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THE PHILIPPINE STAR

Kadiwa growth among Marcos achievements - DA exec

By BELLA CARIASO

The increase in the number of Kadiwa centers is among the achievements of President Marcos during his first year as Department of Agriculture (DA) secretary, a ranking official said.

At the Laging Handa press briefing yesterday, Agriculture Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista noted that from 200 Kadiwa outlets, Marcos was able to increase the stores offering affordable farm products to 627.

"Definitely, there are more areas now with Kadiwa. We believe that the decision of the President to remain as secretary of the department was a big factor as it increased the interest of the local government units to allow the operation of Kadiwa in their respective areas," Evangelista said.

She added that efforts are still being done to further strengthen the operation of Kadiwa stores in the country. At the same time, Evangelista added that during the stint of Marcos at the DA, the smuggling of various agricultural products was also addressed.

"We know that our stakeholders are affected by the smuggling. We were able to file cases and, hopefully, we can keep doing this, together with the inspectorate team and adjudication," she added.

Evangelista said that the DA will also implement various programs to improve production and attain the target of food security and rice sufficiency.

"We are fixing the value chain. We are looking into the distribution system and all the interventions should be there to capacitate our farmers to take on more roles. By doing so, we not only increase production but the affordability of agricultural commodities will be addressed," she said.

For his part, Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. president Danilo Fausto gave Marcos an incomplete grade.

"Incomplete! However, it is understandable as we recover from decades of neglect. Looking forward to consider PBBM's term as the golden age of Philippine agriculture," Fausto said in a text message to **The STAR**.

Marcos has said he is resigned to being graded "incomplete" for his achievement as agriculture chief but emphasized fulfilling his campaign promises "is a work in progress."

Farmers' groups yesterday gave President Marcos varying grades after a year in office as DA secretary, ranging from a "failing grade of 5" to a "passing score of 75."

Rice watchdog group Bantay Bigas spokesperson Cathy Estavillo said that Marcos failed to address the food crisis in the country.

"We are giving him a failing mark of five. He did not do anything to address the food crisis. The government was totally dependent on importation to address the shortage in the local production, particularly onions, sugar, meat, fish and rice," Estavillo told **The STAR**.

Marcos marked his first anniversary in office on June 30.

"Under his leadership (at the DA), there was a spike in the retail price of onions, sugar and rice," she added.

The retail price of onions reached as high as P720 per kilo in December 2022 amid the shortage in supply.

In August 2022, the retail prices of sugar started to increase and until now, the sweeteners are sold as high as P110 in the markets.

On the other hand, retail prices of rice increased to P40 per kilo and farmers' groups said the upward trend in the cost of the staple food will persist as the stocks are already in the hands of traders.

"There is no clear solution on how to strengthen local production... The promise of P20 (per kilo) is a big lie as the retail price of the rice is now doubled," Estavillo said.

She said the government should junk the implementation of Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law amid the flooding of imported rice in the country.

"We continue to call for the passage of the food security bill or the Rice Industry Development Act or House Bill 405. And House Bill 1161 or the (proposed) Genuine Agrarian Reform bill, allowing the free distribution of lands to the farmers," Estavillo added.

According to her, Marcos should also order the P15,000 support subsidy to farmers.

Estavillo said Marcos should also sign an executive order to stop land conversion.

"At least 10 percent of the national budget should be allotted to agriculture as a subsidy for production. The food security will not be attained as long as President Marcos is still the concurrent DA secretary," she said.

For his part, farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SIN-AG) executive director Jayson Cainglet gave Marcos a passing grade of 75, but said that his biggest problem after winning the presidency is the disheartened outlook and lack of enthusiasm of local producers to continue farming and raising livestock.

"The agriculture sector was neglected for the past 20 to 25 years, especially the last six years. By choosing to be the concurrent secretary of agriculture, he set the right policy direction that this government is giving special attention

to the agriculture sector," Cainglet told **The STAR**.

He said the local farm sector was given renewed hope under the leadership of Marcos.

"To be fair, some key officials at the DA have worked with the local agriculture industry at the height of the onion price spike in raiding warehouses, cold storages and alerting the Bureau of Customs of suspected smuggled onions. Onion farmers are happy with higher farmgate prices," Cainglet added.

The SINAG official said the biggest challenge of the local agriculture industry is the false assumptions of economic managers that the solution to high retail prices is more imports and further lowering of tariffs.

"They refuse to accept the fact that local producers have nothing to do with high retail prices. Because of the flooding of imports and decrease in the tariff on pork, chicken and rice in the last four years, it never translated to lower prices," Cainglet said.

According to him, while the marching orders of Marcos were clear, the DA failed to implement his directives.

Cainglet said among those gains of farmers under the Marcos administration were the high farmgate prices of onions and palay.

"The farmgate price of palay ranged between P22 and P24, compared to P16 and P18 in 2021 and early 2022. The farmgate price of onions also increased between P50 and P80 this year compared to P15 and P30 in early 2022," he added.

