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Catch landed at fish ports down 4.26% month on month in May

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Russian wheat export prices stop long decline, trailing benchmarks

Wheat futures edge lower



PHL fishing yield could rise with 'progress' in WPS talks

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said the country is expected to increase its fishing yield due to "progress" in the country's talks with China on contested fishing grounds in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

In an interview with reporters at the 125th founding anniversary of the Department of Agriculture on

Tuesday, Marcos said his latest talk with Chinese President Xi Jinping has allowed local fishermen to resume

their activities in the WPS.

"The latest report showed they are now being followed [by Chinese vessels], unlike before where they were being barred entry [in the fishing grounds]. So there's a little progress there," Marcos said.

The President said this development has led to the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources's (BFAR) making a projection that local fishermen can increase their catch this year.

The country's talks on fishing matters have reached the point where there is now coordination on the

fishing ban to minimize its impact on all fishermen, according to Marcos.

"We are slowly making progress because the key to that is the improved communication between the Philippine government and the Chinese government," Marcos said.

He made the remarks when sought for reaction to the latest reports of fisherfolks at the Pag-asa Island claiming they were still being harassed by the Chinese Coast Guard in the WPS.

Pag-asa Island is the second largest on the naturally occurring Spratly Islands, which is administered by the Philippines. **Samuel P. Medenilla**

CTALK CITO BELTRAN

'Secretary for life'

President Bongbong Marcos recently announced that he will be staying on as the incumbent Secretary of Agriculture "until the required structural reforms are instituted to make the sector more efficient and competitive."



In an article published in *The Philippine STAR*, the President was quoted as saying: "What I aspire is by the time I leave the DA (Department of Agriculture), we will have systems in place so that we can guarantee the food supply of the Philippines, number one; we can guarantee that the prices are affordable and number three, that our farmers make a good living."

Based on these preconditions set by PBBM, it is safe to assume that PBBM will remain Secretary of Agriculture "for life" (as a figure of speech) or until his last day in office. It is also interesting to note that in his 3-point agenda, the farmers come in third to food security and prioritizing pricing concerns of consumers. You would think that farmers should be prioritized so that food production would increase and as a result of abundant production, food prices would not only be affordable but cheap.

I have no quarrel with the President regarding his set goals, but his priorities clearly need to be reconsidered and it may help the President if he spoke with other stakeholders and not just his cordon sanitaire or the favored few businessmen pretending to be farmers or pretending to know what's best for Philippine agriculture.

Farming and agriculture are not some political campaign that you develop for political purposes or propaganda, as DA officials seem to be promoting to pander to PBBM's links with his father FM and the various programs FM promoted in his time. The desk jockeys and ex-corporates at the DA have to do more than recycle martial law era agricultural campaigns or merely approve importations that stir up controversy and suspicion.

Agriculture is what feeds a nation and ensures its survival and ideally contributes to its progress. It is the rare economic model that rises from the ground up resulting from the hard work, determination and grit of various groups knitted together with their desire to produce food and products from the earth, from water, from plants and animals.

Economists can say and do all they want but if climate change, geo-political disruption and dysfunctional government policies push farmers against the wall, no charts and formulas are going to work, and neither will the farmers.

The "farmer" invests the most with the little he or she has, works the hardest on the land, is the most disadvantaged in the pricing, negotiation and sales and is the most used if not abused when propagandists and storytellers of government come out glorifying themselves. One industry leader while comparing the Philippines to other nations in the region, labeled the DA and the country as "Anti-Farmer."

Various agencies of the DA have piles of documentary and scientific and financial requirements for registration, certification and permission in relation to business registration, certification of farms, products or movement. I am certain that if someone at the Anti-Red Tape Authority (ARTA) investigated the processes and requirements of the DA, they would flag so much red tape in its various agencies.

Yes, you can modernize agriculture, you can increase yield, you can integrate and make it more efficient, but only through the people on the ground and of the land. The President's friends and advisers all talk about "factory farms" and integrating lands that have already been subdivided and distributed in an attempt to make PBBM believe, which he probably already has, that is the answer.

Unless the President has been hiding in a cave, I am certain that he is well aware of the state of agricultural infrastructure in terms of available land for different types of applications, not just rice. He must be aware that irrigation in the country is in such a sorry state that on occasion, the distribution of water ends up being a choice on whether Metro Manila gets potable water or if farmers get water for their rice paddies.

Even with water available, the irrigation and distribution are so fractured that it costs more and wastes more. Time and again it has been suggested that rice production be relocated to regions, provinces or areas where there are rivers and wetlands instead of sustaining them in areas challenged with water supply.

The biggest mistake is we continue to focus all resources of the DA – 60 percent is the often-quoted amount – invested on rice production. Agriculture is not just rice. There is livestock, grains and vegetables along with marine products. Then the DA is like a philanderer whose responsibility is to care for Philippine agriculture but delights in sourcing and supporting the agriculture and products of other countries.

The Philippines needs to create a buffer to transition us towards increased self-sufficiency or local sourcing and ultimately reduce importation of agricultural products simply to cover deficits or as a remedial solution to uncontrollable disruption in the supply chain.

Going full circle, whatever we do to fix Philippine agriculture, it has to start with the farmers. I seriously doubt if there has even been a demographic survey of who and where are the different types of farmers, their products, assets, location and outputs as well as challenges or needs.

PBBM said that Filipinos don't want dole outs and as far as farmers go, that may be the case. But what they want is a fair and level playing field where their effort and sacrifice are honored by their government through "priority status," "buy local" policies and to be finally recognized and respected for their contribution to nation building.

DA officials need to be sent to reeducation camps on how to respect their stakeholders, engage and consult. You cannot help farmers if you are not willing to walk their pain and get your feet dirty, *mga* "bossing."

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SKETCHES ANA MARIE PAMINTUAN

Staying put

Until efficient "systems" are in place, according to President Marcos, the nation will have to put up with him as secretary of agriculture.

The systems, he said, should make it possible to fulfill his "aspirations" for a guaranteed food supply at affordable prices and a "good living" for farmers.

Those are ambitious goals along the line of his election campaign "aspiration" for rice at P20 a kilo. They make his story about having no volunteers for the top agriculture post almost believable... except the "Marites" grapevine had been awash with stories of at least one person already preparing to take on the job. This willing person, however, reportedly became a casualty of the feud between the President's avowed BFF the Vice President and his cousin the Speaker.

Last January, BBM had said he wanted an agriculture expert as permanent secretary of the Department of Agriculture. He already had such an expert in agriculture scientist Leocadio Sebastian, but the guy became an early casualty of infighting within the walls of power. Although Sebastian has since been recycled to a post where his expertise is well suited, what happened to him is surely a concern for anyone being recruited by BBM to head the DA.

So it looks like the nation will have to put up with the current secretary of agriculture (his words) all the way to the end of his term in 2028, for better or worse.

This is an underwhelming prospect for those who remember the "chicken sad" and onion crises of 2022, plus the continuing greed-driven sugar crisis.

A common criticism is that with so many other complicated problems requiring a president's urgent attention, from the education crisis to looming power and water shortages and (according to his finance chief) fiscal collapse, BBM needs a full-time DA secretary who can micromanage and focus 100 percent on the agriculture sector.

Last year, according to official data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), agriculture, forestry and fishing accounted for the lowest contribution among the major economic sectors to the gross domestic product with 8.9 percent, behind the services sector (61.4 percent) and industry (29.7 percent).

In terms of employment, the agriculture sector's share was only 23.5 percent as of March this year, below the 59 percent in services, and only slightly higher than those in industry (17.5 percent), according to the PSA.



On the other hand, Marcos supporters say the problems that have long hounded the agriculture sector are best tackled by the President himself. Orders can be issued directly for faster compliance by both national and local government agencies.

The President has talked about supply and value chain issues that need fixing to stabilize supply and prices of agricultural commodities. DA officials have told "The Chiefs" on *One News* that this means, among other things, eliminating several middlemen and having the government provide farm equipment, facilities and services, whose lack or steep fees drive up crop retail prices.

But we've heard such commitments before, from a succession of administrations, so people aren't holding their breath about the latest plans.

DA Secretary BBM was in charge of the country only during the second half of 2022. So "chicken sad" and P750-a-kilo onions (plus P136-a-kilo sugar) notwithstanding, he can still deflect blame for the lackluster agricultural production, and even for food inflation – the biggest contributor to the 14-year-high inflation rate under his watch.

So far, the agriculture problems are still not sticking to him, as can be inferred from his continuing high survey ratings (although slipping). He can still afford to pass on the blame to officials by firing them.

His authority can even be invoked to brush aside criticism of the short-circuiting of importation rules to favor three companies in bringing in 440,000 metric tons of white refined sugar ASAP, with the sugar arriving even before an import order was issued. (Yet sugar prices still refused to come down.)

The impressive clout of those three entities – something that can be possible in this country only through powerful connections – could be among the reasons why there are no takers for the top DA post.

An official who signs off on that kind of questionable importation could find himself facing an indictment for plunder in the not-too-distant future. Such is life in this land of "weather-weather lang."

Meanwhile, here we are the hoi polloi, wondering when greed will be moderated to substantially bring down sugar prices, and not just in the tax-subsidized Kadiwa outlets.

Since it looks like positioning for 2028 is starting early, food-driven inflation and other agriculture issues may be used by non-administration forces against Marcos 2.0.

The issues may be used even by forces within the administration, if the rift in the UniTeam widens, which is looking inevitable even this early considering the egos and ambitions involved.

BBM seems unfazed about such possibilities. Perhaps he's thinking that if his ambitious objectives are attained, especially for P20 a kilo rice outside Kadiwa, it will not only establish his legacy but also boost his efforts to fully rehabilitate the Marcos name.

In agriculture, the buck stops with the President – successes and failures alike.



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Improved agri crucial for post-pandemic recovery – BBM

By ALEXIS ROMERO

The Philippines cannot recover from the impact of the COVID pandemic if its farming sector does not improve, President Marcos said yesterday.

In a speech during the 125th anniversary celebration of the

Department of Agriculture (DA) in Quezon City, Marcos said the problems that the administration is facing go beyond providing sufficient food that people

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can afford.

"One of the great priorities of this administration is to pull out of the pandemic economy. And every analysis, even if it is not conducted by farmers, even if it is done by banks, by the World Bank, by the ADB, they always say that 'your economy won't recover if your agriculture does not improve' because everything that we do in the economy is anchored on a resilient and robust agriculture sector," Marcos, who is also the agriculture secretary, said, referring to the Asian Development Bank.

"That is how important your work is. It is not just about feeding people but the recovery of the Philippines after the pandemic. Let us always keep that in the back of our mind so we will always remember that this work is not just something that you do because you cannot find another job, you cannot find another work," he added.

Marcos said agriculture is and "will always be an important contributor" to the economy.

He said that in the first quarter of the year, the sector grew by 2.2 percent while contributing 9.1 percent to the country's total gross domestic product.

"Let us always bear in mind that the agriculture sector plays a major and significant role. Enhancing the agriculture sector is tantamount to improving the Philippines," Marcos said in Filipino.

He expressed optimism that the targets set by the DA would be achieved.

"There are a lot of good people in the Department of Agriculture... They did not think of anything but find ways to improve the lives of our farmers, to strengthen our food supply. And that is why I am sure that... the goals that we have set for ourselves in the next few years... are goals that we can achieve because we have all the different elements that are required," he said.



President Marcos examines a plant on display during the 125th anniversary of the Department of Agriculture yesterday. The program highlighted the DA's contributions to the continuous development of the agri-fisheries sector and in giving support to farmers and fisherfolk amid the challenges in addressing food and nutrition security.



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"We have the expertise. We have the experience. We have the knowledge. We have the motivation to make things work. And so that is why – that is what we are trying to do to put all your efforts into a single plan that everyone can follow."

Marcos did not provide specifics on the targets that he said were attainable.

He also did not mention anything about his promise to lower the price of rice to P20 per kilo.

'Work together'

The President said the goals of the agency would be achieved if there is coordination among its personnel.

He cited the need to study forces that could affect the performance of the farm sector such as climate change, decreasing productivity, diminishing natural resources and changes in the market.

"But I cannot say that we can do it without any of you. We have to be together. We have to work together. I know that it

is something that all of you want... Because with your help, we have harnessed the transformative potential of the agricultural sector in ensuring food sustainability, generating employment opportunities (and) mitigating poverty," Marcos said.

He said the DA would continue to devise interventions to advance agri-fishery practices, improve the competitiveness of agri-fishery products and boost the income of our farmers and fisherfolk.

He urged the DA to continue the dialogues with experts, researchers and rural workers in order to solve the roots of lingering problems and adopt climate resilient and cutting-edge agricultural technologies.

"There is still a great deal of work to do. But it is on this note that I enjoin each of you to continue to exert all efforts to address the concerns of our sector, so we can achieve the goals we have set for ourselves, our sector and for our country," Marcos said.

"As one department, let us continue to champion the well-being of our farmers, fisherfolk and rural communities. Let us promote agricultural productivity and resilience while also maintaining environmental stability, and let us nurture inclusivity and pride in the noble work of feeding our people."

Smuggling

In an interview with journalists, Marcos said the agriculture sector's value chain would be strengthened if smuggling and hoarding are addressed.

"We are making sure that the simple problems we are facing – rice smuggling, sugar smuggling, onion smuggling – will be stopped. We will do everything to stop them," Marcos said.

