CLIPPINGS FOR WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2022

A. SEC. PBBM QUOTED

MANILA STANDARD
PBBM to grace launch of 'Kadiwa ng Pasko'

DAILY TRIBUNE
Cambodia bullish on agri cooperation

MANILA BULLETIN
Marcos heads for APEC summit in Thailand today

BUSINESS MIRROR
PHL eyes unprocessed rice imports from Cambodia

BUSINESS WORLD
Great start for BBM administration

ABANTE TONITE
PBBM iaarangkada Kadiwa ng pasko project sa Mandaluyong

B. DA FAMILY

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
Ombudsman suspends NIA chief over workers' gripes
Smuggled pigs from ASF-hit Masbate slaughtered on arrival in Cebu

MANILA BULLETIN
Senate urged to ratify RCEP now

THE MANILA TIMES
Philippines to import 7K metric tons of red onions

BUSINESS MIRROR
Bataan emerges as 3RD PHL province to be declared bird-flu free by Agriculture Dept.

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT
No new bird flu cases

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
Bataan bird flu-free
Rice and fish
Reforming the sugar industry (Part 2)

BUSINESS WORLD
MAP urges Senate to act on RCEP after 10-month delay

ABANTE TONITE
NIA boss 6 buwan sinuspinde ng Ombudsman

PILIPINO STAR NGAYON
Bataan idineklarang bird-flu free na – DA

C. AGRI-RELATED STORY

DAILY TRIBUNE
Nueva Ecija irrigation system boost farmers livelihoods

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT
MAP urges Senate to ratify RCEP

BUSINESS WORLD
Food fortification

REMATE
Mga produktong agrikultura mula Nueva Vizcaya, murang mabibili sa Maynila

REMATE
Editorial: PH's call for post0pandemic Recovery, economic cooperation heard on…

D. FOREIGN STORY

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT
Wheat drops, corn down
World making little progress on food waste, a big climate problem

Manila Standard

Date: Nov. 16, 2022 Page: A4

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

IN BRIEF

PBBM to grace launch of 'Kadiwa ng Pasko'

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. will lead the nationwide launch of the government's "Kadiwa ng Pasko" project aimed at providing a market to the country's local agricultural producers while at the same time giving the public access to affordable and high-quality products.

Mr. Marcos is scheduled to arrive in Barangay Addition Hills in Mandaluyong City for the launch of the program, where he is expected to speak and visit the Kadiwa stalls.

Fourteen sites will be opened simultaneously across the country on Wednesday, including 11 in the National Capital Region, one in Tacloban City, one in Davao De Oro, and one in Koronadal City, South Cotabato.

The Kadiwa ng Pasko project was conceptualized to address inflation by providing the people with affordable goods, especially in the upcoming holiday season in coordination with the Department of Agriculture (DA) as the lead agency. Support agencies include the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). **Vince Lopez**

Daily Tribune
WITHOUT FEAR ▫ WITHOUT FAVOR

Date: NOV. 16, 2022 Page: 13

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DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Cambodia bullish on agri cooperation

BY RAFFY AYENG
@tribunephl_raf

Cambodian businessmen are bullish on establishing trade ties with both big and small enterprises, especially in the field of agriculture, according to ASEAN Business Advisory Council Chair and Go Negosyo founder Joey Concepcion.

He said several expansion and export opportunities in Cambodia for Philippine companies were explored during the CEO Roundtable meeting held on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh last 10 November, attended by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

Aside from agriculture, other priority areas of cooperation include housing, digitalization, food security, hospitality, garments manufacturing, business process outsourcing, and micro, small and medium enterprises development.

Agriculture, in particular, turned out to be a promising area of cooperation between the two countries, as Cambodia produces rice, but Vietnam – which is a major exporter of rice to the Philippines – has the biggest production by hectare.

"Cambodia is a big exporter of rice, but it goes through Vietnam for processing," said Concepcion. "Our suggestion is to import so that the Philippine companies can process the rice," he said.

Concepcion shared that the Cambodian businessmen were receptive to the idea, and even offered technology exchange between the two countries.

"Cambodia is very good at growing rice, and we could learn from them," he said.

MANILA BULLETIN

Date: NOV. 16, 2022 Page: 7

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Marcos heads for APEC Summit in Thailand today

By BETHEENA V. UNITE

President Marcos is set to leave for Bangkok, Thailand, today, Nov. 16, to join other world leaders in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit until Nov. 19.

This will be the first time Marcos will attend the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting (AELM) as the country's president.

It will also be the first in-person meeting of the leaders of the APEC economies since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020.

The President will join world leaders in various dialogues and will hold bilateral talks with other heads of state on the sidelines of the AELM.

He is expected to focus on food security, energy security, and climate change mitigation.

Marcos, who attended the 40th and 41st Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summits last week, considers both ASEAN and APEC as vital platforms in advancing the country's interests and positions before world leaders.

"Iyon ang mga plano namin dahil sa sitwasyon ngayon sa mundo ngayon, hindi natin kaya—kahit sinong bansa, kahit Amerika eh, kahit Russia, kahit China, yung mga malalaki—kahit sila, hindi nila kayang labanan at gawan ng paraan itong mga problemang hinaharap natin na nag-iisa (Those are our plans because amid the world's situation now, we cannot—even other countries, even America, Russia, China, even the big ones—they cannot address the problems alone)," Marcos said in a speech before the Filipino community in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on Sunday.

The APEC serves as the premier Asia-Pacific economic forum established in 1989 with the primary goal of supporting sustainable economic growth and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region.

APEC's 21 member-economies are home to more than 2.9 billion people and make up over 60 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP).

APEC membership includes Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Chinese-Taipei, Thailand and the United States of America.

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

Date: NOV. 16, 2022 Page: A5

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

PHL eyes unprocessed rice imports from Cambodia

By Andrea E. San Juan

ASEAN Business Advisory Council Chair for the Philippines and Go Negosyo founder Jose Maria A. Concepcion III said the Philippines is mulling over importing rice from Cambodia.

"Cambodia is a big exporter of rice, but it goes through Vietnam for processing," said Concepcion.

"Our suggestion is import so that the Philippine companies can process the rice," he added.

In a news statement issued by Go Negosyo on Tuesday, Concepcion shared that Cambodian businessmen were receptive to the idea, and even offered technology exchange between the two countries. "Cambodia is very good at growing rice, and we could learn from them," the Go Negosyo founder added.

"Agriculture in particular, was revealed as a promising area of cooperation between the two countries. Cambodia produces rice, but Vietnam—which is a major exporter of rice to the Philippines—has the biggest production by hectare," Go Negosyo said.

Further, it said that several expansion and export opportunities in Cambodia for Philippine companies were explored during the CEO Roundtable meeting held on the sidelines of the Asean summit in Phnom Penh last November 10.

The CEO Roundtable meeting was attended by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) President George T. Barcelon, LT Group's Mike Tan, Go Negosyo senior adviser Josephine Romero, and the Philippine winners of the Asean Business Awards 2022.

Go Negosyo said aside from agriculture, other areas of cooperation that the meeting was able to identify were on housing, digitalization, food security, hospitality, garments manufacturing, business process outsourcing (BPO), and micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) development.

In his intervention during the event, Marcos stressed the importance of international cooperation to prevent regional food shortage.

"It has become glaringly clear that there is a dire need to strengthen food security towards self-sufficiency in our region, to increase adaptability and resilience in the face of threats to the global supply chain," the President said.

Marcos is the concurrent Agriculture Secretary of the Philippines.

Meanwhile, during the meeting, the Philippine group invited the Cambodian businessmen to invest in the Philippines and partner with the Philippine businesses.

"SMEs from the Philippines—namely, FELTA Multimedia, Home Healthlink and Esquire Financing—who were also winners of the Asean Business Awards, said that they are looking for partners to expand both in the Philippines and within Asean. Meanwhile, the chairman of the Cambodian garments industry association commended during the meeting the logistics support from Philippine cargo and mobility facilities, namely Philippine Airlines [PAL]," Go Negosyo said in its statement.

According to Go Negosyo, the Cambodian businessmen shared that PAL helped them not only with cargo, but also with the transport of the designers and other technical people between the two countries.

Further, it said that the Philippines and Cambodia are also together in a campaign to get their respective garments exported at zero rates in the United States's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) so that these may be imported by US brands at zero, or near zero duty.

BusinessWorld™

Date: 16 NOV 2022 Page: 6/S1

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DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Great start for BBM administration

HUMAN SIDE OF ECONOMICS

BERNARDO M. VILLEGAS

Not even an eternal optimist like me expected that the Philippine GDP would grow by 7.6% in the third quarter of 2022, what with inflation exceeding 7% and many alarmists talking about the Philippine peso reaching "senior citizen" levels (meaning more than P60 to $1).

