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President won't give up DA post just yet

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said Thursday he would only appoint a Health Secretary if the country's situation had already returned to normal in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

He also said he will only leave his concurrent post as Agriculture Secretary when structural changes to the department have been made.

The Chief Executive also made his first appointments to the judiciary, naming two trial court judges as associate justices of the Court of Appeals, and the head of the Supreme Court's Fiscal Management and Budget Office as an associate justice of the Court of Tax Appeals.

On the sidelines of the Philippine Business Conference at the Manila Hotel, Marcos was asked when he planned to appoint a Department of Health (DOH) secretary amid the continuing threat of the pandemic. *Next page*

President...

From A1

"We will wait for it to get there (normal situation), and then we will normalize also the reorganization of government," Mr. Marcos told reporters. "When that happens, when what I just explained happens. The same as DA (Department of Agriculture), when it's fixed, and (the situation is) normalized."

"The reason (for this) is I want people to understand that this is the government's work, not everything is a crisis, so let's normalize the work of the government," he added.

"That is what I am trying to do, so that everyday functions are fulfilled, every day without fuss, without bother, without gulo (mess), without fixers, without paying, that's what I'm fixing. So that is what I am hoping to get to that point, especially in the DOH and DA," the President said.

At present, Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire is the Health department's officer-in-charge.

In September, Mr. Marcos extended the state of calamity throughout the Philippines due to COVID-19 until December 31, 2022.

The President also told reporters that problems within the Department of Agriculture are so difficult that "it will take a president to change and turn it around."

"So, I think when we are able to say that the DA's functions are properly institutionalized and the structural changes that we need to make in the DA have been made and the appointments in the DA have already been made, then saka ako bibitaw [I will let go]," he said.

"Because then they don't need me anymore, they don't need the President heading the department," Mr. Marcos added.

Meanwhile, in a transmittal letter to Chief Justice Alexander Gesmundo, the President appointed as CA associate justices Regional Trial Court (RTC) Judges Selma Palacio Alaras and Wilhelmina B. Jorge Wagan.

Alaras and Wagan took over the posts vacated by retired CA Associate Justices Gabriel T. Ingles and Edgardo A. Camello, respectively.

Appointed CTA associate justice was SC-FBMO Chief Corazon G. Ferrer-Flores who took over the post vacated by Associate Justice Juanito C. Castaneda.

Rey E. Requejo and Vito Barcelo ***(See full story online at manilastandard.net)***

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■ World Food Day without the Agriculture secretary. (Undersecretary Panganiban, middle, and Senator Villar, right). DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE PHOTO

Gag order, spoiled food at DA

RIGOBERTO D. TIGLAO

I DO hope that President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. realizes that his being an absentee Agriculture secretary is demoralizing the institution's ranks, and practically suspending any new initiatives there, which is a crucial agency to contain inflation.

➤TiglaoA11

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■ TIGLAO FROM A1

Gag order, spoiled food at DA

"The situation will make the DA inept, and make it prone to corruption," an insider claimed. "It's getting seriously dysfunctional here. The department cannot adapt to a president who is also its secretary, and (senior undersecretary) Domingo Panganiban does not know how to manage the situation. The mismanagement and ineptness of the DA now will seriously undermine the agriculture sector and our food security."

Indeed, Panganiban is getting worried at the situation that he issued, as *The Manila Times* reported the other day "a gag order prohibiting officials of the agency to grant interviews, issue statements and press releases without his clearance. "You are hereby directed to not accept interviews from the media unless given clearance by the Office of the Secretary," Panganiban said in his memorandum.

The Agriculture department which Marcos is secretary of is the first agency under his term to suppress the press, on his 111th day in office.

World Food Day, celebrated last Monday, became another instance urging Marcos to vacate the agriculture portfolio. The department was only informed on Friday evening that Marcos would be leading the celebration of it at its premises, so preparations were made in panic.

Can't attend

However, Malacañang called Sunday to say that sorry, Agriculture secretary Bongbong after all can't attend the event, which the agency and no other has the mandate to celebrate. Sen. Cynthia Villar, chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food was there though, her stature emphasizing the importance of the event, and gave a short speech.

I wonder what event or meeting made Marcos cancel his World Food Day attendance. That would have been his third time to visit the department, the first and second times were in July.

As if to add insult to injury, the fried chicken and vegetables prepared for the celebration turned out to be spoiled, the attendees of course realized it, and so no one ate them. "Even the food was disappointed that the secretary was absent," one attendee said. "It was all wasted or probably fed to pigs... well, can be good to increase hog production," another remarked sarcastically. No wonder Panganiban rushed to issue his gag order Wednesday.

Generals condemn judge's ruling

Three days after the ROTC Alumni Association's condemnation of the ruling, an unprecedented number of retired generals of the Armed Forces of the Philippines issued a similar statement denouncing Manila Trial Judge Marlo Malagar's decision that the Communist Party and its New People's Army are not terrorist organizations.

The concise but eloquent statement, titled "Manifesto of support to Dr. Lorraine Badoy calling the CPP-NPA-NDF a terrorist organization," reads as follows:

"We, and thousands other retired generals, admirals and officers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Philippine National Police, the Philippine Coast Guard, the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, and the Bureau of Fire Protection, declare and strongly affirm our full support to Dr. Lorraine Badoy in calling the CPP-NPA-NDF a terrorist organization.

"We join in her statement in calling the decision of Judge Malagar a legal misprision and distortion of the realities on the ground. Judge Malagar's heavy citation of the CPP-NPA-NDF's constitution to defend her anomalous decision whitewashes 53 years of violence and terror inflicted on the Filipino people. Judge Malagar's invocation of leniency for all the killings and murders committed by this terrorist organization is an insult to the cry for justice of all the victims of the CPP-NPA-NDF. Calling these violence and murders merely the 'means' to the CPP-NPA-NDF's purpose of overthrowing our constitutional government is her indictment to perdition of our own Republic.

"We have fought this enemy for decades and many among our ranks paid the ultimate sacrifice. No one knows this enemy more than us. And no one desires peace and the end of this violence more than we do. We cannot attain this peace by mere assumption that the silence of guns in the battlefield is a moment of peace. To silence the voices of peace crusaders such as Dr. Lorraine Badoy, MD is a threat to our democracy, our way of life. Here, we add our voices for her message to ring louder and clearer, the CPP-NPA-NDF is a terrorist organization and a threat to our national security; to the Filipino people, we say this without a shadow of doubt."

First time

The statement was signed by generals from past administrations, including President Benigno Aquino 3rd's defense secretary Voltaire Gazmin and President Duterte's national security adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr. While the manifesto so far has 118 signatories, Esperon said there will be many more, as its organizers are still in the process of contacting other generals.

This is the first time ever that such a big number of current and retired generals have signed a manifesto calling on the government to adopt a political stance, which is to treat the CPP-NPA as terrorist organization, which the state is therefore duty bound to crush.

President Marcos should listen to the generals, who emphasized "we have fought this enemy for decades and many among our ranks paid the ultimate sacrifice."

It is not clear if Marcos has abandoned President Duterte's iron-fist approach to the insurgency, which had so seriously weakened the CPP-NPA that it has been unable to even convene its central committee to elect a chairman. For over a year now, the CPP appears to be headless, without an announcement of a new chairman.

Most analysts though have concluded that Marcos with his sheer silence on the issue of the insurgency and appointment as his national security adviser the retired academic Clarita Carlos, he prefers a less confrontational stance against the CPP-NPA and a new attempt at peace talks. Secretary Carlos indeed has abandoned a major project of her predecessor, which involved the mobilization of former CPP-NPA cadres to expose the Reds' atrocities and their recruitment schemes. These ex-cadres have been left out in the cold, leaving them vulnerable to retaliation from the communist terrorists.

The generals' manifesto is in effect an appeal to Marcos, in the strongest possible terms, that he has to end the insurgency by force, and not to resort to past administrations' useless peace talks with the communists that only gave them the breathing space to strengthen their organization.

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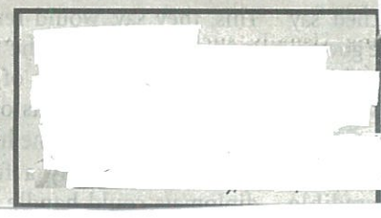

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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BBM keeping DA post, for now

By ALEXIS ROMERO

President Marcos said he would remain agriculture secretary for now, as he intends to focus on the department, the problem of which is "very deeply embedded."

"I'm giving my full attention to the department. The reason that I stayed on up to now, I have actually raised the subject with some of the staff and the employees and the secretaries in the DA and they asked me not to. And the reason is very simple. There are things that the President can do and a secretary cannot," Marcos said on the sidelines of the 48th Philippine Business Conference and

Turn to Page 4

Exposition yesterday.

