

CLIPPINGS FOR FRIDAY, JULY 14, 2022

A. SEC. PBBM QUOTED

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Productive meeting with the President

THE MANILA TIMES

Why the President should stay as DA secretary

MANILA BULLETIN

PBBM after a year, not bad at all!

B. DA FAMILY

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

Gov't to tap PDLs in food security efforts

Food Security

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

PH needs comprehensive shark legislation

For Rare Dolphins' sake, give this Bicol Bay a break.

BUSINESS MIRROR

BOC, DA seize smuggled sugar worth more than 34 million

Govt tapping PDL to plant crops on idle Corrections bureau land

PFDA eyes construction of CEBU regional fish port

ABANTE TONITE

Senado dinikdik NIA sa kapalpakan

Bracing For El Niño

C. AGRI-RELATED STORY

MANILA BULLETIN

Look to local: We're not making good use of our resources

BUSINESS MIRROR

If the current administration wants to bring down the country's poverty rate to single-digit levels, the economy must grow faster--- even at double digits according to the Philippines's "Prophet of Boom"

D. FOREIGN STORY

No Stories

Date: July 14, 2023 Page: B2



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Productive meeting with the President

The elected private sector leaders of the public-private Philippine Council of Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF) value the results from a crucial meeting with President Marcos last July 10. This should be done again in October.

A short background on PCAF, according to its website: "PCAF is an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture (DA) which facilitates broad-based participation processes in the agriculture and fisheries sector. It provides quality services to a nationwide network of private sector-led consultative councils at the national, regional and local levels for the formulation of sound policies, plans and programs."

During the meeting, PCAF was represented by the heads of the Regional Agriculture and Fisheries Councils and the sectoral committees. The DA appointed Elias Jose Inciong and Francisco Hernandez to speak on behalf of the heads.

As the chair of the international trade committee, I was privileged to witness firsthand the political will and decisive action of the President. We will cover here three critical issues that were discussed.

COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDOÑEZ

ification Law review.

If one does not include the unusual year of 1989 when retail prices increased abnormally due to the government's delayed move to import rice, retail prices decreased by only 2 percent, while farm-gate prices (and incomes) dropped by 23 percent. The remedy of putting in place safeguard duties was not implemented. What worsened matters is that necessary functions in the National Food Authority (NFA) were abolished, creating havoc in the industry.

The President said he would advocate domestic production over unbridled importation. He added he would move to restore the NFA functions and implement the agency's original mandate of ensuring rice supply and price stabilization.

These received the most applause from the participants.

Date: July 14, 2023 Page: B2

On water

With the onset of El Niño, water is a top agriculture priority. But water governance has long been a major concern.

In two Asian Development Bank studies covering 48 countries, we ranked at the bottom third in 2013 and 2016. On a 5-point scale, with 5 being the highest, we scored a 1 in terms of water governance in 2013, but improved to a 2 in 2016.

With the formation of a public-private water task force in 2018 where I was the secretary general, we increased this to a 3 in 2020. But much more has to be done.

At the July 10 meeting, the PCAF leaders asked for better coordination among government agencies and significant improvement in the water impoundment and irrigation systems.

The President said he had created last April 27 a Water Resources Management Office that would soon roll out a systematic and coordinated plan. In addition, he tapped the expertise of Rogelio Singson, former Department of Public Works and Highways secretary under the administration of former President Benigno Aquino III. This demonstrated that the President chooses the best, regardless of past political affiliation, which the PCAF leaders appreciated.

On rice

Noting a pattern of reducing tariffs without the corresponding support measures and trade remedies, the participants asked for a Rice Tar-

On smuggling

Rampant smuggling is well documented by the United Nations Comtrade. Unexplained imports have grown from P500 billion in 2019 to P1.3 trillion in 2021.

Despite the excellent work of Agriculture Assistant Secretary James Layug, endless reports of smuggling—with no one seeing jail time—have brought fear to our agriculture sector. With imports expected to increase further due to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, the Senate highlighted as a conditionality in the country's accession to the trade deal the involvement of the private sector in fighting smuggling.

Last Jan. 14, the Philippine News Agency already reported the President's position on the matter: "President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. has sought the assistance of the private sector to intensify the fight against rampant smuggling in the country ... He said that the present system is 'not working.'"

How this will be implemented has yet to be clarified. However, the President said he would hold the Bureau of Customs, not the DA, accountable for any further deterioration in this area.

The meeting with the President was indeed a very successful step. A follow-up in October is needed so we can finally pursue the agriculture transformation we all need. INQ

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

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Why the President should stay as DA secretary

ON the occasion of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s first year in office, I was asked by media friends whether it was judicious on his part to concurrently remain as secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA).



FINER
POINTS

FERMIN
ADRIANO

While a number of my professional colleagues feel the necessity of appointing a full-time Agriculture secretary given the myriad problems the sector faces, I hold the opposite view. I support the President's decision to remain as Agriculture secretary until, as he puts it, the necessary reforms are instituted in the sector.

I have seen at close range how the DA operates, how its bureaucracy functions, how various vested interest groups lobby hard to influence the department to issue favorable decisions and how our honorable legislators disrespect (as part of media grandstanding) DA officials who hold views, and scientific ones at that, unpopular to their political constituents.

An agricultural secretary who does not have the political and financial clout, no matter how technically qualified he is and how outstanding his plans and programs are, will have a difficult

►Finer B3

■ FINER FROM B1

Why the

time withstanding the pressure from vested interest groups operating in the sector.

In addition, the challenges facing the agricultural sector cannot be addressed by the DA alone. It will require the cooperation of others such as the Department of Public Works and Highways for the provision of farm-to-market roads and irrigation facilities; the Department of Trade and Industry to promote the food processing industry; the Department of Health in preventing entry of harmful viruses and diseases; the Department of Agrarian Reform to make farm clustering and consolidation successful; and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to revive our fishing grounds, among others.

department with recommended solutions.

Besides the senior undersecretary, there should be undersecretaries each for rice industry development; the livestock and animal subsector; fisheries; high-value crops; and finance, administration and legal. The justification for their appointments are as follows:

- Over 50 percent of the DA budget goes to rice productivity-enhancing programs;

- In the last 10 years, it is the livestock, poultry and animal subsector that has registered the highest growth rates. Rising demand means this trend will continue. Moreover, African swine fever and avian flu remain a threat.