After Philippine GDP grew at more than 7% for six consecutive quarters, peaking at 12.2% during the second quarter of 2021, the majority of economic forecasters expected a median figure of 6.1% (I forecasted 6.5% myself). The first quarter of the existence of the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. produced a hefty rate of 7.6%, surpassed only by India and Vietnam in the Indo-Pacific region.

As reported by Dr. Dennis Mapa, Undersecretary and Head Statistician and Civil Registrar General, the main contributors to this robust growth were wholesale and retail trade (evidence of "revenge spending"), repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles ("revenge traveling") at 9.1% growth; financial and insurance activities, 7.7%; and construction, 12.2% (continuation of the Build, Build, Build activities of both the public and private sectors).

The three major economic sectors, i.e., agriculture, forestry and fishing, industry, and services all posted positive growth rates in the third quarter of 2022 with 2.2%, 5.8%, and 9.1% respectively. Especially notable is the 2.2% growth of agriculture, a sector notorious for negative growth rates in the past decade or so. Although there is no reason to be complacent, this respectable growth rate of agriculture (even the agribusiness behemoths of the ASEAN such as Thailand and Vietnam can grow their agriculture sector only at an average of 2-3% yearly) shows that the President as Secretary of Agriculture has started on the right foot. He just has to make sure that we maintain an average of 2-3% yearly growth of agriculture to contribute to even an 8-10% annual growth of GDP during his tenure.

This high rate of growth is attainable if, together with agriculture growing at 2-3% yearly, the present administration can partner closely with the private sector to increase our rate of investment from the historically low 20-22% of GDP to the more than 30% attained by our East Asian neighbors. This can be done if during the next six years, we can bring up Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) to a level of $20 billion yearly, an amount that Vietnam has already reached. With the amendment of the Public Service Act and the very visible aggressive campaign of President Marcos Jr. to travel all over the world appealing to foreigners to come and invest in the Philippines, it is possible to attain this level of FDIs.

It is also significant that on the demand side, as Dr. Mapa reported, Household Final Consumption Expenditure grew by 8% in the third quarter of 2022. This highlights the importance of having a young and growing population of 112 million consumers who constitute the main engines of growth of the economy. Now that we can feel comfortable that the pandemic is behind us (without throwing caution to the wind by still retaining some of the safeguard measures such as wearing masks in very crowded places), we can continue to rely on consumer spending to help us grow at an average of 6-7% as a minimum.

There is no question that, as President Marcos Jr. emphasized in his recent trip to Cambodia, the strongest appeal to investors, whether domestic or foreign, is the large domestic market we now have, thanks to a fertility rate that is still above the replacement of 2.1 babies per fertile woman. In fact, I suspect that this is the greatest attraction to Elon Musk to be bullish in getting Starlink to invest heavily in the Philippines. Musk is one of the most vocal business leaders about the need to combat demographic decline which is threatening the whole developed world and even China, which has not yet reached First World status. The major role of consumption in helping us attain a high GDP growth rate convinces me that we shall see the fourth quarter GDP still growing at over

BusinessWorld

Date: 16 NOV 2022 Page: 6/S1

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

REVOLI CORTEZ/PPA POOL

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. presides over a cabinet meeting at the Aguinaldo State Dining Room in Malacañan Palace on Oct. 25.

7%, despite high inflation (at least 5-6%). I forecast consumption to grow even more than 8% during the fourth quarter as a result of consumer spending related to the Christmas season.

Where will the money come from for consumers to spend? I see at least two major sources: remittances of OFWs (overseas Filipino workers) that will grow at more than 5% in the last quarter, as well as the foreign exchange earnings of the BPO-IT (business process outsourcing-information technology) sector that is enjoying a boom because of its ability to quickly adjust to work from home (WFH) modes of servicing their clients, both here and abroad. I also see the large corporations in the developed countries of North America and Europe trying to fight recessionary forces in their respective regions by outsourcing more and more of their online services to countries like India and the Philippines. In fact, I was so impressed with the bullish stance I perceived among the leaders of the BPO-IT industry who announced in a recent conference they had in Boracay that they hope to add one million more workers to their sector between now and 2028.

These two foreign exchange earning sectors are among those who are happy that the peso is depreciating vis-à-vis the US dollar. That means more purchasing power for the relatives of the OFWs and workers in the BPO-IT sector — higher incomes can partly compensate for the higher prices of consumer goods. In the New Year, consumers will get some relief from the lower rate of inflation expected, i.e., 4-5%, as the Central Bank turns very hawkish in increasing policy rates to over 5% to match the increases in the policy rates in the US. I see our Central Bank having enough tools to succeed in inflation targeting as our monetary authorities manifested during the two episodes of inflation in the last 20 years. In 2008, inflation rose to 8.26%; the year after, 2009, inflation was brought down to 4.2%. Then 10 years later, with another round of high inflation in 2018, which the Central Bank was able to bring it down to 2.4% the year after. If there is one institution, we can count on to do its job of inflation targeting, it is the Philippine Central Bank, whose Governors have been systematically rated as among the best in the world for at least the last 20 years.

On the demand side, there is clearly a sector that will be a drag to GDP growth — Government Final Consumption Expenditures which grew only at 0.8% for obvious reasons.

The government is buried deeply in debt incurred during the pandemic and can hardly be an engine of growth for at least the next two years. Even the high growth of gross capital formation to which government infrastructure spending made a significant contribution, may slow down if we depend too much on the continuation of the Build, Build, Build program of the Duterte administration. Continuous growth of this item on the demand side can only be assured by greater investments from the private sector in the Build, Build, Build program through Public-Private Partnership (PPP) projects and, more importantly, as already indicated above, from FDIs in such sectors as airports, railways, subways, telecommunications, energy, and other public services that can now be owned 100% by foreigners, thanks to the amendment of the Public Service Act. The role of the government in infrastructure building should be in endowing the rural and agricultural sectors with more farm-to-market roads, irrigation facilities, and other public services badly needed by the farmers to improve their productivity.

I would like to point out, however, that the present administration can not claim all the credit for the good performance in its first quarter of being in power. Much of the resilience of the Philippine economy during these times of global economic crisis should be attributed to more than 30 years of slow but sure institution building (such as those we have seen in the Central Bank, the National Economic and Development Authority, the Department of Finance and its subsidiaries, the Department of Trade and Industry, etc.) that some of our most competent and honest officials were able to deliver. The current success can also be attributed to a good number of major economic reforms that corrected some serious mistakes in economic policy in the last century (inward-looking, protectionist industrialization measures, unrealistic foreign exchange rates, almost criminal neglect of rural and agricultural development, among others).

Our present leaders should also be thankful for the advantages the Philippine economy derives from its demographic dividend (a young, growing, English speaking population); geographic dividend (being at the epicenter of the most dynamic economic region in the world today that has not turned anti-globalization); and the temporal dividend (being at the stage of transitioning from a low-middle income to an upper middle income country in the next few years, a stage of income growth that will result in an explosion of demand for more sophisticated consumer goods and services.)

Humbly recognizing those favorable conditions being given to them on a silver platter, our leaders today can better chart our economic future by building on our strengths and removing our weaknesses or at least making them irrelevant. ■

BERNARDO M. VILLEGAS has a Ph.D. in Economics from Harvard, is professor emeritus at the University of Asia and the Pacific, and a visiting professor at the IESE Business School in Barcelona, Spain. He was a member of the 1986 Constitutional Commission.
bernardo.villegas@uap.asia

Abante TONITE
MABILIS SA BALITA
Date: NOV. 16, 2022 Page: 3

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

PBBM iaarangkada Kadiwa ng Pasko project sa Mandaluyong

Pangungunahan ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ang paglulunsad ng Kadiwa ng Pasko project sa Mandaluyong City ngayong Miyerkoles, Nobyembre 16, 2022.

Layon ng proyekto na maibenta ang mga produkto ng mga magsasaka sa mas murang halaga sa harap ng mataas na presyo ng mga bilihin ngayon sa bansa.

Ang konsepto ng Kadiwa project ay nabuo upang maibsan kahit papaano ang problema sa inflation at makabili ang mga tao ng murang mga produktong pang-agrikultura lalo na ngayong holiday season.

Kasabay ding magbubukas ang Kadiwa sites sa iba't ibang lugar sa bansa ngayong Miyerkoles, 11 rito ay sa National Capital Region, isa sa Tacloban City, isa sa Davao de Oro, at isa sa Koronadal City, South Cotabato.