He said the DA must also find ways to boost productivity to ensure that agricultural crops and livestock are affordable.

"Those two go hand-in-hand. The best way to improve, first of all, availability and to keep the prices down, is to have a good level of production so we won't be a victim of imported inflation, which is happening now... we are forced to import," he said.

"We are doing everything that we can to increase production in all aspects. I'm not talking only about rice and corn but also livestock and fisheries," he added.

Marcos ended his speech by announcing that DA employees would receive a bonus.

"We have to meet. I have to see first how much our savings is but you will have a bonus," he said.

Also present during DA's anniversary were Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban, Sen. Cynthia Villar, Ilocos Norte Rep. Sandro Marcos and Lionel Dabbadie, country representative of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization.



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Marcos confident DA goals will be achieved

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is confident that the "far-reaching" goals set by the Department of Agriculture (DA) in the next few years will be achieved under his watch.

Speaking at the 125th founding anniversary of the DA, the President cited the recent improvement the country posted in terms of production.

"I am sure that the goals that we have set for the Department of Agriculture in the next few years are

goals that we can achieve because we have all the different elements that are required," said Marcos, who is also the Agriculture chief.

"We have the expertise. We have the experience. We have the knowledge. We have the motivation to make things work. And so that is

why, that is what we are trying to do to put all your efforts into a single plan that everyone can follow," he added.

The DA said the agriculture sector had achieved 0.7 percent growth in production amounting to P931.8 billion in gross value added (GVA) in agriculture, forestry and fishing from July to December 2022.

In his speech, the President cited a 2.2 percent or P9.8-billion expansion in agricultural GVA during the opening quarter of 2023.

"Agriculture is and will always

be an important contributor to our national economy. In the first quarter of 2023, the agriculture sector grew by 2.2 percent while contributing 9.1 percent to our total gross domestic product," he said.

Marcos added that the country must adopt and use the latest technologies and best practices that will not only boost the nation's productivity and quality of life for Filipinos but "will also open more doors to investments and market opportunities for our friends from outside of the Philippines."

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MARCOS: PH, CHINA MAKE HEADWAY ON 'FISHING BAN'

STORY BY NESTOR CORRALES

The President says two countries now have 'coordination' on annual fishing ban imposed by Beijing in 1999.

Whenever it is in force, 'we can make a plan' to give Filipino fishers other ways to make a living, he adds.

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

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FROM A1

By Nestor Corrales
@NCorralesINQ

President Marcos said Manila and Beijing were “making some progress” toward a breakthrough in resolving their dispute over China’s annual fishing ban in the South China Sea that had been the bane of Filipino fisherfolk for over two decades.

Speaking to reporters in Quezon City on Tuesday, the President said the two sides had reached the point of having “coordination” on fishing activities despite China’s unilateral imposition of a fishing ban in the resource-rich waterway.

“We already have coordination with them (China) when there is a fishing ban so there won’t be a sudden fishing ban. At least we can have a plan,” Mr. Marcos said.

“We are making some progress in that regard,” he added.

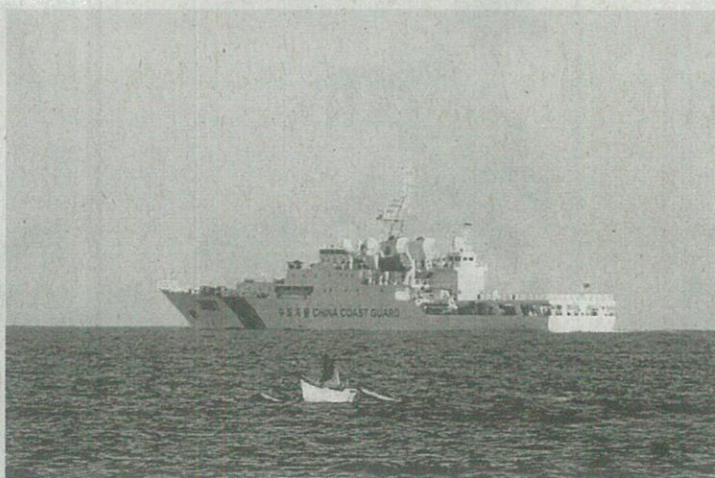
Since 1999, Beijing has imposed a yearly fishing ban in the vast South China Sea, including the West Philippine Sea, or the parts within the country’s 370-kilometer exclusive economic zone (EEZ), despite a 2016 arbitral ruling recognizing the Philippines’ sovereign right to fish and explore for resources in those waters.

Other income source

“When they say there will be a fishing ban in two months’ time, we can make a plan,” Mr. Marcos said.

“What will our fishermen do? So let’s give them another livelihood or another source of income.”

In May, the President said Beijing had agreed to discuss



TRADITIONAL FISHING GROUND In this November 2016 photo, a Filipino fisherman catches fish as the China Coast Guard patrols Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal in the West Philippine Sea, a traditional fishing ground for Zambales and Pangasinan fishers. —RICHARD A. REYES

the fishing rights of Filipino fisherfolk in the South China Sea, as many of them often experience harassment from Chinese vessels even in their traditional fishing grounds.

“These things do not come very quickly... but we are slowly making progress because the key to that is the improved communication between the Philippine government and the Chinese government,” the President said.

Mr. Marcos had ordered the Philippine Coast Guard and the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to create a map of the Philippines’ fishing grounds in the West Philippine Sea, which he planned to present to China.

In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, Netherlands, ruled in favor of the Philippines by invalidating China’s sweeping claims in the South China Sea and recognizing the right of Filipinos to fish in those waters.

Beijing has refused to acknowledge that decision.

On June 16, a Chinese navy ship reportedly shadowed the Philippine civilian patrol vessel BRP Francisco Dagohoy as it was heading back to Palawan from the Philippine-occupied Pag-asa Island.

Asked to comment on the incident, Mr. Marcos suggested that Beijing was actually becoming less hostile.

‘A little progress’

“The latest report is that they were just tailed, unlike before [when] they were being blocked. So there’s a little progress there,” he said.

“That is because we are continuing to talk to the Chinese government, President Xi (Jinping), in every way,” he added.

Mr. Marcos said he had pressed the matter during his bilateral meeting with Xi in Beijing in January.

“Let’s not talk about the territory because we can’t decide [on] it now that we are talking. Let’s prioritize the fisheries, because I say, the people

are innocent, why should we punish them,” he recalled telling China’s leader.

China says the fishing ban, which lasts from May to August, is intended to promote sustainable fishing and improve marine ecology. The Philippines has repeatedly protested the imposition.

The May 1 to Aug. 16 fishing ban covers waters north of the 12th parallel and two of the 12 fishing management areas of the Philippines—designated as Zones 5 and 6 by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR).

These zones include waters surrounding the provinces of Antique, Occidental Mindoro, Palawan, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Pangasinan, Zambales, Bataan, Pampanga, Bulacan, Cavite and Batangas.

The ban roughly covers waters west of Palawan’s Busuanga Island all the way north past Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal, also called Bajo de Masinloc off Zambales.

In 2019, Malacañang said the China-imposed fishing moratorium was against the sovereignty of the Philippines.

In May 2021, the DFA filed a diplomatic protest against China’s fishing ban in the South China Sea, saying the prohibition encroached into parts of the country’s EEZ and put Filipino fishers at risk of attack.

Bigger fish haul

A year later, the DFA filed a new diplomatic protest against the ban, which it said covered areas in the West Philippine Sea over which the Philippines enjoyed “sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction.”

But China rejected the Philippines’ diplomatic protests. At a press conference in Beijing on June 1, 2022, a Chinese foreign ministry

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MARCOS: PH, CHINA MAKE HEADWAY ON 'FISHING BAN'

FROM A2

spokesperson said China could not accept the DFA's "unwarranted accusation."

On Tuesday, Mr. Marcos said the improving ties with China had already led to a BFAR projection of a bigger haul for Filipino fishers.

BFAR spokesperson Nazario Briguera said on Saturday that the West Philippine Sea had contributed 6 percent to the country's total fisheries production, as of 2022.

Data from BFAR showed there were 376,733 fishers in the West Philippine Sea as of January this year. —WITH A REPORT

FROM INQUIRER RESEARCH INQ



Marcos cites progress in ties with China as far as fishing activities go

By Beatriz Marie D. Cruz Reporter

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. on Tuesday said the Philippines and China have made progress in coordinating fishing activities in the South China Sea.

"We are making some progress in that regard," he told reporters on the sidelines of an Agriculture event, adding that the two countries have started coordinating on China's yearly fishing ban.

He made the remarks after a Chinese Navy vessel reportedly tailed a multi-mission offshore civilian patrol vessel in a Philippine-claimed area of the waterway last week.

Mr. Marcos said the fact that the Chinese vessel did not block and only tailed the Philippine patrol vessel is an improvement in itself.

"These things do not come very quickly," he said. "But we are slowly making progress because the key to that is the improved communication between the Philippine government and Chinese government."

Mr. Marcos said he's "continuing to talk" to the Chinese government and

President Xi Jinping "in every way" to avoid a clash between Filipino fishermen and Chinese authorities in the area.

At the weekend, an official from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) said Filipino fishermen could increase their catch if there were no aggressive Chinese activities.

BFAR spokesman Naz Briguera told a media forum the agency did not want to downplay the significance of the South China Sea in the country's fish production and food security. Philippine-claimed areas contributed 6% to fishery output in 2022, he said.

Meanwhile, the presidential palace said Mr. Marcos had ordered the Agriculture department and BFAR to come up with studies on the rehabilitation and maintenance of the country's marine habitats "to address illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing."

The president issued the order at a June 13 meeting, where he cited the need for the Philippines to comply with international commitments, particularly to the European Union on preventing illegal fishing.

"He also highlighted the importance of addressing the concerns of fishery

stakeholders by using a science-based approach in managing marine resources," the Presidential Communications Office said in a statement.

POLITICAL WEIGHT

Also on Tuesday, Senator Ana Theresa "Risa" N. Hontiveros-Baraquel said her proposal for a United Nations (UN) intervention to stop Chinese harassment of Philippine Coast Guard vessels could influence international norms and policies.

"A UN General Assembly resolution has the potential to hone international norms and influence even national policies of its member-nations, whether it's the Philippines, China, or others," she told an online news briefing.

She said a UN resolution could guide other UN specialized agencies and regional organizations like the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) on how it approaches the sea dispute.

"Although not legally binding, [the proposed UN resolution] has political weight and serves as an expression of the

will and consensus of the international community," she added.

The senator has filed a resolution urging the Philippine government through the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to sponsor a resolution before the UN General Assembly asking China to stop harassing the Philippine Coast Guard in the disputed waterway.

Beijing's "blunt refusal to accept its legal fate should have serious consequences," Ms. Hontiveros said in Filipino.

China claims more than 80% of the South China Sea, which is believed to contain massive oil and gas deposits and through which billions of dollars in trade passes each year.

UN intervention would serve Philippine interests but "could harden the position of China," Rommel C. Banlaoi, director

of the Center for Intelligence and National Security Studies at the Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research, said in a Viber message.

The dispute could be resolved peacefully through direct consultations and negotiations, he added. — with Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza

FULL STORY



Read the full story by scanning the QR code or by typing the link <<https://rb.gy/tady5>>



Why having the President in charge of agriculture is a good thing

After reading the very positive assessment of Philippine economic prospects in the coming five years from my long-term colleague, Jim Walker, I have been reinforced in my belief that Philippine GDP can grow at an annual rate of 6-7%, given existing strong institutions and enlightened economic policies that have been products of more than 30 years of reforms. This 6-7% growth, however, is not enough if we want to make a significant dent in fighting mass poverty, which is still at double-digit levels. We must target at least 8-10% growth. This is where I appreciate getting some constructive criticism from Jim Walker.

He is not happy with the President appointing himself as the Secretary of Agriculture. First, he admits that it is not unusual in Asian politics for the prime minister or president of a country to hold another senior government portfolio. He cites the example of Najib Razak who was not only Prime Minister of Malaysia but also Finance Minister. He uses this example to offer a warning shot to President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. because of the corruption that resulted in the IMDB scandal. As the reader may remember, Najib Razak was sent to jail for corruption.

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. presides over the Department of Agriculture meeting at the Aguinaldo State Dining Room in Malacañan Palace on Aug. 1, 2022.



**HUMAN SIDE
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BERNARDO M. VILLEGAS



and Natural Resources, and Interior and Local Government (or the DA, DAR, DENR, and DILG respectively).

First, let me share with the reader what I told Jim Walker about why I supported the decision of the President to be Secretary of Agriculture, at least for some time at the beginning of his presidency. I have been very much involved in strategizing for the increase in agricultural productivity with some of the leading lights of Philippine agribusiness. We are completely convinced that there is no way we can improve overall agricultural productivity unless we are able to reconsolidate the millions of hectares of farms (especially in the coconut and sugar sectors) that were splintered into small units of two to three hectares each by a failed agrarian reform program. We are convinced that the efforts to reconsolidate these fragmented farms — either through cooperatives and/or the nucleus estate system made famous by the Malaysians in palm oil — at least four departments of the government must be on the same page: the departments of Agriculture, Agrarian Reform, Environment

Unfortunately, in the initial efforts at reconsolidation we have seen so far, some of these departments work at cross purposes. There is the notorious case during the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte when, despite the fact that the CARP (Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program) law already expired in 2014, the then sitting Secretary of Agrarian Reform was still aggressively fragmenting farm units. It is important that President Marcos Jr. ensures that the Agrarian Reform Secretary today is doing everything possible to get beneficiaries of agrarian reform to go along with efforts of reconsolidation by organizing cooperatives or leasing their lands to large agribusiness companies who will take over the management of the consolidated farms and pay them rent and employ members of their families.

