

# DoE's Garin sees many other possible suppliers of energy

THE GOVERNMENT is considering alternative sources of energy in the event of a "worst-case scenario" for Middle East suppliers, Energy Secretary Sharon S. Garin said.

"*Marami tayong pwedeng pagkukunan* (There are many sources we can draw from). 20% *lang ang dumadaan sa* Strait of Hormuz (only 20% of the world's energy transits the Strait of Hormuz)," she said, referring to the narrows that restrict access to the Persian Gulf, which is at risk of being blocked by military action in the area.

"There are many countries that are producing oil and are willing to sell oil also to the Philippines," Ms. Garin said at a briefing on Tuesday.

Reuters reported on Monday that Iran will fire on any ship trying to pass the Strait.

Users of the Strait include Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Kuwait and Iran.

Ms. Garin said 98% of Philippine crude imports comes from the Middle East. The remaining 2% is sourced from Brunei and Malaysia.

"Looking globally, significant shifts in global conditions may therefore be reflected in broader market prices," she said.

Rino E. Abad, director of the Department of Energy (DoE)-Oil Industry Management Bureau, said alternative suppliers not affected by disruptions to the Persian Gulf include the US, Canada, South America, and Africa.

"*Yun ang importante na pina-prioritize ng* department *ay 'yung masigurado 'yung continuous supply ng fuel at 'yung mga big-time price increases ay hindi ma-implement on a one-time basis.* (The department's priorities are to ensure continuous supply of fuel and to ensure that severe prices increases do not take effect in one blow)." The combination of these measures will actually mitigate the impact on consumers," he said.



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Ms. Garin said oil companies have sufficient inventory to meet fuel demand.

"We would like to assure the Filipino households, motorists and businesses that the country's fuel supply remains sufficient and stable," Ms. Garin said.

Oil companies are required to maintain at least a 30-day inventory of crude oil and a 15-day inventory of finished petroleum products.

Ms. Garin said that ordering takes about a week, noting that maintaining an inventory of a year will be expensive and require more storage.

"We are instructing all oil companies to submit to us this week, by tomorrow, if possible, all the contingency measures that they are currently taking as a situation as is today or if it prolongs or escalates," Ms. Garin said.

She also directed the Philippine National Oil Co. to pursue alternative sources in the event that oil companies require assistance.

Energy Undersecretary Alessandro O. Sales said the supply is less of a concern than price.

"There will be petroleum products that can be bought. The main risk... is how high the price will go. And therefore, (the DoE is focusing on) how to mitigate the price impact," he said, adding that the possible suspension of the excise tax on petroleum products is on the table.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. said in a Palace briefing earlier on Tuesday that he is considering seeking congressional authority to temporarily reduce excise taxes on petroleum products should global oil prices surge further.

The Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion law imposed excise taxes hikes on petroleum products in three tranches between Jan. 1, 2018 and Jan. 1, 2020.

The biggest excise tax increases were applied to diesel, liquefied petroleum gas and bunker, with rates rising from P2.50 to P6 per liter.

"We are willing to give assistance in whatever form is needed," Ms. Garin said.

On Monday, oil firms announced an increase in gasoline prices by P1.90 per liter, diesel by P1.20 per liter, and kerosene by P1.50 per liter.

The upward adjustments marked the 10<sup>th</sup> consecutive week of increases for diesel and kerosene, and eight straight weeks for gasoline. Since January, per-liter prices of gasoline, diesel, and kerosene have risen by P6.70, P9.40, and P7.70, respectively.

Ms. Garin said the government is looking to encourage oil companies to implement a staggered approach should there be a major price movement next week. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**



JOY/REUTERS

## Fertilizer, freight costs seen as main areas of concern due to Iran crisis

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said the impact of the Iran crisis is expected to manifest in the cost of synthetic fertilizer, much of which is petroleum-based fuel, which farmers and fisherfolk depend on, and the cost of freight, which will rise due to the risk premiums attached to shipments from the Persian Gulf.