Sa pamamagitan ng Kadiwa program ay matutulungan ang mga magsasaka at mga mangingisda na maibenta ang kanilang mga produkto na hindi na kailangang dumaan sa middleman at mabibili ito sa tamang presyo at magkaroon ng mas magandang kita.

Ang Kadiwa Center ay suportado ng iba't ibang ahensya ng pamahalaan gaya ng Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), at Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). **(Aileen Taliping)**

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

Date: NOV. 10, 2022 Page: A1 & A4

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Ombudsman suspends NIA chief over workers' gripes

STORY BY DEMPSEY REYES

The complaint against Benny Antiporda says his alleged wrongdoings had a 'chilling effect' on employees. He dismisses the accusations as 'petty' and suggests that they were in retaliation for his anticorruption drive in the agency. A4

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

Date: NOV. 16, 2022 Page: A1 2 A4

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

FROM A1

By Dempsey Reyes
@dempseyreyesINQ

The Office of the Ombudsman on Tuesday ordered the suspension of acting National Irrigation Administration (NIA) chief Benny Antiporda for grave misconduct, among other charges, following a lengthy complaint filed by the agency's employees.

Antiporda confirmed to the Inquirer that the suspension order had been served on him and that his office was padlocked.

He dismissed the allegations against him as "petty" and suggested that they were in retaliation for his anticorruption drive in the agency.

The six-page order signed on Tuesday by Ombudsman Samuel Martires stated that Antiporda's six-month preventive suspension was without pay.

The complainants are officers and members of NIA Employees Association of the Philippines, the NIA Concerned Employees and the agency's lawyers.

The complaint alleged that Antiporda humiliated and berated NIA employees; prohibited managers of NIA's central office from traveling, "which is counterproductive to their work"; and reassigned and transferred some personnel "without valid grounds."

He was also accused of placing some employees on floating status; allegedly harassing NIA corporate board secretary Michelle Raymundo by placing a security guard and a closed-circuit television camera at the door of her office and locking her office then turning off electricity at 5 p.m.; and "falsely accusing" NIA legal services chief Lloyd Allain Cudal of corruption and asking Cudal and other legal services members to retire or resign, or face charges.

Antiporda was also alleged to have threatened employees with nonrenewal of their appointments "if they do not side with him or do not act in consonance with his policies."

'Dolomite' defender

He allegedly made "boot-licking" as a basis for promotion, used flag ceremonies as an "avenue for his bullying and fake news" and maligned employees through the media.

Antiporda, 52, is a former undersecretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and one of the

Benny Antiporda

staunchest proponents and defenders of the much-criticized P389-million Manila Bay dolomite beach project.

He was a former journalist who had served as president of the National Press Club.

He was appointed by former President Rodrigo Duterte as NIA senior deputy administrator in February, then designated by President Marcos as acting administrator in July.

'Chilling effect'

The complaint also alleged that he was "misleading" the President in saying that the NIA would irrigate all farmlands through public-private partnership "when irrigation is the mandate of the government and not a business venture which is enticing to the private sector."

The complaint also included his alleged threats not to renew the appointments of some employees of NIA's General Services Division who installed and repaired the air-conditioning in his residence "but they were not able to finish the job at once."

"These acts of Respondent Antiporda, according to the complainants, allegedly created a chilling effect on NIA employees," the Ombudsman said.

After "careful evaluation" of the complaint's records, the Ombudsman said it found that his guilt was "strong" for committing grave misconduct, conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service and oppression, exposing him to possible removal from office."

"Further, in order to secure the documents and to prevent possible harassment of witnesses and considering further that Respondent Antiporda's continued stay in office may prejudice the case filed against him, he is, for the duration of this investigation, hereby placed under preventive suspension without pay...," according to the Ombudsman's order.

A copy of the order was sent to the President as the concurrent agriculture secretary.

'So be it'

Antiporda maintained his innocence and made counter-allegations against Cudal and Raymundo, who are the named complainants in the Ombudsman's order.

"If this is the price to pay for my drive against corruption, then so be it. These are petty allegations against me, compared to hundreds of millions [of pesos] that we are running after," he told the Inquirer in a phone interview.

Antiporda was referring to the administrative and criminal charges he filed against Cudal and NIA lawyer Mary Annabelle Domingo after the NIA lost a case early this year which resulted in the agency paying P205 million in damages to a construction company.

Antiporda said they lost the case against Green Asia Construction & Development Corp. "on a technicality and not by merit" and accused Cudal and Domingo of committing gross inexcusable negligence, gross neglect of duty, grave misconduct, and gross ignorance of the law. INQ

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

Date: NOV. 16, 2022 Page: A10

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

BORDER WATCH

SMUGGLED PIGS FROM ASF-HIT MASBATE SLAUGHTERED ON ARRIVAL IN CEBU TOWN

By Dale G. Israel
@dalegisrael

CEBU CITY—A shipment of at least 37 live hogs were intercepted by authorities in the northern town of San Remigio in Cebu on Monday as authorities tightened its patrol of entry points to keep the province free from the African swine fever (ASF).

Dr. Mary Rose Vincoy, Cebu provincial veterinarian, said the pigs came from Esperanza town in Masbate, one of the provinces in the country with a confirmed case of the ASF.

"Even if the pigs looked healthy, we were anxious that if we allowed their entry, they would end up infecting our local pigs," she said.

The pigs were immediately slaughtered and buried at Barangay Bancasan in San Remigio. Vincoy said the pigs were no longer brought to another location as a protocol to prevent the spread of ASF.

No documents

The provincial government has imposed an "indefinite" ban on the entry of live hogs and pork products from Panay Island and Eastern Visayas region and from Luzon and Mindanao, where cases of ASF were reported, to protect the more than P10-billion pork industry of Cebu.

Investigation showed that the vessel carrying the pigs from Masbate arrived at dawn of Nov. 13 on the shores of Barangay Bancasan, San Remigio, which is not a usual docking port for motorized banca.

Some villagers relayed the matter to authorities. The local police then went to the area to intercept the shipment.

The owners of the pigs or its intended recipient in Cebu could not be immediately located as there were no permits or shipping documents presented by those who transported the pigs.

"At first, no one would tell us where these hogs came from, until someone (from those who shipped the pigs) said the pump boat came from Masbate. The pigs were loaded in Esperanza and then shipped directly to San Remigio," Vincoy said.

"It was a good thing that the incident was reported [to local authorities] immediately," she added.

Cebu Gov. Gwendolyn Garcia, who ordered the ban on the entry of hogs and meat products from ASF-infected areas, commended the swift action of the Provincial Veterinary Office and other agencies.

Vincoy admitted it remained a challenge for them to fight ASF, particularly the unauthorized movement of live hogs from the provinces at night and dawn.

"The problem really happens during the night or graveyard shift. Local governments, however, have been helping us in monitoring our borders at night," she said.

ASF is a fatal and highly contagious disease of domestic and wild pigs with a mortality rate of 100 percent, according to the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS). A vaccine has yet to be developed against ASF but the NMIS said the animal disease is not a threat to human health. INQ

MANILA BULLETIN

Date: NOV. 16, 2022 Page: B-1

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

MAP issues call

Senate urged to ratify RCEP now

By BERNIE CAHILES-MAGKILAT

The Management Association of the Philippines (MAP), a group of business leaders committed to promote excellence for nation building, has strongly urged the Senate to ratify without further delay the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) deal saying the country has lost 10 months against ASEAN neighbors in competing for foreign investments and expanded trade flows.

"We strongly urge our honorable Senators to ratify RCEP now," said MAP in a statement Tuesday, Nov. 15.

The mega trade deal was already ratified by then President Rodrigo Duterte, but the Senate failed to concur the ratification by the executive branch amid strong opposition from various organizations, particularly farmer groups.

"We have already lost 10 months of ability to compete on equal footing with our ASEAN and Asian partners already in RCEP in attracting foreign investments as they capitalize on the shift by a number of multinational corporations (MNCs) to seek alternative locations for their manufacturing sites," said MAP

According to MAP, the delay in ratification deprives the country's producers of various exportable products of easier access to the markets of the RCEP countries due to the improved provisions on market access and easier rules of origin.

"The threat of likely diversion by their buyers of their business to other members already in RCEP is very real," MAP said.

Similarly, foreign investors will favor locating in other RCEP countries, including those already in the country, who are likely to move their business out of the country the longer we delay ratification. "All told, we risk not only failing to attract new investments and trade opportunities; we are also likely to lose those we now have to those already in RCEP," MAP said.

