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President calls nat'l budget as 'fine Xmas gift'

By Vince Lopez, Vito Barcelo and Maricel V. Cruz

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. signed the P5.268 trillion 2023 national budget on Friday, calling it "as fine a Christmas gift" a chief executive could receive from Congress.

The General Appropriations Act of 2023, he said, was the national roadmap that defines the intentions of the government and the projects it would pursue next year.

He also said the speed by which Congress passed the GAA—"the fastest passage of the national budget that we have seen so far"—was indicative of the support and solidarity that the legislature had with the executive department.

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President...

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"The roadmap that we have proposed from the executive is fully supported by our legislature and that is very, very important indeed," Marcos said, noting that preparing a budget was often a long, difficult, and long-drawn-out process.

"The legislature has been very cooperative in making... amendments that we find are necessary to the laws in terms of investment, in terms of... our financial policy. All these elements... are important for us to position ourselves in the... new economy after the pandemic," the President said.

Mr. Marcos thanked the members of both the Senate and the House of Representatives for creating the carefully crafted 2023 GAA, citing the leadership of Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri and House Speaker Martin Romualdez.

Moreover, the President also acknowledged the efforts of the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) for their dedication and hard work in preparing the budget proposal.

"I had a picture with the DBM and the DBM staff. And I've met withthem before. It's the first time I've seen them smiling again because their job is done." Mr. Marcos said.

The 2023 budget, which is 4.9 percent higher than this year's, seeks to support the current administration's goal of economic transformation, with the infrastructure and education sectors securing the largest shares.

The Department of Education, Public Works, Health, Social Welfare, Agriculture, and Transportation are among the priority sectors in the administration's first national budget.

Senate finance panel chairperson Sonny Angara said the bicameral conference-approved 2023 budget realigned funding to increase allocations for state universities and colleges, DepEd, infrastructure projects including bike lanes and specialty hospitals across the country, Libreng Sakay program, fuel subsidy, emergency employment,

Assistance to Individuals in Crisis, Quick Response Fund, Department of Justice, Department of Interior and Local Government, and the Supreme Court.

He said Congress also restored the P10-billion budget for the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), which was reduced to P5 billion in the House version of the proposed budget.

Angara said the signing of the 2023 national budget would ensure continuous delivery of service, including the "targeted ayuda," Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), medical assistance to low-income Filipinos, scholarships to students, assistance to public utility vehicle drivers and operators, subsidies for the farmers and fisherfolk, and increase of the pension for the indigent senior citizens.

He said the budget will also cover the benefits and allowance for the health workers in the country.

The budget also provided P170 billion for the agriculture sector, in line with the President's priority, Angara said.

It also incorporates P150 million in confidential funds for the Department of Education, as well as the P10 billion funding of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, two controversial budget items that the Senate had originally sliced from the spending plan.

The budget also includes a P4.5-billion confidential and intelligence fund under the Office of the President and P500 million under the Office of the Vice President. ***(See full story online at manilastandard.net)***

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SIGNED AND DELIVERED. President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. signs the 2023 General Appropriations Act (GAA) surrounded by Vice President Sara Duterte-Carpio, Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri, Speaker Martin Romualdez, Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin, and other lawmakers and Cabinet members (inset) who made it possible to draft and pass the spending measure in record time. **Ver Noveno**

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BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

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Marcos: European regard for PH business 'high'

By Nestor Corrales and Ronnel W. Domingo
@Team_Inquirer

The P9.8-billion in investment pledges that the government received from European investors shows that confidence in the country's business environment is high, President Marcos said upon his return from Belgium.

"I am pleased to announce that European business confidence in the Philippines is high as evidenced by the expansion plans of European companies that we met," the President said upon his arrival on Thursday evening.

Mr. Marcos said business leaders with whom he met "committed to be a part of our development and our economic growth, particularly in renewable energy, infrastructure, food security [and] climate change initiatives."

"With European technology and innovation with Filipino talent and ingenuity and industry, we will be working on addressing some of our key economic challenges," the President added.

P4.7B from Unilever

The pledges included those from British consumer goods giant Unilever, French shipbuilder Ocea SA, French agro-logistics firm Semmaris and Spanish conglomerate Acciona SA.

Unilever, which has been operating in the Philippines since 1927, pledged to invest P4.7 billion for a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility for personal care products in Cavite province.

Unilever makes popular brands of laundry detergents and soaps, shampoos and hair conditioners, toothpastes, deodorants, skin care products, household cleaners and toilet soaps.

The President also met with the shipbuilder Ocea, which renewed its intention to develop a shipyard worth P1.5 billion and create 500 to 600 direct and indirect jobs in the Philippines.

Press Undersecretary Cheloy Velicaria-Garafil said Ocea also commited to work with the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources in assisting Filipino fisherfolk to enhance their operations and promote sustainable fishing.

Agro-logistics hub

Semmaris, a semi-public company that operates the Rungis International Market in Paris, is eyeing to develop an agro-logistics hub at the New Clark City in Tarlac.

Benoit Juster, Semmaris executive director, said the hub would promote local production with fair prices to farmers and lower prices for consumers, improve logistics and decrease traffic congestion in Manila.

Juster said the company already had a development masterplan and cost estimates so it can start quickly in New Clark City.

Earlier this year, Semmaris also concluded a similar partnership agreement with companies in the United Arab Emirates on the creation of a future agro-logistics hub in Abu Dhabi.

Mr. Marcos also met with officials of the Spanish conglomerate Acciona which plans to invest in the renewable energy sector in the Philippines.

Acciona officials, led by its chairman Jose Manuel Entrecanales, are also looking at making Manila as its main hub in the Southeast Asian region. INQ

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TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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President Marcos signs the General Appropriations Act of 2023 in a ceremony at Malacañang. Also in photo are Vice President Sara Duterte, Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri, Speaker Martin Romualdez and Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin. KRIZJOHN ROSALES

Marcos signs P5.268-T national budget for 2023

By HELEN FLORES

President Marcos signed into law yesterday the P5.268-trillion General Appropriations Act (GAA) for 2023, the earliest enacted budget program in the country's history, designed – according to administration officials – to usher in prosperity in the post-pandemic era.

In his speech, Marcos described the signing of the 2023 GAA as a "historic moment" and a "fine Christmas gift" to any president from the legislature. This was the first national budget of the Marcos administration.

"I cannot overstate the significance of the fact that as Speaker Martin (Romualdez) continually reminds me, this is the quickest and the fastest – and the SP (Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri) – the fastest passage of the national budget that we have seen so far," the President said.

"And why is that important? Well, it is important because the budget is essentially the roadmap that we are going – that essentially defines and

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Marcos From Page 1

gives muscle to the roadmap of what we intend to do for the next year," Marcos said.

With the President during the budget signing at Malacañang were Vice President Sara Duterte, Zubiri, Romualdez, members of the Cabinet, members of the Senate led by finance committee chairman Sen. Sonny Angara, members of the diplomatic corps, officials of the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines and representatives from the business sector.

Marcos said the quick passage of the 2023 GAA shows that the roadmap proposed by the executive is fully supported by the legislature.

