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**Title: BAGONG PILIPINAS, Transforming Philippine agriculture towards full economic recovery**

**(Monday, July 24, 2023)**

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# Bagong Pilipinas, transforming Philippine agriculture towards full economic recovery



The Department of Agriculture (DA), through the leadership of President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., continues to implement various programs to assist and empower the farming and fishing communities and the private sector so that they can produce enough, accessible, affordable, safe, and nutritious food for all Filipinos while also having improved and sustainable incomes.

From July 2022 to June 15, 2023, the DA has pursued programs, projects, and activities to sustain the gains of the agriculture, fishery, and livestock sector and protect them from the effects of calamities and other risks.

## Stabilizing Food Supply by Supporting Agricultural Productivity and Accessibility and Facilitating Access to Affordable Agricultural Commodities

### Farm and Fisheries Clustering and Consolidation (F2C2) Program

- Assisted farmer-beneficiaries to partner directly with big institutional buyers from the private sector.

### Farm-to-Market Road (FMR)

- Completed 412 FMR projects spanning 566.04 kilometers (km) and 670 km worth P9.43 billion (B) under the FMR Development Program and Philippine Rural Development Project, improving the market access of 54,458 rural households nationwide.

### Farm-to-mill roads

- Completed 46 farm-to-mill road projects worth PhP532.26 million (M) covering 32.88 km through the Infrastructure Program of the Sugarcane Industry Development Act.

### KADIWA Program

- Initiated 6,490 regular KADIWA in 416 sites nationwide, which benefitted 1.76-M households and 984 farmers' cooperatives and associations (FCAs) and agri-fishery enterprises.
- Conducted 352 KADIWA ng Pasko/Pangulo, which benefitted 78,671 households and 1,562 FCAs and agri-fishery enterprises.
- Conducted Seafood KADIWA activities, which benefitted 471 fisherfolk FCAs and traders, as well as 26,596 buyers nationwide.

### Transport, logistical, and investment matching support

- Sought new international market access for various agricultural commodities: Fresh durian – China; Pili Nut-27 European Union countries; Shallots-Indonesia; Fresh Mangoes- Australia.
- Facilitated 71 onion market linkage transactions, benefitting 17 onion suppliers and 27 onion buyers.
- Assisted 43 FCAs and enterprises in various international trade events, which generated PhP10.89-B sales of banana, papaya, pineapple, hass avocado, durian, mango, coffee, and virgin coconut oil.
- Assisted 115 FCAs and agri-based enterprises assisted, which earned PhP24.33-M sales.

### Timely and calibrated importation

**Sugar** – The Sugar Regulatory Administration implemented Sugar Orders No. 1, 2, 6, and Memorandum Circular No. 5 to ease the high price of sugar and implement productivity improvement interventions, increasing the farmgate price to 56.6%.

**Fish** – Issued Certificate of Necessity to Import a maximum importable volume of 25,000 metric tons (MT) of fish, to augment the local fish production.

**Onion** – Imported 3,958 MT of onions in January 2023 to resolve the supply gap in 2022.

### Sustained Provision of Farm Inputs

#### Rice Competitive Enhancement Fund

- Distributed 50.8-M kilograms (kg) of seeds benefitting 1.039M rice farmers.

#### Corn Production Enhancement Project

- Distributed 1.51-M kg. of seeds benefitting 89,097 corn beneficiaries.

#### National Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture Program

- Distributed 12,288.17 kg of vegetable seeds, 10,501 pieces of seedlings, and 1,684 bags of soil and fertilizers benefited 227 beneficiaries.

#### Coconut Farmers Industry Development Plan

- Planted 4,379 hybrid seeds, hybridized 40,022 palms, and produced 660,263 hybrid seed nuts under the Coconut Hybridization Program.
- Planted 1.37-M coconut seedlings in 9,934 hectares (has.) of coconut farmland with 10,009 farmer-beneficiaries under the Coconut Planting and Replanting Program.

### Irrigation Network Systems

- Generated 30,925 has. of new irrigation service areas and restored 11,064 has. under the National and Communal Irrigation Project.
- Constructed and rehabilitated 1,086 Small-scale Irrigation Projects and 14,951 linear meters of irrigation canals, benefitting 917 farmers' groups.

### Fertilizer Discount Voucher (FDV), Balance Fertilization Strategy, Fuel Discount Voucher

- Provided 1.65-M rice farmers FDVs worth PhP6.86-B and 29,128 corn and cassava farmers FDVs worth PhP58.26-M under the National Rice Program and the National Corn Program, respectively.
- Campaigned balanced fertilization with highlights on the 4Rs in Fertilization – Right Source, Right Placement, Right Amount, and Right Rate.
- Distributed PhP417.8-M worth of fuel subsidies to 732,632 corn farmers and fisherfolk.

### Production and postharvest facilities, machinery and equipment

- Established 3,753 production facilities benefitting 3,641 farmer groups and 105 postharvest facilities benefitting 104 farmer groups; distributed 28,438 production and postharvest machinery and equipment to 2,597 group and 226 individual beneficiaries.

### Legislated hatcheries

- Established hatcheries to strengthen the aquaculture industry and address critical farming issues. To date, there are 13 operational and two completed sites in Luzon, seven in Visayas, and one in Mindanao.

### Increased farmers' and fisherfolk's access to agricultural credit and financial assistance

#### Credit and financing

- Released PhP4.36-B to 50,268 farmers and fisherfolk, and 260 FCAs/micro and small enterprises through the Agricultural Credit Policy Council.

#### Cash Assistance

- Provided PhP7.64-B unconditional cash assistance to 1.53-M rice farmers through LBP and DBP.

### Mitigating the Impact of Calamities, Diseases, and other Threats

#### Contained the ASF outbreak

- Launched Bantay ASF sa Barangay and the Integrated National Swine Production Initiatives for Recovery and Expansion programs to manage the effects of ASF, increasing hog inventory by 4.2% or from 9.77-M head in 2022 to 10.18-M head in March 2023.
- Distributed 44,109 sentinel pigs to 17,622 ASF-affected farmers; released 1,325 barangays from quarantine.
- The Bureau of Animal Industry concluded the Phase 1 test trial of the AVAC ASF Live vaccine from Vietnam.

#### Controlled AI outbreak

- Conducted bird culling, surveillance within the 1km and 7km zones surrounding the affected area, and cleaning and disinfection of affected farms.

#### Helped fisherfolk affected by the Oriental Mindoro Oil Spill

- Provided PhP25-M worth of livelihood and relief assistance to the affected communities: training and fish stalls; fuel subsidy for affected fisherfolk to fish in alternative grounds; and fiberglass reinforced plastic boats with marine engines.

#### Prepared for El Nino to mitigate its effects

- Reactivated the DA National El Nino Task Force to enforce the El Nino Mitigation and Adaptation Plan.

#### Controlled pest infestation and disease incidence

- Allocated PhP160-M for the implementation of recovery and rehabilitation programs in affected areas.

#### Protected farmers and fisherfolk against smuggling, hoarding, and price manipulation of agri-fishery commodities

- Intercepted PhP2.24-B worth of smuggled agri-fishery products such as onion, vegetables, sugar, frozen fish, poultry, and meat products.







## Central Luzon LGUs commit support for 'Kadiwa ng Pangulo'

BY ZORAYDA TECSON AND  
MARILYN GALANG, PNA

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO, Pampanga – A wide array of agricultural products and other food items were put on sale on recently as local government units (LGUs) in Central Luzon joined the nationwide launch of the "Kadiwa ng Pangulo" (KNP).

The LGUs committed to continuously support the program of the Marcos administration aimed at addressing the rising food

prices and giving farmers, fisherfolk and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) rent-free venues to sell their produce.

As early as 8 am, residents trooped to the KNP stores in the region's seven provinces to buy fresh vegetables and processed goods at lower prices.

In Nueva Ecija, residents enjoyed savings as they bought lower-priced basic commodities, particularly rice, at the KNP booths set up at the provincial capitol compound in Cabanatuan City.

Dr. Richard Simangan, provincial direc-

tor of the Department of Trade and Industry in the province, said the Kadiwa store was opened to farmers and small entrepreneurs so they could sell their respective products.

"We gathered our farmers and micro and small enterprises to exhibit and sell their cheaper products," Simangan said.

"If we say cheaper, the price is not the same as what we can buy outside because our farmers brought their products directly from the field," he said.

Evangelina Bergano, a vendor from Ba-

rangay Tabacao, Talavera, Nueva Ecija, offered meat and poultry products at PHP10 per kilo lower than the market price.

Annie Lacero of the National Food Authority-Nueva Ecija Quality Assurance Unit said their agency has allocated 20 bags of rice that were sold at P25 per kilo, made possible by government subsidy.

In Pampanga, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., together with Governor Dennis Pineda, made rounds of the KNP stalls that showcased the province's top products

such as chicharon (crispy pork rinds), tinapa (smoked fish), balot (fertilized duck egg), salted egg, lowland vegetables, and fruits.

Pineda said the President was happy to find out that the price of sugar was only P70 per kilo while the NFA rice was only P25 per kilo.

"The sellers and exhibitors were thankful to the program that gave them an opportunity for the public to know their products," the governor said.

In Bulacan, 39 exhibitors participated in the event.

"This is in support of President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr.'s vow to establish more 'Kadiwa ng Pangulo' centers in the country to help local producers earn a higher income by eliminating intermediaries and, at the same time, allow consumers to buy agricultural products and other goods at a lower price," Governor Daniel Fernando said.

KNP stalls were also set up in the provinces of Tarlac, Zambales and Aurora as the LGUs' show of commitment to the program. (PNA)





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## 'Concrete ways to address food security woes needed'

**A** YEAR into the Marcos Jr. administration, local economists are looking for concrete projects and programs that would address the country's food security issues, especially with inflation remaining elevated and the impending El Niño.

University of the Philippines School of Economics (UPSE) Associate Professor Karl Robert L. Jandoc said he is eager to hear about the President's plans for agriculture since prices remain elevated.

Jandoc also worries over a pos-

sible reversal of the Retail Trade Liberalization (RTL) law, particularly in allowing the National Food Authority (NFA) to intervene. The law is the only reason why rice prices have not been a significant cause for higher inflation.

"If the President assures that he will [retain] the RTL, that he won't touch it, that might temper an increase in prices [especially in the context of] a shortfall in the December harvest," Jandoc told the BUSINESSMIRROR in an interview.

SEE "CONCRETE WAYS," A2

Jandoc said a shortfall in the December harvest of rice is possible especially in the context of the El Niño. The government's weather bureau earlier estimated that the full impact of the drought could be felt sometime in the last quarter of the year.

Should this reduce the country's production of rice, the water-loving food staple of the Philippines, and the production shortfall is compounded by the spike in consumer spending typical of the Christmas season, Jandoc said the inflation targets of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) may not be met.

The BSP earlier said the country's inflation rate could fall within target toward the end of the year. Inflation in June already reached 5.4 percent, only 1.4 percentage points away from the high end of the 2 to 4 percent target of the government.

The concern, Jandoc said, also includes the reduction in the rice farmer's incomes due to El Niño. Given the government's "cloud of fiscal consolidation," he said it may be difficult for the government to "pick up the slack" in their incomes, similar to previous bouts of reduced farm output.

UP Professor emeritus Epictetus Patalinghug told this newspaper that the government should address the structural problems in agriculture particularly low productivity, low farmer incomes, lack of rural infrastructure, and the existence of cartels in onions, garlic, vegetables and essential food crops.

Patalinghug said the government should also address "regulatory rent seeking by BFAR, BPI, BAI, and SRA" by reducing barriers before giving private firms the authority to import fish, vegetables, meat, and sugar.

"I like to hear the President outline his projects and programs for the next five years and his accomplishments in his first year. Particularly, the plans to contain inflation, food prices, energy prices, health access, education access, housing access, and job generation programs," Patalinghug said.

Before addressing these reforms, Freedom from Debt Coalition President Rene E. Ofreneo thinks the President must recognize that the agriculture sector "is in shambles" due to "bad economic policies" such as the "World Bank's 'agricultural deregulation' program."

Ofreneo said this agriculture deregulation program gave rise to "untrammelled profit taking by big importers, big distributors, big hoarders, big traders and big smugglers" who took advantage of the so-called free-market rules.

He added that agrarian reform is still vital, such as what remains to be done in terms of the Land Acquisition-Distribution (LAD) in private lands and land tenurial issues in government lands, especially in forest lands and military reservations.

Ofreneo said many Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) have also abandoned farmers, selling their lands after the 10-year restrictive rule in the 1990s to 2000s.

"What PBBM is now gradually doing in the agri sector shows that his government cannot afford to take a hands-off role in the market. Otherwise, food inflation and social unrest will be difficult to tame," Ofreneo said.

Meanwhile, Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU) economist Leonardo A. Lanzona is concerned about how the coming El Niño and the government's fiscal constraints could worsen the employment situation.

Lanzona said the government should exert more effort to eliminate corruption, which reduces competitiveness and productivity.

Ofreneo said employment is crucial given that a study by the UP School of Labor and Industrial Relations (SOLAIR) found that 80 to 82 percent of workers in the Philippines are considered informal workers who

had "limited protection, social and legal" if at all.

Given this, Lanzona said greater attention must also be paid to jobs lost or affected by automation and digitalization through a "massive skill program."

"I would like to hear an admission that the government failed to take decisive action on inflation and unemployment. Unfortunately, we will probably hear that inflation and unemployment have finally declined," Lanzona said.

"The truth is that low inflation does not mean that prices have gone down. Also, easing unemployment does not mean greater access to quality jobs," he added.

Crucial to addressing the jobs challenge, Ofreneo said, is the need to strengthen the manufacturing sector. Unfortunately, the manufacturing sector could not grow because of the country's power constraints.

This underscores why efforts to reduce energy costs and meet the targets set in the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) on energy need to be met, according to Ateneo de Manila University's Majah Leah Ravago.

Ravago stressed that it is not enough that the government focuses on generation. There is a need to accelerate the development of transmission capacity to bring down energy costs.

"Accelerate development of transmission capacity. Fast-track the implementation of permitting reforms and right-of-way: EVOSS and Ease-of-doing business should be operationalized to realize its true intent. Digitization of systems and processes and not just making it online," Ravago said.

Meanwhile, UPSE Head of Research Renato E. Reside Jr. said the President should also focus on the next set of tax reforms. These include passive income taxation, excise on plastics, and land taxes, among others.

These will be crucial in addressing the country's financial needs in the next few years, as well as efforts to undertake reforms in the country's pension and retirement system.

Patalinghug added that along with this, fiscal reforms must include efforts to allow the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) as well as the Commission on Audit (COA) to "discipline" national government line agencies who are not spending their budgets efficiently.



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"The President should pursue pension reform in the military and uniformed personnel. He should lay down his anti-poverty programs and social safety nets for the weak and the poor for the remaining 5 years of his term."

Patalinghug added that beyond fiscal, monetary, and banking policy reforms, the national government needs to use the Maharlika Investment Fund to finance essential infrastructure projects.

He added that some foreign lenders and the private sector players may not be willing to undertake projects. Patalinghug said some of these projects are the Tutuban to Sorsogon Railway, Matnog, Sorsogon to Samar Bridge, and Leyte to Surigao Bridge.

Patalinghug also cited the Panay Railway Project, Manila to Tuguegarao Railway, and the Mindanao Railway Project among the infrastructure projects that could boost economic growth, including certain sectors such as tourism.

For De La Salle University economist Maria Ella Oplas and University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) College of Economics and Management Department of Economics Assistant Professor Luisito C. Abueg, the tourism sector needs more than a change in tagline and logo.

Oplas and Abueg said the national government should continue to support or invest in the tourism sector. They stressed that the government must also resolve the issue of fund mismanagement in the Department of Tourism (DOT). *Cai U. Ordinario*





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## SONA 2023 SPECIAL FEATURES, C1-C8

### Budget, Leduc bills priority as Congress reopens today

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ

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As the Second Regular Session resumes today (Monday), the House of Representatives will concentrate on passing the proposed 2024 General Appropriations Act and measures to carry out President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s promise to lower the price of rice to P20 per kilo, as well as the remaining priority bills.

The approval of the P5.768-trillion 2024 national budget, which is expected to be presented to the House of Representatives a week after the President's State of the Nation Address (SONA), will be one of the top priorities, according to Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez.

The House targets to approve the proposed national budget before the first recess of the 2nd Regular Session in October, Romualdez said.

The proposed national budget for next year is P500 billion higher than this year's P5.268-trillion spending program.

Under the Constitution, the President has 30 days after the Sona to submit his budget proposal to Congress.

"We will prioritize, of course, the P5.7-trillion budget that will be submitted within a week. [I heard] that the DBM will submit our 2024 budget NEP [National Expenditure Program] a week after the Sona," he said.

"We average at least five weeks of solid work [until October congressional break] on the budget deliberations, considerations, review, and approval through the third reading. So we are confident with the processes, protocols, and procedures that we have to pass the national budget, which is the most important piece of legislation," added the speaker.

SEE "BUDGET," A2

Meanwhile, Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri is confident the 19th Senate can, at its second regu-

will discuss the real situation of the Filipino People at the household level."

Among the issues that Pimentel thinks should take the spotlight at Sona are the high cost of living, inadequate income, problems on education, unemployment and underemployment, and ballooning national debt.

For his part, Senate President Zubiri said, in reply to a query on priorities of the President, "Well in terms of prices, food is number 1." He noted that Marcos is the concurrent Secretary of Agriculture. "So he must focus on the availability and lowering of food prices. He must strengthen

the farm sector, help our farmers. And if needed, import cheap food products if these cannot be produced in the country."

It is, Zubiri added, one big "balancing act" for a president who must look out for the prices and availability of the people's food while also protecting the farmers. "It is a very difficult job."

Still, he added: "But I think he is doing good. He got the best and the brightest" people in key agencies.

According to Zubiri, they are committed to fulfill the priorities spelled out in the last meeting of the Legislative Executive Development

Advisory Council (Leduc) and listed the key ones: amendments to the Build-Operate-Transfer Law/Public-Private Partnership Bill, the National Disease Prevention Management Authority, the Internet Transactions Act/E-Commerce Law, the Medical Reserve Corps, the Virology Institute of the Philippines, Mandatory ROTC and NSTP, Revitalizing the Salt Industry, Valuation Reform, E-Government/E-Governance bill, and the Ease of Paying Taxes, National Government Rightsizing Program, the Unified System of Separation/Retirement and Pension of MUPs, the LGU Income Classification, the Waste-to-Energy Bill, the New Philippine Passport Act, the Magna Carta for Filipino Seafarers, the National Employment Action Plan, and Amendments to the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act, Amendments to the Bank Secrecy Law.

Zubiri noted that "with respect to the last one, the Philippines is the only country that has not repealed its bank secrecy law," signaling an intent to pass legislation that central bank and Finance department officials have been pushing.

### 'Life up close, not macro'

WHILE macroeconomic figures are important, Pimentel said the Sona should concentrate on microeconomic matters which concern and affect the lives of the ordinary Filipino.

"The cost of living is very high. The income of the typical Filipino family is not enough for their basic needs and for their decent existence as a family of human beings." Those who are employed are not paid 'living wages,' the senator said, stressing that: "Many are unemployed and many more underemployed."

He highlighted the importance of education as the great equalizer and suggested "bigger budgetary allocation as well as inclusion of computer-coding in the school curriculum."

Pimentel also affirmed the significance of focusing on agriculture to generate jobs, food, and fight inflation. He advocates for better support for micro and small entrepreneurs, mental health initiatives, and attracting long-term foreign investments.

The senator also underscored the importance of enacting laws to improve trust in and the reliability of online transactions, citing the Internet Transactions Act (ITA) as an example, saying that the measure has the added value of protecting delivery riders from hoax orders and other scams.

### Remaining priorities

CAMARINES Sur Rep. LRay Villafuerte expressed confidence that both houses of Congress will give their final approval to 50 bills meant to prop up President Marcos' "Agenda for Peace and Prosperity."

Villafuerte exhorted his peers in both chambers to pass the remaining nine bills from the expanded list of 44 priority measures that President Marcos had drawn up with the Leduc.

Villafuerte likewise urged senators alone to act on at least 47 other bills, comprising the 30 other priority measures along with 17 more bills that the House had already passed on third and final reading during the first regular session of the 19th Congress.





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## 'Biochar' shows promise as sustainable soil enhancer

MARITESS Mendoza, a plant grower in Laur, Nueva Ecija, set aside one-fourth of the 3.7 hectares of her agricultural land to experiment on the viability of biochar as a soil enhancer for onions and other high-value crops or HVCs.

In an interview with *The Manila Times*, Mendoza, an onion raiser, said she earned an additional P60,000 from the 16 tons of onions to which she had applied biochar, exceeding the usual 10 tons that she harvested in the past using commercial fertilizers.

With the promise shown by biochar, she also said she will again use it not only on onions but other HVCs as well,

including corn and vegetables, in her newly bought five hectares of land for the next planting season.

Lauro Medina, a farmer tilling his 2,500-square meter rice field in San Leonardo town, also tried biochar on a portion of his property and saw an 18-percent increase of up to 5.9 tons in palay (unhusked rice) production.

Medina, in his video testimony, said a portion of the land that was not treated with biochar showed a decreasing yield from the usual 4-5 tons during the trials conducted in his demonstration farm during the dry season.

He, however, also said the area treated with biochar registered an increase

of one ton in output.

Biochar, or biological charcoal, is meant to be used as a soil enhancer.

Introduction of biochar by Singaporean firm Alcom Pte. Ltd. to the provincial government of Nueva Ecija in August 2022 resulted in a joint venture agreed upon by Gov. Aurelio Umali and Prateek Tiwari, Alcom's founder and managing director; Siddarth Kaul of Alcom's global lead for carbon; and lawyer Rodeo "Doddie" Nuñez, managing director of Alcom-Philippines.

The soil enhancer will be branded as "Nuevachar," which is expected to help protect the environment amid a threat

of global warming and climate change and to educate farmers on minimizing production costs even as they adopt modern farming.

To date, Nuñez said, the provincial government's biochar processing facility in Palayan City has produced five tons of biochar.

The weight of biochar is 18 kilos per bag/sack and the 5 tons produced are equivalent to 27,777 bags of the enhancer.

Nuñez said the processing facility recently passed an audit conducted by a team from International Registry and will now wait for issuance of carbon credit certification before going into

full-blast operation.

