

# NSCR north right-of-way acquisition rate tops 65%

THE Department of Transportation (DoTr) said it resolved 345 expropriation pleadings, raising the right-of-way (RoW) acquisition rate for the North-South Commuter Railway (NSCR) north segment to 65.5%.

“With our partnership with the OSG (Office of the Solicitor General) we are fast-tracking the right-of-way and site acquisitions for DoTr’s big-ticket projects. We need this to expedite the construction and to ensure the completion of transport projects,” Transportation Acting Secretary Giovanni Z. Lopez said in a statement on Thursday.

The DoTr said securing RoW has always been one of

the major challenges in transport project implementation as land acquisition always delays and disrupts construction schedules.

The affected portion of the project is the Clark-Malolos corridor of the NSCR project, including critical sites for the Metro Manila Subway project, Mr. Lopez said.

The DoTr had reported an RoW acquisition rate of 7.59% in March 2025.

It said 1,537 of the 2,647 affected households have received compensation for the acquisition.

The NSCR north section is expected to be operational by

2028, while the southern section will be completed by 2031. The entire NSCR is expected to be fully operational by late 2031 or early 2032.

The 147-kilometer NSCR will connect Malolos, Bulacan with Clark International Airport, and Tutuban, Manila with Calamba, Laguna. The P873-billion project is co-financed by the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the Asian Development Bank. It will have 35 stations and three depots. While, the Metro Manila Subway project’s RoW is now at 90.80%, with the project expected to be completed by 2032. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**



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## FAO tags PHL as key driver of global meat market

THE Philippines was among the countries that drove growth in global meat shipments in 2025, citing its strong demand and constrained domestic supply, the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said.

In its meat market review, the FAO reported that the global meat trade grew 3.4% to 43.4 million metric tons (MMT) in 2025, supported by robust import demand despite tight availability, animal disease outbreaks, and shifting trade policies.

The FAO said imports declined in major markets such as China and Japan, with the shortfall offset by higher purchases from countries that included the Philippines.

The Philippines was identified as the second-largest contributor to the growth in global pig meat import demand, reflecting continued constraints in domestic production due to African Swine Fever (ASF).

The FAO estimated that Philippine pork production declined 2.46% to 1.38 MMT in 2025, while imports rose 22.05% to 620,000 metric tons.

Overall, meat imports into the Philippines increased to 1.51 MMT in 2025, up 15.33%, which was accompanied by a modest increase in domestic meat production to 3.39 MMT.

Globally, the pork trade expanded 2.3% to 10.02 MMT in 2025, the FAO said. — **Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**



## PHL, Malaysia smooth over diesel-sourcing gaffe

THE PHILIPPINES and Malaysia reaffirmed their intent to cooperate on energy after clarifying the sourcing of shipment of diesel, which was obtained from a private trading company rather than Malaysian national oil company Petronas.

In a statement on Thursday, the Department of Energy (DoE) said it held bilateral talks with Malaysia’s Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, after the DoE announced on April 11 that it had secured a 329,000-barrels shipment of diesel from Petronas.

The actual source was the Singapore office of trading company Vitol Asia Pte. Ltd., according to Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who rejected reports that the Philippines had obtained diesel from Malaysia. The Prime Minister identified Vitol as the supplier in a social media post.

At the bilateral meeting, the DoE was represented by Secretary Sharon S. Garin, Undersecretary Alessandro O. Sales, and key officials from the Philippine National Oil Co. and PNOC-Exploration Corp.

“The Philippines values its long-standing partnership with Malaysia, particularly in advancing regional energy cooperation,” the DoE said.

“We express our appreciation for the open and productive engagement, which reinforces our shared commitment to ensuring stable and reliable energy supply, strengthening market resilience, and promoting coordinated responses to evolving global conditions,” it added.

The Philippines has been an active buyer of fuel since the outbreak of war in Iran, which has disrupted petroleum shipments from the Persian Gulf. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

## Fish landed at regional ports up 15% in March

THE Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA) said fish landed at regional fish ports totaled 50,608 metric tons (MT) in March, up 15.62% from a year earlier.