- Our coastal areas are large. There are untapped potentials in the fishery sector that can propel higher growth rates for agriculture;

- Besides bananas and pineapples, there are other high-value crops that have huge export potentials and can generate significant foreign exchange revenues and at the same time raise farmer incomes; and

The Manila Times®

Date: July 14, 2023 Page: B1 & B3

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE



While the challenges faced by the agricultural sector will undeniably be better addressed by the President serving as concurrent DA head, others will be quick to point out he cannot devote his full attention to just tackling agricultural problems because there are other major issues confronting the country. In other words, the President does not simply have the time to ensure that much-needed reforms are implemented.

This can be addressed if the President appoints a highly technically qualified senior undersecretary who is supported by equally technically competent undersecretaries. The senior undersecretary will serve as the President's alter ego, seeing to the DA's day-to-day operations and ensuring the institution of necessary reforms. He should coordinate the activities of the other undersecretaries and key DA officials and conduct regular briefings for the President to present issues confronting the

- The promotion of farm consolidation, clustering and agro-industrial hubs will require enhanced business orientation in the DA's administration, finance and legal functions.

A somewhat similar arrangement was executed by Agriculture Minister Arturo Tanco during the term of the President's father. He appointed highly competent technical people in the persons of Ed Quisumbing and Emil Javier (former University of the Philippines-Los Baños chancellor and UP president and currently National Scientist) to vet all technical work, including project proposals, of the ministry. Tanco handled the management and politics of implementing agricultural programs and projects.

Going back to the reality of the food market, meanwhile, prices of

refined sugar have become sticky at around P100 per kilo. It used to be at P54 per kilo in May last year before the Marcos administration took office. This is despite the fact that more than 440,000 metric tons had already been imported.

The DA, particularly its Sugar Regulatory Administration, Office of Policy and Planning, and Agribusiness and Marketing Services Assistance unit should provide a satisfactory explanation for the high prices of sugar, which is killing our food processing industry. Millions of Filipinos are dependent on food processing for their employment, including small-time

vendors selling turon, banana cue, "sapin-sapin" and "gulaman," etc.

Another worrying trend are again-rising prices of onions. These are now around P240 per kilo and will most likely shoot up if supply is not properly managed through importation. Onion planting starts from late October to January and harvests commence from February to early May. There will be a supply surplus during the harvest months, particularly for the red variety that dominates our onion farms, and the excess is usually stored in cold storage facilities and released during the lean months starting June and onwards.

The country normally imports white onions as supply is limited. This is the variety used for fast food items such as hamburgers, hot dogs and salads. Importation normally occurs in August and thereafter to meet higher demand during the Christmas season. If white onion imports are not allowed during these months, there will be a shift of demand to red onions because this is what is readily available.

The red onion supply is not enough, however, and this explains why onion prices skyrocketed last year because a certain lawmaker castigated the DA for allowing

white onion imports. Fearful of continued rants, the DA withheld importations, which caused a serious supply shortage that led to onion prices shooting beyond the roof. A repeat of this scenario can be avoided if DA properly manages onion importation. But for this to happen, one needs technically competent officials who know production, supply and the nature of demand for both varieties.

Politics will not solve our economic problems. Worse, politics will only lead to hunger and further suffering for consumers.

fdadriano88@gmail.com

PBBM after a year, not bad at all!

An assessment of a President's performance after only a year in office can provide a good sense of his governance direction and the soundness of his initial steps. It is a directional gauge and a qualitative, not a quantitative, measure of the governance steps so far taken.

Initially, his most important step is in his choice of his cabinet, the people who will assist him in governance – in formulating, finetuning and implementing policies. The next important step is the setting of priorities and standards, given the resources he can command and the time for action allowed him.

A good cabinet, properly tapped, can serve as a multiplier, giving him more thinking minds and more hands to act. In particular, a good cabinet team can propose options or alternative courses of actions, allowing him the opportunity and time to act in many directions, and better use of available resources.

PBBM's performance so far has not been bad at all based on his cabinet choices, the areas he has chosen to prioritize, and his initial actions in light of the challenges he faced upon assumption to office.

By choosing to handle Agriculture, he is apparently well aware of our food security problem, given our expanding population and our agricultural production that has perennially lagged behind. Joined together (as they are, most of the time), these are mammoth problems that a President, as the bossman, can best and effectively undertake with capable underlying support.

The problem is thus reduced to PBBM's leadership and the focus he can provide, and the supportive resources and mechanisms he can find or put in place. Overall, in PBBM's case, this initial decision resolves the major part of the problem – the need to prioritize: food security above everything else and the people before anybody else.

By handing over the Education portfolio to the Vice President, PBBM has also signalled another prioritization, and the degree of handling and focus he wants. VP Sara is a hands-on self-starter with expertise and experience on legal and local government concerns. In Davao City, she showed the will she could put into a problem and, on her own, can produce fruitful results.

The Philippines ranks 77th out of 132 countries in the 2012 Global Knowledge Index that assesses a nation's expertise in terms of education, innovation, knowledge, economy, technology, and research and development.

Under this ranking, our educational system may be better than

half of the countries surveyed, but we cannot rest easy on this kind of record; it is up to VP Sara to lead us out of this almost mediocre ranking.

In tackling this task, the administration must not forget that the Philippines cannot be an isolated island in our now globalized world. We have long standing survival problems, and we need others to help us resolve them. We must interact with friends and allies to secure co-operation and assistance rather than encourage competition.

Education is a means to secure for us the tools we need – to innovate, keep up with developing technology, research on our own, and develop our human and natural resources and our economy. Unless we so equip ourselves, we would be left behind, relegated to the dung heap of history.

Who would want this kind of historical verdict? Apparently, not PBBM nor VP Sara; hence, their focus on education – a policy choice that is not bad at all.

By choosing to handle Agriculture, he is apparently well aware of our food security problem, given our expanding population and our agricultural production that has perennially lagged behind.

An example of the importance of setting correct directions and priorities early on, is the case of President Cory Aquino, who – at the start of her administration – gave top priority to her promise to set all political detainees free, including the top ranking communists already jailed by President Marcos, Sr. As history shows, this initial decision started a chain of events that bedeviled her administration until the end, and took time and several succeeding presidents to rectify.

Another signal of PBBM's prioritization, is his choice of Gilbert "Gibo" Teodoro for National Defense. Gibo carries topnotch credentials as a lawyer and as a defense specialist. He had occupied the Defense portfolio under GMA before. PBBM's choice for the Defense portfolio effectively prioritizes the West Philippine Sea sovereignty issue as a top problem, and signals our reliance on our traditional defense allies and on the solutions that diplomacy can provide, in resolving this problem.

