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A nationwide calamity state?

> ***Declaring a state of calamity nationwide will allow local government units and NDRRMC to access funds for emergencies with expenditures not subject to audit.***

Calamities have struck the frail Marcos administration right on the solar plexus. It is noteworthy though that President Bongbong Marcos remained firm and steady on his job, he also proved he is on top of the emergencies when he rejected the shady proposal to declare a state of calamity nationwide for a duration of one whole year.

Marcos threw out the proposal of the National Disaster Risk and Reduction and Management Council placing the entire country in a state of calamity. Earlier he made a personal survey of affected areas and likewise received reports from local government units on the impact of tropical storm "Paeng". He came out with an assessment that a state of nationwide calamity is not necessary. The damage is localized, he rightly noted.

We, in Davao Region, just had a whiff of wind and evening drizzle. The same is true with other regions in Mindanao and Visayas.

Declaring a state of calamity nationwide will allow local government units and NDRRMC to access funds for emergencies with expenditures not subject to audit. This is like awarding billions of taxpayers' funds to lotto bettors, the only difference is that this one is done overtly with a shroud of legality by government officials. Giving in to that suggestion would have been a calamitous calamity that would impact the coffers of local government units.

As PBBM pointed out, there was severe destruction in terms of infrastructures and private properties, and loss of lives and livelihood which can run to billions but in several places that were along the path of "Paeng", the damage was not severe. Metro Manila for one was spared.

From what we read and saw on TV coverages, Central and Northern Luzon were pummeled and flooded. It's a good thing that *palay* had been harvested earlier. But rice traders are quick to suggest "we have to import."

Visayas and Mindanao appeared to have escaped the wrath of "Paeng". The unfortunate disaster in Maguindanao caused by mud, rocks, and boulders slides due to non-stop rains was a freak. Several had perished in a place believed to be a safer ground from

SOUTHERN OPTICS
JUN LEDESMA

tsunami, earthquake, and flooding. Several families were relocated there, however, it turned out to be a valley of death. Nobody paid attention to the balding mountain top which had been over-logged years back. There were towns in North Cotabato that were flooded like Pigkawayan but again the barangays affected are too few to mention. This brings us back to one simple mitigating solution: massive reforestation, not along highways but, in watershed areas. Bamboos, like what former Agriculture Secretary Manny Piñol suggested, are perfect along slopes and riverbanks. Easy to propagate, faster to grow, multiply fast, and can be processed into various industrial products.

Our problem though is with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. In Davao del Norte and Davao de Oro, flagrant illegal logging had been taking place. A team dispatched by DENR head office caught the suspects red-handed but nothing happened after they turned over the case to their regional office. We do not even know where the impounded logs and logging trucks are now. Everything had been buried deep in oblivion.

> ***We do not even know where the impounded logs and logging trucks are now. Everything had been buried deep in oblivion.***

Again, PBBM is correct in saying that the causes of floods should be addressed. Riverbeds, like those of Marikina and Pasig, have to be desilted and if necessary widened. In Davao City, for example, some subdivisions get flooded when heavy rainfall happens upstream. In 2011, the worst flood disaster struck with incessant rains taking place in the middle of the night. Rambling flood water inundated houses along the narrow and shallow riverbanks. Thirty-one victims died during the incident.

Later the Department of Public Works and Highways promised to dispatch dredging equipment to Davao City to desilt the riverbeds. Up to now, however, the machine has not arrived.

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EDITORIAL

A member of the PPI Philippine Press Institute
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Probe on pricey laptops ends

IN the past 19th Congress, the Senate Committee on Government Accountability which is more popularly known as the Blue Ribbon Committee had been a venue for bombastic revelations and searing inquisition, but the Senate as a whole had been remiss in passing relevant legislation coming out from these investigations.

The Blue Ribbon panel is now under its new chairman, Sen. Francis Tolentino, who implemented various procedural reforms and has made a dent in the conduct of official inquiry.

The result is a faster and more productive public investigation, which we saw in the panel's recent probe on the sugar importation mess that involved key officials of Malacañang and the Department of Agriculture which President Bongbong Marcos heads.

'There was no browbeating here, just plain and simple documents Tolentino produced before the committee…'

A second issue handled by the Blue Ribbon Committee is the controversial purchase by the Department of Education (DepEd) and Procurement Service of the Department of Budget and Management (PS-DBM) of slow and overpriced laptops which were distributed to teachers for their online or hybrid teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

After several hearings, Tolentino's committee has established that the laptops supplied to public school teachers (Dell Latitude 3420 BTX) cost around P27,000 from its source in China but were bought by the Department of Education for about P58,300 apiece, or a markup of nearly 50 percent.

There was no browbeating here, just plain and simple documents Tolentino produced before the committee, saying he did not want to reveal this information but was compelled to after lawyer Bong Bernas of VST Tecs Philippines Inc. tried to justify the price of the laptops supplied to the DepEd during the presentation of the Commission on Audit findings on the "pricey and outdated laptops."

Tolentino terminated the hearing after five meetings and said any resource person who felt alluded to during the inquiries but were not given the chance to refute them will be given a chance to submit a memorandum to the committee, with the assistance of their legal counsel, to rebut the allegations. He gave them until today, November 4, to submit the memorandum.

Senator Tolentino promised that on November 19, he will come up with a committee report. His leadership in the Blue Ribbon Committee could be cited for accomplishing some results without the customary bulldozing and intimidation.

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GOTCHA

JARIUS BONDOC

Can Marcos push away politicos from rice policy?

"Science shall shape policies and programs," Bongbong Marcos defines his presidency and agriculture secretaryship. "Science provides us answers to the future." That should inspire Filipino students who always flunk international Science, Math and Reading Comprehension tests. With Marcos as role model, youths can embrace technology, not partying.

Marcos cannot stray. Palay farming suffers from backward thinking and methods. Imported machinery and fertilizer drive up costs. Typhoons add to losses.

Visiting his mother's Leyte home-province last month, Marcos could have dropped by the country's most modern rice facility. Rachel and Patrick Renucci's Chen Yi Agventures is in Alangalang town, in the congressional district of Marcos' cousin Speaker Martin Romualdez.

Renucci rice is the world's third best. Four thousand farmers depend on the Renuccis' ten harrower-harvester-thresher combines, five high-speed dryer-millers and five controlled-temp silos. They are taught tillering, natural fertilizing and marketing.

"We're begging to be replicated countrywide," Makati-born Rachel says. Congress recently made Frenchman Patrick a Filipino citizen. Within three years of their operations, Alangalang rose from fourth- to second-class municipality, now with hotels, a mall and Jollibee.

Marcos proceeded to Ormoc City fiesta, then inaugurated in Tacloban the new lights of San Juanico bridge to Samar. It was hyped as the "bridge of love", a 1973 birthday gift of Marcos' father president Ferdinand Marcos Sr. to first lady Imelda Romualdez. He skipped Alangalang, a mere 15-minute chopper hop from either destination. Not even a short plant tour.

Rodante Marcoleta, among Marcos' senatorial bets last May, ranted. San Juanico's "aesthetic lighting" cost P80 million. Leyte-Samar agribusinesses reel from pricey electricity. "Half of Filipino families rate themselves poor due to burdensome electricity bills," Marcoleta lamented, "yet we initiate this tourist attraction that would use loads of electricity."

Rice is a political crop. Politicians worsen things meddling in rice policy.

Example is the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Program. Congress clustered the 83 provinces into 15 each, then assigned what palay seedling variety to be given free to farmers. Disregarded were years of seed matching with soil and irrigation type. High-yield hybrids were limited to only 15 provinces. Depending on brands, inbred varieties were allocated to other clusters.

Lawmakers reasoned that hybrid seeds cost two-and-a-half times more than inbred. They ignored that hybrid harvest is three-and-a-half times more.

Ex-agriculture chief Manny Piñol discussed it after Senate committee chair Cynthia Villar nixed hybrid seeds. "Should a senator dictate what rice seeds to plant?" he posted on Facebook. "*Mahal daw ang* hybrid at P3,500 per bag compared to P1,200 per bag of inbred seeds or a savings of P2,300. *Hindi nila naisip na kung aani ng* ten tons *ang* hybrid *at* six tons *ang* inbred, *sa presyong* P14 per kilo, *kikita ang* hybrid farmer *ng* P140,000 *samantalang ang nagtanim ng* inbred *ay kikita lamang ng* P84,000.

"That's a difference of P56,000. *At hindi ito inabot ng* inbred rice farmer *dahil nagtipid sya ng* P2,300. *Ano ba ang* objective *ng* Rice Program? Isn't it to increase production?"

Hybrid costs more because of research and development, SL Agritech founder Henry Lim Bon Liong explained to *GOTCHA*. But farmers and government seed procurers actually get a bargain. Only 15 kilos of hybrid seeds are needed per hectare, compared to 40 kilos of inbred. Hybrids are spaced wider apart because of better tillering: stalks are more and thicker, leaves lusher and grains more abundant.

Henry's rice is tasty, aromatic and clean. The Filipino Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry chairman gives away tens of thousands bucketfuls every year to poor families.

Henry produces four hybrid variants, suitable for irrigated, rain-fed, humid and cool fields. All are virus resistant. All can more than triple harvests, Nueva Ecija farmer Danilo Bolos said. Like industrious-scientific Japanese rice planters, he drives an SUV.

William Dar, immediate past agri boss, boosted palay yields and hectarage. In 2019 it was 18.81 million tons from 4.65 million hectares. In 2020, 19.4 million tons from 4.73 million hectares. In 2021, 19.96 million tons from 4.74 million hectares.

Dr. Frisco Malabanan attributed the feat to hybrid. He has computations and graphs to show for it, as Dar's adviser on hybrid and Henry's technical consultant.

A former undersecretary, Malabanan acknowledged the country has yet to achieve rice self-sufficiency. In 2005 government imported the 1.5-million ton shortage; imports rose to 1.8 million tons in 2010, 2 million tons in 2013, and now 3 million tons this 2022. If hybrid is introduced nationwide instead of limited to 15 provinces, rice harvest can finally catch up with demand, Malabanan said.

Marcos might want to study hybrid science for his rice policies.

* * *

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A detached presidency?

DEMAND AND SUPPLY

BOO CHANCO

We really, in all honesty, should have very low expectations of Junior in terms of his management style. He has never managed anything in his life.

He was governor of Ilocos Norte, but he was not the hands-on governor that his sister Imee was. He was lucky to have capable subordinates who managed the province when he was governor.

For those of us with some managerial experience, we know during emergencies, there is nothing better than being right there and getting your hands dirty with the situation on the ground. Delegation is fine, but not while you are still new to the job.

Junior tried delegating early to his then executive secretary and press secretary, and both subordinates crashed in flames. Junior delegated duties at the agriculture department to a respected expert, but it also failed because Junior was not clear how much authority he was willing to delegate.

When still on OJT, like Junior is now, it is best that he spends a lot of time learning the ropes, specially in key departments like agriculture, where he didn't name a Cabinet member to take charge. Sure, technology helps, but I doubt management by Zoom is as effective as face-to-face management in times of crisis, like typhoons or that sugar shortage.

Then again, it was obvious from the start that Junior only wanted the honor and the power of the presidency. He isn't exactly in love with the amount of work being president requires.

In other words, Junior would have been alright as a ceremonial or figurehead king. Those who voted for him must have known Junior's aversion to hard work, but voted for him anyway to deliver whatever message to the rest of us.

Unfortunately for Junior, being president of the Philippines is backbreaking work. FVR and GMA were the most hardworking of our recent presidents. Erap winged it over two years. PNoy worked hard, but was aloof. Duterte cursed his way through six years, as he overslept daily, and left management to a capable guy like Sonny Dominguez.

Perhaps we need a parliamentary system with a working prime minister and a symbolic president like in Singapore. The prime minister can rise from the ranks through sheer talent and accomplishments. The president can focus on looking pretty, as he or she receives the credentials of newly-appointed ambassadors, and then sleep the rest of the time or attend F1 races.

Jimmy Morelos, a friend in an egroup, observed that we love to put down our own country by voting the wrong person for president.

"And this is probably one of the reasons why we were left behind by other countries here in Southeast Asia when we used to be at the top of the heap in this region.

"We elect presidents without understanding that the presidency is a MANAGEMENT POSITION and we should elect a president who has a long track record of managing large enterprises if we want to progress.

