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## Amendments to Fisheries Code favor commercial operators, fisherfolk say

THE Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya), an organization of subsistence fisherfolk, said planned amendments to the Fisheries Code are likely to favor commercial fishing companies.

The amendments "will certainly benefit owners of commercial fishing vessels who will be institutionally allowed to conduct large-scale fishing activities inside the 15-kilometer municipal waters intended for small-scale and subsistence fisherfolk," Pamalakaya said in a statement.

During his second State of the Nation Address, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. sought Congressional support to further amend the Republic Act No. 10654, or the Amended Fisheries Code of the Philippines.

It was recently amended to include rules to address illegal,

unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUUF). Trade concessions the Philippines enjoys with the European Union depend on Philippine compliance with a number of environmental and labor rights conventions, one of which requires signatories to crack down on IUUF.

"Our Fisheries Code must be revised 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," Mr. Marcos said on Monday.

"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.

Under the law in its current form, commercial fishing vessels are only allowed to operate

outside the 15-kilometer limit for municipal waters.

Pamalakaya said that the decision to amend was "the result of the continuous lobbying of big fishing firms (seeking) to operate within municipal waters."

"There can be no 'harmonization' between the municipal fishers and commercial fishing vessels because the latter outcompete the traditional and backward methods of fishing," the group said.

Groups such as Oceana and Samahan ng Mangingisda - Bataan earlier expressed doubts over the fresh amendments, saying that the last round of rule changes has not been given adequate time to be enforced effectively.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources said it will issue a statement regarding the proposed amendments. —  
**Shelden Joy Talavera**



## Marcos eyes Islamic banking, Halal food ties in Malaysian trip

**PHILIPPINE President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.** on Tuesday afternoon departed for his three-day visit to Malaysia, vowing to boost ties in agriculture, Islamic banking and the Halal industry.

"My visit will focus on the renewed partnership in the fields of agriculture, food secu-

rity, digital economy, tourism, people-to-people exchanges as well as explore new avenues for cooperation particularly in areas of the Halal industry and Islamic banking," he said in a pre-departure speech.

Mr. Marcos Jr. said the Halal industry is expected to become a trillion-dollar industry in the

international market as global demand continues to expand.

"Malaysia is one of the global leaders in this sector and this visit aims to forge synergies with Malaysia for the Philippines to enjoy a share of this market," he said.

Mr. Marcos was set to meet with Malaysian Prime Minis-

ter Dato' Seri (Anwar) Ibrahim and Malaysian King Al-Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah.

He is also expected to meet with Malaysian business leaders "to showcase trade and investment opportunities (in the Philippines)."

"I hope that through the investment forum, roundtable

discussions and business meetings organized by the Department of Trade and Industry, we will build new bridges between our economies and create inroads to new ventures that will see our bilateral trade volumes and investments increase," he added. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**





# Economic and industry updates from State of the Nation Address 2023

**PRESIDENT FERDINAND R. Marcos, Jr.** gave an overview of the economic situation as well as of some key sectors over the administration's first year during his second State of the Nation Address (SONA) delivered at the Batasang Pambansa Complex on July 24.

In the first year of the Marcos administration, the country was faced with several challenges to its post-pandemic recovery, such as the surge in oil prices amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the elevated inflation.

The previous year ended with economic growth of 7.6%, surpassing the government's 6.5-7.5% expectation. However, the inflation rate for 2022 averaged at 5.8%, which was above the 2-4% target range.

For 2023, Mr. Marcos cited the World Bank's projection of a 6% growth rate, still within the government's target. Meanwhile, he said that inflation is "moving in the right direction," as it eased from a record-high 8.7% in January to 5.4% in June.



*"Puspasan ang ating ginagawa upang pataasin ang produksyon ng ating ekonomiya. Pinapalago natin ang mga industriya. Dinadagdagan natin ang mga imprastruktura upang mas mapabilis ang daloy ng mga produkto at serbisyo. Higit sa lahat, pinapalakas natin ang kakayahan ng mga mamamayan upang mapaganda nila ang kanilang pamumuhay. Ito ang puno't dulo ng ating Philippine Development Plan,"* he said.

## AGRICULTURE

Mr. Marcos, who also served as the Agriculture Secretary, highlighted the initiatives and plans for agriculture in this year's SONA.

The KADIWA program, which seeks to directly connect farmers and fisher-folks' products to consumers through the KADIWA stores, has helped families and livelihoods, according to Mr. Marcos. He added that KADIWA is being sought to be extended nationwide.

Mr. Marcos also shared that farmers' knowledge of new technologies and processes is being broadened. The government also provided over 28,000 new machinery and equipment to various locations.

In the area of infrastructure and facilities for agriculture, the president said that the Geo-Agri map of farm-to-market roads is being arranged. Furthermore, nearly 4,000 additional fabrication labs, production, and cold storage facilities are established, while 24,000 multi-species hatcheries are built.

Meanwhile, Mr. Marcos assured that agrarian reform continues. He mentioned the new Agrarian Emancipation Act, which he signed earlier this month and is set to free over 600,000 beneficiaries from debt.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

Investment in infrastructure was also in the spotlight during the SONA, particularly the administration's P8.3-trillion Build Better More program, which aims to expand the previously Build, Build, Build program.

There are 194 projects planned under the Build Better More, 123 of which are new. Mr. Marcos said that infrastructure spending would remain to be at 5-6% of the country's gross domestic product.

Among the progress made in infrastructure development were the construction, maintenance, and upgrade of





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over 4,000 kilometers of roads and about 500 bridges as of June, according to Mr. Marcos. Also finished were airport and port developments such as Cebu's Pier 88 port and the new passenger terminal building at the Port of Calapan.

"Intermodal connectivity will be a primary consideration," he added. "Roads, bridges, and mass transport systems will be interconnected."

"For strategic financing, some of the nation's high-priority projects can now look to the newly established Maharlika Investment Fund (MIF), without the added debt burden," Mr. Marcos said.

The President signed the MIF into law on July 18, despite the risks and concerns raised. During the SONA, he assured that "a group of internationally recognized economic managers shall oversee the operations of the Fund, guided by principles of transparency and accountability."

"The funds for the social security and public health insurance of our people shall remain intact and separate," he added.

## ENERGY

The president also recognized the developments made in the energy sector

during his second SONA, such as the eight new power plants, which brought the total power generation facilities turned on in the country since the past year to 17.

He also noted the opening of renewable energy (RE) projects for foreign investments to "accelerate the realization of this green energy goal." The country targets a 35% RE share in the power generation mix by 2030, then 50% 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.

Mr. Marcos also mentioned the renewal of Malampaya's contract, as well as the push for further gas exploration in other areas of the country.

"The national government has partnered with the BARMM (Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao) in regard to energy exploration, development, and utilization within its territorial jurisdiction. We, therefore, expect to see renewed investor interest in its promising sites," he added.

## EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

This year's address also touched on the improvements in the education sector, particularly with the increase in the school workforce as well as public schools and facilities.

The K to 10 curriculum is also being recalibrated, said Mr. Marcos, to make it "always relevant, responsive, and at par with international standards."

He also pointed out that one-third of over a million Filipinos who graduated from TVET (technical-vocational education and training) since the past year were scholars of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). He also shared that the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education program helped nearly half of the 4.1 million enrolled college students last year.

Education in maritime as well as the medical and nursing programs was also mentioned during the SONA, with the former said to have been "strengthened" while the latter is being "greatly expand[ed]."

Meanwhile, Mr. Marcos noted the country's employment rate improved to 95.7% in May this year from 82.4% in April 2020 at the height of the pandemic.

"But even with our current high rate of employment, we must do more. We will generate additional jobs for the remaining 4.3% of our workforce, as well as for the 11.7% underemployed Filipinos seeking better employment opportunities," he said.

The President also mentioned their engagement with partners in the international community "to ensure a safe working environment" for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) during his address. "As we do so, we are also putting in place responsive mechanisms for the social welfare, repatriation, and reintegration of our returning OFWs into the Philippine economy," he said.

## HEALTH

In matters of health, Mr. Marcos shared the programs launched to address hunger and issues concerning nutrition, one of which was the recently launched Food Stamp Program.

The country also catches up with routine vaccinations, he said, with over 80% of eligible children have been vaccinated against measles, rubella, and, polio as of 2023.

"Our healthcare system is undergoing structural enhancements," the President also said.

He shared on the expansion of public health facilities, with more than 3,400 project completions in 2022. There are also 60 additional specialty centers that have started their operations.

Furthermore, he mentioned the programs that have assisted several Filipinos in their healthcare needs in the past year, such as PhilHealth's Konsulta Package and the Department of Health's Medical Assistance for Indigent Patients program. — **Chelsey Keith P. Ignacio**





# DOJ-led task force lists govt agencies, execs linked in agri product smuggling

By JOEL R. SAN JUAN  
@jrsanjuan1573

**J**USTICE Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla said Tuesday the Department of Justice (DOJ)-led Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Task Force (AASTF) will leave no stone unturned in identifying government officials who may be possibly involved in smuggling of agricultural products, particularly garlic and onion, into the country.

Remulla made the assurance following President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s 2nd State of the Nation Address (SONA) where he warned smugglers and hoarders of agricultural products that their days are numbered.

The DOJ secretary said they are now looking into several names of individuals connected in various government agencies involved in the importation, supply and distribution of agricultural products.

Remulla identified the agencies as the Department of Agriculture (DA), Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI), Bureau of Customs (BOC), and other agencies

with similar mandate.

He pointed out that garlic-onion smuggling operations have been operating for 15 years, or since 2008, and may involve bribes running "in the billions of pesos."

"We are looking at some individuals who may be involved in this, including those that may be behind the increase in the prices of products in the market, we are talking here about onion and garlic," the justice chief said.

"There are names that we are closely looking at from several agencies involved in issuing permits for

the entry of commodities, including the Bureau of Customs, Bureau of Plant Industry and other offices in the Department of Agriculture as well as those who have influence in the supply side of agricultural commodities," he added.

He said the task force has adopted a multi-pronged approach in addressing the issue of smuggling, which entails the involvement of the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR).

"This is a multi-pronged approach. This does not involve the prosecutors only but all other agencies that can be used to go after those involved in this kind of anomaly and bring them to justice," Remulla said.

He added the result of the fact-finding on agricultural smuggling might be known in the "next two weeks," while the conduct of the probe for the possible filing of charges might take at least two months.

