House panel asks DA to explain absence of rice safeguard action

A HOUSE of Representatives special committee has asked the Department of Agriculture (DA) to explain why it has not pursued safeguard action for rice.

In a letter addressed to Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr., Special Committee on Globalization Vice Chairman Ryan S. Recto said farmer raised concerns about the uneven application of special safeguards.

"It was noted that while the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has been proactive in exercising its mandate to protect non-agricultural industries through provisional and definitive safeguards, a similar level of protection has not been extended to local agricultural producers," Mr. Recto said in the letter, a copy of which was obtained by *BusinessWorld*.

Special safeguard measures allow the government to temporarily raise duties on specific imported products when their prices or volumes breach certain trigger levels, in order to protect domestic industries from cheap imports.

Under Republic Act No. 8800 or the Safeguard Measures Act, the DA may request the Bureau of Customs to impose an additional duty on the product under review equivalent to not more than a third of its current duty.

In his letter, Mr. Recto asked the DA to explain why it has not resorted to safeguard measures for rice and other "sensitive" products.

The committee also sought more details on the administrative or technical constraints preventing the DA from prioritizing domestic production even though agricultural products are exempt from the "public interest" test under Section 5 of RA 8800.

The Committee said the DA's response would help legislators fine-tune proposed amendments to the Safeguard Measures Act.

Leonardo Q. Montemayor, former Agriculture secretary and chairman of the Federation of Free Farmers, said it has been nearly five months since the group and MAGSASAKA Party-List petitioned the DA to initiate safeguard measures.

"Almost five months have elapsed since we petitioned Secretary Laurel to apply safeguard measures to protect rice farmers against the serious injury caused by the surge in rice imports in 2025," he said in a Facebook message. "Until now, the good Secretary has not even started the investigation."

The DA was asked via Viber to comment but had not replied at the deadline. — **Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**

NTC sets P100-M asset threshold for Konektadong Pinoy entrants

THE National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) said data transmission industry participants (DTIPs) must have assets of at least P100 million to operate core network services under the Konektadong Pinoy law.

In a memorandum circular dated Feb. 2, the NTC also outlined registration requirements for prospective entrants, adding that it will serve as the entity receiving their registrations.

The NTC also said that eligible applicants must have a technical and financial capability to deliver reliable and secure services and must also establish, operate and maintain data transmission infrastructure.

It said that participants that meet all the requirements may apply in one or more segments of the data transmission network.

"In determining financial eligibility, the NTC shall evaluate the financial and economic viability of the applicant's proposal to operate as a DTIP in its proposed data transmission segment, accounting for the scale and complexity of its proposed operations," NTC said in its memorandum circular.

The Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) has said that one Philippine company is seeking to enter the industry under the provisions of the Konektadong Pinoy Act.

All applicants, except for middle mile providers, will be required to pay a performance bond, the NTC said, noting that the bond will be equivalent to at least 10% of the applicant's projected capital expenditure for the first two years, but not to exceed P5 million.

The memorandum requires all applicants seeking to operate in any segment of the data transmission network whether as international gateway facility, core or backbone, middle mile, or last mile provider to allocate minimum assets for each application and to maintain a debt-to-asset ratio within a prescribed threshold.

"The NTC shall periodically review the minimum asset requirements, leverage ratios and related financial thresholds every three years or at such shorter intervals as may be necessary, after taking into account inflation, industry environment and other relevant economic indicators," it said.

The NTC said that the debt-to-asset ratio for all applicants for all segments is at 70%. The memorandum outlined that the minimum asset requirement for international gateway facility applicants is P1 billion; around P100 million for core or backbone network applicants, P10 million for middle-mile provider applicants, and P500,000 for last-mile providers.

The Konektadong Pinoy Act, also known as the Open Access in Data Transmission Act, lapsed into law in August.

The law streamlines the licensing process for new entrants, boosting competition in data transmission.

About seven foreign companies have signified interest to enter the Philippine telecommunications sector, with each company expected to invest around $1 billion.

Globe Telecom, Inc. President and Chief Executive Officer Carl Raymond R. Cruz said that the company will work closely with the DICT to ensure that DTIPs are subject to strict cybersecurity vetting and certification.

"We need rules that balance openness with accountability, especially around infra use, security standards, and spectrum coordination," Mr. Cruz said. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

SSS net profit rises 58.4% in 2025

THE SOCIAL Security System (SSS) said net profit rose 58.4% to P142.97 billion last year, with its reserve fund exceeding P1-trillion mark.