"Singapore is one of the richest countries in the world based on per capita income because of good management by their government. They get the best and the brightest from the private sector and pay them higher salaries than what they will get in the private sector…

"Lee Kwan Yu told N.R. Murthy, the founder of Infosys, one of the biggest IT companies in India, that he should have been the prime minister of India and that India would probably progress rapidly under Murthy. Murthy, one of the richest men in India, is also the father-in-law of Rishi Sunak, the newly elected prime minister of Great Britain.

"India has some of the best scientists and top executives who run some of the biggest companies in the world. But the country, just like the Philippines, is run by people who have NO MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE and India, like the Philippines, has many laws that hinder progress of the country. Both India and the Philippines are poor countries."

Come to think of it, some of the best talkers in many international conferences I have attended are Indians and Filipinos. We are experts in everything. Yet, we are unable to execute good ideas. It took us over 10 years to construct a four-kilometer extension to LRT2 with no right of way problem.

One management strategy Junior must adopt is management-by-walking-around. Junior is new in his job and he has to know how the pieces work together. The best way to do that is to spend time going around and checking on key aspect of running our country.

For instance, we can assume Junior knows next to nothing about agriculture. Yet, he assumed the portfolio. From what we gather, he has visited the department at most twice since he took office. How does he expect to come up to speed very quickly to address a looming food shortage before it becomes a full-blown crisis?

The prospect of having a food crisis is real. A PhilRice study predicts a decline of around 1.3 million MT of palay (unhusked rice) harvest or equivalent to around 700,000 metric tons (MT) of rice this year due to the inadequate fertilizer application.

Increasing world prices of rice and other food commodities, as well as rising food nationalism, may make importing the food we need not as easy as before.

Does Junior have a plan? Do they still have enough time to fully respond to the problem? *Bahala na!*

What we now have is a detached presidency. If we only listened to Junior's father who wrote in his diary: "Bongbong is our principal worry. He is too carefree and lazy."

Junior's father concluded: "The boy must realize his weakness – the carefree wayward ways that may have been bred in him."

During the typhoon weekend, Junior did not have to be out there distributing relief goods. But he must reassure people he knows what is going on while the crisis is going on. He cannot just disappear.

A belated Zoom meeting from a kitchen table doesn't count. A leader must show some heart… show that the lives of people he is responsible for are important.

Boo Chanco's email address is *bchanco@gmail.com*. Follow

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'Paeng' death toll hits 150; damage to infra at P2B

The death toll from Severe Tropical Storm "Paeng" (international name: Nalgae), which triggered flooding and landslides across the archipelago last week, has reached 150, disaster officials said on Thursday, as more rain was forecast in some of the hardest-hit areas.

Of the 150 deaths recorded by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), 63 were in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

At least 128 people were injured and 36 are still missing across the country, the agency said. Authorities have warned there is no hope of finding more survivors. ***(See related story in Regions, Page A6.)***

More rains

With more rain forecast on Thursday, disaster agencies in Bangsamoro were preparing for the possibility of further destruction in the poor and mountainous region.

"The soil is still wet in areas where flash floods and landslides occurred so further erosion could be instantly triggered," said BARMM Interior Minister Naguib Sinarimbo.

"Waterways and rivers that were in the path of the flash floods are blocked by debris and boulders so they could easily overflow."

President Marcos has blamed deforestation and climate change for the devastating landslides in Bangsamoro.

He has urged local authorities to plant trees on denuded mountains.

"That's one thing that we need to do," Mr. Marcos told a briefing this week.

"We have been hearing this over and over again, but we still continue cutting trees. That's what happens, landslides like that happen."

29 more deaths

Mr. Marcos has declared a state of calamity for six months in the worst-affected regions, freeing up funds for relief efforts.

From 121 on Wednesday, the NDRRMC confirmed 29 more storm-related deaths on Thursday.

Disaster management officials reported 33 died in the Calabarzon region (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon) and 29 in Western Visayas.

Of the 4 million affected individuals, 1.2 million were still listed as displaced or had yet to return to or rebuild their homes.

Some 15,000 houses worth P17.2 million were damaged, the NDRRMC also reported.

Agricultural losses stood at P2.4 billion, covering 69,260 hectares of damaged crops and affecting the livelihood of around 60,000 farmers.

Electricity has been restored in 200 areas, but power supply in 150 towns and cities nationwide has yet to normalize. At least 38 areas were still without mobile phone signal.

On Wednesday, Mr. Marcos placed BARMM, Calabarzon, Western Visayas and Bicol regions under a state of calamity, enforcing a price freeze on basic commodities in these areas. ***(See related story on A5.)***

DPWH report

Also on Thursday, the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) estimated the damage to public infrastructure initially at P2.09 billion.

Damage to public roads was at P917.80 million; bridges, P523.80 million; flood-control structures, P652.76 million.

Twelve regions suffered infrastructure losses, but Calabarzon sustained the most at P967.09 million, followed by Cordillera Administrative Region at P227.02 million, and BARMM at P200 million.

Ilocos Region recorded losses at P58.40 million; Cagayan Valley, P61.03 million; Central Luzon, P54.50 million; Mimaropa, P130.40 million; Bicol, P74.83 million; Western Visayas, P150.41 million; Central Visayas, P8 million; Eastern Visayas, P60 million; and Soccsksargen, P102.68 million.

—REPORTS FROM ANGEL YABUT, FRANCES MANGOSING AND AFP INQ

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

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INFRA IS KEY: FOOD SECURITY NOT JUST IN GARDENS, DRIVES

THE country needs more than urban gardens and educational campaigns to attain food security, and infrastructure is a key factor as well, according to a researcher from the state-owned Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS).

PIDS Supervising Research Specialist Ivory Myka Galang said the food security plan of the Department of Agriculture (DA) is anchored on promoting home or urban gardening and developing prepackaged nutritious products.

Galang also said the framework includes educational campaigns such as the Pinggang Pinoy seal and school-based nutrition programs such as supplementary feeding to attain food security. More needs to be done to attain food security.

"Infrastructure plays a big role in determining the cost of food. Food, especially perishables, is sensitive to temperature and proper handling. If the food is damaged during transport due to uneven roads or substandard storage facilities, the likelihood of food wastage increases. This will cause food prices to also increase," Galang expounded in Filipino.

SEE "INFRA," A2

Galang emphasized that it is important to look at food security from a systems view since transport and food sector infrastructure affect food availability and people's access to food.

She added that food systems are connected to transport, energy, health, and other systems. Addressing food security, Galang added, is a must as it directly contributes to the higher goal of nutrition security.

"Still, the country stands a chance at realizing food security as evidenced by the collaboration of government agencies and other sectors to provide short-term and long-term solutions," Galang said.

Based on the World Food Summit definition, Galang said food security could be attained if the availability of food supply, physical and economic accessibility, utilization (food consumption, safety, and quality), and price and volume stability were ensured.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority showed that while the Philippines has a 100-percent self-sufficiency ratio (SSR) or the ability to produce to meet domestic demand, its rice, pork, and chicken SSR decreased to 90 percent.

The SSR of tuna and galunggong or round scad was also reduced in recent decades to 90 and 80 percent, respectively.

However, the number of moderately or severely food-insecure Filipino households increased from 43 to 62 percent during the Covid-19 pandemic, based on Department of Science and Technology-Food and Nutrition Research Institute (DOST-FNRI) data.

The Philippines dropped to 67th out of 113 countries in the Global Food Security Index Rating in 2022.

Cai U. Ordinario

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Bill includes part of Benham Rise in list of protected areas

A SENIOR lawmaker is asking Congress to declare a large part of the Philippine Rise, a vast undersea region east of Luzon, as a protected area (PA) so it could be managed and explored for its marine resources.

In House Bill 5687, Cagayan de Oro City Rep. Rufus Rodriguez proposed that the area known as Benham Bank and its neighboring waters, be designated as a PA to be known as Philippine Rise Marine Resource Reserve under the Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System Law.

The bill indicates the geographic coordinates of Benham Bank, which is composed of 352,390 hectares. The Philippine Rise is believed to be more than 24 million hectares.

Rodriguez said most of Philippine Rise, including Benham Bank, is within the country's 200-mile exclusive economic zone.

He said while the undersea region is 3,000 to 3,500 meters beneath the ocean's surface, Benham Bank, the tallest seamount, is lying just 48-70 meters below the sea.

An all-Filipino group of research scientists discovered the proposed protected marine resource reserve in 2014, along with its diverse habitats and fish communities, he said.

He added that Filipinos actually do fishing activities in the area, "but the state of its habitats and biodiversity must be closely monitored to ensure the sustainability of the resources therein."

"Monitoring and maintaining the high biodiversity and near pristine habitats in the Philippine Rise Marine Resource Reserve will contribute to sustainable fisheries productivity and ecosystem services for present and future generations of Filipinos," Rodriguez stressed.

He noted that at present, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), Philippine National Police Maritime Group, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) are patrolling the area, protecting Filipino fishermen and enforcing fisheries laws.

He said aside from designating Benham Bank as a protected area, his bill would provide additional funds for these agencies.

"Most importantly, passing the bill is an exercise of Philippine sovereignty over our waters and the resources therein," he said.

Under the measure, a Philippine Rise Marine Resource Protected Area Management Board would be created as the policy-making body for the management of Benham Bank.

The board is to be composed of the secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR); the chairpersons of the Senate Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change and the House Committee on Natural Resources and representatives from BFAR, National Economic and Development Authority, Department of Science and Technology, Department of National Defense-Office of Civil Defense, PNP Maritime Group, National Security Council, National Coast Watch Council Secretariat, Department of Foreign Affairs Maritime and Ocean Affairs Office, AFP, and PCG.

Four representatives from non-government organizations accredited by the DENR, four from academic institutions and one from the private fishing sector would also sit in the board.

The bill enumerates prohibited activities in the proposed protected area, including poaching, dumping of toxic waste, use of destructive gears, and hindering law enforcement.

Proposed penalties for violators include fines of up to P5 million and imprisonment of up to six years.

Jovee Marie N. Dela Cruz

BusinessWorld

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Sugar repricing awaiting outcome of talks; DA may consider SRP range of P85-90/kg

THE new suggested retail price (SRP) for sugar has not yet been set pending the completion of consultations, though the Department of Agriculture (DA) cited a possible range of P85-90 per kilogram.

"*Pagdating sa presyo, hindi pa po tayo naglalabas ng* SRP *sa* refined sugar. *Meron pong* stakeholders meeting *na nagaganap ang* Sugar Regulatory Association (SRA) *ay nakikipag-ugnayan sa kanilang* traders, planters, and millers. (In terms of pricing, we are not yet releasing an SRP for refined sugar. The SRA is still consulting traders, planters and millers) Once we come up with a price (of around) P85 to P90 per kilogram (/kg), *iyan ang presyong tinitignan ngayon* (that is the price range being looked at now), then we can suggest an SRP," Agriculture Assistant Secretary Kristine Y. Evangelista said in a Laging Handa briefing on Thursday.

"We've monitored *na merong* effect *iyong nakaraang bagyo sa ating* sugar millers and planters. (We have monitored the impact of the latest storm on millers and planters) We are closely coordinating with SRA *kung ano ang epekto nito* (how this has affected) the volume of production," she added.

Recently, the United Sugar Producers Federation asked President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. to intervene in order to increase the retail price of sugar charged by major supermarkets to P85 to P90/kg from the current price of P70/kg.

In August, major supermarkets reached an agreement with Mr. Marcos to sell sugar at P70/kg.

Separately, Trade Assistant Secretary Ann Claire C. Cabochan said prices charged by retailers for basic necessities and prime commodities in areas affected by Tropical Storm Paeng (international name: Nalgae) have been stable, following monitoring conducted by the regional offices of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Ms. Cabochan added that the price of some ingredients needed for the traditional holiday meal, known as Noche Buena, will increase. She did not specify the products.

"The manufacturers told us that they will implement price increases in certain Noche Buena products, but not all. If there are increases, they will be tempered," Ms. Cabochan said.

The DA estimated late Thursday afternoon that agricultural damage caused by Paeng amounted to P2.86 billion. Lost production was estimated at 116,291 MT across 86,574 hectares of farmland. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

Daily Tribune
WITHOUT FEAR ▫ WITHOUT FAVOR

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'Paeng' leaves P2.8B in damaged infra

BY LADE KABAGANI, JOM GARNER AND TIZIANA CELINE PIATOS

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council yesterday pegged at P2,833,910,844 the cost of damages to national roads, bridges and flood-control structures caused by severe tropical storm "Paeng." It added that damage to agriculture was at P2,441,329,786.

