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## PBBM launches food security RISE project

**PRESIDENT** Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. urged national government agencies on Thursday to continue pursuing innovative projects to ensure food security, meet the people's needs, and build a more robust economy.

Speaking during the Ceremonial Signing of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Reformation Initiative for Sustainable Environment for Food Security (RISE) Project, the President highlighted the need for increased collaboration among agencies, noting there is no single sector or institution that can address all the issues confronting the country.

The RISE Project is an innovative collaboration between the two agencies to rehabilitate arable lands in all Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) prison reservations and

penal farms in the country to support a sustainable environment for food production, while empowering and reskilling the persons deprived of liberties (PDLs).\*

"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," President Marcos said.

"Rest assured that this Administration will continue to reinforce these pursuits and fortify the foundation that we have laid by monitoring the progress of our projects."

Marcos expressed optimism that the RISE Project, which will be piloted in Iwahig Penal Colony and Prison Farms in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan, will also encourage more public-private partnerships (PPPs) and inspire people to pursue activities that will leave a lasting impact on society.

Describing the challenges in food security as multifaceted and complex, the President said it is crucial for agencies to work together and tap into their respective strengths in formulating more comprehensive, empirical, and integrated approaches.

"In fact, among this Administration's priorities are the attainment of food security and Zero Hunger under the Sustainable Development Goals," Marcos pointed out.

"These twin priorities require cooperation amongst all disciplines and across all sectors. We must delve into the underlying causes of food insecurity, poverty, inequality, and the lack of access to resources," he said.

Achieving these objectives, the President said, will also contribute to much greater humanitarian causes as PDLs will acquire new skills, hone their earning capacity and prepare them

for eventual reintegration into society.

The signing of MOA on the RISE Project, through a tie up with the private sector, will enable the government to utilize its natural resources and promote not only ecologically sustainable practices among PDLs through the project, but also afford them better nutrition as the produce they will harvest will support their own food requirements.

By investing in the capacity-building activities, the government and its partners will not only help boost food production but also give PDLs opportunities to realize their potential for positive change and reformation.

Marcos said the RISE initiative attests to the unyielding commitment of those involved to both food security and rehabilitative justice, as he expressed gratitude to the private sector for its support and dedication.  
PCO



## GOV'T INITIATES FARM TRIALS TO BOOST PH SOYBEAN YIELD

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**  
@jordeenelagare

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is carrying out a farm trial project to improve the country's meager production of soybean, an important source of oil and protein that the country imports heavily.

The agency issued general guidelines on the implementation of the soybean farm trial project, aiming to verify and adopt new or matured component technology on production and post-production of soybean in specific location.

The DA also wants to find out the best production management practices and assess new or improved soybean varieties developed by research institutions or existing varieties from other regions.

Results of technology demonstration trial will guide farmers to choose the appropriate technology for their farms and ensure compliance with industry requirements, the DA said.

The Philippines has been producing only 0.35 percent of the country's total demand in the last five years while 99.65 percent is being imported, such as seeds, soybean meal and by-products, based on 2021 data from the Philippine Statistics Authority.

"Based on the present status, it is necessary to increase local production to meet local demand, ensure food security and to reduce dependence on importation," the DA said.

"Farmers should be encouraged to try new and matured technologies that are applicable in their areas to increase their yield and income," it added.

### Mechanics

The farmer cooperator (FC) participating in this project must be in the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture.