In a statement, the PFDA said the volume unloaded for March was the highest recorded in the first quarter.

The PFDA said the Navotas Fish Port Complex posted 24,461 MT of fish landed, up 36.58% from a year earlier.

The General Santos Fish Port Complex landed 16,966 MT in March.

The PFDA said the Bulan Fish Port Complex in Sorsogon posted the largest year-on-year increase, with volume almost doubling to 3,452 MT.

Fish unloaded at the Iloilo Fish Port Complex rose 15.25% in March to 2,818 MT.

The volume of fish landed at the Lucena Fish Port Complex in Quezon grew 12.35% to 1,943

MT, while fish landed at the Zamboanga Fish Port Complex rose 72.84% to 727 MT.

The Davao Fish Port Complex reported landed volume of 237 MT.

The Department of Agriculture has said it is studying a proposal to grant a P10 subsidy per kilo of catch landed at government fish ports to assist municipal fisherfolk and commercial operators deal with rising fuel costs.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. told a Senate hearing that the proposal will require consultation with the government’s economic managers to determine how to fund the scheme.

“If it can be funded, commercial fishers, and even municipal fishers with larger boats, will receive P10 for every kilo they unload at government fish ports. But that needs to be funded,” he said. — **Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**

## Agriculture dep’t forms office to manage World Bank programs

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it created a dedicated project management office (PMO) to oversee two World Bank-supported programs.

In Department Order No. 13, the DA consolidated the management of the Philippines Sustainable Agriculture Transformation (PSAT) program and the Technical Assistance for Sustainable Agricultural Transformation (TASAT) project in a single office.

The \$1-billion PSAT program, structured as a policy-based loan, links the release of funds to performance targets, while the \$24.5-million TASAT project provides technical support for institutional reforms in agriculture.

Both programs are financed through official development assistance from the World Bank.

In a statement on Thursday, the DA said the restructuring is intended to streamline execution and address coordination gaps across multiple units involved in delivering the programs.

“The creation of a unified PMO is critical to ensure that these programs are implemented efficiently, transparently, and in full alignment with our reform agenda,” Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said in the statement.

Under the new setup, a project director will lead the PMO, supported by a deputy who will handle day-to-day operations and compliance.

The office will also include specialized units tasked with delivering specific reform outcomes tied to disbursement-linked indicators required by the lender.

The units will be supported by technical working groups drawn from across the DA, including divisions handling rice systems, high-value crops, logistics, procurement, and audit functions.

The DA said a project support team will manage finance, procurement, and human resources, with dedicated units expected to help minimize delays that have tended to affect publicly funded projects. — **Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**

## Budget utilization rate hits 98.5% at end of March

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES posted a budget utilization rate of 98.5% in March, behind the year-earlier pace of 99%, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) said.

In its Notice of Cash Allocations (NCAs) Utilization Report, the DBM said that the National Government, local governments, and state-owned companies used P1.22 trillion out of P1.24 trillion issued NCAs as of the end of March.

Unused NCAs stood at P19.14 billion, the DBM said.

NCAs are quarterly disbursement authorities issued by the DBM to agencies, allowing them to withdraw funds from the Bureau of the Treasury for their spending needs.

In March, line departments used P749.19 billion, or 97.5% of their allotments, while P19.11 billion remained unused.

Six agencies posted a 100% budget utilization rate: the Office of the Vice-President, the Judiciary, the Commission on Audit, the Commission on Elections, the Office of the Ombudsman, and the Commission on Human Rights.

Four had 99.9% utilization rates: State Universities and Colleges and the departments of Foreign Affairs, Migrant Workers, and Transportation.

The departments of Energy, National Defense, and Tourism used 99.8% of their NCAs, while the departments of Education, Health, Human Settlement and Urban Development, Interior and Local Government, and Labor and Employment used up 99.7%.

The Civil Service Commission posted the lowest utilization rate of 58.2% at the end of March.

