generates higher operational expenses that is ultimately incorporated into regulated tariffs and passed on to all consumers," it added.

In addition, senior citizen discount beneficiaries overlap with Lifeline Rate recipients, who receive discounted electricity as low-income or marginalized consumers.

About 31% of Lifeline-qualifying households overlap with the senior citizen program, it said. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

Trustmark voluntary registration period extended by one year

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said it extended the voluntary registration period for the e-commerce trustmark for another year.

"The DTI is keeping trustmark registration voluntary (until next year). This gives online businessmen more time to join at their own pace," the DTI said in an advisory on Monday.

With the extension, companies doing business online will have until December 2026 to register for the trustmark. The original voluntary period had been due to lapse on Dec. 31, 2025.

The trustmark policy has elicited calls for review, with stakeholders and legislators claiming that it duplicates some requirements that online businesses already must comply with.

Sen. Paolo Benigno A. Aquino IV in October urged the DTI to reconsider Department Administrative Order 25-12 describing it as an unnecessary burden on micro, small and medium enterprises.

At the time of the order, registration had been mandatory.

Mr. Aquino also said that the order contradicted the Internet

Transactions Act, which identified the trustmark as a voluntary program, and the Ease of Doing Business Act.

Trade Secretary Ma. Cristina A. Roque said about the extension: "We encourage everyone to register. It is for their credibility," she added.

According to the DTI, obtaining a trustmark results in "the immediate benefit of helping build a safer digital marketplace while boosting your business."

The DTI has received 18,405 trustmark applications so far. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**



Plans announced to develop Clark data center site

ISLAND INFORMATION & Technology, Inc. (IS) said one of its subsidiaries is planning to develop a site within the Clark complex to host data centers.

In a disclosure on Monday, IS said its Island Data Centers (IDC), Inc. unit entered into a memorandum of agreement with a firm called Y-I Corp. to jointly establish a property man-

agement company on a 50:40 basis whose main asset will be property rights to a three-hectare site leased from Clark Development Corp.

According to the agreement, the partners are hoping to sign up two data centers to establish operations on the site.

IS said the site management company has received "tentative interest to invest over P1

billion subject to contract from various investors and operators."

IDC has also obtained a commitment from Clark Electric Distribution Corp. to service the data centers' electricity requirements via a 69-kilovolt sub-transmission line. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

House measure seeks to reduce PHL dependence on imported coffee

A BILL seeking to boost the Philippine coffee industry and curb reliance on imports was filed at the House of Representatives last month.

House Bill No. 6404 seeks to improve coffee farm productivity through modern, sustainable practices and support for smallholder farmers.

"(The) widening gap between limited local production and growing domestic demand underscores the urgency of strength-

ening support for farmers and building resilience across the coffee value chain," Ang Probinsyano Party-list Rep. Alfred C. Delos Santos said in the explanatory note of the bill, which was filed on Nov. 26.

Philippine coffee production is insufficient to meet market demand. According to the US Department of Agriculture, the Philippines produced 27,000 metric tons (MT) of coffee in marketing year 2023-2024, against domestic consumption of 371,400 MT.

Consumption is projected to continue rising to 405,000 MT, putting the country on track to overtake Japan this year as the biggest coffee consumer in Asia.

The proposed measure seeks to strengthen the coffee industry through the creation of the National Coffee Board, tasked with overseeing the development and promotion of the sector.

The board will be chaired by the Secretary of Agriculture, with the Secretary of

Trade and Industry as vice-chairperson, and will include representatives from local governments, academia, coffee growers, traders and processors.

The bill also seeks to establish a national program for the coffee industry to guide the development of production, processing, marketing, research, and trade.

The program will include research and development on climate-resilient

practices, farmer training, financial and market support, infrastructure development, and branding strategy.

The bill is seeking an initial budget of P50 million from the Special Activities Fund of the President or other sources. Subsequent funding will be included in the Department of Agriculture's allocations under the annual General Appropriations Act. — **Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**

SM Supermalls unveils the 2025 Wall of Champions, honoring Filipino MSMEs

SM Mall of Asia — SM Supermalls once again celebrated the heart of Filipino entrepreneurship with the unveiling of the 2025 SM for MSMEs Wall of Champions, a visual tribute to the resilience, innovation, and impact of micro, small, and medium enterprises across the country.

