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Senate to conduct inquiry on rice tariff law implementation

By PAOLO ROMERO

The Senate committee on agriculture and food is set to conduct an inquiry into the implementation of the Rice Tariffication Law, particularly the disbursement of funds meant for farmers.

The probe was prompted by a resolution filed by Sen. Cynthia Villar, chair of the agriculture committee that seeks to look into the implementation of Republic Act 11203 that lifted quantitative restrictions on rice imports and replaced it with tariffs, and created the P10- billion Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

"This (RCEF) is the protection measure we have in place for our local farmers in a tariffied regime we find ourselves in following the expiration of the agreement with the World Trade Organization. We believe in this law and for the sake of our farmers, we want it to succeed," Villar, principal author of the law, said.

"The issues that have surfaced lately in the rice sector, particularly among the government agencies charged with the implementation of the RCEF law, are causes for apprehension on whether our rice sector and rice farmers are adequately made ready this early to face the regime of rice import liberalization," she said, referring to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

The Bureau of Customs earlier reported that it has so far collected P6.48 billion from rice imports since the law was implemented in March or an average of P1.4 billion monthly.

Villar said regardless of the amount of collection, the law mandates the allocation of P10 billion annually for the RCEF and there is no room for discretion in the fund's disbursement.

The law allocates P5 billion annually to procure rice farm equipment through the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech). Farm equipment such as tillers, tractors, seeders, threshers, rice planters, harvesters and irrigation pumps will be given as a grant-in-kind primarily to eligible rice farmer associations and registered rice cooperatives.

The law also allocates P3 billion to the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) to develop, propagate and promote inbred seeds, which is projected to increase farmers' yield by up to 50 percent.

Villar, however, found out that the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) released P5 billion last December for rice farmers but only P1 billion has been credited to the sector.

The remaining P4 billion is still a subject of debate between the National Economic and Development Authority and the DA, she said.

"It should be ensured that kinks like these in the fund release and distribution flow should be ironed out and removed in the implementation of the RCEF law," the senator said.

She also lamented that PhilMech and PhilRice are reportedly not yet ready to come up with their respective guidelines in disbursing their respective shares of the RCEF.

Villar said the government agencies must act with urgency as tariff proceeds are coming in along with the imports so local farmers must be given all the assistance for them to become competitive.

The law imposes a 35 percent tariff on rice imports from member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and 50 percent on those imported from non-ASEAN countries.

Malaya
Business Insight

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P775M irrigation in Quezon breaks ground

THE National Irrigation Administration (NIA) broke ground recently on the P775-million Macalelon small reservoir irrigation project (SRIP) in Quezon province.

The project is expected to provide a reliable and timely irrigation water supply to 830 hectares of agricultural lands in 12 barangays of Macalelon and Lopez.

The facility also aims to enhance agricultural productivity of the municipality to create more employment opportunities and to improve the living environment of the locals as it includes the construction of a 22.5-meter high zoned-earthfill embankment dam and appurtenant structures with active storage capacity of 3.504 million cubic meters, as well as drainage facilities.

NIA said the project will have beneficial impact on the livelihood of 700 farmer-beneficiaries in terms of control, aquaculture, agro-tourism, hydroelectric and solar power generation and watershed management.

Since the construction of Macalelon SRIP will submerge about 99 hectares of coconut land at the reservoir and dam area and 75 hectares for canal and appurtenant structures, as much as 87 affected families will be relocated.

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editorial

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Maximizing PHL agri's strengths

FILIPINOS are fond of eating fruits, such as bananas and pineapples, with their meals. Cost is oftentimes a major consideration in choosing these items as *panghimagas* or dessert because fruits in season are cheaper than popular sweets like cakes. There is also a growing awareness that it is healthier to consume fruits than sugar-laden desserts.

Apart from this, fruits that grow in abundance in the country also enable local traders to earn dollars. Export earnings from bananas, for example, have already breached the $1-billion mark, and businesses that thrive on the shipment of this tropical fruit have created jobs for thousands of people, especially in the rural areas.

Traders also earn millions of dollars in export revenues from shipping other fruits such as mangoes. Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) indicated that last year, the country's export earnings from bananas and canned pineapple reached nearly $1.7 billion ***(See, "Mindanao produces agri export winners," in the* BUSINESSMIRROR, *July 29, 2019).***

Despite the export potential of these agricultural products, a huge chunk of government funds for the sector is channeled to rice. Aside from the money directly allocated to the subsector, the government sets aside billions of pesos for the National Irrigation Administration every year to support rice and corn farms. As expected, the support given to the subsector has encouraged farmers to cultivate the crop.

The rationale given by the government in pouring huge sums of money on the rice subsector is the fact that it is our staple food. However, this rice-centric agriculture policy has been detrimental to the development of other subsectors, which could have allowed farmers to earn more if they were given the proper support. Aside from production loans, planters and firms need help in implementing systems that will make their products acceptable to the export market.

Given the decision of the Duterte administration to further open up the country's rice market, the government must now seriously implement its plan to encourage farmers to plant other crops. As it is, planting rice is no longer profitable given the high cost of production. In the immediate future, earnings from rice could decline further as the influx of cheap imports will make it harder for our farmers to compete.

