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The Manila Times

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Cheap NFA rice to stay available under new law

STATE-SUBSIDIZED rice at P27 per kilo will remain available despite the implementation of the Rice Tariffication Law, a Cabinet official said.

This has been assured under implementing rules and regulations (IRR) approved on Tuesday by the the National Food Authority Council, Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol said.

Piñol, chair of the NFA Council, said the agency would adopt "rolling buffer stocking" and buy *palay* (milled rice) from local farmers all-year round with an optimal buffer stock level good for 30 days.

Once the NFA reaches the optimal level, it will be allowed to release the "aged stocks" to prevent spoilage as milled rice cannot be kept beyond six months, Piñol added.

This overrides a provision of the law that allows the release of stocks only during calamities and emergencies.

Piñol said this would ensure that the NFA will continue supplying retailers with low-priced

➤Law B2

■ LAW FROM B1

Cheap NFA rice to stay available

rice despite losing its authority to license them in the domestic market.

Current imported rice stocks of the NFA stand to last until August this year.

"We still have stocks... and since these supplies were acquired at a lower price then we will have to sell it P27 [per kilo]. By the end of August or before that, the NFA Council will determine what will be the right price for the purchased local palay," Piñol told reporters.

He explained that the NFA palay buying price would have to be adjusted "to ensure that the agency does not lose money" since it will be limited to buffer-stocking agency under the new law.

"Since our buying price for local palay is a lot higher compared to the price of imported rice, we will have to recompute. So there will be adjustments but we will determine that in the future NFA Council meetings," Piñol said.

By September, the NFA will start buying local farmers' produce which will be released to the markets as cheap priced NFA rice.

"We would like to let the farmers know that NFA will buy your palay. It will be continuous; we will not stop," Piñol assured.

It was also agreed during the NFA Council meeting yesterday that requirements on "collaterals" in the P1-billion credit facility under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) be eliminated.

This means that the RCEF Credit Program will impose interest that is 1/3 of the prevailing rates of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) to farmers who wish to avail the loan.

Also, the new IRR ruled that machinery and farm equipment and seeds will be given to the rice farmers as grant.

The NFA Council has also approved a draft resolution of other minor revisions of the IRR based on inputs gathered in consultations conducted last week.

The paper, Piñol said, will then be endorsed to the Department of Agriculture, National Economic and Development Authority, and the Department of Budget and Management, whose secretaries will sign it to signal the official transition to a new rice regime.

The Rice Import Liberalization law replaces quantitative restrictions that had hindered imports of the grain.

Under Republic Act 11203, the country will apply a 35 percent tariff for rice shipments from Asean member states, 40 percent for in-quota or within minimum access volume (MAV) shipments from non-Asean sources, and 180 percent for out-quota and non-Asean shipments.

It also calls for the establishment of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), to be endowed with P10 billion a year for six years, which will be utilized to provide different forms of assistance to rice farmers.

EIREENE JAIREE GOMEZ

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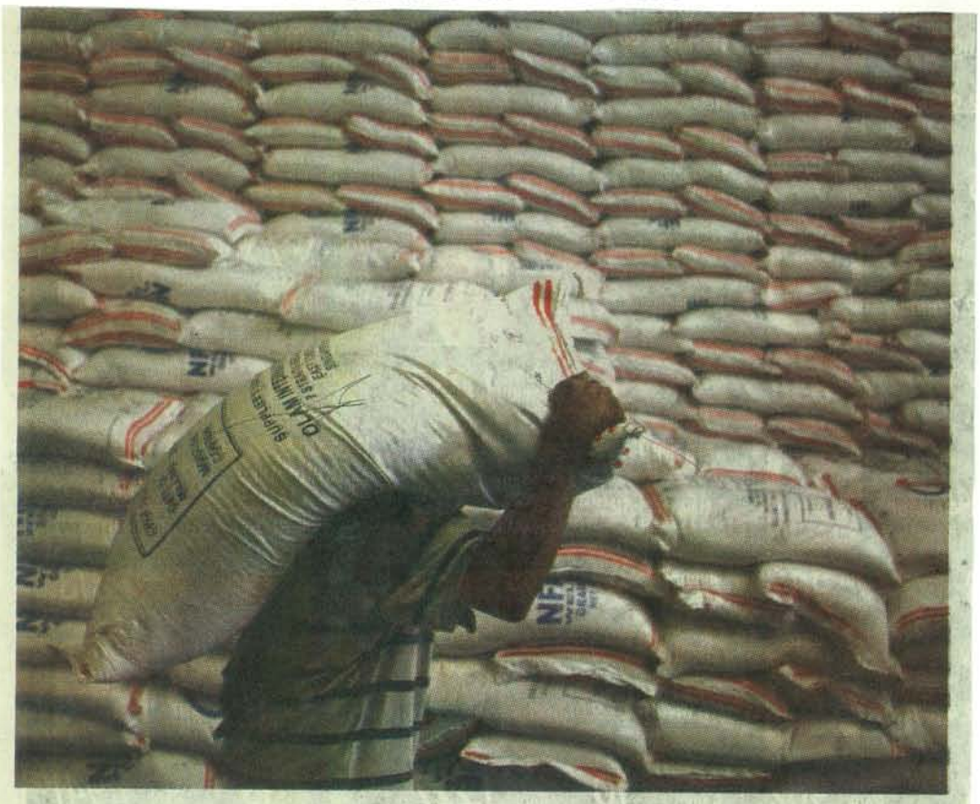

PHILIPPINE STAR/MICHAEL VARCAS

THE National Economic and Development Authority expects to decide by the end of March on the Implementing Rules and Regulations of the Rice Tariffication Act submitted by the National Food Authority Council.

NEDA decision on IRR for rice tariff law could come this month

THE National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) said it expects to decide by the end of March on the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the Rice Tariffication Act submitted by the National Food Authority (NFA) Council.

In a phone interview on Wednesday, NEDA Undersecretary Rosemarie G. Edillon said "(The IRR) should be (decided on) because the law is already being implemented)" when asked if it is possible to make a decision in March.

The NFA Council submitted an amended IRR on Monday, March 5, the first day of the rollout of the law.

Among the provisions in the draft, Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol said in a phone interview Wednesday are one that permit the continuous sale of rice by the NFA at prices to be determined by the NFA Council, provided that the prices are set such that the agency does not lose money.

Ms. Edillon said that NEDA has yet to review the IRR.

"We will check the reasons for the policy, (and) if it supports the bottomline objective which is to improve the rice trading regime," Ms. Edillon added.

NEDA's original plan was to auction NFA buffer stock as needed before the inventory ages out, and not to sell it directly in the market through retailers as per current practice.

Mr. Piñol also said that the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) should be staffed by personnel from the NFA as it finds itself with an enlarged role as private entities import rice and need to obtain sanitary permits.

"The law's implementation has gone ahead but there should be some period of adjustment. The BPI should be beefed up by employees from the NFA because it cannot possibly (fulfill its) food safety function right away because it lacks the background," Mr. Piñol said.

Ms. Edillon concurred but added there is a need to conduct an inventory of the skills of NFA employees as well as prepare for a capacity building program or retraining these personnel. — **Reicelene Joy N. Ignacio**

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DA flags prospect of European coco oil orders

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said the representative of an Austrian-registered firm which controls a distribution network in Eastern Europe is currently inspecting coconut oil mills in southern Luzon to explore the possibility of producing coconut products for export.

"Monaco-based Russian businessman Igor Malyshkov firmed up his Coconut Oil and Products Supply agreement last night (Tuesday night) with the Coconut Industry Investment Fund Oil Mill Group (CIIF-OMG)," Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol said in a social media post on Wednesday.

"Tomorrow, Malyshkov will travel to Mulanay, Quezon to inspect a mothballed Southern Luzon Coconut Oil Mill and to the San Pablo Oil Mill in Batangas, which produces coconut oil products under the Minola brand name," Mr. Piñol added.

"Malyshkov said he will consider leasing the mothballed oil milling facility in anticipation of huge demand for coconut products once it is introduced to Eastern European consumers."

The official Philippine News Agency on Monday identified Mr. Malyshkov as representing Arteks Generation, an Austrian-registered company that can distribute product across 5,000 outlets. The report said Arteks is also interested in importing palm oil and pineapple.

Mr. Piñol claimed that Mr. Malyshkov can tap a distribution network of 15,000 outlets. He did not explain the discrepancy with the earlier report.

The report said Mr. Malyshkov also represents BANEX Group, with offices in Moscow and Ecuador, which is exploring the possibility of sourcing banana products from a site of about 7,000 hectares in the Bangsamoro region. — **Reicelene Joy N. Ignacio**

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A broader look at today's business

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Two firms to bid for dairy project in Bohol–Piñol

TWO dairy firms were allowed to participate in the bidding for the Ubay Dairy Project, which seeks to establish "compact" dairy farms in Bohol, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol said he has signed documents permitting ACDI Multipurpose Cooperative, a farmer's organization managed by retired military men, and AFIMilk, an Israeli firm based in Vietnam, to bid for the dairy project.

"These groups will set up a compact dairy farm with an initial 2,000 heads of dairy cows by next year," Piñol said in a statement.

The DA said it allowed the private sector to import cattle and put up the necessary dairy facilities so the government can fast-track the implementation of its banner dairy program and save money.

He said the DA's goal is to increase the dairy-cow population in Ubay to 6,000 by the end of 2022.

The Ubay Dairy Project is in line with the government's goal of transforming Bohol into the dairy capital of the Philippines by expanding the milk output of the province.

Piñol said in 2017 that the government's plan is for Bohol to serve as the center of the DA's dairy-development program because it owns the 3,000-hectare Ubay stock farm.

"Only 2 percent of the Philippines's total milk requirement is produced by local farmers. The rest are imported," he said.

"Give five years to Bohol, I am projecting that the island of Bohol will be the major dairy-production area of the country," Piñol added.

The agriculture chief said Canada and the Czech Republic have expressed interest in helping Manila develop the Philippine dairy industry.

"Canada would like to bring in their technologies and establish dairy farms in Bukidnon while Czech Republic government seeks to showcase its dairy agri-tourism, and proposes to build a hostel and learning site for students in Baguio," Piñol said.

The importation of cattle is part of the DA's plan to ramp up local milk production to meet at least 10 percent of the annual domestic requirement by 2022 and reduce the country's reliance on imports. The DA is allotting at least P1 billion for the live cattle-importation program.

A Global Agricultural Information Network (GAIN) report prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service in Manila projected that the country's total milk imports in 2019 could reach 2.7 million metric tons (MMT).

The GAIN report also projected that local milk output could go up by 4.17 percent this year. "Local milk production [may] reach 25,000 MT in 2019 due to increasing consumer preference for fresh milk and growing local dairying capabilities."

"Around 63 percent of total milk produced is cow's milk, while the rest is carabao milk [34 percent] and goat milk [3 percent]," the report read.

The report noted that average Philippine milk production per animal of 8 liters/day remains low due to poor feed and management practices, as well as high production costs and a lack of adequate dairy infrastructure.

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'Greedy copra traders excluded from supply deal'

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said "heartless" traders who failed to raise their copra buying price will not be able to enjoy the benefits of a business deal that will expand exporters' access to the Eastern European market.

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol made the pronouncement after he and officials of the Coconut Industry Investment Fund Oil Mill Group (CIIF-OMG) and the Philippine Coconut Authority met with Monaco-based Russian businessman, Igor Malyshkov.

Piñol said Malyshkov has firmed up a supply agreement with CIIF-OMG on Tuesday night in a meeting arranged by the DA. The Russian businessman's Austria-registered Arteks Generation, he said, has links with a supermarket chain in Eastern Europe that has 15,000 outlets.

"By next week, I will direct the Marketing Group of the DA to monitor the buying price [of traders] for copra and whole coconuts. If [their] price is below P25, as earlier agreed upon, [they] will be excluded from this supply deal," he said in a post on his official Facebook page on Wednesday.

