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'Only NFAC can talk about rice situation'

By Bernadette D. Nicolas @BNicolasBM

MALACAÑANG has ordered the National Food Authority (NFA) to desist from making pronouncements about the current rice situation, saying the food agency's statements about its stockpile may have caused the recent increase in rice prices.

Starting on Tuesday, Presidential Spokesman Harry L. Roque Jr. said the NFA Council (NFAC)—the highest policy-making body of the NFA—s the only one authorized to speak on the country's rice situation.

"During the Cabinet meeting on Monday, there was an acknowledgment that the statements made by NFA Administrator Jason L.Y. Aquino caused panic, which probably caused prices to rise," Roque told reporters in a news briefing in Malacañang.

Roque also said there was "some disagreement" on the figures presented by the NFAC on Monday but, "ultimately, there was agreement that there is no rice shortage." He added, however, that Aquino did not attend the Cabinet meeting.

"The President instructed that there will be a cluster Cabinet meeting for about two hours in the next Cabinet meeting next month, and Aquino will be invited to that meeting," he said.

Roque said the NFAC told the members of the Cabinet that there is "absolutely no shortage of rice."

In January the NFA revealed that its stockpile has fallen to less than 100,000 metric tons (MT), or equivalent to three days of national consumption. The food agency attached to the President had urged the NFAC to import rice to beef up its dwindling stockpile.

The NFAC green-lighted the proposal of the food agency to import, but its requested volume of 250,000 MT would only arrive in June, after rice farmers have harvested the dry-season crop.

Because it has been mandated to ensure national food security and stable prices, the NFA buys paddy from farmers and imports rice. Part of its stockpile is sold to the poor at a lower price.

"The reality is that NFA rice constitutes just a fraction of the Philippines's rice supply. The bulk of our national inventory constitutes commercial rice. Henceforth, it will be the NFAC that shall speak on the current rice situation," Roque said.

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol told the BusinessMirror that the Department of Agriculture (DA) is not covered by the President's directive.

"[The order] only pertains to the rice supply of the NFA. The DA can always report on the country's rice output. Besides, we are not part of the NFAC," Piñol said.

Piñol disclosed that it was Roque himself who made the proposal to task the NFAC to speak on the NFA's rice situation to ensure that the public would get only "accurate information." ***With Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas***

The Manila Times

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WVisayas farmers get P100M production loan

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) through its Agricultural Credit Policy Council (ACPC) intensified its support for local farmers in Western Visayas with the grant of more than P100 million production loan fund.

Remelyn Recoter, DA regional executive director, said provision of funds is part of the national government's effort through the DA to give farmers easy financing access.

An initial P1.8 million of the P10-million fund was released through the Kooperatiba Naton Multi-purpose Cooperative in Tigbauan, Iloilo for 15 onion growers of Oton town during the February 23 visit of Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol.

According to Recoter, Oton is a new area that targets to increase its coverage to 36 hectares this year. To date, 31.5 hectares in Barangays Buray, Santa Rita, Trapiche, Tagbak Sur, Turog-turog, Sambaludan, Batuan Ilawod, Galang and Salngan are planted to onions.

A separate fund of P12 million was committed to onion and garlic farmers in Tigbauan.

Piñol also pledged P20 million for Capiz and Aklan farmers.

Apart from committing funds, ACPC already released to the Rural Bank of Miagao an initial P20 million of the P50 million fund that Piñol promised to the onion and garlic growers of southern Iloilo last year.

Piñol also released P15 million to Pandan Multi-purpose Cooperative, P5 million to Egaña Parish Credit Cooperative and P10 million to Antique Provincial Government Credit Cooperative, all in Antique province in 2017.

The fund is not only for garlic and onion growers but can also be availed for planting other crops.

Garlic and onion farmers can avail of P150,000 per hectare while rice farmers can obtain a loan of P30,000 to P50,000 per hectare, with an interest rate of six percent per annum.

More than 300 farmers from the towns of Tigbauan, Igbaras, Tubungan, Oton and Miagao are planting onion and garlic, covering about 200 hectares.

At present, the country sources 90 percent of its garlic and 50 percent of its onion requirements abroad.

EIREENE JAIREE GOMEZ

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Revamp, reform the NFA

MIDWEEK COMMENTS

MARLEN V. RONQUILLO

IT does not need Einsteinian depth to see what is glaringly wrong with the policy-making work at the National Food Authority (NFA). Butil party-list Rep. Cecil Chavez said the NFA Council, which sets policy at the NFA, does not include Agriculture Secretary Manny Piñol and his key executives at the Department of Agriculture (DA). This arrangement, said Chavez, is akin to the policy-crafting work of an anti-crime body that excludes Gen. Bato and his key men at the Philippine National Police (PNP).

The DA, for one, oversees the food production side with rice production as the centerpiece. The agency in charge of compiling all agricultural statistics and data, including rice production and supply and current prices, is under the DA.

The best agricultural economists are with the DA, and its policy and planning group is on top of global and national developments that pertain to rice, from supply to price fluctuations. If there is a body best prepared to answer all the relevant issues on rice supply and demand, from the national and global perspective, that is the DA.

A small note: Mr. Piñol started his public career at the Northern Mindanao office of the NFA and he is deeply grounded on the workings of the agency.

So, how can the Council set its policy-making right without inputs from the government department overseeing the production side?

Since time immemorial, the agriculture secretary has overseen the affairs of the NFA, except perhaps during the time of the first NFA administrator, the late Jess Tanchanco , whose closeness to Imelda Marcos gave him the freedom to run the NFA like his own fiefdom. The late Bong Tanco, technically the overseer of the NFA as agriculture minister, just gave Mr. Tanchanco the full freedom to run the agency.

And except during the time of Mr. Aquino, when the DA was balkanized to place it and three other critical agencies under a co-secretary of Mr. Alcala.

Today, the DA is intact, except for the NFA which remains under the Office of the President. And whose policy-making body, the NFA Council, sadly excludes the agriculture secretary and his key staff.

At the macro and micro level, the NFA is perhaps the government agency that fails miserably and fails with outstanding consistency.

The subsidies it received over the past 10 years for its stabilization work on rice supply and prices has a grand total of P45 billion, according to Senator Angara. And there is no end in sight to the massive subsidies as demand outstrips supply year in and year out. Whether this long history of shortage is man-made or for real is one thing we do not know. The Senate agriculture committee, commenting on the current shortage, said there is ample supply but vested interests have been manipulating the supply situation to profit on the misery of rice consumers.

The NFA has never been absent from the Top 5 GOCC losers. It is a losing leviathan, whose governing lexicon has purged the words efficiency and viability.

What about the performance of the NFA at the micro level? In Nueva Ecija, the most efficient rice producer in the Luzon Plains, Chavez said that rice farmers in the province generally do not even want to sell their palay to the NFA despite the higher buying prices of the state agency.

The reason? Dealing with the NFA is a tedious, bureaucratic process. The private traders pay less but selling to them is quick and hassle-free.

The NFA fails on the "ease of doing business" test, according to the Butil representative. A seller has to seek, first and foremost, an official accreditation, which is not required by private traders. A seller, even a bulk seller, has to deliver the palay sold to NFA buying stations because the NFA does not do hauling. If the palay sold does not meet the 14 percent moisture requirement, the NFA will require the seller to dry the palay first. The seller gets paid in checks. And if the amount of the palay sold is over P200,000, local NFA buying stations cannot issue checks— the seller has to go to the regional buying center.

Private buyers buy in cash and buy palay at any condition. A transaction can be done in minutes.

Even if the buying price of government is adjusted from P17 per kilo to P19 per kilo, the burdensome process of selling to the NFA will remain a great disincentive to farmers with palay to sell.

The classic illustration of NFA's many failures took place decades ago, when a ship carrying much-needed rice imports disappeared at sea and no one at the NFA could explain the missing ship and the missing bulk rice shipment.

An NFA official, in broken English, tried to tell a congressional inquiry that the ill-fated rice-carrying ship might have capsized after being buffeted by giant waves, a calamity of the rough seas. But his tortured narrative of a supposedly sunken ship was a class act on ungrammatical, illogical use of the King's language.

That is still the state of the NFA today, either barely afloat or sinking.