In the coconut industry, there are efforts to put together tens of thousands of hectares of farmlands in such areas as Eastern Visayas, Bicol, Southern Luzon, and Northern Mindanao. It would

be difficult to reach those scales of consolidated farms employing private lands alone. Public lands under the DENR, especially denuded forests, must be added to the potential corporate farms. This would require that the DENR think along the same lines. Furthermore, local government units can put all sorts of obstacles to these efforts of reconsolidation. Governors and mayors must also be convinced about the benefits of large-scale farming. Thus, the DILG Secretary must have a minimum understanding of the requirements of farmland consolidation at the local government level.

It is in this light that I am of the opinion that by occupying the position of Secretary of Agriculture, the President was able to obtain a more comprehensive view of what it takes to improve agricultural productivity and exert every effort at the beginning of his presidency to make sure that these four departments — that are under his leadership as President of the country — will work in the same direction. As Secretary of Agriculture, the President is getting a ground level knowledge of the intricacies involved in attaining food security. He has given a sterling example to the population of the urgent need for every leader or professional to upskill, reskill, and retool himself or herself. I am glad he started it

in the field that is directly related to food security, our most urgent economic objective.

In fact, to make matters more complex, the other major strategic directions that must be taken to attain the 2-3% annual growth in agriculture that has already been achieved by our neighboring ASEAN countries like Thailand and Vietnam (fortunately, Philippine agriculture grew at this rate in the first quarter of 2023) are product diversification, digitalization, and industrialization. On product diversification and industrialization (the further processing of our farm produce), there must be very close coordination with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to determine what are the markets for such farm products as coffee, cacao, avocado, durian, and other non-traditional exports, as well as manufactured food products both in the domestic and foreign markets. As regards digitalization, there is an obvious role that has to be played by the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT). Here again, during his stint as Secretary of Agriculture, the President was able to have firsthand knowledge of the synergies among the executive departments over which he presides.

I am convinced that it was a very wise move for the President to take over the portfolio of the Secretary of Agriculture in the

first months of his presidency. Among other reasons, he has made it a personal responsibility to upskill and retool himself in matters related to agriculture by devoting a lot of time interacting with the most knowledgeable people about agribusiness in the private sector, such as those comprising the Kapatid Angat Lahat Agri Program including Francisco Dizon of Dizon Farms, Ramon Garcia of DFNN, Winston Uy of Universal Leaf Phils., Nando Cojuangco of Central Azucarera de Tarlac, Go Negosyo senior advisor and former Secretary of Agriculture William Dar, James Amparo of Yovel East, Simon Bakker of Kennemer, Carl Benedick Chung of Bounty Fresh, Michael Tan of the LT Group, Go Negosyo founder Joey Concepcion, Christian Moeller of Lionheart Farms, and Ruth Novales of Nestlé. I don't think he would have spent so much time listening to these agribusiness experts if he did not occupy the position of Secretary of Agriculture. Knowing some of the people in this list, I can vouch for the fact that his traveling schedule did not prevent the president from having a very down-to-earth grasp of the intricate problems of the agricultural (or, more accurately, the agribusiness) sector by spending a lot of time listening to these agribusiness experts.

In fact, one of them — Christian Moeller of Lionheart Farms — who



was traveling with me in a business road show in Europe, could not complete the road show because he was called by President Marcos Jr. to give him a briefing on ways and means of improving productivity in the coconut sector.

Anyway, I am convinced that we shall have the position of Secretary of Agriculture filled by another person before the end of June. This person — whoever he/she will be — will be able to face the challenge that Jim Walker posed in his article. As he correctly pointed out, the importance of the Agriculture Secretary looks set to grow during the current year.

It is widely expected that by late summer, the region will be in the grip of an El Niño event (this follows three years of supply-supportive La Niña conditions). It is highly probable that this will once again disrupt rice production across Southeast Asia and would require preemptive action to secure imported supplies. We are already facing the need to import sugar and, most probably, pork products soon. I fully agree with Jim's observations that all eyes are on President Marcos as regards the food sector. The target of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas to bring inflation down to 2-4% by the last quarter of 2023 would be seriously endangered if there is another round of steep increases in food prices.

This new Secretary of Agriculture would have the assurance that, with the help of a President who is more knowledgeable about the problems of the agriculture thanks to his stint as Secretary of Agriculture, he will get all the cooperation he needs from the other departments of the Executive branch in carrying out farm consolidation, product diversification, digitalization and industrialization. The new Secretary of Agriculture will then be the one directly responsible for attaining the 2-3% annual growth in agriculture that is one of the requirements for the Philippine GDP to grow at 8-1% during the rest of the current Administration. ■

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Marcos warns of 'modest' agri gains being upended by El Niño

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. said on Tuesday that the upcoming El Niño dry spell is threatening to upend "modest gains" made in agriculture in recent months.

In a speech at the 125th anniversary of the Department of Agriculture (DA), Mr. Marcos also promised to address the challenges agriculture continues to face, like "decreasing productivity, climate change (and) diminishing natural resources."

The El Niño event, projected to emerge sometime between July and September, is expected to drag down growth in agriculture, which expanded 2.1% in the first quarter, a turnaround from the 0.3% decline posted a year earlier and a 1% contraction in the fourth quarter of 2022.

The last El Niño took place in 2019, causing as much as P8 billion worth of damage to agriculture.

Agriculture accounts for about a 10th of the Philippines' gross domestic product.

Mr. Marcos, in his speech, said the DA must "continue to adopt and utilize the latest technologies and practices" to enhance agri-

cultural productivity and attract foreign investment.

He said climate-mitigation practices and technology can make agriculture sector resilient to future shocks.

"Moving forward, the DA will continue to devise interventions to advance our agri-fishery practices, improve the competitiveness of our agri-fishery products, (and) further boost the income of our farmers and fisherfolk," he said.

Mr. Marcos, who is also Secretary of Agriculture, promised to expand market reach for farmers "by enhancing our physical and our digital infrastructure (and) leveraging private sector investment."

He said the DA should continue to engage in collaborative dialogue with experts, researchers, and rural workers to "solve the root causes of the lingering problems."

The Philippines imports much of its food and farm inputs, making it vulnerable to imported inflation.

In a recent World Bank report, the Philippines ranked first in a group of 16 countries in terms of regressive output subsidies, followed by Mexico, Canada, Japan, and Vietnam.

"We have all heard the issues of food supply, of food prices, of supply chain problems. And these are all of the things that we have to overcome if we are going to be able to say that the DA has achieved its ultimate goal and that we are able to provide to Filipinos all of the food supply," Mr. Marcos said, adding that the industry's contribution to nutrition should be considered in assessing the DA's success.

Mr. Marcos has been urged by opposition legislators to appoint his replacement as Secretary of Agriculture.

In a statement on Tuesday, ACT Teachers Party-list Rep. France L. Castro said the DA needs a full-time Secretary "who truly understands and knows the solutions to the agricultural as well as agrarian problems of the country."

"Unfortunately, the remedies being implemented by the DA under Marcos are mostly band-aid solutions and entail the importation of key agricultural products like rice, sugar, onions, and the like," she said.

"Instead of helping farmers, such measures further mire them deeper into poverty but at

the same time make agricultural importers richer," Ms. Castro said. "Unless genuine agrarian reform coupled with full support of the government to farmers is implemented, (alongside the suspension of) land conversion, our agricultural sector will die even if President Marcos stays there up to 2028."

The DA has addressed food inflation by, among other things, organizing subsidized stores allowing farmers to sell directly to consumers.

The Kadiwa stores allow sellers to offer low prices because the government pays for transport costs and other expenses.

Kadiwa stores have been accused of seizing markets from small- and medium-sized traders who had been weakened by the pandemic, with economists saying that any discussion of the program needs to consider the level of public funding it is receiving.

"It may still be fairly early to tell whether we are now realizing the benefits of prices saved vs. investment spent," agroforestry researcher Ayn G. Torres told *BusinessWorld* earlier. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**



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Marcos upbeat agri goals on target

By BETHEENA UNITE

President Marcos expressed full confidence that the goals set for the country's agriculture sector will be met in the next few years.

Speaking at the 125th founding anniversary of the department which Marcos heads in a concurrent capacity, he said the Department of Agriculture's (DA) goals will be attained as he cited the recent improvement the country posted in terms of production.

"I am sure that the goals that we have set for ourselves in the next few years, that we have set for the Department of Agriculture in the few years are goals that we can achieve because we have all the different elements that are required," Marcos said in his speech.

According to the DA, the agriculture sector has achieved 0.7 percent growth in production amounting to P931.8 billion in gross value added (GVA) in agriculture, forestry and fishing from July to Dec. 2022.

In his speech, the President cited a 2.2 percent or P9.8-billion expansion in agricultural GVA during the opening quarter of 2023.

Marcos said that he is banking on the department's effort and expertise to

attain the country's agricultural goals.

"We have the expertise, we have the experience, we have the knowledge, we have the motivation to make things work. And so that is what we are trying to do to put all your efforts into a single plan that everyone can follow," Marcos added.

He encouraged the DA officials and employees to "be together and work together."

"With your help, we have harnessed the transformative potential of the agricultural sector in ensuring food sustainability, generating employment opportunities, mitigating poverty," he said.

He said there is still a lot of work to be done so he urged the department to continue collaborating with experts towards agriculture development.

"Moving forward, the DA will continue to devise interventions to advance our agri-fishery practices, improve the competitiveness of our agri-fishery products, [and] further boost the income of our farmers and fisherfolk," Marcos said.

"In addition, we will expand access to our markets and related enterprises by enhancing our physical and our digital infrastructure [and] leveraging on private sector investments," he added.



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PBBM: PH 'slowly making progress' in fishing grounds talks with China

By RAYMUND ANTONIO

President Marcos assured that he is "slowly making progress" in his talks with China regarding the rights of Filipino fishermen in accessing their traditional fishing grounds.

In a media interview on the sidelines of the Department of Agriculture's (DA) 125th founding anniversary on Tuesday, June 20, Marcos shared the current situation in the resource-rich waters of the South China Sea, which are claimed in whole by China and in part by the Philippines and several other neighboring nations.

"We are slowly making progress because the key to that is the improved communication between the Philippine government and the Chinese government," Marcos furthered.

Citing the latest report, the chief executive said that Chinese vessels no longer block Filipino fishermen but merely follow them.

He described this as a "little progress," which also pushed the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) to project that the catch would increase.

"That is because we are continuing to talk to the Chinese government, to President Xi (Jinping) in every way," Marcos said, adding he prioritized discussing the plight of Filipino fishermen with Xi when they first met.

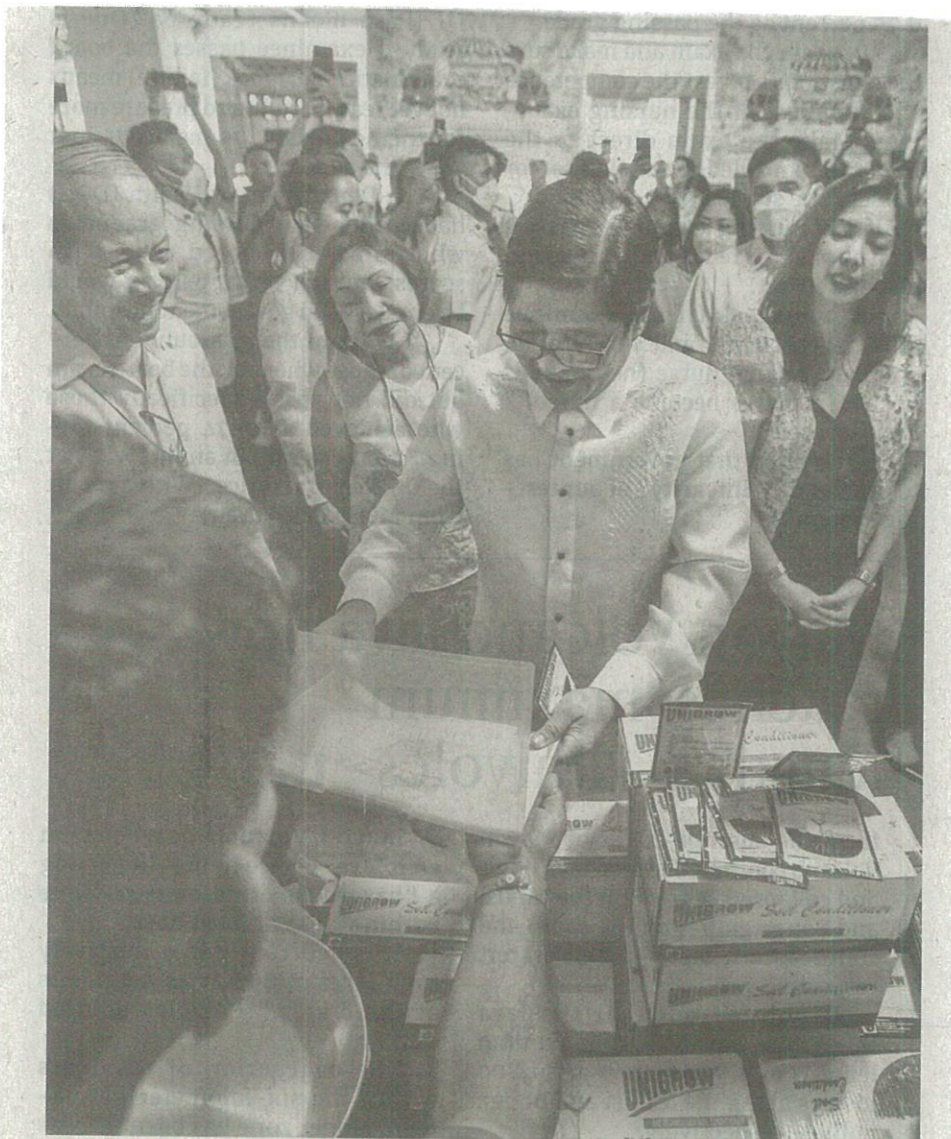
"Ang inuna ko talaga noong kami ay nagkita, ay sinabi ko unahin na lang natin 'yong fisheries, huwag na nating pag-usapan 'yong teritoryo dahil hindi naman tayo makakapag-decide dito na nag-uusap tayo, unahin niyo 'yong fisheries. Dahil sinsabi ko e wala namang kasalanan 'yong tao, bakit natin paparusahan? (I prioritized fisheries when we met. I told him that we'll not talk about the territory because we cannot decide on that, but we'll prioritize the fisheries. I said the fishermen did not do anything wrong, so why should they suffer?)," he said.