In a statement on Tuesday, the DA said: "We are concerned about the intensifying conflict between the US and Iran as it might increase oil prices over an extended period, affecting petroleum-based fertilizers, freight costs, and the fuel that powers the machinery our farmers use and the boats our fishermen rely on," Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. was quoted as saying.

The DA said increased fuel prices can drive up the cost of agricultural inputs, particularly

nitrogen-based fertilizer products derived from natural gas.

The DA added that higher bunker fuel costs can raise shipping rates, increasing the landed cost of imported commodities such as wheat and animal feed, with knock-on effects on the prices of bread, poultry, and pork.

"We have seen this during past oil shocks, and we are now looking at ways to manage the impact on our food systems and on the country's food security," Mr. Laurel said.

Mr. Laurel earlier told *BusinessWorld* that the DA is currently assessing possible interventions for farmers and fisherfolk who may be affected by the Iran crisis.

"We are studying now what we can assist them with. I hope this conflict in the Middle East does not last long," he said. — **Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**



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## OTC drug registration going online this year

THE Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said it hopes to roll out an online portal for registering over-the-counter (OTC) medicines within the year.

"We will soon launch the online application portal for the registration of OTC medicines. This is (currently) undergoing public consultation," FDA Director General Paolo S. Teston said at the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines Luncheon Meeting on Tuesday.

The portal is expected to speed up the application process and shorten turnaround times for OTC medicine, he said.

"Over-the-counter medicines are the most commonly consumed, in particular for non-communicable diseases," Mr. Teston told reporters on the sidelines of the event.

Mr. Teston added that having more market authorizations for pharmaceutical products would ensure competitive pricing.

"This will ultimately improve our patients' access to quality, safe, effective, and affordable medicine," Mr. Teston added.

Meanwhile, the FDA is also seeking the help of law enforcement agencies, including the Bureau of Customs, to contain the proliferation of counterfeit vaccines.

Mr. Teston said: "We really need the help of the Bureau of Customs to really catch the big sellers of counterfeit vaccines," adding that previous operations have netted only smaller players.

The FDA has seized P56.8 million worth of unregistered and counterfeit medicine in the last eight months, Mr. Teston told the Senate in January.

It has also taken down 1,531 online listings for unregistered and counterfeit products between November and January, he said. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

## Rice imports top 700,000 MT as of late February

RICE IMPORTS in 2026 amounted to 707,711 metric tons (MT) as of Feb. 26, up 28.5% from a year earlier, the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) said.

The year-to-date volume has exceeded the Department of Agriculture's (DA) projection of about 600,000 MT for the first two months. The DA had urged traders and importers to keep shipments to around 300,000 MT per month.

The BPI said inbound rice shipments rose 33.87% to 374,768 MT in January, while shipments from Feb. 1 to 26 totaled 332,944 MT, 22.9% higher than the full-month figure of 270,796 MT a year earlier.

The BPI said inbound shipments as of Feb. 26 are equivalent



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to 74.95% of the 944,290 MT expected volume based on approved import clearances.

Of the total arrivals, 87.96% originated in Vietnam, 6.17% Thailand, and 5.04% Myanmar.

Regular rice accounted for the bulk of imports at 686,957.68 MT or 97.1% of the total, while special rice amounted to 20,753.78 MT or 2.9%.

The DA has said it expects rice import volumes to amount to 150,000 MT per month in March and April, following consultations with rice traders and importers.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said the projected shipments are lower than the usual monthly aver-

age of about 400,000 MT, after importers agreed to scale back inbound shipments for the domestic harvest.

If realized, the combined 300,000-MT import volume for March and April would be equivalent to a 65.5% decline from the year-earlier 869,321 MT. — **Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**

## Recruitment firm officials ruled personally liable in OFW claims

CORPORATE OFFICERS of recruitment and manning agencies are jointly and severally liable with their companies for the money claims and disability benefits of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), the Supreme Court (SC) has ruled.

In a resolution promulgated on Oct. 13, 2025 and made public on Tuesday, the High Court clarified that individual officers, such as Sorwin Joy G. Rivera of Magsaysay Maritime Corp., cannot hide behind the company's separate legal identity to avoid paying a worker's claims.

