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## Marcos vows to crush agricultural cartels

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

PRESIDENT Marcos Jr. yesterday vowed to unmask the people behind and put an end to the activities of agricultural cartels in the country even as he refused to set a deadline to the investigation which he ordered the Department of Justice (DOJ) and National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) to carry out.

The President, in a media interview on the sidelines of the 6th Livestock Philippines Expo 2023 in Pasay City, said that while government investigators do not have a timeline to stick to, "siyempre gusto ko tapusin nila kaagad pero kailangan tapos, hindi hilaw (Of course, I want them to finish [the probe] immediately but it should not be behalf-baked)."

"Hindi ako mahilig magbigay ng deadline (I do not like giving deadlines). Let them do their investigation," he also said.

Marcos said his administration is bent on stopping the illegal activities of the agricultural cartels, especially the smuggling, hoarding and price fixing of farm produce,

which have badly impacted the country's agricultural sector, the farmers, and the economy.

"Ang utos ko sa DOJ atsaka sa NBI, (sinabi) ko sa kanila ay kailangan malaman ninyo na, hindi lamang sa sibuyas kung hindi pati 'yung mga (ibang) sindikato, marami talagang sindikato na nag-o-operate pa, para habulin na natin, matigil 'yung kanilang ginagawa (My orders to the DOJ and NBI is for them to identify not just those engaged in onions, but also other syndicates, there are a lot of syndicates operating, to go after them and stop what they are doing)," he said.

"Hindi nila (cartels) maaari ituloy 'yung kanilang ginagawa. Tama na 'yan at tigilan na nila 'yung kanilang masasayang ginagawa dati (The cartels cannot continue their activities. It's time to stop their happy days)," he added.

Marcos said the government will pursue its campaign against the cartels, which he said could be charged with economic sabotage for contributing to the hunger and

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## MARCOS

even deaths of many Filipinos.

Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla said he will form a special team of investigators to conduct the probe and a team panel of prosecutors to start building a case against the people involved in the illegal activities.

Marcos' order is an offshoot of the legislative inquiry conducted by the Committee on Agriculture and Food of the House of Representatives into the hoarding and price fixing of onions during the last quarter of 2022.

The House committee probe has established that an agricultural cartel allegedly operated through the Philippine VIEVA Group of Companies Inc. (PVGCI), which has been engaged in various activities including farming, importation, local trading, warehousing, and logistics.

The prices of onion skyrocketed in December last year, on a

perceived supply shortage of the agricultural bulbs. But data from the Department of Agriculture - Bureau of Plant Industry showed there was "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."

Cold storage facility owners have also denied the shortage, saying there was ample supply in their storage facilities at the time.

## COOPERATE

The House of Representatives will cooperate with the DOJ and the NBI in going after the onion cartel which is behind the hoarding and price manipulation of the agricultural product.

"The House of Representatives is ready to provide our authorities with the data uncovered from our committee hearings to provide them a head start in their own

investigation," said Speaker Martin Romualdez, who was the one who called for a congressional probe in December last year when prices of onion surged to over P700 a kilo.

The House panel, which is chaired by Quezon Rep. Mark Enverga, was able to unmask key cartel personalities and allied firms believed to be involved in onion smuggling and hoarding.

Romualdez said the President's directive "should be enough to deter further supply manipulation of agricultural products and help stabilize prices, especially amid reports that prices of onion are on the rise again."

"This is a welcome development, a decisive action that manifests the President's resolve to clamp down on unscrupulous businessmen preying on hapless Filipino consumers and hampering his administration's efforts to sustain the robust growth of our economy," he said.

Marikina Rep. Stella Quimbo, a

senior vice chair of the panel, has said some members of the BPI are working in cahoots with the onion cartel in the country led by trader Leah Cruz who, according to her, remains the "undisputed Sibuyas Queen."

According to Quimbo, the cartel which operates through a group of companies, was engaged in various activities in the supply chain such as farming, importation, local trading, warehousing, and logistics.

Malacañang has said the President's directive was based on Quimbo's memorandum which shows substantial evidence pointing to the existence of an onion cartel which could be behind the surge in onion prices in 2022.

Quimbo said seeing the Executive "taking proactive measures brings hope that the cartel's days will be over, sooner rather than later."

"The entities involved in the alleged onion cartel also have long-standing pending cases for

cartel activities involving garlic. The President's instructions to the DOJ and NBI are expected to fast-track the ongoing investigation of the PCC (Philippine Competition Commission) on the onion cartel," she said.

Cavite Rep. Elpidio Barzaga Jr., who also played a huge role in exposing the cartel members during the hearing, said the President's order shows his seriousness in protecting both "consumers and the farmers who till the land to ensure that we'll all have food to eat."

"The President's order also shows that he had been following our hearings and that he recognizes the huge role it played in helping dismantle the biggest onion cartel in the country to restore the prices of agricultural products to its previous level," he said.

The Speaker said the President's

directive should be enough to deter further supply manipulation of agricultural products and help stabilize prices, especially amid reports that prices of onion are again on the rise.

He said the House will continue to monitor prices, especially of basic staples like rice, vegetables, meat, onions, and garlic, "to protect our people from hoarding, price manipulation, unreasonable price increases, and other practices in restraint of trade and which hamper competition."

"That is part of our oversight function. We have the appropriate tools to carry this out, including conducting follow-up hearings and summoning suspected hoarders, smugglers and cartel leaders if needed. We will not shirk from our duty to help our people," he said. — *With Wendell Vigilia*



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**Livestock expo.** President Marcos Jr. looks at one of the products being sold at the 6th Livestock Philippines Expo 2023 in Pasay City Wednesday.

PCO PHOTO





# Easing food prices prompt call for review of tax plans

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ [@joveemarie](#)

**W**ITH a slowdown in prices of food muting inflation, the solon behind tax laws expressed reluctance in supporting Finance officials' proposals to impose new taxes on junk food and hike levies on sweetened beverages.

"The healthier alternatives to junk food and drinks are becoming expensive," according to House Committee on Ways and Means Chairman and Albay Rep. Jose Ma. Clemente "Joey" S. Salceda.

The lawmaker cited that flour and bread products are at 11-percent inflation while milk, dairy and eggs are at 11.2 percent. Salceda also noted that fruits and nuts are at 11.4-percent inflation while vegetables are at 12.7 percent.

"This is all while sweetened beverage inflation is just at 7 percent," he added. So I would be very hesitant to impose food taxes in such conditions."

Salceda further said last Wednesday that "broken down, inflation in key food items convinces me that recent proposals to increase taxes on sweetened beverages and impose new taxes on junk food need further refinement and study."

Inflation slowed to 5.4 percent in June, slower than the 6.1 percent posted in May 2023 and June 2022, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

"I was with the media this morning when I gave out my projection of

5.5 percent inflation for the month of June, so the actual figure being lower, at 5.4 percent, is very much welcome and is well within expectations," Salceda said.

The lawmaker said he expects "business and consumer confidence to continue to improve as inflation figures are now very much anchored on expectations."

## Underreported achievement

ACCORDING to Salceda, rice inflation remains low at 3.6 percent, which is "good news" especially for the bottom 30 percent of households who spend as much as one-fifth of their budget on rice.

He considers the lower rice inflation as also a part of one of the "most underreported achievements" of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.

"Ever since he took over as Agriculture Secretary, farmgate price for palay per kg [kilogram] has increased from P17.24 in May 2022 to P19.06 in May 2023: a 10.6-percent increase, even when retail prices increased only by 3.6 percent over the same period," Salceda explained.

This indicates that farmers are getting a better deal for their pro-





duce, the solon added.

"This is also the opposite of what was observed during the initial months of rice tariffication, when farmgate prices declined faster than retail prices did," Salce said. Hence, he said, "there are signs that the rice cartel is being diminished if not demolished" under Marcos as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture.

Salceda said that "moving forward, the main focus must be on sustaining agricultural production amid threats of El Niño."

The lawmaker added he has discussed ideas with officials of the National Irrigation Administration on this and that he will continue to work with the agencies "to help them with what they need from Congress."

## Sound policies

MEANWHILE, House Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez also welcomed the slowdown in headline inflation for the fifth straight month.

Romualdez said last Wednesday the continued drop in inflation can be attributed to the President's "strong political will and the administration's sound economic policies."

He added that the House of Representatives tried to move at the President's pace.

"And we were also very productive in our mandate to support the 8-point economic agenda of the President and his Agenda for Prosperity, including his priority legislation," Romualdez added.

According to the lawmaker, from a high of 8.7 percent at the start of the year, inflation had been tamed to 6.1 percent in May and dropped again in June at 5.4 percent.

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) had earlier projected that headline inflation is projected to slow down again in June. The headline inflation of 5.4 percent in June is the lowest in a span of 13 months.

Romualdez said that the President's spending plan in the 2023 national budget, investment tours and programs and actions against the high prices of goods "all contributed to this drop in inflation rate."

## Achieved effectively

ROMUALDEZ said that one of Marcos's visions for the 2023 national budget focused on "strengthening the purchasing power of Filipinos and, so far, it had paid off during the first half of the year."

"Lowering the inflation rate is a necessary offshoot of boosting our people's purchasing power. And the Marcos administration has achieved that effectively," the House leader from Leyte said.

The lawmaker added that in the exercise of its oversight functions, the Lower House "exhaustively investigated the issue of the smuggling of onion and other agricultural products that drove the prices of goods too high."

Romualdez credited these actions in helping bring down the prices of commodities and ease food inflation.

Last May, Marcos signed Executive Order 28 creating the Inter-Agency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook, which promotes and enhances the coordination and action of government agencies in managing inflation.

Romualdez said he predicts inflation will continue to slow down "as we reach the end of 2023, as the programs of the national budget have been implemented to their full extent and the policies of the administration continue to benefit the people."





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## Marcos vows to boost farm output to tame price gains

**PHILIPPINE** President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. on Wednesday said he is keeping his promise to boost the country's food production to temper price gains.

Bringing down inflation "requires our success in increasing our production," he told reporters on the sidelines of a Department of Agriculture (DA) event. "It's really the answer."

The president recalled how spiraling farm prices had driven Philippine inflation to a 14-year high in January.

He said helping local producers by giving them access to modern technologies and making their production more efficient would help cool price gains.

"Improving the technologies, helping our farmers at both ends of that value chain, there is an advantage because the farmers will make more money — because they are spending less, because they are more efficient," he said. "At the same time, that price level will translate all the way to the consumer."

Mr. Marcos Jr., 65, has been pushing for food self-sufficiency in a decidedly populist direction, a policy choice that he is well-placed to implement after appointing himself Agriculture secretary.

Economists have said supply bottlenecks that jack up prices remain unaddressed since he took office a year ago.

Since peaking at 8.7% in January, inflation has eased to 5.4% in June, the lowest since April 2022.

At the DA event, Mr. Marcos cited the "clear importation schedule" for sugar as one of the efforts his government had taken to bring down food prices.

In May, Mr. Marcos approved at least 150,000 metric tons of sugar imports, citing a possible supply shortage. Sugar prices had reached as much as P130 a kilo.

Mr. Marcos vowed to limit imports "as much as possible" early in his term, but that promise has yet to be fulfilled.

At the gathering of livestock and aquaculture players, Mr. Marcos cited the "urgent need" to revitalize the poultry sector "considering the problems that we face, particularly the effects of the African swine fever (ASF) and avian influenza."

He touted the Integrated National Swine Production Initiatives for Recovery and Expansion, which he said has benefitted more than 430 farmers' cooperatives and associations with more than 13,000 members and about 27,500 farmers.

"We are also happy to announce the completion of phase one of the safety and efficacy trials for the ASF vaccines," he said. "The Philippine FDA (Food and Drug Administration) is on track to issue a certificate of product registration for these vaccines while phase two trials are under way."

"This gives us great hope as we have been waiting for this for a very long time."

Mr. Marcos said the vaccine is 80% effective. "There is still a 20% that we need to look out for very carefully."

He also said his government is making progress in the procurement of avian influenza vaccines, noting that the Bureau of Animal Industry has called on drugmakers to register their products with the FDA pending the rules on how to administer these.