"The problems are so difficult that it will take a President to change and turn it around," he added.

Marcos said he wants to see some things "normalized" and some changes in the way the government works before he appoints a full-time agriculture and health secretary.

"I want people to understand that this is the government's work, not everything is a crisis, so let us normalize the work in government," Marcos told reporters.

"That is what I am trying to do. So that everyday functions are fulfilled everyday without fuss, without bother, without disorder, without fixers, without paying, these are the things I am fixing. So that is what I am hoping to get to that point, especially in the DOH (Department of Health) and DA (Department of Agriculture)," he added.

The DOH is being led by is officer-in-charge Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire.

Marcos said the problems hounding the DA have been around for years and fixing them won't be easy.

"That's why it won't be that fast. It's not that easy to return to the previous good system. So I think I am still needed there," the President said.

"So I think when we are able to say that the DA's functions are properly institutionalized and the structural changes that we need to make in the DA have been made and the appointments in the DA have already been made, then that's the time I will leave. Because then they don't need me anymore, they don't need the President heading the department," he added.

With regard to the DOH, Marcos said he wants the COVID-19 pandemic to be handled differently, citing the need to attract investors and tourists.

"We have to get away from the emergency stance of the DOH because we have to open up businesses, we have to make the Philippines more hospitable to travelers, both business and tourist, and it does not help if we are still under a state of calamity, if we are the only country that still has a mask protocol but these are mandated to us by the laws that were passed during the pandemic so we need to fix it," Marcos said.

"In the case of the DOH it's not structural changes... it's the method of handling the pandemic... We must treat Covid no longer as an emergency but something that we will have to manage forever – like flu, like pneumonia. It's there so we have to be careful not to get sick," he added.

"For now we are finding ways to normalize it so that we do not need to say that the Philippines is still under a state of calamity, so we can tell potential investors, come to the Philippines... We have to reach that stage and then we will normalize also all the reorganization of the government," he added.

Recommendations

President Marcos also gave assurance that his administration would look into the recommendations and concerns of businesses, which he described as "agents of creativity, innovation, and progress."

The Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry submitted to Marcos 10 resolutions aimed at promoting economic development and creating an environment more conducive to investments.

The resolutions covered the areas of food security, health, employment, education, national security, digitalization, environment and climate change, power, transportation and international trade.

"I am much gratified that when I heard the enumeration of those ten resolutions that they are very much in line with the government's thrust and the government's directions that we feel will be the most advantageous for the Philippines," Marcos said.

"And in that regard, I assure you that the concerned agencies will assess the feasibility and probability of success of these recommendations," he added.

Under food security, the PCCI urged the national government to amend the Agrarian Reform Law to increase land retention limit from five to 24 hectares, implement a debt condonation program for unpaid amortizations of agrarian reform beneficiaries, and convert certificates of land ownership award into fee simple titles.

The resolution on health called on the national government to reform the Philippine Health Insurance Corp. into a science-based and transparent health care system and encourage public-private partnerships in implementing the Universal Health Care Law.

Under employment, the PCCI urged the government to work together with the private sector to "reenergize" the economy by supporting new investments to generate employment, provide assistance to pandemic surviving micro, small and medium enterprises, amend all "restrictive" and "punitive" labor laws and enact laws that would increase productivity.

In the field of education, the PCCI is seeking the amendment to the Philippine Qualifications Framework Law to create a Philippine Qualifications Authority that will establish and maintain Qualification standards for all levels of education and training.

Also included in PCCI recommendations were deepening cooperation with neighboring states, expanding participation in regional and multilateral defense agreements while accelerating the modernization program of the military, and develop and implementing a nationwide internet connectivity program that is reliable and competitive by passing into law the Open Access in Data Transmission Act.

In the same conference, Marcos highlighted the importance of local investors and vowed to continue efforts to make the Philippines a viable investment destination.

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Marcos: PH to strengthen diplomatic ties, peace efforts

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

PRESIDENT Marcos Jr. yesterday vowed that his government would exert more efforts to enhance the Philippines' diplomatic ties with other nations as it continues to advocate peace-building initiatives especially in conflict areas.

The President, during the 78th Leyte Landing commemoration in Palo in Leyte, recognized the sacrifices and contributions of those who fought for the country's freedom.

He also acknowledged alliances that were formed and strengthened.

"Domestically, we will strengthen our peace-building efforts, especially in conflict-affected areas. Externally, we will continue to pursue the enhancement of our relations with our neighbors towards ensuring security and addressing global issues such as facilitating post-pandemic growth and addressing climate change," Marcos said.

He said the government would also enhance efforts to support initiatives that will not only preserve historical and cultural sites but will also deepen the Filipino people's sense of national identity and foster a peaceful and inclusive Philippines.

The President, who stated he is a son of a war veteran, referring to the late President Ferdinand Marcos, committed to always look after the welfare of war veterans.

He recognized the courage and heroism of war Filipino and foreign war veterans.

"They who have fought and died in and for this land will have their names forever etched in the pages of history. We express our most profound gratitude for the sacrifices that they had made in reclaiming our freedom and for ushering in a new age of peace for our people and for the world," Marcos said.

This year's Leyte Gulf Landing rite is the first face-to-face celebration since the COVID-19 struck.

It commemorates the arrival of Allied forces, led by Gen. Douglas MacArthur, to liberate the Philippines from the Japanese Imperial Forces that occupied the country from 1942 to 1945.

Also present in the event were United States Ambassador

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MARCOS

charge Cheloy Garafil.

The SC Public Information Office said the three new members of the appellate courts took their oaths of office before Chief Justice Alexander Gesmundo last Wednesday afternoon.

Marcos chose the RTC judges for the CA posts from among the 13 nominees named by the Judicial and Bar Council in a letter sent last July 8, while there were 10 JBC nominees to the vacant CTA post.

The JBC is the body tasked by the 1987 Constitution to screen and vet nominees to the judiciary. It is headed by the chief justice in an ex-oficio capacity.

'STRUCTURAL CHANGES'

On calls to already appoint the secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA), Marcos said he is still needed at the department and will only leave if structural changes are already in place.

The President had assumed the agriculture portfolio since the start of his presidency to emphasize that his administration prioritizes the industry and to ensure that immediate government actions are taken in anticipation of a possible food crisis.

Marcos said the DA needs a "president to change and turn it around."

"I think when we are able to say that the DA's functions are properly institutionalized and the structural changes that we need to make in the DA have been made and the appointments in the DA have already been made, then saka ako bibitaw (that's the time that I will let go)," he said.

He added that once he sees that the DA no longer needs him, he will step down.

There had been calls for Marcos to appoint a DA secretary, with some expressing disappointment with the way he is handling the department.

At the same time, the President likewise said that he is waiting for things to "normalize" particularly in connection with the handling of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) situation before he appoints the secretary of the Department of Health (DOH).

Marcos said the government is now looking for ways as to how to "normalize" the COVID-19 situation and eventually lift the natal state of calamity.

He said this means the COVID-19 situation should no longer be treated as an emergency but something that is as manageable as a flu or pneumonia.

"Nandyan lagi iyan pero mag-iingat tayo para hindi tayo magkasakit, and that is way we should be handling COVID (It is there but we are being careful so we do not get sick and that is the way we should be handling COVID)," he said.

At present, Health Undersecretary Rosario Vergeire is the officer-in-charge-of DOH.

PDEA

Outgoing Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) director general Wilkins Villanueva, in a social media post, said Marcos has designated former PNP Special Action Force director Brig. Gen. Moro Virgilio Lazo as his successor.

Villanueva posted a copy of the October 19 appointment papers of Lazo in his Facebook page.

PDEA has made a number of successful anti-drug operations during the Marcos administration, including the arrest of Juanito Jose Remulla III, son of Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla.

The younger Remulla was arrested during a controlled delivery operation last October 11 in Las Piñas. Seized from him was nearly a kilo of kush worth P1.3 million.

"It is with profound gratitude that I close my two decades of professional service to God and country in the field of drug law enforcement," said Villanueva, a former police officer who spent many years with PDEA.

Villanueva thanked former President Duterte for appointing him as PDEA director general, "thus allowing us to kick the Barangay Drug Clearing Program into high gear while continuing with our aggressive anti-drug operations against the top tier of drug trafficking organizations."

He also thanked Marcos "for allowing me to continue serving as the seventh Director General until my worthy successor was appointed as of October 19, 2022."

He likewise expressed his gratitude to PDEA personnel "for giving me a great career experience that I will forever remember."

"I shall leave behind a legacy of professional, dynamic, excellence-driven and accountable drug law enforcers while I continue to support the national anti-drug campaign in my private capacity," said Villanueva. – ***With Victor Reyes***

Abante TONITE
MABILIS SA BALITA

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PBBM BABALASAHIN DA SAKA BIBITAW

Hindi pa napapanahon para bitiwan ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ang pangangasiwa sa Department of Agriculture (DA) at magtalaga ng magiging kalihim ng ahensya.