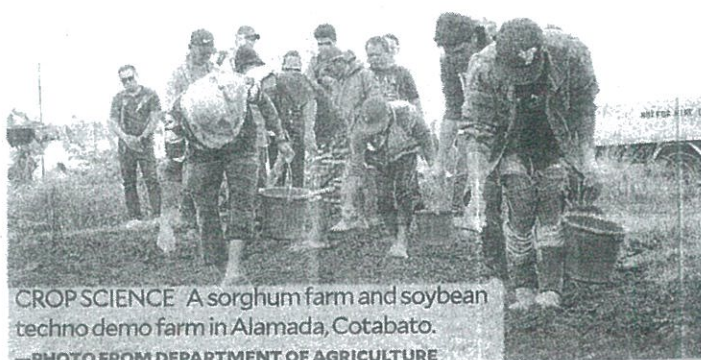
The technology demonstration trial will be conducted at the farmer's field. Quality and quantity tests on seeds for distribution, including the harvested seeds, will be conducted to ensure conformity with the existing and prescribed quality standards.

The DA's Regional Field Office (RFO) will provide farm inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, fuels for irrigation (if applicable), pesticides and biological control agents to the FC.

"The FC shall return the same amount of volume of seeds to DA-RFO after harvest. The FC shall gather, store and notify DA-RFO to retrieve the same volume of seeds received," the DA said.

The DA-RFO and the FC will present the result of the field trial to the farmers' cooperatives and associations at a timing that should coincide with the maturity and harvest period.

The FC is not obliged to return the volume of seeds received from the agency in the event of crop failure, provided it will submit proofs within 10 working days. INQ



CROP SCIENCE A sorghum farm and soybean techno demo farm in Alamada, Cotabato.

—PHOTO FROM DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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## DAR's value chain big boost to rice sufficiency

By JEL SANTOS

**T**he existing value chain program of the government is seen as a key factor in achieving the highest possible level of rice sufficiency in the country through the "Masagana Rice Industry Development Program" (MRIDP).

The Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) said that the value chain program for agricultural products, particularly on farm clustering, marketing, and linking smallholders to providers of inputs and credit, "would be a solid ground for the four strategies of the Department of Agriculture's (DA) MRIDP."

"With the MRIDP set to be fully adopted, the wealth of experience of ARBOs [agrarian reform beneficiary organizations] can hasten the learning curve of newly organized clusters to be formed by the different attached agencies of the DA," the agency said.

These include the irrigators' associations (both national and communal irrigation systems) of the National Irrigation Administration (NIA), the small water irrigation

systems associations of the Bureau of Soils and Water Management (BSWM), and rice farm cooperatives registered with the Cooperatives Development Authority (CDA).

"The DA met with DAR and BSWM on July 12 to discuss how the clustering of farmers would be expedited and a follow-up meeting for this purpose has been set for August 16," the DAR said.

The DAR further said other programs for ARBOs that could jibe with the strategies of MRIDP include stocks and market liberalization, land reform, agro-processing and input supply channels, urban finance, and market institutions.

Meanwhile, the four core strategies of the MRIDP are: MATatag (climate change adaptation or resiliency), SAMa-sama (clustering and consolidation of farms), GAnado (motivated farmers in the rice value chain), and NApapanahon (digital transformation to improve farming practices and program implementation).

Matatag aims to boost farmers' climate change resiliency by adjusting the planting calendar during the wet season, shifting main production to the dry season, and

promoting crop diversification and crop-live-stock-fisheries integration using balanced fertilization, proper irrigation, and other climate-smart practices.

Sama-sama seeks to create economies of scale by clustering farmers and consolidating farms at the barangay and municipal levels and converging interventions. They will be linked to millers and the NFA, enabling cooperation between farmers, millers, and government institutions to achieve better prices, better quality rice, and appropriate seed distribution. This, too, is the essence of GAnado, or the value chain approach.

NApapanahon supports the first three approaches by providing timely and accurate information for decision-making, making interventions, digital-based, location-specific, and efficient.

The MRIDP will support rice clusters with seeds, fertilizers and soil ameliorants; training-related activities; credit programs and loan facilities; crop insurance; market assistance; irrigation projects, production and post-harvest machinery and equipment and facilities.



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## Heavy rains fail to raise Angat water level

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Heavy rainfall experienced in the past days have not been enough to improve the water level of Angat Dam, National Water Resources Board (NWRB) executive director Seville David Jr. said yesterday.

