

CLIPPINGS FOR FRIDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2020

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Focus transforms agriculture rhetoric into reality

THE DAILY TRIBUNE

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Promote farm tourism amid the pandemic

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Focus transforms agriculture rhetoric into reality

It is the focus given by the Department of Agriculture's (DA) top management that transforms the rhetoric of noble intentions to the reality of concrete plans and actual results. This we have seen in recent months.

In 2016, frustrated by the poor performance of agriculture with average annual growth of 1.5 percent compared to industry's 6.5 percent in the past six years, Alyansa Agrikultura (AA) united with four other coalitions to form Agribusiness Alliance (AFA). AA represented small farmers and fisherfolk, while the others represented agribusiness, science and academe, rural women and multi-sectors. The coalitions selected six priority areas for the DA to address immediately.

These were: road maps and management systems; private sector participation; agriculture extension; credit and insurance; international trade; and structural reform in coconut, water and agriculture consolidation.

On July 29, in an AFA meeting with President Duterte, as represented by Agriculture Secretary William Dar, nine initiatives for urgent action were identified in the context of these six priorities. Below is the status of these initiatives:

1. **Importation.** We must use legal trade remedies to ensure a level playing field, especially for rice and poultry. For hogs, comprehensive inspection and testing must be done to prevent the further spread of the African swine fever (ASF). Secretary Dar has taken action on this. In addition, the Department of Trade and Industry resources such as their attaches and deep expertise must be harnessed to supplement the DA efforts.

2. **Rural women.** A separate unit has been created to increase their empowerment in areas like fisheries and animal production, where their participation is only 15 percent and 32 percent, respectively. Programs are now being implemented to correct this imbalance.

COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDOÑEZ

3. **Exports.** The missing private sector trade expertise is now being provided. There are new product-specific strategies for market access to countries like Korea and Taiwan.

4. **Antismuggling.** Though this is still problematic (e.g. less than 4 percent of the confirmed P1.4 billion rice smuggling loss in 2019 has been recovered), there is now a DA-supported program for the private sector to have the Bureau of Customs access to nonclassified information and inspection.

5. **Fisheries.** Imported fish not following trade laws like labeling are identified and banned from wet markets, the main income source for municipal fishers. Secretary Dar has installed a required Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) for commercial ships. This will prevent them

from catching fish in municipal waters reserved for small fishers. Postharvest and processing facilities are critically needed here, as in other sectors such as rice, corn, poultry and livestock

6. **Tariffs.** The restoration of higher rates for products in exchange for the rice liberalization postponement is being discussed. The Tariff Commission will consider the new situation caused by the pandemic.

7. **National information network.** This legally mandated body is finally being set up after 24 years. It digitizes information and collects the long-missing agriculture-related data needed for both government and private sector planning and decision-making.

8. **DA budget.** This budget has to be increased and allocated much more effectively. An example is that poultry and livestock, which produce 30 percent of agriculture output, is getting only 3 percent of the DA budget.

9. **Coconut levy.** While release is imminent, there is still

no credible road map and plan to guide the effective distribution of the funds to the farmer beneficiaries. In addition, farmers should be part of the decision-making body.

