



# 필리핀 한국 상공회의소 뉴스 KOREAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PHILIPPINES NEWSLETTER



March 2026 Issue | Vol. 19

## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- **Asean eyes new trade dynamics amid global uncertainty** — page 1
- **Meralco taps South Korean expertise for early-stage nuclear project dev't** — page 2
- **Manufacturing sector seen vulnerable in 4-day word week** — page 2-3
- **Travel tax abolition bill hurdles House committee** — page 3-4
- **Asian economies move to limit Mideast war impact** — page 4-6
- **Philippine bank lending growth slowed to 9.3% in January** — page 6
- **PEZA investments for early 2026 drop P35B** — page 6-7

## UPCOMING EVENT

- **[March 23, 2026] KCCP's 31st Annual General Membership Meeting** — page 8

## Asean eyes new trade dynamics amid global uncertainty

March 10, 2026 | Logan Kal-El M. Zapanta | Philippine Daily Inquirer

MANILA, Philippines – Geopolitical upheavals and trade wars may force Southeast Asian economies to explore new trading dynamics as the global trade environment grows increasingly unpredictable, a trade official said on Monday.

Benedict Uy, executive director of the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) Foreign Trade Service Corps, said conflicts in key regions and the weaponization of trade policies had pushed countries to reassess longstanding economic partnerships.

"The conflict in the Middle East, the ongoing trade war between the US and China, the weaponization of tariffs, and the changing dynamics between former trading partners are just some of the things that have made the global landscape an unpredictable environment," Uy said.

"With such disruptions stifling progress, the same can be viewed as opportunities to capitalize and develop new trading dynamics," he added.

As such, these issues are expected to be discussed at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Business Environment Forum on Wednesday, which the Philippines is hosting with the Asian Development Bank.

## Regional integration

The forum will be held on the sidelines of the Asean Economic Ministers' Retreat this week, one of the first landmark events under the Philippines' Asean chairship for trade and investment engagements.

Uy said the forum would bring together ministers, senior government officials and private sector leaders to discuss ways to improve the region's business environment. It is meant to complement ministerial-level policy discussions.

At the forum, business leaders are expected to focus on improving ease of doing business within Asean, strengthening public-private collaboration and expanding the use of digital tools in government processes.

Strengthening regional integration of trade and investment is expected to be another key topic.

"Importante na malakas ang economy ng Asean because that's our our only way to shield us from all these global tensions and issues," Uy told reporters. "Kung 'yong intra-Asean trade and investment is strong, then our exporters, our companies are really doing good already."

Intraregional investments within Asean rose 45 percent to \$31 billion in 2023, according to the bloc's latest investment report, making it the second-largest investment source for the region after the US.

In 2024, Asean's total trade in goods reached \$3.8 trillion. Asean economies were the largest export market for goods within the bloc, accounting for 22.5 percent of total exports, while also ranking as the second-largest source of imports at 20.3 percent.

Trade within the region also takes place largely tariff-free under the Asean Trade in Goods Agreement, which has eliminated tariffs on 99.86 percent of products traded among member states.

Source: <https://business.inquirer.net/578397/asean-eyes-new-trade-dynamics-amid-global-uncertainty>



Benedict Uy —LOGAN KAL-EL M. ZAPANTA

## Meralco taps South Korean expertise for early-stage nuclear project dev't

March 10, 2026 | Sheldeen Joy Talavera | BusinessWorld



(L-R) KEXIM Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Kiyoon Hwang, Meralco Chairman and CEO Manuel V. Pangilinan, and KHNP CEO Dae Wook Chun. — MERALCO

MANILA ELECTRIC CO. (Meralco) has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power (KHNP) and the Export-Import Bank of Korea (KEXIM) to collaborate on the development of nuclear energy projects in the Philippines.

The partnership aims to leverage South Korean expertise to evaluate the feasibility of nuclear power through a multi-faceted approach.

Under the agreement, the three organizations will conduct joint discussions on reactor design and engineering, exchange technical and regulatory information, and work to “strengthen the Philippines’ nuclear legal and institutional frameworks.”

The scope of the MoU also covers early-stage project development, including “public acceptance initiatives, project planning, and site selection studies.”

The companies will focus on business and financial modeling, with KEXIM specifically exploring “potential financing structures and credit facilities” for Meralco’s prospective projects.