Sa ambush interview sa pangulo sa Manila Hotel Huwebes ng gabi, inihayag nitong malalim ang mga problema sa DA dahil ilang taon na ang mga ito kaya hindi madaling maibalik at maayos ang sistema.

"Problems are so difficult that it will take a president to change and turn it around, very deeply embedded ang mga problema natin sa agrikultura. Ito ay nangyari na sa nakaraan, napakaraming taon, kaya hindi ganon kabilis, hindi ganon kadali na ibalik ang ating magandang sistema dati. Kaya I think I am still needed there," wika ng pangulo.

Naniniwala si Pangulong Marcos na kailangan pa siya ng ahensya dahil maraming mga bagay na kayang tugunan ng presidente na hindi kayang gawin ng isang kalihim.

"And the reason is very simple: there are things that a President can do that a secretary cannot," dagdag ng pangulo.

Kapag naayos na aniya ang mga kinakailangang pagbabago sa istraktura ng DA at naitalaga ang mga taong karapat-dapat ay saka siya bibitaw bilang tagapangasiwa ng ahensya.

"So I think when we are able to say that the DA's function are properly institutionalized and the structural changes that we need to make in the DA have been made, and the appointments in the DA have already been made then saka ako bibitaw, because they don't need me anymore, they don't need the president heading the department," sabi ng pangulo. **(Aileen Taliping/Prince Golez)**

Pilipino Star
NGAYON
Diyaryong disente ng masang intelihente

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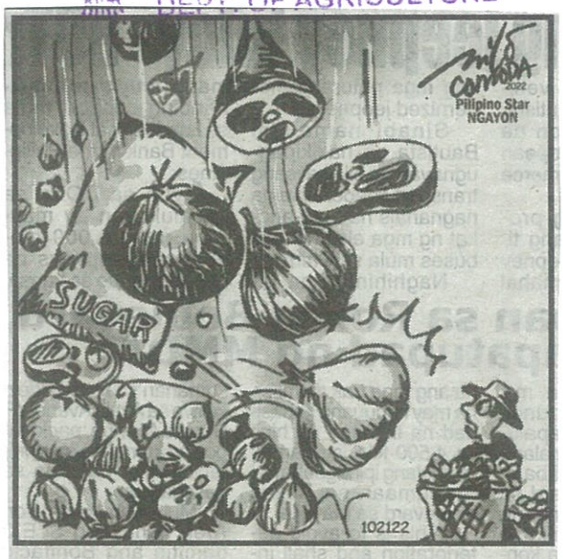

Editoryal

Patuloy ang smuggling ng agri products

WALANG natatakot na smugglers kay President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. at maski sa kasalukuyang commissioner ng Bureau of Customs (BOC) na si Commissioner Yogi Filemon Ruiz. Kung natatakot, bakit hanggang ngayon ay patuloy pa rin ang smuggling ng agri products na kinabibilangan ng asukal, gulay, prutas at maski karne. Sabi noon ni Marcos Jr. babantayang mabuti ang BOC upang walang makapasok na illegal shipments. Ang BOC ang isa sa pinagkukunan nang malaking revenue kaya nararapat bantayan. Isa rin sa inaalagaan ni Marcos ay ang Department of Agriculture (DA) sapagkat pangarap niyang magkaroon ng kahustuhan sa pagkain ang bansa. Ibig niyang magkaroon ng magandang ani upang maraming pagkain sa hapag ang mga Pilipino. Para magkaroon ng katuparan ang pangarap, inokupa ni Marcos ang pagiging DA secretary.

Subalit sa kabila ng mga paghihigpit, patuloy pa rin ang smuggling at tila wala na ngang nababahag ang buntot sa mga babala ni Marcos Jr. Noong nakaraang linggo lang, tinatayang P228 milyong halaga ng imported na asukal ang nasabat ng BOC. Nanggaling ang asukal sa Thailand. Hindi nakasaad kung sino ang consignee ng kargamento. Pinangunahan ni BOC commissioner Ruiz ang pag-inspection sa mga sako ng asukal sa Manila International Container Port. Ayon kay Ruiz, walang Clearance for Release na galing sa Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) ang kargamento. Ayon kay Ruiz, marami umanong hokus-pokus ang smugglers para matakasan ang kanilang krimen.

Nagbabala naman ang ilang mambabatas na lalo pang titindi ang smuggling ngayong palapit ang Christmas season. Dadagsa ang agri products gaya ng asukal at saka itatago. Kapag nagkaroon ng kakapusan, saka ito ilalabas pero mataas na ang presyo. Pati umano, karne ng baboy ay posibleng bumaha ngayong papalapit ang Pasko.

Marami rin namang senador ang nanawagan kay Marcos Jr. na magtalaga na ng permanenteng DA secretary para mahawakan nang husto ang kagawaran at masupil na rin ang smuggling ng agri products.

Maski ang kapatid ni Marcos na si Senator Imee Marcos ay nanawagan sa kanyang kapatid na magpakita ng galit sa mga smugglers ng agri products. Masyado na umanong talamak ang smuggling at panahon na para naman magalit sa smugglers.

Walang tapang sa smugglers. Dapat talagang magpakita ng pangil ang pamahalaan laban sa mga salot na smugglers. Kawawa ang mga local farmers kung hahayaan ang mga salot.

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EASING LONGTIME BURDEN OF FARMERS

FERTILIZER SUBSIDY PROGRAM GETS P4.1-B ADDITIONAL FUNDING

By Jordeene B. Lagare
@jordeenelagare

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has infused an additional P4.1 billion into the government's fertilizer subsidy program to help alleviate the burden on local rice farmers of the rising cost of the farm input.

In a memorandum order dated Oct. 17, the DA said the money would enable rice farmers to meet the recommended urea fertilizer usage and, in turn, increase rice production in the country.

"This fund shall be used by beneficiaries as a discount on the retail price of urea fertilizers," the memorandum read.

Urea is the most common fertilizer used by local farmers. As of Sept. 30, urea was selling at P2,523.08 per 50-kilogram bag, surging by 64.7 percent from P1,531.78 a year ago, according to the Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority.

The DA earlier earmarked P5.85 billion for the implementation of the fertilizer discount voucher project under the National Rice Program (NRP), covering almost 3 million hectares of land nationwide.

The fund, which is from the DA's 2022 budget, covers the subsidy program for the 2022 wet season, or from June to August, as well as the 2002-2023 dry planting season from December to March next year.

The additional P4.1 billion approved by the DA will be for the 2022-2023 dry season and came from the unprogrammed funds directly released by the Department of Budget and Management to the DA's Regional Field Offices through the special allotment release order (Saro) dated Sept. 2.

Supply stabilization

"With the goal of cushioning the potential impacts of underapplication of urea fertilizer to palay production and ultimately food security, the DA shall provide fertilizer vouchers to eligible beneficiaries which will be used in acquiring urea fertilizers," the DA said.

"This activity aims to ensure the timely availability of the needed fertilizer for rice production in the targeted areas through the distribution of fertilizer discount vouchers," it said.

Specifically for the 2022-2023 dry season, the goal is to enable farmers to increase urea fertilizer usage to raise rice output and stabilize local supply and prices.

The Philippines is aiming for a rice production of 20.25 million metric tons this year, slightly higher than last year's record high of 19.96 million MT.

However, the US Department of Agriculture has lowered its Philippine rice production estimate for 2022-2023, which began in July, to 11.98 million MT from 12.41 million MT due to steep fertilizer prices, which resulted in significantly reduced usage, and the impact of Typhoon "Karding" (international name: Noru) on the rice sector.

The fertilizer subsidy program covers regions that have been planted with inbred and hybrid rice seeds, except the National Capital Region and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao.

Mechanics

To avail themselves of fertilizer discount vouchers, farmer beneficiaries must be listed in the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture, and will be planting during the 2022-2023 dry cropping season. The DA will prioritize farmers tilling 2 ha or smaller.

The one-time voucher, which has a value of P1,131 per ha for inbred, and P2,262 for hybrid, may be obtained from accredited fertilizer merchants in their areas.

In the 2022-2023 dry cropping season, farmers tilling 0.5 ha and below are entitled to a fertilizer voucher worth P3,300, and for those tilling 0.51 ha to 2 ha, the voucher value will be computed by multiplying the farm area by P6,600.

For the 2022 wet season, beneficiaries have until Dec. 11 this year to get the fertilizer using the voucher and the deadline for payment to merchants is on April 28, 2023.