The DOJ is likely to file a case of economic sabotage against those involved in the smuggling, hoarding and price fixing of onion and other agricultural products.

Earlier, Remulla said at least six to seven names would always come out in probes about smuggling.

"There are around six or seven names that come out whenever we look at the whole picture. So we already have an idea. We just have to catch them in the act," Remulla said.

Among the members of the AASTF are the Office of the Prosecutor General



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headed by Prosecutor General Benedicto Malcontento, Fadullon and the National Bureau of Investigation headed by Director Medardo de Lemos.

The AASTF's probe encompasses violations of Republic Act 10845, also known as the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016, among others.

The said law specifically targets the illegal importation of agricultural products and imposes severe penalties on offenders.

Aside from smuggling, Remulla said the department would be pursuing cases related to crimes of profiteering and hoarding, which are recognized as acts of economic sabotage.

## Cayetano expects 'concrete' action plan vs smugglers after SONA 2023

SENATOR Alan Peter Cayetano said Monday he expects the administration to lay down its concrete plans for catching agriculture smugglers in the coming weeks following the President's SONA.

"When he said, '*Bilang na ang araw niyo* [Your days are numbered], what does that mean? Let's wait for that," Cayetano said in a media interview immediately after the SONA on Monday.

He was referring to President Marcos's pronouncement that the administration will run after and file charges against individuals and entities that have been smuggling and hoarding agricultural products.

"That should have a follow-up, right? Hopefully [apprehending the smugglers and hoarders] will help the supply and the prices," the senator said.

Cayetano nonetheless acknowledged Marcos's "sense of urgency" about the matter, which he said has been in the minds of many Filipinos.

An alliance of farm groups has urged the Marcos administration to actually put smugglers and hoarders of agricultural products 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," Jayson Cainglet, executive director of Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) said.

He lamented that to this day, none of the supposed smugglers and hoarders has been found guilty.

Evidence presented by the Bureau of Customs (BOC) during congressional hearings were often deemed insufficient,

thus halting further investigations, Cainglet said.

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

Nevertheless, the group has 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."

For his part, Sinag President Rosendo So said that it will be beneficial for farmers if Marcos keeps his post as the Department of Agriculture (DA) secretary.

Keeping his post as the DA chief will make Marcos closer to the farmers, So said.

"It is more effective if the President becomes the secretary of agriculture; they can reach him and tell him what the problem is and he will understand.... We see less corruption if he will be the head of agriculture," he said.

With Raadee S. Sausa



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## House vows to support PBBM's fight vs smugglers, hoarders of agri products

THE House of Representatives said on Tuesday vowed to wield its legislative power to help the government's "war" against smugglers of agricultural products.

Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez said the lower chamber strongly backed President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s war against the smuggling and hoarding of rice and other agricultural products.

"We share the President's anger and frustration with smuggling, hoarding, and price manipulation. We will redouble our efforts to stop the smuggling and hoarding of rice, sugar, onions, garlic, and vegetables, which harms our farmers' competitiveness and disrupts the agricultural value chain," said Romualdez.

"We in Congress will help the President prevent the increase in the price of basic goods. We will do everything we can in this

mission," Romualdez said.

The House leader reiterated the President's warning that the days of smugglers, hoarders, and price manipulators are now numbered.

"We shall safeguard the interests of our farmers and our people in general, ensure equitable market conditions, and foster sustainable farming methods to guarantee our nation's food security," he said.

The Speaker noted that under President Marcos, the agriculture sector has started to flourish, even as vowed that the House would continue to monitor consumer prices.

"We will continually check on prices, especially of staples like rice, vegetables, meat, onions, and garlic, to protect our people from hoarding, price manipulation, unreasonable price increases, and other practices in restraint of trade that hamper competition,"

Speaker Romualdez said.

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

The Speaker called on concerned departments and other state offices and banks to assist farmers in obtaining technology, funding, equipment, and inputs to improve their harvest and boost the supply of agricultural products.

"Needless to say, if there is sufficient supply, it would not be profitable for traders to resort to hoarding and similar anti-competitive activities," he stressed.

The President vented his anger at smugglers and hoarders in his second State of the Nation Address (SONA) on Monday.

The Chief Executive said the government will go after smugglers and hoarders of agricultural commodities that unreasonably jack up prices, stressing that their days are numbered.

For his part, House Committee on Appropriations Chairman Elizaldy Co of the Ako Bicol Party List expressed his unwavering support for the priority bills, particularly the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act.

"Agriculture has always been the backbone of the Philippines, and measures must be taken to protect and promote the interests of our hardworking farmers and fisherfolk. The proposed amendments to the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act are crucial in safeguarding our local agricultural industries from unfair competition and ensuring the prosperity of our rural communities," said Co.

Jovee Marie N. Dela Cruz





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## An open appeal to Usec Panganiban



Dr. Jesus Lim Arranza  
**MAKE SENSE**

**I**T'S been five months since the Office of the President (OP) sent a communication to Agriculture Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban, instructing the department to address the serious problem of technical smuggling of palm olein.

I was furnished a copy of the Malacanang letter, as it was made in reaction to my letter-complaint to President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on the "illegal use of imported palm olein that is hurting our coconut and palm oil industry and depriving the government of VAT and duties."

With this development, we made repeated attempts to set up a meeting with Usec Panganiban via letters and calls to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Up to now, however, we have yet to receive a favorable reply.

I don't want to be blunt, but I'm starting to wonder why a DA official would ignore a letter from the President who concurrently heads the department. Is this not tantamount to ignoring the President's instruction to take immediate and proper response on the matter, particularly since this brazen technical smuggling of palm olein has been wreaking havoc on the domestic coconut and palm oil industries? Acting on this would greatly help the government's initiatives to plug revenue leakages due to corruption and other illicit acts.

Thus, I have decided to use this space to make an open appeal (with all due respect) to Usec Panganiban.

To put everything in context, last year, House Ways and Means committee chairman, Albay Rep. Joey Salceda reported that some P45 billion in revenues have been lost due to technical smuggling of palm oil

over a period of six years. This, according to the lawmaker, was being done through misdeclaration of palm olein that unscrupulous traders were bringing into the country purportedly for compounding of animal feeds. These technical smugglers know that if used as animal feeds additive, their palm olein importations would be exempted from VAT and duties.

However, the palm olein imports were apparently going straight to the market as cooking oil for human consumption, or to the blenders of bio-diesel as a substitute for the more expensive coconut oil.

As a crusader against smuggling and illicit trade for about five decades now in my capacity as chairman of the Federation of Philippine Industries and head of its Anti-Smuggling Committee, Salceda's report naturally got my attention. This prodded me to launch my own probe on the matter.

In the process, we came across the following, which I've wanted to discuss in detail with Usec Panganiban:

Documents showing that a big portion of the imported palm olein is being diverted for sale to either producers of biodiesel as an additive to diesel fuel, and to the retail market (public markets, groceries, supermarkets, and sari-sari stores) as cooking oil for eventual sale to the consuming public;

Statistics indicating that despite the African Swine Fever (ASF)

On behalf of the officers and members of the Federation of Philippine Industries, we want to give a huge kudos to President Marcos for giving a stern warning against smugglers and hoarders of agricultural products in his second State of the Nation Address. The President hit the nail on the head when he said that one of the reasons of soaring prices is the presence of smugglers, hoarders and manipulators of agricultural products.

that greatly diminished our hog production, the volume of palm olein importation supposedly for compounding animal feeds still increased.

Former Senate President and current Presidential Chief Legal Counsel Juan Ponce Enrile and I interviewed then Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) officer-in-charge Reildrin Morales in our weekly radio and TV program "Dito sa Bayan ni Juan." In our discussion, Morales could not explain the anomalous increase in the duty- and VAT-free importation of palm olein despite the ASF. He also admitted that the BAI has no listing of the animal feed producers that is necessary in determining whether or not the total imported palm olein was really used in feeds production.

With all these vital pieces of information on hand, and given the instruction from the President to the DA "to resolve the matter immediately," I feel really compelled to have a face-to-face meeting with Usec Panganiban.

But so far, all my attempts to set that meeting up have been in vain.

In the middle of this, I was informed that Panganiban has instructed the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) to look into the matter.

But this is barking up the wrong tree.



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Keep in mind that it is the BAI—not the PCA—that's been issuing the exemptions and is seemingly unaware of what's really happening on the ground.

I'm sure I can help in the investigation immensely if given the chance and the proper forum.

So, for the nth time, I'm appealing to Usec Panganiban, let's meet so I can present to you conclusive evidence that the government is losing huge potential revenues from palm olein smuggling. I beg the indulgence of Usec Panganiban in this issue because I personally brought this up with the President, and I don't want him to think that I have forgotten my commitment, or that I am not serious in our fight against all forms of smuggling. Together, we can put an end to the technical smuggling of palm olein that is killing the country's coconut industry.

On behalf of the officers and members of the Federation of Philippine Industries, we want to give a huge kudos to President Marcos for giving a stern warning against smugglers and hoarders of agricultural products in his second State of the Nation Address. The President hit the nail on the head when he said that one of the reasons of soaring prices is the presence of smugglers, hoarders and manipulators of agricultural products.

"*Bilang na ang mga araw n'yo!*" the President thundered, to the applause of the gallery. He explained that the fraudulent activities of smugglers and hoarders of agricultural products do not only affect the farmers, but the consumers as well. Now, the agriculture community and the millions of poor consumers owe a huge thank you to President Marcos. *Mabuhay po kayo, mahal na Pangulo.*

*Dr. Jesus Lim Arranza is the chairman of the Federation of Philippine Industries and Fight Illicit Trade; a broad-based, multisectoral movement intended to protect consumers, safeguard government revenues and shield legitimate industries from the ill effects of smuggling.*





# Marcos SONA wish list 'doable'

BY BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO, JAVIER JOE ISMAEL

**S**EN. Juan Edgardo Angara on Tuesday described as "doable" the "wish list," or the administration's priority bills, that President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. wants Congress to pass.

The senator described Marcos' SONA (State of the Nation Address) as a comprehensive and forward-looking report to the nation.

"Most of these were not that complicated and doable," the chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance said in a statement.

He said the SONA covered all the important issues facing the nation.

Angara thanked Marcos for including his "pet" measure, the Tatak Pinoy bill, in his list of priority measures.

Among the key points raised by the President was the importance of science, technology and innovation in driving the quality and competitiveness of the country's workforce, as well as the manufacturing, export, creative and service industries.