Piñol noted that many of the traders did not heed the appeal he made in November to raise their buying price.

He issued the appeal after farmers stopped harvesting copra when its average mill-gate price fell to as low as P15 per kilogram.

"As early as last year, when the buying price of copra, the main source of livelihood of our Coconut farmers, dropped, I met with many of [the traders] and appealed for their help by setting an agreed buying price of at least P25 per kg," he said.

In exchange for this, the agriculture chief said he had promised traders that he will work hard to convince the Department of Energy to increase the coconut oil content of biodiesel to 5 percent, from 2 percent and slap tariffs on imported palm oil.

"Obviously, these options are very challenging as I expected a lot of opposition. Some of [the traders] heeded my appeal to increase [their] buying price but most of [them] did not," Piñol said.

Coco exports

THE agriculture chief said CIIF-OMG officials briefed Malyshkov on the line of products which the government-owned and -controlled corporation can immediately supply. They also identified other coconut milling and processing companies which may be tapped to supply the requirements of the Eastern European market.

"I will, however, make sure that only those who are willing to help the coconut farmers will be included in this Eastern European marketing deal. I will persuade Malyshkov and his group to exclude the greedy and the heartless [traders], especially those who exploited the farmers," he said.

Piñol said Malyshkov will travel to Mulanay, Quezon, to inspect a mothballed Southern Luzon Coconut Oil Mill and the San Pablo Oil Mill in Batangas, which produces products under the Minola brand name.

Malyshkov said he would consider leasing the mothballed oil milling facility in anticipation of a huge demand for coconut products once it is introduced to Eastern European consumers.

Piñol said Malyshkov also represented Moscow-based banana corporation BANEX. "The Russian businessman is also finalizing a banana supply agreement with small banana growers while at the same time laying the groundwork for the establishment of a 7,000-hectare banana plantation in the Bangsamoro area."

MANILA BULLETIN
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North Cot gov chides Piñol, belies accusations

By **IVY C. TEJANO**

DAVAO CITY — The provincial government of Cotabato on Wednesday belied claims made by Agriculture DA Secretary Emmanuel Piñol that it was to blame for the delayed implementation on the Special Area for Agricultural Development (SAAD) program in the province.

In a statement on Wednesday, North Cotabato Governor Emmylou "Lala" Taliño-Mendoza said the fund used for the SAAD program was allotted in 2015 and not in 2016 because the source of funds downloaded to the Province of Cotabato was a continuing fund from the 2015 budget of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

"The allegation made by the DA secretary that it took two years for the Province of Cotabato to implement the SAAD project is misleading," Mendoza said.

She said the DA downloaded the funds to the Province of Cotabato only in December 2016. "Thereafter, the necessary and regular requisites had to be complied with such as the needed revision of the MOA to conform to its objective," Mendoza said.

Mendoza clarified the Province of Cotabato recorded a poverty incidence of 34.5 percent in 2015 and not 47 percent as mentioned earlier by Piñol. She added that the figures are based on the Poverty Incidence 2015 conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Mendoza emphasized that when the 2012 full year official poverty statistics report of the National Statistics and Coordinating Board (NSCB) had ranked second the Province of Cotabato in terms of poverty incidence of families, a Resolution No. 227 dated May 20, 2014 was immediately issued by the Sangguniang Panlalawigan of Cotabato, to manifest protest and disagreement to the report.

"All of these requirements were completed only in August 2017, the governor said, hence, it would be factual and correct to state that the implementation of the SAAD project commenced in August 2017 and not in December 2016," she added.

"Its implementation, therefore, did not go beyond the prescribed period," Mendoza said.

Mendoza and Piñol's row on the SAAD program stemmed from a news report accusing the agriculture secretary of allegedly using DA resources to boost the candidacies of his daughter, Dr. Krista Piñol-Solis, who is running as board member in the second district; his siblings Socrates Piñol who is running for Vice Governor, Efren Piñol who is running as congressman for 2nd district; Bernardo Piñol Jr., for Kidapawan City Mayor and Joselito Piñol who is running for Vice Mayor of Mlang.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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Ubay dairy project lures two bidders

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

Two firms are vying to bid for the Ubay dairy project as part of the government's effort to develop the local dairy industry.

Agriculture Emmanuel Piñol said he has already signed documents, allowing ACDI Multipurpose Cooperative and Israel-based Afimilk Agricultural Cooperative Ltd. to pitch bids for the establishment of compact dairy farms in Bohol.

The groups aim to set up a compact dairy farm with an initial 2,000 heads of dairy cows by next year. This is expected to reach 6,000 dairy cows by the end of Duterte's term.

"We have to understand that we are only producing two percent of the total requirement and the rest are already imported," Piñol said.

He said Canada and the Czech Republic had also expressed interest in developing the dairy industry in the country.

"Canada would like to bring in their technologies and establish dairy farms in Bukidnon, while the Czech Republic government seeks to showcase its dairy agri-tourism, and proposes to build a hostel and learning site for students in Baguio," Piñol said.

"I am projecting that the island of Bohol will be the major dairy production area of the country in five years," he added.

Bohol has been chosen as the site to develop the dairy industry with the establishment of a 6,000-head dairy farm estimated to produce 21-million liters of milk annually.

The Department of Agriculture said the dairy program would significantly benefit the province since the offsprings of the imported cattle produced would be used in establishing satellite dairy farms to be owned by the farmers in the different towns of Bohol.

Along with the establishment of the dairy farm in Ubay, the DA plans to partner with big milk companies like Nestle to consider the possibility of establishing a fresh milk-packaging plant at the Ubay Stock Farm.

The program targets to increase the country's milk and dairy production from 1.8 percent of the national requirement to 10 percent by 2022.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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Failed IRR signing delays effectivity of rice tariff law

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

The opening up of the local rice industry may be slightly delayed as the government has failed to sign the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) under the rice tariff regime.

During the special interagency National Food Authority Council meeting Tuesday afternoon, Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol confirmed that the IRR has yet to be signed.

"It has been finalized and endorsed by the NFA Council with amendments. The final version will go through legal scrubbing before we sign it," Piñol said in a text message to **The STAR.**

Piñol, however, did not elaborate on the possible changes, but NFA officer-in-charge administrator Tomas Escarez said there were "no major" revisions.

"They are still looking at the changes that may be incorporated based on the consultations. They are still finalizing the draft, but these are just small items, Just more of polishing the statements," Escarez told **The STAR.**

Escarez said the council has yet to come up with a new timeline as to when the IRR would be signed, but a referendum is already being eyed.

"Instead of having another council meeting, a resolution will just be made and if they are amenable to it, they can just sign. No need to convene the council," Escarez added.

It was NEDA which collated all recommendations after DA conducted consultations in different clusters nationwide to ensure that concerns of stakeholders, especially farmers, are addressed.

One of the salient points raised by farmers is for NFA to be allowed to procure buffer stocks more than just 15 to 30 days, as originally stipulated in the law.

"Just so when prices really drop, they have somewhere to go to and NEDA has taken this into consideration. President Duterte earlier said he would like sufficient buffer stocking up to 60 days. So, I think it should be more than 30 days," Piñol said.

And since it is now the Bureau of Plant Industry that will release import permits, the agri department is now looking at borrowing manpower from NFA.

"This will be an added task for BPI actually. And BPI does not have the budget for it. Their budget this year is only P876 million, lower than 2018's P1.02 billion. We can probably ask for additional budget next year," he said.

This year, the local rice industry is set to receive P22 billion, its biggest budget to date. This consists of the initial P5 billion released, P7 billion regular funding for the rice program, and the expected P10 billion under the tariff regime.

"Although there are calls from other industry stakeholders to extend and prolong the crafting of the IRR, I am against it. The longer we wait, the longer it will take for the budget to be released. One planting season lost for us," Piñol said.

Manila Standard

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NFA official slammed for 'insensitive remarks' on rice

OFFICIALS and employees of the National Food Authority and NFA rice consumers expressed extreme disgust over the remarks of National Economic and Development Authority Undersecretary Rosemarie Edillon that some people buy NFA rice "for the dogs."

Edillon made that statement, coupled with audible laughter, during a phonepatch interview with Alvin Elchico and Doris Bigornia during their program "S.R.O.: *Suhestiyon, Reaksyon, Opinyon*" last March 5, 2019. Topic of the show was the Rice Liberalization Law that took effect on the same day.

In the course of the interview, host Doris Bigornia asked about the welfare of consumers who are patrons of the low-priced quality NFA rice at P27.00/ kilogram, saying that even the middle-class families are buying that variety in order to save on other expenses as prices of other consumer goods continue to rise.

In a very unprofessional and highly-insensitive tone, Edillon remarked that there is a "quality difference" and that some people buy NFA rice for other uses. Asked by host Alvin El Chico on what possible other uses the NFA rice is bought for, Edillon, in a condescending tone, said "for the dogs" with naughty giggling.

NFA's OIC administrator Tomas Escarez said such remarks, coming from a high-ranking official of government, is a slap on the face to the more than 10 million poor Filipinos who have, through the years, relied on the low-priced, good quality NFA rice for their daily meals. It is also an insult to the more than 4,000 NFA employees nationwide who have been faithfully protecting the quality of NFA rice in its warehouses, delivering the staple to the marginalized consumers in far-flung barangays, isolated island provinces and poor urban areas, and consuming it themselves.

"This is the highest form of arrogance, callousness and being "*mata pobre*"! An insult to the more than 10 million Filipinos who eat NFA rice, not to mention the more than 4,000 NFA employees who risk their lives to reach far-flung areas and islands to serve the poor and marginalized *kababayan*," Escarez wrote on his Facebook account. It immediately drew strong reactions

The Manila Times

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Nationinbriefs

INTENSIVE RABIES VACCINATION UP IN CARAGA

BUTUAN CITY, Agusan del Norte: The Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Department of Health (DoH) in the Caraga region launched an intensified campaign for rabies vaccination regionwide in line with Rabies Awareness Month. On Wednesday, the DoH and DA said this was their campaign on rabies prevention since rabies is a vaccine-preventable viral disease, but despite the continuous efforts of government and the private sector, around 59,000 people have already died from the disease annually. In the Philippines, it is considered a public health problem as it is one of the most acutely fatal infection, responsible for the deaths of at least 200 Filipinos each year. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 99 percent of all rabies transmissions were from dogs. Prevention, they added, would greatly help the continuing efforts to eliminate rabies disease in the region. The schedules for mass rabies vaccination are: In Butuan City, it will be held especially in Barangay Masao and at the Guingona Park from March 5 to 8; in Barangay MJ Santos on March 11; in Barangay Taguibo and San Vicente on March 12 to 15; in Dankias on March 23; in Agusan del Norte, particularly in the town of Tubay on March 5 to 7; Magallanes on March 12 to 13; Santiago on March 19 to 21; Jabonga on March 26 to 27; Kicharao on April 3 to 4; and Las Nieves on April 9 to 12. Vaccination schedules in other provinces in Caraga will be announced soon.

ALEXANDER D. LOPEZ

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#NATION AT A GLANCE:

THE AIRCRAFT that will be used for cloud seeding operations. DA-12

SOCCSKSARGEN

DA prepares for cloud seeding operations in SOCCSKSARGEN amid weak El Niño

THE DEPARTMENT of Agriculture (DA) in the SOCCSKSARGEN (South Cotabato-Cotabato-Sultan Kudarat-Sarangani-General Santos City) is preparing to conduct cloud seeding operations amid the onset of a weak El Niño and a forecast of below normal rainfall in the coming months. DA Regional Director Milagros C. Casis, in a statement, said they already allocated P2.5 million for the intervention. "We are just processing some more documents in order for us to kick-start the cloud seeding operations together with the Bureau of Soils and Water Management," Ms. Casis said. A total of 40 rounds of cloud seeding will be conducted around the region. Meanwhile, 9,000 bags of palay seeds from the DA's Quick Response Fund are also ready for distribution in areas that could be affected by the natural calamity. Field Operations Division Officer-in-Charge Ray Embajador said these planting materials will only be released to areas validated by the agency for rehabilitation. "Although there were already municipalities which declared state of calamity in the region, we will still subject the areas for validation," Mr. Embajador noted. He also advised farmers to select rice varieties that could better withstand the weather condition, or plant legumes and root crops such as cassava, camote, and even watermelon, which are drought-resilient crops.