In the case of the 2022-2023 dry season using the 2022 budget of the DA, all vouchers must be generated by Feb. 17, 2023, and farmers may get their fertilizers using vouchers no later than March 17, 2023. Payment to merchants shall be made on or before April 28, 2023.

For the 2022-2023 dry season that will use the unprogrammed appropriations, the deadline for producing vouchers is on Nov. 28, 2022. INQ

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
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Importers get more time to bring in sugar

Lack of vessels, containers wreaking havoc on schedules

By Jordeene B. Lagare
@jordeenelagare

Importers have been given until the end of the month to bring in more sugar from overseas—a move seen to lower the sweetener's selling price in the markets—as they continue to grapple with global shipment problems.

The Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said it moved the deadline for the arrival of the sugar imports following various requests for more time to apply for an import clearance.

Importers cited vessel delays and lack of containers, which are among the supply chain problems that have been hounding global trade following the resumption of economic activity as the COVID-19 pandemic waned.

A number of local industrial users and international sugar traders who already have ample supply, for their part, have asked the agency to allow them to transfer their allocation to other users who have a more urgent need to augment their sugar inventory. Scheduled to arrive by the end of this month are 9,194.10 metric tons of sugar, representing the balance of the 200,000 MT that the government authorized to be brought in this year.

Manuel Lamata, president of the United Sugar Producers Federation of the Philippines, hailed the SRA's decision to extend the deadline to bring in the sugar as this would help stabilize retail prices of the widely used commodity. "That is a good move. The industrials have also agreed to this scheme to help the government and consumers avail [themselves of] cheaper sugar," said Lamata in a message.

To date, refined sugar in supermarkets are selling at between P70 to P134 a kilogram while in public wet markets, prices range from P98 to P110 per kg, according to the SRA's Oct. 7 price monitoring.

The new directive amended Sugar Order No. 3 promulgated by the previous SRA management in February this year, authorizing the importation of 200,000 metric tons of refined sugar for crop year 2021-2022. INQ

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Arrival window for imported sugar extended to Oct. 31

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said the arrival period for sugar ordered overseas to supplement domestic supply has been extended to the end of October due to shipping delays.

Sugar Order (SO) No. 3 series of 2022-2023 issued by the SRA on Oct. 19 extended the arrival deadline for the 200,000 metric tons (MT) of foreign sugar authorized for import to Oct. 31.

"The deadline for application for SRA Clearance for release of imported sugar has been extended to Sept. 30, 2022 and the arrival date of any imported sugar for this program is also extended to Oct. 31, 2022," according to the order.

"The SRA received request(s) to change the arrival date of any imported sugar for the above-said importation program due to vessel delays and lack of availability of container vans being experienced not just regionally but also globally," it added.

In February, the SRA issued SO No. 3 series of 2021-2022 allowing imports of 200,000 MT of sugar for crop year 2021-2022. Industrial users will also be allowed to transfer and sell part or all of their imported sugar allocation to other industrial users or assignees.

PHILIPPINE STAR/EDD GUMBAN

According to the SRA, import allocations for 9,194 MT of refined sugar have yet to apply for SRA clearance.

The industrial users inquiring about transferring their supply told the SRA that their shipments have arrived but are not immediately needed.

Meanwhile, "there are industrial users who... are still in urgent need to augment their sugar supply," it added.

Asked to comment, United Sugar Producers Federation President Manuel R. Lamata said in a Viber message that the new order will benefit consumers and the industry.

The transfers "will bring down the very high retail prices. The industrials have agreed to this scheme to help the government and consumers. (SO No. 3) will not affect us farmers," Mr. Lamata said.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) estimates the price of refined sugar as of Oct. 20 at P100 per kilogram (/kg).

The DA has said it will sell refined sugar at P70/kg in Kadiwa outlets and SRA offices in Quezon City and Bacolod City. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

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The Department of Agriculture set a suggested retail price of P170 per kilogram for red onion sold in wet markets in the National Capital Region.

tribunephl and ConceptCentral tribunephl and ConceptGrp
tribune.net.ph and conceptnewscentral.com

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Sardine industry forum launched

An estimated 1,000 participants attended the forum which aims to discuss and find solutions to critical issues and challenges of the sardine fishing and processing industry in the Philippines today

BY NONOY LACSON

ZAMBOANGA CITY – The 5th National Sardines Industry Congress 2022 formally kicked off on 20 October with no less than President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Senator Imee Marcos attending the occasion.

An estimated 1,000 participants attended the forum which aims to discuss and find solutions to critical issues and challenges of the sardine fishing and processing industry in the Philippines today.

Southern Philippines Deep Sea Fishing Association Inc. president Engr. Jaydrick Johnson Yap said that the forum also includes a scientific session centering the discussion on "Sardines' close fishing season: Impact on biomass and production" with Divina Ignacio, project leader for the national stock assessment program of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources in Zamboanga peninsula.

The BFAR also discussed topics on biomass and stock distribution sardines.

A memorandum of agreement was also signed on attaining sustainability in the fisheries for sardines and other pelagic fish of the Zamboanga peninsula. It was signed by the BFAR, the University of the Philippines, Mindanao State University, Iligan Institute of Technology, Jose Rizal Memorial State University and SoPhil Fishing Association Inc.

Also included in the discussions was climate change's impact on sardines fishery and fishers, updates on the national sardine management framework plan, and its ways forward.

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Bataan, Zambales farmer coops undergo training

BY JONAS REYES

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT – The Department of Agriculture in Central Luzon recently conducted a three-day training to various Farmers' Cooperative and Associations from the provinces of Bataan and Zambales at the Venezia Hotel here.

The DA said that the training is in line with preparing the farmers for the Project Proposal, Business Plan, and Cluster Development Plan.

The training is under the Farm and Fisheries Clustering and Consolidation Program, an administrative order created for farmers and fishers.

The aim of the training is to increase the number of production, increase revenues and provide a better path towards resources, technology and market. It also eyes forming a better synergy between the producers at the farm and the market.

The F2C2 will help the government attain economies of scale and enable more farmers, fishers, and agriculture entrepreneurs to produce and earn more from their toil.

Through the F2C2 program, the government aims to channel assistance such as credit, modern production methods, farm machinery, post-harvest and program facilities, transport and logistics, packaging support, as well as information and communication technologies, to farm and fishery clusters.

The DA, through its Agricultural Policy and Credit Council will also provide farm clusters credit financing.

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DA issues rules on fertilizer discounts to rice farmers for dry cropping season

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas
@jearcalas

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has issued the guidelines for the provision of P3.453 billion worth of fertilizer vouchers to rice farmers for the dry cropping season.

The DA issued Memorandum Order (MO) 65 series of 2022 that outlined the guidelines for the use of the supplemental fund it received for its fertilizer voucher program.

"A supplemental fund sourced from an unprogrammed regular agency fund, over and above the 2022 General Appropriations Act [GAA] budget has been released to enable rice farmers to meet the recommended urea fertilizer thereby, securing rice production in the country," it said.

The fertilizer discount voucher program has been one of the major programs of the DA to help farmers cope with the rise in costs of planting inputs, such as fertilizer. Rice farmers have been reeling from high fertilizer prices, which reached as much as P3,000 per 50-kilogram bag, due to the disruption in global supply caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"With the goal of cushioning the potential impacts of under application of urea fertilizer to palay production and ultimately food security, the DA shall provide fertilizer vouchers to eligible beneficiaries which will be used in acquiring urea fertilizers," MO 65 read.

"The use of fertilizer vouchers offers an alternative to farmers with lower purchasing power to buy a sufficient volume of urea recommended for their rice area," it added.

The DA said the supplemental fund of P3.453 billion that was released by the Department of Budget and Management directly to its regional field offices would cover the 2022-2023 dry cropping season (DS).

The fertilizer voucher program for the dry cropping season seeks to maintain or improve farmers' yield to 4.22 metric tons (MT) per hectare.

"Specifically for the DS 2022-2023, the project aims to enable rice farmers to supplement the requirement for urea fertilizer for their rice production [and] stabilize the rice supply situation in the country despite challenges in the price of commercial fertilizers," the DA said.

Under the DS 2022-2023 fertilizer voucher program, rice farmers tilling 0.5 hectare and below would receive a voucher value of P3,300. Meanwhile, rice farmers tilling 0.51 hectare to 2 hectares would receive a discount amounting to the size of their farm area multiplied to P6,600.

"In the event of excess funds which can still be utilized for this project, farmers tilling more than two [2.0] hectares can avail of this fertilizer support, wherein fertilizer voucher shall be computed at P6,600.00 per hectare, still following the computation as shown above," the DA said.

The DA said the generation of fertilizer vouchers funded by the unprogrammed appropriations would be on November 28 followed by the claiming of fertilizers using the voucher on December 11. The payment to merchants by the government would be on December 29, according to the DA.