Meralco Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Manuel V. Pangilinan highlighted the strategic importance of the collaboration, saying “Partnering with KHNP and KEXIM gives us access to proven global expertise and enables us to study technology, business models, and financing options with greater depth. This MoU marks an early but consequential step in this important process.”

He also said that nuclear energy is a critical component of the company’s long-term strategy to ensure energy security. “Nuclear energy is a way to diversify our portfolio and reinforce energy security, while offering a degree of insulation from fuel market fluctuations,” he said.

He added that Meralco’s initiative is “complementary to the Philippine government’s efforts to lay the groundwork for its nuclear power program” as the utility provider assesses how the technology can best contribute to its future operations.

KHNP, a subsidiary of Korea Electric Power Corp., is currently the largest power generation company in South Korea, while KEXIM serves as the nation’s state-owned official export credit agency.

Meralco is the country’s biggest private electric distribution utility, serving 39 cities and 72 municipalities. It also has interests in power generation through wholly owned units and equity stakes.

Its controlling shareholder, Beacon Electric Asset Holdings, Inc., is partly owned by PLDT Inc. Hastings Holdings, Inc., a unit of PLDT Beneficial Trust Fund subsidiary MediaQuest Holdings, Inc., has an interest in *BusinessWorld* through the Philippine Star Group, which it controls.

*Source: <https://www.bworldonline.com/corporate/2026/03/10/735093/meralco-taps-south-korean-expertise-for-early-stage-nuclear-project-devt/>*

## Manufacturing sector seen vulnerable in 4-day work week

March 09, 2026 | Bless Aubrey Ogerio | BusinessMirror

BUSINESS groups have raised concerns about the potential impact of a four-day workweek on the manufacturing sector, saying production-driven industries face operational realities that differ from service-oriented businesses.

Starting Monday, March 9, government agencies will temporarily shift to a four-day workweek as part of energy conservation measures amid uncertainties tied to tensions in the Middle East.

The Federation of Philippine Industries (FPI) said any change in work arrangements

should be carefully studied to avoid disruptions to production output, delivery schedules and supply chain operations.



[Cont. page 3]

## Manufacturing sector seen vulnerable in 4-day work week

[Cont. from page 2]

The group noted that productivity and cost considerations would be key factors in assessing proposals to adopt a shorter workweek.

“The impact may differ significantly for manufacturing, where continuous production requirements are a central consideration,” FPI chairperson Elizabeth Lee said in a statement.

“Possible effects on supply chain stability, delivery timelines, and competitiveness relative to regional peers should be thoughtfully assessed,” she added.

For Lee, pilot programs and data-driven evaluation could help assess the feasibility of broader implementation.

Service-oriented and knowledge-based sectors, she added, may be better positioned to adopt flexible or hybrid work arrangements depending on their operational needs.

On the other hand, the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) echoed similar concerns. The manufacturing sector, for them, could be among those most affected by reduced workdays.

In a statement, the PCCI said it supports the intent of the measure to promote energy efficiency, cut operating costs and support employee well-being, but stressed the need for a balanced and evidence-based approach that takes into account the conditions of different industries.

“For manufacturing, we have been operating on limited resources and further reducing the number of work days could affect our commitments,” PCCI president Ferdinand Ferrer said.

“We are not against the implementation of flexible work arrangements, but there should be proper consultation with various stakeholders and [decisions must be] supported with data to ensure that industries with specific operational requirements will not be adversely affected,” he added.

The PCCI expressed willingness to work closely with policymakers, labor groups and industry stakeholders to ensure beneficial work arrangements.

The country remains vulnerable to energy disruptions as it imports most of its crude oil from the Middle East and still relies partly on oil-fired power plants for electricity.

Globally, several countries have tested compressed or reduced workweeks through pilot programs. Within Southeast Asia, however, no country has adopted a universal four-day workweek across all sectors.

Image credits: [Vetre Antanaviciute-meskauskiene](#) | [Dreamstime.com](#)

Source: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2026/03/09/manufacturing-sector-seen-vulnerable-in-4-day-work-week/>

## Travel tax abolition bill hurdles House committee

March 09, 2026 | Kenneth Christiane L. Basilio | BusinessWorld



STOCK PHOTO | Image by L.Filipe C.Sousa from Unsplash

A HOUSE of Representatives committee approved on Monday a measure to abolish the travel tax, citing the need to relieve the burden on travelers.