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Price of rice imports to hold steady despite weak peso–economists

By Cai U. Ordinario
@caiordinario

A WEAK peso will not have much of an impact on the domestic price of rice for now as imports from traditional sources, such as Vietnam, remain relatively low, economists said on Wednesday.

The National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) acknowledged that the foreign-exchange rate will be a major factor in determining the cost of rice imports following the effectivity of the rice trade liberalization law. The law, which replaced the quantitative restriction on rice with tariffs, is expected to significantly hike demand for cheap imports.

As the Philippines is a net-food importing country, Philippine Institute for Development Studies Senior Research Fellow Roehlano Briones said a strong peso will be beneficial for the country, but this will hurt exporters and make them less competitive.

In 2007 Briones said the peso was at parity with the Indian rupee at around 47 to the dollar. While both currencies have depreciated against the greenback, the rupee's depreciation was far greater and allowed exports to boom.

"I suppose in terms of that narrow concern of being able to buy affordable food, yes [a strong peso is beneficial]," Briones told the BusinessMirror in an interview on Wednesday.

"But where do we find the balance between getting affordable food from abroad and dollar-earning activities? My answer to that is, as usual, let the market decide. Let the market determine the exchange rate," he added.

Reports indicated that Vietnam rice prices have been on the decline. The price of 5-percent broken rice is around $340 to $345 per metric ton, which is lower by $105 per MT compared to the average price last year.

Briones also noted that data from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) showed that international rice prices have significantly dropped to around $400 per MT in 2017.

If rice prices remain steady at these rates or even decline, Briones said there is a "good chance"

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Peso

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that the landed cost of imports would settle at P18 per kilogram to P19 per kg, or around P18,000 to P19,000 per container.

Forex

NEDA Undersecretary for Planning and Policy Rosemarie G. Edillon told the BusinessMirror that the government expects the landed cost of rice to reach P18 per kg.

However, this price and the resulting retail price are dependent on factors such as the exchange rate and the "resourcefulness" of traders in procuring the most affordable quality rice from countries like Vietnam and Thailand.

"For now, yes [the landed cost will be P18 per kg but] it will not always be that way. It also depends on the exchange rate. The price may even be higher. But there can be a different program to address access of poor consumers," Edillon said.

"Given the very low price of P27 per kg, it is not surprising that some upper middle class families buy [rice sold by the National Food Authority or NFA], not for their own food consumption but for other purposes," she added.

'For the dogs'

ON Wednesday, officials and employees of the NFA took offense at Edillon's remark in a local radio program that some households buy NFA rice "for the dogs."

NFA's OIC Administrator Tomas Escarez said this remark was "a slap in the face of more than 10 million poor Filipinos who have, through the years, relied on the low-priced, good-quality NFA rice for their daily meals."

"This is the highest form of arrogance, an insult to the more than 10 million Filipinos who eat NFA rice, not to mention the more than 4,000 NFA employees who risk their lives to reach far-flung areas and islands to serve the poor," Escarez said in a statement.

The rice trade liberalization law, which took effect on March 5, amended the two-decade-old Republic Act (RA) 8178, otherwise known as the Agricultural Tariffication Act of 1996.

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PHilMech needs more time, funds for rice sector mechanization

By **MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR**

Even if billions of funds will soon be made available, the needed machinery and equipment to make local rice farmers competitive amid rice tariffication could not be distributed until late this year or early next year.

Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech) Deputy Director Raul Paz said even if the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) will be made available this month, his agency — used to handling only ₱200 million to ₱300-million budget every year — could not immediately distribute machineries all over the country.

Under the Rice Tariffication Lawl, an initial budget of ₱10 billion should automatically be injected to RCEF, which is where all the tariff to be collected from all the imported rice set to enter the country under a liberalized regime should go.

The fund will be used to make Filipino rice farmers competitive so they can produce equally cheaper rice.

Right now, the cost of producing rice in the Philippines stand at ₱12 per kilo, which is more than half of the production cost of Thai and Vietnamese rice farmers. Thus, making the locally produced rice more expensive than the imported supply.

Bulk of RCEF, or about ₱5 billion, will go to PHilMech primarily to help mechanize the rice sector as well as reduce post-harvest losses. Some will go to Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) for seed distribution.

But before PhilMech could spend such allocation, Paz said his agency would first need to hire more people, get more vehicles for effective transportation, and expand its procurement unit.

This is before they could start the validation process of areas that would receive the needed machinery and then the procurement process for the actual equipment to be distributed. Paz said all of this could take months.

"PhilMech is a very small agency," Paz said, but he also noted that it is the most appropriate agency to handle the farm mechanization program of the government.

What PhilMech needs right now, he said, is additional "administrative cost" of at least ₱250 million to expand its operations and structure.

Paz said this is something that PhilMech is still clarifying with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM).

Nevertheless, he said PhilMech is now "ready" to help the government implement the Rice Tariffication Law, which tasked the agency to immediately rollout sets of farm equipment to 57 priority areas across different parts of the country.

PhilMech can only start the procurement process on the fifth month of the Rice Tariffication Law's actual implementation.

The target is for the agency to be able to distribute 200 sets of equipment across the country every year.

"It will take a while," he said. "But at this time, we are already doing preparatory activities and we are starting to validate the municipalities."

Raul Montemayor, National Manager of the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF), has earlier questioned the inclusion of local government units (LGUs) as among the direct beneficiaries of the ₱5-billion farm mechanization program under the RCEF.

"There have been many complaints that LGUs use these programs for political patronage, and only their supporters are able to access these support programs. So we want clear rules in the IRR [Implementing Rules and Regulations] that will limit their access to the RCEF and prevent them from acting as conduits for machinery grants to farmers and farmer organizations," said Montemayor.

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Calamansi industry in Mindoro analyzed

Horticulture experts from the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) discussed the status and prospects of the calamansi industry in Oriental Mindoro, the largest producer of calamansi in the country at a seminar convened by the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) last month.

Dr. Calixto Protacio presented an "Analysis of Calamansi Production Practices in Oriental Mindoro," while Dr. Domingo Angeles talked about the "Calamansi Sub-sector Industry Situationer, Challenges, Programs, and RDE Needs." Both are full professors at the Institute of Crop Science of the UPLB College of Agriculture and Food Science.

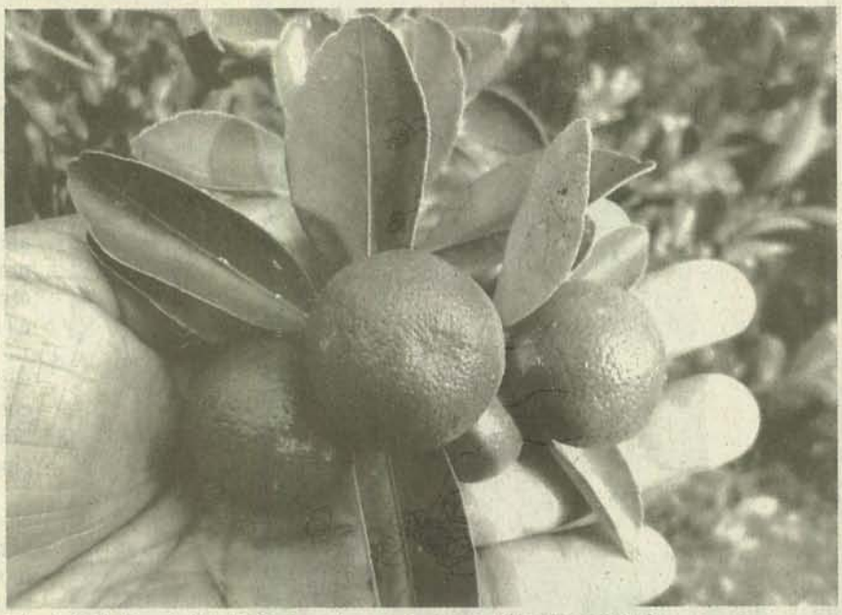
LOW PRODUCTION, INCOME – Based on his study in 2017-2018 that covered calamansi farms in Calapan City, Naujan, Victoria, Socorro, and Pola, Protacio reported that only those farms with access to water year-round were able to achieve off-season production. He also said the study showed that "low fertilization input towards production invariably resulted in low production and income."

OTHER CONSTRAINTS – In addition to Protacio's report, in his presentation, Angeles noted that other constraints in calamansi production in Oriental Mindoro include lack of supply of quality planting materials, low prices during the peak season, lack of access to service providers, and poor farm-to-market road.

Meanwhile, Dr. Jose Medina, overall project coordinator of Piloting and Upscaling Effective Models of Inclusive and Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development (ISARD), stressed the importance of investing on Mindoro farmers, directing new paths of partnership, life-long learning for family, incorporating start-up funds, institutionalizing group savings and lending system, and creating KM center for calamansi farmers.

From the perspective of the local community, Christine Pine, Provincial Agriculturist of Oriental Mindoro, shared the vision for the calamansi industry in the province. She emphasized the need to increase year-round production of high quality fresh calamansi fruits, increase farmers' income, increase adaptive capacity of calamansi farmers to climate change, develop and sustain new local and export markets, and establish a functional industry cluster that complements the agriculture and food industry sectors.

The seminar was also a venue for developing approaches for the scoping activity and baseline studies of the new project "Upgrading the Calamansi Value Chain towards Improving the Calamansi Industry of Oriental Mindoro" that SEARCA has embarked with several partners and funding from the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Agricultural Research (DA-BAR).



Oriental Mindoro is the biggest producer of calamansi in the country.

The project aims to address the technical and market constraints that confront the calamansi industry along the value chain and bring together the strengths of research institutions, in collaboration with the local government units and other calamansi stakeholders in Oriental Mindoro.

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KOICA project eyed to resolve Panay upland farmers' marketing problem

ILOILO CITY – The Panay upland farmers will no longer have to worry where to market their produce as the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) established the regional Local Food Terminal (LFT) in San Miguel, Iloilo, and 10 Bayanihan Tipon Centers (BTCs) worth ₱36.5 million.

Jose Pepe Caoyonan, chairman of San Miguel Farmers' Cooperative, said "with this LFT, our farmers will be able to lessen their expenses in the transport of their farm products to Iloilo City, thus increasing their income."

KOICA's Panay Island Upland Sustainable Rural Development Project (PIU-SRDP) with the Department of Agriculture (DA) 6 targets to empower upland communities by providing direct market link between food producers and consumers.

"The third phase of PIU-SRDP responds to farmers' marketing problem. Before the farmers' products reach the consumers, it used to pass through several layers of traders and middlemen. Sadly, farmers have no control over the [farm gate] price for their crops," explained DA 6 Regional Executive Director Remelyn Recoter.

The Panay Local Food Center and Terminal, constructed in San Miguel, Iloilo, will serve as the regional consolidation hub for upland products from the different BTCs in Panay.

Worth ₱11.8 million, the LFT project includes solar-powered cold storage facility with 12-cubic-meter capacity, office and training center, and two delivery vehicles.

Meanwhile, KOICA and DA put up BTCs in Libacao and Madalag in Aklan; Patnongon, Sebaste, and Tobias Fornier in Antique; Jamindan and Tapaz in Capiz; and Alimodian, Lambunao, and Tubungan in Iloilo.

"Our marketing partners—farmers' coop and associations—will act as consolidators of the products of members and non-members. In fact, two of the beneficiary LGUs here—Lambunao and Tubungan—are already supplying their agricultural products to major supermarkets in Iloilo City," Recoter added.

There is a big demand for agri-products in Iloilo City, according to Tubungan Mayor Vicente Gargaritano Jr.