Upon the issuance, Alcom-Philippines will be the first-ever registrant of the product in the country, Nuñez said.

Over the weekend, Alejandro Abesamis, the provincial administrator, ordered the immediate distribution of the 27,777 bags of biochar to the 27 towns and five cities of Nueva Ecija.

Abesamis, also in an interview with *The Times*, said the biochar will be tested within 120 days in at least two trials during this rainy season and the dry season in 2024.

Some 225 hectares were set aside in the province for the municipalities and

cities that will serve as pilot areas in the application of biochar, he added.

Dr. Carlo Torres, Alcom's chief agronomist, said biochar as a soil amendment will protect the environment against global warming and climate change precisely because it is able to break the carbon cycle.

Torres added that "biochar is the solid material obtained from the thermochemical conversion of biomass in an oxygen-limited environment."

Application of biochar aligns with the nation's rice food security that is pushed by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., concurrent Agriculture secretary.

**CELSO M. CAJUCOM**





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## What I hope the President will address

A STATE  
of the  
Nation  
Address  
(SONA)  
tradi-



FR. RANHILIO  
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tionally takes place once a year. Under the Constitution, the president can ask to address Congress whenever he discerns the need to do so. A SONA has two constitutional functions: First, it provides the legislature — and the nation — with information by the chief executive on the execution of laws and the management of the affairs of the republic; Second, it gives the president the opportunity to propose his agenda for legislation, in recognition of the doctrine of separation of powers that assigns to Congress the power to pass and enact laws.

► AquinoA11

The president can only propose — and can certify when there is urgency.

We are and will remain an agricultural country. My province, Cagayan, as well as its neighbors, Isabela and Nueva Vizcaya, are agricultural. While it seems that we are producing enough food and that we are nowhere near a shortage in food commodities — although we do import agricultural products such as rice — the lot of the farmer has hardly ever been addressed. It seems that we have consigned him to the position of a mere unit in the overall machinery of food production. But the farmer is in a pathetic situation, and if many Filipinos live by the farm and contribute to the stability, perhaps even growth, of the economy through their labor, their lot should be addressed. Each year — perhaps twice or thrice a year — the farmer borrows, and borrows heavily, for seeds, fertilizers and other farm input. He counts on the harvest to settle his dues and earn something for himself. But, very often, things do not run according to this apparently seamless design. Northern Luzon is particularly prone to typhoon visits during the months that rice is planted and the harvest is awaited. With each unwelcome visitation, typhoons set farmers back in debt by several thousands of pesos — and all they can do is hope for a good harvest next time around to drag them out of the pit of penury. I do not have the answer, but government must find and devise



one. A related issue that stares us in the face is the fact that the farmer sells to middlemen at rock-bottom prices while the middleman sells at a more than handsome profit — at the expense of the backbreaking toil of the farmer. While this is a matter that can be addressed by legislation and regulation, it also needs executive action — action on the ground that directly involves the farmer and his market, and whatever may be called for in between.

The issue of the sovereign wealth fund — the so-called Maharlika Investment Fund — has bothered many, partly because not enough official information has filtered through. The President should tell the nation exactly what the plan is, the sources of the funds, where the funds will be invested, and on what projects or to what commitments the returns will be applied. We would also like to hear an unqualified commitment to the Santiago Principles and other safeguards against corruption, mismanagement and ineptitude.

Education calls for nothing short of a total revamp. Congress itself has noted how incompetently the Commission on Higher Education, particularly Mr. Prospero de Vera 3rd, has managed (rather, mismanaged) the funds meant by law to cover tuition and miscellaneous fees in higher education and to translate equal access to quality higher educa-

tion from aspiration to reality. Several congressional hearings have exposed the insouciance and the inefficiency. In the first place, the Implementing Rules and Regulations, crafted both by Mr. de Vera and the Unified Student Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education (UniFAST) — whose board he chairs — doomed the program from the very start. The way it was implemented made it unsustainable. The government cannot assume the costs of a burgeoning university population — and at the same time afford subsidies for private higher education.

Then there is the fact that the K to 12 program that was at the heart of the Philippine qualifications framework has been mangled, largely because higher education and basic education do not communicate. This shows the folly of an independent Commission on Higher Education that is at liberty to track its own course, regardless of the trajectory in basic education. One solution would be to have only one government department oversee education. But as important is the elimination of systems of control subtly put in place by the Commission on Higher Education through so-called policies, standards and guidelines, as well as "CHED memorandum orders" that have stifled academic freedom and imposed a senseless, purposeless uniformity in higher education. The jurisprudence laid down by the Supreme Court in the Philippine Law School Admission Test cases should be applied to CHED — as the principles enunciated are those following from academic freedom. The form of control that CHED now exercises over higher education is simply incompatible and irreconcilable with any decent notion of university education and academic freedom.

In regard to foreign policy, the President must at least provide the nation with the lineaments of a clear, unambiguous foreign policy as it relates, first, to the West Philippine Sea and the rights adjudicated in our favor by the arbitral tribunal; second, to the very real threat of the invasion of Taiwan by the People's Republic of China because of our strategic position — our proximity to Taiwan — and the crucial importance of the Bashi Channel.

Finally, the President cannot forever vacillate on the issue of Charter change. He ran on the platform of the Partido Federal ng Pilipinas. Political integrity demands that he champion the platform and sponsor the amendment (or revision, really) of the Constitution that will be necessary to bring about a federal system, apart from eliminating the ambivalences that mark several provisions of our fundamental law and those that stymie the influx of foreign investment.

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# 2nd SONA will be a 'progress report'

STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

## SONA 2023

BY KRISTINA MARALIT

**P**RESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s second State of the Nation Address (SONA) that will be delivered today gives him a chance to report on the "significant progress" his administration has made in his first year in office.

In his inaugural address, the Chief Executive assured Filipinos that the country was in good hands and vowed to make sweeping reforms in the economy, agriculture, health and other sectors.

In front of three former Philippine presidents — Joseph "Erap" Estrada, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and Rodrigo Duterte — Marcos will lay down his "progress report," said to be around one hour and 40 minutes long, on the legislative agenda he enumerated last year and is also expected to list down his administration's wish list for the year ahead.

► SONAA2





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## ■ SONA FROM A1

### 2nd SONA

Although Malacañang has not provided the gist of the President's speech, it confirmed that Marcos himself wrote most of it.

One certain issue the Chief Executive is sure to bring up anew is his administration's efforts to further improve the country's agriculture sector. While the price of rice has yet to be brought down to P20 per kilo, Marcos has repeatedly given assurances that "we are getting there."

"It's really very simple. It's just a performance report for Filipinos to see — on the many pronouncements, on the many words we said — if these were really significant or mere lip service. That's what I want to explain to the people: that we have made significant progress. We can see the difference now, not only in terms of how the systems work, how the government works; it is also how we are seen or judged in the international community. That's equally important," he said in an earlier interview.

On July 5, Marcos convened the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (Ledac), which prioritized 20 measures for this year.

Among them are the proposed amendments to the Build-Operate-Transfer Law or the Public-Private Partnership Act; the National Disease Prevention Management Authority; the Internet Transactions Act/E-Commerce Law; the Health Emergency Auxiliary Reinforcement Team or Heart Act (formerly the Medical Reserve Corps); the Virology Institute of the Philippines; the Mandatory Reserve Officers' Training Corps and the National Service Training Program; Revitalizing the Salt Industry; Valuation Reform; E-Government/E-Government; and the Ease of Paying Taxes.

Filmmaker and Presidential Adviser on Creative Communication Paul Soriano will not be handling the production of this year's SONA, which will be taken over by the in-house presidential

production group Radio Television Malacañang (RTVM).

House Secretary General Reginald Velasco said the RTVM covered all the events where the President is the main guest or the keynote speaker, so "they already know what to do."

Velasco did not say why Soriano would not be calling the shots, only that it was "the prerogative of the Office of the President and the Presidential Communications Office."

The Philippine National Police (PNP) has created a task force headed by National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO) chief MGen. Edgar Alan Okubo to map out strategies to ensure the safety and security of the event.

Although the PNP has not monitored any security threats to the SONA, it will temporarily suspend the Permit to Carry Firearms Outside Residence at 12:01 a.m. on July 24 until midnight on July 25.

During that period, only uniformed personnel of the PNP, Armed Forces of the Philippines and other law enforcement agencies who are on duty on the day of the SONA can carry firearms.

The NCRPO will deploy a 22,081-strong state security force and force multipliers for the event.

Up to 4,460 personnel will come from the regional command's support units, Aviation Security Group, Special Action Force, Joint Task Force NCR, Philippine Coast Guard, Bureau of Fire Protection, Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, Office of Civil Defense, Department of Health, Metropolitan Manila Development Authority, and Philippine Red Cross.

Thirty-one checkpoints will also be put up by the police at entry and exit points around Metro Manila.

Cause-oriented groups will be allowed to hold demonstrations on Monday, with police personnel directed to observe maximum tolerance.

Authorities have designated the Quezon Memorial Circle and the flyover in Luzon Avenue as "freedom parks" for rallies.





## All set for Marcos' SONA







## All set for Marcos' SONA 1◀

PNP chief Gen. Benjamin Acorda Jr. assured the police force's preparedness for the SONA.

He explained that the PNP has been monitoring areas where protesters may converge and where rallies and protest matches may occur, and identifying the groups of rallyists and unearthing if there are activists threatening to disrupt public law and order.

Acorda said more than 22,000 PNP personnel are deployed in various areas of the National Capital Region (NCR), excluding those in the different regions where rallies are also expected.

He also assured that the PNP will prevent any confrontation between the pro- and anti-administration groups to avert any violent or even bloody occurrences.

He noted that the police personnel deployed in the various rally sites and other similar areas will be provided with raincoats in case of inclement weather brought by tropical cyclone "Egay."

Acorda pointed out that command centers will be deployed and CCTV cameras and drones are included in the PNP's deployment activity in the areas covering the Quezon City Police District (QCPD).

### Pro, anti-gov't rallies allowed

The Quezon City government allowed both pro and anti-administration rallies in the city on the day of the SONA.

Mayor Joy Belmonte reminded all groups to follow laws and regulations and not to disrupt peace and order in the affected areas.

The local government had set an area along Commonwealth Avenue near the Commission on Audit for the pro-administration groups.

Anti-administration groups are set to assemble along Tandang Sora overpass along Commonwealth Avenue.

"QC is a bastion of free speech and we value the right of everyone to peacefully assemble as protected by our Constitution," Belmonte said.

She added that the city government will deploy more than 7,000 traffic, security, and emergency response personnel to ensure peace and order during President Marcos' SONA.

"The Quezon City government is ready to assist during the President's second State of the Nation Address. Our goal is to ensure a peaceful and orderly event for everyone," Belmonte said.

Among the personnel to be deployed on Monday are 800 QC Transport and Traffic Management Department (TTMD) traffic enforcers that will help in managing the traffic in the city's major thoroughfares; 6,123 uniformed officers from the Quezon City Police

District; and 375 QC Department of Public Order and Safety (DPOS) personnel that will maintain security and public order during the event.

The QC Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Department (DRRM) will also deploy 287 personnel from its Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Search and Rescue (SAR) teams, and other additional resources to ensure the safety of the public and respond to any untoward incident, the city government said.

There will also be QC City Buses, service vehicles from 142 barangays, and three buses from the QC General Services Department that will be deployed should there be a need for additional transportation options for commuters to be affected.

The city government advised motorists to look for alternative routes as the eastbound lane of Commonwealth Avenue will be closed starting Sunday, July 23, until Monday, July 24.

### Heightened alert for SONA, 'Egay'

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) will be placed on a heightened alert beginning Monday, July 24, to help ensure safety and security for the second SONA of President Marcos and the possible effects of Egay.

PCG Commandant Admiral Artemio Abu said hundreds of coast guardians from its districts, stations, and sub-stations in the National Capital Region (NCR)-Central Luzon, Northeastern Luzon, Northwestern Luzon, Southern Tagalog, and Bicol will be fielded on the ground to maintain peace and order in anticipation of a three-day transport strike that will be staged by protesters, and to secure vital waterways and key roads in Metro Manila.

The PCG personnel will augment the 22,000-strong deployment from the PNP which will be the primary security force for the SONA.

"In coordination with the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police, the PCG will deploy security personnel, K9 units, and medical teams in various critical areas in NCR for the SONA 2023," Abu said on Sunday, July 23.

"Our deployable response groups (DRGs) were also alerted in the provinces that will be affected by TS Egay for the immediate conduct of evacuation or rescue operation," he added.

The PCG has also coordinated with the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) and Maritime Industry Authority (Marina) to ensure the safety of passengers and sea vessels that are scheduled to sail on Monday and in the coming days.

### Realistic report, concrete plans

Sen. Christopher "Bong" Go hopes to hear the country's leader highlight concrete steps towards a path of inclusive economic recovery.

"Nais ko pong marinig sa ating mahal na Pangulo sa kanyang ikalawang SONA ang mga (I wish to hear from the President's second SONA all his) additional plans niya po for our full and inclusive economic recovery," Go said in an interview.

"Dapat po ay walang maiwan na Pilipino lalo na po ang mga mahihirap nating kababayan. Dapat po walang magutom. Importante po ang laman ng tiyan at trabaho po para sa bawat Pilipino (No Filipino should be left behind, especially our poor fellow men. No one should go hungry. It's important that every Filipino has food on the table and has a job)," he said.

He said he is optimistic that President Marcos will use this platform to underscore his commitment to uphold the administration's eight-point Philippine Development Plan, which includes food security, supply chain management, energy costs, healthcare and social protection, infrastructure development, green economy, market competition, and entrepreneurship.

Sen. Francis "Chiz" Escudero also said the President "deserves his victory lap as there are good things to be happy about."

Escudero also said it is about time the President delivers a report that would be an eye-opener, saying he believes Filipinos "can handle the truth."

"The President deserves his victory lap as there are good things to be happy about, but he must end it with a pep talk that must rally the people to steel themselves for the hard work ahead," Escudero said in a statement.

"Tomorrow's SONA must, therefore, balance the 'what has been done' with the more important (question) 'what is to be done?'" he pointed out.

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III said Filipinos deserve "unfiltered truth" during Marcos' SONA, saying he hopes the President would do away with sugar coating or glossing over the harsh realities facing the entire nation.

"During the President's SONA, it is my hope that he will discuss the real situation of the Filipino People at the household level," Pimentel said in a statement.

"The cost of living is very high.



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The income of the typical Filipino family is not enough for their basic needs and for their decent existence as a family of human beings. Those who are employed are not paid 'living wages.' Many are unemployed and many more are underemployed," the minority leader lamented.

After the plenary session in the morning for the opening of the 19th Congress' Second Regular Session, the senators will proceed to the House of Representatives for a joint session of Congress and attend the President's second SONA.

### Vision for PH

House Speaker Martin Romualdez said he is eager to hear President Marcos' "vision for the country" in his SONA.

Romualdez said lawmakers would "carry on their mission to serve as true representatives of the Filipino people, translating their hopes and aspirations into meaningful, impactful legislation, and fostering a shared sense of progress and prosperity for all."

Over 2,000 guests are expected to troop to Batasan Complex in Quezon City to listen to the SONA. President Marcos will deliver the speech in a joint session between House members and senators at around 4 p.m. Monday.

House Secretary General Reginald Velasco has said last Thursday that it was "all systems go" for the SONA, and that Romualdez has been satisfied with the lower chamber's preparations during the past few weeks.

Velasco had said the SONA 2023 theme or motif was Filipiniana. This will be reflected in the guests' outfits to the food that will be served.

### Bagong Pilipinas

The SONA will be President Marcos' chance to tell Filipinos what the "Bagong Pilipinas (New Philippines)" brand is all about.

House Deputy Speaker and Batangas City 6th district Rep. Ralph Recto as he joined other solons is sharing their expectations for Marcos' second SONA.

"SONA is not just a throwback moment for the year gone by, but a battle plan on how we can fast-forward to what we hope to achieve," Recto said in a statement Sunday, July 23.

"It is not a mere replay of the past, but a preview of the future, setting a vision so compelling that it inspires and unites the entire nation to work hard for it," noted the former Senate President Pro Tempore.

Speaking of a vision for the future, the Marcos administration ordered last week the adoption of the new governance brand, Bagong Pilipinas. But as to what it's about is still up for interpretation.

"It is an opportunity for the President to present the architecture of Bagong Pilipinas where it is hoped that the full potential of the Filipino is harnessed, merit is given a chance, and hard work rewarded," Recto said.

The deputy speaker said that the SONA should "satisfy the people on what will be done to things that matter to – and bother – them the most."

"These are food on the table, jobs for the skilled, faster commute, streets for their children, care for the sick, comfort for the aged," he said.

"I am not looking forward to spell-binding oratory tomorrow. I am interested in the marching orders," Recto added.

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## Ease of doing business tops business sector's wish list for SONA

By BERNIE CAHILES-MAGKILAT

Ease of doing business to reduce corruption in government topped the wish list of the business sector that they want President Marcos to commit to in his second State of the Nation Address (SONA) today, July 24.

Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry President George T. Barcelon said that top of mind in the business sector's wish list for the President's SONA is the ease of doing business in government agencies and especially at the local government unit (LGU) level.

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## Ease of doing business tops business sector's wish list for SONA 1◀

According to Barcelon, the Anti-Red Tape Authority (ARTA) is doing its job, but it cannot do it alone. He said the bigger part lies on LGUs to further ease doing business. "It is best to impose a target for LGUs to achieve ease of doing business to facilitate investments into their locality," said Barcelon.

LGUs, he said, should be able to facilitate investments for job creation. "It is good that the Department of Trade and Industry/Board of Investments has already created the Greenlane for Strategic Investments, but LGUs should do more in facilitating these investments," said Barcelon.

Since bureaucratic red tape is associated with corruption, Barcelon stressed the need to impose timelines in government processes and transactions. "President Marcos has been going out to promote investments and we are going again to Malaysia, but the LGUs should also be able to facilitate the inflow of these investments because this is a teamwork. We need more jobs for agriculture and fisheries," he said.

"LGUs should think like PEZA to create more job opportunities in their localities," he said, adding that he expects the LGUs to "improve the environment with clear regulation and a mentality to be able to create more job opportunities."

Digitalization would be able to help in easing the cost of doing business because this limits face-to-face transactions in government agencies, he said. While there is this initiative, he urged the implementation of a score card to ensure phased achievement.

He also cited the need for the government to work on improving the cost of logistics because the Philippines has one of the highest in this sector. With the enforcement of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Cooperation (RCEP), Barcelon said local businesses would be at the losing end if logistics cost remains high.

Other issues the President should prioritize include education as the Philippines ranked among the lowest.

Edgardo Lacson, chairman of

the Employers Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP), also listed corruption as number one among the business sector's wish list in the President's SONA.

"Reduce corruption in government," said Lacson.

He said the other priorities the government should address are the continuation of the Build, Build, Build program; keep inflation in check, modernize transport system (air, land water); adequate, stable and affordable power and water supply; food security; reengineer education system; strengthen defense of territorial integrity; rationalize party list system and revert to traditional two party system; and prepare to adopt artificial intelligence technology in all facets of national, social, academic, and industrial/commercial applications.

Sergio Ortiz-Luis, Jr., president of the Philippine Exporters Confederation Inc., urged the President for the urgent repeal of the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) AO 04-2021 as this will add huge cost and extra processing time to import and export shipments.

Instead, he said, exporters strongly urged the government to continue to streamline processes and implement computerization towards ease of doing business and ensure whole of government approach to development.

"Rationalize importation of raw materials especially for export production and to stabilize prizes of prime commodities," he said. He also pushed for a continued Build, Build, Build program.

Other issues in his list include review/update/strengthen skills mapping and upgrading to keep up with technology developments; implementing Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) in reviewing existing and new government processes; climate change interventions; and, address high cost of power, water, and telecommunications.

As president also of ECOP, Ortiz-Luis urged the President to stop efforts to legislate minimum wage.

For the legislative branch, ECOP

is pushing for the passage of the amended Magna Carta for MSMEs; Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Act; ASIN Law; PhilPorts Act to decouple the regulatory and developmental functions of the PPA; Revised Warehouse Receipts Act for movable collaterals; and, increase DTI budget, particularly for export promotion fund and shared services facilities

### Telco policy wish list

The Globe Group urged the government to continue regulatory reforms for the Philippines to be a truly Digital Nation and issued a "Policy Wishlist" with electrification of ICT infrastructure as top priority.

"The government should ensure the timely electrification of ICT infrastructure, particularly cell towers, so telcos can provide life-enabling connectivity to more areas in the country," stated Ernest Cu, Globe Group President and CEO.

In order to shift to advanced network technologies, Globe also called for the rationalization of the 26-year-old Spectrum User Fees (SUF).

In its current form, the SUF penalizes greater use of more spectrum-efficient 4G and 5G and other Fixed Wireless Access technologies.

The SUF also disincentivizes network expansion, as fees are charged for every station even for the same frequencies.

This hampers the industry's push for stronger and wider connectivity as demand continues to grow.

Furthermore, the government should pass a law requiring developers to allocate space for telco infrastructure.

Legislators need to amend the 46-year-old National Building Code and its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) to require the mandatory provision of telecommunications infrastructure. (With Emmie Abadilla)





## Gains made a year after 1st SONA: Tax reform, food production, healthcare, infrastructure

By BETHEENA UNITE

A year ago, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., in his first State of the Nation Address (SONA) declared key undertakings to set the tone of his administration.

Transforming the economy took a huge part of President Marcos' speech last year, touching on tax reforms that will increase revenue collection while expenditure will be realigned for efficient spending. He said the Philippine Development

Plan 2023-2028 will be crafted to set the country's roadmap for economic recovery in a post-pandemic era.

In January this year, Marcos signed Executive Order (EO) No. 14, approving the Philippine Development Plan. It is intended to "bring back the country to a high-growth trajectory" and "enable economic and social transformation for a prosperous, inclusive, and resilient society."

While he has asked the Department of Finance (DOF) to continue looking into the current tax system

and find ways to level the playing field between foreign and local businesses, the tax reform he cited in his first SONA was addressed after his approval of the Philippine Export Development Plan (PEDP) 2023-2028.

It will serve as his administration's blueprint to increase exports of food and services in the next five years.

