

**Inflation,**  
from S1/1

“The uptick reflects a low base effect as last year’s declaration of a food security emergency on rice, which authorized the release of buffer stocks at subsidized prices, dampened price pressures,” Moody’s Analytics Assistant Director and Economist Sarah Tan said in an e-mail. “As a result, declines in rice prices over the past few months will lose momentum.”

Aris D. Dacanay, ASEAN economist at HSBC Global Investment Research, also noted that the cost of the staple grain has climbed by 3%-4% month on month since January “with supply conditions tight.”

Data from the PSA showed that the average price of local regular milled rice fell by 2.5% to P46.01 per kilo in the second half of February from P47.19 per kilo a year ago but inched up by 5.14% from P43.76 in January.

Well-milled rice was also 0.7% cheaper year on year at P53.54 per kilo from P53.90 but climbed by 5.04% from P50.97 in January. On the other hand, the cost of special rice edged down by an annual 1.22% to P61.55 per kilo from P62.31 but went up by 2.57% month on month from P60.01.

In January, the Department of Agriculture said that the levy on imported rice will remain at 15% until March, but noted that they could bring the rate up to 20% if the benchmark price of the staple grain slides to \$367 per metric ton.

Mr. Dacanay also noted that core inflation may have also picked up further in February.

“With food components having a heavy weight in the Filipino consumer basket, the inflationary pressures in headline inflation may have also spilled over to core CPI,” he said.

Core inflation, which excludes volatile prices of food and fuel, was at its fastest in one-and-a-half years at 2.8% in January.

**RISKS TO BSP EASING**

Inflation could continue to quicken in the coming months, a trend that could weigh on the BSP’s policy path going forward, analysts noted.

“Uptick in inflation is expected to continue in coming months which could mean the window for BSP to consider easing again remains open for only a little longer,” Metropolitan Bank & Trust Co. Chief Economist Nicholas Antonio T. Mapa said in a Viber message.

Last month, the central bank trimmed the key interest rate by 25 basis points (bps) for a sixth straight meeting to an over three-

year low of 4.25% as it sought to regain lost confidence amid the flood control corruption scandal.

The Monetary Board has now delivered a total of 225-bp reductions since it began easing in August 2024.

BSP Governor Eli M. Remolona, Jr. said the policy path ahead is now less certain as they see “tentative” signs of recovering confidence, while also noting that further monetary policy easing may not be enough to boost the sluggish economy.

Bank of the Philippine Islands Lead Economist Emilio S. Neri, Jr. said they are also reconsidering their outlook for one more rate within the year as they see inflation potentially breaching the central bank’s target band by April.

In a Viber message, he said the February print could come in at 3%, which “if realized, headline inflation could approach or breach 4% as early as April, largely contingent on the rice demand-supply dynamics in the coming months, which we continue to monitor closely.”

The BSP now expects inflation to settle at 3.6% by yearend, faster than its initially expected average of 3.2%.

If the *BusinessWorld* poll’s February inflation estimate materializes, it would bring the two-month average to 2.2%.

Mr. Remolona earlier said that he is more worried about inflation exceeding their 3% target than it falling below 2%.

BSP Deputy Governor Zeno Ronald R. Abenoja has said headline inflation could breach the 3% mark by the second half of the year before stabilizing around the midpoint of the target band, with electricity rate adjustments, costlier oil and the impact of the government’s flexible rice tariff scheme on local rice prices likely to bring “temporary” inflationary pressures.

Michael L. Ricafort, chief economist at Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., also said inflation might approach 3% in the coming months due to rising global oil prices amid ongoing global geopolitical tensions.

“For the coming months, higher global crude oil prices, (which was) among five-month highs recently, and also higher prices of some industrial metals and other global commodity prices amid the recent geopolitical risks in Iran, Venezuela, Greenland, among others, could lead to some pick up in importations costs and in overall inflation,” he said in a Viber message.

The Monetary Board is set to hold its second policy meeting this year on April 23.

# SEC orders Digido to permanently stop all financing operations

THE SECURITIES and Exchange Commission (SEC) has ordered Digido Finance Corp. to permanently cease all its financing operations after discovering that the company continued operating despite the revocation of its corporate registration and secondary license last year.