Based on the latest data from the PSA, farmers earned an average of P0.47 for every peso of investment in palay production. Earnings were affected by expensive fuel and labor, according to PSA data. Farmers who planted fruits earned more than their counterparts who cultivated the staple, according to government data. In a report released in September 2018, the PSA said a peso invested in pineapple production generated a net gain of P3.57, while the net profit in watermelon production was P2.72.

Apart from promoting the cultivation of fruits, the government must also encourage value adding by helping farmers acquire their own processing equipment. This way, farmers will not have to throw away their surplus output. A well-thought-out program on fruits production and processing, one that will have the full support of the government, will allow the Philippines to expand its shipments to markets where Manila has existing trade deals. Thailand is earning some $27 billion annually from its food exports. The Philippines can learn from Thailand and cash in on the opportunities presented by the increasing global demand for food.

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A broader look at today's business

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NIA breaks ground for ₱775-million Quezon farm irrigation project

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas
@jearcalas

THE National Irrigation Administration (NIA) said it has broken ground for the construction of the P775-million Macalelon Small Reservoir Irrigation Project (SRIP) that aims to provide irrigation to 830 hectares of farmlands in 12 barangays in Macalelon and Lopez in Quezon province.

The Macalelon SRIP, which is expected to be completed by early 2022, includes the construction of a 22.5-meter high zoned-earthfill embankment dam and its appurtenant structures with active storage capacity of 3.504 million cubic meters.

Upon completion, the project would irrigate 830 hectares of agricultural lands in 12 barangays of Macalelon and Lopez, Quezon, benefiting 700 farmers.

"Macalelon SRIP aims to enhance the agricultural productivity of the Municipality of Macalelon, to create more employment opportunities, and to improve the living environment of the locals," NIA said on Tuesday.

The Macalelon SRIP would also provide the beneficiaries with incidental benefits, such as flood control, aquaculture, agro-tourism, hydroelectric and solar power generation, and watershed management, NIA added.

"Through the years, we see how irrigation brings significant changes to the lives of Filipino farmers and to the community where they reside," NIA Administrator Ricardo R. Visaya said.

"Now we also want to see that change here in Macalelon and Santa Elena, and nearby villages. We thank our project-affected families who were supportive and cooperative in order to kick-start this project," Visaya added.

NIA said the construction of Macalelon SRIP would submerge about 99 hectares of timber/coconut land at the reservoir and dam area, and 75 hectares for canal and appurtenant structures.

NIA added that 87 families residing in two barangays of Macalelon were relocated to a barangay in Lopez, Quezon, as they would be adversely affected by the project.

Visaya led the ground-breaking ceremony last July 29 witnessed by Roger Panganiban, executive assistant to the Municipal Mayor of Macalelon, some national and local government officials, project beneficiaries, project-affected families and NIA employees.

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Senate to probe rice trade lib law's implementation

By Butch Fernandez @butchfBM

THE Senate is poised to open an inquiry into the implementation of the rice trade liberalization law, particularly the establishment of a fund that aims to improve the competitiveness of farmers.

In filing Senate Resolution 39, Senator Cynthia Villar cited the need to monitor the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) embodied in Republic Act (RA) 11203, by the designated government agencies, stressing that "this law involves a very important and sensitive commodity—rice—for every Filipino."

She added that the Senate inquiry is being mounted to also "ensure that funds are allocated for the purpose actually intended."

Villar's resolution recalled that the law signed by President Duterte on February 14 mandated the lifting of rice import restrictions amid government hopes this will "make the food staple more affordable to Filipinos."

She recalled that the law was passed precisely to "liberalize the importation, exportation and trading of rice, lifting for the purpose the quantitative import restriction on rice."

RA11203 amended Republic Act 8178, also known as the Agricultural Tariffication Act of 1996, and replaced the quantitative restriction (QR) in rice imports.

The resolution recalled that "instead of limiting the amount of rice that will enter the country, rice imports will instead be charged with corresponding tariffs, the collected amount of which shall be given to farmers to strengthen their productive capacities in the amount of at least P10 billion a year, for the next six years, through the RCEF."

The Villar resolution noted that imported rice from Southeast Asian countries is slapped a 35-percent tariff, which is the import duty rate commitment of the Philippines for rice in the Asean Trade in Goods Agreement.

For non-Asean member-states, the tariff is set at 50 percent or the tariff equivalent calculated in accordance with the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreement on agriculture upon the expiration of the waiver relating to the special treatment for rice of the Philippines.

RA 11203 provides that the RCEF will fund programs to increase income of Filipino farmers through various forms of assistance, such as development of inbred rice seeds, provision of rice farm equipment, cheap credit with Land Bank of the Philippines and the Development Bank of the Philippines and education-training on skills enhancement, adding that "the fund would be allocated and disbursed to rice-producing areas."

The law's implementing rules mandates that a new rice roadmap should be crafted within 180 days after its effectivity, with the Department of Agriculture (DA) as lead agency to be joined by the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda), the Department of Finance and the Department of Budget and Management "in the formulation and adoption of a new rice roadmap."

It specified that this roadmap should be based on the following principles: sustainable investments, particularly on rice support infrastructure and post-harvest facilities; improved productivity, efficiency and profitability of small rice farmers and landless farm workers; strengthened research and development programs; preservation and enhancement of rice production capabilities; provision of accessible, targeted and technology-oriented support services that cover the entire value chain; setting up of responsible, participatory and effective governance mechanisms; and, addressing the impact of income loss due to rice tariffication.