Some 172 roads and 94 bridges have remained not passable following the heavy flooding and rain-induced landslides by "Paeng" which left the Philippine area of responsibility Monday.

Likewise, communication lines in 154 areas were yet to be restored while nine areas were still experiencing water supply interruption as of press time. A total of 12,968 houses were partially destroyed and 2,194 totally damaged by the typhoon.

NDRRMC spokesperson Raffy Alejandro IV said 94 deaths had been confirmed and 54 other reported deaths were under validation.

Prices of agricultural commodities have increased due to "Paeng," the Department of Agriculture reported Thursday.

DA spokesperson and Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista said the lower agricultural volume being delivered to trading posts across the country due to damaged roads has affected the retail prices in Metro Manila.

Price monitoring

"Based on our monitoring, the retail prices of vegetables increased by P20, P30, P40 (per kilo). The lowest was P10 (per kilo)," Evangelista said.

Price monitoring of the DA showed that the retail prices of Baguio beans ranged from P120 to P150 per kilo; cabbage, P100 to P150/kilo; calamansi, P80 to P150/kilo; carrots, P100 to P200/kilo; eggplant, P100 to P160/kilo; and *pechay*, P90 to P140/kilo.

Evangelista said the prices of vegetables in the wet markets would decrease once the volume of vegetables in the trading posts normalizes.

Meanwhile, Senate President Juan Miguel "Migz" Zubiri said the impact of "Paeng" will be discussed during the scheduled deliberation of the P5.268-trillion budget for 2023 next week.

"'Paeng' will figure largely in our budget deliberations, once they start in the Senate next week. We will have to consult with the NDRRMC and local governments to assess our recovery roadmap," Zubiri said after heading to Mindanao to donate relief to the local governments of affected provinces and cities.

"Mindanao will be needing sustained aid after 'Paeng,'" he continued. "We're here to deliver some relief goods for now, to make sure our affected communities don't go hungry. And it is good to see so many private citizens doing the same. It really shows the heart of our people."

Zubiri underscored the need to push for long-term solutions after the death toll due to Paeng climbed to 150.

"We cannot continue to be reactive when it comes to disaster management, especially since there are lives at stake. We keep learning this the hard way. We have already lost over a hundred lives to 'Paeng,'" he stressed.

The remarks came a day after Senator Juan Edgardo "Sonny" Angara, chair of the Senate Committee on Finance, said the panel is open to adjusting the funding for calamity aids under the proposed 2023 national budget.

Angara said the calamity fund for the 2023 budget will be roughly P30 billion, which is larger than in past years.

"Given the increased frequency and magnitude of recent typhoons, this is appropriate," he said.

"Certainly the committee will always be open to changes that may help our people during these difficult times and which will improve the government's response to these calamities," he added. *@tribunephl_Lade @tribunephl_jom*

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Tech-based tact pushed to attain food security

DESPITE significant challenges, the Philippines can still attain food security using a technology-enabled systems-based approach, according to a study of the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS).

The study proposed a multi-sectoral national food and nutrition plan that targets all while prioritizing people most in need.

In the study published last June said discussing food security is a must for the government as it directly contributes to the higher goal of nutrition security.

Citing the World Food Summit definition, the study said food security could be attained if the availability of food supply, physical and economic accessibility, utilization through food consumption, safety and quality as well as price and volume stability are ensured.

Citing data from the Philippine Statistics Authority, the research said even if most of the key agricultural commodities have a 100-percent self-sufficiency ratio (SSR) or the ability to produce to meet domestic demand, the country's rice, pork and chicken SSR decreased to 90 percent. SSR for tuna and galunggong declined to 90 and 80 percent, respectively.

"Infrastructure plays a big role in determining the cost of food. Food, especially perishables, is

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TECH-BASED

sensitive to temperature and proper handling. If the food is damaged during transport due to uneven roads or substandard storage facilities, the likelihood of food wastage increases. This will cause food prices to also increase," the study authored by Ivory Myka Galang, PIDS supervising research specialist.

The research said at present, the food security framework of the Department of Agriculture encapsulates the government's campaign on food security as it is supported by various agencies and local government units with various programs and initiatives, including promoting home or urban gardening, developing prepackaged nutritious products, educational campaigns and school-based nutrition programs.

However, Galang emphasized the importance of using a systems view in addressing food security challenges since the sector is connected to transport, energy, health and other systems.

Other immediate issues that need to be resolved based on the research include increasing agriculture yield to ensure domestic food demands, addressing the issue of land conversion for residential and commercial development, helping smallholders increase their crop yield, keeping farming and food production costs low and improving the roads and the transport system.

Based on data from the Department of Science and Technology-Food and Nutrition Research Institute, the number of moderately or severely food-insecure Filipino households increased from 43 to 62 percent during the pandemic.

The Philippines also dropped to 67th out of 113 countries in the Global Food Security Index Rating in 2022 from the 64th spot in 2021.

-Jed Macapagal

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Paeng damage nears P5B

BY JED MACAPAGAL AND MYLA IGLESIAS

DAMAGE sustained by the country due to tropical storm Paeng has reached P4.8 billion, combined figures from the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) showed.

DA figures showed damage to agricultural products stood at P2.74 billion while DPWH statistics revealed damage to national roads, bridges and flood-control structures has reached P2.09 billion.

According to a report from the DPWH Bureau of Maintenance, the total cost of damage, subject to field validation, on national roads stood at P917.80 million; national

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bridges, P523.80 million; and on flood control structures, P652.76 million.

By location, Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) had incurred P227.02 million in infrastructure damage; Ilocos Region, P58.40 million; Cagayan Valley, P61.03 million; Central Luzon, P54.50 million; Calabazon, P967.09 million; Mimaropa, P130.40 million; Bicol Region, P74.83 million; Western Visayas, P150.41 million; Central Visayas, P8 million; Eastern Visayas, P60 million; Soccsksargen, P102.68 million; and Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), P200 million.

As of November 3, DPWH said, 24 road sections in CAR, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabazon, Western Visayas, Eastern Visayas, Soccsksargen and BARMM are still closed to traffic due to damaged pavement/slope protection, road cut, collapsed bridge, damaged bridge approach, flooding and fallen debris, among others.

Of the total 24 road sections, 12 are located in Luzon, six in Visayas and six in Mindanao areas.

DPWH said its quick response teams are expediting the clearing operations along remaining closed roads, while ensuring warning signs and barricades are installed for the public's safety.

Despite the agricultural damage caused by severe tropical storm Paeng, hit P2.74 billion.

At the Laging Handa public briefing yesterday, DA assistant secretary Kristine Evangelista said the agency noted lower volume of arrivals of agricultural goods from trading posts to Metro Manila markets mainly due to logistical challenges.

"Based on reports we gathered from regions, the volume of products being brought to trading posts slightly decreased because of (issues with) roads. With that, we are working closely with local government units and hopefully, both volume and prices will go back to pre-typhoon levels as it will also help us stabilize prices of agri commodities when it comes to retail," Evangelista said.

Based on the DA's Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Operations Center bulletin as of 5 p.m. of November 2, Paeng's total cost of damage is equivalent to 111,831 metric tons of goods tended by 74,944 farmers and fisherfolk in 82,380 hectares (ha) of affected areas.

The monitoring captured data from the Cordillera Administrative Region, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Western Visayas, Eastern Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Central Mindanao and Soccsksargen.

Bulk of Paeng's recorded damage is on rice at P1.71 billion; followed by high value crops at P555.4 million; fisheries, P201.64 million; corn, P135.4 million; agricultural infrastructure, P133 million; livestock and poultry, P9.49 million and; machineries and equipment at P235,000.

Evangelista said the DA's current interventions include the provisions of rice, corn and assorted vegetable seeds, biologics for livestock and poultry, fingerlings and fishing paraphernalia. She said loans and crop insurance claims are available.

The DA's announcement supports fisherfolks led by ugon Kabuhayan's claims that local fish supply remains stable and that there is no need to flood the local market with imported fish.

"We want the government to know that our industry remains resilient regardless of the strong winds, rain and flooding. Despite Paeng affecting many fish producers, it did not hinder our production. We can still supply the whole country without importing fish. Don't use this calamity as a reason to justify importation. Support our local producers first before turning to other countries for fish," said Mario Balazon, director of the Taal Lake Aquaculture Alliance Inc. in a statement.

Jon Juico, president of the Philippine Tilapia Association, agreed with Balazon, saying that last year, prices of bangus and tilapia plummeted because of importation that forced local producers to sell at P60 to P70 per kg while the cost of production was at P90 per kg.

Norbert Chingcuanco, Tugon Kabuhayan co-convenor, said shortage of fish in the Philippines is unlikely.

"When fish from aquaculture cages escape, the municipal fishermen catch those fish. It doesn't disappear. Our fishing industry is robust and we can always fulfill the demand. There is no need to import," Chingcuanco said.

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Hearing on tariff cuts on pork, other commodities set Nov 9

THE Tariff Commission will conduct a public hearing next week on a request to extend until next year the validity of Executive Order (EO) 171 series of 2022 which lowered most favored nation tariff rates on pork, corn, rice and coal.

In a notice posted on its website, the commission said the hearing will be conducted on November 9 but interested parties may send their evidences and supporting statements until November 16.

Stakeholders have clamored for the extension, saying the original basis for reducing tariff on said items remain relevant to date.

Tariff rates for these commodities are set to return to their higher rates by next year.

EO 171 cut the duty rates on pork for in quota shipments to 15 percent and for out quota shipments 20 percent to until the end of the year. The rates will revert to 30 percent and 40 percent, respectively, by next year if the EO is not extended.

EO 171 also lowered tariffs of in quota and out quota rice to 35 percent from 40 percent and 50 percent, respectively, while tariff for coal was temporarily removed.

EO 171 lowered tariff of corn to 5 percent for in quota from 35 percent and to 15 percent for out quota from 50 percent.

Based on data from the Department of Agriculture's Bantay Presyo monitoring of markets in Metro Manila, as of yesterday, the prevailing price of kasim is at P300 per kg while liempo is at P370 per kg.

Imported rice special variety is at P50 per kg; premium at P45 per kg; well-milled at P41 per kg; and regular milled at P38 per kg.

Local rice special variety is at P50 per kg; premium at P45 per kg; well-milled at P40 per kg; and regular milled at P38 per kg. - ***Jed Macapagal***

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Why Philippine agriculture remains undeveloped

Second of two parts

PART 1 of this column argued that overregulation of our agriculture sector is the key reason why its development has been stymied.

Among the regulations that stifled the growth of our countryside are the following: the prolonged implementation of the agrarian reform program which resulted in miniscule farm sizes and prevented the attainment of economies of scale in production; the decentralization law that mandated local government units (LGUs) to lead in the development of our agriculture sector, a function most of them never took seriously; and the protracted protection of the sector through high tariffs on agricultural imports or imposition of non-tariff barriers to prevent the entry of imported agriculture products. This had the effect of discouraging local producers from enhancing their productivity, innovating and becoming competitive because they were assured of high prices.

Two additional impediments to agricultural development are discussed below.

Leadership discontinuity

Agriculture takes time to bear positive results because it is subject to the workings of nature. It takes almost four months before *palay* (unmilled rice) can be harvested, at least six to seven months (after birth) before a hog can be sold and slaughtered, seven months for sugar to be harvested and at least five years for mango or coconut trees to bear fruits, among others.

On the other hand, leadership changes in the Department of Agriculture (DA) happen almost every two years. Thus, whatever excellent plans or programs the previous DA head had will most likely be replaced by the new appointee. Consequently, there is no continuity of activities which, in turn, is detrimental to agricultural development because of the medium- or even long-gestating nature of plants and animals.

To ensure the sector's continued growth, a package of support

FINER POINTS

FERMIN ADRIANO

services must be given to farmers. To modernize an agricultural area, for instance, one must provide the necessary irrigation facilities, farm-to-market roads, drying and cold storage facilities, warehouses, silos and farm machines. The absence of one of these complementary support services will make it difficult for the farmers to reduce costs and produce quality products.

In the Philippines, the absence of an integrated development plan results in LGU officials requesting funding for a certain component of a required assistance package, supposedly to develop their agriculture sector. Some will ask for farm-to-market roads, others will demand warehouses, another irrigation, etc. While these facilities will aid in reelection bids, their provision on an installment basis will not lead to real agricultural growth.

In contrast, Malaysia and Vietnam have a five-year planning process for their agriculture sector and once agreed and approved, they devote a block budget for five years to support the development plan. The scheme also prevents unnecessary political interventions by politicians because projects must follow the technically sound and approved five-year plan.