The President shared that there is also better coordination now, which allows fishermen to plan ahead when there's an upcoming fishing ban.

The government, Marcos said, must provide other livelihood and other sources of income in case of a fishing ban.



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DA@125 — President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. (center) receives a brochure from a vendor at the 'Kadiwa ng Pangulo' at the Department of Agriculture (DA) head office in Quezon City during the 125th founding anniversary of the agency on Tuesday, June 20, 2023. Joining the President, who is also the concurrent Agriculture Secretary, are (from left) DA Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban, Senator Cynthia Villar, Ilocos Norte Rep. Sandro Marcos (partly hidden), and DA Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista. (Noel B. Pabalate)

Abante

UNA SA BALITA

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Mahal ng Diyos ang mga Pinoy - BBM

ITINUTURING ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. na masuwerte pa rin ang mga Pilipino sa kabila ng mga kinakaharap na pagsusbok sa bansa.

Sa kanyang pagdalo sa 125th founding anniversary ng Department of Agriculture sa Quezon City, sinabi ng pangulo na mapalad pa rin ang mga Pilipino dahil sa kabila ng pinangangambahang epekto ng El Niño ay umuulan pa rin sa malaking bahagi ng bansa.

"Inaalala natin ng matagal kung ano ang mangyayari doon sa El Niño, sinuwerte naman tayo na imbes na tayo ay

bagyuhin ay tayo'y hinihila 'yong ulan dito, so kokontrolin na lang natin 'yong flooding, make sure that irrigation association is taking full advantage of all of this rain na ma-direct sa tamang lugar. Baka naman masabi natin eh sinusuwerte pa rin ang Pilipinas, mahal talaga ng Diyos ang mga Pilipino," anang pangulo.

Kasabay nito ay pinuri ng pangulo ang mga opisyal at tauhan ng ahensiya dahil sa kabilang aniya ng mga balakid ay nagagawan pa rin ng paraan na mapaganda ang buhay ng mga magsasaka. (Aileen Taliping)



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Buhayin muli ang industriya ng asin sa bansa



REP. BRIAN YAMSUAN

Abante
BASTA BICOLANO,
SARO

Nakakapagtaka na kahit isang kapuluan o archipelago ang Pilipinas at may napakahabang baybaying dagat, ang industriya ng asin sa bansa ay tila ba naghihingalo na.

Noong mga nakaraang siglo, ang mga bayan po ng Las Piñas at Malabon ang nangunguna sa paggawa ng asin at napakasigla ng industriyang ito. Kaso nga lamang, simula ng kalagitnaan ng 1990s, unti-unting "naalat", ika nga, ng mga imported na asin ang salt industry ng bansa. Bukod pa ryan, naging batas ang tinatawag na Act for Salt Iodization Nationwide (ASIN) kung saan pinag-utos sa mga food-grade manufacturer na gawing iodized ang mga binebenta nilang asin. Maging ang mga restaurant po at iba pang food outlet ay inatasang tanging iodized salt lang ang ihain sa kanilang establisimiyento.

Dahil wala naman pong kaakibat na suporta mula sa gobyerno at teknolohiya ang ating mga magsasaka ng asin para maging iodized ang kanilang mga produkto ng mga panahon na iyon, unti-unti po silang nasapawan ng mga imported iodized salt sa merkado.

Nakakalungkot po ang nangyaring pagbababaya sa industriya dahil puwede sana tayong maging isa sa mga pangunahing producer ng asin sa mundo. Sa halip na mangyari ito, nag-aangkat pa

tayo ngayon ng 550,000 metric tons o 93 porsiyento ng kailangang asin ng bansa.

Kaya naman po isa sa ating mga unang naihain na panukalang batas ng tayo ay magsimulang magsilbi bilang kinatawan ng Bicol Saro Party-list sa Kongreso ay ang bill na ang layunin ay pasiglahin muli ang industriya ng asin sa Pilipinas. Kasama ko pong nag-file ng bill sina Congressman LRay Villafuerte, Cong. Migz Villafuerte at Cong. Hori Horibata na mga kinatawan lahat ng Camarines Sur.

Naipasa na po ng Kamara de Representante bago mag-adjourn ang sesyon ng Kongreso ang House Bill (HB) 8278 o ang Philippine Salt Industry Development Act. Ito po ang pinagsama-sama at inayos na mga bill na naihain natin at ng ibang mambabatas para mabigyang buhay muli ang industriya ng asin sa Pilipinas. Isa po ito sa mga prayoridad ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. na siya ring kasalukuyang tumatayong Agriculture secretary.

Sa ilalim ng panukalang batas, magtatatag ng Philippine Salt Industry Development Council (PSIDC) na ang pangunahing gagawin ay magbuo ng isang komprehensibong plano para ma-modernize at ma-industrialize ang salt industry ng bansa.

Ang PSIDC rin ang magbibigay ng pondo, makabagong kagamitan at teknikal na suporta sa mga magsasaka ng asin.

Palalaguin din ang paggawa ng artisanal salts. Ito po ang asin na ginagawa sa tradisyonal na paraan. Ilang halimbawa ng artisanal salt ay ang Ilocano Asin at Sugpo Asin na mula sa Pangasinan at ang Asin Tibuok mula

sa Bohol.

Naiulat ko po na kapag naisabatas ang Salt Industry Development Act, ito ay makakalikha ng may 100,000 na trabaho sa sektor ng agrikultura.

Ang sinabi ko pong ito ay hango sa naunang pahayag ng Department of Labor of Employment (DOLE) na ang pagpapasigla muli sa industriya ng asin ay makakalikha ng 20,000 na trabaho at ng karagdagang 80,000 na indirect o related jobs.

Marahil ay tatanungin ninyo po kung paanong umabot sa ganitong kadamang trabaho ang malilikha ng isang malakas na salt industry sa bansa?

Ang karaniwan po nating alam sa asin ay bilang pampalasa sa pagkain. Pero marami pa pong gamit ang asin. Halimbawa na lang po ay ang paggamit ng asin bilang pataba sa niyog na isa ring produkto ng ating bansa na maraming magsasaka ang nakadepende. Tinatayang sa coconut industry pa lamang ay kakailanganin ng 300,000 metric tons ng asin.

Bukod diyan, ang asin bilang industrial salt ay ginagamit din sa paggawa ng dye o pangkulay sa mga tela, at gayundin sa paggawa ng glass, polyester, plastic at leather. Ginagamit rin ang asin sa chemical industry, at mahalagang elemento rin ang industrial salt sa paglilinis ng mga gas at oil wells, at sa paggawa ng papel, tires, brass, bleach at case-hardened steel.

Kaya naman kung muling magiging bida ang mga magsasaka ng asin at ang salt industry natin, tiyak pong marami ang magkakatrabaho. Mahalaga ang asin hindi lamang sa ating hapagkainan, kundi maging sa ekonomiya ng ating bansa.

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LIFETIME PENSION FOR FARMERS, FISHERS EYED

Story
on p. 2



PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. leads the 125th Founding Anniversary of the Department of Agriculture under theme "Kagawaran ng Agrikultura: 125 Taong Naglilingkod Tungo sa Masaganang Agrikultura at Maunlad na Ekonomiya," Tuesday. The program highlights the DA's contributions to the continuous development of the agri-fishery sector and in giving support to the farmers and fisherfolk amid the challenges in addressing food and nutrition security. Photos REY BANIQUET/PNA

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NEWS

PEOPLES JOURNALS

Lifetime pension for farmers, fishers eyed

By Jester Manalastas

A NEOPHYTE solon is pushing for the passage of a measure that seeks to establish a fund that would provide lifetime pensions for the country's 9.7 million small farmers and fisherfolk, most of whom live in poverty.

Bicol Saro Party-list Rep. Brian Raymund Yamsuan said House Bill 7963 aims to establish the Agricultural Pension Fund (APF) to be managed by the Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation (PCIC).

According to Yamsuan, the mea-

sure stands to benefit at least 708,000 workers in the Bicol Region who are employed in the agriculture sector, citing the latest available data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

"Our farmers and fisherfolk are among the poorest of the poor in our society. Despite their hard work and sacrifices to ensure that we have food on our tables, they retire without expecting any lifeline aid from the government. Providing them with pension benefits when they reach old age is a long-overdue measure that Congressman L Ray and I hope will be approved

in this Congress," Yamsuan said.

The measure "recognizes that universal access to comprehensive and adequate social protection systems is an important tool to prevent and reduce poverty and inequality."

Under the bill, the PCIC is tasked to create a pension plan for retirees in the agriculture sector, and manage and invest the APF to ensure its sustainability.

The PCIC, which is an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture (DA), is also authorized under the measure to determine the criteria for eligibility of the potential agricultural

pensioners, in coordination with other relevant government agencies.

PSA data as of 2019 show a steady decline in the number of workers in the agriculture sector over a five-year period. From 11.294 million workers in 2015, the number of employed in the agriculture sector fell to 11.064 million in 2016; 10.261 million in 2017; 9.998 million in 2018; and 9.698 million in the pre-pandemic year of 2019.

The Bicol region accounts for the most number of agricultural workers, with 871,000 in 2015, which dropped to 841,000 in 2016 and 698,000 in

2017.

In 2018, the number of agricultural workers in the region rose slightly to 741,000.

But in 2019, only 708,000 workers were reported by the PSA as having been employed in the Bicol Region's agriculture sector.

Yamsuan said providing lifetime pensions for farmers and fisherfolk should be included in the roster of measures that the government aims to implement to encourage more workers to stay in, or shift to, the agriculture sector.

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Concepcion: Pagbabago sa agrikultura legasiya ni PBBM

Todo suporta si Go Negosyo founder at Private Sector Advisory Council (PSAC) Lead for Jobs Joey Concepcion sa desisyon ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. na manatiling Kalihim ng Department of Agriculture (DA) hanggang hindi nailalatag ang kailangang pagbabago sa istraktura na magbibigay ng sapat na lakas at kakayahang sa sektor ng agrikultura ng bansa.

Inihayag ni Pangulong Marcos ang nasabing desisyon sa isang event ng DA kamakailan. "Staying as the lead for agriculture is a smart decision from the President. He can quickly make reforms and ensure that all systems are in place to help the country's farmers just like what his father did during his term," wika ni Concepcion.

Sa ilang beses nilang pag-uusap ng Pangulo para pag-usapan ang KALAP ng Go Negosyo, batid ni Concepcion na mahal niya ang mga magsasaka at nais niyang baguhin ang industriya. "Given the right time, this will be his legacy," dagdag pa niya.

Suportado rin ni Concepcion ang programa ng Pangulo na nagsusulong ng farm clustering bilang mahalagang bahagi ng programa ng kanyang administrasyon na gawing



moderno ang sektor ng agrikultura sa kanyang pahayag kamakailan sa pakikipagpulong niya sa mga magsasaka sa South Cotabato.

Iginiit din ni Concepcion ang kahalagahan ng farm clustering para mapalakas ang produksiyon, matiyak ang seguridad sa pagkain at mapataas ang kita ng mga magsasaka.

Kabilang ang farm clustering sa mga rekomendasyon ng KALAP at think tank group Foundation for Economic Freedom (FEF) sa kanilang pulong kamakailan sa mga opisyal ng Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), sa pangunguna ni Secretary Conrado Estrella III.

Sa pamamagitan ng clustering, sinabi ni Concepcion na mahihikayat ang malalaking kumpanya na mamuhunan sa pagsasaka dahil nais lang nilang umupa ng lupang pang-

agrikultura at hindi bumili nito.

Magsisilbi rin ang farm clustering bilang magandang suporta sa mga reporma at mga programang isinusulong ni Pangulong Marcos upang matiyak ang seguridad sa pagkain, mapalakas ang sektor ng agrikultura at maiangat ang buhay ng mga magsasaka.

