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The Manila Times

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COCO NUTS Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol (right) and Metropolitan Manila Development Authority chief Danny Lim enjoy fresh *buko* juice during the launch of the Summer Coco Fest on Thursday. The program aims to help coconut farmers market their produce.
PHOTO BY RUY L. MARTINEZ

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GOTCHA

JARIUS BONDOC

Tumult in Piñol's agriculture turf

No man, not even a cabinet minister, is a prophet in his own land. Agriculture Sec. Manny Piñol is doubted in his North Cotabato home province. He hails two solar-powered irrigation works he set up there as the Philippines' way to rice self-sufficiency. Farmers scoff that they're white elephants.

Costing P6.5 million each, the irrigations in two arid villages are unworkable. Reason: not enough water to draw and gush onto paddies.

Piñol had picked the locations because, with farmers dependent on rain, cropping is only once a year. With suction pumps running on solar panel-generated electricity, he ballyhooed, planting can be twice a year or more. Four hectares supposedly can be irrigated per day, or 60 hectares in 15 days. Going nationwide, he can then water 500,000 similarly rain-fed hectares to boost rice supply. He pulled in President Rody Duterte to inaugurate the first site in Janiuay, Mlang in Feb. 2017. Mlang was where Piñol began his political career as mayor.

Here's the catch. Precisely because the two locations are dry most of the year, there are no irrigation sources. Ponds and creeks are too shallow. Last Monday the Janiuay barangay council petitioned Duterte to inspect the never-used facility.

A later one in Manubuan, Matalam looked more promising. A 350-cubic meter reservoir was installed, to release water during the parched months. But recent photos show it inoperative. An El Niño drought is expected this year.

In Pigcawayan, gentleman farmer Reynaldo Palomero questions Piñol's dole last month of expensive tractors to 20 barangay captains. Writing to the Presidential Complaints Center in Malacañang, he says the equipment should have been given instead to qualified farmers associations. Commission on Audit (COA) guidelines state that beneficiaries must be groups verified as working on over a hundred hectares. The barangay chiefs have hectarages of only two to 20. Palomero sees politics behind the deal. Allegedly, a high official in the Dept. of Agriculture (DA) in Region XII, covering North Cotabato, chose the 20 barangay captains for elevating a kinsman to municipal councilor. The regional officer is Piñol's appointee.

A certified public accountant and member of the Institute of Internal Auditors, Palomero is a stickler for rules. He seeks investigation if the grantee-barangay chiefs filed proper application forms and the DA properly vetted them.

In Kidapawan, the city government refuses to implement one of nine DA projects. From a P2-million grant, the poultry production would have improved farm incomes. But there are kinks with the DA's chosen recipient, Diamond Agri-Venture Farmers Association. For one, DAVFA, formed in 2016, was registered with the SEC only in 2018. COA rules state that grantees must have at least three years' financial statements. A seven-man special committee of city hall found DAVFA officers unfamiliar with its finances.

There's worse. Of DAVFA's 71 members, 49 (or 69 percent) are employees of the Office of the City Vice Mayor. Twenty-nine of the latter are contractual, 18 are temporary hires, and two are co-terminus with Vice Mayor Bernardo F. Piñol, the DA secretary's brother. All the DAVFA trustees are with that office. A city ordinance and DA guidelines debar city hall employees as grantees, the committee noted.

DAVFA's members are unregistered with the Federation of Farmers Associations, or Kapisanan ng mga Magsasaka sa Lungsod ng Kidapawan. Neither is DAVFA accredited by the Kidapawan City Livelihood Desk. It has no business permit, the committee added. City Hall withheld the poultry startup until the DA qualifies DAVFA and certifies no conflict of interest.

Elsewhere agri-businessmen and farmer leaders lament the mess in DA. Hog and poultry raisers lost billions of pesos in late 2018 to early 2019 due to oversupply. DA's Bureau of Animal Industry had over-imported pork and chicken, says Engr. Rosendo So, head of Samahang Industriya at Agrikultura (SINAG). Over 398 million kilos of foreign pork and 288 million of chicken flooded the country. Domestic growers account for 97 percent of pork and 98 percent of chicken supply. The BAI should have allowed importation only of the three and two percent shortfall. That would be about the 45 million kilos of pork and 24 million of chicken that the Philippines commits to the World Trade Organization to let in.

SINAG being the largest umbrella of agriculture concerns, So reported everything to Piñol. Allegedly he got a scolding for talking to the press.

Due to the over-importation, farm-gate prices of hogs and poultry fell. Citing the chicken situation, So recounts buyers quoting only P45-P50 a kilo when the raisers' cost of production was P75-P80. Severely hurt were backyard hog and poultry raisers, 65 percent of the suppliers. So anticipates a drop in domestic production this year. Having been burned, raisers will scale down or shift business.

So has alerted Senators Cynthia Villar and Grace Poe, as heads of the agriculture and public services committees, respectively. He also raises the alarm about a supposed DA purchase of fertilizers at P600 per bag when the going rate is P450, for distribution to rice farmers. Another worry is the lack of footbaths at international airports – a duty of DA's veterinary quarantine – against a spreading African swine fever.

Cash croppers have also been burned by overproduction. In 2017 Laguna growers had to let rot hundreds of tons of tomatoes they had been enticed to plant. Last year it was melons in Pampanga, carrots and other vegetables in Benguet, and tomatoes again in Pangasinan and La Union. In the age of instant telecommunications, DA has not been informing them of what to plant where, and how to stagger harvesting.

Piñol has been unreachable on any of his known mobiles.

* * *

Catch *Sapol* radio show, Saturdays, 8-10 a.m., DWIZ (882-AM).

Gotcha archives on Facebook: *https://www.facebook.com/pages/Jarius-Bondoc/137660215921845*9, or **The STAR** website *https://beta.philstar.com/columns/134276/gotcha*

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Indonesia wants Phl import safeguards on coffee mixes lifted

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

The Indonesian government is demanding for the Philippines to permanently lift the safeguards on the imports of coffee mixes in exchange for investments in the country.

Agriculture Undersecretary Segfredo Serrano said Indonesia has gone straight to President Duterte to lobby for the removal of the special safeguards on coffee mixes which the Department of Agriculture invoked to protect the local industry.

"They raised the issue to the President. They prepared an agreement without even studying our laws and they want us to permanently lift the SSG. They want to invest here, but the condition is we lift the SSG. I feel insulted that they are making these demands," Serrano told reporters.

"There is no such thing under our laws. If they want to invest, it is very much appreciated, but without any condition, they can invest and apply for incentives, we will assist, but for them to meddle with our trade policies is something that is totally and completely unacceptable," he said.

Indonesian company PT. Mayora Indah Tbk manufactures and exports the Kopiko brand to the Philippines.

It was last year when Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol invoked the SSG amid complaints of local manufacturers that foreign companies were just bringing in processed coffee products into the country without any investments in the local farm sector.

"Our domestic processors that invested in the local coffee industry approached us for the lifting of the SSG on coffee beans because we do not have adequate production of the raw materials," Serrano said.

"We put a premium on providing safeguard that will protect our local industry in a justifiable manner. The special safeguard action is something that we have notified the WTO. It is not specifically targeted at Indonesia as a trading partner," he added.

Furthermore, Serrano said Indonesia has not been practicing diplomacy in terms of seeking dialogue with the DA Secretary.

"It's like a de facto demand from the secretary. Do we even do that to them? For a country that has very good foreign service, with a lot of geopolitical influence, it seems like their actions are not exactly right," he said.

"The secretary is well aware of the actions done by Indonesia and it is our duty as government officers to protect our people. Plus, we really are making headway in our coffee and cacao and these are avenues for diversification for our small farmers, it will not be on our interest to abandon and leave them to the dogs and vagaries of international trade," Serrano added.

The Philippines has long been asking Indonesia to ease up on its protocols and open its market access for agricultural products coming from the Philippines to settle the restrictions and disparity in trade imbalance.

Government data showed that Indonesia exports $1 billion worth of agricultural products to the Philippines mainly palm oil, while allowing only a measly $50 million worth of exports from the Philippines.

The Philippines used to export a huge volume of horticultural products to Indonesia, including shallots and tobacco, but restrictive import policies imposed tilted the trade balance in favor of Indonesia.

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PHILIPPINE STAR/MIGUEL DE GUZMAN

RESIDENTS QUEUE with their pails and containers as fire volunteers supply water at Brgy. Barangka Drive in Mandaluyong City on March 11.

Senate gearing up to conduct investigation into water crisis

SENATE President Vicente C. Sotto III has filed a resolution calling for an investigation into Metro Manila's water crisis.

Mr. Sotto filed Senate Resolution 1028 on Wednesday ordering the Senate Committee on Public Services and other committees to look into the matter and come up with recommendations.

"If left unresolved, the water crisis may bring more serious problems to the people and businesses in the affected areas, and may impact the country as a whole," according to the resolution.

The crisis in Metro Manila's water supply stems from La Mesa Dam, which Manila Water Inc. Co. reports is below the critical level of 69 meters at 68.74 meters. The La Mesa Dam is Manila Water's emergency water source.

Many areas in the metro have experienced weak to no water supply, with some areas having people line up for hours to get water from tankers.

The Committee on Public Services, Chaired by Senator Grace Poe-Llamanzares, has scheduled hearings for March 19.

In a statement on Thursday, Ms, Poe said that the probe will, in part, seek to resolve the matter of the low water levels in La Mesa Reservoir in Quezon City, despite normal water levels at Angat Dam in Bulacan, which is the ultimate source of most of Metro Manila's water.

"*May tubig pa ang* Angat Dam *kaya nga ang* western part *na sineserbisyuhan ng* Maynilad *ay may tubig pa. Ang problema 'yung* conveyance *kung saan dadaloy ang tubig* (There is still water in Angat Dam which is why the Western part that is being served by Maynilad Water Services Inc. still has water. The problem is in how the water gets to Metro Manila,") she said.

The committee invited Manila Water Chief Operating Officer Geodino V. Carpio and Communications Head Nestor Jeric T. Sevilla Jr. and Maynilad Water Services Chief Operating Officer Randolph T. Estrellado.

Also invited were Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol; Environment Secretary Roy A. Cimatu; the weather bureau administrator Vicente Malano; Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA) administrator Jeci A. Lapus; National Water Resources Board (NWRB) Executive Director Sevillo D. David Jr.; Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) Administrator Reynaldo V. Velasco and its Chief of Regulation Patrick N. Ty. — **Gillian M. Cortez**

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DA to provide loans for coconut water sellers

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it will provide funding for poor families and out-of-school youth willing to sell coconut products in Metro Manila, as a means of supporting coconut farmers beset by weak copra prices.

The "Healthy Drink, Healthy Life" campaign targets to expand the market for young coconut, which is the source of coconut water and takes less time and labor to get ready for market than copra meal.

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol said Thursday that copra prices are dictated by the world market, but the DA hopes to help farmers better exploit opportunities to sell young coconut.

Mr. Piñol said the annual surplus of coconut oil, the end-product of copram is about 200,000 metric tons (MT).

The Philippines produces 15 million MT of coconut yearly, equivalent to five billion nuts.