MAP further called "misplaced, unfounded and illusory" the fears of some agricultural sector critics of RCEP based on pronouncements by experts and negotiators from the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Agriculture.

The group cited government negotiators in RCEP who have repeatedly explained that sensitive agricultural products remain protected under our commitments to the agreement. These products include rice, swine meat, poultry meat, potatoes, onions, garlic, cabbages, sugar, and carrots. All these farm products will retain the restrictions they currently enjoy.

The DTI and the Department of Agriculture (DA) have explained that membership in the Agreement opens up further export opportunities for our agricultural products "without exposing ourselves to an imagined flood of farm imports feared by opponents."

As the most important economic grouping in the world so far, MAP stressed the "Philippines cannot afford not to be in RCEP."

"It is time that we got on board and proactively exploit the wealth of opportunities it offers the Filipinos in terms of expanded jobs, increased incomes, and better lives," MAP added.

RCEP is a 15-member free trade deal that accounts for one-third of the world's economy, one-third of the global trade, and a market of 2.3 billion people. RCEP also covers 50 percent of the global manufacturing output, 50 percent of the global automotive products, and 70 percent of electronics products.

RCEP member economies also account for 51 percent of the Philippines' export market, 68 percent of the country's imports and, most importantly, 58 percent of the country's foreign direct investment inflows, according to DTI.

MAP even likened it to the European Union, a powerful economic bloc that will benefit enormously from the interchange of business among them, and with the world at large.

The Manila Times®

Date: NOV. 16, 2022 Page: 18

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Philippines to import 7K metric tons of red onions

AGRICULTURE Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban on Tuesday said the government is considering the importation of 7,000 metric tons of red onions as retail prices have reached P300 per kilo.

Panganiban said he already tasked the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) to determine if there is a shortage in the supply of red onions as prices continue to increase despite the imposition of a P170 suggested retail price (SRP).

"I saw that the retail price reached P300 per kilo. I called the BPI to take a survey and see what can be done on whether we need to import," he said.

According to the agriculture department's daily price monitoring, the retail price of red onions hover from P250 to P280 per kilo.

"This should be urgent. If there is a shortfall then we have [to import], if [there's] no shortfall, we shall not," Panganiban added.

The DA official said importation will not affect local production as onion farmers have yet to harvest their produce.

"There is no production of red onions as farmers have yet to harvest. We will only import 7,000 metric tons so as not to affect the local production," he added.

The planting season for onions starts in October and goes on until December, while the harvest season is from February to March.

Earlier, Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura President Rosendo So made an appeal to the DA to intervene to arrest the spike in prices of red onions.

So said there is enough supply of red onions as stocks are still in the hands of traders.

Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food president Danilo Fausto said that the DA should strictly implement the P170 SRP.

Fausto said farmgate prices of onions during harvest ranged between P45 and P55 per kilo.

Fausto said the DA should work to increase the number of onion production areas from the current estimated 18,000 hectares to 25,000 ha.

Fausto added that the government should provide more post-harvest facilities and cold storage preferably under the management of farmers cooperatives or clusters.

He said the DA should also link producers to customers and minimize the role of middlemen and traders to solve unstable prices at farm gate level.

Fausto said that the DA and the BPI should also provide better technology to control armyworms and other pests and diseases.

Retailers warned that the retail prices of red onions could increase further as demand increases during the holiday season.

Galunggong price increase

The Association of Fresh Fish Traders of the Philippines on Tuesday said retail prices of galunggong (round scad) are expected to increase despite the implementation of a fishing ban from November 1 to January 31 next year.

Roderick "John John" Santos, president of the fish traders' group, said that because of the closed fishing season in Palawan, markets in Metro Manila and other areas in Luzon will depend on the supply of imported fish products.

"Palawan supplies 90 percent of the fish requirement in Metro Manila and Luzon so if the fishing activities stop, we cannot eat locally produced galunggong," Santos said.

The fishing ban aims to allow fish species to reproduce and for the fry and juveniles to mature and restore valuable fish stocks.

Santos said the importation of 25,000 metric tons of round scad and other fish products was necessary because of the fishing ban.

"At least 50,000 metric tons of fish are needed during the closed fishing season, but during the stakeholders meeting, it was agreed to import 25,000 metric tons of frozen fish so as not to flood the wet markets with imported fish products," he added.

Santos added that retail prices of round scad are expected to go up with supply being sourced abroad.

"We should expect movement in the price of fish, especially galunggong," he added.

Santos is confident that the retail prices of tilapia and milkfish will remain stable.

"Prices of tilapia and milkfish will remain stable as an option for consumers," Santos noted.

Santos noted that there is an abundance in the supply of tilapia and milkfish during the closed fishing season.

"For the past years, aquaculture growers make sure the supply of tilapia and milkfish are more than enough in November to December as they take advantage of the closed fishing season to increase the demand for tilapia and milkfish," he said.

Based on the daily monitoring of the DA, the retail prices of local galunggong ranged from P180 to P260 per kilo while imported frozen round scad ranged from P200 to P240 per kilo, and alumahan, P300 to P320 per kilo.

The retail prices of tilapia ranged from P100 to P140 per kilo, and bangus, P150 to P220 per kilo.

BELLA CARIASO

BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

Date: NOV. 16, 2022 Page: A4

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Bataan emerges as 3rd PHL province to be declared bird-flu free by Agriculture dept

By Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas
@jearcalas

THE province of Bataan has been declared by the Department of Agriculture (DA) as an avian influenza (AI)-free province, becoming the third province to regain its freedom status nationwide amid an earlier string of bird flu outbreaks.

Senior Agriculture Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban issued Memorandum Circular (MC) 39 series of 2022 that officially recognized Bataan province as free from bird flu. MC 39 was signed by Panganiban on November 14.

MC 39 explained that Bataan has not recorded any bird flu outbreaks for more than 40 days since the last disinfection operation in the province.

Under the World Organisation for Animal Health's Terrestrial Animal Health Code, an area can regain their freedom status from bird flu after a minimum period of 28 days after implementation of stamping-out policy, disinfection measures and surveillance program.

"Results of subsequent disease monitoring in the 1-kilometer and 7-kilometer surveillance zones surrounding the affected farms yielded negative results for influenza type A virus," the memorandum circular read.

"The last HPAI H5N1 laboratory detection in Bataan was on 22 March 2022," it added.

The DA earlier declared the provinces of Camarines Sur and Davao Del Sur free from bird flu. ***(Related story: https://businessmirror.com.ph/2022/07/05/da-declares-camarines-surdavao-del-sur-free-of-bird-flu/)***

Latest data from the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI), as of October 20, showed that 136 barangays nationwide have been affected by bird flu since the start of the year. The number corresponds to 68 cities and municipalities in 18 provinces across 9 regions.

BAI noted that as of October 20, there was no ongoing bird flu case since necessary culling or depopulation measures have been undertaken by authorities.

BAI data showed that there are 41 cities and municipalities with no reported bird flu case for more than three months already while 13 cities and municipalities have no cases for at least 61 to 90 days.

The government has culled over 1.2 million birds this year to control the spread of the AI.

The Philippines lost earlier this year its bird-flu free status after the government reported its first confirmed outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) Type A subtype H5N1 in Central Luzon. ***(Related story: https://businessmirror.com.ph/2022/02/22/phl-reports-new-avian-flu-outbreaks-in-central-luzon-farms/)***

Malaya
Business Insight

Date: NOV. 16, 2022 Page: A3

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

No new bird flu cases

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE country is gaining progress in its effort to stamp out avian influenza after the Department of Agriculture (DA) declared the province of Bataan free from the animal disease.

Bataan is one of the latest province to be declared avian flu-free.

Data from the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) showed there were no positive avian influenza cases reported from October 14 to October 20. There are no ongoing cases since culling and depopulation activities in previously reported cases were completed.

Despite having no ongoing cases of the disease, not all previously affected areas can be simultaneously considered free from avian influenza as under the current government guidelines, only those without cases for at least 90 days can be processed to be considered as recovered.

The declaration of Bataan as avian-flu free was made through Memorandum Circular (MC) No. 39 Series 2022.

The MC signed by DA Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban said the highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 in Bataan was detected back in March 22, 2022.

The MC said based on the Terrestrial Animal Health Code of 2021 of the World Organization for Animal Health, the avian influenza free status of a previously free country or zone may be regained after a minimum period of 28 days after a stamping-out policy has been completed alongside the disinfection of the last affected establishment was carried out together with consequent surveillance.

Drive vs bird flu. The DA-BAI prioritizes ithorough disease investigation, immediate culling and proper disposal of all remaining birds in affected farms. (DA Photo)

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
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Date: 16 NOV 2022 Page: 14

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Bataan bird flu-free

The province of Bataan has been cleared from avian influenza or bird flu.

