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Congress asked: Pass audit, procurement bills

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ

[@joveemarie](#)

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Monday called on Congress to pass his priority measures that will enhance government audits and procurement.

In his second State of the Nation Address (SONA), the President said a new government procurement law and government auditing code will empower the entire government, which is deemed a "transformative" solution amid the changing times.

"Once again, on this same principle, I urge Congress to enact a new Government Procurement Law and a new Government Auditing Code, to make government procurement and auditing more attuned to these

changing times," he said.

According to him, cooperation is "key" within and among government agencies, the public and private sectors, business and academia, the government and foreign partners, and Filipinos themselves.

"We need the help and skills of the whole government and entire nation. And so, we shall do the same for the next five years. We seek not only to become more effective, but more, to become truly transformative," he said.

He said that this strategy would be put into practice through inter-agency collaboration, coordinated efforts across the three levels of government, and independent constitutional entities.

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He added that private sector advisory councils and national-local mechanisms have also been organized to establish the needed linkages.

Marcos said the Mandanas-Garcia ruling of the Supreme Court in 2018, which reflects the mandate of the Constitution and the Local Government Code, will take effect "soonest" to improve collaboration between the LGUs and the national government.

Marcos said all of the LGUs' necessary devolution transition plans have been completed.

"To fully prepare them for optimal devolution, the necessary technical and financial assistance is being extended to our local governments. In everything that we do, the enduring Filipino quality of Bayanihan will be our guide," he added.

Fisheries code

MEANWHILE, the President also urged Congress to pass amendments to the Fisheries Code.

"Our Fisheries Code must be revisited to incorporate and strengthen science-based analysis and determination of fishing areas. This approach will protect both the interests of our fisherfolk and our fisheries and aquatic resources," he said.

"To this end, we will seek the support of Congress to amend the Code to guarantee sustainable development of our fisheries sector in harmony with environmental balance," he added.

Marcos also asked Congress to pass the Tatak-Pinoy (Proudly Filipino) Law and the Blue Economy Law.

The proposed Tatak Pinoy Law, filed by Sen. Sonny Angara, seeks to enhance the capabilities and standards of local industries, level up the country's exports, create jobs, and ultimately make the economy more vibrant and competitive with the rest of the world.

The Blue Economy Law, pending in the House, seeks to serve as the basis for marine spatial planning, the determination of investments to enhance maritime domain awareness, the preservation of the value and sustainability

of ocean resources, and their protection from threats such as land-based pollution and over-fishing.

To maximize the economic and social benefits of Philippine maritime industries, Rep. Jose Francisco Benitez of Negros Occidental filed House Bill 69 to prioritize programs that promote the blue economy in the interest of national economic security.

Benitez explained that the blue economy is a framework for sustainable development of marine and coastal resources based on principles of stewardship and social responsibility.

House Bill 69, if passed into law, will strengthen interagency coordination and planning to identify the best use of maritime zones, including the EEZ, promote blue finance or funding for special economic zones concentrating on sustainable and strategic maritime industries, and enhance maritime domain awareness to flag threats to our marine environment, including unauthorized access, overexploitation, and pollution.

Marcos also pushed for the passage of essential tax measures under the Medium-Term Fiscal Framework, including an excise tax on single-use plastics, a VAT on digital services, the rationalization of the mining fiscal regime, a motor vehicle user's charge or road user's tax, and the Military and Uniformed Personnel Pension.

All these tax bills and the MUP are now in advanced stages in the House.

Also, the President said the bills creating the Department of Water Resources and Services, the amendment of the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act, the amendment of the Cooperative Code, the Anti-Financial Account Scamming Act, and the proclamation granting amnesty to rebel returnees must be passed. All these bills are currently under deliberation in the lower house.

Marcos also asked Congress to give its nod to bills easing the payment of taxes, LGU income classification, and the Philippine Immigration Act. Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez said these three bills, which are part of the LEDAC priorities, will be approved this year.



President presents wish list of priority bills

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Monday asked Congress to support his priority measures, some of which he considers "essential" to his administration's medium-term fiscal framework.

The bills include the excise tax, single-use plastics and digital services, as the President mentioned in his second State of the Nation Address (SONA).

He said that for the country to sustain its recovery from the Covid pandemic, Congress needs to back his administration's priority measures.

The President sought the passage of the proposed bills on the Rationalization of Mining Fiscal Regime, the Motor Vehicle Users Charge/Road Users Tax, and the Military and Uniform Personnel Pension.

He also considered as a priority the need to amend the Fisheries Code, the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act and the Cooperative Code.

Marcos also pushed for a new Government Procurement Law, a new Government Code, the Anti Financial Accounts Scamming Act, the Tatak Pinoy Law, the Blue Economy Law, the Ease of Paying Taxes, the LGU (Local Government Unit) Income Classification Law, and the Philippine Immigration Act.

Senate President Juan Miguel "Migz" Zubiri on Sunday assured the chamber will pass 20 bills labeled priority by both the legislative and executive branches by December.

► Priority A2

Zubiri said the Senate will also push for a legislated nationwide wage for workers.

Also on the Senate's "must" list is the proposed Public-Private Partnership Act, which will amend Republic Act (RA) 6957, or the "Build-Operate-Transfer" 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 Program; and the bill revitalizing the Philippines' salt industry.

The senators will also "work on the approval of measures aimed at improving and streamlining government transactions and services," Zubiri said.

These are the proposed Real Property Valuation and Assessment Reform Act; the proposed E-Governance and E-Government Act; the Ease of Paying Taxes Act; the National Government Rightsizing Act; the 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 also sees the passage of the proposed Waste-to-Energy Act, the Magna Carta for Filipino Seafarers, the proposed "Trabaho Para Sa Bayan" Act, the Anti-Financial Scamming Act, and the proposed amendments to the Bank Secrecy Law.

The following proposed measures, meanwhile, are scheduled for third and final reading: the Philippine Defense Industry Development Act, the Cybersecurity Act, and amendments to the procurement provisions of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Modernization Act.

BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO



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More investments in health, agri sought

A POLITICAL analyst urged President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to increase investments in health, education and agriculture programs as the country made its formal exit from the Covid-19 pandemic.

In an interview with *The Manila Times*, OCTA Research founder Ranjit Singh Rye said the lifting of the state of public health emergency by Marcos is an achievement by the current administration itself. However, he noted that much of the work during the pandemic was done by the past administration.

"But it is important for people to understand that exiting Covid, reopening the economy in a calibrated manner also took a lot of leadership and a lot of planning. Now it has been realized and formalized, and that is one major achievement of the President," Rye said. "If we are going to learn from the lessons of the past pandemic, we must realize that it is not a question of if but when the next pandemic will hit us. We need to prepare."

He stressed the importance of having science as part of public governance, enhanced disease surveillance and management, and paying more than lip service to strengthening human health resources.

"That means raising salaries, recruiting more nurses, building facilities. It should focus not just on mindless infrastructure but infrastructure for health, education and agriculture, and that should be the focus in the next few years," Rye said.

He also suggested that the proposed implementing rules and regulations for the recently passed Maha-

rika Investment Fund should note increased investments in education, health and agriculture development.

"I don't believe that the fund should just be allocated ambiguously in infrastructure. I think that the funds and resources should be given to the government to achieve certain things like improvements in health, education and agriculture, even if it is just infrastructure in those areas," Rye said.

He also believes that the proposal to move the Philippine Health Insurance Corp. to the Office of the President is not a sound idea to reform the state health insurer. Instead, he suggested structural reforms and public and private partnerships to digitize PhilHealth's records.

"One way is to ramp up efforts to have a national ID system so it is easier for us to check if the funds are utilized, and provide more ways of expanding accountability and transparency in the PhilHealth process," Rye said.

In a separate statement, militant health workers from public and private hospitals gave Marcos Jr. a failing grade, criticizing his "health for all" agenda as a year full of "empty rhetoric and mere hollow promises."

"He did not take any steps to fulfill his promise. In his one year in term, the health workers' situation further led to more misery: wages are low and taxes are high, benefits and allowances are unimplemented, public hospitals suffer chronic understaffing, while contractualization among our ranks is increasing," AHW President Robert Mendoza said in a statement.

RED MENDOZA

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PBBM to run after smugglers, hoarders

By BETHEENA UNITE

President Marcos warned smugglers, hoarders, and those who manipulate prices of basic commodities that their days are numbered.

In his second State of the Nation Address (SONA), Marcos lamented that the acts of smuggling and hoarding have played a role in the sudden rise of prices of basic commodities such as sugar and onions in the early stage of his leadership.

Before the entire nation, he issued a stern warning against them that the government will run after them.

"Isa sa mga dahilan ng pagtaas ng presyo ay ang mga smuggler, mga hoarder at mga nagmamaniipula ng presyo ng produktong agrikultural. Hina-habol at ihahabla natin sila (One the reasons of high prices are the smugglers, hoarders, and those who manipulate the prices of agricultural products. We are running after them, and we will file charges against them), the President said, gaining applause from the audience inside the Plenary Hall of the Batasan Pambansa in Quezon City on Monday, July 24.

The chief executive stressed that what these erring individuals are doing are not in line with the govern- ► 4

ment's goal to provide affordable food supply to Filipinos.

"Pandaraya ang kanilang ginagawa (What they are doing is fraud)," he said.

"Napapahamak hindi lamang ang mga magsasaka, kundi tayo na ring mga mamimili. Kaya hindi natin papayagan ang ganitong kalakaran (It is not just the farmers that are suffering but also the consumers. So, we will not allow this kind of scheme)," he added.

Similar to what he said early this month when he ordered the Department of Justice (DOJ) and National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) to conduct an investigation on syndicates behind the hoarding and smuggling of onions, Marcos has reiterated his stern warning to smugglers.

"Bilang na ang mga araw ng mga smugglers at hoarders na 'yan (The days of the smugglers and hoarders are numbered)," Marcos said.

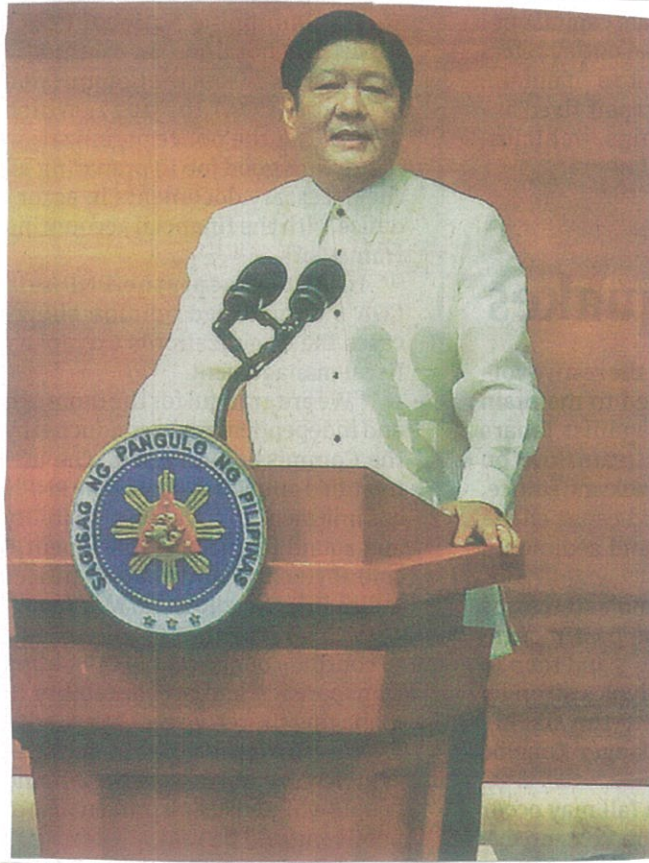
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Marcos vows to transform rejuvenated PH economy



Country's
financial
system
remains
strong, stable

By ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

Despite the bleak global prospects over the past few years caused by various factors, President Marcos said the country now boasts of a revived and rejuvenated economy, which his administration will continue to transform.

Marcos stressed this when he delivered his second State of the Nation Address (SONA) on Monday, July 24. ▶ 4

'NEW PH HAS ARRIVED' — With this declaration, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. (foreground) concludes his second State of the Nation Address (SONA) as Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri (left) and House Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez applaud the President's one-hour, 11-minute report to the Filipino people at the Batasang Pambansa on Monday, July 24, 2023. Photo below, at left, shows the President acknowledging the cheers as he arrives before a jam-packed Plenary Hall, while photo at right shows Vice President Sara Duterte in a Moro-inspired tribal wear, and Senator Imee Marcos wearing Cordillera-influenced Igorot attire. (Noel B. Pabalate)



In his speech, the President celebrated the country's high growth and reported that the Philippines remains one of the fastest-growing economies in the world despite the increase in prices of oil and other basic commodities.

"Sinuri nating mabuti ang sitwasyon. Sa tulong ng ating mga ekonomista, nakapagbalangkas tayo ng mga polisiya na magsisilbing pundasyon ng ating ekonomiya sa mga susunod na taon. Kasabay nito ang paglulunsad ng mga istrategiya na mapalakas sa kakayahan ng ating mga kababayan at mga sektor ng ating ekonomiya (We studied the situation well and with the help of our economists, we crafted policies that will serve as our economy's foundation for the next few years. Alongside this, we will launch strategies that would boost the capabilities of our people and the different sectors of the economy)," he said.