"There's very little we can do in terms of pricing because it is dictated by the world market but there are small things we can do to make sure the oversupply can be addressed," Mr. Piñol said at the launching in Quezon City.

The scheme involves lending money to out of school youth in groups of four, providing sufficient capital to buy a multi-cab and inventory.

"They can sell *buko* in areas approved by the MMDA," Mr. Piñol said, referring to the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA).

MMDA General Manager Danilo D. Lim, who was present during the launch, said the authority will support the program.

Eligible to apply for the scheme are two members per family group, four out-of-school youth, and four students who can sell during school holidays.

The DA will also seek to encourage restaurants to use more young coconut products, which include the flesh of the nut.

Mr. Piñol also said coconut farmers need to be supported in producing value-added products, such as desiccated coconut, virgin coconut oil, and coco sugar. — **Reicelene Joy N. Ignacio**

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

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Jobless Pinoys may sell fresh coconuts in Metro Manila, other cities–DA

JOBLESS families, out-of-school youth and students looking for summer jobs may consider selling fresh green coconuts in Metro Manila and other major Philippine cities, according to Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said it is currently designing a program with the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) that will provide participants with transportation and working capital so they can buy young coconuts from farmers.

"The coconut farmers will be organized by the PCA and engaged in supplying the green coconuts, which will be bought for at least P8 to P10 per piece," Piñol said in his post on his official Facebook page.

Piñol said green coconuts are now sold by ambulant vendors using carts or *karitons* for at least P35 apiece.

He said the coconuts will be delivered to a consolidation area in Metro Manila where these will be cleaned. From the consolidation area, the coconuts will be brought by the "Coco Vendors on Wheels" to various parts of Metro Manila.

"The program is expected to expand the market for coconut and provide an alternative source of income for coconut farmers who have suffered from very low prices of copra in recent months," Piñol said.

He said the DA will vet participants and start training vendors on proper handling and hygiene next week.

Piñol said the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) has agreed to support the DA's program to sell young coconuts using multicabs or small trucks in populated areas.

He said MMDA Chairman Danny Lim, who attended the launch of the Summer Coco Festival on Thursday, which aims to promote coconut water, has agreed to talk with Metro Manila mayors to allow vendors on wheels to sell fresh coconuts.

The MMDA has been clearing Metro Manila streets of obstructions, including ambulant vendors who impede traffic.

"Chairman Lim said that since the Coco Vendors on Wheels are mobile, these are not expected to obstruct movements in the streets," Piñol said.

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PHL to retain safeguard duty on imported coffee products

MANILA has thumbed down Jakarta's demand to lift the special safeguard duty (SSG) on coffee imports in exchange for the expanded access of Philippine agricultural products to Indonesia's market.

Agriculture Undersecretary for Policy and Planning Segfredo Serrano said the Philippines would continue to impose SSG when imports exceed the minimum access volume (MAV) to protect local coffee farmers.

Serrano said the government imposed the SSG on imported coffee products last year after local manufacturers complained that the surge in imports is hurting their business.

Allowing the market to be flooded with cheap imports, he said, would be detrimental to farmers as Philippine-based manufacturers may reduce their purchases of local coffee.

"It is important to protect the livelihood of our people as the welfare of a large portion of our people is at stake. We do not want uncertainties in our coffee industry," Serrano said in a recent interview with reporters.

"We are really making headways in coffee and other high-value crops, and these are also avenues for diversification for small farmers. It will not be in our interest to abandon and leave them to the dogs and vagaries of international trade," he added.

Serrano also clarified that Manila did not target Indonesia when it imposed the SSG on coffee products, as it also applies to the other trade partners of the Philippines. He noted that local conglomerates manufacturing coffee, such as San Miguel Corp., were also affected by the SSG.

The agriculture official said Manila observed all the necessary procedures prescribed in Philippines laws in invoking the SSG and followed the terms of World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements, specifically on the use of safeguards.

"These are all at the discretion and the judgment of the agriculture secretary. We put a premium on providing safeguards that will protect our local industry in a justifiable manner," Serrano said. "There is basis [to impose the SSG]. The triggers have been breached."

In March, Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol issued Department Order 6 that authorized the slapping of SSG duty on out-quota imports of various agricultural commodities, including several coffee products, such as instant coffee.

These coffee products are: roasted coffee (not decaffeinated, unground); roasted coffee, (not decaffeinated, ground); roasted coffee (decaffeinated, unground); instant coffee; other extracts, essences and concentrates of coffee; preparations with a basis of extracts, essences or concentrates or with a basis of coffee, mixtures in paste form with a basis of ground roasted coffee, containing vegetable fats; and other preparations with a basis of extracts, essences or concentrates or with a basis of coffee.

The SSG was imposed on these products starting April 6, following the Bureau of Custom's issuance of a memorandum circular.

Jakarta's 'demands'

SERRANO said he took exception to the recent statements and moves of Jakarta. For one, the agriculture official said Jakarta had complained directly to President Duterte that Manila had targeted Indonesia in imposing the SSG.

He said he also came across news reports indicating that the SSG imposed by Manila was really aimed at reducing Indonesia's exports to the Philippines.

Serrano disclosed that an Indonesian delegation recently arrived in the Philippines and brought an agreement without consulting agriculture officials. The draft agreement supposedly indicated that Manila will permanently withdraw the SSG on coffee imports in exchange for a factory.

He also said Jakarta had demanded Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol to meet with Indonesian investors, in a letter sent to his office.

"I feel insulted that they are making these demands. If they want to invest here then it is very much appreciated but it should be done without any conditions. They can invest here, apply for incentives, and we will support and assist them," he said.

"But if they will meddle with our trade policies, that is totally and completely unacceptable," Serrano added.

'Hostage'

SERRANO said Jakarta is also linking the SSG on imported coffee to the long-standing request of Philippines to expand the access of local farm products to the Indonesian market.

"That's a different issue. We have an issue with the constant change in the rules and [the foot-dragging] on our submissions," he said.

"[Indonesian] products freely enter our market because we have reasonable rules of entry. But they have seem to technically closed their borders to our products, which caused the Philippines to incur a huge trade deficit with them," Serrano added.

Bilateral talks between Jakarta and Manila in December ended in a stalemate with the Indonesian market remaining closed to Philippine farm goods, including horticulture and tobacco products.

Serrano said Indonesia appeared lukewarm to negotiating with the Philippine delegates on market access. He said the Indonesian delegates sought for a "half-day" bilateral talk with the Philippine delegation.

"We were there to earnestly clarify issues so that the interests of both parties can be sorted out. My interpretation is that they want to make it appear that they are willing to talk but nothing substantial came out of that engagement," he said.

"The Philippines respects Indonesia but apparently their actions show that they do not respect us," he added.

In September, Jakarta questioned the Philippines's decision to impose SSG on coffee imports in a meeting of the WTO Committee on Agriculture. Indonesia is home to a number of popular instant-coffee brands.

"Having substantial interests in supplying these agriculture product categories, Indonesia would like to express its deep regret on the imposition of this measure by the Philippines," Jakarta said.

The Philippines argued that it "undertook due diligence by factoring in the very significant increased imports of coffee products in the last three to four years" in invoking the SSG duties.

For example, data from the Philippine Statistics Authority showed that the country's instant coffee imports in 2017 expanded by almost 35 percent to 81,900.466 metric tons, from 60,732.319 MT recorded in 2016. ***Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas***

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COCO FESTIVAL

DA, MMDA launch 'buko' on wheels

VENDORS of fresh young coconuts or buko using multi-cabs or small trucks will be allowed to sell their products in populated areas of the metropolis.

This was disclosed yesterday by Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol during the launching of the Summer Coco Festival. The festival aims to promote drinking of coconut water.

Piñol said the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) will support the DA's initiative to market fresh young coconuts (Buko) by allowing Coco Vendors on Wheels to sell buko.

MMDA Chairman Danny Lim said he will talk with the mayors of the cities in Metro Manila to allow coco vendors on wheels to sell "buko."

The MMDA has been clearing Metro Manila streets of obstructions, including ambulant vendors who impede traffic.

Lim said coco vendors on wheels should not obstruct movement of traffic on the streets.

Lim assured Piñol that he will also ask the mayors to urge restaurants and eateries in their cities to offer "buko" to their customers.

In the program designed by the DA and the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA), the PCA will organize the coconut farmers, to supply green coconuts which will be bought for at least P8 to P10 per piece.

Green coconuts are now sold by ambulant vendors using "karitons" for at least P35 per piece. They will be delivered to a consolidation area in Metro Manila where these will be cleaned.

He added that the program is expected to expand the market for coconut and provide an alternative source of income for coconut farmers who have suffered from very low prices of copra in recent months.

Piñol said the project is expected to provide livelihood opportunities for Metro Manila families who do not have steady sources of income, including out-of-school youths and students.

"Next week, the validation of all applicants for this program will start including the training of the vendors on proper handling and hygiene," Piñol said.

Cory Martinez

Malaya
Business Insight

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La Mesa water level hits new low

BY ANGELA LOPEZ DE LEON

WATER level at La Mesa Dam in Quezon City dropped to 68.74 meters as of 6 a.m. yesterday, the lowest in 21 years, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astrological Services Administration (PAGASA).

Weather forecaster Richard Orendain said this breached the dam's all-time lowest water elevation of 68.75 meters registered during the 1998 El Niño season. He said if there will be no rain in the next few days, La Mesa's water reserve could further drop to 68.40 meters by Friday next week.

La Mesa Dam breached its critical level of 69 meters last Sunday afternoon.

Orendain attributed the significant drop in La Mesa's water level to extreme heat, lack of rain, high commercial and domestic water demands, and ongoing constructions in Metro Manila.

Due to the dwindling water level at La Mesa, residents of Metro Manila and parts of Rizal have been affected by water interruptions since last week.

A weak El Niño phenomenon is now affecting the country and is likely to last until June.

Orendain many parts of the country, mostly in the Luzon and the Visayas, will experience "way below normal" and "below normal" rainfall until May. Metro Manila, where the La Mesa Dam is located, is among the areas that will experience below normal rainfall this month.

The La Mesa Dam is part of the Angat-Ipo-La Mesa water system that supplies most of Metro Manila's water.

Orendain said water level at Angat Dam

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LA MESA

in Bulacan was down to 199.63 meters yesterday morning from 199.94 meters on Wednesday. Orendain said this is still above its critical low level of 180 meters.

The water reserve of Ipo Dam also in Bulacan was at 101.06 meters yesterday morning. Ipo Dam's critical water level is at 97 meters.

ARTIFICIAL SHORTAGE?

Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo, concurrent presidential spokesman, raised the possibility that there is an "artificial" or "fake" water shortage following reports that there is ample water supply at the Angat Dam, the main source of water supply in Metro Manila and surrounding areas.

Panelo said Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana mentioned that there is enough water supply at Angat.

"If it is true that Angat is full of water, and everything comes from there, then it (water shortage) is not true," Panelo said.

He added that Maynilad Water Services Inc. is not having supply problem like the Manila Water Company. He said both firms source their water from Angat Dam.