In memorandum circular issued recently, Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban declared Bataan free from avian influenza.

Panganiban said the province tested negative for the disease based on the monitoring of the one-to-seven-kilometer surveillance zones surrounding the affected farms.

"The last HPAI H5N1 laboratory detection in Bataan was on March 22," the circular read.

Outbreaks were detected in two provinces in March after a backyard duck farm tested positive for the virus.

The outbreaks prompted local government units, in coordination with the Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI), to implement disease control measures such as stamping out, cleansing and disinfection as well as other quarantine activities to prevent the spread of the disease.

The DA said more than 40 days have lapsed since the last cleanup and disinfection operations were conducted in affected areas, in accordance with the World Organization of the Animal Health (WHOAH) Terrestrial Code and the Avian Influenza Protection.

Based on Article 10.4.6. of the WHOAH, a country or zone may regain the avian influenza-free status at least 28 days after completing the stamping out activity, disinfection and surveillance resulting in the absence of infection.

The BAI said the avian influenza could be spread through migratory or local wild birds, late or non-reporting of suspected cases and illegal movement of infected birds.

As of Oct. 20, BAI data showed 18 provinces in nine regions still have confirmed bird flu cases. – **Danessa Rivera**

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

16 NOV 2022
PAGE: B3

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Rice and fish

There was this story of a school girl whose *baon* every school day was a cup of rice sprinkled with *patis* or fish sauce. That was all her parents could afford, the story on social media said.

The basic Filipino diet is rice and fish. Fish and fish products provide the bulk of protein for more than half of all Filipinos when they eat.

Galunggong or scad was the poor man's fish when I was growing up. But today, the poor can no longer afford *galunggong*. It is now imported.

DEMAND AND SUPPLY

BOO CHANCO

Today, the most affordable fish are bangus and tilapia because these are products of aquaculture. Bangus and tilapia can be bought at P170 and P120 per kilo, respectively. That's lower than local and imported *galunggong*, which range from P200 to P320 per kilo. Lazada lists it at P299.

"Per capita, Filipinos consume about 60 kilos of meat protein per year. Sixty percent of that or roughly 36 kilos comes from fish, according to government data. Hence, fish, like bangus and tilapia, can be a real 'lifesaver,' especially for low-income families," Tugon Kabuhayan, an advocacy group said.

But like almost everything else, we have fumbled on bangus the way we have fumbled rice, corn, onions, garlic, etc. We used to be the market leader in bangus, with neighboring countries looking at us for technology assistance. Not anymore.

We are now importing our bangus fry from Indonesia and Taiwan. That's because we did not continue investing in our breeder farms. The *sabalo* from Taiwan came from Palawan. They studied the breeding habits to produce fry.

Tilapia is now saving the day for many families. About 12 percent of their animal-based protein consumption comes from farmed tilapia.

We had so much promise in aquaculture. As late as 2018, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported that the Philippines is the 11th largest aquaculture producer in the world, with a contribution of 1.01 percent of the total world production. The country is also the fourth largest producer of aquatic plants (including seaweed), comprising 1.48 million MT or 4.56 percent of the total world production.

A policy brief written by a team led by economist Dr. Karlo Adriano reports that the country's aquaculture has a strong potential to expand and develop because of the availability of its vast resources (338,393 hectares of swampland, 14,531 hectares of freshwater fishponds, 239,323 hectares of brackish water fishponds, 200,000 hectares of lakes, 31,000 hectares of rivers, and 19,000 hectares of reservoirs).

"The proper management and utilization of these available production areas would easily increase aquaculture production by more than 100 percent," the Adriano policy paper said.

But we have squandered our great potential in aquaculture, as in everything that the Department of Agriculture is responsible for. The local production of the sector has been stagnant since 2017. The average annual growth rate of aquaculture is only 0.1 percent from 2017 to 2021.

"Based on the data of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), aquaculture production recorded an annual decline of -3.3 percent from 2,323 thousand MT in 2020 to 2,246 thousand MT in 2021, at constant 2018 prices. In terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the fishery's share is minimal with only a 1.5 percent average contribution from 2010 to 2020 at constant 2018 prices. Despite having a minimal contribution to GDP."

While the global fisheries and aquatic production are rapidly growing, our aquaculture production is even contracting.

According to the Food and Fertilizer Technology Center (2008), Philippine aquaculture is faced with the following challenges: (1) Unavailability of high-quality fry/fingerlings, (2) High input costs, (3) Lack of post-harvest facilities, (4) Limited access to both local and international market, (5) Food safety and quality constraints, among others.

According to the policy paper, "the underdevelopment of the aquaculture sector can be attributed mainly to the lack of a value chain approach (upstream, production, midstream, and downstream).

"For instance, a major constraint in the upstream is the limited supply of fry or fingerlings and the high cost of inputs such as feeds and fertilizers."

Studies have shown that the major upstream bottlenecks in the production of milkfish in the country are the high prices of commercial formulated feeds, and the insufficient local fry and/or fingerlings supply. On average, feeds constitute around 60 percent of the total operating costs of a typical pen or cage culture system.

"On the other hand, the country has been heavily dependent on the importation of fry to augment the fry requirements of the local milkfish industry... approximately 1.65 billion milkfish fry is required annually based on the country's milkfish production. In general, this can be attributed to the insufficient investment in the development of hatcheries and nurseries."

Aquaculture fishers are also faced with limited access to credit and financial assistance. How can they invest in new technology and modern facilities without access to credit?

The Philippines is also lagging behind other countries in terms of marketing and post-harvest practices for fishery products... According to ADB, the number of establishments processing aquaculture products that are HACCP-certified were still very limited... then there is the limited cold chain infrastructure...

Oh well... What else is new? We know what our problems are, our experts have good recommendations, but DA and BFAR flub implementation. We have good experts in aquaculture just as we have good experts in rice. If only decision makers listened to them.

I visited the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center, Aquaculture Department (SEAFDEC/AQD) in Iloilo some years ago with Senator Serge Osmena III. They do great work, which recently included farming *galunggong*.

"Our breeders have been spawning continuously since December last year until this February, and we now have thousands of *galunggong* in different larval to early juvenile stages at our hatchery, which we hope to further grow to market sizes to prove that we can farm *galunggong*," revealed SEAFDEC/AQD chief Dan Baliao in an interview last Feb. 28 and published in the website of aquaasiapac.com.

We have what it takes to be food self-sufficient. We have experts and we have natural resources. But our politicians are not focused on the national good. If only we elected better leaders... Oh well... we can dream.

Boo Chanco's email address is *bchanco@gmail.com*. Follow him on Twitter @boochanco

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LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Date: 16 NOV 2022 Page: B4

Reforming the sugar industry (Part 2)

The Philippine domestic sugar industry has a wide set of components along the value chain of production and trading. Due to its past history and organization, economic inefficiencies and incidence of high concentration of economic power have created problems that need attention and reform.

The value chain of sugar. As discussed in my Nov. 2 column (see Briones-PCC Competition paper), the value of sugar at retail follows the following value-chain formation:

At the agriculture stage, cane sugar is grown on the farm, and upon harvest is sold at sugar mill gate for crushing and processing. At this point, it accounts for 60.8 percent of the value of sugar.

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GERARDO P. SICAT

At the industrial processing stage, sugar is in raw form and refined sugar is the output. About 23.5 percent of value is added to the sugar product at this stage so that the value of sugar rises to 84.3 percent.

(In both the agriculture and industrial stages, other economic costs are incurred – costs of production, which includes transport costs and taxes.)

Finally, trading activities from wholesale to retail contributes another 15 percent to make up the full 100 percent value.

Reforms needed in the sugar industry. Based on the previous discussions, the reforms in the Philippine sugar industry need to touch all the three stages of the value formation.

(1) Agriculture: Sugar agriculture needs to raise its productivity to reduce per unit costs.

(2) Sugar milling. The sugar mills have to modernize their (a) machinery and (b) their sharing arrangements with planters concerning cane procurement.

(3) Industry and trade. Reforms (a) to improve domestic competition along the value chain from agriculture to milling operations, and finally to the retail level, and (b) liberalize the importation of sugar to help bring down sugar prices to respond to the world market for sugar.

The reforms recommended by the sugar policy paper of the Philippine Competition Commission focus mainly on those that help to improve competition within the industry.

Therefore, they do not encompass the full scope of development and health of the sugar industry, which are reforms (1) and (2). Lack of space does not permit discussion of these important earlier stages of reforms aimed at raising productivity.