**Marcos remains  
as Agriculture chief**  
The President took over the



**PBBM'S FIRST SONA:** President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. delivers his first State of the Nation Address at the plenary hall of the House of Representatives in Quezon City on July 25, 2022. Behind him are Senate President Migs Zubiri and House Speaker Martin Romualdez. (Noel B. Pabalate)





agriculture portfolio when he assumed the presidency as he believed that there were crucial reforms that only the President could handle. He became the secretary when prices of basic commodities were rising, and while supply of agricultural products, such as rice and sugar, was dwindling.

The President has said that he will remain as Agriculture chief until necessary reforms are implemented in the agency.

In his first SONA, the Chief Executive bared his intention to exert all efforts to increase food production by prioritizing the modernization of agriculture production.

A year later, he visited several provinces in the country to establish "Kadiwa ng Pangulo" where producers can directly sell their agricultural produce at a lower price, eliminating costs incurred by middlemen.

During his visits, the Department of Agriculture (DA) also turned over equipment to farmers to help modernize their operations and cut production cost.

### 'We are disengaging from the ICC'

Marcos inherited a drug-related problem from his predecessor, former president Rodrigo Duterte, in the form of a request for investigation from the International Criminal Court (ICC).

In March, the ICC rejected the Philippines' appeal to suspend the probe on the deadly drug war.

"We don't have a next move. That is the extent of our involvement with the ICC. That ends all our involvement with the ICC. The appeal has failed and in our view, there is nothing more that we can do. So at this point, we, essentially, are disengaging from any contact, from any communication, with the ICC," he said.

Marcos considers the ICC probe as an "intrusion into our internal matters and they are a threat to our sovereignty."

The President also maintained his earliest pronouncement that his way of dealing with the country's drug war would be different from Duterte's way of handling it. His past statements show that he is keen on focusing on rehabilitation rather than a bloody drug war.

### No more lockdowns

Marcos had declared in his first SONA that "we will no longer implement a lockdown." Although there was yet no official declaration ending the public health emergency then, Marcos said the country is

headed in the direction of lifting restrictions.

In his first SONA, the President vowed to put up more specialty hospitals in the country, including the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and a vaccine institute.

This month, he led the inspection of the site for the future Clark Multi-Specialty Medical Center (CMSMC), which is envisioned to be a world-class medical facility with state-of-the-art equipment that will provide specialized care in four medical disciplines: pediatric, renal, cardiovascular and oncology. Its construction was expected to start this July.

### 'Friend-to-all' policy

Marcos stressed in his first public address that the Philippines will not lose even an inch of its territory under his watch but will maintain the "friend to all, enemy to none" foreign policy while prioritizing national interest.

In the past year, several sea incidents in the West Philippine Sea involving Chinese vessels occurred, leading to the country's filing of 30 diplomatic protests against China. Yet, Marcos said the country is not shifting away from China.

"Some people have said that the Philippines had shifted its policy away from the People's Republic (of China) and to other powers, that is certainly not true," the President said last month.

While he was in the United States and in Belgium last year, he said that the Philippines would not want to be in the middle of any tensions between its two long-time allies—China and the US.

"And we, the Philippines, for our part, has taken an independent policy and we absolutely refuse to go back to the situation of the Cold War where we have to pick sides in terms of the superpower we were aligned with," he stressed.

### Build Better More

Marcos is also committed to finishing the ongoing infrastructure projects started by his predecessor, and to build more. From Duterte's "Build, Build, Build," Marcos' infrastructure slogan is—"Build, Better, More."

In order to fulfill this, infrastructure development funding is among the key sectors included in the newly-signed law establishing the Maharlika Investment Fund (MIF).

With the signing of the controversial measure, the country now has a fund "which will itself make money" to increase the government's capacity and capability to invest in all "extremely important projects" such as investments in agriculture, infrastructure, digitalization, strengthening of supply chains, and all of those necessary elements in the post-pandemic economy.

He noted that the MIF is a "crucial undertaking" that will support the implementation of the 194 NEDA-approved infrastructure projects.

### Freeing farmers from debt

In his first SONA, Marcos encouraged the Congress to pass a law that will emancipate the agrarian reform beneficiaries from the agrarian reform debt burden.

He said that the loans of agrarian reform beneficiaries with unpaid amortization and interest shall be condoned while agrarian reform beneficiaries, who are still to receive their awarded land under the comprehensive agrarian reform program, shall receive it without any obligation to pay any amortization.

On July 7, Marcos signed Republic Act (RA) No. 11953 or the New Agrarian Emancipation Act, freeing agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) from their debt burden.

The new law condones all the unpaid amortizations of the principal debt, including any interest and surcharges incurred by the ARBs. A total of ₱57.56 billion of unpaid principal debt will be condoned to benefit 610,054 ARBs tilling 1.173 million hectares of land.

In addition, the government will assume the obligation of 10,201 ARBs tilling 11,531.24 hectares of land to pay the remaining balance of the direct compensation due the concerned landowners under the Voluntary Land Transfer (VLT) or the Direct Payment Scheme (DPS) amounting to ₱206,204,776.41.





## PERFORMANCE REPORT

# "There's still a great deal of work to do"

### RISE reaffirms gov't commitment to achieving food security, zero hunger

AT the outset of his presidency, the food crisis was among the challenges the government of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has vowed to defeat. Food security and "zero hunger" was what kept the President standing firm at the helm of the Department of Agriculture. His resolve has not waned.

He reaffirmed his administration's commitment to attain these goals at the ceremonial signing of the memorandum of agreement (MOA) between the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) for the implementation of the Reformation Initiative for Sustainable Environment for Food Security (RISE) Project.

The MOA was signed by the DA's Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) and the DOJ's Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) in a ceremony at the President's Hall of Malacañan Palace in Manila.

The President in his keynote speech said the partnership is a testament to his administration's "unyielding" commitment to both food security and rehabilitative justice.

"Allow me to recognize the synergy, the work of the DA, DOJ and their private partners to utilize our natural resources and promote ecology sustainable practices amongst persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) through this RISE project," Marcos said.

Marcos cited capacity-building initiatives as key to helping boost food production while giving PDLs the chance to be part of positive change and while aiming for reformation.

The cooperation between the DA-BPI and BuCor would contribute to "much greater" humanitarian causes such as the rehabilitation and reintegration of the PDLs, the President added, citing that this partnership

would help prevent in hunger prevention, poverty alleviation and better health.

"So, I urge our national government agencies to continue pursuing innovative projects that address the needs that evolve now in this modern age for Filipinos. By making innovation our priority, we can expedite the delivery of programs and services and build a more robust economy," Marcos said.

Marcos hoped that the RISE Project would encourage more private-public partnerships and inspire the Filipino people to pursue activities that will leave a "lasting" impact on the country.

Under the joint initiative, rehabilitate arable lands within the BuCor's prison reservations and penal farms across the country will be used to boost food production.

The arable areas spanning around 28,700 hectares of land at the Iwahig Prison and Penal Farm in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan will serve as the pilot site of RISE Project.

To be implemented under RISE are agro-industrial projects carried out in land areas and resources transformed into productive agricultural camps or food production centers.

PDLs will be provided with appropriate training for livelihood preparation and societal reintegration, facilitate rehabilitation through agricultural production training, horticultural therapy, and vocational gardening under the BuCor's Work and Livelihood Program.

RISE initiates the pilot technology of the DA's National Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture (NUPAP) and the High-Value Crops Development Program (HVCDP) interventions and management systems that can be replicated in other BuCor facilities nationwide.

"THE state of the nation is sound."

These were the last words in the his first State of the Nation address a year ago. One year later, do his words still ring true?

"The delivering of promises is a work in progress. It's not something that you say, 'It's done. I finished it,'" he said.

"This is an ongoing process."

The challenges remain and will remain myriad, as with all economies that have been buffeted by the strong winds that blew by when the pandemic struck.

Despite the difficult task, however, business and economic voices have joined together in a chorus of optimism for the country despite the persistent challenges most of which are the results of the pandemic induced lockdowns, and many more nagging issues in an emerging economy.

The Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) cited the president's efforts to promote the country overseas as ripe for investments.

"I think he has a very good rating on that aspect," said PCCI president George Barcelon in an interview with ABS-CBN News Channel.

His foreign trips alone, according to the Presidential Communications Office (PCO), have generated P3.48 trillion in investment pledges.

Keeping its optimistic forecast for the country, the Asian Development Bank sees Philippine domestic product growth at 6 percent this year and 6.2 percent next year buoyed by the region's steady uptick in recovery from the pandemic.

For the International Monetary Fund (IMF), economic growth forecast for the Philippines is pegged at 6 percent this year, and next year's gross domestic product projected expansion in between 5.5 percent and 6 percent, said a Fund official in May.

Today, in his second State of the



**PARTNERSHIP.** President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. witnesses the signing of the memorandum of agreement between the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Justice for the implementation of the Reformation Initiative for Sustainable Environment for Food Security (RISE) Project in a ceremony at the President's Hall of Malacañan Palace in Manila on Thursday (July 13, 2023). In his speech, Marcos reaffirmed his administration's commitment to attain food security and "zero hunger" in the country. (Screenshot from Radio Television Malacañang)



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Nation Address (SONA), President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. will report on how his government's performance measures up to the highlights of his first SONA.

To recall the highlights of the year-ago SONA, these included the economy, food crisis, subsidies for farmers, tourism, cheap medicines, more health centers and hospitals, education, digitalization, infrastructure, cheap and renewable energy, OFW welfare, foreign policy, public-private partnership, transport system, fresh water supply, disaster resiliency, and hopes for a number of legislative measures to help his government with its programs for the Filipino.

The economy will always be on top of the list, for which he vowed to create reforms to increase revenue collections, to support eco-zones, and to digitalized the economy. To this end, he also tasked the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) to come up with a development plan for 2023 to 2028.

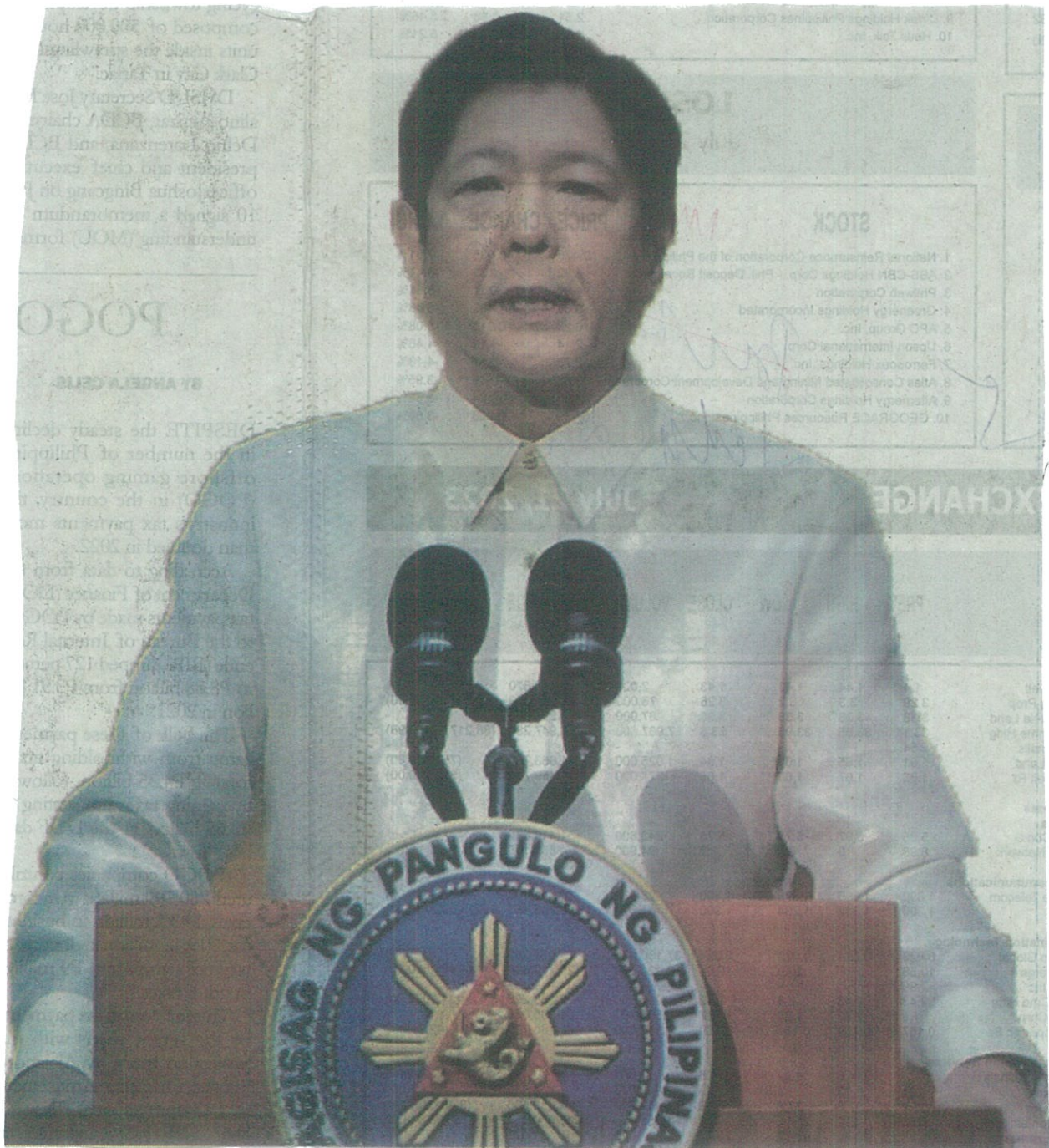
The food crisis has been a huge concern and the Department of Agriculture, which he heads, has been pressed to come up with solutions to the rising prices and lack of supply of food.

"Farmers and fisherfolk will be the priority of my administration," he said in his first SONA.

To help "unburden the farmers of their dues and be able to focus on improving farm productivity," Marcos ordered a one-year moratorium on the payment of land and interest rates.

In that first SONA, Marcos asked Congress to pass a law that will condone the loans of agrarian reform beneficiaries. He said this measure will amend Section 26 of Republic Act 6657.

On July 7, the president signed into law the Malacañang-sponsored New Agrarian Emancipation Bill that aims to make the farmer-beneficiaries of the government's agrarian reform program





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## Farmers' emancipation eyed to infuse new blood

IN his first SONA a year ago, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said that "The call of the times is for the infusion of fresh and new blood in the agricultural sector. We need a new breed of farmers equipped with modern agricultural technology able to engage in sustained scientific farming that will not only increase farm yields but also resilience in the face of climate change."

This could very well become the optimal result of the condonation of the over P57 billion worth of loans of more than 600,000 farmers who are agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs). The new law condones all loans, including interests, penalties and surcharges that covered the land awarded to ARBs under Presidential Decree (PD) 27, RA 6657 and RA 9700. PD 27, the Tenant Emancipation Decree, was signed by the President's father, the late president Ferdinand Marcos Sr., on Oct. 21, 1972.

This is seen as a good way to address the problems in agriculture: farmers aging and no young people having the desire to be in the sector. Young people interested in agriculture would be given a boost so that they do not need to start from nothing.

High on the President's first legislative wish list from Congress which was clearly stated in the same SONA, was a law that would free from debt farmers who were awarded lands by the government under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

On July 7, he finally signed RA 11953 which condones all the unpaid amortization of the principal debt, including interest and surcharges, if any, incurred by agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARB). It is the only law

among the first SONA bills to have been signed by the end of his first year in office.

A total of PHP57.56 billion of unpaid principal debt would be condoned, to benefit 610,054 ARBs tilling 1.173 million hectares of land.

"By freeing farmers from the agrarian debt, and ensuring broader support services and credit facilities, the Marcos administration has given more resources to our farmers to increase the productivity of their farms and uplift the quality of their lives," Agrarian Secretary Conrado Estrella III said.

Asked in an interview about the impact of the condoned amount on the fiscal picture of the government, Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno told reporters that the condonation of the multi-billion peso loan under the New Agrarian Emancipation Act would have no impact as the estimated revenues do not include the amount to be condoned, that the government's five-year plan has already been set.

Republic Act No. 11593 will benefit around 610,054 Filipino farmers tilling more than 1.7 million hectares of agrarian reform lands, making them debt-free from around P57 billion of agrarian arrears.

Agri Party-list Rep. Wilbert Lee, principal author of the law, emphasized that its objective is not only to free farmers from debts but likewise to provide "enough support" to ARBs and make farming a profitable livelihood.

He added that credit facilities and support services offered under the law give priority to farmers who have completed their land amortization payments.

debt-free.

Marcos signed Republic Act (RA) 11953 in a ceremony held at the Kalayaan Hall of Malacañan Palace in Manila. This has been termed as one off the president's bucket list which he believes remains long as his government is undoing decades of neglect in his most favored sector.

As for energy, Marcos said the country must increase the level of energy production by expanding the present power supply and building new power plants.

He also stressed at the top of his climate agenda is the use of renewable energy. He said the government will increase the country's use of renewable energy sources such as hydropower, geothermal power, solar, and wind.

Not to be missed was OFWs welfare. Marcos said the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), will serve as the refuge especially of distressed migrants workers and overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). His administration would eliminate red tape in the system by automating the verification of contracts.

For foreign policy, he said: "I will not preside over any process that will abandon even one square inch of territory of the Republic of the Philippines to any foreign power."

To support his administration's plans, he proposed 19 measures for Congress to pass.

The check list is long, and the president is expected to show how his government has fared since making this wish list

Some sectors would grade him with flying colors, while there are those who say his grade would be "Incomplete."

The president himself said: "So, you know, it's never enough. It's never enough. Whatever it is that we have managed to do, there is still a great deal more to do. We have a lot of work still to do and we have to work smart and we have to work well and we have to be very conscious."



ENACTED INTO LAW. President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. signed into law Republic Act 11953 or the New Agrarian Emancipation Act on July 7, 2023. The measure was one of the president's promises mentioned in his 2022 State of the Nation Address (SONA). (PNA photo)



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## Freshman year

There is really nothing much to expect in the first year of a presidency. At best, one can get an inkling of the quality of leadership we will have for the remaining five years. And given the gravity of our problems, does he have what it takes to move the needle rather than merely watching events transpire?

As in any new administration, there will be plus and minuses. Apologists of this administration will go to great lengths to claim accomplishments when all that has happened was an inspired speech or a big claim, an aspiration (e.g. P20/kg rice), in a press release. But we take speeches and press releases as if the leadership had really done something to address a need or even a crisis.

### DEMAND AND SUPPLY



**BOO CHANCO**

I was going through a powerpoint presentation shared by Rep. Joey Salceda with the Viber group of the Tuesday Club. Rep. Joey did some pretty fancy acrobatics in claiming accomplishments for the administration for which credit resides elsewhere.

For example, Rep. Joey credits the President for "protecting the peso from collapse." Excuse me... if anyone deserves credit here, it is former BSP Governor Philip Medalla, the Monetary Board, and the very competent deputy governors of the BSP who did their work well.

In fact, the peso dipped after the President was elected due to his family's history.

GDP growth? Here is the correct analysis by a retired investment banker writing the Heneral Lunacy blog:

"Compared to the previous year, our 2022 GDP grew by 7.6 percent, which is great, but partly due to the "base effect" i.e. our 2021 economy was so bad because of the pandemic anything benchmarked to it will look good.

"More telling are the quarter-on-quarter numbers: A reputable think tank reports that on this basis, the economy slowed down from growth of three percent in Q3 2022 to two percent in the succeeding quarter to one percent in Q1

this year i.e. the economy is still moving forward, but the pace is decelerating."

Rep. Joey also credits the President for bringing down inflation. Really?

Sure, the inflation rate is going down, no thanks to the President who failed multiple chances of arresting the high food inflation rate that plagued us for much of last year. Even Rep. Joey concedes as much when, in a later slide, he noted that there is a "need to reconcile policies on trade in sugar and key vegetables, such as onion, since deficiencies in such areas appear structural."

In layman's terms, the President just watched helplessly as sugar and onion prices zoomed sky high at the retail level. The President even let go of his senior agriculture secretary who wanted to import 300,000 MT of sugar because the sugar lobby protested. Now they are importing 450,000 MT, which proves his former deputy was right. Still, nothing happened at the retail level as sugar stayed at P100/kilo up to P138/kilo. The sugar traders are being coddled... earning billions simply because they have connections.

As for onions, Speaker Martin Romualdez is so proud of the findings of a House investigation on the existence of an onion cartel that brought the retail price to a ridiculous P750/kilo at one point. But did anyone get charged in court for economic sabotage?

Those two examples show the President did nothing significant to bring down food inflation, the prime contributor to our high inflation rate. On the contrary, he exacerbated it with his favored treatment of the sugar cartel and he did nothing on the onions. Then there are also problems with the prices of eggs, chicken, pork, and beef.

Inflation started to go down not because we have a decisive President who is unafraid of the cartels that keep food prices high. Inflation started to go down because the price of petroleum and some food products we import have started to go down in the world market.

Tourism recovered not because of anything this administration has done yet, but because of revenge tourism which is a worldwide trend. The real test of the administration's ability to promote tourism will start this year, but it started badly with a botched launch of its new slogan and



# THE PHILIPPINE STAR

TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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campaign.

Other accomplishments Rep. Joey cited involved creation of new offices and promulgation of new executive orders, etc., which are probably good steps in the right direction, but are not accomplishments by themselves.

But it seems even Chat GPT was fooled by the press releases. When I asked it to tell me what it thought about the President's first year, it wrote back:

"In his first year, President Marcos implemented several policies aimed at boosting the Philippine economy. He introduced tax reforms and streamlined bureaucratic processes to attract foreign direct investment. These measures resulted in a modest increase in GDP growth and a reduction in unemployment rates, signaling positive economic progress..."

Really, Chat GPT? Tell me more about his tax reforms? How did he streamline bureaucratic processes to attract foreign direct investments? It is too early for anything good to happen because of mere pronouncements.

Tax reforms being implemented now are those passed by Congress during Duterte's watch, thanks to his finance secretary Sonny Dominguez and Rep. Joey working together.

Still, the President started on the right foot with the appointment of respected economic managers to his Cabinet. He also appointed a proven international central banker as BSP Governor to succeed Philip Medalla. It is only hoped that these economic managers will not sell their souls to political expediency the way most of his father's technocratic economic managers did. The Maharlika discussion gives little reason to hope.

Another feather on the President's cap is the new agrarian emancipation law, which will hopefully help give farmers the relief long sought for. If land consolidation also happens quickly, then farm modernization can take place and improve farm productivity.