"It could be inefficiency, mismanaged," he said then added, "then that is artificial."

He said investigations are ongoing to determine the cause of the shortage but could not say who is leading the probe.

Panelo assured that Manila Water, if found to be at fault, would be held accountable.

He also said he would not speculate on whether the water supply problem is connected with calls made by Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III for the implementation of the China-funded Kaliwa Dam project.

Sen. Grace Poe said Manila Water has a lot of explaining to do amid the ongoing water shortage in Metro Manila and the province of Rizal.

In a radio interview, Poe, the chair of the Committee on Public Services, said Manila Water officials have been invited to attend a hearing Tuesday next week on the water shortage in its east zone concession area.

Poe said she was surprised by the sudden onset of the water shortage considering the water level at Angat Dam in Bulacan, which supplies more than 90 percent of the water needs of Metro Manila, is still at normal level.

She said this is why the western part of the metropolis being serviced by Maynilad is not experiencing water shortage compared to the east zone.

Poe said the problem could be in the conveyance or delivery of the water supply instead of lack or shortage of water.

Mandaluyong City is seriously considering declaring a state of calamity due to the water shortage so it can gain access to emergency funds.

Jimmy Isidro, city public information office head, said city and barangay officials are discussing this possibility.

CLOUD SEEDING

The Philippine Air Force will commence cloud seeding operations this weekend in Isabela province to save crops that are in danger of drying up due to El Niño, a military official said.

"We've already approved the request of the Department of Agriculture to do cloud seeding operations. That's the output of the meeting yesterday," said Air Force spokesman Maj. Aristides Galang, referring to a meeting at Villamor Air Base in Pasay City between Air Force and DA officials to discuss an earlier request of agriculture officials for the Air Force to carry out cloud seeding operations.

Galang said a Nomad plane from the 220th Airlift Wing is currently in Benito Ebuen Air Base in Mactan, Cebu being equipped with devices needed for cloud seeding missions.

"The tentative date is on Saturday or Sunday. We will do it initially in Cauayan town to save the crops there. The priority of the DA is agricultural for the meantime," he said.

Galang said the DA determines areas where cloud seeding operations will be held and how often it will be conducted. "The Air Force will just be providing the manpower and the aircraft," he said.

Office of Civil Defense administrator Ricardo Jalad said the Department of Interior and Local Government is due to issue a memorandum to all local government units "urging them to enact ordinances curbing illegal connections and encouraging the prudent use of water."

Jalad said the Bureau of Fire Protection has also been directed "to allow the free use of fire trucks for water distribution."

Jalad added the Department of Social Welfare and Development has earmarked P11.8 billion as standby funds "to provide family food packs as well as cash-for-work programs should they be needed."

Citing figures from the Department of Agriculture, Jalad said damages and losses due to El Nino had been placed at P464 million of March 8.

He said the total area affected is 13,679 hectares involving 6,034 farmers in Zamboanga Peninsula, Northern Mindanao, Davao region, Soccsksargen, Mimaropa and the newly-established Bangsamoro Autonoumous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

Weather forecaster Aldczar Aurelio said Metro Manila, parts of the Luzon and the Visayas will have partly cloudy to cloudy skies with passing light rains until Sunday because of the cold northeast monsoon or "hanging amihan."

He said parts of Mindanao, on the other hand, will experience partly cloudy to cloudy skies with light to moderate rains due to a trough of a low pressure area (LPA).

As of 4 p.m. yesterday, Aurelio said the LPA was spotted some 2,355 kilometers east of Mindanao, still outside the Philippine area of responsibility (PAR). Aurelio said the weather disturbance is seen to enter the country on Sunday.

– With Jocelyn Montemayor, Victor Reyes, Ashzel Hachero and Christian Oineza

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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Sugar firms want US quota scrapped

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

Local sugar producers are calling for the removal of sugar allocation to the US given the expected lower production this year.

The Confederation of Sugar Producers Association (Confed) is pushing for the elimination of the "A" allocation and its transfer to "B" due to the lower than expected output.

The Sugar Regulatory Administration classifies sugar into "A" for sugar for export to the US, "B" for domestic consumption, "C" for reserves, "D" for export to countries other than the US and "E" for local food processors.

Confed spokesperson Raymond Montinola said A sugar is only beneficial if there is an expected big production.

The US has allocated for the Philippines an initial quota of 136,201 metric tons for the current crop year, which started in September 2018 and will end in August 2019.

The Philippines is one of the select countries given an annual allocation of sugar export to the US market at a premium.

SRA board member for the planters side Emilio Yulo, for his part, said the proposal to stop the A program is a highly emotional issue in the sugar industry.

"We need to seriously study the matter. We should start talking with USDA and appraise them of the situation. We just finished the first shipment, the next one is in March and yet we are nearing the end of the milling season. The problem is how to reconfigure your classification if it's about to end," Yulo said.

The SRA has already revised its projection for the year to 2.079 million metric tons from 2.225 million MT.

For the current crop year, the Philippines has allocated 95 percent of sugar production for the domestic market, while the remaining five percent will go to the the US market.

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THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER
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₱21-million farm-to-market road completed in Agusan del Sur

By **MIKE U. CRISMUNDO**

BUTUAN CITY – The regional office of the Department of Agriculture (DA) here reported on Thursday that a ₱21.1 million worth of farm-to-market road (FMR) was recently completed in Trento, Agusan del Sur.

Emmylou T. Presilda, regional spokesperson of DA 13 said the completed FMR will benefit 355 households or 1,408 direct beneficiaries in Trento town.

Officials of the DA-Philippine Rural Development Project (DA-PRDP) turned over the completed construction of 2.7 kilometer Sitio Gasa to Algon FMR to the officials of Trento town.

Farmers and resident said the concrete road does not only support the rubber and palm oil industries in the municipality but will also boost the production of other high-value crops like mangosteen, banana, and cacao, Presilda added.

DA 13 Regional Executive Director (RED) Abel James I. Monteagudo also told The Manila Bulletin on Thursday that the new FMR will benefit a big number of farmers in the area.

The region's top DA 13 official also cited the hard work of the farmers in utilizing their farm areas.

"Various crops are everywhere and this new FMR will surely bring better production in that part of Northeastern Mindanao region," Monteagudo added.

The concrete road connects Barangay Poblacion to Sitio Gaza and has paved the way for the opening of the road to Barangay Tudela last January 25, 2019.

DA-PRDP partners with the local government units and private sector to provide key infrastructures and facilities to raise incomes, productivity, and competitiveness of the farmers and farmers' associations in targeted areas.

"No more hassle. This new FMR will surely change our farming attitudes and encourage us to produce more," said Razel Altieza, a banana farmer in Barangay Algon, Trento town.

"Farmers before were tired of expanding because of the hassle and big cost in transporting their produce. Now, people can see various commodities in our area. Farmers are inspired to expand and produce more because they can now save a big amount in transporting their commodities to the market," Altieza said.

The Manila Times

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Rice, corn stocks up in February

THE rice and corn inventory of the country increased in February compared to levels a year ago, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.

In a monthly inventory report, the PSA said the country's rice stocks went up by 19.24 percent to 2.141 million metric tons (MMT) from last year's 1.795 MMT. However, it fell 16.05 percent from 2.550 MMT in the previous month.

On a monthly basis, stocks from commercial warehouses and National Food Authority (NFA) depositories rose by 25.46 percent and 384.72 percent, respectively. But household rice stocks dropped by 5.09 percent.

Year-on-year (yoy), stocks in NFA depositories increased by 203.72 percent. But the existing stocks in the households and commercial warehouses fell by 17.25 percent and 32.69 percent, respectively.

Of the total rice inventories, 48.22 percent were from households, 37.88 percent from the commercial warehouses and 13.90 percent from NFA depositories.

The country's rice stocks are seen to increase in the coming months as the Philippines opens its market to cheap imported rice under a new rice regime. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) earlier projected that imports may reach a record-high 2.6 million MT this year, which may also further increase as the Rice Import Liberalization Act takes effect.

Meanwhile, the PSA said total corn inventory climbed by 90.46 percent to 781,520 MT in February from 410,330 MT a year ago. It was also up by 15.59 percent from 676,130 MT in the previous month.

Stocks from households and commercial warehouses rose yoy by 96.85 percent and 89.27 percent, respectively. Meanwhile, there were no corn stocks in NFA depositories during the period. On a monthly basis, stocks in the households and commercial warehouses likewise increased by 26.20 percent and 13.40 percent, respectively.

Some 81.33 percent of the total corn inventory was held by households while the remaining 18.67 percent consisted of inventory held by ommercial warehouses.

EIREENE JAIREE GOMEZ

The Manila Times

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Cloud seeding starts in Isabela this weekend

BY DEMPSEY REYES

CLOUD seeding will be conducted this weekend starting in Cauayan, Isabela, to cushion the impact of drought caused by the El Niño phenomenon, the Philippine Air Force announced on Thursday.

The announcement came amid the dry spell ushered in by the weather phenomenon, resulting in water shortage in several major cities, including those in Metro Manila.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has tapped the Air Force and the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines for assistance in carrying out the cloud seeding as the dry spell was blamed for the water shortage.

Isabela is the most vulnerable to drought , according to the Agriculture department.

Maj. Aristides Galang Jr. said the aircraft to be used in the operation would be the GAF N-22 "Nomad" twin-engine turbo-prop aircraft.

The plane is being fitted with cloud-seeding equipment at the Mactan-Benito Ebuen Air Base in Cebu.

Pilots from the 220th Airlift Wing would fly the aircraft, while the cloud seeding shall be conducted by personnel from the 900th Air Force Weather Group.

The operation would be conducted from March up to May.

Meanwhile, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council has convened to discuss updates and plans regarding the impacts of El Niño.

Office of Civil Defense Administrator Ricardo Jalad assured that the government was exerting efforts to ensure adequate water supply to the public.

"These agencies present in [the] meeting, especially those working with the water sector, would continue to collaborate to provide the needed services to the public," Jalad said in a statement also on Thursday.

He added that the regional offices of the DA allotted P18.3 million for the cloud-seeding being recommended for Cagayan Valley and Soccsksargen (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos City) scheduled between March 14 and May 21 this year.

Jalad said the Department of the Interior and Local Government would issue a memorandum circular to all local government units to urge them to enact ordinances to curb illegal connections and encourage prudent use of water.

The Bureau of Fire Protection was also directed to allow free use of firetrucks for water distribution.

A total of 16,034 farmers have been affected by El Niño, based on a DA report, while the total volume loss was placed at 22,918 metric tons of crops, mostly rice and corn.

The farmers affected are from Mimaropa (Mindoro Occidental and Mindoro Oriental, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan), Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Zamboanga Peninsula, Northern Mindanao, Davao Region and Soccsksargen.

The Manila Times

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'More speed bumps' to come from El Niño

BY ANNA LEAH E. GONZALES

THE El Niño currently being felt by the Philippines could halt an inflation slowdown, an ING Bank economist said, adding to the economic growth challenge caused by delays to the 2019 national budget.

In a statement on Thursday, ING Bank senior economist Nicholas Mapa forecast "more speed bumps ahead" with the weather pattern's impact not limited to the agriculture sector — likely to be "challenged for a second year".