"And that is very, very important indeed. Because it is what is essentially or sometimes regarded as a long, difficult, long drawn-out process has been shown to still be able to express that kind of support, that kind of solidarity with the executive," he said.

"And that bodes well for us, seeing as we have many, many plans. There are many things that we need to do. There are many things that we would like to do. And we are slowly moving in that direction. We are doing all the structural changes that we need," the Chief Executive said.

Marcos also hailed the legislators for being "very cooperative" in making necessary amendments to the law.

"All of these elements that are important for us to position ourselves in the new – I nearly said new society – in the new economy after the pandemic," the President said.

Marcos, meanwhile, also approved the government's six-year development plan aimed at boosting the Philippines' economic and social transformation and make it more inclusive and resilient to unexpected shocks.

The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) board presented the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2023-2028 to Marcos during a meeting at Malacañang yesterday.

With Marcos' approval, the development plan will be ready for immediate implementation in 2023, according to the Office of the Press Secretary.

"This will facilitate the coordination and the alignment of all departments and all agencies in government to a single plan so that we are all working in the same direction," Marcos said.

Grateful

The President expressed his gratitude to the Senate and the House, as well as to the Department of Budget and Management, for working very hard to ensure the fast enactment of the spending law.

"And what we have achieved here in terms of the fact that we have been able to put into place the budgeting requirements for all that we plan to do and that we did it in record time, that is a significant, significant achievement. And for that, I can only thank you all," the Chief Executive said.

"It is the most important and potent tool the President, his economic team and the entire government can use to accomplish the goals of the prosperity roadmap," Romualdez said.

"The money needed to sustain our economic expansion momentum and keep the country on the high-growth path should be out on Jan. 1. Agencies should be ready to keep up with their programs, activities and projects, while observing transparency and accountability," Romualdez added.

House Majority Leader Manuel Jose Dalipe said the "record-breaking" enactment of the national budget is "proof of the Marcos administration's unparalleled commitment to quickly set into motion all the programs needed to revive the economy."

Angara said targeted financial assistance to sectors hardest-hit by the pandemic would continue under the approved budget program.

"While there were disagreements on some issues during the bicameral conference committee meetings, both panels found common ground in the need to ensure that assistance is given to those who require it the most and to keep the momentum going in the country's move towards economic recovery," Angara said.

"As stated by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., this budget is anchored on an agenda for prosperity. We are no longer at a point where we are catching up and reacting to the developments just like the past two years," he said.

"Now we can lay the foundation for the country to build on towards sustaining economic growth and providing more opportunities for our people," he added.

In a statement, the DBM said the passage of the 2023 national budget is historically the fastest for the country. The 2023 GAA is 4.9 percent higher than this year's budget.

The bicameral conference committee – composed of representatives from the Senate and the House of Representatives – approved the 2023 budget bill last Dec. 5.

The Marcos administration aims to achieve the following economic objectives outlined in its Medium-Term Fiscal Framework (MTFF): 6.5 to 7.5 percent real gross domestic product growth in 2022 and 6.5 to eight percent real GDP growth annually between 2023 and 2028; nine percent or single digit poverty rate by 2028; three percent national government (NG) deficit-to-GDP ratio by 2028; less than 60 percent NG debt-to-GDP ratio by 2025 and the attainment of upper-middle-income status for Filipinos.

Meanwhile, the eight-point socioeconomic agenda under the MTFF is focused on food security, improved transportation, affordable and clean energy, health care, social services, education, bureaucratic efficiency and sound fiscal management.

"When we submitted the NEP (National Expenditure Program) to the Congress, we only asked for one thing – hopefully, if they introduce amendments, it is in sync with the MTFF and the eight-point socioeconomic agenda. We are grateful that both houses have adopted," Budget Secretary Amenah Pangandaman said.

The following are the agencies with the highest appropriations for 2023 based on the final report of Congress: Department of Education (P900.9 billion), Department of Public Works and Highways (P881.9 billion), Department of Health (P334.9 billion), Department of the Interior and Local Government (P255.3 billion), Department of National Defense (P234.9 billion), Department of Social Welfare and Development (P199.5 billion), Department of Agriculture (P178.7 billion), Department of Transportation (P105.9 billion), Department of Justice (P54.9 billion), and Department of Labor and Employment (P44.8 billion). – **With Sheila Crisostomo, Paolo Romero**

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2023 NATIONAL BUDGET – President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. (seated) signs into law the ₱5.268-trillion national budget for 2023 in Malacañang on Friday, Dec. 16, 2022, and witnessed by Vice President Sara Duterte, Senate President Miguel Zubiri, House Speaker Martin Romualdez, Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin, and other Cabinet secretaries, senators, and congressmen. (Ali Vicoy)

Marcos signs 2023 budget

By BETHEENA V. UNITE

President Marcos signed into law the ₱5.268-trillion national budget for 2023, which "gives muscle" to the roadmap the administration intends to implement next year.

Marcos signed Republic Act 11936 (General Appropriations Act of 2023) in a ceremony with lawmakers and Cabinet members in Malacañang on Friday, Dec. 16.

The ₱5.268-trillion national budget for 2023 is 4.9 percent higher than this year's ▶ 8

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Marcos signs 2023 budget 1◂

budget of ₱5.024 trillion.

It intends to fund priority sectors such as education, public works, health, social welfare, agriculture and transportation.

The President underscored that the swift passage of the national budget "essentially defines and gives muscle to the roadmap of what we intend to do for the next year."

"The rapidity of the passage is significant because it means the roadmap we have proposed from the executive is fully supported by our legislature," Marcos said.

Marcos also stressed that the national budget would help "position ourself in the new economy" after the coronavirus pandemic.

"And that bodes well for us, seeing as we have many, many plans. There are many things that we need to do. There are many things that we would like to do. And we are slowly moving in that direction. We are doing all the structural changes that we need," Marcos said.

'Christmas gift'

The President described the prompt passage of the first national budget under his administration as a Christmas gift since it is regarded the fastest budget passed.

"I have been greeted by many of you as we had our pictures taken. Merry Christmas. Well, I will have, I suppose a Merry Christmas because this is as fine a Christmas gift any President can receive from his legislature," he said. "I cannot overstate the significance of the fact that, as Speaker Martin continually reminds me, this is the quickest and the fastest, and the SP (Senate President), the fastest passage of the national budget that we have seen so far."

The legislature, the chief executive said, "has been very cooperative" in making amendments that are necessary to the laws in terms of investment and the country's financial policy.

He commended both the House of Representatives and Senate for "moving in the same direction" and "following the same plan" as the Executive department.

"So, it is a very important day. It is always an important day when we sign into law the General Appropriations Act. It is always very important that the GAA has been put together in consonance with all of the plans of the Executive. And that kind of coordination and that kind of synergy that we will gain from that is going to be an essential part of the way that we move forward," Marcos said.

Rare feat

House Speaker Martin Romualdez said Congress achieved a rare feat with Friday afternoon's signing of the ₱5.268-trillion national budget for 2023.

"As far as I can remember, the 2023 budget is one of the few spending bills signed into law in mid-December, way before the start of its implementation on New Year's Day," Romualdez said in a statement.