Anti-development budgeting

A clear indication of the leadership's priorities and a key instrument in regulating an organization's activities is the way the budget is allocated. This is true for the country as well as for an agency like the DA.

Unfortunately, the budget of the department is allocated in a manner wherein the best value for taxpayers' money is not derived. Unlike in the private sector wherein the principle followed is to obtain the highest return on investments or to address the weakest link in the supply chain, this is not followed in the DA budgeting process. Budgetary allocations are mostly based on political considerations.

We derived the following observations on the budgetary allocation of the DA for the period 2015-2020:

– Spending was focused on increasing primary production of cereals through input subsidies. World experience has shown that input subsidies are inefficient and ineffective in raising productivity and competitiveness of the agriculture sector because they only last for one cropping season. Moreover, world experience shows that funding more agriculture public goods, for instance research and development, and irrigation, yields long-lasting immense benefits by increasing productivity and raising incomes of farmers at very modest cost (WB, 2022).

– There was inadequate attention given to the other segments of the value chain (upstream, midstream, secondary production and downstream) as demonstrated by relatively low forward linkages improvement. The underdevelopment of critical value chain infrastructure such as logistics, warehouses and cold chains has resulted in significant output losses: around 30 to 40 percent of total production is lost before it reaches the market (FAO, 2011).

– The Philippines is considered as one of the most vulnerable to climate change and yet the DA's Climate Resilient Agriculture Office (CRAO) has not been institutionalized. Damages to agriculture due to climate change is estimated to be around P23 to P25 billion annually.

– The DA budget is rice-centric because rice is considered a political commodity. On average, more than 50 percent of DA's budget went to the rice sector from 2017 to 2022. This leads in the further neglect of non-rice agricultural commodities.

– As a result of the rice-centric budget, DA's budget is not based on the contributions of the subsectors to gross value added (GVA). Animal

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production (livestock, poultry, dairy, etc.) has the highest share to the GVA of agriculture at 26 percent. However, its budget share is only 12 percent. The DA budget share is also not based on subsectors' contributions to agriculture's growth. The main source of agricultural growth before the African swine fever outbreak and Covid-19 pandemic were non-crop commodities. Budget sharing was also not based on the number of workers by commodity. Agricultural workers largely remain an invisible factor in the Agriculture department's expenditures and programs. Budget sharing is also not based on commodities where the country has a comparative advantage, resulting in low growth of agri-food exports. It is not based on poverty incidence: rice farmers are relatively well off compared to those farming other agricultural commodities. Lastly, the sharing is not based on potential net returns for farmers. High-value crops have larger net profits per hectare compared to palay;

– The DA's regional budget is disproportionate to the region's share to the total GVA of the agriculture sector. Luzon gets the lion's share of 57.5 percent when it only contributes around 47 percent to the total GVA of the sector. In contrast, Mindanao's budget share is only 27 percent when it contributes 35 percent to the total GVA of agriculture.

– The DA's proposed budget in 2023 (P102 billion) significantly increased from an annual average of only P64 billion from 2016 to 2022. The problem, though, is not only the size but the low disbursement rate. From 2010-2021, the DA's average annual disbursement rate was only 65 percent, paling in comparison with other agencies that registered 82 percent.

Given the structural challenges encountered by the agriculture sector, which we elaborated in this two-part column, it is obvious that only a complete overhaul of the DA and the environment by which it operates can save the sector from its downward decline.

Overregulation by the government should be minimized. The private sector must be encouraged to actively participate in agricultural development. Setting the agricultural agenda based on sound economic principles and a solid empirical basis — not politics or ideology — is the only way to save our agriculture sector from the curse of underdevelopment.

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AGRI PRICES IN METRO MANILA UP

THE retail prices of vegetables in Metro Manila markets have risen from P10 to P40 per kilo following the onslaught of Tropical Storm "Paeng."

Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesman Kristine Evangelista on Thursday said the delivery of farm products was also affected because of damaged roads.

Evangelista said that once the flow of vegetables to the trading posts normalizes, the prices of vegetables will go down.

"So we are expecting that from P30 to P40 (per kilo) increase in the retail prices, it will decrease to P10 from P20 (per kilo) until we are back to pre-typhoon prices," she said.

Evangelista supported the statement

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of the farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) President Rosendo So that agriculture supply will normalize within two to three days.

So said there is no shortage of farm produce, but damaged roads are slowing down their delivery.

As of Thursday, per kilo prices of amargoso (bitter gourd) ranged from P120 to P160; string beans from P100 to P160; pechay from P90 to P140; eggplant from P100 to P160; tomatoes from P120 to P160; cabbage from P100 to P150; carrots from P100 to P200; Baguio beans from P120 to P150; potatoes from P100 to P140; red onions from P170 to P200; calamansi from P80 to P150; and refined sugar from P98 to P110.

Evangelista said storm damage to agriculture reached P2.74 billion.

Paeng destroyed at least 111,831 metric tons of agriculture products covering 82,380 hectares of farm areas.

The storm-stricken areas were the Cordillera Administrative Region, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon), Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan), Bicol, Western Visayas, Eastern Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Central Mindanao, and Soccsksargen (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos City).

At least 74,944 farmers and fishers were affected by the storm, Evangelista said.

The affected commodities include rice, corn, high-value crops, fisheries, livestock and poultry.

The Department of Agriculture recorded at least P1.71 billion in damage to rice plantations; P135.4 million to corn farms; P555.4 million to high-value crops; P201.64 million to fisheries; P9.49 million for livestock and poultry; and P133 million to agricultural infrastructure.

Evangelista said rice, corn and assorted vegetable seeds will be distributed to affected farmers, and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources will provide fingerlings and assistance to fisherfolk.

She said loans no less than P25,000 each will be provided to storm victims under the Survival and Recovery Loan Program of the Agricultural Credit Policy Council which is payable in three years and at zero interest.

"Our regional field offices are ready to help our farmers in securing loans that are available as well as interventions and assistance to help our farmers to plant again," Evangelista added.

BELLA CARIASO

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Damage to infra, agri soars to P5.2 billion

BY FRANCIS EARL CUETO

THE National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) said the estimated damage to infrastructure and agriculture from Severe Tropical Storm "Paeng" now stands at P5.2 billion.

It pegged damage to infrastructure at P2,833,910,844.

This covers 367 damaged structures across the country that includes roads, bridges, flood control systems, government, health and utility services facilities and schools.

For agriculture, the estimated cost of damage was P2,442,804,786.

This covers 69,260.74 hectares of crops. An estimated P87,380,252 worth of livestock, poultry and fisheries was also affected.

Meanwhile, 15,162 houses were damaged — 12,968 partially and 2,194 totally.

The NDRRMC said the number of reported deaths has reached 150, with 128 injured and 36 missing.

The storm affected 3,963,555 people from 8,712 villages.

Public Works Secretary Manuel Bonoan said on Thursday that total cost of damage, subject for field validation, on national roads was placed at P917.80 million, P523.80 million on national bridges and P652.76 million on flood control structures for a total of P2.09 billion.

The Cordillera Administrative Region sustained P227.02 million in infrastructure damage, Region 1, P58.40 million; Region 2, P61.03 million; Region 3, P54.50 million; Region 4A P967.09 million; Region 4B P130.40 million; Region 5, P74.83 million; Region 6, P150.41 million; Region 7, P8 million; Region 8, P60 million; Region 12, P102.68 million; and Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, P200 million.

Meanwhile, an official of the Department of Agriculture (DA) on Thursday said that sugar plantations were also affected by Paeng.

During the Laging Handa briefing, Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista said the agency is coordinating with the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) to provide assistance to the local sugar industry.

"We monitored that indeed our sugarcane planters were affected by the typhoon. We are closely coordinating with SRA to determine its effect as far as volume of production is concerned," Evangelista said.

United Federation of Sugar Producers President Manuel Lamata said sugar farmers need help to recover from the damage caused by Paeng.

Lamata sought the intervention of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to raise the suggested retail price of sugar to P85 to P90 per kilo.

He also appealed that the mill gate price of sugar be increased to P3,000 per bag.

"Before the typhoon, mill gate prices were already going down but seeing the damage Paeng wrought, we need the immediate assistance from President Marcos to bring up the retail prices until our farmers will be able to recover," Lamata said.

Based on the monitoring of the DA on Thursday, the retail price of refined sugar ranged from P95 to P110 per kilo.

WILLIAM B. DEPASUPIL AND BELLA CARIASO

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Prices of agri commodities rise amid storm damage

By DANESSA RIVERA

Retail prices of agricultural commodities rose by as much as P30 per kilo due to logistical issues caused by Severe Tropical Storm Paeng, which the Department of Agriculture (DA) is now addressing in coordination with local government units (LGUs).

Prices of vegetables and other farm produce increased by P25 to P30 per kilo, DA Assistant Secretary and spokesperson Kristine Evangelista said during the Laging Handa briefing yesterday.

Based on reports from the DA's regional offices, the price increase was due to the lower volume of produce brought to trading posts before these are transported to Metro Manila.

Evangelista said the problem is

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being addressed with the help of LGUs to stabilize retail prices of agricultural commodities.

"Hopefully, that will go back to the pre-typhoon activities as far as volume and prices are concerned. In the trading posts, we saw higher prices which caused a ripple effect in prices in Metro Manila markets," she said.

Data showed damage to agriculture due to Paeng has reached P2.74 billion.

The storm displaced 79,944 farmers and fishers, with a total volume of production loss at 111,831 metric tons (MT) and 82,380 hectares of agricultural areas.

The Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) urged the DA and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to freeze prices in the provinces and regions that were placed under a state of calamity.

It urged the government to help both producers and consumers.

The state of calamity is raised throughout BARMM, Bicol, Calabarzon, Bicol and Western Visayas.

Although the price freeze on basic commodities is automatic as provided under the Price Act, it is not followed in the market.

The KMP said the expected spike in prices after storm Paeng is alarming.

KMP chairman Danilo Ramos said consumers will not be able to handle the new price increase, especially since the government is not providing enough aid.

The group said the DA's support is not enough for farmers and fishermen to recover from the devastation caused by Paeng.

"In the 2020 pandemic, there was a call for a P15,000 production subsidy for farmers and fishermen. The DA and Congress should consider giving it. There is no end to the calamities and the farmers' debts are piling up," Ramos said.

Supply ensured

The DTI assured the public of adequate supply and availability of basic necessities in areas affected by the storm.

In a statement yesterday, the DTI said that as chairman of the National Price Coordinating Council, it is coordinating with the Philippine Chamber of Food Manufacturers (PCFM) to guarantee timely and constant replenishment of goods particularly in typhoon-affected areas.

The PCFM is composed of manufacturers and retailers of basic necessities and prime commodities.

The DTI said that after the onslaught of Paeng, the agency is continuously conducting intensified monitoring of prices and supply of BNPCs and ensures the submission of daily situational monitoring reports from its provincial and regional offices.

"The prices and supply of basic necessities and prime commodities are generally stable based on the latest nationwide situational report," Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual said.

"We remind businesses and traders to comply with the price freeze on basic necessities in areas under a state of calamity," Pascual said.

Trade Undersecretary Carol Sanchez earlier affirmed that a price freeze on basic necessities is in effect in areas under a statement of calamity. Pascual said establishments found violating the price freeze may be subjected to administrative cases and fines.

"We also encourage consumers to be vigilant and report any violation or incident of overpric-

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ing or hoarding," he said.

The DTI monitors basic necessities under its purview such as canned fish, locally manufactured instant noodles, bottled water, bread, processed milk, coffee, candles, laundry soap, detergent and salt.

Other implementing agencies of the Price Act ensure price stability and availability of supply for the products under their jurisdiction.

The DA is in charge of rice, corn, cooking oil, fresh, dried and other marine products, fresh eggs, fresh pork, beef and poultry meat, fresh milk, fresh vegetables, root crops, sugar and fresh fruits.

The Department of Health takes care of drugs classified as essential.

Under the law, business establishments found to have violated the price freeze will face a penalty of up to 10 years imprisonment or a fine ranging from P5,000 to P1 million, or both depending on the discretion of the court.

The price freeze will be automatically lifted on their end date unless sooner lifted by the President.

The DTI urged consumers to report retailers, distributors and manufacturers that sell basic necessities above the prevailing prices through the One-DTI (1-384) Hotline or email, *ConsumerCare@dti.gov.ph*.

Noche Buena products

As this developed, the DTI has been urging manufacturers of *Noche Buena* products to temper their intended price increases.