"El Niño will undoubtedly hamper our agricultural production, which in itself is coming off a lackluster performance in 2018," Mapa said, pointing to crop damage and poor fisheries harvests due to droughts.

"Meanwhile, we see the drought to also sap some momentum from our manufacturing sector, given the heavy weight of 'food manufactures' in the overall sector (24 percent)," he added.

"With the projected shortage of agricultural produce, we could see an episode where inflation remains within target but likely at or above the 3 percent handle given the primacy of the food basket in the overall CPI (consumer price index)."

While El Niño is primarily characterized by the lack of water, Mapa said the weather phenomenon "can induce even more virulent typhoon activity" that would be a "bane" to slowing inflation.

Inflation hit a nine-year high of 6.7 percent in September and October last year but has since returned to the 2.0-4.0 percent target range, easing to 3.8 percent last month. Rising oil prices and food supply shocks, particularly with respect to rice, have been blamed for last year's surge.

The ING economist said the implementation of the rice tarrification law, which liberalized the entry of imported rice, would mitigate the impact of El Niño "to some extent".

"[However] the damage to domestic rice production will be felt in lower incomes for farmers in this sector as well as on fruits, vegetables and meat products," he added.

"Consumption, which we are counting on for the heavy lifting this year, will need to overcome the slight blip in inflation due to the dry spell."

The Department of Agriculture has said that El Niño already caused P463.3 million in damage in just one month.

Mapa also noted that the delayed approval of the 2019 budget was already holding back the economy and said legislators needed to act.

"Against the backdrop of slowing

➤El Niño B4

■ EL NIÑO FROM B1

More

growth due to the harsh and extreme weather conditions, the budget impasse simmers. Government officials paint a dour outlook should the budget be delayed further, we hope that the budget can and will be passed at the soonest," he said.

"Passage of the 2019 budget will indeed help cushion the impact of El Niño on growth, which is already expected to hit a speed bump in the 1H (first half) due to slowing capital formation and now likely challenged government spending," he added.

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto Pernia on Wednesday warned that economic growth could slow to as much as 4.2-4.9 percent if the government was forced to operate on the 2018 budget for the whole year.

Growth targets for 2019 and 2020 were cut later that day by the interagency Development Budget Coordinating Committee, which cited the ongoing budget delay, El Niño and the US-China trade war.

The government is now aiming for 6.0-7.0 percent growth this year and 6.7-7.5 percent for 2020, down from 7.0-8.0 percent previously.

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Palace: Water shortage 'could be artificial'

By Arjay L. Balinbin *Reporter*

PRESIDENTIAL Spokesperson Salvador S. Panelo said on Thursday the government will look into Manila Water's service interruptions in Metro Manila, saying the water shortage "could be artificial."

He added that an inquiry will be made via an executive order.

"As far as that particular dam (Angat Dam) is concerned — *puno*...so *bakit nagkakakulang iyong* distribution.... *Iyon ang sigurong alamin natin bakit, ba't nagkaganoon,*" Mr. Panelo said in a press briefing at the Palace. (As far as that particular dam is concerned, it is full. So why is there a shortage? We should probably find out why it happens).

He added: "Artificial *lang iyon, kung ganoon.* Because if the source is *puno,* and another concessionaire [Maynilad Water Services, Inc.] is *puno* also, eh *bakit naman iyong isa* [Manila Water Company, Inc.] *hindi? Iyon ang* logic *doon.*" (It could be artificial if that is the case. Because if the source is full, and another concessionaire [Maynilad Water Services, Inc.] is also full, then why is the other one [Manila Water Company, Inc.] not? That is the logic there).

Mr. Panelo said Defense Secretary Delfin N. Lorenzana shared in the Cabinet's online chat group that the water level in Angat Dam is still normal.

"*Sinasabi ni* Secretary Lorenzana *doon sa kaniyang* (said in his) chat *na* (that) the water comes from Angat Dam and there is no shortage *doon* (there); as far as that particular dam is concerned — *puno* (full), *walang kulang* (no shortage)," he said.

"*Iimbestigahan kung bakit, ano bang nangyari? Sasama iyan sa* executive order (There will be an investigation to find out why this happened. That's part of the Executive Order)."

Mr. Panelo also said, "*Kung totoo na puno ang* Angat Water Dam, *ibig sabihin* inefficiency *iyan,* mismanaged (If it is true that Angat Dam is full, then it means inefficiency, mismanaged)."

Manila Water, one of the capital's two concession holders, said on March 8 that it implemented "operational adjustments" that resulted in low pressure or no water.

For its part, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) said it has released P18.3 million to regional offices of the Department of Agriculture (DA) for cloud seeding operations in an effort to tackle the water-supply problem confronting parts of Metro Manila since last weekend.

NDRRMC said cloud seeding is being recommended for Regions 2 and 12 between March 14 to May 21.

"We want to assure the public that the government is doing everything to ensure adequate water supply for all. These agencies present in today's meeting, especially those working with the water sector, will continue to collaborate to provide these needed services to the public," NDRRMC Executive Director Ricardo B. Jalad said in a statement late Tuesday evening.

For his part, Air Force Spokesperson Major Aristides M. Galang, Jr. said, "*Siguro* by Saturday or Sunday *na mag*-start *na 'to, kasi prini*-prepare *pa natin 'yung mga eroplano....* Ang initial *natin* will be Cauayan [in Isabela]." (Maybe we can start by Saturday or Sunday, because we are still preparing the aircraft....We still start the operations in Cauayan [in Isabela]).

The Air Force said the GAF N-22 Nomad will be fitted with cloud seeding equipment at the Buenito Air Base in Cebu City. Operations will be carried out by the 900th Air Force Weather Group.

NDRRMC said the Department of Interior and Local Government will issue a memorandum circular to all local government units to enact ordinances curbing illegal connections and encouraging the prudent use of water. — ***with*** **Vince Angelo C. Ferreras**

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PHILIPPINE STAR/MICHAEL VARCAS

A WORKER at NFA Quezon City warehouse arranging newly arrived buffer stock.

Rice inventories increase 19.24% on eve of tariffication

THE inventory of rice held by households, commercial entities and the government rose 19.24% year on year as of Feb. 1, to 2,141.23 thousand metric tons (MT), with volumes held by households, the largest category, declining, while the National Food Authority's (NFA) holdings rose nearly 400%, the Philippine Statistics Authority said on Thursday.

Households, which accounted for the biggest share of inventories at 48.22%, held 1,032.42 thousand metric tons (MT) of rice, down 5.09% year on year, it said.

Inventory held by the commercial sector was 811.20 thousand MT, up 25.45%, while National Food Authority (NFA) stocks amounted to 297.62 thousand MT, up 384.72% from a year earlier, bouncing back from a period when its dwindling inventories helped spark the 2018 inflation crisis.

The NFA imported a total of 750,000 MT of rice as authorized by the NFA Council in 2018, which was the last of its rice shipments from overseas before the implementation of the Rice Tariffication Law, which effectively privatized imports of the staple. Under the law, the NFA will continue to buy palay, or unmilled rice, from domestic farmers to maintain its emergency reserve for subsidized sales to low-income families and for release during calamities.

The inventory of corn stocks was 781.52 thousand MT during the period, up 90.46%, following an increase in the holdings of households and commercial entities, while the NFA stock fell to zero.

Household inventory rose 96.85% to 145.90 thousand MT, while inventory in commercial was 635.62 thousand MT, up 89.27% from a year earlier. — **Reicelene Joy N. Ignacio**

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"INDONESIA prepared an agreement without even studying our laws. It wants the Philippines to agree to permanently lift the SSG," Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Segfredo R. Serrano said, noting that the maker of Kopiko would like to invest in the Philippines on the condition that SSGs are lifted.

DA opposes lifting of safeguards vs Indonesian coffee mix

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it cannot grant an Indonesian request to remove the special safeguards (SSG) on coffee mixes, noting that a surge in imports has harmed domestic coffee producers.

Undersecretary Segfredo R. Serrano told reporters on Tuesday that Indonesia has complained to President Rodrigo R. Duterte of unfair treatment, particularly the Kopiko brand. Mr. Serrano noted the huge trade deficit between the Philippines and Indonesia as the latter does not want to open its market to Philippine agricultural goods.

He said the SSG applies to all nations, not just Indonesia, and Manila has "solid basis" to act as it did. "We have followed the provisions of the World Trade Organization (WTO) notably on the use of safeguards and our own domestic legislation which is the Safeguard Measures Act," Mr. Serrano said.

"There is a basis (for SSGs), the triggers have bee breached, and that therefore, the special safeguard action is something we have posted notice on to the WTO. It is not specifically targeted at Indonesia," Mr. Serrano added.

Members of the WTO are allowed to invoke special safeguards to raise import duties temporarily to deal with import surges or price decliens.

"Indonesia prepared an agreement without even studying our laws. It wants the Philippines to agree to permanently lift the SSG," Mr. Serrano said, noting that the maker of Kopiko would like to invest in the Philippines on the condition that SSGs are lifted.

"If they would like to invest here, it is very much appreciated but it has to be without conditions. They can apply for incentives, we will support and assist them, but they cannot impose conditions, which is meddling with our trade policies. That is completely unacceptable," he said. — **Reicelene Joy N. Ignacio**

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BOC eases rice import rules

By Ben O. de Vera
@bendeveraINQ

To facilitate easier entry of imports as mandated under the rice tariffication law, the Bureau of Customs simplified processes and removed the advance duty previously slapped on importers.

Noting that the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of Republic Act (RA) No. 11203 that took effect on March 5 were yet to be issued, Customs Commissioner Rey Leonardo B. Guerrero released interim guidelines on certain provisions of the new law.

Under the March 5 memorandum, Guerrero said all rice importation would be processed under regular customs cargo clearance procedures, unlike before when the National Food Authority (NFA) had to issue import permits prior to entry.

RA 11203 took away the NFA's commercial functions and regulatory powers and retained only its emergency buffer stocking mandate.

Also, Guerrero said rice shipments would no longer be slapped the advance customs duty that was required before.

Under RA 11203, the following tariff rates now apply: 35 percent if rice was imported from Asean member-countries; 40 percent on rice within the 350,000 metric ton minimum access volume (MAV) and imported from World Trade Organization member-countries outside Asean, and 180 percent for rice above the MAV.

Guerrero said that pending the issuance of the IRR, district collectors might allow release of shipments "due to the perishable nature of rice importation and in order to protect the interest of the government," citing provisions of the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act (CMTA) on provisional goods declaration.

The BOC, however, requires all rice importers to secure a sanitary and phytosanitary import clearance (SPSIC) from the Bureau of Plant Industry before importation.

"Rice importation should arrive prior to the expiration of the SPSIC from the BPI," the BOC said. INQ

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Cotabato farms dry up; crop losses at P675M

Province under state of calamity due to drought impact, disease outbreak

By Williamor Magbanua, Orlando Dinoy and Leo Udtohan
@InqNational

KIDAPAWAN CITY—The provincial board of Cotabato placed the province under a state of calamity after crop losses attributed to the dry spell was projected to reach P1 billion.

