

Regulator approves raw sugar exports of 100,000 metric tons to US

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said it authorized the export of 100,000 metric tons (MT) of raw sugar to the US to fulfill the Philippines' 2026 quota. Sugar Order (SO) No. 3, which will take effect on Jan. 23, will allow the Philippines to fulfill its US raw sugar commitment for a third consecutive year. Sugar

shipments under the quota typically fetch higher prices than those sold on the world market. Participation in the export program is open to qualified traders. According to SO No. 2, priority for the export program goes to those who have purchased domestically produced sugar.

Participants who comply with the terms of SO No. 3 will be given priority in future sugar import programs, at a 1:3 export-to-import ratio. The SRA, however, clarified that it currently has no import program for crop year 2025-2026. Privileges granted under SO No. 3 may be transferred to another licensed

international sugar trader in good standing, subject to approval by the SRA administrator. The order follows the Department of Agriculture's (DA) approval of the SRA's proposal to export raw sugar to the US, citing the need to reduce excess domestic supply and support farmgate prices.

The DA said domestic sugar production rose by about 130,000 MT in the last crop year, resulting in higher inventory levels. Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. has cited the need to export as soon as possible to provide immediate relief to the sugar industry. — **Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**

Tarlac pharmaceutical ecozone locator operational in 2027

PHARMACEUTICAL manufacturer Zen LifeSciences, Inc. is set to start commercial operations in Tarlac early next year, according to the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA). In a social media post on Wednesday, PEZA said it signed a registration agreement with the company on Jan. 19, marking Zen LifeSciences' classification as an export enterprise. The agreement covers the company's P1.2-billion manufacturing facility in Luisa Industrial Park-Special Economic Zone in Tarlac, which will start commercial operations by January 2027. Expected to generate over 90 jobs, the facility will produce medical, wellness, and general healthcare products. "The registration of Zen LifeSciences is aligned with President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.'s (instruction) to reduce reliance on imported medicines," PEZA Director General Tereso O. Panga said. "By locating in a PEZA ecozone, this project will not only help ensure a stable supply of quality, locally made health products but also cre-

ate meaningful employment and economic opportunities for communities in Tarlac and nearby areas," he added. In a separate statement, PEZA said it launched the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tech Academy last week, which is expected to deliver practical, industry-driven training in AI, data science, fintech, blockchain, and other emerging technologies. Aimed at bridging the skills gap, the program will develop a pool of experts "capable of supporting smart manufacturing, advanced services, and the modernization of ecozones nationwide." Following the launch, PEZA will also be pursuing an agreement with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, StackTrek, and the IT & Business Process Association of the Philippines for the nationwide rollout of the academy. The agreement, which will also include local government units hosting ecozones, is expected to help ensure a steady flow of AI-proficient workers in support of the ecozone industry. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

WTO sees PHL as AI-ready due to business outsourcing

THE World Trade Organization (WTO) said artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled services are shaping up to be a potential source of competitive advantage for the Philippines. "(The global) digitally delivered services trade, which is all trade across computer networks, is growing at almost 6%," WTO Director General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said at the Philippine pavilion at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland. "The Philippines has an area where it can actually do well. You already have business outsourcing. You have that background,

and I do agree that the shift from voice to more digital and AI-enabled services could really serve the Philippines well," she added. She acknowledged the country's potential to be better in certain areas. "I think that digitally delivered services is an area of competitive and comparative advantage for the Philippines that you should exploit quickly," she said. "For that, you need the skills and the training ... It can employ so many more people if they are AI-enabled," she added. Citing a WTO report, she said world trade is projected to

increase by 40% by 2040, depending on how economies adopt AI. "If we are able to adopt and have accessibility to AI equally between developing and developed countries, this will happen. If we are not, we are exacerbating inequalities," she said. She said developing countries should put the needed connectivity, infrastructure, and skills in place to ensure they can reap the benefits of AI. "Let us skill our people in the use of this AI, not that it will replace them, but how can they make themselves more produc-

tive, and let us also put in place the infrastructure, including in rural areas, so that people can access this AI," she said. She added that the Philippines, being vulnerable to natural disasters, must invest in climate proofing and adaptation. "It can be done in a way that helps drive the economy ... You can create jobs while shifting to climate adaptation and climate mitigation techniques, and I think the Philippines needs to follow that; otherwise, it will continuously be prone to losing," she added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

PHL obtains P3.7-B JICA loan for Typhoon Tino rehab works

THE Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is providing a ¥10-billion (P3.7 billion) loan to support Philippine rehabilitation and recovery projects following Typhoon Tino. In a statement on Jan. 20, JICA said it released the first tranche of the Post-Disaster Standby Loan Phase 3 (PDSL3), which aids the government in addressing urgent post-disaster needs and managing financial pressures during crises. The loan disbursement had been requested by the Department of Finance after a State

of National Calamity was declared due to the severe impact of the typhoon, JICA said. Typhoon Tino left 150 people dead and affected about 4.1 million during its Nov. 4 passage. The Philippines, one of the world's most disaster-prone countries, faces about 20 tropical storms each year. "By making critical funds available, the PDSL3 enables the Philippine government to sustain response operations, ensure the con-

tinuity of vital public services, and transition into early recovery and reconstruction," JICA Chief Representative Baba Takashi said. PDSL3, signed through a loan agreement in August 2023, is part of a ¥30-billion facility to support recovery efforts after a natural disaster. JICA said the first phase of PDSL was triggered in 2013 following Typhoon Yolanda, followed by the second phase in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