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Govt to buy research vessels to explore Benham

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte is willing to invest taxpayer money on maritime survey vessels, Malacañang said on Tuesday.

In a news briefing, Palace spokesman Harry Roque Jr. said there was a need to assess the natural resources in the Philippine Rise or Benham Rise.

"[Agriculture] Secretary [Emmanuel] Piñol noted that they have been conducting research on the Philippine Rise for the past decade. [The plan of buying the ships is] now very solid," Roque said.

Roque said the government would be able to buy the ships even without the use of Malampaya funds, which is the government's share in royalties from the Malampaya gas facility.

"There was an initial proposal to buy using Malampaya funds but it was noted that they may be legal questions because the Malampaya funds, in a case that I filed, there was a TRO (temporary restraining order) issued—permanent injunction issued by the Supreme Court that Malampaya funds could only be utilized for energy-related projects," Roque said.

"And so, it was [Department of Finance] Secretary [Carlos] Dominguez who said, we have the money anyway we will buy even if we do not have to use Malampaya funds. So the government will buy more research vessels," Roque said.

Roque also said that during the 23rd Cabinet meeting on Monday night, Duterte reiterated that the sole right foreign entities could have in the Philippine Rise was their right to passage.

"[The] exploration for natural resources, conduct of scientific research, laying of submarine cables and building of artificial islands in the Philippine Rise are reserved for Philippine nationals," Roque said.

The proposed joint exploration of China and Philippines has been a hot topic especially after Duterte likened China's offer of joint exploration to "co-ownership" of the disputed area.

Opposition lawmakers Edcel Lagman of Albay and Gary Alejano of Magdalo party-list said on Tuesday the Philippine government risked diminishing its legal victory before the United Nations-backed Permanent Court of Arbitration against China if the Duterte administration pursued joint exploration with Chinese companies.

They argued that the tribunal already ruled in favor of the Philippines in July 2016 by junking China's "nine-dash-line" claim on the entire South China Sea and declared that the Kalayaan (Spratly) Islands, Panganiban (Mischief) Reef, Ayungin (Second Thomas) Shoal and Recto (Reed) Bank were all within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Philippines.

"Whether directly with China or indirectly with its corporate alter ego, any joint exploration in the country's EEZ violates the Constitution and diminishes Philippine sovereignty. What the Constitution allows in the EEZ is only for the Philippines, through the President, to secure technical and financial assistance from foreign corporations as contractors or creditors, not as joint venturers or partners, and these corporations should be at least 60 percent owned by Filipinos," Lagman said.

Alejano said: "While we could benefit from such joint venture, we should be wary of its outcome. China can just use this to infiltrate us. If we allow China there, that is as good as our government invalidating the UN ruling."

China has never recognized the tribunal's decision and did not participate during the proceedings in the Hague-based court.

RALPH U. VILLANUEVA AND LLANESCA T. PANTI

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editorial

Govt must promote high-value crops

DEMAND for chocolates and specialty coffee continues to rise in many countries including the Philippines, yet Filipino coffee and cacao planters remain unable to cash in on this trend. Imports continue to fill the shortfall in domestic production and the requirement of local manufacturers. Farmers in other countries are earning from the inability of the Philippines to expand its plantation for high-value crops like coffee and cacao.

According to the latest data from the International Cocoa Organization (ICCO), cocoa beans prices averaged $2,000 per metric ton (MT) as of March 2. Historical data from the ICCO also showed that from January 2012 up to March 2017, the international price of cocoa remained above $2,000 per MT. It even breached $3,000 per MT in 2014 and 2015. The average daily price of cocoa fell to $1,957 per MT in January but recovered and reached $2,265 per MT on March 1. These figures only show that demand for cocoa beans remains strong.

As for coffee, data from Bloomberg indicated that it was priced at $121.10 per pound. Data from the International Coffee Organization also showed that the price of coffee beans did not fall below $100 per pound since 2012. Despite the favorable international price, farmers are unable to expand output. In fact, the Philippines continues to import some 70,000 MT of coffee beans just to fill the increasing demand of local consumers.

Experts and even those from the private sector have sought government assistance to hike the output of the two high-value crops. The government has already drawn up road maps that outline strategies to expand the output of cacao and coffee. The end-goal of the two road maps is to wipe out imports by the time the President steps down from office.

But rolling out interventions required to achieve this goal would require lots of political will and money. Farmers and even non-government groups have been urging the government to offer affordable production loans. This is because farmers can only start earning from planting coffee and cacao after three years.

The Philippines would soon be removing its rice-import quotas, which would make it more difficult for farmers to earn from planting the staple. What the government can do now is to help farmers find alternative crops they can plant should cheap rice starts flooding the country. In areas where cacao and coffee can be grown, the government should encourage the cultivation of these two high-value crops by providing farmers the support they need.

Government agencies are now in the process of crafting their budget. The Department of Agriculture said earlier that it would again aspire for a higher allocation for 2019. It is hoped that part of this increase would go to funding interventions outlined in road maps that are aimed at boosting the production of high-value crops like cacao and coffee. Encouraging the output of high-value crops is a viable alternative for some rice farmers who would soon lose their livelihood with the entry of cheap imports after the import quota is lifted.

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Existing policies not enough to protect sardines–experts

FILE PHOTO

CITING a recent study, experts said sardines are getting smaller and smaller, and they spawn earlier to adapt to heavy fishing pressure and changes in the environment.

Unless the government acts with dispatch, experts fear that the sardine species may eventually become extinct. The government, they said, must craft a national management framework to address the overfishing of sardines, or face the consequences of declining fish stocks.

In a statement, Jimely Flores, a senior marine scientist of Oceana Philippines, said an effective management framework for sardines is "a necessary guide in the implementation of policies that are based on science and research."

The management framework, she added, should include data from the National Stock Assessment Program (NSAP) of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR).

"We have called on the BFAR to reconvene the technical working group, and together with our scientists, craft the much-needed management framework for sardines," Flores said.

According to Flores, the management framework should include "timely and transparent" scientific data for policy support, and a review process for implementation.

"We need to work together in sustainably managing our sardines through science-based policies. This way, we can ensure that there will be sardines, a small but important fish, forever," she said.

Dr. Wilfredo Campos, a scientist from the University of the Philippines in the Visayas, said: "Sardines are being overfished and existing policy measures are not enough to protect them, especially spawning fish."

Their studies show that sardines are getting smaller, and spawn and mature early.

Catching sardines would be more sustainable if they are allowed to mature for at least two years, so they can reproduce more, he said.

He said instinctively, sardines are adapting to overfishing—somehow, maturing earlier than they used to and be able to reproduce.

"To keep up with being caught too quickly, they biologically adapt by maturing early to compensate for their population loss. They remain small, and spawn less compared to ideal, mature sardines," Campos said.

Experts noted that fishermen caught 344,730,201 kilograms of sardines worth P7.43 billion in 2015.

Sardines are also crucial in the food chain, eaten by high-value fish, such as tuna, mackerel and scad, plus larger predators like sharks and dolphins.

A recent study made by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) also showed that 71 percent of typical Filipino families eat seafood, especially sardines, at least five times per month, proving that seafood is a significant source of animal protein diet. However, they also noted that the fish they eat are getting smaller and more expensive.

In 2012 the BFAR ordered a closed season for sardines in major fishing grounds, including the Visayan Sea and the Zamboanga Peninsula, to ensure that they will be protected during the spawning months.

However, experts said it is also important to protect sardines after the spawning season.

Dr. Jose Ingles, an advisor to the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) in the Philippines, said that after the closed season, there's often a "race to fish" for sardines, where commercial fishers may end up catching the juveniles which are expected to spawn next season.

"There should be other additional measures to protect the little fish that were produced during the spawning season. These include setting catch limits and reducing fishing efforts which will help protect the juvenile sardines, especially during the race to fish season," Ingles said.

He also emphasized that these measures must be urgently implemented in fishing grounds that are already overfished. Additional measures, such as setting catch limits and reducing fishing effort, can protect juvenile sardines, especially during the race-to-fish season. Ingles said these measures must be urgently implemented in fishing grounds that are already overfished. ***Jonathan L. Mayuga***

THE DAILY tribune
Without fear or favor

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PIDS pushes RP farm productivity initiatives

The Agribusiness Venture Arrangements (AVAs) and Sugarcane Block Farming (SBF), two government initiatives aimed at boosting farm productivity and income of agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs), should be encouraged.