This is a decision that, again, is not bad at all.

Rather than be deluded by glowing initial assessments, our leaders should focus on the sustainability of their decisions and the actions they are taking. Sustainability has not been our strong point and in fact has been our problem in recent presidential history. Presidents Macapagal-Arroyo (GMA) and Fidel Ramos (FVR) initially performed well in governance and in their handling the economy.

Under FVR, for example, the people had the sense that governance had become systematic and effective. The economy boomed. Up to a certain extent, this was true also for GMA. But at some point, these developments stalled, stopped in their tracks by many causes, some of them external, but largely by actions of the administrations themselves.

In the case of FVR, external factors intervened and affected our economy. But people's trust and effective governance began to really wane when the Centennial celebration scandal began to unfold. In GMA's case, the allegations of election irregularities (the Hello, Garci tape) and of corruption triggered the diminution of the people's trust. In both cases, the encouraging early start thus proved to be unsustainable. A golden lesson, too, from these examples is that corruption – a problem for all administrations, bar none – is a plague that everyone must carefully avoid.

PBBM is starting out as President in the third decade of the 21st century, with six presidents separating him from his father's presidency. He does not exactly face the same challenges his father and the other presidents faced. But there are commonalities, among them, food security, our recurring economic problems, and graft and corruption, all of them serious although differing in kind and intensity. A unique and new one for him is the West Philippine Sea problem. To PBBM's credit, he has identified them all and has creditably acted. In this sense, as of the end of his first year, his performance has not been bad at all.

Whether he will have the grit to sustain his focus and persevere as new governance challenges unfold, remains to be seen. Until then, let us put our hope in him and support him. (art.brion.spc@gmail.com)



THE LEGAL FRONT

JUSTICE ART D. BRION (RET.)

Date: July 13, 2023

Page: A15

'DA, local govt tie ups to boost agri production'



BUSINESSMIRROR FILE PHOTO

By CAI U. ORDINARIO

[@caiordinario](#)

IF the national government wants to improve agriculture production, the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** must forge partnerships with local governments nationwide, according to former Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Cielito Habito.

In a forum at the University of the Philippines School of Economics on Monday, the former Secretary of the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) said that when agriculture services were devolved, the DA left municipal agriculture officers (MAOs) and Provincial Agriculture Officers "were left to fend for themselves."

This, he said, prevented them from delivering the much-needed assistance to farmers and fishers nationwide after the devolution through the 1991 Local

Government Code (LGC). This, in turn, led to the lackluster performance of the country's farm sector for many years.

"When it [agriculture services] was devolved back in 1991, their [DA] attitude should not have been 'bahala kayo sa buhay ninyo' because it's now devolved to you.' What they should have done was to deliberately make it their responsibility to capacitate, train the LGUs [local government unit] to handle agriculture," Habito told reporters on the sidelines of the event.

He said one concrete example

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE



Date: July 13, 2023 Page: A15

of this is information he obtained from farmers in Zamboanga del Norte. When he asked the barangay chairman, who was also a farmer, what was the one thing he would like to ask from the government, the barangay captain replied "kalabaw" or carabao.

The country's former chief economist went to the MAO to ask why this request was not relayed to the DA Central Office. The MAO, Habito said, replied that the matter was already brought up with the DA but that the agency was

focused on sending only fertilizer and hybrid seeds, which was its national program.

Habito said this has been addressed only now through the Province-led Agriculture and Fisheries Extension System (PAFES) introduced by the previous administration. The program is already being expanded to other parts of the country.

"[In effect, this failure of the DA led to the] burdening of farmers. The biggest problem in the Department of Agriculture is

the institution itself. The devolution was not properly done," Habito said.

Apart from this, he said something has to be done to address the DA's "very low" absorptive capacity. He said that as far back as the 1990s when he was still Neda Secretary, the DA managed to spend only 60 to 70 percent of its annual budget by November 30.

The remainder, or 30 to 40 percent of the annual budget, Habito said was spent to finance the bonuses and other perks given to DA officials. He said these funds should have been downloaded to the LGUs to help the farmers.

"Everybody's arguing to death that the DA should get a bigger budget. How can you give a bigger budget to an agency that has not demonstrated to move the money? The way they can move the money quickly is to download it to the provinces but capacitate them also to use it well. Of course govern it with a tight memorandum of agreement para hindi gamitin sa basketball court ni governor," he said.

"In short, it has to be a package. And part of the performance indicators of the DA is

to determine if the provinces are better capacitated now to handle agriculture. It was never in their performance indicators, it was never in their KPIs [key performance indicators]."

Habito said these issues could only be solved by someone who does not fear any political backlash. He said at this time, it's only the President who fits this bill.

It can be recalled that the President won the last election with 31 million votes, one of the highest in the country's history.

"I am giving him [the President] a chance to recover kasi sabi niya I still want to hold on to it kasi nga supposedly he's determined to fix it. Privately, my friend Arsi Balisacan [current Neda Secretary Arsenio Balisacan] tells me, yeah talagang 'yan ang pag-iisip ni President," Habito said.

"I guess he just gets distracted by so many things. But when he gets around to doing it, hopefully, he listens to Arsi also because Arsi knows the agency very well, he used to be an [undersecretary] there. Sana ma-fix nila. It's really the institution that's very dysfunctional."



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE



Date: July 14, 2023 Page: A3

Gov't to tap PDLs in food security efforts

By ALEXIS ROMERO

Persons deprived of liberty will contribute to food security efforts as the Bureau of Correction (BuCor)'s vast idle lands will be used for agricultural development.

The Reformation Initiative for Sustainable Environment for Food Security (RISE) Project was signed yesterday, aimed at reintegrating persons deprived of liberty into society through farm work.

"By investing in these capacity-building activities, we are not only helping boost food production but also giving our PDLs opportunities to realize their potential for positive change and for reformation," Presi-

dent Marcos said.

The RISE Project, signed in Malacañang by the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Justice, will provide support to PDLs as they improve their agricultural skills and rehabilitate BuCor's arable land and penal farms.

Around 500 hectares of BuCor's land in Iwahig in Palawan will be developed into agri-tourism sites and food production areas.

A 30-hectare cashew production area will be established, including a one-hectare edible landscaping and agri-tourism site and a 25-hectare yellow corn production area.

Half a hectare of land will also be set aside for the growing of 25,000 tilapia fingerlings.

A 40-hectare rice production area and 400-hectare forage and dairy production area will also be built.

