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BOC seeks to avoid port congestion with return of truck ban

- Bureau of Customs (BOC) coordinating with terminal operators and shipping lines to avert congestion at Manila ports with the re-imposition of the Metro Manila-wide truck ban
- The Customs Container Control Division of each port will strictly ensure empty containers are loaded out, while assessment personnel must immediately process release of laden containers to prevent pileups at the port
- From December 1 to 13, average yard utilization at Manila International Container Port was 75%

THE Bureau of Customs (BOC) is coordinating with terminal operators and shipping lines on averting the possible congestion of Manila ports now that the truck ban has been re-imposed in Metro Manila.

“To ensure the unhampered delivery of services and avoid possible port congestion, the Bureau is closely coordinating with shipping lines and terminal operators as our proactive role in averting the unlikely event of port congestion,” BOC Assessment and Operations Coordinating Group deputy commissioner Atty. Edward James Dy Buco said in a statement.

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Online delivery platform connects farmers, MSMEs to consumers

- *Deliver-E, an end-to-end logistics platform that aims to connect farmers and MSMEs to consumers, was formally launched on December 14*
- *The trade and industry departments, private sector, farmer cooperatives, and USAID pledged to upscale agriculture value chain and improve overall food security in the country even beyond the COVID-19 crisis*
- *Since its initial launch in April 2020, the Deliver-E platform has mobilized over 260 tons of fresh fruits and vegetables, and recorded more than P7.15 million worth of transactions*
- *Deliver-E also helped around 600 farmers in Luzon and Mindanao to double their income and reduce wastage from 50% to only 5%*

THE Philippine government and the private sector formally launched on December 14 Deliver-E, an end-to-end logistics platform that aims to bring farmers and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) closer to consumers by cutting layers in trade.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Agriculture (DA), private sector partners, farmer cooperatives, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on December 14 also pledged to upscale agriculture value chain and improve food security in the country past the COVID-19 crisis.

DTI Secretary Ramon Lopez said in a statement the initiative will bring farm produce closer to consumers and cut layers of traders. "It will be game-changing not only for our farmers but also for our

consumers," he said.

He bared that DA and DTI are partnering to "jointly work on solutions" to increase farmers' income, provide a better supply chain in agriculture, link the sector to industry processors or direct to marketplace, and deliver fresher products for consumers.

For his part, Agriculture Secretary William Dar said that with the sheer size of agricultural supply chains, "only a multi-stakeholder approach to their management could free up the bottlenecks."

He said DA appreciated the "Pledge of Commitment" that partners in the development, private, and public sectors have taken to support Deliver-E, which "installs digital technology in the most crucial stops of the agricultural supply chain."

Deliver-E operates through blockchain technology and integrates related e-commerce and logistics application services, from consolidation point to central warehousing facility, and then to last-mile delivery services to reach end-clients.

The system was developed by Filipino tech startup Insight Supply Chain Solutions, while Food Terminal, Inc. handles the central warehousing facility.

Deliver-E was developed and initially launched in early April 2020, and since then, the platform has mobilized over 260 tons of fresh fruits and vegetables and recorded more than P7.15 million worth of transactions.

Partners

The platform is the result of the collaborative efforts between DTI, DA, Supply Chain Management Association of the Philippines, logistics technology experts, farmer groups, and the USAID DELIVER-Project.

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DTI noted that the platform has helped around 600 farmers in Luzon and Mindanao to double their income from their harvests and reduce wastage from 50%

only 5%, DTI noted.

There are currently two farmers' cooperative/groups and seven MSMEs on

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BOC running after P2.4B tax deficiencies of rice importers

- *The Bureau of Customs is eyeing the collection of P2.4 billion in tax deficiencies uncovered in a post-clearance audit of cooperatives that had imported rice in 2019 and 2020*
- *A post-clearance audit of rice imports for 2019 showed 48 cooperatives had tax deficiencies totaling P1.4 billion*
- *For 2020, BOC estimates another set of top 60 importers would yield an additional P1 billion in tax deficiencies from undervalued rice imports*

THE Bureau of Customs (BOC) is looking to collect P2.4 billion in tax deficiencies uncovered in a post-clearance audit of cooperatives that imported rice in 2019 and 2020, according to the Department of Finance (DOF).