From pandemic to prosperity

House Committee on Appropriations Chairman Elizaldy Co said the 2023 budget will help the country move forward from pandemic to prosperity.

"The annual passage of the General Appropriations Act is the single most important task of Congress. This GAA for 2023 will help the Philippines recover from the continuing effects of the pandemic and move forward to prosperity," said Co, who helped shepherd the law in the House of Representatives. "I thank my colleagues in the House and the Senate, and our officials from the Executive Department for the diligence, hard work, and long hours that they put in into the drafting, deliberations, and consequent swift passage of the law."

Co said the GAA provides for items that would sustain the growth we are enjoying, continue generating investments and jobs for our constituents, and increase incomes of Filipino families.

Shared responsibility

Passing the 2023 General Appropriations Bill (GAB), which contains the national budget, is a shared duty of the House of Representatives and the Senate—the two chambers of Congress.

The House gets first crack at scrutinizing the executive branch's proposed budget for a given year, which is usually transmitted to Congress following the President's State of the Nation Address (SONA).

The eventual budget bill or GAB is then approved by the House and sent to the Senate. The Senate approves its own version of the GAB, and then representatives of the two members meet to harmonize the two bills.

The House and the Senate ratified the harmonized and consolidated 2023 GAB on Dec. 5.

Romualdez had correctly predicted that Marcos would sign the ₱5.268-trillion budget after the latter came home from his trip to Belgium. The President arrived on Thursday night.

House Appropriations committee Senior Vice Chairperson Stella Quimbo had earlier said the GAB could be signed before Christmas, thanks to the early convening of the bicameral conference committee.

Romualdez gave further context to the importance of the GAB's enactment.

"It is the most important and potent tool the President, his economic team, and the entire government can use to accomplish the goals of the prosperity roadmap," he said.

He said the administration, principally the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), now has enough time to prepare for the release of funds appropriated in the 2023 budget law. (With a report from Ellson A. Quismorio)

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Marcos brings home P9.8-B trade pledges

PRESIDENT Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. returned from his visit to Brussels, Belgium, with P9.8 billion worth of investment pledges from European business executives.

Arriving at the Villamor Air Base in Pasay City Thursday night, Marcos described his trip to attend the Association of South-

➤PledgesA2

east Asian Nations-European Union (Asean-EU) Commemorative Summit as "very productive," with European companies planning to expand their businesses in the Philippines.

"I am delighted that my first visit to Europe, in Brussels in particular, which has the seals of the European Commission, the Council of European Union, and the European Council, is a successful one, and I can see that the outcomes of this visit will generate opportunities for the benefit of the Filipino people," the President said in his arrival speech.

He said "European business confidence in the Philippines is high as evidenced by the expansion plans of European companies that we met in the sectors of fast-moving consumer goods, in shipbuilding, renewable energy, and green metals. An estimated investment pledge of around P9.8 billion has been received."

The President said all the business leaders he met on the sidelines of the Asean-EU summits have committed to invest in renewable energy, infrastructure, climate change, and food security initiatives.

He said that in his opening remarks during the commemorative summit, he noted "the recent milestones in Asean-EU relations under the Philippines' coordinatorship — the adoption of the Asean-EU Plan of Action for 2023 to 2027 and the successful conclusion of the first-ever Summit between Asean and EU Leaders."

"And this is a very significant development that EU has turned very, very distinctly towards the Asia-Pacific region when it comes to the driving force behind the new global economy. And this is not really surprising considering that in terms of geopolitical agrupation, the EU and the Asean are two of the most active, best organized, and cohesive organizations in the world," he added.

Marcos also welcomed the adoption of the Joint Leaders' Statement at the Asean-EU Commemorative Summit.

The President said the newly formed Asean-EU Business Council "has a pivotal role to play in advancing Asean's regional economic integration and post-pandemic economic recovery efforts."

He also said he was able to secure the commitment of leading European shipowners "to help our country hurdle some of the challenges in our seafarers' European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) accreditation through the creation of an advisory council composed of our concerned government agencies, international and local shipowners and other stakeholders."

Marcos explained to EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen "what we have done, that we have this new advisory council, and she made a promise that she would — that the Commission itself would provide technical help to us so that within the three months — we have a three-month deadline — we will be able to remedy all of the deficiencies that EMSA has been pointing out and hopefully we finally solve this problem."

Marcos said he was granted an audience with the king of Belgium, who recalled his visit to the Philippines many years ago.

The President also held bilateral meetings with his counterparts from the European Council, the European Commission, Estonia, Sweden, Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Spain.

He also met with Filipinos living in Belgium and nearby European countries like Italy, Poland and Germany.

"It was a very fulfilling event as I was able to personally thank them for their support. I was also able to hear their concerns and update them on the priorities of this administration," he said.

During his meeting with Von der Leyen, Marcos also pushed for the resumption of negotiations for a free trade agreement (FTA) between the Asean and the EU.

Marcos said the FTA would also bolster the country's Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) accreditation that is under review by the Western European bloc.

"While the Philippines awaits the resumption of the PH-EU Free Trade Agreement negotiations, we remain committed to maintain our EU GSP+ beneficiary status, serving as a stepping-stone towards this FTA," Marcos told Von der Leyen and other European business leaders.

"We also have an FTA with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) namely, Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, which provides the Philippines duty-free market access to all industrial and fisheries products to the Member States," he added.

The EU has threatened to withdraw the Philippines' GSP+ benefits, citing its "deep concern over the deteriorating human rights situation in the Philippines" during the term of President Rodrigo Duterte.

The GSP+, set to lapse in 2023, allows the tariff-free entry of more than 6,000 exports from the Philippines to the EU.

The unilateral trade arrangement offers zero tariffs on 6,274 products or 66 percent of all EU tariff lines.

To retain its GSP+ incentives, the Philippines must comply with 27 conventions on human and labor rights imposed by the EU.

Marcos said the Philippines is "the only Asean country" to benefit from the EU GSP.

Von der Leyen said the EU wants a "high level of accountability" for human rights violations, but it is open to all possibilities for strengthened cooperation in many areas, particularly trade.

"Let's work on it," she told Marcos, referring to talks on the renewal of the country's GSP+ status.

Negotiations for the EU-Philippines FTA started in 2016. The last round of negotiations was held in Cebu City in 2017.

The negotiations have since been put on hold.

CATHERINE S. VALENTE AND KRISTINA MARALIT

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President signs P5-trillion budget

SIGNED President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. signs the P5.268-trillion 2023 national budget in a ceremony with lawmakers and Cabinet members in Malacañang on Friday, Dec. 16, 2022. Looking on are (from left) Vice President Sara Duterte, Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri, Speaker Martin Romualdez and Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin. PHOTO FROM THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES' FACEBOOK PAGE

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE AND BELLA CARIASO

PRESIDENT Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. has signed into law the P5.268-trillion national budget for 2023, the first full-year outlay under his administration.

Marcos signed the 2023 General Appropriations Act (GAA) in a ceremony in Malacañang, which was witnessed by Vice President Sara Duterte, some Cabinet officials and members of Congress led by Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri and House Speaker Martin Romualdez.

In his remarks, the President said the passage of the spending measure was among the fastest in recent years.

"This is a fine Christmas gift as can be received by any president from his

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legislature," he said.