In an order dated Feb. 18, the SEC’s Financing and Lending Companies Department (FLCD) found Digido administratively liable for violations of Section 12(b)(1) and (2), and Section 14 of the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of Republic Act No. 8556, or the Financing Company Act (FCA).

“The order came following an investigation by FLCD which found that Digido continued to engage in the business of financing even after the Commission’s issuance of an order on May 9, 2025, revoking its certificate of incorporation and certificate of authority to operate as a financing company,” the Commission said in a statement on Friday.

Section 12 of the FCA IRR bars entities from operating as a financing company or rep-

resenting themselves as one without a valid certificate of authority and certificate of incorporation. Meanwhile, Section 14 penalizes failure to comply with any lawful, immediately executory order from the Commission.

The SEC then ordered Digido to pay a P600,000 administrative fine, consisting of P100,000 each against the company and its five officers.

The FLCD denied Digido Finance Corp.’s argument that the order was not yet final or appealable, explaining that revocation orders qualify as immediately executory under the 2016 SEC Rules of Procedure.

The FLCD said that Digido continued processing and approving loan applications, disbursing funds to borrowers, issuing disclosure statements and promissory notes, and maintaining active loan accounts.

“Each post-revocation loan transaction constitutes a discrete and independent act of engaging the business of a financing company without authority. The statutory violation is not theoretical; it attaches to every extension

of credit made after revocation,” the order read.

The FLCD also discovered that Digido had been handling loan servicing and collections through Fingertip Finance Corp., a wholly owned subsidiary of Singapore-based Robocash Pte. Ltd.

“The continuation of collection operations through Fingertip is particularly telling. Collection and servicing are not ministerial remnants of past activity when they are executed through structured payment channels, borrower communications, and organized remittance instructions,” the order read.

“They are integral incidents of financing operations. By directing borrowers to remit payments through Fingertip after revocation, [Digido] sustained the operational core of its financing business despite the Commission’s withdrawal of authority,” it added.

*BusinessWorld* sought comment from Digido Finance Corp. via e-mail but had not received a response as of press time. — **Alexandria Grace C. Magno**

## PLDT’s data center REIT plan seen to attract strong interest

By **Ashley Erika O. Jose**  
Reporter

PLDT INC.’s plan to list its data center business as a real estate investment trust (REIT) is expected to attract strong investor interest, with the Philippine equity market primed for such an offering, analysts said.

“I think PLDT’s data center REIT offering will generate a lot of interest from the local investor community. PLDT has been an established data center operator even before the boom in interest in that sector due to digital transformation and now AI (artificial intelligence), and they have been expanding their capacity,” Colliers Philippines Senior Director and Head of Capital Markets and Investment Services Julius Guevara said in a Viber message on Friday last week.

Last week, Pangilinan-led telecommunications company PLDT Inc. announced that it is pursuing a REIT listing for its data center business, VITRO Inc.

VITRO manages and operates the group’s data center business. It is a wholly owned subsidiary

of ePLDT, Inc., the ICT holding company of PLDT Inc.

The move comes after negotiations with potential investors failed to advance because they preferred majority control rather than the minority stake PLDT was willing to sell.

The move also comes as the company plans to raise funds to pay some loans and obligations. PLDT’s net debt rose to P284.7 billion as of end-2025.

For COL Financial Group, Inc. Chief Equity Strategist April Lynn C. Lee-Tan, pursuing a REIT listing for PLDT’s data center business will be favorable, especially with the revised REIT Law.

“I think the market will be receptive given that demand for data centers is growing and is still expected to grow further. Plus investors will get income through cash dividends, which seems to be what’s important right now,” she said in a Viber message.

In January, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) issued amended rules on REITs as part of its initiatives to help develop and spur investments in the capital market.

The amendments are aligned with the objectives of the REIT Act

by expanding eligible income-generating assets and allowing unlisted special purpose vehicles (SPVs) and incorporated joint ventures (JVs), consistent with global practices.

Under SEC Memorandum Circular (MC) No. 1, Series of 2026, REITs may own income-generating real estate directly or indirectly. For indirect ownership, a REIT may hold shares in an unlisted SPV formed primarily to own real estate, provided it owns at least two-thirds of the SPV’s voting stock, including through incorporated JVs.