Customs Commissioner Rey Leonardo Guerrero said a post-clearance audit of rice imports in 2019 showed that 48 cooperatives had tax deficiencies totaling P1.4 billion, DOF said in a statement. BOC is an attached agency of the DOF.

These 48 cooperatives came from an initial batch of the top 60 importers out of the list of over 320 cooperatives that imported rice last year, Guerrero said in

his report to Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III during a recent DOF executive meeting.

"They have been issued audit notices and subsequent demand letters for the payment of additional duties and taxes as a result of the under declarations (of their imports)," Guerrero reported.

The BOC chief said several of the importers with tax deficiencies are contesting the demand letters, slowing down the bureau's efforts to collect the additional duties and taxes from them.

For this year, Guerrero said BOC estimates that a post-clearance audit of another set of top 60 importers would yield an additional P1 billion in tax deficiencies from undervalued rice imports.

Agriculture Secretary William Dar earlier suspended the issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances (SPSICs) to cooperatives and irrigators' associations, effectively barring them from importing rice. The suspension came after reports these organizations had resorted to rice imports rather than procure rice from local farmers as they should have done.

Both DOF and DA have also received reports that the SPSICs issued

to cooperatives were misused by traders to avoid legal responsibilities and the payment of the correct import duties.

Earlier, Dominguez directed BOC and the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) to assist the DA in investigating the reported use of cooperatives by private traders as dummies for rice imports.

According to Finance undersecretary Antonette Tionko, while cooperatives are not exempted from paying duties for importing rice, they can be exempted from paying the income tax subject to certain conditions.

All import duties collected from rice imports must go to the annual P10-billion Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund pursuant to the Rice Tariffication Act. The fund aims to raise palay productivity and sharpen the global competitiveness of local farmers by providing them with inputs, farm equipment, credit, and a mechanization program.

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Liza P. Almonte
Publisher & Editor

Mariel Kliatchko
Director

Roumina M. Pablo
Reporter

Elenita L. San Juan
Marketing Associate

Jeronel C. Alejandrino
Production

Fe A. Dionisio
Cristina D. Marzan
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BOC seeks to avoid port congestion...

Continued from page 1

Dy Buco added that the Customs Container Control Division of each port has been directed to strictly ensure empty containers are loaded out, while all assessment offices personnel are instructed to immediately process the release of laden containers to prevent pileups at the port.

BOC said it is "optimistic amid the threat of port congestion in the resumption of the truck ban as the agency has been keeping the yard utilization rate within the desired level in alignment with the global standard rate which does not exceed 70%."

It noted that from December 1 to December 13, average yard utilization at Manila International Container Port was at a manageable level of 75%.

The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) on December 14 reinstated the truck ban on major thoroughfares in Metro Manila, including a total truck ban on Epifanio Delos Santos Avenue (EDSA) from Magallanes to North Avenue. This was made upon the request of Metro Manila mayors to alleviate the heavy traffic in the metropolis this holiday season.

The truck ban was suspended last March to allow the smooth flow of goods during the COVID-19 pandemic.

BOC noted that "while the reimposition may ease traffic flow in the meantime, this resulted to allegation from a group of truckers contesting that it would lead to different problems such as increased congestion."

"As it has been long noted that the implementation of truck ban significantly constricts the flow of trade, the public does not only foresee traffic congestion but a repetition of the chaotic port situation that marred the years 2014 and 2018," BOC stated.

Truckers decry ban

Trucking groups are asking the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) to reconsider its decision to reimplement the truck ban, saying it does not address the heavy traffic in the metropolis.

In a statement, Alliance of Concerned Truck Owners and Organizations (ACTOO) vice president Rina Papa said that

while not surprised the truck ban was re-implemented during the Christmas season, her group had hoped the "formula solution to old problems would be rethought, after all old formulae have long been proven to fail in the past."