The SC noted that protecting migrant workers under specific labor laws requires these officers to be personally responsible for ensuring payment, particularly if they signed the employment contract on the company's behalf.

"If the recruitment/placement agency is a juridical being, the corporate officers and directors and partners as the case may be, shall themselves be jointly and solidarily liable with the corporation or partnership for the aforesaid claims and damages," the SC

special first division said in its 10-page ruling, written by Associate Justice Josep Y. Lopez.

The case involved seafarer Ruthgar T. Parce, who suffered a shoulder injury while working as a senior electrical fitter. Although the company's doctors initially claimed he was fit to return to work, the SC found their medical assessment incomplete and indefinite.

As a result, the tribunal upheld an award of \$60,000 for total and permanent disability, plus 10% in attorney's fees and legal interest.

The court further noted that officers of manning agencies are already required by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration to sign a formal promise — a "verified undertaking" — stating they will be personally liable for claims arising from the employment relationship. This policy, according to SC, is intended to ensure that Filipino workers abroad receive the "immediate and sufficient payment" they are rightfully owed. — **Erika Mae P. Sinaking**

## PEZA expresses support for long-overdue amendments to law governing ecozones

THE Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) requested amendments to the PEZA Law that will boost the attractiveness of economic zones to investors.

Speaking at the House Joint Committee on Economic Affairs on Tuesday, PEZA Director General Tereso O. Panga said Republic Act No. 7916 or the Special Economic Zones Act of 1995 requires updating, having been amended only once since it passed in 1999.

"Amid an evolving global investment environment and intensifying regional competition for foreign direct investment (FDI) and export markets, PEZA seeks to update its governing law to remain agile, competitive, and future-ready," he was quoted as telling legislators in a PEZA social media post.

Mr. Panga has said that PEZA is looking to restore its authority to issue fire safety inspection certificates and certificates of origin, expedite the ecozone proclamation process, and venture into other types of ecozone.

PEZA said amendments would allow it to attract high-value and innovation-driven investments; sustain export growth; generate jobs; and enhance ease of doing business.

It also expressed support for House Bill (HB) No. 5640 — filed last year by Antique Rep. Antonio Agapito B. Legarda, Jr. — which contains proposed amendments.

The bill proposes to align PEZA's incentive schemes with provisions of the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises Act.

The bill, a copy of which was obtained by *BusinessWorld*, also seeks to expand the types of ecozones to areas focusing on green technology, digital innovation, and the creative industries.

"(The proposed amendments to the PEZA law) could help attract more FDI and locators, in view of evolving new technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning and emerging requirements on ESG (environmental, social, and governance)," Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Chief Economist Michael L. Ricafort said via Viber.

For 2026, PEZA is hoping to approve P300 billion worth of investment pledges, which would exceed the actual 2025 approval total by 15%. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

## Seafarer security directive issued for Middle East

THE Department of Transportation (DoTr) said it issued an advisory to ship-owners, operators, and manning agencies to undertake measures to ensure the safety of seafarers plying Middle Eastern routes, in the wake of the Iran crisis.

The advisory was issued by the Maritime Industry Authority, a unit of the DoTr, following attacks on Iran by Israel and the US. It covers seafarers on vessels operating in and transiting the affected areas.

Separately, the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) said it has seen no disruptions to shipping as a result of the Iran crisis.

"No direct operational routing issue on our ports, but any disruption could

affect freight rates, bunker costs, and eventually cargo volumes," PPA General Manager Jay Daniel R. Santiago said via Viber on Tuesday.

Mr. Santiago added that much of the traffic likely to be affected by any disruptions will be energy-related.

"Exposure is primarily crude oil, refined petroleum products, and LNG (liquefied natural gas). There are also some petrochemicals and fertilizer imports, and limited containerized cargo from Gulf transshipment hubs like Jebel Ali (in the United Arab Emirates), but the bulk of the strategic exposure is energy-related," Mr. Santiago said. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**