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# Marcos tells DOJ to probe smuggling of farm products

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA

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**F**OLLOWING a congressional probe that revealed the existence of a cartel allegedly responsible for the onion price spike last year, **President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.** has ordered an investigation into the smuggling of onion and other agricultural products.

"I have just given instructions to the DOJ [Department of Justice] and the NBI [National Bureau of Investigation] to initiate an investigation into the hoarding, smuggling [and] price fixing of agricultural commodities," Marcos said in a video statement on Tuesday.

He noted this was in line with a memorandum sent to him by Marikina Rep. Stella Quimbo containing the "substantial evidence" uncovered by the Committee on Agriculture and Food

on the activities of the onion cartel, which is supposedly operating through the Philippine VIEVA Group of Companies Inc. (PVGCI).

The memorandum included an "Onion Matrix" containing the list of vegetable importers and owners of cold storage facilities, who were purportedly part of the cartel.

"The findings they came through is sufficient ground for us to initiate an investigation into what amounts to economic sabotage," Marcos said.

He said he wants the people behind the cartel to be held accountable if they are found to be liable after the probe.

The House of Representative launched the investigation in response to the surge in onion prices starting in July and hitting 87 percent inflation by December 2022.

During the hearing, the Department of Agriculture Bureau of Plant Industry reported there was only a modest onion supply shortage of approximately 7.56 percent last year.

This prompted the Committee led by Quimbo to suspect the rise in onion prices was caused by "price-fixing through manipulation of stocks, leveraging control over cold storage facilities."

The Presidential Communications Office (PCO) said Quimbo reported to the President that PVGCI, and its majority stakeholder, Lilia/Lea Cruz, were implicated "in cartel operations, including coordination of stock withdrawals and price-fixing at various stages."

Quimbo urged the President to dismantle the cartel through the DOJ, NBI and the Philippine Competition Commission.



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## PBBM's first year in office

**L**ast June 30 marked the first year in office of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. after being voted by more than 31 million Filipinos.

There was no honeymoon phase for the President as he had to immediately roll up his sleeves and get down to work. He had to ensure strong recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and had to shield the economy from the impact of global issues that are greatly affecting the availability and prices of local commodities.

The President himself said that there's still a lot to be done to fulfill his campaign promises. For instance, his administration needs to fill in the decades of neglect in the agriculture sector.

Agriculture has always been a priority for the President. His assumption as agriculture secretary is a clear indication of his strong resolve to address the lingering problems in the sector and achieve food security.

In fact, one of his programs is the Kadiwa ng Pangulo, which seeks to address inflation by providing the public with affordable and high-quality products. Products such as rice at ₱25 per kilo, fish, poultry and livestock, fruits and vegetables, and other basic commodities are made accessible and affordable to Filipinos, especially poor families. As we can now see that having ₱25 per kilo of rice is possible, the goal of having ₱20 per kilo of rice is possible as well.

There are already more than 300 Kadiwa centers in the country, and the President's commitment is to establish more to help local producers earn a higher income by eliminating intermediaries and, at the same time, allow consumers to buy agricultural products and other goods at a lower price.

However, in order to sustain the operations of Kadiwa, there needs to be increased production of all agricultural commodities. That is why the government is implementing the concept of 'vertical integration' to address the multi-faceted issues hounding the agriculture sector, including hoarding and smuggling of agricultural products.

The President has also established meaningful reforms in his first year in office. In all his state visits and other official trips abroad, he would always meet with the Filipino community to honor them for their contributions to the nation and to ensure them that the government is working hard to protect their interests.

His meetings with foreign companies have also brought in investments for

the country. For instance, during his state visit to China, aside from the signing of 14 bilateral agreements, the President secured for the country investment pledges from Chinese businessmen amounting to US\$22.8 billion.

During the ASEAN-EU Commemorative Summit in Brussels, the President met with business leaders from different European companies and secured ₱9.8 billion worth of investment pledges, particularly in the sectors of fast moving consumer goods, shipbuilding, renewable energy, and green metals.

Meanwhile, his official visit to the US generated over US\$1.3 billion in investment pledges that have the potential to create around 6,700 new jobs for Filipinos.

All these investments would mean more job opportunities for Filipinos.

The President has been emphasizing the need to create more jobs and livelihood opportunities in order to bounce back from the pandemic. We are seeing the gains of his administration's move to fully reopen the economy as the country's unemployment rate continues to drop. In the latest Labor Force Survey of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), unemployment rate dropped to 4.5 percent in April 2023, from 5.7 percent in the same month last year. In January 2023, unemployment rate was posted at 4.8 percent.

Meanwhile, the Marcos administration is also pushing for the implementation of critical infrastructure projects to ensure interconnectivity of major roads and expressways, and build needed roads and bridges in strategic places around the country.

The President has approved 194 high-impact priority projects as part of the government's Build Better More program. These are new projects as well as those that have been carried over from the previous administration.

Definitely, more needs to be done in order to achieve the goal of a "matatag, maginhawa, at panatag na buhay" for all Filipinos. The Marcos administration has laid out the plan for this, but we all need to work with the President, to work together — the whole of government and society — to achieve a prosperous, inclusive and resilient society.



**NIGHT OWL**

ANNA MAE YU LAMENTILLO





# BBM to DOJ, NBI: Probe smuggling of agri crops

By ALEXIS ROMERO

President Marcos has directed concerned agencies to investigate the smuggling, hoarding and price fixing of onion and other agricultural products, acts that he described as tantamount to economic sabotage.

"I have given instructions to the DOJ and the NBI to initiate an investigation into the hoarding, smuggling, price fixing of agricultural commodities," Marcos said, referring to the Department of Justice and the National Bureau of Investigation, respectively.

Marcos, who also serves as agriculture secretary, said the order stemmed from the House hearings conducted by Marikina Rep. Stella Quimbo.

"The findings that they came up with...are sufficient for us to initiate an investigation into what amounts to economic sabotage," he said in a video message released by Malacañang yesterday. "And that is why we are going to be very, very strict about finding these people and making sure that they are

brought to justice," he added.

