

# P2B budgeted for repatriated OFWs needing seed capital

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said it allocated P2 billion for overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) requiring capital to set up businesses should they need repatriation as a result of the escalating crisis in the Persian Gulf.

OFWs can start tapping the OFW Negosyo Fund starting March 12, the DTI said in a statement on Thursday.

"We are committed to opening doors for OFWs ready to come home and invest in their own

country, especially when external crises force their hand," Trade Secretary Ma. Cristina A Roque said.

"Through the Small Business Corp. (SBCorp.), we've tailored this fund to equip them with the

resources to build, hire, and secure their families' futures," Ms. Roque added.

"The fund anticipates the real-world contingencies OFWs face, from abrupt returns due to geopolitical tensions to the hurdles of starting enterprises after years abroad," the DTI said.

The Department of Migrant Workers said it received 1,900 repatriation requests from OFWs due to safety concerns in the region following the attacks on Iran, Migrant Workers Secretary Hans Leo J. Caddac told senators on Thursday.

The OFW Negosyo Fund offers loans of between P30,000 and P20 million to qualified borrowers, with a one year grace period for payment over up to five years.

The collateral requirement is waived for loans of up to P5 million. OFWs can apply for a loan via the SBCorp. Money App or its website, [app.sbcorp.ph](http://app.sbcorp.ph).

Online registration for the loan facility can also be done through [sbcorp.gov.ph](http://sbcorp.gov.ph).

Individuals can also visit any of the 1,431 Negosyo Centers nationwide for assistance. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**



FILE PHOTO OF overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) Terminal 1.



## Card shortage forces use of provisional permits for alien job applicants

THE Department of Labor and Employment (DoLE) said on Thursday that it will continue to accept applications for Alien Employment Permits (AEPs) and will resort to provisional permits while it works through a shortage of physical cards.

The DoLE said the resort to temporary measures will remain in effect "until such time that the physical AEP cards are available for release."

In an advisory, the DoLE said its regional offices continue to accept and process all applications for new permits, renewals, and certificates of exclusion or exemption. To facilitate these transactions, it is implementing a flexible filing system that accepts physical or electronic submissions.

"The Department hereby confirms that submission of all Alien Employment Permit applications remains OPEN and ACTIVE," it said.

The DoLE said the provisional process involves the issuance of a Temporary Certification of AEP Approval in place of the standard physical cards.

This certification is intended to act as "valid proof of employment authorization until such time that the physical AEP cards are available for release."

DoLE said all applicable fees must be settled through regional cashiers. It added that upon payment, applicants will receive a manual tracking number or barcode, which will serve as the official reference for the duration of the evaluation process.

Despite the resort to paper certificates, the DoLE said it "remains committed to its prescribed processing timelines."

Evaluators have been made available for on-site consultations to assist clients with filing requirements or status inquiries at various regional public assistance desks. — **Erika Mae P. Sinaking**

## DoE planning first auction for gas-fired capacity

THE Department of Energy (DoE) is planning to launch the first auction dedicated to gas-fired power generation, with the aim of raising the proportion of reliable capacity that will support the influx of intermittent clean-energy projects.

"The increasing penetration of variable renewable energy in the national grid necessitates the procurement of flexible mid-merit capacity to manage intermittency, ensuring grid reliability and stability," the DoE said in a draft circular.

The auction is designed to position natural gas as a "transition fuel" to support the shift to clean and sustainable energy.

Republic Act No. 12120, or the Philippine Natural Gas Industry Development Act, recognizes natural gas as having the potential to meet increasing energy demand and hopes to position the Philippines as a liquefied natural gas trading and transshipment hub.

The law also requires the "transparent and secure procurement" of natural gas, prioritizing the utilization of indigenous natural gas over imported gas and other conventional energy sources.

The DoE said the auction is necessary "in view of the projected power supply-demand outlook and system reliability requirements,

particularly in the Visayas, Mindanao, and off-grid areas."

The Energy Regulatory Commission will set a gas auction threshold price as the ceiling for each auction round, taking into account the cost of building gas facilities, fuel price volatility, and foreign exchange rates.

Winning bidders may opt to finance and construct the necessary transmission facilities in case of delay in the facilities due to be built according to the Transmission Development Plan, or if the grid impact study deems it necessary for the power project. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

## House resolution calls for measures seeking to mitigate fuel price increases from Iran war

A HOUSE RESOLUTION filed this week called for an inquiry into measures that could possibly blunt the impact of the Iran crisis, including hedging and other methods to minimize price shocks.

Party-list Rep. Nathaniel M. Oducao said in a statement on Thursday that the purpose of House Resolution No. 825 is to ensure prompt action "to protect consumers from sudden oil price shocks that hurt families and small businesses."

The Philippines is a net importer of oil and is vulnerable to sharp fluctuations in global oil

prices, often triggered by crises in the Middle East.

US and Israeli forces launched airstrikes on Iranian targets on Saturday, in what US President Donald J. Trump described as an effort to eliminate threats against the US, including the development of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Trump has said that the US military will continue striking Iranian targets for "as long as necessary" to achieve Washington's objectives, which include regime change.