"Some manufacturers are planning to increase prices of certain *Noche Buena* products such as ham, *queso de bola*, macaroni salad and fruit cocktail," Undersecretary Sanchez told journalists in a Viber message.

"At this time, the DTI continues to coordinate with manufacturers in a bid to temper any increase," she said.

The DTI is asking manufacturers of Christmas products to implement a maximum of 10 percent price increase only.

In September, DTI Consumer Protection Group Undersecretary Ruth Castelo said the agency had asked manufacturers of these Christmas products to implement a maximum of 10 percent price increase only.

"We hope that this will not exceed (10 percent) so that consumers will not be shocked," she said. Castelo affirmed that around 20 manufacturers of Christmas products have notified the DTI of the price increase in their products.

She said the price increases are acceptable as the DTI does not regulate *Noche Buena* products. She urged manufacturers to keep price increases to a minimum.

"If the increase is around P5 to P7, maybe this is OK, but if it's too big, consumers might have a hard time buying," she said.

Meanwhile, the government has been urged to take a pro-active stance and prioritize food security in light of the calamities' repeated damage to crops and the continued suffering of the people from hunger despite the reopening of the economy.

"As long as hunger numbers do not see major improvements and given global conditions, food security should be on top of President Marcos' priorities, with agriculture and food trade being the most important concerns," Rep. Joey Salceda said.

"I don't see how we are going to have exceptionally good harvests of rice, sugar, and corn next year either, so the situation at least on the domestic front could still be challenging," Salceda added.

– With Catherine Talavera, Delon Porcalla

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Ex-congressman cleared of graft, malversation raps

Former Malabon-Navotas representative Ricky Sandoval has been cleared of graft and technical malversation charges by the Sandiganbayan in connection with his office's allegedly questionable purchase of a shredder worth P3 million.

"For failure of the prosecution to prove the existence of the elements of the crime as charged, it therefore follows that the dismissal of the case is warranted," the anti-graft court's Second Division declared, absolving Sandoval of irregularities.

The decision was approved by Sandiganbayan Justices Oscar Herrera, Michael Frederick Musngi and Arthur Malabaguio.

The court dismissed for lack of evidence the complaints filed against Sandoval and his 10 co-defendants, mostly former officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA) Regional Field Unit IV.

"In both cases (graft and technical malversation), the evidence presented by the prosecution failed to establish the guilt of the defendants," Malabaguio, who wrote the decision, said.

Also cleared of the charges were former DA officials Dennis Araullo, Juvylee Obice, Raymundo Braganza, Lourdes Imperial, Abelardo Bragas, Felix Ramos, Ofelia Montilla, Gregorio Sangalang, Balagtas Torres and Remus Villanueva, president of the shredder supplier LCV Design and Fabrication Corp.

Government prosecutors based the charges on a Commission on Audit report that direct contracting is unlawful because the LCV Design's patent application for the shredder has not yet been approved by the Intellectual Property Office.

The Office of the Special Prosecutor also accused Sandoval and his co-defendants of overpricing on the basis that there were similar shredders in the market at much lower cost.

– Delon Porcalla

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL
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P663-M calamity fund released in October

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

The government released P663 million in calamity fund in October, with the remaining P8.8 billion ready to be tapped for disaster relief operations for the rest of the year.

Latest data from the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) showed that the remaining national disaster risk reduction and management fund, commonly known as the calamity fund, is at P8.79 billion out of the P20.7 billion allocation for 2022.

This was after the DBM released P663 million in October, lower than the P1 billion it disbursed the month before.

The entire P663 million was released to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to replenish the agency's quick response fund (QRF).

Based on the law, first response agencies, such as the DSWD are allocated QRFs in their annual budget. Once the QRF of any agency reaches 50 percent or lower, it can request for replenishment from the DBM.

The QRF is used for the reconstruction, rehabilitation or repair of damaged roads, bridges and buildings, among other disaster-related expenses.

Apart from DSWD, agencies with QRFs are the departments of Agriculture (DA), Education, Health, and Public Works and Highways (DPWH), as well as the Bureau of Fire Protection, Philippine National Police and the Office of Civil Defense.

As of end-October, P11.9 billion had already been released by the DBM, 86 percent or P10.25 billion of which were allocated to national government agencies.

The remaining P1.66 billion spent for calamity funds went to government-owned and controlled corporations.

The DSWD is the top recipient with P3.57 billion, followed by the DPWH with P3.12 billion, and the DA with P2 billion.

With Congress set to resume session on Nov.7, Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri said the chamber would factor in the effect of Severe Tropical Storm Paeng in its deliberations on the proposed P5.268-trillion national budget.

"Paeng will figure largely in our budget deliberations, once they start in the Senate next week. We will have to consult with the NDRRMC and local governments to assess our recovery roadmap," Zubiri said, referring to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

Zubiri was in Mindanao to deliver relief goods to local governments affected by Paeng.

"Indeed, apart from personally handing over our donations, I am also here in Mindanao to hear directly from our local governments – what is the damage like on the ground? What will they need to rebuild and recover? And I will take all the answers back to the Senate when session resumes next week," he added.

"Mindanao will be needing sustained aid after Paeng," he continued. "We're here to deliver some relief goods, for now, to make sure our affected communities don't go hungry. And it is good to see so many private citizens doing the same. It really shows the heart of our people."

But he said the government cannot go on being reactive in responding to calamities.

"But we also need to push for long-term solutions. We cannot continue to be reactive when it comes to disaster management, especially since there are lives at stake. We keep learning this the hard way. We have already lost over a hundred lives to Paeng," he pointed out.

He also said he hopes President Marcos would reconsider his position against the setting up of a separate department in charge of disaster response.

"I mentioned it to the President and the President said 'I don't think we need a new department particularly for disaster management Migz.' I said sir, with due respect, with all the typhoons and calamities that are happening here we just still need a better response team," Zubiri said, recalling a conversation with Marcos a month ago.

"I will again make that pitch to the President and hopefully he listens and we can strengthen our disaster management capabilities," Zubiri said.

He said his proposal is similar to the Federal Emergency Management Agency of the US.

"Now, if we have an agency, the agency will make sure that every LGU is ready and will have a standard of excellence," Zubiri said.

Higher calamity fund

His colleagues, meanwhile, have expressed support for a proposal to increase the calamity fund for 2023, including by slashing allocations for intelligence funding.

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel III said the government must rechannel non-essential projects, activities and programs both in the 2022 General Appropriations Act and the proposed P5.268-trillion national budget for 2023 in order to make available funds for critical programs.

"We must ensure that resources are immediately available and accessible both by the national and local government," Pimentel added. "Let us cut confidential and intelligence funds and rechannel this much-needed allocation to strengthen our disaster response capabilities," he stressed.

"These funds can be used instead to beef up the weather forecasting capabilities of PAGASA, build houses damaged by typhoons and earthquakes, and repair damaged roads and bridges," Pimentel said, referring to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration, the main agency responsible for monitoring typhoons in the country.

Sen. Bong Go also said he is in favor of increasing calamity funds for 2023. "I have no objection to that because it is our duty to immediately help those affected by various calamities so that they can get up again immediately," he said.

Like Go, Pimentel acknowledged the need to pump more funds into the country's aid, relief and rehabilitation programs for the victims of calamities with an average of 20 tropical cyclones a year.

Under the proposed National Expenditures Program for 2023, allocation for calamity fund is P31 billion.

"Given these 20 tropical cyclones a year and the fact that the Philippines is located in the Pacific Ring of Fire, it is imperative to pump more funds into disaster and calamity response and recovery programs," Pimentel said.

"The more important question is how to ensure that this huge fund is used immediately and more correctly," Go, for his part, said. – **With Cecille Suerte Felipe, Roel Pareño**

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
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HIGHER BY P40/KILO FOR SOME TYPES

VEGETABLE PRICES CLIMB IN 'PAENG' AFTERMATH

By Jordeene B. Lagare
@jordeenelagare

Retail prices of certain vegetables in Metro Manila rose by as much as P40 per kilogram after Severe Tropical Storm "Paeng" (international name: Nalgae) ravaged many parts of the Philippines, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said.

The DA observed that vegetable prices have climbed by P10 to P40 per kg as a result of the decline in the volume of agricultural produce shipped to the metropolis, according to Agriculture Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista.

"Prices of vegetables have increased by P25 to P30. The lowest increase was around P10," she said during the government's Laging Handa briefing.

Evangelista said they are expecting the selling price of vegetables in Metro Manila markets to stabilize as the quantity of vegetable products being transported to trading posts have normalized since then.

"From an increase of P30 to P40 in retail prices, we are expecting food prices to decrease by P10 to P20 before reverting to pretyphoon prices," she added.

Bittergourd was sold for P140 per kg as of Thursday, higher than P120 per kg a day ago, according to the DA's price monitoring.

String beans also rose to P120 per kg from P100 per kg. Pechay tagalog and squash were unchanged at P100 per kg and P50 per kg, respectively.

Also, prices of eggplant and tomato remained at P120 per kg each.

White potato retailed for P120 per kg, higher than P110 per kg. The selling price of cabbage fell to P100 per kg from P120 per kg while that of carrot dropped to P140 per kg from P150 per kg.

Pechay baguio and B3

FROM B1 chayote were still at P100 per kg and P50 per kg.

Paeng wiped out P2.74 billion in farm produce as of Wednesday, based on the latest DA tally.

The weather disturbance affected the livelihood of 74,944 farmers and fishers in the regions of Cordillera, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon), Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan), Bicol, Western Visayas, Eastern Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Central Mindanao and Soccsksargen.

The volume of production loss was pegged at 111,831 metric tons covering 82,380 hectares of land.

Rice (P1.71 billion), high-value crops (P555.4 million) and fisheries (P201.64 million) were among the most affected commodities.

The Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), meanwhile, appealed to the DA and the Department of Trade and Industry to strictly implement the price freeze in areas that were put under a state of calamity.

The group likewise appealed for interventions to help agricultural producers and consumers affected by the typhoon as consumers will not be able to afford agricultural goods should prices spike again.

"The KMP is not satisfied with the assistance given by the DA to farmers and fishers affected by the typhoon," it added. INQ

MANILA BULLETIN

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Much corn-sternation in the corn industry

AVANT GARDENER

YVETTE TAN

Many sectors of our agriculture industry are asking for help, and the corn sector is one of them.

"I think the corn industry has been castigated for so many years of neglect," Roger Navarro, president of the Philippine Maize Federation, Inc. (PhilMaize) said during the last PCAFI (Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc.) roundtable. "[With] the Rice Tariffication Law, NFA (National Food Authority) has become rice-centric."

He added that though corn farmers are confident that with proper support, they will be able to meet the demand of the entire country, there seems to still be a reliance on importation. "There are threats that corn tariffs will be reduced to five percent or zero percent," he said in Taglish, though he acceded that this is not without reason, as growers cannot assure the quality of their crop during the wet season harvest.

"We must all remember that there are two season cropping, the wet season crop and the dry season crop. The wet season crop comes in during the months of August, September, and October," he explained. "This is when we have an abundance of corn. We know these months as rainy days, so what farmers do is they harvest, they dry [their crops], and they plant again for the next season. Sixty-five percent of the total harvest of corn is harvested during the wet season crop... The dry season crop, we supply the market for the balance of five months to total to 12 months in a year."

He further explained that despite the wet season crops having to supply 65 percent of the country's total harvest, there aren't enough infrastructures to make this as efficient as it should be. "This is still our cry... we need infrastructure. Dryers. Storage facilities."

And while there is still enough supply of corn for now, increasingly unfavorable policies are making farmers lose interest in the crop. "...farmers' planting intentions are affected by detrimental policies... there is no help from the government for local farmers and yet their battering ram is always importation. If there's a lack, import. There's no helping [the industry] and importing [only when really needed]."

He added that even just the right messaging from the government will be a good start to give farmers enough confidence to continue with their planting intentions.

He appealed to government agencies to focus on building infrastructure to prioritize agriculture. "If you're building skyways, why can't we build post-harvest facilities in corn-producing areas? Because if we can build this, we can guarantee quality corn for the livestock sector. We know that if the corn isn't good, the growth of the livestock sector won't be good, either... This is where it starts."

He also requested an increase in the Department of Agriculture's budget for corn. "Because of the [Russo-Ukranian war], fertilizer prices have gone up. From ₱1,000, it's more than ₱3,000 now. Farmers spend a lot on inputs. Pre-Covid, it was at ₱20 billion. Now, the total needed input is ₱40 billion. But how much budget does the DA give to corn?"