The RISE Project also promotes the reformation of PDLs sentenced to more than three years.

The memorandum of agreement for the RISE Project was signed by Agriculture Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban, Justice Undersecretary Raul Vasquez, BuCor director Gregorio Pio Catapang Jr. and Bureau of Plant Industry director Gerald Glenn Panganiban.

"Among this administration's priorities are the attainment of food security and the zero-hunger goal under the Sustainable Development Goals," Marcos said.



President Marcos witnesses the signing of the reformation initiative for sustainable environment for food security project of the departments of agriculture and justice at Malacañang yesterday.

-KRIZJOHN ROSALES

Date: July 14, 2023

Page: 83 & 84

LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Food security

Food security is not guaranteed by a policy calling for food self-sufficiency. Vested interests in our agricultural sector have long been insisting self-sufficiency guarantees security. As a result, our feeble attempt for food self-sufficiency is threatening our food security.

We are a failure in self-sufficiency and are now increasingly dependent on imports, such that our import dependency ratio in 2021 was at 25.1 percent, according to data from the Philippine Statistics Authority.

Our agriculture sector has underperformed terribly. It barely grew in recent years. This explains why the government had such a difficult time trying to tame food inflation or high food prices that caused our inflation rate to rise a lot higher than our economic managers predicted or would want it to be.

Food prices have been on the rise in many parts of the world because of increasing population, changing weather patterns that negatively impact food growing, and the Russian war in Ukraine, a country that is a major wheat producer. In our case, local food cartels that control distribution of rice, onions, sugar, etc are also major contributors to the food inflation problem. Unfortunately, the Marcos administration had been reluctant to deal with these cartels.

Interestingly, ever efficient Singapore has apparently successfully dealt with rising food prices even as it has managed to assure food security. An article published by the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy tells us how they did it.

The LKYSPP noted that global developments are especially concerning for Singapore given its heavy reliance on food imports. More than 90 percent of Singapore's food is imported. Agriculture makes up less than one percent of Singapore's land use.

"In recent years, Singapore has focused on boosting domestic food production through innovative measures, such as the promotion of urban agriculture, coastal fish farming, aquaculture, vertical farms and lab-grown meat. Despite that, local production meets only about four percent of the city's vegetables, 30 percent of its eggs and 7.5 percent of its seafood consumption needs."

"Given Singapore's high dependence on food imports, it should have been badly affected by global food developments of the last two years.

"The question then is, how is Singapore becoming better at insulating itself from global food crises? One reason could be Singapore's growing economy.

"Singapore's growing economy, along with a relatively stable currency, may have contributed to higher purchasing power in the world market, thereby, providing a greater buffer towards global food price shocks...

"Singapore's public policies, which are geared towards food 'self-reliance' (over self-sufficiency), have also played a role in ensuring greater domestic food price stability relative to world markets... The government made concerted efforts to diversify food sources, not only among countries, but also among zones within the countries, with major source countries...

"A network of trade partnerships and Free Trade Agreements

Turn to B4

DEMAND AND SUPPLY



BOO CHANCO

DEMAND AND SUPPLY From B3

with several countries have helped. According to the Singapore Food Agency, Singapore currently imports food from more than 170 countries and regions in the world, thus reducing the risk of over-reliance on a single food supply source.

"Another key policy measure has been the government's emphasis on maintaining an essential food item stockpile of staples and proteins to withstand food supply chain disruptions. For instance, the Rice Stockpile Scheme requires rice importers to pre-commit to the quantity they would like to import and stockpile a prescribed amount (typically twice the import quantity) in a government designated warehouse. While ownership of the rice stockpile resides with the importer, during emergencies the government has the right to acquire the rice with compensation.

"If the rice stock is held in the warehouse for more than a year, the importer is required to replace it with a new stock. Details of the size of the stockpile typically remain undisclosed so as to not impact negotiations with suppliers and for the sake of national security. Maintaining a large stockpile helps to maintain a steady food price and avoids price surges during times of panic buying.

"Thus, despite its high food import dependency and global food price shocks, Singapore has largely been able to maintain stability in its food prices, due to food availability rooted in the city state's growing economic prowess, increased local production, diversification of food sources, and stockpiling."

That is the Singapore story. It showed professional management, which is sadly lacking in our case. Here is how one academic who is familiar with the workings of our Department of Agriculture sees it.

"There has to be a change in our policy direction: from attaining rice self-sufficiency to ensuring food security for all. The latter will require pegging the amount of rice we can financially / economically produce (meaning concentration of production and support on fertile irrigated lands) and importing any supply gap, farm consolidation/clustering, and promoting rice-based crop diversification and crop diversification in general for our farmers to generate higher income in the cultivation of high value crops.

"The problem now is institutional. Key officials in the DA do not have a thorough understanding of agricultural economics and the plans and programs that will make agriculture a dynamic sector. They are sympathetic to populist and Leftist ideas about agriculture, i.e., the need to protect it from imports, the perpetual provision of subsidies to poor farmers, etc.

"Their position, just like politicians, is to protect our small farmers from imports. I've interacted with the different agencies, bureaus, units (including our Foreign Agri Service Units) and they have this notion that they are the white knights that will save our poor and small cultivators against unwarranted flooding of imported agri products.

"What we need in DA right now are technically competent managers who understand the workings of the agri economy to provide proper guidance to activities of DA. Not hopeless if at least four to five good senior people are appointed. You need a team who really cares about the sector and the people."

The President needs a competent full time agriculture secretary who is market savvy. We need a dynamic and younger head of DA who is ready to modernize the sector that is badly in need of it. We need fresh thinking and no links with the food cartels. So much is at stake.

Boo Chanco's email address is bchanco@gmail.com. Follow him on Twitter @boochanco

PH needs comprehensive shark legislation

COMMENTARY

ANNA OPOSA



OVER 200 KINDS
OF SHARKS LIVE IN
PHILIPPINE WATERS,
MAKING THEM
AN IMPORTANT
AQUATIC RESOURCE

Today is Shark Awareness Day, and we urgently call on the Marcos administration to pass a shark conservation legislation—or the future of Philippine conservation will come back to bite us.

Over 200 kinds of sharks live in Philippine waters, making them an important aquatic resource. However, there are several challenges to these species, such as unrestricted tourism, marine wildlife destruction, and rampant fishing for their meat, oil, skin, and fins.

