

CLIPPINGS FOR SUNDAY JUNE 25, 2023

A. SEC. PBBM QUOTED

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

WB: Rice Tariffication Law indicative of true spirit of strategic shift

B. DA FAMILY

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

DA, MMC eye more Kadiwa stores

DA, Korean agency partner for agri practices innovation

4 former DA-Caraga execs arrested for graft

BUSINESS MIRROR

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4 exec-officials ng DA –Caraga inarestado!

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4 ex-DA-Caraga officials nabbed on graft raps

Beware of hot meat – PNP

C. AGRI-RELATED STORY

*No stories*

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*No stories*



Sen. Cynthia Villar joins President Marcos and Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban during the recent 125th anniversary celebration of the Department of Agriculture.

## WB: Rice Tariffication Law indicative of true spirit of strategic shift

Sen. Cynthia Villar has expressed elation at the recognition given by the World Bank (WB) to the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) or Republic Act 11203 as a "strategic policy reform."

The WB lauded the RTL, passed into law in 2019, as "indicative of the true spirit of this strategic shift."

The WB issued the citation during

the launch of the Agriculture Public Expenditures Review with special focus on the implications of the Mandanas Ruling on the agri-food system.

Representing the World Bank at the forum was operations manager Achim Fock. The European Union

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(EU) was represented by head of cooperation EU Delegation to the Philippines Christoph Wagner. The fo-

rum was held at the Bonifacio Global City.

WB Senior Agriculture Economist Anuja Kar and WB Practice Manager Dina Umali-Deininger also attended the event and pre-

sented their findings on the review.

Philippine Institute for Development Studies senior research fellow Roehlano Briones and Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Monetary Board

Member Dr. V. Bruce J. Tolentino gave their positive assessment of the RTL.

They said RTL creates P10-billion Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund yearly from tariffs on im-

ported rice.

The earnings are given to farmers listed in the Registry System of Basic Sectors as assistance in the form of machineries, high quality inbred rice seeds, training

and loans.

The Agriculture Public Expenditures Review of the World Bank aims to help the government evaluate the direction of spending policies under its priority strategy.

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## DA, MMC eye more Kadiwa stores

By **ROMINA CABRERA**

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is in talks with the Metro Manila Council (MMC) to put up more Kadiwa stores to provide residents with basic commodities at lower costs.

DA Assistant Secretary for Consumer Affairs Kristine Evangelista said the support of local govern-

ment units (LGUs) is vital to putting up more Kadiwa stores.

"We recognize the importance of local governments in expanding the Kadiwa stores; it's one of the things we're discussing with the MMC," Evangelista, speaking in Filipino, told *dzBB* radio yesterday.

She noted that some LGUs have already expressed interest in put-

ting up Kadiwa stores in their localities.

The DA offers grants of up to P1 million for LGUs to put up Kadiwa stores that will sell commodities sourced from the department's partner-farmers' cooperatives.

The grant includes capitalization requirements as well as initial

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inventory for the Kadiwa store.

"We are encouraging the LGUs to make use of their comm[unity]-based orgs [organizations] to run the Kadiwa store," Evangelista said. "In effect, it will also become job generating for their community."

The DA official said it is their vision to establish a Kadiwa center in every

city and municipality nationwide. "Hopefully, we can replicate that... While we are still working on that, we will strengthen our pop up and Kadiwa on wheels [stores]," she said.

Since the Marcos administration put up Kadiwa centers in a bid to help Filipinos cope with the rising prices of food and other commodities last year, there are now 924 farmers' cooperatives supporting the initiative and around 500 stores operating nationwide.



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## DA, Korean agency partner for agri practices innovation

By **RICHMOND MERCURIO**

The **Department of Agriculture** has teamed up with the Korea Partnership for Innovation of Agriculture (KOPIA) of the Rural Development Administration (RDA) to innovate agricultural practices and technologies.

The partnership was formalized under a technical cooperation project (TCP), "Development of Pilot Village Project through the Establishment of Protective Cultivation and Postharvest Management of Vegetables in the Philippines."

The collaboration aims to provide and enhance support services and transfer research knowledge to Filipino farmers.

KOPIA and the Bureau of Plant

Industry (BPI), an attached agency of the DA, are set to make a meaningful impact over a period of three years, or from 2023 to 2025.