Data from the provincial disaster risk reduction office of Bulacan showed that the water elevation of Angat Dam had only slightly increased to 178.09 meters as of 11 a.m. yesterday, and was monitored at 177.99 meters as of 5 p.m.

David noted that the water level of Angat is still below its minimum oper-

ating level of 180 meters.

In a radio interview, David reiterated his call for the public to conserve water amid the uncertainties brought by the El Niño phenomenon.

"We continue to appeal to the need to save water. It is better for us to take advantage of the rains so that our

dependence on the water from Angat Dam will be lessened," David said.

According to David, the water from the rains can be used to support domestic needs.

At the same time, the rains will also help farmers in Bulacan and Pampanga

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**Heavy rains** From Page 1

to be able to plant after the water allocation for the irrigation decreased to 20 cubic meters per second from the previous 28.5 CMS David said.

David said that the NWRB continues to monitor the water level of Angat Dam, adding that based on the projection of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration, rains will continue to come in August and September.

"We are anticipating rains for July, until August and September so that our dams will be recharged. At present, we need to prepare for the expected El Niño at the end of the year and until next year," he said.

According to David, there is a need to manage the supply of water in the dams, particularly Angat Dam, to prevent prolonged water interruption during El Niño.

Angat Dam provides the potable water needs of more than 90 percent of Metro Manila, irrigation supply to some 25,000 hectares of Bulacan and parts of Pampanga and hydro-power generation needs of the Luzon grid.

Customers being serviced by Maynilad Water Services Inc. are experiencing at least nine to 11 hours daily water interruptions after the NWRB implemented the 48 CMS water allocation for the two water concessionaires.

The 48 CMS will be in effect for the entire month of July.

David said the NWRB will decide whether to adjust the 48 CMS water allocation for Maynilad and Manila Water if the water level of Angat Dam improves or further drops.

### Preparations

Amid reports that many farmers have decided not to plant palay over fears of the dry spell, a ranking official of the Department of Agriculture (DA) said the government is preparing for the worst-case scenario amid the possible impact of the El Niño phenomenon.

In an interview with **The STAR**, Agriculture Assistant Secretary and deputy spokesman Rex Estoperez added that the DA already prepared action plans for mild, moderate and worst El Niño scenarios.

"While we do not know the extent of the effect of the El Niño, it is better to anticipate the worst so that we can prepare. All is prepared, including fisheries, agriculture crops and animals," Estoperez added.

According to Estoperez, the DA has yet to come up with the calculations on the possible damage of the dry spell to the agriculture sector.

At the same time, Estoperez said the DA is now conducting an information campaign to assure farmers that they can still plant palay amid fears of the drought.

On the other hand, Estoperez said the Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF) submitted its recommendation to address the report of the Commission on Audit after the National Food Authority (NFA) was found to have failed to reach its target of rice procurement of 300,000 metric tons.

"The buying price of the NFA is not competitive that is why the PCAF submitted its recommendation to increase the buying price of NFA to increase their stocks," Estoperez added. — **With Ramon Lazaro**

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## Traders' group to sell P38/kilo rice to Kadiwa

By **BELLA CARIASO**

A group of local rice traders on July 14 said rice at P38 per kilo of rice would also be made available to the Kadiwa outlets amid the continued spike in retail prices of the grains.

In a radio interview, Philippine Rice Industry Stakeholders Movement (PRISM) lead convenor Rowena Sadicon admitted there was a decline in demand for rice due to rising prices.

"We felt the decline in consumption of rice during these lean months because of high retail prices," Sadicon said.

She said that PRISM is now coordinating with the Department of Agriculture (DA) to start the sale of P38 well-milled rice at the Kadiwa stores.

"We are negotiating with the DA as our members want to participate in the sale of P38 per kilo of rice at the Kadiwa. We are arranging that we can have a space at the Kadiwa where we can sell rice," she added.