The Philippine government has made great progress in shark conservation and management after realizing the critical role that sharks play in the country's environment and economy. To protect the future of sharks in our waters and safeguard Philippine culture as well as present and future generations, it is critical that we act fast by building on this accomplishment and enacting comprehensive legislation.

The Philippines is a signatory to important international environmental treaties like the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals. These international agreements impose binding legal requirements on member nations, laying the groundwork for effective conservation initiatives. We can work together to conserve sharks and their habitats by upholding our commitment and playing an active role in international negotiations.

The engagement of civil society organizations (CSOs) has strengthened the administration's initiatives. A collaboration of committed institutions and organizations called Save Sharks Network Philippines (SSNP) has been instrumental in promoting shark conservation. SSNP has advanced the conservation movement through multistakeholder participation and skill- and knowledge-sharing activities. As we move forward, it is essential that we continue the collective action with CSOs, advocates, and experts while also harnessing our best practices and lessons learned.

Globally, the Philippines has consistent-

ly shown dedication to shark conservation, distinguishing itself in Southeast Asia. The country has demonstrated its commitment by supporting CITES listing requests for several shark species in recent years, consequently ensuring international protection for these animals. While these international agreements offer a solid policy basis, enacting thorough national legislation is an essential next step.

Significant advancements in shark conservation were made at the onset of the administration in June 2022, with the introduction of the shark conservation bill in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Once passed, these bills could be used as a basis for amending other species-specific regulations and as a supplement to current laws like the Philippine Fisheries Code and the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act.

There is another legislative path available. A fisheries administrative order (FAO) can speed up the process by including clauses that are similar to those in the proposed

bill because they only need the approval of the Department of Agriculture and its secretary. Though an FAO can efficiently mobilize resources within the mandate of the national government agency, a national law makes it easier to distribute resources and mobilize manpower, which increases the likelihood that it will be implemented successfully.

Additionally, the drafting of the national framework for shark conservation and fisheries management in March 2023 means moving forward in the right direction. It is crucial to follow it with the enactment of a comprehensive and stringent shark conservation law. Such legislation will handle important issues that previous regulations have not fully addressed, such as confinement, interactions with tourists, and bycatch. A national legal framework will strengthen our conservation efforts and inspire the long-term viability of sharks in our waters by dedicating resources for enforcement and implementation.

The year 2023 offers a unique potential for the Philippine government to establish itself as a leader in shark conservation on a worldwide scale. The adoption of a national law will formalize efforts and create a strong anchor for ongoing conservation projects. We must capitalize on this momentum and give shark conservation, management, and sustainable use a top priority. By doing this, we can conserve our marine habitats, the tourism sector, and the future of these species in the years to come.

The time to act is now. We must keep working to save sharks and push forward its sustainable use in alignment with biodiversity preservation. We can reinforce our international obligations and strengthen the participation of civil society, advocates, and experts as we ensure a future in which sharks coexist well with our ecosystems by enacting comprehensive national legislation.

Anna Oposa is executive director of Save Philippine Seas and the co-convener of Save Sharks Network Philippines.

Date: July 14, 2023 Page: AG6

IRRAWADDY SIGHTINGS BOTH EXCITE, ALARM SCIENTISTS

FOR RARE DOLPHINS' SAKE, GIVE THIS BICOL BAY A BREAK



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

By **Krixia Subingsubing**
@krixiasINQ

Recent sightings of the rare Irrawaddy dolphins in one of the most overfished bays in the Philippines confirmed their existence in the Bicol region—but also indicated risks that can lead to their disappearance from its waters.

This was according to a team of scientists from the University of the Philippines' Institute of Environmental Science and Meteorology (UP IESM) and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), who went on a four-day survey mission from July 6 to July 9 to verify the presence of one of the world's most critically endangered species in San Miguel Bay.

Led by UP IESM professor and Marine Mammal Research and Conservation Laboratory chief Lemnuel Aragones, the team sighted two of these grey dolphins that are noted for their blunt, rounded heads—one near Apuao Island and another near Canimog Island in Mercedes, Camarines Norte.

Aragones said the dolphins traveled 335 kilometers across San Miguel Bay, covering almost 680 square kilometers of waters off Camarines Norte and Camarines Sur.

Subpopulations

Before this sighting, he said, there were three confirmed subpopulations of the Irrawaddy species in the Philippines, mainly at Malampaya Sound in Palawan province and in the Iloilo-Guimaras-Negros Occidental area.

"These three distinct populations do not interact at all and they are not related to each other," he said in an Inquirer interview. "This discovery is

Date: July 14, 2023 Page: AG



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

a validation of the existence of these rare animals outside those areas."

The Irrawaddy—named after Myanmar's largest river where they were first documented—often prefer shallow, brackish waters, making the San Miguel Bay an ideal place for them to thrive, Aragonés said.

However, the fact that they only saw two dolphins in San Miguel Bay could be taken as a sign of their dwindling population in the area, he said.

For one, it was hard to miss the marine mammals in the bay's crystal-clear waters since "they would eventually have to

break the surface to breathe," Aragonés said.

2022 sighting

He said last week's four-day mission was prompted by an August 2022 sighting of an Irrawaddy dolphin in Camarines Sur.

The dolphin spotted at the time, which they named Calab, was accidentally entangled in a fisherman's net in San Miguel Bay off Calabanga and eventually drowned.

It was the first confirmed sighting in Bicol of such a dolphin, which has been declared "critically endangered" both by the Department of Environ-

ment and Natural Resources and the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

In October last year, both the UP IESM and the BFAR's Region 5 office interviewed local residents to confirm whether these species have always been there.

Apart from having melon-shaped heads, Irrawaddy dolphins are relatively small compared to the other species (between 2 meters to 2.5 meters long) and are gray-skinned except on their bellies. They also don't have a rostrum, or a "beak," but they have a small rounded dorsal fin.

"In one interview, we talked to an old fisherman who said they always saw those dolphins there," Aragonés said. "Back then, the dolphins would sometimes be seen in groups of 20 and were commonly seen close to the shorelines."

'Sense of urgency'

Compare this to 2022, where residents said they spotted just one Irrawaddy dolphin.

That they were spotted in one of the most heavily fished areas in the country raises the risk of their eventual disappearance, Aragonés warned.

For decades, local fishermen

have competed with commercial trawlers that sweep the bottom of the bay for a big catch, leading to overfishing and abuse of the underwater environment.

"So there is a sense of urgency here; we cannot wait for another 10 years to act," he said.

Aragonés said he had appealed to the regional BFAR office to impose a moratorium on commercial fishing in San Miguel.