The President said the budget "defines and gives muscle to the roadmap of what we intend to do next year."

"It is always very important that the GAA has been put together in consonance with all of the plans of the executive. And that kind of coordination and that kind of synergy that we will gain from that is going to be an essential part of the way that we move forward," he said.

The President lauded Congress for being "very cooperative in making what amendments are necessary in investments, financial policies, all of these elements that are important for us to position ourselves in the new economy after the pandemic."

The GAA was signed less than two weeks after Congress ratified the Marcos administration's first spending plan.

It is 4.9 percent bigger than this year's budget.

The budget was criticized by opposition lawmakers for allocating confidential and intelligence funds, including those for Duterte and the Department of Education, which the vice president also heads.

Budget Secretary Amenah Pangandaman earlier said the 2023 budget supports the Marcos administration's eight-point Socioeconomic Agenda and the Medium Term Fiscal Framework.

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"The administration's first full-year budget shall serve as a springboard for the economy's full-speed recovery and meaningful structural reform," Pangandaman said.

Romualdez said the spending law will help the administration implement its agenda for prosperity to sustain growth, spur economic activity and jobs, and increase the people's income.

Rep. Bernadette Herrera (Bagong Henerasyon party-list) lauded the President's timely approval of the GAA.

Herrera said the budget "is a strong way forward for the country as we begin a journey of recovery from global economic effects caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and more recently, the Russia-Ukraine crisis."

"The bicameral conference committee did a good job in harmonizing the conflicting provisions in the Senate and House versions in an expeditious and thorough manner, thus ruling out a reenacted budget that could derail our economic recovery," Herrera said.

Senate Committee on Finance Juan Edgardo "Sonny" Angara said Congress worked hard to ensure the budget measure is signed within the year so that the delivery of public service is uninterrupted.

"While there were disagreements on some issues during the bicameral conference committee meetings, both panels found common ground in the need to ensure that assistance is given to those who require it the most and to keep the momentum going in the country's move towards economic recovery," Angara said.

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Mr. Marcos approval rating improves to 64% in last qtr.

By Julito G. Rada

MORE Filipinos are concerned the Marcos administration should focus on the prices of goods and inflation after the national economy, a fourth-quarter survey conducted by Publicus Asia Inc. from Nov. 25 to 30, 2022 involving 1,500 total interviewees showed.

The same survey showed President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s total approval-rating in the fourth quarter inched up to 64 percent compared to a quarter ago, but his low rating as the concurrent Department of Agriculture secretary is a "wake-up call" for him to find somebody to lead the department, an economist said Friday.

The national economy is still considered the topmost priority for the President to focus on but prices and inflation moved up "as a clear second place, indicating a growing concern, particularly in NCR (National Capital Region)," Publicus said in its deck for the survey released to the media.

Meanwhile, the Chief Executive's 64 percent rating was higher than the 62 percent in his first three months in office. Vice President Sara Duterte's approval rating was higher at 68 percent in the fourth quarter from 66 percent a quarter ago.

During the online Pahayag 2022

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Mr...

From A1

End of the Year public briefing, Publicus showed that the Marcos administration got an approval rating of 64 percent in the first six months but only 32 percent said it was better than the previous administration.

When asked what's the most important issue that the President should focus on, a quarter of the respondents said the Philippine economy came first, followed by prices and inflation at 15 percent – but at 25 percent of those surveyed in Metro Manila, and 18 percent in Visayas and 15 percent in North and Central Luzon.

The respondents also said their most important concern heading into the next quarter was "not being able to afford basic needs" at 17 percent, followed by difficulty in finding employment at 14 percent, and losing a job and not getting enough pay, both at 12 percent.

Getting sick was also a concern as it would put an additional strain on their budget, mainly among the respondents in the 40 to 49 age group, according to Publicus.

The Marcos administration also received an approval rating of 59 percent in the National Capital Region, 66 percent in Northern Luzon, 55 percent in South Luzon, 61 percent in Visayas, and 75 percent in Mindanao, the highest regionally.

But the President was considered the second-worst Cabinet secretary next to Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla.

In the survey, interviewees were asked who the worst Cabinet members were, and Remulla got 16 percent (the highest), followed by Marcos (9 percent), and Energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla (8 percent).

Dr. Rosalina Ora'a-Fuentes from Southeast Asia Interdisciplinary Development Institute in Quezon City, one of the panelists, said Remulla's and Marcos's ratings were due to the "burning issues" attached to them.

"For Remulla, the [Bureau of Corrections chief] Bantag issue, and the other one was about his son's involvement [in illegal drugs]. For Marcos, it is about agricultural issues like food security and the higher prices of commodities," Fuentes said.

"So, Remulla and Marcos have burning issues to be addressed. [For the President], this is a wake-up call for him if he really is the [right] one to lead the DA or find someone to lead the department," Fuentes said.

"That is really a wake-up call for Marcos because it is just rightthat the people [surveyed] have given him the red flag [in terms of his leadership in DA]... Besides, leading the DA gives him additional loads," Fuentes said.

Publicus Asia economist Eric Estrabo echoed Fuentes' statement, saying "maybe it's time [for the President] to pass on the leadership of DA to another person to address the agricultural issues…."

The top two Cabinet secretaries in the survey were Social Welfare Secretary Erwin Tulfo who received a total of 65 percent rating and Vice President Sara Duterte, 61 percent.

In terms of trust ratings, the President's score slightly dipped to 57 percent in the fourth quarter from 58 percent a quarter ago. On the other hand, the Vice President got 63 percent in the fourth quarter, slightly up from 62 percent a quarter ago.

Estrabo said the slight decline in the President's trust ratings could be a signal that the people wanted more action from him.

Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri's approval rating declined to 49 percent in the fourth quarter from 50 percent a quarter ago; House Speaker Martin Romualdez, 44 percent from 46 percent; and Chief Justice Alexander Gesmundo, 38 percent from 43 percent.

Likewise in trust ratings, Zubiri's score declined to 36 percent from 41 percent; Romualdez, 35 percent from 39 percent; and Gesmundo, 30 percent from 35 percent.

Among government agencies, the highest approval rating was given to the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority with 72 percent, followed by the Department of Education with 65 percent.

The Senate received an approval rating of 56 percent in the fourth quarter, unchanged from a quarter ago, while the House slightly declined to 52 percent from 54 percent in the third quarter.

Those surveyed also said the economy should be the topmost priority for the President to focus on.

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Marcos secures P9.8B investment pledges from Brussels trip

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on Thursday night announced that the Philippines had acquired P9.8 billion worth of investment pledges from European business executives after his three-day participation in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations-European Union (ASEAN-EU) Commemorative Summits in Brussels, Belgium.

Marcos and his delegation arrived at 6:58 p.m. (Dec. 15) at the Villamor Air Base in Pasay City.

In his arrival speech, Marcos described his trip as "productive" and "successful," following plans of European companies to expand their businesses in the Philippines.

"I am also pleased to announce that European business confidence in the Philippines is high, as evidenced by the expansion plans of European companies that we met in the sectors of fast-moving consumer goods, in shipbuilding, renewable energy and green metals. An estimated investment pledge of around P9.8 billion has been received," he said.