Sa pamamagitan ng farm clustering, mas madali para sa gobyerno na magpaabot ng tulong sa mga magsasaka, tulad ng pautang at mga gamit sa pagtanim, dahil grupo na ang kanilang kakausapin at hindi mga indibidwal, paliwanag ni naman ni FEF representative Dr. Fermin Adriano sa kanilang pulong sa DAR.

Tumaas ang ani ng ibang mga bansa na nagpapatupad ng farm clustering, tulad ng China, Vietnam, Laos, at Cambodia.

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HUNYO 21, 2023

PBBM: Pakikipag-usap sa China tungkol sa mga mangingisdang Pinoy, umuusad

Kahit mabagal, umuusad ang ginagawang pakikipag-usap ng Pilipinas sa China tungkol sa mga hinaharang na mga mangingisdang Pinoy, ayon kay Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

Sinabi ni Marcos na sa pinakahuling ulat ay sinundan na lamang ng mga sasakyang pandagat ng China ang mga mangingisdang Pinoy sa kanilang mga tradisyunal na fishing ground sa South China Sea at hindi na hinaharang.

"Yung latest na report ay sinundan na lang, hindi na kagaya ng dati na hinaharang. So there's a little progress there," ani Marcos.

Inihayag din ni Marcos na hindi naman maaaring madaliin ang isyu pero mayroong "progress" kaya mahalaga ang komunikasyon sa pagitan ng gobyerno ng Pilipinas at ng China.

Dahil sa nangyayari ay may projection aniya ang Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) na lalaki ang huli ng mga mangingisda.

Sinabi rin ng Pangulo na partikular na idinulog niya kay President Xi ang isyu ng mga mangingisda.

"Ang inuna ko talaga noong kami ay nagkita, ay sinabi ko unahin na lang natin 'yong fisheries, huwag na nating pag-usapan 'yong teritoryo dahil hindi naman tayo makakapag-decide dito na nag-uusap tayo, unahin niyo 'yong fisheries. Dahil sinasabi ko e wala namang kasalanan 'yong tao, bakit natin paparusahan. We are making some progress in that regard," dagdag ni Marcos.

Kahit aniya ang pagpapatupad ng fishing ban ay may koordinasyon na rin sa China upang matulungan ang mga mangingisda kapag nagpapatupad ng ban.
(Malou Escudero)



MIYERKOLES / HUNYO 21, 2023

Editor: J

PBBM may bonus sa Agri, VP Sara-DepEd 'di nagpatalbog

Pinasaya ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. ang mga empleyado ng Department of Agriculture (DA) matapos ianunsiyo na bibigyan ang mga ito ng anniversary bonus sa kanyang pagdalo sa ika-125 founding anniversary ng kagawaran.

Bago matapos ang programa nitong Lunes sa tanggapan ng DA sa Quezon City ay inianunsiyo ng presidente na makakatanggap ng grasya ang mga empleyado ng ahensiya.

Kinausap aniya siya

nina Senadora Cynthia Villar at DA Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban na bigyan ng dagdag na bonus ang mga empleyado.

Kukunin aniya ang bonus sa savings ng ahensiya matapos tiyakin sa kanya ni Panganiban na mayroon namang savings ang kanilang ahensiya.

Sa ambush interview sa pangulo matapos ang aktibidad ay sinabi nitong pag-aaralan pa kung magkano ang ibibigay na bonus sa mga empleyado batay sa ipon ng ahensiya.

Samantala, makatatanggap naman ng P3,000 anniversary bonus ang mga opisyal at empleyado ng Department of Education (DepEd) bilang bahagi ng pagdiriwang ng ika-125 anibersaryo ng kagawaran.

Aprubado na ni Vice President at Education Secretary Sara Duterte ang P3,000 anniversary bonus kung saan kabilang sa mga opisyal at empleyado ng DepEd na makatatanggap ng bonus ay 'yong may isang taon na sa serbisyo. (Aileen Taliping)

Abante TONITE

MABILIS SA BALITA

Date: June 21, 2023 Page: 3



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Sibuyas kontrolado ng sindikato - BBM

Kontrolado pa rin ng mga sindikato ang supply ng sibuyas kaya hindi mapababa ito sa normal na presyo.

Ito ang inihayag ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr sa panayam ng media sa ika-125 anibersaryo ng Department of Agriculture (DA) sa Quezon City nitong Martes.

Ayon sa pangulo, itinatago ng mga sindikato ang sibuyas at kahit na mayroong sapat na supply ang bansa ay nagawang maitaas ng 87% ang presyo nito noong mga unang buwan ng taon.

Kaya naman aniya nakikipagtulungan na sila kay Senadora Cynthia Villar para malansag ang mga smuggler na nagsasamantala nang husto sa publiko.

"Iyung hoarding, I think maliwanag na maliwanag na sa ating lahat na iyung pagtaas ng presyo by 87%

noong nakaraang Pebrero, noong Enero-Pebrero, walang dahilan iyon. Kumpleto ang onion natin dito. Nagho-hoard lang talaga at iniipit ang presyo. Tapos, 'yong food storage ay hindi pinapagamit sa iba para 'yong kontrolado lang, 'yong mga sindikato, kontrolado nila ang onion,

'yon lang ang puwedeng pumunta, aabot sa palengke," anang pangulo.

Seryoso aniya ang gobyerno na malansag ang mga sindikato kaya gagawin ang lahat para matigil na ang pananamantala ng mga ito sa publiko.

"Yong mga rice smuggling, sugar smuggling, onion

smuggling - iyan ititigil natin ang mga iyan. Gagawin namin ang lahat para matigil iyan," dagdag ng pangulo.

Matagal na aniyang imbestigahan ng Senado ang smuggling ng mga pangunahing agri-products kaya ito ngayon ang tinututukan ng administrasyon.

(Aileen Taliping)

Sheet 1/1



Bill outlines role for DSWD, DA in food stamp program

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ
@joveemarie

THE chairman of the House Committee on Poverty Alleviation has filed a bill tapping the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Department of Agriculture (DA) in the creation and implementation of a comprehensive food stamp program for poor households across the country.

1-Pacman Party-list Rep. Mikee Romero filed House Bill 8532 to supplement all poor families' food intake and to possibly diminish and in time completely

eliminate hunger in urban and rural communities.

"These comprehensive food stamp programs as proposed and executed in other countries, are actually agricultural programs. They aim to link rural surpluses with food-poor urban communities. This way, we could effectively address both urban poverty and rural poverty," Romero said.

Under the House bill, the DSWD should integrate its planned food stamp program with efforts by the agriculture department to expand the market for local farm products.

"As the lead agency in social welfare and development, the DSWD

would formulate policies and plans which provide direction to intermediaries and other implementers in the development and delivery of social welfare and development services," Romero added.

Under the protocol and mechanics of the comprehensive Food Stamp Program, the bill said there shall be benefit cards or "tap cards" loaded with food credits amounting to P5,000.

It said the beneficiaries could use the cards to buy a select list of healthy products from DSWD-accredited local retailers.

Also, the bill said beneficiaries can choose from a list of differ-

ent food groups, and the program would be conditional and should complement a "work component," which means the beneficiaries would need to find work to keep the benefits.

The bill added the beneficiaries are only families whose income does not go beyond P8,000 a month.

According to Romero, the planned program targets at least 300,000 families by 2024, and hopes to increase the tap card recipients to 1 million during the following years.

The measure said the six-month pilot run would come from grants from the Asian Development Bank.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

Date: 21 JUN 2023

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Republic of the Philippines
Department of Agriculture
BUREAU OF FISHERIES AND AQUATIC RESOURCES
Fisheries Building Complex, Bureau of Plant Industry Compound,
Visayas Ave., Diliman, Quezon City
Tel. No. 929-8074 | doa@da.gov.ph | www.da.gov.ph

Shellfish Bulletin No. 15
Series of 2023
19 June 2023

Shellfishes collected and tested from coastal waters of Davao and Tagbilaran City in Bohol; San Pedro Bay in Samar; Dumanquilas Bay in Zamboanga del Sur; and Lianga Bay in Surigao del Sur are still positive for Paralytic Shellfish Poison (PSP) or toxic red tide that is beyond the regulatory limit.

**Do not harvest
Do not sell
Do not buy
Do not eat**

All types of shellfish and *Acetes* sp. or *alamang* gathered from the areas shown above are NOT SAFE for human consumption. Fish, squids, shrimps, and crabs are safe for human consumption provided that they are fresh and washed thoroughly, and internal organs such as gills and intestines are removed before cooking.

The following areas continue to be **FREE** from toxic red tide: coastal waters of Cavite, Las Piñas, Parañaque, Navotas, Bulacan, and Bataan (Mariveles, Umay, Orion, Pilar, Balanga, Hermosa, Orani, Abucay, and Samal) in Manila Bay; mariculture areas in Infanta, coastal waters of Bolinao, Anda, Alaminos, Sual, and Wawa, Bani in Pangasinan; mariculture areas in Rosario, and Sto. Tomas in La Union; coastal waters of Pampanga; Masinloc Bay in Zambales; Pagbilao Bay, Pagbilao, and coastal waters of Wala, Padre Burgos in Quezon; Honda, and Puerto Princesa Bays, Puerto Princesa City, and coastal waters of Inner Matnog in Sorsogon; coastal waters of Gigantes Islands, Carles, and Borongan, San Dionisio in Iloilo; coastal waters of Roxas City, Panay, President Roxas, and Pilar in Capiz; Saplan Bay (Ivisan and Saplan in Capiz; Mambuquiao and Camanci, Batan Talisey City, Silay City, Bacolod City, Hinigaran, and Victorias City in Negros Occidental; Tambobo, and Silt Bays, Siaton; and Bais Bay, Bais City in Negros Oriental; coastal waters of Daram, and Zumarraga, Cambatutay, Irong-Irong, Maqueda, and Villareal Bays in Samar; coastal waters of Guiuan in Eastern Samar; coastal waters of Leyte, Calubian, Ormoc, Sogod, Carigara, Murcielagos Bay in Zamboanga del Norte and (Sapang Dalsaga, and Bellangao) in Misamis Occidental; Panguli Bay, Tangub City, and coastal waters of Ozamiz City in Misamis Occidental; coastal waters of Baroy in Lanao del Norte; Taguines Lagoon, Benoni, Mahinog in Camiguin; Balite, and Pujada Bays, Mati City in Davao Oriental; Malalag Bay in Davao Occidental and Davao del Sur; coastal waters of Nasipit in Agusan del Norte; Litalit Bay in Surigao del Norte; and coastal waters of Hinatuan, Cortes, and Bislig Bay in Surigao del Sur.

ATTY. DEMOSTHENES R. ESCOTO
Director

P.S. June 21, 2023



Fish deliveries slip for 2nd month in a row

By **DANESSA RIVERA**

Monthly fish deliveries in the country's regional fish ports (RFPs) slipped for the second straight month in May ahead of the early onset of the rainy season.

Latest data from the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA) showed the RFPs unloaded 42,814.9 metric tons (MT) of fish and other fishery products last month.

The figure is 4.26 percent lower than the 44,721.05 MT unloaded in April and 11.84 percent lower than the 48,563.31 MT during the same month last year.

The PFDA attributed the decline to the onslaught of Typhoon Betty and widespread heavy downpour spawned by the southwest monsoon.

The PFDA-Bulan Fish Port Complex recorded the highest percentage increase in monthly fish unloading after delivering 1,334 MT, which was up 17.14 percent month-on-month.

The General Santos Fish Port Complex bounced back from the previous month's slight dip with 15,788.37 MT of fishery products unloaded. The figure was 6.75 percent higher than the previous month.

The PFDA said the Zamboanga and Davao fish port complexes both maintained increasing unloading records for several months.

The Mindanao ports recorded a 5.24 percent rise in unloading volumes to 965.65 MT and a 4.07 percent jump to 441.404 MT, respectively.

The Iloilo Fish Port Complex unloaded 2,207.66 MT, which was up 13.89 percent and its highest volume

record this year.

The Navotas Fish Port Complex experienced a transition period from peak season to regular fishing season toward the end of May.

This resulted in a 15.14 percent drop in monthly unloading to 19,644.03 MT of fish.

The Lucena Fish Port Complex delivered 2,246.85 MT of fish, which was down by 4.9 percent. The Sual Fish Port Complex returned to fishing and recorded 186.935 MT.

UN sea treaty

Meanwhile, the Philippines welcomed the historic adoption of the United Nations High Seas Treaty, a legally binding marine biodiversity agreement following nearly two decades of negotiations.

The UN's 193 member-states, including the Philippines, adopted the first-ever legally binding international treaty to govern and protect international waters.

The treaty is titled Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), but is widely referred to as the High Seas Treaty.

The agreement aims to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, which cover over two-thirds of the ocean.

The Philippine Mission to the United Nations in New York said the BBNJ treaty, which aims to protect the environment and heading off disputes over natural resources, was adopted through a consensus with delegates applauding afterwards.

Foreign Affairs Undersecretary for

multilateral affairs and international economic relations Carlos Sorreta said the Philippines participated for two decades in the process leading up to the adoption of the agreement.

Sorreta delivered a statement following the adoption of the agreement and commended conference president Rena Lee for heading the process.

Building on the legacy of the UNCLOS or United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the treaty strengthens the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in over two-thirds of the ocean.