"While the global prospects are bleak, our economy posted a 7.6-percent growth in 2022—our highest growth rate in 46 years," he added.

According to Marcos, the country's growth for the first quarter of the year was recorded at 6.4 percent, which was still within the government's target of six to seven percent.

"We are still considered to be among the fastest-growing economies in the Asian region and in the world. It is a testament to our strong macroeconomic fundamentals," he said.

Marcos then asked Congress to continue supporting his government's legislative agenda and enact into laws the policies and reforms under its Medium-Term Fiscal Framework.

'Strong and stable'

According to President Marcos, the country's financial system remains strong and stable, with banks having strong capital and liquidity positions.

He likewise hailed how transactions have once again flourished with the relaxation of pandemic restrictions and the booming e-commerce that was undeterred by the pandemic.

"The digital economy contributed P2 trillion—the equivalent of 9.4 percent of our GDP (gross domestic product)," Marcos said.

"The economy is revived and rejuvenated, backstopped by a favorable, enabling environment and the strong rule of law," he added.

'Bagong Pilipinas'

In the same speech, the President lauded the people for stepping up and uniting for the country, saying their efforts contributed to the nation's sound state.

"Every Filipino have unanimously risen to the challenge to be part of the nation's future. Handa silang maghandog ng tulong, dahil mahal nila ang kanilang kapwa-Pilipino, at mahal na mahal nila ang Pilipinas (They are ready to help because they love their fellowmen and they love the Philippines)," he said. "With this in my heart, I know that the state of the nation is sound and is improving. Dumating na po ang Bagong Pilipinas (The new Philippines has arrived)."

The President asked for the people's continued support, saying the peace and progress the country enjoys would not be possible without them.

"Nagsisimula pa lamang tayo. Ang pagbangon ng ating bayan ay magpapatuloy pa. Hinihiling ko ang inyong tiwala at pakikiisa (We are just getting started. Our country's recovery will continue. I just ask you for your trust and cooperation)," Marcos said. "Sa ganitong paraan makakamtan natin ang ating hangarin—ang maginhawa, matatag, at panatag na buhay para sa lahat ng Pilipino (With this, we can achieve our goal of a comfortable, resilient, and tranquil life for every Filipino)," he added.

Looking forward

According to Marcos, the past year signified a bright future for the Philippines.

"The initial results of our efforts inspire confidence. Let us continue to be relentless in our aspiration of peace and progress," he said. "This has not been the work of a single person, neither a single branch of government nor even the whole government acting alone. This is the collective synergy achieved by all Filipinos working together," he added.

"It took a whole-of-nation effort to achieve this immediate recovery from our pandemic slump. Unity was what made us rise once more," he continued.

With this, the President said it was now up to the government to provide good leadership and guidance to support the enormous pool of highly competent and dedicated workers serving the country.

"I have stated before that my confidence in our future was grounded in our world-class quality workforce—be they the farmers in the field, corporate giants, government officials, school teachers, health workers, or employees. That confidence has been further buoyed by the demonstration of love

Economy and food security

President Marcos opened his speech talking about the country's economic status. He said that despite the good numbers, the government would continue prioritizing public infrastructure and giving people food, education, healthcare, jobs, and social protection to increase their capacity.

According to the President, the government aims to boost local agricultural production through consolidation, modernization, mechanization, and improvement of value chains. He said the country's methods are now more guided by science balanced with nature, so production is both sustainable and responsible.

Marcos vowed to go after smugglers and hoarders who manipulate the prices of agricultural products.

"Hinahabol at ihahabla natin sila (We are going after them, and we will prosecute them)," he said. "Sadyang hindi tama ang kanilang gawain, at hindi rin ito tugma sa ating magandang layunin. Pandaraya ang kanilang ginagawa (What they're doing is not right and is not aligned with our ambition. What they're doing is cheating)."

Marcos, meanwhile, said they continue coordinating with Congress to pass a law that would create the Department of Water Resource Management.

"Ang tubig ay kasing-halaga rin ng pagkain. Kailangan nating tiyakin na may sapat at malinis na tubig para sa lahat at sa mga susunod na salinlahi (Water is as important as food. We need to ensure that we have enough and clean water for everyone and for the succeeding generations)," he said.

Infrastructure

According to President Marcos, his administration will continue to "build better, and more" as infrastructure development is one of the keys to continuing economic growth.

"Our P8.3-trillion 'Build Better More' (BBM) Program is currently in progress and being vigorously implemented," he said.

He said the government's infrastructure spending would be five to six percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). The entire country would benefit from the 194 projects under his infrastructure program.



Maharlika Investment Fund

President Marcos said the Maharlika Investment Fund (MIF) would be used to make high-impact and profitable investments, such as his BBM program.

"The gains from the fund shall be reinvested into the country's economic well-being," he said.

To ensure sound financial management, the President said a group of internationally recognized economic

managers will oversee the operations of the Fund.

"This guarantees that investment decisions will be based on financial considerations alone, absent any political influence," he added.

Meanwhile, Marcos assured the people that funds for social security and public health insurance of the people shall remain intact and separate.

Energy

Since assuming office, President Marcos said that almost 500,000 homes were given access to electricity. He vowed to "spare no effort" to achieve full household electrification by the end of his term in 2028.

According to Marcos, they are aggressively promoting renewable energy so that it provides a 35-percent share in the power mix by 2030 and then on to 50 percent by 2040.

"Since last year, an additional 126 renewable energy contracts with potential capacity of 31,000 megawatts have been awarded. To date, we have over a thousand active projects spread all over the country—299 of these are solar; 187 are wind; 436 hydroelectric; 58 biomass; 36 geothermal; and nine are ocean-powered," he said. "The Malampaya project has been a boon to our country, energizing 20 percent of Luzon. The renewal of the contract guarantees continued revenues and energy production for another 15 years. Aside from Malampaya, we will also push for more gas exploration in other parts of the country."

"We finally have a Unified National Grid, with the interconnection of the Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao grids. The 'One Grid, One Market' will enable more efficient transfers and more competitive pricing of electricity throughout the country," he said. "However, 68 grid connections are much delayed, according to the ERC's count. We are conducting a performance review of our private concessionaire, the National Grid Corporation of the Philippines."

Uniformed personnel

In his speech, President Marcos assured the country's uniformed personnel that efforts were underway to make their pension system fully functional and financially sustainable. He said their pension is as important, urgent, and humanitarian as civilian employees.

"We are once again working closely with Congress to ease the transition from the old system to the new one so as to be able to guarantee that no effects are felt by those in the uniformed services," he said.

Education

President Marcos said that learning recovery will be at the forefront of his education agenda, beginning with addressing the shortage of classrooms and facilities.

"Aside from new construction, schools and facilities are being retrofitted to become ready for the future—ready for hybrid and high-tech



SONA PROTEST – Rallyists march on Commonwealth Ave. in Quezon City during the State of the Nation Address of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on Monday, July 24, 2023. (Mark Balmores)

learning, and also climate-ready and disaster-proof," he said.

The President said they are also recalibrating the K to 12 curricula to ensure it is always relevant, responsive, and at par with international standards.

To keep the youth away from "sinister influences," Marcos said they are making available to them their partici-

pation in formal schooling, alternative learning, non-diploma courses, or technical-vocational education and training (TVET).

"We will not let a student's financial constraints be a hindrance to his or her education. We have activated social safety nets, such as skills development training and youth employment programs," he said.

"Deserving and talented students without the financial capacity to attend school will not be left behind in this education agenda," he added.

Meanwhile, to address the challenge of staying at cutting-edge technology, Marcos said 44 renowned Filipino scientists in diverse areas of expertise have returned home under the Balik-Scientist Program and will undertake research in various priority fields. Upgraded facilities and research and development funding will support them.

Health

According to President Marcos, healthier communities and lifestyles remain his advocacy.

He said the government had launched convergent programs to address hunger and nutrition-related issues among the people, especially the children, like stunting and wasting. He cited the recently launched Food Stamp Program (FSP), which seeks to supply the nutrition needs of the million most food-poor Filipinos.

The President called on parents to complete their children's vaccination and head to the nearest health centers for free vaccines.

Aside from the maximum retail price regulation being implemented, Marcos said strategic VAT exemption lowered the prices of 59 essential medications, such as those for cancer, diabetes, hypertension, kidney disease, and mental illness. The improved Konsulta Package of PhilHealth made free 21 kinds of drugs and 13 different laboratory services.

President Marcos said that dialysis is now free for most Filipinos and that 156 dialysis sessions are free.

Meanwhile, to pay back the sacrifices of health workers during the pandemic, Marcos assured them that the government would now give them their health emergency allowance and other benefits that are still pending.



Foreign policy

President Marcos said the country maintains an independent foreign policy.

"We will continue to forge more of these international partnerships that will lead to a more balanced trade strategy and a healthier economic position," he said.

"We will protect our sovereign rights and preserve our territorial integrity, in defense of rules-based international order," he added.

With the national interest paramount, Marcos said the government would continuously pursue constant dialogue and diplomatic approaches to resolve any issue.

Investments

To create investment opportunities, Marcos said they would ensure the country has an enabling business environment, peace and order, and the rule of law.

"We will solidify our country's reputation as an attractive and reliable investment destination," he said.

Digitalization and internet

Marcos lauded the recently launched eGovPH application, which offers all key government services for the convenience of the general public.

He ordered all government offices to ensure their vital services were digitalized immediately.

Meanwhile, Marcos said that as of June this year, the country's fixed broadband speed ranks 47th among 180 countries. This ranking is 11 places higher than it was last year.

"Our mobile internet speed is now

ranked 83 out of 142 countries, which is eight places higher than last year," he added.

Migrant workers

President Marcos said they are engaging with partners in the international community to ensure a safe working environment for Filipinos. They are also implementing responsive mechanisms for the social welfare, repatriation, and reintegration of returning overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) into the Philippine economy.

He noted that OFWs continue to send in historically high remittances, solidifying their role in transformative economic growth. In 2022, OFWs contributed \$32.5 billion, or roughly ₱1.8 trillion, to the economy.

"Several countries have signified interest to explore bilateral labor cooperation with the Philippines in the areas of healthcare, tourism, hospitality, engineering, construction, and information technology. Recently, we signed agreements with Singapore, Austria, and the province of Alberta in Canada," he said.

Housing

Marcos vowed to expand the country's housing program to benefit poor Filipinos. Citing data from Pag-IBIG, he said that over 100,000 Filipinos have availed of the housing loan amounting to ₱117 billion.

He likewise promised to build over a million houses for the people across the country.

BARMM

President Marcos said he was proud of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)'s progress.

"Former adversaries are now partners in peace. Its functions have been defined, and its basic laws are now being written," he said. "Through the BARMM, we have strengthened the nation's prospects for finally achieving sustainable progress anchored on a true and lasting peace in Southern Philippines. We will continue to support the progress of the BARMM, apace with our singular vision for all Filipinos," he added.

Refocused drug war

After making no mention of it last year, President Marcos said that the country's fight against illegal drugs continues but is now geared toward treatment, rehabilitation, education, and reintegration.

He noted that law enforcers were involved in the drug trade and that he would accept their resignation.

"We cannot tolerate corruption or incompetence in government," Marcos said.

Insurgency

Through community development and livelihood programs, President Marcos said the Barangay Development and Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Programs have effectively addressed the root cause of conflict in the countryside.

He said he would issue a proclamation granting amnesty to rebel returnees to complete this reintegration process.

Priority bills

President Marcos enumerated his 16 priority bills:

1. Excise tax on single-use plastics
2. VAT on digital services
3. Rationalization of mining fiscal regime
4. Motor vehicle user's charge/road user's tax
5. Military and Uniformed Personnel Pension
6. Amendment of the Fisheries Code
7. Amendment of the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act
8. Amendment of the Cooperative Code
9. New Government Procurement Law
10. New Government Auditing Code
11. Anti-financial accounts scamming
12. Tatak-Pinoy law
13. The Blue Economy law
14. Ease of paying taxes
15. LGU income classification
16. The Philippine Immigration Act

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EDITORIAL

New Philippines

The "new Philippines" or Bagong Pilipinas is here, President Marcos said at the conclusion of his State of the Nation Address yesterday. As he had promised, his second SONA was a performance report on the "successes and challenges" in his first year in office.

It was a year during which the nation received a boost from the improvement in the COVID health situation, which allowed the lifting of pandemic restrictions and paved the way for a revival of the global economy. On the other hand, Russia's invasion of Ukraine seriously disrupted global supply chains and caused fuel prices to surge, driving inflation that was worse than during the pandemic.

Still, the President sounded a positive note in summing up his first year, describing the state of the nation as "sound and improving" and macroeconomic fundamentals strong. He reiterated his commitment to "build better and more" critical infrastructure, to continue expanding affordable housing, social safety nets and Kadiwa outlets. He set a target of 100 percent household electrification by the end of his term.