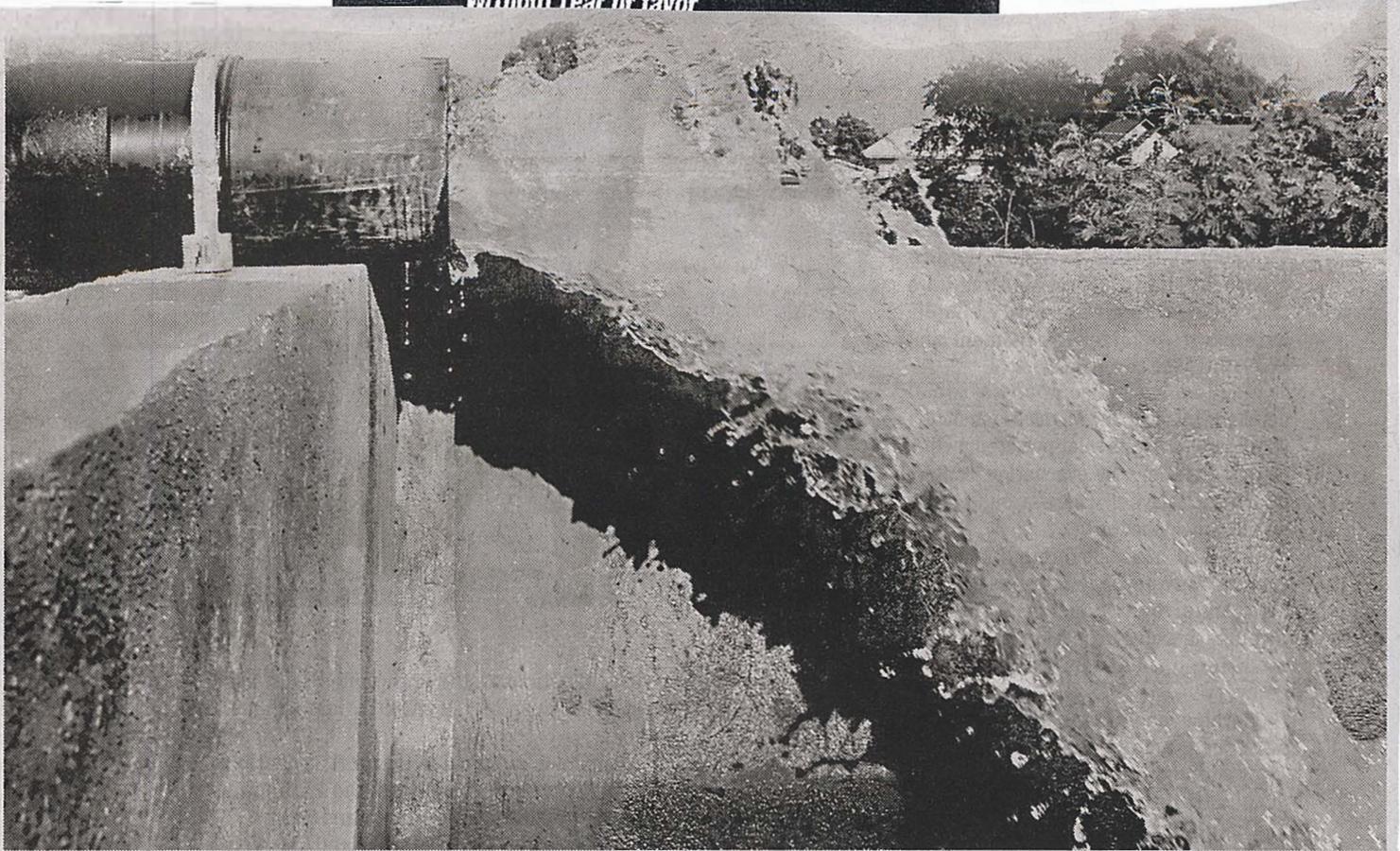
Recently, focus has been getting concrete results. AFA commended Dar's creation of a Provincial Agriculture and Fisheries Extension System (Pafes), done with local government units. But only one province has started this. On Dec. 4, Dar directed Pafes implementation nationwide through one focal province per region as a model for other provinces. Since several commercial ships illegally encroaching on our municipal waters are depriving small fishers of their catch and depleting our scarce fish supply, Dar instituted the VMS. This way, commercial ship movements will be electronically monitored and penalized for illegal activity. When certain critical priorities were not sufficiently addressed, Dar created a powerful committee with three critical undersecretaries to solve this problem.

The DA can now address the two most important but inadequately addressed two issues today. The first is governance. There will now be road maps with action plans agreed upon by both the DA and the private sector, as well as a management system with transparency and accountability. The second is importation. There will be the proper import policy with trade remedies utilized, as well as the inspection, testing and anti-smuggling activities necessary to have a level playing field.

Given this focus, the rhetoric of good governance and enlightened importation policy can now become the reality of results that our agriculture needs badly today. *INQ*



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PHOTOGRAPH BY JUN YAP FOR THE DAILY TRIBUNE

HARNESSING power from the sun, the DA promotes the use of modern technology by implementing its SPIS for the Filipino farmers.