Mr. Marcos said the Agriculture department would continue to partner with the academe and private sector to find solutions to diseases that continue to wreak havoc on the country's livestock and poultry subsectors. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**





## LIVESTOCK PHILIPPINES 2023



## AQUACULTURE PHILIPPINES 2023

### 5-7 JULY 2023

WORLD TRADE CENTER METRO MANILA  
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**PRESIDENT Marcos** leads guests at Wednesday's opening of Livestock Philippines Expo 2023 at the World Trade Center in Pasay City. Joining him are (from left) Reps. Nicanor Briones and Wilfredo Mark Enverga, Sen. Cynthia A. Villar, Agriculture Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban, Informa Markets Philippines GM Gerard Leeuwenburgh, and Pasay Mayor Imelda Calixto-Rubiano. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



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## Marcos: Smuggling, hoarding starve farmers and consumers

**S**MUGGLING and hoarding bring misery to Filipino farmers and consumers, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said Wednesday.

Marcos told reporters in a chance interview that the government is bent on ending smuggling and hoarding as they cause starvation and worsen poverty.

"We can't just let it go because some Filipinos are starving. Some Filipinos are dying from starvation and poverty because of what they [smugglers and hoarders] are doing," he said on the sidelines of the opening of the Livestock Philippines Expo 2023 in Pasay City.

As for his directive to the National Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Justice (DOJ) to conduct a probe on smuggling and hoarding of agricultural products, Marcos said he did not

specify a deadline, but he wants the agencies to complete it "soon."

The president also said he wants the investigation of the two agencies to cover other agricultural commodities.

"There are actually many syndicates which are still operating. So we should go after them and stop them."

The government's investigation will focus on possible violations of Republic Act (RA) 10845, also known as the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016, which specifically targets the illegal importation of agricultural products, including onions.

The DOJ noted that profiteering, smuggling, and hoarding are acts of economic sabotage.

In May, the president announced that the government will study the possibility of reinstating

the pre-shipment inspection (PSI) of agricultural commodities to combat smuggling and the spread of diseases.

Marcos made the pronouncement after it was recommended by Société Générale de Surveillance SA (SGS) Vice President George Bottomley and Managing Director Cresenciano Maramot during their meeting.

Under the proposed scheme, the quality as well as the sanitary and phytosanitary import permits of the Philippines-bound agricultural products will be checked prior to being transported from their country of destination. The said goods should also be paid prior to shipment.

### Sharing of ideas

MARCOS urged government agencies and stakeholders to share

ideas that will advance the poultry and livestock sector.

"Rest assured that the government stands firm with you in overcoming our present challenges by implementing data and science-based policies and programs," he said.

"We aim to streamline our value chain systems, ease our access to local produce, and cushion the impact of food inflation on the lives of our farmers and our consumers."

He said good ideas that will make agricultural production more efficient will allow the government to help farmers and increase their incomes.

"It is our hope to bring back nobility to a profession that has sacrificed so much to feed and to nourish us for many, many generations." *Raadee S. Sausa*





## 'Probe will deter manipulation of food prices'

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ

[@joveemarie](#)

**S**PEAKER Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez on Wednesday said the directive of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to conduct a probe on the smuggling of onions and other agricultural products should be enough to deter further supply manipulation of agricultural products and help stabilize prices.

Romualdez issued the statement after Marcos ordered the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the National Bureau of Investigation to investigate the smuggling, hoarding, price fixing of onion and

other agricultural commodities pursuant to the findings of the House Committee on Agriculture and Food pointing to a cartel as the culprit.

"This is a welcome development,



# BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

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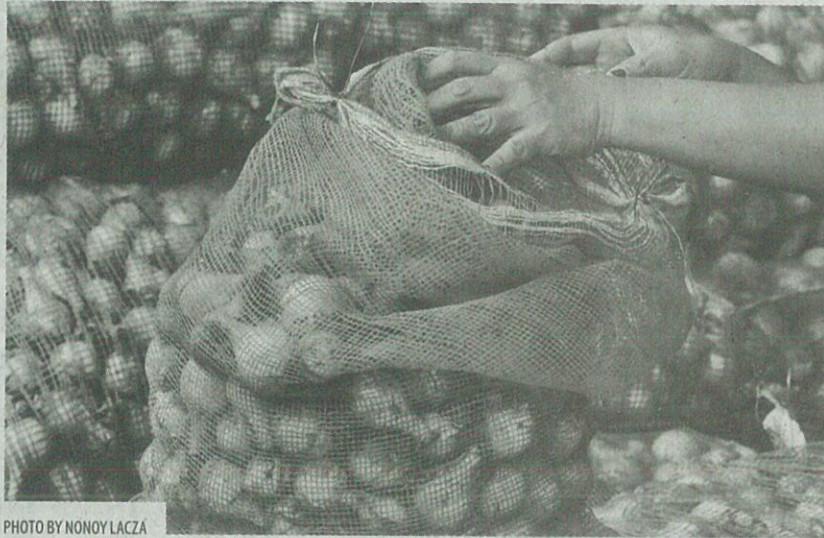


PHOTO BY NONOY LACZA

a decisive action that manifests the President's resolve to clamp down on unscrupulous businessmen preying on hapless Filipino consumers and hampering his administration's efforts to sustain the robust growth of our economy."

It was Romualdez who called for a congressional probe on onion smuggling after the prices

of the agricultural product hit a record high of P700 per kilo in December last year.

"The House of Representatives is ready to provide our authorities with the data uncovered from our committee hearings to provide them a head start in their own investigation."

Romualdez assured Marcos and

the public that the House would remain vigilant against price fixing by monitoring the prices of onion, rice, and other vital commodities and services to protect the interest of consumers.

"We will continue to monitor prices, especially of basic staples like rice, vegetables, meat, onions, and garlic, to protect our people from hoarding, price manipulation, unreasonable price increases, and other practices in restraint of trade and which hamper competition," he said.

"That is part of our oversight function. We have the appropriate tools to carry this out, including conducting follow-up hearings and summoning suspected hoarders, smugglers and cartel leaders if needed. We will not shirk from our duty to help our people."

According to Malacañang, the President's directive was based on a memorandum submitted by Marikina Rep. Stella Quimbo indicating substantial evidence pointing to the existence of an onion

cartel which could be behind the surge in onion prices in 2022.

Last May, during a hearing of the House Committee on Agriculture and Food chaired by Quezon 1st District Rep. Wilfrido Mark Enverga, Quimbo alleged that Lillia or Leah Cruz and her family-controlled firm were at the center of the purported onion cartel.

According to Quimbo, the cartel, which operates through a group of companies, was engaged in various activities in the supply chain such as farming, importation, local trading, warehousing, and logistics.

Following the directive of Marcos, the DOJ announced the creation of the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Task Force, which will include the Bureau of Customs and the Department of Agriculture.

In a statement, the department said it would also form a special team of prosecutors "primarily focused on protecting the entire agricultural sector, not only the onion industry."





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## Marcos warns of dangers on poultry, livestock sector

By BETHEENA KAE UNITE

Despite the development of vaccines against animal viral diseases, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said there is still danger and the government must look out for it.

Speaking at the opening of the Livestock Philippines 2023 on Wednesday, July 5, Marcos stressed the need to detect and prevent the spread of animal diseases such as African swine fever (ASF) and avian influenza.

He announced the completion of Phase 1 of the safety and efficacy trials for the ASF vaccines, saying the Bureau of Animal Industry has found to produce sufficient antibodies and to be safe for use.

Marcos added that the Philippine

Food and Drug Administration "is on track to issue a certificate of product registration for these vaccines while Phase 2 trials are underway."

The Chief Executive, concurrent Agriculture Secretary, said that the government is making progress in procuring Avian influenza vaccines.

He, however, reminded the government not be complacent over the availability of the vaccines.

"This gives us great hope as we have been waiting for this for a very long time. However, it is not a reason for complacency as we are being continuously warned by those who have studied the vaccine. The vaccine is 80 percent effective. There is still a 20 percent that we need to look out for very carefully," Marcos said.

"But nonetheless, there is still a danger and it is something that we need to look out for," he added.

The President acknowledged that "there is much work to do," urging the Department of Agriculture to continue to forge partnerships with the academe and private sector to devise solutions to eradicate these diseases that continue to wreak havoc on the country's livestock and poultry subsectors.

"I also urge all concerned government agencies and stakeholders to engage in productive dialogue and share our best ideas, practices, and technologies to advance our poultry and livestock industries," Marcos said.

"Rest assured that the government stands firm with you in

overcoming our present challenges by implementing data and science-based policies and programs," he added.

Marcos also renewed his commitment to find ways to increase Filipino farmers' incomes "so that they can lead a dignified and comfortable life and return to the profession a sense of pride that has been lost over the years."

He likewise encouraged all stakeholders to make the most of the knowledge and tools made available at the trade fair to establish a more food-secure, sustainable, and resilient Philippines.

Livestock Philippines 2023 is an international trade fair for innovative production and processing of poultry and livestock.





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## PH inflation further eases to 5.4% in June

By CHINO LEYCO

The rate of increase in consumer prices decelerated for the fifth consecutive month in June, reaching its lowest level in over a year, on the back of reduced transport costs and gradual ascent in food and utility prices.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported on Wednesday, July

5, that the headline inflation eased further to 5.4 percent in June from 6.1 percent a month ago, marking the lowest rate since June 2022.

In addition, it stood below the inflation rate of 6.1 percent recorded in June of the previous year, which also marked the fifth occurrence of a decline since reaching its peak of 8.7 percent in January. ▶ 4

## PH inflation further eases to 5.4% in June 1◀

### Marcos cites agri production

President Marcos attributed the decreasing inflation rate to the improved production of agricultural products in the country, stressing the need to keep it going to lower down prices.

Marcos underscored that agricultural products are the "biggest part of the inflation rate." Thus, helping the producers of agricultural commodities to improve their production and lower the price is crucial in bringing down inflation.

"All of these, we are trying to put together and I really believe that it's a large part of why the inflation rate has begun to come down," Marcos said in an interview on the sidelines of the Livestock Philippines 2023. "Now, that we have been able to stabilize the price of sugar by making a very clear schedule of importation, making a very clear schedule of assignment of the importation where it goes to the industrial or if it goes to food. This is the kind of thing that is helping to bring down the inflation rate."

### Managing inflation

Moreover, June's figure was aligned with the projected range of 5.3 percent to 6.1 percent set by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas and

below the median estimate of 5.5 percent by private analysts.

"We are making progress in managing inflation and we can expect that it will decline to within two to four percent by the end of the year," National Economic and Development Authority Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said in a statement.

Balisacan said the inflation rate deceleration can be primarily attributed to a decrease in food inflation, which slowed to 6.7 percent compared to the previous month's 7.5 percent.

Additionally, non-food inflation also experienced a slowdown, declining from five percent in May to 4.1 percent in June.

This decline in food prices, meanwhile, was due to a slower rate of inflation in meat (0.3 percent compared to 3.2 percent), eggs and dairy products (11.2 percent compared to 12.1 percent), and bread and other cereals (11 percent compared to 11.4 percent).

Despite this positive trend, headline inflation has remained persistently high throughout the first half of the year, averaging 7.2 percent. This figure stands significantly above the government's target band of two percent to four percent.

Meanwhile, Finance Secretary

Benjamin E. Diokno said the latest inflation figure serves as confirmation that the momentum for possible price hikes has been steadily diminishing in recent months.

"The seasonally adjusted month-on-month inflation slowed down to 0.1 percent in June 2023, from a 0.3 percent monthly rate in the previous month," Diokno cited.

Core inflation, which excludes selected volatile food and energy items, declined to 7.4 percent in June from 7.7 percent in the previous month, also depicting a tapering in price pressures.

"The consistent decline in inflation rate for the fifth consecutive month suggests the government's continued progress in taming inflation," Diokno said.

"This indicates that we are on track to manage inflation to within target sometime in the fourth quarter of this year and below the lower limit of the target in the first quarter of 2024," he added.

Despite the slowdown, Diokno said there is still more to do, but the economic team assures the Filipino nation that the Marcos administration is ready to take on forthcoming challenges and bring down the cost of living while fostering a robust economic environment. (With a report from Betheena Unite)



# MANILA BULLETIN

## 'Your days are numbered'

### Marcos warns smugglers, hoarders, price fixers; DOJ, NBI ordered to investigate

By BETHEENA KAE UNITE

**P**resident Marcos said he is determined to go after smugglers and hoarders of agricultural goods, stressing that Filipinos are dying of starvation because manipulative schemes in the market continue to thrive.