Renewing the commitment that no Filipino will be left behind in terms of education, the President said the K-10 program is being "recalibrated" and the jobs-skills mismatch is being rectified. Science and technology and "a culture of innovation" are being given priority.

He warned that the days of

agricultural smugglers and hoarders "are numbered," and he would accept the resignation of rogue police officers, as he stressed that "we cannot tolerate corruption and incompetence in government." Addressing concerns about his pet project, the Maharlika Investment Fund, the President vowed transparency and accountability in its management.

He then enumerated 17 priority measures that he wants Congress to pass during its second regular session. These include the controversial reforms in the pension system of military and other uniformed personnel as well as new or higher taxes on single-use plastics and digital services.

The President also wants to rationalize the mining fiscal regime and create a water resources management agency. He wants amendments in the road user's tax, the Cooperative Code, the Fisheries Code and the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act. He wants a new government procurement law, Government Auditing Code and Philippine Immigration Act, and a law on "Tatak Pinoy" and the blue economy.

Other priorities are income classification of local government units as well as laws to ease tax payments and fight financial accounts scams.

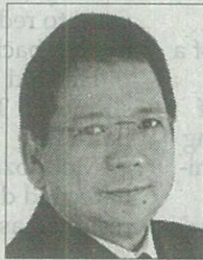
That's a long to-do list, for both the President and the legislature. At the start of the second regular session of the 19th Congress, everyone should hit the ground running.

FIRST PERSON

ALEX MAGNO

Unsaid

Because our deadlines happen ahead of the delivery of President Marcos' State of the Nation Address, this commentary cannot be on the things said. It will therefore be on the things that will likely be left unsaid. These are things that run against the grain of current public orthodoxy.



Foremost among the things that will be left unsaid is a rollback of the land redistribution program.

The breakup of landholdings in the name of "land reform" is one of the main reasons our agriculture stagnated the past few decades. The small farm lots defy the economies of scale. They are resistant to the capitalization of our farming and the mechanization of our farms.

Worse, they are unable to support the basic family that is supposed to tend to the micro farms. In many cases, farming is done only because the family's earnings are supplemented by non-farm incomes.

Our laws require banks to lend a portion of their funds to agriculture. But there are little qualified borrowers and banks end up paying the fines instead. This raises banking costs while delivering no palpable benefit to the economy.

With micro-farms, our farmers are prohibited from investing in new technologies, even at this time when, in other countries, artificial intelligence and vertical farming are transforming the economics of agriculture. Our farming remains at subsistence level. This puts our food security at risk, given climate change and disruptions in global grains supply because of war. Recently, for instance, India restricted its exportation of rice, given supply uncertainties.

The only way to rescue our agriculture is to allow farmland to be consolidated to take advantage of the economies of scale, encourage food processing, enable higher value crops and construct better logistics systems.

The only concession we won from China recently is the opening of her markets to our durian. This is an empty concession: our small durian orchards are unable to meet the volumes demanded by the China market.

Harmful as land redistribution has been to our agriculture, public orthodoxy continues to support this path.

Another point that will likely be left unsaid in the SONA is the reversal of the devolution of power to local governments.

The policy of devolution has its advantages. But those are overshadowed by the disadvantages.

Devolution has diminished the fiscal strength of national government, disabling it from investing in strategic infrastructure. The local governments, on the other hand, use much of their increased revenues in growing the public payroll. This is politically profitable for local powerbrokers.

Many of the social services that are supposed to be devolved are kept in the account of the national government because the local governments profess incapacity to fund them. The income gaps between rich and poor provinces widened. Warlordism consolidated.

What has been devolved are opportunities for corruption. This is the reason why dynasties have prospered and investments are not dispersing to the rural areas.

Congressional abuse

Much has been said about the abuse of congressional hearings by legislators wishing the grandstand. Little has been said about the use of congressional powers to settle local political rivalries.

Recently, Leyte Rep. Richard Gomez called for an inquiry into the case of DBSN Farm Agriventures, Inc. The enterprise operates the largest agricultural facility south of Luzon. It employs over 500 individuals in the locality.

It turns out, the enterprise is owned by the family of Pamplona, Leyte mayor Ramon Oñate.

The purpose of the hearing is unclear.

Gomez accuses the farm of violating our environmental laws. But the farm has all the permits from the DENR that such an enterprise requires. DBSN has every permit required for its operations: an ECC that was recently amended to take into account its expanded operations, a discharge permit and a permit to operate a standby generator. It even has a hazardous waste ID for its used oil and used oil containers.

If Gomez could document any violation of environmental regulations, the proper course is to simply file a complaint with the DENR. It is never correct use of legislative time to encroach into the work of agencies in the executive branch.

Gomez very clearly oversteps his bounds by calling on the LandBank to withdraw the loan granted the company to grow its Albura, Leyte plant. The bank has its own procedures for evaluating loans. If Gomez insists, he can go to court and sue the bank – not by way of press releases and congressional hearings.

The officers of DBSN insist that the company has maintained good housekeeping standards and ensures the best business practices. This is the reason the venture has prospered since its very modest beginnings in 2016 – the pandemic notwithstanding. The economic success of DBSN apparently threatens the configuration of power in the province.

DBSN insists its long-term business goals can only be achieved by protecting the ecosystem and bringing benefits to host communities. That is true for any business venturing in the rural areas. No company would want to scorch the earth on which its business thrives.

Mayor Oñate says the "court hearings are the rightful forum for both the accused and the accuser to argue their differences instead of the bar of public opinion where the truth can be easily distorted and the untruth touted to the maximum to serve vested interest."

★

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BBM to agri smugglers: Your days are numbered

The days of smugglers and hoarders of agricultural products are "numbered," President Marcos warned yesterday, as he vowed to make sure cases are filed against those involved in unlawful activities that raise prices of farm goods.

In his second State of the Nation Address, Marcos noted that smuggling and hoarding are causing much harm to farmers and consumers.

"One of the reasons behind the higher prices is that smugglers and hoarders manipulate the prices of agricultural products. We will run after them and we will file charges against them," the President, who is also the agriculture secretary, said.

"We will not let these practices continue. The days of the smugglers and hoarders

Turn to Page 4

BBM

From Page 1

are numbered," he added in Filipino.

Earlier this month, Marcos directed the Department of Justice and the National Bureau of Investigation to probe the smuggling, hoarding and price fixing of onions and other farm goods.

His order stemmed from a congressional inquiry into onion smuggling. Marikina Rep. Stella Quimbo earlier told the President that there was "substantial evidence" pointing to the existence of a cartel.

In a recent media interview, Marcos said "many" syndicates are into hoarding and manipulation of the prices of agricultural products.

He said he did not set a deadline for the probe but is expecting investigators to produce a comprehensive report.

The investigation covers possible violations of the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016.

Farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura executive director Jayson Cainglet meanwhile lauded the inclusion of the amendment to the Anti-Smuggling Agriculture Act as priority legislation of the Marcos administration.

"It is not the local producers who are causing the spike in the retail prices of agriculture products, contrary to the claims of economic managers," Cainglet said.

"Charges should be filed against smugglers and hoarders who are behind the spike in the retail prices of farm products. A decision of the court should be issued this year sentencing those involved to serve as warning," he added.

— Alexis Romero, Bella Cariaso



'The new Philippines is here'



President Marcos delivers his second State of the Nation Address at the House of Representatives yesterday while Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri (top left) and Speaker Martin Romualdez applaud.

Marcos: The state of the nation is sound and improving

By ALEXIS ROMERO

A "new Philippines is here" – buffeted by challenges, but "sound and improving," President Marcos said yesterday in his second State of the Nation Address (SONA), where he made familiar calls for unity and promises of inclusive growth.

"Dumating na po ang bagong Pilipinas (The new Philippines has arrived)" as workers and ordinary Filipinos "have unanimously risen to the challenge" and are ready to help because of their love for the country, Marcos said.

"With this in my heart, I know that the state of the nation is sound and is improving," the Chief Executive said.

"Bagong Pilipinas" is the administration's new governance and leadership branding that emphasizes unity.

According to Memorandum Circular No. 24 recently issued by Malacañang,

Bagong Pilipinas is characterized by "a principled, accountable and dependable government reinforced by unified institutions of society."

Acknowledging that the Philippines is just starting to recover from the pandemic, Marcos said the government and other sectors should work together to achieve a comfortable and stable life for all Filipinos.

"Let us continue to be relentless in our aspiration of peace and progress. This has not been the work of a single person,

PRIORITY BILLS IN 2ND STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

- Excise tax on single use plastics
- VAT on digital services
- Rationalization of mining fiscal regime
- Motor vehicle user's charge/ Road user's tax
- Military and uniformed personnel pension reform
- Amendment of the Fisheries Code
- Amendment of the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act
- Amendment of the Cooperative Code
- New government procurement law
- New Government Auditing Code
- Anti-financial accounts scamming
- Tatak Pinoy law
- Blue economy law
- Ease of paying taxes
- LGU income classification
- Philippine Immigration Act
- Law creating Department of Water Resource Management



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The new From Page 1

neither by a single branch of government nor even the whole government acting alone. This is the collective synergy achieved by all Filipinos working together," the President said in his address, which lasted for one hour and 10 minutes.

"It took a whole-of-nation effort to achieve this immediate recovery from our pandemic slump. Unity was what made us rise once more," he said.

"We've only just begun. The recovery of the nation will continue. All I ask of you is trust and cooperation," he said in Filipino.

Despite last year's uncertainties and problems, Marcos said the "enormous pool of highly competent and dedicated workers" in the government as well

as the "world-class quality workforce" gave him reason to be optimistic about the country's prospects.

In his SONA, Marcos mentioned figures highlighting what he called the country's sound economic fundamentals.

He said that while the global prospects were bleak, the Philippine economy posted a 7.6 percent growth last year, the country's highest growth rate in 46 years.

For the first quarter of the year, the economy grew by 6.4 percent, well within the target of six to seven percent for 2023, he added.

"We are still considered to be among the fastest-growing economies in the Asian region and the world. It is a testament to our strong macroeconomic fundamentals," the President said.

Marcos described the country's

financial system as "strong and stable," citing the "strong capital and liquidity positions" of banks.

According to Marcos, inflation "is moving in the right direction" as it eased to 5.4 percent in June from 8.7 percent in January.

Citing information from the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, Marcos said inflation is expected to ease further by the end the year to reach 2.9 percent by 2024.

"What this means is that in spite of all the difficulties, we are transforming the economy. We are stabilizing the prices of all critical commodities," he said.

"On matters of the economy, there are many things over which we have no control. But over those where we do have control, we are doing everything we can."

Marcos also reported that revenue

generation has improved, with the Bureau of Internal Revenue collecting P1.05 trillion from January to May, an increase of almost 10 percent over the previous year.

The Customs bureau also increased its collection by 7.4 percent for the first seven months, amounting to P476 billion, he added.

Marcos, criticized by some quarters for traveling too much, claimed that his foreign trips, which he called "economic missions," yielded an estimated total investment value of \$71 billion or P3.9 trillion and may generate 175,000 jobs.

Investment projects approved by the Board of Investments reached P1.2 trillion during the first year of the administration, while other strategic investments approved for processing through the newly es-

tablished "green lanes" amounted to P230 billion, the President added.

Marcos gave assurance that the government is working to ensure that economic growth would benefit the poor.

He said the government has allocated huge sums for education, health and job generation programs.

The President also enumerated government initiatives designed to assist the needy, including employment, livelihood and training programs, social pension for indigent senior citizens and cash-for-work for persons with disabilities.

"As we strive for development, no Filipino will be left behind. For us, everyone is important, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion or physical condition. Everyone will receive care and assistance," Marcos said in Filipino.

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MARCOS LAYS OUT PLANS TO ENSURE FOOD SECURITY

STORY BY ALDEN M. MONZON AND MEG J. ADONIS

The President during his second State of the Nation Address vows to expand the Kadiwa program and go after smugglers and hoarders of agricultural commodities whom he blamed for high prices of basic goods.

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THE PRESIDENT'S LEGISLATIVE WISH LIST:

- Excise tax on single use plastics
- Tax on digital services
- Rationalization of mining fiscal regime
- Motor vehicle users charge
- Road users taxes
- MUP pension
- Amendment of the Fisheries Code
- Amendment of the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act
- Amendment of the cooperative code
- New government procurement law
- New government auditing code
- Antifinancial account scamming
- Tatak Pinoy law
- Blue economy law
- Base of paying taxes
- LGU income classification
- Philippine Immigration Act



EXPECTATIONS A woman in Manila minds her store while sewing clothes and watching President Marcos deliver his State of the Nation Address on Monday. In his second year in office, Mr. Marcos promised to provide Filipinos with a stable food supply and quality education and health care. —**RICHARD A. REYES**



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FROM A1

By Alden M. Monzon
and Meg J. Adonis
@Team_Inquirer

President Marcos on Monday outlined his administration's grand plan to secure the country's food supply, focusing on expanding the number of government-backed food stores, boosting agricultural production, and pursuing a relentless campaign against smugglers and hoarders of agricultural goods whom he blamed for the escalation in the prices of basic food items.