He surmised that the current budget of ₱1.5 billion is not enough, and that if the needed infrastructure is to be built the budget should be at least ₱150 billion. "This means the amount given by the government is not enough for a progressive, developed corn industry... This is why we are saying that post-harvest facilities should be included in the government's build, build, build concept in agriculture."

He ended with a warning, a variation of the refrain that many agricultural sectors have been repeating about the oncoming food crisis, "What we're seeing is the tail. Maybe by next year or by December, we'll see the whole face [of the problem]. As Danny [Fausto, president of the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc.] said, [it is] looming."

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Proposed SRA reforms won't lower sugar prices -- Salceda

By Jester Manalastas

THE proposed reforms on the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) charter cannot address the problems especially on the prices of sugar.

This was the reaction of House Committee on Ways and Means chair Albay Representative Joey Salceda on the recommendations made by the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee Report No. 3, following hearings on the sugar imports issue.

Salceda called the proposed reforms to the charter of the SRA "immaterial to actual sugar prices and supply" as the agency issued a Memorandum Circular seeking comments on the Senate recommendations.

"The recommendations might or might not be good. Some of them make sense, although not urgently. But, I can definitively tell you that they will do nothing of immediate consequence to address ongoing sugar supply or price issues," Salceda said.

The recommendations include "incorporating transparency and accountability" provisions in the process of issuing import permits and other critical issuances, including the SRA's audit processes, procedures and public consultations.

The proposal also adds expanding the membership of the SRA Board from two to eight members with additional members coming from the following sectors: industrial and household consumers, sugar industry workers, sugar transportation sector workers, other relevant stakeholders.

It also seeks to prohibit the SRA board from "delegating its authority to reclassify sugar,"

"It might make sense to include more consumer representation in the SRA board, but they'll keep getting outvoted anyway, if the basis of import orders is still arbitrary. The question should be simple for the SRA board: Is there a sugar shortage or not? And have we no other immediate recourse but to import? Those are yes-or-no questions. They need technical answers," Salceda said.

Salceda added that the proposals "do not address the urgent problems of consumers or industrial users."

Refined sugar is now up to P120 per kilo. Industrial users have 4-5 days' worth of inventory, and several bottling plants have ceased or downscaled operations.

Instead, the solon proposes more sweeping changes to the SRA's rules, "so that pressing issues are addressed without delay."

First, the stakeholders should have the right to call the SRA board into a meeting as often as once-a-month on top of their regular meetings. If the industrial inventories or consumer prices are in trouble, their representatives have a 'golden buzzer' to call for a board meeting and propose an immediate supply solution.

Second, a technical panel of experts composed of the DA, DTI, and NEDA should have motu proprio powers to determine, based on official statistics, whether a sugar shortage exists. That should be the basis of all sugar import orders. Acting on a shortage is not something you can compromise on in a committee. A shortage is a shortage.

Fourth, the SRA itself should have the ability to import sugar over and above its sugar import orders during emergency situations, such as thin industrial inventory. They should be able to import and sell the imports to industrial users, if they will not allow industrial users themselves to import. That will prevent closures of food manufacturing plants. Ideally, they should allow industrial users to import when the technical panel determines the existence of a shortage."

REMATE
ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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Pinsala sa agri dahil kay Paeng, pumalo na sa P2.74B -- DA

UMABOT na sa P2.74 bilyong piso ang pinsala at pagkalugi sa agrikultura dahil kay Severe Tropical Storm Paeng.

Sinabi ng Department of Agriculture na nakasaad sa data na ipinalabas ng Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Operations Center ng departamento na P2.74 bilyon "as of 5 p.m." araw ng Miyerkules, Nobyembre 2 ay tumaas mula sa P1.33 bilyon "as of Monday afternoon."

Sakop ng latest bulletin ang 82,830 ektarya ng agricultural areas sa Cordillera Administrative Region, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Western at Eastern Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Central Mindanao, at Soccsksargen.

Ang pinsala sa agricultural infrastructures ay umabot na sa P133 milyong piso, sakop ang iba't ibang laboratoryo at crop protection centers, irrigation systems, water impounding projects, at diversion dams. Ang pinsala naman sa machineries at equipment ay sinasabing umabot na sa P235,000, kabilang na ang hand tractors at vermi beds.

Sinabi pa ng DA na ang tulong ay available para sa distribusyon sa mga apektadong magsasaka at mangingisda, kabilang ang bigas, mais at assorted na vegetable seeds at gamot para sa livestock at poultry.

Sinabi pa ng departamento na ang Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources ay mayroong fingerlings at tulong na ibibigay sa mga apektadong mangingisda.

Ang mga apektado aniya ay maaaring mag-avail ng P25,000 loan mula sa Survival and Recovery Loan Program mula sa Agricultural Credit Policy Council, kasama ang Quick Response Fund para sa rehabilitasyon ng mga apektadong lugar.

KRIS JOSE

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Philippines, RCEP and geo-economic fragmentation

SIGNS AND WONDERS

DIWA C. GUINIGUNDO

When the Senate failed to ratify the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) due to what some senators described as "lack of safeguards for the agriculture sector," that signaled the country's lost opportunity to join the world's biggest trade agreement early. That Senate deliberation in June 2022 took all of five months since RCEP was enforced on Jan. 1 this year. At the time, both Indonesia and Myanmar were yet to ratify the regional trade pact, too.

RCEP involves 15 countries accounting for a third of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) and nearly half of the world's population. Some estimate that by 2050, RCEP's share of the global economy could tip the scale at $0.5 quadrillion. The trade pact aims to form an integrated market to facilitate cross-border transactions in trade in goods and services, investment, intellectual property, dispute settlement, e-commerce, small and medium enterprises and economic cooperation.

The benefits are definitely non-trivial. If global trade weakens, this regional agreement is a good fallback, if not a strong mitigant.

But the prognosis for quick Senate action turned for the worse when then President-elect Bongbong Marcos called for a review of RCEP in order to "determine whether the agriculture sector is adequately protected."

For all his shortcomings in economic policy, then President Rodrigo Duterte actually approved the RCEP Agreement as early as September 2021. He realized and accepted that RCEP was trade and investment positive for us. Those issues of proper transitioning to free trade and appropriate safeguards for some industries were amply discussed in the nearly one decade of RCEP negotiations.

Safety nets, they call them, and they are well articulated in the RCEP Agreement. Foreign competition, in the first place, has been with us since we acceded to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the 1990s and inked other free trade relations with ASEAN and other country groupings. The scope has just been broadened to the extent of the larger membership of RCEP. It must be the rules and disciplines that some quarters complain about. Agricultural products are

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excluded from tariff liberalization, yet they would still qualify for some other benefits coming from trade remedies including those provided by WTO global safeguards.

If burgeoning imports threaten a local industry, for instance, WTO safeguards continue to be available to the Philippines. RCEP also provides a transitional safeguard to address this possible situation by way of suspending further reduction of customs duties or increasing them should imports surge under the RCEP. Anti-dumping and countervailing measures which reaffirm the rights and obligations of various parties under relevant WTO agreements remain available.

The Department of Trade and Industry therefore assured that our local industries including agriculture should consider RCEP "as a platform of more and bigger opportunities ranging from improved market access in the RCEP region, cheaper access to raw materials, wider cumulation area, trade facilitative measures, and even investments in smart agriculture and research and development."

It helped that the economic managers in the Philippines were in support of RCEP. For instance, both then NEDA Head Karl Chua and then Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez both testified in the Senate and dialogued with members of the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) in May 2021. As Chua stressed: "The best farmers who can mechanize, improve their productivity, and consolidate land operation, win and become more productive. However, the trade deficit is a real problem, it means we are not competitive. The solution there is not to stop RCEP but to address the root causes of the inefficiency of the agriculture sector."

With a broad inclusion of free trade partners in RCEP, the Philippines could work out ways to expand the partners' share of over 50% of the country's exports, while shaping up to secure its imports from them, now at more than 67%.

If the Philippines fails to join RCEP early enough, therefore, the country is expected to lose on so many other opportunities in the region's journey to economic recovery. RCEP is a timely tool to foster regional integration and economic growth.

Indonesia, though relatively late in the game, realized in a deeper way that while its exports would benefit directly from RCEP, its own downstream industries are also poised to reap higher investments. With rich natural endowment, Indonesia seeks to ascend the global value chain, from raw materials exporter to processed high-value global supplier. Some members of Indonesia's parliament were also apprehensive that the elimination of some 92% of tariffs on goods traded with the other 14 RCEP members could result in excessive influx of imports. But its key ministers were smart enough to emphasize that there are indeed short-term costs like higher trade deficit. In due time, Indonesia expects some turnaround in its real output as well as trade surplus by nearly a billion dollars. The challenge is to diversify its manufacturing sector, incubate new and emerging value chains especially in the digital space. Infra projects are also critical and Indonesia is quite serious in pursuing them.

Why is RCEP imperative, and should have been ratified yesterday?

In its Regional Economic Outlook for Asia and Pacific, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is beginning to see some harmful fragmentation scenarios recently. These scenarios derive from potential global trade disruption following geopolitical tensions in the last few years. The Fund calls this as trade fragmentation that comes in the form of rising trade restrictions and uncertainty.

Asia is crucial in this scenario because its value added in global production meets half of external demand in North America and 35% in Europe in 2018, up from 41% and 28%, respectively, in 2000. Asia is no less than a global production hub, accounting for about half of global demand in key commodities. Asia's well-developed regional value chains fuel two-thirds of intra-Asian trade.

And there are dark clouds on the horizon.

There are rising geopolitical tensions that could impinge on global trade and multilateralism. The Fund points to these tensions being driven by strategic competition and national security issues at the expense of economic efficiency. Greater trade integration has led to higher productivity and living standards across the world in the last two decades, with Asia riding the trend. But Asia might be looking at a possible inflection point.

The Fund is now seeing increased trade restrictions actually imposed by countries based on its Global Trade Alert since 2018, "mirroring the increase in trade-related uncertainty." The sectoral composition of trade restrictions shows that high-tech and energy sectors are up, presaging what could happen to them in economic competition and national security.

Keeping trade-related uncertainty at current level would be enough to affect economic activity. Uncertainty around trading relationships promotes "wait and see" attitude among business firms, holding them back from investment and exporting. Uncertainty could also drive inflation by jacking up import prices or importers' markups.

In general, the Fund reports, trade policy uncertainty reduces investment and GDP, but expands unemployment. It could also motivate exchange rate depreciation via higher risk premium. If higher trade policy uncertainty is rolling out negative economic effects in the short run, the Fund is equally concerned with the long-term impact. The earlier US-China trade hostilities and lately, the Russia-Ukraine conflict have sent waves of trade policy uncertainty.

An illustrative sharp fragmentation scenario was assumed in which the world divides into separate trading blocs and in the process generates large, permanent output losses. The hit on Asia is expected to be largest, and most severe, given its big role in global manufacturing and trade. The resulting reduction in productivity is enough to shave off 3.3 percentage points from regional output. Admittedly, total losses could be higher due to the impact on investment as exporters lose their markets.

As expected, the Fund's advice is to encourage greater international cooperation to roll back trade restrictions, avoid policy uncertainty and invariably foster open and stable global and regional trade.

But the story does not end there.

Trade fragmentation may be aggravated by financial fragmentation. There are early signs including capital flow measures imposed by several countries in the aftermath of the pandemic. In particular, some restrictions on foreign direct investment inflows have been most obvious. It would definitely hurt Asia, and the Philippines, too when we see foreign firms doing more "reshoring," "nearshoring," and "onshoring."

Thus, an early accession of the Philippines to RCEP can be a good countervailing move against these observed signs of both trade and financial fragmentation. Given the country's large external trade to GDP ratio of more than 60%, RCEP can keep our growth engine firing on all cylinders.

There is no time to lose. ■

DIWA C. GUINIGUNDO is the former deputy governor for the Monetary and Economics Sector, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP). He served the BSP for 41 years. In 2001-2003, he was alternate executive director at the International Monetary Fund in Washington, DC. He is the senior pastor of the Fullness of Christ International Ministries in Mandaluyong.

Malaya
Business Insight

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'Paeng' death toll rises to 150; 36 still missing

BY VICTOR REYES

THE death toll from severe tropical storm "Paeng" rose yesterday to 150 individuals, with 36 others still missing, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) said.

The increase was attributed to 29 fatalities recorded, in addition to the 121 the Camp Aguinaldo-based agency reported as of Wednesday morning.

