

## Forward contracts under study to minimize volatility in electricity bills

THE Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) said it is exploring the use of forward contracts that will allow power distributors to lock in prices of electricity for future delivery to minimize so-called “bill shock” for consumers.

At a roundtable discussion on Monday, ERC Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Francis Saturnino C. Juan said the agency is studying the use of such contracts for distribution utilities (DUs) and electric cooperatives (ECs) to ensure greater price stability and reduce exposure to price swings on the spot market and in power deals.

Short-term price movements transfer the burden to end users and can result in bill shock.

Mr. Juan underscored the volatility of the prices on the Wholesale Electricity Spot Market (WESM), the venue where energy companies can buy power when their long-term contracted supply is insufficient.

A forward contract is a deal between parties to buy or sell certain commodities at a predetermined price that must be delivered within a specified future time. This serves as an alternative mode for procuring electricity in addition to the WESM and bilateral contracts.

While this mechanism can protect consumers from price volatility and bills shock, it also carries the risk of locking in higher-than-market prices if the market price swings in a direction unfavorable to the contracting party.

“As the regulator, the ERC’s primary mandate is to protect the public interest by ensuring reasonable, just, and affordable rates. In line with this duty, we continuously examine mechanisms that can enhance market efficiency and consumer welfare,” Mr. Juan said.

He said that forward contracting serves as a hedging tool for managing the financial risks associated with spot market volatility.

For consumers, forward contracting arrangements allow utilities to mitigate extreme price spikes, ensure price stability and predictability for end-users over time, and prevent bill shocks. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

## Higher crop insurance budget tapped for expanded coverage

THE Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. (PCIC) will expand services to more farmers and increase payouts for claims involving staple crops to take advantage of its expanded budget, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said.

In a statement, the DA said the additional funds will raise insurance coverage for rice and corn to P25,000 per hectare, up from P20,000, providing protection against total crop losses from natural calamities, pests, and diseases under the multi-peril insurance program.

The 2026 General Appropriations Act increased the PCIC’s budget by 45% to a record P6.5 billion.

The expanded budget is also expected to cover 2.93 million farmers and fisherfolk in 2026, up nearly 25% from 2.35 million a year earlier, according to the DA.

The free insurance program covers rice, corn, high-value crops, fisheries, livestock, and non-crop agricultural assets, but excludes credit and life term insurance.

The program’s funding comes from the government premium subsidy, which supports insurance for farmers and fisherfolk enrolled in the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture.

Free coverage will also be extended to coconut farmers registered under the National Coconut Farmers Registry System, supported by roughly P500 million from the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund.

This year, around 714,000 coconut farmers are expected to be insured, up nearly 12% from 640,000 in 2025. — **Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**

## PPP being considered for España Busway

THE Department of Transportation (DoTr) said it is considering tapping the private sector for the planned busway along España Boulevard and is evaluating the project’s economic attractiveness to potential investors.

“We have to look for other options; we want to explore private partnerships,” Undersecretary for Road Transport and Infrastructure Mark Steven C. Pastor told reporters recently.

In 2025, the DoTr said it is considering the construction of a busway between España Boulevard in Manila and Quezon Avenue in Quezon City (QC).

A feasibility study is currently underway, Mr. Pastor said, adding that the DoTr is looking at various sites in Quezon City.

“We are looking at several sites along QC to implement it,” he said, noting that a viable alignment for a busway project at the moment would be along Katipunan Avenue and Circumferential Road 5 (C-5).

“Unfortunately, we have very limited funding for 2026; for busways we will only receive P88 million,” he added.

The DoTr is determined to have another busway due to passenger growth for the Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA) Busway project, he said.

“We are not scrapping the project. It is always on the horizon. Obviously, we see the success of the EDSA busway (being replicated elsewhere in the city) so we can expand our operations,” he said.

The DoTr expects the EDSA Busway to carry more than 70 million passengers this year, reflecting greater efficiencies due to modernization. Last year, the DoTr reported EDSA Busway rider volume of 66.67 million, up 5.79%.

In 2026, the DoTr is adding three more stations to the EDSA Busway: Cubao, Magallanes and the Parañaque Integrated Terminal Exchange.

The DoTr is currently upgrading five EDSA Busway stations, including Bagong Barrio, Monumento, North Avenue, and Guadalupe, which are due for completion by the third quarter. The Kamuning station is expected to be finished next month. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**



FREPIK

## BGC planners seeking fix for road congestion issues

THE Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) said the update of the Bonifacio Global City (BGC) master plan will help address challenges like road congestion and making mobility within the business district more inclusive.

“The master plan update is necessary to address emerging challenges such as traffic congestion, infrastructure constraints, climate risks, and the need for more inclusive and accessible mobility in a maturing central business district,” the BCDA said in a statement on Monday.

“Once completed, the updated BGC plan is expected to support long-term

investments, generate employment, and improve mobility and accessibility for workers, residents, and visitors,” it added.

Due to be completed by September, the BCDA will be developing the master plan with the help of SyCip Gorres Velayo & Co. (SGV & Co.).

“More than two decades since its original development framework was put in place, the updated plan will serve as a practical and forward-looking guide for BGC’s next phase of growth,” the BCDA said.