In a statement, the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) said Quimbo sent a memorandum to Marcos stating that "substantial evidence" has been uncovered pointing to the existence of an onion cartel.

Quimbo, who led the hearings of the House agriculture and food committee, tackled the causes of the surge in onion prices last year.

She said the cartel, operating primarily through the Philippine VIEVA Group of Companies Inc. (PVGCI), is engaged in various activities such as farming, importation, local trading, warehousing and logistics.

During the hearings, it was learned that while the sharp rise in onion prices that started in July last year was linked to supply shortage, data from the agriculture department showed only a modest shortage of about 7.56 percent.

This means the significant inflation rates reaching 87 percent in December cannot be justified.

Citing a report by Quimbo, the PCO said responses from cold storage facility owners during the hearings

indicated a sufficient supply of onions during the time of the price hikes.

"This led to the examination of an alternative explanation: cartel activity. The cartel allegedly engaged in price-fixing through manipulation of stocks, leveraging control over cold storage facilities," the PCO said.

Lilis "Leah" Cruz, who was referred to as the "Sibuyas (onion) Queen," has denied that she was into onion importation.

Cruz said she was just involved in trucking and helping farmers.

"However, Quimbo said evidence presented in the hearings confirmed Cruz's heavy involvement in the onion industry," the PCO said.

Quimbo alleged that Cruz is the majority stockholder of PVGCI, which has been linked to cartel operations, including coordination of stock withdrawals and price-fixing.

The lawmaker presented an "onion matrix," showing the firms that are trading and importing onions and other vegetables are allegedly acting in connivance with the owners of cold storage facilities.

Quimbo urged the NBI, the Philip-

pine Competition Commission and the enforcement unit of the agriculture department to expose the onion cartel.

## Task force

Following Marcos' order, the DOJ announced that it would create an inter-agency task force that would investigate and prosecute agricultural smugglers tagged for the excessive prices of onions.

The DOJ said it would create the anti-agricultural smuggling task force to be composed of the Bureau of Customs, the Department of Agriculture and other concerned government agencies.

"Together with these agencies, the department will create an Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Task Force along with a special team of prosecutors who will focus on protecting the entire agricultural sector, not only the onion industry," the DOJ said in a statement.

It said chief state prosecutor Richard Anthony Fadullon and NBI director Medardo de Lemos will head the task force, while NBI investigators will collect evidence, conduct inter-

views and analyze data to "uncover the intricate web of onion smuggling networks."

"The shared objective is clear: to dismantle these smuggling networks and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice," the DOJ said.

It said it has started building a case against some persons and organizations tagged in onion smuggling.

"Charges will be filed as soon as the cases are airtight."

Primary targets of the task force are violators of the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016 and other relevant laws that prohibit illegal importation, profiteering, hoarding and smuggling, which the DOJ said the state recognizes as "acts of economic sabotage."

"The DOJ is one with the President in his commitment to eradicate onion smuggling in the Philippines. The department is not only focused on investigation and prosecution, but also in enhancing the regulatory framework and strengthening border controls to prevent future incidents," the agency said.

— With Neil Jayson Servallos



# DOJ, NBI to investigate agriculture smuggling

By Nestor Corrales  
and Dona Z. Pazzibugan  
@Team\_Inquirer

President Marcos ordered on Tuesday an investigation of the smuggling of onion and other agricultural products into the country after a House hearing led by Marikina Rep. Stella Quimbo found evidence pointing to the existence of an onion cartel.

"I have just given instructions to the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the National Bureau of Investigation to initiate an investigation into the hoarding, smuggling [and] price fixing of agricultural commodities," Mr. Marcos said in a video statement.

In reaction, the DOJ said it would coordinate with the Bureau of Customs and the Department of Agriculture (DA) to create a task force against agricultural smuggling, "along with a special team of prosecutors primarily focused on protecting the entire agricultural sector, not only the onion industry."

It added that members of the task force would include those from the Office of the Prosecutor General headed by Chief State Prosecutor Richard Fadullon, and the NBI headed



**PRICEY ONIONS** Customers buy white onions at a discounted price of P150 per kilo at the Kadiwa Store at the Department of Agriculture in Quezon City. —NIÑO JESUS ORBETA

by Director Medardo de Lemos.

"The shared objective is clear: To dismantle these smuggling networks and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice," the DOJ said.

Quoting Quimbo's memorandum to the President, Presidential Communications Secretary Cheloy Velicaria Garafil said that "substantial evidence [had] been uncovered pointing to the existence of an onion cartel ..."

Quimbo, chair of the House committee on agriculture and food, said the cartel, operating primarily through the Philippine VIEVA Group of Companies Inc. (PVGCI), was engaged in various

activities, including farming, importation, local trading, warehousing and logistics.

Mr. Marcos said the findings "[were] sufficient grounds to initiate an investigation into what amounts to economic sabotage."

## Cartel operations

"And that is why we are going to be very, very strict about finding these people and making sure that they are brought to justice," he added.

Garafil said the House hearings had highlighted the sharp increase in onion prices starting in July 2022, which was attributed to a perceived supply shortage.

But data from the DA's Bureau of Plant Industry revealed only a modest shortage of approximately 7.56 percent in 2022, which could not justify the significant inflation rates reaching 87 percent in December of that year.

Quimbo told the President that responses from cold storage facility owners during the hearings also indicated an ample supply of onions during the period of price surges, which led to the examination of an alternative explanation—cartel activity.

During the hearings, Lilia or Lea Cruz, known as the "sibuyas queen," denied involvement in onion importation, saying her participation was limited to trucking and assisting onion farmers.

But Quimbo said evidence showed during the hearings showed Cruz's "heavy involvement in the onion industry."

According to Quimbo, Cruz is the majority stockholder of PVGCI, which was established in 2012.

