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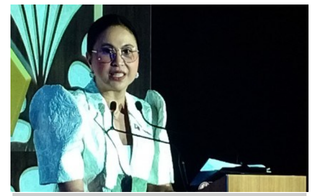
SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

DTI chief upbeat on new investors from S. Korea

December 16, 2025 | Joan Villanueva | Philippine News Agency

MANILA – Job creation in the Philippines is expected to get a boost as additional businesses have indicated interest in starting operations in the country.



INVESTMENTS. Trade and Industry Secretary Cristina Roque speaks during the anniversary celebration of the Philippine Economic Zone Authority in Pasay City Monday night (Dec. 15, 2025). In a media interview, Roque expressed optimism about the entry of more foreign investors, saying she is scheduled to meet with officials of four firms in South Korea this week to discuss their plans to start operations in the Philippines. *(PNA photo by Joann Villanueva)*

Trade and Industry Secretary Cristina Roque told journalists Monday night she will be in South Korea from Dec. 17-19 to meet four investors, whom she declined to identify.

"We're hoping to get also into retail sector to have more jobs," she said without elaborating.

Aside from the retail sector, Roque said the businesses of the four entities, whose officials she is scheduled to meet this week, are also into food business.

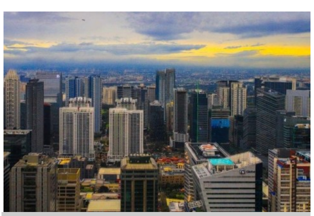
She expressed optimism that these interests will materialize to provide balanced employment, not just in manufacturing sector, for Filipinos.

Earlier, the Board of Investments, said it has approved around 261 projects worth PHP816.81 billion as of the end of November this year, and 10 more big-ticket items are being assessed.

Source: https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1265329

Philippines emerging as key market for sustainable finance

December 16, 2025 | Keisha Ta-Asan | The Philippine Star



The STAR / Noel Pabalate.

The STAR / Noel Pabalate

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippines is emerging as a key growth market for sustainable finance in Asia-Pacific, buoyed by accelerating renewable energy projects and rising demand from data-intensive industries, even as global issuance softened in 2025, according to Dutch financial giant ING.

ING's latest Sustainable Finance Pulse showed global sustainable finance issuance reached $1.231 trillion from January to September, down by 5.2 percent from $1.298 trillion in the same period last year.

Despite the moderation, the Asia-Pacific region recorded $345 billion in issuance from January to September, extending a growth streak that began in 2021 and keeping the region on track for another record year.

Within this regional momentum, the Philippines has posted measurable gains, supported by policy targets and strong deal flow. ING said year-to-date sustainable finance issuances in the country have exceeded $10 billion, alongside commitments for around 10.2 gigawatts of renewable energy capacity secured through the government's Green Energy Auction program. *[Cont. page 2]*

Philippines emerging as key market for sustainable finance

[Cont. from page 1]

The country is also set to record its first annual decline in coal power generation in nearly two decades, marking a milestone in its energy transition.

"The global sustainable finance market's resilience creates a strong foundation for growth in our Philippine operations," said Jun Palanca, country manager for ING Philippines.

He noted rising client interest across multiple sectors, prompting the bank to expand its local expertise and product offerings.

"ING Philippines is committed to being a leading partner for companies driving the country's energy transition, supporting projects that deliver both environmental impact and commercial value," Palanca said.

The Department of Energy's Clean Energy Scenario aims to raise the share of renewables in the power generation mix to 35 percent by 2030 and 40 percent by 2040, targets that ING said are spurring both project development and sustainable finance activity.

The data center market in the Philippines is also experiencing robust growth. ING said the country is targeting one gigawatt of hyperscale data center capacity by 2026, with government policy encouraging operators to source power directly from renewable energy suppliers through the Green Energy Option Program.

Several leading facilities are already transitioning to 100 percent renewable energy operations, aligning digital infrastructure growth with climate objectives.

At the regional level, ING noted that sustainable finance has remained resilient despite global headwinds.

"Even against a backdrop of geopolitical uncertainty and shifting policy signals, sustainable finance has proven remarkably resilient," Deepali Bhargava, head of research and chief economist for ING Asia Pacific, said.

She added that corporates are pushing ahead with decarbonization while the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence and data centers is driving fresh demand for clean energy, keeping sustainable finance central to funding the transition beyond 2025.