The Philippine equities market remains largely concentrated in traditional sectors, with limited exposure to high-growth themes, said Peter Louise D. Garnace, an equity research analyst at Unicapital Securities, Inc.

He said a potential initial public offering (IPO) of a data center business will likely serve as a catalyst by further diversifying sector composition beyond traditional real estate and introducing digital infrastructure as a new asset class.

“This would deepen and broaden the Phil-

ippine REIT segment, enhance market liquidity, and attract a wider base of institutional and foreign investors seeking exposure to technology-linked, long-duration cash flows,” he said.

Mr. Garnace said the planned REIT listing of PLDT will expand REITs into tech-related infrastructure, which will likely strengthen the country’s investment landscape.

“[It will] position the Philippines more competitively alongside ASEAN peers that are advancing as digital and data center hubs,” he said.

“Definitely, PLDT would have the data center assets that are REITable, as they have been in this business the longest and probably have the largest coverage,” said Investment & Capital Corp. of the Philippines (ICCP) President Jesus Mariano P. Ocampo.

He said PLDT has a strong data center portfolio to sell into a REIT.

For Colliers’ Mr. Guevara, PLDT’s plan is also strategic as it would unlock value for the business while bringing additional value to the local equities market.

**FULL STORY**

Read the full story by scanning the QR code or by typing the link [tinyurl.com/mj3r5yxx](https://tinyurl.com/mj3r5yxx)

## ING Philippines marks 35 years of supporting Philippine business growth



By **Jun Palanca**  
Country Manager, ING Philippines

In 1990, ING opened as a foreign commercial bank in Manila with a team of four people, based in the Pacific Star Building. 35 years later, ING Philippines has built enduring partnerships with many of the country’s leading companies – supporting their growth through economic cycles, industry transformations, and shifting market dynamics.

This milestone anniversary offers an opportunity to reflect on that shared journey and to look ahead at how Philippine businesses can navigate their next phase of growth in an increasingly complex global environment.

**BUILDING MARKET LEADERSHIP**

ING’s evolution in the Philippines has been shaped by milestones that reflect both the bank’s capabilities and the growing sophistication of the local market.

In 1996, ING became the first foreign bank to receive a universal banking license from the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas. This

was followed by participation in major privatization transactions, including the Petron Corporation divestment in 2001, which helped establish ING as a trusted adviser on complex, high-stakes deals.

By 2002, ING was among the first foreign banks to introduce foreign exchange derivatives and structured solutions for Philippine corporates, enabling companies to better manage currency risk and adopt more advanced hedging strategies.

Over the following decades, ING built a substantial track record across capital markets and mergers and acquisitions. The bank has participated in more than 194 capital market transactions totalling US\$28 billion and advised on over 80 M&A deals valued at US\$35 billion. Among the most notable mandates was ING’s 2015 advisory role to Globe Telecom on a US\$1 billion infrastructure transaction, alongside pioneering debt capital market structures and solutions for leading conglomerates and financial institutions.

ING’s performance in financial markets has long been recognized by the industry. From 2004 to 2017, the bank was named Best Fixed Income House for 14 consecutive years by the Fund Managers Association of the Philippines, and from 2010 to 2013, it was awarded Best M&A House by The Asset for its work during an active period of telecommunications acquisitions and significant banking-sector consolidation. In 2025, ING’s strength in cross-border flows and currency solutions was reaffirmed when the bank was named the Philippines International Foreign Exchange Bank of the Year at the Asian Banking and Finance Wholesale Banking Awards.

**SETTING THE STANDARD FOR GREEN AND SOCIAL FINANCE**

Sustainable finance has become one of ING’s most important areas of market leadership, with the bank pursuing an approach that integrates structuring expertise, advisory depth, and long-term partnership.

The journey began early. In 2015, ING supported pioneering renewable energy initiatives in the Philippines, including its advisory and financing role for the Burgos Wind Project.

By 2019, ING was shaping the country’s sustainable finance landscape through a series of market-first transactions. In February 2019, ING advised on the Sustainable Finance Framework and arranged the Philippines’ first Php ASEAN Green Bond – the P15-billion RCBC issuance. This was followed by the first Php ASEAN Sustainability Bond in June 2019, also arranged by ING. In September, ING was one of the arrangers of RCBC’s first USD Sustainability Bond, helping set new benchmarks for the local sustainable finance market.