The senator said the plans of the President for the education sector, including the hiring of more teachers and the recalibration of the curriculum for schools, also stood out.

"It was a very comprehensive SONA. It covered a lot of the important issues being faced by the nation and outlined his legislative agenda. We will continue

to work closely with the executive to implement its policies and programs while working on our own advocacies and priorities," Angara said.

The President sought the passage of the following measures: Rationalization of the Mining Fiscal Regime, Motor Vehicle Users Charge/Road Users' Tax, and Military and Uniform Personnel Pension.

The Chief Executive also raised 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.

"These, along with what the President mentioned about the need for continuous reskilling and upskilling training programs, are key components of Tatak Pinoy and will ensure that our workforce will have stronger chances in securing quality jobs," Angara said.

## 'Reminder of obligation'

Vice President Sara Duterte lauded Marcos Jr.'s second State of the Nation Address speech, calling it a reminder of their obligation to the country.

In a statement shared with reporters, Duterte said that she was grateful for Marcos' leadership, which is marked with decisiveness, strength, fortitude and political will.

"It is the kind of leadership that inspires us to be more aggressive in delivering what we have promised to the Filipino people," Duterte added.

She said that the reforms introduced by the Department of Education through the Matatag agenda will not only benefit learners but also the teaching and non-teaching staff of the DepEd.

Duterte also said that she was pleased with Marcos' development agenda for Mindanao, as it offers "hope and a deep sense of optimism" to remove terrorism and boost the peace-building initiatives of the past administrations to bring development to the region and its people.

"The same hope and optimism resound across the country with the implementation of his administration's socioeconomic agenda, providing security to vulnerable sectors, such as farmers and fisherfolk," she added.

She lauded Marcos for reminding them of their obligation to





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the country that was contained in the contract that they signed with Filipinos in the 2022 election.

Sen. Mark Villar also commended the President.

"Overall, President BBM's SONA was very good. He was able to touch base with all the pressing issues in the country. Economic gains, increased employment rate, Maharlika Investment Fund and Build Better More were among the highlights for me," he said.

"The growth of our economy and increase in employment rate are good signs that the President is doing his job in prioritizing economic recovery and making sure that Filipinos are given ample opportunities to succeed," Villar said.

He added that the Senate will look into the President's priority bills, "especially those addressing food security, water security, ease of paying taxes, and anti-financial accounts scamming."

## Green, agri groups blast SONA

Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) Executive Director Jayson Cainglet said that they support the institutionalization of Kadiwa and that it is not simply a showcase area for government intervention.

"The benefits to consumers of Kadiwa should be based on the benefits to our farmers in terms [of] higher farm gate prices and better terms," he said.

"Unfortunately, they increased

in the past days." He said that fuel and fertilizer subsidies helped rice farmers, but more assistance would further boost the local rice industry.

Meanwhile, Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) chairman Danilo Ramos noted that "what we expected to hear [from the President] is to strengthen local food production and not importation."

Ramos expressed his dissatisfaction with what he heard during the President's second SONA.

"Most of what the President mentioned is the same as his promises during the campaign period. It is like he is campaigning."

Environmental groups said that the President also failed to address the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro.

"Is the plight of more than 24,000 fisherfolk not worth mentioning, or is the oil spill now a crisis forgotten?" said Fr. Edwin Gariguez, lead convenor of Protect VIP.

"Marcos himself committed that he would resolve this crisis in under four months, and we take its absence in his speech as his admission of failing to meet his own deadline," he added.

Last month, the Philippine Coast Guard declared that oil spill recovery operations were "completed" and on July 20, the fishing ban in the entire Oriental Mindoro was lifted.

According to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Manage-

ment Council (NDRRMC), a total of 24,698 fisherfolk have been affected by the oil spill caused by the sinking of the MT Princess Empress off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on February 28.

The NDRRMC added that fishermen lost an estimated P4.99 billion in production due to the oil spill.

Gariguez said that the President's repeated assertion of a "whole-of-society" approach in the face of challenges must also be given to an environmental catastrophe such as the oil spill.

"The oil spill is a crisis far from done, and we continue to stand with impacted fisherfolk and communities," he said.

Meanwhile, Greenpeace Philippines, an organization campaigning for a sustainable environment, said that the President's SONA did not "accurately reflect the real state of the nation."

Greenpeace campaigner Jefferson Chua said that the climate crisis demands a genuine whole-of-society approach, "one that ensures that historically marginalized and oppressed sectors are given their due."

Chua also mentioned El Niño.

"Marcos Jr. neglected to afford the urgency and importance both of these issues need. His agenda is marred by band-aid solutions and lacks a holistic approach to address this phenomenon," he said.

**WITH RED MENDOZA,  
JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL AND  
CLAIRE BERNADETTE  
MONDARES**





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## Marcos to explore halal exports

**PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr.** on Tuesday vowed to explore "new areas of synergies" with Malaysia on halal-certified exports and Islamic banking that he expects to grow by trillions of dollars in the global market.

Marcos is in Kuala Lumpur for a three-day state visit upon the invitation of Sultan Abdullah, the king of Malaysia.

In his pre-departure speech, the President said his trip will build on the success of the March 2023 visit to Manila of Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who at that time also pushed for an enhanced partnership on defense, the digital

economy, and sports.

"Building on past successes, this state visit to Malaysia aims to identify new areas of synergies that can propel our partnership and serve as a roadmap for our respective agencies to work on for the mutual benefit of both our countries and the peoples of the new century," Marcos said.

"I believe that this is an opportune time to harness the potential of a revitalized relationship between the Philippines and Malaysia," he added.

The President said the halal industry "is expected to grow to a trillion-dollar industry in the

international market as its global demand continues to expand."

"Malaysia is one of the global leaders in this sector, and this visit aims to forge synergies with Malaysia for the Philippines to enjoy a share of this market," he said.

Manufactured in keeping with Islam's Sharia law, halal-certified products do not contain traces of pork, alcohol or blood.

Marcos said his Malaysia visit would also explore cooperation on Islamic banking "to assist our nation's trajectory of economic growth."

**CATHERINE S. VALENTE**



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## 'AGRI SMUGGLERS CHARGED SOON'

EXECUTIVE Secretary Lucas Bersamin on Tuesday said cases will soon be filed against smugglers and hoarders of agricultural products after President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. warned them that their days are numbered.

Bersamin said that intelligence reports on these smugglers have been validated many times.

He said authorities have also identified possible hoarders.

"I think it will be very soon that cases will be commenced against people responsible for smuggling and hoarding," Bersamin said in a television interview.

The President, he added, asked the Department of Justice to come up with an anti-agricultural smuggling task force that would focus on protecting the agricultural sector.

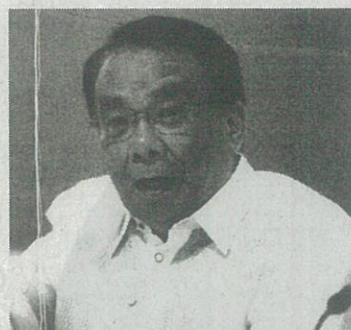
The panel is gathering for case development.

"The task force was established very recently. They're still gathering evidence," Bersamin said, adding that the identities of the hoarders will be revealed.

"He (Marcos) really means to deal these people the justice that they deserve," the executive secretary said.

In his second State of the Nation Address on Monday, Marcos warned smugglers and hoarders of agricultural products, saying their days are numbered.

He attributed the sudden rise in the prices of sugar and onions to "fraudsters."



■ Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin  
MALACAÑANG PHOTO

"Pandaraya ang kanilang ginagawa (They are swindlers)," the President said in his speech.

"It is not just the farmers that are suffering but also the consumers. So we will not allow this kind of scheme," he added.

Marcos, who also sits as Agriculture secretary, ordered on July 4 an investigation into the smuggling of onions and other agricultural products, saying the act was equivalent to economic sabotage.

He noted the findings of the hearings conducted by the House of Representatives on the matter.

In May, Marikina Rep. Stella Quimbo, the vice chairman of the Committee on Appropriations, alleged that trader Lilia "Lea" Cruz engineered the artificial spike in onion prices late last year through firms involved in all levels of the value chain.

Cruz has denied involvement in the soaring prices of onions, which went up to P700 per kilogram in 2022.

CATHERINE S. VALENTE





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## Gov't to file cases against agri hoarders, smugglers – Bersamin

By JOSEPH PEDRAJAS

Cases will be filed against hoarders and smugglers of agricultural products, Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin assured the public on Tuesday, July 25.

Bersamin's statement came after President Marcos issued a stern warning against them during his second State of the Nation Address (SONA), saying "their days are numbered."

"I think it will be very soon that cases will be filed against the people responsible for smuggling and food

hoarding," Bersamin said in an interview.

Marcos' right-hand man said the government already validated intelligence reports on the identities of the smugglers and hoarders. Some of them are already known even in the previous administrations.

"Their names have already been mentioned in prior administrations as engaged in smuggling of food products and they are very, very hazardous to our economy and our health," he said.

Bersamin also reiterated Marcos' order to the Department of Justice (DOJ) to form a task force against

anti-smuggling, which is now gathering evidence.

No reports have been forwarded yet to the Office of the President (OP), he said.

"That is a personal undertaking of the President. He really means to deal with these people, the justice that they deserve. His (President) statement yesterday (Monday) to me was a very correct statement of his sentiment against smuggling and economic sabotage," Bersamin said, adding that the timeline of the filing of cases depends on the strength of the evidence that will be gathered.





## A PBBM legacy

In his most recent State of the Nation Address (SONA), President Bongbong Marcos announced that he is now “coordinating” with Congress for the creation of the Department of Water Resources (DWR).

That was, perhaps, one of the most important highlights of his second SONA, and one which stands to become one of the most significant legacies of his administration. We join the many Filipinos who applauded the President’s history-making move.

It will be recalled that in last week’s column, we expressed the hope shared by many that the President would announce his support for the creation of this department in this year’s SONA. We did so in the wake of soaring temperatures, decreasing water levels in our dams, and frequent interruptions of water supply to many households in the National Capital Region and nearby provinces.

We mentioned that several international organizations have warned against water shortage rising to crisis levels even as several countries in the world are scraping the bottom of their depleted water tables. The crisis has become so worrisome that the head of the Paris-based World Meteorological Organization (WMO) described the current situation as “uncharted waters.” The world has never been here before.

That served as the perfect backdrop for the President’s announcement regarding his efforts at the creation of the DWR.