Overall, the President's first year gets a passing rate, but only because he has raised enough hope that he will deliver more in the coming years to lift our people out of poverty and give us a vision for a better future. We still need to see things start to happen.

Boo Chanco's email address is [bchanco@gmail.com](mailto:bchanco@gmail.com). Follow him on Twitter @boochanco





# A year into Marcos Jr. admin: Promise of unity materializing

By **EDU PUNAY**

**P**resident Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. persistently espoused unity during his campaign for the top government post last year, which I covered for **The Philippine Star**. In Cabinet and high-level meetings

that I witnessed, the President always emphasized the importance of a whole-of-government approach, with agencies getting their act together for programs to be successful. In several Palace meetings on "Walang Gutom 2027," the country's first-ever food stamp program, he

consistently directed the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), led by Secretary Rex Gatchalian, to collaborate with other agencies in coming up with a sustainable solution to hunger, malnutrition, and poverty.

Such a task wasn't difficult for a Cabinet that does not work in silos. We were able to enlist the Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), Department of Health (DOH), National Nutrition Council (NNC), Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), and Department of Science and Technology-Food and Nutrition Research Institute (DOST-NRI).

These agencies' respective roles are crucial to the success of the program. For instance, DOLE and TESDA will provide the necessary job skills training to one million beneficiaries to enable them to find jobs or start small businesses so they could stand on their own feet.



**Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. delivers his first State of the Nation Address today.** (Photo from pbbm.com.ph)



**President Marcos checks out local produce for the Department of Agriculture's Kadiwa ng Pangulo program.** Photo by KJ ROSALES

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## A year into Marcos Jr.

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We in the DSWD firmly believe that the Filipino is hardworking and would never want to remain poor. If given the opportunity to work, they would grab it for their families.

The DA and its flagship "Kadiwang Pangulo" program will also play a key role by providing the market for our beneficiaries through a farm-to-table system where local farmers will also benefit.

The DOH and NNC are also our partners in ensuring the nutrition component of the program, which also covers pregnant and lactating women and their children up to two years old, pursuant to the administration's First 1000 Days agenda to address malnutrition and stunting among Filipino children.

The President's directive was to make sure that we would feed nutritious food to our beneficiaries, thus the use of the food basket of DOST-FNRI (50% carbohydrates, 30% protein,

and 20% healthy fibers) in the program design.

PSA, for its part, will provide the crucial indicator that will determine the success of the program after three or four years through its community-based monitoring system which will tell whether the beneficiaries have managed to graduate from food poverty.

The other agencies will have crucial roles as well in ensuring the sustainability of the food stamp program.

"The President's marching order is for the DSWD to use the entire machinery of government to achieve the goal of poverty incidence reduction by a single digit," Secretary Gatchalian revealed.

The power of unity in action to address hunger, malnutrition, and poverty was so strong it transcended even to other sectors.

With the President's support, it wasn't long after when the World Food Programme reached out to us and offered to collaborate through their innovative SCOPE system and electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card. The P3,000 grant per household is leak-free since the EBT cards are not transferable as the point-of-sales equipment requires fingerprints taken from the beneficiaries.

The Asian Development Bank also came in to provide a USD3-million grant for the pilot implementation of "Walang Gutom 2027."

Even the private sector, particularly Pilipinas Kontra Gutom and the Management Association of the Philippines, volunteered to take part in the program by providing nutrition sessions to teach beneficiaries how to cook meals that are affordable, nutritious, and delicious.

The program is a clear illustration of the President's vision of unity in bringing a better future to all Filipinos.

"We have always tried to rise from the throes of poverty, but the problem of hunger and malnutrition remains. And that is why, it has become a priority of this government that we will fight poverty. We will put in all our programs, so that one day we can say that we are able to give our people, the very least, the food that they need to survive, the nutrition that they need to survive," the President stressed during our project kick-off in Tondo, Manila last week.

The food stamp program is also a realization of the President's vision for a country where no more Filipino will sleep with an empty stomach and where there is no more food poverty.

"Walang Gutom 2027," the country's first-ever food stamp program, seeks to end involuntary hunger among one million families listed as "food poor" or those who are unable



Walang Gutom 2027 EBT card. Photo by KING RODRIGUEZ



Walang Gutom 2027 program aims to provide food augmentation to the bottom one million households from List 3, who belong to the poor criteria as defined by the Philippine Statistics Authority. Photo by MICHAEL VARGAS





President Marcos and Vice President Sara Duterte kick off the launch of the food stamp program Walang Gutom 2027 in Tondo, Manila. Photo by KING RODRIGUEZ



DSWD Secretary Rex Gatchalian, Human Rights chairperson Atty. Richard Paat Palpal-latoc, Metro Manila council chair and San Juan City mayor Francis Javier Zamora, and MMDA director Shiela Gail Saturate-Quingco lead the launch of Oplan Pag-Abot in the DSWD Central Office in Batasan, Quezon City. (Photo from DSWD official website)



DSWD Secretary Rex Gatchalian visits the SWADCAP, which the DSWD revived into the agency's own learning facility last March. (Photo from official Facebook page of DSWD).



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to consume adequate meals per day, which cost about P8,000 per month for an average family with five members.

When DSWD, led by Secretary Gatchalian, started to conceptualize the program last February, we were guided by the wisdom of the President that the solution to poverty requires innovative, multi-pronged, and whole-of-nation approaches.

The President, being the hands-on leader and techie that he is, directed us in several meetings to make the program digital, sustainable, and development driven.

After just six months and with the hands-on guidance by the President, as well as the competent leadership of Sec. Gatchalian, we were able to launch last week in Tondo, Manila the pilot implementation that targets 3,000 families across five regions: National Capital Region, Cagayan Valley, Bicol, CARAGA, and BARMM.

But the success of the food stamp program is still far from sight. The story has just started — at least with a bright future ahead.

Apart from the novel food stamp, the DSWD, under the leadership of Secretary Gatchalian, is pursuing other new initiatives, which have also attracted the support of development partners.

Under the watch of Sec. Gatchalian, DSWD hopes to be transformed from an agency known for ayuda or cash assistance into a developmental agency where beneficiaries become productive citizens who can contribute to nation-building.

The department is strengthening its disaster resilience capability through the "Buong Bansa Handa Project" that will establish two parallel supply chains on disaster response.

The first supply chain will feature an expanded network of national and local government warehousing infrastructure, while the other one will be private sector driven.

"Oplan Pag-Abot" is one of the latest initiatives of the DSWD to reach out to children

and families, including indigenous peoples, staying or living on the streets by providing them with the necessary interventions, such as livelihood opportunities and shelter assistance, to help them live a safer, sustainable, and productive life.

The DSWD is also retooling its educational assistance program for students through its "Tara Basa!" project in collaboration with the Department of Education (DepEd). College students will be tapped for the department's cash-for-work program to teach non-readers among incoming Grade 2 students. Parents will also be given training on tutoring to enable them to sustain the intervention at home.

The DSWD will also revive its Social Welfare and Development Center for Asia and the Pacific (SWADCAP) into a DSWD Academy to serve as a learning facility that will provide specialized training, capacity-building activities, and other learning development interventions to social workers to enable them to keep abreast with the ever-changing social work landscape.

To prioritize the ease of doing social welfare, the DSWD will implement the "Paspas Serbisyo – Digital Transformation" (DX) initiative that will streamline the forms, steps, and requirements in the delivery of social welfare through the following features: deployment of an AI-driven chatbot; an online portal for Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS); an online portal for permitting Social Welfare and Development Agencies-NGOs and foundations; and digital platforms for dispensing cash assistance.

The DSWD is also currently retooling its programs and services through policy reforms, recalibration of its implementation guidelines, streamlining of processes and timelines, as well as rationalizing cost parameters for interventions and modalities to become more responsive to the needs of its clients and beneficiaries.





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## Increase in Kadiwa centers is one of PBBM's achievements in his first year in office

By JOHANNA L. AÑES-DE LA CRUZ

**A** Department of Agriculture (DA) high-ranking official recently said that the increase in the number of Kadiwa centers is among the achievements of President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. (PBBM) during his first year as the country's top official and as agriculture secretary.

In a press briefing earlier this month, Agriculture Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista noted that from 200 outlets, PBBM was able to increase the number of Kadiwa stores to 627.

In an article by Bella Cariaso published in *The Philippine STAR* last July 1, it was mentioned that the DA believes the decision of the President to remain as Secretary of the department was a "big factor" in this increase, with more local government units allowing Kadiwa to operate in their respective areas.

The DA revived the Kadiwa program, a brainchild of former first lady Imelda Marcos, during the Duterte administration.

It is a farm-to-consumer market chain that eliminates intermediaries, allowing local producers to generate higher income by selling their produce directly to consumers.

Moreover, agricultural commodities such as rice, sugar, and onions are sold at Kadiwa centers at more affordable prices.

Evangelista added that with PBBM as Agriculture Secretary, the smuggling of various agricultural products had also been addressed.

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

Evangelista said that the DA will also implement various programs to improve production and attain

food security and rice sufficiency.

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

Meanwhile, other sectors gave the President different "ratings." Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. president Danilo Fausto, for example, gave Marcos an incomplete grade, while farmers' groups gave him varying grades from a "failing grade of 5" to a "passing score of 7.5."

Despite his "incomplete" rating, Fausto looks forward to considering PBBM's term as the "golden age of Philippine agriculture," he said in a text message to *The Philippine STAR*, as mentioned in Cariaso's article.

Farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng

Agrikultura (SINAG) executive director Jayson Cainglet, on the other hand, gave Marcos a passing grade of 7.5, clarifying that PBBM's biggest problem after winning the presidency is the "disheartened outlook and lack of enthusiasm of local producers to continue farming and raising livestock."

He added, however, that the local farm sector was given "renewed hope" under the leadership of Marcos.

"To be fair, some key officials at the DA have

worked with the local agriculture industry at the height of the onion price spike in raiding warehouses, cold storages, and alerting the Bureau of Customs of suspected smuggled onions. Onion farmers are happy with higher farmgate prices," said Cainglet.

PBBM was accepting of his "incomplete" grade for his achievement as agriculture chief but

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**The DA revived the Kadiwa program, a brainchild of former first lady Imelda Marcos, during the Duterte administration. Agricultural commodities such as rice, sugar, and onions are sold at Kadiwa centers at more affordable prices.**





President Marcos visits a Kadiwa ng Pangulo center at the Department of Agriculture main office during the 125th anniversary of the agency. Photo by KJ ROSALES

## Increase in Kadiwa From Page 12

emphasized that fulfilling his campaign promises "is a work in progress."

Kadiwang Pangulo (KNP) centers will be set up in local government units nationwide as part of President Marcos' long-term plan to bring local agricultural products closer to consumers.

In a separate article by Helen M. Flores and Delon Porcalla, which was also published in the STAR, it was reported that Marcos signed a memorandum of agreement with other government agencies to establish KNP centers nationwide. The ceremonial signing in Pampanga was followed by the distribution of family food packs and P3,000 financial assistance to almost 500 residents.

"The national government cannot bring affordable food to all if we will not partner with the local government," PBBM said on July 17.

Livelihood grants were also awarded to 13 Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) beneficiaries.

Signatories to the agreement include the

Department of Agriculture, Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of the Interior and Local Government, the Presidential Communications Office, and the Presidential Management Staff.

In addition, Bataan Rep. Geraldine Roman filed the Magna Carta for Agricultural Workers, which will register farmers and fisherfolk under the Kadiwa program to help them sell their produce.

A pricing scheme shall also be in place for registered agricultural workers to prevent losses incurred by the low prices set on their goods.

It is expected that as more KNP centers are set up across the country, SLP associations will be able to offer various products such as bags, accessories, and food delicacies at Kadiwa Centers, according to the DSWD.

The Tarlac Home for Women and the Regional Home for Girls, for instance, will sell delicacies, such as nougats, coated sugar peanut, mixed nuts, peanuts, *bagnet*, *bagoong*, *kakanin* ube, cassava, *kalamay*, *buko* juice, *guapple*, *chicharon*, and rugs.

A total of 81 provinces participated in the simultaneous launch of the KNP.





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## SKETCHES

ANA MARIE PAMINTUAN

### Incomplete

It's been just over a year, so Ferdinand Marcos Jr. himself acknowledges the grade of "incomplete" that an economist gave him.

Other critics have been harsher and given him a failing grade. The first year of a six-year term, however, is not enough to provide a conclusive verdict of failure.

The P20-a-kilo rice "aspiration" is a work in progress. The UniTeam is fraying, and there's growing talk of Imeldific 2.0 emerging, with all its negative connotations.

Inflation, which hit a 14-year high in January, has only slightly eased, and the national debt stood at a record P14.1 trillion as of end-May. And with the economy fully reopened, the government will soon be unable to rely on a pandemic-generated low base for touting rosy economic growth figures.

After just one year, however, Marcos 2.0 can still legitimately claim that it is laying the foundations for better times ahead, not just for the new *naghaharing uri*, but for the entire nation. And so, yes, BBM's work is incomplete.

From Day One, simply being himself has been an improvement from his predecessor. No more cussing, misogynist sex jokes, insults sometimes laced with threats of violence, and stream-of-consciousness digressions from prepared public speeches. No more addresses to the nation until past midnight, which people were forced to watch, if only to find out if it was OK to venture outside their homes or if they still had a job the next day.

The current President looks presidential, doesn't denigrate and instead emphasizes the usefulness of English proficiency, and understands the meaning of PC and woke.

He has also received praise (except from the new *Makapilis*) for ending the pivot to China and taking a firm stand on the arbitral ruling on the South China Sea, reinvigorating the alliance with the US and mending ties with the European Union.

We have yet to see the impact of BBM's pronouncement that "we're done" with the International Criminal Court. In Washington, my guess is there will be little pushback, since the US itself has never been a party to the Rome Statute creating the ICC.

Some quarters see the ICC issue as an ace that BBM holds over the Dutertes. The probe covers acts in the previous administration and when Rodrigo Duterte and his daughter Sara, who has been named in the probe, were local executives in Davao City.

Relatives of those killed in Duterte's war on drugs and certain witnesses might cooperate with the ICC. The situation can become embarrassing for the administration, and taint the ongoing Marcos rebranding with accusations of obstructing a probe on possible crimes against humanity.



Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla seems to have softened his stance, saying last Friday that while the probe is tantamount to interference in a sovereign state, the government is open to a "dialogue" with the ICC.

The ICC ruling came out just days before the second State of the Nation Address. But even in his first SONA, the human rights situation was conspicuously not mentioned by Ferdinand Junior.

Still, critics must concede that the level of violence has gone down in the campaign against illegal drugs, and there's an effort to minimize if not eliminate abuses.

Instead of death for drug pushers and abusers alike, we might see cannabis legalized, even for recreational use – especially if proponents point to the boost in tourism that Thailand is now enjoying after it decriminalized marijuana, allowing its recreational use and home production.

Among the laws enacted in the first year of Marcos 2.0, the condonation of P57.557 billion in amortizations of over 654,000 agrarian reform beneficiaries has been hailed. Critics, however, have pointed out that these are mostly bad loans that the farmers have not been paying anyway and the government was simply forced to write them off.

BBM had to amend Republic Act 11709, the fixed term law for the military that was signed last year by Duterte in his final months as president. And now BBM must confront resistance to reforms in the pension system for military and other uniformed personnel.

Legislation in the first year of Marcos 2.0 will be remembered for indecent haste, thanks to the mad rush to pass the Maharlika Investment Fund law, just so it can be touted at today's SONA.

The state of COVID public health emergency was also lifted in time for the SONA, but the administration can't take credit for this epidemiological development. People still hoping to get their bivalent vaccines are also chafing at the prospect of having to pay for the jabs, with the country no longer eligible for free vaccines from the COVAX Facility.

\* \* \*

The Maharlika and ICC are among the controversies in Year One of Marcos 2.0 that are expected to continue into his second year.

Another is food security, with the problems mainly involving agriculture, the department that BBM has chosen to head himself. He will have to take a firmer hand in bringing down the prices of sugar. Industry players themselves are saying, and not even in whispers, that the failure to lower the prices is due to the greed of people close to the President.

Then there's the onion cartel, whose members have been openly identified by lawmakers. The nation is still waiting for the promised indictment of the alleged cartel members for economic sabotage.

The Marcos campaign's slogan was *babangon muli*, which has been true for his clan; the elder Marcos' buzzwords have risen again – Kadiwa, Masagana 99, Maharlika.

Those who knew the elder Marcos say BBM lacks the magnetism of his father. Junior comes off with a laid-back personality, almost bland and boring, which is actually impressive considering that he bears the baggage of his family's unrevised history.

Seeing how BBM led his family's spectacular political comeback or *pagbangon muli*, non-administration forces underestimate him at their own peril. Into his second year, the opposition remains in disarray.

The controversies and that "incomplete" assessment notwithstanding, Marcos has retained his immense popularity. With his enormous political capital, he can focus on making the country rise through urgent reforms. If significant national progress is achieved, he need not rely on sloganeering and gimmickry to rehabilitate the Marcos name.



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## EDITORIAL

### State of the nation

President Marcos delivers his second State of the Nation Address today with the state of COVID public health emergency lifted, which should pave the way for full economic reopening. The national debt, however, which ballooned to a record high mostly to finance the pandemic response, breached the P14-trillion mark as of end-May.

Into his second year in office, the President still can't trumpet the fulfillment of his election campaign promise of rice at P20 a kilo, even in heavily subsidized Kadiwa outlets. Food prices continue to fuel high inflation, which hit a 14-year high in January. Despite the importation of nearly 500,000 metric tons of sugar, with the import process hounded by controversy, prices of the basic commodity have refused to come down, affecting micro and large enterprises alike.

At least onion prices have gone down, although people are still waiting for a conclusive probe on what caused the unconscionable price spike during the 2022 holiday season. Consumer prices in general have also started easing, but experts have warned that the country is not out of the woods yet. The President, who has held on to his concurrent post as agriculture secretary, has promised reforms to boost farm productivity while at the same time improving the plight of farmers. For this, climate change must also be confronted.

The President is expected to pitch the controversial Mahar-

lika Investment Fund, passed in time for the SONA, even as several groups are preparing to challenge the MIF law before the Supreme Court. The government has yet to dispel fears that the MIF will turn into another 1Malaysia Development Berhad, the scandal-plagued sovereign wealth fund of Malaysia, which Marcos will be visiting tomorrow.

There are so many things that need fixing in this country, but the government can't even fix the Ninoy Aquino International Airport. There's a massive backlog of vehicle license plates and plastic driver's license cards. The country is water insecure and power rates are among the highest in the region.

Even with the lifting of the COVID emergency, public health care is woefully inadequate, and is aggravated by the continuing exodus of nurses and other health professionals. Education is in crisis, affecting national competitiveness and many other aspects of life, with the problem worsened by the COVID pandemic. Corruption, according to Baguio Mayor Benjamin Magalong, is becoming the norm.

The country faces an external threat in the South China Sea while internally, armed violence remains rampant. Despite the passage of laws to ease doing business and attract job-generating foreign investments, the laws are good mostly on paper and investor response has been underwhelming. President Marcos has his work cut out for him.





RONALD LLAMAS

Tonite

YARI KA

## Tunay na pagbabago, hindi palpak na logo!

Talamak pa rin ang katiwalian sa loob ng gobyerno, lalo na sa Department of Agriculture (DA) kung saan si BBM ang tumatayong secretary. Kaliwa't kanan ang anomalya gaya ng sugar at rice smuggling, hoarding at cartelization. Mismong si Senator Imee Marcos, Presidential sister, na ang nagsabi ng malala ang agricultural smuggling. Bilyon-bilyong piso ang nawawala sa kaban ng bayan dahil sa food smuggling at mga cartels, at tuloy-tuloy na sumisirit pa rin pataas ang presyo ng pangunahing pagkain.

Bukod dito, laganap pa rin ang kapal-pakan at kawalan ng accountability sa loob ng gobyerno. Kitang-kita ito sa mga kontrobersiya na kinasangkutan ng Department of Tourism (DOT) at PAGCOR tungkol sa mga palpak nilang rebranding na lumustay ng milyon-milyong piso, at sa appointment ni disbarred lawyer Larry Gadon bilang isa sa mga political adviser ni BBM.

Kamakailan, nilunsad ni BBM ang "Bagong Pilipinas" bilang branding ng kanyang pamamahala. Pero ano ang bago sa Pilipinas kung luma pa rin at hindi rumeresponde ang ating ekonomiya sa pangangailangan ng mahihirap. Walang bagong economic strategy upang protektahan ang mamamayan sa tumitinding economic crisis, partikular na ang mataas na inflation sa bansa. Sa likod ng ipinagmamalaking economic growth kuno, malalim ang income inequality sa ating bansa dulot ng kawalan ng living wage. Ayon sa World Bank, pang-15 tayo sa listahan ng 63 na bansa na may malalang income inequality, isa sa pinakamataas sa East Asia. Dagdag pa rito, sa March 2023 report ng SWS, inulat nito na 51 percent ng mga Pilipino ay tinuturing ang mga

sarili na mahihirap. Ngunit ano ang inatupag ng mga alyado ni BBM sa Kongreso? Imbes na bigyan ng konting ginhawa ang mamamayan, mas inuna pa nila ang charter change, at pag-pasa ng Maharlika Investment Fund.

Pero to be fair, may "different" din naman sa unang taon ni BBM. Kitang-kita ito sa foreign policy ng bansa, partikular sa West Philippine Sea (WPS). Kung si Duterte ay lantarang maka-Tsina, si BBM naman ay piniling kilalanin ang ating Arbitral Ruling victory na kinikilala ang ating soberanya at territorial integrity sa WPS. Mas malawak din ang foreign policy framework ni BBM lalo na sa defense at economic cooperation ng kanyang administrasyon sa iba't ibang alyadong bansa at rehiyon gaya ng US, UK, EU, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand at India.

Pasok din sa kategoryang "different" ang away ng mga paksyon sa loob pamahalaan ni BBM. Isang taon pa lang si BBM bilang pangulo ngunit malalim, malawak at tila hindi na mapagkakasundo ang mga nagbabangyang kampo. Kadalasan, ang mga ganitong away ay nagyayari sa natitirang 2-3 years ng isang administrasyon. Na ito ay nangyayari sa unang taon pa lamang ni BBM ay signos ng mas malalang mga pangyayari sa hinaharap.