He said he had "fruitful discussions" with ASEAN and EU member states' leaders where they exchanged views on what is in store for ASEAN-EU cooperation, particularly on areas of mutual interest and concern such as connectivity, trade, digital transition, food security, climate change and geopolitics, among others.

"I was honored to deliver one of the opening remarks during the Commemorative Summit, in which I was proud to note the recent milestones in ASEAN-EU relations under the Philippines' coordinatorship – the adoption of the ASEAN-EU Plan of Action for 2023 to 2027 and the successful conclusion of the first-ever Summit between ASEAN and EU Leaders," he said.

During the 10th ASEAN-EU Business Summit, he also shared the Philippines' perspective on deepening ASEAN-EU trade through efforts in sustainable development.

He, likewise, met with several business leaders from different European companies throughout the week.

"All of them committed to be a part of our development and our economic growth, particularly in renewable energy, infrastructure, food security [and] climate change initiatives. With European technology and innovation with Filipino talent and ingenuity and industry, we will be working on addressing some of our key economic challenges," he added.

Marcos said he met various leading shipowners all over Europe and got their commitment to helping the Philippines hurdle some of the challenges in our seafarers' European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) accreditation through the creation of an advisory council composed of concerned government agencies, international and local shipowners and other stakeholders.

He also met with the EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen where he got to explain the Philippines' efforts to comply with EMSA standards.

The Philippine delegation, he said, also organized a business roundtable that served as an important catalyst for the renewed relations between the Philippines and the EU business communities.

Marcos said he was granted an audience with the King of Belgium, who fondly recalled his visit to the Philippines many years ago.

He also invited the King to visit the Philippines again.

He held bilateral meetings with his counterparts from the European Council, the European Commission, Estonia, Sweden, Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and Spain, with whom he identified many possible areas of further development and future partnerships.

He also met with fellow Filipinos living in Belgium and nearby European countries like Italy, Poland, and Germany.

Meanwhile, Marcos said a "downside" of his Brussels trip was dealing with "colds" while delivering speeches and attending meetings.

"Ang naging downside lang ay nakakahiya 'yung Presidente ninyo dahil noong nagsasalita ako papiyak-piyak ako na ano ganoon. Pero naintindihan naman daw nila. Sabi ko na lang sorry na lang dahil 'yung mga winter ninyo hindi bagay sa Pilipino 'yan kaya kako nagkaganito," he said.

In a chance interview with reporters, the President admitted that he used to handle the cold weather just fine.

"Dati ang tibay ko sa lamig eh. Ewan ko ano nangyari sa akin," he said.

Earlier, Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Undersecretary Ceferino Rodolfo said top European leaders admired Marcos' dedication to attending all meetings despite catching a cold.

PNA

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FRUITFUL Marcos secures P9.8B investment pledges from Brussels trip

Story on p.2

FRUITFUL

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He also met with the EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen where he got to explain the Philippines' efforts to comply with EMSA standards.

"She [von der Leyen] made a promise that the Commission itself would provide technical help to us so that within the three months – we have a three-month deadline – within the three months that we will be able to remedy all of the deficiencies that EMSA has been pointing out and hopefully we finally solve this problem," he said.

The Philippine delegation, he said, also organized a business roundtable that served as an important catalyst for the renewed relations between the Philippines and the EU business communities.

"I was joined by the economic managers and other Cabinet members where I announced our recent game-changing laws that aim to transform our business environment significantly in favor of investors and support for inward foreign direct investments," he said.

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P9.8-B negosyo, naiuwi ni Marcos sa EU trip

Iniulat ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. noong Huwebes ang isang matagumpay na paglalakbay sa Europa, ang kanyang unang pagbisita sa kontinente mula noong siya ay naging Pangulo, na nakakuha ng P9.8 bilyong halaga ng mga pangako sa pamumuhunan.

"I am also pleased to announce that European business confidence in PH is high as evidenced by the expansion plans of European companies that were met in the sectors of fast-moving consumer goods, shipbuilding, renewable energy and green metals," pahayag ni Pangulong Marcos sa kanyang arrival statement kasunod ng pagdalo sa Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-European Union (EU) Commemorative Summit sa Brussels, Belgium.

Dumating ang Presidential plane na lulan ang Pangulo at ang delegasyon ng Pilipinas alas-6:58 ng gabi sa Villamor Air Base sa Pasay City.

Sa ginanap na gala dinner ng EU, sinabi ng Pangulo na nakipagpalitan siya ng kuru-kuro sa kanyang mga katapat sa kooperasyon ng ASEAN-EU, partikular sa connectivity, trade, green at digital transition, food security at geopolitics.

Ayon sa Pangulo, ikinararangal niyang ihatid ang isa sa mga pambungad na pananalita sa Commemorative Summit, kung saan ipinakita niya ang mga kamakailang milestone sa relasyon ng ASEAN-EU – ang pag-ampon ng ASEAN-EU Plan of Action para sa 2023 hanggang 2027, gayundin ang ang paglagda sa ASEAN-EU Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement.

Sa 10th ASEAN-EU Business Summit, sinabi ng Pangulo na natutuwa siyang ibahagi ang pananaw ng Pilipinas sa pagpapalalim ng kalakalan ng ASEAN-EU sa pamamagitan ng pagsisikap sa sustainable development, na siyang tema ng Business Summit.

Sa sideline ng summit, si Pangulong Marcos ay pinagkalooban ng Royal Audience kasama si King Philippe ng Belgium at nagsagawa ng mga bilateral na pagpupulong kasama ang kanyang mga katapat mula sa Czech Republic, Netherlands at Spain, na lahat ay naging maganda para sa Pilipinas at sa mga kasosyo nito.

Sa summit din, sinamantala ng Pangulo ang pagkakataong makipagkita sa mga Pilipino sa Belgium, na inilalarawan niya bilang katuparan dahil "narinig niya ang kanilang mga alalahanin at na-update sila tungkol sa mga prayoridad ng aking administrasyon." *(Malou Escudero)*

Abante
UNA SA BALITA

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PBBM NASUNGKIT ₱9.8B PUHUNAN SA EUROPE

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"I also welcomed the adoption of the Joint Leaders' Statement at the ASEAN-EU Commemorative Summit, which is the product of intensive discussions between ASEAN and EU Member States through our Ambassadors to ASEAN in Jakarta," diin ng Pangulo.

"This is a very significant development that EU has turned very, very distinctly towards the Asia-Pacific region when it comes to the driving force behind the new global economy," pahayag pa ni Pangulong Marcos.