Source: https://www.philstar.com/business/2025/12/18/2495114/philippines-emerging-key-market-sustainable-finance

'Minimally disruptive' EDSA rehabilitation to start Dec.24

December 17, 2025 | Ashley Erika O. Jose | BusinessWorld

THE Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) said it will begin rehabilitating Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA) on Dec. 24.

PHILIPPINE STAR/MIGUEL DE GUZMAN

"This new plan is entirely different from the original plan. We have worked to find a better way for the (EDSA rehabilitation) project. It is important to begin this project; we can assure the public that this will only cause minimal disruption," Public Works Secretary Vivencio B. Dizon said at a briefing on Wednesday.

The DPWH, together with the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA), and the Department of Transportation (DoTr) presented the revised plan for the EDSA rebuild, featuring a project timetable of eight months from the original target of two years.

The revised plan is divided into two phases and is expected to be completed by May 31, 2026, Mr. Dizon said, adding that the project cost is now estimated at P6 billion from the earlier P17-billion quote.

The first phase of the project covers all reblocking works and asphalt overlay of subway lanes both for northbound and southbound. This will be a round-the-clock construction work beginning Dec. 24 and ending on Jan. 5, 2026.

The construction work for the second phase will only be during 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. starting Jan. 5, 2026 until May 31, 2025, Mr. Dizon said. *[Cont. page 3]*

'Minimally disruptive' EDSA rehabilitation to start Dec.24

[Cont. from page 2]

During the second phase of the project, DPWH will carry out asphalt overlay lane by lane for both northbound and southbound sections during the working week, with Friday to Sunday devoted to asphalt overlay and reblocking of one lane per direction.

Mr. Dizon said the DPWH will use stone mastic asphalt, which he said is more durable and involves less maintenance than traditional asphalt.

"We will be using new asphalt technology. (In the original) plan, we were supposed to use traditional asphalt. I think this new technology has not been used on our national roads yet," Mr. Dizon said.

The original EDSA rehabilitation plan had been scheduled to begin in June 2025, for completion by 2027.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. had rejected the original timeline as too disruptive, citing the outsized impact of the repairs on commuters, motorists, and the broader economy.

This rehabilitation will be the highway's first major rehabilitation since 1980. Around 437,000 vehicles use EDSA every day.

"I am confident DPWH can do this well within their timeline. They have more than enough experience in scheduling these kinds of repair activities which should include all possible unforeseen kinks that might happen," Nigel Paul C. Villarete, senior adviser on public-private partnerships at the technical advisory group Libra Konsult, Inc. said via Viber.

"There are days (in December) when there is no work or classes, which the DPWH can maximize especially the preliminary preparation works," Mr. Villarete said, noting that such work can be undertaken gradually to ensure commuters are not presented with drastic changes to driving conditions.

"It is the abrupt shift which affects commuters; most traffic congestion usually eases out as it tries to redistribute over time and space," he said.

MMDA Chairman Romando S. Artes said the agency will retain the current number coding scheme, abandoning an earlier plan to implement a 24-hour odd-even scheme for private vehicles along EDSA.

Under the previous EDSA rehabilitation plan, the Department of Transportation had requested tollway operators to waive their tolls for some segments.

Transportation Acting Secretary Giovanni Z. Lopez said there is no need to seek a waiver of tolls, noting that roads will remain passable because no disruptions are expected during the EDSA rebuild.

"The good thing is we are expecting to deploy Dalian trains (on the MRT-3 commuter rail line) by December," he said.

A 2018 Japan International Cooperation Agency study estimated the economic cost of road congestion in Metro Manila at around P3.5 billion a day.

Metro Manila roads were ranked the 14th most congested in the world, with an average travel time of 32 minutes for an average 10-kilometer distance, according to the latest edition of the TomTom Traffic Index.

Globalinks Securities and Stocks, Inc. Head of Sales Trading Toby Allan C. Arce said the EDSA rehabilitation is likely to have short-term disruptive impact on businesses along the avenue, particularly malls, restaurants, and entertainment venues that depend heavily on foot traffic and ease of access.

"Even if construction activity is scaled down during the holidays, the signaling effect alone — lane closures, rerouting, and traffic advisories — could deter casual shoppers and diners, especially those coming from outside immediate catchment areas," Mr. Arce said via Viber.

The rehabilitation of EDSA is ultimately expected to be positive for EDSA-facing businesses, he said.

"If execution is disciplined and timelines are credible, improved road quality, smoother traffic flow, and safer pedestrian conditions would enhance accessibility and dwell time once works are completed," Mr. Arce said.