Sadicon said that traders pass the P38 per kilo of rice to retailers with no added cost.

"In fact, we shoulder the cost for logistics and at least P100 subsidy. If our retailers order at least 500 bags, we ask them to provide space for the P38 per kilo. This is part of our bayanihan spirit," she said.

According to Sadicon, the campaign is part of the corporate social responsibility of the member traders.

She added that she sources her rice in Nueva Ecija where she is a rice miller.

"We cannot do this alone. We only started the campaign. Everybody is welcome to join us so that we will be able to sell rice at P38 per kilo until the lean months," she added.

Sadicon said the group also plans to hold a caravan to reach depressed

areas. "We are working with barangays and local government units as our goal is to bring the P38 to depressed areas," she said.

Based on DA's monitoring on July 14, the retail price of local regular milled rice is sold to as high as P42 per kilo; local well-milled rice, P46 per kilo; local premium rice, P49 per kilo; local special rice, P60 per kilo.

The retail price of imported well-milled rice is pegged as high as P48 per kilo and imported special rice, P58 per kilo.

### Food summit

A farmers' group yesterday called on the DA to organize a food summit to prepare for the adverse impact of El Niño and the possible shortage of rice supply.

"I am calling on (Agriculture) Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban to hold a food summit so that there will be a consultation with the farmers so that we can solve the possible food shortage because of the El Niño," Central Luzon Farmers' Cooperative president Sonny Sioson said in a radio interview.

Sioson added that many farmers were affected by the decision of the National Water Resources Board to lower the water allocation for irrigation to 20 cubic meters per second from the previous 28.5 meters after the level of Angat Dam reached below 180 meters.

Sioson also noted the increasing retail prices of imported rice as neighboring countries are also affected by the dry spell.

"The landed cost of imported rice is now at P43 to P44 (per kilo). The retail prices of imported rice ranged between P44 and P50 per kilo and it is expected to go up as ASEAN countries like Vietnam, Thailand limit their export as they are also affected," he noted.



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## Govt forms El Niño Team to prepare for dry spell

BY FRANCO JOSE C. BAROÑA AND JAVIER JOE ISMAEL

**THE Office of Civil Defense (OCD) is set to convene the National El Niño Team to ensure harmonized implementation of efforts to address the possible impacts of the El Niño phenomenon.**

The National El Niño Team will be convened on July 19 in Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City during a meeting to be presided over by Undersecretary Ariel Nepomuceno, Civil Defense administrator and National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) executive director.

During the meeting, the ongoing activities of the government agencies for El Niño will be discussed.

Among the discussion points are the presentation of the short-, medium- and long-term plans of the various team clusters to address the effects of El Niño on food security, water security, energy security, health, public safety and cross-cutting issues.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) will also be providing an updated forecast of the climate phenomenon, as well as the status of the various dams in the country.

Nepomuceno said they are looking forward to the finalization of the National Action Plan for El Niño by the National El Niño Team, as the OCD continues to undertake various activities specific to the agency's mandates to ensure that the effects of the El Niño-induced dry spells and drought to the country can be countered.

Pagasa has declared the start of the El Niño phenomenon on July 4. It also forecast its possible movement from a "moderate" to "severe" by the latter part of 2023.

The National El Niño Team regularly convenes for updates on the actions taken by agencies following President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s instructions for a science-based, whole-of-nation strategy to prepare the country for the adverse effects of the climate phenomenon.

### Legarda chimes in

Senate President Pro Tempore

Lorna Regina "Loren" Legarda also underscored support for programs dedicated to attaining disaster resilience.

Legarda, a United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Global Champion for Resilience, said there must be proactive ways to help the country withstand the effects of calamities battering the country annually.

"The Philippines is constantly hit by endless natural disasters every year, so we must be able to face any possible danger head-on," she said.

"Since we have identified most of the causes of damage to property and lives, the state and the citizens must work together to mitigate them by preparing ourselves, starting with simple things such as waste segregation and heeding disaster warnings," she added.

The Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone nations on earth, where various natural calamities such as typhoons, earthquakes and volcanic activities affect millions yearly.

Situated along the Pacific Ring of Fire, seismic and volcanic activity occurs more often here than in the rest of the world, usually to a more dangerous degree, putting millions of lives at risk.

"I call on local government units to seriously consider ways to conserve the water supply. We cannot expose ourselves to the risk of seeing it dry up completely — it will be catastrophic," warned Legarda, who also welcomed the administration's move to release an El Niño mitigation plan to help the country brace for its adverse effects.

The President announced Monday that the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), Department of Agriculture (DA), and National Irrigation Administration (NIA) have joined forces to boost mitigation efforts for the coming of El Niño. Legarda welcomed this development.

"Let us also look at building standards and determine if structures can withstand tremors and various waterways to see if they are clear from debris that might cause overflow and flooding in low-lying areas," Legarda said.

"Lastly, we must be able to ensure that our people are capable enough in fending off disaster themselves by empowering them and could live comfortably without the danger of their surroundings," she added.

# REMATE

ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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## P2.8M bulok na karne nasamsam sa Bulacan

MULING nagsagawa ng pag-salakay ang mga tauhan ng Department of Agriculture (DA) at Philippine Coast Guard sa isang warehouse ng frozen meat sa Meycauayan Industrial Subdivision sa Meycauayan City, Bulacan dahil sa kawalan ng business permit.

Amoy ng nabubulok na karne ang sumalubong sa inspection team nang pumasok sila sa warehouse hanggang nadiskubre ang iba't ibang klase ng karne na inilagay sa makeshift na cold storage containers.

Sa patuloy na paghahalug-hog ng mga awtoridad ay nadiskubre rin ang mga expired meat products sa loob ng dalawang sasakyan sa loob ng warehouse. Kabilang sa mga ahen-syang sumalakay sa naturang warehouse ay mga tauhan mula sa National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS), Philippine Na-

tional Police, at Armed Forces of the Philippines.

Ayon kay DA Assistant Secretary James Layug, tinatayang nasa P2.8 milyon ang halaga ng nakumpiskang 14,000 kilo ng karne. Inaresto ang walong indibidwal na inabutan ng mga awtoridad sa warehouse na ngayon ay nahaharap sa kasong paglabag sa Food Safety Act o Republic Act 10611.

Nakatakda namang sunugin ang hot meat na nakumpiska mula sa warehouse, ayon kay Dr. Roseller Manalo, hepe ng enforcement team ng NMIS Region 3. Ito na ang ikalawang beses na sinalakay ng mga awtoridad ang Meycauayan Industrial Village — una ay nito lang July 11 kung saan nakumpiska an tinatayang P35 milyong halaga ng smuggled frozen meat mula sa Germany at India.

**DANNY GRAVADOR**

# REMATE

ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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## DA at DoJ, sanib-pwersa sa paglikha ng “green jobs” para sa PDLs

SANIB-PUWERSA ang Department of Agriculture at Department of Justice sa paglikha ng “sustainable green jobs” para sa persons deprived of liberty o mga preso.

Nauna nang sinaksihan ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ang paglagda sa isang kasunduan sa pagitan ng mga ahensya para sa Reformation Initiative for Sustainable Environment for Food Security Project na naglalayong gamitin ang mga nakatiwangwang na lupain ng Bureau of Correction para sa agricultural development para tulungan ang nilalayon ng pamahalaan na makamit ang food security.

Sa pamamagitan ng proyekto, mauugnay ang mga PDL sa farm work para ireporma at ihanda ang mga ito na maisama sa lipunan.

Sa naging talumpati ng Pangulo sa ceremonial signing ng kasunduan, sinabi ng Pangulo na ang inisyatiba ay patotoo sa “unyielding commitment to both food security and rehabilitative justice” ng pamahalaan.