During his State of the Nation Address (Sona) marking the end of his first year in office, Mr. Marcos said the "Kadiwa stores"—centers that directly link farmers to consumers thus leading to higher incomes to producers and lower prices for buyers—were essential in bringing down the prices of rice, meat, fish, vegetable and sugar.

The Kadiwa program was first introduced during the term of his father, Ferdinand Sr., and was revived in 2022 as part of his strategies as concurrent head of the Department of Agriculture to make basic food items more affordable to the masses.

"Malaking tulong ang mga Kadiwa stores, na ating muling binuhay at inilunsad. Ang layun-

in ng Kadiwa ay pag-ugnayin ang magsasaka at ang mamimili. Walang iba pang namamagitan. Walang dagdag na gastos at patong (Kadiwa stores, which we have revived and launched, have been a huge help. The purpose of Kadiwa is to connect farmers and consumers. No middlemen. No added cost and markup)," Mr. Marcos said during his televised national address.

The President said they launched more than 700 Kadiwa stores nationwide which benefited 1.8 million families.

"The results were good so we will expand Kadiwa to the whole country," he said in Filipino.

Smuggling

The President also reiterated his commitment to go after smugglers and hoarders of agricultural products, vowing to prosecute these criminals behind high prices of basic goods.

"Napapahamak hindi lamang ang mga magsasaka, kundi tayo na ring mga mamimili. Kaya hindi natin papayagan ang ganitong kalakaran. Bilang na ang mga araw ng mga smugglers at hoarders na iyan (It's not just the farmers who get in trouble, but also us consumers. So, we will not allow this trend. The days of these smugglers and hoarders are numbered)," he said.

The bravado failed to impress a farmer's group that instead urged the Marcos administration to actually put these smugglers and hoarders behind bars.

"These smugglers and hoarders need to actually be brought to justice this year, because they are the main reasons why the prices of agricultural products are high," said Jayson Cainglet, executive director of Samahang



FOCUS ON ECONOMY Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri and House Speaker Martin Romualdez applaud the President as he emphasizes a point in his second State of the Nation Address. —MARIANNE BERMUDEZ

Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag).

Danilo Fausto, president of the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc., agreed, saying that "stopping and penalizing smugglers, hoarders and price manipulators are necessary and a must for the government in order to protect farmers, fair trade, and the economy."

Fausto and Cainglet lamented that to this day, none of the supposed smugglers and hoarders had been found guilty.

According to Cainglet, evidence presented by the Bureau of Customs (BOC) during congressional hearings were often deemed insufficient, thus halting further investigations.

"None have proceeded beyond the preliminary investigations. All [of the cases] have been dismissed," he said.

Nevertheless, Sinag welcomed the proposed amendments to the Anti-Agricultural

Smuggling Act that lawmakers claimed would help the President's drive against "unfair practices that hurt consumers and local farmers alike."

Like Sinag, Marikina Rep. and House appropriations panel vice chair Stella Quimbo cheered Mr. Marcos' stand against smuggling and hoarding.

"It is a manifestation of his conviction that smuggling, hoarding, cartel are huge problems and that curbing these will have a huge impact on food inflation. These have been systemic, decades-old problems. First time, as far as I recall that a President has made such strong pronouncements."

Inflation

Mr. Marcos also pointed out in his Sona that the biggest problem that confronted his young administration was inflation, with global events such Russia's

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invasion of Ukraine and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic leading to high prices of basic commodities.

Nevertheless, it has been decelerating for five straight months, putting the Marcos administration closer to its target of containing inflation to between 2 and 4 percent.

Mr. Marcos stressed that inflation was "stabilizing" and "moving in the right direction."

This bolsters his claim that the country's macroeconomic fundamentals remained strong.

He touted the Philippines' economic growth in 2022, his first year in office, saying that the country achieved its fastest growth rate in 46 years despite the lingering impact of the pandemic.

"While the global prospects were bleak, our economy posted a 7.6-percent growth in 2022—our highest growth rate in 46 years. For the first quarter of the year, our growth registered at 6.4 percent. It remains within our target of 6 to 7 percent for 2023. We are still considered to be among the fastest-growing economies in the Asian region and the world," he said.

Mr. Marcos also said that higher revenue collections will be critical in his administration's bid to boost public investments, citing that they project the government's tax and revenues by 2028 to increase up to 16.9 percent and 17.3 percent, respectively.

From January to May, the Bureau of Internal Revenue said it posted record collection amounting to P1.05 trillion, an increase of almost 10 percent from last year, while the BOC collected P476 billion during the first seven months of the

year, an increase of 7.4 percent during the same period in 2022.

However, it must be noted that the Philippine economy had barely recovered what it lost at the height of the devastating pandemic in 2020 with gross domestic product growing to P19.94 trillion in 2022, just 3 percent higher than the prepandemic level in 2019 of P19.38 trillion, according to data from the Philippine Statistics Authority.

Think tank Ibon Foundation also pointed out that while inflation rate indeed lowered, this only meant that prices "only rose slower recently."

In reality, the group said rice prices, for example, rose from P42 to P45, more than double Mr. Marcos' famous promise to bring down rice prices to P20 a kilo. Indeed, almost all commodities—onions, garlic, sugar, meat, fish and vegetable prices, water, electricity and transport rates—increased under his administration, Ibon claimed.

"[Mr. Marcos] confirms his position as the country's premier superspreader of hyperbolic and fantastic narratives, after a tedious Sona that struggled to give even flimsiest evidence of any progress," said Ibon executive director Sonny Africa.

The president of the country's largest business organization, the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said they were "generally satisfied" with the plans outlined by Mr. Marcos during his Sona, noting in particular the plans to bring in more renewable energy investments and recalibrating the K-12 curriculum. **(See related story on Page A3.) —WITH REPORTS FROM JULIE M. AURELIO AND KRIXIA SUBINGSUBING INQ**



Work ahead after the SONA

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s second State of the Nation Address (SONA) adhered to this annual speech's tradition of pomp and pageantry rather than the nitty gritty of governance since after the longish speech, Congress, the judiciary and the executive department of the government are back to the salt mines working with basically the same policies and programs.

Aside from the show of strong support from the leaderships of the House of Representatives and the Senate, which were the same since the end of the last regular session, nothing much has changed in the lay of the land in the Batasang Pambansa. The House was presided over by Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez, the favorite presidential cousin, and attended by 311 representatives.

Tomorrow, six committees of the House will start work again on pending bills, including those that seek to amend Republic Act 8794 or the law imposing a motor vehicle user's charge (MVUC) on owners of all types of motor vehicles. Being a tax measure, this will be handled by the Committee on Ways and Means.

'... Congress passed only one out of the more than 20 priority bills that the Chief Executive mentioned and endorsed during his first SONA last year.'

Even before the second SONA, there had been criticism aired that despite the supermajority that President Bongbong Marcos enjoys in both houses of Congress, the legislature has not been delivering on the bills that were agreed as priority measures in the past meetings of the Legislative Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC).

One political columnist even pointed out that Congress passed only one out of the more than 20 priority bills that the Chief Executive mentioned and endorsed during his first SONA last year. This is Republic Act 11953 which condones more than P58 billion unpaid loans of some 654,000 agrarian reform beneficiaries, a problem that for decades stunted the growth of our rural economies and consigned our aging farmers to a life of debts and misery.

Now, the House will try its level best to move in the legislative mill the following proposed measures, all considered priority by the President: the National Rightsizing Program, Unified System of Separation, Retirement and Pension of MUPs, National Employment Action Plan, and the Amendments to the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act.

Other bills which carry the same weight in importance are many, and we may cite some of them as the Amendments to the BOT Law or the Public-Private Partnership Bill, Virology Institute of the Philippines, Mandatory ROTC and NSTP, Magna Carta for Filipino Seafarers, and Amendments to the Bank Deposits Secrecy Law.

Over at the Senate, the senators will have to act on Ease of Paying Taxes Act, Magna Carta for Seafarers Act, New Philippine Passport Act, Internet Transactions Act, the Center for Disease Control Act, and the Act Institutionalizing the Automatic Income Classification of Provinces, Cities and Municipalities.

Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri said they will work on eight more priority measures under the LEDAC. He said that with most of their work in the Commission on Appointments done, they will have more time to devote to their plenary duties, as he stressed that they "will continue to prioritize the quality of our measures over the speed of our performance or the quantity of our output."

This last statement from the Senate president is most reassuring and a very valid one.

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By **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**
and **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**
Reporters

PHILIPPINE President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. on Monday highlighted economic recovery from the pandemic in his second State of the Nation Address (SONA) and urged Congress to prioritize the passage of “essential” new tax measures.

Analysts, however, said the President had failed to mention new programs for struggling domestic sectors, including agriculture and manufacturing.

In a speech before a joint session of Congress, Mr. Marcos said his administration has succeeded in bringing down inflation, which he described as the “biggest problem encountered by the nation.”

“The inflation rate is moving in the right direction... What this means is that in spite of all the difficulties, we are transforming the economy. We are stabilizing the prices of all critical commodities,” he said.

From a peak of 8.7% in January, inflation has steadily eased to 5.4% in June but is still above the central bank’s 2-4% target.

Red-hot inflation pushed the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) to raise borrowing costs by 425 basis points (bps) from May 2022 to March 2023.

Mr. Marcos said the Philippine economy is considered among the fastest-growing economies in Asia and the world, “a testament to our strong macroeconomic fundamentals.”

This year, the government is targeting 6-7% gross domestic product (GDP) growth, which Mr. Marcos said is supported by strong domestic demand.

“The economy is revived and rejuvenated, backstopped by a favorable enabling environment and the strong rule of law,” he said, adding that the “state of the nation is sound, and is improving.”

Mr. Marcos once again asked Congress to support his priority measures, including the excise tax on single-use plastics, value-added tax on digital services, rationalization of the mining fiscal regime, and the motor vehicle user’s charge, as well as the proposed reform of the pension system for military and uniformed personnel (MUP).

Marcos, SI/9



PHILIPPINE STAR/KJ ROSALES

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. delivers his second State of the Nation Address during a joint session of Congress on July 24.

AGRICULTURE

In his SONA, Mr. Marcos emphasized that the agriculture sector, which contributes 10% to GDP, is a priority.

“Our aim is to boost our local agricultural production — through consolidation, modernization, mechanization, and improvement of value chains — augmented by timely and calibrated importation, as needed,” Mr. Marcos said.

The President urged Congress to amend the Fisheries Code “to incorporate and strengthen science-based analysis and determination of fishing areas.”

Emy Ruth S. Gianan, an economics professor at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines, said Mr. Marcos failed to mention new programs for the agriculture and manufacturing industries, which she said are vital to increasing the Philippines’ production and make the country safe from imported inflation.

“We also did not hear about the Rice Enhancement Fund from the Rice Tariffication Law — how it was used and whether it was indeed helpful,” she said in a Facebook Messenger chat.

Maria Ela L. Atienza, a political science professor at the University of

Marcos,
from SI/1

The Finance department earlier said continuing the current pension system for MUPs could lead to “fiscal collapse,” as accumulating pension liabilities might increase public debt by as much as 25% by 2030.

The President also pushed for a new government procurement law and state auditing code “to make government procurement and auditing more attuned to these changing times.”

Other priority measures cover Ease of Paying Taxes bill, proposed Anti-Financial Account Scamming bill, the proposed Tatak Pinoy bill, the Blue Economy bill, and Philippine Immigration Act.

Mr. Marcos also pushed for the institutionalization of the automatic income classification of local government units (LGU), as well as changes to the Fisheries Code, Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act and Cooperative Code.

The President failed to mention the proposed amendments to the Bank Deposit Secrecy Law, which was included in the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council’s (LEDAC) list of 20 priority measures targeted for congressional approval by December. This measure is said to be key to Philippine efforts to get out of the Financial Action Task Force’s “gray list” by January 2024.

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the Philippines, said this year's SONA is similar to the one he gave last year except there were discussions on what the government has done.

"Some areas have a lot of details like the economy and agriculture, as well as infrastructure, digitalization and climate change, perhaps because there were more concrete actions in these areas, while other areas were given some sweeping, very general pronouncements or vague plans," she said in a Viber message.

Ms. Gianan said what was clear during the President's speech was the importance and contribution of the digital economy.

"But we need to dissect this," she said. "What kind of jobs are available to Filipinos in the digital economy, and could there be room for greater growth if only we'll attract more sophisticated tech industries and upskill our workforce?"

Mr. Marcos said the digital economy contributed P2 trillion to the Philippine economy in 2022, which was equivalent to 9.4% of the country's GDP.

The President also focused on his P8.3-trillion infrastructure plan, which he said is "being vigorously implemented."

"The flagship projects cover investments in the areas of physical connectivity, water resources, agriculture, health, digital connectivity, and energy," he said, noting that physical connectivity infrastructure such as roads, bridges, seaports, airports, and mass transport accounted for 83% of the program.

"Our infrastructure spending will be at 5 to 6% of our GDP."