The Sangguniang Panlalawigan, in a resolution approved on Tuesday, also cited the increasing number of measles and dengue cases and the recent fires in Arakan and Antipas towns that killed five people as bases for the declaration.

Vice Gov. Shirlyn Macasarte-Villanueva said damage to crops in 16 towns and a component city in the province reached P675 million as of last week but officials were expecting the figure to hit P1 billion as assessment reports from municipal governments had yet to be completed.

Records from the Integrated Provincial Health Office (Ipho) showed that at least three people died of dengue in the province during the first quarter of this year. Dengue cases increased by 210 percent compared to the same period last year, according to Ipho.

The state of calamity declaration will allow the provincial government to tap the 5-percent calamity fund allotment to aid drought-hit and disease-stricken communities.

Aid to farmers

In Kidapawan City, at least P18 million in calamity funds will be used to give immediate relief to farmers in villages hit by the dry spell.

Part of the amount will be used to buy seedlings, said Psalmer Bernalte, city disaster risk reduction and management council officer.

PARCHED Farms in Cotabato province are parched due to extreme heat. —WILLIAMOR MAGBANUA

In neighboring Davao region, crop damage has reached P55 million, agriculture officials said.

Reports from the Department of Agriculture in the region said El Niño had affected the provinces of Davao del Sur and Davao Occidental and parts of Davao City.

In Davao del Sur, some 2,000 hectares of rice lands in the towns of Matanao, Magsaysay, Hagonoy, Kiblawan and Bansalan had been hit by dry spell.

The Matanao municipal government had declared the town under a state of calamity last week.

Helen Carampatana, Magsaysay municipal agriculturist, said P8 million worth of palay in the town had been destroyed by the dry spell.

Bohol losses

In the Visayas, farmers in Bohol province, known as the rice bowl of Central Visayas, reported that their palay had either wilted or had been charred due to intense heat.

The lack of water in an 8,000-square-meter farm of Orcesio Amoy in Sitio Camanayon, Barangay Buenos, in Carmen town caused palay to wilt.

His rice paddies had cracked due to lack of water while the palay had turned yellow.

Amoy said he was expecting to post huge losses.

Last year, he was not able to recover the P20,000 he invested in farm inputs after suffering from the brunt of a dry spell.

Water supply drops

Gerry Quita, a farmer from Sierra Bullones, said the intense heat had literally burned some of the stalks while others had wilted. Those that survived were stunted.

He relied on rains that didn't come.

Farmers are expected to produce a total of 200,000 metric tons of palay, equivalent to at least 100,000 MT of milled rice that can feed 1.1 million people for a year.

The agriculture sector in the province remains a major source of employment and livelihood, with 42 percent of the province's population working in or dependent on agriculture.

Bohol has a total of 46,587 ha of rice farms, accounting for 25 percent of the province's agricultural land.

Of the rice fields in Bohol, 24,000 ha are irrigated and the rest rely on rain.

Because of the dry spell, water supply in various irrigation systems—Malinao Dam in Pilar town, Bayongan Dam in San Miguel town, Capayas in Ubay town and Zamora Dam in Talibon town—has dwindled.

Some springs and creeks in the province are also drying up.

Acting Provincial Agriculturist Larry Pamugas said cloud seeding would be conducted in May. INQ

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SEA URCHIN CULTURE, SEAWEED FARMING

IN LA UNION, FISHERS EARN FROM 'SEA RANCH' BOUNTY

By Yolanda Sotelo
@yzsoteloINQ

BALAOAN, LA UNION—Jayson Prado and his wife Loida regularly tend to their sea ranch, feeding spiny sea urchins, locally known as "maritangtang," with seaweeds twice a week.

Prado, 40, said he had developed this "special bond" with sea urchins at a young age when their coastal waters were still teeming with urchins, which had become a prized Asian delicacy.

"There has been a huge demand for sea urchins over the years, but harvesting these from their natural habitat has led to lack of supply," Prado told the Inquirer.

To address the scarcity of supply, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) regional office introduced farming urchins in cages in 2013.

Fishermen were trained on urchin and seaweed farming. They received initial stocks of juveniles and seaweed planting materials from the BFAR.

At least 45 fishermen were organized for the activities and given an area of 20 x 20 meters for seaweed growing and two cages for urchins.

SEA HARVEST Jayson Prado gathers sea urchins cultured in cages in the waters of Balaoan, La Union. — PHOTO COURTESY OF BFAR REGION 1

Profitable

Six years later, the Almeida Fisherfolk Organization has grown into 150 members, each with two cages for urchins and a 10 x 20 m plot (made of floating ropes) for growing seaweeds.

The group said cultivating seaweeds and sea urchins was profitable as the members could sell P80 a kilogram of sea urchins and P60 a kilogram of seaweed (eucheuma) at a farm-gate price.

Eucheuma is sold by farmers to manufacturers of carrageenan, an ingredient for cosmetics, food processing and industrial manufacturing.

"We harvest eucheuma every 45 days. A foreigner comes to buy our produce," Prado said, adding that they could barely match the rising demand for seaweeds.

He said they had expanded from cage farming to sea ranching, or culturing urchins right on the seabed, to meet the market demand.

While each cage can only contain up to 80 kilos of adult urchins, a seabed measuring 10 x 20 m can accommodate 10,000 to 30,000 urchins.

"A kilo of adult urchins is usually made up of eight to 10 pieces," Prado said.

Food supply

Local fishermen said they took care of the sources of food for their stocks, never uprooted the seaweeds that naturally grew on the coastal waters.

"We gather floating branches of seaweeds, so there will always be available food for the urchins," Prado said.

The industry has been good to Prado, who is able to send his four children to school, with his eldest already in college.

He was also hired by Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University (DMMMSU) as a casual employee. He is now doing a research on seaweeds near the DMMMSU campus in this town.

Eventually, seaweed farming has also spawned another industry: Making pickles and soap called "seabon."

The DMMMSU assisted the members in the production of the soap made of seaweeds and papaya. INQ

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

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Sans IRR for RA 11203, Customs issues order to hasten rice imports

By Rea Cu @Rea

DESPITE the absence of interim rules and regulations for the implementation of the Rice Import Liberalization Act, the Bureau of Customs has issued an order to hasten the entry of the staple. On March 11, the BOC issued its Memorandum 2019-03-015 in line with the implementation of the tariff rates for rice in its electronic-to-mobile (E2M) system. The BOC said it issued the memorandum in accordance with the interim guidelines for the implementation of Republic Act (RA) 11203 and pending the issuance of the IRR of the Rice Import Liberalization Act.

The BOC memorandum said it is implementing "the tariff rate of 180 percent for out-quota tariff headings of rice originating from non-Asean [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] WTO [World Trade Organization] member-states in the E2M system effective March 11."

This is the third memorandum the BOC issued sans the IRR for RA 11203.

The second, Memorandum 2019-03-014, orders that all rice importations would be processed under the regular customs cargo clearance procedure, since the National Food Authority (NFA) ceased to exercise regulatory functions over international and domestic trading of rice.

It also said that the payment of advance customs duties and tariff for rice importation is no longer required. However, all importers of rice are required to secure a sanitary and hytosanitary import clearance (SPSIC) from the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) prior to importation.

"Rice importations should arrive prior to the expiration of the SPSIC from the BPI," the memorandum said.

An import duty rate of 35 percent under the Asean Trade in Goods Agreement (Atiga) is implemented for rice importations coming from the Asean region, while an out-quota of 180 percent shall apply for those that originate from non-Asean WTO member-states.

"Due to the perishable nature of rice importations and in order to protect the interest of the government, district collectors may allow release of goods pursuant to Section 304 and 426 of the CMTA [Customs Modernization and Tariff Act], pending the issuance of the IRR," it added.

The first memorandum in line with rice importations was issued by the BOC on March 1 and which stated that "all rice importations covered by NFA import permit issued on or before March 4, 2019, shall be subject to in-quota tariff rates."

Last week, it was reported by the BusinessMirror that National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) Assistant Secretary Mercedita A. Sombilla received complaints from traders facing difficulties in retrieving their shipments at the port. The traders said the BOC have refused to recognize the certificate of eligibility (COE) to import from the NFA.

Sombilla said that the NFA Council (NFAC) had requested the NFA to furnish them a list of COEs it issued, which would make it easier for the BOC to identify the shipments that would be exempted from the new rules.

The Rice Import Liberalization Act took effect on March 5 after President Duterte signed it into law on February 14. The law removed two things: the quantitative restrictions on rice, replacing these with tariffs, and the powers of the NFA to issue import permits.

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Govt to seed clouds to boost water in dams

By Rene Acosta
@reneacostaBM

THE government will conduct cloud-seeding operations in Regions 2 and 12 to counter the ill effects of El Niño, which a water concessionaire blamed for the water-supply interruption in the eastern part of Metro Manila.

National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council Executive Director Ricardo Jalad said the operations will be conducted by planes of the Philippine Air Force in coordination with the Department of Agriculture (DA) following the release of P18.3 million for the activity.

The cloud seeding, which will be carried out until March 21 to induce much-need rain, was supposed to have been initiated on Thursday, according to Jalad, but the Air Force through its spokesman, Major Aristides Galang, said they could only commence the operation on Saturday or Sunday as the Nomad planes were still being prepared along with the equipment.

"So most probably, it is still tentative [if it's] on Saturday or Sunday, and then the initial area will be Cauayan, Isabela," Galang said, adding that the cloud seeding will be undertaken by the 900th Air Force Weather Group.

The cloud-seeding activities were agreed upon by the council in a meeting late Wednesday afternoon. The Department of Social Welfare and Development reported at the meeting it has allocated a standby fund of P11.8 million for family food packs as well as cash-for-work programs.

Jalad said that the agriculture department reported that El Niño has already resulted in production loss of P464.3 million and volume loss of P22.918 million in the agriculture sector as of March 8.

"[The] total area affected has reached 13,679 hectares, affecting 13,679 farmers in.... Regions 9, 10, 11, 12, Mimaropa and BARMM. DA conducted field validation to assess the damage and losses and continues to monitor standing crops in areas at risk," he said.

Several areas, including Zamboanga city, the province of Zamboanga Sibugay, Pagadian City and San Jose in Occidental Mindoro have already declared a state of calamity due to the effects of the El Niño-spawned drought.

Other measures

DURING the meeting, the council also discussed the prevailing problem of water supply that has already affected more than a million residents in the eastern part of Metro Manila, most of whom have been forced to line up for water rations, especially in the cities of Pasig and Mandaluyong.

Jalad said, however, that the Department of Environment and Natural Resources reported that Angat Dam, the main source of water for Metro Manila, is still within its normal operating level at 199.94 meters of elevation compared to its minimum operating level at 180 meters.

"The decline of La Mesa Dam, according to MWSS [Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System], is caused by the increase in water-treatment production of Manila Water. The water allocation of Manila Water from MWSS sourced from Angat Dam is 18.5 cubic meters per second [1600 million liters per day]," Jalad said.

"The water demand from Manila Water consumers, however, has increased to 20.25 cms [1750 million liters per day], forcing the latter to source the deficit from La Mesa Dam," he added.