The announcement was among the items applauded in his speech. In a way, the President brought the announcement to some kind of a climactic point in his address.

Before he made the announcement, he bannered the important achievements of his administration in the area of economic development. While he admitted that the country reeled under the effects of “certain strong headwinds,” including the war in Ukraine and unmitigated inflation, he bannered the gains that his administration marked during the first year of his presidency.

Among these were the 6.4 percent growth in gross domestic product, our strong macroeconomic potentials, and our recognition as one of the fastest-growing economies, not just in Southeast Asia, but in the rest of the world.

Then, he segued into his vision for the agricultural sector, underscoring the need for “biosecurity” and to “modernize, mechanize and make the farming more systematic.” No doubt, the President has a full grasp of the risks that food production in our country faces, and the urgent need to act on them right away.

At the core of the remedy, of course, is water.

Modernization, mechanization, and any other attempt at transforming our farms may prove futile unless the government can assure the sector that there will be enough fresh water to irrigate

*Modernization, mechanization, and any other attempt at transforming our farms may prove futile unless the government can assure the sector that there will be enough fresh water to irrigate them.*

them. Water remains the single most important farm input.

We laud the move of the President.

We look forward to the creation of this department. We also look forward to the President naming a “water czar.” Given the huge number of stakeholders that our water resources have, the administration would need someone who has both the talent, the will, and the courage to reconcile conflicting interests, synchronize policies, and get the government machinery to get their act together in a cohesive bid to protect and expand our water resources.

We will not be surprised if the Presi-

dent would eventually announce that he will hold this portfolio as soon as the DWR is created. After all, the economic and social gains of his administration would not amount to much if this precious resource is to continue to be mismanaged and diminished.

His announcement that billions of pesos from the national budget have been earmarked for water projects also inspires hope.

We also laud the many other plans that the President outlined in his SONA.

Many of these plans will directly impact local governments and communities. Among these are the President’s move to hasten infrastructure development, including the construction of new road links and bridges that will decrease travel time between regions. This move will speed up the transportation of people and goods, improving commerce among provinces in the province.

The President also underscored the continuation by his administration of our country’s pursuit of social justice through the redistribution of land under the agrarian reform program. More farmers will get to own the land that they till, making them responsible for their future by putting a valuable resource into their hands.

We are also buoyed by the President’s restatement of his commitment to renewable energy – which includes power generation technologies that depend also on the availability of a strong supply of water.

After listening to the President’s SONA, we can say that the country is moving in the right direction.

(For feedback, please email it to [antipolocitygov@gmail.com](mailto:antipolocitygov@gmail.com) or send it to Block 6 Lot 10 Sta. Barbara 1 cor. Bradley St., Mission Hills Subd., Brgy. San Roque, Antipolo City, Rizal.)



**THE VIEW  
FROM RIZAL**  
DR. JUN YNARES





## 'Bagong Pilipinas': Keynote of PBBM's second SONA

**"I** know that the state of the nation is sound, and is improving. Dumating na po ang Bagong Pilipinas." (The dawn of a new Philippines has come.)

President Ferdinand R. Marcos' second State of the Nation Address (SONA) ended on this note of confidence on the country's present and future well-being.

He gave a comprehensive assessment of his administration's performance in 15 focal areas, namely: economy and food security; infrastructure; Maharlika Investment Fund; energy; uniformed personnel; education; health; foreign policy; investments; digitalization and internet; migrant workers; housing; Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM); refocused drug war; insurgency; and priority bills.

He noted that the economy is "revived and rejuvenated;" inflation is down to 5.4 percent and employment has risen to 95.7 percent compared to a low of 82.4 percent at the height of the pandemic. He gave a robust account on food sufficiency and agriculture, a portfolio he has chosen to lead personally since he took office. Agriculture production has been boosted through "consolidation, modernization, mechanization, and improvement of value chains."

Then he drew applause by warning hoarders, smugglers, and price manipulators that their days are numbered.

The ₱8.3-trillion Build Better More program involves 194 priority projects in roads, bridges, seaports, airports, and mass transport infrastructure. Citing that the digital economy contributed ₱2 trillion or 9.4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), the President also said that both fixed broadband and mobile internet speed in the country

have improved and that digital payments accounted for 42 percent of total retail transactions — a definite gain from the constraints in physical mobility arising from the pandemic.

Emphasizing that "education is where it all begins," he lauded the MATATAG agenda for basic education that addresses the welfare of both learners and teachers; the technical-vocational-education and training (TVET) that has enabled graduates to get employed in competitive technical jobs; and the enhanced competitiveness of higher educational institutions, 52 of which have been included in the World Universities Rankings, compared to only 15 last year.

Stressing that "healthier communities and lifestyles are our advocacy," he reported the completion of more than 3,400 projects to increase and improve public health facilities. Hunger and nutrition programs are also being expanded to address stunting and wasting among children. Multi-specialty regional facilities are also being built to provide access outside of those that are concentrated in Metro Manila.

As chief architect of foreign policy, the President reiterated that he will not preside over any process that will abandon even one square inch of the territory of the Republic of the Philippines to any foreign power. He vowed that the country shall "continue to be a friend to all, an enemy to none."

Most importantly, President Marcos acknowledged that Filipinos are stepping up to secure their country'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)."





## Fisher group rejects amendment of Fisheries Code

By **DANESSA RIVERA**

Fishers are rejecting the call of **President Marcos** to amend the Fisheries Code, saying this will only favor commercial fishers.

In his second State of the Nation Address (SONA), Marcos asked Congress to amend the Fisheries Code to ensure sustainable fishing.

Under the Fisheries Code of 1998, commercial fishing vessels weighing 3.1 gross tons (GT) and above are only allowed outside the 15-kilometer municipal waters.

In a statement, Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) said amending the Fisheries Code will only benefit big-fishing firms.

The group claimed this purported harmonization will allow big fishing firms to operate within municipal waters.

"We outrightly reject this amendment of the Fisheries Code. This will certainly benefit owners of commercial fishing vessels who will be institutionally allowed to conduct their large-scale fishing activities inside the 15-kilometer municipal waters intended for small-scale and subsistence fisherfolk," Pamalakaya national chairman Fernando Hicap said.

By allowing commercial fishers to operate in municipal waters, the group fears small fishers will lose out in harvests.

In light of this concern, Pamalakaya is urging President Marcos

to "hold a dialogue with small-scale fishers and hear our basis of objection against the proposed Fisheries Code amendments."

### Press freedom

There was no need for President Marcos to address the press freedom situation in the country in his second SONA as authorities have been able to solve the cases of three journalists who were attacked in his first year, the Department of Justice (DOJ) said.

"I think that this is the time that the government has been successful in running after the people responsible for these crimes. No such thing as impunity now; everybody accounts for what they do," Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla told reporters.

"And I think that is... it's not mentioned anymore because we were successful there and don't want this to happen. When we don't want it to happen, we don't let it go. We fix it properly. The problem is faced head-on," he added.

Since Marcos' ascent to the presidency, three journalists have been killed: radiomen Rey Blanco of Negros Oriental, Percy Lapid and Cresenciano Bunduquin of Oriental Mindoro.

Remulla highlighted how authorities have arrested and filed charges against some of the suspects, saying this testifies to the government's efforts to run after perpetrators of media killings.

For 14 straight years since its

inception, the Philippines has appeared on the Committee to Protect Journalists' list of countries where practicing journalism is unsafe.

Since 1986, nearly 200 journalists have been killed in the Philippines, based on a tally by the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines.

### Lacking substance

Militant group Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan) scored President Marcos' second SONA for lack of substance on important issues such as human rights abuses.

"For the second year in a row, he failed to address this concern especially with the state of impunity prevailing in the country," Bayan president Renato Reyes yesterday said in a statement.

What is glaring, according to Reyes, is Marcos' silence on the killings in the government's war on drugs as well as murders and abduction of activists.

Reyes also scored Marcos for not tackling substantial wage increase for workers and employees, and keeping silent on the issue of jeepney modernization and corporatization.

Reyes said Marcos' Bagong Pilipinas, like the Bagong Lipunan slogan of his father, the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr., harps on grand promises but is short on actual benefits for the people.

- With Emmanuel Tupas, Neil Jayson Servallos





# RICE SMUGGLERS, HOARDERS BEWARE

**By Jester Manalastas**

**SPEAKER** Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez said the House of Representatives will do all it can to help President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. wage the war against the smuggling and hoarding of rice and other agricultural products.

"We share the President's anger and frustration with smuggling, hoarding and price manipulation. We will redouble our efforts to stop the smuggling and hoarding of rice, sugar, onions, garlic, and vegetables, which harms our farmers' competitiveness and disrupts the agricultural value chain," Romualdez said.

"Kami sa Kongreso ay tutulong sa Pangulo para mapigilan ang pagtaas ng presyo ng mga pangunahing bilihin. Lahat ng kaya

naming gawin ay ibubuhos namin samisyon ng ito," he added.

The House leader said the national government must safeguard the interests of the farmers and people in general, ensure equitable market conditions, and foster sustainable farming methods to guarantee our nation's food security.

He reiterated the President's warning that the days of smugglers, hoarders and price manipulators are now numbered.

Likewise, he noted that under President Marcos, the agriculture sector has started to grow.

He vowed that the House would continue to monitor consumer prices.

"We will continually check on prices, especially of staples like rice, vegetables, meat, onions, and garlic, to protect our people from hoarding, price

manipulation, unreasonable price increases, and other practices in restraint of trade that hamper competition," Romualdez said.

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

The Speaker called on the concerned departments and other state offices and banks to assist farmers in obtaining technology, funding, equipment, and inputs to improve their harvest and boost the supply of agricultural products.

Early this year, the House Committee on Agriculture conducted an inquiry into the high prices of onions, which had jumped to as much as P600

a kilo.

The committee uncovered evidence pointing to the existence of a cartel behind the surge in prices in 2022 and this year.

The cartel is supposedly composed of a few trading companies controlled by a certain Lea Cruz, who has earned the label "Sibuyas Queen." The group reportedly resorts to hoarding, price-fixing and coordinated release of opinions in the market to manipulate prices.

Summoned by the investigating committee, Cruz, who had been dragged in previous congressional inquiries, denied any wrongdoing. She claimed her participation was limited to helping farmers transport their produce.

The President vented his anger on smugglers and hoarders in his second State of the Nation Address (SONA) on Monday.





## Investments needed for agri research, technology — NEDA

THERE's a need to invest in research and technology to increase agricultural output, National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said recently.