Papa noted that EDSA has had a truck ban since 1994, and the regulation "is one of the worst when it comes to traffic jams, pre-, during and post-strict lockdown policies."

She said truckers, which had operated during the lockdown even "with our noses barely above water" just to contribute to government's efforts to address pandemic-related concerns such as food security, were saddened with the policy's reimplementation.

"Now that the country is being ushered back to recovery, the opportunity to recover is being taken away from us only because the traffic situation is not given more thoughts [or] being afforded a conscientious study it deserves," Papa said.

"We reiterate that solving the traffic situation with token and old solutions compromises the nation's economy. And at this time when we are all yet to recover, this is very crucial," she added.


Not panacea to traffic woes

The Confederation of Truckers Association of the Philippines (CTAP), in a position paper to MMDA dated December 14, said implementing the truck ban on major thoroughfares "is not the solution to the problem but [adds] more injury to our struggling national economy punctured by the COVID-19 pandemic."

CTAP said the truck ban will result in transport gridlock for cargoes, and this will affect the country's economy.

It added that the truck ban will "thwart not only the effort of the national government to promote sustainable mobility of container cargoes for the betterment of our national economy but will also paralyze the operation of various companies and container yard operators" in Metro Manila.

The group noted that more economic activity happens and the volume of import and export goods drastically increases during the Christmas season. Thus, more road network from North



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Luzon area and South Luzon area to the Port of Manila "is imperatively needed due to expected heavy volume of cargo that would exit and enter the port premises," CTAP said.

It said the trucking industry constitutes "the very lifeblood of the economy for it is the indispensable partner of the government for the country's economic development," so "it is just proper and necessary that TH (trucks for hire) must be given priority for the use of the government major roads and highways..."

The group pointed out that trucks utilize only a single lane on major thoroughfares, and prohibiting their passage will have minimal effect on the traffic problem.

CTAP also said private cars have "sufficient and adequate" alternate routes as compared to trucks, while public utility

vehicles can use secondary roads—which trucks cannot use—to alleviate the traffic gridlock in the metropolis.

Moreover, the truck ban counters the effectiveness of the Terminal Appointment Bookings System (TABS) being implemented at international port terminals in Manila.

Instead of a truck ban, CTAP is requesting a 24/7 single truck lane to and from north and south Luzon and on major strategic routes in Metro Manila except EDSA to "eventually minimize the volume and presence" of trucks on major roads in Metro Manila.

The group also requested a consultation with MMDA to formulate guidelines for the proposed 24/7 single truck lane "to facilitate the continuous and sustainable movement of container cargoes within Metro Manila." - **Roumina Pablo**

SBITC unveils e-gate pass for Subic port users

- Starting December 18, Subic Bay International Terminal Corp. (SBITC) will roll out its electronic gate pass to registered processors, brokers, and forwarders
- The e-gate pass is an alternative to the printed version to further support social distancing protocols and minimize face-to-face interaction at Subic port
- Only documents with Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority gate pass stamped with "cleared for exit" may secure an SBITC e-gate pass

STARTING December 18, Subic Bay International Terminal Corp. (SBITC) will introduce its electronic gate pass to registered processors, brokers, and forwarders to further support social distancing protocols and minimize face-to-face interaction at

MPIC to invest in petroleum import storage terminal

- Metro Pacific Investments Corp. (MPIC) and partner Keppel Infrastructure Trust (KIT) seek to acquire Philippine Coastal Storage & Pipeline Corp (PCSPC)
- MPIC will initially hold a 20% stake in PCSPC for a purchase consideration of US\$67 million, with option to increase its interest up to 50%
- PCSPC is the largest independent petroleum products

Subic port.

The e-gate pass is an alternative to the printed gate pass, which may still be requested from SBITC's Billing Office once complete documents are presented and terminal charges are paid, the port operator said in an advisory.