Garafil said that PVGCI, along with other major players in the onion industry, was implicated in cartel operations, including coordination of stock withdrawals and price-fixing at various stages. **INQ**





## SIBUYAS SMUGGLING TALUPAN - PBBM

Ipinag-utos ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. ang pagsisiyasat sa pagpupuslit ng sibuyas at iba pang produktong pang-agrikultura, kung saan tinatawag ang naturang pagkilos katumbas ng pagsasabotahe ng ekonomiya.

"Nagbigay lang ako ng mga tagubilin sa DOJ at NBI na simulan ang imbestigasyon sa hoarding, smuggling (at) price fixing ng mga agricultural commodities. And this is stemming from the hearing that we've held in the House, specifically by Congresswoman Stella Quimbo and the findings that they came with," pahayag ni Pangulong Marcos.

Sa isang Memorandum sa Pangulo ni Marikina Rep. Stella Quimbo, na namuno sa Committee on Agriculture and Food hearings sa House of Representatives, sinabi niya na natuklasan ang malaking ebidensya na nagtuturo sa pagkakaroon ng kartel ng sibuyas habang binibigyang-liwanag niya ang mga dahilan sa likod ng pagtaas ng presyo ng sibuyas noong 2022.

Sinabi niya na ang kartel, na pangunahing nagpapatakbo sa pamamagitan ng Philippine VIEVA Group of Companies Inc. (PVGCI), ay nakikibahagi sa iba't ibang aktibidad kabilang ang pagsasaka, pag-aangkat, lokal na kalakalan, warehousing, at logistics.

Binigyang-diin ni Pangulong Marcos ang kahalagahan ng mga natuklasan na ito bilang sapat na mga batayan upang simulan ang isang pagsisiyasat, na binanggit ang pangangailangan na tugunan kung ano ang halaga ng economic sabotage.

"And that is why we are going to be very, very strict about finding these people and making sure

that they are brought to justice," diin ni Pangulong Marcos.

Binigyang-diin ng mga pagdinig ang matalim na pagtaas ng mga presyo ng sibuyas simula noong Hulyo 2022, na naiugnay sa isang nakikitang kakulangan ng suplay. Gayunpaman, ang datos mula sa Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Plant Industry ay nagsiwalat lamang ng isang katamtamang kakulangan na humigit-kumulang 7.56 porsyento noong 2022, na hindi maaaring bigyang-katwiran ang makabuluhang inflation rate na umabot sa 8.7 porsyento noong Disyembre ng taong iyon.

Iniulat ni Quimbo na ang mga tugon mula sa mga may-ari ng cold storage facility sa panahon ng mga pagdinig ay nagpapahiwatig din ng sapat na supply ng mga sibuyas sa panahon ng pagtaas ng presyo. Ito ay humantong sa pagsusuri ng isang alternatibong paliwanag: aktibidad ng kartel. Ang kartel ay umano'y nakikibahagi sa pag-aayos ng presyo sa pamamagitan ng pagmamaniipula ng mga stock, na ginagamit ang kontrol sa mga pasilidad ng cold storage.

Sa mga pagdinig, itinanggi ni Lilia/Lea Cruz, na kilala bilang 'Reyna ng Sibuyas', na may kinalaman siya sa pag-aangkat ng sibuyas, at sinabing ang kanyang pakikilahok ay limitado sa pag-truck at pagtulong sa mga magsasaka ng sibuyas.

Gayunpaman, sinabi ni Quimbo na ang ebidensya na ipinakita sa mga pagdinig ay nagkumpirma ng matinding pagkakasangkot ni Cruz sa industriya ng sibuyas. Si Cruz, ani Quimbo, ang mayoryang stockholder ng Philippine VIEVA Group of Companies, Inc. (PVGCI), na itinatag noong 2012.





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# ONION PROBE

**PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.** yesterday ordered an investigation into the smuggling of onion and other agricultural products, calling such acts as being tantamount to economic sabotage.

In a statement, President Marcos said: "I have just given instructions to the DOJ and the NBI to initiate an investigation into the hoarding, smuggling (and) price fixing of agricultural commodities. And this is stemming from the hearing that we've conducted in the House, specifically by Congresswoman Stella Quimbo and the findings that they came up with."

In a Memorandum to the President by Marikina Rep. Stella Quimbo, who led the Committee on Agriculture and Food hearings at the House of Representatives, she stated that substantial evidence has been uncovered pointing to the existence of an onion cartel as she shed light on the causes behind the surge in onion prices in 2022.

She said the cartel, operating primarily through the Philippine VIEVA Group of Companies Inc. (PVGCI), has engaged in various activities including farming, importation, local trading, warehousing, and logistics.

President Marcos emphasized the significance of these findings as sufficient grounds to initiate an investigation, citing the need to address what amounts to economic sabotage.

"And that is why we are going to be very, very strict about finding these people and making sure that they are brought to justice," the President stated.

The hearings highlighted the sharp increase in onion prices starting in July 2022, attributed to a perceived shortage of supply. However, data from the Department of Agriculture Bureau of Plant Industry revealed only a modest shortage of approximately 7.56 percent in 2022, which could not justify the significant inflation rates reaching 87 percent in December of that year.

Quimbo reported that responses from cold storage facility owners during the hearings also indicated an ample supply of onions during the period of price surges.

This led to the examination of an alternative explanation: cartel activity. The cartel allegedly engaged in price-fixing through manipulation of stocks, leveraging control over cold storage

facilities.

During the hearings, Lilia/Lea Cruz, known as the "Sibuyas Queen," denied involvement in onion importation, stating her participation was limited to trucking and assisting onion farmers.

However, Quimbo said evidence presented in the hearings confirmed Cruz' heavy involvement in the onion industry. Cruz, Quimbo said, is the majority stockholder of the Philippine VIEVA Group of Companies, Inc. (PVGCI), established in 2012. PVGCI, along with other major players in the onion industry, is implicated in cartel operations, including coordination of stock withdrawals and price-fixing at various stages.

Quimbo also presented an "Onion Matrix" which involves several companies engaged in the trading and importation of onions and other vegetables acting in connivance with owners of cold storage facilities.