During this timeframe, both organizations will share equal responsibility for ensuring the project's successful implementation.

The pilot village project will focus on the implementation of protective cultivation techniques and efficient postharvest management of vegetables in the Philippines.

"By utilizing the expertise and experience of KOPIA and the resources available through BPI, the project will introduce innovative agricultural practices and technologies to enhance the productivity and sustainability of vegetable cultivation in the country," the

BPI said.

Through the TCP, both organizations will work closely together to develop and implement comprehensive strategies for the successful establishment of protected cultivation systems.

BPI said its collaboration with KOPIA "marks a significant milestone in promoting agricultural innovation and knowledge transfer in the Philippines."

"By harnessing the expertise and resources of both organizations, this partnership aims to empower Filipino farmers with the latest technologies and practices, ultimately improving their livelihoods and contributing to the overall development of the agricultural sector in the country," it said.

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## **ACROSS THE COUNTRY**

### **4 former DA-Caraga execs arrested for graft**

COTABATO CITY – Four former officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA) office in Caraga have been arrested in connection with the graft and malversation charges they are facing before the Sandiganbayan.

Former DA assistant regional director Edgardo Dahino, former administrator and finance officer Jessica Da-An, former budget officer Merylinda Santos and former accountant Gerry Leop were apprehended on Thursday, Brig. Gen. Pablo Labra II, Caraga police director, said.

Personnel of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group and local police served the arrest warrants dated May 26 issued by the Sandiganbayan's Fourth Division.

The court recommended bail of P210,000 each.

The four were implicated in the fertilizer fund scam in 2004 in which alleged pork barrel scam mastermind Janet Lim-Napoles was also tagged.

The charges stemmed from allegations that the four former officials were responsible for an agricultural project entered into by the municipal government of Del Carmen in Surigao del Norte with a non-government organization linked to Napoles.

– John Unson



# GOOD AS GOLD

By HENRY EMPEÑO

**I**BA, Zambales—For nine days in April, residents and visitors alike shared in the revelry of the 2023 Dinamulag Mango Festival, this year's reiteration of an annual event that was revived after being sidelined by the pandemic in the past two years.



The "revenge celebration" was expectedly bigger: more participation in the streetdance and float parade; better products display; wider range of cultural and sports events; and, for the first time, farm demonstration and tours—all to showcase the pride of Zambales, which is the "Dinamulag" or carabao variety of mango that is famous the world over for its delectable taste.

But beneath the oomph and hoopla of the mango-themed festival was a serious effort to raise awareness and stir action among stakeholders in the mango industry to further develop their business.

Governor Hermogenes Ebdane Jr., whose office oversaw festival preparations, pointed out that the nine-day event "created a stronger bond among various sectors in terms of planning and implementing activities and programs that require whole-of-community approach."

He also stressed that the festival was meant to identify the many potentials and resources in the province that the government is now tapping to build a better, sustainable future for Zambaleños.

Aside from being a vehicle to show the world what local culture and traditions are all about, the Mango Festival, he said, should demonstrate "how Zambaleños define and work for their future, and what kind of Zambales we are building in the present."



MISS Palauig 2023 Alyssa Alday with a basket of mangoes from the Batungbacal Farms ZAMBALES TOURISM OFFICE

## Gold standard

MANGO (*Mangifera indica*) is the country's national fruit, and there are three well-known varieties of it in the Philippines: carabao, pico, and Katchamita, otherwise known as Indian mango. But the one that has made it to the *Guinness Book of World Records* in 1995 as the sweetest in the world was the carabao variety, or the *kinalabaw* that Zambaleños grow as the *dinamulag*.

The more common carabao mango strains in Zambales are the Sta. Elena and Lamao. In Guimaras, they have the Super Galila, Talaban and Fresco; while Ilocos has the Mariano Marcos State University (MMSU) Gold.

Fleshy and not fibrous, with smooth light-green skin that later ripens into deep yellow, the *dinamulag* mango is considered the gold standard among Philippine mangoes because of its unique flavor that combines sweetness with a hint of tartness.

## Zambales's "Dinamulag" mango industry is doing well, but needs serious rethinking for sustained viability



BATUNGBACAL Farms mango have their distinctive seal of quality BATUNGBACAL FARMS



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Note that the Sta. Elena strain in Zambales at one time was declared by Bureau of Agricultural Research of the Department of Agriculture as the sweetest carabao mango in the country. That was in 2003.