Twenty-one of the 29 newly-recorded fatalities were in the Calabarzon region, two each in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and Cagayan Valley region, and one each in the Soccsksargen, Mimaropa, Central Luzon, and Bicol regions.

Overall, 63 deaths were recorded in BARMM, 33 in Calabarzon, 29 in Western Visayas, five in Eastern Visayas, four each in Zamboanga Peninsula and Soccsksargen, three in Mimaropa, one in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), and two each in Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Central Visayas, and Bicol.

The NDRRMC said 94 of deaths have been "confirmed" – 63 in BARMM, 28 in Western Visayas, and three in Soccsksargen. The rest are still subject to validation.

It also said 28 were injured due to Paeng and 36 are still missing – 17 in BARMM, 11 in Western Visayas, five in Calabarzon and one each in Mimaropa, Eastern Visayas and CAR.

The NDRRMC said 1,131,409 families or 3,963,555 persons in all the country's 17 regions have been affected by Paeng. Of the number, 462,042 families or 1,405,193 individuals have been displaced.

As of yesterday morning, the number of displaced was down to 398,748 families or 1,196,606 individuals who are either housed in 2,094 evacuation centers or staying with relatives or friends.

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PAENG

The NDRRMC placed the combined cost of damage to infrastructure and agriculture at P5.27 billion.

MAGUINDANAO

Maj. Gen. Roy Galido, commander of the Army's 6th Infantry Division, on Wednesday said they have terminated the search and retrieval operations for four missing individuals who were buried by a landslide in Barangay Kusiong in Datu Odin Sinsuat in Maguindanao.

"Actually, we already terminated the retrieval (operation), we are now in the rehabilitation (mode). There are four still missing. Our K-9 dogs can no longer detect anything," said Galido.

A community in the barangay was buried by a landslide last Friday due to rains brought by Paeng. Galido said they have retrieved 21 bodies in the landslide area.

The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority deployed a 28-man contingent to assist communities in Maguindanao.

MMDA acting chairman Romando Artes said the team will help local officials in delivering assistance to their constituents, adding they also brought with them 40 water purification machines which can filter 180 gallons of water per hour.

"The team will set up water purifiers in various communities with limited to no supply of clean water. Some will also help in the ongoing operations to clear the roads affected by massive flooding and landslide," he said.

Artes said the team will stay in Maguindanao for about 15 days before returning to Metro Manila.

Earlier, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. directed all government agencies to prioritize the delivery of drinking water to the typhoon victims.

DAMAGE

The NDRRMC said the cost of damage to infrastructure in Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Western Visayas, Central Visayas, Northern Mindanao, Davao region, Soccsksargen and CAR was placed at P2.83 billion.

Meanwhile, the cost of damage to agriculture in Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Western Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Northern Mindanao, BARMM and CAR was placed at P2.44 billion.

The NDRRMC said 12,968 were "partially damaged" by Paeng and 2,194 others were "totally damaged." The cost of damage to houses was placed at P17.2 million.

The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) said partial cost of damage to national roads, bridges, and flood control structures has reached P2.09 billion.

Citing a report from the DPWH Bureau of Maintenance, total cost of damage, subject for field validation, on national roads was placed at P917.80 million, P523.80 million on national bridges, and P652.76 million on flood control structures.

By location, CAR incurred P227.02 million in infrastructure damage, Region 1 with P58.40 million, Region 2 P61.03 million, Region 3 P54.50 million, Region 4-A P967.09 million, Region 4-B P130.40 million, Region 5 P74.83 million, Region 6 P150.41 million, Region 7 P8 million, Region 8 P60 million, Region 12 P102.68 million, and BARMM with P200 million.

The DPWH said as of yesterday, 24 road sections in CAR, Regions 2, 3, 4-A, 6, 8, 12, and BARMM remained closed to traffic due to damaged pavement/slope protection, road cut, collapsed bridge, damaged bridge approach, flooding, and fallen debris, among others.

Of the total 24 road sections, 12 are located in Luzon, six in the Visayas, and six in Mindanao areas.

AID

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) said P119.64 million worth of assistance has been provided to the affected families.

The department has also provided P12.827 million worth of financial

assistance to 4,428 beneficiaries in Cagayan Valley, Calabarzon, Western Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Soccsksargen, BARMM, and CAR.

Social Welfare Secretary Erwin Tulfo yesterday relieved DSWD Field Office IV-A regional director Barry Chua and assistant regional director Mylah Gatchalian following the complaint of Noveleta, Cavite Mayor Dino Chua that the department had been asking too many documents from his constituents who were flooded and evacuated, to receive any aid.

Tulfo, in a briefing, said DSWD Assistant Secretary Marites Maristela will be in charge of the FO

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IV-A while the two officials would be reporting to the Office of the Secretary starting Thursday pending investigations on the issue.

"We are asking for forgiveness from Cavite especially from Noveleta… Mayor, since you complained I will act on the problem now, the investigation will be fair. I will make sure that this situation never happens again," he said in mixed Filipino and English.

He said an initial probe showed that members of the DSWD regional field office asked for some documents or identification to verify who are in the list of beneficiaries.

Chua said many of his constituents were asking for help and did not receive any after the DSWD asked for a certificate of indigency, barangay clearance, and identification cards.

He said his constituents were flooded and unable to save anything or bring anything with them, especially those who were evacuated.

He added that during the visit of President Marcos Jr. to Cavite over the weekend, only 20 percent of the thousands of his constituents who need help received relief packs due to the DSWD requirements.

Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri made the rounds in three provinces and two cities in Mindanao to deliver relief goods to affected areas.

Zubiri said he turned over 1,500 sacks of rice to the LGUs in Zamboanga City, Maguindanao del Norte, Maguindanao del Sur, Cotabato City, and Sultan Kudarat.

He said the rice was privately sourced and no government funds were used in its procurement or distribution.

"Paeng really battered Mindanao… The storm left a wreck across the country, but the damage and the loss here in Mindanao is especially devastating… Mindanao will be needing sustained aid after Paeng," he said.

He, however, said donating relief goods is only part of a temporary solution, adding it is high time that government "streamline our response system."

He said the effects of the typhoon will surely be tackled when the Senate deliberates on the proposed P5.268-trillion national budget for 2023. -- ***With Ashzel Hachero, Jocelyn Montemayor, Myla Iglesias, and Raymond Africa***

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FOOD IS IMPORTANT Food security was the main topic at the Nordic Chamber forum on Thursday, Nov. 3, 2022. From left are Finland Ambassador to the Philippines Juha Pyykkö, Norway Ambassador Christian Halaas Lyster, and Lotis Ramin, country president of AstraZeneca.
PHOTO BY J. GERARD SEGUIA

Envoys: Russia disrupted food supply chain

AMBASSADORS of the Nordic countries believe that the Russian invasion of Ukraine continues to disrupt the food security supply chain worldwide.

Speaking at the Nordic Chamber (Nordcham) open forum with ambassadors from four Nordic countries on Thursday, Finland Ambassador to the Philippines Juha Pyykkö clarified that European Union sanctions against Moscow do not affect trade with Russia on agricultural products and fertilizers.

"The food security supply chain disruptions and issues and problems that we have globally now, they are due to the Russian aggression [of Ukraine]," Pyykkö said. "We have to be extremely clear on this one. The EU and like-minded countries' sanctions do not affect trade with the Russian Federation on agricultural products and fertilizers. And the one to look at and blame is the Russian Federation, in terms of food security issues we are facing all around the world, including here in the Philippines."

Denmark Ambassador Franz-Michael Mellbin agreed with Pyykkö, and added that Russia is trying to weaponize food against the Filipino people and other countries around the world.

"Russia is weaponizing food against the Filipino people, against people in Africa, against people in Latin America, to create political unrest," Mellbin said in a video link. "People are suffering because of this every single day."

Mellbin also said Filipino businesses have a big role to play in the agricultural sector on what can be done to help better align the adaptation toward food security and robustness in the country.

Meanwhile, Norway Ambassador Christian Halaas Lyster said food security is a very important issue for both Norway and the Philippines.

"It's important in the Philippines, but it's also very, very high in the political agenda in Norway, at least, and in the other Nordic countries," Lyster said. "Our Minister of Development [Anne Beathe Tvinnereim] personally put this on top of her agenda, promoting and supporting ways of thinking about food security in the world."

Last September, during the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, US President Joe Biden announced $2.9 billion in new worldwide food security assistance from Washington, which also includes $2.14 billion in commitments from USAid.

ARIC JOHN SY CUA

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TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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SEVERE TROPICAL STORM PAENG:

Calabarzon agri damage hits P603.9 M

By ED AMOROSO

Damage to agriculture in Calabarzon due to Severe Tropical Storm Paeng has reached P603.9 million.

In a report, the Regional Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (RDRRMC) said rice, corn, cassava, high-value crops, livestock, fisheries, irrigation and agricultural infrastructure were affected.

Damage to high-value crops was placed at P409.6 million; rice, P118.47 million; white corn, P22.2 million, and yellow corn, P18.15 million.

The fishery sector incurred damage amounting to P7.4 million; irrigation, P18 million, and agri-infrastructure, P9.4 million.

The RDRRMC said 1,329 houses were affected, with 181 destroyed.

Calabarzon is among the four regions placed under a state of calamity due to the damage caused by Paeng.

The calamity declaration is seen to hasten rescue, relief and rehabilitation efforts as local government units are allowed to utilize their calamity funds.

Meanwhile, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) government released 70 metric tons of rice on Wednesday for distribution to storm-hit areas.

BARMM Senior Minister Abdulrauf Macacua said residents of 63 barangays in Cotabato, which comprise the special geographic area of the region, as well as Maguindanao del Norte and Maguindanao del Sur are among the beneficiaries.

More than 50 people died in landslides and flashfloods in Datu Odin Sinsuat, Datu Blah Sinsuat, Sultan Kudarat, Sultan Mastura and Upi in Maguindanao del Norte due to Paeng. **– With John Unson**

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Christmas staples not under price freeze

By Alden M. Monzon
@AldenMonzonINQ

STILL A GOOD NIGHT A shopper inspects "noche buena" goods at a supermarket last year. —INQUIRER FILE PHOTO

Yes, there will theoretically be a price freeze on basic and prime commodities over the next six months. But no, it will not be nationwide and will exclude the products Filipinos usually serve on Christmas and New Year's eves.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) explained that, under the law, President Marcos' Proclamation No. 84 covered only the four regions of Calabarzon, Bicol, Western Visayas and Bangsamoro, and excluded most "noche buena" products.

The only Christmas staples covered by the price freeze are milk—whether processed, condensed, evaporated, powdered and full cream—and three-in-one instant coffee.

As to other Christmas staples, the trade department said that they can only issue a "price guide" since they are not considered prime or basic necessities.

In fact, the DTI said that local manufacturers and makers of noche buena items have sent notifications on price increases as early as the first week of September, weeks before the state of calamity.

And there has been a substantial increase in the prices of Christmas staples since September, according to local data firm Packworks.

Data from the 'hood

According to data from Sari IQ, the firm's data analytics tool which tracked spending habits of buyers at "sari-sari" stores from January to September, there have been noticeable changes in the prices of noche buena items.

The price of milk and cream went up by 11.84 percent, leading to a P10 to P15 increase for a 250-milliliter pack of all-purpose cream, 300-ml pack of condensed milk and 370-ml pack of evaporated milk.

"The reason for the price increase is that culinary milk and creams are normally imported from other countries. The increasing dollar rate over the peso affects the commodity prices since these are imported," said Packworks' chief data officer Andres Montiel.

Similarly, prices of palm, vegetable and canola oils went up by 5.95 percent and are now being sold for approximately P80 more per liter.

Dairy products like cheese, margarine and chilled ice cream also got 5.28 percent more expensive, adding around P30 to their costs.

Prices of various canned goods also saw a 5.26-percent increase, with the price tags of canned nata de coco, whole and cream-style corn, "kaong," pineapple chunks and fruit cocktails seeing an P8 to P20 jump.

Other canned goods such as corned beef, tuna, meatloaf and sardines also rose by P5.

Meanwhile, bread spreads such as mayonnaise and peanut butter got costlier by 5.77 percent and now cost P40 more per kilogram.

"These prices could go up further through the 'ber' months, and the demand will definitely be higher. Our local households may be able to skimp on other items, such as clothing or gas, but they have to eat," he added.

A notable price increase of 4.90 percent was seen in frozen processed food as well, with packed hotdogs, hams and nuggets now sold for P25 more than the suggested retail price.

