

Unilab signs on to upgrade capacity of pharma workforce in PEZA economic zones

THE Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) said Unilab Foundation, Inc., has agreed to help strengthen pharmaceutical manufacturing and workforce capacity in economic zones (ecozones).

"This partnership will position the Philippines as a regional hub for advanced pharmaceutical manufacturing and innovation by strengthening research and development (R&D), quality production, and an artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled workforce," PEZA said in a social media post on Wednesday.

PEZA signed the memorandum of understanding to that effect on Feb. 2.

"The agreement focuses on developing pharma-specific competencies, adopting advanced production and quality systems, and enhancing readiness for emerging drug technologies and evolving regulatory requirements," it added.

The partnership is also expected to improve operational

efficiency, elevate product quality and patient safety, and raise occupational health and safety standards for ecozone locators.

"As PEZA and Unilab explore areas of cooperation for the establishment of the Manufacturing Development Alliance, the partnership will drive workforce development through targeted training programs for manufacturing firms in the ecozones," PEZA said.

"Research and development will likewise be bolstered through joint projects that promote a highly skilled, future-ready workforce," it added.

As one of the largest health-care companies in the Philippines, Unilab is expected to bring in global insights in advancing health education, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics capacity-building, and inclusive workforce development.

— **Justine Irish D. Tabilo**

PHL hoping to regain spot as top banana exporter to Japan

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said the Philippines is hoping to regain its former status as the leading banana exporter to Japan when the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA) is reviewed.

"Our bananas reclaimed the number two position last year ... We are continuously talking to the Japanese government if we could, of course, start the talks," Trade Secretary Ma. Cristina A. Roque told reporters on Wednesday.

"We are hoping that with the Japanese support, (as we are) trying to really push for the JPEPA," she added, through the help of which "we could really get the top spot again."

She is scheduled to meet her Japanese counterpart within the first quarter to discuss JPEPA.

"We talked to their foreign affairs official who came here last month... they are aware of (our

position). But I still have to talk to my (trade) counterpart," she said.

"I am setting a meeting very soon, within the first quarter definitely. We hope that we can sit down and get this going," she added.

For this year, she said the Philippines is also looking to conclude free trade agreements (FTAs) with the European Union, Chile, and Canada.

"Our President will go down in history (as the one with) the most FTAs that were signed during his term," she said. "And we hope to do more (with countries like) Brazil and many others."

She said an FTA with Brazil is on the wish list of Philippine exporters.

She said the Philippines should also prepare its logistics to help micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) tap global markets.

On Wednesday, the DTI onboarded more private sector

partners to its logistics network, which includes Toyota Motor Philippines (TMP) Corp.

"Through our partnership with the DTI's Supply Chain and Logistics Center, we aim to strengthen businesses by improving their logistics capabilities — making them more efficient, accessible, and resilient," TMP President Masando Hashimoto said.

"Our shared goal is simple: to empower businesses to move forward, expand opportunities, and succeed — with trusted mobility and stronger logistics support at every step," he added.

During the event, Mr. Hashimoto also welcomed the resolution of the funding for the Comprehensive Automotive Resurgence Strategy program.

"This support secures our local manufacturing and industrial systems," he said.

He said that the company's operations have been boosted by the

production of the Toyota Tama-light business truck.

"As of end-January, we have proudly produced over 21,000 units, made possible by the dedication of 4,500 Filipino workers and the support of 44 parts suppliers — many of whom are MSMEs themselves," he added.

Among its new partners were the Association of International Shipping Lines (AISL) and the Philippine Chamber of Customs Brokers, Inc. (PCCBI).

"As Philippine exports continue to climb, the DTI is ensuring local logistics capabilities can keep pace with international demand. The inclusion of AISL and PCCBI is designed to bridge the gap between local production and global markets," the DTI said.

Established in June, the Supply Chain and Logistics Center is meant to help MSMEs access real-time service referrals and cost-saving regulatory guidance.

— **Justine Irish D. Tabilo**

ADB sees tax compliance, process upgrades as key to boosting ease of doing business

THE Asian Development Bank (ADB) said improving tax processes and compliance remains critical to boosting ease of doing business (EoDB).

Governments face increasing pressure to strengthen economic competitiveness and improve their attractiveness to investors, ADB Country Director Andrew Jeffries said at a briefing on Wednesday.

"Fiscal and tax compliance are regulatory requirements for every business — you know the saying, death and taxes are the only certainties. Therefore, a central

element of any ease of (doing) business is ... improving these processes," he said.

Mr. Jeffries, speaking at the 2026 Economic-EoDB Briefing of the Anti-Red Tape Authority (ARTA), said improving such systems is a "key reform priority."

The Philippines ranked 53rd out of 101 economies in the World Bank's 2025 Business-Ready (B-Ready) report, which measures the state of the business environment.