In 2016, however, Sta. Elena, which had a Brix reading (°Bx) of 18.98, was overtaken by the Guimaras Super Galila, which was marked at 22.3°Bx, as the sweetest. The Brix reading measures the dissolved sugar content.

Still, local growers attest that Zambales mangoes draw more buyers because of their taste.

"It's not sweet as in sugary like mangoes from other places, but it has this different kind of *linamnam* [full flavor] that mango lovers come back for," described Enrico Batungbacal, who has grown mangoes in Palauig, Zambales, since 1988 after graduating from college.

"The best mango fruits are

those grown in the northern part of Zambales—from Iba town (in the central part of the province) up to Santa Cruz, the northernmost," Batungbacal said, echoing a "fact" accepted by Zambales natives. "Any scientific explanation for it must be in the location," he hastened to add.

The Batungbacal Farms, he said, grows mangoes of the Lamao strain—five strains, in fact, from Lamao 1 to Lamao 5—of the carabao variety.

He recalled that his father initially brought mango seedlings from Batangas and Los Baños, areas not particularly known for delicious mangoes. However, these bore flavorful fruits.

On the other hand, mango seeds or cultivars from Zambales and grown elsewhere did not bear fruits as delicious as

those harvested locally, Batungbacal pointed out.

## Mango business

A GRADUATE of business administration, Batungbacal initially set out to properly set up in two years the farm that his father, a weekend farmer, started as a venture in 1973. That "two years" had since continued from 1988 up to now.

Today, the Batungbacal Farms is a 120-hectare spread on rolling land naturally fed by creeks in Barangay Bulawen at the eastern part of Palauig. The area has been planted to 6,000 mango trees, as well as guava, papaya and honeydew.

The fresh mangoes from the farm—duly marked with stickers bearing the Batungbacal Farms logo—have since become synonymous with quality Zambales mangoes and immediately became popu-

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OTHER mango products made by Green Thumb HENRY EMPEÑO



MANANG Shirley Velarde shows off premium quality Zambales mangoes at her stall in Iba, Zambales. HENRY EMPEÑO

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lar among clients in Alabang, where they were first sold commercially.

Batungbacal said his clients would be the ones to say that Zambales mangoes were the best.

"In terms of taste, there wouldn't be any comparison with mango fruits from other places," he declared, and that is even with Guimaras mangoes recently given the seal as the country's first geographical indication (GI), a marketing tool that is supposed to highlight the product's distinctiveness.

"In the end, it would boil down to quality and taste. Zambales mangoes are tastier and we consistently deliver quality, which allows us to command the right price at any time," he stressed.

Batungbacal said he is preparing to enter the export market next year, with direct buyers from France and Dubai already inquiring specifically for mangoes with the Batungbacal brand.

## Growing mangoes

ACCORDING to a report by the Zambales Provincial Agriculture Office (ZPAO) that detailed the state of the mango industry in the province from 2018 to 2022, mango production has gradually increased even as the number of

trees and area planted to this valuable cash crop had remained virtually unchanged.

The ZPAO recorded total mango production at 12,944.22 metric tons in 2018 and slightly going down to 12,041.53 MT in 2019. However, it rebounded to 16,838.74 MT in 2020, then to 19,686.71 MT in 2023, and 18,919.18 MT in 2022.

This was despite the fact that the area planted and harvested remained at 8,851 hectares in 2018; 8,835.7 hectares in 2019; and 8,836.53 hectares from 2020 to 2022.

In the last five years, the average number of fruit-bearing trees remained at 56 per hectare, with the total of fruiting trees at 492,638 in 2018; 491,901 in 2019; 494,901 in 2020; and back to 491,901 in 2021 and 2022.

The average yield per tree, however, significantly increased from 26.27 kilograms in 2018 to 24.48 kg in 2019; 34.23 kg in 2020; 40.02 kg in 2021; and 38.46 kg in 2022.

As such, Zambales was top contributor to carabao mango production in Central Luzon in 2022, with a total of 396,181 trees, or 29 percent of the total, and ranked number one in the region; 7,558 harvested area, or 30 percent of the regional total, and also ranked number one; and 16,476.31 metric tons production, or

47 percent of the total, with number one ranking.