In partnership with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the annual ceremony honored this year's Presidential Awardees for MSMEs:

- Nutridense Food Manufacturing Corp. — Medium Enterprise Awardee
- Pasciolco Agri Ventures — Small Enterprise Awardee
- Heaven's Bakehaus & Enterprises — Micro Enterprise Awardee

Also recognized were the 2025 MSME Finalists, who have demonstrated excellence in community impact, innovation, and inclusive business growth. This year's finalists include:

- Agriko-Multi-Trade & Enterprise Corp.
- House of Musa
- Gift of Grace Food Manufacturing Corp.
- Tonio's Sisig
- Famous Belgian Waffles
- Siargao's Bounty Seafoods Corp.

Together, these awardees and finalists represent diverse industries and powerful stories of Filipino entrepreneurship at its best. During his welcome remarks, Joaquin San Agustin, Executive Vice-President for Marketing at SM Supermalls, highlighted the importance of providing meaningful platforms for MSMEs. "The Wall of Champions is more than a showcase



2025 MSME Awardees and finalists gather at the SM for MSMEs Wall of Champions, joined by executives from SM Supermalls and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), to celebrate their achievements and enduring contributions to their communities. The Wall of Champions serves as a powerful tribute to the resilience, innovation, and nationwide impact of Filipino micro, small, and medium enterprises.

— it is a tribute to Filipino grit and creativity. Behind every business that thrives in our malls is a story of courage, purpose, and community impact," he said.

Asec. Leonila T. Baluyut, DBA, Regional Operations Group and Officer-in-Charge of the Bureau of SME Development, also expressed DTI's pride in seeing MSMEs gain national recognition and affirmed the agency's support for programs that expand opportunities for entrepreneurs.

FROM THE AWARDEES AND FINALISTS

Representing this year's awardees, Maura Pasciolco, Owner of Pasciolco Agri Ventures — Small Enterprise Awardee, shared, "SM's own beginnings from a humble shoe store that grew through perseverance and vision deeply resonates with our own story. Their

support to MSMEs through the SM for MSMEs Foundation, together with DTI, exemplifies the power of collaboration in lifting small enterprises toward great impact. This award affirms the years we spent championing Filipino farmers and products, growing with purpose, sustainability, and pride. Being part of the Wall of Champions inspires us to aim higher and reach more Filipinos. If there's one thing our story proves, it's that no dream is too small to grow. We hope this recognition encourages more MSMEs to keep pushing, keep creating, and keep believing."

Finalist Euclid Cezar of Innovention Food Manufacturing Corp. expressed optimism about the broader impact of the initiative "SM is like a big brother to smaller businesses like us. During the pandemic, we were only asked to pay what we can, 1,000 or 1,500 pesos. Only a big brother would



Left Photo: Pasciolco Agri Ventures Owner and General Manager Maura M. Pasciolco shares her story as this year's Small Enterprise Awardee. Center Photo: Heaven's Bakehaus proprietor Marc T. Claro delivers his heartfelt message as the Micro Enterprise Awardee, inspiring fellow entrepreneurs. Right Photo: Innovention Food Manufacturing Corp. President and CEO Euclid S. Cezar speaks on his journey as the 2025 Medium Enterprise Finalist and SM tenant.

do that. Being named a finalist is already a huge honor. It motivates us to expand, innovate, and bring our products to more communities. Seeing SM's commitment to MSMEs gives entrepreneurs like us the confidence that growth is possible."

The MSME Champions' Wall, now displayed at SM Mall of Asia, highlights inspiring journeys of resilience, creativity, and community empowerment — serving as a beacon for more than 17,000 MSMEs thriving across SM malls nationwide. SM Supermalls remains steadfast in its mission to empower local entrepreneurs and strengthen the MSME ecosystem through long-term partnerships, accessible platforms, and inclusive opportunities for growth.

ABOUT SM SUPERMALLS — MSMEs Celebrating 40 Super Years of Evolving With You, SM Supermalls — one of Southeast Asia's largest mall developers and operators with 89 malls nationwide — marks a bold new era of connecting communities and redefining the mall experience through sustainability, innovation, and inclusivity. As the country's biggest marketplace for MSMEs, SM champions Filipino entrepreneurship — empowering small businesses, driving local growth, showcasing homegrown talent, and fueling the Filipino spirit of enterprise. Be part of this success story — visit msme.smsupermalls.com or email customer@smsupermalls.com to grow your business with SM today!



SM Supermalls Executive Vice-President for Marketing Joaquin San Agustin, together with DTI Assistant Secretary Leonila Baluyot, officially unveil the MSME Champions' Wall, marking the highlight of the ceremony.