To remedy the problem, a technical working group which included the MWSS, National Irrigation Administration, the weather bureau Pagasa, Manila Water and the other concessionaire, Maynilad, has "committed to continue their close coordination to ensure that water-supply releases from the Angat Dam are optimized."

"Cross border gate opening shall be done in which 50 MLD [millions of liters per day] from Maynilad will be delivered to Manila Water. MWSS also presented its contingency plans, which include rotating water supply and pressure management, energization of Cardona Water Treatment plant on March 31, 2019, that can provide an additional 50 MLD," Jalad said.

Among others, the technical working group agreed to go for a "nonrevenue" water recovery, utilization of backwash from water-treatment plant and deployment of water tankers and mobile water-treatment plants "in which five units shall come from Manila Water and three standby units from Maynilad."

The MWSS would also activate its backup deep wells in case there would be need to augment the water supply.

"On this, hospitals with standby deep well will be the priority," Jalad said.

Also, the Department of the Interior and Local Government will issue a memorandum that will require local government units to enact ordinances that would curb illegal connections and encourages the prudent use of water.

The ordinances would allow water concessionaires and water utilities to conduct emergency repair of leaks.

At Camp Crame, National Police chief Police General Oscar Albayalde has directed all police units in areas affected by the temporary water shortage in Metro Manila and Rizal to observe water-conservation measures in all camps and offices to help avert a possible water crisis in Luzon at the onset of the dry season.

PNP spokesman Police Colonel Bernard Banac said Albayalde ordered headquarters support units in camps and facilities affected to detail inspectors who will check on wasteful or unnecessary water usage.

"Local PNP units are directed to ensure safety and security of water-service providers against unruly crowd and persons who may want to provoke chaos in the water-distribution points," Albayalde's directive read.

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'Black Friday'

BAYAN said it will stage a "Black Friday protest" against Manila Water and MWSS over what it said was Manila Water's "corporate greed" that has caused the current water crisis in Metro Manila.

"The claim that El Niño is to blame for the crisis has been exposed as a big fat lie. Manila Water has been expanding its customer base even if current facilities are unable to meet the growing demand. It is Manila Water's obligation to provide the needs of its customers. It has failed to do so," Bayan said in a statement.

"Manila Water earned a whopping P6.5 billion in 2018 and another P6.5 billion in 2017. It was even granted a rate hike of P6.50 per cubic meter spread over five years. It has expanded its operations overseas to include Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. Yet it has failed to provide the necessary facilities to meet the demands in its concession area in Metro Manila," it added.

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SRA told: Beef up local sugar supply

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas
@jearcalas

PLANTERS are appealing to the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) to increase local sugar supply by prioritizing the domestic market over the United States, as El Niño could cut sugarcane output in the current crop year.

A LOCAL supermarket displays various brands of refined and brown sugar in this file photo.

Confederation of Sugar Producers Association (Confed) Spokesman Raymond Montinla called on SRA to reclassify a portion of "A" sugar, or those to be exported to the US, to "B" sugar for the domestic market.

For crop year 2018-2019, the SRA allocated 5 percent of output for the US sugar quota while the remaining 95 percent is for the domestic market.

"Confed has been pushing for the transfer of the 'A' allocation to 'B' on the grounds that output might be lower than expected," Montinola said in an interview with reporters last week. "We have been proposing this way before the crop year started. We feared that output may be lower because we came from a La Niña season."

He also said production may be lower than the SRA's projection of 2.079 million metric tons (MMT) as El Niño could dry up sugarcanes faster.

SRA Board Member Emilio Yulo concurred with Montinola that El Niño could affect total sugar production in the current crop year, which would end on August 31.

The SRA earlier revised its production forecast to 2.079 MMT, from 2.225 MMT after bad weather conditions affected some sugarcane-producing provinces. The latest forecast is slightly lower than the previous crop year's 2.08 MMT.

"The 'A' sugar allocation is beneficial if production is huge. But on a year of deficit, it is not good," Montinola said.

Under Executive Order 18, dated May 28, 1986, the SRA has been vested with the power to "establish and maintain a balanced relationship between sugar production and the requirements of sugar and to maintain such marketing conditions, as will ensure stabilized prices at levels reasonably profitable to the producers and fair to consumers."

Shortfall

IN a separate interview, Yulo said the proposal of Confed requires "serious study" by the SRA board.

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"We need to determine if it is worth continuing the 'A' program, particularly since it will be hard to justify to our planters why we continue to export sugar to the US, but we also have the importation program," he said.

Yulo said the Philippines may not be able to fill up the sugar quota allocated by Washington.

"Our revised projected output is 2.079 MMT and the 5 percent [for the US] is a little over 100,000 metric tons. Our quota is 136,000 MT so we will end up short," he said. "The shortfall is equivalent to one boatload."

While shipments may fall short of the sugar quota, Philippine Sugar Millers Association (PSMA) Executive President Jesus Barrera said raw sugar exports to the US would still be "substantial."

"We will be short, but we have an overhang from last year of about 15,000 metric tons, so we will still be able to ship a substantial volume but not the entire quota," Barrera told the BUSINESSMIRROR. "It could be less than 15,000 MT to 20,000 MT."

Barrera said production in the current crop year is on track to hit the SRA's latest forecast as data shows higher sugarcane delivery and higher sugar content.

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Cloud seeding under way—PAF

THE Philippine Air Force confirmed Thursday that it will begin cloud seeding operations this weekend, as the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council has released P18.3 million to the Department of Agriculture's regional officers to address the El Niño phenomenon.

"[Cloud seeding] will be conducted supposedly tomorrow [Friday]. However, it was moved to Saturday or Sunday because we still have to prepare the airplanes. Initial [area to be covered] will be Cauayan [to save crops in danger of drying up in Isabela]," PAF spokesperson Maj. Aristides Galang said.

However, cloud seeding—a process in which substances such as salt are dumped onto targeted clouds to induce rainfall—should be the last resort in addressing drought, the National Irrigation Administration said.

Pilipina Bermudez, Department Manager of the NIA Public Affairs and Information Staff, said that cloud seeding is expensive and dependent on too many factors to work.

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Cloud...

From A1

Pilipina Bermudez, Department Manager of the NIA Public Affairs and Information Staff, said that cloud seeding is expensive and dependent on too many factors to work.

"'Cloud seeding should be a last resort, because it costs P1 million to fly an airplane [to do the seeding]," Bermudez told GMA's News To Go program.

Instead, the NIA official suggested the use of shallow tube wells and distribution of water supply in irrigated lands on rotational basis as a better option.

The government will do everything it can to provide clean water for everyone, NDRRMC Executive Director Ricardo Jalad said.

"We want to assure the public that the government is doing everything to ensure adequate water supply for all," Jalad said in a statement sent to reporters late Wednesday.

Previously, Ayala-led Manila Water Co. Inc. and Enrique Razon Jr. of the International Container Terminal Services Inc. were discussing the construction of a dam in Montalban, Rizal to ensure sufficient water supply in the east zone area.

According to Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System administrator Reynaldo Velasco, Manila Water is now negotiating with the Razon-Oscar Violago tandem to proceed with the new Montalban Dam or much improved Wawa Dam as a medium-term water source.

"Insofar as additional water coming from Wawa, it is a talk between Manila Water and the Razon group. That is the direction they are going and from what I gathered, Manila Water is being invited by Razon to form a JV [joint venture]," Velasco said. **PNA**

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PILIPINO MIRROR / PAGE: 2

CLOUD SEEDING OPS SIMULA NA

TINALAKAY na sa pagpupulong ng National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office ang pagsasagawa ng cloud seeding operations.

Ito ay sa gitna ng epekto ng El Niño phenomenon kung saan lubhang apektado ang sektor ng agrikultura.

Sa pagpupulong na isinagawa kahapon, iniulat ng Department of Agriculture (DA) na dahil sa epekto ng El Niño ay umabot na sa P464.3 million ang production loss at P22.918 million ang volume loss sa agrikultura na naitala nitong Marso 8, 2019 dahil sa tagtuyot.

Batay sa report na inilabas ng DA, nasa 13,679 ektarya ng panganim at 13,679 magsasaka sa regions: 9, 10, 11, 12, Mimaropa (Mindoro-Marinduque-Romblon-Palawan), at Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, ang apektado ng kakulangan sa tubig.

Bunsod nito, ipinalabas na ng DA ang kabuuang P18.3 milyon sa kanilang mga regional office para sa cloud seeding operations sa tulong ng Philippine Air Force.

Matapos ang isinagawang joint area assessment, inirekomendang isagawa ang cloud seeding operations sa Regions 2 at 12 mula kahapon, Marso 14 hanggang May 21, 2019.

BENEDICT A JR.

INQUIRER Bandera
BALITA • BUENAS • CHIKA

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Cotabato farms dry up; crop losses reach P1B

KIDAPAWAN CITY—The provincial board of Cotabato placed the province under a state of calamity after crop losses attributed to the dry spell was projected to reach P1 billion.

The Sangguniang Panlalawigan, in a resolution approved on Tuesday, also cited the increasing number of measles and dengue cases and the recent fires in Arakan and Antipas towns that killed five people as bases for the declaration.

Vice Gov. Shirlyn Macasarte-Villanueva said damage to crops in 16 towns and a component city in the province reached P675 million as of last week but officials were expecting the figure to hit P1 billion as assessment reports from municipal governments had yet to be completed.

Records from the Integrated Provincial Health Office (Ipho) showed that at least three people died of dengue in the province during the first quarter of this year. Dengue cases increased by 210 percent compared to the same period last year, according to Ipho.

The state of calamity declaration will allow the provincial government to tap the 5-percent calamity fund allotment to aid drought-hit and disease-stricken communities.

In Kidapawan City, at least P18 million in calamity funds will be used to give immediate relief to farmers in villages hit by the dry spell.

Part of the amount will be used to buy seedlings, said Psalmer Bernalte, city disaster risk reduction and management officer.

In neighboring Davao region, crop damage has reached P55 million, agriculture officials said.

Joedel Lileza, alternative focal person of the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) of the Department of Agriculture in the region, said El Niño had affected the provinces of Davao del Sur and Davao Occidental and parts of Davao City.

In Davao del Sur, some 2,000 hectares of rice lands in the towns of Matanao, Magsaysay, Hagonoy, Kiblawan and Bansalan had been hit by dry spell.

The Matanao municipal government had declared the town under a state of calamity last week.

Helen Carampatana, Magsaysay municipal agriculturist, said P8 million worth of palay in the town had been destroyed by the dry spell.

Bohol losses

In the Visayas, farmers in Bohol province, known as the rice bowl of Central Visayas, reported that their palay had either wilted or had been charred due to intense heat.

The lack of water in an 8,000-square-meter farm of Orcesio Amoy in Sitio Camanayon, Barangay Buenos in Carmen town caused palay to wilt.

His rice paddies had cracked due to lack of water while the palay had turned yellow.

Amoy said he was expecting to post huge losses.