The general trend was also observed at the Batungbacal Farms, where all-out production in 2018 yielded some 400 metric tons of mangoes from about 6,000 trees.

Even when production had to be controlled in the last three years because of the La Niña condition that also posed greater risks from cecid fly infestation, Batungbacal harvested 120 MT from just 1,000 trees. This made for an average harvest of 120 kilos per tree, compared to just 66 kilos per tree during full production in 2018.

With quality at its premium, Batungbacal mangoes command a good price: small size at P650 per box of 5 kilos; regular at P750 per box; medium at P900 per box; large at P1,100 per box; extra large at P1,400 per box; and jumbo at P1,900 per box.

The bigger sizes get sold out first, Batungbacal said.

## Selling quality

ASIDE from fresh mangoes, Zambales is increasingly being recognized for its dried mango and other fruit extracts. One of the more popular producers of these is Green Thumb, a backyard enterprise located in Barangay Luis, Candelaria, Zambales.

Its proprietor Evelyn Grace told the *BusinessMirror* that business continued to boom since she set up a backyard venture with her husband after getting married in 1987.

"We were married in June, acquired a lot, then planted mango trees in December to get this business going," she said.

There were 12 trees remaining in their 2,200-square-meter lot, from the original seeded and grafted cultivars that started fruiting in 1991. At first, they sold fruits that were exported to Japan at a time when mango-buying stations were in vogue in Zambales and local growers competed to get their export quota.

"But we had the edge—from P10 to P25 more per kilo, because our products did not use any inorganic fertilizer, this showed in a better taste that the Japanese liked better," Grace said.

At that time, she added, they used to harvest about 10 crates of 24 kilos each per tree. "And 90 percent of these made the grade for Japan," she said.



MANGO-THEMED streetdance in the recent Zambales Dinamulag Mango Festival HENRY EMPENO



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Grace said that even during the pandemic, they maintained their price for fresh mango at P300 to P350 per kilo in Manila because it was top quality.

Like Batungbacal, Grace revealed that quality is anchored on fruit maturity, which averages from 115 to 130 days after flowering. During harvest in the cold months of December to February, Grace said they waited for at least 120 days before harvest. In the summer months beginning March, fruits mature faster and could be harvested after 110 or 115 days.

From fresh mango exports, Grace then ventured into producing dried mango in 1988 upon the suggestion of a farm worker from Cebu.

"It took me five years to master the process through trial and error," Grace recalled. And because she disliked the use of preservatives for her mango products, the Green Thumb brand of dried mango has a shelf life of only six months, compared to the preserved "for export" kind that could last up to two years.

Still, quality sells better, Grace said, noting how before the pandemic, her firm used to sell 1.5 metric tons of dried mango per year just to walk-in buyers, *pasalubong* centers, restaurants, and companies and government agencies that placed direct orders, sometimes for 30 boxes of 50 packs each at a time.

Aside from fresh and dried mangoes, Green Thumb also produces mango nectar, wine, vinegar, pickles and chutney.

Now, Grace has also started training mango stakeholders from other areas like Tarlac and Pampanga, teaching them how to manufacture various mango products.

"Saying, if I kept the technology to myself," she said. "If it would help others, and promote the mango industry more, why not share it?"

## Industry challenges

DESPITE the seeming resilience of the local mango industry, the golden pride of Zambales faces serious threats and challenges from natural and man-made factors.

In terms of technology, the Zambales Provincial Agriculture Office identifies problems related to density planting, plant nutrition, pest management, and irrigation.

Threats, meanwhile, include climate change, pesticide pollution, heavy metals decomposition, high investment, and backyard planting.

In recent years, however, the most serious problem faced by local mango growers was *cecid fly* (*Procontarinia mangivora*) infestation, which causes the galling of young leaves, and, more damaging, mars the skin of mango fruits with brown to black, scab-like spots that are commonly called *kurikong*.

"This has been hurting the industry in the past eight to 10

years," notes Batungbacal, who limited mango production last year to just 1,000 trees out of the 6,000 in his farm.

"Because of the *cecid fly* problem, a lot of growers have stopped operation altogether because they have been losing for several years in a row," he adds.

Aside from pest management, the type of farm production also impacts on industry yield, says Batungbacal, pointing out that the widespread practice of contract spraying does more harm than good.