Sa ilalim ng programa, ang

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US WARNS OF STRONG DRY SPELL

# SEVERE EL NIÑO TO DRIVE LOCAL FOOD PRICES UP

**By Ronnel W. Domingo**  
@RonWDomingoINQ

The persistence of upward pressure on food prices in the Philippines is more certain as United States-based climate experts see a 90 percent chance that the El Niño dry spell will prevail through the year and early 2024, and has significant probability of becoming a severe occurrence.

The American agency Climate Prediction Center (CPC) said in their latest monthly bulletin that while data gathered in June indicate a “weak” El Niño, there is a one-in-five chance of “an event that becomes ‘historically strong,’ rivaling the [occurrences during the] winters of 1997-1998 or 2015-2016.

The most recent occurrence of a strong El Niño, 2015-2016, was considered one of the most severe on record.

The CPC said a strong El Niño meant sea temperature readings

that are at least 2 degrees Celsius warmer than normal.

“Forecasters favor continued growth of El Niño through the fall, peaking this winter with moderate-to-strong intensity (with an 81-percent change that temperatures will be warmer than average by at least 1 degrees Celsius during November to January),” CPC said.

Fitch group subsidiary BMI said in a commentary international prices of rice have been easing but they remain high and may see an uptick later this year or early next year as the peak of the El Niño approaches.

BMI also said that based on five occurrences of “severe” El Niño since the 1990s, rice production in the Philippines was one of the worst-hit in Asia whenever the climate phenomenon hits overdrive.

Severe El Niños were recorded in 1991-1992, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2009-2010, and 2015-2016. INQ

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## Railway expansion must include socialized housing, agri value chain—Sen. Hontiveros

By BUTCH FERNANDEZ

**S**ENATOR Risa Hontiveros reminded Friday the urgent need to frontload socialized and affordable housing, as well as the agricultural value chain, in line with the expansion of the country's railway system.

*"Hindi lang problema sa transportasyon ang pwedeng matugunan ng railways*

*projects," the senator said. "Isa rin itong oportunidad para makapagtayo ng mga abot-kayang pabahay at maging tulay sa pagitan ng mga magsasaka at pamilihan sa siyudad," she said.*

The senator issued the statement in the wake of the ceremonial signing of P50-billion contract packages for the North-South Commuter Railways (NSCR) project.

The 14.9 kilometers of elevated railways

and viaducts will be constructed in Blumentritt, Buendia, EDSA, Senate, Bicutan, and Sucat. Some of these stations will be interconnected with the Metro Manila Subway Station.

Hontiveros suggested the concerned administration officials should "take advantage of the transportation project to broaden the market access of farmers in rural areas, thereby increasing the demand for agricultural products and possibly leading to higher [profit margin] for farmers."

Moreover, she proposed that railways can connect remote and rural agricultural areas with urban centers and export markets.

*"Konektado na ng tren mula Clark hanggang Calamba at sa long haul project hanggang Bicol," the senator reminded, suggesting, "Dapat samantalahin ito ng gobyerno para sa wakas ay mapadali na para sa mga masasaka ang mai-angat ang produkto sa mga palengke sa siyudad."*

She added: *"Hindi na kailangang umasa pa ng magsasaka sa mga middle men na doble managa ng presyo at bibilhin lang sa kanila ng palugi ang mga produkto. Sana nandoon si Presidente bilang Agriculture Secretary dahil sa mga palibot ng itatayong tren na ito pwedeng magkaroon ng patotoo ang paulit-ulit na sinasabi nilang value chain para sa maliliit na mangangisda at magsasaka."*

Moreover, Hontiveros urged that the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development's (DHSUD) socialized and affordable housing programs be given priority over private property developers when allocating the lots surrounding train stations *"Huwag sanang hayaan na ag-agawan ng mga property developers ang palibot ng mga train station. Kailangan nating bigyan ng puwang ang murang pabahay ng DHSUD para sa mga kababayan natin na hindi kayang magbayad ng mataas na presyo ng mga high rise condominiums,"* she added.