DA taps solar power to irrigate remote farmlands

Solar-powered irrigation facilities can enable farmers to shift from expensive and pollution-causing diesel-powered pumps towards having sustainable and efficient water sources

BY JUN YAP

FEATURE

Undoubtedly, irrigation plays a vital role in increasing the country's agricultural output.

Irrigation is a key factor to increase farm productivity by providing sufficient water which can raise yield and ensure food sufficiency, even under extreme weather conditions.

Since the Department of Agriculture (DA) is responsible for the promotion of agricultural development, it has started promoting the use of available technologies by implementing its Solar-Powered Irrigation System (SPIS) project.

According to the Agriculture department, irrigation is an integral component to cultivate agricultural crops, maintain landscapes and revegetate disturbed soils in dry areas and during periods of less than average rainfall.

With this development, the DA has been implementing its SPIS project in the different parts of the country, notably the Candaba Solar Irrigation Project in Barangay Bamban, Pampanga that was completed two years ago, which enhanced the production of rice and vegetables in the municipality.

Development framework

The DA, under the leadership of Secretary

William Dar, pursues a development framework under his "New Thinking for Agriculture" agenda, which is built around eight paradigms designed to increase productivity and profitability of farmers and fisherfolk through sustainable, globally-competitive and climate-resilient technologies and practices.

The secured irrigation facility in Candaba is composed of 108 solar panels, a reliable and sturdy 25-horsepower submersible pump, state-of-the-art electronic control devices, storage tank, control gauges and distribution pipelines.

The facility now supplies the water requirements to irrigate at least 75 hectares of ricelands.

But on a rotation basis of water distribution, the facility can supply the irrigation needs of more farmers around the area.

Practical solution

At present, solar-powered irrigation facilities are increasingly and continuously being sought in order to provide a cost-effective and practical solution to boost agricultural productivity.

Access to irrigation water is the key for many small-scale farmers to sustain their livelihoods and contribute to the government's objective of

attaining food security.

In most agricultural areas, the availability of irrigation water depends mostly on monsoon rains, or available power needed to operate water pumps.

With lack of electricity, diesel-operated water pumps are usually used to pump water for irrigation purposes.

But diesel-powered engines have several disadvantages, like the ever-increasing prices of fuel which will affect the economic success of the farmers and its negative effect on the environment.

According to the Agriculture department, irrigation is an integral component to cultivate agricultural crops, maintain landscapes and revegetate disturbed soils in dry areas and during periods of less than average rainfall.

It can be noted that renewable energy options, particularly solar power is a very promising solution to help attain sustainable agriculture in the country.

Solar-powered irrigation facilities can enable farmers to shift from expensive and pollution-causing diesel-powered pumps towards having sustainable and efficient water sources.

Providing irrigation facilities is tantamount to attaining food security in the country and helping rural farmers to generate substantial income for their families and their communities.



Promote farm tourism amid the pandemic

The Farm Tourism Development Act of 2016 is aimed at helping farmers and other stakeholders to increase their income by providing alternative sources of revenues

BY JUN YAP

The Philippines – a country fortunate to have abundant natural resources, biological diversity and cultural heritage – has a strong lead to become among the best farm tourism destinations.

But the current pandemic drastically affected the tourism destinations in the country, forcing some to fold, even without turning their sights on a looming rebound with the development of vaccines against the coronavirus disease.

With the apparent availability of the vaccine in sight, it is now the perfect time to look into and seize the numerous opportunities available from the country's farm tourism destinations.

Farm tourism is fun in Phl

A lawmaker once said that, "Spread the word to the world that farm tourism is more fun in the Philippines!"

Under Republic Act (RA) 10816, farm tourism is the practice of attracting visitors and tourists to farm areas for production, educational and recreational purposes that involves any agricultural or fishery-based operation or activity, which may also provide a venue for outdoor recreation and accessible family outings.

The law provides the policy and enabling environment for the encouragement, development, and promotion of farm tourism in the country, and recognizes the importance of agriculture in making available food and other products necessary to sustain and enhance human life and in providing livelihood to a major portion of the population.