"It's only in the Philippines that we do this—getting a contractor to spray chemicals for 70 percent of the harvest, and leaving 30 percent of the production to the tree owner," notes Batungbacal.

"What's bad about this is that after harvest, the trees are left without care, no application of fertilizer, no trimming, as there is no more incentive for both owner and contractor to rehabilitate the trees in between spraying. In the long run, this leads to low yield," he adds.

## Shrinking production

IN the Third Luzon Mango Congress held on April 28 in Botolan, Zambales, Senator Imee Marcos pointed to yet another weakness in the local mango industry—the inability to produce significant volumes of mango products that could address demand for Philippine mangoes abroad.

She says that a recent China trip had revealed a huge demand for Philippine mangoes that the country simply cannot supply.

"How could we cope with the demand, when instead of increasing production we have 3.8 percent reduction of 10 to 12 metric tons a year since 2021?" laments the senator.

"Even Vietnam that only wanted to copy our mangoes previously, has overtaken us in production. The mangoes from Vietnam, as well as from India and Mexico, are no longer fibrous and are already aromatic like Philippine mangoes," she adds.

She says that while the Philippines has been struggling with the *cecid fly* problem in the last 15 to 20 years, other countries have advanced their research and development and produced better mango varieties.

In the face of the continuing mango pest problem, Marcos cited a need to develop new, sturdier mango varieties, as well as further increase production and intensify marketing and promotion efforts.

## Sustaining the momentum

AS a high-value cash crop, Zambales mango has the opportunity to make it big because of its superb taste and high marketability.

Dr. Jhino Ilano, assistant director of the Department of Trade and Industry's Export Marketing Bureau, unveiled opportunities for the mango industry in the recent Central Luzon Mango Congress, among them an unrealized export potential of \$121 million in the next five years for fresh or dried mangoes, guavas and mangosteens.

Ilano also cited an unrealized export potential of \$192 million in the next five years for products that included prepared or preserved edible plant parts; raw, steamed or boiled, or frozen fruits and nuts; fruit jams; and mixtures of nuts or dried fruits.

While mango export is dominated by countries like Thailand, with export quantity of 382,093 metric tons; the Netherlands (265,935 MT), and Mexico (429,391 MT), the Philippines was at the tail-end with just 16,262 MT. He added that the country's export revenue had reached a total \$16.2 million for fresh mangoes and \$55.7 million for processed mangoes in 2022.

The top mango importers, Ilano added, are the United States with 4.5 million metric tons; the

Netherlands, 2.1 million MT; the United Arab Emirates, 847,700 MT; Germany, 808,025 MT; and the United Kingdom, 720,299 MT.

As of now, the Philippines exports most of its fresh mango to Hong Kong, with \$9.9 million in 2022; South Korea, \$3.4 million; the United States, \$1.1 million; Singapore, \$393,643; and Japan, \$375,342.

Ilano said that the Philippines must take advantage of trends shaping the global mango industry, including increased global demand for mangoes due to its nutritional characteristics and properties; low penetration of the global market by tropical countries that produce mangoes; and the need for specific orchard management techniques due to the climate-change phenomenon.

He also said that among the top fastest-growing product categories with mango ingredients include air care, fragrances, paper products, hard surface care, dishwashing products, sweet spreads, toilet care, fabric care, sweeteners and sugar, and soap and bath products.



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ZAMBALES mangoes are sought after for their sweet-tarty taste, soft flesh and aroma. HENRY EMPENO

## Gift to the world

GIVEN the challenges and opportunities to the local mango industry, mango stakeholders in Zambales, with the assistance of the provincial government, are eyeing better production in the years ahead by rethinking concepts in farm production and management, as well as retooling to better meet increasing demands.

Rethinking and retooling, for sure, would take time and increased inputs, but it is the only way to the future, opined Batungbacal, who was recently recognized by the Department of Agriculture as an outstanding farmer in the fruit category of the High Value Crops Development Program.

"It's a good thing that Governor Ebdane gave the support of his administration to strengthen the local mango industry by forming the Zambales Mango Industry Board, because it paved the way for assistance from the various agencies like the DOST (Department of Science and Technology), DTI (Department of Trade and Industry), Tesda (Technical Education and Skills Development Authority), Department of Tourism, and the PRMSU (President Ramon Magsaysay State University)," Batungbacal acknowledged.