"Kaya't hindi natin basta pabayaan ito dahil may ginugutom na Pilipino, may namamatay from starvation and poverty ang Pilipino dahil sa kanilang ginagawa (We will not just let this go as they are causing hunger to Filipinos; people are dying due to starvation and poverty because of their acts)," Marcos said in an interview on the sidelines of Livestock Philippines 2023 on Wednesday, July 5. "Hindi maaaring ituloy nila ang kanilang ginagawa. Tama na 'yan at titigilin natin yung kanilang masasayang ginagawa (They cannot go on with what they're doing. That's enough and their happy days are numbered)."

The President pointed out that the smuggling and hoarding of agricultural goods in order to manipulate the prices "amounts to economic sabotage," prompting him to order the Department of Justice (DOJ) and National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) to conduct an investigation on syndicates behind the hoarding and smuggling of onions.

Marcos did not impose a deadline on the DOJ and NBI inquiry, but nevertheless said he wanted the agencies to finish it soon. ▶ 4



**FOOD SECURITY** — President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. (center) cuts the ceremonial ribbon at the opening of the Sixth Livestock and Aquaculture Philippines 2023 at the World Trade Center in Pasay City on Wednesday, July 5, 2023. Joining the President are (from left) Agap Party-list Representative Nicanor Briones, Quezon First District Representative Wilfrido Mark Enverga, Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food Chairperson Senator Cynthia Villar, Department of Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban, Informa Markets Philippines Country Manager Gerard Leeuwenburgh, and Pasay City Mayor Imelda Calixto-Rubiano. (Noel B. Pabalate)

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## 'Your days are numbered' 1◀

According to the President, there is a clear case of onion hoarding as controlled by syndicates, noting he also wanted a wide-ranging investigation conducted to include other commodities.

"[A]ng utos ko sa DOJ at saka sa NBI, sa kanila ay kailangan malaman ninyo na hindi lamang sa sibuyas, kung hindi pa yung mga sindikato, marami talagang sindikato, na nag-o-operate pa para habulin na natin, matigil yung kanilang ginagawa (My order to DOJ and NBI is to look not only into the syndicates behind onion smuggling and hoarding because there are more syndicates out there. Let's go after them and put an end to their illegal acts)," Marcos said.

House Speaker Martin Romualdez hailed Marcos' "decisive action" against the alleged onion cartel.

"This is a welcome development, a decisive action that manifests the President's resolve to clamp down on unscrupulous businessmen preying on hapless Filipino consumers and hampering his administration's efforts to sustain the robust growth of our economy," Romualdez said in a statement Wednesday.

Quezon 1st District Rep. Mark Enverga, House Committee on Agriculture and Food chairman, assured Malacañang that his panel will assist national agencies in the effort to clamp down on the personalities involved in the alleged onion cartel.

These allegations were discussed at length by the House Committee on Agriculture and Food during its hearings on the onion price surge issue from February to May this year.

"The committee assures PBBM (Marcos) of our support to the DOJ and NBI by providing key information on the cartel operations gathered throughout the hearing," Enverga said.

The DOJ said it would collaborate with other government agencies, including the Bureau of Customs (BOC), the Department of Agriculture (DA), and other agencies in conducting the investigation.

The department's investigation encompasses violations of Republic Act No. 10845, also known as the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016, which specifically targets the illegal importation of agricultural products, including onions. (With a report from Ellson Quismorio)



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## EDITORIAL

# Economic sabotage

Department of Agriculture data showed only a modest supply shortfall of 7.56 percent in onions last year. Owners of cold storage facilities also said there was ample onion supply. Lawmakers who conducted an inquiry into the onion crisis have zeroed in on one other explanation for the 87 percent inflation rate for onions in December last year, when retail prices soared up to an eye-watering P750 a kilo: cartel activity.

**President Marcos**, who is concurrent agriculture secretary, has been informed by Congress members who conducted the inquiry that substantial evidence has been unearthed, showing that the cartel is engaged in the multiple aspects of onion trading, from farming to warehousing, logistics, local trading and importation.

Last May, the House of Representatives had identified the Philippine VIEVA or Vegetable Exporters and Vendors Association Philippines Inc. as the principal player in the alleged onion cartel. PhilVIEVA is a group of companies owned by Lilia or Leah Cruz, tagged as the "sibuyas queen" by lawmakers.

The President has ordered the National Bureau of Investigation and its mother agency the Department of Justice to study the findings of the House and pursue those engaged in the smuggling not

only of onions but also other agricultural products – an offense that he said is tantamount to economic sabotage.

This probe could take some time, considering that agricultural products include commodities such as sugar, whose prices have stubbornly refused to soften despite the importation of 440,000 metric tons earlier this year and a regular harvest of sugarcane. The President said he is setting no deadline for the NBI probe.

The public is also waiting for action on the controversial process of importing the 440,000 MT of sugar, which was awarded to just three companies handpicked by the agriculture department. The sugar began arriving ahead of the release of an import order by the Sugar Regulatory Administration.

Expectations are also high about the government pushing through with the reported plan to overhaul agricultural supply and value chains to bring down food prices while at the same time raising the income of farmers.

Similar probes into various cartels have been ordered by previous administrations. Because the President is serving concurrently as agriculture secretary, however, there are higher expectations that his order will produce solid results.



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**President Marcos, shown with Department of Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban, Sen. Cynthia Villar and other officials, attends the Livestock and Aquaculture Philippines 2023 at the World Trade Center in Pasay yesterday.**

KRIZJOHN ROSALES





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## ***Gov't protecting Pinoys' purchasing power – Marcos***

By **ALEXIS ROMERO**

The slower inflation last month indicated that the government's efforts to support consumers, workers and businesses are working, President Marcos said yesterday.

"We are continuously protecting the purchasing power of Filipinos," Marcos said in a Facebook post.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a livestock trade fair in Pasay City yesterday, Marcos cited the need to boost agriculture production to lower prices.

Marcos, also the agriculture secretary, said the setting of a clear sugar importation schedule and giving of assistance to farmers also played a role in lowering inflation.

Despite lower inflation figures, the retail prices of vegetables have

further increased by at least P60 to P80 per kilo as highland vegetables such as cabbage and carrots rose to P180 and P200 per kilo, respectively, according to the Department of Agriculture.

In an interview with **The STAR**, farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura president Rosendo So said the spike in the retail prices of vegetables could be attributed to transportation and other additional costs.

Earlier, Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesman Kristine Evangelista said the retail price of vegetables is expected to stabilize as she attributed the movement to the rains experienced in many areas in the country.

- With Delon Porcalla, Bella Cariaso, Danessa Rivera



# Abante

UNA SA BALITA

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## PBBM WALANG SASANTUHING SA AGRI SMUGGLING

HINDI magtatakda ng deadline si Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. para lutasin ang problema sa smuggling, hoarding at pagbebenta ng mataaas na presyo ng sibuyas at iba pang produktong agrikultura sa bansa.

Ito ang inihayag ng pangulo kasunod ng direktiba nito sa Department of Justice (DOJ) at National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) na buwagin ang cartel ng sibuyas at kasuhan ang mga ito sa korte.

Ayon sa pangulo, hahayaan niyang mag-imbestiga ang mga awtoridad at makasuhan ang mga sindikatong kumokontrol sa supply at presyo ng sibuyas at iba pang produktong agrikultura dahil ang mga ito ang nagpapahirap sa mamamayan.

Nais aniya nitong malutas agad ang problema sa smuggling subalit kailangang hindi hilaw ang imbestigasyon laban sa mga makakasuhan.

"Unang-una, hindi ako mahilig magbigay ng deadline. Siyempre gusto ko tapusin nila kaagad. Pero kailangan tapos hindi hilaw. Let them do their investigation. Wala namang particular, ang

pinag-usapan, ang naging pagbasehan 'yong naging problema sa maliwanag na nagho-hoarding, na kinokontrol 'yong suplay ng sibuyas," anang pangulo.

Malinaw ayon sa pangulo na pananabotahe sa ekonomiya ang ginagawa ng mga sindikato kaya hindi pahihintulutan ng gobyerno na magdusa ang mamamayan dahil sa kagagawan ng mga ito.

"At sa aking pananaw, sa palagay ko 'yong mga abogado natin ay sasangayon siguro sa atin, 'yong kanilang ginagawa amounts to economic sabotage. Kayat yun ang aming direksyon dito sa pag-imbestiga nito. Kayat hindi natin basta pabayaang ito dahil may ginugutom na Pilipino, may namamatay from starvation (and poverty)? ang Pilipino dahil sa kanilang ginagawa. Hindi maaring ituloy nila ang kanilang ginagawa. Tama na yan. Titigilin natin ang kanilang masasayang ginagawa," dagdag ng pangulo.

Naniniwala si Pangulong Marcos na maraming sindikato ang sangkot sa agri-smuggling kaya marapat lamang na maputol ang pagsasamantala ng mga ito.

(Aileen Taliping)



# REMATE

## ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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### PBBM: Walang deadline sa agri smuggling probe

SINABI ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. na wala siyang ibinigay na deadline sa kanyang ipinag-utos na imbestigasyon ukol sa agricultural smuggling.

Sa katunayan, hahayaan niya ang Department of Justice at National Bureau of Investigation na masusing imbestigahan ang napaulat na hoarding, smuggling, at price fixing sa agricultural products.

Naniniwala ang Punong Ehekutibo na maraming sindikato ang nasa likod ng smuggling at hoarding ng agricultural products.

Inulit nito na ang illegal practices ay pinangangambahang magdudulot ng economic sabotage.

Si Pangulong Marcos, chairman ng Department of Agriculture, ipinag-utos sa DOJ at NBI na imbestigahan ang smuggling ng sibuyas at iba pang agricultural products.

Ayon sa Presidential Communications Office, sinabi ni

Marikina Representative Stella Quimbo sa isang Memorandum to the President na mayroong matibay na ebidensya na magtuturo na umiral ang onion cartel na nasa likod ng pagsirit ng presyo ng sibuyas noong 2022.

KRIS JOSE



# Abante TONITE

MABILIS SA BALITA

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## SMUGGLING GINUGUTOM MGA POBRENG PINOY - BBM

Tiniyak ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. na bilang na ang araw ng mga smuggler at hoarder na siyang lalong nagpapahirap sa buhay ng mga ordinaryong Pilipino.

Kasunod ito ng utos ng Pangulo sa Department of Justice (DOJ) at National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) na mag-sagawa ng malalimang imbestigasyon sa sibuyas smuggling.

"Yun ang aming...direksyon dito sa pag-imbestiga na ito. Kaya't hindi natin basta pababayaan ito dahil may ginugutom na Pilipino. May namamatay from starvation and poverty (na) Pilipino dahil sa kanilang ginagawa," sabi ni Pangulong Marcos sa panayam sa kanya ng media matapos dumalo sa Livestock Philippines Expo 2023 na ginanap sa Pasay City nitong Miyerkoles, Hulyo 5.

Ayon sa Pangulo, malinaw na mayroong hoarding o mga nagtatago ng sibuyas at kontrolado ito ng sindikato na siyang dapat makalkal sa inutos niyang

imbestigasyon.

"Ngunit ang utos ko sa DOJ at saka sa NBI, sa kanila ay kailangan malaman ninyo na hindi lamang sa sibuyas, kung hindi pa 'yung mga sindikato, marami talagang sindikato, na nag-o-operate pa para habulin na natin, matigil 'yung kanilang ginagawa," sabi ni Pangulong Marcos.

Samantala, ibibigay ng House committee on agriculture and food sa DOJ at NBI ang mga hawak nitong impormasyon tungkol sa sibuyas kartel.

Sinabi pa ni Quezon Rep. Mark Enverga, chairperson ng komite, gagawin niyang prayoridad ang pag-amyenda sa Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016 upang ipasok ang hoarding, price manipulation at profiteering sa mga krimen na ituturing bilang economic sabotage.

Kumpiyansa naman si Marikina Rep. Stella Quimbo na makakatulong ang imbestigasyon ng DOJ at NBI para bumaba ang presyo ng pagkain sa bansa. (Aileen Taliping/Billy Begas)



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## **PBBM: Walang deadline sa imbestigasyon vs agri smuggling**

Walang ibinigay na deadline si Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. sa isasagawang imbestigasyon laban sa cartel na nagmamanipla ng presyo ng mga agricultural products kabilang ang sibuyas dahil ayaw niya itong maging "hilaw."