It provides an essential framework for cross-sectoral cooperation between and among states and other stakeholders to promote the sustainable development of the ocean and its resources as well as address the pressures it faces.

"With UNCLOS as our guidepost, we approached this process with the following principles – the common heritage of mankind, fair and equitable sharing of benefits, rights and jurisdiction of adjacent coastal states, special recognition for archipelagic states, the precautionary principle and transparency of action and support," Sorreta said.

He also highlighted the recognition of archipelagic states, particularly in relation to building capacities in implementing the treaty.

The treaty will be open for signature at the UN Headquarters in New York for two years from September onwards. It will be enforced after ratification by 60 states.

– With Pia Lee-Brago



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RCEF program delivers El Niño-ready rice seeds

ALMOST 2 million bags of certified rice seeds, including varieties that could limit the impact of the El Niño weather pattern, have been distributed under the country's Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) Seed Program.

The Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) said that the early maturing varieties distributed can be harvested before the drought associated with the weather pattern intensifies.

"Early maturing varieties have better probability of 'escaping' the drought that the El Niño may cause at the last quarter of the year," said Flordeliza Bordey, director of the RCEF Program Management Office at PhilRice.

The NSIC Rc 480 or the GSR (Green Super Rice) 8 variety given to farmers has a maturity period of 107 days and yields an average of 3.2 to 4.4 tons per hectare (t/ha) in a rainfed ecosystem, PhilRice said.

The variety also has an intermediate reaction to blast, green and brown plant hoppers, and stem

borers that can destroy rice at any stage of the plant from seedling to maturity.

Seeds of the NSIC Rc 27 variety (Katihan 3) were also delivered. These work well in upland areas where the main water source is rain, and the variety has an average yield of 2.7 to 4.3 t/ha in upland conditions.

NSIC Rc 27 also matures in 107 days and has moderate resistance against white stem borer and intermediate reaction to bacterial leaf blight and sheath blight.

Other varieties with similar maturity characteristics such as NSIC Rc 222 (Tubigan 18), Rc 436 (Tubigan 47) and Rc 440 (Tubigan 39) will be given to farmers registered in the Registry System for the Basic Sectors in Agriculture.

The PhilRice El Niño task force is recommending the use of early maturing varieties as one of the key adaptation mechanisms to the weather pattern. Farmers are also being encouraged to adopt water-saving technologies, crop

➤ **Seeds B2**

SEEDS FROM B1

RCEF

diversification and off-farm practices like crop insurance.

"El Niño is not new, but it

seems to be occurring more often," PhilRice task force member Elmer Alosnos said. "Let's help our stakeholders identify and choose adaptation strategies that are better suited to their local context."

The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

earlier this month announced that El Niño conditions were present and expected to intensify.

"Depending on its strength, El Niño can cause a range of impacts, such as increasing the risk of heavy rainfall and droughts in certain locations around the world," said

Michelle L'Heureux, climate scientist at the Climate Prediction Center.

The NOAA said that there was an 84 percent chance of greater than a moderate strength El Niño and a 56 percent chance that it would be considered strong.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



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DA, FAO, Japan partner for project

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) signed a partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations and the government of Japan to restore agri-fishery-based livelihoods and promote climate resiliency among farmers and fisherfolk affected by typhoons.

The "Project for Restoring Livelihoods and Enhancing Resilience of Farmers and Fisherfolk Affected by Typhoon" will get a 251-million yen or about P98.57-million donation from Japan.

"Back-to-back crises — conflicts, typhoons, flooding, earthquakes — make it difficult for many farmers and fishers in the Philippines to rebound as they struggle to replace what was lost or damaged — be it seeds and tools, livestock or fishing gear," FAO Representative in the Philippines Lionel Dabaddie said.

The project will provide aid to 4,000 small-scale coconut farmers, landless coconut farmworkers, coconut farmers' organizations, fishers and fisherfolk organizations in 12 municipalities across the country.

Dabaddie said that getting vulnerable families back to producing food and earning an income is one of FAO's work objectives in the Philippines. The agency's assistance will also help them withstand the next disaster.

DA cited the onslaught of Super Typhoon "Odette," which according to National Disaster Risk Reduction and Man-

agement (NDRRMC) has affected 10.607 million people in 11 regions and caused P51.8 billion worth of damages — P17.7 billion to the agri-fishery sector.

The municipalities of Carlos P. Garcia, Mabini and Ubay in Bohol will receive assorted seeds and fertilizers for vegetable production, island-born Bohol native chicken strain, and feeds for poultry and egg production, water pumps as irrigation support, milkfish fingerlings and fish feeds, and drift gill nets.

On the other hand, the municipalities of Bontoc, Tomas Oppus, Malitbog and Limasawa in Southern Leyte will implement a "one municipality, one product" scheme prioritizing sweet corn, peanuts and vegetables.

Meanwhile, the municipalities of Surigao City, San Francisco, Gigaquit, Mainit and Sta. Monica in Surigao del Norte will be encouraged to make use of integrated vegetable production technology under protected culture for banana and cassava production.

Seaweed propagules, vermicomposting facilities, and poultry and egg production equipment, and other planting materials will also be provided to qualified farmers organizations.

Training and farming schools for farmer-leaders and agricultural extension workers will also be established at the local level.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



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What drives global rice imports? The country that talks big about 'self-sufficiency'

FINDING a feel-good, inspiring story about Philippine agriculture is like finding pork in a can of pork and beans, be it local or imported. There is no "there, there" after prying that can open; it only contains pre-cooked beans swimming in thick orange liquid, and the pork seemingly sworn to either self-effacement or invisibility.

In a similar way, our political overlords — from the top honchos at the Palace to the lesser gods at the Elliptical Circle — consistently talk big about an agricultural renaissance, as if it were a fact of agriculture or of life, with real results like food aplenty, supplied by our farms, harvested with energy and enthusiasm by our globally competitive farmers.



MIDWEEK
COMMENTS

MARLEN V.
RONQUILLO

Like welcome rain pouring into our farms and paddies to nourish the crops and nurture the soil. The truth? Just like the invisible pork in a can of pork and beans, there is no "there, there" after all the big talk about self-sufficiency, food aplenty, and freedom from hunger and the tired corpus of farm-centric propaganda.

Let us start with rice, our most important crop and basic staple.

The way our political overlords tell it, a medium-term program — forthcoming and fully

supported with the required wherewithal and resources — will, at the very least, aim for 97.5 percent rice self-sufficiency. That would be the crowning glory, the climax, of the promised agricultural renaissance program, which would indeed spark cheers and celebration across the board, as that would end our embarrassing record as the biggest — if not the second-biggest — rice importer in the world since the passage of Republic Act 11203, or the "Rice Tariffication Law," in 2019. Only in the Philippines can a law lead us to food perdition and make us fodder for comic skits.

So OK, what is the harsh reality that shatters all the dreamy and high expectations raised by

the big talk of the political overlords on rice self-sufficiency?

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is the go-to source for figures on global rice imports because it has expertise in this area, and its vast global outposts enable the agency to track in real time the movement of rice imports worldwide. It breaks down its figures in what it calls "marketing year" — a one-year tally, but not following the January-to-December cycle. The USDA says that, for marketing year 2022-2023, we are expected to import 3.9 million metric tons (MT) of rice, the second-biggest import volume after China. This was earlier placed at 3.7 million MT, but adjustments were made

➤ RonquilloA5



What drives global rice imports? The country that talks big about 'self-sufficiency'

after the domestic rice supply was found inadequate.

(One must remember that the USDA is a nonpartisan source of global rice import data and reports facts and figures about it. The agency is probably unaware that, in the Philippines, rice importation has been a politically sensitive topic for generations.)

The rice-import estimate for marketing year 2023-2024 is set at about the previous year's range, or 3.8 million MT. Estimates can go down or up, depending on local production and supply circumstances. But like the 2022-2023 estimate,

that figure is close to 4 million MT, and that is extraordinarily high for a country with a population of just over 110 million. By contrast, China — the world's biggest industrial economy with 1.4 billion people — is expected to import 5 million MT.

"Global consumption is up with increases for India and the Philippines. Import forecasts are higher mainly for Kenya and the Philippines," the USDA said in a statement. But what did that statement fail to say in all candor? It is this: since 2019, the global rice market has hardly registered a down year,

and Vietnamese rice farmers have never complained about the lack of foreign markets for their surplus grain, as there is always that Philippine market of irrational exuberance.

Let us skip the bad news on the second and third most important crops, corn and sugar, whose operative word is also built around that dreaded word: "importation." The issue of sugar imports used to center on their volume. Now, it has an additional dimension: corruption. On corn, we may have a "new normal" of yellow corn imports breaching the 1 million MT mark.

So what about the twin of ag-

riculture, fisheries? Can we draw uplifting stories from fisheries to break the pattern of gloom and doom in the agriculture sector? It looks like the woes of agriculture have been cascading into fisheries.

A 7-percent drop in fishery output has been recorded in 2021 and 2022 in the rich fishing grounds of the West Philippine Sea (WPS), according to the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR). That is not insignificant. The BFAR says the WPS contributes 6.3 percent of total fishery output, and there is no new ground to explore. Sophisticated Chinese fishing

vessels backed by their country's coast guard, which is now the envy of the world, crowd out Philippine fishing vessels in the fishing areas mapped by China's fictional nine-dash line. Consequently, the harassed Filipino fishermen have lost the right to fish in their own waters.

Meanwhile, the tilapia-raising craze in inland areas of Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog that used to contribute to the national output is over with a dear lesson learned. Aquaculture can't thrive on traditional sugar or corn lands. (To digress: I was part of that craze. Bulldozers

carved a 1-hectare artificial fishpond in a plot of land that had been devoted to sugar for at least a century. After a year of losses I quit, just like the others who were caught up in that craze.) Fishpond operations, now entirely dependent on aqua feeds and not the by-product of brackish water like algae, now require real capital, and the big players are dominating that field.

Indeed, finding uplifting news in the agriculture sector is like trying to find the minutest sliver of pork in a can of pork and beans. There is nothing, no "there, there," beyond the hype and propaganda.



Bill seeks to institutionalize food stamps program

BY WENDELL VIGILIA

THE chairperson of the House Committee on Poverty Alleviation has filed a bill seeking to institutionalize the Marcos administration's comprehensive food stamps program using tap cards loaded with P5,000 worth of credits to fight hunger in urban and rural communities.

1Pacman party-list Rep. Michael Romero filed House Bill No. 8532 in light of the Department of Social Welfare and Development's (DSWD) plan to launch its food stamp program next month, which will initially cover about 300,000 families.

The DSWD has said that the Asian Development Bank has provided a \$3 million grant for the pilot program.

Under Romero's bill, program beneficiaries can use the cards to buy a select list of healthy products from DSWD-accredited local retailers.

The proposed law mandates the DSWD to integrate its food stamp program with efforts by the **agriculture department** to expand the market for local farm products.

"This comprehensive food

stamp program, as proposed and executed in other countries, is actually (an) agricultural program. (It) aims to link rural surpluses with food-poor urban communities. This way, we could effectively address both urban poverty and rural poverty," the bill said.

As the lead agency in social welfare and development, the bill tasks the DSWD to formulate policies and plans "which provide direction to intermediaries and other implementers in the development and delivery of social welfare and development services."

The bill said beneficiaries can choose from a list of different food groups, and the program would be conditional and have a "work component," which means that those who will sign up need to find work to keep their benefits.

Only families whose income does not go beyond P8,000 a month will qualify as beneficiaries under the measure.

The planned program targets at least 300,000 families by 2024, and hopes to increase the tap card recipients to a million in the following years.



COA: PhilMech missed 2022 farm mechanization target by 45%

BY PETER TABINGO

AFTER three years of exceeding targets in the distribution of farm machinery from 2019 to 2021, the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech) missed its 2022 target by a whopping 45 percent.

This was revealed in the 2022 audit report on PhilMech released last June 13, 2023.

Agency figures showed PhilMech posted a 108 percent accomplishment record in 2019, having bought and distributed 8,538 farm machinery bankrolled by the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement

Fund (RCEF) against a target of 7,912.

In 2020, procurement and distribution totaled 8,233 against a 7,996 target for a 103 percent accomplishment score.

In 2021, PhilMech again exceeded the year's target, 4,312 against 4,221, to chalk up 102 percent.

However, in 2022, the agency only bought 3,155 units out of the funded procurement for 5,704 target units, dropping its accomplishment rate to just 55 percent.

PhilMech is an independent national government agency mandated to promote mechanization

technologies in agriculture and fishery to increase efficiency and productivity, reduce losses, and add value to the produce through research and development.

Over the last four years, the agency's RCEF Mechanization Program incurred P17.565 billion in obligations while total disbursements hit P12.725 billion.

The biggest difference was incurred in 2022 with obligations totaling P4.334 billion while total disbursements stood only at P191.2 million or four percent.

The audit team traced the decline in the procurement as well as the disbursement rate to the

backlog in postharvest equipment.

"While procurements for various production technologies were completed, procurements for postharvest technologies are still ongoing and are expected to be completed during the first quarter of CY 2023," auditors said.

Likewise, the PhilMech Bids and Awards Committee (BAC) explained that bidding activities were delayed due to the late issuance of the Special Allotment Release Order (SARO) for FY 2021, which was released by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) only in the second quarter of 2022.



DA personnel to get bonus - BBM

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

PRESIDENT Marcos Jr. yesterday said personnel of the Department of Agriculture, which he heads in a concurrent capacity, will receive a bonus to be sourced from the department's savings.