"In other countries, their agriculture is very modern technology-driven. They're using hybrid [seeds], biotechnology so farmers have bigger income," Balisacan said.

Balisacan said that in the past, there was very little investment in developing the country's agriculture sector.

"We need to invest in appropriate technology and we are not doing that. We have very little investment in research and technology, especially in agriculture, that is why farmers do not have access to modern technology," he said.

Balisacan said President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. is currently addressing these issues in the agriculture sector.

The President earlier vowed to build infrastructure and improve market linkages to improve farmers' income.



# REMATE

## ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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## ISMAGLER, HOARDER, KORAP ISELDA LAHAT

**NABANGGIT** ni Pangulong Bongbong Marcos sa kanyang State of the Nation Address na bilang na ang araw ng mga smuggler at hoarder, lalo na sa mga produktong agricultural.

Minamanipula o nilalaro ng mga smuggler at hoarder ang suplay sa merkado upang tumaas ang presyo ng bigas, sibuyas, asukal at iba pa para sila kumita.

Ang mga smuggler, lalong kumikita dahil wala silang buwis na binabayaran pagpasok ng kanilang mga imported na kalakal.

Ang mga hoarder, na madalas smuggler o kakutsaba ng mga smuggler, itinatago ang mga kalakal hanggang magkaroon ng pansamantalang lubhang kakulangan ng suplay saka nila pakakawalan sa merkado

nang unti-unti kasabay ng pina-taas nilang presyo.

Wais din ang mga smuggler at hoarder dahil kung kailan nagkakaroon ng ani ang mga magsasaka, magsisibuyas at iba pa, saka naman sila nag-aangkat kasabay ng pagbili nila ng mura sa mga lokal na produkto.

Nagaganap lahat ng ito, mga brad, dahil sa pagkabalimbing ng mga smuggler at hoarder.

Kompleto ang mga ito ng mga papeles sa pag-aangkat, warehousing at pag-iingat ng mga produkto at pangangalakal at pagbebenta at kakambal ng mga ito ng smuggling at hoarding.

### MGA KORAP

Hindi naman magagawa ng mga smuggler at hoarder ang kanilang mga gawaing ilegal kung walang mga korap.



Kasama sa mga korap ang mga inspector mula sa mga kakulang ahensya ng gobyerno na walang nakikitang ilegal at kung may makita man, walang kasong isinasampa, lahat kapalit ng suhol.

May alingasngas ding katulad ng Chief Justice Renato Corona impeachment na nagkaroon ng mga "insentibo" na P50 milyon sa bawat mambabatas na

sumipa kay Corona sa pwesto.

Nagkaroon din ng katulad na alingasngas sa nakaraang ilang "investigation in aid of legislation" sa agricultural products.

Medyo tumino lang lahat nang dumating si ex-Pang. Digong at inoobserbahan pa natin kung nangyayari pa rin ang korapsyon sa panahon ni Pangulong Bongbong.



# Abante TONITE

MABILIS SA BALITA

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## Makatotohanang laban sa smuggling



ELY SALUDAR

Sana naman ay maging makatotohanan na ang naging pahayag ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. ang paglaban nito sa pamamayagpag ng smuggling at hoarding sa bansa.

Nabanggit kasi ng Pangulo sa kaniyang ikalawang State of the Nation Address (SONA) ang patungkol sa smuggling at hoarding ng mga produkto na siyang

dahilan ng patuloy na pagtaas ng presyo nito sa pamilihan.

Maging ang Kongreso sa pangunguna ni House Speaker Martin Romualdez ay nangakong tutulong ito sa giyera laban sa smuggling at hoarding.

Pero sa katunayan ay maraming administration na ang nangako na susugpuin ang tao amal na smuggling sa bansa pero wala naman nangyari.

Hanggang sa ngayon ay wala pa ring naipapakulong na malalaking smuggler ang gobyerno mula sa nakaraang administration.

Mabuti naman at alam daw ng pangulo na ang nagpapataas ng presyo ng bilihin ay ang smuggling at hoarding pero dapat ay maging makatotohanan na ito.

Sa ngayon ay makakabuting sampolan din ng pangulo ang mga napapaulat na smuggler na umanoy malapit sa kaniyang asawa at bayaw.

Kung tutuusin ay isang malaking samantal sa pangulo ang pamamayagpag ng smuggling at hoarding sa bansa dahil siya rin ang kalihim ng Department of Agriculture.

Kung ating matatandaan ay ang napakaraming problema na lumutang sa pagpasok ng administrasyon ay may kinalaman sa mga produktong agricultural na sakop mismo ng pangulo bilang DA secretary.

Abangan natin kung hindi magiging moro-moro ang kampanyang ito o giyera laban sa smuggling at hoarding at kung may mapaparusahan na sangkot dito.



# Abante

UNA SA BALITA

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teen talking)

## Mga smuggler, hoarder kakasuhan na

MALAPIT nang kasuhan ng gobyerno ang mga smuggler at hoarder sa bansa, ayon kay Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin.

Binanggit ito ni Bersamin nang tanungin sa kanya sa television interview hinggil sa sinabi ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. sa kanyang State of the Nation Address (SONA) na bilang na ang araw ng mga smuggler at hoarder.

Aniya, may listahan na sila ng pangalan ng mga smuggler at hoarder at kailangan na lamang ng mga dagdag ebidensiya para makasuhan ang mga ito.

"I think it will very soon that cases

will be commence against the people responsible for smuggling, hoarding. Alam mo ang mga hoarders identified naman ang mga yan eh. We're glad that we have that intelligence available to us," paliwanag ni Bersamin.

Tiwala ang Malacañang sa isinasagawang imbestigasyon ng task force na binuo ng Department of Justice (DOJ) para habulin ang mga smuggler at hoarder.

"Ang maganda kasi sa DOJ hindi na sila yung bara-bara: Under Secretary Boying Remulla, sila ay very conscious about case development and they want to succeed every time that they bring a case," saad ni Bersamin.



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## Bilang na ang araw n'yo?

SA pagkakatatanda ko, ang mga katagang "bilang na ang araw ninyo" ay madalas banggitin ng lahat ng naging Presidente ng bansa kapag nangangakong tutuldukan ang isang matinding problemang dulot ng mga taong masama. Mga taong nagpapasasa sa kayamanang mula sa katiwalian na ang nagdurusa ay maliliit na mamamayan.

Halimbawa: "bilang na ang araw ninyong mga kurakot sa gobyerno"; "bilang na ang araw ninyong mga rebel-deng komunista"; "bilang na ang araw ninyong mga kidnappers at drug lords"; "bilang na ang araw ninyong mga smugglers." Sa mga tabloid, magandang pam-banner iyan. Ngunit ang higit na mahalaga ay ang katuparan ng mga sinasambit na salita.

Pero sa lahat ng mga leader na nagsabi niyan, natupad ba ang ipinangako? Mula pa kay Aguinaldo ay narinig na marahil ng mga ninuno natin iyan. Ngunit talamak pa rin ang katiwalian sa loob at labas ng gobyerno. Nananatili



ang mga kawatan sa gobyerno pati na ang mga smugglers na nakikipagsabwatan sa kanila. Namamayagpag pa rin ang mga sindikatong kriminal na noong araw ay sinabihan na rin ng mga naging Presidente na bilang na ang araw.

Hindi araw ang binibilang nila kundi limpak-limpak na salapi na dapat sana ay gastusin ng gobyerno upang guminhawa ang buhay ng tao. Ang mas masakit, tila lalong naglulubha ang sitwasyon. Ipinagmalaki ni PBBM na sa pamamagitan ng kanyang programang Kadiwa, nakakatikim ng murang halagang pagkain ang mga mamamayan. Pero ilan lamang ang Kadiwa stores? Kulang pa rin upang tugunan ang pangangailangan ng mahigit 100 milyong Pinoy.

Bumaba raw ang inflation rate sa 5.1 percent mula sa dating 8 percent. Subalit ano ang kabuluhan ng inflation

(Sundan sa pahina 5)

## AKSYON NGAYON... Mula pahina 4

rate na bumaba kung ang preyo ng mga bilihin ay ubod pa rin ng taas para sa mga pinakamahirap na Pilipino? Wala. Ang isang leader ay pinipili at iniluluklok ng mamamayan para pagsilbihan ang taumbayan at hindi upang pasayahin ang mga kaalyadong sumuporta sa kanila noong halalan.

Muli nating narinig ang "bilang na ang araw ninyo" sa labi ni Presidente Bongbong Marcos na narinig na nating sinabi ng kanyang tatay na si Marcos Sr. nang ito ay Presidente pa. This time, ang pinatutungkulan

ni Marcos Jr. ay ang mga smugglers ng agricultural products at mga hoarders na nagpapahirap sa mamamayan. Umiiral ang mga iyan dahil may proteksiyon sa ilang humahawak ng tungkulin sa pamahalaan.

Sa halip magbigay ng paniniyak na "bilang na ang araw ng mga smugglers at hoarders, unahing usigin at ipakulong ang mga tiwaling opisyal at tauhan ng pamahalaan na padrino ng mga kriminal. Ipatupad ang matibay na political will at kastiguhin nang tama kahit pa kaalyado ng gobyerno.





## SRA rules milling to start in Sept., rejects appeals from planters

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said it will stick to plans for a September opening to milling season, rejecting appeals from planters to begin in August.

"We will start in September to give the farmers an opportunity to earn more," the SRA said, noting that more mature cane will result in greater yields.

SRA Acting Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona told reporters on Tuesday that the ultimate goal in raising output is to become self-sufficient in sugar.

Three planter federations — the Confederation of Sugar Producers Associations, Inc., the National Federation of Sugarcane Planters, Inc. and the Panay Federation of Sugarcane Farmers, Inc. — appealed to the SRA to start the milling season in August, which was the start date set a year earlier.

They said the August season start in 2022 was caused by the shortage of sugar.

The groups claimed that delaying the start of milling operations may lead to overripe

cane that had been planted in April this year rather than May.

According to Mr. Azcona, the Sept. 1 start is the long-standing practice, and is "based on science and weather patterns."

Citing the results of a simulation, he said milling in September will enable farmers to sell cane at P3,300 per ton, up from P2,800 a year earlier.

"So, it's a big difference... those who milled in August are our small farmer beneficiaries, so *sayang naman* (it would be a waste if they lose) the opportunity to earn more," he said.

