

Luzon Economic Corridor admits more partners

THE LUZON Economic Corridor (LEC) partnership has been expanded to include Australia, Denmark, France, Italy, South Korea, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, the US Embassy in the Philippines said on Monday.

In a statement, the embassy said the US, Japan, and Philippine governments expanded the economic bloc to boost cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

"The expansion of the LEC partnership demonstrates the power of collaboration among like-minded nations committed to transparency and shared pros-

perity," Finance Secretary Fredrick D. Go was quoted as saying.

The LEC is a trilateral agreement to improve the connectivity of Luzon's economic areas, primarily Subic Bay, Clark, Metro Manila and Batangas.

Partner countries provide technical assistance, financing, while facilitating private sector investment. They also participate in working groups on transport, energy, and digital infrastructure.

As a participant in the LEC, Australia is mobilizing investment through its Manila Deal

Team. It is pushing for a P1.9-billion partnership with the Philippines on inclusive economic growth, as well as technical assistance under the Partnerships for Infrastructure Program.

For its part, Denmark is looking to invest in the Philippine shipbuilding and create 10,000 jobs.

France will provide official development assistance (ODA) to finance 100 bridges, the US Embassy said. It will also focus on building industrial capacity through a project in the aeronautics industry.

South Korea expressed its interest in pushing for ODA initiatives that seek to enhance transport, digital connectivity, and sustained economic growth along the LEC.

Its support includes a P1.5-billion grant to establish the National Cyber Security Center and the modernization of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport.

Meanwhile, the UK is deploying its full Growth and Investment Partnerships program for the LEC. It will provide technical assistance, P411 billion in export finance, and mobilize capital

towards infrastructure and energy projects.

Italy said it is increasing its public financial support in order to facilitate private sector investment from Italian companies in transport, semiconductors, and manufacturing sectors.

Sweden, meanwhile, is providing a P74-million grant to fund a feasibility study on signaling systems and operational models.

"This initiative is creating real opportunities for US business, our Philippine partners, and investors across the Indo-Pacific while countering exploitative in-

frastructure practices with a better alternative," Heather Variava, US senior advisor for economic, energy, and business affairs ambassador, said.

Announced in 2024, the Luzon Economic Corridor is the first project undertaken by the US Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment in the Indo-Pacific.

It seeks to coordinate investments in key industries like transport infrastructure, advanced manufacturing, energy, and digital connectivity. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

EV adoption campaign seen facing affordability hurdles

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

THE campaign to promote the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) as an alternative to internal combustion engine (ICE) cars is running up against affordability concerns and the dearth of charging infrastructure, according to Agile Data Solutions, Inc., a market research firm.

"Filipino buyers do their research, especially about price points," Agile Data Solutions Co-founder and Chairman Jason Christian B. Gaguan said in a video interview.

"EV players need to understand their target market and then (set prices based on) the price stratification of their market."

Mr. Gaguan noted that awareness of the benefits of EVs is high, though hurdles remain before potential buyers come to the stage of the purchase decision.

"The competition among EV sellers is not awareness. It's about consideration, meaning 'I know that EVs exist, but would I consider buying?'" he said.

He also said the preferred vehicle type is the sport utility vehicle (SUV), though sedans enjoy an affordability advantage.

"That is an opportunity also for EV manufacturers to offer larger sedans or probably compact SUVs at the sedan price point," Mr. Gaguan said.

Citing results of study, "Oil Shock Pushes Filipinos to Reconsider Mobility – But EV Adoption Remains Deferred," Mr. Gaguan noted that about 44% of survey respondents that do not own an EV or hybrid vehicle are deterred by price.

Other factors include concerns about battery lifespan or replacement cost (20%); limited charging infrastructure (13%); lack of clear information (9%); range anxiety during daily travel (7%); and limited model choices (7%).

It also noted that 52% of respondents consider EV charging stations in their area to be inadequate.

Mr. Gaguan noted that the expansion of EV manufacturing in the Philippines could help lower the retail price of EVs.

Around 49% believe that with suitable government support, switching to EVs would reduce their financial burden, while only 34% expect minimal impact.

Mr. Gaguan noted that transitioning to electric vehicles would require higher upfront costs, as users would also need to invest in solar panels or personal EV chargers.

MRT-3 O&M privatization target set for next year

THE Department of Transportation (DoTr) said it hopes to privatize the operations and maintenance (O&M) functions of Metro Rail Transit Line 3 (MRT-3), with a target to award the contract by July 2027.

Transportation Acting Secretary Giovanni Z. Lopez told *BusinessWorld* that the DoTr aims to award the contract between June and July 2027, with the winning bidder set to take over the operations of the rail line by October next year.

The Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Center and the DoTr have scheduled market consultations for the MRT-3 PPP project on May 14-15, and May 18.

Mr. Lopez said the DoTr hopes to obtain approval from the Economy and Development Council by August or September, with the auction to be launched by October, and bid submissions due by March 2027.

According to the PPP Center, the MRT-3 O&M contract's scope covers the rail line's rolling stock fleet, stations, depot and other systems and infrastructure.

This includes the collection of passenger fares to be remitted to the government, the exercise of commercial rights within prescribed station boundaries with a government share of gross revenue, and the government's payment of availability fees.

The DoTr had initially aimed to initiate the bidding process for the operations and maintenance of the MRT-3 before the expiration of its build-lease-transfer (BLT) agreement with the Sobrepna-led Metro Rail Transit Corp. (MRTC) in July 2025.

Approval of changes to MRT-7 seen keeping operations timeline on track

THE Metro Rail Transit Line 7 (MRT-7) remains on schedule for operations next year after amendments to the project terms were approved by the Economy and Development Council, the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Center said.