Sa kabila ng lahat ng ito, hindi ako magtataka kung suportado pa rin ng maraming Pilipino si BBM. Sabi nga ng political journalist na si Christian Esguerra, sobrang binaba ni Duterte ang pamantayan ng pamamahala at tila nilubog pa sa putik, kaya kahit gaanong karampot na "improvement" ay titingnan ito ng publiko na malaking pagbabago. Ito ang malungkot at tunay na state of the nation. Yari tayo!

Ngayong araw ay gaganapin ang ikalawang State of the Nation Address (SONA) ni President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. Iuulat niya sa harap ng mamamayan ang kasalukuyang kalagayan ng bansa at nagawa ng kanyang administrasyon sa loob ng unang taon ng kanyang pamamahala. Pero ano nga ba ang tunay na kalagayan ng bansa at nagawa ni BBM sa unang taon ng kanyang termino?

May kilalang phrase ang mga Thai na tingin ko ay akmang description ng kasalukuyang kalagayan ng bansa sa ilalim ni BBM: "Same same but different." Sabi ko nga, while we may have a different president, "same same" pa rin ang ating kalagayan dahil walant halos inabante ang bansa sa ilalim ni BBM sa kanyang unang taon.

Sa usapin ng human rights, imbes na dinggin ang panawagan ng international community na palayain si dating Senator Leila de Lima, patuloy pa rin itong nakakulong. At gaya ni Duterte, hindi rin kinikilala ni BBM ang jurisdiction ng International Criminal Court (ICC) taliwas sa desisyon ng ating Supreme Court at sinasaad ng Rome Statute. At bagama't may tangka si BBM na dumistansiya sa madugong anti-drug war ni Duterte, nagpapatuloy pa rin ang extrajudicial killings, lalo na sa hanay ng mga political activists, at wala pa ring nakakamit na hustisya ang mga EJK victim.



# REMATE

ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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ANO NA?



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ISANG taon na mula nang manumpa bilang Pangulo si Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Sa kanyang ikalawang State of the Nation Address o SONA ngayong araw na ito, inaasahan nang maraming Pilipino na magbibigay ulat siya sa kanyang mga naga-wa na, base na rin sa mga ipinangako noong kampan-ya.

Kung bibigyan ko ng grado ang Pangulo, mukhang mahihirapan akong bigyan siya ng passing grade. Kumbaga sa estudyante, hindi lang kulang ang naabot ng kanyang performance, meron pang mga sumablay.

Unahin ko muna ang aspeto ng foreign policy o ugnayang panlabas ng bansa. Dito, medyo maganda ang resulta ng administrasyon, dahil mukhang bumalik sa normal ang relasyon ng Pilipinas sa US, at medyo nabawasan ang sobrang lapit natin sa China. Yun nga lang,

mas tumaas ang tensyon sa West Philippine Sea, dahil mas naging agresibo ang mga coast guard at mga barko at mangingisda ng China sa kanilang mga operasyon.

Sa usapin ng pagkain, sunod-sunod na krisis sa sibuyas, asukal, bigas at hanggang sa karneng baboy at manok. Walang maliwang na rason kung bakit nagtaasan ang mga presyo, pero mukha naman kasing nakontrol ng mga kartel sa Department of Agriculture. Isabay pa ang mga ilgal na importasyon ng mga ito.

Wala na yatang umaasa na darating pa ang P20 hanggang P25 kada kilo ng bigas.

Ang masaklap pa rito, si PBBM mismo ang Kalihim ng DA, kaya medyo nakapagtataka nga ang mga kaganapang ito. Anyare?

Hindi lang dismayado, medyo galit pa nga ang mga manggagawa, dahil nakukulangan sila sa dagdag na sweldo



na ipaprubahan ng gobyerno. Sa dagdag na P100 hiling para sa daily minimum wage sa National Capital Region ay P40 lang ang inaprubahan. Hindi nga naman ito sapat sa walang kontrol na pagtaas ng presyo ng mga bilihin at maging ng serbisyo.

Sa usapin naman kalikasan, nalulungkot ang maraming mga environmental groups dahil bigo raw ang Presidente at ang Department of Environment and Natural Resources na resol-

bahin nang malinaw ang mga isyu nang mapanirang pagmimina sa Sibuyan Island at sa Palawan. Idagdag pa ang oil spill sa Mindoro at ang kontrobersyal na Kaliwa Dam sa Sierra Madre. Sa susunod na kolum, ang mga panukalang batas naman ng Kongreso ang sisilipin ng inyong lingkod.

Pero sa ngayon, mukhang ang naririnig ko sa mga oposisyon ay State of No Action ang nangyari kay PBBM ngayong 2023.

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## PBBM, please the people, please

NOON pa mang araw, simple lang ang hinahanap ko'ng katangian ng iboboto kong mamumuno sa bansa. Ayaw ko 'yung may mga malalalim na platapormang hindi mauunawaan ng masang Pilipino. Basta ang isang prospective leader ay may kapasidad na ihatid ang very basic na kailangan ng mga mamamayan at nangunguna niyan ang pagkaing abot kaya ng lukbutan.

Siyempre, kailangan ding tutukan ang ibang basic needs tulad ng housing, education, health care, national security at iba pa. Pero unang dapat tutukan ay ang sikmurang kumakalam. Sabi nga, ang sikmurang walang laman ay ugat ng lahat ng karahasan. Pero kumustahin natin ang presyo ng pagkain. Alam na alam ito ng mga ginang ng tahanan at kahit mga ginoo na sanay mamalengke. Hindi ako namamalengke pero laging nagrereklamo ang misis ko na kinakapos ang P1,000 kada araw sa aming pagkain.

Hihimatayin ka sa presyo ng isda. Ang galunggong na dati'y nasa P150 ang kilo ay umaabot na kung minsan ng P250 hanggang P300. Kahit ang presyo ng gulay ay mataas. Ang kangkong na noo'y P5 lang ay nagkakahalaga na



Aksyon  
**NGAYON**  
NIAL G. PEDROCHE

ng P15! Kung medyo malaki ang pamilya, ang P500 o kahit P1,000 ay kukulangin sa isang araw na pagkain.

Ngayon ang ikalawang State of the Nation Address (SONA) ni Presidente Bongbong Marcos at sa palagay ko lang bilang isang ordinaryong mamamayan, umaasa ang marami na mag-aanunsyo si Marcos ng magandang balita hinggil sa mas mababang presyo ng bilihin. Hinihi-kayat ni Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri si President Marcos na iyan mismo ang tutukan niya—ang pagpapa-baba sa presyo ng pagkain.

Ang Presidente ang concurrent agriculture secretary ngunit hanggang ngayon ay mataas pa rin ang halaga ng pagkain sa merkado at ang nagdurusa ay 'yung mga mahi-hirap at middle income families. Alam natin na hindi madaling gawing ibaba ang presyo ng bilihin lalo pa't may nanalasang bagyo na madalas mangyari sa bansa, mataas na transportation cost at pag-iral ng mga middlemen at cartel bago

(Sundan sa pahina 5)

## AKSYON NGAYON... Mula pahina 4

makarating sa palengke ang mga paninda.

Idagdag pa ang mga nakikipagkutsaba sa ilang tiwaling opisyal upang magdikta sa presyo ng mga pangunahing bilihin. Bilang Presidente na pinagtiwalaang ihalal ng mamamayan, obligasyon ni Marcos, Jr. na humanap ng ma-

bisang paraan upang malutas ang problema sa presyuhan ng pagkain. Naiisip ng iba, binibig-yan ng pabor ng Presidente ang mga negosyanteng tumulong na maihalal siya bilang presidente. Kung totoo iyan, please naman, don't please your allies but please the people. Please?



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## STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS



HULYO 24, 2023

### NI JO CAGANDE-REDUCTO

Ang natamong makabuluhang pag-usad ng kanyang administrasyon sa loob lamang ng isang taong panunung-

kanyang unang SONA noong 2022, kabilang sa mga highlights ng pangako niya ang pagkakaroon ng kautusan na layuning mag-

Kasama rin sa mga nabanggit sa nakaraang SONA ng pangulo ang target na makapag-issue ng nasa 92 milyong national IDs sa kalagitnaan ng taong 2023. Kaugnay nito,

kondisyong pangkabuhayan ng iba't ibang sektor sa bansa, sa pamamagitan ng modernisasyon at sa pagpapaunlad sa kalidad ng public infrastructure. Ipinangako rin ng

sabing halaga ay para sa capitalization requirements, gayundin bilang initial inventory ng Kadiwa store. Sinabi ng mga opisyal ng DA na hangad nilang makapag-establisa ng

ang kalagayan ng bansa tungkol sa inflation, ang higit na konkreto at epektibong hakbang na direktang magpapayuko sa lalo pang tumataas na presyo ng bilihin; ang unemployment o kawalan ng matatag na trabaho ng maraming Pilipino, kasama na rito ang estado ng pagpapasahod sa mga pangkaraniwang manggagawa.

# SONA 2023: ANG MAKABULUHANANG PAG-USAD



kulan ang pahapyaw na paglalarawan ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. sa nilalaman ng kanyang Ikalawang State of the Nation Address ngayon, Hulyo 24, 2023.

Sa mga panayam, sinabi ng pangulo na ang napaka-simpleng speech niya ay performance report na layong ipaliwanag sa mga Pilipino na maaari nang makita ang pagkakai-ba ngayon, hindi lang sa kung paano gumagana ang sistema, kung paano kumikilos ang gobyerno, kundi maging kung paano nakikita at hinusgahan ito sa international community.

Matatandaan na sa

takda ng moratorium para sa pagbabayad ng lupa at interes, nang sa gayon ay hindi mabaon sa utang ang mga benepisyaryo ng agrarian reform.

Natupad ito nito lang Hulyo 7 ng taong kasalukuyan, makaraang pagtibayin ng lagda ng punong ehekutibo ang RA No. 11953 o ang New Agrarian Emancipation Act, na nagpapawalang bisa sa 57 bilyong pisong utang sa amortization ng agrarian reform beneficiaries. Alinsunod sa naturang batas, mahigit sa 600,000 na mga magsasaka ang tinukoy na malaya na sa pagkakautang.

inilulat ng Philippine Statistic Authority (PSA) na nasa mahigit 80 milyong Pilipino na ang rehistrado sa Philippine Identification System (PhilSys) o national ID.

Samantala, ipinangako rin ng pangulo na hindi suspindihin ang anumang imprastraktura na nasimulan ng administrasyong Duterte. Nailathala na sa 194 infrastructure projects ng pamahalaan, na nakakahalaga ng P9 trillion, 123 rito ay new initiatives habang 71 ay mula sa Duterte administration.

Ang lahat ng ito ay bahagi ng Build Better More program na may layuning ma-improve ang

pangulo ang pagbuhay sa Kadiwa stores, na magbenta ng mga pangunahing bilihin mula sa 'partner-farmer' cooperative ng Department of Agriculture at titiyak na mabibili ito ng publiko sa murang halaga.

Tinukoy na nasa 500 Kadiwa outlets ang nasa iba't ibang bahagi ng bansa sa kasalukuyan, mula nang ilunsad ang programa sa huling bahagi ng nakaraang taon. Layon pang palawigin ito makaraang makipag-ugnayan ang Department of Agriculture sa LGUs at mag-alok ng hanggang P1 milyong piso para sa pagpapatayo ng Kadiwa stores. Ang na-

Kadiwa center sa bawat lungsod at munisipalidad nationwide.

Tinukoy din na mula nang makapaglagay ng Kadiwa centers na tutulong sa mga Pilipino na magling abot-kaya ang pangunahing pangangailangan sa kabila ng pagbulusok ng mga presyo ng bilihin sa merkado, sinasabing nasa 924 kooperatiba na ng mga magsasaka ang sumusporta sa inisyatibong ito ng gobyerno.

Ang mga nabanggit ay ilan lamang sa mga ipinangako ng kasalukuyang administrasyon at pagkikig nito sa nakalipas na isang taon.

Magugunita na nauna nang nagpahayag ng pagkakumpleyansa ang pangulo sa ire-report niya sa publiko kaugnay sa progreso ng kanyang liderato. Ilang araw bago ang SONA, ilang kilos-protesta ang inilunsad sa hangaring iparating sa pangulo ang hinaing tungkol sa patuloy na pagtaas ng presyo ng krudo, kasama na rin ang bantang phaseout ng mga jeepney at iba pang isyu ng transportasyon sa bansa.

Samantala, umaasa naman ang iba't ibang sektor ng lipunan na kasama sa bibigyang-diin sa ikalawang SONA ng pangulo

wa. May pag-asa pa nga bang malangat ito para makausad din ang buhay ng pamilyang Pinoy? Inaabangan din ang hakbang ng pamahalaan para higit na mapatatag at mapaanlad ang edukasyon sa bansa, gayundin ang tungkol sa lumolobong utang nito. Sa pinakahuling tala nito lamang buwan ng Pebrero taong kasalukuyan, tinukoy na nasa P13.42 trillion o katumbas ng \$246.34 bilyong dolyar ang general debt ng Pilipinas.

Alamin ang kabuuang ulat sa bayan ng Ikalabimpitong pangulo ng bansa sa kanyang 2023 SONA.



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### Editorial

## May masampolan na kayang agri smugglers?

**N**GAYON ang ikalawang State of the Nation Address (SONA) ni President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Maraming inaasam ang taumbayan sa kanyang gagawing pag-uulat sa bayan sa mga nagawa sa nakaraang isang taon ng panunungkulan. Inaabangan din ang mga ipangangako niya lalung-lalo na ang may kinalaman sa agrikultura at ang walang tigil na pamamayagpag ng smugglers ng agri products.

Kamakailan lang, inatasan ng Presidente ang NBI na dakmain ang mga bigtime agri smugglers at kasuhan ang mga ito. Ang Presidente ang kasalukuyang secretary ng Department of Agriculture (DA).

Sa kabila na may pinangalanan ng personalidad na sangkot sa agri smuggling tulad ni "Sibuyas Queen" wala pa ring nadadakma para makasuhan. Sabi ng Bureau of Customs, meron na silang sinampahan ng kaso, pero isang taon na ang nakalilipas, wala ni isa mang naipakukulong at lalo pang lumala ang agri smuggling. Sa kanilang ginagawa, ang mga lokal na magsasaka ang naging kawawa. Inagawan ng kabuhayan at namimintong kumalam ang sikmura.

Ang inaasahan ngayon ng mamamayan ay tupa rin ng Presidente ang mga pinangako sa unang SONA na mag-aangat sa kabuhayan ng mga magsasaka. Kamakailan, nilagdaan ni Marcos Jr. ang batas na bumubura sa utang ng mga magsasaka. Ayon sa Presidente, ngayong wala nang utang ang mga magsasaka at pag-aari na nila ang lupang sinasaka, mapauunlad na nila ang buhay at mapaparami na ang ani.

Pinamunuan ng Presidente ang DA noong Hunyo 1, 2022 para magabayan ang departamento na matagal na napabayaang ng mga nakaraang administrasyon. Nangako ng pagkakaroon nang sapat na pagkain at tulong sa mga magsasaka. Magkakaroon ng farm-to-market road para madaling mailuwas ang ani. Makabagong teknolohiya ang ipakikilala para magkaroon nang saganang ani. Sa pamamagitan daw ng mga ito, hindi na aangkat ng bigas ang Pilipinas. Nasabi minsan ng Presidente na mabigat sa kanyang kalooban na umangkat ng bigas at iba pang agri products.

May natupad at merong hindi sa pinangako ni Marcos sa kanyang unang SONA. Ngayong ikalawa niyang SONA, nananalig ang mamamayan na lubusan nang matutupad ang lahat para sa kanilang kapakanan. Higit sa lahat, ang dapat tuunan ng Presidente ay ang pagdakma sa mga agri smugglers. Kapag nahuli na ang mga smugglers, dito magsisimula ang katuparan ng mga pinangako ni Marcos. Dapat mayroon nang masampolang smugglers sa pagkakataong ito.





## MGA NATUPAD NA PANGAKO NI PBBM

### Kadiwa ng Pangulo

Binanggit din ni Marcos Jr. ang legasiya ng kanyang namayapang amang si dating Pangulong Ferdinand E. Marcos Sr. tulad ng mga Kadiwa rolling store.

Noong Hulyo 17, 2023, inilunsad ni Marcos Jr. ang "Kadiwa ng Pangulo" program sa lahat ng local government units sa buong kapulungan.

"Ang programa ng Kadiwa ay napakasimple lamang at tayo ay ginagwa natin ay nilalapit natin sa magsasaka ang palengke, kaya't 'yong mga middleman, added cost, ay binabawisan natin ng husto 'yan para sa ganyang paraan ay maipagbili natin ng presyo na mababa," wika ni Marcos matapos saksihan ang nilagdaang memorandum of agreement (MOA) sa pagitan ng Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) at iba pang ahensiya ng gobyerno.

### Rendahan ang inflation

Ipinangako rin ng Pangulo na kokontrolin ang pagtaas ng inflation. Noong Hunyo 2023, bumaba sa 5.4% ang inflation, pinakamababa na mula nang sumirit ito sa 8.7% noong Enero 2023. Ilan sa tinuturong dahilan ay ang pagbaba ng presyo ng pagkain at produktong petrolyo.

Sa kabila ng nagawa ng gobyerno sa inflation, hindi pa rin kumtento ang maraming Pilipino kung pagbabasehan ang resulta ng survey ng Pulse Asia noong June 19-23. Halos tatlo sa bawat limang Pinoy o 63% ang nagsabing dapat ito ang pagtuunan ng pansin ng gobyerno.

"Ibig sabihin, karamihan ng Pilipino parang hindi sila nasisiyahan o aprubado sa pagtugon ng administrasyon sa dalawang usa-

ping ito, kahirapan at mataas na presyo ng bilihin," wika ni Ronald Holmes na siyang presidente ng Pulse Asia.

Ipinangako rin ng pangulo na papaspasan ang mga railway project tulad ng North-South Commuter Railway, Metro Manila Subway Project, LRT-1 Cavite Extension, MRT-7 at ang common station na magkonekta sa LRT-1, MRT-3 at MRT-7.

Kanyang sinabi sa SONA na ang mga tren ay nakapagbibigay ng "great potential as it continues to be the cheapest way of transporting goods and passengers."

Hindi nakasama sa unang SONA na Maharlika Investment Fund (MIF) pero simbilis ng kidlat itong nai-pasa ng Kongreso. Noong Hulyo 18, 2023 ay ga-

nap na pinirmahan ni Pangulong Marcos ang MIF upang maging ganap na batas.

Ang MIF ay isang sovereign wealth fund kung saan ang pondo ay gagamitin sa pag-invest sa domestic at foreign corporate bonds, commercial real estate, infrastructure projects, at iba pa.

Ilang beses niyang inilalako sa abroad ang MIF at nagkaroon pa ng soft launching noong magtungo ito sa Switzerland noong Enero para dumalo sa World Economic Forum.

Sa kabuuang 22 panukala na hiniling ni Marcos na aprubahan ng Kongreso, isa lamang ang nakalusot - ang New Agrarian Emancipation Act o RA No. 11953.

Nangako na si Senador Ronald "Bato" dela Rosa na papaspasan ang pagpapatibay ng mandatory ROTC sa Senado dahil nahihiya na raw siya kay Pangulong Marcos.

Sa ikalawang SONA ni Marcos, may panibagong pakiusap na naman ang pangulo sa Kongreso.







NGAYONG Lunes, ilalahad ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. ang ikalawang State of the Nation Address (SONA). Sa mga kapos sa kaalaman, ang ibig sabihin nito ay talumpati tungkol sa kalagayan ng bansa.

Alinsunod sa Konstitusyon, ginaganap ito tuwing ikaapat na Lunes ng Hulyo. Sa Joint Session ng Kongreso ilalahad ng pangulo ang kanyang SONA.

Dahil nakaisang taon na sa panunungkulan si Pangulong Marcos, dito niya ibibida ang mga nagawa niya sa loob ng 12 buwan.

Ano ba ang mga ipinangako ni Marcos sa kanyang utang SONA noong nakaraang taon?

Sa sektor ng agrikultura kung saan siya tumatayong Agriculture secretary, inilahad niya ang plano para mapataas ang produksyon sa agrikultura sa pamamagitan ng tulong pinansiyal at technical assistance sa mga magsasaka.

#### Ayuda pa more

Tungkol naman sa ayuda, nangako siya na ipagpapatuloy ang conditional cash transfer ng Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) na mas lalong kilala sa tawag na Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) gayundin ang Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situations program.

Kinontra niya ang suhestiyon ni Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno na itigil na ang pamimigay ng ayuda na may kaugnayan sa COVID pandemic. Marami raw leakage o nabibigyan ng ayuda kahit hindi naman karapat-dapat.

Sa kabila nito, lalo pang nanganak ang ayuda program ng gobyerno nang ilunsad ang food stamp, hango sa Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) ng Estados Unidos.

Nangako rin si Marcos na ipagpapatuloy ang Build, Build, Build program ng administrasyong Duterte, sa ilalim ng bagong pangalan na Build, Better, More o BBM.

#### Buradong utang ng mga magsasaka

Inatasan din niya noon ang Kongreso na aprobahan ang panukalang batas na bubura sa utang ng mga agrarian reform beneficiary.

Nagkaroon ito ng katuparan nang pirmahan ni Pangulong

deficit.

"Warning lang to our President. If you look at our first quarter figures, it's not so good. Our tax to GDP has fallen from 14.6% to 12.4%," babala ni Salceda.

"Pag nag-11.8 'yan, I think it's fiscal crisis because our capacity to provide for the needs of our people and to pay for our liabilities. In other words, in terms of our sustainable debt, I think the 11.8 will be at the critical stage," dagdag pa ng kongresista.



Marcos noong Hulyo 7, 2023 ang Republic Act 11593 o ang New Agrarian Emancipation Act. Dito ay binura ang higit P57 bilyong utang ng 610,054 ARB.

Kung inyong matatandaan, sa administrasyon ni yumaong dating Pangulong Corazon "Cory" Aquino ay namahagi ng lupa sa mga magsasaka sa ilalim ng Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) subalit nabaon naman sila sa utang sa pagbabayad ng lupa.

Tungkol naman sa lagay ng ekonomiya, inilatag niya ang target na 6.5 hanggang 8% real GDP growth kada taon mula 2023 hanggang 2028, ang single-digit poverty rate pagsapit ng 2028; ang 3% National Government deficit to GDP ratio pagsapit ng 2028, ang pagkamtan ng upper middle-income status pagsapit ng 2024 at iba pa.