At the same time, the senator vowed to support equitable transit-oriented development (eTOD) by the Department of Transportation and DHSUD in the upcoming budget hearings in the Senate. *"Para walang hirap na makapunta sa trabaho, eskwela, ospital, pasyalan at ibang serbisyo publiko ang 10,000 na pamilya na apektado ng construction ng riles at 50 stations mula Clark hanggang Matnog,"* she said.

*"Kung sabay na isasaalang-alang ang transportasyon, pagpapalakas ng value chain, at abot-kayang pabahay, magiging malaking kaluwagan ito sa mga commuters, manggagawa at mga konsyumer,"* said Hontiveros.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

CHIT U. JUAN

### Mystical Banahaw coffee

**W**e were invited to talk to coffee farmers in Quezon, my first time to meet a group there after almost 30 years in the industry. I guess I never went back to the place after my sad experience planting coffee in Lucban, when I was such a greenhorn I thought coffee could grow anywhere. My first coffee project in 1997 failed. So I scratched Quezon off my imaginary coffee map.



But recently a friend said he had bought coffee from Pinagdanglayan in Dolores, Quezon. I got curious because this coffee roaster would not lie. He said it was good but the beans got to him unsorted. In coffee processing, we sort the beans lovingly and manually after they dry to the correct moisture level. We remove black beans, broken ones, foreign material and other defects that may cause good coffee to taste bad. So I told my friend I would go to the source and check what they had.

So we met the farmers one cloudy day. We brought some coffee to brew and share with them. They have already had so many trainings in coffee from the government, NGOs and other agencies. I thought: "What else could we share with them?" I was feeling my way around, checking what they still wanted to know about our industry practices, our purpose in meeting them and if they would still be interested in even more coffee talk.

It was, however, gratifying to know they already know a lot about our past campaigns such as:

- Pick red – pick only the ripest (usually red or yellow) fruits of the coffee tree;
- Promoting Liberica or Barako variety – it's now one of the most expensive varieties. I feel especially happy because 20 years ago this was sold with Robusta, the most affordable variety. Today they pick the Barako and separate them from Robusta and sell them at a higher price;
- Correct storage – I saw hermetically-sealed bags of coffee in their warehouse. They had the right moisture alright, but were they good enough?

Yes, it takes 20 or so years to get a group to accept and implement changes in an industry with age-old practices. In most of our visits, many farmers are already set in their ways, they have no succession plan and most probably coffee will die with their generation. But we carry on. We still teach and share even if the average age of these farmers could be 57 years old.

Even if they have been to countless seminars and trainings, they lent their ears to our group of women champions and advocates of Philippine coffee. After a couple of hours of sharing, guess what? We found a most interesting group whose minds and hearts opened to us, helped by cups of Arabica and Robusta coffee and a snack of sweetened banana *turon* and banana "cue" without sticks.

As my co-speaker and I wrapped up our open forum, we knew we had made a little dent in their interest quotient. They now want another training, they want Barako seedlings and they want to learn more about different enterprise opportunities in coffee and whatever crops could grow with it on Mount Banahaw. Nestled at 1,500 feet and higher, their coffee farms enjoy a biodiverse natural environment and the added feature of being grown on a mystical mountain.

Mount Banahaw must be our biggest draw for Faith Tourism, as pilgrims come not only during Holy Week but all year round. We visited the National Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows and said a prayer before our farmer meet-up. We then drove just a few minutes to a meeting place – the roasting facility of this farmers' association, with tall coffee trees in the background. "Tall is no good, we tell them." "Prune your trees," we continue. We knew they would be resistant to change when we first opened up the discussion – farmers, especially older ones, usually are. The rules are simple: Prune your trees, pick the fruits only when ripe, dry them well and then sort them.