Mr. Marcos said some of the priority projects "can now look to the newly established Maharlika Investment Fund without the added debt burden."

"In pooling a small fraction of the considerable but underutilized government fund, the fund shall be used to make high-impact and profitable investments such as the 'Build, Better, More' program," he said. "The gains from the fund shall be rein-

vested into the country's economic well-being."

Terry L. Ridon, convenor of InfraWatch PH, said while Mr. Marcos cited an "impressive listing" of infrastructure projects, there is a lack of clarity on the primary objective of the Maharlika Investment Fund (MIF).

Mr. Ridon said if the MIF's primary objective is to make high-impact and profitable investments, "it means that it should only participate in 'Build, Better, More' projects with indisputable commercial outcomes, such as airport, railways and various power projects."

"However, this will also mean that the MIF will ultimately compete with private sector capital in vying for the various available projects under public-private partnership projects," he said.

"If this is the President's direction, this might dampen private sector and foreign investor appetite to participate in various flagship and commercially viable public-private partnership projects, as the cloud of government power will hang over these commercial transactions."

ENEMY OF NONE

During his speech, the President also touted his foreign policy — "a friend to all and enemy of none" — that he said has proven effective.

He said his government would continue to forge more of these international partnerships that will lead to a more balanced trade strategy and a healthier economic position.

The President touted his foreign trips that have yielded P3.9 trillion in investment pledges and are expected to generate 175,000 jobs for Filipinos.

"We hear these numbers but how adequate are these measures? What are the institutional structures that ensure that the targets are going to be achieved?" Leonardo A. Lanzona, who teaches economics at the Ateneo de Manila University, said via Messenger chat.

Meanwhile, Mr. Marcos vowed to prioritize the recovery of the

education sector and boost the Philippine labor force.

The President also said his government continues "to exhaust all efforts" to boost programs for alternative learning, nondiploma courses or technical-vocational education and training.

"The bane of the mismatch between jobs and skills among our workforce is being rectified through strengthened government-industry-labor-academe partnerships, and continuous reskilling and upskilling training programs," he added.

Ms. Atienza also lamented the President's failure to highlight how corruption and the lack of good governance reforms continue to affect the delivery of public services.

"He talked about forcing the resignation of police officers involved in drugs and other unethical behavior but did not discuss how to encourage trustworthiness in government service," she added.

'HIGHLY ENCOURAGED'

The European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (ECCP) said in a statement it is "highly encouraged" after the SONA since Mr. Marcos mentioned efforts to reduce inflation and promote industry development.

"While the P3.9-trillion total investment pledges with the potential to generate 175,000 jobs is indeed promising, we look to the government to further solidify the country's position as an attractive investment destination through incentive schemes and the proper implementation of green lanes to boost the country's competitiveness and facilitate ease of doing business," the ECCP said.

Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry President George T. Barcelon said Mr. Marcos' speech showed he is clearly prioritizing agriculture and showed no sign he would step down as Agriculture secretary.

"I think he is very focused on the agriculture sector. He did not give any hint on anybody (as a replacement)," he said in a mobile phone message.

Management Association of the Philippines President Benedicta Du-Baladad welcomed the President's initiatives on addressing malnutrition, low level of education and employment, among other things.

"We urge the government to continue taking steps to further narrow the income disparity and ensure that economic gains redound to a more equitable distribution of wealth across the board," she said in a statement.

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DA heightens campaign to control agri smuggling

By Joel dela Torre

THE Department of Agriculture has vowed to bolster the agency's countermeasures against agricultural smuggling as he warned violators of heavy fines and charges if caught.

According to Asst. Secretary for Inspectorate and Enforcement James Layug, DA is committed with its mandate and will make it sure that all violators pay for putting the general public's health and the livelihood of Filipino farmers at stake.

He stressed that the Filipinos deserve nothing but the best when it comes to the agri-fishery sector which is under the personal watch of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. who stands as concurrent DA Secretary.

Among his directives is for DA and other government agencies concerned to intensify measures against agricultural smuggling.

DA-IE reported that two makeshift cold storage containers containing assorted frozen meat as well as two vehicles with expired meat products were discovered in the mo warehouse.

This includes the disposal of produced, processed, distributed, or imported food products that are deemed contaminated or unsafe for consumption as well as immediate coordination with the regulatory agencies and the public should an unsafe food reach the market.



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A NEW PHILIPPINES

PBBM on sound, improving PH condition:
'Dumating na ang Bagong Pilipinas'

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. expressed confidence Monday that the state of the nation is sound and improving, and that a new Philippines has come.

In his second State of the Nation Address (SONA), the President said his confidence has been further buoyed by the world-class Filipino workforce's demonstration of love for their homeland.

"Every Filipino has unanimously risen to the challenge that we have made to them to be part of the nation's future. Handa silang maghandog ng tulong, dahil mahal nila ang kanilang kapwa-Pilipino, at mahal nila ang Pilipinas," Marcos said of the nation's workers.

"With this in my heart, I know that the state of the nation is sound, and is improving. Dumating na po ang Bagong Pilipinas."

In the past year, Marcos said knowing the presence of an enormous pool of highly competent and dedicated workers serving the government has been a source of great hope and optimism for him, adding it is up to the bureaucracy to provide them with good leadership and guidance.

"They love the Philippines, and have responded to our call," Marcos said.

The President's second SONA delved on the administration's accomplishments in various areas such as the economy, infrastructure development, agriculture, peace and order, tourism, energy, Mindanao peace efforts and many others.

The chief executive also enumerated the plans that his government wants to carry out in the future to sustain the nation's development.



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19TH CONGRESS REOPENS

**By Jester Manalastas
and Camille P. Balagtas**

THE Second Regular Session of the 19th Congress opened smoothly ahead of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s State of the Nation Address (SONA).

Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez presided over the first session day which was adjourned after an hour without as much as a whisper about changing the House leadership.

Romualdez took pride in the achievements the House made during the First Regular Session of Congress, for which he expressed his deep gratitude to his colleagues.

"The First Regular Session's accomplishments bear testament to our collective will and determination. We have raised the standards, and the expectations are high. Yet, we are not daunted. We are inspired. We are not simply lawmakers but nation-builders and champions of the people," he said.

"Your relentless devotion and unyielding efforts have launched us toward addressing the urgent challenges of our era and enacting impactful legislation. Now, we must ensure this momentum propels us further. Our solemn pledge is to continue championing the change our beloved nation so earnestly requires," he added.

Aside from attending to agriculture sector issues and other priorities, Speaker Romualdez said Congress also likewise focus on approving the 20 LEDAC bills.

He enumerated the 20 measures: (1) amendments to the BOT Law or Public-Private Partnership bill; (2) National Disease Prevention Management Authority; (3) Internet Transactions Act or E-Commerce Law; (4) Health Emergency Auxiliary Reinforcement Team Act, formerly Medical Reserve Corps; (5) Virology Institute of the Philippines; (6) Mandatory ROTC and National Service Training Program; (7) Revitalizing

the Salt Industry; (8) Valuation Reform; (9) e-Government and e-Governance; (10) Ease of Paying Taxes Equally; (11) National Government Rightsizing Program; (12) Unified System of Separation/Retirement and Pension of Military and Other Uniformed Personnel; (13) LGU Income Classification; (14) Waste-to-Energy Bill; (15) New Philippine Passport Act; (16) Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers; (17) National Employment Action Plan; (18) Amendments to the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act; (19) Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas-endorsed Bank Deposit Secrecy; and (20) Anti-Financial Account Scamming Act.

"We face the remaining bills in the LEDAC priority list with enthusiasm and optimism, steadfast in our determination to transform these initiatives into concrete laws for the benefit of our fellow Filipinos," Romualdez told his House colleagues in his opening speech.

He expressed hope that this session

stands as further testament to the capability and dedication as the people's lawmakers.

"Let us labor to sustain our gains, continue to work tirelessly, and strive to realize our shared dreams for our nation. Let us retain the momentum of the Nineteenth Congress and strive to make it one of the most productive and impactful in our history," he said.

Meanwhile, the Senate officially reopened with Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri banging the gavel at 10 a.m. yesterday and with 23 senators physically present.

Senator Pilar Pia Cayetano was the only one absent during the opening as she led the Philippine delegation for the FIFA Women's World Cup in New Zealand.

Zubiri who maintained his post as the Senate Chief in the 19th Congress despite rumors of possible change of leadership shrugged off the so-called coup in the Senate saying there is so much work to do under his leadership.

"Maraming trabaho na dapat namin gawin and we are too busy para patulan po ang mga ganyan issue," Zubiri told People's Journal in an ambush interview.

According to the Senate chief, the recent survey shows that the Filipino people are satisfied and he considered the result of the survey as an inspiration to work harder and do better.

The session which only lasted thirty minutes with no contention from other senators nor any disagreement.

"If the majority say so, I will not insist on staying in this position. We are here to serve the people and the majority in the Senate will decide who must lead them," Zubiri who was able to maintain his seat as the Senate President said.

Senator Joel Villanueva said the supermajority in the Senate echoed one voice in supporting Zubiri.

Earlier, Senator Jose Jinggoy Estrada denied the rumor that he is replacing Zubiri as well as those committee chairmanship under the present leadership.

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2024 national budget agad aasikasuhin ng mga solon

TINIYAK ng liderato ng Malaking Kapulungan ng Kongreso na ipapasa ang pambansang badyet ng 2024 na aabot sa P5.768-trilyon bago matapos ang Oktubre ngayong taon.

Binigyang-diin ni House Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez na agarang kikilos ang may 312 na mambabatas sa sandaling isumite ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Romualdez Marcos Jr. ang budget proposal isang linggo matapos ang State of the Nation Address ngayong araw.

"Pag nangyari po 'yan, sigurado tatapusin natin 'yung budget before our October break. We average five weeks of solid work on budget deliberations, consideration, review, and approval through third reading. So we are confident with the processes and protocols and procedures that we have na matatapos natin ang ating national 2024 budget. That is the most important piece of legislation."

Ani Romualdez, kabilang sa layunin ng panukalang budget sa 2024 na mapanatili ang paglago ang ekonomiya ng bansa, makalikha ng mapapasukang trabaho para sa mga Pilipino at mapaganda ang kalidad ng kanilang pamumuhay sa pamamagitan ng pagbibigay ng naaayong serbisyo publiko gaya ng edukasyon, pangkalusugan, at imprastraktura.

Susuriin umano ng Kamara kung papaano ginagamit ng iba't ibang ahensya ang budget nito sa kasalukuyan at kung papaano inasahang gagamitin ang budget para sa 2024 kaugnay ng mga naisang batas ng Kongreso gaya ng New Agrarian Emancipation Act.

"So tayo po sa Kongreso, babantayan din natin na maayos at maging ang implementasyon para yung mga magsasaka maging productive para tutulong din sila sa ating hangarin na 'yung ibaba natin 'yung presyo ng bilihin gaya ng bigas, asukal at gulay. Kaya excited po tayo kasi pinagtrabahuhan natin 'to," sinabi pa ni Romualdez.

Binigyang-diin ni Speaker Romualdez na mayroong sapat na support ng bigas upang walang magutom na Pilipino na siyang pangunahing layunin ni Pangulong Marcos na siya ring kalihim ng Department of Agriculture.

"Yung commitment niya, 'yan ang isa sa number one accomplishment. At sa totoo lang, bilang isang congressman kung 'yun lang ang panukalang batas na maipasa natin, proud na proud na ko to have been part of the 19th Congress who have passed a very, very important measure that means so much to us as Filipinos because it's a life-long dream of every farmer."

"Kaya itong panaginip ng mga magsasaka, panaginip ng ating mamamayan ay natupad na. So we will make sure that the implementation is immediate and efficient so that the benefits of this law will be felt in every household," dagdag pa ng lider ng Kamara.

Sinabi ni Speaker Romualdez na kaya ng Kamara na mabilis na mabusisi ang budget at maipasa ito ng dumaraan sa transparent na proseso.

"Like last year, we will get the widest consensus on our spending plan among our members. Its approval is very crucial in maintaining stability and facilitating the seamless implementation of government programs and projects. It has significant implications for the country's progress and development."

Titiyakin aniya ng Kamara na ang bawat sentimos ng national budget ay gagastusin ng tama upang masiguro na makadaragdag ito sa pag-unlad ng bansa sa pagsasabing "we will be setting clear priorities and making informed decisions that would further promote sustainable growth aimed at uplifting the lives of Filipino people, enhancing public services, and making our economy strong and more agile."

MELIZA MALUNTAG

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EDUKASYON, KALUSUGAN, TRABAHO, PAGKAIN ATBP DINIINAN SA SONA

SA kanyang ikalawang State of the Nation Address, diniinan ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. ang mga hamong kanyang hinaharap at mga tagumpay na kanyang nagawa, partikular na sa pagkain, edukasyon, kalusugan, trabaho at iba pang mahahalagang sektor ng lipunan.

Investments in public infrastructure and in the capacity of our people—through food, education, health, jobs, and social protection—remain our top priority, ayon kay Pangulong Marcos sa kanyang ikalawang SONA na tumagal nang isang oras at 15 minuto na isinagawa sa Batasan Complex sa Quezon City.