Maganda ang pigura na prinsipal ng pangulo pero nitong Hulyo, nagbabala ang chairman ng House committee on ways and means na si Albay Rep. Joey Salceda na malapit nang danasin ng Pilipinas ang fiscal crisis kung patuloy ang pag-utang ng bansa upang punan ang taunang budget

deficit.

Kung umaangat ang ekonomiya ng 'Pinas, kailangang masabayan din ito ng tamang pag-angat sa koleksyon ng Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR). Tumataas naman ang revenue ng Bureau of Customs (BOC) dahil sa dami ng iniimport ng Pilipinas.

#### Pagbabalik ng face-to-face classes

Tungkol naman sa edukasyon, natupad din ang pangako ng pangulo na makabalik na sa eskuwelahan ang mga estudyante. Umarangkada na ang face-to-face classes noong Nobyembre 2022 matapos ang halos dalawang taon na blended learning bunsod na rin ng COVID-19 pandemic.

Kasabay nito ay ipinag-utos din niya ang pag-review sa K to 12 system dahil na rin sa dami ng mga nagrereklamong magulang. Ang naturang programa ay ipinatupad sa administrasyon ni dating Pangulong Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III.





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## Four foreign vaccine makers apply for bird flu trials

THE Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) said four foreign vaccine suppliers have made presentations to a BAI veterinary panel ahead of field trials to test their products' effectiveness against highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI).

"We are currently working on the guidelines for AI vaccination. Of course, there will be another round. The guidelines will subject the candidate vaccines also to field trials" BAI Director Paul C. Limson told reporters last week.

*"Kailangan talaga medyo naka-strategy ang pag-te-test nong bakuna para sigurado tayo sa resulta. Happy 'yong producer in the long run (We will need a strategy for testing the vaccines to ensure good results. The producers will be happy with this in the long run),"* he added.

According to Mr. Limson, the four foreign vaccine suppliers have presented to the BAI's Veterinary Technical Advisory Committee.

He said that the draft of the guidelines for the trials has undergone public consultation on July 11 and 13. There will be another round of consultations with the Philippine College of Poultry Practitioners.

*"So, hindi lang kami ang gumagawa ng guidelines. Kasama ang beteryaryo na involved sa industry then*

*of course those who have offered, the drug companies (We are not solely responsible for the guidelines. Veterinarians and drug companies have also had their input),"* he said.

As of July 14, eight regions, 17 provinces, 79 municipalities, and 168 barangays had active HPAI cases, according to BAI.

The Department of Agriculture has declared Batangas, Ilocos Sur, Rizal province, Quezon province, and South Cotabato free of bird flu.

Meanwhile, Mr. Limson said that the second round of field trials for the vaccine against African Swine Fever (ASF) is set to be completed by September.

It had previously announced the completion of initial safety and efficacy trials.

The Vietnam-made AVAC vaccine for ASF has been endorsed to the Food and Drug Administration and is awaiting a certificate of registration.

*"Malamang hinihintay din nilang matapos namin ang field trial and then they will act on it." (The FDA is probably awaiting the results of the field trial and then they will act on it),"* he said.

ASF cases are present in nine regions, 16 provinces, 58 municipalities, and 187 barangays as of June 29. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**





## Rice export curbs give farmers room to hike prices

By Sheldeen Joy Talavera  
Reporter

RICE EXPORT curbs imposed by India and Vietnam will likely increase rice prices overall, with the higher cost of imports providing cover for sellers to charge more for domestically-grown rice, industry officials said.

"What happens within our market is (when the price of) imported rice goes up, domestic prices go along because imported rice is the competitor of domestic rice," Raul Q. Montemayor, national manager of Federation of Free Farmers, told *BusinessWorld* by phone.

In May, Vietnam announced its plan to reduce rice exports to four million tons a year by 2023, Reuters reported.

"The government said that it will focus on the production of high-quality, fragrant and glutinous rice, while reducing the production of low-quality grains to 15% of total output by 2025 and to 10% by 2030," it said.

In the six months to June, Vietnam was the Philippines' top rice supplier, accounting for 1.61 million metric tons (MT) or 89.09% of the total.

It was followed by Myanmar and Thailand with 81,895 MT and 73,667 MT, respectively.

"India is planning something similar to control their inflation because rice prices there are go-

ing up in response to rising export prices. There will be a mad scramble for available stocks that will result in rising prices," Mr. Montemayor said.

In a July 20 decision, India imposed an "immediate" ban on exports of non-basmati white rice to ensure domestic availability and curb the rise in prices.

The curbs were announced in a notification issued by the Directorate of Foreign Trade of the Department of Commerce, via the amendment of its export policy on the commodity from "Free" to "Prohibited."

According to Fitch Solutions BMI on Friday, the export ban may have "substantial ramifications for trends in the global market."

"As a result, the ban adds significant further upward price impetus to the global rice export market, average prices for which stood 13.9% higher in June 2023 than 12 months previously as per the (United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization) Rice Price Index," it said.

Philippine rice imports from India hit 12,023.89 MT in the first six months, equivalent to 0.63% of all imports.

"We don't buy much from India, but because India accounts for 40% of global rice exports, what it does will have spillover effects on other exporters like Vietnam," Mr. Montemayor said.

He said that every P1-increase in the price per ton of Vietnamese

rice translate into a P5 increase in the landed cost, including tariffs.

Ateneo de Manila economics professor Leonardo A. Lanzona said in a Facebook Messenger chat that the export curbs in our supplier countries will be inflationary.

"Imported rice prices were previously lower than the domestic price, so they contributed to lower inflation. With higher imported rice prices then, we would expect inflation to rise," he said.

The Philippine Statistics Authority estimates based on preliminary data that consumer price index growth eased to 5.4% in June from 6.1% in May.

Food inflation decelerated for a fifth consecutive month to 6.7% in June.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Chief Economist Michael L. Ricafort said the export curbs will reduce the global rice supply and could lead to an "uptick" in world prices, raising the Philippines' rice import bill.

"This could lead to some uptick in overall inflation, or at least slower easing of the inflation/disinflation trend for the coming months since rice accounts for nearly 10% of the country's (consumer price index) basket," he said in a Viber message.

Mr. Lanzona said that the government should prepare for these developments and take them as an opportunity to boost domestic rice production.





PHILIPPINE STAR/RUSSELL PALMA

**A MAN carries a sack of rice from a truck to a rice store in Divisoria, Manila on March 21, 2022.**

"The years when the government simply allowed imports without enabling farmers to compete will take a major toll now in the form of higher rice prices," he said.

"The government should turn problems into opportunities for greater efficiency and inclusivity, and not turn its back on issues by means of easy and palliative solutions. We need to go to the root of the problems," he added.

Jayson H. Cainglet, executive director of Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura, said in a Viber message that imports and reduced tariffs "have not tamed rice prices."

"The most crucial is, for the country's economic team to accept that they failed miserably in equating unlimited rice imports

and lowering rice tariffs as our main solution to combat inflation," he said.

Mr. Cainglet said that the last two crop seasons have been favorable to farmers due to interventions such as higher palay procurement from the private sector and increased fuel and fertilizer subsidies from the government.

"These developments are encouraging farmers to plant and more institutional support from the (Department of Agriculture) would further encourage the local rice industry," he said.

Agriculture Undersecretary for Rice Industry Development Leocadio S. Sebastian said that the department's plan is embodied in the five-year Masagana Rice Industry Development Program,

with the aim of raising self-sufficiency.

"As of now, local production is augmented by imports. The plan is to gradually reduce imports as we ramp up production," he told *BusinessWorld* in a Viber message.

Asked about the impact of export decisions from Vietnam and India, he said: "I don't want to speculate. There are already many people speculating. I want to see the data first and see how the market is reacting."

As of Friday, domestically-produced well-milled rice sold in Metro Manila for between P40 and P49, while regular-milled rice fetched between P36 and P44.

Imported well-milled rice sold for between P41 and P48. The Philippines does not import regular-milled rice. Meanwhile, Mr. Sebastian said in a statement that El Niño may actually increase yields amid fears on reduced supply due to potential crop losses.

"When the El Niño is preceded by normal to above-normal rain, this allows water reservoirs to stock enough water for irrigation. Sunny weather brings higher palay yields and better milling recovery from better quality palay harvest," he said.

He asked officials in the field to maximize production in irrigated areas and diversify crops in areas expected to suffer from water deficits.



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## 'LOWER RICE TARIFFS NO QUICK FIX TO INFLATION'

**T**HE government must concede its failure in using lower rice tariffs as the prime solution to combat inflation, an agriculture industry group said on Sunday.

"Seven years is still a long time, but we must change the narrative now. Rice is a vulnerable global commodity since less than 10 percent of all production are traded globally," Jayson Cainglet, executive director of Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) said.

He noted Vietnam's and India's decision to slash rice exports and increasing global rice prices to underscore this.

"We have a very thin international rice market; with only five major rice-exporting countries – India, Vietnam, Thailand, Pakistan and Myanmar," Cainglet said.

Global rice trade is thin as compared to other agricultural commodities (20 percent and up), he said.

"This relatively thin market means that rice supply [and rice prices] has tended to be more unstable in the era of extreme weather situation. This year, it is El Niño, and the cycle continues," the Sinag official said.

In 2021, of the total 512 million tons of global rice production, less than 50 million tons (less than 9 percent) were traded globally.

"The decision of India [with 30 percent of global rice production] and Vietnam [15 percent of total rice exports; but 80 percent to 85 percent of our rice imports] will heavily impact on all net rice-importing countries, especially the Philippines, if we continue policies that

incentivize a few privileged importers and favored traders," Cainglet added.

"Now is the time for NEDA [National Economic and Development Authority] and our economic team to accept these realities," he said. The Sinag said that unlimited imports and reduced tariffs have never tamed rice prices and they never will.

Imported rice prices are more expensive, in fact, from DA's (Department of Agriculture) own Bantay Presyo monitoring.

"Rice prices at the global market hovers between \$500 and \$540 per metric tons [/MT] from our major source of rice imports," Cainglet said.

Meanwhile, he said that the last two cropping seasons "have been very positive to our rice farmers because of the extended help of the private sector [buying palay from P21/kilo and up] and the increased fuel and fertilizer subsidies from the government."

Farmgate prices have increased and cost of producing palay has been reduced because of these interventions.

These developments are encouraging farmers to plant, and more institutional support from the DA would further encourage the local rice industry, he said.

"It is high time that we finally support our local rice producers; incentivize local millers, promote food sovereignty and do away with the mentality that imports are manna from our benevolent importers," Cainglet said. The BUSINESSMIRROR tried to get the reactions of the Agriculture department to Sinag's statement, but it had no comment until press time. *Raadee S. Sausa*





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## Climate-tech firm rolls out biochar solution in Cavite poultry farm

**W**ASTEX, a climate-tech company operating in the Philippines and Indonesia, said it rolled out a biochar solution in a poultry farm in Cavite.

The company said it pilot tested biochar, a charcoal-like and carbon-rich substance derived from biomass, which can boost the performance of the poultry industry and help achieve sustainable farming techniques.

"The outcomes of our solution implementation at the poultry farm have exceeded our initial expectations. While we anticipated operational improvements and benefits from the generation and sale of carbon credits, the additional income and savings resulting from decreased mortality rates and reduced bedding use will far surpass the carbon credit proceeds," said Pawel Kuznicki, Founder and CEO of WasteX.

"We are currently working with several other poultry farms in the Philippines and Indonesia to expand the implementation of our solution."

While still nascent in the Philippines, the company said biochar technology has already received positive reception and full support from the government. The Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), for instance, has expressed eagerness to promote biochar as a green alternative to chemical fertilizer.

It also said the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is still looking at ways to widely promote the use of biochar among farmers.

Citing data from the Bureau of Animal Industry, WasteX said there are 1,593 registered poultry farms in the Philippines.

Biochar is produced from rice husk and poultry litter using WasteX's proprietary equipment at one of Pitik's farms. The biochar was then incorporated into the

farm's operations in two ways: as a bedding additive of up to 10 percent of the total bedding, and as a feed supplement of up to 2 percent of the feed.

The supplementation of bedding with up to 10 percent biochar led to substantial improvements in the farm's broiler chicken production.

"The results were impressive, with a 25-percent reduction in chicken mortality rate, a 30-percent decrease in overall bedding use, and the farm achieving the highest-ever recorded value in its Performance Index. Furthermore, there was a slight decrease in the feed conversion ratio or FCR."

Additionally, by supplementing the feed with up to 2 percent biochar, the poultry farm experienced a near-complete eradication of the E. coli population, contributing to enhanced biosecurity measures and healthier poultry, according to the company.

WasteX's pilot findings revealed that total benefits for a 20,000-chicken farm would amount to more than \$5,000 or P275,000 annually in additional savings and income.

"Given the slim margins of a typical poultry farm, adopting this new practice could significantly improve farmers' profits and livelihood."

Furthermore, WasteX "guarantees" carbon credits to its clients for the entire biochar production and application, amounting to \$50 or about P2,750 per metric ton of biochar. This could translate to up to \$2,000 or about P110,000 per farm per year, incentivizing farms to adopt this innovative solution.

Biochar is entitled to carbon credits because it captures and stores carbon for extended periods to help mitigate climate change. If applied at full scale, biochar could transform the agricultural industry into a carbon-negative and climate-positive sector.



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## DOJ: Authority of Bangsamoro govt over irrigation systems limited to CIS

By JOEL R. SAN JUAN

[@jrsanjuan1573](#)

**T**HE Department of Justice (DOJ) has declared that the authority of the Bangsamoro government over irrigation systems in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) is limited only to communal irrigation systems (CIS).

Thus, the DOJ ruled, only properties and assets confined to CIS should be turned over to the Bangsamoro government by the National Irrigation Administration (NIA).

The DOJ's legal opinion was issued in response to the request of Deputy Executive Secretary Naealla Bainto Aguinaldo's as a result of the letter of NIA Administrator Eduardo Guillen seeking clarification on the transfer of its properties and assets to the BARMM, pursuant to Republic Act (RA) 11054, otherwise known as the BARMM Law.

Prior to this, NIA received a letter

on October 30, 2022 from Engr. Ariel Cayan, Undersecretary for Operations of the Department of Agriculture (DA), referring the letter of then Finance Secretary Carlos G. Dominguez "requesting for the transfer of properties and assets" of the NIA Office Building in Cotabato identified by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Agrarian Reform (MAFAR- BARMM).

In response, NIA Administrator Ricardo Visaya, now retired, issued Memorandum Circular No. 003, Series of 2022 creating a Technical Working Group (NIA-TWG) to work with its counterpart in the BARMM on the possible transfer of properties and assets to the BARMM.

However, the NIA and the Bangsamoro Government Intergovernmental Relations Body (IGRB) have conflicting views on the interpretation of Section 37, Article XIII (Regional Economy and Patrimony) ("Section 37") and Section 11, Article XVI (Bangsamoro

Transition Authority) of the BARMM Law.

The NIA expressed belief that the authority granted to the Bangsamoro Government in Section 37 is limited to CIS.

IGRB claims that the authority of the Bangsamoro government is not limited to CIS, and that the properties and assets to be transferred to the latter should include, among others, the NIA Office Building in Cotabato City.

Despite several meetings, the NIA and IGRB failed to resolve their opposing views, thus, the request for the DOJ's legal position.

In declaring that the authority of the Bangsamoro government is limited only to CIS, the DOJ noted that under Section 2 of RA 360, the law creating NIA, the authority to operate, maintain and administer all national irrigation systems is vested in the NIA.

Likewise, the said provision gives NIA the authority to temporarily administer all government-funded communal and pump irrigation systems.

Section 2, Article V of the BARMM Law, has authorized the Bangsamoro government to exercise its power over the irrigation systems in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (BAR).

"Reconciling the two (2) provisions, while Section 2, Article V of the BARMM Law provides that the BG has authority over the irrigation systems in the BAR, by the express provision of Section 37, it is the National Government (NG) which retains its authority over NIS," the DOJ said in a legal opinion signed by Undersecretary Nicholas Felix Ty.

"Nothing in the powers and functions of the MAFAR can be considered as similar to the NIA's primary mandate to construct, improve, rehabilitate and administer irrigation systems," it added.

Thus, the DOJ said, absent the existence of any agency or office in the BAR that is primarily responsible in irrigation development and management, NIA's personnel, properties and assets cannot be disposed of to the MAFAR.



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## DA: Risk maps to help planters cope with El Niño impact

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said its attached agency had designed maps that would identify areas that may suffer drought and dry spells due to El Niño.

Agriculture Undersecretary for Rice Industry Development Leocadio Sebastian said the risk maps aim to guide farmers in their planting decisions.

Sebastian said the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) would map out all areas of the country that could be hit by droughts and dry spells. This could guide local government units (LGUs) and regional offices on the kind of interventions that it would

implement in affected areas.

"PhilRice has been sending out to farm communities around the country its 'Be Water Smart' magazine containing information of varieties and ways to optimize water use to mitigate the impact of El Niño."

The DA official said the magazine contains previous experiences of farmers, particularly on how they coped with calamities and adverse weather conditions.

It also has information on seed varieties that are heat or drought tolerant and under what soil conditions they can be planted, including the experience of Vietnam in using

climate-smart maps to address its drought problem.

PhilRice Deputy Director for Development Karen Barroga said the agency has been disseminating satellite-based data of rice area, production and yield to local governments and DA regional field offices so that they can be adequately guided on how to adjust their cropping calendars and on what interventions to give.

"These data, were weather patterns obtained and analyzed by the PRISM [Philippine Rice Information System] team—to LGUs and their extension workers and DA regional field officers down to the municipalities so they

can adequately guide farmers on seed varieties to plant based on available water supply."

PRISM, a Bureau of Agricultural Research-funded project with the International Rice Research Institute and is now managed by PhilRice, is the first rice monitoring system in Southeast Asia that uses satellite imagery and information and communication technology, crop modeling and smartphones.

Through PRISM, the extent of standing crops and the different crop stages all over the country can also be known, Barroga said.

*Raadee S. Sausa*





## 'Cefa makes it easier to secure PHL borders'

By RAADEE S. SAUSA [@raadeeboy](#)  
& BUTCH FERNANDEZ [@butchfBM](#)

**T**HE first border inspection facility for agricultural imports will make it easier for the Philippines to secure its borders and prevent the entry of transboundary animal diseases, according to government officials.

Department of Agriculture (DA) officials also said the Cold Examination Facility in Agriculture (Cefa) "signals to the world the Philippines's commitment to implementing meaningful reforms in the agriculture sector."

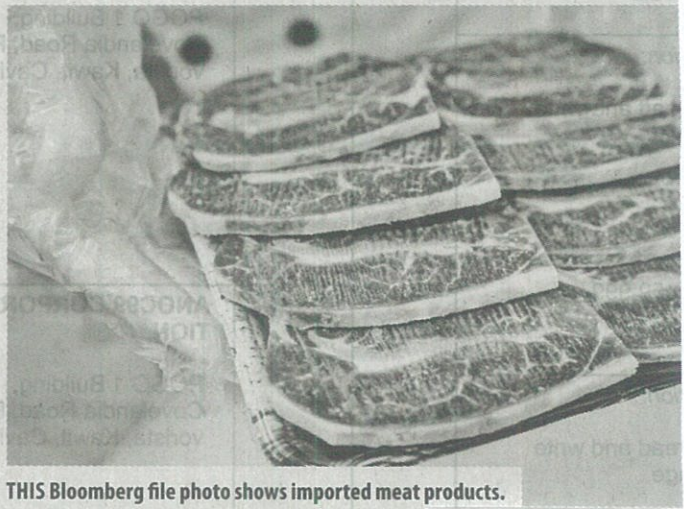
The DA has allotted P2.3 billion in its 2023 budget for the construction of the facility, which would include hubs in Cebu and Davao. The Cefa, which will house "state-of-the-art testing laboratories," aims to strengthen the country's capability to conduct first border inspections and improve its examination of containerized agricultural commodities and prevent smuggling.

"All imported agri-fishery products are to undergo a 100 percent examination by the various food regulators like the Bureaus of Animal Industry [BAI], Plant Industry [BPI], Fisheries and Aquatic Resources [BFAR], as well as the National Meat Inspection Service [NMIS]," DA Assistant Secretary James Layug said during the signing of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) on Cefa last July 20.

"From the port of entry, the commodities are brought to the various cold storage facilities, which are beyond our supervision...the CEFA makes it easier to secure the borders."

The DA partnered with Pacific Roadlink Logistics Inc. (PRLI) for the construction of the country's first border inspection facility on its property at General Alejo Santos Highway, Angat, Bulacan.

Under the MOU, the PRLI allows the government to use for a maximum of 25 years, its 10-hectare land for the Cefa, which will include a laboratory, incinerator, container yard, and truck parking, among others.



THIS Bloomberg file photo shows imported meat products.

The facility will be operated by the DA's Food Safety and Regulatory Agencies, BAI, BPI, BFAR and NAMIS. Its construction is expected to be finished within 6 to 8 months.

The facility will initially function as a 24-hour Off-Dock Custom Facility to handle agricultural importations from the country's two main ports: Port of Manila and Manila International Container Port.

Once operational, the DA said the facility is expected to employ about 1,500-2,000 unskilled workers in Bulacan.

### 'A good step forward'

DISEASES that threaten the country's agricultural sector can now be more effectively averted by Cefa, according to the chief of the Senate agriculture panel. Senator Cynthia Villar made

this point in her inaugural speech at the recent groundbreaking rites launching Cefa.

Villar, whose committee has held numerous hearings and investigations on rampant smuggling of farm goods, and the ability of unscrupulous importers to bring in diseased animal meat, joined Senior Agriculture Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban in the groundbreaking that farm groups have hailed as "a good step forward."

"This is the first, and we hope that we will be at the groundbreaking ceremonies of the other two more inspection facilities to be put up in Cebu and Davao," she said. "The groundbreaking and MOU signing for the establishment of our very first border control facility is a milestone for our country."

Villar said Cefa complies with the Food Safety Act of 2013 or Republic Act 10611. "The lack of adherence to the Food Safety Act of 2013 has led to the inadequate management of the African swine fever challenge, and created a risk of other diseases

in livestock entering the Philippines."