Sinabi ng Pangulo na nananatiling kalihim ng Department of Agriculture, na ayaw niyang magbigay ng deadline sa imbestigasyon bagaman at nais niyang matapos ito agad.

"Unang-una, hindi ako mahilig magbigay ng deadline. Siyempre gusto ko tapusin nila kaagad pero kailangan tapos hindi hilaw. So, let them do their investigation," ani Marcos.

Maliwanag naman aniya ang basehan ng imbestigasyon na nagkaroon ng hoarding at kinontrol ang suplay ng sibuyas kaya nagmahal ang presyo.

Malinaw anya ang naging utos niya sa Department of Justice (DOJ) at National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) na kailangang malaman hindi lamang ang sindikato na nasa likod ng pagtaas ng presyo ng sibuyas kundi lahat ng sindikato na nag-o-operate.

Muling inulit ng Pangulo na maituturing na economic

sabotage ang pagkontrol sa suplay ng produkto kaya nagmamahal ang presyo.

Ipinahiwatig din niya na may katapusan ang ginagawa ng mga sindikato at hindi sila tatantanan ng gobyerno. (Malou Escudero)



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## Kamay na bakal vs agri smugglers

SA maagang bahagi pa lang ng termino ni Presidente Bongbong Marcos ay problema na ng bansa ang hindi masugpong smuggling ng mga agricultural products gaya ng asukal, sibuyas at iba pa na nakasisira sa ekonomiya. Isa iyan sa mga dahilan kung bakit ipinasya ng presidente na magsilbi ring Agriculture Secretary. Hinawakan niya at pinamunuan ang DA pero walang nangyari. Tuloy pa rin ang happy days ng agricultural smugglers.

Tama ang presidente na ang mga nagaganap na ito ay katumbas ng economic sabotage o pagwasak sa ekonomiya ng ating bansa. Pero bakit nagpapatuloy? Tila pati si Marcos ay hindi maunawaan ang dahilan nito. Ipinasisiyasat na umano niya ang mga anomalyang ito sa Department of Justice. Siyasat? Anong mangyayari sa puro siyasat?

Ang dapat mangyari, bukod sa imbestigasyon ay kilalanin ang mga taong nasasangkot, pati na ang mga umuukopang mataas na puwesto sa gobyerno at papanagutin. Sariiling kaanak man o kaalyado sa pulitika, kung may ginawang falso ay parusahan. Dapat makalaboso ng habambuhay



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 NIAL G. PEDROCHE

ang mga iyan na sumisira sa kabuhayan ng bansa at nagiging pahirap sa mga mamamayan na kandakuba na sa mataas na presyo ng bilingin. Damang-dama ko ito dahil ordinaryo rin akong mamamayan na nasisindak sa presyuhan ng mga pangunahing pangangailangan.

Sumasabay pa ang problemang ito sa walang habas na importasyon ng ibang kalakal na dahilan para mapabayaan ang mga lokal na producers. Kamay na bakal ang dapat gamitin ni Marcos at hindi kamay na bakla. Magaling ang bokadura ni Marcos Jr. Na halos hawig sa pananalita ng kanyang tatay, ang orihinal na Real Macoy. Kaya lang, kung tinawag si Marcos Sr. na dictator, ang impression ko sa ating Presidente ngayon ay dictated. Sana ay nagkakamali ako.

Ang isang tunay at magaling na leader ay hindi dapat madiktahan ng ilang impluwensyal na taong may sariling interes. Kung may dapat magdikta sa isang namumuno, ito ay ang taumbayan na ang mga hinaing ay dapat palaging

(Sundan sa pahina 5)

## AKSYON NGAYON... Mula pahina 4

dinidinig ng isang presidente. May limang taon pa si Marcos upang patunayan na he is his own man at gumawa ng desisyong tuluyang susugpo hindi lang sa smuggling kundi sa la-

hat ng mga katiwalian na naganap sa pamahalaan.

In fairness, kung may kapuri-puri sa mga ipinatutupad na programa si Marcos, ito ay ang kanyang murang pabahay sa mga mahihirap dahil nakikita na nag-uusbungan ang housing projects kahit walang masyadong publisidad. Ngunit ang dapat iprayoridad ay ang pagpapasigla ng kabuhayan at pagsugpo sa katiwalian.



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## AGRI PRICE WATCH

**By Jester Manalastas**

THE House of Representatives will join the administration in the lookout for price manipulation of onion and other agricultural products.

Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez made this commitment as he welcomed the directive of President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. for a probe on the smuggling of onions and other agricultural products.

On Tuesday, Marcos ordered the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) to investigate the smuggling, hoarding, and price fixing of onion and other agricultural commodities.

"This is a welcome development, a decisive action that manifests the President's resolve to clamp down on unscrupulous businessmen preying on hapless Filipino consumers and hampering his administra-

tion's efforts to sustain the robust growth of our economy," Romualdez said.

It can be recalled that the House leadership has initiated a congressional probe on onion smuggling after the prices of the agricultural product hit a record high of P700 per kilo in December last year.

"The President's directive should be enough to deter further supply manipulation of agricultural products and help stabilize prices, especially amid reports that prices of onion are on the rise again," Romualdez said.

"The House of Representatives is ready to provide our authorities with the data uncovered from our committee hearings to provide them a head start in their own investigation," he added.

Likewise, Romualdez assured Marcos and the nation that the House would remain vigilant against price fixing by monitoring the prices of onion, rice, and other vital

commodities and services to protect the interest of consumers.

"We will continue to monitor prices, especially of basic staples like rice, vegetables, meat, onions, and garlic, to protect our people from hoarding, price manipulation, unreasonable price increases, and other practices in restraint of trade and which hamper competition," Speaker Romualdez said.

Last May, in the hearing of the House Committee on Agriculture and Food chaired by Quezon 1st District Rep. Wilfrido Mark Enverga, Quimbo tagged Lillia or Leah Cruz and her family-controlled firm at the center of the alleged onion cartel.

Quimbo stressed that the cartel which operates through a group of companies, was engaged in various activities in the supply chain such as farming, importation, local trading, warehousing, and logistics.



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## Marcos to smugglers: Your days are numbered





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BY KRISTINA MARALIT

## LIVESTOCK



**P**RESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Wednesday vowed to bring to justice hoarders and smugglers of agricultural products.

"We can't allow them to continue. Enough is enough; we must put a stop to their ways," Marcos said in Filipino on the sidelines of the Livestock and Aquaculture Philippines Expo 2023 held in Pasay City.

"There are many syndicates that are really operating, and we have to go after them," he added.

The President had earlier tasked the Department of Justice (DoJ) and the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) to probe groups behind the smuggling and hoarding of onions that resulted in a stiff increase in the product's price.

The DoJ said it would collaborate with the Bureau of Customs, the Department of Agriculture and other concerned government agencies in conducting the probe.

"I told the DoJ and NBI that they should focus not just on onions but also the syndicates. There are many syndicates operating; we should go after them," Marcos said, noting that such activities amount to economic sabotage.

The DoJ said perpetrators would be charged with violating Republic Act 10845, or the "Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016," which refers to the illegal importation of agricultural products.

**ENOUGH IS ENOUGH** President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. at the Livestock and Aquaculture Philippines Expo 2023 held on Wednesday, July 5, 2023. PHOTO BY RENE H. DILAN

➤ SmugglersA8





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## ■ SMUGGLERS FROM A1

# Marcos to smugglers: Your days are numbered

They could also face penalties for profiteering, hoarding and smuggling — all recognized as acts of economic sabotage.

The department said it was enhancing the regulatory framework for agricultural imports and strengthening border controls to prevent similar incidents from happening in the future.

Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez said the President's directive showed his firm determination to stamp out cartels behind food price manipulation.

"This is a welcome development, a decisive action that manifests the President's resolve to clamp down on unscrupulous businessmen preying on hapless Filipino consumers and hampering his administration's efforts to sustain the robust growth of our

economy," Romualdez said in a statement on Wednesday.

"The President's directive should be enough to deter further supply manipulation of agricultural products and help stabilize prices, especially amid reports that prices of onions are on the rise again," he added.

Malacañang said the President's directive was based on a memorandum submitted by Marikina Rep. Stella Quimbo indicating substantial evidence pointing to the existence of an onion cartel, which could be behind the surge in onion prices in 2022.

Last May, during a hearing of the House Committee on Agriculture and Food chaired by Rep. Wilfredo Mark Enverga (Quezon, 1st District), Quimbo tagged Lilia, or Leah Cruz, and her family-controlled firm at the center of the

alleged onion cartel.

Quimbo said the cartel, which operates through a group of companies, was engaged in various activities in the supply chain such as farming, importation, local trading, warehousing and logistics.

It was Romualdez who called for a congressional probe on onion smuggling after the prices of the agricultural product hit a record high of P700 per kilo in December last year.

Meanwhile, Rep. Elpidio Barzaga Jr. (Cavite, 4th District) said the President's order for the DoJ and the NBI to launch an investigation showed that Marcos had been following the hearings and that he recognized the huge role they played in helping dismantle the biggest onion cartel in the country and restore the prices of agricultural products to their previous levels.

"It only shows the Chief Executive's seriousness in protecting the welfare of the public, especially ordinary people — consumers and the farmers who till the land to ensure that we'll all have food to eat," Barzaga said in a separate statement.

In the meantime, Romualdez said the House of Representatives is ready to provide authorities with the data uncovered from the committee hearings "to provide them a head start" in their investigation.

"We will continue to monitor prices, especially of basic staples like rice, vegetables, meat, onions, and garlic, to protect our people from hoarding, price manipulation, unreasonable price increases, and other practices in restraint of trade that hamper competition," he said.





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## Rising palay prices to boost rice program

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

**R**ISING palay (unmilled rice) prices will help boost the government's Masagana Rice Industry Development Program (MRIDP), a Department of Agriculture (DA) official said.

Agriculture Undersecretary for Rice Industry Development Leocadio Sebastian said the increase in the prices "would attract farmers to join" the program.

He cited the report from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showing that the average farmgate price of palay at the national level increased by 10.6 percent to P19.06 per kilogram (kg) in May 2023 from P17.24 per kg in May 2022.

Sebastian said the DA wanted to speed up implementation of the MRIDP, particularly the clustering of rice farms tilled by irrigators associations (IAs), farmers cooperatives, and other associations registered with the Cooperative

Development Authority.

The Agriculture department held its Rice Technology Transfer Workshop last week in Cauayan, Isabela for the Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley and Central Luzon, and the Cordillera Administrative Region to set strategies of the MRIDP, the first of which is to cluster to 100 hectares the program beneficiaries. The clustered beneficiaries will receive interventions like seeds, fertilizers and other technologies from the DA in partnership with the private sector.

"Thereafter, we can strategically position the seeds, fertilizers, farm machineries and other interven-

tions in time for the dry season planting, starting in September, after four months of which harvest commences in February or March," Sebastian said.

Under the strategy, existing IAs formed under the National Irrigation Administration will be tapped to receive interventions and assistance.

"The other key strategies of MRIDP are increasing production by optimizing yield, reducing risk and increasing resilience; promoting digital and information technology in agriculture; and modernizing production, agribusiness and agri-industrialization," Sebastian said.

The MRIDP aims to achieve four outcomes: a self-sufficient rice industry with increased production, yield and farm incomes; enhanced resilience to disasters and climate risks; a rice industry that is digitally transformed; and ensured ac-

cess to safe and nutritious rice.

Last month, Sebastian said that a bountiful harvest during the first semester (January to June) planting season would yield a 6-percent production increase that would ensure the daily food needs of Filipinos during the third quarter.

He said that palay production could reach 8.605 million metric tons (MT) in 2023, or about 5.6 million MT of milled rice.

This volume — in addition to the 1.8 million MT carryover stocks of milled rice and the arrival of 1.8 million MT imported rice — would be sufficient to meet local demand of 7 million MT from January to June.

He attributed the current price fluctuations to the high local and global production costs, affecting the prices of both domestically grown palay and imported rice, respectively. But he said that "we expect this to stabilize."