Meanwhile, about 200 individuals from several militant groups who marched yesterday from the University of Santo Tomas in España, Manila to Mendiola, have described the Marcos presidency as "*palpak, pahirap at pasista* (a failure, oppressive and fascist)."

Militant fisherfolk group Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalalakaya) said that one year in, the administration has not given significant improvement to the fishing sector.

"The fishermen continue to be the hardest-hit sector under the current administration. Marcos has maintained policies, programs and projects that are not beneficial and harmful to fishermen, such as the conversion of fishing grounds and coastlines," Ronnel Arambulo, Pamalakaya vice chairman said in Filipino.

"Currently, there are around 187 reclamation projects nationwide, according to data from the Philippine Reclamation Authority. Marcos turns a deaf ear to the strong and continuous calls of the fishermen against these projects," he added.

- With Elizabeth Marcelo, Ralph Edwin Villanueva

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PBBM outlines plan to boost devt of PHL coconut industry

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. is eyeing to boost the country's coconut exports by accelerating the modernization efforts of the coconut industry.

"There is no reason why the Philippines should not be the biggest producer of export in terms of coconut products," the President said during the 50th anniversary celebration of the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) last Thursday.

He instructed the PCA to intensify its implementation of the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan, which aims to boost the competitiveness of the country's coconut industry by improving the capacity of farmers and the use of new technology and facilities.

Efforts to boost the productivity of the local coconut industry includes replanting old and unproductive coconut trees and planting of coconut seedlings as well as the establishment of mills and other post-production facilities to process coconut by products.

Currently, Marcos said the Philippines is a major exporter of coconut oil and other products, such as copra meal and desiccated coconut.

"We will no longer export the raw material, which will then be processed in other countries. Then later on we will buy the end product," Marcos said.

"We cannot allow this very, very grand opportunity for our farmers to slip by. And we have now come to the point where we have been looking at the coconut industry as an industry. And it is now time to revitalize that economy," he added.

The efforts, he said, will also help make the coconut industry resilient to emerging threats such as effects of climate change, pests, and diseases.

"So, let us double our efforts to tackle these issues and invest in technologies and initiatives that will not only safeguard but also ensure the resilience of the coconut sector of our agriculture," Marcos said.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported coconut production increased to 3.26 million metric tons (MMT) during the first quarter of the year, from 3.20 MMT in the same period in 2022.

However, government data showed the country's coconut exports still declined by more than half from \$1.04 billion in January to April 2022 to \$490.16 million in the same period in 2023.

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Marcos binigyan ng bagsak na grado ng farmers groups

Binigyan ng bagsak na grado ng Rice watchdog group na Bantay Bigas si Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. bilang kalihim ng Department of Agriculture.

Ayon kay Bantay Bigas Spokesperson Cathy Estavillo, 'failing grade of 5' to 'passing score of 7.5' ang grado kay Pangulong Marcos.

"We are giving him a failing mark of five. He did not do anything to address the food crisis. The government was totally dependent on importation to address the shortage in the local production, particularly onions, sugar, meat, fish and rice," pahayag ni Estavillo.

Isang taon na si Pangulong Marcos sa tungkulin nitong Hunyo 30. Sa ilalim anya ng pamumuno nito sa DA ay tumaas ang presyo ng sibuyas, asukal at bigas.

Umabot sa P720 ang kada kilo ng sibuyas noong Disyembre 2022 habang P110 ang presyo ng asukal.

"There is no clear solution on how to strengthen the local production... The promise of P20 (per kilo of rice) is a big lie as the retail price of the rice is now doubled," pahayag ni Estavillo.

Sinabi naman ni Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) Executive Director Jayson Cainglet na 7.5 ang grado nila kay Pangulong Marcos.

"The agriculture sector was neglected for the past 20 to 25 years, especially the last six years. By choosing to be the concurrent secretary of agriculture, he set the right policy direction that this government is giving special attention to the agriculture sector," pahayag ni Cainglet. (Angie dela Cruz)

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Direct importation will kill sugar industry – lawmaker

By GILBERT BAYORAN

Allowing industrial users to directly import their sugar requirements "will kill the sugar industry," Negros Occidental 5th District Rep. Emilio Yulo III said yesterday, as opposition to the call of Finance Secretary Diokno continued to snowball.

Sugar planters' federations in the country are opposing sugar liberalization which, according to Diokno, is a "reasonable compromise" following plans to raise taxes on sugary drinks.

Yulo disclosed that the plans to liberalize the sugar industry, which was also pushed in the past by industrial users, "will be largely felt by small sugar producers," noting that the sugar industry is 90 percent composed of marginalized farmers.

"The sugar industry is the lifeblood of the province," he stressed, citing also the statement of the National Economic and Development Authority that "liberalization will not favor any particular sector."

Sen. JV Ejercito, United Sugar Produc-

ers Federation (UNIFED) and National Federation of Sugarcane Planters (NFSP) have aired opposition to the plan of Diokno.

In a separate statement, NFSP president Enrique Rojas said "allowing manufacturers of sweetened beverages to directly import sugar will wreak havoc on the long-established government regulations over the sugar industry, and it will further destabilize the livelihood of thousands of marginal sugarcane farmers."