This is the unsolicited advice of think tank Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS).

The institute said AVAs and SBF can be successful as long as adequate government support is given to ARBs from the farm production stage to marketing and post-production activities.

Likewise, government must provide a policy environment for Philippine exports crops to be competitive.

Three of the country's biggest export crops-banana, pineapple, and sugarcane-have been covered under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

Through AVAs, ARBs that were awarded with lands planted with high-value crops such as banana and pineapple can implement an agribusiness venture with private investors to make farming more economically viable for them.

Meanwhile, sugarcane farmers owning farms that are 10 hectares or less can set up cooperatives or organizations through SBF to consolidate their operations and attain economies of scale.

Recently, however, AVAs and SBF have been the subject of increasing scrutiny following reports that ARBs have not been successful in their partnerships with private investors as shown in a 2016 study of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.

These have prompted lawmakers in both houses of Congress to propose legislations to review the AVAs and change some of the provisions governing how they are implemented.

"While it is true that many farmers have entered into one-sided contracts, there are also existing arrangements which have benefited the farmers as indicated," the authors of the PIDS study maintained. Thus, they suggested that it may be worthwhile to look into the conditions of the successful AVAs that can be inputted in the proposed bills.

Meanwhile, to strengthen the implementation of AVAs and SBF, the authors noted that the persistent problems faced by ARBs need to be resolved.

First, they noted that farmers or cooperatives should have security of tenure over the land awarded to them so that they can partner with private investors. They added that "labor, farm machinery, and irrigation should also be available and accessible to them."

Provision of credit is another necessity highlighted by the PIDS study. It cautioned that unless capital is provided, individual farmers will always be tempted to go into a lease agreement without thinking of its consequences.

"Financial assistance is needed by the farmer to ensure that recommended inputs are applied. If government cannot provide the needed capital, it should look into the possibility of providing subsidized inputs to farmers or cooperatives," the study suggested.

For the SBF to be successful, the PIDS study recommended that the Department of Agrarian Reform must sustain the support services being given to the ARBs. Likewise, it urged government to lobby for the imposition of a quota on corn syrup after 2018 to ensure that the local demand for sugar will increase.

"Corn syrup, which is from China, was identified as a sugar substitute only in 2017 and therefore, an importation quota has not yet been set. This reduced the demand for sugar by soft drinks companies, which, in turn, led to a decline in sugar prices," the authors explained.

Finally, they cautioned that creating a new government entity that would address the needs of the banana and pineapple industry is costly and tedious.

According to them, it may be more practical and feasible for the Department of Agriculture or the Department of Trade and Industry to create a section within its organization that will look into the concerns of the two industries.

Ed Velasco

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No SRP on rice – DTI

By **BERNIE CAHILES-MAGKILAT**

The imposition of a suggested retail price on rice will have to be decided by the economic managers and the Department of Agriculture (DA), according to Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Secretary Ramon M. Lopez.

Lopez said this yesterday after meeting with the National Price Coordinating Council (NPCC) to assess prices of basic and prime commodities. An SRP on rice was raised during a Senate hearing on rice.

"An SRP on rice is a policy issue so it is not just a decision of the NPCC but of the economic managers and the Department of Agriculture," said Lopez, who chairs the NPCC.

The price of regular milled rice has increased from ₱37 to ₱40 per kilo, well-milled also went up to ₱42 from ₱40 last year and premium rice to ₱46 from ₱45 last year. The special rice was also up to ₱55 from ₱50 last year.

Lopez, however, made clear they are not reimposing the era where SRPs have to be approved by the DTI. The only thing the DTI is doing is to influence or a moral suasion on manufacturers on their pricing scheme.

Prices stable

Lopez also reported that prices of basic goods and commodities have remained stable and that the DTI has tightened its monitoring to prevent profiteering and influence to keep prices within suggested retail prices down to the grassroots level.

Lopez said that his agency monitors prices on a weekly basis and that out of 20 basic items carried in the supermarkets and groceries only one can be said to have imposed higher price than the SRPs.

There was no instance also that a retailer has been caught profiteering, which is a price higher than 10 percent.

In fact, other products, such as refined sugar, have gone down by ₱5-₱50 this year from ₱55 last year. Agricultural products are also stable while some items such as tomatoes and papayas have reduced prices.

Canned goods

The canned goods manufacturers have already informed DTI of their intention to raise prices by ₱1 to ₱2 due to higher cost of tinplates and the foreign exchange rate, but Lopez said their computation showed the increase should only be between 36 to 50 centavos per can.

He, however, said that they will not prevent a price adjustment as long as this is limited to one or two brands only.

A sardines brand has minimal price hikes but the same brands have lower prices in the regions.

The DTI is also launching the "Suking Tindahan" to sari-sari stores that will volunteer to adhere to the SRP prices in an effort to ensure that prices remained at the SRP level even up to the grassroots level. Those with the badge of "Suking Tindahan" will have the benefit of getting supplies from manufacturers at wholesale rates.

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Italy donates ₱12.4 million in food aid to Marawi farmers

By **ROY C. MABASA**

The Italian government has donated ₱12.4 million to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) to support Filipino farmers affected by the fighting in Marawi City with food assistance.

With this latest contribution, WFP will support 1,600 displaced farmers and their families over a period of three months, providing them with ▶11

Italy donates ₱12.4-million... ◀1

food assistance in exchange for their participation in agricultural activities to restore community assets.

WFP, in collaboration with its partners, will implement training in support of rice and corn production, bio-intensive and vegetable gardening, as well as inland fishpond tilapia farming – incorporating basic nutrition and food security sessions. Partners include the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Agrarian Reform, the Department of Social Welfare and Development, and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

Nine months after the start of the armed conflict in Marawi, the Philippine government and WFP have distributed rice to some 128,000 people and provided school meals to more than 57,000 students in the provinces of Lanaodel Norte and Lanao del Sur where displaced people affected by the conflict have relocated.

WFP is mobilizing additional resources to cover the needs of its current operations until May, including early recovery activities that involve food and cash-based assistance.

Fighting broke out in Marawi City in May, 2017 between government forces and armed militant groups linked to the so-called Islamic State. The WFP has since been supporting the Philippine government by addressing the nutrition needs of conflict-affected communities.

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Marawi farmers receive WFP aid

FILIPINO farmers affected by fighting in Marawi are to receive food assistance from the United Nations World Food Programme. This has been made possible by a P12.4 million (€300,000) contribution from the Government of Italy to WFP.

"Italy stands with the Philippine Government in its efforts to assist the people of Marawi," said Italian Ambassador Giorgio Guglielmino. "Our partnership with the World Food Programme will support the food needs of thousands of Filipinos as they rebuild their lives."

Thanks to this latest contribution, WFP will support 1,600 displaced farmers and their families over a period of three months, providing them with food assistance in exchange for their participation in agricultural activities to restore community assets.

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Italy nagkaloob ng P12.4M sa magsasaka ng Marawi

Nagkaloob ang Italian government ng P12.4 milyon sa United Nations World Food Programme para suportahan ang mga magsasakang Pilipino na naapektuhan ng digmaan sa Marawi City.

Sumiklab ang digmaan sa Marawi City noong Mayo 2017 sa pagitan ng puwersa ng gobyerno at ng mga militanteng Maute Group na nakipag-alyansa sa Islamic State. Matagal nang sinusuportahan ng WFP ang gobyerno ng Pilipinas sa pagtugon sa pangangailangan sa nutrisyon ng mga komunidad na naapektuhan ng digmaan.

Sa huli nitong kontribusyon, susuporthan ng WFP ang 1,600 lumikas na magsasaka at kanilang mga pamilya sa loob ng tatlong buwan, magkakaloob ng tulong na pagkain kapalit ng kanilang pagsali sa agricultural activities para mapanumbalik ang kasapatan sa pagkain ng komunidad.