Registration procedures

To register for the e-gate pass, port users must accomplish a registration form, and once registration is approved, SBITC Billing will send a confirmation to the applicant.

To secure the e-gate pass, port users must get complete documents from Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA) and Bureau of Customs (BOC), and send scanned copies of these to SBITC Billing, which will send an invoice for the settlement of terminal charges.

A PDF file of the e-gate pass will then

import storage facility in the Philippines

METRO Pacific Investments Corp. (MPIC), together with Keppel Infrastructure Trust (KIT), is moving to acquire Philippine Coastal Storage & Pipeline Corporation (PCSPC), the largest petroleum products import terminal in the Philippines.

MPIC and KIT have entered into a sale and purchase agreement with Philip-

pine Investment Alliance for Infrastructure to acquire PCSPC, as MPIC sets out to expand its portfolio and revenue streams.

MPIC will initially hold a 20% stake in PCSPC's parent company, Philippine Tank Storage International Holdings, Inc. (PTSI), for a purchase consideration of US\$67 million. In addition, MPIC and Kit are in discussion to give MPIC an option to increase its interest in PCSPC up to 50%.

Only documents with an SBMA gate pass stamped with "cleared for exit" may secure an SBITC e-gate pass.

SBMA senior deputy administrator for operations Marcelino Sanqui earlier said the pandemic accelerated the authority's automation programs and processes, which include the online processing of vessel entry applications and other applications that were previously processed manually.

SBMA operates and manages Subic port in the Subic Bay Freeport Zone, while SBITC holds the contract to manage and operate the port's container terminals, New Container Terminals 1 and 2.

SBMA is now undertaking several automation initiatives which include upgrading its vessel traffic management

system to incorporate a web-based port management system.

In addition to its current gate management system, the port will also roll out additional modules to include transshipment and bring-in permit applications that will lead to less physical transactions.

Subic port's value-added service provider is likewise developing a port community system that will "interconnect and consolidate all current and upcoming automation projects of the SBMA Seaport as well as Trade Facilitation and Compliance Department in just one portal."

While the pandemic delayed the port's rehabilitation and upgrading, Sanqui said it also pushed SBMA to plan the building of facilities that will be both efficient and sustainable to achieve a green port with provisions for shore power and expanded storage spaces to better accommodate port users' needs during crisis.

Through this investment, MPIC said it will be able to diversify its portfolio and revenue streams in a new industry vertical with strong growth potential. The company noted that PCSPC generates stable cash flows via take-or-pay contracts with high-quality off-takers.

"With PCSPC accounting for 36% of the total import terminal storage requirements of the Philippines, MPIC sees this facility as vital energy infrastructure for

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PH not taking advantage of APEC membership to boost competitiveness, says expert

- The Philippines should use its Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) membership to gain ideas leading to domestic reforms and a more competitive industry
- As an APEC member, the Philippines has access to funds for building capacities and information on best practices of advanced
- APEC's efforts to liberalize trade, nurture MSMEs and promote social equity and economic growth mostly felt in the National Capital Region

THE Philippines should use its membership in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) to gather ideas and concepts that will lead to domestic reforms and a more productive and competitive industry sector, according to a director of the Philippine APEC Study Center Network.

Francis Mark Quimba, who is also senior research fellow at state-owned think tank Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), said "the pressure is on the domestic side to make use of the transfer of ideas and concepts" among APEC's member-economies to enable reforms that will open up trade and investment opportunities for the Philippines.

The Philippines joined the APEC in 1989, the same year APEC, a 21-member regional forum, was established to leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific.

Incubator of ideas

"APEC is an incubator of ideas. We get to learn important issues relevant to us beforehand through APEC," Quimba said during a presentation at a recent PIDS webinar.

"We should take advantage of our participation in APEC by getting as many ideas as we can and incorporating these in our domestic policies and trade agreements."

An APEC member has access to funds for building capacities in the region and learning best practices of more advanced countries in terms of ease of doing business and other economic reforms.