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## CLSU unveils food processing research and development center

THE Central Luzon State University (CLSU) in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija has inaugurated its research and development facility for food processing, funded by the Agricultural Competitiveness Enhancement Fund under the **Department of Agriculture (DA)**.

The facility houses different food processing equipment like a smokehouse, freeze dryer, automatic meat slicer machine and cabinet dryer, among others. It is under the Department of Food Science and Technology of CLSU's College of Home Science and Industry (CHSI).

"The same facility will also strengthen the mode of instruction, research and extension endeavors of CHSI, as well as the assistance of the university to micro, small [and] medium enterprises (MSME), cooperatives, and other stakeholders in developing food products for their livelihood

opportunities," CLSU said in a statement.

Armando Espino Jr., CLSU vice president for research and extension, acknowledged the efforts and dedication of the DFST faculty in acquiring the equipment and upgrading their facility. He also recognized the strong partnership between DA and CLSU, as the department always shows its support for the research initiatives of the university.

Junel Soriano, director of the DA-Bureau of Agricultural Research, said he recognizes the initiative of CLSU in assisting MSMEs involved in food processing.

"I want to see in the future that they (MSMEs) bring their knowledge and skills to their communities and teach other associations or groups, especially the food growers," Soriano said.

**CONRAD M. CARIÑO**



■ The research and development facility for food processing of the Central Luzon State University in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija.  
CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



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## Aquaculture, poultry, livestock can survive El Niño's impact—govt

**T**HE government expressed optimism on Wednesday that the country can overcome the hurdles posed by El Niño phenomenon to the poultry, livestock and aquaculture industries.

"The problem with the water, I think, is solvable when it comes to, in terms of the livestock. The difficulty [is] with crops. In fisheries, not much, as you can imagine. So, I think I'm confident that when it comes to livestock and the broilers, the hogs, and the cattle," the problems are manageable, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said in a sideline interview at the Livestock

Philippines Expo 2023 that opened Wednesday at the World Trade Center in Manila.

He added that problems can be reckoned with "if we continue to be able to fix the systems, and now, of course, the biggest issue is still the ASF [African swine fever] and then the Avian influenza. So, slowly it looks like we are getting control and we are seeing a good supply here for us now. The price is not very volatile, it is quite stable."

The President said he believes that as long as the country con-

SEE "EL NIÑO," A2

## El Niño...

CONTINUED FROM A1

tinues to develop more and take advantage of all of the new available vaccines, it can fight diseases affecting the industries.

"I think we can sustain it. Not only sustain it but let's make it even better, let's make it bigger. Make it more efficient, make it more streamlined," said Marcos, the concurrent Agriculture secretary.

Still at the Livestock Philippines Expo 2023, the President said the government is implementing the Integrated National Swine Production Initiatives for Recovery and Expansion (INSPIRE) Program, with more than 430 farmers' cooperatives and associations benefiting from the program.

He also announced the completion of Phase One of the safety and efficacy trials for the ASF vaccines, and the Philippine Food and Drug Administration (FDA) product certification process for the vaccines while Phase Two trials are underway. The government is also making progress in the procurement of Avian Influenza vaccines, he said.

Invited dignitaries and officials from the Department of Agriculture, together with Informa Markets, the organizer of Livestock Philippines, warmly welcomed the President, whose championing modernization and agricultural development is timely to his visit to Livestock Philippines. Around 300 local and international exhibitors showcased at the expo their machinery, products, and other services beneficial to the agriculture industry, particularly to the livestock, poultry, and aquaculture sectors.

Now in its sixth edition, Livestock Philippines 2023 highlights the theme of the ecosystem of livestock and poultry supply chain on food security, safety, and sustainability as the show coincides with the country's celebration of Nutrition Month in July. Specialists are slated to spearhead the seminars and conferences that will underscore the need for a modernized but safe approach to livestock, aquaculture, and poultry farming in ensuring safe and sustainable food production. Some of the conference topics are contributed by the National Dairy Authority, the Philippine Carabao Center, the Bureau of Animal Industry, and

the National Livestock Program to name a few. This year, Livestock Philippines also collaborated with new partners like the Philippine College of Swine Practitioners.

Livestock Philippines also highlights exclusive technical seminars by the exhibitors about the in-depth discussion on feed production, sustainable livestock production, aqua farming, breeding, broiler caging system, and egg forum.

The show's success is being attributed to the valuable partnership between the DA and Informa Markets—the organizers of Livestock Philippines and its ASEAN and Taiwan series. The exceptional insights of the DA, along with its affiliated agencies and the global marketing connection of Informa Markets, made Livestock Philippines the most trusted trade event for livestock, poultry, and aquaculture since 2011.

Livestock Philippines is concurrently held with the 3rd edition of Aquaculture Philippines, led by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR).

This year, Livestock Philippines expects around 10,000 trade visitors both local and international.

Raadee S. Sausa





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# Lava flow from Mayon extends 2.8 kms

By ROMINA CABRERA

Lava flow has reached 2.8 kilometers from the summit crater as Mayon Volcano's high level of unrest continued in the past 24 hours, according to the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology.

Phivolcs said the very slow effusion of lava continued on the Mi-isi (south) and Bonga (southeastern) gullies of the volcano.

Five dome-collapse pyroclastic density currents (PDCs) that lasted for two to five minutes were observed aside from 232 rockfall events, a volcanic earthquake and repetitive pulse tremor.

Continuous moderate degassing produced steam-laden plumes rising 200 meters from the summit crater.

Sulfur dioxide emissions averaged 1,170 tons per day.

More than a month since increased seismic activity was observed, Mayon remains under Alert Level 3.

Phivolcs stressed the need to evacuate residents within the six-kilometer permanent danger zone due to the danger of PDCs, lava flow, rockfalls and other

volcanic hazards.

As Mayon continues to be restive, the Albay Public Safety and Emergency Management Office (APSEMO) gave assurance that there are enough food and other relief items for more than 5,000 families in 25 evacuation centers across the province.

Eugene Escobar, APSEMO assistant head, said supplies that can last for three months are on standby.

## 6,182 hectares of agri land at risk

Meanwhile, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said 6,182 hectares of agricultural land are at risk from Mayon's explosive eruption.

In a bulletin issued yesterday, the DA said 1,378 hectares of rice fields, 1,125 hectares of cornfields, 626 hectares of vegetable farms and 3,053 hectares of fruit farms may be affected in nine towns and cities in Albay.

The DA said there are also 52,626 animal heads in the affected areas.

Agricultural damage due to Mayon's unrest has not been recorded, but ashfalls were monitored in Guinobatan and Ligao City.

Last month, the DA activated its com-

mand center to monitor the situation.

It has identified 26 animal evacuation centers outside the six-kilometer-radius extended danger zone.

"To date, there are 20 animal pooling sites with 1,120 animals (cattle, carabao, goat, sheep) evacuated from 467 farmers. Evacuation of animals is ongoing," the DA said.

## Gov't aid

The DA said it provided P1.25 million worth of drugs, biologics and feeds for the evacuated animals.

It is conducting regular livestock health monitoring and disease surveillance of animals in the centers.

The DA distributed P1.17 million worth of agricultural inputs to evacuees for the establishment of communal gardens at evacuation sites in partnership with the Department of Labor and Employment.

Kadiwa centers near evacuation centers were opened in coordination with the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Trade and Industry, farmers' associations, micro, small and medium enterprises as well as local government units. — With Cet Dematera, Bella Cariaso, Danessa Rivera





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## **SINAG: File charges vs agri smugglers, hoarders**

By **BELLA CARIASO**

A farmers' group wants charges filed against people, including government officials, involved in smuggling, hoarding and price fixing of agricultural products.

The Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) made the call yesterday after President Marcos ordered the Department of Justice (DOJ) and National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) to probe people involved in these illegal activities, including officials from the Bureau of Customs, Department of Agriculture (DA) and Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI).

SINAG president Rosendo So said the DOJ and NBI should un-

mask personnel from the BOC, DA and BPI who are conspiring with unscrupulous traders.

On Tuesday, Marcos directed concerned agencies to investigate the smuggling, hoarding and price fixing of onions and other agricultural products.

Marcos, who also serves as agriculture secretary, said the order stemmed from the House hearings conducted on the issue.

"The investigation should not only include onions but all the agricultural products as it really affects the local industry," So said.

SINAG executive director Jayson Cainglet said the pieces of evidence gathered during the House inquiry are enough to file charges against

those involved.

Retail prices of onions reached as high as P720 per kilo in December 2022 amid shortage in the supply due to hoarding and price manipulation.

Marcos vowed to put an end to the unlawful activities of smugglers and hoarders of agricultural products, saying their operations are causing starvation and poverty.

Marcos did not set a deadline for the investigation, but expects the NBI and DOJ to come up with a comprehensive probe.

Marcos reiterated that the activities of hoarders, smugglers and price manipulators amount to economic sabotage.

— **With Alexis Romero, Delon Porcalla, Marc Jayson Cayabyab**





# Inflation drops to 5.4% in June

BY NIÑA MYKA PAULINE ARCEO

**I**NFLATION slowed for a fifth consecutive month in June as transportation and food prices fell, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported on Wednesday.

The 5.4-percent result, down from 6.1 percent in May and a year earlier, fell within the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' (BSP) 5.3- to 6.1-percent forecast for the month. It also matched the 5.4-percent median in a *Manila Times* poll of economists.

It was the lowest recorded inflation in the past 13 months, the PSA said.

Core inflation, which strips out volatile food and energy items, also declined to 7.4 percent from 7.7 percent.

Year to date, headline inflation stood at 7.2 percent while core inflation was at 7.7 percent. It remained well over the central bank's 2.0- to 4.0-percent target.

"The downtrend of the overall inflation in June 2023 was primarily influenced by the slower annual increase in the heavily weighted food and non-alcoholic beverages at 6.7 percent in June 2023 from 7.4 percent in the previous month," the PSA said in a statement.

"The faster annual decrease in transport at -3.1 percent during the month from -0.5 percent in May 2023 also contributed to the downtrend of the overall inflation," it added.

"Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels was the third main source of deceleration of the headline inflation in June 2023 with a 5.6-percent annual growth rate from 6.5 percent in May 2023."

The PSA noted that higher inflation rates were seen in the index of personal care, and miscellaneous goods and services at 5.8 percent from 5.7 percent in May 2023.

Food inflation at the national level eased to 6.7 percent in June from 7.5 percent in May. This was primarily due to lower annual growth in meat and other parts of

slaughtered land animals at 0.3 percent from 3.2 percent.

"This was followed by fruits and nuts with an inflation of 11.4 percent in June 2023 from 14.3 percent in the previous month," the PSA said.

The National Economic and Development Authority also noted slower inflation for meat, eggs and dairy products, bread and other cereals.

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan claimed that the government was "swift to provide immediate solutions to mitigate the effects of rising prices, particularly for the most vulnerable sectors."

"We are making progress in managing inflation, and we can expect that it will decline to within 2-4 percent by the end of the year,"

he added.

"The government remains committed to protecting the purchasing power of the Filipino people by ensuring food security, reducing transport and logistics costs, and lowering energy costs for Filipino households."

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas emphasized that inflation risks remained and were leaning toward the upside due to the possible impact of fare and minimum wage increases, supply constraints, the El Niño weather pattern and higher toll rates.

In June, the BSP kept its policy rate steady at 6.25 percent for a second straight policy meeting after raising key interest rates by a total of 425 basis points since May of last year.

The 2023 inflation forecast was also cut to 5.4 percent from 5.5 percent but that for next year was raised to 2.9 percent from 2.8 percent.

For 2025, inflation is expected to average 3.2 percent.

"The BSP stands ready to adjust the monetary policy stance as necessary to prevent the further broadening of price pressures as well as the emergence of additional second-order effects in view of the persistent upside risks to the inflation outlook," the central bank said.

"The BSP also supports the timely and effective implementation of nonmonetary government measures to mitigate the impact of persistent supply side pressures on inflation," it added.





## A look into advances in irrigation technology

**A**GRICULTURE is known to account for about 70 percent of fresh water consumption globally, and I do not see that trend as sustainable as fresh water is not a finite source. The sad thing is not much has changed when it comes to irrigation practices in the Philippines and globally. But we cannot wait for the time when agriculture will have limited or lesser access to fresh water as urbanization and industrialization also have fresh water requirements.