In taxation, the Philippines scored 60.46 out of 100. The scores break down into 67.86 for the quality of tax regulation,

52.08 for public services for corporate taxpayers, and 61.44 for the operational efficiency of the tax system.

However, the ADB official said private firms continue to face hurdles.

"We also hear the feedback of the private sector that many challenges remain, including the need for greater digitization, transparency, and timeliness around the processes for tax filings, assessments, and refunds," he added.

Earlier this month, the BIR resumed issuing letters of authority and mission

orders after two months of suspension amid allegations of misuse.

"The idea of replacing red tape with red carpet represents a shift from barriers to a welcoming approach that makes processes easier and more accessible," ARTA Secretary Ernesto V. Perez said.

"Together, we aim to create a system that works efficiently and responds to the needs of the people," he added.

Meanwhile, the Department of Finance (DoF) said ease of doing business is a "constant commitment in building trust with investors and the public."

FULL STORY



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VinFast revises battery subscription policy in the Philippines, reducing EV ownership costs by up to 20%



VinFast announces an updated battery subscription policy for the Philippine market, significantly reducing upfront investment costs and simplifying electric vehicle ownership. This pioneering policy once again reinforces VinFast's commitment to a customer-centric approach in advancing green mobility in the Philippines.

In addition to the traditional route of purchasing a vehicle with the battery included, customers can own a VinFast electric vehicle (EV) under a battery subscription model. This option offers a more attractive initial investment, with upfront costs reduced by up to approximately 20% depending on the model. Battery subscription fees are applied flexibly, starting from PHP 1,600 per month, based on actual driving distance.

Currency: PHP

| Model | MSRP | | Monthly subscription cost | |
|-----------|------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| | Battery included | Battery subscription | ≤ 2,000 km/ month | ≥ 2,000 km/ month |
| VF 3 | 745,000 | 590,000 | 1,600 | |
| VF 5 Plus | 1,099,000 | 949,000 | 1,950 | 2,900 |
| VF 6 Eco | 1,499,000 | 1,249,000 | 2,350 | |
| VF 6 Plus | 1,699,000 | 1,409,000 | 2,350 | |
| VF 7 Eco | 1,760,000 | 1,430,000 | 2,650 | |
| VF 7 Plus | 2,380,000 | 1,550,000 | 3,350 | |
| VF 9 Plus | 5,390,000 | 3,845,000 | 3,840 | |

Positioned as a "lifetime battery warranty" solution, VinFast's battery subscription policy is not only a flexible financial tool that optimizes cash flow, but also a long-term commitment to Philippine consumers. VinFast assumes full responsibility for battery performance throughout the subscription period, including maintenance, repairs, and free replacement when battery capacity drops below 70%. In the event of battery damage caused by an accident, VinFast will handle the issue under the battery subscription policy, helping minimize financial risks for customers.

For customers who opt for the traditional vehicle purchase with battery included, VinFast continues to offer comprehensive after-sales benefits, including a battery warranty of up to 10 years or 200,000 km. This dual approach allows Philippine consumers to proactively select the ownership model that best suits their needs and personal financial conditions.

Antonio Zara, Chief Executive Officer of VinFast Southeast Asia, stated: "With our pioneering battery subscription policy, we aim to remove the biggest concerns of Philippine consumers, helping VinFast electric vehicles become a truly practical and accessible choice for every household when combined with our comprehensive sales and after-sales policies. This also reaffirms VinFast's commitment to rewrite the rules of the market and create the most favorable conditions for customers in the green transition."

The updated battery subscription policy complements the comprehensive suite of solutions that VinFast is deploying in the

Philippines to remove barriers to EV adoption. Previously, the company introduced initiatives such as free charging at stations operated by strategic partner V-Green, flexible financing packages with low down payments, and a residual value guarantee program ensuring returns of up to 90% of the original price.

After more than one year in the Philippine market, VinFast has steadily strengthened its presence with a diverse electric vehicle lineup, flexible sales policies, and a rapidly expanding after-sales service network. Alongside its authorized dealership system, VinFast is working with strategic partners to develop charging infrastructure and service workshops, ensuring that customers in the Philippines can access vehicle care services conveniently and consistently.

ABOUT VINFAST

VinFast (NASDAQ: VFS), a subsidiary of Vingroup JSC, one of Vietnam's largest conglomerates, is a pure-play electric vehicle ("EV") manufacturer with the mission of making EVs accessible to everyone. VinFast's product lineup today includes a wide range of electric SUVs, e-scooters, and e-buses.

VinFast is currently embarking on its next growth phase through rapid expansion of its distribution and dealership network globally and increasing its manufacturing capacities with a focus on key markets across North America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

Learn more at: <https://vinfastauto.ph/>.