Meanwhile, Mr. Dizon said the DPWH is also fine-tuning the plan for the Guadalupe bridge rehabilitation, which he said "will not happen until we have a detour bridge. The detour bridge will start early 2026; once it is completed, we can rehabilitate the Guadalupe bridge," Mr. Dizon said.

Source: https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/12/17/719633/minimally-disruptive-edsa-rehabilitation-to-start-dec-24/

Ecozones seen to rebound, breach P311-billion mark — PEZA

December 17, 2025 | Andrea E. San Juan | BusinessMirror

The 275-hectare Cavite Economic Zone or Cavite Export Processing Zone in Rosario, Cavite.

PHILIPPINE economic zones are expected to make a comeback as investments that could infuse the economic zones are seen to breach the P300-billion mark next year, nearing the record-high investments approved in 2011, according to the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (Peza).

"It is our aspiration that, if not this year, we will breach the P300-billion mark by 2026—bringing us back to the heyday of Peza when we were approving an average of P290 billion in annual investments during the 2011 to 2015 period," Peza Director General Tereso O. Panga said during Peza's 30th Anniversary and Investors Recognition Night on Monday.

The Peza chief expressed such confidence after he noted that the investment promotion agency has not only recovered from the downward spiral in ecozone investments recorded from 2016 to 2021 but has also achieved its highest investment approvals in the past seven years.

"We're traveling to the US to meet with another big-ticket investor in the first week of January to discuss about their big-ticket investment to start the year with a bang," Panga told reporters on the sidelines of the event on Monday night.

The highest investment pledges recorded by Peza was during the administration of former President Benigno S. Aquino III.

As such, he said: "That's why we said this will bring us back to the heydays of Peza. But we're hoping and praying it's going to be an upward, consistent trajectory."

Explaining the trend of the investment approvals within the ecozones, Panga said: "It's been increasing," adding, "These investors are investing in the future more than the present."

"That means they have their trust and confidence, huge trust and confidence in current leadership. And that eventually we will surpass all these troubles besetting us now," added Panga.

As 2025 comes to a close, Panga reported that the Peza Board has already approved P238 billion in investments as of December 12,2025.

This is P12 billion short of this year's lower-end target of P250 billion, but Panga stressed: "We're getting some applications still."

In fact, Panga revealed that at least four projects may still be approved by Peza before the year ends.

"These are manufacturing [firms] and some of these are coming in new. There's one American, some are Japanese. I cannot name yet unless they actually file their application into Tourism, which is another big-ticket investment. This time, it's Ultra Luxury Tourism brand," the Peza chief also noted.

With the P238-billion investments approved by Peza as of December 12, it has already surpassed last year's P214.18 billion in investments.

The amount of investments greenlighted by Peza in 2024 is 21.89 percent up compared to the P175.71 billion in 2023.

In his speech during the Investors Recognition Night, Panga said Peza has generated over P4.5 trillion in cumulative investments since its establishment in 1995, created more than 1.81 million direct and quality jobs, and contributed over $1.12 trillion in exports.

"We managed to transform wastelands into industrial hubs, sleepy towns into bustling central business districts, and rural communities into thriving new growth areas—driving both local and national development," the Peza chief underscored.

Source: https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/12/17/ecozones-seen-to-rebound-breach-%e2%82%b1311-billion-mark-peza/

A call for a transparent and fair BIR audit program

December 17, 2025 | Euney Marie Mata-Perez | The Manila Times

The Manila Times®

THERE has been so much noise lately on the Bureau of Internal Revenue's (BIR) issuance of letters of authority (LOAs) to taxpayers, particularly when these cover several years, resulting in taxpayers having to attend and defend assessments involving multiple years all at the same time.

There is no doubt that the Commissioner of Internal Revenue (CIR) or his duly authorized representatives are authorized to issue LOAs in the exercise of the CIR's power to examine any taxpayer and assess the correct amount of tax. This power is enshrined in the National Internal Revenue Code (Tax Code). The issuance of a LOA in order to clothe revenue examiners with the authority to examine and audit books of accounts is an essential step. In numerous decisions, it has been held that the failure to issue a valid LOA violates the sacrosanct right of taxpayers to due process.

There are basic requirements in order for a LOA to be deemed validly issued. The LOA must be in writing and signed by the CIR himself or his duly authorized representatives, the revenue examiners must be specified and if there is a change of examiner, new LOAs must be issued, the LOA should cover only one taxable year and the LOAs should be properly served. Only the CIR, deputy commissioner, assistant commissioner/head revenue executive assistants (for large taxpayers), and regional directors are generally authorized to issue LOAs.