In the immediate scenario, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration declared on Tuesday (July 4, 2023) the onset of the El Niño phenomenon in the country that is expected to last until the end of this year or the first quarter of next year. This is definitely bad news for the whole country, including the Philippine agriculture sector.

What puzzles me is El Niño episodes are predictable and there are hundreds of proven measures to mitigate its impact, most especially to the agriculture sector.

What also puzzles me is there are existing irrigation technologies that have proven to conserve water and increase farm production



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output simultaneously, and the advent of artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and digitalization are helping develop more efficient irrigation systems.

One of the proven irrigation technologies is drip irrigation developed in Israel in 1959 where water is literally "dripped" on the roots of crops through a series of pipes or hoses with holes. With AI and digitalization, I believe that drip irrigation can be more efficient or save more water. The savings in water using drip irrigation is up to 80 percent while crop yields can be increased by upwards of 20 percent.

Drip irrigation can also be used to deliver nutrients to crops through a process called "fertigation," reducing the cost of fertilizer use. Today, there are many companies that have drip irrigation systems as part of their product offerings, like Rain Bird in the United States, Irritech in Italy and Netafim in Israel. These

companies have also tapped into the power of AI and digital technology to further improve their drip irrigation systems.

Netafim, which can claim to be the leader in drip irrigation technology, currently has systems that utilize soil moisture sensors and weather data to automatically adjust water delivery.

Micro-irrigation, meanwhile, is an advancement of drip irrigation that utilizes very small emitters to deliver water directly to the roots of plants. This type of irrigation system is primarily designed for high-value crops, particularly fruits, vegetables and flowers.

### Smart irrigation

Traditional irrigation systems can also be made more efficient through a "smart" system that deploys AI and a host of other tools like sensors to monitor the weather and condition of the soil and crops. The other tools deployed are metering and mechanical distribution systems that deliver the most optimum level of water to grow crops. The metering system also sets a schedule on delivering water, as irrigating crops must be

conducted at certain intervals and during the best time of the day, like when the sun is not out.

Sensors have also become more sophisticated. For example, US-based Toro Co. offers a smart irrigation system called the Precision Soil Sensor, which utilizes wireless sensors to measure soil moisture levels and generate information that will be sent to a controller. The controller will then make adjustments on what is the most optimum level of water to be delivered to the crops based on the conditions in the field.

### More advances in irrigation systems

Another advanced irrigation system that is gaining popularity for its efficiency is subsurface drip irrigation (SDI) that delivers water to the root system through a dripline underneath the soil. This type of water delivery ensures almost zero water loss from evaporation, especially in hot climates or tropical environments.

SDI can become more efficient if it is combined with a mechanical system governed by AI and supported by sensors for the crops and climate. Toro Co. and Rain Bird

now offer SDI systems with smart controllers utilizing weather data, soil sensors and flow meters to optimize delivery of irrigation water.

Meanwhile, Jain Irrigation Systems has products that use recycled or reclaimed water that helps conserve precious water resources.

While all the recent or latest developments in irrigation technology looks promising, the issue of ensuring fresh water supply should also be addressed and this can be done also through rainwater harvesting. The wonder about rainwater harvesting is it is low tech and can be integrated with the latest in irrigation technology.

Advanced irrigation systems are one of the technologies that farmers must adopt over the short to medium term to help conserve precious water resources and increase crop yields.

So, to further improve yields, farmers can start adopting high-yielding varieties of the crops they cultivate, and utilize drones for the delivery of pesticides and for field monitoring.

With the rapid advances in technology, farmers will never run out of solutions and innovations to increase their yields and conserve precious resources like soil and water.

However, the high cost of technology can discourage smallholder farmers in adopting the latest in agricultural innovation. Among the solutions to address that issue is to organize farmers, and extend low-interest loans so they can acquire the technologies they need. Private companies can also offer intensive training and low-cost financing to the organized farmers or agribusiness companies seeking advanced irrigation systems.

The organized farmers can also partner with a research institution like a state university or college (SUC) that would assist them in technology adoption.

A good example of a state university that can assist farmers in advanced irrigation adoption is the Central Luzon State University in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija that has developed its own advanced irrigation systems: drip irrigation for garlic and onion production; and automated furrow irrigation system for sugarcane.

And my wish is for more SUCs to develop agricultural technologies and be at the forefront of helping farmers adopt to emerging scientific innovations for sustainably growing food.





## This rooftop gardener is also in YT

BY LEANDER C. DOMINGO

**A** PHOTOGRAPHER by profession, Don Bustamante was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes in 2015, and his doctor advised him to eat nutritious food such as vegetables. Because of this, Bustamante thought of building an organic garden in his yard and rooftop.

When the pandemic hit in 2019, Bustamante also lost his livelihood due to the lockdowns. But he didn't go hungry because of his rooftop garden that also earns him money.

"I have no passion for gardening because the agriculture sector is considered the least attractive economic sector in the country. But I got interested when I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. Because I wanted to follow the doctor's advice to reduce my rice intake and increase vegetables, I attempted to grow them," Bustamante told *The Manila Times*.

He then thought of gardening on the rooftop of his residence in Taguig, realizing that he didn't have a place to grow his crops.

"I live here in a highly urbanized area. So, the biggest problem is if you want to grow crops, you don't have your own land, especially here in Metro Manila," Bustamante said.

He said it just so happened that when he started gardening, his house was still under construction, and he designed it to have a small portion where he can grow his own food.

Bustamante made all the preparations for his rooftop garden. "When planting, you must have a good space. If you have a rooftop, first clean your rooftop and imagine where you will put the plants."

"If there are things that will bother you, you have to remove them. You also have to study



■ Don Bustamante tends to his rooftop garden in his residence in Taguig. TMT SCREENGAB



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where the sunlight comes from. Remember that sunlight requirements are depending on what you plant," he added.

In his rooftop garden, Bustamante plants mostly pechay, which he said is an example of a crop that requires sunlight from six to eight hours.

"So, when you plant on the rooftop, look for an area where the sun shines from six to eight hours. There are also other types of crops like herbs such as dill, basils and coriander, these are the ones that need three to six hours of sunlight," Bustamante said.

His first foray into planting was not very successful but he persevered.

"So that's where I started to study. There are a lot of free information on the internet, and I also asked my friends who are into gardening what should be done," he said.

Bustamante sought information from Filipinos and not from content creators based in another country because their climate is different from the Philippines.

"I learned from friends and acquaintances, and I also learned from social media, on the internet, and little by little, I learned the correct mixing of soil and fertilizers," he said.

For those who are new to urban farming, Bustamante recommends planting pechay whose light and water requirements are very important.

"After a lot of practice, I perfected the soil, light and water requirements of pechay, which makes it easier for me to grow other crops like the green leafy mustard, lettuce and kangkong," he said adding that their soil, light and water requirements are almost the same.

He thought lettuces only grow in cooler locations, but some varieties can also grow in hot areas like Metro Manila, otherwise, they will taste bitter.

Bustamante started growing crops five years before the pandemic when more people became interested in gardening increased.

## Teaching what he has learned

Now he teaches what he has learned and doesn't want his students to go through the trouble of getting the right soil mix, among others.

"I tell my students directly what the formula is, so that it will be easier for them. For those who want to learn, I avoid teaching them the hard way because they might get discouraged," he said.

He also promotes organic gardening that includes fermenting the intestines of fish and chopping up leaves to convert them into fertilizer. Fruits go through fermentation that takes weeks before one can take advantage of its uses.

Bustamante has been into recording and bookkeeping when he started gardening.

"I do trial and error. Sometimes when I plant, I see no improvements, so I go back to zero. Thus, I thought maybe it would be easier if I had all data recorded," he said.

Everything he did was documented, the soil mixing and the amount of fertilizer applied, among others. He wrote everything and when his plant doesn't grow,

he refers to his data to review and make necessary adjustments until he discovers the correct procedure.

Once a week, Bustamante also applies organic fertilizer using fermented plant juice to accelerate growth and make the leaves look better and don't turn yellowish.

"Because it's an organic planting method, there's no overdose even if you give it to the plant every day, but once a week is good enough," he said.

Due to his perseverance, Bustamante is also known as a successful organic practitioner in the online world who also earned a YouTube silver button plaque for his first 100,000 subscribers. He now has 350,000 followers on his YouTube Channel.

"But the most important thing is watching and learning from what you show in the video. My subscribers are automatically notified whenever I upload videos. What

is more important is how many views there are because revenues are based not on subscribers but on views," he said.

He said he created his YouTube Channel as he wanted to share information "because I believe that sharing is enriching so whatever you learn, share it with others."

He said he didn't know about video monetization and that was not his intention. But when he started his YouTube Channel, within three months, his channel was monetized. That was during the pandemic when many people became interested in plants and ornamentals.

"When I started engaging in agriculture and gardening, so many opportunities came. When my YouTube Channel was monetized, it became a new source of income for me and my family, which also made me quit my job and had to focus on gardening," he said.



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## Inflation further decelerates in June

**By Keisha B. Ta-asan**  
Reporter

HEADLINE INFLATION slowed for a fifth straight month in June, the lowest in 14 months, as food and transport prices eased, the state statistics agency said on Wednesday.

However, the potential impact of El Niño and wage hikes may fuel price increases in the second half of the year, analysts said.

Preliminary data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed the consumer price index (CPI) eased to 5.4% in June from 6.1% both in May 2023 and June 2022.

This was the slowest in 14 months or since the 4.9% clip in April last year. It was also the first time inflation fell below 6% since the 5.4% print in May 2022.

The June print was below the 5.5% median estimate in a *BusinessWorld* poll conducted last week, and at the low end of the 5.3-6.1% forecast range of

the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP).

Seasonally adjusted inflation slowed to 0.1% in June from 0.3% in May.

Year-to-date inflation settled at 7.2%, still higher than the revised 5.4% forecast by the central bank. It also marked the 15<sup>th</sup> straight month of inflation

exceeding the BSP's 2-4% target band.

The slower annual increase in the food and transport index contributed to the deceleration in inflation, National Statistician Claire Dennis S. Mapa said at a press briefing on Wednesday.

The index for food and non-alcoholic beverages eased to 6.7% from

7.4% in the previous month. Food inflation alone decelerated to 6.7% in June from the 7.5% in May, due to the slower rise in prices of meat and other parts of slaughtered land animals (0.3% in June from 3.2% in May), fruits and nuts (11.4% from 14.3%), and sugar, confectionery and desserts (28.9% from 31.6%).

*Inflation, S1/9*





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## JUNE INFLATION SLOWS TO 5.4%; EL NIÑO A RISK

By CAI U. ORDINARIO

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**E**L Niño is now considered one of the major upside risks to inflation in the next few months, according to the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) and the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda).

On Wednesday, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that inflation slowed to 5.4 percent in June from the 6.1 percent posted in May 2023 and June 2022. (Full story here: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/07/05/inflation-slows-down-to-5-4-in-june-downtrend-mostly-due-to-cheaper-food-transpo-costs-psa/>).

The Philippine weather bureau, Pagasa, on Tuesday issued an advisory that El Niño's impact will be most pronounced in the latter part of 2023 and will extend until the second quarter of next year.

"The balance of risks to the inflation outlook continues to lean towards the upside owing to the potential impact of additional transport fare increases and minimum wage adjustments, persistent supply constraints of key food items, El Niño weather conditions, and possible knock-on effects of higher toll rates on prices of key agricultural items. Meanwhile, the impact of a weaker-than-expected global economic recovery remains the primary downside risk to the outlook," BSP said in a statement.

BSP said the June 2023 inflation rate was within the BSP's forecast range of 5.3 to 6.1 percent. It is also consistent with the assessment that inflation will remain elevated over the near term before gradually decelerating back to target range in last quarter of 2023 in the absence of further supply shocks.

"The BSP stands ready to adjust the monetary policy stance as necessary to prevent the further broadening of price pressures as well as the emergence of additional second order effects in view of the

persistent upside risks to the inflation outlook," BSP said.

"The BSP also supports the timely and ef-

fective implementation of non-monetary government measures to mitigate the impact of persistent supply-side pressures on inflation," it added.

It may be noted that El Niño years such as

1998, which saw one of the worst dry spells experienced by the country, saw inflation average 9 percent and peak at 10 percent, according to PSA data.