Powering the future of enterprise data with smarter, scalable storage

Seagate showcases autonomous, sustainable, and future-ready storage systems for modern enterprises

Artificial intelligence (AI), social media, and mobile applications now shape how people work, communicate, and access services. Behind these digital experiences lies a shared requirement: massive, reliable data storage. Every photo uploaded, transaction processed, or AI model trained depends on information being stored and retrieved in milliseconds. As digital ecosystems expand, enterprises are reassessing how their storage environments are built. Scalability, automation, and sustainability have become essential, especially as organizations balance performance demands with operational and environmental goals.

MEETING THE DEMANDS OF MODERN DATA GROWTH
For more than four decades, Seagate Technology has played a central role in the evolution of data storage, delivering more than four zettabytes of capacity across cloud platforms, edge deployments, and enterprise environments. As data volumes surge, Seagate continues to evolve its systems



Modern data centers rely on scalable, high-performance storage systems to support AI, cloud, and enterprise workloads.

to help organizations deploy storage that is easier to manage, more resilient, and ready for long-term growth. Seagate's enterprise portfolio is designed for CIOs, CTOs, data center operators, and procurement leaders seeking cost-optimized,

environmentally responsible, large-scale data management. **AUTONOMOUS STORAGE FOR MISSION-CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTS**
Downtime remains one of the biggest challenges in large-scale storage. In environments where availability is critical, even brief interruptions can have significant consequences.

Seagate addresses this through autonomous storage capabilities that reduce reliance on manual intervention. A key example is Exos Corvault, a high-capacity block storage system designed for multi-petabyte deployments. Instead of requiring immediate drive replacement, Corvault isolates and bypasses defective sectors while keeping systems online. This allows organizations to maintain access to their data and schedule maintenance on their own terms. Its distributed data protection architecture also enables faster recovery and reduced performance impact compared with traditional RAID systems.

SUSTAINABILITY BUILT INTO THE DESIGN
With data centers expanding rapidly, sustainability has become a priority alongside performance and cost. Frequent hardware replacement contributes to electronic waste and higher energy consumption. Seagate's autonomous drive regeneration extends the usable life of storage components, reducing waste and supporting ESG goals without compromising reliability. This design approach helps organizations lower their environmental footprint while maintaining operational efficiency.

UNIFIED EXOS STORAGE FOR DIVERSE ENTERPRISE WORKLOADS
With the recent rebranding of the Exos line — including the introduction of Seagate's 32TB platform — the entire Exos family now operates as a single, unified enterprise storage portfolio. This streamlined approach gives organizations a consistent, scalable foundation for modern workloads across analytics,

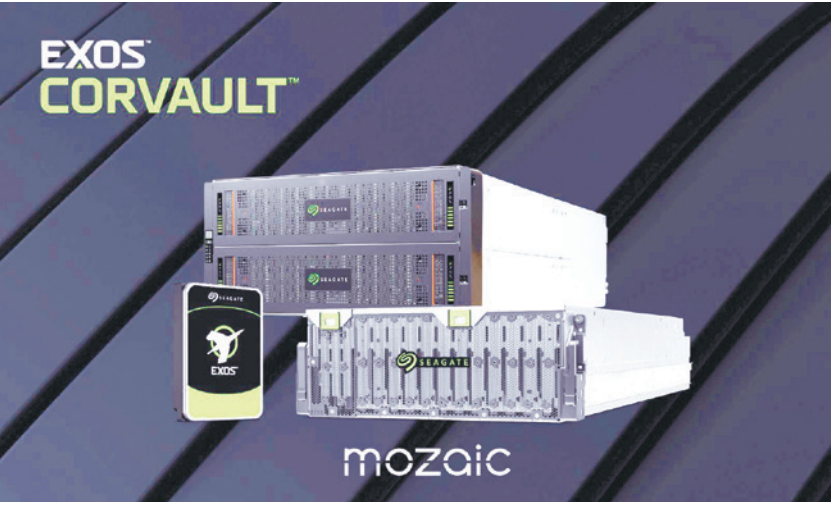
virtualization, AI, edge computing, and high-density data environments. The unified Exos platform delivers:
• High-density capacity, including next-generation 32TB drives
• Flexible expansion options for growing environments
• Integrated compute-and-storage configurations for data-intensive workloads
• Enterprise-grade reliability and performance across all deployment models

By consolidating the Exos family into one cohesive portfolio, Seagate simplifies planning, deployment, and scaling — enabling organizations to modernize infrastructure without complexity.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT PHASE OF DATA GROWTH
Industries such as finance, telecommunications, government, healthcare, and media face unique storage demands shaped by regulatory, operational, and performance requirements. As data needs continue to rise, organizations are evaluating how prepared their current environments are for the future. Seagate supports this process through assessment tools and consultative guidance that help enterprises plan confidently and make informed decisions without disrupting operations.

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Seagate's Exos Corvault system features autonomous drive regeneration, enabling continuous operation even when individual components encounter issues.