Since then, ING has continued to close several landmark sustainability transactions in the Philippines, including the country’s first corporate Green Bond issuance with Arthaland in 2020. In 2023, the bank acted as Green Structuring Advisor for Arthaland Corp.’s P3-billion ASEAN Green Bond, directing all proceeds toward certified sustainable residential developments to be built over the next decade. That year, ING was also honored at the Europa Awards for Sustainability in the Philippines by the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines—recognition of the bank’s longstanding contribution to advancing sustainability aligned with global standards and the Philippine Development Plan.

In 2024, the bank acted as joint lead arranger for Bank of the Philippine Islands’ P20.4-billion ASEAN Social Bond, which was recognized as “Best Social Bond” at The Asset Triple A Sustainable Finance Awards.

Momentum continued to build. In 2025, ING acted as Sole Sustainability Coordinator for Philippine National Bank’s US\$300 million Sustainability Bond, which was recognized as “Best Sustainability Bond – Financial Institution” at The Asset Triple A Sustainable Finance Awards. The following year, ING ex-

panded its support for large-scale sustainability-linked transactions, including its role as Sole Arranger and Sustainability Coordinator for BDO Unibank’s P115-billion ASEAN sustainability bond, which earned “Best ASEAN Sustainability Bond” in The Asset Triple A Sustainable Finance Awards 2026.

Most recently, ING supported another industry-defining achievement: SteelAsia became the first steelmaker in ASEAN to secure Moody’s SQS2 “Very Good” rating for its Sustainable Finance Framework, with ING acting as Sustainable Finance Structuring Bank. This transaction stands out for its multi-taxonomy alignment, mapping across both EU and ASEAN sustainability taxonomies and embedding strong governance and eligibility criteria. It highlights how ING’s global network and deep sector expertise help clients navigate increasingly complex sustainability requirements while supporting industrial decarbonisation and meeting the expectations of international investors.

These accolades reinforce how ING’s structuring capabilities and long-term commitment to sustainability continue to differentiate the bank in the Philippine market.

What sets ING apart is not simply the volume of its sustainable finance work, but the depth of engagement with clients. Rather than limiting efforts to green-labelled transactions, ING supports clients through transition planning, risk management, and advisory on credible sustainability pathways. As more Philippine corporates pursue growth strategies aligned with climate ambitions, the demand for sustainability-linked financing continues to expand, and ING remains well positioned to guide this shift.

**PARTNERING THROUGH THE NEXT TRANSFORMATION**

As we look toward 2026, Philippine businesses face an environment defined by heightened complexity and rapid change. Climate-related disruptions are occurring with greater frequency and severity, creating urgent pres-

sure for corporates to reduce emissions and accelerate the transition to renewable energy. Regulatory expectations around governance, data privacy, and sustainability disclosures continue to evolve, while geopolitical uncertainties and shifting monetary cycles add new layers of market volatility.

Against this backdrop, ING Philippines has positioned itself to support clients in a more holistic way – combining strategic advisory, innovative capital solutions, and global connectivity across more than 40 markets. The bank’s leadership in sustainable bonds, social financing and supporting energy transition gives it a unique ability to back the country’s low-carbon transition and broader development priorities.

Digital transformation is an equally significant frontier. ING Hubs Philippines, established in 2013 as a global capability centre, has grown into one of the bank’s most technologically advanced sites. Its progress in automation, engineering, and artificial intelligence not only enhances ING’s global operations but also underscores the bank’s expertise in supporting Philippine corporates as they embark on their own digital transformation journeys.

**LOOKING AHEAD: THE NEXT 35 YEARS**

As Philippine businesses pursue sustainable growth, renewable energy transition, and digital innovation, ING remains committed to being the partner they need for the long term. The bank will continue to bring international expertise, innovative financing structures, and advisory capabilities that help companies turn today’s challenges into tomorrow’s competitive advantages.

Together, we can help build a more resilient and sustainable Philippine economy – one that creates lasting value for businesses, communities, and future generations.