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P9.8-B investment pledges show 'high' EU confidence

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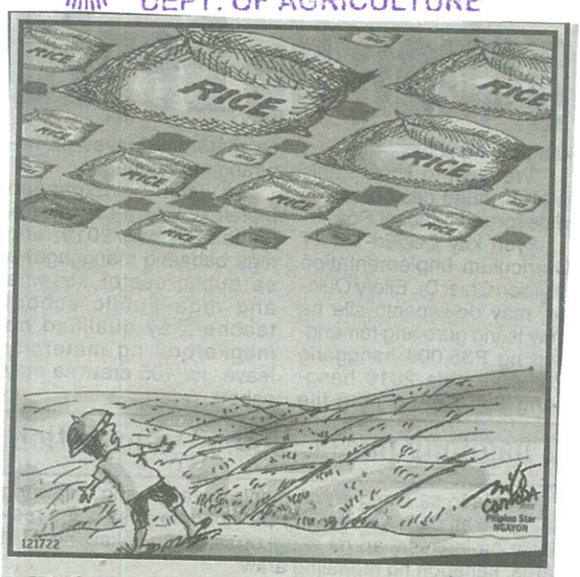

Editoryal

Walang katapusang pag-import ng bigas

NAKADEPENDE pa rin ang Pilipinas sa pag-import ng bigas. Hindi na natapos ang pag-bili ng bigas ng bansang malawak ang taniman ng palay. Patuloy pa rin na ang inihahaing kanin sa hapag-kainan ay imported na bigas? Kailan kaya makakakain ng kanin na mula sa palay na iti-nanim sa sariling linang? Kailan kaya sasagana ang bigas na prodyus ng mga lokal na magsasaka para hindi na bumili ng bigas sa ibang bansa?

Ipinahayag ng Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) na posibleng umangkat ng tatlong milyong metriko tonelada ng bigas ang Pilipinas sa susunod na taon. Ayon sa FFF, posibleng magkulang ang bigas sa bansa sa third quarter ng 2023. Ang mahinang produksiyon at ang mataas na pangangailangan sa pagkain ang dahilan kaya mag-aangkat ang Pilipinas ng tatlong milyong metriko tonelada.

Sabi ni FFF chairman Leonardo Montemayor, 321,000 tonelada lamang ng bigas ang maaaring maprodyus bago matapos ang 2022 at hindi ito sasapat kaya kailangang mag-angkat. Lumalaki rin umano ang populasyon kaya malaki ang panga-ngailangan sa pagkain.

Hinulaan naman ng United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), na 3.5 milyong metriko tone-lada ng bigas ang iimportahin ng Pilipinas sa su-sunod na taon. Ito anila ay mas mataas sa dating inangkat na 3.3 milyong metriko tonelada. Ang kaku-langan ng bigas ay nag-ugat sa pananalasa ng bagyo sa mga nakaraang buwan.

Magpapatuloy ang pag-angkat ng bigas at hindi pa mangyayari ang sinabi ni President Marcos Jr. noong Hunyo na masakit sa kalooban niya ang pag-import nito. Ayon sa kanya, parang hindi niya matanggap na bumibili ng bigas ang Pilipinas. Kasabay nito, pinangako nga niya na magiging P20 per kilo ng bigas. Paano maibababa sa P20 ang kilo kung patuloy ang importasyon. Mangyayari lamang ito kung makapagpoprodyus nang maraming bigas ang bansa. Hangga't umaangkat, hindi maibababa ang bigas.

Isa pang problemang kahaharapin sa pag-ang-kat ng bigas ay ang pamamayagpag ng smugglers ng agri products. Dahil kulang ang suplay ng bigas, dadagsa ang mga puslit na bigas. Walang kata-pusang pag-import at wala ring katapusan ang pag-smuggle ng bigas.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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Make ban on certain imported fish permanent – Pamalakaya

By DANESSA RIVERA

A fisher group is asking government to make permanent the ban on certain imported fish in local wet markets.

Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) said the Department of Agriculture (DA) and its attached Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) should repeal the Fisheries Administrative Order 195, which serves as a legal basis to open the floodgates for imported fish.

"While we welcome the temporary ban of certain imported fish in local wet markets, this should translate into actual policy that will permanently prohibit fish importation. As long as the policies of import liberalization are in place, our market remains exposed to cheap imported fish at the expense of our local fishing industry," Pamalakaya national spokesman Ronnel Arambulo said in a statement.

Recently, the BFAR suspended the issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances (SPSIC) for importing certain fish species including *galunggong* (round scad), *tulingan, alumahan* (mackerel), pompano and tuna by-products to prevent the diversion of these fish products imported under FAO 195.

However, the agency issued exceptions for processors and importers who supply raw materials to processors with License to Operate issued by the Food and Drug Administration, compliant to the Food Safety Standards provided under the Food Safety Act and with a verifiable recording system of production.

Institutional buyers can also import pompano and tuna by-products if they have a verifiable recording system.

Related to its proposal to suspend importation, Pamalakaya refuted the claim of importers that this will further inflation, because it is the middlemen system that actually controls the market pricing and not the supply of fish.

It cited that the retail price of *galunggong*, currently at P240 per kilo, but its farm gate value remains at P120 a kilo.

"Because the fish products, before reaching local markets, pass through around three to four private traders who secure profits by marking up and consequently push the retail prices," Arambulo said.

If there are no importation policies, the government will not have any issues on imported fish entering into wet markets, the group said.

"Instead, we reiterate our demand for a significant state support to the local fishing industry in a form of production subsidy and ensuring the exclusive rights of Filipino fisherfolk to our fishing grounds and coastal areas," Arambulo said.

Earlier, BFAR conducted a market information drive at 21 markets in Metro Manila, in response to the reported proliferation of imported pompano and pink salmon, to inform the public and the fish vendors that imported fish can be sold if authorized.

However, this drew negative reactions from fish vendors who feared the confiscation of their products and even more criticism from lawmakers.

The Manila Times®

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Editorial

New ideas needed at NIA

IN a press briefing on Thursday, newly appointed National Irrigation Administration (NIA) acting administrator Eduardo Guillen said that the "marching orders" given to him by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. were to eliminate poverty in rural areas.

As a former local executive — he was mayor of Piddig, Ilocos Norte — Guillen certainly understands the problem and seems to be sincere in his intentions, as his first message to the NIA was for the agency to set aside divisions caused by the controversies surrounding suspended former administrator Benny Antiporda and focus on its work. However, it is difficult to see how the NIA will accomplish the objective given to it by the President if there are not fundamental changes in the way it does business.

Citing data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), which show that 60 percent of poverty incidence in the country is in rural areas, Guillen explained, "The President wants NIA to make sure that our farmers will not only be producers of goods, but they will also have the capacity to become consumers of goods and services, meaning we should remove them from the poverty threshold." The NIA cannot solve that problem on its own, of course, but it can contribute mightily to the solution by ensuring that Philippine farms have sufficient supplies of irrigation water, so that they can maximize their productivity.

However, despite being in existence for nearly 60 years — the NIA was created by Republic Act 3601 in 1963 — the state of the Philippines' irrigation infrastructure can be best described as woefully inadequate. According to data from the Department of Agriculture, there are approximately 1.2 million hectares of farmland in the country that lack irrigation, and are thus not being used for food production, or are producing far below their potential output. Data from the World Bank also shows that only about 10 percent of Philippine farms are irrigated; that data is somewhat older, and so the percentage may have improved somewhat in recent years, but only marginally at best.

