

Department of Energy prepares Visayas power supply augmentation

MANILA—The Department of Energy (DOE) through the Philippine Electricity Market Corp. (PEMC) is lining up preparations for the Visayas Supply Augmentation Auction (VSAA), particularly for the registration of participants. This move is pursuant to the provisional authority issued by the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) last April 13. The DOE sees the VSAA as one of possible ways to solve the power supply problem in the Visayas. The registration process will cover all preparatory steps leading up to the official launch of the VSAA," Energy Secretary Angelo T. Reyes said.

The participant registration is being administered by PEMC and has started this April.

"This registration process is designed to ensure readiness of the participants for the VSAA and covers the actual filing of application to take part in the program, prequalification of participants, as well as participant training and familiarization with the VSAA through a trial operation program," Reyes said.

The VSAA is the infrastructure that will be the backbone of all VSAA transactions. It is composed of a solver, participant web interface and associated database that will ensure all transactions made during the program are monitored, validated and subsequently settled.

PEMC has also ensured the accessibility of VSAA-related information and documents by devoting a section in the Wholesale Electricity Spot Market (WESM) website covering, among other important documents, the VSAA application forms and registration guide.

"Assuming sufficient level of registered participants, promulgation of VSAA rules and ERC approval of VSAA pricing and cost recovery mechanism and administration fees are achieved, the program is expected to commence immediately upon the approval of the ERC," PEMC acting president Melinda L. Ocampo said.

The WESM began commercial preparations in Luzon in June 2006.

It is a centralized venue for buyers and sellers to trade electricity as a commodity where its prices is based on actual use (demand) and availability (supply). (Philstar.com)

RP ranked one of world's best dive sites

THE Philippines was recently ranked and awarded by Japan's leading diving magazines as one of the world's top five diving areas.

The country also made it to the list of Top 10 Most Desirable Destination, Best Dive Resort (Bohol Tropics) and Favorite Dive Operator (Blue Coral, Cebu), according to a survey participated in by more than 50,000 Japanese dive enthusiasts.

Divers from Japan are seen to rise during the summer months as more vacation packages and even lower fares are being offered.

Survey voters included readers of top dive magazines in Japan namely; *Marine Diving*, *Travel Dive*, *Marine Photo* and *I love Diving*. These publications by Marine Art Co., Ltd., organizers of the 17th MDF, are best-selling magazines catering to serious divers in Japan.

Given at the recent 17th Marine Diving Fair (MDF) held in Tokyo, the largest diving fair in Asia, the MDF Awards are among the highly-acknowledged commendations for must-visit dive destinations in the world.

More than 65 countries representing various destinations,



Blue Coral Cebu

tourism boards, airlines, resorts, dive operators and other tourism-related companies were present in the 17th MDF, attracting close to 100,000 visitors.

"There are more than one million Japanese divers who annually travel worldwide returning to their familiar dive spots or in search of new locations. The country in gaining momentum in this niche activity signals our strong efforts in making people aware of the Philippines' diverse marine life that is worthy of every traveler's discovery," said Tourism Secretary Ace Durano.

Durano added the Department of Tourism (DOT) sees these achievements as a positive result of the promotional campaigns

specifically targeted for this market segment.

Undersecretary for Tourism Planning and Promotions Eduardo Jarque Jr. added, "The Philippine participation to the annual MDF wants to maintain and further the Philippines' popularity among the Japanese divers."

Bohol Tropics
"This is not the first time for the Philippines to win the award; we have always been in the Top 10 best dive destinations. The positive feedback we received affirms the country's standing as a premier dive destination."

Head of Team Japan, Director Benito Bengzon said, "The Philippines remains to be a favorite dive destination among the Japanese. For several years, Blue Coral Resort in Cebu has been voted as the number one Best Dive Operator."

This year, the Philippine delegation exhibit booth featured

a whale shark or 'butanding' backdrop and several sea water aquariums featuring small sea creatures found only in the Philippines, such as the multi-colored jelly fish.

Bengzon said "The Philippine participants are very happy with the outcome of the country's participation to the MDF. Optimism was evident despite the economic challenges, with their clients asking for return trips, and many prospective clients signifying strong interest."

Part of the Philippine delegation was Kasai Village Resort from Moalboal, popular for their expertise in taking divers around spectacular wrecks in Cebu.

General Manager Michael Pettersson said, "Moalboal is one of the oldest centers of diving in the country. The sites here are famous for the pygmy seahorse and frog fish, to name a few."

Kasai Village Resort will now be represented in Japan by Metropolitan Tours, one of Japan's biggest tour operators.

Japan named the other places of top 10 dive sites as Maldives, Palau, Ishigaki Island; Saipan, Okinawa Island, Zamami Island, French Polynesia, Mizako Island, and Guam. (PNA)

Miriam: Visiting Forces Agreement up for review

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she said.

Santiago said the CA should have given the Department of Foreign Affairs time to determine certain formalities that must first be undertaken before Smith could be allowed to leave the country.

US authorities pounced on the ruling that Smith could be released right away, she added.

Gov't knew of Smith departure—Kenney

US Ambassador Kristie Kenney said yesterday the Philippine government was informed through the Department of Foreign Affairs of the departure of Daniel Smith.

"The Philippine courts were the ones that had jurisdiction over this case so it is important to keep the DFA fully posted and to work with them at every stage," she said. "They were, of course, notified not only of the decision but of Daniel

Smith's departure from the country. We followed all the procedures of the VFA."

Kenney said Smith left the Philippines after receiving a copy of the Court of Appeals decision acquitting him of the crime of rape.

"The CA sent him a copy of the decision which called for his immediate release," she said.

Kenney said US Marine Corps Headquarters will determine what to do with Smith. He should be entitled to the same privacy given to Nicole "so they can rebuild their lives and move on."

Smith is now reunited with his family in the US, Kenney said.

Smith to leave Marines

Smith is expected to leave the US Marine Corps like the other US soldiers who were involved in the Subic rape case, his lawyer said.

"I think so," lawyer Jose Justiniano said when asked if Smith is expected to leave the service after he serving for more than four years.

Justiniano said Americans who join the military voluntarily are given four-year contracts and afterwards given the option to leave or continue their tours of duty.

Many join the service to get scholarships and other benefits, he added.

Justiniano said he did not even get a chance to say goodbye or talk with Smith before he flew to the US.

However, Smith sent an email to lawyer Joan de Venecia to express his "appreciation for the work of his lawyers," he added.

Justiniano said he is not hurt by the personal attacks that he defended an accused rapist of

a Filipina.

"It is the job of the lawyer to handle a case irrespective of race, nationality, religion, and social standing of his client," he said.

"I'm just doing my job, nothing personal, that's the way I handle my cases. I don't harbor any ill feelings towards my opponents.

"If you're carried away by your emotions, you will not be doing a good job, you have to be objective."

Justiniano is preparing to go to the US to relax and watch Manny Pacquiao's fight with Ricky Hatton in Las Vegas.

He bought a ticket for the big event at the MGM Grand on May 2 for \$600, he added.

Asked if he would like to join Pacquiao's legal team, he said: "I would be honored." ■



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