The House Ways and Means Committee approved an unnumbered substitute bill consolidating six measures seeking to remove the travel tax, a decades-old levy imposed under a Presidential Decree that had been designed to curb overseas travel at a time when the Philippines was seeking to conserve foreign exchange and promote domestic tourism.

The substitute bill will now head to the House Appropriations Committee, which will evaluate the measure’s funding provisions before being discussed on the House floor.

“We cannot allow our system of collecting funds for the government’s important programs to become regressive,” Marikina Rep. Miro S. Quimbo, who heads the House Ways and Means Committee, told the panel. “Our tax system must remain progressive.” [Cont. page 4]

## Travel tax abolition bill hurdles House committee

[Cont. from page 2]

The proposal to cut the travel tax, which collects P1,620 from economy class air passengers and P2,7000 from first class passengers flying overseas, was designated a priority bill by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.

The levy was first imposed by Republic Act No. 1478 in 1956 and later amended through Presidential Decree No. 1183 in 1977. Exempt from travel tax are overseas Filipino workers, Filipino permanent residents overseas who stayed less than a year in the Philippines, and children aged two years and below.

Legislators have overwhelmingly backed moves to scrap the travel tax, saying the levy has outlived its purpose and now hampers travel for Filipinos, despite concerns from government agencies that rely on it as a steady source of funding.

“For flights scheduled on or after the date of effectivity, the collection authority shall immediately refund any previously paid travel taxes to the passenger,” according to the unnumbered substitute bill, a copy of which was obtained by *BusinessWorld*.

Under the current law, 50% of the proceeds from the travel tax collection go to the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority, with 40% earmarked for the Commission on Higher Education for tourism-related education programs. The National Commission for Culture and the Arts takes up the remaining 10%.

“The survival of these programs should not be dependent on the number of travelers or the amount of taxes that we collect from them,” Mr. Quimbo said. “They are far too important to be dependent on unpredictable numbers.”

The bill proposes that government agencies affected by the tax cut and whose projects may be jeopardized be funded through the national budget “to ensure the continuity of programs and projects previously funded by travel tax collections.”

*Source: <https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2026/03/09/735105/travel-tax-abolition-bill-hurdles-house-committee/>*

## Asian economies move to limit Mideast war impact

March 09, 2026 | By Agence France Presse | Manila Standard

Manila, Philippines—Faced with soaring prices and disruptions to their oil and gas supplies, Asian countries heavily dependent on fossil fuels from the war-struck Gulf are moving to protect their domestic markets.

Here are some of the measures being considered to limit the war’s impact:

### South Korea eyes price caps

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung has said the manufacturing powerhouse, the world’s eighth-largest consumer of crude oil, is moving towards instituting fuel price caps to alleviate pressure on the country’s energy supply.

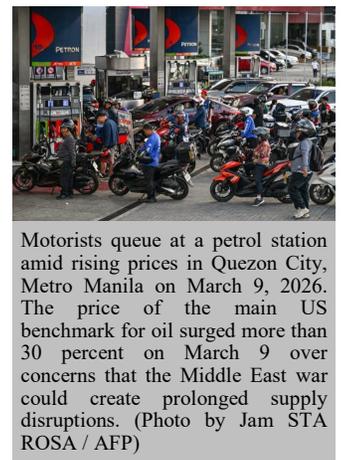
“We should swiftly introduce and decisively implement a price ceiling system for petroleum products that have recently seen excessive price increases,” he told a Monday cabinet meeting.

His chief of staff said Friday the country had already secured the “emergency delivery” of four million barrels of crude oil from ports in the United Arab Emirates.

### Vietnam moves to slash tariffs

Vietnam has prepared a draft decree that would slash import tax rates to zero on certain petroleum products in a bid to “stabilize the domestic market,” its finance ministry has said.

Current tariffs of 10 percent on unleaded gasoline and seven percent on diesel, aviation fuel and kerosene would all be temporarily removed under the decree. [Cont. page 5]



Motorists queue at a petrol station amid rising prices in Quezon City, Metro Manila on March 9, 2026. The price of the main US benchmark for oil surged more than 30 percent on March 9 over concerns that the Middle East war could create prolonged supply disruptions. (Photo by Jam STA ROSA / AFP)

## Asian economies move to limit Mideast war impact

[Cont. from page 4]

### Japan may tap strategic stocks

According to Japanese news agency Kyodo, Tokyo is considering drawing on its national oil reserves to protect itself against possible prolonged supply disruptions—a measure being demanded by the country’s refiners.