One of the recommended actions of Quimbo to address the issue effectively is the dismantling of the cartel with the help of the DOJ, the NBI and the Philippine Competition Commission.

# REMATE

## ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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### PBBM: Hoarding, smuggling, price fixing ng agri products busisiin

IPINAG-UTOS ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. ang masusing imbestigasyon ukol sa smuggling ng sibuyas at iba pang agricultural products.

Tinawag ito ng Pangulo bilang "an act as being tantamount to economic sabotage."

Sa isang kalatas, sinabi ng Pangulo na "I have just given instructions to the DOJ and the NBI to initiate an investigation into the hoarding, smuggling (and) price fixing of agricultural

commodities. And this is stemming from the hearing that we've conducted in the House, specifically by Congresswoman Stella Quimbo and the findings that they came up with."

Sa isang memorandum na isinumite sa Pangulo ni Marikina Rep. Stella Quimbo, ng House committee on agriculture and food, sinabito na "substantial evidence has been uncovered pointing to the existence of an onion cartel as she shed light on the causes behind

the surge in onion prices in 2022."

Binigyang-diin ng Pangulo ang kahalagahan ng mga natuklasan bilang "sufficient grounds" para simulan ang imbestigasyon at tinukoy ang pangangailangan na tugunan ang laki ng "economic sabotage."

Iniulat ni Quimbo na ang pagtugon sa cold storage facility owners sa nasabing pagdinig ay nagpapa-hiwatig din ng sapat na suplay ng sibuyas sa panahon ng price surges.

Sa nasabing pagdinig, itinanggi ni Lilia/Lea Cruz, kilala bilang "Sibuyas Queen," ang pagkakasangkot sa onion importation at sinabing ang kanyang naging partisipasyon ay limitado lang sa "trucking at assisting onion farmers."

Gayunman, sinabi ni Quimbo na ang ebidensya na iprinisinta sa pagdinig ay nagkumpirma sa "involvement" ni Cruz sa onion industry.

Ayon kay Quimbo, si Cruz ay "majority stockholder" ng Philippine VIE-VA Group of Companies, Inc., na itinatag noong 2012. KRIS JOSE





# Anomalya sa sibuyas, agri products pinatatalupan ni PBBM

Ipinag-utos ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. ang pagsisiyasat sa pagpupulit ng sibuyas at iba pang produktong pang-agrikultura, na ayon sa

kanya ay katumbas ng economic sabotage.

Sa isang pahayag, sinabi ni Marcos na inilutos na niya sa Department of Justice at National Bureau of Inves-

tigation na simulan ang imbestigasyon sa hoarding, smuggling at price fixing ng mga agricultural commodities.

"Nagbigay lang ako ng mga tagubilin sa DOJ at NBI na simulan ang imbestigasyon sa hoarding, smuggling (at) price fixing ng mga agricultural commodities. And this is

## NI MALOU ESCUDERO

stemming from the hearing that we've held in the House, specifically by Congresswoman Stella Quimbo and the findings that they came with," pahayag ng Pangulo.

Sa isang Memorandum sa Pangulo ni Marikina Rep. Quimbo,

na namuno sa House Committee on Agriculture and Food hearings sa House, sinabi niya na natuklasan ang malaking ebidensya na nagtuturo sa pagkakaroon ng kartel ng sibuyas habang sinisiyasat ang mga dahilan sa likod ng pagtaas ng presyo ng sibuyas noong 2022.

Sinabi niya na ang kartel, na tumatakbo sa pamamagitan ng Philippine VIEVA Group of Companies Inc. (PVGCI), ay nakikibahagi sa iba't ibang aktibidad kabilang ang pagsasaka, pag-aangkat, lokal na kalakalan, bodega, at logistik.

Binigyang-diin ni Marcos ang kahalagahan ng mga natuklasan na ito bilang sapat na mga batayan upang simulan ang isang pagsisiyasat.

"And that is why we are going to be very, very strict about finding these people and making sure that they are brought to justice," ani Marcos.

Nakita sa pagdinig ang biglang pagtaas sa presyo ng sibuyas simula noong Hulyo 2022, ay iniuugnay sa kakulangan ng suplay.

Gayunpaman, ang data mula sa Department of Agriculture at Bureau of Plant Industry ay nagsisilwat lamang ng isang katamtamang kakulangan na humigit-kumulang 7.56 porsiyento noong 2022, na hindi maaaring bigyang-katwiran ang inflation rate na umabot sa 87 porsiyento noong Disyembre ng taong iyon.

Iniulat ni Quimbo na ang tugon ng mga mayari ng cold storage facility na nagpapahiwatig na

sapat ang supply ng mga sibuyas sa panahon ng pagtaas ng presyo kaya sinilip ang posibleng aktibidad ng kartel.

Ang kartel umano ay nakikibahagi sa price fixing sa pamamagitan ng pagmamanipla ng mga stock, at ginagamit ang kontrol sa mga pasilidad ng cold storage.

Sa mga pagdinig, itinanggi ni Lilia/Lea Cruz, na kilala bilang "Reyna ng Sibuyas," na may kinalamang siya sa pag-aangkat ng sibuyas, at sinabing ang kanyang partisipasyon ay limitado sa trak at pagtulong sa mga magsasaka ng sibuyas.

Si Cruz, ayon kay Quimbo, ang majority stockholder ng PVGCI, na itinatag noong 2012. Ang PVGCI, kasama ang iba pang pangunahing manlalaro sa industriya ng sibuyas, ay idinadawit sa mga operasyon ng kartel, kabilang ang koordinasyon ng stock withdrawals at price-fixing.

Nagprisinta rin si Quimbo ng isang "Onion Matrix" na kinasasangkutan ng ilang kumpanyang nakikibahagi sa pangangalakal at pag-aangkat ng mga sibuyas at iba pang gulay na kumikilos sa pakikipagsabwatan sa mga mayari ng mga cold storage facility.