Sinabi ng Pangulo na ang edukasyon ang unang armas para sa pag-unlad at pagbabago ng bansa.

Aniya, bawat buhay ay mahalaga kaya sa tulong ng DSWD, DOLE, TESDA, DEPED at iba pang sektor, matutugunan ang edukasyon, kalusugan at trabaho ng mga Filipino.

Kapansin-pansin na tanging si Vice President at DepEd Secretary Sara Duterte ang binanggit nito sa loob ng kanyang SONA.

Binanggit nito na ang kalusugan ang ikalawang armas para sa pangangatawan ng bawat Filipino kaya binanggit nito ang iba't ibang programa para sa kalusugan, kabilang ang universal health care, mababang presyo ng gamot, konsulta centers, libreng dialysis centers at iba pa.

Ipinagmalaki ng Pangulo ang Kadiwa Store na naging daan para sa mababang presyo ng mga bilihan at nakapagbigay ng trabaho sa mga miyembro ng

kooperatiba.

EKONOMIYA AT

SERBISYONG PANLIPUNAN

"For this year, economic and social services were allocated almost 70 percent of the national budget. Higher revenue collections will be critical in our bid to bolster public investments," ayon pa sa Pangulo.

Hiniling naman ng Pangulo sa Kongreso na suportahan ang pagsasabatas ng polisiya at reporma sa ilalim ng fiscal framework.

Inamin ng Pangulo na maraming bagay ang hindi niya kontrolado pagdating sa usapin ng ekonomiya.

Subalit sa mga bagay na may magagawa, aniya ginagawa niya ang lahat para rito.

Sinabi ng Pangulo na puspusan ang kanyang ginagawa upang pataasin ang produksyon ng ekonomiya ng bansa.

Pinalalago aniya niya ang mga industriya, dinaragdagan ang mga imprastraktura upang mas mapabilis ang daloy ng mga produkto at serbisyo.

Higit sa lahat ay pinalalakas niya ang kakayahan ng mga mamamayan upang mapaganda ng mga ito ang kanilang pamumuhay.

TAX COLLECTIONS

"Under our fiscal framework, we envision our tax and

revenue efforts to further increase to up to 16.9 percent and 17.3 percent by 2028. Revenue generation has improved this year," aniya pa rin.

Mula Enero hanggang Mayo, nakapagtala aniya ng koleksyon ang Bureau of Internal Revenue ng halagang 1.05 trilion pesos, tumaas aniya ng 10% sa nakalipas na taon.

"For its part, the Bureau of Customs has also increased its collection by 7.4 percent for the first seven months of 2023, amounting to 476 billion pesos. Since July 2022, we have seen increased revenues from PAGCOR of 47.9 percent and from the PCSO of 20 percent," anito.

ALLOWANCE NG HCWS

ILALABAS

NANGAKO si Pangulong Marcos na ipalalabas nito ang COVID-19 health emergency allowance ng mga health care workers (HCWs) na nagserbisyo noong panahon ng pandemiya.

Sinabi ng Pangulo na suportado ng bansa ang HCWs.

"Upang masuklian naman natin ang naging sakripisyo ng health workers, pribado at pampubliko na mga ospital, noong nakaraang pandemiya, ipamamahagi na sa kanila ang kanilang COVID-19 emergency allowance at iba pang nabinbin

na benepisyo," ayon sa Pangulo.

Sinabi pa ng Pangulo na handa ang pamahalaan na mag-deploy ng mga doktor sa 2000 munisipalidad sa iba't ibang bahagi ng bansa.

Nangako rin na magbibigay ng doktor para sa 19 munisipalidad na wala kahit isa.

KAMPANYA VS DRUGS PATULOY

Sinabi ng Pangulo na magpapatuloy ang kampanya laban sa ilegal na droga subalit gagamit ng bagong mukha.

"It is now geared towards community-based treatment, rehabilitation, education, and reintegration, to curb drug dependence amongst our affected citizenry," ayon sa Pangulo.

Noong nakaraang taon aniya, inilunsad niya ang Buhay Ingatan, Droga'y Ayawan o BIDA program at nagtatag ng karagdagan 102 Balay Silangan Reformation Centers sa buong bansa.

Tatanggapin na niya ang pagbibitiw sa pwesto o sa tungkulin ng "unscrupulous law enforcers" at iba pang sangkot sa "highly nefarious drug trade" na nalantad.

Binigyang diin ni Pangulong Marcos na hindi nila kukunsintihin ang korapsyon at kawalan ng kakayahan sa gobyerno.

KRIS JOSE

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TUMATAHAK SA TAMANG DAAN

MARAMI ang nasiyahan sa pag-uulat ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. sa kanyang 2nd State of the Nation Address na ginawa sa Batasan Complex sa Quezon City kahapon ng hapon at sinabing tumatahak ang pamahalaan sa "tamang daan."

Ayon sa mga nakasaksi at nakarinig sa talumpati at pag-uulat ni Presidente Marcos, hindi naman makukuha sa isang upuan lang ang mabilis na pag-angat ng ekonomiya ng bansa subalit sa loob lang ng isang taon ay maraming pagbabago na ang naganap sa ekonomiya ng bansa dahil sa pagsusumikap ng administrasyon.

Nagbigay ng mahabang pagtutok sa agrikultura si Pangulong Bongbong kung saan ay matindi ang pagnanais niyang mapababa ang presyo ng bigas, asukal at iba pang pagkain. Hindi naman nakalimutan ng Pangulo ang kanyang pangako kaugnay sa pagpapababa ng presyo ng bigas.

Ginagawaan ng paraan ng pamahalaan kung paano maibibigay sa mamamayan ang sapat na pagkain sa kanilang hapag kainan, kaya naman ang sabi niya ay kailangan ang mga pagbabago sa mga kautusan obatas subalit kailangang suportado ito ng kaalaman sa siyensiya.

Nagbabala ang Pangulong Marcos sa mga korap lalo na ang mga smuggler at hoarders, na nagpapahirapsa mga magsasaka at maging sa mga mamimili, na bilang na ang araw nila.

Sa usapin ng tubig at enerhiya ay tututukan din ng pamahalaan upang hindi na kapusin ang bansa.

Sa usapin ng trabaho, ibinalita ni Presidente Marcos na maraming trabaho ang nakukuha mula sa ibang bansa dahil sa angking galing at talino ng mga Pilipino hindi lang sa usapin ng "blue collar job" subalit maging ang "white collar job" at lalo na sa trabahong medical tulad ng mga doktor at nars.

Pero pinasubalian din ni PBBM na dahil sa pagdami ng offer sa ating mga nasa medical field at iba pang trabaho, nawawalan na tayo ng mga mahuhusay na manggagawa sa ating bansa. Nauubusan na tayo ng mga doktor at nars.

Nausal ng Pangulo na sana kung magtatrabaho ang mahuhusay na Pilipino ay dahil sa kanilang kagustuhan at hindi dahil sa pangangailangan.

Gayunman, ibinalita rin ng Pangulong BBM na maraming siyentipiko na umalis sa bansa ay nagbalikan na at nangakong tutulong sa pamahalaan upang maikisa sa mga pag-aaral kung paano lilikha ng mga bagay na magpapalakas at magpapalago sa ating ekonomiya.

Gayunman, ang mga grupong nasa kabilang panig ay walang sinabing maganda sa Pangulo at sa tingin nila na ang mga iniulat nito ay pawang pampapogi lang.

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PBBM sa smugglers, hoarders: 'Bilang na ang araw n'yo!'

"Bilang na ang Araw ninyo".
Ito ang babala ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. sa mga smugglers at hoarders ng mga produktong agrikultural.

Sa kanyang ikalawang State of the Nation Address (SONA), sinabi ni Marcos na ang mga smugglers at mga hoarders ang dahilan sa patuloy na pagtaas sa presyo ng mga produktong agrikultura, gayundin sa fertilizers o pataba na ginagamit ng mga magsasaka.

Babala ni Marcos, hahabulin at ihahabla ang mga smugglers at hoarders dahil hindi ito tugma sa magandang layunin at sa halip ay napapahamak hindi lang ang mga magsasaka kundi tayo rin mga mamimili kaya hindi niya papayagan ang ganitong kalakaran.

Ang mga hoarders at smugglers din umano ang dahilan ng pagtaas ng presyo dahil namamanipula nila ang mga produktong agrikultural.

Kasabay nito, inihayag din ni Marcos sa kanyang SONA na pinapalawak ng pamahalaan ang kaalaman ng mga magsasaka sa mga makabagong teknolohiya at pamamaraan.

Kabilang na umano rito ang paggamit ng biofertilizer na gawa sa Pilipinas para hindi na umasa sa mas mahal at imported na fertilizer para mapalakas ang local agricultural production at sa ganitong paraan ay gaganda ang ani ng mga magsasaka.

Ibinida rin ng Pangulo sa kanyang ikalawang SONA na namigay ang pamahalaan ng mahigit na 28,000 makabagong makinarya at mga kagamitan sa iba't ibang dako ng Pilipinas.

Namigay rin umano ang Department of Agriculture (DA) ng mahigit 50,000 binhi ng palay, mahigit isang milyong binhi ng mais at sari-saring binhi ng gulay.

Bukod pa rito, nagpamigay din umano ang pamahalaan ng mahigit 100,000 binhi ng niyog at nagpatanim ng halos 10,000 hektarya ng lupa sa buong bansa.
(Gemma Garcia)



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PBBM sa mga smuggler, hoarder 'BILANG NA ANG ARAW NINYO'

SA ikalawang State of the Nation Address (SONA) ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., binalaan nito ang mga smuggler at hoarder na bilang na ang kanilang maliligayang araw.

Ito'y dahil sa hahabulin at kakasuhan na sila ng gobyerno sa mga ilegal nilang aktibidad na maituturing na pananabotahe sa ekonomiya ng Pilipinas.

"Sadyang hindi tama ang kanilang gawain, at hindi rin ito tugma sa ating magandang layunin. Pandaraya ang kanilang ginagawa," diin ng Pangulo.

"Napapahamak hindi lamang ang mga magsasaka, kundi tayo na ring mga mamimili. Kaya hindi natin papayagan ang ganitong kalakaran. Bilang na ang mga araw ng mga smuggler at hoarder na 'yan,' babala ni Marcos.

Aniya, dahil sa hoarding at smuggling, tumataas ang presyo ng mga produktong agrikultura.

"Isa sa mga dahilan ng pagtaas ng presyo ay ang mga smuggler, mga hoarder at mga nagmamaniplula ng presyo ng produktong agrikultural. Hinahabol at ihahabla natin sila," pagtiyak ni Marcos.

Sa panimula ng kanyang talumpati ay inamin ng pangulo na naging sakit ng ulo ng kanyang administrasyon ang inflation o pagtaas sa presyo ng bilihan at serbisyo.

"Last year, we emphasized certain headwinds confronting us, along with the rest of the world, in our post-pandemic economic recovery, and the biggest problem we encountered was inflation," wika

ni Marcos.

Ang inflation noong June ay bumaba na sa 5.4%, mas mababa kumpara sa 6.1% noong June 2022.

Marami pang ibinida ang pangulo tulad ng electrification program na 500,000 kabahayan na raw ang nakabitán ng kuryente mula nang maupo siya sa puwesto.

"We will spare no effort to achieve full household electrification by the end of my term. 100% is within our reach," ani Marcos.

Nangako rin itong padaramihin pa ang "Kadiwa ng Pangulo" sa buong bansa upang makabili ng murang bilihan ang mga kapuspalad na mamamayan.

Isiniwalat din nito ang plano na pagkalooban ng amnestiya ang mga dating rebelde.

Nakiusap naman si Marcos sa publiko na magtipid sa tubig dahil sa kinakaharap na El Niño phenomenon.

Inatasan naman nito ang Kongreso na ipasa ang 17 priority measures ng administrasyon. (Prince Golez)



Biofertilizer na gawa sa 'Pinas pinush

INIHAYAG ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. na pinapalawak ng pamahalaan ang kaalaman ng mga magsasaka sa mga makabagong teknolohiya at pamamaraan, kabilang na rito ang paggamit ng biofertilizer na gawa sa Pilipinas upang hindi na umasa sa mas mahal at imported na fertilizer.

Layon nilang palakasin ang local agricultural production sa pamamagitan ng consolidation, modernization, mechanization at improvement ng value chain.

"Sa balance fertilizer strategy, gaganda ang ani ng mga magsasaka. Hindi na nila kailangan pang umasa sa mas mahal at imported na fertilizer," lahad ng pangulo sa ikalawa niyang State of Nation Address nitong Lunes.

Dagdag pa niya, bilang tulong sa mga magsasaka, namigay ang pamahalaan ng mahigit 28,000 mga makabagong makinarya at mga kagamitan sa iba't ibang dako ng Pilipinas.

Sa ilalim din aniya ng iba't ibang programa ng Department of Agriculture, namudmod din sila ng mahigit 50,000,000 binhi ng palay; mahigit isang milyong binhi ng mais; at sari-saring binhi ng gulay.