UNIFED president Manuel Lamata said they are "totally against the move of Diokno to liberalize importation in favor of a few industrial users," as he sought the intervention of President Marcos, who is concurrent agriculture secretary.

Under the present system, the Sugar Regulatory Administration regulates the importation of sugar and determines the volume to be imported, after assessing the local industry's capability to satisfy the country's consumption demands.

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Palay farmgate price reaches nearly P20/kilo

By **DANESSA RIVERA**

The average farmgate price of palay, or unhusked rice, went above P19 per kilo in May, driven largely by high production costs.

Latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed the per kilo farmgate price of palay was 10.6 percent higher than the P17.24 recorded in the same month last year.

All rice producing regions saw higher average farmgate prices, with Northern Mindanao registering the highest growth of 20 percent to P21.26 per kilo.

On the other hand, the Cordillera Administrative Region posted the lowest annual increase at 5.2 percent.

The PSA also noted the Caraga region recorded the lowest farmgate price at P17.49 per kilo.

On a month-on-month basis, the PSA data showed the average farmgate price of palay increased by 1.4 percent from P18.79 per kilogram in April. Of the 16 regions, 13 regions recorded increases from the previous month.

The Ilocos region and Central Visayas posted month-on-month declines of 0.7 percent, while the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao maintained its April average farmgate price.

On the other hand, the PSA said the highest monthly growth was recorded in Eastern Visayas at 8.8 percent.

Industry stakeholders pointed to higher input costs as the main driver for the increase in farmgate price of palay.

"Input costs went up as early as 2021, especially fertilizer. But palay prices did not move because of the entry of cheap imports," Federation of Free Farmers national manager Raul Montemayor said in a text message.

On the other hand, Bantay Bigas spokesperson Cathy Estavillo said the increase in farmgate price in May coincided with the end of harvest.

She also noted that because of the high input costs, rice farmers saw lower yields this season.

"Millers and traders are aware of the

lower production at the end of the season because of the high cost of production. Farmers were forced to cut down on inputs, that's why they were not able to meet the average yield. Law of supply and demand," Estavillo said.

Earlier, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said the high cost of production locally and globally has been driving the price of palay and imported rice.

Based on the DA's monitoring in Metro Manila markets yesterday, retail prices of local commercial rice ranged from P48 to P60 per kilo for special, P42 to P50 for premium, P39 to P46 for well-milled and from P35 to P42 per kilo for regular milled.

On the other hand, prices of imported commercial rice ranged from P45 to P58 per kilo for special, P44 to 48 for premium and P40 to P48 for well-milled.

Apart from high input costs, the up-trend in rice prices can also be attributed to El Niño concerns.

"The present uptick indicates that traders are anticipating higher rice prices maybe due to El Niño, higher import prices and tighter supply due to lower carryover stocks from 2022. The higher palay prices have allowed farmers to recover part of the increase in input costs," Montemayor said.

The DA, however, earlier assured the public that the country has enough supply of rice to provide for the daily food requirement of Filipinos as it expects a six percent production increase in the January-June rice planting season.

"This is based on PhilRice PRISM data of 8.153 MMT (million metric tons) palay production in 2022 to 8.605 MMT palay or 5.6 MMT milled rice in 2023," DA Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian said.

He said the volume, plus the carryover stock of 1.8 MMT milled rice (based on PSA) and import arrival of 1.8 MMT, are enough to fill the demand/consumption of seven MMT from January to June.

"By the end of June, the stock available will be good for more than two months, in addition to the incoming supply from the new harvest and import arrivals in the coming months," Sebastian said.

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NIA approves P37.9-B PPPs for irrigation projects

By **DANESSA RIVERA**

State-run **National Irrigation Administration (NIA)** has endorsed three priority irrigation projects worth P37.9 billion to be undertaken via the public-private partnership (PPP) scheme.

The NIA Board approved the Ilocos Norte-Ilocos Sur-Abra Irrigation Project II (INISAIP II), Tumauni River Multipurpose Project (TRMP), and Upper Banaoang Irrigation Project.

The projects were identified by the PPP Center as priority projects out of the 12 potential facilities shortlisted by the joint technical groups formed by the two agencies.

The P22.7-billion INISAIP II intends to irrigate approximately 11,100 hectares of agricultural land with Palsiguan River as the main source of irrigation water.

According to NIA, the project is intended to irrigate sub-areas of the province of Ilocos Norte such as Nueva Era, Cura, Madupayas, Pinili, Badoc-Sinait and Batac-Paoay through a network of link canals.

Other planned purposes of

the project include fish culture, eco-tourism, hydropower generation, and other recreational purposed which would help generate job opportunities for the community and constituents.

Meanwhile, the P8.6-billion TRMP is a proposed project to expand the coverage of the existing Tumauni Irrigation System (TIS) to 32 barangays located in the municipalities of Tumauni, Cabagan, and the city of Ilagan, Isabela.

The TIS was originally designed to potentially irrigate an area of 6,100 hectares however, only around 3,000 hectares are currently being irrigated, due to insufficient water-river runoff, especially during the summer season.