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## DA to farmers: Sustain planting of crops despite El Niño threat

**T**HE Department of Agriculture (DA) renewed its call to farmers on Tuesday to sustain their planting of crops despite a looming El Niño threat.

The DA statement came on the heels of reports that some farmers have ceased to plant amid reports of a severe drought that might only destroy crops, notably rice.

DA Director U-Nichols Manalo for Field Operations said farmers might have no reason to stop planting since "higher or normal rainfall is still expected this month, which is suitable for planting."

The DA, he added, will also conduct mapping to identify areas that run the risk of being highly affected by a possible draught and not to increase production.

The DA is also asking the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) for funds to conduct cloud seeding on three sites in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

The agency will also distribute plant resistant seeds such as mangoes, and peanuts. Fertilizers, and other interventions are also included.

On July 3, the DA said that it has started implementing measures to

mitigate the effects of the looming El Niño phenomenon or dry spell on farm production.

The DA's action plan as of May 2023 includes preparatory activities from prepositioning of seed reserves, planting materials, crop diversification and water management.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) said the El Niño phenomenon is characterized by unusually warmer than average sea surface temperatures (SSTs) in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific.

Below normal rains are expected,

which can cause dry spells and droughts in several areas of the country.

Manalo said that, "right now the rainfall is way below normal, [but] we are saying that this is a meteorological forecast, [and] we at the DA are looking at the actual ground situation or assessment on the condition there below."

The DA identified at least 19 areas in Cavite, Laguna, Batangas and Rizal that are vulnerable to drought, 10 of which are tagged very high to high risk, while nine others are under moderate risk. **Raadee S. Sausa**





## editorial

# Irrigation plays a critical role in PHL's food security

**T**HE national government has spent billions of pesos to irrigate more farmlands in its bid to beef up the country's rice supply. The state raised its expenditures for irrigation facilities following the 2008 rice crisis, when export bans limited the global supply of the staple. The government realized then that it could not always rely on the international market to plug the perennial shortfall in domestic rice output.

From P4.4 billion in 2005, the budget allocated for irrigation jumped to nearly P12.8 billion, according to data from the **Department of Agriculture and the National Irrigation Administration (NIA)**. Starting in 2009, the government set aside more funds for irrigation to raise rice production and reduce the country's food imports. Amounts earmarked for irrigation have been consistently above P10 billion following the 2008 crisis.

Despite the billions of pesos poured into irrigation, it took two administrations to significantly expand the irrigated land area in the Philippines. Data from the NIA and the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed the country's irrigated land area breached the 2-million-hectare mark in 2021, from the 1.73 million hectares recorded in 2015. As of the end of the term of former President Duterte, the irrigated land area in the Philippines reached 2.042 million hectares.

According to NIA, the Duterte administration was able to expand the country's irrigated land area by 311,265 hectares. **(See, "NIA: Projects expanded PHL's irrigated areas," in the BUSINESSMIRROR, June 2, 2022)** From 2016 to 2021, NIA claimed that irrigation development averaged at 51,877.5 hectares, faster than the 31,865.16 hectares recorded during the Aquino administration, covering the years 2010 to 2015, based on historical data. The NIA said the expansion from 2016 to 2021 was the highest in its history.

However, there are still more than 1 million hectares of irrigable land that do not have access to irrigation. To irrigate the 3.128 million hectares of total irrigable area nationwide, the Marcos administration's irrigation development must expand by around 200,000 hectares annually, from now until 2028. It may be a tall order, based on the experience of the Duterte administration, but it has to be done if the government is really serious about ensuring the country's food security.

For one, the country's rice output in 2020 came from 1.36 million hectares of farms that continue to rely on rainfall for irrigation. These rainfed farms produced 4.52 million metric tons of palay equivalent to more than 3 million tons of milled rice. The yield of farms that relied on rainfall averaged 3.3 metric ton, lower than the national average of 4 MT.

If these rice farms had access to irrigation, our agricultural production would significantly improve. Enabling farmers to have access to postharvest facilities will allow them to earn more and encourage them to stay in agriculture and not turn to construction work to feed their families. More importantly, higher domestic output would mean less reliance on imports and fewer dollar reserves flowing out of the government's coffers.



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## Pagasa declares onset of El Niño

By ROMINA CABRERA  
and DANESSA RIVERA

A severe dry spell looms in the country with the onset of the El Niño phenomenon, the impact of which would be felt toward the end of the year, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said in an advisory yesterday.

"Recent PAGASA climate monitoring and analyses indicate that the unusual warming of sea surface temperatures along the equatorial Pacific that was established in March 2023 has further developed into a weak El Niño, which show signs of strengthening in the coming months," PAGASA said.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) yesterday said the El Niño weather pattern emerged in the tropical Pacific for the

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## Pagasa From Page 1

first time in seven years.

El Niño is linked to extreme weather conditions from tropical cyclones to heavy rainfall to severe droughts.

State weather forecasters said El Niño, characterized by the rise of sea surface temperatures in the central equatorial Pacific, will be moderate to strong and will persist until the first quarter of 2024.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said it has set in place measures to cushion the impact of the dry spell on water supply and on food security.

Camarines Norte and Southern Leyte are expected to experience drought conditions, or below normal rainfall conditions for three to five months, by December.

In Luzon, 26 areas may experience drought conditions by January 2024, while a total of 17 provinces may experience dry spell, or below normal rainfall conditions for two to three consecutive months.

State weather forecasters said the number of affected provinces may still increase as projections are based on current models.

With El Niño, fewer tropical cyclones are expected to enter the Philippine area of responsibility (PAR) this year.

From a yearly average of 19-20 cyclones, only around 10-14 cyclones are expected to enter PAR next year. However, cyclones with stronger character may be experienced.

Still, normal to above normal rainfall conditions are expected to continue from this month to September in most parts of the country due to the prevailing northwest monsoon.

Esperanza Cuyanan, PAGASA officer-in-charge, warned that the adverse impact of El Niño may be fully felt by the next dry season in the country,

especially in terms of water shortages.