Marie Sherylyn Aquia, division chief at the Department of Trade and Industry's Bureau of International Trade Relations, agreed, saying "APEC is a vehicle to support domestic reforms" and a "testing ground for Philippine policies and advocacies."

"We will always be open to ideas in APEC, to learn from other economies, to drive productivity, and to build competitive industries," Aquia added.

Filipinos' perception of APEC and its benefits is still limited. Quimba said APEC's efforts to liberalize trade; nurture micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs); and promote social equity and economic growth are mostly felt only in the National Capital Region (NCR).

"This signals the need to either strengthen information dissemination or to deliver programs that will effectively bring the fruits of trade liberalization outside of NCR," Quimba explained.

Aquia, meanwhile, said the increasing use of digital platforms owing to the COVID-19 pandemic has provided the government an opportunity for wider participation in APEC trainings and meetings.

Moreover, Aquia said the Philippines has also been given a "voice" through its membership in APEC.

"Big economies used to drive the APEC agenda. APEC has evolved, and the Philippines has helped shape its agenda," she said, noting that one of the country's major contributions to APEC was its advocacy on MSMEs, an initiative that became one of the main priorities of the APEC summit hosted by the country in 2015. – Roumina Pablo

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ALS FAUNA	090N	DEC 28	DEC 30	090S	JAN 3	JAN 3	JAN 3	JAN 5	JAN 10	JAN 12
SEASPAN NEW YORK	012N	JAN 2	JAN 4	012S	JAN 8	JAN 9	JAN 9	JAN 11	JAN 16	JAN 18
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Continued from page 2

board the platform with around 600 farmer beneficiaries.

For 2021, the target is to include 25 farmers' cooperatives/groups, an estimated 12,500 farmer beneficiaries, and 100 MSMEs. USAID will be deploying implementation specialists to help farmers get on board the system.

DTI said that even after the pandemic, Deliver-E's technology is deemed as one of the key sustainable solutions to improve the Philippines' agriculture value chain, make the country more food-secure and improve farmers' lives.

As more players in the agriculture value chain join the system, Deliver-E will be able to build an elaborate supply-and-demand dashboard system that can provide insightful data for the Philippine government's evidence-based decision-making process, DTI said.

The platform is also seen to help realize the government's Agribusiness Support for Promotion and Investment in Regional Expositions project, which seeks to create businesses and jobs in the rural community by linking farmers directly to the market. – Roumina Pablo

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Senate urges DOTr to suspend cashless toll collection

- The Senate wants the mandatory cashless toll collection program on expressways suspended following the massive gridlock it caused
- Senate Resolution 596 suggested actions to improve implementation. Among these are to allow cash lanes for infrequent and first-time users of expressways, remove penalties for insufficient cash balances, and impose a deadline on interoperability before a deadline on cashless transaction
- A Senate hearing on the cashless toll collection scheme is set for December 17

THE Senate is urging the Department of Transportation (DOTr) to suspend the implementation of mandatory cashless toll collection on expressways until issues with the policy are addressed in order to ease the burden experienced by motorists.

Senate Resolution (SR) 596, signed by 14 senators and adopted on December 14, seeks a temporary halt to the implementation of DOTr Department Order (DO) No. 2020-012 and its related issuances “pending the resolution of the complaints against the cashless or contactless transaction system.”

It also seeks to amend the issuances to reflect the following actions to improve implementation:

Allow cash lanes for infrequent and first-time users of expressways

Remove penalties for insufficient cash balances as this should not be a traffic violation and may be remedied at the next reloading opportunity

Impose a deadline on interoperability before a deadline on cashless transaction

Create a policy on dormant accounts and the accumulated amounts that are expected to pile up through time

Resolve all other issues for a better cashless and contactless toll system

DO 2020-012, issued last August, ordered the cashless toll collection on expressways as part of DOTr’s toll collection interoperability project launched in 2017. The cashless toll collection was supposed to be implemented last November, but was moved to December 1 to give motorists more time to secure radio frequency identification (RFID) stickers, which the toll operators are using to enforce cashless toll collection.