The TRMP, NIA added, includes the construction of the high dam, after bay dam, and long siphon as well as the improvement and expansion of irrigation facilities.

It would also provide other incidental benefits such as watershed management, eco-tourism, and infrastructure support for

renewable energy, particularly hydropower and solar farm component.

On the other hand, the P6.6-billion Upper Banaoang Irrigation Project aims to construct an impounding dam with Malapaao River as its water source.

With a potential service area of 5,000 hectares of agricultural land, the project is also designed to engage in fish culture and develop hydroelectric power projects.

Last March, the NIA and PPP Center signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) to maximize the technical services of the latter in terms of NIA's capacity-building for the utilization of various PPP modalities for irrigation projects.

The NIA said PPP is eyed to fast-track and expand irrigation development through private sector expertise.

The agency is pursuing the development of climate-smart, multi-purpose irrigation systems, and is increasing irrigated areas to contribute to overall agricultural productivity and attain food security.

NIA, PPC Center tie up for irrigation projects

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

THE National Irrigation Administration (NIA) on Thursday approved P37.9 billion worth of irrigation projects to be undertaken through public-private partnerships.

The NIA board and the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Center executed a memorandum of agreement that aims to maximize the latter's technical services for the former's capacity-building. This will allow the NIA to utilize various PPP modalities for major irrigation projects.

"With NIA's pursuit in developing climate-smart, multi-purpose irrigation systems and in increasing irrigated areas to contribute to overall agricultural productivity and attain food security, PPP is eyed to fast-track and expand irrigation development through private sector expertise," the NIA said.

The PPP Center's assessment and prioritization of projects for

public-private partnerships has identified three priority projects including the Ilocos Norte-Ilocos Sur-Abra Irrigation Project II (Inisaip II), Tumauni River Multipurpose Project (TRMP) and Upper Banaoang Irrigation Project.

The P22.7-billion Inisaip II aims to irrigate approximately 11,100 hectares of agricultural land with the Palsiguan River as the main source of irrigation water.

"The project is intended to irrigate sub-areas of the province of Ilocos Norte, such as Nueva Era, Cura, Madupayas, Pinili, Badoc-Sinait and Batac-Paoay, through a network of link canals," the NIA said.

Other planned purposes of the project include fish culture, eco-

tourism, hydropower generation and other recreational purposes that would help generate job opportunities for the community and constituents.

The TRMP has an allocation worth P8.6 billion for expanding the coverage of the existing Tumauni Irrigation System (TIS) to 32 barangay (villages) located in the localities of Tumauni, Cabagan and Ilagan all in Isabela.

The TRMP includes the construction of a high dam, afterbay dam and long siphon as well as the improvement and expansion of irrigation facilities.

"It will also provide other incidental benefits such as watershed management, ecotourism and infrastructure support for renewable energy, particularly hydropower and solar farm components," the NIA said.

Meanwhile, the NIA allocated P6.6 billion for the Upper Banaoang Irrigation Project for the construction of an impounding dam with the Malapao River as its water source.

The project is also designed to integrate fish culture and develop hydroelectric power projects with a potential service area of 5,000 hectares of agricultural land.

The NIA emphasized its strong pursuit of partnerships with the PPP program to boost the country's irrigation network.

"In support of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s plans in expansion of infrastructure projects through PPP, NIA, headed by acting administrator engineer Eddie G. Guillen, strongly pursues collaboration on the PPP Program to boost the Philippine irrigated agriculture," it said.

Present in the recently concluded NIA board meeting for the P37.9 billion worth of irrigation projects were Agriculture Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian, National Economic and Development Authority Assistant Secretary Roderick Planta, NIA Deputy Administrator Ralph Lauren Du, and NIA central office department and division managers.

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WB okays \$.6-B loan to PHL rural devt scaling-up of DA

By CAI U. ORDINARIO

THE World Bank's Board of Executive Directors this week approved a new multimillion-dollar loan to expand the country's Philippine Rural Development Project (PRDP).

In a statement, the World Bank said the Philippines will receive a \$600-million loan for the Philippines to finance Philippine Rural Development Project Scale-Up (PRDP Scale-Up) of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

The Washington-based lender said the expansion aims to stimulate further growth in these critical sectors and strengthen the nation's rural economy through rural infrastructure and enhancing connectivity.

"Almost 60 percent of the poor work in agriculture in the Philippines, so accelerating the growth of agriculture

and fishery is vital for the country's development overall and for poverty reduction," said World Bank Country Director for Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand Ndiame Diop.

"Improving access to markets will help farmers and fisherfolk in rural areas raise their incomes, provide for their families, and elevate their standards of living," he added.

World Bank said the financing will come from a loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).

The Scale-Up will prioritize fewer but larger programs, increasing support for investments that will yield benefits beyond the immediate project area, including research and development, infrastructure, market connectivity, and biosecurity.

In addition, it will provide enterprise

grants to support farmers' and fisherfolk cooperatives, associations, and local government units.