"This record performance and over P1-trillion reserve fund level send a clear message to SSS members: your pensions are secure; your benefits sustained," Finance Secretary and Social Security Commission (SSC) Chair Frederick D. Go said in a statement on Sunday.

"Guided by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.'s directive to enhance benefits and strengthen governance, we are building a social security system that is financially resilient and more responsive to the needs of every Filipino," he added.

SSS President and Chief Executive Officer Robert Joseph M. De Claro said the state pension fund's financial performance was driven by sustained fiscal discipline, strengthened fund governance, and long-term reforms designed to safeguard member contributions and preserve the fund's actuarial soundness.

"Surpassing the P1-trillion mark in our Reserve Fund is a milestone and a strong affirmation of our duty to every worker and pensioner who relies on SSS. This performance reflects prudent stewardship of member contributions, strengthened governance, and our continuing commitment to deliver secure and sustainable benefits — today and for generations to come," he said.

In 2025, the SSS disbursed P304.94 billion in pensions and benefits to 5.66 million members.

Meanwhile, loan releases hit P61.11 billion at the end of 2025.

The SSS noted that the pension loan program extended benefits to an additional 1.2 million members last year.

Total assets grew 22.1% to P1.26 trillion, it said. — **Aaron Michael C. Sy**

BIR planning to streamline requirements for companies seeking to shut down

THE Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) said it is working to streamline the requirements for companies planning to shut down, Commissioner Charlito Martin R. Mendoza said.

"Since we make registration simple when starting a business, and tax compliance fair and predictable while businesses operate, then the BIR must be efficient and streamlined when enterprises close," he said in his speech during the National Tax Campaign Kickoff last week.

Mr. Mendoza, who took office in November, said the bureau is pushing its digitalization efforts to make filing easier for taxpayers.

"We make payment easier. We streamline our processes. We revisit our existing issuances. Revenue generation. Revenue memorandum circulars. Let's see if we can make it easier," he said, noting this will help value-added tax collections.

Last year, the BIR surpassed its collection target, posting P3.105 trillion and exceeding the P3.101 trillion emerging collection target, which had been lowered in December.

For 2026, Mr. Mendoza said the P3.58-trillion goal is "very challenging but we will do our best," and will focus more on real-time monitoring to prevent revenue leakages.

He is also banking on sustained economic growth, expanded digitalization, and taxes on digital services platforms to meet its ambitious collection target this year.

The government also expects P21 billion in revenue from the foreign digital platforms this year after collecting P8 billion in 2025.

"I remind the BIR that revenue collection rests on public trust. And therefore, ensure that our reforms are geared towards making our tax system more transparent and more productive," President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. said in a video message.

Mr. Marcos added that micro and small enterprises should be guided to ensure they are compliant with taxation requirements. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

OPINION

Driving sustainable energy solutions in the Philippines: From vision to action

(First of two parts)

IN BRIEF:

• The global energy landscape is transforming due to rising electricity demand driven by factors such as data center proliferation, electrification, and increased manufacturing, with businesses expected to account for a significant portion of this growth in the Philippines.

• Energy providers must rethink their strategies to meet the complex needs of business clients, focusing on diverse energy sources and customer-centric solutions to capitalize on the growing demand for clean and reliable electricity.

• The Philippines faces challenges such as high electricity costs and grid constraints, but opportunities exist for energy providers to deliver innovative, adaptive solutions that prioritize sustainability, operational flexibility, and customer satisfaction.

SUITS THE C-SUITE

SMITH C. LIM *and* **CHIP A. MAALIHAN**

With facilitating policies, favorable economics, and an engaged innovation environment, energy providers have the opportunity to develop sophisticated, adaptive, and data-replete solutions to address the diverse requirements of businesses.

Globally, the energy landscape is undergoing a profound transformation, with businesses at the forefront of rising electricity demand. Factors such as the proliferation of data centers, increased electrification, and heightened manufacturing activities have led to unprecedented growth in electricity consumption. As companies navigate uncertainties and shifting trade dynamics, they are prioritizing energy strategies to secure their operational futures.

This surge in demand presents a unique opportunity for energy providers and the broader energy ecosystem. However, many providers focus primarily on residential consumers, leaving the complex needs of business clients untapped. While it is happening in the global stage, the Philippines is at a strategic position to capitalize on this opportunity.