The law indicated that this will be implemented "through a complementation of the DA's rice sector programs which are separately funded by the General Appropriations Act, on one hand, and the RCEF programs, on the other."

Manila Standard

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Where is the P4-b Budget released for farmers?—Villar

By Macon Ramos-Araneta

SENATOR Cynthia Villar wants the Senate to account for the P4-billion funds released by the Department of Budget and Management last December since only P1 billion went to the accounts of the farmers.

In his proposed Senate Resolution No. 39, Villar wants to seek clarification on the reported P5-million DBM release intended to help the rice farmers under the memorandum of understanding entered by the Agricultural Credit Policy Council with LBP and DBP.

Villar's proposal also seeks an inquiry into the implementation of the law lifting the quantitative restriction on rice importation and creating the P10-billion Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund.

Villar, chairperson of the Committee on Agriculture and Food, has made it a point to prioritize the exercise of her committee's oversight function on the implementation of the law enacted on Feb. 14.

"This is the protection measure we have in place for our local farmers in a tariffied regime we find ourselves in following the expiration of the agreement with the World Trade Organization. We believe in this law and for the sake of our farmers, we want it to succeed," Villar said.

The measure directs a Senate inquiry into the implementation of Republic Act 11203 or the rice tariffication law to closely monitor its implementation by the designated government agencies and to ensure that funds are allocated for the purpose actually intended.

Under RA 11203 which amends RA 8178 or the Agricultural Tariffication Act of 1996, instead of limiting the amount of rice that will enter the country, rice imports will instead be charged with corresponding tariffs.

The collected amount shall be given to farmers to strengthen their productive capacities in the amount of at least P10 billion a year, for the next six years through a fund known as RCEF.

"The issues that have surfaced lately in the rice sector, particularly among the government agencies charged with the implementation of the RCEF law, are causes for apprehension on whether our rice sector and rice farmers are adequately made ready this early to face the regime of rice import liberalization," Villar said.

The law allocates P5 billion annually to procure rice farm equipment through the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization. Farm equipment such as tillers, tractors, seeders, threshers, rice planters, harvesters, and irrigation pumps will be given as a grant-in-kind primarily to eligible rice farmer associations and registered rice cooperatives.

"During the Senate deliberation on this law, we have identified 947 rice-producing municipalities in 55 provinces where farm equipment will be deployed over the next six years," Villar said.

The law also allocates P3 billion to the Philippine Rice Research Institute to develop, propagate and promote inbred seeds, which is projected to increase farmers' yield by up to 50 percent.

The Nacionalista Party senator pointed out that the Department of Agriculture's regular program on hybrid rice remains and should not be confused with the RCEF for PhilRice.

Also under the law, P1 billion will be given to Land Bank of the Philippines and the Development Bank of the Philippines for the creation of a credit facility with minimal interest rates and collateral requirements.

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NIA starts P755 irrigation project in Quezon

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

The government has started the construction of the P775-million Macalelon Small Reservoir Irrigation Project aimed at improving agricultural productivity in Quezon province.

The National Irrigation Administration recently broke ground for the Macalelon SRIP in Barangay Vista Hermoza to enhance the farm sector, create more employment opportunities, and improve the living environment of the locals.

The project includes the construction of a 22.5-meter high zoned-earth fill embankment dam and its appurtenant structures with active storage capacity of 3.504 million cubic meters.

It also involves irrigation, drainage, and project facilities, conduct of detailed engineering and pre-construction activities, institutional development programs, right-of-way acquisitions, and resettlement of project-affected families.

Upon completion, the project is expected to provide a reliable and timely irrigation water supply to 830 hectares of agricultural lands in 12 barangays of Macalelon and Lopez in Quezon.

This is expected to benefit the livelihood of 700 farmer-beneficiaries. It also entails incidental benefits, such as flood control, aqua-culture, agro-tourism, hydroelectric and solar power generation, and watershed management.

The project, however, will submerge about 99 hectares of timber and coconut land at the reservoir and dam area, and 75 hectares for canal and appurtenant structures.

NIA maintained that it has already identified relocation sites and initially, 87 families will be relocated from two barangays of Macalelon and one barangay in Lopez in Quezon.

The Manila Times

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NIA starts P775-M Macalelon irrigation in Quezon

THE P775-million Macalelon Small Reservoir Irrigation Project of the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) broke ground in Barangay Vista Hermoza, Macalelon, Quezon on Monday.

According to NIA, Administrator Ricardo Visaya led the groundbreaking ceremony of the multi-million irrigation project. The project includes the construction of a 22.5-meter high zoned-earthfill embankment dam and its appurtenant structures with active storage capacity of 3.504-million cubic meters, as well as irrigation, drainage, and project facilities, conduct of detailed engineering/pre-construction activities, institutional development programs, Right-of-Way (RoW) acquisitions, and resettlement of project-affected families.

Over 830 hectares of agricultural lands in 12 *barangays* (villages) of Macalelon and Lopez, Quezon are expected to benefit from the irrigation, providing a beneficial impact on the livelihood of 700 farmer-beneficiaries, NIA said.

The project also entails numerous incidental benefits, such as flood control, aqua-culture, agro-tourism, hydroelectric and solar power generation, and watershed management, it added.