"The Rural Development Project concentrated on spurring growth among farming and fishing enterprises," said World Bank Senior Agriculture Economist Mio Takada. "The Scale-Up takes this further, emphasizing support throughout the value chain, from production through to marketing, ultimately increasing the competitiveness and profitability of these businesses."

The Rural Development Project is active in 80 provinces, including 640 municipalities and 32 cities. It has reached almost 633,000 farmers, raised incomes, and improved connectivity to markets through construction of roads, bridges and post-harvest facilities, among other interventions.

The Scale-Up will support access for

micro- to medium-scale agricultural and fishery enterprises to resources, knowledge, and income-generating activities. Funding will support inputs, production, marketing, and enterprise management, among others. The project also aims to increase participation of women in these activities.

It will also strengthen rural infrastructure and connectivity, as this scaling up of rural development support will fund climate-proof infrastructure, including more roads, bridges, irrigation systems, and post-harvest storage facilities such as warehouses, drying, and cold storage.

The project aims to provide improved technology to reduce post-harvest losses and put in place more efficient logistics. This will help ensure a stable supply of food and agricultural products in markets.

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COST TO BE SPLIT BETWEEN LOCAL, FOREIGN ENTITIES

DA STREAMLINES INSPECTION FOR FOREIGN AGRI, FISHERIES SUPPLIERS

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
@jordeenelagare

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has updated the guidelines on inspecting foreign suppliers to ensure continuous trade of agricultural products between the Philippines and the rest of the world.

The revised rules will "cover inspection missions for accreditation of all suppliers or exporters of agricultural and fishery products," the DA said in a department circular.

Funding for all foreign on-site

inspection missions will be equally split between the agency and the foreign country whether it is a new application or the renewal of the latter's accreditation.

"Funding shall be charged to the respective agencies conducting the inspection missions," the DA said.

The DA will shoulder the pretravel allowance, the cost of round-trip economy plane fare and clothing allowance.

It will also finance 50 percent of the daily subsistence allowance (DSA) of the DA's

inspection mission members, which shall cover their meals (30 percent) and incidental expenses (20 percent) as well as other applicable expenditures.

On the other hand, all foreign applicants, through their respective national competent authorities, will pay for the in-country expenses including the accommodation or lodging of the DA inspector.

They will cover the in-country transportation and transfer of DA representatives for the duration of the inspection mission,

guided by the approved itinerary.

Moreover, the non-English speaking applicant is required to assign a person, preferably with a technical background who can read and speak the English language and serve as an interpreter during the audit process.

"Documents not written in English shall be translated into English, with copies furnished to the team," it added.

The amended circular will take effect 15 days after the complete publication in one newspaper of general circulation and

submission of copies to the UP Law Center's Office of the National Administrative Register.

The new policy repeals and supersedes the provisions set forth in the department circulars issued by the DA in 2017 and 2022.

The DA issued the revised guidelines as it sees the need for cosharing of expenses in undertaking the inspection mission in the interest of strengthening and fostering healthy collaboration between the Philippines and exporters of commodities.

It also cited the need to re-

voke last year's circular "due to confusion and miscommunication it caused to affected internal and external stakeholders before its actual implementation."

The DA is mandated to carry out on-site verification as part of inspection missions to assess food control system equivalence and gauge the confidence of foreign country applicants or individual establishments.

This would ensure the production and distribution of agricultural and fishery products are in line with standards. INQ

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FOR INCREASED MARKET ACCESS, INCOME

WB APPROVES \$600-M LOAN TO HELP PH FARMERS, FISHERFOLK

Additional support will be provided to farmers and fisherfolk in the Philippines with the World Bank (WB) Group approving a \$600-million loan to build on the momentum of the Philippine Rural Development Project (PRDP) that was launched in 2014.

Implemented by the Department of Agriculture, PRDP was designed to increase market access and incomes for almost half a million farmers and fisherfolk across the country.

The World Bank said the new initiative, PRDP Scale-Up, will expand the implementation of the original project, which had been instrumental in strengthening the agriculture and fisheries sectors, bolstering rural infrastructure,

and enhancing connectivity.

Financing will come from a loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development of the World Bank Group.

The Scale-Up is designed to support access for micro-to medium-scale agricultural and fishery enterprises to resources, knowledge, and income-generating activities.

The intention is to stimulate further growth in these critical sectors and strengthen the Philippines' rural economy.

"Almost 60 percent of the poor work in agriculture in the Philippines, so accelerating the growth of agriculture and fishery is vital for the country's development overall and for poverty

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BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

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WB APPROVES \$600-M LOAN TO HELP PH FARMERS, FISHERFOLK

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reduction," said
Ndiamé Diop,
World Bank coun-
try director for the Philippines.

"Improving access to markets
will help farmers and fisherfolk in
rural areas raise their incomes, pro-
vide for their families, and elevate
their standards of living," he said.

Funding will support inputs,
production, processing, marketing,
and enterprise management. The
project also aims to increase partic-
ipation of women in these activities.

Mio Takada, senior agricul-
ture economist at the World
Bank, noted that PRDP concen-
trated on spurring growth among

farming and fishing enterprises.