With the construction of Cefa, the senator said the risk of diseases and other potential threats to the Philippine agriculture sector will be minimized.

Through the comprehensive examination and inspection protocols, she said Cefa will be "a crucial tool" in detecting and preventing the spread of diseases in livestock, reducing the likelihood of outbreaks.

This, she said, is "a proactive approach" that will protect the agricultural sector and local communities from potential epidemics, ensuring the stability of food production.

All developed countries, Villar noted, have these facilities as part of their strengthened food safety and quarantine, inspection regulations.

Apart from the laboratories, the senator said the facility will also feature a crematorium to ensure the safe disposal of confirmed agricultural commodities with quarantine violations, if these cannot be returned to origin.





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## P9-M DAM TO INCREASE RICE OUTPUT IN CAGAYAN TOWN

**SANTA ANA, Cagayan:** To boost food production, the P9-million Department of Agriculture (DA)-funded San Juan diversion dam in San Juan village here was completed and turned over to the local government unit (LGU) in this coastal town.

DA Regional Field Office 2 (DA-RFO2) Executive Director Narciso Edillo said the diversion dam, which will be under the management of the LGU here led by Mayor Nelson Robinion, has the capacity to supply water irrigation to some 30 farmer beneficiaries.

Edillo also said the 53-meter long dam, which was finally turned over on Friday, July 21, 2023, is located at San Juan sub-village of Barangay Casambalangan in this town under the General Appropriations Act of 2023.

"In our quest for food security, we need to increase production. In doing so, we need

irrigation. This diversion dam will raise the water level and redirect it to your fields," Edillo told the farmers during the turnover.

Robinion thanked the DA-RFO2, saying "this project means a lot to the small-holding farmers of Santa Ana, especially Casambalangan."

He also said Casambalangan, a farming and fishing community, is a mix of agricultural and commercial economy.

"Most of the commercial and industrial activities are at Casambalangan's Port Irene within the Cagayan Special Economic Zone," Robinion added.

He said some of its agricultural and aquatic products are rice, corn, peanut, fish, lumber and shells and thus with the San Juan diversion dam, the farmers can improve their rice yields.

It was Robinion who requested the construction of the diversion dam from the DA-RFO2 to help the members of the San



**HARVEST BOOSTER** A 53-meter long dam benefiting 30 farmer beneficiaries has been turned over by the Department of Agriculture Regional Field Office 2 headed by Executive Director Narciso Edillo (second from right) to the local government unit of Santa Ana, Cagayan headed by Mayor Nelson Robinion (fourth from left) on Friday, July 21, 2023.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Juan Casambalangan Farmers Association Inc.

The DA-RFO2 said the construction of the diversion dam that has a service area of 46 hectares started March 6, 2023 and

was finished on July 12, 2023 with the technical assistance of DA-RFO2 Agricultural Engineering Division.

**LEANDER C. DOMINGO**





## Editorial

### Solar-powered irrigation addresses food, climate, energy issues

**T**HE Department of Agriculture (DA) has announced that it will be developing climate-resilient water infrastructure as part of its long-term strategy, not only to stave off the debilitating impact of global warming but to improve farm productivity as well.

A big part of the strategy calls for widening the use of solar-powered communal irrigation, a concept that has firmly taken hold in South and Central Asia and Northern Africa.

A solar-powered irrigation system (SPIS) provides renewable, affordable energy for pumping water to farmlands. It is particularly suitable for rural areas too remote to be connected to an electricity grid.

According to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IREA), a power system that harnesses renewable energy "would be less water-intensive than one dependent on fossil fuels." Adopting renewables like solar "helps to rein in cost volatility, bolster energy security, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to long-term food sustainability."

As gleaned from government data, only 1.2 million hectares out of the 3.9 million hectares of rice farms in the country benefit from communal irrigation systems that allow farmers to plant rice twice a year. The other 2.7 million hectares rely on rainwater, restricting farmers there to planting rice only once a year.

Because there are not enough irrigated lands, the government must agonize over how much water from its reservoirs to allocate to farms and urban users.

The same scenario plays out every year. As the rain-starved Angat Dam nears or surpasses its critical level, the National Water Resources Board reduces the water flow to both Metro Manila and farmlands in the surrounding provinces. The water concessionaires in the metropolis resort to rationing, and the farmers lose part of their harvest. Often, urban users get priority because, as the board explains, farmers don't need irrigation once they have harvested their crops anyway.

Such decisions, however, are getting harder to make now that climate change has spawned more prolonged and severe dry spells and droughts, making water allocation crucial.

The Agriculture department actually set in motion an SPIS program in 2017 as a flagship project supervised by the Bureau of Soils and Water Management. Under the project, the department subsidizes the building of a solar irrigation system for rice farmers and other crop growers in a rain-fed area.

The project has benefited small farming communities in Ilocos Norte, Lanao del Sur, and Ilagan City in Isabela. It's a modest start, and times call for the project to be expanded to a national scale.

The DA has created a Water Resources Management Office (WRMO) to oversee the management and sustainability of the SPIS program.

There is an urgency to bring the Philippines' SPIS project up to speed.

The IREA predicts that by 2050, global demand for energy will nearly double, while demand for water and food will increase by over 50 percent. "Meeting this surge of demand presents a tremendous challenge, given competing needs for limited resources amid heightened climate change effects," the agency said.

The so-called water-energy-food nexus must be at the core of any government policy. Because they interconnect, interventions in one area can cause unexpected impacts in another.

"To overcome the increasing constraints the world faces, we need to fundamentally rethink how we produce and consume energy in relation to the water and food sectors," IREA said.

Seventy percent of the world's freshwater is diverted to agriculture. As agricultural production goes up, the need for irrigated water grows. Farmlands need water to yield bigger harvests, the key to food security.

Renewable energy, on the other hand, reduces the carbon footprint of delivering water to farms.

Side by side with establishing solar irrigation systems, the DA will set up water-impounding facilities in highland areas to capture rainfall, upgrade irrigation facilities to optimize water delivery and cut wastage. It will also build flood control and sea wall structures in flood-prone areas.

It would therefore be wise for President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to give the SPIS program the attention it deserves.





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## El Niño could boost yields for some crops

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said El Niño can also increase harvest for some crops, especially when that weather phenomenon is weak or moderate in irrigated rice lands that are water-sufficient.

"Many fear El Niño because of crop losses, reduced food supplies, and water resources depletion. But not too many realize that El Niño can also increase yield for some crops," Agriculture Undersecretary for Rice Industry Development Leocadio Sebastian said in a statement on Saturday.

"We are only talking about rice in irrigated areas but in rainfed or upland sites corn and monggo (mung bean) would thrive along with any other root crops," he said.

Sebastian noted that when El Niño is weak to moderate, like what occurred in 2002, 2004, and 2007, crop production can still increase.

"While the weak El Niño of 2019 caused declines in output in non-irrigated areas, production in irrigated rice fields increased," he said.

He also noted that sunny weather brings higher palay (unmilled rice) yields and better milling recovery from palay harvest with better quality.

Meanwhile, Sebastian urged DA field officials to apply their knowledge of agricultural technology such as crop science, crop physiology, agronomy, and agro meteorology when analyzing historical and current data on the El Niño's impact on agriculture.

"Expected to be negatively impacted by El Niño during the dry

season are water-deficient areas like those in the tail ends of irrigation systems and the rainfed areas," he said.

Since 2000, seven El Niño episodes have so far hit the country. These were in 2002, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2015 and 2016 and 2019. During mild El Niño, palay production still increased such as in 2002, 2004, and 2007.

DA cited the data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showing palay production in 2001 was at 12.95 million metric tons (MT), rising to 13.27 million MT in 2002, an El Niño year. Palay output also inched up to 14.5 million MT in 2004, another El Niño year, from 13.50 million MT in 2003, and from 15.33 million MT in 2006, to 16.24 million MT in 2007, also with El Niño persisting.

"Production recovered after the 2015-2016 El Niño more dramatically at 19.28 million MT in 2017, dropping in the 2019 El Niño to 18.81 million MT before recovering ground to 19.29 million MT in 2020," it said.

Sebastian noted that forecast of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) of moderate to strong El Niño by December this year should not indicate a "doomsday scenario" for the rice sector, as palay output will also depend on the amount of rainfall and water reserves accumulated in the dams and reservoirs for the 2024 dry season.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL





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## NIA properties excluded from Bangsamoro land claims

BY ASHZEL HACHERO

THE Department of Justice has thumbed down the claim of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) on properties and assets of the National Irrigation Authority (NIA) in its jurisdiction, saying its authority extends only to communal irrigation system (CIS).

In a legal opinion dated July 8, the DOJ through Undersecretary Nicholas Felix sided with the NIA which sought its legal opinion on the interpretation of Section 37, Article XIII (Region Economy and Patrimony) and Section 11, Article XVI (Bangsamoro Transition Authority of Republic Act 11054 or the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao).

The NIA took the position that the authority granted to the Bangsamoro government in Section 37 is limited only to CIS, adding that pursuant to Section 11, the properties and assets that it should turn over to the latter should be confined to CIS in the region.

On the other hand, the Bangsamoro Government Intergovernmental Relations Body (IGRB) took the view that its authority is not limited to CIS, and that properties and assets to be transferred to it should include, among others, the NIA office building in Cotabato City.

Despite several meetings to find a solution, the NIA and IGRB failed to resolve their opposing views, hence the request for a legal opinion from the DOJ.

The DOJ, siding with the NIA, said, "After a careful review of the applicable laws and jurisprudence, we opine that the Bangsamoro Government's authority over the irrigation system in the BARMM extends only to communal irrigation system and thus, only the properties and assets confined to the CIS should be turned over to the Bangsamoro Government."

The DOJ further said that under Section 2 of Presidential Decree 552, the authority to "operate, maintain and administer all national irrigation systems is vested in the NIA."

"The cited provision also provides that the NIA, has among others, the authority to temporarily administer all government-funded communal and pump irrigation systems," the DOJ added.

It also said the BARMM Law authorizes the Bangsamoro government to exercise its power over the irrigation system in the region.

The DOJ said the Bangsamoro Administrative Code shows that "there is no ministry or agency created in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region that performs the function of the NIA."

"Nothing in the powers and functions in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Agrarian Reform (MAFAR), which is the Department of Agriculture's counterpart in the Bangsamoro Government, can be considered as similar to the NIA's primary mandate to construct, improve, rehabilitate and administer irrigation systems," the DOJ said.





## Capiz solon fails in bid to quash subpoena in graft trial vs ex-DA chiefs

**BY PETER TABINGO**

THE Sandiganbayan has denied a motion filed by Capiz Rep. Jane Tan Castro seeking the quashal of the subpoena duces tecum/ad testificandum issued by the Sandiganbayan in connection to the graft trial against former Agriculture Secretaries Proceso Alcala and Bernie Fondevilla.

Fondevilla served as acting DA chief from March to June 2010 during the Arroyo administration and was succeeded by Alcala, who served six years until June 30, 2016 under the Aquino presidency.

The Sixth Division of the Sandiganbayan said the Western Visayas lawmaker failed to raise a valid ground to quash the subpoena issued by the anti-graft court on June 19, 2023.

Castro was required to submit a judicial affidavit to the division clerk of court and to testify in both cases.

Defendants sought production in court of a letter request dated March 9, 2010 which originated from the Office of the Representative of the Second Legislative District of Capiz. Former Rep. Fredenil Castro was the signatory in the said letter.

Fondevilla was charged in the first graft case together with former Bureau of Soils and Water Management (BSWM) Silvino Tejada, Inspection Committee chairman Uldarico Andal, Procurement Unit head Sonia Salguero, Bids and Awards Committee Rodelio Carating, Diosdado Manalus, Ernesto Brampio; and BSWM officers Ester S. Santos, Arnulfo Gesite, Wilfredo Sanidad, and Rafael Monte, and private defendants Elmer

Baquiran and Eduardo Villamor concerning the alleged anomalous procurement of 1,500 shallow tube well (STW) pump and engines with a total value of P116.925 million on April 12, 2010.

Graft investigators from the Office of the Ombudsman said the contract was awarded to Agricom via negotiated procurement.

On the other hand, Alcala was named in the second graft case involving the purchase of 375 STW pumps and engines worth P29.23 million based on a request by Tejada.

Prosecutors said the transaction was anomalous since the negotiated procurement pushed through when there was no second failed public bidding.

A team of government auditors from the Commission on Audit found that many STW pumps and engines went to waste, having been left undistributed and idle because the supposed beneficiaries did not want them.

In her motion to quash, Castro pointed out that she is a first-term legislator having been elected to the post in the May 9, 2022 elections while the cases were filed back in 2019 before the assumed her office.

She added that she does not know any of the defendants aside from having no personal knowledge of any matter relative to the pending cases hence, requiring her to testify in court would only be a waste of time.

Defendant BSWM executives argued that the court may consider continuity of office and possible availability of records and information regarding the procurement transactions.





## 'Rethink pro-import stance on rice'

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE government must rethink its pro-import policy on rice as two of the world's top suppliers of the grain intend to slash the volumes that will be made available for global trade, according to the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG).

Last week, India ordered a stop to its largest rice export category to limit the increase in domestic prices. Vietnam said last May it will cut annual rice exports by 44 percent by 2030, citing the need to boost exports of higher quality rice while also ensuring domestic supply and environmental protection.

"Seven years is still a long time but we must change the narrative now. The most crucial is for the country's economic team to accept that they failed miserably in equating

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Several varieties of rice are sold in a public market in Manila on June 26, 2023. Farm groups say government incentives have helped reduce the cost of production of palay. (Photo by ROLLY SALVADOR)

unlimited rice importation and lowering rice tariffs as our primal solution to combat inflation. Rice is a vulnerable global commodity since less than 10 percent of all production are traded globally," Jayson Cainglet, SINAG executive director, said in a statement.

According to Cainglet, the international rice market is considered "very thin" with only five major rice exporting countries: India, Vietnam, Thailand, Pakistan

and Myanmar.

"The decision of India, with 30 percent of global rice production, and Vietnam, with 15 percent of total rice exports but (comprise) 80 to 85 percent of our rice imports, will heavily impact on all net rice importing countries, especially the Philippines, if we continue policies that incentivize a few privileged importers and favored traders," Cainglet warned.

SINAG said the government

should pour additional support to local rice producers apart from incentivizing local millers to promote food sovereignty and veer away from dependence to imports.

"The last two cropping seasons have been very positive to our rice farmers because of the extended help of the private sector buying palay from P21 per kilogram (kg) and up and the increased fuel and fertilizer subsidies from the gov-

ernment. Farmgate prices have increased and cost of producing palay has been reduced because of these interventions," Cainglet said.

"These developments are encouraging farmers to plant and more institutional support from the DA (Department of Agriculture) would further encourage the local rice industry," Cainglet added.

Based on data from the Bureau of Plant Industry, of the 3.83 million metric tons (MT) of imported

rice that entered the country in 2022, 3.18 million MT or 83 percent was from Vietnam while 10,094.54 MT or only 0.26 percent was from India.

As of July 13, a total of 1.89 million MT of imported rice has arrived in the country, with the bulk at 88.9 percent or 1.68 million MT from Vietnam and only 12,023.89 MT or 0.64 percent from India.

Based on public markets moni-

toring by the DA in the National Capital Region as of Friday, the per kilogram price of imported rice ranges from P48 to P58 for special variety, P45 to P50 for premium and P41 to P48 for well milled.

No data is available on the price of regular milled rice.

For local rice, the special variety costs P48 to P60 per kg; premium, P42 to P49 per kg; well-milled, P40 to P49 per kg; and regular milled at P36 to P44 per kg.

## RETHINK



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## **BARMM gov't has no authority over NIA properties – DOJ**

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) government cannot assume authority over all properties of the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) situated in the region due to laws and jurisprudence, according to the Department of Justice (DOJ).

In a legal opinion written by Justice Undersecretary Nicholas Felix Ty, the DOJ said the BARMM may take control only of communal irrigation systems (CIS), which are "small-scale and constructed with the participation of the farmer-beneficiaries."

The DOJ sent the legal opinion to Deputy Executive Secretary for general administration Naealla Aguinaldo.

The legal opinion addressed the failure of both the NIA and the BARMM's intergovernmental relations body to resolve the conflict over the transfer of all properties and assets of the irrigation agency to the BARMM.

The NIA maintains that the properties that should be turned over to the BARMM

are limited to CIS.

The BARMM insisted otherwise and wanted the NIA building in Cotabato City to be placed under its jurisdiction, citing provisions of the Bangsamoro Organic Law.

After reviewing applicable laws, the DOJ said that the BARMM's authority over the irrigation system in the region extends only to CIS.

The DOJ said only properties and assets confined to CIS should be turned over to the Bangsamoro government.

The NIA will maintain and operate national irrigation systems, which are "large and medium schemes," the DOJ said.

It said there was no agency created in the BARMM that performs functions similar to the NIA.

Even the BARMM's Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Agrarian Reform – the Department of Agriculture's counterpart in the Bangsamoro government – does not perform NIA's functions, the DOJ said.

– Neil Jayson Servillos





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## BUSINESSMIRROR AGRI PAGE, REPORTER INDUCTED INTO 'BINHI' HALL OF FAME

STAYING true to its vision of providing a broader look at today's business enabled the *BusinessMirror* to achieve a rare feat in Philippine agricultural journalism history: having two Hall of Fame inductees on a single night.

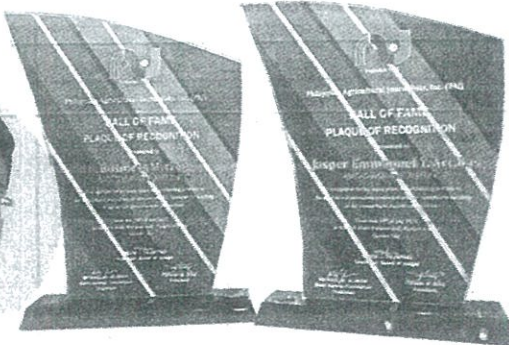
The *BusinessMirror*'s Agri-Commodities page, which is edited by Associate Editor Jennifer A. Ng, was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Binhi Awards of the Philippine Agricultural Journalists (PAJ) last Thursday.

It was elevated to the PAJ's Hall of Fame for winning the Best Agriculture Section of a National Newspaper award for four years (2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019).

*BusinessMirror* reporter Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas was



ARCALAS



also inducted into the Hall of Fame for bagging the Agricultural Journalist of the Year award for three consecutive years (2018, 2019 and 2020).

This is Arcalas's second Hall of Fame award. In 2021, he received the Oriental Leaf Award and joined the Bright Leaf Hall of Fame.

PAJ said awardees are elevated to the Hall of Fame after winning the top prize in the same category of the Binhi awards thrice.

Arcalas also won the 2023 Binhi's Rice Story of the Year Award for his story titled "PHL to WTO: Rice trade liberalization regime stays as is" (<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2022/12/22/phl-to-wto-rice-trade-liberalization-regime-stays-as-is/>). The story discussed the current administration's policy regarding the Philippines's current liberalized rice trade regime, which started

in 2019 following the enactment of the landmark Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Trade Liberalization Act.

*BusinessMirror* Senior Editor Dennis D. Estopace represented the newspaper during the awarding ceremony held at the National Food Authority auditorium in Quezon City on July 20.

The Binhi Awards was sponsored by conglomerate San Miguel Corp.



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## PHL must work 'double time' as rice exporters cut back

By CAI U. ORDINARIO [@caiordinario](#)

**T**HE national government needs to work "double time" in terms of looking for cheap and accessible sources of rice imports in light of the decision of Vietnam and India to limit rice exports, according to local economists.

DeLa Salle University economist Maria Ella Oplas noted that Vietnam accounts for around 70 percent of the country's rice imports while India accounts for 3 percent.

Given the amount of rice imports from these two countries, local economists said Filipinos should soon brace for higher rice prices.

"Unless we find new cheaper rice supplies it will definitely raise imported rice prices," Oplas said. "It is not only the Philippines who will look for supply so it's expected that prices will go up. Our government should work double time."

University of Asia and the Pacific economist Senen Reyes told the BUSINESSMIRROR the government should explore bilateral trade talks with potential sources of rice.

"The actual impact of the El Nino

will be a factor in the price increase though some say that Vietnam's output will be stable thus price will be good," Reyes said.

Ateneo de Manila University Leonardo Lanzona said this is a significant challenge for the country simply because the government "simply allowed imports" without helping farmers.

"The government should turn problems into opportunities for greater efficiency and inclusivity, and not turn its back on issues by means of easy and palliative solutions. We need to go back to the root of the problems," Lanzona said.

"It will be less costly and risky for the farmers if the government were to recommend and develop new technologies that result in greater production," he added.



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## Customs seizes ₱24-B smuggled goods in H1

By CHINO LEYCO

**T**he Bureau of Customs (BOC) carried out anti-smuggling operations in the first half of the year, resulting in the confiscation of illicit goods, including agricultural products and tobacco, with an estimated value of nearly P24 billion.

In a report, Customs Commissioner Bienvenido Y. Rubio said the bureau, which contributes about a quarter of the government's income, conducted anti-smuggling operations that led to 603 seizures valued at P23.851 billion from January to June 2023.

Rubio said Customs seized a variety of commodities, including counterfeit products, agricultural goods, tobacco products, illegal drugs, and general merchandise.

Notable seizures included P86 million worth of misdeclared sugar from Hong Kong at Subic Port last March 15; P1.4 billion worth of imported cigarettes at a Sulu warehouse last March 2; and P3.8 million worth of shabu intercepted at a warehouse in NAIA last May 8.

The fuel marking program implemented by Customs also showed notable advancement, as it successfully marked 9.42 billion liters of fuel, equivalent to P114.53 billion in duties and taxes.

Rubio said this achievement has effectively combated illicit fuel trade in the country.

Furthermore, the bureau demonstrated firm resolve in dealing with customs law violators by revoking the accreditation of 33 customs brokers and 85 importers.

In addition, 74 criminal complaints were filed with the

Department of Justice (DOJ), while two administrative complaints were lodged with the Professional Regulation Commission against individuals who violated customs laws.

Rubio said the strengthened collaborations with the DOJ to improve prosecution measures.

Since assuming office in February, Rubio has placed a high priority on modernizing the Customs' systems and streamlining customs processes.

This effort has yielded an impressive digitalization rate of 96.39 percent for 160 out of 166 customs procedures outlined in the 2021 Citizen's Charter.