"We will see to it that this partnership and project will succeed. We will produce more to provide for the increasing demand for our local food system in Panay," Gargaritano said.

The Panay Local Food Center in San Miguel, Iloilo established by KOICA.

DA 6 Regional Executive Director Remelyn Recoter shows a sample of the local product carrying the brand 'Panay Local Food', to be marketed and distributed among BTCs and LFT.

On the other hand, KOICA provided ₱20 million loan fund which can be availed by the farmers' groups or even individual farmers through the financial partners to fund their marketing related activities.

The provision of agribusiness financing facility is also a component of PIU-SRDP phase III. The credit facility will be managed by identified rural banks and cooperatives as the financial partners for this project.

"There will be no reason for these projects to fail because everything is provided by KOICA—from the structures to mobility, financing, and technology," said the agri chief who went on urging the public and private partners to make the project sustainable as the demand for food continue to increase.

Panay Local Food will be the official brand for all upland produce of participating municipalities. "Branding is a marketing strategy that gives identity and differentiates their farm produce from the rest," she said.

She also urges the farmers' groups to obtain certifications/accreditations for their farm products. "We envision that other than the local food, your products will also have a Philippine Good Agricultural Practices (PhilGAP) logo. This will guarantee the consumers that they are buying good quality food products," said Recoter.

The LFT and BTC marketing partners will consider the current market price in their trading operations. "We will regularly provide price monitoring reports to all the marketing partners. This marketing support will increase the income of the farmers and also free them from the manipulation of middlemen," said Maria Teresa Solis, marketing division chief of DA.

KOICA Country Director for Philippines Dr. Lee Sangback, economist Dr. Haejin Yoon, and local chief executives of the participating towns also graced the grand opening of the LFT in San Miguel. (Sheila Mae H. Toreno/DA-RAFIS 6)

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Rescued dolphin is found dead

TACLOBAN CITY– A spinner dolphin that was released back to sea after being stranded was found dead by fishermen in Bobon, Northern Samar Tuesday. The dolphin was stranded on the beach of Sitio Napanpan, Brgy. San Agustin, Mondragon, Northern Samar, recently. It was taken back to sea last Sunday.

The animal's carcass was opened by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) Provincial Fisheries Office of Northern Samar to determine the cause of death.

BFAR Eastern Visayas Director Juan Albaladejo said that based on initial findings, the dolphin had congested lungs and liver and had enteritis. The cause of death was not established, however, and tissue samples were taken for analysis and further examination. "It looked like the dolphin was near a blast fishing incident, which may have caused the internal hemorrhaging as shown in the necropsy report," Albaladejo said. (Marie Tonette Marticio)

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PRDP tractors

BUTUAN CITY — The Department of Agriculture-Philippine Rural Development Project (DA-PRDP) in Northern Mindanao on Tuesday reported that 29 farm tractors were handed over to farmers associations and cooperatives in agricultural province of Bukidnon. The farm mechanization support from the DA-PRDP 10 was commended by the provincial government of Bukidnon. In a statement sent to The Manila Bulletin, the DA-PRDP 10 said the sub-project, under the Investments in Rural Enterprise and Agriculture and Fisheries Productivity (IREAP) component of PRDP, aims to improve the farm productivity of the beneficiaries through machinery support and increase farmer's income. With a total cost of ₱1,257,905.33 per unit, the package includes 35 horsepower manual-operated tractor with disc plow, trailer, and heavy duty low torque pneumatic wheels that will greatly benefit rice farmers. (Mike U. Crismundo)

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DRY SPELL IN MINDANAO

DA TURNS TO CLOUD SEEDING TO FIGHT EL NIÑO

By Bong S. Sarmiento and Williamor Magbanua
@inqmindanao

KORONADAL CITY—The Department of Agriculture (DA) is conducting cloud seeding operations across Soccsksargen (South Cotabato, Cotabato City, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos) region this month as the dry spell starts to wreak havoc on corn and rice farms, agriculture officials said on Wednesday.

Milagros Casis, DA regional director, said the agency had been preparing to conduct 40 rounds of cloud seeding in the region starting later this month as part of its preparation and mitigation activities for El Niño.

Arnulfo Villaruz, Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council operation officer in Cotabato, said crop damage in the province had reached P470 million, affecting at least 8,500 farmers in 13 towns and Kidapawan City.

NOT A DROP Agriculture officials are resorting to cloud seeding to induce rains in drought-hit areas in Mindanao, like this corn field in M'lang, Cotabato. —WILLIAMOR MAGBANUA

"The amount will still increase as we are still waiting to complete the damage assessment from the towns of Pikit, Arakan, Magpet and Makilala," Villaruz said.

Assistance

He said 5,505 hectares of corn fields and 5,338 ha of rice farms were hit by the dry spell.

The Cotabato provincial government is preparing seedling assistance, which will be distributed to farmers during the planting season, Villaruz said.

Of the 13 towns affected by the dry spell, five had already been declared under a state of calamity. These are M'lang, Tulunan, Pikit, Alamada and Aleosan.

Citing information from the government weather bureau, Ray Embajador, acting chief of the DA's field operations division here, said Soccsksargen would experience "near normal rainfall" condition from March to June.

"A weak El Niño condition was predicted to prevail in the region still in July," he told the Inquirer.

The prolonged dry season being felt in the region has ravaged corn farms in Tulunan, Pigcawayan, Aleosan, Alamada, Libungan and Carmen in Cotabato, Embajador said.

Surviving drought

Lack of rain and extreme heat had dried palay farms in the towns of M'lang, Tulunan and Pigcawayan in Cotabato and Esperanza in Sultan Kudarat province, he added.

Embajador said the DA had prepared at least 9,000 bags of palay seeds for distribution to farmers once reports of their losses had been validated by the agency.

He also urged farmers to plant drought-resilient crops like legumes and root crops, such as cassava, camote and watermelon to survive the dry spell.

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Shellfish Bulletin No. 05
Series of 2019
05 March 2019

Based on the latest laboratory results of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and Local Government Units (LGUs), shellfishes collected at **San Pedro Bay in Western Samar; Lianga Bay in Surigao del Sur; and Coastal waters of Dauis and Tagbilaran City in Bohol** are still **positive** for paralytic shellfish poison that is beyond the regulatory limit.

All types of shellfish and *Acetes sp.* or alamang gathered from the area shown above are NOT SAFE for human consumption. Fish, squids, shrimps and crabs are safe for human consumption provided that they are fresh and washed thoroughly, and internal organs such as gills and intestines are removed before cooking.

The following areas continue to be **FREE from toxic red tides**: coastal waters of Cavite, Las Piñas, Parañaque, Navotas, Bulacan and Bataan (Mariveles, Limay, Orion, Pilar, Balanga, Orani, Abucay and Samal) in Manila Bay; coastal waters of Bolinao, Anda, Alaminos, Sual and Wawa, Bani in Pangasinan; Masinloc Bay in Zambales; coastal waters of Milagros, Mandaon and Placer in Masbate; Juag Lagoon, Matnog and Sorsogon Bay in Sorsogon; Honda and Puerto Princesa Bays, Puerto Princesa City and coastal waters of Inner Malampaya Sound, Taytay in Palawan; coastal waters of Gigantes Islands, Carles in Iloilo; coastal waters of Pilar, Panay, President Roxas and Roxas City in Capiz; Sapian Bay (Ivisan and Sapian in Capiz; Mambuquiao and Camanci, Batan in Aklan); Altavas, Batan and New Washington in Batan Bay, Aklan; coastal waters of E.B. Magalona, Talisay City, Silay City, Bacolod City, Hinigaran and Victorias City in Negros Occidental; Tambobo and Siit Bays, Siaton and Bais Bay, Bais City in Negros Oriental; coastal waters of Daram Island, Maqueda, Villareal, Irong-Irong and Cambatutay Bays in Western Samar; Matarinao Bay in Eastern Samar; coastal waters of Leyte, Calubian, Carigara and San Pedro Bays in Leyte; coastal waters of Biliran Province; Dumanquillas Bay in Zamboanga del Sur; Tantanang Bay in Zamboanga Sibugay; Murcielagos Bay in Zamboanga del Norte and Misamis Occidental; Taguines Lagoon, Benoni, Mahinog in Camiguin Island; Balite and Pujada Bays, Mati in Davao Oriental; and Hinatuan and Bislig Bays in Surigao del Sur. **Moreover, Coastal waters of Pampanga and Cancabato Bay, Tacloban City in Leyte are now free of the toxic red tides.**

EDUARDO B. GONGONA
Undersecretary for Fisheries, DA/Director, BFAR

(PDI – March 7, 2019)

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Double whammy for deficient agriculture

COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDOÑEZ

On March 5, two seemingly unrelated events occurred that significantly affected our agriculture.

This first event of focus group discussions was to update the findings and recommendations of seven water presummits held during the first part of 2017. The country is confronted by a water crisis that has caused more than 50 people to die every day, the onset of El Niño we are ill-prepared for, and the fact that several key recommendations of the 2017 seven presummits have still not been acted upon.

PRRD's political will shown in Boracay and Manila Bay should now be exercised in water areas that are even more important because of their greater overall impact, especially for the poor.

One example is the proposed presidential directive increasing our dismal 4 percent rainwater harvesting rate (compared to India's 60 percent in key areas). Because this was not done, all the rainwater over the past two years that could have been used to mitigate the impact of El Niño is not there.

The second event involved farmers' expressing in a press conference their anger over the way the government treated rice trade liberalization. After our government was given three extensions and 25 years to prepare by the World Trade Organization, our farmers were not provided the necessary support services to prepare for liberalization.

Partly led by Raul Montemayor of the Federation of Free Farmers and Romeo Royandoyan of Centro Saka, these farmers argued that the rice tariffication today will be harmful to the farmers, the consumers, and the credibility of our government.

Studies have shown that the 35-percent tariff is much lower than the 70-percent tariff that would enable our farmers to compete. At this rate, Philrice's Flordelis Bordey said 53 out of 82 (or 65 percent) of our rice producing provinces would not survive. Some 40 percent of our 3.4 million farmers will will not be able to sell their produce because of the low imported prices. They cannot heed the ill-informed suggestion of a senior government official that they can immediately produce alternative crops. This takes time, and the necessary support services are simply not there.

The consumers will certainly immediately benefit from lower rice prices. But in the long run, they face the prospect of paying much higher prices. In 2008, when our farmers had a significant rice production gap and a great need to import, the world market responded by increasing the $400 per ton of imported rice to $1,000.

With El Niño, the 35-percent tariff, and China erecting structures that will significantly decrease the flow of water from the Mekong Delta to affected counties where we wish to import, overall rice supply will decrease. Consequently, prices will increase, harming our food security, especially for the poor.

Thirdly, the credibility of our government in agriculture governance will further deteriorate. Already, our average 1.5 percent agriculture growth rate over the last eight years has significantly dragged down our overall growth of more than 6 percent. The mechanization budget of P5 billion annually given to Philmech, a small organization in Nueva Ecija with no other offices in the Philippines, shows a lack of due diligence in making this decision. Depriving the National Food Authority of the ability to effectively monitor the rice trade—unless this function is given to another organization—shows inadequate foresight in understanding the dire consequences in areas such as rice smuggling and cartel behavior.

This double whammy could have been managed much better with the proper preparation. In the same manner, our current water crisis suffers the same tragedy of lack of analysis and strategic direction. Government must now act, rather than react. To avoid this dangerous situation in our country, a special high level group with outside experts must be formed and report to PRRD himself. It is only with PRRD's demonstrated political will that we can overcome this enormous challenge. INQ

The author is Agriwatch chair, former Secretary of Presidential Programs and Projects and former undersecretary of Agriculture and Trade and Industry. Contact him via agriwatch_phil@yahoo.com

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Coco farmers protest low copra prices

By Mariejo S. Ramos
@MariejoRamosINQ

Farmers from southern Luzon have set up a weeklong camp in Quezon City to protest the new rice law and lower prices of copra that peasant groups said could turn the Philippines into a "hungry and food-insecure" agricultural country.