Maliban dito, nagpamigay din aniya ang gobyerno ng mahigit 100,000 binhi ng niyog at nagpatanim sa halos 10,000 hektarya ng lupa sa buong bansa.

"Lahat ng mga binhing ito ay makabago. Hybrid at mataas ang kalidad," dagdag pa niya. (Issa Santiago)



Marcos hinirit Department of Water sa Kongreso

Umapela si Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. sa Kongreso na suportahan ang 17 pang panukalang batas ng kanyang administrasyon kabilang na ang Department of Water Resources Management Act.

Inilahad ng Pangulo sa kanyang ikalawang State of the Nation Address ang mga panukalang nais niyang ipasa ng Kongreso.

Bukod sa Department of Water Resources Management Act, kabilang pa sa mga panukala ni Pangulong Marcos ang mga sumusunod: excise tax sa single-use plastic, pagbabago sa sistema ng mining tax, road user's tax, military and uniformed personnel (MUP) pension, pag-amiyenda sa Fisheries Code, Anti-Agricultural

Smuggling Act at Cooperative Code.

Nais din ng Pangulo na repasuhin ng Kongreso ang Government Procurement Law at Government Auditing Code.

Kasama rin sa mga prayoridad na panukala ang anti-financial accounts scamming, Tatak-Pinoy (Proudly Filipino) law, The Blue Economy law, ease of paying taxes, income classification ng mga local government unit, at Philippine Immigration Act.

"Makikipagtulungan tayo nang mabuti sa Kongreso para sa mga mahahalagang batas na kakailanganin natin sa ating tuloy-tuloy na pag-ahon," sabi ni Pangulong Marcos. **(Prince Golez)**



Sugar producers ask SRA to start milling in August

A SUGAR federation asked the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) over the weekend to reconsider starting the milling season in August, instead of September this year.

"Hectares of standing canes are due for harvest in August. A year ago, in June 2022, the national government urged us to start milling early. Many sugar farmers supported the call, milling 432,356 tons as reported by SRA," Sugar Council said.

"Consequently, the ratoon plants, estimated at 400,000 tons, are now mature, and delaying their harvest to September will cause them to become overripe, compromising purity and tonnage," it added.

In a statement, Sugar Council said that last year, five Negros mills started milling in August, with two mills commencing operations on August 8, in response to the

national government's call to mill the canes early because of the acute sugar shortage.

Now, the producers are looking forward to the start of milling this August because the canes they planted after their early harvest last year are already ripe for milling.

In a letter addressed to Acting Administrator Pablo Luis Azcona, the council has appealed to continue with the previous practice of commencing milling operations in August.

The letter was signed by Confederation of Sugar Producers' Associations Inc. (CONFED) president Aurelio Gerardo Valderrama Jr., National Federation of Sugarcane Planters (NFSP) president Enrique Rojas, and Panay Federation of Sugarcane Farmers (PANAYFED) president Danilo Abelita.

"The recent typhoon Dodong, with its torrential rains and strong winds, caused

mature canes to lodge. If left unharvested, the purity and weight of these distressed canes will suffer," the Sugar Council said.

"Farmers fear that any delay in milling will lower the weight and sugar yield of the canes, resulting to lower sugar production and lesser returns for the farmers," the council added.

The Sugar Council also cited the need for fresh income by the producers, especially the small farmers, after months of no work in the farm.

In view of the early start of milling last year, milling operations finished earlier than usual.

Numerous sugar mills stopped milling in April this year, instead of the traditional May up to June.

Consequently, some sugar farmers have had no income from their farms since April.

Complicating the financial quandary of the sugar producers is the obligation to their farm workers, who have also been looking forward to getting back to work this August.

"Sugar farmers have already contracted cane cutters, and delaying milling to September will force them to financially support the workers or risk losing them," the Sugar Council said.

Furthermore, it said that if milling will start on September 1 yet, this will create an overwhelming demand for farm workers, which are already in short supply, and for hauling services of truckers.

"Farmers are apprehensive that this unprecedented demand for farm labor and hauling services will give rise to an unhealthy competition, thereby driving up their production costs," the council added. **Raadee S. Sausa**



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Sugar council urges SRA to start milling in August

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

SUGAR producers are urging the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) to reconsider starting the milling season this coming August instead of September, saying that delaying the harvest would compromise sugarcane purity and tonnage.

The Sugar Council, representing thousands of sugarcane farmers from three planter federations, including the Confederation of Sugar Producers' Associations Inc. (Confed), National Federation of Sugarcane Planters (NFSP), and Panay Federation of Sugarcane Farmers (Panayfed) appealed to SRA to proceed with the previous practice of commencing milling operations in August.

"Farmers fear that any delay in milling will lower the weight and sugar yield of the canes, resulting to lower sugar production and

lesser returns for the farmers," the council said.

"A year ago, in June 2022, the national government urged us to start milling early. Many sugar farmers supported the call, milling 432,356 tons as reported by SRA. Consequently, the ratoon plants, estimated at 400,000 tons, are now mature, and delaying their harvest to September will cause them to become overripe, compromising purity and tonnage," it added, noting that hectares of standing canes are due for harvest in August. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

has approved changing the start of the milling season from August to September this year.

According to the Sugar Council, sugar farmers fear that any delay in milling will lower the weight and sugar yield of the canes, resulting in lower sugar production and lesser returns for them.

The council added that five Negros mills started operating in August last year in response to the national government's call to mill the canes early because of the acute sugar shortage.

"Now, the producers are looking forward to the start of milling this August, because the canes they planted after their early harvest last year are already ripe for milling," it said.

The council also noted that some sugar farmers have had no income from their farms since April this year, as several sugar mills stopped operations during that month, instead of May to June traditionally.

"Sugar farmers have already contracted cane cutters, and delaying milling to September will force them to financially support the workers or risk losing them," the council said.

It also emphasized that if the milling starts on Sept. 1, 2023, it will create an overwhelming demand for farm workers, who are already in short supply. Workers for hauling and trucking services will also be needed once milling starts.

"Farmers are apprehensive that this unprecedented demand for farm labor and hauling services will give rise to an unhealthy competition, thereby driving up their production costs," it added.

The council expressed their appeal through a letter addressed to SRA Administrator Pablo Luis Azcona and signed by Confed President Aurelio Gerardo Valderama Jr., NFSP President Enrique D. Rojas and Panayfed President Danilo Abelita.

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FARMERS NEED THE INCOME ASAP

SUGAR FARMERS, PLANTERS SEEK EARLY HARVEST IN AUG

By Meg J. Adonis
@MegINQ

Sugarcane farmers and planters' federations are asking the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) to consider starting the next milling season a month earlier than the original

schedule, as hectares of canes would already be due for harvest in August and farmers risk suffering at least 30 days of no fresh income.

In its letter to SRA acting administrator Pablo Luis Azcona, the Sugar Council—a group composed of the Con-

federation of Sugar Producers' Associations Inc., the National Federation of Sugarcane Planters Inc., and the Panay Federation of Sugarcane Farmers Inc.—said any delay in milling could lower the weight and sugar yield of mature canes, resulting in lower

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SUGAR FARMERS SEEK EARLY HARVEST

FROM B1

sugar production and lower returns for farmers.

"Hectares of standing canes are due for harvest in August. A year ago, in June 2022, the national government urged us to start milling early," the Sugar Council said, noting that sugar farmers milled at least 432,356 tons last year to support the government's call.

NFSP president Enrique Rojas explained to the Inquirer that mills need the SRA's approval before they could start milling.

"Without SRA approval, any sugar produced by the unsanctioned mill will not be issued a sugar quedan. Without the quedan, the sugar is deemed illegal and can't be sold to traders," he said.

In May, President Marcos delayed the start of the sugar milling season for crop year 2023 to 2024 from August to September to improve raw sugar yields.

However, the Sugar Council pointed out that around 400,000 tons of canes were now mature, and that delaying their harvest to September "will cause them to become overripe, compromising purity and tonnage."

At the same time, the group stressed that sugar farmers were "in dire need of fresh income" after months of no work in their farms since milling finished in April this year, which was earlier than the traditional May to June.

"If milling will start on Sept. 1, this will create an overwhelming demand for farm workers, which are already in short supply, and for hauling services of truckers. Farmers are apprehensive that this unprecedented demand for farm labor and hauling services will give rise to an unhealthy competition, thereby driving up their production costs," it added. INQ



Date: July 25, 2023 Page: A1 & A2

Sugar planters want early start of milling

BY JED MACAPAGAL

PLANTERS are asking the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) to consider advancing the start of the milling season by a month to August instead of September, saying sugar canes that were planted early need to be harvested soon to avoid a drop in their quality.

"Hectares of standing canes are due for harvest in August. A year ago, in June 2022, the national government urged us to start milling early. Many sugar farmers supported the call, milling 432,356 tons as reported by SRA. Consequently, the ratoon plants, estimated at 400,000 tons are now mature and delaying their harvest to September will cause them to become over-ripe, compromising purity and tonnage," said a letter of the Sugar Council, composed of the Confederation of Sugar Producers' Associations Inc., National Federation of Sugarcane Planters and Panay Federation of Sugarcane Farmers.

The group said Typhoon Dodong which brought torrential rains and strong winds also caused mature sugarcane to lodge and if left unharvested, will have lower purity and weight.

The Sugar Council warned any delay in milling will lower the weight and sugar yield of canes, resulting to lower sugar production



Farmers in Hinigaran, Negros Occidental harvest their first produce from the sugarcane-rice cropping system on Sept. 29, 2020. (Photo courtesy of PIO Negros Occidental)

and lesser returns to farmers.

The group also said producers especially small farmers need fresh income after months of no work in the farm.

The Sugar Council also warned starting the operations

of mills by September can also create "an overwhelming demand for farm workers" and hauling services of trucks which are now in short supply.

"Farmers are apprehensive that this unprecedented demand for

farm labor and hauling services will give rise to an unhealthy competition, thereby driving up their production costs," the group said.

The Sugar Council said last

See SUGAR ► Page A2

SUGAR

year, five mills in Negros started operations in August in response to the national government's call to mill the canes early because of the local sugar supply shortage.

"In view of the early start of milling last year, milling operations finished earlier than usual. Numerous sugar mills stopped milling in April this year, instead of the traditional May up to June. Consequently, some sugar farmers have had no income from their farms since April," the

group added.

Based on Department of Agriculture's latest monitoring of public markets in the National Capital Region as of Friday, prevailing retail price of sugar ranges from P85 to P110 per kg for refined sugar, P80 to P90 per kg for washed sugar and P75 to P90 for brown sugar.

Meanwhile, SRA millsite monitoring showed composite price of raw sugar as of July 2 was 3,000 per 50 kg bag.

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Sugar planters want start of milling operations to return to August

SUGAR PLANTERS are asking the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) to continue with the August timetable for starting milling season, claiming that delaying the start to September runs the risk of overripening the cane.

In a July 18 letter, the Sugar Council — composed of three planter federations — appealed to the SRA to continue starting milling operations in August, instead of reverting to the traditional start in September.

The letter was signed by the Confederation of Sugar Producers Associations, Inc. President Aurelio Gerardo J. Valderama, Jr., National Federation of Sugarcane Planters, Inc. President Enrique D.

Rojas, and Panay Federation of Sugarcane Farmers, Inc. President Danilo A. Abelita.

It was addressed to SRA Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona and planters' representative to the SRA board David Andrew L. Sanson.

The sugar industry was instructed to start milling early last year due to the sugar shortage prevailing at the time, with mill output last year amounting to 432,345 tons.

Mr. Azcona has said that a September start will allow the cane additional time to mature, thereby improving sugar yields.

The sugar planters are pushing for an August start because the cane they planted last year after the milling season began in August is ripe for harvest.

"Consequently, the ratoon plants, estimated at 400,000 tons, are now mature, and delaying their harvest to September will cause them to become overripe, compromising purity and tonnage," the Sugar Council said.

A ratoon is the sprout emerging from harvested cane.

The planters said delaying the start of milling this year may lower the weight and yield of the cane. They also cited the impact of Typhoon Dodong on output and the prospect of planters earning lower returns from their crop.

With the early start to milling last year, many sugar mills stopped operating in April, instead of the usual May or

June, leaving farmers "in dire need of fresh income."

"Sugar farmers have already contracted cane cutters, and delaying milling to September will force them to financially support the workers or risk losing them," the Sugar Council said.

It added that delaying milling to September will "create overwhelming demand" for farm workers and hauling services.

"Farmers are apprehensive that this unprecedented demand for farm labor and hauling services will give rise to unhealthy competition, thereby driving up their production costs," it said. —
Sheldeem Joy Talavera



SOLON: MAKE KADIWA PERMANENT, BIGGER

**By Jester
Manalastas**

A neophyte solon urged his colleagues in Congress to prioritize the passage of a measure that will institutionalize the agribusiness and marketing initiative intended to help link local farmers and fishers directly to consumers.

AGRI Party-list Representative Wilbert Lee made this call following the aggressiveness of the government to pursue the establishment of Kadiwa centers in the country.