"We need to let the bay take a break," he said. "The fact that there are now only a handful of these animals (here) and their habitats are very much disturbed means they would soon be in more serious peril." INQ

Date: July 14, 2023 Page: A4



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

BOC, DA seize smuggled sugar worth more than P34 million

A RECENT Bureau of Customs (BOC) and Department of Agriculture (DA) joint operation has resulted in the seizure illegally imported refined sugar in 10 containers worth more than P34 million from Hong Kong.

The spot-check examination of five containers at the Manila International Container Port (MICP) yielded more or less P17.2 million worth of Thailand refined sugar.

Another examination is scheduled for five more containers, which would more or less contain another P17.2 million worth of the smuggled agricultural product.

The containers were consigned to Smile Agri Ventures Inc., and arrived at the MICP on May 27 with 100,000 kilograms of silica sand in the declaration for each container.

Customs Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio said the spot check examination was conducted after Customs Intelligence and Investigation Service (CIIS) Field Station-MICP requested for the issuance of Pre-Lodgment Orders (PLOs) on June 30.

"The PLOs were requested based on information that the shipment contains agricultural products, misdeclared and undeclared goods," the Customs chief said.

For his part, Department of Agriculture (DA) Assistant Secretary for Inspectorate and Enforcement (IE) James Layug told the BUSINESSMIRROR that "the consignee Smile Agri Ventures Inc. has declared the 15 containers as Bags of Selica Sand but upon actual inspection, the containers were found to contain Bags of Sugar."

"The duty personnel coordinated with BOC and recommended that all 15 containers inspected containing

bags of sugar be subjected to Warrant of Seizure and Detention [WSD]," he added.

"There are 15 alerted containers, still subject to inspection for the five," Layug said.

Meanwhile, CIIS Director Verne Enciso said that Customs agents were quick to act on the derogatory information they received about the contents of the shipment.

"Based on the spot-check examination, the derogatory information received turned out to be positive. We have also recommended for the issuance of Warrants of Seizure and Detention. These would be made as soon as the actual quantity of the goods is determined," he added.

The examination was conducted by the assigned Customs examiner, together with representatives from CIIS, Enforcement and Security Service (ESS), the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), Customs Anti-Illegal Drug Task Force (CAIDTF), and Chamber of Customs Brokers Inc. (CCBI).

Moreover, Intelligence Group Deputy Commissioner Juvymax Uy said that the consignee is facing possible violations of Sec. 117 (Regulated Importation and Exportation) and Sec. 1400 (Misdeclaration in Goods Declaration) in relation to Sec. 1113 (Property Subject to Forfeiture) of Republic Act (RA) 10863 known as the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act (CMTA).

"We cannot emphasize enough the important work being done in intercepting smuggled products that hurt our markets, consumers, and the economy. This recent operation is further proof of our border protection efforts and the diligence of our people," he added. **Raadee S. Sausa**



Govt tapping PDL to plant crops on idle Corrections bureau land

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA [@sam_medenilla](#)

TO help boost the country's food supply, the government is set to launch later this year a new program which will tap persons deprived of liberty (PDL) for agriculture production in idle lands of the Bureau of Correction (BuCor).

On Thursday, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. witnessed the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) of the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Department Justice (DOJ) for the implementation of the Reformation Initiative for Sustainable Environment (RISE).

The chief executive lauded the initiative, which will ensure the country's food security and help in the rehabilitation of PDL.

"Allow me to recognize the synergy that is the work of the DA, DOJ and their private partners to utilize our natural resources and promote ecology sustain-

able practices amongst PDLs through this RISE project," Marcos said.

"This initiative attests to our unyielding commitment to both food security and rehabilitative justice," he added.

The 500 hectares of the Iwahig Prison and Penal Farm in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan will be used as the pilot site for the project.

Of these, 400 hectares will be used for forage and dairy production, 40 hectares for growing rice, 30 hectares for cashew production and 25 hectares will be for planting yellow corn.

Half a hectare will be used for raising 25,000 tilapia fingerlings, and another hectare will be for "edible landscaping" and used for agri-tourism.

The new DA-DOJ MOA allows the Bureau of Correction (BuCor)

to enter into agreements with other government agencies as well as public-private partnerships with companies with sufficient financial and appropriate technological capacity and establish agri-business ventures.

It also requires BuCor to craft its five-year Agriculture Development Plan.

Marcos urged other government agencies to develop similar joint initiatives to help achieve his administration's priorities.

"It is more pragmatic and effective to allocate our scarce resources wisely and ensure that all our initiatives are aligned, coordinated and integrated through a whole of nation approach," Marcos said.

"By making innovation our priority, we can expedite the delivery of programs and services and build a more robust economy," he added.

Date: July 14, 2023 Page: A4



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

PFDA eyes construction of Cebu regional fish port

THE Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA) has bared plans for the construction of a proposed regional fishport in Cebu province.

"This proposal can help more fisherfolk in the region and further improve the already robust economy of Cebu," PFDA Acting General Manager Glen Pangapalan said recently.

"In addition, this project can help boost the production of commercial fisheries, municipal fisheries, and aquaculture in the province," he added.

The project will be lobbied to become one of the priority projects of the administration of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.

Based on the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data for 2021, Cebu recorded the highest annual increase in the value of production in agriculture and fisheries in

Central Visayas at 7.3 percent.

Cebu has emerged as the economic center in Central Visayas, and making the province a feasible location for a regional fish port.

For her part, Cebu Gov. Gwendolyn Garcia has expressed full support for the project.

"Port should be in a strategic place in Cebu which can be accessible to fishing vessels from neighboring provinces in Central Visayas like Bohol, Siquijor and Negros Oriental," the governor said.

An estimated 8-hectare lot is required to construct the regional fish port.

Moreover, the PFDA and the capitol will continue to cooperate to identify which area the project will soon rise.

Once approved and completed, this project will be the second regional fish port in the region after the Iloilo Fish Port Complex in Iloilo City. *Raadee S. Sausa*



Senado dinikdik NIA sa kapalpakan

Pinuna ni Senador Risa Hontiveros ang kakulangan sa aksyon ng pamahalaan upang pahasayin ang trabaho ng National Irrigation Administration (NIA) para makatulong sa sektor ng agrikultura lalo na sa mga magsasaka ngayon may banta ng tagtuyot sa bansa.

Ayon sa senador, walang aksyon ang gobyerno upang pahasayin ang NIA o humingi ng tulong sa mga lokal na pamahalaan para dumami ang mga nakaimbak na tubig na magagamit sa mga irigasyon.