Based on the Special Allotment Release Orders (SAROs) released by the DBM, Region 6 received the biggest allocation at P635.617 million followed by Region 1 with P563.792 million. Region 3 received P413.82 million of funding for the fertilizer discount program.

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SRA board amends rules for sugar imports

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas
@jearcalas

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) has extended the arrival date of the remaining volume of sugar for importation under the previous crop year's program until the end of the month.

The SRA board, chaired by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. as the concurrent agriculture secretary, issued Sugar Order (SO) 3 Series of 2022-2023, that amended the guidelines of the sugar importation program for crop year (CY) 2021-2022.

Under SO 3, the SRA board explained that there have been requests from importers "to change the arrival date" of imported sugar due to "vessel delays" and lack of available container vans due to the persisting global logistical and shipping woes.

The SRA board added that industrial users and international traders under the SO 3 of CY 21-22 also requested for the transfer of their allocated refined sugar to other eligible players under the import program.

"The reason for the above requests for the transfer of allocation to other allocates is that the imported sugar of some participating industrial users (proposed transferor) had already arrived though the supply will be needed at the later months, while there are industrial users (proposed transferee) who have already used up their allocation and are still in urgent need to augment their sugar supply," the latest sugar order read.

SO 3 showed that as of August 31 there were still 9,194.10 metric tons (MT) of refined sugar import allocations with no SRA clearance applications and 12,913 MT of imported sugar that have not been reclassified from "C" Reserve sugar to "B" domestic sugar.

Aside from extending the deadline for the arrival of imported sugar, the SRA board also allowed industrial users to transfer their import allocations in whole or in part to other users or assignees. "The SRA administrator is hereby authorized to approve the applications submitted pursuant to Section 2, provided all requirements under this Sugar Order are complied with," SO 3 read.

"Furthermore, the SRA Administrator is likewise directed to approve the reclassification of the remaining 'C' Reserved Sugar into 'B' domestic sugar imported under Sugar Order No. 3 series of 2021-2022 or the Sugar Import Program for Crop year 2021-2022," it added.

SO 3 was signed by Marcos, SRA Acting Administrator David John Thaddeus P. Alba, Millers' Representative Ma. Mitzi V. Mangwag and Planters' Representative Pablo Luis S. Azcona. Agriculture Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban also signed the sugar order.

The SO 3 was released on October 19 and was filed on the same day with the Office of the National Administrative Register at the UP Law Center.

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TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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Shift to polymer banknotes to result in P2.4 B savings

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) will save as much as P2.4 billion in production costs in the ongoing shift to polymer from paper-based banknotes.

During a recent briefing by the Senate Committee on Banks, Financial Institutions and Currencies, BSP Deputy Governor Mamerto Tangonan said that estimates of potential savings from longer bill lifespan stood at P1.26 billion to P2.4 billion based on actual 2021 bank withdrawals of new P1,000 banknotes from the central bank.

"The longer lifespan of polymer banknotes would translate into lower replacement costs, hence higher production cost savings," Tangonan said.

Tangonan said polymer banknotes lasts two and a half times to four times longer than paper-based banknotes.

Higher savings, Tangonan explained, would redound to higher earnings for the BSP, half of which accrues to the national government in the form of dividends.

"Higher dividend remittance to national government can then be used to fund government's economic and social programs," the BSP official said.

These include the flagship tuxy buying special project of the Philippine Fiber Industry Development Authority (PhilFIDA) that aims to produce higher quality abaca, as well as double farm and income productivity.

Others include funding more hospital beds and classrooms, higher number of household beneficiaries from 4Ps program, mass housing units, among others.

The circulation test of the 100 million pieces of P1,000 polymer banknotes is ongoing alongside the existing P1,000 paper banknotes.

Polymer-based banknotes, Tangonan explained, are more difficult to counterfeit, more hygienic and sanitary, more durable, environment-friendly, and more cost-effective.

According to Tangonan, the country's abaca industry will continue to prosper even with the shift to polymer banknotes from paper bills amid growing demand for natural fibers in the global market.

Tangonan said that the circulation test of 500 million pieces of P1,000 polymer banknotes are estimated to affect just 0.2 to 0.4 percent of abaca farming jobs or 210 to 481 jobs, and 0.1 to 0.2 percent of abaca export revenues or from P8.5 to P17 million.

"The estimates were based on the assumption that abaca suppliers have no alternative markets that is, it is a do-nothing scenario. However, the BSP fully recognizes the vast potential and growth opportunities given the large global demand," Tangonan said.

The BSP official explained abaca farmers do not directly supply abaca to the central bank for production of cotton-abaca paper bills, but supply to processors and exporters who sell abaca pulp to manufacturers of specialty paper abroad.

"The share of the estimated abaca content of the Philippine banknotes to total volume of abaca fiber production in 2020 is just around two. Meanwhile, the share of abaca content of our banknotes to abaca export earnings is less than two percent at its peak. That is, when the BSP had multi-year procurement," he said.

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel III is looking into the plan of the BSP to shift to polymer from paper-based banknotes.

For her part, Sen. Pia Cayetano said polymer-based bills are non-biodegradable as opposed to paper banknotes that use natural materials.

"When we look at the sustainability picture, we always have to take different factors into concern. It may, in fact, use less water, may have a smaller carbon footprint, but it will not biodegrade. It will still be there and it is a product we created and will stay there forever, as opposed to abaca and cotton," Cayetano said during the inquiry.

Cayetano, who chairs the Senate Committee on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Futures Thinking, also questioned the BSP's claim that polymer bills use less water and can be recycled into chairs and tables.

– Lawrence Agcaoili

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COMMONSENSE

MARICHU A. VILLANUEVA

Sugar, spice and everything nice

The Senate Blue Ribbon Committee is on a "trailblazing" path. This was how Senator Francis "Tol" Tolentino described the latest innovations, adopted under his leadership, of the powerful Senate Blue Ribbon Committee. A lawyer also by profession, Sen. Tolentino vowed "to give real essence to due process" in the conduct of public hearings of the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee in adopting these drastic changes in its proceedings.

This is the mission set by Tolentino for the Senate Committee on Accountability of Public Officers and Investigations, or more popularly called for short as the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee. Except the Senate president, the Blue Ribbon is the only committee composed of almost the entire 24 Senators.

For the first time in the 106 years of the Philippine Senate, Tolentino touted during our *Kapihan sa Manila Bay* forum last Wednesday, the Blue Ribbon has adopted "trailblazing" changes in its parliamentary inquiry procedures. Upon his assumption as its chairman, Tolentino cited as example the first Committee Report of the Blue Ribbon under his stewardship. Specifically, he referred to the Senate probe into the controversial Special Order (SO) No. 4 of the Sugar Regulatory Authority (SRA) Board that allowed the import of some 300,000 metric tons (MT) of sugar.

However, President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. (PBBM) subsequently rescinded SO No. 4 upon learning its issuance without his prior approval. As the concurrent Agriculture Secretary, the President sits as the presiding chairman of the SRA Board. In a privilege speech, Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri condemned the issuance of SO No. 4 last Aug. 9 in the middle of the harvest season amid a reported shortage of sugar in domestic markets. The matter was immediately referred to the Blue Ribbon Committee for "inquiry in aid of legislation."

After three hearings that started last Aug. 23, Tolentino produced the Blue Ribbon Committee Report of its findings and recommendations signed by 14 out of the 17 Senators. In this Committee Report, Tolentino recommended the filing of criminal and administrative charges against several former officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the SRA.

Likewise, Tolentino noted, as first time ever in the history of the Blue Ribbon Committee, having the dispositive portion of the 75-page report on SO No. 4 read out by the panel's general counsel.

The Committee Report declared there was enough preliminary evidence indicating that former DA undersecretary and concurrent officer-in-charge (OIC) Leocadio Sebastian, former SRA administrator Hermenegildo Serafica, and board members Roland Beltran and Aurelio Valderrama Jr. have committed grave administrative offenses. The panel also recommended to the Office of the Ombudsman to file criminal cases against them for violations of Republic Act (RA) 3019, or the Anti-graft and Corrupt Practices Act; one count of a violation on the provision of RA 10845, or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016; and one count of usurpation of functions defined and penalized under Article 177 of the Revised Penal Code.

Obviously, the smugglers were still undeterred, if not undaunted.

Also in this Committee Report recommendations, Tolentino added, is a need for a clear mandate and definite limit to the tenure and powers of an OIC.

However, the same Committee Report effectively cleared Executive Secretary Victor Rodriguez of any wrongdoing over the fiasco. Senate Minority Leader Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III and Sen. Risa Hontiveros refused to sign it and sought for more accountability from Rodriguez aside from the former DA and SRA officials implicated whom they fear might just be "fall guys."