The government said last week that Japan had stocks equivalent to 254 days of crude oil consumption—including reserves held by the private sector—and three weeks of liquefied natural gas (LNG) consumption.

### Philippines keeps civil servants home

Government departments in the Philippines, a country heavily dependent on oil imports, began adopting a four-day working week Monday to cope with soaring fuel prices.

President Ferdinand Marcos has also ordered all government agencies to reduce their fuel and electricity consumption by 10 to 20 percent, while police have warned against hoarding as queues were seen forming at some petrol stations.

### India gambles on Russia

India has been pushing ahead with imports of Russian oil, after the United States issued a temporary waiver allowing New Delhi to buy Moscow’s oil if it was currently stranded at sea.

An Indian government source, however, said that New Delhi does not need any country’s permission to source the fuel from Russia, its largest crude supplier.

The source also said India was “well stocked” with more than 250 million barrels of crude and petroleum products to “handle short-term disruptions.”

The country’s petroleum ministry has reassured the public that India “has sufficient energy reserves,” without ruling out potential measures to mitigate the impact.

### Taiwan locks down LNG supplies

Taiwan, a country dominated by the tech industry and highly dependent on hydrocarbon imports, is moving swiftly to compensate for missing LNG from Qatar.

“We need to organise the supply of about 22 shipments of LNG for March and April,” economic affairs minister Kung Ming-hsin said Monday, while noting 20 of those shipments had already been secured.

The government was also seeking to keep prices “as stable as possible” for consumers via “a fuel pricing formula” that would take into account neighboring markets, he said.

### China suspends exports

According to financial outlet Bloomberg News, China, the world’s second-biggest economy, has asked its main refiners to suspend exports of diesel and gasoline to prioritise domestic needs.

The Middle East accounted for about 57 percent of China’s direct imports of crude transported by sea in 2025, according to the analysis firm Kpler.

### Indonesia warns subsidies won’t last

Indonesia, under pressure due to a fiscal policy that worries the markets, warned of the limits of its room for maneuver.

“If the budget can no longer cope with (oil price increases), there is no other solution than to share... the burden with the population,” Finance Minister Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa said Friday.

“This means that fuel prices will have to rise and the budget can no longer support” increased energy subsidies, he said.

### Cambodia ups prices at the pump

Cambodia’s commerce ministry set retail fuel prices higher for a three-day period to Tuesday, noting the increase was due to the spike in global oil prices. [Con. Page 6]

## Asian economies move to limit Mideast war impact

[Cont. from page 5]

The Southeast Asian country, which relies completely on imported diesel and petroleum for its consumer fuel needs, has enough reserves to last for about three weeks, its energy minister has said.

### Myanmar rations, but holds prices steady

Since Saturday, Myanmar's military government has enforced rules to ration fuel, requiring half of all private vehicles to stay off the roads each day, depending on their licence plate numbers.

AFP reporters in Yangon have seen queues outside some petrol stations and restrictions on the amount of fuel sold to each driver, but the junta has only allowed modest price hikes so far.

### Thailand halts exports

Thailand said last week it had secured two months' worth of oil supplies but was suspending exports to conserve its holdings.

The government also capped the price of diesel at just under 30 baht (\$0.94) per litre for a 15-day period.

*Source: <https://manilastandard.net/news/world/314713732/asian-economies-move-to-limit-mideast-war-impact.html>*

## Philippine bank lending growth slowed to 9.3% in January

March 10, 2026 | :Ian Nicolas P. Cigaral | Philippine Daily Inquirer



MANILA, Philippines – Bank lending in the Philippines expanded at a slightly slower pace at the start of 2026, signaling moderating credit growth even as consumer borrowing remained robust.

Preliminary data from the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) showed loans extended by universal and commercial banks rose 9.3 percent in January from a year earlier, easing from the revised 9.6 percent growth recorded in December.

Credit extended to businesses – which accounts for the bulk of bank lending – grew 8.2 percent in January.

Meanwhile, consumer loans to residents expanded 21.3 percent from a year earlier, slightly slower than the revised 21.5-percent growth in December.

Household borrowing includes credit card debt, motor vehicle loans and general-purpose salary loans.

The central bank closely tracks bank lending as it serves as a key transmission channel for monetary policy.

Looking ahead, the central bank said it will ensure domestic liquidity and bank lending conditions remain aligned with its mandates of maintaining price stability and safeguarding the financial system.