"Eh eto na nga't unang magdamag na tuloy-tuloy ang pag-ulan, kulang pa rin 'yung ganyang paghahanda para maimbak ang tubig ulan na 'yan o para linisin ang mga kanal na para sa halip na pagbara at pagbaha ay 'yung pagdaloy ng tubig kung saan ito kailangan at palawakin ang naaabot ng kasalukuyang irigasyon at 'yun na nga 'yung impounding systems," pahayag ni Hontiveros sa isang panayam sa radyo nitong Huwebes, Hulyo 13.

"Hindi pa rin pinahusay ang crop

insurance system para sana na-frontload ito at naengganyo na magtanim ng mas maaga ang nakararami bago pa man maramdaman sa bandang Nobyembre ang pagtindi pa ng El Niño at marami ang hindi makapagtanim dahil inaasahan ang kakapusan ng tubig sa mga sakahan," ayon pa sa senador.

Dagdag pa ni Hontiveros na tila katwa ang mga pangyayari dahil kahit dumating na ang tag-ulan ay pinangan-gambahan pa ng bansa ang kakulangan ng patubig sa mga sakahan.

Aniya pa, hindi katwiran na may nakabang banta ng tagtuyot dahil sa El Niño.

"Eh lagi namang dumadating ang El Niño kada lima o pitong taon kaya wala pong excuse," giit pa ng senador.

Matatandaang kamakalawa lamang ay pinayuhan ng NIA ang publiko na magtipid sa bigas ngayong nahaharap ang bansa sa banta ng El Niño kung saan isa ang sektor ng agrikultura ang inaasahang matinding tatamaan ng tagtuyot.



BRACING FOR EL NIÑO

By Joel dela Torre

NATIONAL Irrigation Administration (NIA) regional offices are primed for the impact of the weather phenomenon El Nino.

According to NIA Administrator Eddie Guillen, field preparations are in place for a systematic response during call time.

According to the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council (NDRRMC), up to 46 provinces could be affected to which the provinces of Ilocos Norte, Bataan, and Cavite could be hit hard-

est.

Measures include water delivery schedules, utilization of alternate wetting and drying (AWD) technology, diversification of crops and the use of early maturing and drought-resistant crop varieties.

And with the convergence of other national government agencies, Guillen expressed confidence that the country can overcome all challenges El Nino can bring.

Recently, NIA met with the Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Science and Technology (DOST), Philippine

Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), NDRRMC and other agencies involved in agricultural sector and disaster management.

Also in attendance were local government units (LGUs), Irrigators Associations (IAs) and the general public.

The water administration head said that the agency also conducted some strategies to include preparatory activities such as weekly monitoring or updating of local field conditions (dam hydrological data and dam discharge)

among other preparations in the agricultural side.

Originally, the normal cropping periods for wet and dry seasons were in the months of May and November, respectively.

However, in the adjusted cropping calendar, these were moved to as early as the months of February and September, respectively.

NIA also maximizes and optimizes non-vulnerable areas where production inputs will be provided to increase production and compensate for the possible damage and losses in areas at risk of the El Niño phenomenon.



Look to local: We're not making good use of our resources

I'm in the middle of writing a story about a young man who, for no reason other than he saw a need and found a possible solution, raised funds to build a flatbed dryer to service rice farmers in his girlfriend's hometown of Lopez, Quezon.

Jose Diego Roxas, 26, is the spokesperson of the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI). When he was in college, he chanced upon a social media post of Ilocos farmers staring at their spoiled rice harvest, which they had laid out on the highway to dry, but instead had gotten soaked in the rain. He asked his girlfriend, who comes from a rice farming community, if this was a problem they encountered, and she said yes. He took this as a challenge and did some research. He found that commercially available flatbed dryers cost around ₱400,000, which was way beyond anyone's budget, even if they were to raise funds for it. "It would be a very uphill battle to raise such an amount," he said in Taglish.

He stumbled on literature from the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) that outlined a blueprint for building a flatbed

dryer from scratch using low cost, readily available materials. Building it would cost around ₱20,000, ₱30,000 if you include R&D expenses.

He pitched the project, which he called Project Payo, to friends, relatives, and his girlfriend's family. They were interested, but didn't want to invest in anything unless they were sure it would work. Eventually, they decided to split the cost—he would raise funds for the materials and his girlfriend's family would cover the cost of labor.

Roxas managed to raise the money through donations, and they had the machine prefabricated, using electricity instead of the recommended LPG to run it. They were worried about its slow drying rate at first, until a friend introduced them to an LPG



AVANT GARDENER

YVETTE TAN

manufacturer, who offered to sponsor a tank that they could use to experiment on. Because of this, they were able to adjust their specifications, "And that's when it took off," Roxas said. "It performed as expected according to our needs."

The dryer came in handy during the next rainy season, when many farmers lined up to use the dryer. The demand was so big, they weren't able to service all of them. "We were able to service about a hundred or 160 sacks, but not all," he shared.

A dealer expressed regret at not asking to have one built as well. Roxas said he was free to copy the Project Payo dryer. "I don't own the patent, I don't own the design, it's a free design," he said. Roxas counts the project a success because "the farmers accepted it because it's low cost and [using it] is not heavy on the pocket for them."

This is only one story that I've encountered where the subject used available, free local sources as the backbone to a successful agricultural project.

Another one would be Lionheart Farms (LF) in Rizal, Palawan. LF grows and works with Indigenous Peoples in the area to grow coconut trees, whose harvests are turned into different products that are mostly sold overseas.

When LF co-founder and President Christian Eyde Moeller was looking for up-to-date research and literature on coconut cultivation practices, they realized that they didn't need to go further than the Philippine Coconut Authority. "We quite quickly found out that all we had to do was simply look

at established research and all the answers were there already," Moeller said in the article. "What we have done is adaptive science. You take existing established science research that's available and you modify it and adapt it to the specific situation."

Because of red tape, perpetual lack of funding, and other systematic ills experienced by many of our institutions, not to mention good old colonial mentality that pervades almost, if not all sectors of Philippine society, there is a tendency to think of foreign research, development, and products as better than those found in the Philippines. These two examples show that this is not always the case, particularly in relation to subjects related to common experiences in the Philippines.

May these two anecdotes remind us that as tempting and cool as it is to pick what's new, expensive, flashy, and foreign, it is more prudent, and if done properly, more efficient and appropriate, to look for research and resources locally. Our many educational and research institutions have numerous published works that cater specifically to Philippine conditions. It may not seem as sexy as using a foreign study or brand spanking new technology, but it's more likely to already fit local needs and solve local problems.