In the middle of these investigations, PBBM accepted the resignations of Sebastian and the entire SRA Board. The Chief Executive quickly appointed their respective replacements. It took Rodriguez until Sept. 17 to resign and later PBBM appointed retired Chief Justice Lucas Bersamin as his new Executive Secretary.

After so much hullaballoo, PBBM eventually approved on Sept. 14 the SRA recommendations to import 150,000 M/T of refined sugar under SRO No. 2 to augment crop year 2022-2023.

Less than two months after the Blue Ribbon Committee winded down its probe into the SO No. 4, the Bureau of Customs just last Monday foiled smuggling attempt of P228 million worth of refined sugar imported from Thailand. Seized from 76 containers, the shipment arrived on Sept. 24 and contained "mis-declared and undeclared" items. The sacks of sugar were seized after the consignee failed to present an import clearance from the SRA.

Obviously the smugglers were still undeterred, if not undaunted.

On the contrary, Tolentino argued, the Bureau of Customs detected and foiled the latest smuggling attempt. He would like to believe this was because they were able to unravel the smuggling schemes as brought out during the Blue Ribbon Committee public hearings on SO No. 4.

If that is so, is the sugar import scandal revolving around SO No. 4 now considered case closed? As the chairman of the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee, Tolentino expressed his readiness to reopen their probe if any Senators would file a new Resolution to look into this latest sugar smuggling attempt not covered under SO No. 4.

Anyway, before the sessions of the 19th Congress adjourned last Sept. 30, Tolentino cited, the majority report of the Blue Ribbon Committee on the SO No. 4 is still being debated at the floor. When both chambers go back to sessions on Nov. 7, the plenary debate on the Committee Report will resume at the Senate floor, he pointed out. Only after that, it will be voted upon by the plenary whether to adopt or reject the findings and recommendations of the Committee Report.

Yesterday, the SRA Board has allowed importation of refined sugar under SO No. 3 in the past crop year to come in until end of the month to further augment supply of the sweetener. SO3 was implemented last February, which called for a sugar importation program of 200,000 M/T of refined sugar.

So it is sugar, spice and everything nice from here on?

★

Malaya
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SRA extends deadline of arrival of 9K MT of unallocated sugar

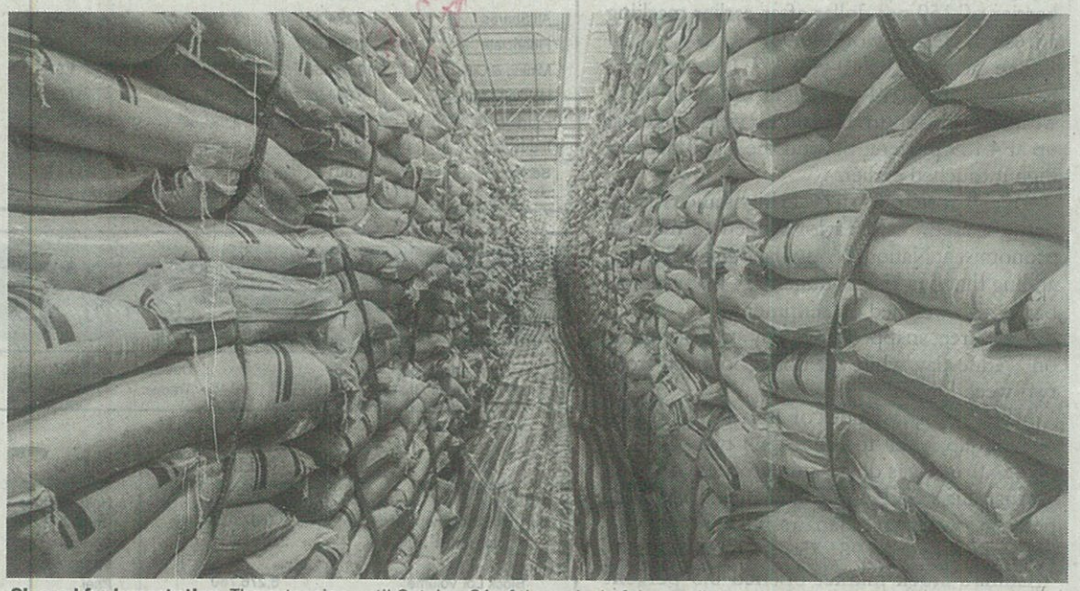
THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) has issued a sugar order extending the deadline of arrival of 9,194.10 metric tons (MT) of sugar without clearance applications from the previous crop year's import program.

The extension of arrival is seen beefing up local supply.

Under Sugar Order 3 (SO 3) series 2022-2023 released on Wednesday, import applications submitted before September 30 will be considered for the said volume with actual arrival allowed until October 31.

The 9,194.10 MT of sugar form part of the 200,000 MT of imported sugar allowed to come into the country by SO 3 series 2021-2022 issued last February. The SO originally wanted all the volume to arrive no later than May 1.

The more recent SO3 also allowed the reclassification of 12,913 MT of sugar originally meant as reserves for domestic use. The order was signed by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. as concurrent SRA chairperson and Department of Agriculture (DA) secretary; Domingo Panganiban, DA undersecretary; David Alba, SRA administrator; Mitzi Mangwag, SRA millers representative; and Pablo Azcona, SRA planters representative,



Cleared for importation. The extension until October 31 of the arrival of the unallocated sugar is seen beefing up local supply. (File photo)

Earlier, the SRA through SO 2 series 2022-2023, also allowed the entry of 75,000 MT of refined sugar for industrial users and another 75,000 MT for consumers to arrive on or before November 15.

As of October 14, SRA issued clearances for the SO to 13 international traders with a total volume of 33,772.50 MT of refined sugar intended for consumers and end users and another 6,625 MT for industrial users. - *Jed Macapagal*

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P4B fertilizer subsidy set

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said an additional P4.1 billion has been allocated for fertilizer subsidy to rice farmers for the dry season cropping next year.

Under DA Memorandum Order No. 65 series of 2022 signed on Monday by Domingo Panganiban, DA undersecretary, rice farmers registered in the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture and encoded in the Farmers and Fisherfolk Registry System who will plantduring the 2022-2023 dry cropping season are eligible to avail the program.

Farmers tilling 0.5 hectares (ha) and below will get fertilizer vouchers worth P3,300 while those tilling 0.51 ha to 2 ha will get varying amounts following the formula of their rice farm area multiplied by P6,600.

"With the goal of cushioning the potential impacts of under application of urea fertilizer to palay production and ultimately food security, the DA shall provide fertilizer vouchers to eligible beneficiaries which will be used in acquiring urea fertilizers. The use of fertilizer vouchers offers an alternative to farmers with lowered purchasing power to buy a sufficient volume of urea recommended for their rice area," the document said.

The DA said the program is funded jointly by balance from this year's General Appropriations Act for wet season fertilizer subsidies as well as from Special Allotment Release Orders.

The DA expects the program to enable rice farmers supplement the requirement for urea fertilizer for their rice production; mitigate the impacts of the projected decline in production

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P4B

due to low usage of urea fertilizer and attain the target yield of 4.22 metric tons per ha of palay for 2023; and stabilize the rice supply situation in the country despite challenges in the price of commercial fertilizers.

However, the program will only cover regions planted with inbred and hybrid rice seeds except the National Capital Region and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao.

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SRA distribution of P216M farm equipment questioned

BY PETER TABINGO

THE Commission on Audit (COA) has asked the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) to explain the basis for the distribution of 159 out of 180 agricultural machineries and farm equipment worth P216.43 million funded out of a program intended to boost local sugar production.

Government auditors were told that the farm machines were distributed among "block farms" or consolidated small sugarcane farms in the Visayas but the SRA failed to show any document that provides the guidelines as well as the responsibilities of the farmer beneficiaries or what was expected of them.

A briefer in the SRA website says block farms were created by combining several smaller sugarcane farms to achieve plantation-scale production with an aggregate area of between 30 to 50 hectares through economy of scale.

Under the Block Farm Program, the SRA provides guidance and other forms of assistance to help ensure productivity and that agrarian reform beneficiaries will retain ownership of the land.

However, the audit team found that the farm equipment were given away to program beneficiaries without a single memorandum of agreement (MOA) or a statement of policy setting the guidelines of the distribution and defining the obligations of those who received them.

Records showed among the equipment purchased by the SRA for the program were 44 sugarcane grabbers (P108.62 million), 37 farm tractors (P64.32 million), 62 farm implements (P35.32 million), and fertilizer applicator (P8.16 million). All the procurements took place between March and October 2021.

"The distribution was not covered by a MOA between the SRA Visayas and the beneficiaries concerned. As such, the responsibilities/obligations of the parties involved were not properly defined to ensure achievement of the [program] objective," the COA said.