Last year, he was not able to recover the P20,000 he invested in farm inputs after suffering from the brunt of a dry spell. - *Inquirer*

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Abante
UNA SA BALITA

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Hirit sa Kongreso: Veto ng Pangulo sa Coco Levy bill baligtarin - Tañada

NANAWAGAN ang Otso Diretso candidate na si Erin Tañada sa Kongreso na baligtarin ang 'di pag-apruba ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte sa isang batas na naglalayong ipamigay sa mga magsasaka ang mga perang nakalap sa ilalim ng Coco Levy fund noong diktaduryang Marcos.

Ani Tañada, na dating kasapi ng Kamara, pagkakataon na ang pagsasabatas ng Coco Levy bill upang matulungan ang mga magsasaka na sadyang isa sa pinakahirap sa mga sektor ng lipunan.

Tinuligsa rin niya si Pangulong Duterte, na nagpasyang huwag pirmahan ang panukala, matapos ang pabalik-balik na pagrebisa nito. Muli niya itong ibinalik sa Kongreso dahil hindi umano sang-ayon na mas maraming kasapi ng sektor ang bubuo ng Board na magmamatyag sa paggamit ng nasabing pondo.

Para kay Tañada, nakakadismaya ang galaw na ito, na pag-atras sa pangakong binitawan ng Pangulo noong siya ay tumatakbo pa lamang noong 2016.

"Matagal nang hirap ang ating mga magniniyog pero para silang inilulubog lalo sa kahirapan dahil walang tulong na ibinibigay ang ating pamahalaan. Wala na halos silang kinikita simula pa noong nakaraang taon. Lalo silang nawalan ng pag-asa nang ibinasura ni Pangulong Duterte ang pagasa nilang mapakinabangan ang coco levy trust fund," ayon kay Tañada.

"By refusing to sign the bill, sinayang ng Presidente ang isang batas na apat na dekadang ipinaglaban ng ating mga magniniyog. Unless Congress overrides the veto when it convenes this May, back to square one na naman tayo. This is a major disappointment to our coconut farmers, especially since ipinangako ni Duterte ito noong 2016," dagdag pa niya.

Nanawagan rin si Tañada sa Department of Agriculture na siguruhin ang ayuda para sa mga magniniyog at iba pang magsasaka, sa gitna ng mga hinaharap na suliranin, gaya ng papalapit na El Niño at ang rice tariffication.

Kasama ni Tañada sa Otso Diretso sina Sen. Bam Aquino, Cong. Gary Alejano, dating senador Mar Roxas, at ang mga baguhang sasabak sa pulitika na sina dating solicitor general Pilo Hilbay, mga abogadong sina Chel Diokno at Romy Macalintal, at dating ARMM assemblywoman Samira Gutoc. **(Aries Cano)**

Balita

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Red tide drive, pinaigting

JIABONG, Samar – Pinaigting pa ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR)-Region 8 ang kanilang kampanya laban sa red tide sa Eastern Visayas.

Ito ay sa pamamagitan ng pagpapalaganap ng impormasyon kaugnay ng nasabing toxin upang makapag-ingat nang husto ang mga residente sa rehiyon.

Kahapon, pormal nang inilunsad ng BFAR ang programang Community Alliance for Sustaining our Threatened Seas (COASTS) sa tulong iba pang ahensya ng pamahalaan.

Pinili ng BFAR ang nasabing bayan para sa pilot area ng proyekto dahil laganap na red tide sa lugar, partikular na sa Maqueda Bay na nagresulta sa pagkakasawi ng 21 katao noong Hunyo 1983.

Marie Tonette Marticio

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Pananim sa WV, nasira

ILOILO CITY – Nararamdaman na ang epekto ng El Niño sa Westerrn Visayas.

Ito ay nang iulat ng Iloilo Provincial Agricultural Office na umabot sa 11,000 ektaryang pananim na sinasaklawan ng 37 bayan sa rehiyon ang nakaranas ng pagkasira ng pananim bunsod ng tagtuyot.

Kaugnay nito, nanawagan naman si Department of Agriculture (DA)-Region 6 field operations chief, Rene Famoso, sa mga magsasaka na ireport agad sa local government unit ang tinatayang halaga ng nasirang pananim ng mga ito.

Paliwanag nito, nasa 40 porsiyento lamang ng 322,000 ektaryang palayan ang umaasa sa irigasyon, kaya't ramdam na ng mga magsasaka sa lugar ang epekto ng El Niño.

Tara Yap

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Du30 signs agri law, 2 more

By Nat Mariano and Macon Ramos-Araneta

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte has signed a law removing restrictions on agricultural free patents, giving farmers access to more capital to increase their productivity and thus reduce poverty in the countryside.

Under the 1936 Public Land Use Act, an agricultural free patent is required for those who occupied and cultivated tracts of agricultural lands although holders are prohibited from selling or mortgaging their land within five years upon the issuance of the patent.

However, with the signing of RA 11231, or the Agricultural Free Patent Act, Duterte has removed the said restrictions, paving the way for an efficient and effective utilization of lands to contribute to wealth creation, entrepreneurship, and economic development, Malacañang said.

In other developments:

• Duterte also signed a law mandating the use of bigger, readable, and color-coded number plates and other identification marks in motorcycles, documents from Malacañang showed on Thursday.

Duterte signed Republic Act 11235, also known as Motorcycle Crime Prevention Act on March 8. A copy of which was only released by the Palace to the media on Thursday.

Under the new legislation, the Land Transportation Office shall issue bigger, readable, and color-coded license plates to every motorcycle in the country.

• At the same time, Malacañang said Duterte signed a law seeking to fast-track the legal adoption processes of a child by allowing simulated births through simplified administrative proceedings.

On Feb 21, Duterte signed Republic Act 11222, or the Simulated Birth Rectification Act. A copy of which was only released by the Palace on Thursday.

The new law grants amnesty and allows the rectification of the simulated birth of a child where the simulation was made for the best interest of the child.

It would also provide a simple and less costly administrative adoption proceeding where the child has been living with the person or persons who simulated her or his birth record for at least three years before the effectivity of the said act.

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Central Luzon El Niño-free, UPRIIS claims

By Ferdie Domingo

CABANATUAN CITY—The National Irrigation Administration's Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems, operator of the Pantabangan Dam, has declared as "El Niño-free" some 136,848.39 hectares of agricultural land in Central Luzon.

Rosalinda B. Bote, acting UPRIIS manager, made the declaration in a press briefing and said the areas will not be affected by the dry spell brought about by El Niño.

Bote said this was possible because of the high water elevation at the Pantabangan Dam, which as of Thursday was 204.107 meters above sea level, way above the critical level of 172 meters.

Bote said the 125,848.39 hectares programmed for irrigation this dry season included an additional 10,000 hectares in Casecnan and 1,500 hectares in the tail-end portion of Pantabangan Dam's service areas in Arayat and Candaba in Pampanga, San Miguel and San Ildefonso in Bulacan, and the Nueva Ecija towns of Cabiao, Licab and Guimba.

UPRIIS has a total service area of 130,000 hectares covering Nueva Ecija and parts of Bulacan and Pampanga.

Bote said there was enough water to irrigate farmlands up to April 22, the end of the dry cropping season.

"With the high water level at the Pantabangan Dam, we can say that we are El Niño-free insofar as UPRIIS is concerned," she said.

The El Niño-free declaration is expected to be a welcome reprieve among farmers who were told in October 2014 that some 39,000 hectares of their agricultural land would not be receiving irrigation water from Pantabangan Dam due to El Niño.

Then UPRIIS manager Florentino David warned that the water deprivation could affect at least 20,000 farmers this dry season, which he blamed on the low water level at the Pantabangan Dam recorded at 191.91 meters on Oct. 14.

Then, UPRIIS only programmed for irrigation 120,800.30 hectares out of the total service area.

During a stakeholder meeting recently, Bote announced that their service areas would not be affected by El Niño.

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Subsidies, warning systems needed for El Niño, say climate activists

By Patricia Denise M. Chiu
@PDMChiuINQ

Climate activists have cautioned that El Niño conditions could come more frequently in the coming years, and at a greater intensity, as a result of global warming.

These activists, which include Kalikasan, Greenpeace Philippines and the Climate Reality Project, called on the government to prepare the sectors most likely to be affected, even as they urged the Duterte administration to provide concrete, workable solutions to slow down climate change.

El Niño is the warm phase of the El Niño Southern Oscillation characterized by reduced rainfall.

John Leo Algo, science policy officer of the Climate Reality Project Philippines told the Inquirer that changes in the frequency and intensity of El Niño events "are not completely natural."

'Undoubtedly man-made'

"Current global warming, which is undoubtedly man-made, is very likely to enhance future El Niño episodes and make them more frequent," Algo said.

Leon Dulce, national coordinator for Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment, said the government should also be accountable for their lack of planning for El Niño cycles, including this year's, which has aggravated the water crisis in the metro that has left thousands of families cut off from their water supply.

PARCHED A farmer examines his arid field amid El Niño.
—MICHAEL B. JAUCIAN

"El Niño cycles should have long been anticipated but government did nothing to prepare our water supplies, agricultural systems and communities," Dulce said.

Dulce called on the government to provide subsidies for the affected communities.

For Wilhelmina Pelegrina, country director for Greenpeace Philippines, the worst is yet to come, in terms of El Niño.

Harsher and longer El Niño events can lead to many devastating consequences, Pelegrina said, including smallholder farmers, fisherfolk and indigenous peoples going hungry and becoming poorer as they bear the brunt of the impact of El Niño.

Pelegrina said Greenpeace believes that the only way to curb or reverse the negative effects of climate change is to stop the widespread use of oil, coal, fossil fuel and gas.

However, since the organization recognizes that it will be difficult, as an "immediate measure," it said that the national government, as well as local government units and concerned agencies should set up a localized early warning system, such as one through text messages, which ideally, should be at the hands of farmers, fisherfolk, coastal communities and indigenous peoples. INQ

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EXTREME HEAT IN LUZON

VEGETABLE GARDENS, FORESTS SUFFER FROM LACK OF RAIN

By Inquirer Northern Luzon
@InqNational

BAGUIO CITY—Farmers in Benguet have blamed the dry spell for stunted carrots, pest-infested cabbages, and idle farms while local officials in Pangasinan and Nueva Ecija said the extreme heat had worsened forest fires.

Augusta Balanoy, manager of the Benguet Farmers' Marketing Cooperative, said at least five villages in four Benguet towns have been suffering from water shortage since Feb. 4 due to reduced rainfall associated with the weather phenomenon El Niño.

Balanoy said this had led to withering crops and pest attacks at Barangay Catlubong and Loo in Buguias town, Madaymen in Kibungan and Balili in Mankayan, all in Benguet.

STUNTED In Benguet, vegetable farmers are blaming the dry spell for stunted carrots harvested in their villages. —PHOTO COURTESY OF BENGUET FARMERS MARKETING COOPERATIVE

Moth attack

"Cabbages in the affected areas were being attacked by the diamondback moth and this could have been prevented if the plants were watered regularly," Balanoy told the Inquirer.

According to the Benguet agriculture office, 26,000 hectares of cultivated farm land in the province are irrigated while 30,000 ha are rainfed.

Semitemperate vegetables, such as cabbages or carrots, are being grown in 38,000 ha.