Represented by peasant groups Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas, Kampuhang Magsasaka Laban sa Kahirapan, Kagutuman at Pasismo (Kasama-TK) and Bantay Bigas, farmers from Quezon, Laguna and Batangas provinces said they would camp outside the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) until Friday to oppose the Rice Import Liberalization Law, or Republic Act No. 11203.

The groups said RA 11203, which took effect on Wednesday, stripped the National Food Authority (NFA) of its regulatory functions over the grains industry, including the granting of licenses to rice traders, inspecting warehouses, and seizing hoarded and smuggled rice.

Eddie Billiones of Kasama-TK said the unrestricted importation and liberalization of the rice industry would lead to hunger especially among local farmers.

The groups urged the government to strive for rice sufficiency and food security, instead of depending on rice imports.

During a protest dialogue at the PCA on Tuesday, coconut farmers also asked the coconut agency, the Department of Agriculture, and the NFA for an immediate food aid of three sacks of rice for each coco farming family affected by the steadily declining price of copra and whole coconut in southern Luzon provinces.

The groups also demanded the standardization of copra prices at P50 per kilo and coconuts at P12 each, and asked that the wages of farm workers be raised to P300 a day for every 1,000 coconuts harvested.

"Copra prices have declined by 66 percent from P38 per kilo in 2017 to the latest February 2019 price of P12 per kilo. This amount is not even enough to buy half a kilo of rice," said Agaton Bautista of Bakasan at Lakas ng mga Magniniyog sa Batangas.

"Coco farmers earn even less because of long-standing antifarmer practices of *resicada*, *resiko* or moisture content," Bautista added.

PCA OIC-Administrator Glen Santos assured the farmers during the dialogue that the agency would review the resicada system. INQ

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TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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NFA slams NEDA exec over 'rice for dogs' quip

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

The National Food Authority has expressed disgust over the comment of a ranking official from the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) that NFA rice is for dogs.

In a radio interview, NEDA Undersecretary Rosemarie Edillon had said some people buy the cheap NFA rice for their dogs, saying that there is a "quality difference" and that some people buy NFA rice for other uses.

NFA officer-in-charge administrator Tomas Escarez said such remarks, coming from a ranking government official, is a slap to the more than 10 million poor Filipinos who have relied on the low-priced NFA rice for their daily meals.

"This is the highest form of arrogance, callousness and being *matapobre*," Escarez said.

He added that the remark is also an insult to the more than 4,000 NFA employees nationwide who have been delivering the staple to marginalized consumers in far-flung areas, isolated island provinces and poor urban areas.

The video of Edillon's remarks also gathered negative reactions from netizens, including NFA employees, retailers and ordinary citizens.

One netizen said Edillon was being insensitive and unprofessional, emphasizing that such comment should not even come from a public servant.

"We, retailers of NFA rice, do not sell food for dogs. There are about 200 to 500 people lining up every day for the cheap rice, do you call all of them dogs?" an NFA retailer said.

Right now, the NFA has been officially stripped of its powers over the import and export of rice and its functions over the domestic rice industry as the rice liberalization law takes effect.

This includes the licensing and registration of persons and entities engaged in the grains business, collection of regulatory fees, issuance of negotiable warehouse receipts, warehouse inspection, authority to seize hoarded stocks and enforce rules and regulations in the grains business, among others.

However, under the amended implementing rules and regulations of the tariffication law, NFA will still be allowed to release "aged stocks" to prevent spoilage once they reach their 30-day optimal level.

This means that stocks in excess of the 30-day buffer will be released to the market on a "first-in, first-out" system and the rolling buffer stocking system will allow the NFA to roll over its procurement funds and continuously buy local rice.

The NFA will continue to sell rice because of the rolling buffer stocking concept as it will have to clear its warehouses of old stocks to prevent spoilage.

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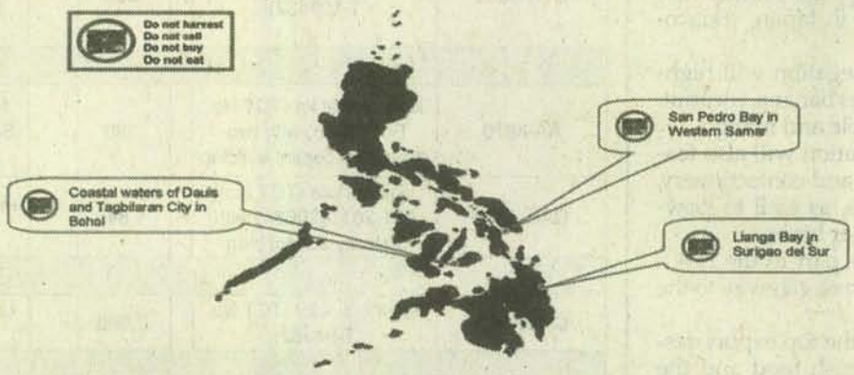

All types of shellfish and *Acetes sp.* or alamang gathered from the area shown above are NOT SAFE for human consumption. Fish, squids, shrimps and crabs are safe for human consumption provided that they are fresh and washed thoroughly, and internal organs such as gills and intestines are removed before cooking.

The following areas continue to be **FREE from toxic red tides**: coastal waters of Cavite, Las Piñas, Parañaque, Navotas, Bulacan and Bataan (Mariveles, Limay, Orion, Pilar, Balanga, Orani, Abucay and Samal) in Manila Bay; coastal waters of Bolinao, Anda, Alaminos, Sual and Wawa, Bani in Pangasinan; Masinloc Bay in Zambales; coastal waters of Milagros, Mandaon and Placer in Masbate; Juag Lagoon, Matnog and Sorsogon Bay in Sorsogon; Honda and Puerto Princesa Bays, Puerto Princesa City and coastal waters of Inner Malampaya Sound, Taytay in Palawan; coastal waters of Gigantes Islands, Carles in Iloilo; coastal waters of Pilar, Panay, President Roxas and Roxas City in Capiz; Sapian Bay (Ivisan and Sapian in Capiz; Mambuquiao and Camanci, Batan in Aklan); Altavas, Batan and New Washington in Batan Bay, Aklan; coastal waters of E.B. Magalona, Talisay City, Silay City, Bacolod City, Hinigaran and Victorias City in Negros Occidental; Tambobo and Silt Bays, Siaton and Bais Bay, Bais City in Negros Oriental; coastal waters of Daram Island, Maqueda, Villareal, Irong-Irong and Cambatutay Bays in Western Samar; Matarinao Bay in Eastern Samar; coastal waters of Leyte, Calubian, Carigara and San Pedro Bays in Leyte; coastal waters of Biliran Province; Dumanquillas Bay in Zamboanga del Sur; Tantanang Bay in Zamboanga Sibugay; Murcielagos Bay in Zamboanga del Norte and Misamis Occidental; Taguines Lagoon, Benoni, Mahinog in Camiguin Island; Balite and Pujada Bays, Mati in Davao Oriental; and Hinatuan and Bislig Bays in Surigao del Sur. **Moreover, Coastal waters of Pampanga and Cancabato Bay, Tacloban City in Leyte are now free of the toxic red tides.**

EDUARDO B. GONGONA
Undersecretary for Fisheries, DA/Director, BFAR

P.S. March 7, 2019

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Abante
UNA SA BALITA

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NFA pilay sa Rice Tariffication Law

DISKUMPIYADO si Butil Party-list Rep. Cecil Chavez sa kakayahan ng National Food Authority (NFA) na manduhang maigi ang pagbili ng palay nang sa gayon ay matiyak na may sapat na imbak ng bigas para sa national emergencies.

Ayon sa kongresista, kulang ang pondo, walang logistics at nganga rin sa mga pasilidad ang NFA.

"The NFA is in an underwhelming state and is hobbled by financial, logistical and personnel morale problems and it needs propping up to be able to undertake its new mandate under the new rice import liberalization regime," pahayag ni Chavez.

Ang obserbasyon ni Chavez ay kasunod ng inilabas na detalye ng Department of Agriculture (DA) patungkol sa inamiyendahang implementing rules ng Rice Import Liberalization Law o Rice Tariffication Law.

Sa ilalim nito ay inaatasan ang NFA na bumili ng palay mula sa mga magsasaka sa buong taon (para sa buffer stocking purposes).

"Much as we want the NFA to indeed buy palay from farmers at prices above the production cost, we cannot just see how a diminished NFA can do that role effectively," dagdag ni Chavez.

Iginiit ng mambabatas na walang pondo para sa pambili ng palay ang NFA.

Bukod dito, wala ring mga pasilidad na mapag-iimbakan ng mga bibilhing palay.

Inihayag ni Chavez na sinusuportahan nito ang NFA gayundin ang pagpupursige na bilhin ang palay ng lokal na magsasaka. **(Aries Cano)**

INQUIRER Bandera
BALITA • BUENAS • CHIKA

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Ilang lugar positibo sa red tide

INILABAS kahapon ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources ang listahan ng mga lugar na positibo sa paralytic shellfish poison o red tide.

Ayon sa BFAR, nananatili ang red tide sa San Pedro Bay sa Western Samar; Lianga Bay sa Surigao del Sur; at coastal waters ng Dauis at Tagbilaran City sa Bohol.

Inalis na ang red tide warning sa coastal waters ng Pampanga at Cancabato Bay, Tacloban City sa Leyte.

Ayon sa BFAR ang isda, pusit, hipon, alimango na makukuha sa mga lugar na positibo sa red tide ay maaaring kainin. Kailangan lamang itong hugasan nang mabuti at alisin ang laman-loob.—*Leifbilly Begas*

PILIPINO MIRROR
PILIPINO MIRROR MEDIA GROUP CORPORATION
SALAMIN NG KATOTOHANAN

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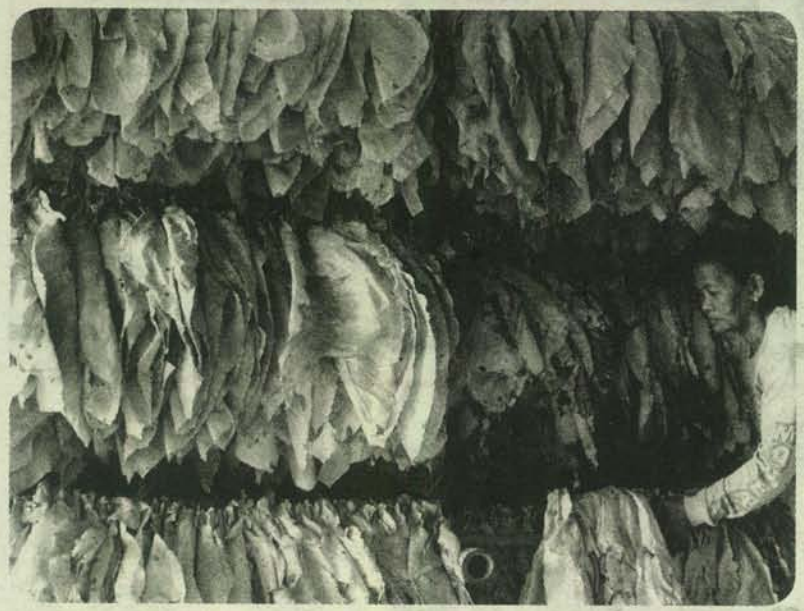
Payo sa mga magsasaka

TABAKO IBENTA SA LISENSIYADONG TRADERS



LAOAG CITY – UMAPELA ang National Tobacco Administration (NTA) kamakailan sa mga tobacco grower ng rehiyon na ibenta ang kanilang produkto sa mga lisensiyadong mangangalakal lamang para masiguro ang parehas na presyo sa merkado.

Ipinaliwanag ni NTA officer-in-charge Luzviminda Padayao na mayroong dalawang NTA-licensed buying stations sa Batac City at sa bayan ng Currimao, kung saan puwede silang mag-alok ng kanilang produkto.