Policy reform recommendations of the PCC. Below are some of the important PCC policy recommendations.

They are not comprehensive, but if they are implemented, they could alter the health and development of this industry. The sugar industry itself and the Department of Agriculture need to focus on a broader set of important reforms that are implied in related to the agricultural and the mill-stages of development.

(1) Liberalize importation of raw and refined sugar. This is the major recommendation of the PCC and is fully identical to the reforms (3b) affecting trade and industry. It is designed to enhance domestic competition by enabling free imports of sugar under the direction of traders rather than by a state marketing agency.

Under the current framework, the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) must first determine that a supply shortage is imminent and then imports are made. Even as it issues the order to import, SRA still has powers associated with the allocation of the sugar imports.

Under this framework, the benefits from the imports do not necessarily go to consumers and domestic users of sugar, but are appropriated as rents to favored parties. Thus, the general public, consisting of consumers and domestic sugar users, do not share well in the form of price reduction.

Enabling a more liberal importation of sugar under the system of import preference for sugar in accordance with ATIGA (ASEAN Trade In Goods Agreement, at six percent) and all other countries at MFN (most-favored-nation, at 65 percent) will provide domestic protection for the local sugar industry and will enable improved flexibility in reducing sugar prices in the country. As important is the fact that the benefits to local consumers and sugar users are dispersed and not bureaucratically pre-determined.

(Further analysis of this point will be made in a future column.)

(2) Re-examine the producer mill sharing system and consider a procurement system for sugarcane. A long-standing issue between millers and sugar farmers is the institution of sharing the output from the milled sugar cane input. This policy recommendation corresponds to policy reform (2b) and in (3a) in the list of reforms that I have enumerated following the value chain for sugar.

The PCC sees the current system of sharing output from the cane between millers and farmers as being too rigid. It favors a shift out of this system toward a system in which millers bid for the cane produce. Such a shift will remove a key source of inefficiency in the sugar industry. The PCC observes that such a system already takes place in the case of mill districts in Negros island.

(3) Continue and strengthen the quedan system as a warehouse receipt system. The quedan is a warehouse receipt document that indicates ownership and values of sugar held in a warehouse.

Under the current powers of the sugar regulator, the SRA uses quedans for different types of sugar markets (for export to the US; for domestic use; for export to other countries; and for reserve). This is an inefficiency because it segments the market for sugar. This institution was devised to allocate domestically produced sugar in the old days when the sugar export to the US was large and significant. Today, much of the domestic sugar production is for domestic use.

The recommendation to liberalize imports will abolish such market segmentation for sugar, thereby creating also a single and more powerful use of the quedan system for trading. It will also enable the country to avail of cheaper sugar from the world market, forcing domestic producers to undertake more serious structural reforms within the sugar industry – both in the agricultural and the industrial milling stages.

Even as such competition reforms are undertaken, the government and the industry will still need to work out the needed reforms in sugar agriculture and milling industry.

For archives of previous Crossroads essays, go to: *https://www.philstar.com/authors/1336383/gerardo-p-sicat*. Visit this site for more information, feedback and commentary: *http://econ.upd.edu.ph/gpsicat/*

BusinessWorld™

Date: 16 NOV 2022 Page: S1/5

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

MAP urges Senate to act on RCEP after 10-month delay

THE Management Association of the Philippines (MAP) said the Senate must immediately ratify the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement, citing the risk of losing out on foreign investment should further delays ensue.

"Foreign investors will favor locating in other RCEP countries, including those already in the Philippines, who are likely to move their business out of the country the longer we delay ratification," MAP said in a statement on Tuesday.

"All told, we risk not only failing to attract new investments and trade opportunities; we are also likely to lose those we now have to those already in RCEP," it added.

The RCEP, which started coming into force in the various member countries on Jan. 1, is touted as the world's largest free trade agreement involving Australia, China, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The Philippines is one of two countries yet to ratify RCEP, along with fellow ASEAN member Myanmar. One of the other holdouts, Indonesia, signed on at the end of August.

"We have already lost 10 months of ability to compete on equal footing with our ASEAN and Asian partners already in RCEP in attracting foreign investment as they capitalize on the shift by a number of MNCs to seek alternative locations for their manufacturing sites," it said.

MAP noted that the delay in signing onto the agreement deprives domestic producers of easier access to global markets and easier trade flows due to the agreement's simplified rules of origin.

"The threat of likely diversion by their buyers of their business to other members already in RCEP is very real," it said.

The Philippines failed to sign on to RCEP in the previous Congress due to concerns by some Senators over the absence of safeguards for agriculture.

Federation of Free Farmers President Leonardo Q. Montemayor has said the RCEP approval effort "highlight(s) its benefits in terms of market access opportunities (but) conveniently downplays, if not deliberately conceals (a) crucial caveat that any tariff concession from our trading partners under RCEP will not be exclusive to the Philippines, and will in fact be available to all other RCEP member countries."

"This means that there is no guarantee that we will be able to avail of and benefit from such opportunities especially if competing countries who are also part of RCEP are more competitive, dependable, and efficient than us," he added.

MAP described as "misplaced" opposition from the agricultural sector, noting as well that sensitive agricultural products remain protected under the Philippines' commitments to RCEP. These products include rice, pork, poultry meat, potatoes, onions, garlic, cabbages, sugar, and carrots. "All will retain the restrictions they currently enjoy," it said.

"Both the DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) and the Department of Agriculture (DA) have explained that membership in the Agreement opens up further export opportunities for our agricultural products, without exposing ourselves to an imagined flood of farm imports feared by opponents," it added.

Senator Imelda Josefa Remedios R. Marcos, who chairs the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, has said that the DA's track record of preferring imports instead of developing productive farms has been cited as a potential deal-breaker within the chamber.

The DA has "an unparalleled record of reckless importation, which is why stakeholders are very fearful," she said at a hearing.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary-designate for Policy, Research and Development Noel A. Padre contends that the DA's mandate of ensuring food security takes heed of the necessity of improving domestic productivity, describing one of the strategies being pursued as "distributing our domestic production from surplus areas to deficit areas."

"We encourage imports only when domestic production is not enough to address our demand," he added. "With respect to the agriculture and fishery sector under RCEP, we assure the committee that we will continue to engage our stakeholders."

Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual said last week that the Marcos administration is determined to sign up to the agreement. "President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. is committed to ratify it."

The chamber has asked the executive branch to send formal notice of its endorsement of the treaty.

"Apparently, there have been no formal letters or endorsement of RCEP with this admin except that the President was the one who asked me to pass it," Senate President Juan Miguel F. Zubiri said at the floor. "We can't act on anything that's not on our table."

Senator Juan Edgardo M. Angara has said key Senate officials commit to accelerating the process with colleagues in the executive branch.

"The Philippines cannot afford not to be in RCEP, as part of what promises to be the most important economic grouping in the world," MAP said.

"It is time that we got on board and proactively exploit the wealth of opportunities it offers the Filipinos in terms of expanded jobs, increased incomes, and better lives," it added. "We strongly urge our honorable Senators to ratify RCEP now." — **Alyssa Nicole O. Tan**

Abante TONITE
MABILIS SA BALITA

Date: NOV. 16, 2022 Page: 3

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

NIA boss 6 buwan sinuspinde ng Ombudsman

Pinatawan ng 6 buwang preventive suspension ng Ombudsman si National Irrigation Administration (NIA) Acting Administrator Benny Antiporda kaugnay ng ilang reklamo ng kawani ng ahensya.

Nang malaman ang inisyung suspensyon, sinabi ni Antiporda na handa niyang harapin ang mga reklamo ng mga kawani. Aniya, inasahan na niya ang ganitong mga reklamo dahil marami ang nagagalit sa kanyang ipinatutupad na polisya sa loob ng NIA na naka-tuon para labanan ang korapsyon.

Ngayong araw ay nakatakda itong magpawatawag ng isang press conference para linawin ang mga reklamo laban sa kanya.

Sa anim na pahinang desisyon ng Ombudsman sinabi nito na may basehan ang reklamong grave misconduct, conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service, harassment, ignorance of the law at oppression kaya nag-isyu ito ng preventive suspension upang hindi nito maimpluwensyahan ang isasagawang imbestigasyon.

Ilan sa mga kawani ay inireklamo ang mga pagbabanta ni Antiporda na aalisin sa puwesto ang ilang kawani ng General Services Division at hindi pagre-renew ng appointment at ilang insidente ng pamamahiya sa mga empleyado sa flag raising ceremony. **(Tina Mendoza)**

Pilipino Star
NGAYON
Diyaryong disente ng masang intelihente

Date: 16 NOV 2022 Page: 9

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Bataan idineklarang bird flu-free na - DA

Mismong ang Department of Agriculture (DA) ang nag-anunsiyo kahapon na bird flu-free na rin ang lalawigan ng Bataan.