The President made the announcement during a photo opportunity with the DA personnel during the department's 125th founding anniversary.

"Sen. Cynthia Villar and our fellow DA officials whispered to me. It is a shame that I am giving many orders to DA because it is your anniversary. There should be a bonus instead. Then, let's add some bonus. Undersecretary Ding Panganiban said you have some savings after all," he said in Filipino.

Marcos joked that he announced the grant of bonus before the "groupie" photo to ensure that everyone is smiling in the photograph.

In a media interview, the President said DA officials will discuss how much saving the DA has and the amount of bonus to be given.

The government, through Administrative Order 263, signed by then President Fidel Ramos on March 28, 1996, grants an anniversary or milestone bonus of P3,000 or lower, depending on the available savings of to its employees, every five years or during the "milestones anniversaries" of

an agency.

The anniversary bonus is usually given to the employees of agencies that have been in existence for 15 years or longer, and starts on the 15th year and every five years thereafter.

The President, during the anniversary commemoration, expressed confidence that the DA will achieve its goals as he said there are many good and capable people in the department.

He also reiterated his administration's commitment boost agricultural production through the adoption of modern and applicable technologies, provisions of more high yielding seedling varieties, and improving irrigation through the establishment of a rainwater impounding center, among others.

Marcos said an increased agricultural productivity would translate to stable supply and lower prices of agricultural produce and livestock in the markets.

It would also make the country less dependent on imported products.

The President also directed the DA and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) to come up with comprehensive studies on the rehabilitation and maintenance of the country's marine habitats to address illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.



Fish unloading declines 12%

BY JED MACAPAGAL

FISH unloading volume across all regional fish ports recorded an 11.8 percent year-on-year drop in May 2023, according to the **Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA)**.

PFDA said total fish unloading volume in May 2023 reached 42,814.9 metric tons (MT) compared with May 2022's 48,563.31 MT.

Month-to-month, May 2023's unloading volume is 4.3 percent lower compared to April 2023's 44,721.05 MT.

The agency said in a statement widespread rain brought by Typhoon Betty and the southwest monsoon are the factors for reduced unloading volumes.

Among regional fish ports included in PFDA's monitoring are the Bulan in Sorsogon; Sual in Pangasinan; General Santos; Davao; Zamboanga; Lucena in Quezon Province; Iloilo; and Navotas.

Based on the Department of Agriculture's monitoring of public markets in the National Capital Region, prevailing per kg retail price ranges as of Monday were at P150 to P240 for milkfish; P105 to P160 for tilapia; P180 to P280 for local galunggong; P200 for imported galunggong; and P240 to P360 for alumahan.

Meanwhile, the Bureau of



Traders are shown at the Navotas Fish Port Complex in this undated photo. Fish unloading volume in May reached 42,814.9 metric tons. (PFDA Photo)

Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) said up to P80 million is allocated this year for programs that will improve production in fish producing areas facing the West Philippine Sea.

Nazario Briguera, BFAR spokesperson, said at the Laging Handa public briefing yesterday the agency is preparing to provide such areas with boats, fishing

gears such as payao and baklad as well as post-harvest equipment, among others.

Briguera added fishing communities from regions of Central Luzon, Ilocos and Mimaropa are set to benefit from the programs.

"Based on data from the Philippine Statistics Authority, between 2021 and 2022, we experienced a

decline in production from areas in the West Philippine Sea but this is not directly attributed to issues in the area. Our country is frequently affected by bad weather so we are seeing it as the likely reason," Briguera said.

However, BFAR did not provide the specific volume of fish caught in waters of the West Philippine Sea.



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BAI declares Batangas avian flu-free

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has cleared Batangas from avian influenza.

The decision was made through Memorandum Circular (MC) No. 23 series of 2023 signed by Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban on June 16.

Batangas recorded one confirmed case of highly pathogenic avian influenza subtype H5N1 which was confirmed through laboratory testing last December.

Upon the detection of the disease, DA said the provincial government of Batangas and the municipality of Ibaan, in coordination with DA regional field office Calabarzon and the Bureau of Animal Industry, conducted disease investigation, immediate depopulation, cleaning and dis-



Continued surveillance of the affected farms in Batangas yielded negative test results for influenza type A virus.

infection, movement restrictions and surveillance in the affected premises following the Avian Influenza Protection Program guidelines.

DA said continued disease mon-

itoring and surveillance surrounding the affected farms yielded negative test results for influenza type A virus for more than 90 days which led to the issuance of the MC. - **Jed Macapagal**



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NIA, Korean firm sign agreement

THE National Irrigation Administration (NIA) signed a memorandum of understanding on food security, disaster prevention, and climate change response with the Korea Rural Community Corp. (KRC) last Friday.

NIA said the agreement aims to foster cooperation between NIA and KRC in the development and implementation of projects related to water resource development and management, irrigation and drainage facilities improvement.

The agency said the partnership will also involve other related initiatives through multilateral development banks and the South Korean government's grants and loans, among others.

Areas of cooperation also include the exchange of experiences and technology in the fields of water resources, irrigation and drainage as well as in smart water management systems.

NIA also mentioned the possibility of exchange visits, education and training programs, seminars, workshops and other relevant activities, as well as the exploration of additional areas of cooperation.



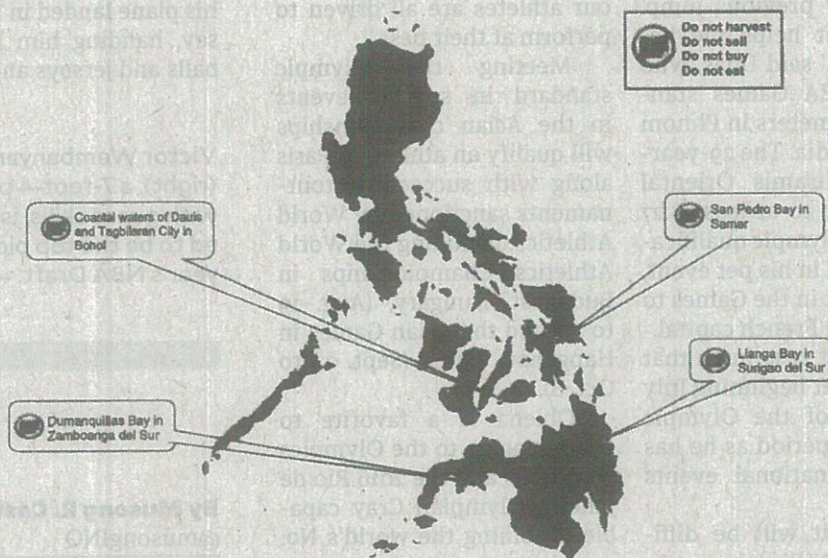
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Republic of the Philippines
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BUREAU OF FISHERIES AND AQUATIC RESOURCES
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Shellfish Bulletin No. 15
Series of 2023
19 June 2023

Shellfishes collected and tested from coastal waters of Dauis and Tagbilaran City in Bohol; San Pedro Bay in Samar; Dumanquilas Bay in Zamboanga del Sur; and Lianga Bay in Surigao del Sur are still positive for Paralytic Shellfish Poison (PSP) or toxic red tide that is beyond the regulatory limit.



All types of shellfish and *Acetes sp.* or alangam gathered from the areas shown above are **NOT SAFE** for human consumption. Fish, squids, shrimps, and crabs are safe for human consumption provided that they are fresh and washed thoroughly, and internal organs such as gills and intestines are removed before cooking.

The following areas continue to be **FREE** from toxic red tide: coastal waters of Cavite, Las Piñas, Parañaque, Navotas, Bulacan, and Bataan (Mariveles, Limay, Orion, Pilar, Balanga, Hermosa, Orani, Abucay, and Samal) in Manila Bay; mariculture areas in Infanta, coastal waters of Bolinao, Anda, Alaminos, Sual, and Wawa, Bani in Pangasinan; mariculture areas in Rosario, and Sto. Tomas in La Union; coastal waters of Pampanga; Masinloc Bay in Zambales; Pagbilao Bay, Pagbilao, and coastal waters of Walay, Padre Burgos in Quezon; Honda, and Puerto Princesa Bays, Puerto Princesa City, and coastal waters of Inner Malampaya Sound, Taytay in Palawan; coastal waters of Milagros and Mandaon in Masbate; Sorsogon Bay, and Juag Lagoon, Matnog in Sorsogon; coastal waters of Gigantes Islands, Carles, and Borongan, San Dionisio in Iloilo; coastal waters of Roxas City, Panay, President Roxas, and Pilar in Capiz; Sapián Bay (Ivisan and Sapián in Capiz; Mambuquio and Camandí, Batán in Aklan); coastal waters of Altavas, Batán, and New Washington in Batán Bay, Aklan; coastal waters of E.B. Magalona, Talisay City, Silay City, Bacolod City, Hinigaran, and Victorias City in Negros Occidental; Tambobo, and Siit Bays, Siaton; and Bais Bay, Bais City in Negros Oriental; coastal waters of Daram, and Zumarraga, Cambatutay, Irong-irong, Maqueda, and Villareal Bays in Samar; coastal waters of Guiuan in Eastern Samar; coastal waters of Leyte, Calubian, Ormoc, Sogod, Carigara Bay, and Cancabato Bay, Tacloban City in Leyte; coastal waters of Biliran Island; Tantanang Bay in Zamboanga Sibugay; Murcielagos Bay in Zamboanga del Norte and (Sapang Dalaga, and Baliangao) in Misamis Occidental; Panguil Bay, Tangub City, and coastal waters of Ozamiz City in Misamis Occidental; coastal waters of Baroy in Lanao del Norte; Taguines Lagoon, Benoni, Mahinog in Camiguin; Balite, and Pujada Bays, Mati City in Davao Oriental; Malalag Bay in Davao Occidental and Davao del Sur; coastal waters of Nasipit in Agusan del Norte; Litalit Bay in Surigao del Norte; and coastal waters of Hinatuan, Cortes, and Bislig Bay in Surigao del Sur.

ATTY. DEMOSTHENES R. ESCOTO
Director

(PDI- June 21, 2023)



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Batangas declared free of bird flu after Dec. outbreak

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has declared Batangas as free from type H5N1 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), or bird flu.

The all-clear was issued via a memorandum circular signed by Senior Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban on June 16.

The province had one confirmed HPAI outbreak detected in Barangay Sabang, Ibaan on Dec. 14 following RT-PCR testing, affecting chickens and ducks.

According to the DA, the Batangas government and Ibaan municipality worked with DA Regional Field Office IV-A and the Bureau of Animal Industry to depopulate, clean, and disinfect the affected area, while conducting surveillance around nearby farms.

"Continued disease monitoring and surveillance in the 1-km and 7-km surveillance zones surrounding the affected farms yielded negative test results for influenza type A virus," the DA said.

According to the guidelines of the World Organization for Animal Health, a country or zone may be declared AI-free 28 days after the completion of depopulation, disinfection of the last affected establishment, and no signs of infection observed after surveillance.

According to the DA, more than 90 days have elapsed since the end of the cleaning and disinfection stage with negative results on all tests.— **Sheldeem Joy Talavera**



Catch landed at fish ports down 4.26% month on month in May

THE catch landed at regional fish ports (RFPs) declined 4.26% month on month by volume in May due to the early onset of the rainy season, according to the **Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA)**.

Fish landed at RFPs amounted to 42,814.19 metric tons (MT), down 4.26% from the record set in April of 44,721.05 MT.

"Following the recent passage of Typhoon Betty and widespread rain brought

by the southwest monsoon (*habagat*), all PFDA ports delivered a sufficient supply of fishery products to their respective clients," the PFDA said.

The Navotas Fish Port Complex unloaded 19,644.03 MT, down 15.14% from a month earlier, with the fishing season typically slowing down towards the end of May.

Fish landed at Lucena Fish Port Complex fell 4.90% month on month to 2,246.85 MT.

The catch landed at Bulan Fish Port Complex rose 17.14% month on month to 1,334 MT.

Fish volumes at the General Santos Fish Port Complex rose 6.75% month on month to 15,788.37 MT.

Zamboanga Fish Port Complex and Davao Fish Port Complex reported that volumes rose 5.24% and 4.07% month on month respectively to 965.65 MT and 441.40 MT. — **Sheldeem Joy Talavera**

Kamote

I was very happy last week when I received a basket-full of kamote (sweet potato) from one of our associates.

Kamote is one of my favorite things to eat. It was part of my childhood and I continue to enjoy it today. I know that in the provinces it has remained a staple in many Filipino families especially those struggling to make ends meet. That is why it has earned the monicker "the poor man's diet." It's cheap, delicious and more importantly, it is good for your health.

I remember my Nanay Curing encouraging me to eat kamote: "Boy, eto kumain ka kamote para lumina ang mata mo at para lumakas ka." Mothers always know best. Several studies have shown that just one piece of kamote has 400 percent of the vitamin A you need each day so it is really good for eye health and your immune system. It is also high in fiber so it will



OF TREES AND FOREST

MANNY VILLAR
Former Senate President

help you maintain a healthy digestive system. When I was young, I remember in the afternoon as I stay at home just staring outside from our window, I would be munching on sweet potato. The thing with kamote is that it is very filling so I would not feel hunger pangs for a long period of time.