Mr. Azcona said the industry was amply informed of the return to the traditional September start via a memorandum circular issued in May.

"(Out of) the 24 mills that we wrote, (only two mills asked) for reconsideration, and one of the two eventually agree to Sept. 1. So, at the moment, just one mill is questioning the September opening," he said. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**





## Fisheries Code amendments to focus on safety of imports

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Tuesday that its proposed amendments to the Fisheries Code will include border controls to ensure the safety of imported fish.

"Wala sa Fisheries Code ang pre-border controls (the Fisheries Code is silent on pre-border controls), which are very necessary to ensure food safety of the imported fish that get into our country," Undersecretary Mercedita A. Sombilla said during the Post-State of the Nation Address (SONA) government briefings.

"There's a need to establish offices that would ensure that imported fish are really safe to enter our country," she said.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., who also serves as his own Secretary of Agriculture, asked Congress during his 2<sup>nd</sup> SONA to pass new amendments to the Fisheries Code.

"Our Fisheries Code must be revised 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.

Republic Act No. 10654 or the Amended Fisheries Code of the Philippines has been recently amended to address illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUUF).

Ms. Sombilla said that the proposed revisions also include adding a section that will require fisheries management to be conducted with an eye towards enhancing the ecosystem.

She also said the DA is proposing to redraw the limits for fishing in municipal waters.

"As of now, even catches of three tons and above are allowed. I think we need to control, limit or totally eliminate (such catches), she said, adding that if left unchecked, municipal waters risk being destroyed.

Under the proposed amendments, the DA will also seek to

improve the tracking of catches to arrive at better supply-demand estimates.

"I think the information that we need here is real-time supply and demand. I think our information is still not on a real time basis," she said. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**





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## CCA Manila, DA-PhilRice, IRRI partner to develop Malusog Rice recipes for Nutrition Month

CULINARY SCHOOL CCA Manila, in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture-Philippine Rice Research Institute (DA-PhilRice) and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), is proud to announce a partnership to develop a range of recipes using Malusog Rice as the main ingredient. This collaboration aims to celebrate Nutrition Month and promote the nutritional benefits of Malusog Rice, a groundbreaking variety of rice developed to help address vitamin A deficiency (VAD) in the country.

Malusog Rice, also known as Golden Rice, was developed by Prof. Ingo Potrykus and Prof. Peter Beyer, with the technology being donated to developing countries like the Philippines. The Malusog Rice Program of DA-PhilRice, is leading the development, production, and deployment of Malusog Rice in the Philippines, in collaboration with IRRI and other government and non-government agencies.

Malusog Rice has undergone rigorous biosafety assessments from reputable organizations such as Health Canada, Food Standards Australia New



Zealand, the Food and Drug Administration of the United States of America, and DA-Bureau of Plant Industry. It has been determined to be as safe, with the added benefit of beta-carotene in the grain, which the body converts to vitamin A.

Malusog Rice offers significant benefits to the Filipino population. It can help improve the diets of children, who are often deficient in vitamin A, by providing 30-50% of the Estimated Average Requirement (EAR) for vitamin A. In fact, one cup of cooked Malusog

Rice can provide as much beta-carotene as 4 cups of cooked kangkong (water spinach), a commonly consumed vegetable.

Moreover, Malusog Rice is not significantly different from commonly available rice varieties in taste and cost. Initial taste tests have shown that participants could not distinguish between Malusog Rice and regular rice. Ongoing consumer sensory evaluation in the pilot provinces confirms that the taste of Malusog Rice is comparable to that of regular rice.

The partnership between CCA Manila and the Malusog Rice Program aims to develop recipes that highlight the versatility of Malusog Rice by utilizing various indigenous ingredients, cooking methods, and heirloom techniques from the Philippines. These recipes, accompanied by comprehensive nutritional value calculations, will be designed to feed a typical Filipino family of six at an affordable cost of P300.

To maximize the impact of the Malusog Rice Recipes, various formats such as recipe cards, cookbooks, and posters will be utilized for dissemination. A soft launch of the recipes is planned to coincide with the national celebration of Nutrition Month this July. This initiative emphasizes the potential of Malusog Rice to improve the nutrition of vulnerable population groups and underscores its importance in complementing existing nutrition interventions.

"Through this collaboration, we aim to inspire mothers, cooks, chefs, and consumers, in general, to explore the vast culinary possibilities of Malusog Rice and enhance the overall nutrition of our nation," said Dr. Ma. Veritas Luna, Chancellor for Education of CCA Manila.





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## DTI trains coffee farmers in Vizcaya

**BAYOMBONG, Nueva Vizcaya:** To help boost the coffee industry in the province, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has developed 20 new "coffee champs" who were taught of the art of coffee farming and post-harvest handling.

DTI Nueva Vizcaya director Marietta Salviejo said this batch of coffee champs is composed of the 15 members of the Forestland Management Project Groups in Nueva Vizcaya and five farmers from the coffee-rich Ambaguio upland town, also in this province.

Salviejo said the training provided by the DTI was held in collaboration with the **Department of Agriculture's Nueva Vizcaya Experiment Station (DA-NVES)**, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and the

**Bumolo Integrated Farm at Barangay Poblacion in Kasibu town.**

She said as a priority industry in the province, coffee farming offers various opportunities.

"We just have to maintain high coffee bean quality to add value and penetrate wider markets," Salviejo said.

In a recent seminar workshop conducted by the DTI Nueva Vizcaya, the participants took part in a coffee farm visit and plant sampling for them to have first-hand experience of all the discussions made.

Moreover, proper trimming and rejuvenation were introduced to boost the production of each coffee tree. The participants also visited a coffee processing center as part of the tour.

Val Corales, DA-NVES agriculturist, said there are different types of coffee species such as the Arabica, Robusta, Excelsa and Liberica.

Corales said the farmers were also trained to protect the coffee shrubs from the different diseases and pests.

LEANDER C. DOMINGO





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## Developing Malusog Rice recipes for Nutrition Month

THE country's top culinary school, CCA Manila, in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture-Philippine Rice Research Institute (DA-PhilRice) and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), is proud to announce a partnership to develop a range of recipes using Malusog Rice as the main ingredient.

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■ CCA chef instructors Miguel Lorino and Anne Atanacio help develop the recipes featuring Malusog Rice. This is in partnership with IRRI and the Department of Agriculture. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

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## Sugar milling starts Sept as scheduled

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) has rejected a proposal by farmers to move to August the start of milling to prevent lower yield.

SRA said the start of operations of sugar mills in the Philippines will start by September 1 as scheduled.

Pablo Azcona, SRA acting administrator, said data shows earlier start of milling operations last year caused lower production as well as missed opportunities for farmers worth at least P700 million.

"I ran a simulation when 432,000 metric tons (MT) of sugar milled in August and sold at August 2022 average price of P2,800, it came to about P1.8 billion. We tried it on actual facts and numbers in September with same amount of sugarcane with yield and price points of P3,300, it went up to about P2.5 billion. It was a big difference of P700 million, especially the people who milled in August are our small farmers beneficiaries," Azcona said.

The SRA added based on hectareage, around 5,750 farmers missed the opportunity to earn a total of at least P700 million.

"The official start of crop year is September 1 and that is based on science, maturity of cane and

when its ideal to cut the cane. We should respect the science behind it," Azcona said.

He said with this schedule, farmers will have the opportunity to choose their sugar mill based on efficiency, incentive offers and based on the help that the mill extends to farmers. The SRA said mills which open first usually get more farmer customers.

The agency added retail price of refined sugar remains steady as supply is stable.

The Sugar Council composed of the Confederation of Sugar Producers' Associations Inc., National Federation of Sugarcane Planters and Panay Federation of Sugarcane Farmers asked the SRA to consider advancing the start of the milling season, citing sugar canes that were planted early need to be harvested soon to avoid a drop in their quality.

Based on Department of Agriculture's latest monitoring of public markets in the National Capital Region as of yesterday, prevailing retail price of sugar ranges from P85 to P110 per kg for refined sugar, P82 to P90 per kg for washed sugar and P78 to P90 for brown sugar.

Meanwhile, SRA millsite monitoring showed composite price of raw sugar as of July 9 was P3,000 per 50 kg bag.



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## For better connectivity, food and energy security

THE Marcos administration is ramping up the rollout of major infrastructure projects as well as initiatives that would improve telecommunication and transportation connectivity, address power costs and ensure food security.

Cabinet secretaries yesterday bared their plans to achieve these goals that were highlighted at the second State of the Nation Address (SONA) of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. last Monday.

At the Post-SONA forum yesterday, Secretary Manuel Bonoan of the Department of Public Works and Highways said the agency continues to fast-track completion of major projects in the pipeline to address traffic congestion: the 32-kilometer Bataan-Cavite Interlink Bridge; 32.5 km Panay-Guimaras-Negros Island Bridges Project, the 4-km Samal Island-Davao City Connector Bridge and the Pangulil bay bridge.

Under the Build Better More Program, the DPWH aims to increase the country's High Standard Highways / Expressways from 523 km to 1,963 kms. One of the priority projects in Mindanao is the ongoing Davao City Bypass Construction project and the 8.02 km. segment A: Bago Aplaya-Times Beach (Talomo-Matina) section of Davao City Coastal Road which was inaugurated last July 1.

The Luzon Spine Expressway Network program, which involves the construction of 1,073 km of Expressways/High Standard Highways in Luzon, aims to reduce travel time from Ilocos to Bicol from 20 hours to just 9 hours.

In compliance with the President's directive to go full speed

ahead at building the much needed transport infrastructure of the country, Secretary Jaime Bautista of the Department of Transportation said the agency is accelerating rail, maritime, road, and aviation projects that will provide socioeconomic benefits to Filipinos.

"The Department will speed up the momentum in completing more transport infrastructures and projects aimed at moving more people, products, and services and trigger economic growth," Bautista said.

He said apart from the massive North-South Commuter Railway System and the over 1,000 kms of railway projects that the government has initiated, in the pipeline are other big-ticket rail infrastructure such as the Light Rail Transit (LRT)-1 Cavite Extension, Metro Rail Transit (MRT)-4, MRT-7, and the Metro Manila Subway, the country's first underground railway.

Bautista also cited airport projects such as the privatization of Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), the New Manila International Airport in Bulacan, Sangley Point International Airport in Cavite, the recently completed Bicol International Airport, Bahol-Panglao Airport, and Laguindingan airport.