However, data showed that in 2014 to 2016 when the country also experienced an El Niño, inflation averaged 3.8 percent in 2014; 0.9 percent in 2015; and 1.4 percent in 2016.

"The Inter-Agency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook will continue to take proactive steps to address the main causes of inflation. This is particularly important considering the impending El Niño, which poses risks to food supply and prices," Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said.

This may be a concern given that rice prices are already increasing. PSA National Statistician Claire Dennis S. Mapa said rice prices have been climbing since January 2023.

Rice inflation reached 2.7 percent in January 2023; 2.2 percent in February; 2.6 percent in March; 2.9 percent in April; 3.4 percent in May; and 3.6 percent in June.

Mapa also said all rice categories, regular and well-milled as well as special rice prices in June 2023, all increased. It can be noted that rice, the country's food staple, is a water-loving crop.

Rice has a weight of 8.87 percent of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of the All Households and 17.87 percent weight in the CPI of the Bottom 30 percent of Households.

"We are seeing that the changes [in prices] are across the three commodity groupings of rice," Mapa said.

"Yung presyo sa [The prices in] retail, [with the] regular, [this is] locally produced [but the uptrend is] very slow, a few centavos every month since February."

The scenario of all rice categories showing rising prices, including special rice which is imported, indicates that El Niño is not just being felt in the Philippines but in other parts of the world.

Bloomberg earlier noted that the El Niño will have the largest impacts on countries like India, Argentina, the Philippines, Australia, and Peru in terms of GDP reduction.

In terms of inflation, Bloomberg said Argentina, Brazil, India and the Philippines will experience the largest increases in commodity prices.

The Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI) said given this, importing food may now be less effective in terms of slowing inflation.

"Importing food from abroad might become less effective in addressing supply problems since El Niño is expected to affect other parts of the world," BPI stated in an economic brief.

The PSA said the 7.5 percent food inflation at the national level in May 2023 also exhibited a downward movement for the fourth month in a row.

In the previous month, food inflation was posted at 8 percent. However, despite the deceleration, the May 2022 food inflation was still lower at 5.2 percent.

Food accounted for a 42.5-percent share, "or 2.6 percentage points to the overall inflation in May 2023," PSA said.

The core inflation, which excludes selected food and energy items in the headline inflation, slowed to 7.7 percent in May 2023 from 7.9 percent in April 2023.

This brings the average core inflation of January-May 2023 to 7.8 percent. In May 2022, core inflation was observed at 2.8 percent.





## PHL delegation of plant-based product exhibitors to Seoul generate \$174.69M in initial export sales

By ANDREA E. SAN JUAN

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**T**HE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) announced the Philippine delegation of coconut and plant-based products exhibitors to the Seoul Food and Hotel (SFH) 2023 generated initial export sales of \$174.69 million during the four-day food and hospitality trade show held from May 30 to June 2, 2023 at the Korea International Exhibition (KINTEX) Center 1, South Korea.

According to the DTI-Export Marketing Bureau (EMB), the mission resulted in "significant" interest from foreign buyers, with \$154.80

million in sales under negotiation and \$19.89 million actual sales.

The \$154.80 million sales under negotiation, DTI-EMB said, is "one

of the highest" among the trade fairs participated in by DTI's export marketing arm under the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP) following its first year of implementation in 2022.

Philippine Trade and Investment Center (PTIC) in Seoul Commercial Counselor Jose Ma. S. Dinsay emphasized that the potential for coconut and plant-based products in Korea is "huge."

"Aside from retail products, we are looking to grab bigger opportunities in high-value inputs to manufacturing, food processing, farming, pharmaceutical, and cosmetics," Dinsay added.

The export marketing arm said the initiative is part of the implementation of the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan, where the DTI has been assisting farmer cooperatives and exporters to increase their knowledge in the global market through research, marketing, and marketing promotion strategies, and in line with the Philippine Export Development



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Plan (PEDP) 2023-2028.

In fact, DTI Assistant Secretary Glenn G. Peñaranda said the Philippines "was able to prove its readiness to seize opportunities for coconut and plant-based products and collaborate with Korean buyers."

With this, Peñaranda said the DTI will "strengthen" its initiatives that aim to expand and diversify the country's exports, in line with the PEDP 2023-2028.

SFH is Korea's "most prominent" international food and hospitality trade show, connecting global businesses and enabling Korean buyers to access premium products worldwide.

Organized by the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) and co-organized by Informa Markets and KINTEX, the 2023 edition consisted of 2,515 booths of 1,316 companies from 39 countries, DTI reported.

Moreover, DTI said SFH provides a "valuable" platform for networking, showcasing products, and facilitating business opportunities within the food and hospitality sectors, making

it a key event for industry professionals and businesses looking to engage in the Korean market.

"The Philippine participation in SFH also enabled Philippine micro, small, and medium enterprises [MSME] to gain on-the-ground market insights that will allow them to better position their products in the highly competitive Korean market," DTI said.

The Philippine delegation included 14 coconut, coffee, and cacao exporters, and two farmer cooperatives that were featured in the Coconut Philippines pavilion, and four exporters of plant-based products in the Asean Trade Fair, and was led by DTI-EMB and PTIC-Seoul.

The Coconut Philippines Pavilion showcased the products of Benevella Corporation, Cattleya & Rose Gourmet Foods Trading, Eng Seng Food Products, Fortune of Wishes Seafood Products, Fruits of Life Inc., Greenlife Coconut Products Philippines, Inc., Hijo Superfoods, Kalipunan ng Maliliit na Magniniyong Pilipino Agriculture Cooperative,

Kimes Food International Inc., Marigold Manufacturing Corporation, Miguelitos International Corporation, Pinagdanlayan Multi-purpose Cooperative, Profood International Corporation, Sol's Italian Food, Theo & Philo Chocolate Factory, and Tongsan Industrial Corporation which gained high level of interest from both Korean and other foreign buyers during SFH 2023.

According to the DTI's export marketing arm, the Coconut Philippines pavilion and Philippine booths at the Asean Korea Trade Fair were visited by major buyers and large general food companies such as Lotte, E-Mart, Daesang Group, Shinsegae department store, and e-commerce platforms like Coupang and AMAZON Korea.

Meanwhile, the DTI-EMB said these major buyers expressed their interest to source Filipino products, particularly desiccated coconut, coconut water, coconut butter, coconut chips, coconut wraps, fruit crisps, vegetable crisps, and calamansi fruit concentrate.





## Inflation consistent with BSP target

By LEE C. CHIPONGIAN

**T**he Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said Wednesday, July 5, that the lower June consumer price index (CPI) is within its expectation on the medium-term inflation path of a below four percent inflation by October or November this year.

This is the fifth month that CPI is on a decelerating trend since hitting a peak of 8.7 percent in January. The continued decline in inflation allows the BSP's Monetary Board to keep its policy rate unchanged for some time if there are no more supply shocks.

"The BSP stands ready to adjust the monetary policy stance as necessary to prevent the further broadening of price pressures as well as the emergence of additional second order effects in view of the persistent upside risks to the inflation outlook," the BSP reiterated on Wednesday after the government announced a 5.4 percent June inflation versus the month of May's 6.1 percent.

Based on BSP data, this is the first time that inflation fell below six percent since June 2022 when it increased to 6.1 percent from 5.4 percent in May of last

year. After June 2022, CPI has continued to rise until it peaked in January.

Before June 2022, the last time inflation exceeded six percent was in August 2018. That year, CPI peaked in September and October at 6.7 percent before declining to six percent by November and to 5.1 percent by December 2018.

The BSP also reiterated that it continues to encourage and supports the government's "timely and effective implementation of non-monetary government measures to mitigate the impact of persistent supply-side pressures on inflation."

The BSP projected June inflation will range from a low of 5.3 percent to a high of 6.1 percent. It said that the 5.4 percent actual June CPI is "consistent with the overall assessment that inflation will remain elevated over the near term before gradually decelerating back to target range

in Q4 2023 in the absence of further supply-shocks."

From a peak of 8.7 percent in January, inflation has steadily declined to 8.6 percent in February, 7.6 percent in March, 6.6 percent in April, 6.1 percent in May and 5.4 percent in June.

The central bank continues to assess that there are more upside risks to inflation outlook than downside risks.

The upside risks include the potential impact of additional transport fare increases and minimum wage adjustments, persistent supply constraints of key food items, El Niño weather conditions, and possible knock-on effects of higher toll rates on prices of key agricultural items, it said.

Downside risk is primarily the impact of a weaker-than-expected global economic recovery.

As of its last Monetary Board policy meeting on June 22, the BSP has an average inflation forecast for 2023 of 5.4 percent, lower than its May 18 projection of 5.5 percent. For next year, the BSP raised its CPI projection to 2.9 percent from 2.8 percent previously.

The BSP has a current "hold" position in monetary policy setting. The benchmark rate is still 6.25 percent for

the last two policy meetings in a row. A pause in the monetary tightening cycle will give BSP time to review markets' conditions after the aggressive rate hikes, especially asset prices.

The BSP has raised the key rate by a combined 425 basis points to ensure CPI will go back to within the target range of two percent to four percent by 2024. As of end-June, inflation averaged at 7.2 percent, still way above the target of two percent to four percent. But the year-to-date average CPI is on point to BSP's forecast of what inflation will be by the end of the first half 2023, based on its latest Monetary Policy Report.

Under the BSP's inflation targeting framework for monetary policy, the target is defined in terms of the average year-on-year change in the CPI over the calendar year.

The BSP said the two percent to four percent inflation target until 2025 remains an "appropriate quantitative representation of the medium-term goal of price stability" that is "optimal for the Philippines given the current structure of the economy and outlook of macroeconomic conditions over the next few years."







## NEWS

### 5.4% inflation rate lowest in 13 months

The inflation rate cooled to a 13-month low in June, easing to 5.4 percent and surprising most economists. Analysts on Wednesday said the rise in the prices of basic commodities was still fast, but they agreed that it should slow down as early as September. National Statistician Dennis Mapa cited the slower increases in the prices of food, transport fares, fuel and electricity as factors.

—STORY BY RONNEL W. DOMINGO

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# Inflation cools to 5.4%, slowest in 13 months

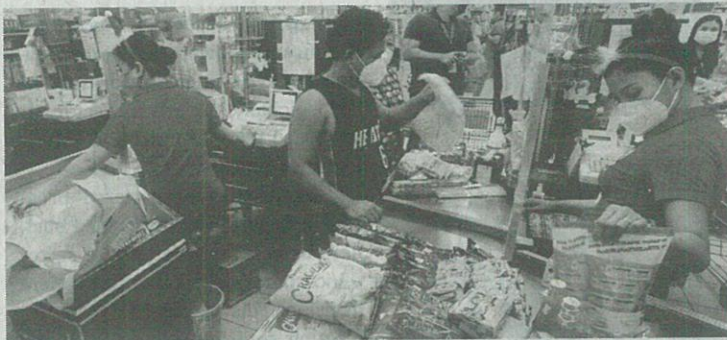
By Ronnel W. Domingo  
@RonWDomingoINQ

The rate of growth in prices of goods and services that households commonly purchase cooled to a 13-month low of 5.4 percent in June and both government and private-sector analysts expect the monthly readout to be back down to 4 percent or less as early as September.

The turnout in June was better than the expectation of Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), which predicted 5.7 percent, as well as those of analysts whose common forecast was around 5.5 percent.

Still, average inflation from January to June remained at 7.2 percent, still way off the BSP's full-year target range of 2 to 4 percent.

National Statistician Dennis Mapa said at a press briefing that the downward pull on headline inflation was mainly due to slower increases in prices of meat, fruits and sweets; gasoline, diesel and road transport fare; as well as



STILL COSTLY, BUT UNDER CONTROL A male shopper keeps an eye on his amount due at a grocery in Quezon City. —FILE PHOTO

electricity and home rent.

On the other hand, prices of personal care services as well as of miscellaneous goods and services grew at faster rates in June.

#### Decline expected

With five consecutive months of decline since 8.7 percent in January, inflation was the slowest since the 6.1 percent recorded in June 2022.

"We are making progress in managing inflation and we can expect that it will decline to within [target] by the end of the

year," Economic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said in a statement.

Balisacan said that in line with efforts to bring down prices further, especially for the benefit of the sectors that are most vulnerable to high prices, the government expects to begin this month the so-called food stamp program, where poor families are given food subsidies worth P3,000.