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Canners warn of possible sardine shortage in Q4

AVANT GARDENER
YVETTE TAN

Local canners are warning of a possible sardine shortage in the last quarter of 2022. This is because commercial fishing boats haven't been able to catch enough of the fish before the fishing season ends in December in Zamboanga, where the bulk of the country's sardines are caught.

"What I am clarifying here is that we are not claiming that there is a shortage now, [but] that there will be a shortage if this is not addressed," said Francisco Buencamino, executive director of the Canned Sardines Association of the Philippines (CSAP).

He explained that in the sardine industry, commercial fishers are only allowed to catch the needed 216,000 metric tons of fish for nine months out of the year, with the closed fishing season imposed so that the sardines have time to spawn. The fish caught in those nine months (March 1 to Oct. 31) are expected to supply the whole 12 months of the year.

Because of this, "we hope that the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) understands that when they investigate our warehouses, we are not hoarding just because we store a huge inventory. They say we're hoarding. No. We are preparing for the closed fishing season," Buencamino explained in Taglish.

The cause of the (probable) shortage

Buencamino went on to explain that the projected shortage stems from reports from their supplier fishing boats that, "they're only catching about 40 percent of what they used to catch, and of late, only 20 percent of what they traditionally catch at this time of the year. So the supply of sardines is dwindling," which led to the group's issuing of the alert that there might not be enough sardines by December, "which is the peak season of most food commodities demand."

How much is needed before the fishing season ends? "We need 72,000 MT to be caught before the closure of the fishing season on Nov. 30. Seventy-two million kilos of tamban (sardines)."

Buencamino emphasizes that this is not a declaration of a current shortage. He also addresses the claim of some municipal fisher groups that refute his assertions by saying there are a lot of fish in municipal waters.

"There is a delineation of the fishing zone for municipal fishermen and a fishing zone for commercial fishing. Zero to 15 kilometers [from the shoreline] is considered as municipal waters, and 15 kilometers upwards, the farther away from shoreline becomes commercial waters. Sardines are a highly migratory species... They will go where the food is. Plankton drifts towards the shoreline, so where will the fish go? Where their food is, and that's towards the shoreline. If it's past 15 kilometers, it's considered municipal waters. Commercial fishing is [not] allowed in municipal waters. That is the rule."

He further clarified that there are cases where the local government unit (LGU) can allow commercial fishers to ply up to 10.1 kilometers from the shoreline, and allowing this at this time will be a big help in preventing a sardine shortage later in the year. "Out of about 15 brands, only about four brands have their own fishing [vessels]. The other 10 have to buy from suppliers, whether it is local, commercial, municipal, or even imported. There are two brands that only use foreign sardines."

The proposed solution

Buencamino has met with BFAR about CSAP's proposed solution to this problem. "The solution that I offered is this: what if I convinced the canneries to buy from the municipal fishermen?"

He explained that sardines aren't usually caught for the wet market because it is "a bony, scaly, and very small fish that does not really have a good retail market demand," so it would benefit both sardine canners and municipal fishermen if the fish were sold to those that need it. "There is now a solution that we are offering to the municipal fishermen. Sell to us given our technical specifications of what is acceptable to us: it has to be fresh, in its natural form, and [given to us] within so many days of catching..."

He added that the canneries are willing to "buy at a percentage higher than what they can sell at the wet markets" and that if the fishers can meet the specifications, each cannery is willing to buy 500 tubs. "We can also issue a PO for that, given a certain price and our technical description."

Buencamino reported that BFAR has been receptive to this suggestion and hopes that all organizations involved (the canneries, municipal fishers, commercial fishers, and BFAR) will be able to resolve the shortage within the month.

"I'm very pleased to announce to you that there are already ongoing talks of getting together the municipal fishermen and the commercial fishing," he said.

When asked what the canneries would do if they don't get the amount of fish needed before the fishing season ends in 2022, Buencamino answered with only one word: "Import."

But they hope it doesn't have to come to that.

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ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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BFAR, kinuwestiyon sa 'bumabahang' imported GG, atbp.

MATINDING kinuwestiyon sa Senado ang Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) sa patuloy na pag-angkat ng imported galunggong, pampano at iba pang uri ng isda na "bumabaha" sa mga palengke.

Ginawa ni Senator Imee Marcos ang pagpuna sa pangyayari sa ginanap na pagdinig ng Committee on Finance sa panukalang badyet ng Department of Agriculture's sa 2023.

Ikinatuwiran naman ni BFAR Regional Director for Calabarzon Sammy Malvas na baka natirang isda sa cold storage ang nabibili ngayon sa palengke mula sa naunang ipinalabs na certificates of necessity to import na nagtapos nitong Hunyo o Hulyo.

Sinabi naman ni Sen. Cynthia Villar na hadlang ang importasyon at ismagling ng isda sa pagpapaunlad ng lokal na sektor.

Nitong Enero, inaprubahan ni dating DA Secretary William Dar ang importasyon ng 60,000 tonelada para sa unang yugto ng 2022 dahil sa inaasahang kakapusan ng suplay.

Sa ikalawang yugto, pinalawig ng gobyerno ang importasyon na ikinapasok ng 38, 695 tonelada nitong Mayo ngunit balanse sa naunang import permit.

Kasabay nito, kinuwestiyon din ni Sen. Koko Pimentel ang pag-aangkat sa kabila ng katotohanang napaliligiran ng dagat ang Pilipinas.

Sinabi naman ni Malvas na maraming bagay ang nakaaapekto sa huli ng mga mangingisdang Pilipino tulad ng

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2023 budget ng NIA, DAR aprub ng Senate panel

INAPRUBAHAN ng Senate finance subcommittee sa pamumuno ni Senador Cynthia Villar ang badyet ng National Irrigation Administration (NIA) at Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) nitong Huwebes.

Sa deliberasyon ng 2023 badyet ng Department of Agriculture (DA) at attached agencies nito, nakatakda nang isalang sa plenaryo ng Senado ang badyet ng NIA at DAR.

Umabot sa mahigit 10 oras ang deliberasyon ng badyet ng naturang ahensya na dinaluhan ng halos lahat ng opisyal ng NIA at DAR.

Base sa National Expenditure Program (NEP), umabot sa P40.84 bilyon ang budyet ng NIA na pinamumunuan ni Administrator Benny Antiporda.

Mas mababa ang badyet ng NIA sa 2023 kumpara sa P47.4B nitong 2022.

Abante
UNA SA BALITA

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Kabisado ko ang climate change - Villar

'MGA MANGINGISDA, MAGSASAKA WALANG ALAM'

KINASTIGO ng grupong National Network of Agrarian Reform Advocates (NNARA)-Youth si Senador Cynthia Villar dahil sa umano'y pang-iinsulto nito sa mga magsasaka at mangingisda matapos sabihin na walang alam ang mga ito sa isyu ng climate change.

"Farmers and fisherfolks surely understand the climate disaster that ruling elites such as the Villars have caused," sabi pa ng grupo sa isang statement. "They experience the worst droughts and strongest typhoons, while Cynthia Villar sits pretty in her air-conditioned room, contemplating on which agricultural land she will steal and convert next."

Nauna rito, sa pagdinig ng Senate finance committee sa panukalang 2023 budget ng Department of Agriculture (DA) noong Miyerkoles, tinalakay ni DA Climate Resilient Agriculture Office Director Alicia Ilaga ang epekto ng climate change sa agrikultura gayundin ang mga programa nila para tulungan ang mga magsasaka at mangingisda.

"Tinuturuan sila ng mga localize climate information, ano ang mga tatama sa kanila. We have seasonal weather advisories, extreme weather advisories, tinitingnan din ang ang climate hazard sa lugar na akma, ayon at tama ang teknolohiya," sabi ni Ilaga.

Agad namang sumingit si Villar, chairperson ng Senate committee on Agriculture, at iginiit na ang DA ang ang dapat gumawa ng hakbang para maibsan ang epekto ng climate change. "Ano gagawin mo sa lugar na tinatamaan ng ano, paano siya tinatamaan? Dapat gagawa ka na ang DA ng project to stop that, huwag mong aasahan ang farmers and fishermen, because they don't know anything," giit ni Villar.

"Kaya kayo, huwag n'yong iaasa sa farmers at fisherfolk kasi sila hindi naman nila naiintindihan yang climate change eh. Huwag n'yo nang sasabihin na climate na change yan. Minsan nga ako kahit nga ako di maintindihan… 'yang climate change," dagdag pa ni Villar.

Inakusahan pa ng ng grupo si Villar na ginagamit ang kanyang posisyon sa Senado para isulong ang business interest ng kanyang pamilya.