The DOTr is set to issue the invitation to bid for NAIA by early next month and award the project by yearend to the winning bidder.

On top of the P170.6 billion cost of NAIA, Bautista said the project will include an upfront payment of P30 billion.

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FOR BETTER

He added 10 regional airports will be developed.

## Reliable broadband

Meanwhile, the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) has committed to redouble its efforts to bring reliable broadband connectivity across the country.

"We will ramp up efforts in achieving the targets of our flagship connectivity programs so we can reach all Filipinos, especially those in the farthest and most remote islands of this great nation," said Ivan John Uy DICT secretary.

Last April, the DICT facilitated the initial 100 Gbps link-up between Los Angeles, California, and the cable landing stations in Baler, Aurora, and San Fernando, La Union as part of the Luzon Bypass Infrastructure (LBI). The LBI, a collaboration between DICT, Meta (Facebook), and Bases Conversion and Development Authority, aims to provide high-speed internet connectivity to Northern Luzon and Metro Manila through the National Fiber Backbone Phase 1.

## Renewables

Secretary Raphael Lotilla of the Department of Energy (DOE) said the call for greater use of renewable energy (RE) is being intensified as a total of 126 RE contracts with potential capacity of 31,131.74 MW were also awarded by the DOE for the period.

"We will continue to work on long-term solutions in accord-

ance with the clear goals set by the President to develop indigenous sources of energy, particularly renewables. We commit to pursue our mission and respond to emerging energy challenges and issues to ensure sustainable, stable, secure, accessible, and reasonably priced energy," Lotilla said at the forum.

In his 194-page President's Report to the People, the technical notes of the SONA, Marcos said the government is also determined to improve energy supply in the country as it promotes more alternative energy sources such as solar, wind and even nuclear power.

The President said the government is now updating its Nuclear Power Roadmap which will serve as a guide for the country's rolling out its Nuclear Energy Program as well as ensure "the highest standards of public safety, security, and safeguards for nuclear energy use."

He said that at present, the administration is also exploring the development of small-scale modular nuclear power plants or its derivatives, and working on the adoption of 123 agreements with the United States "to enhance cooperation on nuclear energy applications."

Marcos said the executive branch will work closely with Congress to ensure the immediate passage of key legislative measures on energy such as the enabling law for the Natural Gas Industry to aid in the rapid development of the country's

natural gas sector, and the amendments to the Electric Power Industry Reform Act (EPIRA) to increase energy supply, render efficient and optimal power utilization, and lower electricity prices.

## Fight vs smuggling

For the Department of Agriculture (DA), Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban's response to Marcos' SONA is to form an anti-agricultural smuggling task force.

"Right now, we're not yet 100 percent perfect (in our performance against) smuggling and that's what we're looking for at this point in time. More people have to be involved, including more people from Customs," Panganiban said at the sidelines of an event hosted by the Sugar Regulatory Administration yesterday.

Panganiban added so far, the DA busted at least four big warehouses in Luzon carrying smuggled sugar, onion and meat, among others.

DA said cases were already filed against different owners of the involved warehouses.

Mercedita Sombilla, DA undersecretary, emphasized the importance of the 662.67 kilometers farm-to-market road put up so far by the administration in connecting rural areas to towns and commercial centers that helped improved income for farmers and encouraged diversification of production.

However, Sombilla said, the DA's masterplan indicates the

country still needs about 64,155 km more of farm-to-market roads

In response to the SONA's call to amend the Fisheries Code, the Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) said government will have to consult small scale fishers and ensure this will benefit owners of commercial fishing vessels.

## Food prices, supply

Also at the forum, Undersecretary Ruth Castelo of the Department of Trade and Industry said the agency has put out a six-point action agenda that would revolutionize food chain from farms to distribution.

Castelo said DTI's methods of ensuring food security are guided by science and the balance of nature, so that production is both sustainable and responsible.

She added the DTI's mandate of ensuring the availability of basic necessities and prime commodities at reasonable prices at all times extends to ensuring access to affordable yet high quality goods through the Diskwento Caravan and in partnership with the DA, the Kadiwa ng Pangulo.

Castelo said in response to farmers' challenges with accessing markets and acquiring fair prices for their produce, the DTI has the Farmer Retail Market Program, a contract farming program, aims to link onion farmers and institutional buyers directly. - *Myla Iglesias, Jed Macapagal, Jocelyn Montemayor and Irma Isip*



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## Marcos endorses 20 more bills

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

PRESIDENT Marcos Jr. still has more to report about the state of the nation but will just leave it to his Cabinet secretaries to explain what has been accomplished in the past year and what more needs to be done in the remainder of his term to fully realize the goals he has set up to transition the country into a "Bagong Pilipinas (New Philippines)."

"Kulang pa... There was so much to go through," the President said when asked if was satisfied with his state of the nation address

(SONA).

In a 194-page President's Report to the People, or the SONA technical report, the President further discussed the accomplishments of his administration, including the country's stronger economy, sustaining of critical infrastructure programs in the transport sector, digital industry, tourism, agriculture and health, among others.

Marcos also endorsed 20 more bills that he did not mention in his SONA, such as the Real

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## MARCOS

Property Valuation and Assessment Reform Bill aimed at developing an equitable, and efficient real property valuation system, and the Passive Income and Financial Intermediary Tax Act which simplifies and harmonizes the taxation of passive income, financial services, and transactions necessary to attract capital and investments.

A news release by the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) said the President wanted to report more items in his second SONA, during which he had talked about achievements in the economy, health system, education and infrastructure, among others.

Marcos also talked about the government's campaign against agricultural smuggling and hoarding, against illegal drugs, and corruption as well as the promotion of drug rehabilitation, improvement of delivery of education, and health services, and grant of amnesty to former rebels.

A post-SONA assessment is being conducted by Cabinet sectors. It started with a briefing of the economic team which talked about infrastructure development and connectivity, and the food security cluster that included the **Department of Agriculture**, Department of Agrarian Reform and Department of Trade, among others.

Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin, in an interview with CNN Philippines, expressed confidence that the P20 per kilo of rice that

was promised by Marcos during the campaign is still possible provided that government programs are sustained, especially those aimed at increasing rice production.

## PRIORITY MEASURES

The President, in his SONA, also called for the passage of 16 priority legislation to uplift the lives of the Filipino people. These include the excise tax on single use plastics; value-added tax on digital services; rationalization of mining fiscal regime; motor vehicle users' charge or road users' tax; military and uniformed personnel pension; anti-financial account scamming law; Tatak Pinoy or Proud Filipino law; Blue Economy law; ease of paying taxes; local government unit income classification act; and the Philippine Immigration Act.

He also called for amendments to Fisheries Code, the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act, the Cooperative Code, Government Procurement Law, the Auditing Code.

In the President's Report to the People, Marcos also called for the passage of the Value-Added Tax Refund for Tourists to boost tourists arrivals and purchases from accredited retailers in the Philippines; the Ease of Paying Taxes Bill to provide a simple and convenient tax payment system through electronic means; and the Internet Transactions Act to strengthen the protection to consumers and merchants and address increasing

complaints and fraud reports in e-commerce transactions;

Amendments of the Build Operate Transfer Law to address challenges in the country's infrastructure investment system and create a more conducive environment for private sector participation; establishment of Regional Specialty Hospitals to bring quality healthcare closer to Filipinos; and amendments to the Universal Healthcare Act to review annual premium rates of PhilHealth and cushion the impact of the recession due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The President also endorsed the bills seeking to create a Philippine Center for Disease, and the Virology Institute of the Philippines; bill creating a Health Emergency Auxiliary Reinforcement Team to ensure a quick mobilization of allied medical professionals during health emergencies; the Magna Carta of Barangay Health Workers (BHWs) that seeks to provide fair compensation and incentives to barangay health workers;

Reinstitution of the mandatory Reserve Officers' Training Corps and National Service Training Program, the National Government Rightsizing Program, E-Governance Act, Valuation Reform Bill (Tax Package 3), waste-to-energy law; National Land Use Act, Department of Water Resources Act, and Philippine Salt Industry Development Act.

Bersamin, asked about a legislated wage hike as some labor

groups want, said it is not part of the priority measures endorsed by the President or mentioned during the Legislative Executive Development Advisory Council meeting.

He said it is best left to Congress, adding that the President prefers not to meddle or comment prematurely about issues that may affect the economy. He said he prefers to wait for the concerned agencies or bodies to act and decide on the issue first.

## 10 BILLS

Speaker Martin Romualdez said the House of Representatives will work to pass before the end of the year all 10 remaining bills that President Marcos Jr. asked Congress to approve in his second SONA last Monday.

The House has approved on third and final reading seven of 17 priority measures, excluding the proposed 2024 national budget which the Executive Department is expected to submit to the House next month.

Romualdez expressed confidence that the chamber would wrap up the final approval of the remaining 10 SONA priority measures before the yearend — four before the congressional recess in October and the other six in December.

"I am extremely confident that the House of Representatives would again rise up to the occasion and accept the challenge from our President: to pass the 17 priority measures needed to sustain our

economic recovery and improve the living condition of our people," the Speaker said.

The Speaker however said the important bill that the House needs to deliberate on and approve at the soonest is the proposed 2024 General Appropriations Bill based on the National Expenditure Program (NEP).

The seven SONA priority measures that have been approved by the House on final reading are: House Bill No. 4102 or Single-Use Plastic Bags Tax Act; House Bill No. 4122 or An Act Imposing Value-Added Tax on Digital Transactions; House Bill No. 6716 or An Act Mandating the Establishment of Fisherfolk Resettlement Areas by the Department of Agriculture, Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and Local Government Units; House Bill No. 7393 or Anti-Financial Account Scamming Act; House Bill No. 7006 or Automatic Income Classification Act for Local Government Units; House Bill No. 8203 or Bureau of Immigration Modernization Act; House Bill No. 4125 or Ease of Paying Taxes Act.

The four SONA priority measures for approval by October are: Anti-Agricultural Smuggling; Amendments to the Cooperative Code; Tatak Pinoy; Blue Economy

The six remaining priority measures for approval by December are: Motor Vehicle User's Charge; Military and Uniformed Personnel

(MUP) Pension; Revised Procurement Law; New Government Auditing Code; Rationalization of Mining Fiscal Regime; National Water Act.

The OFW group Migrante International said it does not agree with Marcos' SONA statement he would hope that overseas employment will soon be "driven by choice, not by necessity."