The Farm Tourism Development Act of 2016 is aimed at helping farmers and other stakeholders to increase their income by providing alternative sources of revenues.

After all, the key essence of the Farm Tourism Development Law is for the government to "recognize that tourism, coupled with agriculture extension services, can disseminate the value of agriculture in the economic and cultural development of the country, which serves as a catalyst for the development of agriculture and fishery communities, and provide additional income for farmers, farm workers and fisherfolk.

The ultimate beneficiaries of the law are, of course, the Filipino farmers who are still among the poorest in our country, and the law provides them with alternative sources of income from their harvest and farms.

In synch with DA goals

Farm tourism is also in synch with the goals of Department of Agriculture Secretary William Dar through his "Masaganang Ani at Mataas na Kita" initiative.

That makes farm tourism to be part of the development plan of the agriculture sector as well as the promotion strategy of tourism in our country.

Farm tourism practitioners or stakeholders also have ample support not just from the private sector or among themselves but from the government itself.

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PART 2 OF 2

FEATURE

It has already become a sunshine industry in many parts of the country, and farm tourism sites have been mushrooming everywhere, attracting even non-farmers like overseas Filipino workers, showing interest in investing on it.

Through farm tourism, young people can also be enticed to go into farming or practice agriculture.

It can be noted that following the passage of RA 10816, the Department of Tourism, with the support of the DA and other stakeholders from the government and private sectors, have been promoting farm tourism.

Among the salient features of the law is to attract young people to venture into farming because the average age of Filipino farmers is 57 years old.

Aside from enticing the young generation, farm tourism can also improve the income of farmers as they are given the opportunity to have a new source of income aside from the produce of their farms.

With this, farmers can develop value-added products made from their produce and sell it to the tourists as "pasalubongs."

Additional source of income

Establishment of farm schools can also provide an additional source of income for the farmers.

On the other hand, even the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) under chairman J. Prospero de Vera III has included agriculture and other related fields as among the priority courses for the coming years.

This prompted some state universities and colleges (SUC) to become aggressive in promoting agriculture to their students.

It can also be noted that CHED has launched its first SUC Expo dubbed "The Art of SUCcess: 2020 State Universities and Colleges Expo" at the activity center of Trinoma Mall in Quezon City.

The expo is an initiative to recognize the passion of SUC in innovating products and connect with Filipinos outside the confines of the academic community.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JUN YAP FOR THE DAILY TRIBUNE

FARM tourism is the practice of attracting visitors and tourists to farm areas for production, educational and recreational purposes that involves any agricultural or fishery-based operation or activity, which may also provide a venue for outdoor recreation and accessible family outings.



PEACE AND ORDER, NATIONAL DEFENSE

THINK TANK QUESTIONS GOVERNMENT'S 2021 SPENDING PRIORITIES

By **Ben O. de Vera**
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Even as the proposed record P4.5-trillion 2021 national budget is being pitched as another stimulus to recover from the health and socioeconomic ills inflicted by the COVID-19 pandemic, a report of state-run think tank Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) is questioning why next year's spending plan prioritized the police and military.

"The increase in budgetary appropriations for almost all sectors (except for general public services) for fiscal year 2021 confirms the expansionary fiscal stance of the government. As in previous years, high spending priority is given to social and economic services,

which is consistent with the policy pronouncements of the government for 2021," read the PIDS discussion paper titled "Analysis of the 2021 President's Budget" authored by Janet S. Cuenca.

President Duterte was reportedly set to sign the 2021 General Appropriations Act on Dec. 28.

"The government's greatest priority for 2021 is to sustain and strengthen government efforts in responding to and recovering from the pandemic. In this regard, the government deems it critical to shift priorities and realign spending policies. In particular, it directs the entire budget to focus on 'containing the spread and mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic; funding a vaccine, restarting the

economy to be able to create jobs and attract investments; and transitioning to the post-crisis recovery environment," the PIDS report said, quoting the Department of Budget and Management (DBM).

"The emphasis on these spending priorities in the 2021 President's budget message [earlier released by the DBM] creates an expectation that the DOH and the DSWD will rank much higher in the top 10 departments/recipients for fiscal year 2021," the PIDS said, referring to the Department of Health and the Department of Social Welfare and Development, which were in the front lines of the country's protracted fight against COVID-19.