Lee, principal author of House Bill No. 3957 or the Kadiwa Agri-Food Terminal Act, pointed out that "data from the Department of Agriculture shows that by April 2021, 41,357 farmers had already benefited from the Kadiwa program, gen-

erating sales of 7.241 billion pesos and serving nearly 4 million households."

"Patunay ito na napakalaking potensyal ng programang ito, at marami pang pwedeng makinabang kung palalawakin natin ang Kadiwa," he said.

"Panalo ang mga magsasaka dito kasi pwede silang kumita nang maayos dahil wala nang middleman. Panalod inang konsyumer kasi nabibili nila nang mas mura ang mga agri and fisheries products. Sa Kadiwa program, malinaw na Winner Tayo Lahat," he added.

The Kadiwa Agri-Food Terminal Act aims to scale up the Kadiwa food terminal model and effectively promote the growth of the local agricultural markets while providing consumers with affordable agriculture and fisheries products.

"Once rolled out in every city and municipality, these agri-food terminals and centers can serve as a location where local farmers and fisherfolk can sell their goods directly to the consumers and the general market," Lee said.

He pointed out that prices in Kadiwa centers should be lower by 10 to 20 percent "since bringing the products won't entail high transportation costs."

The proposed measure mandates local government units (LGUs) to establish Kadiwa Agri-food terminals in their localities in one of the following modes: Kadiwa Retail or Direct Selling; physical food terminals to accommodate farmers and fisherfolk products for sale to customers and food suppliers; Kadiwa on Wheels: rolling stores in vehicles to bring agri-

fishery products to barangays and villages; and Kadiwa sa Pamahalaan: trading centers within the proximity of the government's property office through partnership with the DA or other government agency within the LGU.

The government recently expanded the Kadiwa initiative on July 17 when President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. led the nationwide launching of "Kadiwa ng Pangulo" in San Fernando, Pampanga.

The launch was formalized through the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with national government agencies, including the Department of the Interior and Local Government, to assist LGUs and to facilitate the establishment of Kadiwa centers in their respective jurisdictions.



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BFAR, DENR sinugod sa Oriental Mindoro oil spill

Nagsagawa ng kilos protesta nitong Lunes, Hulyo 24, sa Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) at Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) ang mga komunidad na apektado ng oil spill dahil sa lumubog na MT Princess Empress sa Naujan, Oriental Mindoro noong Pebrero 28, 2023.

Pinangungunahan ng Protect VIP, isang koalisyon para sa proteksyon ng Verde Island Passage, ang protesta matapos na magsagawa umano ito ng pagsusuri sa kalidad ng tubig sa mga karagatan ng Pinamalayan at Pola at nakita na mataas pa rin ang konsentrasyon o kontaminasyon ng langis at grasa kaysa

sa itinakda ng DENR na pamantayan para sa kalidad ng tubig sa mga marine protected area.

Ayon kay Fr. Edwin Gariguez, convenor ng Protect VIP, labis silang nadismaya na matapos ang isang buwan ng pananahimik at paghinto ng regular na mga ulat sa sitwasyon, ay bigla na lang idineklara ng pamahalaan na tapos na ang oil spill.

Mahigit isang buwan na umano ang nakalipas mula ng huling maglabas ang DENR ng situational report na nagpakita pa rin ng langis at grasa, hydrogen sulfide, at mga volatile organic compounds sa Pola. (**Ronilo Dagos**)



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'BM' RUNNER-UP IN INT'L AGRI JOURNALISM TILT



(FROM L to R): Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas, Cai U. Ordinario, Jovee Marie Dela Cruz, Jovynelle Rodriguez.

THE BUSINESSMIRROR earned a runner-up finish in its debut in a global competition for journalists reporting on agricultural issues.

A team of BusinessMirror reporters composed of Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas, Cai U. Ordinario, Jovee Marie Dela Cruz, and Jovynelle Rodriguez, a student from the Lyceum of the Philippines University, were adjudged runners up in this year's International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ) Star Prize Award for Print.

They bagged the citation for the multimedia explanatory story titled "Skyrocketing sugar prices stoke industry liberalization stakes" published in the paper's Broader Look section last August 4, 2022. (Read story here: <https://BUSINESSMIRROR.com.ph/2022/08/04/skyrocketing-sugar-prices-stoke-industry-liberalization-stakes>)

The story focused on the Philippine sugar crisis last year, tackling and tracing the events, issues, and problems that led to the unprecedented record-high prices of domestic sugar in the country.

The story also scrutinized the implications of the crisis on the domestic economy, particularly its impacts for Filipino farmers, consumers, and even small businesses like sorbetero and banana-Q vendors.

The story was edited by Senior Editor Dennis D. Estopace with production guidance from Associate Editor Jennifer A. Ng and Editor-in-Chief Lourdes M. Fernandez.

Thomas Weber's story titled "Zurück Zum Ursprung" ("Back to the Origin") placed first in the IFAJ tilt. The story explored a family's struggle with the economic challenges of dairy farming, according to the IFAJ.

The IFAJ said the award "recognizes excellence in reporting on agricultural topics around the world." (See IFAJ press release: <https://www.ifaj.org/thomas-weber-from-austria-receives-international-federation-of-agricultural-journalists-star-prize-for-print/44645/>)

The IFAJ disclosed that the international judging panel for this year's Star Prize for Print award was composed of John Morriss of Canada and Markus Rediger and Ingold Jonas of Switzerland.

"The power of print remains a driving force in journalism, and the IFAJ Star Prize celebrates the power of excellent research and great storytelling," said Adalberto Rossi, IFAJ secretary-general, in an earlier statement released this month.

The IFAJ is an international group of communications with more than 5,000 members across 61 countries, according to the organization's website.



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BoC nets P23.8B in anti-smuggling ops

THE Bureau of Customs' (BoC) anti-smuggling operations resulted in the seizure of P23.851 billion worth of goods for the first half of the year.

Customs Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio said on Monday that among the top commodities seized were counterfeit products, agricultural products, tobacco

products, illegal drugs and general merchandise.

Among the bureau's big catch this year were P86 million worth of misdeclared sugar from Hong Kong in Subic Port on March 15; P1.4 billion worth of imported cigarettes in a Sulu warehouse on March 2; and P3.8 million worth of shabu at

the NAIA DHL Express Warehouse on May 8.

The bureau's Fuel Marking Program, which was designed to combat illicit fuel trade, was also able to mark 9.42 billion liters of fuel, equivalent to P114.53 billion in duties and taxes.

The bureau also went after customs law violators, revoking

the accreditation of 33 customs brokers and 85 importers.

Additionally, 74 criminal complaints were filed with the Department of Justice, and two administrative complaints were filed with the Professional Regulation Commission against violators of customs laws.

WILLIAM B. DEPASUPIL

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Possible Phl, Hawaii partnership in RE, aquaculture seen

By **CATHERINE TALAVERA**

HONOLULU—Aquaculture and green energy are some of the areas that the Philippines and Hawaii have the poten-

tial to partner in, according to Hawaii State Sen. Glenn Wakai. "I think there's a lot of good collaborative opportunities in the energy space," Wakai told **The STAR** on the sidelines of a briefing under the Foreign Press Centers' International Reporting tour.

Wakai said that one of the Philippines' strengths is its natural resources. "And you have the same kind of environment where you have geothermal," he said.

During the media briefing, Wakai said there is a Hawaiian company working on a geothermal plant project in the Philippines.

He also emphasized the Hawaii's push for renewable energy as it eyes to go 100 percent renewable energy by 2045.

Similarly, the Philippines is also pursuing a transition to greener energy sources as it targets to increase the share of renewable energy in the Philippines' power generation mix to 35 percent in 2030, and 50 percent by 2040.

In a bid to achieve this goal, the Philippines continues to welcome more investments in the renewable energy sector.

Apart from geothermal, Wakai cited that the Philippines also has a lot of rivers, which shows its potential for hydro-power projects.

Wakai also highlighted potential opportunities for the Philippines and Hawaii to partner in fisheries, particularly aquaculture.

"I think there's fisheries we could really partner with the Philippines on that," Wakai said, adding that most of the world's shrimp exports come from Hawaii, the Philippines and Thailand.

"So, if somehow we could partner with you on aquaculture I think that's another opportunity for cross pollination," he said.

Wakai shared that Hawaii is a net importer of fish, importing around 70 percent of the fish it consumes.

"In Hawaii, we're an island state and we import more fish than we export. And so I'm on a push to push more aquaculture, and as we talked about, we're so land constrained," Wakai said.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed that aquaculture accounts for the biggest share of fisheries production in the Philippines with 55.1 percent share of total fisheries production in the first quarter.

Aquaculture production in the first quarter grew by 1.7 percent to 545,636 metric tons (MT) from 536,605 MT in the same period a year ago.

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PAGE: BY

Phl urged to shore up local rice production

By DANESSA RIVERA

As a major importer of rice, the Philippines will have to make a decisive move to further shore up local production with India's recent move to ban the export of non-basmati white rice and the added challenge due to the looming El Niño phenomenon.

While India is not a major source of Philippine rice imports, the country will not be spared from the impact of the ban as this will have a ripple effect on global supply and prices.

"Although the Philippines rice import market will not be directly impacted by the ban, the loss of Indian rice exports will lower global supply, which will lead to upward pressure on the staple," ING Bank senior economist Nicholas Mapa said in a text message.

India supplies around 40 percent of global rice trade and its latest policy is expected to further tighten global supply and send world prices even higher.

Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (PCAFI) president Danilo Fausto said the Indian rice export ban would stir speculation and competition in the current global supply, causing a dent to the country's major sources of imported rice.

"There will be higher demand from other rice exporting countries, which will drive prices up. Buyers of India's rice will trigger the spike in prices," he said.

Therefore, the Philippines would be affected as it would add pressure on local rice prices, PIDS senior research fellow Roehlano Briones said in a phone interview.

"It will definitely put added pressure on prices. In the last few months, global prices have been increasing and we are actually feeling it. We see rice retail prices slowly going up, even farmgate prices," he said.

Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) national manager Raul Montemayor said traders are now on a wait-and-see mode whether Vietnam—also a major rice producer and exporter—would raise its prices in reaction to the Indian ban.

Higher rice prices could be felt in the local market "within a few weeks," he said.

To mitigate the impact of India's policy on local prices, the government needs to focus on ramping up local rice production, especially with the looming El Niño.

"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," Mapa said.

Timing is of the essence due to the challenge of El Niño.

"Our default is to produce our own supply, but there's the challenge of El Niño in the second cropping season," Fausto said.

The second cropping season starts in November, with the harvest in February or March. This is when the El Niño is expected to hit the country at varying levels.

"When El Niño starts to hit our rice producing areas, the irrigation systems will have to be ready," Fausto said.

Vietnam to ban rice exports too?

The last time India implemented a major ban in rice exports in 2007, it not only triggered a world food price crisis, but also created a food security issue in many countries relying on rice as a staple.

At that time, global rice prices soared to \$1,000 per metric ton (MT). Currently, rice prices hover around at \$500 to \$540 per MT.

This time, India's move may not lead to the same scenario as long as the other rice producing countries will not follow suit.

"Will this lead to that? I don't think so... As long as nobody else joins their policy, the impact will not be too extreme," Briones said.

However, Vietnam is also reportedly planning export curbs as well.

With India's latest policy driving up already elevated prices, Vietnam could further send prices spiraling upward if it pushes through with its plan to restrict rice exports, Montemayor said.

Vietnam is our top source of imported rice. Last year, it

accounted for 83 percent of the record high 3.8-million metric ton shipments last year, data from the Bureau of Plant Industry showed.

"Definitely India's move will drive up prices. Vietnam is reportedly planning export curbs also. Imported rice will be more expensive and will push up retail prices. Or importers will scale down imports leading to tight supply domestically," Montemayor said.

Incentive to local farmers

Whatever the decision of Vietnam will be, consumers will be the ones to feel the brunt of the impact of the more expensive imported rice.

But this would also incentivize local farmers to plant more rice to provide a cheaper alternative to consumers.

"Imported rice will have higher price. On the upside, that is good for the farmer. On the other hand, consumers will bear the cost of the more expensive imported rice," Fausto said.

Based on latest monitoring from the Department of Agriculture (DA), the prices of imported and local rice are almost at the same level.

Retail prices of local commercial rice range from P48 to P60 per kilo for special, P42 to P49 for premium, P40 to 49 for well-milled and from P36 to P44 per kilo for regular milled.

On the other hand, prices of imported commercial rice range from P48 to P58 per kilo for special, P45 to 50 for premium, and P41 to P48 for well-milled.

To encourage farmers to plant more, Bantay Bigas spokesperson Cathy Estavillo reiterated their call to strengthen local production, with government providing direct support subsidies, post-harvest facilities and free land distribution to farmers.

They also called for the passage of House Bill 405 or Rice Industry Development Act.

The proposed measure allows rice farmers to avail of production inputs, such as seeds, fertilizer, and tools at discounted prices. It also aims to develop irrigation and post-harvest facilities for farmers.