*Source: <https://business.inquirer.net/578483/philippine-bank-lending-growth-slowed-to-9-3-in-january>*

## PEZA investments for early 2026 drop P35B

March 10, 2026 | Bless Aubrey Ogerio | BusinessMirror

INVESTMENT approvals by the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) fell by 33 percent in the first two months of 2026, totaling P35.37 billion across 52 new and expansion projects.

The investment promotion agency said the approved investments were lower than the P52.93 billion recorded in the same period last year, when 39 projects were approved.

[Cont. page 7]



PEZA Director General Tereso Panga

## PEZA investments for early 2026 drop P35B

[Cont. from page 6]

Despite the decline in value, PEZA said the projects approved from January to February are expected to generate more than 5,049 direct jobs for Filipinos and produce projected exports amounting to \$10.442 billion.

Most of the approved projects are in manufacturing, with 20 investments, followed by ecozone development with 12 and information technology and business process management (IT-BPM) with seven, among other sectors.

Leading sources of investments included South Korea, Indonesia, the British Virgin Islands, China and Japan.

For February alone, the PEZA Board approved 34 new and expansion projects amounting to P22.505 billion in investments. The amount was slightly lower than the P22.78 billion recorded in February last year, although the number of projects increased from 26.

The February approvals are projected to generate \$10.382 billion in exports and create 4,044 direct jobs.

Of the 34 projects approved during the month, 13 are export manufacturing ventures, five are IT-BPM projects, five involve facilities development, two are in logistics, one is a domestic market project, one is tourism-related and seven are ecozone development initiatives.

These projects will be located across several regions, including Metro Manila, Calabarzon, Central Luzon, Cagayan Valley, Central and Western Visayas and the Ilocos Region.

PEZA also reported that three major ventures are expected to bring in a combined P18.367 billion in investments through upcoming projects in Bulacan, Pampanga and Tarlac.

PEZA director general Tereso Panga said the agency remains cautiously optimistic about achieving double-digit growth in investment approvals this year despite global uncertainties.

"We remain focused on opening new frontiers in ecozone development by broadening industry participation, deepening regional expansion, and strengthening the overall competitiveness of our investment ecosystem," Panga said.

For her part, Trade Secretary Maria Cristina Roque, who also serves as chair of the PEZA Board, emphasized the need to accelerate the expansion of economic zones to attract more high-value and export-oriented investments and support regional growth.

Regarding recent geopolitical tensions, PEZA said global developments could affect investment flows in the coming months. The agency also cited volatility in global energy markets as a potential risk to supply chains and investor sentiment.

The agency noted that escalating conflicts in the Middle East and other regions have pushed up global oil prices and created logistical challenges that may affect export-oriented industries.

"The Authority is closely monitoring global economic developments and stands ready to recalibrate its investment targets if necessary to reflect evolving market conditions," Panga said.

"Our focus remains on sustaining investor confidence while ensuring that our projections remain realistic and responsive to global economic shifts," he added.

The Philippines remains exposed to energy supply disruptions as it imports most of its crude oil from the Middle East and still relies partly on oil-fired power plants for electricity.

*Source: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2026/03/09/peza-investments-for-early-26-drop-to-%e2%82%b135b/>*

**[UPCOMING EVENT] KCCP's 31st Annual General Membership Meeting | March 23, 2026**



KCCP will hold its **31<sup>st</sup> Annual General Membership Meeting** on **March 23, 2026 (Monday) 5:30PM** at the **Ayala Ballroom, Makati Sports Club** located at L.P. Leviste corner Gallardo Sts., Salcedo Village, Makati City This event gathers KCCP's member companies, embassy officials, Korean and local partner organizations and other guests for this important event. KCCP is expecting 120-140 attendees.

The event is also open for sponsorships. For more information about the event and mileages for sponsorship, please feel free to call KCCP Secretariat at 8885-7342 or 0917-8015920 (c/o Ms. Chi and /or Ms. Sang)

**Contact Us**

**Korean Chamber of Commerce  
Philippines, Inc. (KCCP)**  
Unit 1104 Antel Corporate Center, 121  
Valero St., Salcedo Village, Makati City  
(02) 8885 7342 | (02) 8404 3099  
info@kccp.ph | www.kccp.ph

*This KCCP E-Newsletter is supported by:*

**200 MW Cebu CFBC Power Plant**



ENERGIZING LIVES,  
POWERING COMMUNITIES



**63.3MW Calatagan Solar Farm**