National Irrigation Administrator Ricardo Visaya leads the groundbreaking ceremony of the P775-million Macalelon Small Reservoir Irrigation Project in Barangay Vista Hermoza, Macalelon, Quezon on Monday. NIA PHOTO

NIA said the construction of Macalelon SRIP would adversely affect about 99 hectares of coconut land at the reservoir and dam area, and 75 hectares for canal and appurtenant structures.

The agency, however, committed to protect the general welfare of the farmers and other stakeholders.

It noted that relocation sites have been already identified and initially, 87 families will be relocated from two *barangay* of Macalelon and one *barangay* in Lopez, Quezon.

"Through the years, we see how irrigation brings significant changes to the lives of Filipino farmers and to the community where they reside. *Ngayon, gusto ko rin pong makita ang pagbabagong ito dito sa* Macalelon at Sta. Elena, *maging sa mga karatig-pook... Nagpapasalamat ako lalung-lalo na sa ating* project-affected families *na naging* supportive *at* cooperative *upang masimulan ang project na ito kahit na wala silang mapapatubigan na palayan,*" Visaya said during the ceremony.

EIREENE JAIREE D. GOMEZ

The Manila Times

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Editorial

Rice Tariffication Act should be reviewed

THE Rice Tariffication Act (RA 11203) was implemented in February this year amid optimism that it would stabilize the supply and price of the country's staple grain. It is, however, becoming increasingly clear that this law is having serious negative effects on the domestic rice sector, and must be reviewed before its unintended consequences for Philippine rice farmers, millers and distributors become grave.

The Rice Tariffication Act was conceived as a replacement for the 1969-vintage framework that put rice imports under the control of the government through the National Food Authority (NFA).

That scheme had clearly become unworkable; rice prices to consumers increased sharply at times, farmers were perpetually unhappy about low farmgate prices, supplies were often unstable, and the NFA itself racked financial losses. Something needed to be done, and RA 11203 appeared to be the solution.

Under the Rice Tariffication Act, unlimited rice importation by private traders is allowed, provided of course that they secure the necessary permits and pay the proper duties. The tariff rates are set at 35 percent for rice sourced from Asean countries, 40 percent for rice from outside the Asean up to a total of 350,000 metric tons, and 180 percent for imports beyond that volume. The 350,000 metric ton figure is the minimum access volume (MAV), the amount of rice the Philippines must allow to be imported annually under World Trade Organization (WTO) rules.

The Rice Tariffication Act also created a P10-billion Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) to help domestic rice farmers improve their productivity.

The fund, which is financed by the tariffs collected from rice imports, provides P5 billion for machinery and equipment through the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech); P3 billion in high-yielding seeds through the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice); and P1 billion for credit and P1 billion in training through the Agricultural Training Institute.

The expected results of liberalizing rice imports were that the increased volume of imports would boost supply and keep overall rice prices reasonable from a consumer standpoint. Meanwhile, the tariff-funded support for the domestic rice sector would improve its yield and quality, so that it could be sold at a competitive price, higher than the prices farmers were earning previously, and slightly lower or equal to the prices of imported rice.

Six months into the new import scheme, however, those reasonable-sounding expectations are not being realized.

According to the Bureau of Customs, 1.5 million metric tons of imported rice has entered the country since implementation of RA 11203. This has stabilized consumer supply and prices, and has provided enough additional revenue to completely fund the RCEF program, but has had a disastrous effect on the domestic rice sector. Prices for unmilled rice are far below pre-tariff levels — in some provinces, they have fallen to as low as P12 per kilogram, which is roughly half the previous price — and as much as 40 percent of the country's milling capacity has been idled.

One fix that has been proposed is to implement an emergency tariff, something which is allowed under WTO rules, to give price support to local farmers for a period of time by making imported rice much more expensive. That would be at best a stopgap measure, however, one that does not address the underlying problem and simply shifts the economic burden from farmers to consumers.

In spite of appearing to be a good idea at the outset, the results of six months of testing have shown that the Rice Tariffication Act is hurting rather than helping Filipino farmers. It is imperative that the administration and Congress review the measure and determine what changes must be made to improve its outcomes.

The Manila Times

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Give rice tariff law a chance, govt urged

BY EIREENE JAIREE GOMEZ

DESPITE appeals from industry stakeholders, particularly farmers groups, the government should wait at least a year of implementing the Rice Tariffication Act before it pursues a review of the law, an agriculture expert said.

For Former Agriculture Secretary Dr. William Dar, who is also the current president of InangLupa Movement Inc., a review of Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law would be unwise for the government to do.

Reviewing the law at least a year after it has been fully implemented will allow the government to clearly determine the impacts of the law, both to farmers and consumers, he said.

"It's not yet implemented. I want it to achieve full implementation. Give it a chance. One year will be a good indication," Dar told *The Manila Times*.

While President Duterte can order for an increase of tariff on rice imports to protect the rice industry from sudden or extreme price fluctuations, as one of the provisions of RA 11203, Dar said the government should do so in a year of the rollout of the new rice regime.

"I'm bias on the full implementation of the law. Let's give it a chance first. Then let's see whether the tariff would still be low or not. That's one of the measures the President can do as adjustments. It's part of the law," Dar said.

His statements came after Senator Cynthia Villar said it is too early to review RA 11203, which is so far in four months of implementation. "[The issue here is] the implementation of the law, not the law itself. The law is very good," she said.