Magpapatupad ang WFP ng pagsasanay bilang suporta sa rice and corn production, bio-intensive and vegetable gardening, at inland fishpond tilapia farming. Katuwang sa proyekto ang Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Department of Agriculture, Department of Agrarian Reform, Department of Social Welfare and Development, at ang Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

Siyam na buwan matapos sumilab ang bakbakan sa Marawi, namahagi ang gobyerno ng Pilipinas at ang WFP ng bigas sa may 128,000 mamamayan at nagkaloob ng school meals sa mahigit 57,000 estudyante sa mga lalawigan ng Lanao del Norte at Lanao del Sur kung saan lumikas ang mga residenteng apektado ng digmaan.

Roy C. Mabasa

The Manila Times

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Conflict-affected farmers in Marawi receive food assistance

FILIPINO farmers affected by fighting in Marawi are to receive food assistance from the United Nations World Food Program (WFP). This has been made possible by a P12.4 million (€300,000) contribution from the government of Italy to WFP.

"Italy stands with the Philippine Government in its efforts to assist the people of Marawi," said Italian Ambassador Giorgio Guglielmino. "Our partnership with the World Food Program will support the food needs of thousands of Filipinos as they rebuild their lives."

Fighting broke out in Marawi City in May 2017 between government forces and armed militant groups linked to the so-called Islamic State. WFP has since been supporting the government of the Philippines by addressing the nutrition needs of conflict-affected communities.

WFP will support 1,600 displaced farmers and their families over a period of three months, providing them with food assistance in exchange for their participation in agricultural activities to restore community assets.

WFP, in collaboration with its partners, will implement training in support of rice and corn production, bio-intensive and vegetable gardening, as well as inland fishpond tilapia farming—incorporating basic nutrition and food security sessions. Partners include the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Agrarian Reform, the Department of Social Welfare and Development, and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

"WFP is grateful to the government of Italy for this generous contribution, which will sustain ongoing relief and recovery operations to address the food needs of communities affected by the Marawi crisis," said Stephen Gluning, WFP representative and country director.

Malaya
Business Insight

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La Niña to bring more rains this year

BY PAUL ICAMINA

MORE rains this year should not worry rice farmers, the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) said yesterday.

While the weather phenomenon will bring more rains, "farmers need not panic as what we might be experiencing until March are just slight effects of La Niña," said Dr. Jasper Tallada, a climate change expert at the Rice Engineering and Mechanization Division, PhilRice. "After that everything will return to the neutral condition."

There are no early signs of the detrimental effects of La Niña, he said. However, it will do farmers well if they are prepared and alert.

El Niño and La Niña are complex weather patterns resulting from variations in ocean temperatures in the Equatorial Pacific. While El Niño means the greater prospects of drought, La Niña causes the opposite effects of El Niño, bringing above average rains. Last December, the "weak" La Niña spawned the destructive typhoons Urduja and Vintain Mindanao and parts of the Visayas and Luzon.

La Niña is caused by a build-up of cooler-than-normal waters in the tropical Pacific, the area of the Pacific Ocean between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. Unusually strong, eastward-moving trade winds and ocean currents bring this cold water to the surface, changing Pacific Ocean temperatures that affect the patterns of tropical rainfall as well as weather patterns in the Pacific.

In an advisory, PhilRice urged farmers to regularly check updates on La Niña and other extreme weather conditions that can affect rice farming. They should also adopt good farming practices that help prepare rice farms for the effects of La Niña.

"We encourage farmers to use submergence-tolerant varieties or those that can still survive despite being soaked in water for days," said Dr. Ricardo Orge who heads PhilRice's Climate Resiliency for Enhanced Agricultural Trade and Efficiency for Rice Program. Flood-tolerant varieties include the NSIC Rc 68 (Sacobia) and NSIC Rc 194 (Submarino 1) rice varieties.

Farmers should also plan their planting schedule very well to avoid torrential rains and strong winds that can cause damages to crops, he said.

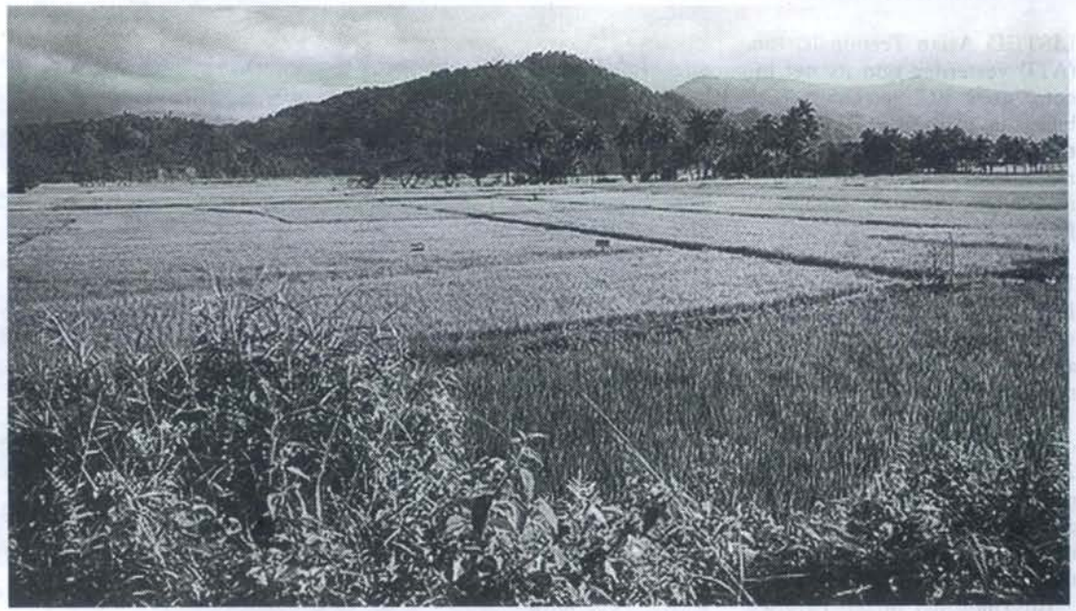
Rice farmers should repair drainage canals and dikes as well to ensure an effective water management system and avoid pest infestation and diseases that are prevalent during La Niña. Farmers are encouraged to plant trees around rice fields that can serve as wind breakers for crops against strong winds.

Both Orge and Tallada highlighted the effectiveness of using mechanical dryers in drying rice harvests, the establishment of floating gardens for water-soaked areas and the use of small farm reservoirs to store rainwater that can be used by farmers in the next planting seasons.

"The bottom line is that we should always be informed about the changes in our weather," Tallada said, adding farmers should regularly check for updates from the National Disaster Risk Reduction & Management Council and the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA).

PAGASA is forecasting that the La Niña weather will last until March, bringing above normal rains and slightly warmer than average temperatures.

However, weather scientists say the weak La Niña weather, which brought higher than average rainfall and slightly warmer weather over some parts of the country, is likely to dwindle in the coming months.



No need to worry. La Niña will do farmers well if they are prepared and alert.

La Niña persists in the tropical Pacific but will likely transition to a neutral phase between March and May when the weather is neither La Niña nor El Niño.

This month, PAGASA weather scientists see generally below average rainfall in Luzon and near to above normal over the Visayas and Mindanao.

The prospects of typhoons hitting the country is minimal with PAGASA forecasters expecting only one tropical cyclone that may enter the country's area of responsibility.

In April, generally below normal rainfall will likely prevail over Luzon while rainfall will be near normal in the Visayas and Mindanao. Generally near normal to above normal rainfall in the Visayas will likely prevail between May and June.

Below to near normal rainfall is expected by July throughout the country. Generally near normal with above normal rainfall is forecast in the eastern section of the Visayas in August. Generally near average to slightly warmer than average surface temperature is expected over the coming months over most of the Philippines.

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Aquino ng NFA namumuro kay Digong sa rice supply

Matapos busalan sa isyu ng supply ng bigas, pinahaharap ni Pangulong Rodrigo 'Digong' Duterte sa cabinet cluster meeting sa susunod na buwan si National Food Authority (NFA) Administrator Jason Aquino kaugnay sa usapin ng supply ng NFA rice.

Sinabi kahapon ni Presidential spokesman Harry Roque na mismong si Pangulong Duterte ang nag-utos para imbitahin sa Malacañang si Aquino at personal na marinig sa opisyal kung ano ang totoo sa isyu ng supply ng bigas.

Matatandaang naging mainit ang isyu sa kakapusan umano ng supply ng bigas noong Pebrero partikular ang ibinebenta ng NFA na kinontra naman ng NFA Council at maging ng Department of Agriculture (DA).