But guess what? After the banana snacks and lots of coffee, we got them interested to expand their farms, give our suggested process a try and make Pinagdanglayan coffee a legend during their lifetime. We will be back soon and maybe this time meet even more members.

And this is how we expand coffee areas in the country. One group at a time. One community at a time. Each coffee growing community would have its unique situation and unique challenges. But when a local endorses us, it makes the task easier and more sustainable. The "locals" are Banahaw Circle Nature Retreat operators Jeannie Javelosa and Carlos Loinaz who have been looking for local coffee to serve at their bed and breakfast. They had us "cup" or taste several samples but the coffee never made the grade. Jeannie found this challenge to be her sign to do something about it. And do something they did. They bought land that will soon be coffee farms!

The resurgence of coffee on Mount Banahaw is happening as we write this, with Carlos and Jeannie already plotting their land and asking us to come with seedlings soon. Carlos and Jeannie listened with clear minds and good hearts to preserve what the mystical mountain offers – forest cover, biodiversity and all of these are good for coffee. With them leading the pack, there now will be coffee tours, coffee shops and yes, maybe mystical and magical coffee very soon.

Jeannie was called back to the mountain during the pandemic, after having started a home there some 30 years ago. We had visited twice in the past as ECHOstore partners but never gave coffee a second look or even a thought. But timing is key and the Universe tells us when it is the right time to do something out of the ordinary. With the reception we were given by Jeannie's neighbors, I am certain Banahaw coffee will be a new special origin to try very soon.

And maybe join a coffee trek, and commune with the mystics on Mount Banahaw.



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## India considers banning most rice exports on inflation fears

INDIA, the world's biggest rice shipper, is considering banning exports of most varieties, a move that may send already lofty global prices higher as the disruptive El Niño weather pattern returns.

The government is discussing a plan to ban exports of all non-Basmati rice, according to people familiar with the matter. That's because of rising domestic prices and authorities want to avoid the risk of more inflation, said the people, who asked not to be identified as the information is not public.

If implemented, a ban would affect about 80 percent of India's rice exports. Such a move may lower domestic prices, but it risks sending global costs even higher. Rice is a staple for about half of the world's population, with Asia consuming about 90 percent of global supply. Benchmark prices have already soared to a two-year high on fears that the return of El Niño will damage crops.

India accounts for about 40 percent of the global rice trade and has sought to tighten exports of some varieties. Last year, the South Asian nation banned broken rice exports and imposed a 20 percent duty on shipments of white and brown rice after Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent prices of food staples like wheat and corn soaring. The country has also restricted wheat and sugar exports.

Representatives for the food, trade and finance ministries didn't respond to emails or text messages seeking comment. India supplies rice to more than 100 countries, with Benin, China,

Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire and Togo among its biggest customers.

Shares of Indian rice millers fell on news of the potential ban. KRBL Ltd., the country's biggest rice company, slumped as much as 3.7 percent before paring losses. Chaman Lal Setia Exports Ltd. declined as much as 1.4 percent, Kohinoor Foods Ltd. dropped 2.9 percent while LT Foods Ltd. tumbled 4.4 percent.

Importers such as Indonesia, China, and the Philippines have been aggressively stockpiling rice this year. El Niño conditions have developed in the tropical Pacific for the first time in seven years, according to the World Meteorological Organization, threatening to bring drought to many rice-growing regions. A potential ban by India will add to worries over supply.

India's plan comes after its consumer price inflation quickened in June mainly due to higher food prices.

Bloomberg Economics expects inflation to rebound further after the latest surge in tomato prices, a key ingredient in Indian cuisine, and an increase in the government's support price for monsoon-sown crops. Barclays Bank Plc and Yes Bank have raised their inflation forecasts.

Retail rice prices in Delhi have climbed about 15 percent this year while the average nationwide price has gained 8 percent, according to data from the food ministry. Persistent high food costs could hurt popular sentiment ahead of several state polls later this year and national election in 2024. *Bloomberg News*