Even Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III, head of the Duterte administration's economic team, dismissed calls for a review of the rice tariffication law, citing that prices of rice have declined with the liberalization of rice imports.

But leaders of the rice industry expressed disappointment on the initial impacts of the new rice regime to the rice sector, which include the steep drop on the farmgate prices of palay (unhusked rice), closure of a number of rice milling facilities in several major rice-producing provinces, and thus, the need to immediately impose a safeguard duty and increase the tariff on imported rice.

The Rice Liberalization Act, which was passed in February this year, removed restraints on the importation, export and trading of rice. Restraints on imports were replaced by tariffs. Under the law, the country will apply a 35 percent tariff for rice shipments from Asean member states, 40 percent for in-quota or within minimum access volume (MAV) from non-Asean, and 180 percent for out-quota and non-Asean or as calculated by the Tariff Commission.

Since the passage of RA 11203, there has been a 422-percent increase in the volume of rice imported by the Philippines, according to the Bureau of Customs. From March to July, about 1.5 million metric tons (MT) of imported rice have already entered the country.

The Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food, Inc. (PCAFI) and Philippine Confederation of Grains Associations blamed the unimpeded rice importation for the very low prices of locally-produced palay which have reached to as low as P12 per kilo, compared to P20 per kilo and above quotation recorded in 2018.

The Philippines is seen to become the second largest rice importer in the world this year, according to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). Philippine rice imports are expected to reach an all-time high of 3 million MT, just 500,000 MT short of China's rice importation requirement.

The new law also calls for the establishment of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) which will be endowed with P10 billion a year for six years which will be utilized to provide different forms of assistance to the country's rice farmers such as the development of inbred rice seeds, the development of rice farm equipment and skills enhancement.

According to Dar, the Department of Agriculture (DA) should also look closely on how to specifically increase farmers income under the new rice regime, citing focus on hybrid rice farming and diversification as ways to do so.

"[The] hybrid rice technology is one opportunity to increase income. The diversification after rice like planting vegetables, that's again one opportunity we need to tap. The crop diversification indicated in the rice tariffication law is already an indication that when properly done, you can also increase income opportunities. On top of that, [there should be] value-adding," he explained.

RA 11203 also removed the National Food Authority's (NFA) rice importation function and repealed its regulatory powers over the grains industry. Under the liberalized rice trading scheme, the NFA will no longer be allowed to import rice as its role was confined to buffer-stocks management for emergencies and calamities through buying palay solely from local farmers.

As of June, NFA's nationwide palay procurement reached 626,100 bags, up 140 percent from the 261,000 bags target set by the agency. NFA Administrator Judy Carol Dansal attributed this on the agency's continued intensified palay procurement, which gives P3.70 incentive per kilo to local farmers for a total of P20.70 per kilo buying price for clean and dry paddy rice.

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VILLAR SEEKS SENATE PROBE OF RICE PROGRAM

SEN. Cynthia Villar has filed a resolution calling for an inquiry into the implementation of the law lifting the quantitative restrictions on rice importation and creating a program to make the rice sector more competitive through the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

Senate Resolution 39 directs a Senate inquiry into the implementation of RCEF by the designated government agencies to ensure that funds are allocated for their intended purposes.

Specifically, the senator wants to look into the implementation of the programs unfunded by the RCEF, which, under Republic Act (RA) 11203 or the "Rice Tariffication Law," would be getting P10 billion annually for six years from 2019 to 2024.

Villar, chairman of the Senate Agriculture and Food Committee, wants to prioritize the exercise of her committee's oversight function on the implementation of the law that was enacted on Feb. 14, 2019. She was the primary author of RA 11203.

"This is the protection measure we have in place for our local farmers in a tariffied regime, [where] we find ourselves in following the expiration of the agreement with the World Trade Organization. We believe in this law and for the sake of our farmers, we want it to succeed," she said.

Under RA 11203 that amended RA 8178, or the "Agricultural Tariffication Act of 1996," rice imports can freely enter the country without quantitative restrictions, but are slapped with corresponding tariffs. The collected tariffs would be allocated to undertake the RCEF for a period of six years.

"The issues that have surfaced lately in the rice sector, particularly among the government agencies charged with the implementation of the law, are causes for apprehension on whether our rice sector and rice farmers are adequately made ready this early to face the regime of rice import liberalization," Villar said.

Under RA 11203, P10 billion from tariff collections should be invested for the following: P5 billion for the distribution of farm machines to be led by the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech); P3 billion to promote the use of high-yielding rice seeds to be spearheaded by the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice); P1 billion for training and capacity building of farmers to be led by the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority; and P1 billion credit support by the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) and the Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP).

PHilMech, PhilRice and ATI are agencies under the Department of Agriculture (DA).

"During the Senate deliberation on this law, we have identified 947 rice-producing municipalities in 55 provinces, where farm equipment will be deployed over the next six years," Villar said.

"We want to make sure that LBP and DBP have come up with guidelines and policies that make access to the funds by farmer beneficiaries easy and not prohibitive," she added.

The senator said the DA's regular program for the promotion of hybrid rice seeds should not be confused with the RCEF seed component spearhead by PhilRice.

The inquiry will also seek clarification on the reported release by the Department of Budget and Management of P5 billion in December 2018 to help rice farmers, with only P1 billion covered by an agreement for utilization by the Agricultural Credit Policy Council (ACPC) with LBP and DBP. ACPC is also an agency under the DA.