However, the bigger question is how are taxpayers selected for audit investigation and being subject to LOAs? Is there risk profiling? Is there prioritization?

The BIR supposedly adopts and implements a program that sets down the rules in prioritizing audits. The most recent issuance, as far as we know, is Revenue Memorandum Order (RMO) 6-2023. In this RMO, the BIR reiterated the rule that, in general, all taxpayers are considered possible candidates for audit and there are mandatory cases for audit. These mandatory cases include transactions where an audit is required as a condition precedent for the issuance of tax clearance and in processing of claims for tax credit or refund. The RMO, however, recognizes that the CIR may issue LOAs on "priority targets" for audit or investigation

How are targets then prioritized and identified?

Theoretically, RMO 6-2023 recognizes that "risks" should be considered in selecting priority audit targets. It provides that priority audit cases are those electronically selected by the Internal Revenue Integrated System (IRIS)-Audit Module based on prescribed selection criteria pursuant to identified risks that need immediate action. The criteria should make use of information from filed tax returns and other pertinent tax information available in BIR systems and the selection codes for these are already embedded in the said module.

However, the issuance of numerous LOAs gives the taxpayers the impression that the standards or selection may not have been properly conveyed to taxpayers, or more so, may not have been properly observed and implemented.

In prioritizing a target, the BIR should be transparent and sensible. BIR examiners cannot repeatedly audit compliant and large taxpayers just because they want to meet their revenue targets. Prioritization should mean doing risk analysis.

As a reprieve to compliant or low-risk taxpayers, the BIR should consider granting taxpayers an audit reprieve.

Being audited by the BIR simultaneously for periods covering several years and being served several LOAs in a span of a few months can be very taxing to taxpayers. Certainly, it does not contribute to ease of doing business. This is especially so since assessments are presumed correct and thus taxpayers will end up defending themselves against assessments that, many times, are based on presumptions and not solid facts.

In addition to formulating and implementing a sound and transparent audit program, BIR examiners should also conduct audit procedures that are based on acceptable auditing standards. For instance, they cannot just make sweeping assumptions that all credits to a revenue account are income recorded. They should go into the essence and reasons for various entries, which sometimes include reversals due to regular system adjustments. Also, the common practice of just comparing audited financial statements and tax returns and then concluding alleged deficiencies, should be revisited.

In other words, the other call is for the BIR to revisit and review its audit manual and procedures.

BIR data shows that collections from assessments, as compared to those from voluntary compliance, is low. The BIR annual report for 2024 shows that voluntary payments were the primary source of 2024 revenues at P2.772 trillion or 97.19 percent of total revenues. Preliminary or final assessments and delinquent accounts took up the remaining P71 billion (2.5 percent) and P9 billion (0.31 percent), respectively. *[Cont. page 6]*

A call for a transparent and fair BIR audit program
[Cont. from page 5]

The BIR should exert more effort on improving voluntary compliance and in going after the real tax evaders or high-risk taxpayers. It should take care of compliant taxpayers and grant them reprieve from repeated year-on-year audits. All of these can be achieved in the formulation of a good audit program, and by making selection criteria risk-based and transparent, as well as by adopting procedures that are acceptable and sound. This will make BIR audits more credible and not just be viewed as a tool to harass taxpayers or a vehicle for corruption.

Source: https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/12/18/business/top-business/a-call-for-a-transparent-and-fair-bir-audit-program/2245447

Senate passes CADENA Act to put budget, gov't records on blockchain
December 16, 2025 | Jean Mangaluz | Philstar.com

Sen. Bam Aquino speaks during a Senate hearing on Thursday, Dec. 11, 2025.

MANILA, Philippines — The Senate approved the Citizen Access and Disclosure of Expenditures for National Accountability (CADENA) Act, a bill moving to place government budget records on a blockchain to improve transparency measures.

The bill had been certified as a priority legislation by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in a bid to regain public trust after a massive corruption scandal was uncovered at the Department of Public Works and Highways.

The measure hurdled the third and final reading on Monday, December 15, with 17 senators voting in the affirmative, and with no negative votes or abstentions.

Sen. Bam Aquino, the principal author of the bill, said the heightened public demand for transparency following the infrastructure scandal helped fast-track the measure's passage in the Senate.

"If you look at this transparency measure, kung hindi nangyayari iyong nangyayari ngayon na investigation, palagay ko walang chance iyan. Pero dahil iyong taumbayan nakatutok dito ngayon na may mangyaring pagbabago sa mga sistema na nagdulot ng ganitong klaseng corruption, may tsansa iyang mapasa," Aquino said.