Sinabi ni Roque na naging malawak ang diskusyon sa isyu ng bigas sa Cabinet meeting kaya't nais ng Presidente na marinig mismo kay Aquino ang tunay na estado ng supply ng bigas sa bansa.

"The President instructed that there be a cluster Cabinet meeting for about two hours in the next Cabinet meeting next month and Mr. Jayson Aquino to that meeting.

There was an acknowledgement that statements made by the NFA administrator caused panic, which probably caused prices to rise. There was some disagreement on the figures presented yesterday by the NFA Council, but ultimately it was agreed that there is no rice shortage, because the figure of only 1.5 days worth of supply of rice was misleading. That was – again, the 1.5 days is only if it is NFA that is the only supplier of rice in the Philippines, which is not the case, because as I repeat, they supply a minority of our rice requirements," ani Roque.

Napagkasunduan aniya sa cabinet meeting na ang NFA Council na ang magsasalita sa kasalukuyang supply ng bigas sa bansa.

Ang NFA Council ay pinamumunuan ni Secretary to the Cabinet Leoncio 'Jun' Evasco. **(Aileen Taliping)**

Balita

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Presyo ng de-lata, karne, nagtaasan

Sumirit ang presyo ng ilang gulay, isda, de-latang pagkain, at maging karne ng manok at baboy dahil umano sa pagtaas ng presyo ng raw materials, iniulat mula sa Region 3.

Nag-abiso sa Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) ang ilang manufacturer ng de-lata, gaya ng corned beef, beef loaf at meat loaf tungkol sa pagtataas ng presyo ng nasabing produkto.

Naglaro sa 50 sentimos hanggang P1 ang dagdag-presyo sa de-lata, partikular sa Sangitan Public Market, sa mga supermarket, at sa shopping malls sa Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija.

Gayunman, nilinaw ni DTI-Nueva Ecija Director Brigida Pili na hindi lahat ng de-lata ay nagtaas ng presyo.

Kasabay nito, tumaas din maging ang presyo ng suka, toyo at patis, gayundin ang ilang gulay, isda, karne ng manok, baboy, at baka sa mga pamilihan.

Batay sa DTI, nasa P10 kada kilo ang itinaas ng karneng manok, na P160 na ngayon mula sa dating P150.

Tumaas din ang karne ng baka, na mula sa P200 ay P300 kada kilo na.

Paliwanag naman ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR)-Central Luzon, ang pagtaas ng presyo ng isda ay dulot ng lagay ng panahon at transportasyon.

Light A. Nolasco

PILIPINO MIRROR
FILIPINO MIRROR MEDIA GROUP CORPORATION
- SALAMIN NG KATOTOHANAN -

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BFAR NAG-ABISO; SEAFOOD MULA SA MLA BAY LIGTAS KAININ

NAG-ABISO ang ilang eskperto ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) na ligtas kainin ang mga isdang nahuli sa Manila Bay at wala umano itong kontaminasyon.

Wala rin daw problema sa kalidad ng tubig sa Manila Bay.

Pero sinabi ito ng BFAR kahit wala pa itong bagong datos kung may-roong E.coli o bacteria mula sa dumi ng tao sa Manila Bay.

Matatandaang noong 2014 at 2015, nakitaan ng mataas na antas ng E. coli ang bahagi ng Manila Bay na sumasakop sa Cavite, Bulacan, at Pampanga.

Gayunman, sinabi rin ng BFAR na dapat maging mapagmatyag din ang publiko kahit pa tuloy-tuloy ang pag-monitor ng ahensiya.

Ayon sa BFAR, limitado ang kanilang manpower.

Isa sa sinasabing mga dapat bantayan ay ang mga ilog na papuntang Manila Bay dahil doon karaniwang dumadaan ang mga E. coli.

Iginiit ng BFAR na trabaho na iyon ng mga local government unit. Iminungkahi pa nila na magkaroon din ng fish inspector ang bawat lokal na pamahalaang malapit sa laot para matiyak ang kalidad ng isdang nahuhuli.

Samantala, wala ring nakikita pang kontaminasyon ang Laguna Lake Development Authority sa lawa na kanilang nasasakupan. Binabawasan na rin ang mga fish pen at fish cage para lumawak pa ang lugar na maaaring pangisdaan.

Mula sa 13,000 ektarya ng fish pen, nasa 9,000 ektarya na lang ito ngayon na isa sa mga nakikitang dahilan kaya tumaas pa lalo ang produksiyon ng isda sa pinakamalaking lawa sa bansa.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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Palace wants NFA Council to speak solely on rice

By ALEXIS ROMERO

President Duterte has barred National Food Authority (NFA) administrator Jason Aquino from speaking about the Philippines' rice supply, saying his recent statements had caused panic that may have increased the price of the staple.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said all information about the country's rice supply situation would come from the NFA Council, an interagency body led by Cabinet Secretary Leoncio Evasco.

"There was an acknowledgement that statements made by the NFA administrator caused panic, which probably caused prices to rise. There was some disagreement on the figures presented yesterday by the NFA Council, but ultimately it was agreed that there is no rice shortage," Roque said, noting that rice supply was discussed during last Monday's Cabinet meeting.

"That was why the President said that henceforth all information on the country's rice supply must emanate from the NFA Council," he added.

Roque said Aquino's claim that the rice supply stocked by the NFA is only good for about one and a half days was misleading.

"The 1.5 day stockpile is if we did not have any other source of rice other than NFA. Meaning, if we only had NFA in our possession, we would have 1.5 days worth of supply. But the reality, of course, is that NFA constitutes a minority of our rice supply," Roque said.

"Bulk of our rice supply consist of commercial rice," he added.

Roque said Duterte has ordered Aquino to attend the next Cabinet cluster meeting next month.

Aquino told lawmakers last month that the remaining rice supply stocked by the NFA is just equivalent to about one and a half days. But the NFA chief clarified that the grains agency is not the only source of rice in the country, noting that there are also commercial and household stocks.

The NFA Council has approved the importation of 250,000 metric tons of rice to augment the grains agency's buffer stock.

The NFA is required to have a buffer stock good for at least 15 days during harvest season and a 30-day buffer during the lean months of July to September.

Evasco has called for the filing of economic sabotage charges against rice hoarders and asked the NFA to be more proactive in monitoring the warehouses managed by traders.

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February inflation surges to 4.5%

By Ben O. de Vera
@bendeveraINQ

Consumer prices further rose at a faster pace in February as prices of food and beverage as well as "sin" products continued to increase partly as a result of the first tax reform package that took effect last Jan. 1.

In a report Tuesday, Philippine Statistics Authority data showed that using 2012 as the new base year, the headline inflation rate jumped 3.9 percent last month, the fastest rate of increase in prices of basic goods since August 2014's 4.2 percent.

Using the old consumer price index (CPI) series based on 2006 prices, inflation hit 4.5 percent, also the highest in more than three years.

"The uptrend resulted from the faster annual gain recorded in the heavily weighted food and nonalcoholic beverages index at 4.8 percent and the double-digit annual increment in alcoholic beverages and tobacco index at 16.9 percent," the PSA explained.

Under Republic Act No. 10963 or the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (Train) Act, the unitary excise tax slapped on cigarettes rose to P32.50 per pack effective Jan. 1 from P30 a pack last year. The TRAIN Law starting Jan. 1 this year also jacked up or slapped new excise taxes on oil, cigarettes, sugary drinks and vehicles, among other goods, to compensate for the restructured personal income tax regime that raised the tax-exempt cap to an annual salary of P250,000.

The PSA said that prices in four other commodity groups also increased in February: Clothing and footwear, up 2 percent year-on-year; furnishing, household equipment and routine maintenance of the house, up 2.5 percent; transport, up 5.8 percent, as well as restaurant and miscellaneous goods and services, up 2.5 percent.

"Lower annual hikes were, however, noticed in the indices of housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels at 2.6 percent; communication, 0.2 percent, and recreation and culture, 1.4 percent," the PSA said.

"A faster annual mark-up of 4.8 percent in February was, likewise, observed in the food-alone index at the national level. It was pegged at 4.6 percent in the previous month and 3.2 percent in February 2017," the PSA added.