JAVIER JOE ISMAEL

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DA HANDANG IPATUPAD ANG PANSAMANTALANG PAGPAPATIGIL SA PAG-ANGKAT NG BIGAS

HANDA ang Department of Agriculture (DA) na pansamantalang itigil ang pag-angkat ng bigas tuwing anihan ng mga magsasaka.

Ito ay makaraang ianunsiyo ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte.

Ayon kay Agriculture Undersecretary Ariel Cayanan, susundin nila ang utos ng Pangulo kahit taliwas sa layunin ng rice tariffication law na walang limitasyon sa importasyon ng bigas.

Dahil dito, mapipilitan ang mga magsasaka na ibenta ang kanilang ani kapag hindi naiangat ang presyo ng palay.

Hiling din nila sa Pangulo na pondohan ang pamimigay ng hybrid na binhi ng palay dahil mas marami ang naaani nito kumpara sa ordinaryong binhi.

MAKIKITANG** abala ang mga grupo ng magsasaka sa pagtatanim ng palay sa isang lupang sakahan sa probinsiya ng Bugallon sa Pangasinan. Bukod kasi sa mas madalas na ang pag-ulan partikular sa gawing hapon, at ilang mga probinsiya sa parte ng Norte. Mainam din naman ito sa kanilang masaganang patubig sa kani-kanilang mga sakahan. Kuha ni **WILFREDO A. CLAMOR

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P10-B RICE COMPETITIVENESS ENHANCEMENT FUND BUBUSISIIN

NAIS ni Senadora Cynthia Villar na imbestigahan ang pagpapatupad ng batas kaugnay sa pagtatanggal sa quantitative restriction sa rice importation at paglalaan ng P10 billion Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

Ito ang nakapaloob sa inihaing resolusyon ni Villar, chairperson ng Committee on Agriculture and Food, upang maging prayoridad ng kanyang komite ang oversight function kaugnay ng pagpapatupad sa batas na ipinasa noong February 14, 2019.

"This is the protection measure we have in place for our local farmers in a tariffied regime we find ourselves in following the expiration of the agreement with the World Trade Organization. We believe in this law and for the sake of our farmers, we want it to succeed," ani Villar.

Sa Senate Resolution No. 39, bubusisiin ng Senado ang pagpapatupad ng Republic Act 11203 o ang Rice Tariffication Law para subaybayan ang mga naatasang ahensiya ng pamahalaan upang matiyak na magagamit nang tama ang inilaang pondo.

Sa ilalim ng RA 11203 na nag-amyenda sa RA 8178 o ang Agricultural Tariffication Act of 1996, sa halip na limitahan ang dami ng bigas na papasok sa bansa, papatawan ng kaukulang taripa ang bigas na magmumula sa ibang bansa.

"The issues that have surfaced lately in the rice sector, particularly among the government agencies charged with the implementation of the RCEF law, are causes for apprehension on whether our rice sector and rice farmers are adequately made ready this early to face the regime of rice import liberalization," ayon pa kay Villar.

Maglalaan ang batas ng P5 bilyong taunang pondo na pambili ng rice farm equipment sa pamamagitan ng Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech).

Gayundin, bibigyan ng grant-in-kind ang eligible rice farmer associations at registered rice cooperatives ng farm equipment gaya ng tillers, tractors, seeders, threshers, rice planters, harvesters at irrigation pumps

VICKY CERVALES

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NIA ground breaks P775M irrigation project in Quezon

By Gemi Formaran

MACALELON, Quezon — Farmers in this progressive coastal town can now expect abundant harvest in the future with the groundbreaking of a 22.5-meter-zoned earth fill dam in this town by the National Irrigation Administration (NIA).

NIA chief Ricardo Visaya on Monday led the laying of capsule and groundbreaking rites of Macalelon Small Reservoir Irrigation Project (MSRIP) in Bgy. Vista Hermosa.

The P775 million worth of irrigation project is set to irrigate 830 hectares of agricultural lands in 10 barangays in the town that will benefit 700 farmers.

Visaya said the project is in line with President Rodrigo Duterte's Build, Build, Build program, which aims to revitalize economic growth through various infrastructure projects.

Town Mayor Nelson Traje expressed gratitude to the Duterte administration.

"Kami po ay nagagalak at nagpapasalamat sa ating gobyerno sa pagbibigay nito ng malaking proyektong ito para suportahan ang agrikultura dito sa aming bayan" said Traje.

The mayor said most of their agricultural lands will benefit from the irrigation project.

Tempo
NEWS IN A FLASH
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Probe on ₱10-B rice farmers' fund sought

Senator Cynthia Villar is seeking a Senate inquiry on the government's disbursement of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) mandated by the rice tariffication law.

Five months into the signing of the Republic Act No. 11203, Villar on Tuesday invoked her committee's oversight function on the law, filing Senate Resolution No. 39 to look into the distribution of the ₱10-billion special fund for rice farmers.

Villar was recently reelected as the chairman of Senate Committee and Agriculture and Food. She sponsored the law in Senate during the 17th Congress.

Under the RA 11203, ₱10 billion of the tariff collections on rice imports shall be appropriated annually for rice farmers through various programs that would help increase their production.