"The Scale-Up takes this
further, emphasizing support
throughout the value chain, from
production through to marketing,
ultimately increasing the compet-
itiveness and profitability of these
businesses," Takada said. —RONNEL

W. DOMINGO INQ.

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PH coco industry ain't a tough nut to crack

With the **Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA)** celebrating its 50th anniversary this week, it is timely to identify three crucial initiatives that will uplift the coconut industry and our farmers.

We are the number one coconut exporter in the world, with 3.5 million farmers and farm workers helping buoy the industry. But our lead is threatened by global competition, not to mention the fact that the industry is still the poorest in our country.

We must now use the P130 billion coconut levy fund, which was recently made available, to address this critical situation.

We must also heed our president's call for unity. To do this, we should improve communication and cooperation between government and the private sector, between the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and between farmers and agribusiness in the private sector.

It is in this context that three coconut initiatives are recommended:

Coconut methyl ester or CME

The 2003 Biofuels Act mandates that CME should constitute 5 percent of diesel by 2020. Today, CME level is still at 2 percent.

Oppositors say increasing the mix will further hike fuel prices. However, the Asian Institute of Petroleum Studies showed that savings obtained from increased mileage using CME was at least five times the return (or a 500-percent return on investment) on the CME cost.

COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDOÑEZ

This is analogous to spending the extra cost of fertilizer because the increase in yield justifies the cost. Such an economic advantage does not even consider the significant benefits in increased farmer incomes while decreasing our environment's carbon footprint.

When the Alyansa Agrikultura brought up the topic with an undersecretary of the Department of Energy seven years ago, the official said it would be considered only if we could guarantee that the increased coconut revenues would go to farmers and not to agribusiness. This kind of reasoning is inconsistent with a unity approach.

Increasing our CME biofuel usage to 5 percent benefits everyone. From 17 million to 250 million tons a year at P55 a kilo, this means additional income of P12.8 billion. Indonesia uses a 30-percent biofuel mix, while Malaysia is targeting 20 percent. Why can we not go for 5 percent?

Intercropping

Two million out of our three million coconut hectares don't undergo intercropping, thus wasting the beneficial use of our lands. Aside from crops like cacao and banana, coffee

can also substantially increase coconut farmers' income.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, we import 80 percent to 85 percent of our coffee. This means we can easily trump imports while keeping the jobs here and increasing farmers' incomes.

The international non-government organization Rainforest Alliance showed that, with help from Nestle in Bukidnon and Sultan Kudarat, coffee yield increased from 300 kilos to 875 kilos a hectare.

Through the PCA's public-private coconut-coffee program, new plant mortality rate dropped from between 30 percent and 45 percent to 15 percent and 20 percent because of the coconut-coffee fertilization approach.

Coconut products

In a June 26 column, John Tria wrote: "Incentivizing the creation of related industries can help our coconut industry go beyond copra and mean jobs for millions more. Dedicating coconut, coconut oil, coconut water, oleochemicals, activated carbon, and other downstream products will broaden the potential of each harvested coconut."

In a recent interview with Dean Lao Jr., chair of the United Coconut Association of the Philippines and managing director of Chemrez Technologies, Inc., he said he was grateful for government support, but more could still be done.

A Lao-affiliated company is investing more than P10 billion this year in a coconut processing plant in Tanauan, Batangas. It will produce a full range of coconut-based export products for personal care, health, nutrition, and even household cleaning.

He suggested that our government must keep up with other countries: by expanding exports and creating more jobs. Maybe the government can help in promotions in establishments like Target in the United States, Coles in Australia, and Aldi in Germany.

We must not lose to other countries in this fast growing high-end, health-conscious global market. It will give us much higher incomes than our traditional low-value copra.

With these three initiatives, PCA can be a game-changer in improving our long neglected coconut industry and coconut farmers,

INQ



The author is Agriwatch chair, former secretary of presidential flagship programs and projects, and former undersecretary of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Trade and Industry. Contact is agriwatch_phil@yahoo.com.

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NIA okays implementation of ₱37.9-B irrigation projects

By JEL SANTOS

The Board of Directors of the **National Irrigation Administration (NIA)** has greenlighted the implementation of its three priority irrigation projects worth a total of ₱37.9 billion.

In a statement, the agency said the three main irrigations projects under Public-Private Partnership (PPP) are the Ilocos Norte-Ilocos Sur-Abra Irrigation Project II (INISAIP II); Tumauni River Multipurpose Project (TRMP); and Upper Banaoang Irrigation Project.

NIA said the three priority projects were identified after the PPP Center's assessment and prioritization of projects for PPP.

The ₱22.7-billion INISAIP II, per the agency, seeks to irrigate around 11,100 hectares of arable land with the Palsiguan River as the main source of irrigation water.

"The project is intended to irrigate sub-areas of the Province of Ilocos Norte such as Nueva Era, Cura, Madupayas, Pinili, Badoc-Sinait and Batac-Paoay through a network of link canals," the NIA noted.

Moreover, the NIA said the project's intended uses include fish farming, ecotourism, hydropower production, and other leisure activities that would aid in creating jobs for the neighborhood and its residents.