Sa pamamagitan ng Memorandum Circular No. 39, series of 2022, ng DA, na may petsang Nobyembre 14, 2022, idineklara ni Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban na malaya na ang Bataan mula sa avian influenza o bird flu.

Matatandaang ang Bataan ay unang naapektuhan ng highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) subtype H5N1 noong Marso 2022, matapos na isang backyard mallard duck farm ang nagpositibo mula sa virus.

Ayon kay Panganiban, matapos ma-detect ang karamdaman, kaagad na nagsagawa ang lokal na pamahalaan ng Bataan, sa pakikipag-koordinasyon sa DA Regional Field Office III at Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI), ng disease investigation, immediate depopulation, cleaning at disinfection, movement restrictions at surveillance sa mga apektadong lugar.

"Results of subsequent disease monitoring in the one-kilometer and seven-kilometer surveillance zones surrounding the affected farms yielded negative results for influenza type A virus. The last HPAI H5N1 laboratory detection was on March 22, 2022," dagdag pa ng DA official.

Sinabi ni Panganiban na naideklarang bird flu free ang Bataan matapos ang joint efforts ng mga local government units (LGUs), DA Regional Field Office, at BAI, sa pagpapatupad ng epektibong pamamaraan upang makontrol at mapigilan ang pagkalat pa ng karamdaman.

Batay sa datos ng BAI, lumilitaw na wala na silang naitalang mga kaso ng bird flu sa lalawigan mula Oktubre 14 hanggang 20, 2022.

Nabatid na nasa 9 na rehiyon, 18 lalawigan, 68 munisipalidad, at 136 barangay ang naapektuhan ng avian influenza simula pa noong Enero ng taong ito.

Bukod sa Bataan, una na ring idineklarang bird flu free ang mga lalawigan ng Camarines Sur at Davao del Sur. *(Mer Layson)*

Daily Tribune
WITHOUT FEAR ◦ WITHOUT FAVOR

Date: NOV. 16, 2022 Page: B15

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Nueva Ecija irrigation system boost farmers livelihoods

CARRANGLAN, Nueva Ecija – The Department of Environment and Natural Resources in the region stressed on Tuesday that a recently-opened irrigation system will ensure the survival of forest plantations and provide sustainable livelihood in this town.

DENR regional executive director Paquito Moreno Jr., the Bayang-bayang irrigation pipeline system would directly benefit 749 hectares of forest tree, agroforestry and fuelwood plantations jointly managed by Kadangdanglaan Farmers Association Inc. and Samahang Itinatag Para sa Pangkalikasan at Pang-Agrikulturang Gawain Inc.

The agency and the Japan International Cooperation Agency opened the P12-million Bayang-bayang irrigation pipeline system in Barangay General Luna, Carranglan. JONAS REYES

Malaya
Business Insight

Date: NOV. 16, 2022 Page: A1 & A2

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

MAP urges Senate to ratify RCEP

THE Management Association of the Philippines (MAP) is calling on the Senate to immediately ratify the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), saying the Philippines has lost 10 months of the opportunity to compete on equal footing with its partners in Asia which have joined the deal.

MAP in a statement said the delay in ratification deprives the country's producers of various exportable products of easier access to the markets of the RCEP countries due to the improved provisions on market access and easier rules of origin. The group added the threat of likely diversion by their buyers of their business to other members already in RCEP is very real. The group also warned foreign investors will favor locating in other RCEP countries, including those already in the country, which are likely to move their business out of the country the longer we delay ratification.

" All told, we risk not only failing to attract new investments and trade opportunities; we are also likely to lose those we now have to those already in RCEP," MAP said.

The group also lashed out as

See MAP ➤ Page A2

MAP

unfounded and illusory what it called are the misplaced fears of some agricultural sector critics on the impact of RCEP.

"(Government has) repeatedly explained that sensitive agricultural products remain protected under our commitments to the Agreement. These products include rice, swine meat, poultry meat, potatoes, onions, garlic, cabbages, sugar, and carrots," the MAP said. - ***Irma Isip***

BusinessWorld™

Date: 16 NOV 2022 Page: 4/S1

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DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

OPINION

Food fortification

MEDICINE CABINET

TEODORO B. PADILLA

Micronutrients — vitamins and minerals needed by the body in minute amounts — are critical to optimal bodily functions and a deficiency in any of them can cause severe and even life-threatening conditions, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Micronutrients perform a range of functions, including enabling the body to produce enzymes, hormones, and other substances needed for normal growth and development. Deficiencies in iron, vitamin A, and iodine are the most common around the world, particularly in children and pregnant women. Low- and middle-income countries bear the disproportionate burden of micronutrient deficiencies, the WHO noted.

A lack of iron, folate, and vitamins B12 and A can lead to anemia, a condition in which there is a reduced number of red blood cells or hemoglobin concentration, causing fatigue, weakness, shortage of breath and dizziness. This can further lead to difficulties in functioning in work, education and community engagement. The WHO estimates that 42% of children under 5 years of age and 40% of pregnant women worldwide are anemic.

Severe iodine deficiency can lead to brain damage and, during pregnancy, cause a number of issues including stillbirth, spontaneous abortion and congenital anomalies. Less severe iodine deficiency may still cause mental impairment that reduces intellectual capacity. Vitamin A deficiency is the leading cause of preventable blindness in children and increases the risk of disease and death from severe infections such as diarrheal disease and measles. Vitamin A deficiency may also occur in women during the last trimester of pregnancy in high-risk areas.

Fortification is the practice of deliberately increasing the content of one or more micronutrients (i.e., vitamins and minerals) in a food or condiment to improve the nutritional quality of the food supply and provide a public health benefit with minimal risk to health. Aside from increasing the nutritional content of staple foods, the addition of micronutrients can help to restore the micronutrient content lost during processing. The WHO recommends large-scale food fortification as a powerful evidence-informed and cost-effective intervention to fight vitamin and mineral deficiencies, including iodine deficiency disorders, anemia and iron deficiency, among others.

National Food Fortification Day is observed annually in the country on Nov. 7 to highlight the persistence of micronutrient deficiencies as a public health problem affecting a significant proportion of the population. Republic Act 8172, otherwise known as "An Act Promoting Salt Iodization Nationwide (ASIN)," was signed into law in December 1995 with the purpose of eliminating micronutrient malnutrition in the country, particularly iodine deficiency disorders, through salt iodization. The law is a cost-effective and preventive measure that requires all manufacturers of salt to iodize the salt they produce, manufacture, import, trade, or distribute.

The ASIN law was supplemented by Republic Act 8976, otherwise known as the Philippine Food Fortification Act of 2000. The law has two components. With voluntary food fortification, the Department of Health (DoH) encourages manufacturers to fortify their processed foods and food products based on rules and regulations the DoH prescribes through the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). On the other hand, among the staple foods that fall under the mandatory fortification component are rice and salt (to be fortified with iron), wheat flour (to be fortified with vitamin A and iron), and refined sugar and cooking oil (both to be fortified with vitamin A). These staples were chosen because these are regularly consumed by the population, especially those at risk to micronutrient deficiencies regardless of socioeconomic status.

The Sangkap Pinoy Seal Program (SPSP) strategy encourages food manufacturers to fortify processed foods or food products with essential nutrients at levels approved by the DoH. The DoH seal of acceptance is used by manufacturers after their products have passed a set of criteria for food fortification. This seal serves as a guide for consumers in selecting nutritious foods. The Sangkap Pinoy Seal is granted to manufacturers who fortify their processed food products with iron, vitamin A, and iodine. The Saktong Iodine sa Asin Quality Seal can be seen on salt products with the recommended amount of iodine. The Diamond Sangkap Pinoy Seal is for staples covered by mandatory food fortification.

There are a number of factors that affect an individual's health. Eating right is a step into the right direction.

TEODORO B. PADILLA is the executive director of the Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Association of the Philippines (PHAP), which represents the biopharmaceutical medicines and vaccines industry in the country. Its members are at the forefront of research and development efforts for COVID-19 and other diseases that affect Filipinos.

REMATE
ANG DIARYO NG MASA

Date: NOV. 16, 2022 Page: 2

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Mga produktong agrikultura mula Nueva Vizcaya, murang mabibili sa Maynila

UPANG matulungan ang mga magsasaka at maibenta ang kanilang mga ani, nagsanib-pwersa ang lokal na pamahalaan ng Maynila at Nueva Vizcaya.