Half of the fund shall be allocated to the Philippine Center for Post Harvest Development and Modernization (PhilMech) to provide farmers with rice farm machineries and equipment; 30 percent to the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) to be used for the development, propagation, and promotion of inbred rice seeds to rice farmers, and the organization of rice farmers into seed growers associations engaged in seed production and trade (30 percent); 10 percent for the credit facility that will be managed by the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) and the Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP); 10 percent for farmers' training on rice crop production, modern rice farming techniques, seed production, farm mechanization, and knowledge or technology transfer.

In her resolution, Villar cited reports that the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) released in December 2018 ₱5 billion for the RCEF. But only ₱1 billion of the released amount has allegedly been disbursed, Villar said. **(Vanne Terrazola)**

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Pollution affecting fishing livelihood

MARIVELES, Bataan – Fisherfolk are asking the government to rehabilitate the entire coastal area of the town on Sunday after pointing out pollution allegedly caused by companies operating near the area has affected their fishing grounds and health of the town.

According to Bataan Anglers Association President Lloyd Reyes, this has already affected their livelihood. "We are trying to propose to the government to have a rehabilitation program in the entire coastal area of Mariveles where (pollution) is basically the problem," he said.

Reyes claimed that pollutants coming from big companies along the coastline have been affecting Mariveles for many years, adding that they were surprised that huge firms have set up business along the coastlines allegedly without public consultation.

Around 300 fishermen have been affected as they used to fish at their "ancestral" fishing ground, a good half kilometer from the shoreline, but now fisherfolk need to go as far as Cavite to have a bountiful catch away from polluted waters.

"There are many fishing grounds that were affected by the pollution. This has literally affected the small fishermen. We are asking the local government and the national government to look into the matter. This time, let us start to stand up for the fishermen," said Reyes.

Fisherfolk attached a streamer to a fishing boat that said "Coastal Municipal Water at Mamamayan Protektahan" to show their intent for the rehabilitation of the coastal area of Mariveles and raise awareness on what was happening to their town as well as convince the government to be proactive in resolving the issue.

JReyes

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Villar told: Rice undervaluation is real

Activist farmers urged Senator Cynthia Villar on Tuesday to take a look at alleged undervaluation of imported rice instead of dismissing the report as an implementation problem.

The Federation of Free Farmers Inc. (FFF) said Villar, who chairs the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food in the 18th Congress as well as the main proponent of the Rice Tariffication law, "should be more proactive in addressing the urgent problems besetting the rice sector at the moment."

The group asked the legislator to help resolve the reported undervaluation of imported rice and its supposed impact on the declining price of palay and closure of some rice mills as a result of these activities.

Some rice millers have reportedly stopped operations because of the glut in the market. *Palay* prices, in turn, have gone down drastically.

The FFF was incensed that Sen. Villar was reported to have merely said the alleged undervaluation was more the problem of the Bureau of Customs than of legislation.

"We are very disappointed with Senator Villar's reaction of washing her hands off the problem and passing the buck to other people. She was the main author of the rice tariffication law, so she should bear some responsibility for the flood of rice imports that are now wreaking havoc on the lives of millions of small rice farmers," FFF national manager Raul Montemayor said.

The group also belied Villar's claim it's too early to review the law, saying it is not even implemented in full yet.

Activist farmers cited Philippine Statistics Authority data showing palay prices having dropped 23 percent since their peak in September last year, "coinciding with the inflow of possibly undervalued rice ingresses."

"President Duterte signed Republic Act 11203 into law in February 2019 as a result of (Villar's) prodding. Since then, more than 1.5 million tons of imported rice have entered the country. Some rice millers have reportedly stopped operations because of the glut in the market. *Palay* prices, in turn, have gone down drastically," Montemayor said.

The group also cited customs and Department of Finance data showing the average landed cost of rice imports, inclusive of tariff, was only $227 per metric ton compared to $391 to $422 based on

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PNP destroys illegal fishing paraphernalia in Caraga

CAMP COL. RAFAEL C. RODRIGUEZ, Butuan City — Police Major General Elmo Francis O. Sarona, Director of the Directorate for Investigation and Detective Management of the Philippine National Police (PNP), spearheaded the ceremonial destruction of illegal fishing paraphernalia during a ceremony held at Caraga Police Regional Office 13 (PRO 13) headquarters here yesterday.

PRO 13 Regional Director Brig. Gen. Gilberto DC Cruz disclosed that, from January to July, PRO 13 was able to conduct a total of 138 illegal fishing operations, which resulted in the apprehension of 240 violators, confiscation of ₱115,245 worth of illegally caught fishes, ₱1,672,168.00 worth of illegal fishing paraphernalia and 19 blasting caps. (Mike U. Crismundo)

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Over 17,000 farmers get LandBank loans

OVER 17,000 small palay and corn farmers have benefited from direct credit from Land Bank of the Philippines as of end-June 2019 through the Sikat Saka Program.

A partnership between Land Bank of the Philippines and the Agriculture Department, Sikat Saka provides direct credit and integrated support services to small palay and corn farmers who are members of Irrigators Associations or endorsed by farmers organizations.

For over 7 years since 2012, LandBank has released P9.18 billion in loans to small farmers in 45 major rice-producing provinces and 11 corn-producing provinces in the country through the program.