Likewise, upward price adjustments were seen for tea and three-in-one coffee mixes, both of which rose by 4.13 percent, while prices of powdered milk and chocolate drinks also went up by 2.04 percent.

Prices of snacks such as candies and biscuits, as well as fruits and vegetables, saw an uptick as well, increasing by 2.50 percent. INQ

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Paeng death toll now at 150, damage at ₱5.3 B

By AARON B. RECUENCO

The damage wrought by Severe Tropical Storm Paeng to agriculture and infrastructure has ballooned to over ₱5.3 billion, while the death toll rose to 150, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) said.

In the latest data released on Thursday, Nov. 3, the NDRRMC disclosed that 29 more persons were added to the fatality list that increased the total tally to 150—94 confirmed and 56 still for validation. ▶7

At least 36 are in the missing list, while 128 were reported injured.

Of the 94 confirmed deaths, 63 were from the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), mostly in Maguindanao which was swept by landslides and widespread flooding, while 28 others were from Western Visayas. Three persons were confirmed to have died in Central Mindanao.

Of the 56 deaths subject for validation, 33 were from Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon), and the rest from 10 other affected regions.

Most of those in the missing list are from Western Visayas and BARMM.

The affected population due to landslides, flooding and other related incidents is close to four million.

Agri, infra damage

Based on the NDRRMC data, Paeng left ₱2.4 billion worth of damage in agriculture. Hardest hit was Bicol Region with almost ₱860 million, followed by Calabarzon with almost ₱604 million, Central Luzon with over ₱443 million, and Western Visayas with ₱376 million. The listed damage includes crops, fisheries products, and agriculture machines.

For infrastructure, the NDRRMC reported ₱2.8 billion damage. Hardest hit was Calabarzon with almost ₱1.2 billion, followed by Bicol Region with over ₱708 million.

Almost 500 roads were affected by landslides and flooding, 172 of these were impassable during and shortly after Paeng's onslaught.

The NDRRMC also reported that 120 bridges and more than 15,000 houses were damaged.

Paeng to impact 2023 budget

Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri said the impact of Paeng will figure largely in the deliberations on the proposed 2023 national budget once the Upper Chamber resumes regular session next week.

"We will have to consult with the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council and local governments to assess our recovery roadmap," he said while in Mindanao to donate relief goods to affected provinces and cities. "Indeed, apart from personally handing over our donations, I am also here in Mindanao to hear directly from our local governments—what is the damage like on the ground? What will they need to rebuild and recover? And I will take all the answers back to the Senate when session resumes next week."

Zubiri made a three-province and two-city sweep on Thursday, hitting Zamboanga City, Maguindanao del Norte, Cotabato City, Maguindanao del Sur, and the Province of Sultan Kudarat to turn over 1,500 sacks of rice for affected communities.

The rice was privately sourced, and no government funds were used in its procurement or distribution, he said.

"Paeng really battered Mindanao," Zubiri said. "The storm left a wreck across the country, but the damage and the loss here in Mindanao is especially devastating."

Zubiri emphasized that Mindanao will need sustained aid after Paeng's onslaught.

"We're here to deliver some relief goods for now, to make sure our affected communities don't go hungry. And it is good to see so many private citizens doing the same. It really shows the heart of our people," he said. "But we also need to push for long-term solutions. We cannot continue to be reactive when it comes to disaster management, especially since there are lives at stake. We keep learning this the hard way. We have already lost over a hundred lives to Paeng."

"We really need to streamline our response systems, and a strengthened national authority that will be able to effectively coordinate national and local actors—not only for disaster response, but especially preparedness and mitigation," he added.

In Zamboanga, Zubiri's donation was received by Mayor John Dalipe and First District Rep. Khymer Olaso.

For the Maguindanao del Norte leg of his visit, he first stopped by Broce Elementary School in Datu Odin Sinsuat town to turn over the donation for the municipality to Mayor Datu Lester Sinsuat and acting Gov. Bai Fatima Ainee Sinsuat.

He then proceeded to Maguindanao del Norte and Cotabato City, where he handed over the rice donation to Cotabato City Mayor Mohammad Ali Matabalao and Mayor Datu Marshall Sinsuat of Datu Blah Sinsuat town.

He also made his way to Sultan Kudarat town to turn over the donation to Rep. Bai Dimple Mastura, Mayor Datu Tucao Mastura, Vice Mayor Datu Shameem Mastura, and acting Vice Gov. Sharifudin Mastura.

For Maguindanao del Sur, Governor Bai Mariam Mangudadatu, received Zubiri's donation, while Governor Datu Pax Ali Mangudadatu received the donation for the Province of Sultan Kudarat. (With a report from Mario B. Casayuran)

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Patay kay 'Paeng' umakyat na sa 150

Umakyat na sa 150 katao ang iniulat na nasawi bunsod ng pananalasa ng bagyong Paeng.

Batay sa tala ng National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) kahapon, 94 sa mga ito ang kumpirmado kung saan 63 ay mula sa Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), 28 sa Western Visayas at tatlo mula sa Soccsksargen.

Sumasailalim naman sa validation ang 56 pang patay na mula naman sa Calabarzon, 33; Eastern Visayas, 5; Zamboanga Peninsula, 4; Mimaropa, 3 at tig-2 sa Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Bicol at Central Visayas habang tig-isa sa Western Visayas, Soccsksargen at Cordillera Region.

Nasa 126 naman ang bilang ng mga nasaktan at 36 katao pa ang patuloy na pinaghahanap.

Ayon pa sa NDRRMC, may 3,963,555 indibidwal o 1,131,409 pamilya ang apektado ng bagyong Paeng.

Samantala, mayroon namang 12,968 mga tirahan ang partially damaged at 2,194 totally damaged habang umaabot na sa P2.8 bilyon ang halaga ng danyos sa imprastraktura.

Lumilitaw din sa datos ng NDRRMC na P2.4 bilyon ang pinsala ni 'Paeng' sa agrikultura kung saan Bicol Region ang napuruhan na umabot sa P860 milyon na sinundan ng Calabarzon, P604 milyon; Central Luzon P443 milyon at Western Visayas, P376 milyon.

Ang mga nasalanta ay kinabibilangan ng pananim, palaisdaan at mga makinarya o kagamitan. *(Doris Franche-Borja)*

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'Paeng' onslaught: 150 dead, 36 missing, 128 injured

By AARON RECUENCO

The damage wrought by severe tropical storm "Paeng" to agriculture and infrastructure has ballooned to over ₱5.3 billion as the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) began to have clear picture of the extent of destruction based on the reports on all the affected areas.

In the latest data released yesterday, the NDRRMC also disclosed that 29 more people

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'Paeng' ...

(From Page 1)

added to the fatality list, bringing to 150 the tally of "Paeng"-related deaths – 94 of them were confirmed to be typhoon-related while 56 others are still for validation.

At least 36 other people are on the missing list while 128 were reported to have been injured.

Of the 94 confirmed deaths, 63 of them were from the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), mostly in Maguindanao which was swept by landslides and widespread flooding, while 28 others were from Western Visayas. Three people were confirmed to have died in Central MIndanao.

Of the 56 deaths that are subject to validation, 33 of them were from Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon), while the rest are from 10 other affected regions.

Most of those in the missing list, on the other hand, came from Western Visayas and BARMM.

The affected population due to landslides, flooding and other related incidents was almost four million.

DAMAGE

Based on the NDRRMC data, "Paeng" left ₱2.4 billion worth of damage in agriculture, the hardest hit was Bicol Region with almost ₱860 million, followed by Calabarzon with almost ₱604 million, Central Luzon with over ₱443 million and Western Visayas with ₱376 million.

The listed damage includes crops, fisheries and agriculture machines.

For infrastructure, the NDRRMC reported ₱2.8 billion damage, the hardest were Calabarzon with almost ₱1.2 billion and Bicol Region with over ₱708 million.

Almost 500 roads were affected by landslides and flooding, a total of 172 of them were rendered impassable during and shortly after "Paeng" onslaught.

A total of 120 bridges were also damaged.

The NDRRMC also reported more than 15,000 damaged houses.

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Arabica coffee futures prices gain 4%; raw sugar little changed

NEW YORK/LONDON — Arabica coffee futures on Intercontinental Exchange jumped 4% on Wednesday as the market continues to recover from last week's slide to a 15-month low. Raw sugar was little changed.

SUGAR: March raw sugar settled up 0.04 cent or 0.2% at 18.47 cents per pound (lb).

Investors kept a close watch on Brazil after former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva narrowly won Sunday's presidential election.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro on Tuesday did not concede defeat in his first public remarks since losing Sunday's election but stopped short of contesting the election result.

Brazilian authorities said on Wednesday they were making some headway in clearing blockades set up across the country by truckers to protest Mr. Bolsonaro's narrow loss.

Dealers said the market was also awaiting news on India's export quota for the new marketing year which began on Oct. 1, with an announcement possible this week.

Sugar consumption in China, the world's second-largest user after India, is heading to the smallest volume in nine years in 2022.

December white sugar rose $4.10 or 0.8% to $536.80 a ton.

COFFEE: March arabica coffee gained 6.75 cents or 4% to $1.7695 per lb, extending its rebound from a 15-month low of $1.6595 set on Friday.

Dealers said a drop in exports from Honduras and Costa Rica during October had helped to tighten short-term supplies, with December's premium to March widening.

It was a national holiday in Brazil on Wednesday, which prevented selling from farmers and exporters.

The US Federal Reserve raised interest rates by three-quarters of a percentage point, but signaled future increases in borrowing costs could be made in smaller steps.

January robusta coffee rose $43 or 2.3% at $1,882 a ton after setting a 14-month low of $1,826 on Tuesday.

COCOA: December New York cocoa rose $31 or 1.3% to $2,379 a ton.

Barry Callebaut said on Wednesday its chief operating officer, Olivier Delaunay, will leave the Swiss chocolate maker for personal reasons, with Jo Thys appointed to replace him from Jan. 1.

March London cocoa rose £24 or 1.3% to £1,922 per ton. — ***Reuters***

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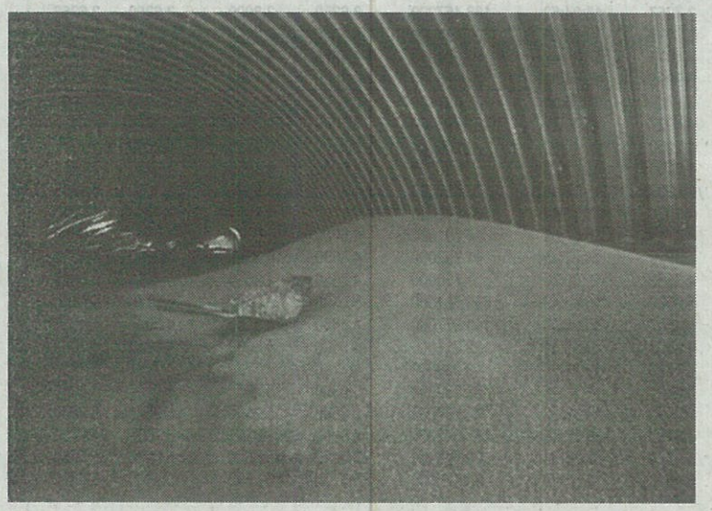
Wheat, soy and corn lose more ground



Wheat grains seen inside a storage destroyed by a Russian military strike, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues, in the village of Yulivka, Zaporizhzhia region, Ukraine. *(Reuters Photo)*

SINGAPORE- Chicago wheat lost more ground on Thursday after Russia said it would resume participation in a Black Sea grain export deal, reversing its decision and easing concerns over food supplies.

Soybeans slid from a six-week high scaled in the previous session and corn also fell.

"Russia resuming participation in the Black Sea grain corridor prompted the fall," said Tobin Gorey, director of agricultural strategy at the Commonwealth Bank of Australia.

"We suspect this will not be the final word on the issue but that is good news while it lasts."

The most-active wheat contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was down 0.8 percent at $8.39 a bushe, after dropping more than 6 percent in the previous session.

Soybeans gave up 0.5 percent to $14.46-3/4 a bushel, having climbed to their highest since Sept. 22 on Wednesday at $14.58 a bushel and corn lost 0.4 percent to $6.84-1/2 a bushel.

Wheat prices came under pressure on Wednesday after Russia's decision reversal on the Black Sea export corridor.

Moscow said it would renew its participation in the UN-brokered corridor just four days after suspending its role in the deal saying it could not guarantee the safety of civilian ships crossing the Black Sea because of a drone attack on its fleet there. - ***Reuters***