Water levels in dams in the country may go down starting November until January 2024, according to forecast. She advised the public to conserve water and electricity while it is still early.

"The worst that we can experience is dry season next year when water saved during this rainy season runs out. We'll have shortage next year during the dry season," Cuyanan said in Filipino.

PAGASA clarified that its El Niño advisory is based on three-month average of sea surface temperature anomalies of above 0.5 degree Celsius.

### Angat level

Water level of Angat Dam, meanwhile, has further dropped to near critical level but water concessionaires assured the public of continued water service.

Latest PAGASA monitoring showed Angat's water level at 181.53 meters as of 8 a.m. yesterday, 0.36 meters lower than 181.93 meters a day earlier and only 1.57 meters from the critical level of 180 meters.

Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) division manager Patrick Dizon said they would meet with PAGASA, the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) and the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) to discuss the problem.

"Under the Angat Dam protocol, when the reservoir elevation reaches 180 meters, the water allocation of irrigation will be reduced to prioritize domestic water supply," he said.

"We are going to see PAGASA's projection of rainfall in watershed areas, if there will be intense rain to help raise the elevation of the reservoir," Dizon said.

The MWSS has yet to determine the amount of water allocation it will request from the NWRB.

"For now, we can't say what level



# THE PHILIPPINE STAR

TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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of raw water allocation we will ask because we need to manage the current water levels in the Angat reservoir," Dizon said.

West zone concessionaire Maynilad Water Services Inc. said it has a program in place to mitigate the possible impact of El Niño.

"This involves the production of additional supply through alternative raw water sources, and through water loss recovery from our pipe replacement and leak repair activities," Maynilad corporate communications head Jennifer Rufo said.

"As we work closely with MWSS to augment available supplies, we call on all water consumers to help by using water responsibility," Rufo said.

Currently, Maynilad is still assessing the actual impact of the reduction of Angat water allocation to 50 cubic meters per second (CMS) on its service levels this month.

"Having said that, even if a 50 CMS allocation will have an impact on service levels this July, the water situation would be better now compared to how it was last April 1 to 15 when the allocation was also at 50 CMS and there were service interruptions," Rufo said.

"This is because we now have rains over the watersheds, and our various supply augmentation projects (i.e., reactivation of deep wells, recovery of water losses and production of potable reused water) have already been generating additional supply," the Maynilad official said.

East zone concessionaire Manila Water Company Inc. said it has been preparing its supply augmentation measures long before the official declaration of El Niño's onset.

Part of the measures is drawing 110 million liters per day (MLD) from Laguna Lake through its Cardona Water Treatment Plant, Manila Water corporate communication affairs group director Jeric Sevilla said.

Manila Water is also tapping deep wells, which are ready to supply up to a maximum of 115 MLD.

"We have also completed Phase 1 of our Calawis Project in Antipolo which will give around 20 MLD and scalable up to 80 MLD while Phase 2 of our East Bay Water Supply Project which can provide 50 MLD drawing water from the eastern flank of Laguna Lake. 15 MLD from our Marikina Portable Treatment Plant is also available," Sevilla said.

## Food supply

At a press briefing, DA director for Field Operations Service U-Nichols Manalo said they have prepared a whole-of-government approach in dealing with El Niño in compliance with President Marcos' directive.

"The President made the instruction of a whole of government approach, science based, we're preparing for it. We should not respond only when the problem is already here in December and January or when there is already drought in 26 provinces," Manalo said at a briefing.

The DA is the lead agency in the food security group under the national El Niño team, composed of different government agencies.

Manalo said that they are also coordinating with local government units, irrigation associations and rice farmers in preparation for the El Niño.

He noted that some areas in Davao del Sur experiencing below average rainfall have started planting their crops earlier to adjust to changing weather conditions.

The DA official said the NIA has also started repairs and maintenance of its irrigation systems.

The DA is also part of the water and health security groups, through its attached agencies and bureaus like NIA and the Bureau of Animal Industry.

- With Reuters





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## BFAR: Fisheries sector under threat

THE country's fisheries sector is under constant threat due to the illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUUF) that the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) is aware of.

BFAR Chief of the Conservation and Environmental Protection Rommel Adolf Diciano said that IUUF undermines the delicate balance of marine ecosystems, depletes fish stocks and jeopardizes the future of coastal communities.

"IUUF poses a significant threat to the sustainability of our marine resources, the livelihood of our fisherfolk and the overall health of our coastal communities," he said during a forum hosted by Oceana Philippines on Tuesday.

He emphasized that fisheries and aquatic resources are invaluable assets that provide food security, support livelihood and contribute to the overall well-being of the country.

BFAR presented proactive measures

to combat IUUF through a multifaceted approach including the IUU Fishing Index and Threat Assessment Tool and Integrated Marine Environmental Monitoring System.

Diciano explained that both of the projects quantify, assess and address IUUF in Philippine waters to enhance fisheries management and combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

According to the World Bank, the fisheries sector contributes 1.3 percent to Philippine gross domestic product and provides approximately 1.6 million jobs or around 4 percent of the labor force, including for low-income families engaged in subsistence fishing.

It also noted that the fish stocks declined by an average of 20 percent over the past decade due to over-exploitation, destructive fishing methods, habitat degradation and negative impacts from land-based activities.

Meanwhile, a report from the United States Agency for International Develop-

ment and BFAR showed that the country loses P62 billion annually to IUUF.

Diciano also said the bureau has intensified its enforcement efforts to deter IUUF activities and prioritized capacity building initiatives for fisherfolk and coastal communities.

"We have bolstered our monitoring control, and surveillance systems, employing state-of-the-art technology to track and identify vessels engaged in illegal fishing practices," he said.

BFAR also recognized the importance of information and transparency in addressing IUUF, adding this could preserve the future of marine resources and coastal communities.

"Moving forward, let us continue to embrace innovations, foster collaboration and champion our responsible use of our oceans. Transparency, access to information and technological advancements will remain integral to our efforts," Diciano said.

**JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL**





## Pinoy coconut exporters earn \$6.9M in Thai trade fair

BY ANDREA E. SAN JUAN

**T**HE participation of Philippine coconut exporters in THAIFEX-Anuga Asia 2023 generated \$6.90 million in initial export sales during the five-day trade exhibition held from May 23 to 27, 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Trade Promotion Group (TPG) Officer-in-Charge Assistant Secretary Glenn G. Peñaranda said the country's participation in THAIFEX-Anuga Asia served as a "gateway to expanding horizons and enhancing the nation's standing as a dependable and premium source of coconut products."

Through the support of the International Trade Centre (ITC), under its ARISE Plus Philippines Project, Peñaranda said Philippine coconut exporters were able to showcase its "high-value" coconut products.

Meanwhile, he noted that the Department of Trade and Industry-Exporting Marketing Bureau (DTI-EMB) and ITC would also work together for the Anuga Germany participation in October 2023.

"Aside from support to trade fair participation, the assistance also includes capacity building initiatives which aim to enable our exporters to better seize market access opportunities and facilitate business linkages with international markets, particularly in the EU," Peñaranda noted.

The DTI-EMB and the ITC, in coordination with Philippine Trade and Investment Center (PTIC)-Bangkok and Philippine Food Processors and Exporters Organization Inc. (PHIL-FOODEX) organized the participation under the Coconut Philippines Pavilion.

The initiative is part of the implementation of the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan

(CFIDP) and the ARISE Plus Philippines project.

Nine coconut exporters and two industry associations showcased their high-value coconut products.

The export marketing arm of DTI said the participating companies were AG Pacific Nutraceuticals Corporation, Ahya Coco Organic Food Manufacturing Corp., Amazing Foods Corp., Amparitas Food Products Manufacturing, Cocoplus Aquarian Development Corporation, Dignity Products & Services Inc., Pasciolco Agri Ventures, Wellness Care International Corporation, Vegetari Vegetarian Products.

Representatives from industry associations, namely, Virgin Coconut Oil Producers and Traders Association of the Philippines Inc. and United Coconut Association of the Philippines Inc. were also present in the fair, DTI-EMB noted.

According to the trade department's export marketing arm, the THAIFEX participation has been considered a "substantial" platform for establishing linkages and increasing the understanding of exhibitors on the demands, and distribution routes that will impact the coconut industry.

Moreover, it said the international trade show has provided a "brand-new" perspective on the future of Asia's food and beverage trends that businesses should look ahead.

The exhibitors emphasized that the participation was not just about showcasing the products and services but also about "unlocking a world of international insights and opportunities as it provided quality buyers and potential leads for them. Aside from participating in the expo, DTI said the delegation conducted market scanning and store visits in Talaad Thai, the largest wholesale market for the trade of agricultural goods in the Asean region and the Big C Supercenter, which is one of the biggest supermarket chains in Thailand."

THAIFEX-Anuga Asia 2023 is one of the most significant food and beverage trade events in Asia.

In 2022, Thailand ranked 8th largest trading partner of the Philippines, 6th export market, and 7th import supplier.





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## PAGASA declares onset of El Niño

By Ashley Erika O. Jose *Reporter*

THE PHILIPPINE state weather bureau on Tuesday declared the onset of El Niño which is expected to bring dry spells, droughts and stronger typhoons.

This as the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) also on Tuesday said the El Niño weather pattern emerged in the tropical Pacific for the first time in seven years.

"El Niño is already in the central equatorial Pacific. Our ocean is really getting warmer now. Although we are not going to feel the impact of this immediately, we are giving this advance information. This means that it is already here," Esperanza O. Cayanan, officer-in-charge of Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), said at a briefing on Tuesday.

El Niño is the warming of water surface temperatures in the eastern and central Pacific

ic Ocean, which is linked to extreme weather conditions such as typhoons and droughts.

Since the weather pattern is already underway, PAGASA raised the El Niño-Southern Oscillation status to El Niño advisory from El Niño alert.

"What we are experiencing right now is a weak El Niño but there are models showing a high probability of more than 56% chance that El Niño will be moderate to strong during the last quarter of this year," Ana Liz S. Solis, chief of PAGASA's climate monitoring and prediction section, said.

Ms. Solis said El Niño will likely persist until the first quarter of 2024 and shows signs of strengthening in the coming months.

Although fewer typhoons are expected during El Niño, Ms. Cayanan said it is possible that stronger typhoons would develop.

ING Bank N.V. Manila Senior Economist Nicholas Antonio T. Mapa said the El Niño will likely negatively impact economic growth, as agriculture production is expected to weaken.

*El Niño, SI/5*





## El Niño, from SI/1

"This is yet another reason why we believe the first quarter was the peak for the year and the likelihood that we'll be seeing an acceleration in growth is much lower," Mr. Mapa said in a Viber message.

In the first quarter, the Philippine economy grew by 6.4%, slower than 8% a year ago. Agricultural production expanded by 2.1% in the first three months, a reversal from the 0.3% decline in the first quarter last year.

The government is targeting 6-7% growth this year.

Raul Q. Montemayor, national manager of the Federation of Free Farmers, said the impact of El Niño in the agriculture sector will depend on its length and severity.

Mr. Montemayor considers the October-to-November period as a good time for harvest of unmilled rice, but expects "limited replenishment of dams", which could result in a decline in production.

"Good for palay harvest season but could result in limited replenishment of dams; possibility of slight decline in production and lower imports (due to rising international prices); in general, supply will be stable, but end-year stocks may be lower," he said.

Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura Executive Director Jayson H. Cainglet, urged the government to provide subsidies and compensation for farmers who will be affected by El Niño.

"In the era of extreme weather situations and changing weather patterns, it is most crucial that local producers are assured of public funds for indemnity (for both livestock and crops) and full insurance coverage that will compensate them for their losses and put them back on their feet to again produce the country's food needs," Mr. Cainglet said.