(If you look at this transparency measure, if the investigations were not happening, I think it does not have a chance. But because the people are focused on seeing changes in the system that caused this kind of corruption, it had a chance of passing.)

What the CADENA Act requires

The CADENA Act would mandate all government agencies to upload and regularly maintain all their budget-related documents on a digital platform secured through blockchain technology.

These include contracts, budget allocations, material costs, procurement records and other related documents.

The files will then be made accessible to the public, and cannot be tampered with. Government officials who fail to comply may face administrative and criminal penalties.

The House of Representatives' version of the bill is still pending at the committee level, despite being certified as priority legislation.

Aquino urged the lower house to pass the CADENA Act as soon as possible to help eliminate corruption.

Source: https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/12/16/2494490/senate-passes-cadena-act-put-budget-govt-records-blockchain

House approves bill amending bank secrecy law on second reading
December 18, 2025 | Kenneth Christiane L. Basilio | BusinessWorld

THE HOUSE of Representatives on Monday approved on second reading a bill amending the Philippines' decades-old bank secrecy law, allowing the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) to look into the accounts of bank officers and employees involved in illegal financial activities. *[Cont. page 7]*

House approves bill amending bank secrecy law on second reading

[Cont. from page 6]

In a voice vote, congressmen approved House Bill No. 6707 that would "lift the barriers in the effective investigation and prosecution of corrupt or illegal financial actions of stockholders, owners, directors, trustees, officers or employees of entities supervised and regulated by the BSP."

BW FILE PHOTO

The bill also seeks to curb tax evasion, money laundering, and other financial crimes, and address the unintended consequences of bank secrecy. It also aims to align Philippine laws with international standards on transparency in financial transactions.

Under the bill, the BSP is allowed to look into bank deposits of the stockholder, owner, director, trustee, officer or employee of a BSP-regulated entity, as well as any of the conspirators of the person involved but only if the Monetary Board determines there is "reasonable ground" that fraud, serious irregularity or unlawful activity is being committed.

"The authority of the BSP to inquire and examine deposits shall also apply in the course of its investigation of closed banks," the bill stated.

Under the measure, the BSP is also allowed to examine the foreign currency deposits in banks operating in the Philippines, including offshore branches of domestic banks, but not in nonstock savings and loan associations that serve only their members.

The bill defines deposits as money received by a bank for a commercial, checking, savings, time or thrift account as evidenced by a passbook, certificate of deposit or other evidence of deposits.

"The results of the inquiry or examinations conducted by the BSP shall be for its exclusive use and shall not be made available to any person or entity, whether public or private, except to the Securities and Exchange Commission, Philippine Deposit Insurance Corp., Anti-Money Laundering Council, Department of Justice and the Courts," the bill said
.
The measure includes a safe harbor clause that exempts banks or financial institutions and their directors, officers or employees from any action, claim, demand or liability for acts done in compliance with a BSP order on the inquiry and examination of bank deposits.

It also forbids the use of the bank secrecy law for persecution, harassment, or hindering business competition.

Violators of the proposed law may face imprisonment of two to 10 years, and fines ranging from P50,000 to P2 million, or both, depending on the court's decision.

"Bank secrecy is also the remaining obstacle to implementing a general tax amnesty," Albay Rep. Adrian E. Salceda, vice-chairman of the House Banks Committee, told *BusinessWorld* in a Viber message in Filipino.

"The Department of Finance and other agencies fear that if a general tax amnesty is granted while absolute bank secrecy remains, those who avail of it will find it easy to hide their assets," he added.

The measure is among President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.'s legislative wishlist for the 20^{th} Congress. A similar bill cleared the House in the previous Congress but failed to advance in the Senate.

In a report for its Article IV Consultation with the Philippines released earlier this week, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said the Philippines should continue to prioritize advancing efforts to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.

"Amendments to the Bank Deposits Secrecy Laws in line with international good practices should be pursued to enhance the BSP's supervisory powers and strengthen AML/CFT (anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism) supervisory effectiveness," the IMF said.

"Strengthening the AML/CFT frameworks is also important to support broader anti-corruption efforts and effectively combat the laundering of proceeds of corruption," it added.

In February, the Philippines exited the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) "gray list" or the list of jurisdictions under increased monitoring for money laundering.

The FATF is set to reassess the country in 2027, where it will verify whether the country's anti-money laundering measures are being sustained and still in place.

Source: https://www.bworldonline.com/top-stories/2025/12/18/719638/house-approves-bill-amending-bank-secrecy-law-on-second-reading/

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