The strikes, which decapitated Tehran's leadership, have risked plunging the Middle East into a

wider conflict after Israel started attacking targets in Lebanon, and as Tehran began hitting oil facilities in Gulf states and shut access to the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20% of the world's oil and gas transits.

"We cannot ignore these global developments because they directly affect the cost of living in our country," Mr. Oducao said. "Congress must study policy options that can shield consumers without putting our economy at risk."

In a statement, former Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Isagani T. Zarate urged Congress to take notice

of a minority bloc proposal for a package of bills aimed at lowering oil prices, warning that failure to enact structural reforms in the oil market could trigger an "inflation explosion."

"If the Marcos administration drags its feet or contents itself with band-aid solutions like emergency powers, we are in for numerous price shocks in the coming months," he said.

The package includes measures to regulate the downstream oil industry and unbundle oil prices to help rein in hikes. — **Kenneth Christiane L. Basilio**

## Rice inventory up 5.3% in February

THE national rice inventory rose 5.3% year on year to 2.11 million metric tons (MT) as of Feb. 1, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said, citing preliminary data.

Of the total, 42.6% was held by households, 37.5% by the commercial sector, and 20% by the National Food Authority (NFA).

Rice held by the NFA almost doubled year on year to 421.51 thousand MT, though it declined 3.9% from a month earlier.

Rice held by commercial establishments stood at 791.20

thousand MT, down 14.2% from a year earlier and 7.9% month on month.

Rice held by households was 421.51 thousand MT, up 13.2% from a year earlier and down 13.8% month on month.

The PSA added that corn stocks rose to 573.04 thousand MT as of Feb. 1, rising 27% year on year and 10.8% month on month.

Corn held by the commercial sector accounted for 87% of the total inventory, while households held 13%. — **Pierce Oel A. Montalvo**

## Glass products subject to mandatory certification

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said the Bureau of Philippine Standards has added glass products to the list of items subject to mandatory certification, with effect from Feb. 19.

Added to the list were flat glass; heat-strengthened and fully tempered flat glass; laminated glass; laminated safety glass; and bent glass.

Memorandum Circular (MC) No. 26-01, Series of 2026 lists 113 products that must undergo product certification.

MC 26-01 classifies certified products needing certification under three main categories: electrical and electronic products, building and construction products, and chemical and other consumer products.

The list also covers household appliances; consumer

electronics; lighting and wiring devices; steel products; plastic pipes and ceramic products; cement and other construction materials; chemical products; automotive related products; and other consumer goods.

The DTI has said it will enforce the certification requirement for glass products beginning April 3.

Manufacturers and importers were given 90 days to apply for Philippine Standards certification following MC No. 25-19, Series of 2025.

Certified products must include a Philippine Standard License Mark or Import Commodity Clearance Sticker.

A year after the effectiveness of the circular, the DTI will conduct market monitoring to ensure compliance. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

## Farmers surveyed on quality of farm aid

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it ordered a comprehensive survey of farmers to gauge the quality of aid distributed by the government following complaints from dissatisfied beneficiaries service.

The survey will cover recipients of machinery, post-harvest facilities, seed, and fertilizer distributed by the DA and its agencies, including the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization.

Farmers and cooperatives will be asked about equipment performance, spare parts availability, after-sales service, and overall satisfaction with the products received.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. said the investigation was prompted by complaints from a farmers' group, though he noted that regular audits have not turned up systemic irregularities.

"If there are shortcomings or wrongdoings, we will address them," Mr. Laurel said.

The DA's Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority is currently preparing legal proceedings against two fertilizer companies in the Caraga Region.

Mr. Laurel also rejected claims that procurement favored a single supplier, pointing out that farm machinery has been obtained from various international brands such as Kubota and Yanmar, while rice processing equipment came from Buhler Group and Satake.



EDUARDO PRIM-UNSPASH

He acknowledged reports regarding isolated equipment failures, including a Chinese-brand combine harvester mentioned in reports, adding that each incident would undergo review.

The investigation is scheduled to conclude by the end of March, with an official report to be presented to President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. and Congressional agriculture oversight committees.

The DA also intends to test Intervention Monitoring Cards for fertilizer assistance in Southern Leyte this year, with the possibility

of expanding the program nationwide in 2027 if it clears trials.

Mr. Laurel said the cards would provide a more transparent and accountable mechanism for delivering fertilizer assistance, though he rejected proposals for a voucher-based seed system.

In a briefing on Wednesday, Agriculture Assistant Secretary and Spokesman Arnel V. de Mesa said that the investigation will cover all regions, commodities, programs, subjects, and procurement activities.

"What the Secretary doesn't want is anecdotal evidence. There's one or two complaints. What the Secretary wants to know is whether this is widespread or if it's really just sporadic," Mr. de Mesa said.

In February, the Federation of Free Farmers and MAGSASAKA Party-List issued a joint statement reporting that beneficiaries had flagged issues with inferior inputs and equipment, such as seed with poor germination rates, inappropriate fertilizer varieties, and machinery with inadequate after-sales service.

The groups added that numerous government-funded rice mills and processing facilities have been left idle or underused because recipients lack sufficient operating funds or the capacity to manage them. — **Pierce Oel A. Montalvo**