Let's stop thinking that foreign or high tech is better than local and low cost and start looking at what our own agricultural institutions have to offer. As these two examples show, sometimes, the best answer can be found right in our own backyard.



Date: July 14, 2023 Page: A1 & A2

By CAI U. ORDINARIO

@caiordinario

IF the current administration wants to bring down the country's poverty rate to single-digit levels, the economy must grow faster—even at double digits, according to the Philippines's "Prophet of Boom."

In a recent economic briefing for EastWest Bank, University of Asia and the Pacific [UA&P] Professor and constitutionalist Bernardo M. Villegas said the country needs to attain a GDP growth of 8 to 10 percent in order to bring the poverty rate to single-digit.

Based on the Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], poverty incidence per population was at 18.1 percent while poverty incidence in terms of households was at 13.2 percent in 2021.

"GDP growth is not the end-all and be-all of economic development. We have to address our biggest challenge, which is poverty eradication. We have the highest rate of poverty still in East Asia. Most of our Southeast Asian neighbors have brought

down their poverty incidence to single digit, anywhere from 1 to 4 percent," Villegas told the BUSINESSMIRROR on the sidelines of the event.

"In fact, Malaysia had one year when it had zero percent poverty incidence. Ours is still at 13 to 15 percent. We cannot make a dent on that if we just grow at 6 to 7 percent. We have to grow at 8 to 10 percent which is the experience of the so-called 'Tigers' when they were growing," he added.

Villegas said attaining a growth of 6 to 7 percent is already possible for the current administration given the momentum of the economy and the reforms introduced in the past two administrations.

SEE "FASTER," A2

Maharlika helpful

IN terms of increasing investments, Villegas said the creation of the Maharlika Investment Fund (MIF) will be very helpful as this could draw in more investments.

This means bringing the country's investment-to-GDP ratio to at least 30 percent from the current 20 to 21 percent. Villegas noted ratios of 25 to 35 percent among the country's neighbors.

Based on Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) data, the foreign direct investments (FDI) that entered the country reached \$876 million in April 2023, a 14.1-percent

Faster...

CONTINUED FROM A1

He said the Marcos administration does not even have to do anything to attain this level of growth.

However, poverty reduction is crucial. Villegas said bringing poverty rates down was the Asian Miracle that propelled China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan into prosperity from the 1960s to the 1990s.

In 1978, Villegas said, the reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping, then leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) who opened up the Chinese economy, led to the "biggest miracle of the century" as it lifted 600 to 700 million Chinese from poverty.

At that time, China was growing steadily by 12 to 14 percent. This meant that the reduction in poverty in China happened only over a span of 20 years, Villegas said.

"China in less than 20 years redeemed 600 to 700 (million) poor people out of poverty. And so the challenge to Marcos is how to accelerate the growth rate from what I consider a mediocre 6 to 7 percent, even though it's already the highest in the region, because we have a lot of catching up to do," Villegas pointed out.

In order to attain this growth, the Marcos administration needs to do three things, according to him: increase the productivity of the agriculture sector; increase the country's investment-to-GDP ratio; and eradicate corruption.

Increasing the productivity of the agriculture sector means improving farm growth to 2 to 3 percent per year. Villegas noted that this level of growth is already significant in other parts of Southeast Asia.

Villegas said that even the country has not posted an annual growth at this level in many years. The country's agriculture sector has only been growing at one percent or its growth starts at zero.

However, based on PSA data, agriculture sector growth increased by 2.1 percent in the first three months of the year. This is considered the highest growth of the sector in over two years.

"Agriculture is a very tricky sector. (You have) all sorts of pests, all sorts of climate, etc. So 2-3 percent is reasonable. He (the President) already knows how to do it. In fact, as Secretary of Agriculture, he has been getting so much good advice from the right people. I think he's been doing his homework. I don't agree with people saying it was a mistake for him to become Secretary of Agriculture," Villegas said.

Date: July 14, 2023 Page: A2



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

in the same period last year (**full story here: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/07/11/april-fdi-dip-on-global-slowdown-inflation/>**).

Villegas said the MIF could help finance infrastructure constraints, particularly in terms of addressing Right of Way Acquisition (ROWA) problems. The 1987 Constitution provides the State the power of eminent domain and what is needed is to better enforce this and implement through funding.

The only criticism Villegas had about the fund was the name which, he said, should be changed to the 'Philippine Long-term Investment Fund.' Changing the name, he believes, could make it acceptable to more Filipinos.

"This (increasing investment-to-GDP ratio) cannot be done from local sources. We are overborrowed, our savings rate is so low that we don't have long-term capital. This is why I want to call the Maharlika fund, the Philippine Long-term Investment Fund because it can be used as an instrument to address this problem by bringing in billions of dollars of foreign investments. That's the only way. Our local sources have dried up, even the San Miguel's, the Ayala's don't have long-term capital," Villegas said.

THE third task, that of eradicating corruption, "is a no brainer" according to Villegas. However, he said, economic development can still be achieved even if corruption cannot be immediately eradicated.

One example is South Korea which is one of the Tiger economies and is already a first world country. Villegas said watching Korean drama already illustrates the deep-seated inefficiencies of their government.

Villegas said South Korea sent three of its Presidents to jail for corruption. Malaysia, an advanced economy in Southeast Asia, also sent its former Prime Minister to jail for corruption for his involvement in the misuse of Malaysia's wealth fund.

What is crucial is that there are policies in place that will work to wipe out corruption. Putting these policies in place will allow the government to do more in terms of economic development.

"I know it will not happen overnight. But I always tell people, 'yes corruption is so difficult to eradicate, it will take us years and years but don't despair.' Even if corruption continues to a certain extent, we can still become first world," Villegas said.

Earlier, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) Macroeconomic Research Office (Amro) maintained its growth and inflation forecast for the Philippines this year and in 2024 despite global headwinds.

In a briefing on Tuesday, Amro Chief Economist Hoe Ee Khor said the Philippines is still expected to post a growth of 6.2 percent this year and 6.5 percent next year, while inflation is seen averaging 5.9 percent in 2023 and 3.8 percent in 2024.

Khor said the Philippine economy remains a service-oriented one and may be insulated from the slowdown of the trade of goods that is expected in other Asean economies (**Full story: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/07/12/amro-keeps-inflation-gdp-forecasts->**