"We have been working aggressively with the Department of Agriculture on programs that provide our small farmers with direct access to credit, as we relentlessly work towards increasing their productivity and income," said LandBank president and chief executive officer Cecilia Borromeo. **Othel V. Campos**

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FARM GATE PRICES NG MANOK BUMABA

INIHAYAG kamakailan ng Laban Konsyumer, Inc. (LKI), isang grupo ng pribadong sektor na ang adbokasiya ay tungkol sa consumer rights, na ang farm gate prices ng manok ay patuloy na bumaba noong nakaraang Hulyo.

Sa isang mensahe sa Viber, sinabi ni LKI president Vic Dimagiba na "farm gate prices ng manok ay nagpapakita ang patuloy na pagbaba noong Hulyo. At ang kasalukuyang presyo."

Noong Hulyo 26, ang presyo ng Off Size chicken ay bumagsak sa PHP84 bawat kilo, regular sa PHP84.67 bawat kilo at Prime sa PHP81.58 kada kilo, paglalahad niya.

Noong Hulyo 12, ang Off Size ay nasa PHP92 bawat kilo, Regular sa PHP91.50 bawat kilo at ang Prime ay nasa PHP96.86 bawat kilo, dagdag pa ni Dimagiba.

Nauna pa rito, noong Hulyo 5, ang Off Size ay nasa mataas ang presyo sa PHP101 bawat kilo, Regular sa PHP102, ang Prime sa PHP105 bawat kilo.

Sinabi niya na ang datos ay direktang galing sa United Broiler Raisers Association president Elias Jose Inciong.

Samantala, ang umiiral na retail price ng manok ay bumaba na sa PHP150 bawat kilo hanggang nitong Hulyo 25 mula sa PHP170 bawat kilo nang Hulyo 13 at PHP160 bawat kilo noong Hulyo 5, pahayag ng LKI president sabay banggit sa datos galing sa Philippine Statistics Authority. **PNA**

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Rice import taxes reach P6.5B in mid-July

THE Bureau of Customs has thus far collected some P6.5 billion in duties from rice imports by private traders under the Republic Act . 11203 or the Rice Liberalization Act, or an average of P1.4 billion a month since the law took effect in March this year, preliminary data show.

BoC collections from rice imports of private traders since the enactment of RA 11203 in March would benefit palay growers as such revenues are earmarked for the annual P10-billion Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund that was set up under this law to finance the modernization of the agriculture sector and directly provide farmers with access to credit and training, and funds for mechanization, high-quality seeds, and fertilizers, among other forms of assistance.

As a result of the liberalized rice trade following President Duterte's signing of RA 11203, the average retail cost of the staple has since its enactment fallen by at least P7 per kilo.

In a report to Finance Sec. Carlos Dominguez III, the BoC said it has collected a total of P6.479 billion from importer-traders as of July 15 under RA 11203 as of July 15, while another P3.103 billion was earned in duties from import permits issued by the National Food Authority since January this year.

The bulk of the collections were from rice import duties under RA 11203 reported by the Port of Subic, which collected P1.598 billion, followed by the Manila International Container Port with P1.033 billion, and the Port of Manila with P998.77 million, the BoC said in its report during a recent DoF Executive Committee (Execom) meeting.

At an average of P1.4 billion a month, the BoC remains on course to collect the minimum of P10 billion needed for the RCEF per year.

Section 13(c) of the rice tariffication law states that 10 percent of the P10-billion RCEF "shall be made available in the form of credit facility with minimal interest rates and with minimum collateral requirements to rice farmers and cooperatives".

The rest of the RCEF would be set aside for farm machinery and equipment; rice seed development, propagation and promotion; and rice extension services, as provided under the rice tariffication law.

On top of paying tariffs, rice importers are required under RA 11203 to secure sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances from the DA's Bureau of Plant Industry, which assumed the food safety regulation function of the NFA under the rice tariffication law.

This requirement would ensure that rice imports are free from pests and diseases that could affect public health and local farm production.

Dominguez has described the rice liberalization law on the shift from quantitative restrictions to tariffs on rice imports as a "proud" accomplishment of the Duterte presidency and the DoF, given that it took more than 30 years under various administrations to get the Congress to approve this game-changing reform.

Liberalizing rice imports has made the staple food more affordable to Filipinos, making retail prices this summer cheaper by about 20 percent compared to last year's peak rates.

The President's enactment of RA 11203 and his implementation of a slew of non-monetary measures to ease food supply bottlenecks in response to last year's elevated inflation has resulted to a subsequent downward trend in the spike in commodity prices.

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Photo courtesy of Poultry Farmchoice Enterprise)

Chicken farm gate prices dip

LABAN Konsyumer, Inc. (LKI), a private-sector group advocating consumer rights, said yesterday farm gate prices of chicken have gone on a steady decline in July.

In a Viber message, LKI president Vic Dimagiba said "farm gate prices of chicken shows continuous decline in July. And also prevailing prices."

As of July 26, the price of Off Size chicken has dipped to P84 per kilo, Regular to P84.67/kg and Prime to P81.58/kg., he revealed.

On July 12, Off Size was at PHP92 per kilo, Regular was at P91.50/kg. and Prime was at P96.86/kg., Dimagiba added.

Even earlier, on July 5, Off Size was at a high of P101 per kilo, Regular at P102/kg. and Prime at P105/kg.

He said this data came directly from United Broiler Raisers Association president Elias Jose Inciong. **PNA**