Substantially expanding irrigation would indeed contribute to rural poverty alleviation by increasing farm productivity and diversification into more high-value crops, as well as improving food security and affordability for the nation as a whole. But half a century of effort on the part of the NIA has only demonstrated that it has neither the organization nor the resources for efficient, rapid development. With all due respect to NIA administrator Guillen, his initial suggestion to improve irrigation in the country — he told the media on Thursday that he plans to tap underutilized irrigation canals to help irrigate farmlands in the country — is not the comprehensive, innovative solution the agency needs to meet its mandate. The agricultural sector, and the country that relies on it, needs new ideas.

One way in which irrigation infrastructure could be quickly and efficiently expanded would be for the NIA to utilize public-private partnership (PPA) models, such as build-own-operate (BOO) or build-operate-transfer (BOT) arrangements. Privatization of public works is, of course, an idea that should be approached with caution. However, the irrigation problem is one for which it can be an effective, low-risk solution.

Under a PPP scheme, a private proponent would construct and operate an irrigation system in a designated area, with the government-guaranteed return on investment being provided in the form of water purchases from the operator by the NIA. The irrigation water would then be provided free to farmers cultivating an area below a certain limit; very large farms and commercial enterprises, on the other hand, could be charged for their water at an appropriate market rate paid either to the NIA or directly to the concessionaire.

One advantage of such a scheme is that it would require very little in the way of budgetary adjustment, though some amendment to the NIA's charter as a government-owned and -controlled corporation might be necessary. The budgetary support for the NIA's part in a PPP scheme would simply require a reallocation of its budget for irrigation system development to irrigation procurement.

We believe such a program would help the NIA meet its mandate faster, more efficiently, and with much less risk of corruption and waste. The agency's new administrator should seriously consider the recommendation.

Manila Standard

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DA: Ex-MILF camps may be transformed into agri sites

By Nash B. Maulana

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) eyes the conversion of former Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) r camps in Mindanao into productive agriculture areas.

Agriculture Undersecretary Zam Ampatuan said the transformation plans have been drawn up and were discussed in an interagency meeting at the Philippine International Convention Center in Pasay City on Dec. 14, 2022.

Government peace panel chairman Cesar Yano and Usec Ampatuan, a panel member, attended the meeting.

Ampatuan said the meeting explored the potentials of abaca production in the areas around MILF camps.

Also present at the meeting were Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)

Minister Akmad Brahim of the Ministry of the Environment, Natural Resources and Energy (MENRE) and representatives of the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources, the National Housing Authority, the Land Registration Authority, the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority, the National Commission on Indigenous Pilipinos, the BARMM Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Agrarian Reform (MAFAR), and the Joint Task Force on Camp Transformation (TFCT-GPH) co-chaired by Bangsamoro Member of Parliament Engineer Baintan Adil Ampatuan and Executive Director Cesar De Mesa of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Reconciliation and Unity.

The meeting assessed the status of land classification and related issues pertinent to the camp transformation program for the 33 barangays in six MILF camps, particularly on abaca production and other agricultural ventures in said areas.

Daily Tribune
WITHOUT FEAR ◊ WITHOUT FAVOR

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Palayan farmers complete climate resiliency training

The curriculum included the use of less pesticides, skills development for rice farming due to changing weather, and increase the output of production and earnings of farmers.

PALAYAN CITY, NUEVA ECIJA – A total of 32 farmers here recently graduated from the Climate Resilient Farm Business School-Farmers Field School in Barangay Aulo conducted by the Department of Agriculture Central Luzon under its Rice Program.

The project aims to hone the skills of the rice farmers and teaching them how to be good decision-makers in regards to farming.

The curriculum included the use of less pesticides, skills development for rice farming due to changing weather and increase the output of production and earnings of farmers.

Present during the graduation ceremony were Regional FFS Techno Demo Coordinator Amelita Londonio, along with Agricultural Technologist Julie Ann Gamit of the Office of the Provincial Agriculture, City Agriculturist Esmenia Lulu, Committee on Agriculture Julius Bautista and Training Facilitator Agriculturist II Juliuzar Uera from the City Agriculture Office.

In Londonio's message, he cited that the FFS conducted the Climate Resilient Farm Business School to ensure that the farmers of Palayan City can cope up with the changing weather with little to no loss of income from farming.

She said that the reason why the agency conducted training on climate resilient is to provide farming methods for any weather. The training also includes the Farm Business School that trains farmers regarding bookkeeping in the proper way to list expenses, and to determine how much the earnings or losses are.

The 32 farmers who participated in the schooling were given certificates of completion, wherein 19 of the farmers were men, while the remaining 13 are women. During the last part of the program, a raffle was held by the DA with gardens tools as prizes.

JONAS REYES

Abante TONITE
MABILIS SA BALITA

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IMPORT BAN SA ISDA IPAKO

Nanawagan ang Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) sa pamahalaan na habambuhay nang ipahinto ang pag-aangkat ng isda sa bansa.

Kasunod ito ng pagsuspinde kamakailan ng Department of Agriculture (DA) sa pag-iisyu ng sanitary and phytosanitary importation clearance (SPICS) para sa galunggong, mackerel, moonfish, pompano at tuna by-products.

Sinuspinde ng DA ang SPICS para sa canning, processing at mga institutional buyer ng mga naturang isda katulad ng mga hotel at restaurant upang maiwasan diumano ang paglilipat ng mga produkto sa wet market o palengke.

Ang suspensyon ng SPICS ay alinsunod sa Fisheries Administrative Order No. 195 series of 1999.

Ikinatuwa ng grupo ang ipinatupad na suspensyon ng DA ngunit sinabi ng Pamalakaya na mas maganda kung maging permanente na ang pagbabawal sa pag-angkat ng isda.

"The government's problem of imported fish entering into wet markets would be solved if there are no importation policies in the first place," pahayag ni Pamalakaya national spokesperson Ronnel Arambulo.

Muli rin nilang inulit ang hiling na suporta ng gobyerno para sa local fishing industry sa pamamagitan ng production subsidy at pagtiyak sa mga eksklusibong karapatan ng mga mangingisdang Pilipino sa kanilang pinangingisdaan. **(Issa Santiago)**

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DA seizes banned poultry imports from China

By CORY MARTINEZ

A "WARRANT of Seizure and Detention" (WSD) has been issued against a company for alleged smuggling of banned poultry products from China.

The warrant was issued following the inspection of three forty-footer container vans consigned to it, initially declared to contain "frozen prawns balls."

A WSD is being issued upon determination of the probable cause of violation of customs laws, rules, and procedures.

On December 13, 2022, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for DA-Inspection and Enforcement (DA I&E) received information about the "suspicious" shipment at the Manila International Container Port, which was later subjected to physical inspection by the Bureau of Customs (BOC).

Upon thorough examination, it was revealed that the cargo contained banned poultry meat from China and various meat products from an unregistered brand, with an estimated value of P31.5 million.

According to Assistant Secretary James Layug, containers under the same consignee still need to be inspected.

The absence and inconsistencies in required importation documents suggest that the shipment did not undergo food safety regulations following the Food Safety Act of 2013 or Republic Act (RA) 10611.

"This may be considered as Technical Smuggling under the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016 (RA ,10845)," Layug said.

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Overstaying containers hoard agri products, says PPA

PPA general manager Jay Daniel Santiago said their hands are tied to inspect or open the cargoes stuck at the port yard facility because there is no pertinent order or law to allow them to do so.