"We have no control over cowboys/traders who are going to villages to buy tobacco leaves. These NTA-licensed buying stations are being monitored through the use of prescribed trading forms such as purchase invoice vouchers (PIVs) and certificate of purchase," lahad niya sa isang panayam kamakailan.

Bago magbukas ang trading season, nagsagawa ang regulation department ng ahensiya ng ilang serye ng miting at orientation seminars para pag-usapan ang kasalukuyang trading situations at iba pang mga alalahanin sa pangangalakal sa mga mamimili ng tabako at para obserbahan ang proseso ng pagbili sa trading floor.

Nagbigay ng payo si Padayao sa pagtitipon ng mga magsasaka sa probinsiya sa Aurora Park ng Laoag kamakailan na umapela sa mga awtoridad na dagdagan ang presyo ng tabako ngayong anihan.

Sinabi naman ni Genaro dela Cruz, kinatawan ng Alyansa Dagiti Mannalon iti Ilocos Norte, sa isang panayam na ang presyo ay dapat madagdagan ng hanggang PHP128 bawat kilo bilang resulta ng implementasyon ng Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law, na nakaapekto sa kanilang gastusin sa produksiyon.

Ang kasalukuyang presyo ng tobacco ay nasa PHP60 hanggang PHP75 bawat kilo.

"This is a five-day protest expressing our sentiments and we are starting here in Laoag," ani dela Cruz, sabay diin na ang ibang grupo ng magsasaka sa Ilocos Sur hanggang La Union ay magsasagawa rin ng protest rally.

Ayon sa Farm and Technology Services Department of NTA, ang tobacco growers ay puwedeng kumita ng average na PHP70,000 net income kada ektarya kung sila ay papasok sa isang contract-growing scheme na suportado ng gobyernong lokal.

"Tobacco is the only crop that gives me a decent source of income for my family. So I appeal to the government to continue giving its support to tobacco growers like me," sabi ni Alvin Bilgera, na nagsimulang mag-ani ng tabako sa kanyang sakahan sa Agtangao, Bangued, Abra noong nakaraang linggo.

Umaasa rin siya na ang kalidad ng dahon ng tabako ay makapagbibigay ng mataas na grado at makahihingi ng mataas na presyo sa trading center. **PNA**

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

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PHILMECH PRAYORIDAD ANG LUGAR NA MABABA ANG PRODUKSIYON NG BIGAS

INILAHAD ng Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech) na sa pagpapatupad ng Rice Tariffication Law bibigyan nito ng prayoridad ang mga lugar na mababa ang produksiyon ng bigas na kinabibilangan ng may 1,212 bayan sa 57 probinsiya na kinilala ng Department of Agriculture (DA) Rice Roadmap.

Sa isang pagpupulong sinabi ni PhilMech Deputy Director Raul Paz, na layon ng farm mechanization na pababain ang pagkalugi sa postharvest production – mula sa pagpapatuyo hanggang paggigiling.

Sa pag-aaral ng PhilMech noong 2010, nakita na ang hindi maayos na pagpapatuyo, na ginagamit ang mga kalye at daanan ang nananatiling gawain ng mga komunidad na magsasaka, na nagreresulta sa mataas na pagkalugi matapos ang ani, habang ang hindi maayos na pagpapagiling ang nagdulot din ng pagkalugi ng 5.52 porsiyento.

Ang ibang dahilan ay mula sa paggiik, (2.18 porsiyento), pagpapatuyo (5.9 porsiyento), pag-aani (2.03 porsiyento), pag-aayos (0.08 porsiyento), at pag-iimbak (0.8 porsiyento).

Sa tamang intervention sa mekanismo ng pagsasaka para matugunan ang mga isyu na kaugnay ng postharvest losses, sinabi ni Paz, na ang halaga ng produksiyon ng palay sa bansa ay puwedeng ibaba sa PHP10 hanggang PHP11 kada kilo mula PHP12.72.

May alokasyon ang Rice Tariffication Law ng PHP10 bilyon kada taon ng Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), kung saan ang PHP5 bilyon ay mapupunta sa PhilMech para sa farm mechanization para mapabuti at madagdagan ang produksiyon ng bigas ng mga magsasakang Pinoy para sila ay mas makapagkumpetensiya sa kanilang Southeast Asian neighbors.

Sinabi ni Paz na mamamahagi ang Philmech ng 200 sets ng farm machines kada taon na nagkakahalaga ng PHP20 milyon bawat set para sa anim na taon sa mga prayoridad ng lugar o bayan na mababa ang produksiyon ng bigas.

Ang pamamahagi ay gagawin sa huling buwan ng taon o sa mga unang buwan sa susunod na taon dahil kailangan pa nilang gumawa ng balidasyon sa listahan ng farmer organizations/ cooperatives na benepisyaryo ng mga kagamitang pangsaka.

Sinabi ni Paz na ang procurement ng mga makinaryang pangsaka ay magsisimula sa Agosto, na kasama ang transplanters at four-wheeled tractors, na makukuha naman sa domestic manufacturers.

Ang Rice Tariffication Law ma pinirmahan ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte noong February 14, 2019, ay naglalayon na paluwagin ang importasyon ng bigas. Inaasahan din na ibaba ang retail prices ng pangunahing pagkain at para maibaba ang inflation ng 0.5 percentage sa 0.7 percentage points ngayong tao. **PNA**

PEOPLES JOURNAL Tonight
http://www.journal.com.ph

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NFA lacks funds to buy palay– Butil

By RYAN PONCE PACPACO

THE farmers party-list group Butil lamented yesterday the National Food Authority (NFA) lacks the funds, the logistics and the facilities to undertake its new mandate of buying of palay for its supposed new role of buffer stocking for national emergencies.

The NFA is in an "underwhelming state" and is hobbled by financial, logistical and personnel morale problems and it needs propping up to be able to undertake its new mandate under the new rice import liberalization regime, said Butil Rep. Cecil Chavez.

Chavez made the observation after the Department of Agriculture (DA) released the details of the amended implementing rules for the rice import liberalization law, which tasked the NFA to buy " all-year-round" from farmers for buffer stocking purposes.

"Much as we want the NFA to indeed buy palay from farmers at prices above the production cost, we cannot just see how a diminished NFA can do that role effectively," she said.

Chavez said the NFA has no funds for palay buying, lacks the facilities to undertake palay buying and lack the silos and related facilities for the storage of the palay acquired.

The lawmaker said she supports the continued existence of the NFA and supports any and all efforts to assign the NFA with palay-buying functions."

But the reality is the NFA cannot do that function unless it is strengthened as an institution, she said.

Chavez noted that the grand agenda of the rice import liberalization law is to eliminate the NFA and its palay buying and rice selling functions.

"So how does NFA get a fresh mandate if the effort of the law was focused on the elimination of NFA and its supposed trade-distorting effect on the rice trade," she asked.

Chavez said that farmers' organizations across the country should unite to monitor the promises of government on the safety nets and support mechanisms to rice farmers under the new regime unlimited rice importation.

"We have been through grand promises from government before. Only to find out that the grand promises have never translated into workable and viable safety net programs," she said.

Manila Standard

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El Niño: State of calamity in Zambo City

ZAMBOANGA City has declared a state of calamity due to a dry spell caused by the El Niño phenomenon, a report said Wednesday.

City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office Chief Elmeir Apolinario told UNTV that the city council passed the resolution declaring a calamity upon his office's recommendation after drought affected crops, the irrigation for rice fields and the city's water supply.

"We are now under state of calamity by reason of the advisory [about] the El Niño," Apolinario said.

The Zamboanga City Water District recently began rationing water after its daily production dropped 50 percent from 158 million liters to 80 million liters.

The local agriculture office, meanwhile, said 600 hectares of rice fields have been hit by the dry spell.

Also on Wednesday, the Manila Water Co., which supplies water to 23 cities and towns in Metro Manila and Rizal, said it is ready for the summer months and the El Niño.

Jeric Sevilla, corporate strategic affairs group head, said the water firm has already put in place beginning this month its water supply contingency plan.

He also called on customers in Metro Manila's east zone covering 1,400 square kilometers to use water "more responsibly and wisely."

The Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration earlier said the the country was already experiencing a mild El Niño with

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El Niño:...

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most parts of the country would continue to receive below normal rainfall.

It said Metro Manila would potentially experience drought conditions from April to June. Sevilla said they would implement operational adjustments to better manage their water supply during these months. **Rio N. Araja**

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THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER
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Economy is getting better – senators

By **MARIO B. CASAYURAN**

Senate President Vicente C. Sotto III and other senators said yesterday the continued drop in the inflation rate only means that the Philippine economy is getting even better.

The rate of increase in consumer prices further slowed down February, falling within the Duterte administration's target range.

Reelectionist Senator Juan Edgardo M. Angara, chairman of the Senate ways and means committee, said this is a very good development for the Filipino people and for the country's economy since it is within the target range of Philippine economic managers.

"Lower prices reflect both international developments and local efforts to manage inflation from our government. We should step up efforts as before to crack down on unscrupulous merchants engaging in profiteering, as well as continue support to our farmers and agricultural sector since food inflation is the most felt of all especially among the poor," he explained.

Senator Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan II, chairman of the Senate national defense and security committee, said this development is encouraging "but we are not yet out of the woods."

"Too many global economic, political, cultural, technological, security variables to manage and predict. Let's continue to do good housekeeping and work on long-term policy stability, continuity, predictability, and building/rebuilding strong democratic institutions," he stressed.

Senator Sherwin T. Gatchalian, chairman of the Senate economic affairs committee, said that for two consecutive months, the country pulled a better-than-expected inflation rate of 3.8 percent as food prices continue to stabilize while the peso continues to strengthen against the dollar.

"Our own estimates pegged inflation rate for February at around four percent," he pointed out.

Gatchalian said the continuing downtrend of headline inflation is a welcome development as the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) under the leadership of newly-appointed Governor Benjamin Diokno would have more elbow room to make adjustments on the country's policy rates to spur economic growth.

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AGRI PLAIN TALK

ZAC B. SARIAN

Make sure to get a copy of March Agriculture

Make sure to get a copy of the March 2019 issue of Agriculture Magazine to find out the money-making vegetable varieties that are harvestable as early as 45 days after planting.

Then there are the high-tech new editions of Yanmar tractors and equipment distributed in the Philippines by AD-AMCO or Ada Manufacturing Corporation, a member of the Ropali Group of companies founded by entrepreneur, Roberto P. Alingog.

Other stories include the Edible white gold of Lubang Island; Sen.Cynthia Villar going for mechanization and inbred rice varieties; 700,000 forest trees up there in a Nature Reserve in Antipolo City; Calamansi industry in Mindoro Analyzed; Quadro Alas, a new hybrid rice that matures in 104 days, and can be planted three times in the same land in one year.

So many other inspiring stories are in the new issue. Be sure to buy one. Better still, subscribe to the magazine that is published by the Manila Bulletin. It is the most widely circulated magazine of its kind in the country.

MARCH 2019 AGRI COVER - On the cover is Monalisa Visitacion Rafer of Ramgo posing in a field of Mt. Data radish, a most profitable crop that can be harvested as early as 45 days from planting.

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Section Editor: ZAC B. SARIAN

The YM357A tractor with rotary tiller is one of the new tractors launched by Yanmar in Bangkok which will be distributed by ADAMCO.

Lubang Island in Occidental Mindoro has the best condition for producing garlic, thus islanders regarded it as an 'edible gold mine', thousands of farmers a hefty income.

Senator Cynthia Villar, together with PhilMech Director Dr. Baldwin G. Jallorina, inspects the different farm machines and equipment showcased during a recent training at the Villar SIPAG Farm School in Bacoor, Cavite.

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Drought in 5 Mindanao provinces to get worse

By **ALEXANDRIA DENNISE SAN JUAN**

The number of provinces that will experience drought is expected to double from five to 10 this March, the state weather bureau said.

Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) Climate Monitoring and Prediction Section chief Analiza Solis said that since February this year, five provinces are experiencing meteorological drought. These are Ilocos Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga Sibugay, Maguindanao, and Sulu.

Solis said the weather condition will also likely be experienced in five more provinces this month including Occidental Mindoro, Oriental Mindoro, Palawan, Ilocos Sur, and La Union, which have been having a dry spell since February.

Solis added that the number of provinces grappling with drought is expected to increase to 22 by the end of April.

In the climate outlook of PAGASA issued last month, the number of drought-hit provinces in the country is also expected to climb up to 33 by the end of May and decrease again to 20 by the end of June.

According to PAGASA , a drought is defined as three consecutive months of way below normal (60 percent lower than average) or five consecutive months of below normal (21 to 60 percent lower than average) rainfall.

A dry spell is described as three consecutive months of below normal (21 to 60 percent lower than average) rainfall or two consecutive months of way below normal (more than 60 percent lower than average) rainfall.

In its earlier advisory, PAGASA said the country is experiencing reduced rainfall and warmer temperatures due to a weak El Niño.

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NEGATIVE IMPACT

LESS CATCH IN MANILA BAY DREDGING, SAY FISHERFOLK

By Mariejo S. Ramos
@MariejoRamosINQ

A group of militant fisherfolk on Wednesday expressed concern over the potential economic and environmental impact of the dredging activities on Manila Bay to the livelihood of small fishermen in surrounding areas.

"Dredging-related stressors such as movement of solid particles, the discharge of toxic contaminants, and noise pollution can effectively disrupt the movement of fish species and various marine life in Manila Bay," said Fernando Hicap, national chair of Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya).

On Tuesday, the Department of Public Works and Highways began massive dredging activities in a 1.5-kilometer stretch of Manila Bay to remove more than 225,000 cubic meters of silt and garbage from the bay.

Respect rights

"While we support a genuine rehabilitation of Manila Bay to restore its ecosystem, the government must assure us that the dredging part will not result in reclamation and that the rights of the small fisherfolk would be respected," added Hicap, a former Anakpawis party-list representative, addressing the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

Hicap said he feared that long-term dredging would affect the income of small fisherfolk whose catch had been dwindling in recent years because of environmental degradation.

Fisherfolk used to catch from 10 to 15 kilos a day. That has now fallen to 2 to 5 kilos, he added.

Pamalakaya said the government must provide more livelihood and economic assistance to the fisherfolk who would be affected by the dredging.

43 pending projects

The group also urged the DENR to prevent "a full-scale sellout of Manila Bay" to private developers, as it noted that there are over 43 pending reclamation projects covering more than 30,000 hectares of Manila Bay.

Included in the project are 4,900 hectares encompassing portions of Cavite province, according to Pamalakaya.

In Bacoor, Cavite, the local government has partnered with Frabelle Fishing Corp. and Aboitiz for a 944-hectare reclamation project.

Another joint project between the provincial government and controversial businessman Wilfredo Keng covers more than 2,200 hectares.

The reclamation projects could affect 26,000 coastal families from Bacoor, Noveleta, Kawit, Rosario and Cavite City through displacement and forcible ejectment, Pamalakaya warned.

Malacañang earlier said that the reclamation projects would generate income for the government and bring in more jobs for Filipino workers.

Although Interior Secretary Eduardo Año has said that all reclamation projects would be reviewed, he also clarified that while his department could recommend whether or not the project should push through, Malacañang would have the last say. INQ

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Hog farms blamed for dirty rivers

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Calabarzon livestock growers ask for leniency, saying closure will hurt meat industry

By Maricar Cinco
@maricarcincoINQ

SAN PEDRO CITY—Animal farms operating in Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon) have been identified by the environment department as a major contributor to the pollution of the region's major waterways that drain into Laguna de Bay and Manila Bay.

The role of the livestock industry, particularly backyard hog raisers, in water pollution was again raised following a regionwide river cleanup led by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) last week.

The DENR traced fecal coliform in the rivers, with the highest concentration found in the 18-kilometer Boso-Boso River that passes through Antipolo City and the towns of Rodriguez and San Mateo, all in Rizal province.

CALABARZON RIVERS

INQ GRAPHICS

Livelihood

Water sampling in Boso-Boso showed that coliform level was highest midstream, near Antipolo City, at 270 million most probable number per 100 milliliters.

Following the March 1 river cleanup, Maria Paz Luna, DENR regional director, said the agency had identified at least four livestock farms, each "with 70,000 to 100,000 head," in Rizal for inspection.

In January, the DENR in Calabarzon had issued notices of violation of the Clean Water Act (Republic Act No. 9275) to 210 livestock farms in Batangas province. These farms either allowed animal waste to flow directly into the water or lacked waste treatment facilities.

A group of livestock farmers, however, has asked the national government for some leniency in shutting down animal farms that failed to comply with proper waste disposal.

"We don't deny that, somehow, livestock production contributes to pollution ... but we have to understand that this is a livelihood," Rep. Rico Geron, who represents the party-list Agricultural Sector Alliance of the Philippines (Agap), said in a telephone interview on Wednesday.

Geron said that given the dipping market price of local meat, as a result of the importation of agricultural products, hog raisers were forced to "prioritize making ends meet over waste management."

Convenient

"We support [environmental initiatives], but all we ask is to give [hog raisers] time to improve [their facilities] and comply [with the policies]," said former Agap Rep. Nicanor Briones, in a separate interview.

According to Agap, the P200-billion hog industry supplies 90 to 95 percent of meat for the local market. About 70 percent of livestock farms are also backyard piggeries, each with just five to 100 animals.

Geron said it had been a practice for backyard raisers to put up farms along creeks and rivers as a "convenient" means to dispose animal waste.

"The level of awareness (on waste management) is not that high. To make (environmental rehabilitation sustainable), it has to be a multisectoral approach. Don't rush things and provide some assistance (to hog raisers)," Geron added.

Aside from Boso-Boso, volunteers cleaned up parts of Zapote River in Cavite province, San Cristobal River in Laguna province, San Juan River in Batangas province, and Iyam-Dumacaa River in Quezon province.

More than 700 sacks of trash were collected, including used diapers, plastic food cups, cigarette butts and even dead animals.

The five river systems drain into the Laguna Lake and eventually into Manila Bay, whose rehabilitation by the government kicked off in January.

The regional Environmental Management Bureau said sanitary landfills in Calabarzon could not accommodate the large volumes of waste.

Ann Hazel Javier, spokesperson for the DENR Calabarzon, said 36 sanitary landfills were operating in the region but only 13 followed DENR standards.

Javier said these landfills had failed in collecting all of the region's solid waste. "We continue to monitor (these landfills) as we are to issue notices of violation to noncompliant [facilities]," she said. INQ

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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Sustainable growth through agriculture

From our recent meeting with Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) commander H. Abdullah Assadulah Macapaar, or commonly known as Commander Bravo last Feb. 20 and 22, which was attended by Go Negosyo partners and stakeholders, we expressed our full support to the peace process through our agriculture and livelihood programs in different areas of Mindanao. This is because we believe that poverty alleviation through entrepreneurship is the key to long-lasting peace and development in the area. As we pursue inclusive growth, we also keep our Muslim brothers and sisters in mind.

NEGOSYO PILIPINAS ANGAT LAHAT!

JOEY CONCEPCION

Go Negosyo conducted a four-day event to highlight all our initiatives to achieve food self-sufficiency and generate livelihood opportunities in the communities in Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte. Go Negosyo was well represented by Go Negosyo adviser for agripreneurship Ginggay Hontiveros-Malvar.

Go Negosyo model farm in Ganassi, Lanao del Sur celebrated the graduation of 180 farmer-trainees last March 3.

The model farm in Ganassi Lanao del Sur celebrated their harvest festival with the 180 farmer-trainees who also graduated from our agricultural training program. Since 2017, we have established several model farms such as Baloi Lanao Del Norte — MBA Farms, Ditsaan Ramain Lanao del Sur — Barlin Farms, Sagonsongan Marawi City model farm, Bubong Lanao del Sur SL hybrid rice farm, and Ramain Lanao del Sur SL hybrid rice farm.

With the support of the British Embassy, we also launched another model farm in Munai Lanao del Norte. Two hundred farmer-trainees are expected to start their agriculture training on Monday, March 11. The ceremony was attended by Munai Mayor Maquiling, MILF administrator Isa Bato, and BTA member/commissioner Said Sheik.

Our partner Kennemer Foods Corp. also had their site validation and farmers orientation for the upcoming cacao model farms that we are working on. Cacao is a high-value commodity due to the increasing consumption of chocolate. Through Kennemer's contract growing program, an inclusive business model, which enables farmers to sell their produce directly to Kennemer, every farmer will have a sustainable income for many years. We are grateful for Kennemer as they share in the advocacy of helping our farmers through these agriculture programs.

During the engagements, I was honored to receive recognition from the Maranao people of Munai, Lanao del Norte through Mayor Casan Maquiling. But the recognition should go to the big brother partners who are helping our brothers in Lanao like Bo's Coffee, Kennemer, the British Embassy, Rotary 3860, Swiping, William Belo, and many others. Ginggay and our team are committed to helping Commander Bravo and his community. It's still a long journey, but now with a clearer pathway, we are headed toward a peaceful and inclusive Mindanao.

This year, we will mark the 14th year of Go Negosyo. As we embark on another year, we have touched thousands of MSMEs through our 3Ms (money, market and mentorship) advocacy across the Philippines. We continuously promote entrepreneurship through mentorship and agri-livelihood programs as it is the mandate of President Duterte to bring inclusive growth and prosperity to all Filipinos.

As part of our program in Mindanao – now one of the biggest contributors to the country's agro-products, we continue to help the region in our full capacity. We look forward to the day when communities in Mindanao are self-sustainable and are experiencing prosperity.

* * *

Tomorrow is the big day as we launch the biggest digital summit — the Youth Entrepreneurship Summit at the World Trade Center in Pasay City. In partnership with the US Embassy, the summit aims to inspire the youth through the presentation of real life business stories and milestones of techpreneurs, and how these industry players capitalized digital transformation in jump-starting their business ventures. We will have top of the line speakers to enlighten the youth about innovation and digitalization.

Our theme, "Yes! Angat Lahat sa Digital: Para sa Kabataan at Maliit na Negosyante," is specifically curated to highlight that digitalization is pro-poor that would initiate inclusive growth across all sectors, including the youth and micro and small entrepreneurs.

We have a great line-up of speakers from different digital platforms including Grab, Lazada, Shopee, Angkas, Honestbee, and many more!

I am still inviting all interested participants to join us! You may register at *www.tinyurl.com/YESGONEG*.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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Phl targets $17.9 M sales from Japan food fair

The export promotions arm of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) is targeting $17.9 million worth of sales from the country's participation in Japan's premier food trade show, the International Food and Beverage Exhibition or FOODEX.

In a statement, the Center for International Trade Expositions and Missions (CITEM) said the 16 participating companies from the Philippines aim to exceed last year's sales and generate at least $17.9 million in export sales from the FOODEX being held at Makuhari Messe in Chiba until Friday.

Last year, the Philippine delegation composed of 18 companies bagged $17.1 million worth of export orders from FOODEX.

"Japan is one of our leading importers of Philippine fruits and other tropical products. As such, we are bringing 16 Philippine companies to showcase these finest selections in Japan's biggest food show," DTI-CITEM executive director Pauline Suaco-Juan said.

The Philippine delegation is composed of Agrinurture Inc., Amley Food Corp., Avante Agri-Products Philippines Inc., Celebes Coconut Corp., Century Pacific Food Inc., Citra Mina Canning Corp., CJ Uniworld Corp., Coconut Cures Inc./Mindanao Pacific Coconut Coop, Grand Asia Integrated Natural Coco Products Corp., GSL Premium Food Export Corp., Leonie Agri Corp., Phil-Union Frozen Foods Inc., Prime Fruits International Inc., Profood International Corp., Seabest Food and Beverage Corp. and See's International Food Mfg. Corp.