"We will not forget that you are the primary culprit behind the liberalization of rice importation that has resulted in plunging palay prices and over P206 billion pesos of losses for farmers. We will not forget how you blamed our farmers for not being competitive enough as they cry for help," sambit pa nila. **(Dindo Matining)**

Manila Standard

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EDITORIAL

Infrastructure push

THE Marcos Jr. administration's pronouncement that it is pursuing major infrastructure projects should serve to reassure Filipinos that it is serious in rebuilding the economy in the years ahead.

Ample proof that the government has begun to make good on this pledge is the recent signing of contracts for the South Commuter Railway Project in Laguna, the largest infrastructure project to be funded by the Asian Development Bank.

The railway project is expected to cut travel time from Manila to Laguna from three hours to just one hour. It can accommodate up to 340,000 commuters a day.

Already being rushed to completion is the first phase of the railway project from Manila to Malolos, Bulacan and eventually to Clark in Pampanga.

The previous administration had planned to build an extensive railway system that would connect major cities in Mindanao, but it appears that the project has been indefinitely shelved since the expected funding from China did not materialize.

Apart from railways, the country needs to build more transportation-related infrastructure, such as roads and bridges that would connect the various islands.

> *"Obviously, we cannot rely solely on domestic revenue generation or local banks to build major infrastructure projects"*

More farm-to-market roads in remote municipalities would benefit not only the agricultural sector but also the travel and tourism industry.

Also in the initial stages of construction is the multibillion-peso Manila International Airport in Bulacan province that will address the limited capacity of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport.

A conglomerate appears to have already secured approval for the construction of the Sangley International Airport in Cavite province. With three international airports in the Greater Manila area alone, the economy stands to benefit immensely in the coming years.

As the country is archipelagic in character, the government needs to build more seaports to stimulate inter-regional trade and commerce as well as tourism.

What is also needed now is a comprehensive infrastructure development plan covering all the major sectors of the economy.

After all, one of the factors hindering the entry of more foreign investments into the country is our poor infrastructure.

But the big problem is where to get the resources needed to build more infrastructure. Obviously, we cannot rely solely on domestic revenue generation or local banks to build major infrastructure projects.

We have to tap other sources, including multilateral financial institutions as the World Bank and the ADB, as well as government-to-government arrangements, so that we can build more roads and bridges and other infrastructure that will propel the economy forward, create more jobs and improve standards of living, especially of those living on the margins of society.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

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Cagayan braces for third storm in over a week

'Obet' brings heavy rains to same areas hit by 'Maymay,' 'Neneng'; floodwater in several villages yet to recede

TUGUEGARAO CITY—The weather bureau hoisted Tropical Cyclone Wind Signal No. 1 over the northeastern portion of mainland Cagayan and the island province of Batanes on Thursday due to Tropical Depression "Obet," the third weather disturbance to hit the area in over a week.

Residents in Santa Ana and Gonzaga towns in Cagayan were still reeling from severe flooding caused by Tropical Depression "Maymay" and Typhoon "Neneng" (international name: Nesat), which hit northern Luzon on Oct. 11 and 12, and Oct. 15 and 16, respectively.

As of Thursday morning, several residents in the low-lying villages of the two towns were again cautioned against flash floods due to Obet and a shear line that were already bringing heavy rains to northern Luzon.

In Cagayan's Ballesteros town, floodwater reached 1.6 feet (0.5 meter) deep, while the level of the river underneath the Nararagan and Lucban bridges in Abulug town continued to rise due to the incessant rains.

At the Laging Handa briefing on Thursday, Ruelie Rapsing, head of the Cagayan provincial disaster risk reduction and management office (PDRRMO), asked all mayors in the province to order a preemptive evacuation, especially in flood-prone areas.

Rapsing said the PDRRMO had deployed its personnel and rescue equipment ahead of the anticipated impact of Obet.

Sanchez Mira in Cagayan was the latest local government to be placed under a state of calamity following the onslaught of Neneng, which destroyed P27.5-million worth of crops and infrastructure in the town, Mayor Abraham Bagasin said on Thursday.

In a phone interview, Bagasin said the town council approved on Tuesday the recommendation of the municipal disaster risk reduction and management council for the declaration, citing the effects of the Neneng and the previous storms.

'Enormous' damage

"The damage was enormous—from typhoons "Florita" and Maymay to Neneng. Now here comes the heavy rain due to the shear line," he added.

He said affected farmers would need seeds, fertilizers, fingerlings and other farm inputs to recover their losses.

Bagasin said the local government had started distributing 3,000 boxes of food packs it received from the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

At least 8,625 families, or 28,266 people, were affected by the onslaught of Neneng in Sanchez Mira. Thirteen houses were also damaged there.

Earlier, the other Cagayan towns of Allacapan, Santa Ana and Santa Praxedes were also placed under a state of calamity due to Neneng and Maymay.

Government data showed that the recent storms caused at least P351-million worth of damage to farms and infrastructure in Cagayan and nearby Ilocos Norte province.

In its 11 a.m. bulletin on Thursday, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) said Obet was located 745 kilometers east of the Batanes provincial capital of Basco. It had maximum sustained winds of 45 kilometers per hour (kph) and gusts of up to 55 kph. It was moving westward at a speed of 10 kph.

Pagasa said Obet might traverse extreme northern Luzon or the northern part of mainland northern Luzon between Friday night and Saturday morning, and could reach tropical storm category.

Moderate to heavy with at times intense rains is expected over Batanes, Babuyan Islands, Ilocos Norte, Apayao and the northeastern portion of mainland Cagayan.

The northern portion of Ilocos Sur, Abra, Kalinga and the rest of mainland Cagayan may experience light to moderate, with at times heavy, rains.

"Under these conditions, flooding and rain-induced landslides are possible, especially in areas that are highly or very highly susceptible to these hazards as identified in hazard maps and in localities with significant antecedent rainfall," Pagasa said. —REPORTS FROM VILLAMOR VISAYA JR. AND ABBY BOISER INQ

The Manila Times®

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New Zealand farmers: No to 'burp and fart' tax

WELLINGTON: Farmers quit their fields and hit the streets of New Zealand's cities on Thursday in countrywide protests against plans to tax greenhouse emissions from farm animals.

Convoys of tractors, 4x4s and other farmyard vehicles disrupted traffic in the capital Wellington, Auckland, and other major urban hubs as protesters demanded the center-left government to ditch plans for an animal "burp and fart" tax.

Earlier this month, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern touted a "world first" levy on emissions of methane and nitrous oxide produced by the nation's six million cows and 26 million sheep as a step to tackling climate change.

Thousands of farmers gathered on Thursday brandishing signs saying the policy "stinks" and warning that the tax would make food more costly and put their livelihoods at risk.

"Most farmers have had enough," said one Wellington protester who gave his name only as Chris. "It's getting hard to carry on farming and this government isn't really supporting us — it's a tough gig at the moment."

NO LAUGHING MATTER

New Zealand farmers rallying in central Auckland pass near vehicles and signs protesting government plans to make them pay for greenhouse gas emitted by their livestock on Thursday, Oct. 20, 2022. NEW ZEALAND HERALD PHOTO VIA AP

Animals produce methane and nitrous oxide as a byproduct of munching on grass and feed.

Methane is much less abundant than carbon dioxide and does not linger as long in the atmosphere, but is a much more potent warming agent.

Scientists believe methane is responsible for roughly 30 percent of the global increase in temperatures despite being a fraction of the greenhouse gas mix.

Ardern has argued that the tax is needed to reach climate targets and could even benefit farmers if they can charge more for climate-friendly meat.

She also signaled a possible willingness to compromise.

"We are out talking to our farmers and food producers as to the best possible design," she told reporters in Auckland.

Bryan McKenzie of protest organizer Groundswell NZ said the tax was "punitive" and "an existential threat to rural communities."

"After years of faux consultation, the government has given up on all pretense of a fair and workable agricultural emissions policy," he added.

While the government hopes the tax would reduce livestock emissions by 20 percent, McKenzie argues that "reductions will be replaced by less efficient foreign farmers."

Urban supporters also joined the protest in some regions, with one sign in the southern city of Dunedin reading "Farming tax affects us all."

In a joint statement, several mayors from New Zealand's remote west coast regions said they "stand strongly in support" of the protest.

Environmentalists argue that protesting farmers are stuck in the mud.

"This country's rural and agricultural sector has been hard hit by floods, intense storms and droughts this year alone," Emily Bailey of Climate Justice Taranaki said. "That cost millions in damages and loads of stress and heartbreak for those losing homes, sheds, stock and fences. ... It's only getting worse."

"Farmers can either adapt and rapidly bring down their emissions or they — and everyone else — will suffer more," she added. **AFP**

Tempo
NEWS IN A FLASH
THE NATION'S FASTEST GROWING NEWSPAPER

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New Zealand farmers protest livestock 'burp and fart' tax

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