Some people bake it or deep fry it with caramelized sugar a la kamote-cue but I like it the traditional way: nilaga. Just boil it and it's good to go. The Filipino diet, of course, is focused on rice. Rice is very nice but it does lead to a myriad of diseases specifically diabetes. White rice in particular is considered empty carbs because

it loses its main sources of nutrients.

Aside from its health benefits, kamote could potentially help our country as we attempt to achieve food security. The Department of Agriculture should consider kamote and other high value crops for development in order to boost the country's food security and resilience to climate-change effects like strong typhoons, flash floods, landslides or even long-season of drought. With the price of rice at times increasing beyond the means of low income families and with periodic shortages happening, promoting kamote as an alternative to rice seems to be a very good idea.

This idea, of course, is easier said than done. We are set in our ways. Rice is at the center of our table. The popular promotions of extra rice and unlimited rice are proof of this. But we should at least start even when it is daunting. Government needs to implement a comprehensive plan that will shift public preference, over a course of time, to kamote as part of a serious food security strategy.

Another good man has been welcomed in

heaven this past week. Former Senator Rodolfo "Pong" Biazon died on June 12, 2023. He was a good soldier, an even better public servant and an uncompromising defender of democracy. I mourn his passing and join the nation in celebrating a life of sacrifice, courage and integrity.

Senator Biazon was already a senator when I was elected to the upper chamber in 2001. I think he was elected in 1998. We did not always agree on every issue but I had the most profound respect for him. This was probably because he also struggled his way out of an impoverished life to make a name for himself. What I remember most about Senator Pong was the fact that he was always a gentleman. When I watched him talk — whether on the floor of the Senate or in personal conversations — he was always respectful, careful with his words, but forceful when speaking about matters important to him.

My family and I wish to condole with his family and loved ones. It is perhaps fitting that he took his last breath on a day that commemorates our nation's independence and honors those who fought for our freedom. (mbv_secretariat@vistaland.com.ph and/or <http://www.mannyvillar.com>.)



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NEWS BRIEF

Food stamp program

ikokonek sa DA

ITINULAK sa Kamara de Representantes ang isang panukala upang magkaroon ng batas para sa pagbibigay ng food stamp ng gobyerno sa mga mahihirap na pamilya.

Sa House Bill 8532 na akda ni House Committee on Poverty Alleviation chairperson at 1-PAC-MAN party-list Rep. Michael Romero, hiniling nito na ang Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) at Department of Agriculture (DA) ang mangangasiwa sa programa.

Sa ilalim ng panukala, ang pamimigay ng food stamp ay iugnay sa mga programa ng DA na naglalayong palawakin ang merkado para sa ani ng mga lokal na magsasaka.

Sa ilalim ng panukala, ang mga benepisyaryo ay bibigyan ng benefit cards o tap cards na mayroong P5,000 credit na magagamit sa pagbili ng mga piling pagkain mula sa mga DSWD-accredited local retailers. Target na mabigyan ang mga pamilya na hindi umaabot sa P8,000 ang buwanang kita. (Billy Begas)

Date: June 21, 2023 Page: 2



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Tahong sa 4 lugar, bawal kainin - BFAR

Ipinagbabawal ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) ang pagkain ng shellfish products tulad ng tahong, talaba at halaan mula sa apat na baybayin sa bansa dahil mataas pa rin dito ang toxicity level

ng red tide toxins.

Ayon kay BFAR Director Demosthenes Escoto, hindi maaaring pagkunan ng shellfish products ang Davao at Tagbilaran City sa Bohol, San Pedro Bay sa Samar, Dumanguillas Bay sa Zamboanga del Sur, at Lianga Bay sa Surigao del Sur.

Pinayuhan ng BFAR ang mga lokalidad ng naturang baybayin na huwag pahintulatang makarating sa palengke at mga pamilihan ang kanilang shellfish products dahil sa red tide.

Sinumang makakakain ng shellfish products na may red tide ay maaring magtae, magsuka, sumakit ang kalamnan at maaaring ikamatay nito. Maaari namang kainin ang isda, pusit, hipon at alimango sa naturang mga baybayin bastat linisirng mabuti bago iluto at kainin.

Ligtas naman sa red tide toxin ang karagatan ng Cavite, Las Piñas, Parañaque, Navotas, Bulacan at Bataan sa Manila Bay. (Angie dela Cruz)



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22 barangay sa Antique dinala ng ASF

Umaabot sa 22 barangay ang halos nalugi na sa pagkalat ng African swine fever (ASF) kung saan nakapagtala na sila ng aabot sa 1,237 baboy na namatay at nasa P11 milyon ang naluging kabuhayan sa Hamtic, Antique.

Sa report ng Antique Provincial Veterinary Office (ProVet), may 47 barangay ang Hamtic at nasa 22 na ang naapektuhan ng sakit ng baboy kung saan nakakuha na sila ng specimen samples at dinala na sa Regional Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory para mag-surong African swine fever (ASF) ang sanhi ng pagkamatay ng mga baboy.

Ayon kay ProVet chief of the Public Health Division Dr. Marco Rafael Ardamil, hinihintay lang nila ang resulta ng mga sample ng baboy at kapag nagpositibong ASF ay maari nang magdeklara ng state of calamity ang Hamtic administration.

(Vick Aquino)

editorial

Hitting two birds with one stone



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Despite the decline in international food prices, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) noted in its latest report that this development has not translated into lower prices at the domestic retail level (See, "FAO: Global food import bill to hit new record this year," in the BUSINESS-MIRROR, June 19, 2023).

In the new edition of its Food Outlook, FAO also observed a decline in food import volumes, suggesting weaker purchasing capacity. The UN agency said inflation would continue to dampen demand for many food items and make it more challenging, especially for poor countries, to improve the access of their citizens to affordable food.

The continuous rise in food prices due to a number of factors, including the cost of logistics, would present huge challenges to the efforts of the government to fight malnutrition and child stunting. In recent years, the Philippines has stepped up its purchases of food items from other countries to meet the requirements of a growing population.

Aside from rice, the staple food of Filipinos, the country also imports meat products, especially pork, which has become more expensive in recent years due to African swine fever.

Ensuring the access of citizens to affordable and nutritious food is essential to the success of any campaign to fight malnutrition and prevent child stunting. Unfortunately, the so-called Bottom 30, or the poorest Filipinos, have yet to get a reprieve from high food prices. Based on the latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), year-to-date headline inflation rate reached 7.5 percent while core inflation—which excludes selected food and energy items—was higher at 7.8 percent.

In May alone, food inflation was on a par with the year-to-date inflation rate at 7.5 percent. While the figure was slower than the 8 percent recorded in April, certain food items remain expensive, especially for those earning a minimum wage.

While the prices of meat products declined on a month-on-month basis, the price of rice and vegetables rose in May, based on PSA data.

We agree with the Management Association of the Philippines (MAP), which called on the government to declare malnutrition and child stunting as top national agenda (See, "Malnutrition, child stunting must be top nat'l agenda," in the BUSINESSMIRROR, June 20, 2023). The business group said the declaration will ensure that concrete measures will be taken, sufficient funds will be earmarked, and actions will be cascaded from the national to the community level.

The government is implementing a program, dubbed Philippine Multisectoral Nutrition Project, which is being bankrolled by a P10-billion loan from the World Bank. This campaign, however, should be complemented by the implementation of reforms that would improve the productivity of farmlands, as well as measures to reduce the cost of logistics.

Citing data from the World Bank, MAP said the Philippines ranks fifth among countries in the East Asia and the Pacific region with the highest prevalence of child stunting, and that rural areas have more stunted children [30 percent] than in urban areas [26 percent]. Implementing major reforms in the agriculture and logistics sectors is like hitting two birds with one stone—cheaper food and lower incidence of malnutrition and child stunting.



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Fishta links Busuanga fishery communities to Japan, Canada

Filipino seafood exporter Fishta Seafood Inc. (FSI) has linked fishing communities in Busuanga, Palawan to export to Japan and Canada under a sustainable fishing program of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

FSI said it has partnered with the USAID Fish Right and Seatrace International Inc. to promote responsible fish sourcing, and reverse the adverse impact of illegal, unreported, unregulated (IUU) fishing.

The company's program with USAID aims to sustain food production while protecting the seas and fish populations.

It recognizes that the Philippines loses an estimated P68.5 billion yearly from illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.

FSI general manager Carina Ong Tan said they anticipate long term benefits to the livelihood of at least 50 women in Busuanga.

"This is an example of the idea of introducing innovation and market linkage direct to the source, from the fishing

communities themselves. We buy their products direct from them, and they no longer have to go to traders," she said.

"It's a program that gives attention to the island itself. Other fishing communities go to us for the replication of this program. We can contribute these ideas to the seafood industry because we have access to technology and markets. This way, we can make an impact directly to fisherfolks," Tan said.

The USAID program has supported protection of fishery areas through key marine biodiversity areas (KMBA) in Calamianes Island, Southern Negros, and Visayan Sea.

FSI has also contributed to the empowerment of 50 women and their families as the Department of Trade and Industry granted them a brine cold storage facility.

It is also developing traceability to ensure food safety in its products. With this, consumers are able to send feedback on the quality of a seafood product as their origin may be traced.

With traceability, the company can pull

back products in the market that pose any adverse risk on human health.

"We are still in the process of creating our RSS (responsibility sourced seafood standard) policy to achieve 100 percent traceability and transparency in our supply chain," Tan said.

FSI, a spinoff from parent firm aquaculture feeds producer Santeh Feeds Corp. (SFC), supplies seafoods to supermarkets, restaurants, and overseas markets from its owned or contracted farms. These are in the form of live, frozen, chilled, and smoked products.

It invested in the seafoods supply chain to achieve fish production sustainability, ensure its products' safety, and reach bigger local and export markets.

FSI also invested in facilities such as blast freezing, indirect contract freezing, and individually quick-frozen technology.

Meanwhile, SFC boasts of ISO-certified manufacturing facilities that produce optimally bioavailable ingredients for fast seafood growth and for environmental sustainability.

- Danessa Rivera



Russian wheat export prices stop long decline, trailing benchmarks

MOSCOW- Russian wheat export prices have stopped their decline of recent weeks, following the direction of overseas benchmarks, analysts said.

The price of Russia's new wheat crop with 12.5 percent protein content, delivered free on board (FOB) from the Black Sea in July, was assessed at \$228 a ton compared to \$223 a ton the previous week by the IKAR agriculture consultancy.

"There are many 'black swans' here: first of all, the forecast reduction for Europe, the drought in the US corn belt, possible problems in Argentina and Australia and sub-optimal conditions in Ukraine," said IKAR head Dmitry Rylko.

The Russia-focused agricultural consultancy Sovecon estimated total Russian wheat exports in June at 3.0 million tons, compared to 1.0 million tons in June 2022 and 1.4 million tons on average.

Russia exported 680,000 tons of grain last week compared to 800,000 tons a week earlier, including 560,000 tons of wheat compared to 770,000 tons a week earlier, Sovecon wrote in its weekly note, citing port data.

As of June 14, farmers sowed 30.2 million hectares of grains



A file photo shows a combine harvest wheat in a field near the village of Suvorovskaya in Stavropol Region, July 17, 2021. (Reuters photo)

compared to 28.8 million hectares in 2022, including 13.7 million hectares of wheat.

"Temperatures are expected to be around normal or colder in all regions," - Sovecon said, adding that the precipitation situation in the Urals and Siberia was becoming

more favorable.

"Abnormally wet weather in the south is very untimely. The gluten and protein content could suffer, there is a growing number of reports of fusarium contamination, particularly in Krasnodar."

Reuters



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Wheat futures edge lower

SINGAPORE- Chicago wheat futures edged lower on Tuesday, as traders locked in profits after a recent rally despite persistent supply concerns amid uncertainty over the future of the Black Sea grain deal.

Soybean and wheat futures were both headed for gains.

Wheat futures lost 0.2 percent to \$6.86-1/2 a bushel, as of 0401 GMT, after reaching a two-month high in the previous session.

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was up 0.9 percent at \$13.54-1/2 a bushel, and corn gained 1.6 percent to \$6.07 a bushel.

The CBOT was closed on Monday for the Juneteenth holiday in the US.

Russia's deputy foreign minister said on Monday that even if a deal allowing shipments of Ukrainian grain via the Black Sea ends, Russia's agreement with the United Nations to ease its own exports will stay in force, Russian state news agency RIA reported on Monday.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Saturday there appeared to be "no chance" of extending the deal.

The trade needs a more de-

finitive outlook on conditions post summer emergence but our observation for the upcoming USDA 7-day crop progress report is for crop ratings to decline for corn and soybeans after lackluster rain events over the weekend, said Terry Reilly, senior commodities analyst with Futures International.

The European Union's crop monitoring service on Monday reduced nearly all its average yield forecasts for this year's grain and oilseed crops in the bloc, citing adverse weather conditions.

Brazilian farmers have harvested through last Thursday 4.7 percent of the area planted for their second corn crop in the center-south region, agribusiness consultancy AgRural said on Monday, up 2.5 percentage points from the previous week.

Algeria's state grains agency OAIC has bought milling wheat in an international tender which closed on Monday with supplies expected to be sourced largely from Russia, European traders said in initial assessments.

Commodity funds were net buyers of Chicago Board of Trade soybean, corn, soybean meal, wheat and soybean oil futures contracts on Friday, traders said. -Reuters