The ₱8.6-billion TRMP, meanwhile, is a project that would expand the reach of the current Tumauni Irrigation System (TIS) to 32 barangays in the municipalities of Tumauni, Cабagan, and the City of Ilagan, Isabela.

The agency said the TIS was originally designed to potentially irrigate an

area of 6,100 hectares however, only around 3,000 hectares are currently being irrigated. This is due to insufficient water-river runoff, especially during the summer season.

"TRMP includes the construction of the high dam, afterbay dam, and long siphon as well as the improvement and expansion of irrigation facilities. It will also provide other incidental benefits such as watershed management, ecotourism, and infrastructure support for renewable energy, particularly hydropower and solar farm component," the NIA noted.

The ₱6.6-billion Upper Banaoang Irrigation Project intends to create an impounding dam with the Malapaao River as its water source, the agency said.

As such, the project seeks to engage in fish culture and create hydroelectric power projects, and it has a potential service area of 5,000 hectares of agricultural land.

NIA said PPP aims to accelerate and expand irrigation development through private sector knowledge in order to support their objective of creating climate-smart, multipurpose irrigation systems and increasing irrigated areas to contribute to overall agricultural productivity and achieve food security.

Recently, a memorandum of agreement between NIA and the PPP Center has been forged to maximize NIA's capacity-building for the utilization of various PPP modalities for irrigation projects. Joint technical groups were then formed and evaluated the initial 12 potential irrigation projects for PPP implementation.

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Murang bigas sa Kadiwa walang subsidiya sa gobyerno - DA

Nilinaw ng Department of Agriculture (DA) na wala itong ibinigay na subsidiya sa grupo ng mga magsasaka sa Nueva Ecija na nagbebenta ng murang bigas sa Kadiwa stalls.

Ayon kay DA Asec. Kristine Evangelista, ang P25 kada kilo na bentahan ng bigas ay presyo mismo ng mga magsasaka na nagdadala ng bigas sa Kadiwa center dahil sa mas mataas na yield ng mga magsasaka at mas mababang production costs.

Una na ring sinabi ni Jimmy Vistar ng Unigrow na inisyatibo nila ang pag-aalok ng murang bigas para magkaroon ng opsyon ang mga mahihirap sa abot kayang bilihin.

Kaugnay nito, sinabi naman ni Asec. Evangelista na may inaasahan pang ani ang grupo ng mga magsasaka kaya posibleng tumagal pa ang bentahan ng P25 per kg bigas sa Kadiwa stalls.

Anyang, sa ngayon ay tumutulong ang DA para magkaroon din ng kasunduan o kontrata ang mga naturang magsasaka sa mga LGU hinggil sa pagsusuplay ng bigas. (Angie dela Cruz)

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Farmers, producers buck easing sugar import

'Ill-advised' proposal will affect thousands of farmworkers and only enrich importers, they warn

By **Carla Gomez**
@carlagomezINQ

BACOLOD CITY—Sugar industry stakeholders have called on President Marcos to deny Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno's plan to liberalize sugar importation, saying it will destabilize the livelihood of thousands of marginal sugarcane farmers.

Danilo Ramos, chair of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas, opposed the proposal of Diokno to further liberalize the domestic sugar industry, saying allowing for more imports will not lower or taper current high prices nor cushion the impact of taxes on sugary beverages.

"Liberalization will be the final nail in the coffin of the country's ailing sugar industry," he said on Tuesday, June 27.

The peasant group said the majority of sugar farmers and workers in the sugar industry stand to suffer the same plight of rice farmers affected by rice tariffication once full liberal-

ization of the sugar industry takes effect.

Most of the country's sugar mills and refineries are in Negros.

Leaders of the country's groups of sugar producers have also opposed Diokno's move. They were Manuel Lamata, president of the United Sugar Producers Federation of the Philippines (Unifed); Enrique Rojas, president of the National Federation of Sugarcane Planters; and Aurelio Valderrama Jr., president of the Confederation of Sugar Producers' Associations (Confed).

Effect on 5M Filipinos

Unifed had appealed to President Marcos to ignore calls of Diokno to allow industrial users to directly import their sugar needs as a concession to plans of increasing taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages.

Lamata said they are totally against the move of Diokno to liberalize importation in favor of a few industrial users.

"He (Diokno) wants to fur-

ther enrich these industrial users even knowing that this move will kill the more than 5 million Filipinos who are dependent on the sugar industry," he said.

"Diokno is bent only on raising taxes without thinking of its effects on the sugar farmers. The finance secretary is ill-advised. Diokno should also think of the consumers or the general public who will also be affected as these industrial users will surely pass on the additional taxes to their consumers," he added.

Unifed hoped the President would not endorse this plan that, it said, was never even done in consultation with the sugar industry.

Uphold regulations

"We know President Marcos' heart is with and for the farmers as he has told us so, and we are calling for his intervention on this matter. Diokno is clearly anti-farmer," Lamata said.

Rojas, for his part, said

allowing manufacturers of sweetened beverages to directly import sugar would wreak havoc on the long-established government regulations over the sugar industry, and it will further destabilize the livelihood of thousands of marginal sugarcane farmers.