BY RAFFY AYENG
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The stagnant containers at the Port of Manila, South Harbor, and Manila International Container Terminal may have been the cause of skyrocketing prices of agricultural products, as the Philippine Ports Authority admitted that the idle cargoes are indicative that there is hoarding of goods in the ports.

PPA general manager Jay Daniel Santiago said their hands are tied to inspect or open the cargoes stuck at the port yard facility because there is no pertinent order or law to allow them to do so.

"What can we do? These importers are paying their storage fees. Our suggestion is to increase the storage fee to the maximum so they will not let those cargoes be stuck there for more than months. There are cargoes rotting there for 700 days," Santiago said.

He added that idle containers are just overstaying, while others are held by the Bureau of Customs and some cannot be processed because they lack permits and are uncleared by the Bureau of Quarantine.

"It is alarming as these idle cargoes have significant numbers. It has goods inside. We do not allow hoarding, but we cannot do anything. Hoarding is the call of importers. It is not in our purview to know what is inside the container, but the Bureau of Customs," Santiago said.

The PPA chief stressed that it is the agency's perennial problem on how to address congestion of idle cargoes in Port of Manila.

"We do not know that legally, a legislature or an executive order can forfeit the cargoes. They can store the cargo as much as they want so long that they are paying the storage fee. It's not that we don't care or are helpless, except that within existing regulations and laws, we are trying to find ways to address that problem. We have been pushing Congress to legislate a measure to resolve this, but nothing proceeds," Santiago said.

He said cargo that is currently overstaying in Port of Manila is alarming, "as any cargo which exceeds a reasonable number of days is not okay because they eat a lot of space and affect efficiency."

Santiago disclosed that the current utilization of the country's port yard is at 85 percent with an average of 7,000 boxes released per day, quite high because of the influx of cargo arriving from other countries because of the Christmas season.

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Pinoy coconut farmers get huge boost

Grameen Foundation – in partnership with Barry Callebaut, the world's leading manufacturer of high-quality chocolate and cocoa products – has launched a five-year program in the Davao region of the Philippines that is designed to improve 25,000 smallholder farmers' copra production and incomes and connect them to markets, while ensuring positive social and environmental impacts.

The Sustainable Coconut Project is funded by Barry Callebaut, in support of its Sustainable Coconut Oil Strategy and the Sustainable Coconut Oil Charter.

Coconut oil, produced from copra, is found in most confectionery products. Currently, coconut production is unable to keep up with global demand. In the Philippines, aging trees, fragmented and untraceable supply chains, pests, diseases, and climate change contribute to low production.

Filipino coconut farmers' yields and incomes suffer from poor extension support, low adoption of GAPs or good agricultural practices, lack of access to technology and financial services, and low resilience to natural disasters.

While farm cooperatives work to support coconut farmers, their effectiveness is compromised by low adoption of digital tools, lack of financial and operational resources, and failure to include female farmers.

"The Sustainable Coconut program will leverage Grameen's extensive experience improving the productivity, income, and resilience of Filipino coconut farmers, as well as our wide range of digital solutions and training content, to comprehensively address the barriers cooperatives and farmers face," said Brent Chism, interim president and CEO of Grameen Foundation.

Grameen began the program earlier this year with a baseline and market assessment in the Davao region, where they'll be working with eight cooperatives, 35 field agents, and 25,000 farmers.

REPRESENTATIVES of the Grameen Foundation work with Filipino coconut farmers in the Davao Region.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF GRAMEEN FOUNDATION

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Tackling supply, price issues at the source

PED XING
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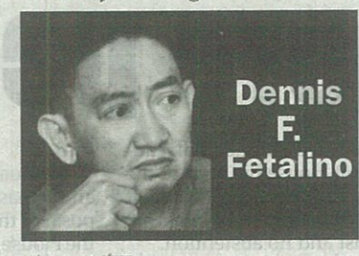

People should be trying to produce more to combat the inflation trends that are going on. – **World Bank president David Malpass.**

ADDRESSING shortages and rising prices of food and other basic consumer goods must begin at the source.

When food growers or producers are guaranteed prompt and fair return on their output, the production cycle is kept going.

Profitability fuels productivity.

But taking away this incentive from farmers and fishermen through structures and systems dampens output and breaks the supply chain.

Thus, ensuring that farm goods and fishery products promptly reach the market and land on the tables of households preclude supply-chain disruptions and upward price pressures.

Timely food-stock replenishment in markets could moderate the inflation rate now dangerously approaching near double-digit level.

Domestic inflation rose to eight percent last month from 7.7 percent in October.

This brought the average inflation in the first 11 months this year to 5.6 percent, higher than the government's two-percent to four-percent target band.

The Bangko Sentral forecasts inflation to peak either this month or in January.

Philippine Statistics Authority deputy chief Divina Gracia del Prado said last month's inflation was mainly due to accelerating prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages, which climbed to 10 percent in the November survey from 9.4 percent in October this year.

The rise in the price index of the food basket came despite the gains in the country's agriculture and fisheries.

The sector has concededly progressed since the passage of the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act in 1997.

Specifically, the law seeks "to enhance profits and incomes in the agriculture and fisheries sectors, particularly the small farmers and fisherfolk, by ensuring equitable access to assets, resources, and services, and promoting higher-value crops, value-added processing, agribusiness activities, and agro-industrialization".

However, achieving AFMA objectives, particularly in boosting profits and incomes in the sector, leaves much to be desired, according to a recent study by a state think tank.

A Philippine Institute for Development Studies paper authored by senior research fellow Roehlano Briones assessed how profits and incomes have increased in the sector, which is among the objectives of the AFMA (Republic Act 8435).

The study assessed the extent this objective was achieved by looking at the change in household income over time and the poverty incidence.

Briones noted a trend of rising incomes among agri-fisheries households before the enactment of AFMA.

He also found that income from farming has been increasing over time despite fluctuations mostly due to environmental stresses such as climate change.

The increase can be attributed to productivity growth, increased competitiveness of agriculture, and diversification toward higher-value activities.

However, the PIDS researcher added that social reform initiatives, such as the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program, have negatively affected farm productivity.

For instance, he pointed out that legal restrictions deprive the land-poor and agrarian reform beneficiaries of additional access to land.

He added that the distribution of collective instead of individual land titles "undermines property rights and constricts access to credit".

"The features of the program [negate] the gains received by beneficiaries from land ownership and support services… This fragmentation is possibly the key constraint facing Philippine agriculture at present," Briones said.

Nevertheless, statistics showed that poverty incidence among agricultural households has fallen with an accelerated pace of decline since 2012.

A World Bank study attributed the bulk of this reduction to the movement of agricultural workers to non-agricultural employment, rising agricultural wages, and aggressive transfer programs such as the government's Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program.

Briones said these facts suggest several policy implications to boost profits and incomes in the agri-fisheries sector.

One is to adopt strategies to accelerate agricultural modernization through structural change, such as boosting infrastructure investment and promoting industrial innovation.

Another is accelerating agriculture productivity growth by strengthening research and development and extension.

Briones also stressed the need to promote diversification within agriculture.

"Reallocation of resources is needed from low-value traditional activities toward high-value products and