The program, however, started to cause heavy traffic at toll plazas even prior to December 1 with motorists scrambling to get their RFID stickers before the deadline. The ensuing heavy traffic at the toll plazas and the systemic issues faced by motorists prompted the city government of Valenzuela to suspend the business permit of NLEX Corp., which operates the toll plazas located in the city.

Senator Grace Poe, in her sponsorship speech for SR 596, said DO 2020-012 “does not seem to take into account the preparedness of our toll expressway service providers to comply with such an order.” Poe said cashless transactions on the expressways are ideal especially during this pandemic, but noted that “effective policies are not [born] out of good intentions alone.”

At the outset, Poe said, there were two major issues—the absence of an interoperable RFID system on all expressways and the sheer volume of vehicles that need to obtain RFID stickers within a short timeframe. She noted there are 12 million registered vehicles in the country. Of these, half are in Metro Manila, Central Luzon, and Calabarzon, with three million of these without RFID stickers.

Other complaints against the system, which became the basis for SR 596, are the difficulty in obtaining RFID stickers; unreasonable cap set by toll operators on the number of vehicles they can accommodate per day for RFID installation; high minimum load requirement; malfunctioning RFID readers and scanners; delays in the reloading system of RFID accounts; unauthorized transactions; and other

glitches that prohibit quick access. Poe said that resulting problems from these inefficiencies were not merely confined to the area where the toll systems are located, but extended to nearby cities and municipalities. The holiday season would also exacerbate the problem, she said.

DOTr-attached agency Toll Regulatory Board (TRB) in a statement said that as of December 8, more than 3.7 million RFID stickers have been installed compared to 1.4 million when the program started. The number of motorists queuing daily for RFID installation has also declined from over 34,000 on December 1 to less than 28,000 on December 8, TRB executive director Abraham Sales said.

The Senate Committee on Public Order, which Poe chairs, will conduct a hearing on DO 2020-012 on December 17.

speech for SR 596, said DO 2020-012 “does not seem to take into account the preparedness of our toll expressway service providers to comply with such an order.”

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BOC-NAIA condemns 2.48 tons of hazardous cosmetics, food products

- The Bureau of Customs-Port of Ninoy Aquino International Airport recently condemned 4.28 tons of unregistered and hazardous goods in Trece Martires, Cavite
- The unregistered cosmetics and food products were destroyed on December 7 using the Thermal

Decomposer (Pyrolysis) Facility of the Integrated Waste Management Inc.

THE Bureau of Customs (BOC)-Port of Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) recently condemned 4.28 tons of unregistered and hazardous goods in Trece Martires, Cavite.

The unregistered cosmetics and food products were destroyed on December 7 using the Thermal Decomposer (Pyrolysis) Facility of the Integrated Waste Management Inc. (IWMI) to ensure items will not be sold in or made available to the market.

For 2020, BOC-NAIA has already condemned a total of 371.42 tons of

unregistered and hazardous goods. This is in compliance with Commissioner Rey Leonardo Guerrero’s directive to decongest all ports and warehouses.

NAIA District Collector Carmelita Talusan vowed BOC-NAIA’s continued vigilance against the influx of dangerous drugs, anti-social goods and hazardous substances.

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BATANGAS

CLARK

SUBIC

CEBU

DAVAO

CAGAYAN DE ORO

FAST AND RELIABLE

PAC-ATLANTIC LINES

CUSTOMS CLEARANCE & DELIVERY

BACKED BY LOCAL KNOW-HOW, SERVICE EXPERTISE, EXTENSIVE TRUCKING COVERAGE

CONTACTUS
E-MAIL: export@pac-atlantic.com.ph
airfreight@pac-atlantic.com.ph

CONTACT PERSONS:
Export: Rey, Aileen, Gem
Air: Cris, Ross

CONTACTUS
E-MAIL: brokerage@pac-atlantic.com.ph
customerservice@pac-atlantic.com.ph

CONTACT PERSON:
Dennis, May

www.pac-atlantic.com.ph