“It aims to ensure that the district continues to evolve in a manner that is inclusive, resilient, and responsive to cur-

rent and future urban needs,” it added.

BCDA President and Chief Executive Officer Joshua M. Bingcang said he plans to make BGC more people-centric, “with greater focus on open spaces, mobility, and transportation.”

Since January, BCDA and SGV & Co. have been working on consultations and technical studies to prepare the updated plan.

“The process will involve data-driven urban analysis, visioning workshops, and engagement with key stakeholders to align development strategies with existing policies and infrastructure capacity,” the BCDA said.

Part of the study is directed at reviewing and reallocating the BCDA’s gross floor area entitlements.

“This will help ensure that development intensity matches infrastructure capacity, optimize land use and value, and identify underutilized areas for potential development or disposition,” it said.

“This initiative is aligned with the administration’s socioeconomic agenda by advancing sustainable urban development, efficient land use, and investment-driven growth,” it added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

# SM Job Fairs kick off 2026 strong with nationwide jobs, upskilling, and career opportunities

### Start strong. Find what fits. Your future begins at SM.

As the new year opens, SM Supermalls reaffirms its commitment to Filipino job seekers by welcoming 2026 with renewed energy, bigger opportunities, and a proven track record of impact through its nationwide Job Fair program.

Building on a landmark 2025, SM Job Fairs have evolved beyond traditional recruitment events into a full-scale career ecosystem — bringing together employers, job seekers, skills training, and government services in one accessible, community-based platform.

#### A Strong 2025 Performance, By the Numbers

In 2025 alone, SM Supermalls hosted 198 job fairs nationwide, connecting over 118,000 job seekers with more than 6,000 employers across industries. These efforts resulted in 15,000+ hired-on-the-spot, proving that accessible, purpose-driven platforms can deliver real employment outcomes at scale.

Beyond hiring, SM Job Fairs expanded their impact through partnerships with key government agencies, embedding skills training, digital upskilling, and on-site services directly into job fair venues — helping future-proof Filipino workers while removing barriers to employment.

#### Zamboanga City Opens 2026 with a Successful Job Fair

Zamboanga City kicked off 2026 with a strong employment initiative as SM City Zamboanga successfully hosted a Job Fair on January 16–17 at the Zamboanga City Coliseum.

Held in partnership with the Public Employment Service Office (PESO) Zamboanga City and the Department of Labor and Employment Region IX, the two-day event brought together 29 employers offering opportunities across retail, food and beverage, customer service, operations, and support services.

The job fair attracted more than 2,000 applicants, demonstrating



On-the-spot hiring success at SM Job Fairs in 2025 underscores the program’s real-world impact, symbolizing thousands of lives changed through accessible employment opportunities and strong public-private collaboration.

strong interest from job seekers eager to begin the year with new career prospects. From this pool, 161 applicants were hired on the spot,



marking an encouraging outcome for both employers and candidates. Guided by the theme “Start strong. Find what fits. Your future



Massive crowd of job seekers during Labor Day Job Fairs at SM City Bacolod (left photo) and SM Mall of Asia (right photo).



Senior High School students explore future career paths and digital upskilling opportunities at interactive booths during an SM Job Fair held in 2025, in partnership with government and private sector stakeholders.



Reputable and prestigious employers from PMAP’s network like BDO, Coca-Cola and SM Supermalls open doors to job seekers during the two-day career event at SM City North EDSA.

begins at SM,” the event provided a platform for applicants to explore roles aligned with their skills, passions, and long-term goals. The smooth execution of the job fair, supported by online pre-registration and coordinated public-private collaboration, reinforced SM City Zamboanga’s commitment to employment generation and community development.

The successful kickoff job fair set a positive tone for labor and employment initiatives in Zamboanga City for the year ahead, highlighting the continued importance of accessible job-matching events in strengthening the local workforce.

As Zamboanga City continues to grow as a regional economic hub, the SM City Zamboanga Job Fair serves as a vital platform for



employment generation, workforce development, and public-private collaboration — supporting inclusive growth in the region.

#### More Opportunities This Year

With strong momentum from 2025, and a packed calendar ahead, SM Job Fairs begin 2026 ready to connect more Filipinos to meaningful work — one opportunity, one community, and one future at a time.

#### About SM Supermalls — Job Fairs

Celebrating 40 Super Years of Evolving With Every You, SM Supermalls — one of Southeast Asia’s largest mall developers — continues to maximize the job fair experience by bringing employment opportunities closer to Filipinos through accessible job fairs across

its 89 malls nationwide. As the country’s most loved and preferred retail destination, SM designs job fair experiences that are personal and inclusive — connecting different job seeker tribes, from fresh graduates and career shifters to experienced professionals, with employers that match their goals and aspirations. More than a retail space, SM has evolved into a platform for empowerment — bridging job seekers and employers, strengthening workforce development, and uplifting lives through strategic partnerships that support inclusive economic growth.



On-the-spot interviews and real conversations take center stage during the 2024 exclusive Job Fair at SM City Zamboanga, where employers and applicants connect face-to-face — setting the tone for an even bigger turnout this year.



A strong turnout marks the previous exclusive Job Fair at SM City Zamboanga in 2024, with hundreds of job seekers lining up early to explore employment opportunities and submit applications — proof of the city’s strong demand for accessible jobs close to home.