

# Fiber backbone on track for Mindanao landing

THE Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) said it is on track to connect the national fiber backbone to Mindanao by July.

"The phases 4 and 5, I think it is around 60% (complete) right now. They are expediting it for July," Information and Communications Technology Secretary

Henry Rhoel R. Aguda said on the sidelines of the BusinessWorld Economic Forum last week.

Mr. Aguda said that by July, Mindanao will be connected to the phase 1 to 3 of the fiber backbone.

"By July, Mindanao will be connected to the national fiber backbone, but it does not mean by July we will complete phases

3-4. By July our target is to have it land in Mindanao," he added.

The DICT hopes to complete the final phases of the national fiber backbone sometime this year. It started building the project in August 2025.

The project is expected to bring high-speed internet to more nodes in Mindanao via a 1,000-ki-

lometer high-speed government-owned fiber network connecting Butuan, Cagayan de Oro, Bukidnon, Zamboanga, and Davao.

The DICT obtained a \$287.24-million loan from the World Bank to accelerate phases 4 and 5.

The second and third phases added almost 1,800 kilometers

to the fiber network, linking Regions II (Cagayan Valley), IV-A (Calabarzon), V (Bicol), VIII (Eastern Visayas), X (Northern Mindanao), and XI (Davao).

This builds on the 1,245-kilometer Phase 1 linking Ilocos Norte to Quezon City, which was completed in April last year. It brings an initial 600 gigabits per

second optical spectrum capacity to at least 14 provinces and two National Government data centers.

The National Fiber Backbone project aims to provide faster and reliable internet connectivity. The DICT expects around 70 million Filipinos to benefit from the project. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

## Air passenger volume rises to 17 million in Q1

AIR PASSENGER volume rose 6.70% to 17.05 million in the first quarter, driven by a surge in domestic passenger traffic, the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) reported.

For the period, domestic passenger traffic rose 6.11% year on year to 9.03 million, while international passenger traffic

increased to 8.02 million from 7.47 million a year earlier.

Pacific and its unit CebGo accounted for 5.10 million passengers during the period. Boutique airline AirSwift Transport, Inc., which was acquired by Cebu Pacific accounted for 95,148 passengers during the quarter.

Flag carrier Philippine Airlines and unit PAL Express accounted for 2.49 million, with PAL carrying 291,338 and PAL Express 2.20 million.

AirAsia Philippines carried 291,338 passengers during the period, while boutique airline Sunlight Air flew 53,993. Island Avia-

tion Corp. and Royal Air Charter Service, Inc. recorded 3,927 and 717 passengers, respectively.

For the first three months, the CAB reported that domestic carriers handled 3.97 million international passengers, while foreign carriers accounted for 4.05 million. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

## Submarine cable vessels granted relief from duties

THE Bureau of Customs (BoC) said it is granting temporary relief on duties for foreign vessels laying and repairing submarine cable.

In Customs Administrative Order No. 02-2026, the BoC outlined the framework for the temporary admission of all foreign-owned and foreign-registered International Cable-Laying and Repair Vessels (ICLRVs).

The specialized ships will be classified as professional equipment, which grants them total conditional relief from import duties and taxes.

According to the BoC, the order was issued to "facilitate the timely and cost-efficient implementation of submarine cable-laying and repair projects that are critical to national telecommunications and energy infrastructure."

To avail of the exemption, the vessel must be owned and imported by a resident outside of the Philippines and must be used solely by or

under the personal supervision of the person visiting the Philippines.

The vessel should be declared as a conditional import and be accompanied by a special permit from the Maritime Industry Authority, a charter agreement or service contract, proof of the value of the vessel, a commercial invoice, and a certificate of vessel registry, among others.

The order also clarified the guidelines for authorized projects covering multiple customs jurisdictions.

According to the order, the project authorization will have to specify the ports covered, the routing plan, the scope of work, and the approximate duration of the activities at each port.

"Movement of the ICLR between these specified ports shall not require the filing of a new import entry nor give rise to the assessment of duties and taxes," it said. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

## Philanthropic group to expand support for RE transition efforts in rural PHL

By **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**  
Senior Reporter

JUST ENERGY TRANSITION COMMUNITY (JETC), a regional philanthropic coalition promoting clean energy, said it is expanding its partnership with a Philippine non-profit to boost renewable energy (RE) access in the rural Philippines.

"In the Philippines, JETC is currently in active dialogue with the Peace and Equity Foundation (PEF), whose work is focused on expanding RE access for farming and agricultural cooperatives, as well as rural enterprises across Mindanao," Jamie Choi, chief executive officer of Tara Climate Foundation,

a founding group of the JETC, said in an e-mail.

JETC was convened in 2025 by Singapore-based Philanthropy Asia Alliance (PAA), alongside non-profit organizations like Tara Climate Foundation and Bloomberg Philanthropies, among others.

At the Philanthropy Asia Summit in Singapore last week, hosted by the PAA, JETC announced a \$2.6-million investment for a just and inclusive energy transition across Southeast Asia.

"This will cover clean-energy access across the region for farming and fishing communities, cooling solutions, workforce support, and responsible energy deployment, among others," Ms. Choi said.

JETC has been working with the PEF to deploy RE technologies in the southern Philippines.

The JETC and PEF's Productive Use of Renewable Energy (PURE) initiative enabled a solar-powered coffee-processing facility in Bukidnon.

Both groups are looking to expand the PURE initiative across Mindanao, according to Ms. Choi.

"JETC's current discussions with the Peace and Equity Foundation are focused on the ongoing Bukidnon pilot, which has been supported by Tara Climate Foundation, and the potential to expand this model to support more cooperatives across Mindanao," she said.

Cauchie C. Garcia, PEF deputy executive director, said the Philippine clean energy transition is challenged by access and affordability issues.

"Energy access and affordability remain uneven, particularly

in rural and agricultural areas where many communities still experience unreliable electricity, high energy costs, or dependence on diesel-based systems," she said in an e-mail.

The upfront cost of RE technology makes it unaffordable for rural enterprises and electric cooperatives, Ms. Garcia said.

She added that the country's energy transition push has focused on reaching targets than ensuring inclusive adoption.

"Energy transition discussions are often framed primarily around power generation targets, rather than around livelihoods and local economic development," Ms. Garcia noted.

RE accounted for 25% of the Philippines' power mix at the end of 2025.



### Melbourne, Australia

**PRIME SITE:** The upcoming Hotel101-Melbourne at No. 540 Flinders Lane at the heart of the Melbourne Central Business District is one of the most prime location in the whole of Melbourne, Australia. Hotel101-Melbourne is expected to become the largest hotel in Melbourne and is expected to generate AU\$ 323.6 million sales revenue (approx. 12.6 billion pesos).

DoubleDragon Corporation expects its Hotel101 subsidiary being an asset-light business model to become one of the major Filipino homegrown brands and business model export to other countries that would generate a significant foreign currency and USD inflow to the Philippine economy.