Despite the lack of rainfall, the supply of semitemperate vegetables in Benguet remains steady, said Rodolfo Kitab Jr., market inspector at the La Trinidad vegetable trading post.

"Considering that it is no longer the peak season, the supply is enough. This is normal during ordinary days," he said.

Forest, grass fires

In Pangasinan, another forest fire broke out on Wednesday afternoon at Sitio Parasapas in Barangay Cacabugaoan, which is at the foot of Mt. Lacab Palale in San Nicolas town.

The fire ravaged a 1,000-square-meter forest in the mountain before it crossed to nearby Mt. Tapilok at Barangay San Eugenio, Natividad town, and destroyed about 20 ha of trees and cogon grasses.

Residents in Sitio Parasapas burned a grassy patch on Wednesday afternoon as they prepared to grow cogon. The extreme heat and dry condition may have caused the fire to spread quickly, destroying the vegetation in the two mountains.

This happened barely a day after a forest fire destroyed a reforestation project in the Zambales Mountains straddling Mangatarem and Aguilar towns in Pangasinan.

Last month, fire razed a wide area in the mountains of Sual town.

In Nueva Ecija, at least 232 ha of forest were razed by fire in the past two months partly due to extreme heat.

The affected areas were mostly in Carranglan, including a national greening program site at Barangay Puncan, and in Lupao town. —REPORTS FROM KIMBERLIE QUITASOL, GABRIEL CARDINOZA AND ARMAND GALANG INQ

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FARMS BEAR BRUNT OF DRY SPELL

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DRY LAND Vegetables grown in the mountain village of Sudlon 1 in Cebu City are wilting due to intense heat and the absence of rainfall. Rice, corn and vegetable farms are drying up due to dwindling water supply.
—JUNJIE MENDOZA

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PART 2 OF 2

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

REGIONS

Editor
Robert Jaworski L. Abaño

LEO UDTOHAN

GRANARY HURTING Farmers in Bohol province, the rice granary of Central Visayas, are expecting to incur losses as dwindling irrigation water supply and lack of rainfall have damaged their crops.

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Para maparami ang produksiyon ng tilapia

DOST NAGBIGAY NG VALUE-ADDED TECH SA KOOPERATIBA

AGONCILLO, Batangas – MAGKAKAROON ng magandang ani ng tilapia rito sa baybayin ng bayan ng Agoncillo sa pagbibigay ng value-added fish processing technology at good manufacturing practices na ipinakilala sa kanila ng Department of Science and Technology (DOST) 4-A (Calabarzon) sa pamamagitan ng Provincial Science and Technology Center (PSTC) - Batangas and Industrial Technology Development Institute (ITDI).

Kinumpirma ni John Maico Hernandez, information officer and science research specialist ng DOST-PSTC Batangas, kamakailan na ang bagong value-added fish processing technology na ginawa ng ahensiya ay nagpapakita sa growers kung paano magproseso ng tuyo at marinated tilapia products.

"The technology aims to improve existing fish processing and combined training on the integrated current Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), which are now benefiting the Bilibinwang Multipurpose Cooperative members here," ani Hernandez.

Tinipon ng PSTC-Batangas ang mga miyembro ng coop noong Pebrero 20-22, para ibahagi sa kanila ang bagong teknolohiya ng food processing na makapagbibigay ng garantiya nang mas mabuting kita dahil makapagsisimula na silang magbenta ng processed tilapia products, na may mas matagal na shelf-life, kaysa sa sariwang isda lamang.

"The cooperative has been engaged in agricultural services, mini grocery and loan services on its initial operation and has ventured into tilapia fish processing besides the huge harvest of the aquatic resources in their locality," dagdag ni Hernandez.

Sinabi niya na ang DOST 4-A, sa pammagitan ng kanilang grants-in-aid program, ay nagbigay ng mechanical dryer para magamit ng multi-purpose coop.

Inaasahan na ang kooperatiba ay magkakaroon ng full production sa kanilang "upgraded" processed tilapia products gamit ang bagong fish processing facility na ibinigay ng DOST, na may suporta ng Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR).

Ilan sa mga bagong tilapia-based products ng kooperatiba na inaasahang magiging best-seller, ay ang "lamayo" o ang semi-dried tilapia, na magkakaroon ng malaking benepisyo mula sa bagong gamit.

Ipinaliwanag din ni Hernandez na ang training program ay sumasakop din ng critical points sa fish processing, tulad ng paglilinis, pagtanggal ng kaliskis, pagtanggal ng lamang-loob at hasang, paghiwa, paglinis at pamimili, na mas magagawa ngayon ng maayos gamit ang makabagong teknolohiya.

Sinabi niya na namahagi rin ang DOST-ITDI trainers ng tatlong estilo ng pagpoproseso ng tilapia -- salted, acidified (marinated), at tocino-styled. **PNA**

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Sa Ilocos Norte

RAINWATER HARVESTING TANK SAGOT SA EL NIÑO

NAKAHANDA ang iba't ibang munisipyo ng rainwater harvesting tank sa lalawigan ng Ilocos Norte upang malabanan ang matinding epekto ng El Niño sa bansa.

Ang rainwater harvester ay nakatutulong upang makaipon ng tubig mula sa ulan. Nitong mga nakaraang araw, may pabugso-bugso pa ring pag-ulan kahit damang-dama na ang init ng panahon kasabay ang pagbitak ng mga lupa.

Sa bayan naman ng Piddig, hindi problema sa kanila ang pagkukulang ng tubig dahil mayroon na silang malaking dam, ang Abucay impounding dam.

Ginawa ito ng local na gobyerno ng Piddig sa pamamagitan ng pondo mula sa iba't ibang ahensya ng gobyerno, na kung tag-ulan ay nakalilikom ito ng libo-libong metro kubiko at pinapakawalan ito tuwing tag-init.

Dahil dito, hindi masyadong naabala ang mga magsasaka sa bukid, maliban na lamang sa mga mangingisda na may mga fish pond sa kani-kanilang bayan.

Malaya
Business Insight

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Wheat prices rebound

SINGAPORE- Chicago wheat futures rose on Thursday and were set to gain for two out of three sessions amid expectations of short-covering by funds, but abundant world supplies kept a lid on prices.

Corn and soybeans were on track to climb for a third consecutive session, with prices supported by planting delays in the US Midwest.

Investment funds hold massive short positions, unusual for this time of year, and many traders were concerned they would begin to start covering them if farmers' seeding efforts were stymied by wet fields and cold soil temperatures.

The most-active wheat contract on the Chicago Board of Trade was up 0.8 percent at $4.50-3/4 a bushel. Wheat touched a 13-month low on Monday, but rebounded nearly 6 percent the following day.

Soybeans were up 0.3 percent at $9.04 a bushel, while corn rose 0.3 percent to $3.67-1/2 a bushel.

"It is mainly fund action which is moving wheat prices higher," said a trader at an international company which runs wheat mills in parts of Southeast Asia.

"As far as supplies are concerned, we are comfortable. The next crop is looking fine in Europe and even in the Black Sea region."

Reuters

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

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Palm trade war looms as Europe sets limits on use in biofuel

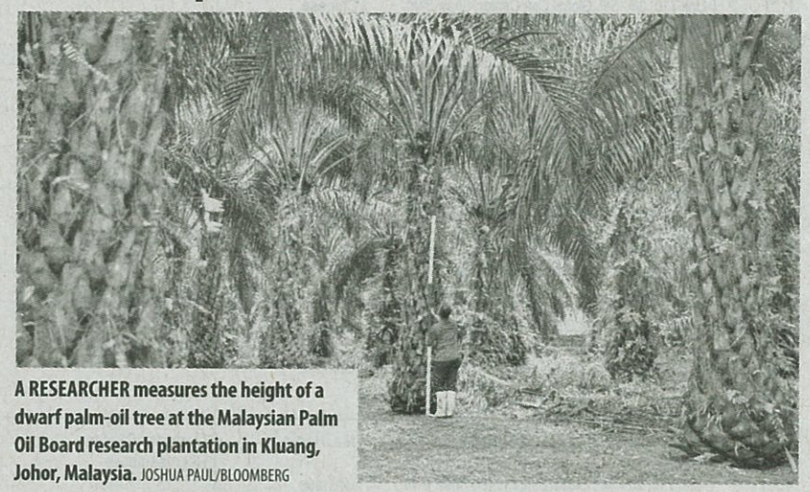
PALM oil emerged as a flashpoint in a potential trade war between the European Union and some of the world's largest developing nations after the bloc imposed stricter limits on how the crop can be used in green fuels.

The European Commission on Wednesday restricted the types of biofuels from palm oil that may be counted toward the EU's renewable-energy goals and introduced a certification system. Indonesia and Malaysia, which supply 85 percent of the crop, have warned that they are ready to retaliate against what they see as "discriminatory" rules.

Palm-oil prices have dropped 18 percent since the start of 2018 partly because of a campaign by environmental groups to reduce use of the crop in fuels that was endorsed by the European Parliament. The EU rules left some loopholes that will weaken the overall impact of the restrictions. Benchmark futures fell for the seventh day on Thursday, the worst streak since November.

"The exemptions to smallholders do not solve the discrimination exercised against palm oil," said Mahendra Siregar, executive director of the Council of Palm Oil Producing Countries. "It fails to recognize the considerable efforts made to secure sustainable palm oil from plantations. Palm oil-producing countries should continue to apply pressure on the EU."

The move was required by a broader law agreed by the 28-nation bloc last year, when the European Parliament pushed for curbs on the use of palm oil on concerns its production caused deforestation and aggravated climate change.



A RESEARCHER measures the height of a dwarf palm-oil tree at the Malaysian Palm Oil Board research plantation in Kluang, Johor, Malaysia. JOSHUA PAUL/BLOOMBERG

The EU wants to lead the battle against global warming and has toughened goals to reduce greenhouse-gases blamed for climate change. It aims to cut emissions by at least 40 percent by 2030 compared with 1990 levels, boost the share of renewable energy to 32 percent and increase energy efficiency by 32.5 percent.

"Today's decision puts a welcomed brake on the craziness of subsidizing the burning of palm oil for energy," said Ariel Brunner, senior head of policy for the environmental group BirdLife Europe. "Unfortunately, it still has many loopholes and doesn't affect other drivers of deforestation and biodiversity loss, such as soy. The EU is still locked into a perverse policy that incentivizes environmental destruction and increases greenhouse-gas emissions in the name of fighting climate change."

The move set up the EU for conflict with producing nations, which had stepped up their lobbying against the provision in recent weeks.

The Council of Palm Oil Producing Countries, whose members Indonesia, Malaysia and Colombia produce about 90 percent of global supply, announced they will jointly challenge the bill through bilateral consultations, as well as through the World Trade Organization. The council said the law uses a "scientifically flawed" concept that targets palm oil and "makes no attempt to include broader environmental concerns" linked to other vegetable oils.

Malaysia plans to halt all expansion of oil palm plantations as it seeks to dispel the oil's reputation as a driver of deforestation, Minister of Primary Industries Teresa Kok said in an interview earlier this month. ***Bloomberg News***