Measures to curb inflation and cushion its impact on the poor are urgently needed, the National Economic and Development Authority said.

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto M. Pernia said that the government should remain vigilant and prepared to implement measures that will mitigate the upside risks to inflation.

"The transitory impact of the TRAIN Law and the continued depreciation of the peso will mainly influence price movements in the coming months, and we must ensure that mitigating measures should be in place," the Neda official said.

Pernia said government must pay closer attention to the poor. He said there was a need to expand the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) and to fast track the distribution of unconditional cash transfer (UCT) from the TRAIN. He also reiterated the call to replace the quantitative restrictions on rice with tariffs. This is expected to lower the price of rice and raise revenues for agricultural programs such as crop diversification and investment in disaster risk resiliency.

Pernia also noted that the government, through the active lead of the Department of Trade and Industry, needed to strengthen the surveillance of businesses' compliance with the country's laws and regulations on fair consumer goods pricing to prevent the occurrence of profiteering. INQ

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Monsanto Ph starts Smart Farms

Monsanto Philippines recently launched a nationwide farmer training program, dubbed Smart Farm, meant to teach smallholder corn growers across the country best farm management practices and the latest corn planting technologies.

In its first year, the program targets to reach out to over 20,000 farmers in different corn regions of the country.

Smart Farm's Center Of Excellence lead John Fajardo said that smallholder farmers, who make up around 80 per cent of all farmers in the country, are often challenged with rural isolation and limited agronomic know-how, which limit their potential for increased productivity and profitability.

Monsanto Philippines established 16 Smart Farms across the country where 2-3 days of both lectures and hands-on workshops will be conducted each planting season.

These demo farms also serve as a shop where farmers can buy high-yielding and disease-resistant corn seed products at competitive prices.

The training will be first conducted in Bugallon, Pangasinan. It will be followed by a series of trainings in other corn growing regions such as Tarlac, Cagayan Valley, Ilocos Sur, Isabela, Occidental Mindoro, Camarines Sur, Capiz and Iloilo.

"For almost 50 years, Monsanto has been supporting local agriculture by bringing a broad range of solutions to our farmers. Through this program, we aim to further sustain the productivity of the sector and improve the profitability of the livelihoods of our smallholder farmers," said Monsanto's Corporate Engagement lead Charina Garrido-Ocampo.

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Du30 issues gag order vs NFA

Malacañang on Tuesday issued a gag order against the head of the National Food Authority (NFA), barring him from discussing in public the country's rice situation.

Mr. Duterte gave the order during Monday's Cabinet meeting on the rice situation, according to presidential spokesperson Harry Roque.

The President decided that only the NFA Council, chaired by Cabinet Secretary Leoncio Evasco Jr., would be authorized to discuss the rice situation in public.

NFA Administrator Jason Aquino has been blamed by lawmakers for saying there was a shortage in NFA rice, causing panic among consumers and raising prices. Aquino had said he was just being transparent. —**LEILA B. SALAVERRIA** INQ

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RICE SUPPLY – The National Food Authority (NFA) releases 100 sacks of rice to two 'Bigasan sa Palengke (BSP)' outlets at the T. Padilla Market in Cebu City as the agency resumed the selling of NFA rice yesterday. NFA is set to release more NFA rice to other major markets in Taboan, Freedom Park, and those in other parts of Cebu City, Consolacion, Lapu-Lapu, Mandaue, Tabunok, Carcar, Danao, and Toledo. (Juan Carlo de Vela)

THE DAILY tribune
Without fear or favor

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NFA boss claim on rice stock disputed

By Ted Tuvera

Malacañang yesterday disputed National Food Authority (NFA) Administrator Jason Aquino's claims on the food security body's claims on the country's rice supply.

President Duterte, according to his spokesman Harry Roque, prefers not to get any information from Aquino who, during a Senate hearing last February 27, said the NFA's rice buffer stock was only good for 1.7 days which alarmed legislators.

Roque, at a press briefing, said the Chief Executive would opt to get information solely from the NFA Council chaired by Cabinet Secretary Leoncio Evasco Jr. as the matter has been among the top subjects tabled during the Cabinet meeting on Monday night.

The Palace official stressed that reports saying the NFA's staple supply is down to 1.5 days—which is slightly close to Aquino's 1.7-day claim—is "misleading."

"The President said that, henceforth, all information on the country's rice supply must emanate from the NFA Council," Roque said.

"The NFA Council briefed the Cabinet that there's absolutely no shortage of rice, that the reported shortfall or the reported stockpile available for the country which allegedly was only for 1.5 days is absolutely untrue," he added.

Roque said the emphasis on Aquino's numbers should be blamed for the sudden surge of rice prices.

It does not follow that when the NFA's buffer stock is depleted, there's a rice shortage in the country, Roque pointed out.

"There was an acknowledgment that statements made by the NFA administrator caused panic which probably caused prices to rise," Roque said.

"Ultimately it was agreed that there is no rice shortage because the figure of only 1.5 days worth of supply of rice was misleading. That was—again, the 1.5 days is only if it is NFA that is the only supplier of rice in the Philippines which is not the case because they supply a minority of our rice requirements," he added.

Roque said Mr. Duterte wants to confront Aquino over his claims.

"The President instructed that there be a cluster Cabinet meeting for about two hours at the next Cabinet meeting next month and Mr. Jayson Aquino should be at that meeting," he said.

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Landbank loans to priority sectors rise 28% to P564B

THE Landbank of the Philippines said its loans to priority sectors comprised of farmers, fishers, agriculture, micro, small to medium enterprises (MSMEs) have reached P564 billion in 2017, 28.1 percent higher from the previous P440 billion.

The bank said the amount represents a record high share of 93.8 percent from the bank's total loan portfolio of P601 billion.

"Landbank is taking bigger, bolder steps in our drive to further increase support to our priority sectors, especially our small farmers and fishers. This is in line with our commitment to fuel development in the countryside which is a vital part of our growth as a nation," said Alex Buenaventura, the bank's president and chief executive officer.

Contributing to the increase was the 53.5-percent jump in loans to agri-businesses to P82.6 billion from P53.8 billion in 2016. This raised the bank's total loans to agriculture and fisheries by 24.4 percent to P138 billion from the previous year's P111 billion.

Landbank loans to national government priority programs, which accounted for 63.4 percent of its priority sector loans, likewise grew 31.9 percent to P380.7 billion from P288.6 billion in 2016.

These include loans to MSMEs which increased by 43.1 percent from P62.8 billion to P89.8 billion; utilities which grew by 48.9 percent from P70.4 billion to P104.9 billion; and healthcare which rose by 39.5 percent from P10.2 billion to P14.2 billion.

Loans to small farmers, fishers and their associations also expanded by 11 percent from P40.8 billion in 2016 to P45.3 billion in 2017.

Other sectors which registered growth in loans are education, 33.9 percent from P4.5 billion to P6.1 billion; tourism, 35.2 percent from P6.5 billion to P8.8 billion and transportation, 29.5 percent from P30 billion to P38.9 billion.

Landbank remains the single largest lender to small farmers and fishers and the leading provider of financial assistance to MSMEs among government owned companies and corporations and government financial institutions.

As of last year, the bank had a nationwide network of 365 branches and 1,607 automatic teller machines complemented by 27 other banking offices across the country.

BUENAVENTURA

BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

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LandBank loans to agribusinesses up 53.5% to ₱82.6 billion in 2017

THE Land Bank of the Philippines (LandBank) on Tuesday said its loans to the agriculture sector in 2017 grew by 20.82 percent to P183.4 billion, from P151.8 billion in 2016.

LandBank said loans intended for the support of the agriculture and fisheries sector grew 24.4 percent to P138 billion, from P111 billion in 2016.

"A major driver of last year's growth in the bank's loans to priority sectors was the 53.5-percent increase in loans to agribusinesses, which jumped to P82.6 billion, from P53.8 billion in 2016," it said in a statement.

Meanwhile, loans to small farmers, fishers and their associations also expanded by 11 percent, to P45.3 billion in 2017, from P40.8 billion in 2016, according to LandBank.

"Other sectors that registered growth in loans include education, which grew by 33.9 percent to P6.1 billion, from P4.5 billion, tourism, which was up by 35.2 percent to P8.8 billion, from P6.5 billion; and transportation, which rose by 29.5 percent to P38.9 billion, from P30 billion," it said.