It said the rail line, which connects Quezon City to San Jose del Monte, Bulacan, is currently at 86.5% completion.

"The decision is timely, and we're glad that the administration and our private partner are responsive to the call for reliable mass transit, given the uncertainties of the geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and the volatile oil supply and prices in the market," PPP Center Executive Director Rizza Blanco-Latorre said in a statement on Monday.

Ms. Blanco-Latorre said council approval reflects the government's commitment to providing reliable mass trans-

port, especially in the face of rising fuel prices.

"The MRT-7 PPP project is a long-term solution that will bring a reliable transport option for daily commuters. Once operational, it is expected to drive unprecedented development to the communities it serves," she said.

Operations for the project are targeted to begin by the second quarter of 2027.

The MRT-7 has a total of 14 stations and is expected to carry 300,000 passengers daily in its first year, and up to 850,000 passengers in its 12th year.

The commuter rail line's stations are Quezon North Avenue Joint Station, Quezon Memorial Circle, University Avenue, Tandang Sora, Don Antonio, Batasan, Manggahan, Doña Carmen, Regalado, Mindanao Avenue, Quirino, Sacred Heart, Tala, and San Jose del Monte.

The project is run by San Miguel Corp., with the company financing the construction and set to operate the 23-kilometer commuter rail system under a 25-year concession agreement with the government.

The project also includes a road component of a 22-kilometers linking the Bocaue interchange of the North Luzon Expressway to an intermodal terminal in Tala, Caloocan City.

The DoTr said last year that the civil works for the last two stations of the MRT-7 will begin in 2026.

The DoTr and San Jose del Monte local government agreed in March on the new location of the MRT-7 station in that city.

The San Jose del Monte stop will now be located near the boundary of San Jose del Monte and north Caloocan, instead of the initial site, which was near the Muzon-Tungkong Mangga Road intersection. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

Under the BLT concession, the DoTr holds the franchise and manages operations and fare collection, while MRTC builds and maintains the system in exchange for regular payments from the government. Following the contract's expiration, the ownership and operations of MRT-3 have been transferred to the government.

Meanwhile, in a statement on Monday, the DoTr said over 50 international firms have expressed interest in participating in key PPP transport projects, particularly the automated fare collection system project, as well as the Davao Public Transport modernization project which also includes an automated fare

collection system component.

The P9.5-billion Philippine Automated Fare Collection System, which is still in the initial stages of project preparation, covers the establishment of a nationwide fare collection system to be integrated into the urban transportation system. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**



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Impeachment, from SI/1

"We are aware of the actions taken by the plenary and with that vote to transmit the articles of impeachment, the burden now rests on the accusers to substantiate their claims in accordance with the Constitution, the law, and rules on evidence," the defense team said.

The defense team also pointed to pending constitutional issues before the Supreme Court while expressing readiness for the impeachment trial.

"While questions of constitutional significance remain pending before the Supreme Court, we are fully prepared to defend the Vice-President before the Senate sitting as an Impeachment Court, where it is incumbent upon the prosecution to discharge the burden of proof," the statement added.

Following the vote, House officials said the approved articles of impeachment would be formally transmitted to the Senate under constitutional procedures governing impeachment proceedings.

Committee on Justice Chairperson Gerardo R. Luistro defended the legality of the impeachment proceedings after allies of Ms. Duterte questioned hearings conducted by the committee during the House recess.

Party-list Rep. Paolo Henry M. Marcoleta argued that constitutional timelines governing impeachment proceedings referred to "session days" and questioned whether the Justice Committee could continue hearings while Congress was on break.

Ms. Luistro responded by citing House Resolution No. 892, which authorized the committee to continue impeachment proceedings and exercise ancillary powers during the recess from March 21 to May 3, 2026.

"It is respectfully submitted... that all the proceedings before the Justice Committee is within the ambit expressly provided by the House of Representatives in Resolution No. 892," she said.

Party-list Rep. Sarah Jane I. Elago explained her affirmative vote, saying the impeachment proceed-

ings were necessary to hold high-ranking officials accountable amid ongoing economic difficulties faced by Filipinos.

During the plenary session, Ms. Elago cited rising oil prices, inflation, unemployment, demolitions, disinformation, and corruption as reasons behind Gabriela's support for the impeachment complaint.

She also linked the impeachment proceedings to allegations involving Ms. Duterte's confidential funds, claiming the money could have instead been used for food assistance, agricultural subsidies, and educational needs.

Ms. Elago further cited allegations involving discrepancies in Ms. Duterte's Statements of Assets, Liabilities and Net Worth (SALN), as well as Anti-Money Laundering Council records referenced during the impeachment proceedings.

"We were not born yesterday. Who would believe that he/she had not even a single peso of cash on hand or a single bank deposit from 2019 to 2024?" she said in mixed Filipino and English.

Party-list Rep. Leila M. de Lima, who also voted in favor, said the evidence presented before the House Committee on Justice warranted a Senate trial.

In explaining her affirmative vote, she said the committee reviewed documentary evidence, testimonies, audit findings, sworn statements, financial records, and certifications from government agencies before recommending impeachment to the plenary.

"We saw evidence of misuse and abuse of confidential funds amounting to hundreds of millions of pesos," she said.

She also cited allegations involving unexplained wealth and suspicious financial transactions allegedly disproportionate to Ms. Duterte's declared income, as well as statements she described as threats against public officials and the constitutional order.

Ms. de Lima stressed that impeachment is a constitutional accountability mechanism and not political persecution.

"Impeachment is not political persecution; it is not a partisan activity; it is a constitutional accountability mechanism," she said.

FULL STORY



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