However, the PIDS said that "based on the detailed analy-

sis done in this study, the 2021 proposed budget gives higher spending priority on maintenance of peace and order and national defense, which placed DILG and DND in higher spots compared to DOH and DSWD in the top 10 departments/recipients for fiscal year 2021," referring to the Department of the Interior and Local Government and the Department of National Defense.

In particular, the PIDS said "a close examination of various government documents indicates that the proposed budget for National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-Elcac) is part of the government's recovery program to adapt to the postpandemic life."

Some economists earlier on

urged scrapping the controversial P19-billion NTF-Elcac budget, which was believed to be an anti-insurgency fund, so the money could instead be spent on COVID-19 response.

When ranked according to size of proposed department budgets for 2021, the Department of Education together with the Commission on Higher Education, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority as well as state universities and colleges topped the list, followed by the Department of Public Works and Highways, the DILG, the DND, the DOH, the DSWD, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Agriculture, the judiciary and the Department of Labor and Employment comprising the top 10, DBM data showed. INQ



RICE COMPETITIVENESS ENHANCEMENT

PHILMECH STEPS UP DISTRIBUTION OF FARM MACHINERY

By **Karl R. Ocampo**
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The **Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech)** is finally picking up pace with its distribution of farm machinery and equipment under the rice competitiveness enhancement program (RCEP).

PhilMech executive director Baldwin Jallorina said in a briefing on Wednesday that the agency was set to conclude the awarding of at least P8 billion worth of machinery by the end of the year,

while the remaining P2 billion is expected to be awarded by the first quarter of next year.

This would finally complete the bidding of the P10 billion worth of equipment covering 2019 and 2020 under the program. However, distributing the sets of machines remain challenging due to the aftermath of recent typhoons and coronavirus-related constraints.

As of Dec. 22, PhilMech has distributed P2.76 billion worth of farm machines to farmers' cooperatives and associations (FCAs) spanning across 52 prov-

inces. Based on PhilMech's targets, there are still five provinces to be covered.

In Masbate province, validation of FCAs has been delayed after the province was distraught with calamities. Meanwhile, turnover sites in Cavite province are being used as quarantine facilities.

Other logistical challenges have beset distribution in the provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur and Bohol.

Aldrin Badua, PhilMech communication division chief, said the agency was looking at two

major indicators to measure the effectiveness of the program—the decrease in production costs and postharvest losses.

The PhilMech's target is to lower the cost of producing palay to P9 a kilo from the current production cost of P12 a kilo. It is also looking at reducing postharvest losses by between 3 and 5 percent from an average of 30 percent.

Mechanizing production is an important chain in agriculture as this would allow farmers to absorb low palay prices without incurring a loss. It

would also enable local farmers to compete with the deluge of cheaper imported rice.

The RCEP, under the law, must provide P10 billion worth of interventions to the rice industry yearly until 2024. Of the amount, P5 billion was allocated for mechanization while the rest was utilized for the provision of seeds, credit and extension services.

Badua said the PhilMech aimed to provide 15 to 20 percent of the country's farm machinery requirement by the end of the program. **INQ**



Feed millers seek gov't support

Feed millers and the government should work together to strengthen the local value chain and make food available on every Filipino's table, according to the Philippine Association of Feed Millers Inc.

"What is important is we not only feed our country, but also uplift the lives of everyone in the value chain – the farmers, chicken growers, workers, delivery men, consumers and so on," PAFMI president Nicole Sarmiento Garcia said during the Pilipinas Kontra Gutom Movement program on the government's campaign to fight hunger.

"People don't see how hard it is to plant vegetables or grow chicken and pig. What they see are fried chicken and pork, and cooked vegetables on their plates," said Garcia, who is also executive vice president of Vitarich.

"To make a chicken, we have corn farmers, coconut farmers and palm farmers. They bring their products to us, millers, and we distribute feeds to broiler farmers, hog raisers and fish pen owners," Garcia said.

She said that part of the recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic is to solve the problem of hunger.