The other departments with the lowest utilization rates were the departments of Agriculture (84.5%), Social Welfare and Development (86.3%), and Economy, Planning, and Development (87.3%).

Budgetary support to state-run firms, amounting to P87.5 billion, was fully utilized as of the end of March.

Allocations to local government units (LGUs) were 100% utilized, along with NCAs issued to the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority.

Michael L. Ricafort, chief economist at Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., said that the utilization rate still reflects some underspending since the latter part of 2025.

“But the latest improvements may have to do with some government catch-up spending,” he said via Viber, citing the increase of utilization from 87% in February.

However, he said government agencies should spend approved funds faster and more effectively.

“There is a need to maximize the use of government funds ... since some of these are financed by loans that charge interest rate costs and amid the policy to optimize the use of funds,” he added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

## Calabarzon working to ‘localize’ Trabaho Para Sa Bayan strategy

By **Erika Mae P. Sinaking**

Reporter

CALAMBA, Laguna — Regional economic and employment planners said they are working to make a nationwide government livelihood plan better reflect local conditions, citing the need to align workforce skills with the industrial demands of the Philippines’ most populous region.

The Calabarzon region, a major industrial hub, continues to grapple with persistent skills mismatches that risk undermining its competitiveness and ability to generate stable, quality employment, officials said on Thursday.

The localization of the Trabaho Para sa Bayan Plan, a 10-year master framework designed to guide labor market development, is being positioned as a critical intervention to bridge these gaps and strengthen coordination between education, industry, and government institutions.

Assistant Secretary Agnes E. Tolentino of the Department of Economy, Planning, and Development (DepDev) Regional Development Group told *BusinessWorld* that aligning workforce capabilities with industry requirements remains a central concern for planners in the region.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) also on Thursday reported that Calabarzon’s economy grew 5.10% in



REY BANIQUEZ/NIB-PNA

**PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. signs into law on Sept. 27, 2023 the “Trabaho Para sa Bayan Act” to address unemployment, underemployment and other challenges in the labor market.**

2025, exceeding the national average growth rate of 4.40%.

The region remains the country’s primary industrial center, accounting for a 25.4% share of the national industrial sector. It also accounts for 10.9% of services sector output.

“Since this is an industrial region, our demand here has to be addressed under the Trabaho Para sa Bayan to really complement or to provide for the support to our industries,” Ms. Tolentino said. “The mismatch between the skills of the graduates as compared to what is actually being required by the industry (makes it) very crucial for

us to create jobs that are stable and decent.”

“When we localize the plan, we have to come up with other strategies not just at the provincial level, but even at the municipal and city level, for us to come up with manpower that is ready for absorption in the industry,” she added.

The DepDev official said that reducing training costs for employers is also a key consideration, noting that improving baseline skills among graduates could make workforce integration more efficient.

“It doesn’t have to be very expensive on the part of the industry, just to get

the level of skills that they need,” she said, in calling for stronger alignment between academic preparation and actual job requirements.

“Of course, we also have to enhance investments in the region, to support the needs of industries and other sectors. We also have agriculture, which is also promising in terms of its contribution,” she added.

Jorge Manuel C. Laude, a senior labor and employment officer at Department of Labor and Employment (DoLE) Region IV-A, said the Trabaho Para sa Bayan Plan serves as a blueprint to guide employment strategies over the next decade.

“This is a 10-year master plan. But we acknowledge that there are pressing challenges and issues that we need to immediately address so that we can mitigate possible adverse effects on the labor market,” Mr. Laude said in a separate interview.

He noted that identifying urgent priorities at the regional level is crucial to ensure that the broader plan remains responsive to current conditions.

“Although these may not yet be fully highlighted in the plan, we need to identify which ones are more pressing that we need to act on,” he said.

“We also want to encourage our applicants to stay and work here in Calabarzon, so they no longer need to go to other regions to find employment,” Mr. Laude said. “Through this plan, we envision generating quality jobs within the region.”