Even the recent Zambales Mango Festival helped a lot by bringing people to mango farms for the mango-picking activities, and thus helping them appreciate mango farming, he added.

"Zambales mangoes are a gift to the world. We have a better product, and the only thing we need to ensure is better marketing and how to bring this better package to all corners of the world," Batungbacal told the *BusinessMirror* during a tour of the farm on June 15.

He said the strategy for this would require a transition from contract farming to managed farms, where stakeholders, including contract sprayers, would join together to integrate and manage small farms and set up a mechanized system for spraying, irrigation, pruning and harvesting.

"This could be done with high-density farming technique, which is also called slim hedge, with about 30 to 50 trees in one hectare," Batungbacal explained.

In this way, he said trees are planted close together to form a hedge, which are pruned and kept at an ideal height of just four meters. This would not only promote easy sunlight penetration and easier spraying, but also result in efficient harvesting.

"We have here 6,000 trees in this farm in an area of 120 hectares. With high-density farming, 10 hectares alone could be planted to 6,000 trees! Imagine what that would do to the local mango industry," Batungbacal enthused.

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## 4 ex-officials ng DA-Caraga inaresto!

**COTABATO CITY --** Apat na opisyal ng Department of Agriculture (DA)-Regional Office 13 sa Caraga ang inaresto ng pulisya noong Huwebes dahil sa mga kasong paglulustay diumano ng malaking halaga ng pondo ng ahensya.

Sa kanyang opisyal na pahayag nitong Sabado, kinumpirma ni Brig. Gen. Pablo Labra II, director ng Police Regional Office (PRO)-13, ang pagka-

kaaresto sa apat na DA officials sa magkakahiwalay na operasyon sa Butuan City ng pinagsanib na mga kasapi ng PNP-Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) at PRO-13.

Ang apat na DA officials ay kinilalang sina Edgardo Dahino, assistant regional director ng DA-13 at tatlong kasama nito sa trabaho na sina Jessica

### NI JOHN UNSON

Da-An, regional finance chief, Meryllinda Santos, budget officer III at Gerry Leop, regional accountant.

Ang nabanggit na mga opisyal ay suspendido rin sa kani-kanilang mga trabaho.

Ang pag-aresto sa apat sa magkakahiwalay na operasyon ng CIDG-Caraga at mga operatiba ng PRO-13 ay batay sa arrest warrant na inisyu ng

Associate Justice ng Sandiganbayan Fourth Division sa Quezon City, na may petsang Mayo 26, 2023.

Ayon kay Labra, may itinakdang tig-P210,000 na piyansa ang Sandiganbayan para sa pansamantalang paglala ng apat habang sila ay lilitisin sa mga kasong paglabag sa Republic Act 3019, mas kilala bilang Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act at Article 217 ng Revised Penal Code para sa malversation.



## DAR, Irrigation pinabubuwanag ni Alvarez

DAPAT nang buwagin ang Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) at National Irrigation Administration (NIA), ayon kay Davao del Norte Rep. Pantaleon Alvarez.

Sinabi ni Alvarez sa interview ni Reymund Tinaza ng **Politiko Ph** na sayang lang ang pondong nilalaan sa DAR at NIA dahil wala nang masyadong pakinabang ang taumbayan sa dalawang ahensiya.

"Rebyuhin nating ang general appropriations act taon taon, ilang mga ahensiya ng gobyerno ang hindi na nagpa-function

sa trabaho sa mandato nila? Marami iyan!" diin ng kongresista.

"Yong national irrigation, 'yong NIA, ay hindi naman ginagawa 'yong trabaho nila. 'Yong pag-maintain ng irrigation canals, hindi na, ginagawa 'yan ngayon ng local government units," giit pa ni Alvarez. "Sabi nila 'wala kaming equipment.' Eh kung wala kayong equipment mag-sara na lang kayo!"

Isa rin umano sa dapat buwagin ay ang DAR dahil tapos na ang trabaho nila sa distribusyon ng lupa.

## 4 ex-DA-Caraga officials nabbed on graft raps

THE Police Regional Office in Caraga Region (PRO-13) said four former officials of the regional agriculture office in Butuan City were charged with graft.

"We are tasked to enforce the law in a manner

that treats all individuals equally, regardless of their social status or positions," PRO-13 chief Brig. Gen. Pablo Labra II said.