Simula bukas, Nob. 16, hanggang Biyernes (Nob. 17) ay idaraos ang "Nueva Vizcaya Tienda in Manila" sa Kartilya ng Katipunan Park, sa tabi ng Manila City Hall.

Batay sa abiso ng Manila Public Information Office, tampok rito ang iba't ibang sariwang produkto na iluluwas sa Maynila mula sa Nueva Vizcaya kung saan abot-kaya ang mga mabibiling produkto gaya ng mga gulay, prutas at marami pang iba.

Inaasahan ding may maibebenta rito na mga handi-craft, na likha rin ng mga resi-dente ng Nueva Vizcaya.

Apela naman ng lokal na pamahalaang lungsod ng Maynila sa publiko, suportahan ang proyektong ito bilang tulong at Pamasko na rin sa mga magsasaka.

Payo naman ng lokal na pamahalaan sa mga tutungo

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NEWS IN A FLASH
THE NATION'S FASTEST GROWING NEWSPAPER
NOV. 16, 2022 PAGE: 4

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

EDITORIAL

PH's call for post-pandemic Recovery, economic cooperation heard on the world stage

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. returned to the country early this week after the 40th and 41st Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summits and Related Summits in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. He dubbed the participation of the Philippines — and his first as Chief Executive — as a success, owing to the numerous dialogues, meetings, and side talks made with our neighbors and allied countries.

Foremost, the President reported to the nation his call for unity among the ASEAN member states and the need for collective strength in order to address post-pandemic recovery issues. "We have similar challenges on food supply, fertilizer prices, oil prices, etc. Member states understand that we can't do this alone. We need to be united and help each other," he said.

The President also mentioned that other pressing issues were discussed, some of which required a "balancing act" as there were opposing sides to consider, such as the situation in Myanmar, the developments in the South China Sea, the war in Ukraine, the application of Timor-Leste for ASEAN membership, etc. During these talks, the President ensured that the Philippines extended its openness to listen and demonstrated receptiveness to cooperation and mutual interests.

"We reviewed the progress of our relations so far, in the initiatives and projects under ASEAN-led mechanisms. There was an exploration of possible new areas of cooperation with our dialogue partners. We exchanged views on regional and international issues," he said, describing his participation in dialogues with the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

As for bilateral meetings, the President had a fruitful discussion with leaders from Cambodia, Brunei, Canada, these meetings, we discussed how we can deepen cooperation in key areas and we exchanged views on important regional and global issues."

More importantly, the economy was on top of the President's agenda. "I invited (Cambodian) business leaders to visit and have a look at the opportunities that they might find in the Philippines, arising from the process of transforming the economy, given that it seems our direction for post-pandemic recovery is bearing fruit. Our discussions touched on collaboration on specific sectors such as food processing, energy, housing, medical care, the manufacture of garments and bags, education, training," the President said.

This positive outcome from the ASEAN meet, buoyed by the optimism of the President who debuted on the world stage, bodes well for the country's participation in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Meeting, which will be held in Bangkok, Thailand starting today, Nov. 16, 2022. Like in the ASEAN meet, the President intends to raise on the world stage the priorities of the country in terms of trade, investment, and post-pandemic recovery.

Add to that, the President will push during the APEC meet for "an economic agenda which includes empowerment of the MSMEs and their inclusion in global value chains, recognition of the essential role of maritime crews and seafarers in ensuring stable and resilient supply chains, and ensuring food and energy security, as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation."

As the President departs for Bangkok, we wish him well. If a President does well on the world stage, it would send an uplifting message to the millions of Filipinos around the world and at home that the Philippines is,

Malaya
Business Insight

Date: NOV. 16, 2022 Page: A6

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Wheat drops, corn down

SINGAPORE- Chicago wheat futures slid on Tuesday, falling for the first time in three sessions, weighed down by rising expectations that an export corridor deal for Ukrainian grains would be renewed.

Corn ticked lower, while soybeans firmed.

"Market sentiment got a material, but ultimately brief, lift when Saudi Arabia bought a lot more milling wheat at tender than they originally planned," said Tobin Gorey, director of agricultural strategy at the Commonwealth Bank of Australia.

"The renewal, or otherwise, of Ukraine's Black Sea grain corridor this week remains the elephant in the room that is tempering activity. We expect the corridor will, ultimately, be renewed. But, like most, we are wary of what kind of disruptive skulduggery Russia's president might think of."

The most-active wheat contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) fell 0.1 percent to $8.17-3/4 a bushel. Corn lost 0.2 percent to $6.56-1/4 a bushel and soybeans added 0.2 percent to $14.42-3/4 a bushel.

The Kremlin said on Monday that talks with the United Nations last week on a deal safeguarding the shipment of grain from Ukrainian ports had been "fairly constructive", raising hopes that it can be rolled over smoothly.

Senior UN officials met a Russian delegation in Geneva on Friday to discuss Moscow's grievances about the Black Sea grain initiative, which has lifted a Russian blockade of Ukraine's seaports.

Wheat prices rose on Monday with strong demand supporting the market.

Saudi state buyer SAGO said on Monday it had bought just over 1 million tonnes of wheat in an international tender, with traders suggesting Russian wheat may be used to cover a large part of the optional-origin purchase. – ***Reuters***

Malaya
Business Insight

Date: NOV. 16, 2022 Page: A6

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

World making little progress on food waste, a big climate problem

EVERY Thursday, California resident Richard Redmond takes a gallon-sized container of food scraps to the farmers market in the city of South Pasadena where it is collected and composted for use in gardens – an effort to reduce the amount of household waste he sends to landfill.

"It's just stunning," the web designer, who is in his 60s, said. "You can see how separating it just reduces the amount of garbage you are putting out."

Redmond's experience is a tiny window into a huge global problem, and not enough people are with him.

Every year, the world throws away around 931 million tons of food, most of it ending up in landfills, where it decomposes to produce around a tenth of the world's climate-warming gases, according to the United Nations.

That's a major challenge for countries tackling global warming at the COP27 climate summit underway in Egypt. Nations around the globe pledged in 2015 to halve food waste by 2030, but few are on track to do so, according to officials from the United Nations, sustainability watchdogs, and governments interviewed by Reuters.

"Eight years to go and we are nowhere close to reaching that goal," said Rosa Rolle, the team leader for food loss and waste at the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization.

Among the top five biggest food wasters per capita, for example, at least three – the United States, Australia and New Zealand – have increased their food waste since 2015, according to independent estimates that their governments do not dispute. Reliable information for the other two, Ireland and Canada, was not available.

The problem is not limited to richer countries, either. A UN study last year found "negligible" correlation between household food waste and gross domestic product, indicating most countries "have room to improve."

The bleak performance is due to a lack of public investment and clear policies to counter things like food spoilage in trucks and warehouses, wasteful consumer habits, and confusion about expiration and sell-by dates, experts said.

Complicating the issue is a lack of transparency. When the UN General Assembly adopted the 2015 food waste goal, it did not establish a clear benchmark against which to measure progress because of spotty country-level estimates.

UN agencies and nonprofits attending COP27 will ask governments on Nov. 16 to renew their pledges and provide progress reports at next year's summit in Dubai, Rolle said.

The average American wastes more than 700 calories of food per day – about a third of recommended daily intake - according to a 2020 study by researchers in Switzerland and India, making America's progress an important benchmark for other nations.

The country is no role model yet. The amount of food wasted in the United States rose 12 percent between 2010 and 2016 and has since plateaued, according to ReFED, a waste reduction group that works closely with the US government.

"We do have a long way to make the goal," said Jean Buzby, the food waste liaison at the US Department of Agriculture.

Part of the problem is a lack of federal leadership.

The USDA, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Food and Drug Administration agreed in 2018 to tackle America's food waste together. But they've devoted few resources to the effort since, said Dana Gunders, executive director of ReFED.

A woman picks up vegetables discarded by food vendors at a garbage dump site of a wholesale market in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, China. *(Reuters Photo)*

USDA and FDA each have just one full-time staff person dedicated to food waste, the agencies told Reuters. EPA declined to give a number, saying the work was spread across several offices.

"What real focus would look like on this topic would be for each of these agencies to dedicate staff, to give those staff funding to implement things," Gunders said.

The USDA and EPA said they do not track spending on food waste initiatives. The FDA did not comment on its spending.

In the meantime, the agencies are relying on the private sector to help. Forty-seven companies, including food retailer Ahold Delhaize and processor General Mills, have made pledges to halve their food waste by 2030 as part of a voluntary USDA and EPA program launched in 2016. - ***Reuters***