### ANGAT WATER LEVEL

Meanwhile, the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) expects the water level in Angat Dam to fall below the minimum operating level in the coming days if there is no rain.

As of 6 a.m. on Tuesday, the Angat Dam declined to 181.57 meters from its previous level of 181.93 meters, and just slightly higher than its 180-meter minimum operating level.

"Possible (to reach below 180 level) if there is no rain in the watershed. We are still at the operational level. When elevation reaches 180,

priority is domestic supply," Leonor C. Cleofas, administrator of MWSS, said in a Viber message to *BusinessWorld*.

Patrick James B. Dizon, head of the MWSS Angat/Ipo operations management division, said that the MWSS has already instructed its concessionaires to fast-track its water augmentation measures.

"Based on the Angat Dam Operation Protocol, if the reservoir elevation reaches 180 meters, the priority will be the domestic supply for Metro Manila. Since we are also preparing for the El Niño, we also need to manage the existing water that we have in the reservoir so that we could minimize the impact during the onset of El Niño," Mr. Dizon said in a Viber message.

### CLIMATE CHANGE

The world's hottest year on record, 2016, coincided with a strong El Niño — though experts say climate change has fueled extreme temperatures even in years without the phenomenon.

But that record could soon be broken, according to WMO.

The organization said in May that there was a strong likelihood that at least one of the next five years, and the five-year period as a whole, would be the warmest on record due to El Niño and anthropogenic global warming.

"To tell you whether it be this year or next year is difficult," Wilfran Moufouma Okia, head of Regional Climate Prediction Service at WMO, told reporters in Geneva on Tuesday.

"What we know is that throughout the next five years, we are likely to have one of the warmest years on record."

During El Niño, winds blowing west along the equator slow down, and warm water is pushed east, creating warmer surface ocean temperatures.

The phenomenon occurs on average every two to seven years, and can last nine to 12 months, according to the WMO.

It is typically associated with increased rainfall in parts of southern South America, the southern United States, the Horn of Africa and Central Asia.

In the past, it has caused severe droughts in Australia, Indonesia, parts of southern Asia, Central America and northern South America. — with  
**Reuters**



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# More practical to help big piggeries

**LOCAL hog raisers recently called on the government to also extend support to pork integrators who are currently battling an outbreak of African swine fever (ASF) in their farms.**

Edwin Chen, past president of the Pork Producers Federation of the Philippines (Pro-Pork), said much of the government's resources to combat ASF is being directed toward backyard piggeries, which, he said, generally lack the capability to produce on an industrial scale.

He explained that while focusing assistance on small, less-efficient hog farms may have inherent political benefits, it does little to address the need to increase domestic production.

Chen, who is also a director at the Philippine Chamber Agriculture and Food, Inc. (PCAFI), said government assistance "may take many forms," but stopped short of saying whether his members are seeking financial assistance or other perks.

The businessman disclosed that ASF has already spread to piggeries in the Visayas and Mindanao, and is already taking its toll on the domestic production of pork.

Chen, however, said the supply of pork in the local market remains stable because of importation.

"There is no supply shortage (of pork) because we are importing so much. The country currently has an inventory of about 70-plus million kilos of imported pork," he said.

Still, he warned that over-dependence on imports can eventually harm the domestic pork industry.

"Other countries that are also affected by ASF are focused on saving their local piggeries, and are not satisfied with just importing," said Chen.

Meanwhile, PCAFI president Danilo Fausto said the larger and better-funded hog integrators must be given priority in the distribution of any new vaccine that will be proven effective against swine flu.



**The Pork Producers Federation of the Philippines (Pro-Pork) claim big piggeries are hurting just as much as backyard raisers from the African swine fever (ASF)**

He explained that it is more practical to prioritize big piggeries because they have economies of scale, and are better equipped to meet the country's growing demand for food.

"They (large piggeries) also have better bio-security practices, unlike backyard piggeries that may not have bio-security mechanisms at all," he added.

Fausto explained that local consumers remain unaware of the ASF crisis because the availability of imported pork has resulted in lower retail prices.





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## Cocoa hits fresh 46-year high; coffee, sugar also up

NEW YORK — London cocoa futures on ICE hit a fresh 46-year high on Monday as the market for the chocolate-making raw material continues to be sustained by supply tightness. Sugar and coffee prices also climbed.

**COCOA:** September London cocoa settled up £47 or 1.8% to £2,660 per metric ton, a 46-year high.

Dealers noted rains had eased in top grower Ivory Coast although there remained concerns about flooded plantations.

The run-up has been driven by funds extending long positions

against the backdrop of tight global supplies.

Funds are doubling down on bets for higher cocoa prices, seeing little reason to exit or even limit a trade that is making them healthy returns and leaving chocolate makers in despair as prices for the bean soar.

September New York cocoa rose \$46 or 1.4% to \$3,399 a ton.

**SUGAR:** October raw sugar rose 0.53 cent or 2.3% at 23.32 cents per pound (lb).

The market regained some ground after falling sharply last week but strong Brazil production should keep a lid on prices.

Dealers said the market may have derived some support from a comparatively small delivery against the July contract, which expired on Friday and was seen reinforcing sentiment that supplies remain tight.

Deliveries of raw sugar on the expiry of the July contract SBN3 were at 8,118 lots, or around 412,000 metric tons, ICE confirmed on Monday following preliminary information from traders on Friday. Origin was all Brazil, with loading at the Paranagua port.

India's annual monsoon covered the entire country on Sun-

day, six days earlier than usual, the state-run weather office said, but rain totals are 10% below average so far this season.

August white sugar rose \$9.90 or 1.6% at \$643.30 a ton.

**COFFEE:** September arabica coffee rose 1.50 cents or 0.9% at \$1.605 per lb, edging away from last week's five-month low of \$1.5775.

Dealers said Brazil's coffee harvest continued to make good progress, keeping the market on the defensive.

September robusta coffee settled up \$47 or 1.9% at \$2,538 a ton. — **Reuters**