During the Philippine Energy Transition Dialogue on Sept. 2, Energy Secretary Sharon S. Garin reaffirmed the government's commitment to energy transition and stated, "We are serious, not just the government but also the private sector, in making this country greener and more secure as far as energy is concerned." To seize this opportunity, energy providers and other stakeholders along the entire value chain must be willing to rethink their approach, exploring diverse energy sources and redefining their roles in the energy landscape.

The important question now is, "How will the Philippines drive sustainable energy solutions?"

THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The demand for industrial electricity is expected to escalate significantly, with businesses driving much of this growth. Research by the EY Navigating the Energy Transition research program, which has surveyed nearly 100,000 residential energy consumers and more than 2,400 energy leaders and decision-makers across eight countries (Australia, Germany, Canada, Ireland, UK, US, Sweden, and Malaysia), indicates that three-quarters of the projected increase in electricity demand will come from business customers. Factors such as the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs), advancements in technology, reshoring of manufacturing, policy mandates, and the need for new equipment are contributing to this trend. In fact, 80% of businesses anticipate an increase in their electricity consumption within the next three years.

In the Philippines, these global trends are playing out against a backdrop of rising electrification and an ambitious green energy transition. With the recent Power Development Plan (PDP) 2023-2050, the Department of Energy (DoE) projects peak demand to grow from 16,596 megawatts (MW) in 2022 to 68,483 MW by 2050, an annual average increase of 5.2%.

The following are some of green reasons that drive the enterprise load in the Philippines:

• **Electrification of the transport sector:** Since the passing of the Electric Vehicle Industry Development Act (EVIDA), EV adoption has seen increasing numbers and is expected to move from niche to scale. EVs will be accompanied by 7,300 charging stations targeted to roll out by 2028.

• **Growing digital economy:** The Philippines has been beefing up its data infrastructure with 300 MW in the pipeline. Currently, data centers are housed in Cavite, Laguna, Rizal, Tarlac, and Metro Manila. The data center market is projected to approach $2 billion by 2030 driven by surging digital demand and hyperscaler interest.

• **Industry-led growth:** Simultaneously, businesses are increasingly sourcing renewable energy through programs like the Green Energy Option Program (GEOP) which allows firms to cut costs and significantly reduce emissions while ongoing industrial modernization is on the way.

These are a few of the several reasons why the industrial electricity demand is expected to spike in the next few years. Persistent grid constraints and limited digital customer solutions remains pain points, creating both urgency and opportunity for energy providers to deliver smarter, more resilient, and customer-centric offerings.

This means that businesses will not merely consume more electricity; they will call for more dependable, more predictable, clean electricity, delivered with new and better services front-lined both by the public and private sectors.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF EVOLVING ENERGY NEEDS

The Philippines has some of the region's highest electricity costs, largely because the grid is powered by imported fossil fuels, exposing users to global price volatility and recurrent rate spikes. That cost pressure comes in addition to increasing climate risks and grid resilience challenges, especially in high-density hubs like Metro Manila, where outages and dry-season peak cooling demand affect productivity and margins. In this regard, additional businesses are in search of affordable decarbonization options that minimize costs, emissions, and increase resilience.

Global utility trends project that suppliers must return to focusing on customer needs and framing sustainable solutions in terms of language that speaks to fundamental values and cost-effectiveness. Filipino consumers, for example, prioritize integrity, customization, and compassion throughout the service journey — expectations increasingly prioritized with energy partners.

In the Philippines, the winning players that will secure and hold onto business customers will not be those who simply sell kilowatt-hours. They will be the ones who provide guaranteed savings, operational flexibility, and quantifiable emissions reductions — all wrapped in a modern, customer-centered experience. With facilitating policies, favorable economics, and an engaged innovation environment, energy providers have the opportunity to develop sophisticated, adaptive, and data-replete solutions to address the diverse requirements of businesses. They will need to adapt and evolve in order to transition with credible, customer-centric offerings.

In the second part of this article, we will discuss the evolving role of energy providers as they seek to enhance their offerings and better serve business clients by focusing on customized solutions, digital innovation, and strategic partnerships that align with the growing demand for clean energy and operational flexibility.

This article is for general information only and is not a substitute for professional advice where the facts and circumstances warrant. The views and opinions expressed above are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of SGV & Co.

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