"Loans for housing projects, environment-related projects and communications also increased in 2017," the bank added.

LandBank said its total loans to all the priority sectors in 2017 reached P564 billion, 28.1 percent higher than the P440 billion recorded in 2016.

LandBank added that the P564-billion loans to its priority sectors represent a "record-high" share of 93.8 percent against the bank's total loan portfolio of P601 billion last year.

The bank's total loan portfolio last yeargrew 22.92 percent, from 2016's P488.9 billion.

"LandBank is taking bigger, bolder steps in our drive to further increase support to our priority sectors, especially our small farmers and fishers. This is in line with our commitment to fuel development in the countryside, which is a vital part of our growth as a nation," LandBank President and CEO Alex V. Buenaventura said.

LandBank's identified priority sectors include small farmers and fishers (SFFs), a good part of which are agrarian-reform beneficiaries, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs); agri- and aqua-projects of local government units and government-owned and -controlled corporations (GOCCs); communications, transportation; housing; education; health care; environment-related projects, tourism and utilities.

LandBank remains the single largest lender to small farmers and fishermen, and the leading provider of financial assistance to MSMEs among GOCCs and government financial institutions.

It also finances projects in agri-infrastructure, agribusiness, schools and hospitals, farm-to-market roads, housing and livelihood, and other development projects of local government units. ***Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas***

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A broader look at today's business

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PMFTC launches 2018 Bright Leaf Agriculture Journalism Awards

PMFTC Inc., on February 27, launched the 12th Bright Leaf Agriculture Journalism Awards in Central Luzon, the country's rice granary.

As an agricultural company, the Bright Leaf is PMFTC's way of honoring the most important and outstanding agricultural news stories that were able to raise the discourse of critical agriculture issues, and celebrating the best photographs that captured the spirit of Philippine agriculture in a single frame.

"As one of the pioneer award-giving bodies in agriculture journalism, Bright Leaf continues to honor and give due recognition to journalists and photographers, who are the people behind the stories that pay tribute to the struggles and successes of our country's farmers and other producers. They are the brave messengers, who bring to public attention the importance of agriculture in our everyday lives," PMFTC External Affairs Director Bayen Elero-Tinga said.

This year's Bright Leaf competition introduces a new and special category—the Best Online Story, which will be awarded to the best agriculture news or feature story published in an online news web site. The addition of this new award category is in keeping with the current trend of readers getting their information speedily in the digital space.

The launch took place at the Bistro Maloleno in Malolos, Bulacan, and was well-attended by Bulacan-based journalists from print and broadcast news agencies.

In the last 12 years the Bright Leaf Awards has truly built a legacy of being the premier agriculture journalism competition in the country. From only 82 entries in its first year, Bright Leaf now reaps hundreds of entries as the judges search for the best exemplars of agricultural journalism in 2018.

With the theme 12 Years of Bounty for the season, Bright Leaf invites journalists nationwide to submit entries to the following categories:

- Agriculture Story of the Year;
- Agriculture Photo of the Year;
- Tobacco Story of the Year;
- Tobacco Photo of the Year;
- Best Television Program or Segment;
- Best Radio Program or Segment;
- Best Agriculture News Story-National;
- Best Agriculture News Story-Regional;
- Best Agriculture Feature Story-National;
- Best Agriculture Feature Story-Regional; and
- Best Online Story

After the Malolos launch, Bright Leaf will be visiting key cities across the Philippines to engage media practitioners and invite them to join the Bright Leaf Awards.

There is no entry fee in joining the competition. Journalists and photographers may submit as many entries for consideration. However, an entry may not be submitted in more than one category. Entries should be published, aired or broadcast between September 1, 2017, and August 31, 2018.

The deadline for entries is September 1, 2018.

Entries may be in English or any of the Philippine languages. For entries that are not in English, participants will need to submit an English translation.

Winners will be announced during the 2018 Bright Leaf Awards ceremony in November, and will be receiving cash prizes, iPads and an all-expense-paid trip to an Asian country.

For more information, you may contact the Bright Leaf Secretariat through their mobile numbers (0945) 477 2035 or (0929) 195 0620, their landline (02) 9755236, or send an e-mail to *secretariat@brightleafawards.com*. You can also visit the Bright Leaf web site at *www.brightleafawards.com* or its Facebook page *www.facebook.com/brightleafawards/* to learn more information about the competition and past winners.

PILIPINO MIRROR
FILIPINO MIRROR MEDIA GROUP CORPORATION
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PAUTANG NG LANDBANK SA FARMERS LUMOBO

LUMAKI ang pautang ng LandBank of the Philippines (LandBank) sa sektor ng agrikultura noong 2017 ng 20.82 percent sa P183.4 billion, mula sa P151.8 billion noong 2016.

Ayon sa LandBank, ang pautang bilang suporta sa agriculture at fisheries sector ay tumaas ng 24.4 percent sa P138 billion, mula sa P111 billion noong 2016.

"A major driver of last year's growth in the Bank's loans to priority sectors was the 53.5% increase in loans to agribusinesses which jumped to P82.6 billion from P53.8 billion in 2016," pahayag ng LandBank.

Samantala, ang loans sa maliliit na magsasaka, mangingisda at kanilang mga asosasyon ay lumaki rin ng 11 percent sa P45.3 billion, mula sa P40.8 billion noong 2016.

"Other sectors which registered growth in loans include education which grew by 33.9% from P4.5 billion to P6.1 billion, tourism which was up by 35.2% from P6.5 billion to P8.8 billion, and transportation which rose by 29.5% from P30 billion to P38.9 billion," sabi pa ng bangko.

"Loans forhousing projects, environment-related projects, and communications also increased in 2017," dagdag nito.

Ang kabuuang pautang ng LandBank sa lahat ng priority sectors noong 2017 ay umabot sa P564 billion, mas mataas ng 28.1 percent sa P440 billion na naitala noong 2016.

Dagdag pa ng LandBank, ang P564 billion loans sa priority sectors nito ay kumakatawan sa 'record-high' share na 93.8 percent laban sa total loan portfolio ng bangko na P601 billion noong nakaraang taon.

Ang total loan portfolio ng bangko noong nakaraang taon ay lumobo ng 22.92 percent mula sa P488.9 noong 2016.

"LANDBANK is taking bigger, bolder steps in our drive to further increase support to our priority sectors, especially our small farmers and fishers. This is in line with our commitment to fuel development in the countryside which is a vital part of our growth as a nation," wika ni LANDBANK President and CEO Alex V. Buenaventura.

CAI U. ORDINARIO

PILIPINO MIRROR
FILIPINO MIRROR MEDIA GROUP CORPORATION
• SALAMIN NG KATOTOHANAN •

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Ibinebenta sa mas mataas na presyo

NABISTO ng National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) ang halos 300 sako ng umano'y ni-repack na NFA rice sa komersyal na sako sa General Santos City.

SUNDAN SA PAHINA 15

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NI-REPACK NA NFA RICE NABUKING

Ibinebenta sa mas mataas na presyo

Mula sa pahina 1

Kasunod na rin ito ng ginawang pagsakalay ng mga awtoridad sa isang bodega ng construction materials sa diversion road sa Barangay Sinawal.

Ayon sa mga awtoridad, ibinibenta ang bawat sako ng ni-rebag na NFA rice sa mas mahal na presyo.

Gayunman, isasailalim pa rin sa inspeksiyon ang sample na bigas para mabatid kung may halong commercial rice ang ilan sa mga sako.

Patuloy ang pag-iinspeksiyon ng NFA council sa mga bodega ng mga rice trader sa bansa at tiniyakin na makakasuhan ng economic sabotage ang sinumang mapatutunayan na nagtatago o nagpapatupad ng rice hoarding.

Todo-tanggi naman ang mga bodegero na NFA rice ang nasa loob ng mga sako ng commercial rice.

MAGKAIBANG PAHAYAG SA RICE SHORTAGE

TANGING ang National Food Authority (NFA) Council lamang ang awtorisadong magbigay ng datos kaugnay sa rice situation sa bansa.

Ito ang inanunsiyo ni Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque makaraang magdulot ng pagkabahala sa publiko ang naging pahayag ni NFA Administrator Jason Aquino hinggil sa umano'y napipintong rice shortage sa bansa.