"With these 16 big companies, CITEM is confident this participation will deliver our sales target and maintain the Philippines' strong market presence in Japan," Suaco-Juan said.

For this year, the delegation will highlight tropical fruits such as banana, coconut, durian, papaya, pineapple and mango.

The Philippine delegation will also feature organic food, cakes and confectionery, tuna, shrimps and crabs, as well as powdered juice drinks of other herbs.

The country is taking part in the FOODEX as the event serves as a gateway to the Japanese market.

Last year, Japan was the top export destination of Philippine fresh food and the second largest market for processed food after the US.

By bringing Philippine firms to trade events like the FOODEX, CITEM is able to help businesses become globally competitive.

Taking part in trade events overseas is also expected to help promote the growth of the country's exports.

The country's merchandise exports declined 1.8 percent to $67.49 billion last year from $68.71 billion in 2017.

– Louella Desiderio

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Abante
UNA SA BALITA

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Paghandaan ang El Niño — Tolentino

NAGPAHAYAG kamakailan ang environmental lawyer at ngayo'y isa sa mga pambato ng PDP-Laban sa senado na si Atty. Francis Tolentino na dapat na paghandaan ng mga mamamayan ang napipintong paglukob ng El Niño sa bansa.

Tinatayang tatama ang matinding tagtuyot sa Pilipinas ngayong taon kung kaya't maaga pa lamang ay hinihimok na ni Tolentino ang mga Pilipino na maghanda sa posibleng epekto ng nasabing phenomena sa buhay at hanapbuhay ng ating mga kababayan.

Ayon kay Tolentino, magkakasanga ang epekto ng El Niño sa pamumuhay at kabuhayan ng mga Pilipino.

"Chain reaction ang inaasahan natin sa pagdating ng tagtuyot. Apektado ang agrikutura at produksiyon ng pagkain dahil sa pagkatuyo ng lupa; apektado ang suplay ng tubig; tataas ang presyo ng pagkain dahil sa mababang suplay; tataas ang konsumo sa kuryente dahil sa init ng panahon; tataas ang kaso ng mga sakit na karaniwang bunsod ng napakainit na panahon tulad ng heat stroke at skin asthma," ani niya. "Mainam na paghandaan, hindi lamang ng pamahalaan, kundi maging ng mga ordinaryong mamamayan ang mga ganitong kaganapan upang mabawasan ang epekto ng El Niño, lalong-lalo na sa kalusugan ng ating mga kababayan."

Dagdag pa ni Tolentino, ang parating na El Niño ay patikim pa lamang ng inaasahang malawakang krisis sa tubig pagdating ng 2025.

Hinikayat din ng dating kalihim ang mga Pilipino na maging matalino sa paggamit ng tubig ngayon pa lamang at makiisa sa mga hakbangin ng pamahlaan upang mapangalagaan ang mga pinagkukunang tubig natin sa bansa.

Balita

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SENTIDO KOMUN

Celo Lagmay

Napag-iwanan sa agrikultura

KASABAY ng pag-iral kahapon ng Rice Tariffication Act (RTA) – kaakibat ng kabi-kabilang pagtutol ng iba't ibang sektor – lalo namang tumindi ang hinanakit ng mga magsasaka na sila ay talagang napag-iwanan sa agrikultura at biktima ng kawalan ng malasakit ng administrasyon; na sila ay mistulang kinawawa sa kabila ng katotohanan na sila ang pinakamahalagang instrumento sa pagkakaroon ng sapat na pagkain o rice self-sufficiency.

Sa isang media forum na dinaluhan ng ilang kinatawan ng grupo ng magbubukid, pahapyaw kong ipinaliwanag ang ilang probisyon ng RTA na inaakala kong nakakiling, kahit paano, sa ating mga kapatid na magbubukid. Subalit kahit anong paglilinaw ang aking binigyang-diin, 'tila sarado na ang kanilang pag-iisip sa paniwala na ang naturang batas ay isang anyo ng pagmamalupit sa kanilang hanay.

Sa isang yugto ng panayam, walang kagatul-gatol na ibinulalas ng mga magsasaka ang kanilang panggagalaiti sa pangasiwaan, lalo na sa tinaguriang economic managers ng gobyerno na sinasabing manhid sa pangangailangan ng sambayanan; hindi alintana ang makabuluhang misyon na ginagampanan ng mga magbubukid sa mga kaunlarang pangkabuhayan, lalo na sa larangan ng agrikultura. Isipin nga naman na isang opisyal ng Duterte administration ang mistulang nag-utos sa mga magsasaka na magtanim na lamang ng ibang agriculture crop sa halip na palay. Hindi ba ang gayong pahayag ay produkto ng malabnaw na utak, wika nga?

Sa naturang media forum, lumutang ang matinding paghihimutok na may kaakibat na pagngingitngit ng mga magsasaka nang tandisan nilang ibinulalas na ipagbibili na lamang nila ang kanilang mga bukirin at iiwanan ang pagsasaka; hihikayatin ang kanilang mga kaanak na humanap na lamang ng ibang pagkakakitaan. At pakutya pang ipinahiwatig na hahayaan na lamang nilang tayuan ng mga subdivision ang kanilang mga bukirin. May mga malalaki kayang subdivision developers ang mistulang nangangamkam ng sinasaka nilang palayan?

Ang ganitong pananaw ng mga magbubukid ay marapat burahin ng administrasyon sa pamamagitan ng puspusang pag-ayuda sa naturang sektor na tinaguriang mga gulugod ng bansa o backbone of the nation. Sa pag-iral ng RTA, kailangang simulan nilang ibuhos ang sinasabing P10 bilyon na nakaukol sa pagpapaunlad ng agrikultura. Hindi dapat panghinayangan ang pagkakaloob ng makabagong mga makinarya sa pagsasaka, kabilang na ang iba pang benepisyo na magpapabago sa kanilang planong talikuran ang pagbubungkal ng bukirin.

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL
Everybody's Newspaper

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Steady inflation dive till yearend

ECONOMIC managers are optimistic the downward path of inflation will continue for the rest of the year on the back of reforms recently rolled out, after the country's inflation declined to an 11-month low of 3.8 percent in February 2019.

"(Last month's inflation) shows the government's resolve coupled with the appropriate measures to rein in inflation," they said in a joint statement.

The economic team cited the recent enactment of the Rice Industry Modernization Act (RA 11203), which is expected to bring down rice prices and cut inflation by 0.5 to 0.7 percentage point this year and 0.3 to 0.4 percentage point next year.

"Our work does not stop here. We must ensure that the change to a rice tariff regime—from government-led to market-led—is seamless and fast. The crafting and promulgation of the Implementing Rules and Regulations or IRR of the new law, as part of the first steps, are now underway. The new regime will include the operationalization of a National Single Window system, which will facilitate seamless trade transactions," they said.

They also vowed that the government would take proactive measures to mitigate the adverse impacts of El Niño on the agriculture sector in the immediate term, and to increase its resiliency against extreme weather conditions over the medium to long term.

Economic managers noted the sharp deceleration in inflation for transport to 1.2 percent in February 2019 from 2.5 percent in the corresponding month last year despite the increase in fuel excise tax.

"We will also remain watchful of developments in the global oil market. While prices have already gone up by around PHP7 to 8 since the start of the year, current domestic fuel prices are still relatively lower compared to pump prices in 2018, even including the second round of increases in fuel excise tax this year," they said.

They thus underscored the need for the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board to increase its efforts to cover more of the targeted beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pasada Program in order to temper possible demand for transport fare increases should oil prices continue to go up.

In a press briefing Tuesday, Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) Deputy National Statistician Josie Perez mainly attributed the decline in last month's inflation to food and non-alcoholic beverages, alcoholic beverages and tobacco, and transport.

"The main driver in the downtrend in February inflation is food and non- alcoholic beverages brought about by the lower prices of rice, corn, meat, milk, cheese and egg, fruit and vegetables," she said.

Rice inflation significantly moderated to 2.9 percent from 4.7 percent in January 2019 on the back of stable rice supply.

Last month's inflation rate was within the government's 2 to 4-percent target after hitting record highs late last year.

Inflation in January 2019 was higher at 4.4 percent, while it was the same as the February 2018 at 3.8 percent.

ABANTE TONITE
MABILIS SA BALITA

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₱470M pananim sinira ng tagtuyot

Aabot sa kalahating bilyong piso ang nasirang mga pananim sa lalawigan ng Cotabato habang higit 8,000 magsasaka ang apektado sa nararanasang pagtaas ng temperatura at kawalan ng ulan.

Ayon kay Engineer Arnulfo Villaruz, operations officer ng Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (PDRRMC), P470 milyong halaga na ng pananim ang nasira dahil sa tagtuyot o dry spell sa nasabing lalawigan.

Dagdag pa ng opisyal, 8,500 magsasaka at 13 bayan na ang napuruhan, kabilang ang 3,000 hektarya ng mais at palayan, at posible pa aniya itong tumaas kapag natapos na ang kanilang assessment sa ilan pang bayan.

Limang bayan na sa Cotabato ang isinailalim sa state of calamity, habang nagbibigay na umano ng tulong ang lokal na pamahalaan para sa mga apektadong magsasaka.

Malaya
Business Insight

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Soybeans, corn up; wheat steady

SYDNEY- US soybeans edged higher on Wednesday, though gains were checked due to fears that an eagerly awaited trade deal between Washington and Beijing would fail to materialize.

Corn, meanwhile, extended an upward trend into a fourth consecutive session. Wheat was little changed.

The most active soybean futures on the Chicago Board Of Trade were up 0.2 percent at $9.15-1/4 a bushel, having closed down 0.2 percent on Tuesday.

"The market continues to worry about the relationship with China," said Tobin Gorey, director of agricultural strategy, Commonwealth Bank of Australia.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in an interview that President Donald Trump will reject a US-China trade deal that is not perfect.

China's commerce minister said earlier on Tuesday talks with the United States have been difficult, although working teams from the two countries are continuing negotiations.

The most active corn futures were up 0.2 percent at $3.76-1/2 a bushel, after gaining 0.3 percent on Tuesday.

The most active wheat futures were little changed at $4.62-1/2 a bushel, having closed up 1.6 percent in the previous session. Despite Tuesday's rally, analysts said wheat remains under pressure on tepid demand for North American supplies.

Australia's 2019/20 wheat harvest is expected to jump 38 percent if farms receive rain. – *Reuters*

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

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China revokes canola permit of Canadian grain processor as dispute escalates

WINNIPEG, Manitoba—One of Canada's largest grain processors said on Tuesday that China has revoked its permit to export canola there, a move that some saw as retaliation for the Canadian government's arrest of a top executive for the Chinese tech giant Huawei.

China's action against Richardson International Ltd. following noncompliance notices alleging that some imports from Canada were contaminated with pests or bacteria. Canada disputes that claim.

"I am very concerned by what we've heard has happened to Richardson. We do not believe there's any scientific basis for this," Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland said in Montreal. "We are working very, very hard with the Chinese government on this issue."

The loss of the shipping permit comes as Canada is proceeding with an extradition hearing for Huawei CFO Méng Wanzhou, who is the daughter of Huawei's founder. She was arrested by Canada at the request of the United States, where she is wanted on fraud charges.

BOTTLES of Canola Harvest brand canola oil, manufactured by Canadian agribusiness firm Richardson International, are seen on the shelf of a grocery store in Beijing on March 6. AP PHOTO/MARK SCHIEFELBEIN

It wouldn't be the first time Beijing has retaliated against nations that offend it. China suspended its bilateral trade deal with Norway and restricted imports of Norwegian salmon after the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Chinese political prisoner Liu Xiaobo in 2010.

Britain and other countries were retaliated against over meetings with the Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, considered a dangerous separatist by Beijing.

Canadian Agriculture Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau said in a statement that the government was closely monitoring the situation and any potential impact on Canada's agricultural trading relationship with China. ***AP***