Arrested were Edgardo Dahino, 67, former Department of Agriculture-

Caraga (DA-13) assistant regional director, Jessica Da-An, 62, ex-chief administrator and finance officer; Meryllinda Santos, 65, former budget officer; and Gerry Leop, 54, ex-regional accountant.

The four are connect-

ed with the 2004 fertilizer fund scam allegedly masterminded by Janet Lim-Napoles, the so-called pork barrel queen.

The four former officials were allegedly responsible for the Agricultural Reinforcement Project entered into by the municipality of Del Carmen, Surigao del Norte with Napoles-linked non-governmental organization Philippine Social Development Foundation Inc.

The former agri-offi-

cials were separately arrested Thursday in Butuan City by operatives of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group-Agusan del Norte.

All four are facing charges for violation of Republic Act 3019 (Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices) and Article 217 of the Revised Penal Code for malversation.

A bail bond of P210,000 each was set by the Sandiganbayan 4th Division for their temporary liberty. (PNA)

# BEWARE OF HOT MEAT -- PNP

By Alfred Dalizon

THE Philippine National Police yesterday warned the public to be wary of smuggled unsafe meat on the market.

The public advisory was issued following two separate police operations which led to the seizure of over P51 million worth of frozen goods this week in Balut, Tondo, Manila and Silang, Cavite.

National Capital Region Police Office director Major General Edgar Alan O. Okubo said on Tuesday, they raided a warehouse in Tondo, Manila where they discovered an estimated P50 million worth of frozen meat products without documents from the Food and Drugs Administration.

Members of the NCRPO Regional Intelligence Division and the Manila Police District under Brigadier Gen. Andre P. Dizon conducted the operation which led to the seizure of the multi-million worth of frozen meat products and fruits.

Assisted by officers from the Department of Agriculture, the Manila Veterinary Division, Philippine Coast Guard and the Bureau of Customs, the NCRPO conducted the raid based on a Letter of Authority from the BOC.

Maj. Gen. Okubo said during the inspection, they found out that the frozen meat products and fruits have no pertinent government documents.

The warehouse has no business permit and its workers have



no occupational permits and health certificate from the city hall.

The official said they are also helping the BOC and other local government units in Metro Manila go after similar establishments engaged in the illegal importation business amid the danger their imported goods pose to public health.

"We are reminding the public to be watchful of the frozen meat products and fruits you are buying in the market. As much as possible, we should only purchase those goods from legitimate markets and stores," said the NCRPO chief.

The official said the owners of the raided warehouse and those behind the illegal importation of the seized goods are now facing charges for viola-

tion of Republic Act 10386 or the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act.

Nineteen employees of the company who were apprehended in the operation will also face charges for violation of city rules and regulations including working without permit and violation of the Professional Occupational Tax rule.

On the other hand, agents of the Philippine National Police Criminal Investigation and Detection Group on Wednesday confiscated over P1.6 million worth of unregistered imported food products inside a Korean-owned establishment in Silang, Cavite.

PNP-CIDG director Maj. Gen. Romeo M. Caramat Jr. said operatives of the CIDG Cavite

FDA raided the establishment located in Barangay Sabutan, Silang town.

The raid led to the confiscation of 544 boxes of luncheon meat valued at P1.2 million; 165 boxes of Jardin Triple Brew worth at least P148,000; 50 boxes of Jardin Blue Lemonade valued at P135,000; and 77 boxes of Delicious BorYung Laver worth around P208,000.

Arrested in the operation were 47-year-old Korean national Yong Cheol Baek and operations manager Jennelyn Arnado, 25.

According to Maj. Gen. Caramat, the raid was conducted by his men following information that the establishment is selling unregistered imported food products that are included in the Public Health Warning Advisory No. 2023-0018 issued by the FDA.

The Cavite CIDG office eventually conducted an entrapment operation and secured a search warrant to raid the establishment.

The search warrant was issued by Judge Agripino Bravo of the Lucena City Regional Trial Court Branch 55 in Quezon province.

Maj. Gen. Caramat said Arnado was arrested while in the act of selling the unregistered food products.

The Korean national was arrested in the subsequent service of the search warrant issued by the Lucena City judge.

The two are now facing charges for violation of RA 9711