He noted that in 2016 and 2017, when beverage manufacturers freely imported high-fructose corn sugar as sweetener for their products, it caused the drastic drop in sugar prices to almost below production level, and numerous farmers suffered losses.

"Worse, the use of cheaper imported sweetener input by these manufacturers simply fattened their pockets more, but it did not translate to lower prices of soft drink products for consumers," Rojas said.

Valderrama said Confed would also oppose the move to allow industrial users to directly import their sugar needs and the proposed additional tax on sugar-sweetened beverages. INQ

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FOR NCR WORKERS

P40 WAGE HIKE NOT ENOUGH TO BUY A KILO OF RICE—SOLON

By **Julie M. Aurelio**
@JMAurelioINQ

The P40 increase in daily minimum pay for workers in Metro Manila approved this week cannot even buy a kilo of rice, a lawmaker said Friday.

On June 27, the National Wages and Productivity Commission approved an order by the National Capital Region (NCR) wage board raising the daily minimum wage for private sector nonagriculture workers from P570 to P610, while the pay for workers in agriculture, service and retail establishments with 15 or less employees, and manufacturing establishments with less than 10 employees was adjusted from P533 to P573.

The wage order takes effect July 16, or 15 days from publication scheduled on June 30.

House Assistant Minority Leader Rep. Arlene Brosas said the new wage of P610 "is still far" from the living wage of P1,000 a day for ordinary families.

But according to the Department of Labor and Employment, the new wage rates in

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Metro Manila "remain above the regional poverty threshold of P452 per day for a family of five."

The Makabayan bloc lawmaker disagreed, saying in a statement that "While the P40 wage hike is a result of workers' lobbying efforts, it is disheartening to see that it can hardly buy a kilo of rice and is significantly below the living wage."

In May, the farm-gate price of palay averaged P19.06 per kilo, an increment of 10.6 percent from P17.24 in the same month last year, according to the latest data by the Philippine Statistics Authority.

'Policy perfume'

Cathy Estavillo, spokesperson for the National Food Authority's Bantay Bigas, which monitors rice prices, said the price of palay ranged from P19 to P21 per kilo in some parts of the country.

The commercial price of rice is usually double the farm-gate price. Retailers in Metro Manila sell locally produced rice from as low as P35 per kilo to as high as P60, depending on grain quality.

Kabataan Rep. Raoul Daniel Manuel, also of the Makabayan bloc, said "measly wage hikes ... are just policy perfume to appease the public if the same government instigates a tsunami of price hikes through various goods and services in the coming months."

Labor groups Nagkaisa co-



FOOD AID Residents of Sampaloc district in Manila receive 10 kilos of rice on Friday during the "Kalinga ng Maynila," a local government program providing medical, legal and other assistance to residents. The food aid comes as some lawmakers and workers' groups say the P40 wage increase in Metro Manila is not enough for their daily needs. —**MARIANNE BERMUDEZ**

alition and Partido Manggagawa called for a "dignified, living wage" increase of at least P150. Partido also said it was "the side of business that was considered in this decision [by the NCR wage board]."

The Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP) also agreed that the new wage increase was "totally disproportionate to productivity growth and inutile in bringing nutritious food to families' tables."

'Small yet significant'

"For more than three decades, labor productivity grew steadily and even exponentially, while minimum wages grew so little and so slow," said TUCP vice president Luis Corral.

But one labor organization,

the Federation of Free Workers, considered the P40 wage increase a "small yet significant step," even as the group pointed out that many private sector workers feel "disappointed" because the new increase "inadequately addresses the escalating cost of living in Metro Manila."

The Employers Confederation of the Philippines (Ecop) called the wage hike for Metro Manila workers "objective" and "balanced."

"While we feel that many micro industries will find it difficult to adjust, we will support it because this is the amount that we think is balanced," Ecop president Sergio Ortiz-Luis Jr. said in a phone interview, adding that the new wage order was more accept-

able than the legislated wage hike that had been proposed in the Senate.

Sen. Grace Poe noted the "rising prices of basic goods, commodities and petroleum products [which] have hit the poor the hardest, including families who earn minimum wage."

"We hope employers capable of going the extra mile will do so through additional allowances or nonmonetary benefits," she said.

Increase in provinces

Sen. Jinggoy Estrada also noted the increase in the prices of goods. "However, as a product of a tripartite body where employers, workers and the government are all represented, we are confident that this amount serves and protects the interests of all stakeholders," he said.

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel III and Agri Rep. Wilbert Lee called on other regional wage boards to implement similar wage hikes.

"How about our countrymen in the provinces who also need to eat three times a day? It's not right to just let them endure having meals just once a day forever," Pimentel said in a statement.

Lee said: "While the government recognizes and acts on the needs of our workers, it must also realize that it has to empower the business sector so that businessmen are in a position to provide jobs and higher wages." —**WITH REPORTS FROM KATHLEEN DE VILLA, JORDEENE B. LAGARE, ALDEN M. MONZON AND MARLON RAMOS INQ**