Garcia said that to be able to preserve the local value chain, consumers should patronize local products and the government should support farmers and local breeders through education, equipment, financial aid and market accessibility.

"But while we transition into a more self-sufficient model, we need to allow the value chain the cheapest and flexible inputs to provide affordable meats to the consumers," she said.

At the same time, Garcia hailed the farmers as the country's "unsung heroes" as they are the ones who "provide food on our plates."

"Their work is not like ours sitting in an air-conditioned room. They sweat, their backs ache. They are not in the best (working) condition. And the irony of it is that they provide us food, and yet they are the ones who are unable to eat nutritious food," she said.

For this, the government and the private sector should help farmers and promote local production of food throughout the whole agricultural chain for the country to attain food security for all," she said.

"I believe that the more we become locally viable, the more we will have food security, and I would really like to encourage everyone to buy Filipino products. When you buy our own locally grown vegetables and rice, farm-raised poultry and hog meat, we not only feed ourselves, but we also feed and give the dignity of livelihood to our farmers," Garcia said.

BY THE DAILY TRIBUNE STAFF

President Rodrigo Duterte on Thursday vowed to "thoroughly review the proposed Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Trust Fund Act to ensure transparency and accountability in the administration of the Coco Levy Fund" which has reportedly reached P100 billion.

EXCLUSIVE

The Chief Executive said the review "will be guided by (his) principle that coconut farmers must receive the most benefit from any law about the fund.

"In 2019, I vetoed a previous version of this bill because it lacked vital safeguards and it would have disproportionately benefitted wealthy coconut farmers," the President said.

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'Let coco fund benefit farmers'

For the coming year, my fondest wish is for our battle against Covid-19 to come to an end. I am certain that in the next few months, the vaccines that the government bought will be ready for distribution to our citizens

From page A1

"Once a new version of the bill is submitted to my office, it will undergo thorough and stringent review to ensure that vital safeguards are placed to protect small farmers," he added.

"What we are looking for is a measure that will benefit all coconut farmers, especially the poorest and the most marginalized," he further stated.

Mr. Duterte, in the same exclusive *Tribune* interview, also reported that the 2019 National Household Survey on the Patterns and Trends of Drug Abuse released by the Dangerous Drugs Board see around 1.67 million Filipinos aged 10 to 69 are users of illegal drugs.

This is a dip from the preview estimate of about 7 million Filipinos allegedly hooked on the use and trade of illegal drugs.

The new number, the President said, consists of Filipinos aged 10 to 69.

"As of 30 November, the government's accomplishments in our ongoing efforts against illegal drug trade include 185,661 operations conducted (since Duterte was sworn in as President); 269,046 drug personalities arrested; 5,980 drug personalities killed during anti-drug operations; 3,467 minors rescued; 17 clandestine laboratories dismantled; and 639 drug dens dismantled.

Also, the President said as total 7,462 kilograms of shabu worth P46.76 billion

had been seized, part of the total P56.67 billion illegal drugs seized.

Of the 42, 045 barangays, the President reported 14,214 are still considered as drug-affected localities while 20,700 have been cleared.

It's still the people's battle against the coronavirus, however, which the Chief Executive wants to win soonest.

Looking back on the year that was, I can say that we had quite an eventful and challenging year. Aside from the obstacles brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, we still had to face the many ills that continue to plague our society such as corruption, violence, poverty and illegal drugs.

"For the coming year, my fondest wish is for our battle against Covid-19 to come to an end. I am certain that in the next few months, the vaccines that the government bought will be ready for distribution to our citizens," he said.

"The challenge for the government is to ensure that the distribution will flow smoothly and go according to plan," he added.

"Looking back on the year that was, I can say that we had quite an eventful and challenging year. Aside from the obstacles brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, we still had to face the many ills that continue to plague our society such as corruption, violence, poverty and illegal drugs," Mr. Duterte stated.

"I am pleased that through the selfless efforts of our public servants and the cooperation of ordinary citizens, we were able to overcome these trials. My sincere hope for the coming year is for us to renew our strength so we may continue fighting not just for our individual aspirations, but for the future of the country as well," he closed.