Ongoing ICT projects, including the E-Service Catalog System, Document Management System, Over Staying Cargo Tracking System, Automated Export Declaration System (AEDS), and Customs Auction Monitoring System, contribute to increased efficiency and transparency.

Customs' endeavors to streamline procedures and improve trade facilitation have produced outcomes as the Philippines has ascended 17 spots in the World Bank Logistics Performance Index (LPI), now ranking 43rd out of 139 countries.

During the period of January to June, Customs exceeded its revenue target by recording a total collection of P433.433 billion, surpassing the goal by 3.04 percent or P12.768 billion.

Rubio attributed this accomplishment to the agency's enhanced system for determining customs' value, resulting in a higher rate of assessment.





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## Senate aims to pass 20 priority bills by December 2023 – Zubiri

By HANNAH TORREGOZA and ELLSON QUISMORIO

The Senate is ready to hit the ground running and pass priority bills and other key pieces of legislation when it opens the Second Regular Session of the 19th Congress today, according to Senate President Juan Miguel "Migz" Zubiri.

Among the priority bills the Senate intends to pass before the end of the year include the proposed Public-Private Partnership Act, which will amend Republic Act No. 6957 or the "Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT)" Law; the creation of a National Disease Prevention Management Authority; the proposed

Internet Transactions Act; the establishment of the Medical Reserve Corps and the Virology Institute of the Philippines; the reinstatement of the mandatory Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) Program; and the bill revitalizing the country's salt industry.

Also up for deliberations are the proposed Real Property Valuation and Assessment Reform Act; the proposed E-Governance and E-Government Act; Ease of Paying Taxes Act; the National Government Rightsizing Act; Automatic Income Classification of Local Government Units; and the bills providing for a Unified System for Separation, Retirement and Pension of Military and Uniformed Services; and a New Philippine Passport Law.

The Senate is also aiming to pursue the passage of the proposed Waste-to-Energy Act; Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers; the proposed "Trabaho Para Sa Bayan" Act; as well as the Anti-Financial Scamming Act, and proposed amendments to the Bank Secrecy Law.

"We made a commitment that, on the part of the Senate, we will pass 20 priority bills by December, 2023," Zubiri said.

"We need to hit the ground running," the Senate leader stressed.

Zubiri also said the Upper Chamber is determined to pursue the bill increasing the daily minimum wage of workers through a legislated nationwide wage hike to help uplift the lives of Filipinos.

The Senate leader has been pushing for a ₱150 minimum wage hike for Metro Manila workers and other regions.

The Senate will also push for the third reading passage of the Philippine Defense Industry Development Act (PDIDA), Cybersecurity Act, and proposed amendments to the procurement provisions of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Modernization Act.

The Senate will also continue to uphold and stand for the Philippines' sovereign rights over the West Philippine Sea by passing a resolution supporting calls for the government to bring the country's grievances against China's incursions in Philippine waters before the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

"The Senate is the last bastion of democracy. It is important to maintain independence," the Senate chief reiterated.

### House assures quick passage of 2024 budget

House Speaker Martin Romualdez has guaranteed the swift approval of another proposed national budget, this time for the year 2024.

Five weeks of "solid work" should be enough to complete the chamber's work on the national budget, the precursor of which is the National Expenditure Program (NEP), he said.

"Maybalitana ang DBM (Department of Budget and Management) ay magsusumite ng ating 2024 budget na NEP, National Expenditure Program, a week after the SONA (State of the Nation Address)," Romualdez said.

"Pag nangyari po yan, sigurado

tatapusan natin yung budget before the break, our October break (If that happens, for sure we will finish the budget before the break, our October break).

"Kaya (That's why) we average at least five weeks of solid work on the budget deliberations, considerations, and review and approval through the third reading," Romualdez said.

The budget process in the House — which possesses the power of the purse — typically begins with hearings by the Committee on Appropriations on the individual budgets of the different departments and agencies.

The House had already carried out what Romualdez called "pre-NEP consultations" with various departments even before the sine die adjournment of the first regular session last May 31.

"So, we are confident with the processes and protocols and the procedures that we have na matatapos natin ang ating national budget 2024 (that we will be able to finish the national budget 2024), that is the most important piece of legislation," the Speaker said.

The NEP 2024 is pegged at ₱5.768 trillion. In comparison, the enacted 2023 budget law — also known as the General Appropriations Act (GAA) — is worth ₱5.268 trillion, the largest national budget in Philippine history. It was the first full-year outlay of the Marcos administration.

### 50 pending bills

Camarines Sur 2nd district Rep. LRay Villafuerte is prodding senators to act on close to 50 bills, including 30 that are considered priority measures of the Marcos administration, that have already been passed by the House of Representatives.

"The approval of this slew of priority and non-priority bills this second regular session of the 19th Congress would go a long way in helping President Marcos achieve his government's paramount goals of achieving a strong and sustainable economy post-pandemic," Villafuerte said.

According to Villafuerte, there are at least 47 bills composed of 30 Marcos priority measures and 17 other bills that the Senate needs to tackle.

Villafuerte, majority leader of the powerful Commission on Appointments (CA), noted that the House of Representatives had already passed these measures on third and final reading during the first regular session of the 19th Congress.

"This call for expeditious yet exhaustive action on priority and other essential bills pending in the Congress that are supportive of the President's 'Peace and Prosperity' vision is in keeping with the full backing of the NUP (National Unity Party) for Mr. Marcos' legislative agenda as well as for the House leadership under Speaker Martin [Romualdez]," Villafuerte said.

Villafuerte believes that pursuing the Marcos administration's legislative agenda would lead to the creation of jobs, improvement of Filipinos' standard of living, enhancement of peace and order, and stronger resilience of the country against climate change and future external shocks.



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## Premature to claim victory vs food inflation - AMRO

By LOUELLA DESIDERIO

The Association of South-east Asian Nations + 3 Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO) said it may be too soon to claim victory over food price inflation in the ASEAN+3 given risks to global food prices posed by uncertainties in the Russia-Ukraine war and the El Niño weather phenomenon.

"It may be premature for ASEAN+3 economies to claim victory over food price inflation just yet. The outlook for global food commodity prices remains precarious," the AMRO said in its latest note.

While global food and energy commodity prices have fallen from their highs in 2022, AMRO said there are risks to the global food outlook that could also affect the ASEAN+3.

Among these risks is the collapse of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which allowed Ukraine to export food and fertilizers from three ports to the world market.

The initiative expired last July 17, after Russia suspended its participation in the deal.

AMRO said this could unsettle wheat, maize, oilseed and fertilizer markets and potentially raise prices.

Another risk to the global food prices is El Niño.

"El Niño conditions that are

forecast for mid-2023 through early 2024 could result in record-high temperatures and altered rainfall patterns, likewise affecting crop yields and prices," AMRO said.

It said ASEAN+3 economies also need to monitor the impact of last year's spike in fertilizer prices on global food supply.

While fertilizers provide necessary nutrients to boost crop yields, their use has declined globally over the last two years, including in China as well as in palm oil and rice-producing countries in Southeast Asia amid a sharp rise in prices.

"Going forward, depressed fertilizer usage could dampen domestic agricultural production and keep food prices elevated in the ASEAN+3," AMRO said.

It said reduced fertilizer usage due to high import costs along with adverse weather conditions, has already led to lower harvests and increases in international sugar and rice prices this year, which are also feeding into retail prices in Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines.

"If not mitigated, rising sugar and rice prices could keep food inflation elevated, as sugar is an input for several processed food products while rice is a consumer staple in Asia," AMRO said.

Turn to B2

### Premature From B1

Earlier this month, national statistician Dennis Mapa said that while the trend in the Philippines' overall inflation is going down, there are still risks from items, including rice, with prices of the staple slowly increasing.

"The increases are relatively small on the average and we will check with other agencies what the reasons are for the increases," he said.

To manage potential price pressures, AMRO said ASEAN+3 monetary authorities have to maintain their hawkish stance despite having

raised policy rates since early 2022 in response to higher inflation.

"At this point in the inflation cycle, it is critical that monetary authorities maintain a tightening bias until underlying price pressures have clearly stabilized," it said.

It also said measures to provide relief to high inflation in the ASEAN+3 region should be withdrawn once price pressures abate.

AMRO also cited the importance of regional cooperation through resource sharing and risk management.





## House to pass last 9 must bills -- Speaker

**SPEAKER** Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez has reaffirmed the House of Representatives' commitment to approve the remaining nine of the 44 urgent measures identified by the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC).

The nine remaining LEDAC bills in the House of Representatives are the Natural Gas Industry Enabling Law, Philippine Ecosystem and Natural Capital Accounting System Bill, National Employment Action Plan, Department of Water Services and Resources, amendments to the Electric Power Industry Act, Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act, Budget Modernization, National Defense Act, and Unified System of Separation, Retirement and Pension for Uniformed Personnel.

The LEDAC has now 44 priority

bills from 42 with the inclusion of Anti-Financial Account Scamming Act (AFASA) and the bill Amending Bank Secrecy Law as part of the 20 measures need to be approved before the year ends during the 2nd LEDAC meeting presided by no less than President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Romualdez Marcos, Jr.

AFASA and the bill Amending Bank Secrecy Law have both been approved by the House of Representatives on third and final reading and were transmitted to the Senate for action even before its inclusion to LEDAC measures, bringing to 35 the 44 LEDAC bills that were passed by the institution.

Before the First Regular Session of the 19th Congress ended last June, the House had approved a total of 33 out

### By Jester Manalastas

of the 42 priority measures identified by LEDAC.

The 44 LEDAC measures included four laws such as the SIM Registration Act, Postponement of Barangay / SK Elections, Amending the AFP Fixed Term Bill, Agrarian Reform Debts Condonation, and the Maharlika Investment Fund and ratified the bicam report on the Regional Specialty Centers in Hospitals.

The other LEDAC bills approved by the House of Representatives on third and final reading include Virology Institute of the Philippines, Passive Income and Financial Intermediary Taxation Act (PIFITA) (Package 4), National Disease Prevention Manage-

ment Authority or Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Health Emergency Auxiliary Reinforcement Team (HEART) Act, New Philippine Passport Act, Internet Transaction Act / E-Commerce Law, Waste-to-Energy Bill, Free Legal Assistance for Police and Soldiers, Apprenticeship Act, Amendment to the Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) / Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Act, Magna Carta of Barangay Health Workers, Valuation Reform Bill (Package 3), Eastern Visayas Development Authority (EVDA), Leyte Ecological Industrial Zone, Government Financial Institutions Unified Initiatives to Distressed Enterprises for Economic Recovery (GUIDE), Instituting a National Citizens Service Training (NCST) Program, Magna Carta of Seafarers, E-Governance Act / E-Gov-

ernment Act, Negros Island Region, Rightsizing the National Government, Ease of Paying Taxes, Automatic Income Classification Act for Local Government Units, Amendment to Universal Health Care Act, Infrastructure Development Plan/Build Build Build Program, National Land Use Act, Bureau of Immigration Modernization, and Philippine Salt Industry Development Act.

Romualdez said this can be attributed to the tireless efforts of the members of the House of Representatives as he also acknowledged that "the hard work is far from over."

"This will ensure exhaustive discussion and careful consideration of the measures, as well as give way to the deliberations of the 2024 General Appropriations Bill," Romualdez said.





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## Indonesia's cassava push leaves bitter taste in Borneo rainforest

GUNUNG MAS, Indonesia — The stream that supplied Indah Lestari's family with fish has dwindled to a trickle since rainforest surrounding her farm was cleared by Indonesian soldiers — leaving behind a barren and eerie landscape that resembles the surface of the moon.

Ms. Lestari, from Tewai Baru village in Gunung Mas regency, said she could do nothing when the armed troops seized half her land in late 2020 to make way for a huge cassava plantation meant to help boost domestic food supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We bought this land with our own money that we saved but they just came and grabbed it," she said inside her small wooden home as she rocked a child to sleep in a hammock, asking to use a pseudonym for fear of reprisals.

Rattled by COVID's disruption of global food supply chains and

price hikes caused by the Ukraine war, many countries launched policies aimed at bolstering their own supplies and cutting imports.

But in Indonesia, environmentalists say nature and indigenous people have paid a high price for the government's nationwide program to develop "food estates," or large-scale plantations for crops including cassava, rice and corn.

Cassava — a drought-tolerant root vegetable that thrives in tropical climates — is widely eaten in Indonesia, used to make savory snacks, desserts and traditional side dishes such as tiwul, a fluffy rice substitute. — **Thomson Reuters Foundation**

### FULL STORY



Read the full story by scanning the QR code with your smartphone or by typing the link [rebrand.ly/Cassava072423](https://rebrand.ly/Cassava072423)



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## Heat, war and export bans: Global food threats are on the rise

**A** Scorching temperatures ravage farms from the United States to China, crop harvests, fruit production and dairy output are all coming under pressure. That extreme weather is just one of threats to food supplies that are once again mounting around the world.

Last week, top rice exporter India banned some shipments of the commodity—a staple for about half of the world's population—to keep domestic prices in check. Russia quit a deal that allowed Ukrainian grain to flow safely across the Black Sea.

On top of that is the recent arrival of the El Niño weather pattern that may cause further damage to agriculture.

All of this is renewing concerns about food security and prices, creating a risk that rampant inflation on supermarket shelves will stick around for longer. That would be a fresh blow to consumers, who were just starting to see some better news after a long-running squeeze on household budgets.

"We're all still struggling under an

inflationary regime," said Tim Benton, a food security expert at Chatham House in London. "And although inflation is tailing off, that doesn't of course mean the prices are going down. It means they're just going up more slowly."

Extreme heat that's engulfing huge swaths of Asia, Europe and North America is just the latest challenge in what's been a rough year for farmers. They've had to grapple with bouts of extreme weather, including prolonged droughts, heavy rain and floods.

Right now, it's so hot in southern Europe that cows are producing less milk and tomatoes are being ruined. Grain harvests will be much smaller too after struggling with drought.

In Asia, the yields from China's rice fields are at risk, and US conditions for growing crops were at their worst in more than three decades in June, before the Midwest got some rain relief. Prices for rice in Asia recently reached a two-year high as importers built up inventories.

While the full extent of the damage will depend on how long the unfavorable conditions persist, there are already clear signs of destruction in fruit and vegetables in southern Europe, which supplies much of the continent.

In Sicily, some tomatoes have ominous-looking black rings, the result of a so-called blossom end rot, when extreme weather renders plants calcium-deficient.

"They're like burnt on the bottom," said Paddy Plunkett, head of global sourcing at importer Natoora who was sent a photo by a grower. "I've never seen it before."

Across Italy, weather-related damage to agriculture will exceed last year's losses of 6 billion euros (\$6.7 billion), according to farmers group Coldiretti.

The temperatures have sped up ripening or caused heat burns on everything from grapes to melons, apricots and aubergines. Bee activity and pollination is affected and wheat production is down, it said.

"This is not a just a regular hot summer,"

said Lorenzo Bazzana, an agronomist at Coldiretti. "They say plants should adapt to the climate changes, but we are talking about cultures that evolved slowly over thousands of years, they cannot adjust to a climate that keeps changing so quickly and so dramatically."

Beyond Europe's vegetable stalls, the good news is the grains market—key to food security of the poorest and import-dependent nations—is still well supplied, thanks to record harvests of soy and corn in Brazil. Top wheat exporter Russia is set for another bumper crop.

But uncertainties are piling up. In an apt illustration, wheat fluctuated throughout the week in response to a flurry of news from the Black Sea.

It rose on the collapse of export deal, before slipping back, then rose again as Russia threatened ships sailing to Ukraine ports. On Friday, it declined as Ukraine sought to restore the export deal.

More concerns stem from India's steps to



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**A FARMHAND sows rice saplings in a flooded paddy field in Bhivpuri, India, July 20. BLOOMBERG NEWS**

ban exports of non-basmati white rice to put a lid on inflation.

Retail rice prices in Delhi are up about 15 percent this year while the average nationwide price has gained 9 percent, according to data from the food ministry. The government may extend the restrictions to other rice varieties, Nomura Holdings Inc. warned.

Elsewhere in Asia, Thailand is asking farmers to limit rice planting to only one crop this year amid drought risks. In China, high temperatures will likely force the early ripening of the crop, impacting yields:

President Xi Jinping on Thursday called for greater efforts to secure grain security, state television reported.

Parts of the US are experiencing similar strains.

While rainfall levels have improved after hot and dry conditions earlier this year, the weather is expected to flip again across the Midwest next week and into early August, just as corn and soybean crops go through critical development stages, said Arlan Suderman, chief commodities economist at brokerage StoneX. **Bloomberg News**





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# India rice export ban could lead to higher prices

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

**G**LOBAL rice prices are seen to rise following India's ban on non-basmati white rice exports, a Fitch group unit said.

BMI Country Risk and Industry Research said in its commentary that the ban on those types of Indian grains further adds pressure to the global rice market.

"We believe that the Government of India's July 20 decision to introduce an immediate ban on the export of non-basmati white rice will have both material implications for Indian inflation as well as substantial ramifications for trends in the global rice market," it said.

The group cited the rise of Indian food price inflation in June to 4.5 percent year on year as an immediate prompt for the Indian government's decision to cut exports.

India, the world's top rice

exporter, banned shipments of non-basmati white rice to maintain domestic food prices at a comfortable level.

BMI also noted that the restriction announced in July indicated that between 30 and 40 percent of India's rice exports are now offline.

The United States Department of Agriculture earlier forecast that India would account for almost 41 percent of global rice exports by weight in 2023 to 2024, suggesting that India's latest ban could remove around 8 percent of expected rice volumes from the global market.

"As a result, the ban adds significant further upward price impetus to the global rice export market,"

the report said, adding that average prices were 13.9 percent higher in June 2023 than the previous 12 based on the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's rice price index.

Sought for comment, chief economist at Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Michael Ricafort said the ban could reduce global rice supplies, leading to some uptick in world rice prices, which, in turn, could lead to higher rice import prices for the Philippines.

"This could lead to some uptick in overall inflation, or at least a slower easing of the inflation/disinflation trend for the coming months since rice accounts for nearly 10 percent of the country's inflation," said Ricafort.

"However, the significant year-on-year reduction of Vietnam's rice exports and India's export ban would affect cheaper rice varieties," he said, noting that exports of more expensive Basmati rice

varieties would continue from India, including those exported to the Philippines that could be more profitable to sell at higher world prices.

Ricafort added that the possible reduction of rice imports by the Philippines would also coincide with the adverse effects of El Niño, especially from the latter part of 2023 to the first three months of 2024. This could potentially reduce local rice output.

For his part, ING Manila Bank senior economist Nicholas Antonio Mapa said that the loss of Indian rice exports would lower global supply, which would lead to upward pressure on the staple.

"In order to prepare for potential tightness in rice supply due to this disruption and El Niño, officials may need to act decisively to ensure timely importation of the grain as well as to help pour resources into ensuring local production improves at the soonest," said Mapa.





# Indian ban on rice exports stokes fears of global food inflation

John Reed in New Delhi, George Steer  
and Leslie Hook in London

INDIA has banned exports of non-basmati white rice, stoking fears of further global food inflation just as Russia's targeting of grain ships has pushed up wheat and corn prices.

India's ministry of consumer affairs said on Thursday it would prohibit exports to "lower the price as well as ensure availability in the domestic market". Rice prices in India have risen 11.5 per cent over the past year and 3 per cent over the past month, according to the ministry, reflecting a 35 per cent year-on-year surge in export volumes between April and June.

India is the world's biggest rice exporter, accounting for about 40 per cent of global exports. It is followed by Thailand and Vietnam, where prices for 5 per cent broken rice have also surged this year, raising costs for countries hoping to circumvent New Delhi's ban. Higher prices for the grain — a staple for billions of people worldwide — are likely



In this file photo taken on June 19, 2023, farmers plant rice saplings in a paddy field on the outskirts of Amritsar. The world's biggest rice exporter India has banned some overseas sales of the grain "with immediate effect", the government said, in a move that could drive international prices even higher. Photo by Narinder NANU / AFP



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to stoke global food inflation, analysts said.

In September, India imposed a 20 per cent duty on exports of unmilled white rice, husked brown rice, semi-milled rice and wholly milled rice. As with the latest ban, the duty did not extend to basmati, India's best-known variety of the grain.

India has been contending with higher food prices in recent weeks after heavy monsoon rains damaged crops and disrupted transport, raising the price of tomatoes and other staples.

"This is a knee-jerk reaction, especially given the fact that as

of July 1 the government's stocks of rice were three times the buffer stock norm," said Ashok Gulati, a professor at the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations. "We are in an extremely comfortable position as far as the stocks are concerned."

Gulati said the move would push up global rice prices and particularly hit countries in Africa. However, he noted that the announcement of the ban said exports could still be allowed to countries that applied for Indian government permission "to meet their food security needs and

based on the request of their government".

"This [export ban] is a huge deal given that India is such an important country for rice production," said Zanna Aleksahhina, grains analyst at commodities research group Mintec. "I hoped we had seen peak food inflation, but I'm concerned that might not be the case."

Global rice inventories are forecast to fall to a six-year low of about 170mn metric tonnes by the end of the year, Aleksahhina added, with extreme weather likely to wreak further havoc over

the coming months.

Kona Haque, head of research at ED&F Man, the agricultural trading house, said India's ban on non-basmati rice exports showed the impact of El Niño. Tightness in the rice market could have a knock-on impact on wheat, she said, because "the two, both key food staples, can be almost substitutes".

El Niño refers to a weather pattern that develops in the Pacific Ocean, as currents of warm water carry precipitation towards South America and create drier conditions in Australia and Asia.

India's ban comes in the same week as Russia has begun bombing Ukrainian grain silos and pulled out of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which for the past 11 months has allowed more than 30mn tonnes of Ukrainian grain and edible oils to be exported around the world. Wheat prices have jumped 11 per cent over the past five days. Corn has risen by almost 9 per cent.

Russia accounts for about one-fifth of the world's wheat exports, while Ukraine before the war accounted for about one-tenth.

"Countries are already dealing

with back-breaking food inflation, particularly poor countries," said Arif Husain, chief economist at the UN World Food Programme. "When you're especially dependent on food imports and your debt burden is severe, your currency is depreciating and interest rates are rising... if you're a poor country who imports your food or fertiliser, you're in trouble."

The World Trade Organization last year exempted the World Food Programme from export bans, Husain added. "If we wanted to purchase rice from India, we could still do that."

FT