Sa kanilang briefing sa ginanap na Cabinet meeting ay sinabi ng NFA council na walang rice shortage sa bansa taliwas sa pahayag ni Aquino.

"That the reported shortfall or the reported stockpile available for the country which allegedly was only for 1.5 days is absolutely untrue," ani Roque.

"The 1.5 day stockpile is if we did not have any other source of rice other than NFA. Meaning, if we only had NFA in our possession, we would only have 1.5 days worth of supply. But the reality of course, is that NFA constitutes a minority for our rice supply, bulk of our rice supply consist of commercial rice and that henceforth, it will be the NFA Council that shall speak on the current rice situation," dagdag pa ni Roque.

Ang NFA council na pinamumunuan ni Cabinet Secretary Leoncio Evasco ay nauna nang bumuwelta ng pagdududa sa naging pahayag ni Aquino.

Magugunita na noong nakaraang buwan ay inaprubahan ni Pangulong Duterte ang importasyon ng 250 metric tons ng bigas na tinatayang darating sa bansa sa unang linggo ng Hunyo.

Inatasan na rin si Aquino na dumalo sa Cabinet cluster meeting sa susunod na buwan upang malaman ng Pangulo nang personal mula rito ang nangyayari sa supply ng NFA rice.

EVELYN QUIROZ

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL
Everybody's Newspaper

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Gov't urged to boost farm output

THE government needs to further strengthen implementation of its initiatives aimed at boosting farm productivity and income of agrarian reform beneficiaries, according to a study of think tank Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS).

Authored by Blanquita Pantoja, Flordeliza Sanchez and Joanne Alvarez, researchers and research associate at the University of the Philippines Los Baños' College of Public Affairs and Development, the study assessed the two government initiatives agribusiness venture arrangements (AVAs) and sugarcane block farming (SBF) for the modernization of agriculture.

Both the AVAs and SBF are land consolidation modalities wherein farms may be owned individually or collectively, but farm operations are done collectively through a cooperative or agrarian reform beneficiaries organization (ARBO).

The study recommended that AVAs and SBF arrangements should be encouraged but, the government has to provide a policy environment for Philippine exports crops to be competitive.

It cited different cases of AVAs and SBFs studied indicating that land consolidation can be successful if the elements of the whole supply chain is present in the arrangement.

"Initially, there should be capital to ensure that appropriate production inputs are applied at the right amount and time. Land which is a factor of production is also necessary together with security of tenure. No investor will enter into an agreement if the farmer or cooperative does not have a firm hold over the rights on the land," it noted.

The study further said labor, farm machinery, irrigation, post-production/processing facilities, market facilities and infrastructure should be also provided.

"Besides a sure market, a stable and optimal price is also essential to ensure profitability," it added. "Besides these, government assistance should be extended, and the policy environment should be supportive of the AVAs and SBF."

Pilipino Star
NGAYON
Diyaryong disente ng masang intelihente

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NFA chief binusalan sa 'rice shortage'

Binusalan ng Malacañang si NFA Administrator Jason Aquino na magsalita tungkol sa isyu ng rice supply situation sa bansa.

Sinabi ni Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque na, iniutos mismo ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte sa ginawang Cabinet meeting kamakalawa ng gabi na tanging NFA Council ang dapat magbigay ng pahayag kaugnay sa sitwasyon ng rice supply ng bansa at hindi ang National Food Authority.

"NFA Council will speak on rice supply situation in PH. Only NFA Council is authorized by the President to speak about rice stock status of the country," pahayag ni Roque.

Iniulat din ng NFA Council sa naturang meeting na walang nangyaring rice shortage sa bansa kamakailan.

Magugunita na sinabi ni Aquino na 2 araw na lamang ang natitirang buffer stock ng NFA sa kanilang mga bodega na naging sanhi upang tumaas ang presyo ng mga commercial rice sa bansa. *(Rudy Andal)*

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Abante
UNA SA BALITA

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P200M lugi sa sibuyas dahil sa army worms

DAHIL sa pananalasa ng army worms o harabas, malamang abutin sa P200 milyon ang malulugi sa mga nagtanim ng sibuyas sa San Jose City, Nueva Ecija.

Nabatid ng **Abante** kay Violeta Vargas, city agriculture officer, nitong Marso 4 lang ay aabot na sa P139.38M na ang tinatayang nasira sa may mahigit isang libong ektarya na taniman ng sibuyas.

Dahil dito ay agarang nagdaos kahapon ng dayalogo sa mga magsasaka upang payuhan na huwag puspusan ang paggamit ng mga pamatay peste dahil 'whole year round' ang buhay ng harabas.

"Dapat magpalit ng tanim para ma-break ang cycle ng buhay ng mga peste" payo ni Ariel Alejo, provincial crop protection officer ng Nueva Ecija.

Pinakagrabe umano ang sinapit ng tanim sa San Jose City, kumpara sa mga tanim sa Bongabon, Sto. Domingo, Rizal, Laur, Talavera, Cuyapo, Carranglan, Gabaldon at iba pa. **(Jojo de Guzman)**

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

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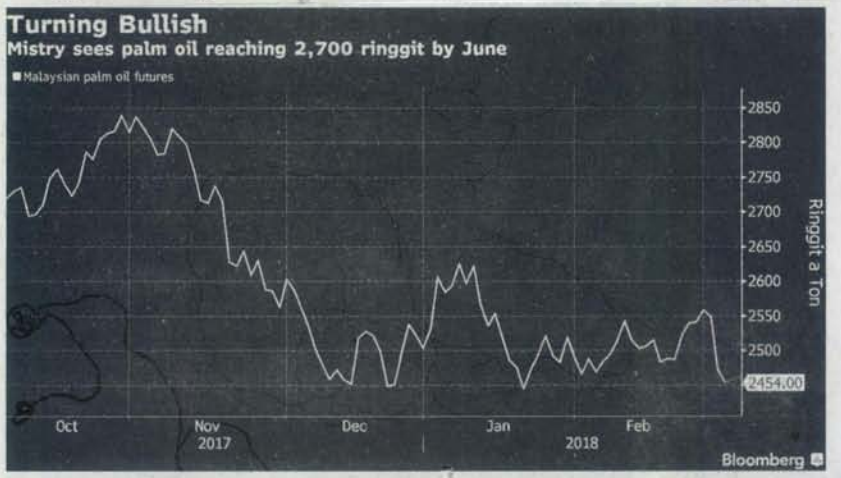
Palm futures may rise to 2,700 ringgit/ton by June, Mistry says

GODREJ International Ltd.'s Dorab Mistry is turning slightly bullish on palm oil.

Benchmark palm oil futures may gradually rise to 2,700 ringgit ($690) a ton by June, the highest level since last November, Mistry said at an industry conference in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday. He trimmed his production estimates for top growers Indonesia and Malaysia by 500,000 metric tons each to 37.5 million tons and 20.5 million tons respectively. Crude palm oil prices in Rotterdam may rise to $750 a ton, he said

Palm oil climbed 2.7 percent in February to close the month at 2,559 ringgit a ton as a drought in Argentina sent soybean prices surging. However, palm prices have fallen about 4 percent this month after top buyer India increased import duties, triggering concerns of a reduction in appetite for the oil used in everything from cooking oil to shampoo. In January Mistry saw palm trading in a range of 2,500 ringgit and 2,700 ringgit until August.

In an alternative bullish scenario, oil palms could suffer tree stress as haze returns to Southeast Asia this year, leaving Malaysian output unchanged in 2018 and Indonesian production up by just 2 million tons, Mistry said. Consumption of an extra 1 million tons of palm-biodiesel in Indonesia could be a game changer, he added.

In that scenario, combined stockpiles in the two countries could be well below 4.5 million tons, or even nearer to 4 million tons, by July, Mistry said. Although such "fireworks" aren't expected, Rotterdam prices of crude palm oil may reach $800 a ton, he said.

High import duties on palm oil in India is a temporary solution, Mistry said, adding it would be better to cut taxes on crude palm oil to 34 percent. That would widen its spread to refined, bleached and deodorized olein and lead to a big increase in refining activity. Still, inflation may soon be a problem for India and the import taxes may fall by May, he said.