According to BSP, the inflation level in June was consistent with the expectation that

prices will remain high over the next few months before gradually decelerating in the fourth quarter.

Japan-based Nomura Group said in a commentary that the direction of its forecast suggested a sharp decline in inflation during this second semester of 2023.

"If [El Niño] does not coincide with the main crop, particularly rice, it may only delay or reduce the impact [on food output]," Nomura said.

The economic research team at the Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI) agreed that inflation may reach target levels by September or October "if conditions remain favorable."

BPI said that this might happen considering that the global economy is still struggling with weak demand.

"However, we also see upside risks that could prevent inflation from declining faster," the homegrown bank said. "The most significant risk is food security, especially given the looming El Niño." INQ





## Preparing for El Niño

With El Niño back once again after seven years, it's time to put more muscle into the El Niño Task Force to carry out the country's Extended Roadmap to Address the Impact of El Niño (E-RAIN) strategy, as well as introduce further improvements to mitigate an foreseen harsher effect on the Philippines.

During the country's last El Niño spell, which lasted 18 months from 2015 to 2016, about five percent of our farmers and 550,000 hectares of farmlands were badly affected by an El Niño-induced drought. Aggregate reports indicated

### BIZLINKS



REY GAMBOA

severe effects on a third of the country, where a state of calamity was declared in six cities, 16 provinces, and 65 municipalities.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO), which monitors weather and climate information across the globe, provides crucial early and reliable warnings of severe weather that are used by decision-makers to be better prepared for climate changes.

For this current El Niño cycle, the WMO is predicting breaking temperature records and more extreme heat in many parts of the world. The warnings by the WMO for countries likely to be most affected by this current El Niño cycle include the need by respective governments to mobilize all preparations to limit the impact on the economies.

### Agriculture shock

Numerous studies have shown how El Niño negatively impacts affected countries' gross domestic product (GDP), household incomes, and per capita consumption, and if not managed well, could induce high inflation resulting from raised food prices.

For the Philippines, our agriculture sector will bear one of the biggest shocks that severe droughts can bring. Not many will remember the El Niño of 1997-1998 when the amount of rain in the country fell to half of historical levels, inducing droughts in two-thirds of farmlands. The dryness was so bad that almost 10,000 hectares of natural forests caught fire and were destroyed

During the last El Niño seven years ago, average rainfall in Luzon decreased by 14 percent, 21 percent in the Visayas, and 35 percent in Mindanao. An estimated \$325 million in crops were damaged, and put in peril the lives of tens of thousands of affected farming families.

While agriculture's contribution to GDP has dropped to barely nine percent over the years, its relevance to the whole economy is still substantial, especially when one takes into consideration downstream agricultural processing, input production, and agriculture-related trading and transporting. More importantly, agriculture employs almost a quarter of the country's workforce.

### Anticipating the worse

Having in place an early response system has been recommended to help cushion the impact of income losses. With the help of international aid programs, early interventions to prepare for the worst consist of training the government's national and local agriculture technicians on disaster preparedness and climate change adaptation.

Other major initiatives are cash-for-work, food distribution, public information, water system improvements, and seeds and fertilizer distribution. The distribution of certified seeds for rice, corn, and vegetables in the past have allowed farm families to re-start livelihood opportunities after months of living in uncertain conditions.

During the last El Niño, RAIN was able to successfully stabilize food prices and food supplies nationwide by supporting crop production in unaffected or mildly affected regions. Together with the distribution of food stamps and the removal of rice import quotas, reports showed a substantial reduction in economic losses.

The President had called for the reactivation of the El Niño Task Force two months ago, which should give the team enough lead time to prepare the country for the worst. The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) warned that the worst of El Niño would likely be towards the end of the year until the second quarter of 2024.

### Room for improvement

Among the areas that the Task Force could improve on are in the faster, more systematic delivery of cash aid. A review of how the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) could quickly make available funds to affected rural and urban

households is in order, similar to what happened three years ago when the pandemic lockdowns were ordered.

Redirecting allotted funds for other climate-related activities and budgets should likewise be reviewed, which should give the government more flexibility in adjusting aid distribution where and when best needed.

The United Nations has already warned of global supply and price pressures on rice should droughts badly affect major rice-producing countries. Being partially dependent on rice importation, the Philippines is at risk of disruptions that could lead to rising prices.

The Task Force, likewise, needs, to improve weather forecasting systems and make these accessible to farmers. Having technology play a larger role for our agriculture sector has been a challenge that has been endlessly talked about, but has remained just talk.

Once again, although likely too late, the Philippines needs to improve on its water management system. Not only does this mean better irrigation infrastructure and system for areas that are likely more prone to droughts, but also to stabilize water supplies to urban areas that are most often affected by lowered water levels.

Additionally, a committed and all-encompassing food security program is needed that would put in place sustainable researches on drought- and flood-resistant crop varieties, a network of farmer-friendly grain and food storage systems, and many others.

The latest inflation numbers have just come in, and even if it has dropped to 5.4 percent last month, the average is still high at 7.2 percent. The last thing we need is a new pressure point in the coming months.

### Facebook and Twitter

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*Should you wish to share any insights, write me at Link Edge, 25<sup>th</sup> Floor, 139 Corporate Center, Valero Street, Salcedo Village, 1227 Makati City. Or e-mail me at [reydgamboa@yahoo.com](mailto:reydgamboa@yahoo.com). For a compilation of previous articles, visit [www.BizlinksPhilippines.net](http://www.BizlinksPhilippines.net).*





# Inflation eases in June

By LOUELLA DESIDERIO

**Inflation in the country eased for the fifth straight month in June largely due to slower increases in food prices, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.**

In a press conference yesterday, PSA chief Dennis Mapa said headline inflation – the rate of increase in prices of

goods and services – continued to move at a slower pace of 5.4 percent last month, from 6.1 percent the prior month and in June last year.

He said this is the lowest inflation print

Turn to B4

## Inflation From B1

since 4.9 percent in April last year.

The June inflation rate is also within the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' 5.3 to 6.1 percent forecast for the month.

Mapa said the slowdown in inflation was mainly due to the prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages, which had a lower inflation rate of 6.7 percent in June from 7.4 percent in May.

He said meat, fruits and nuts, and sugar, confectionery and desserts contributed largely to the slower inflation in food and non-alcoholic beverages.

Also driving the downtrend in overall inflation was the faster decline in transport costs to -3.1 percent in June from -0.5 percent in May.

The housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels commodity group was likewise cited as another source

of deceleration in inflation as the index registered a lower inflation rate of 5.6 percent in June from 6.5 percent in May.

Core inflation, which excludes volatile food and fuel items, also eased to 7.4 percent in June from 7.7 percent in May.

Average inflation for the January to June period was at 7.2 percent, still above the BSP's two to four percent target range.

Economic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said the latest data shows progress in managing inflation.

"We can expect that it will decline to within two to four percent by the end of the year," he said.

Mapa said the trend in overall inflation is going down, but there are still risks, including rice, with prices of the food staple slowly increasing.

He said rice inflation rose to 3.6

percent in June from 2.2 percent in February.

In June alone, he said increases were seen across the three rice categories tracked by the PSA such as regular milled, special and well-milled rice.

For regular milled rice, he said the average price rose from P40.60 per kilo in April to P40.90 per kilo in May, and went up further to P41.20 per kilo in June.



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## IFAD bats for more investments in rural areas to curb food insecurity

**A**MID a global food crisis triggered by the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the acceleration of climate change, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is pushing for greater investments in the small-scale farmers and food producers in developing countries.

Alvaro Lario, IFAD president, recently visited Ireland where he advocated for more investments in rural food producers. He said in a statement that planters in developing countries generate a third of the world's food but are often most impacted by hunger and poverty.

"Investing in small-scale farmers is an investment in a more prosperous and stable world. We cannot continue to neglect rural women and men. After years of under-funding, we need to urgently scale-up these investments so that rural people and small-scale farmers can adapt to climate change, increase local food production, and access markets to earn a decent living," said Lario. "Failure to do so will mean more hunger, more poverty and more conflict and migration."

"Ireland has relentlessly shown that the fight against hunger and poverty is a critical issue that needs to be prioritized. I look forward to meeting Irish decision-makers to provide an updated brief on the urgent need to invest much more in rural people and in food systems to make them more productive, resilient, inclusive and sustainable."

While small-scale farmers produce up to 70 percent of food in low- and middle-income countries, they are often the first to go to bed hungry. About 80 percent of the world's poorest people live in the rural areas of developing countries.

Official development assistance (ODA) to agriculture has been stagnant at 4 to 6

percent for at least 2 decades. Small-scale farmers receive less than 2 percent of global climate finance, and on average, they earn a mere \$0.06 for every \$1 worth of food they produced.

With targeted investments, small-scale farmers can adapt to climate change, and access the markets, technologies and financial services that will transform their lives.

IFAD said investing in agriculture is two to three times more effective at reducing poverty than investment in any other sector. Between 2019-2021, IFAD said its investments raised the incomes of 77.4 million rural people while improving food security for 57 million people.

At the Paris summit on a New Global Financial Pact, 22-23 June, IFAD and French President Emmanuel Macron, made a call for greater funding from IFAD's 177 member states to mobilize as much as \$10 billion for IFAD's work in rural areas between 2025-2027.

During his two-day visit, Lario met with Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland; Sean Fleming, Minister of State for International Development and Diaspora; Charlie McConalogue, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine; as well as the chair and co-chairs of the Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs—overseeing development matters.

Minister for International Development and Diaspora Sean Fleming T.D. said: "Ireland is proud to partner with IFAD to help lift small-scale farmers and rural communities out of poverty. President Lario's visit is a great opportunity to discuss the immense global challenges we face related to food, nutrition and climate, and our shared vision for how to respond."





## EU set for battle over relaxing GMO crop rules in green push

**T**HE European Union is set to propose softer rules on genetically modified crops in a plan backed by big agricultural companies and opposed by green activists and small farmers.

The measure, to be adopted under a broader package on biodiversity and food sectors, is aimed at making agri-food systems more sustainable and resilient, according to draft EU documents seen by Bloomberg News. Supporters such as Bayer AG say it's needed to counter the effects of climate change, while detractors argue it will boost seed costs and hurt consumers.

The European Commission, the bloc's regulatory arm, wants to relax rules on crops made with so-called new genomic technologies, or NGTs, which can improve tolerance to diseases, pests and environmental stresses. Current regulations aren't keeping up with developments like gene editing, which the bloc had previously deemed subject to the same policies as all genetically-modified organisms (GMO).

"The Union risks being excluded to a significant extent from the technological development and economic



AN ear of corn grows at the Bayer AG booth during the Farm Progress Show in Decatur, Illinois. BLOOMBERG NEWS

social and environmental benefits that these new technologies can potentially generate if its GMO framework is not adapted to NGTs," the commission said in the draft law being proposed Wednesday. "In turn, this would lead to less strategic autonomy for the Union."

The new measure comes at a time when governments and businesses across the region are increasingly balking at the costs associated with the bloc's transition to a low-carbon economy. It follows a proposal on nature restoration that ran into Parliamentary opposition over concerns of its affect on

food security and inflation. The assembly is due to hold a plenary vote on it next week.

### Regulatory rollback

THE regulatory rollback on GMOs is intended for plants produced with targeted specific mutations or modifications from the same or closely-related species. It will not apply to crops inserted with foreign species.

The commission has a policy of not commenting on draft documents.

Bayer, one of the world's largest suppliers of genetically modified crops, said the EU proposal will accelerate

breeding of plants that can better cope with extreme weather, helping farms boost resilience against climate change.

"This new regulation is as important as the establishment of book printing was for leading sciences," said Matthias Berninger, global head of public affairs, science, sustainability, health, safety and environment at Bayer.

Once adopted by the commission, the proposal will need endorsement from both the European Parliament and from member states. It has already drawn criticism from Green lawmakers in the EU assembly for significantly softening the existing requirements on labeling, traceability and risk assessment.

"This is really a false miracle solution that plays in the hands of big business and is against small farmers, small seed breeders and also against consumers," said Tilly Metz, a member of the Green party in the EU Parliament. "The consequences will be higher seed prices, less seed choices and less breeding innovation, greater use of pesticides and more herbicide-resistant weeds."

Bloomberg News