"His statements regarding making overseas employment optional and not forced are contradictory and insincere," said Migrante adding the scenario is improbable considering the actions of the government, led by the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), and its reliance to OFW remittances.

"It is actively in talks with different countries and are signing agreements for the deployment of more Filipino workers," said the OFW group.

"Because of the billions of remittances from Filipino migrants, it remains business as usual for OFW deployment," it added.

The Federation of Free Workers (FFW) assailed the absence of any mention of wage adjustments in the second SONA.

"FFW reiterates the urgency of its advocacy for a P150 daily wage hike across the nation by legislative fiat," said FFW president Sonny Matula.

"There is some disappointment... Our agenda was not spotlighted in the President's SONA speech," he added. — *With Wendell Vigilia and Gerard Naval*





# Dialogue sought amid fisheries code review

By Joanna Rose Aglibot  
and Krixia Subingsubing  
@Team\_Inquirer

SAN ANTONIO, ZAMBALES—President Marcos, during his State of the Nation Address on Monday, asked lawmakers to amend the Fisheries Code to “incorporate and strengthen science-based analysis and determination of fishing areas.”

“We will seek the support of Congress to amend the code to guarantee sustainable development of our fisheries sector in harmony with environmental balance,” the President said.

But small fishermen in Zambales province are hoping that the government will hear their sentiments before lawmakers review the 25-year-old law governing the management and conservation of the nation’s fisheries.

Leonardo Cuaresma, chair of the Federated Association of Fisherfolk in Masinloc town, said the government must conduct a dialogue with fishermen “because [we] are the ones who can suggest what is appropriate to protect the fisheries sector and the country’s natural resources.”



**PLEA** Fishermen in San Antonio, Zambales, prepare to sail on Monday. Many small-scale fisherfolk in the province are hoping that the government will consult them before amending the Fisheries Code. —JOANNA ROSE AGLIBOT

“We are desperate because there is no direct plan in the West Philippine Sea as to what services the government will provide to protect the fishermen because the fishermen are the first to be harmed here,” Cuaresma told the Inquirer.

## Competition

The international organization Oceana and militant fisherfolk group Pamalakaya said they were concerned that any amendments to the code, also known as Republic Act No. 8550, could further open up municipal waters to commercial fishing activities.

“It is obvious that the announcement was the result of the

continuous lobbying of big-fishing firms to operate within the municipal waters,” said Pamalakaya chair Fernando Hicap in a statement. “This will certainly benefit owners who will be institutionally allowed to conduct large-scale fishing inside the 15-kilometer municipal waters intended for small-scale fisherfolk.”

Hicap was referring to earlier proposals to compromise on key provisions of the code, which was already amended in 2015 to further eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

Last May, the **Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources** proposed a compromise on Section 16 of Republic Act No.

10654 that defines the jurisdiction of local government units, and Section 18, which opens the use of municipal waters to commercial fishing activities.

“There can be no harmonization between the municipal fishers and commercial fishing vessels because the latter outcompetes with the traditional method of fishing,” Hicap said.

Such amendments, according to Oceana spokesperson Liza Osorio, was a “blatant disregard” of the 1987 Constitution because the proposed amendments “undermine the preferential rights of subsistence fisherfolk to the use of local marine and fishing resources in municipal waters.”

Instead of overhauling the code anew, Osorio said the government must prioritize the implementation of transparency measures that are critical in combating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

This includes the installation of vessel monitoring measures on commercial fishing vessels and electronic reporting system of fish catch that should be publicly accessible. **INQ**



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'BIG VOLUMES' OF SUGAR, ONIONS, MEAT FOUND

## DA: 4 LUZON WAREHOUSE OWNERS SUED FOR SMUGGLING

By Meg J. Adonis  
@MegINQ

A day after President Marcos highlighted the campaign against smugglers and hoarders in his second State of the Nation Address (Sona), the Department of Agriculture (DA) announced that charges have been filed against the owners of four warehouses in Luzon for storing smuggled farm products.

Senior Agriculture Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban told reporters on Tuesday that

the facilities kept a "big volume" of smuggled sugar, onions and meat. He declined to disclose the owners' identities and whereabouts.

"At least one [of the warehouses] delivers supply to the Visayas and Mindanao ... We're not sure whether they're part of a big syndicate," he said.

### No convictions

Mr. Marcos on Monday stressed in his Sona that the government was tracking down smugglers, hoarders and price

manipulators, who he said were behind unreasonable increases in the prices of agricultural products, particularly onion and sugar.

Farmers' groups had pointed out, however, that there had been no convictions due to insufficient evidence presented by the Bureau of Customs (BOC) in congressional hearings.

According to Sen. Imee Marcos, vice chair of the Senate committee on agriculture, food and agrarian reform, only one case against smugglers was

filed back in 2016 yet.

She suggested raising penalties against the illegal acts, since those imposed under current laws "are really inconsequential relative to the gains made by large-scale agricultural smugglers."

"We can broaden the scope of the offenses, we can include government employees and other private individuals who are not necessarily covered by the existing law," Senator Marcos said, adding that she was "certain" there were gov-

ernment officials involved in smuggling operations.

### Investigations

Lawmakers are currently pushing for an amendment to Republic Act No. 10845, or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act, to protect local farmers and consumers from "unfair practices."

Senator Marcos also cited smuggling as the main reason why the price of onions soared to as much as P700 per kilogram in December last year.

This prompted a series of

congressional hearings to investigate cases of hoarding and smuggling in cold storage facilities that were falsely declared full, triggering higher prices of commodities.

For its part, the DA said it needed additional manpower, especially from the BOC, to hasten its investigations.

Panganiban explained that the department was currently focusing on inspecting warehouses and cold storage facilities to assess whether products were smuggled. INQ



4 warehouse owners  
sued for smuggling

A day after President Marcos highlighted the campaign against smugglers and hoarders in his second State of the Nation Address, the Department of Agriculture announced that charges have been filed against the owners of four warehouses in Luzon for storing smuggled sugar, onion, meat and other farm products. But an official of the department declined to disclose the owners' identities. —STORY BY MEG J. ADONIS

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## MGA GOV'T EXEC SABIT SA SIBUYAS TONGPATS

Ilang matatas na opisyal ng gobyerno at mga agricultural companies ang nirekomendang kasuhan dahil sa profiteering, unethical practices, anti-competition at hoarding sa overpriced sibuyas noong nakaraang taon, ayon sa source na nakaalam sa resulta ng imbestigasyon ng National Bureau of Investigation (NBI).

"More than ten individuals including a senior official are recommended for prosecution over the overpriced onions," a source.

Nakinabang umano ang ilang agricultural companies sa kakapusan ng supply ng sibuyas sa merkado, ayon sa dokumento at pahayag ng mga testigo.

Maaari raw pigilan ng mga opisyal ng gobyerno ang pagsirit sa presyo ng sibuyas, itinuturing na pinakamataas sa mundo, pero hindi ito ginawa.

"These Department officials were in the position to prevent the high

price of onions, but did nothing," paliwanag pa ng source.

Matatandaan na umabot sa P800 ang bawat kilo ng sibuyas noong Disyembre ng nakaraang taon kaya naging laman ito ng mga balita ng international news organizations.

Sa isang ambush interview naman, tinukoy ni Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla ang Bureau of Customs (BOC),

Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI), at Department of Agriculture (DA), na masusing iniimbestigahan sa smuggling at hoarding ng sibuyas.

"Marami tayong pangalang nais tignan mula sa iba't ibang ahensya na may kinalaman sa pagpasok at pagbibigay ng permiso na ipasok ang mga... commodities na pinag-uusapan," wika ni Remulla. (Nancy Carvajal)



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### **DOJ may pangalan ng gov't officials na dawit sa onion smuggling**

May mga pangalan na ng mga matataas na opisyal ng gobyerno na sangkot sa smuggling ng sibuyas at iba pang produktong agrikultura si Department of Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla.

Ngunit tumanggi ang kalihim na tukuyin sila dahil sa kailangan pa umanong isailalim sa masusing balidasyon ang mga impormasyong kaniyang natanggap.

"Marami tayong pangalanang nais tignan mula sa iba't ibang ahensya na may kinalaman sa pagpasok at pagbibigay ng permiso na ipasok ang mga... commodities na pinag-uusapan," ayon kay Remulla.

Kasama sa proseso ng gagawing balidasyon ang pakikipag-ugnayan sa mga ahensya ng gobyerno na sangkot sa regulatory process upang makakuha sila ng mga kinakailangang dokumento para makumpleto ang kanilang database.

Kabilang sa mga ahensya na kanilang titingnan ang Bureau of Customs (BOC), Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI), at ang Department of Agriculture (DA).

Ipinaliwanag ng kalihim na sa BOC dumaraan ang lahat ng produkto na pumapasok sa mga pantalan, ang BPI naman ang nagmumula ang mga import permits at sa DA naman nanggagaling ang iba't iba pang permits.

Bilyon-bilyon na umano ang halaga ng mga smuggled na sibuyas na ipinapasok sa bansa, ayon pa kay Remulla. (Danilo Garcia)



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## Rice prices risk hitting decade-high as Indian export curbs rock market

Rice prices are set to surge after top exporter India banned a large chunk of shipments, adding to stresses on global food markets that have already been roiled by bad weather and the worsening conflict in Ukraine.

"In the short term, the price is definitely going up, it's just a question of how high up it will go," said Chookiat Ophaswongse, honorary president of the Thai Rice Exporters Association, one of the world's biggest shippers of the grain. "And it will be a spike, it's not going to be increasing incrementally."

Rice is vital to the diets of billions in Asia and Africa, and a surge

in prices would add to inflationary pressures and jack up the import bills for buyers. India's restriction, which applies to shipments of non-basmati white rice, is aimed at controlling domestic prices. The move comes as concerns escalate about the impact on farm supplies of the El Niño weather pattern, soaring temperatures in Europe, and Russian attacks against Ukrainian export facilities.

"India's export ban needs to be seen in the light of this ominous setting," said Peter Timmer, Professor Emeritus at Harvard University, who's studied food security for decades. "There is

considerably more reason for concern now that rice prices in Asia could spiral out of control pretty quickly."

With Vietnam, another major rice shipper, already quoting supplies at \$600 a ton for 5% white rice, Thailand may follow that, Chookiat said in an interview. A jump to that level would push Thai prices to the highest since 2012, and compares with the current level of \$534 a ton, near a two-year high.

A surge in rice — plus the gains in wheat, corn and other agricultural commodities seen so far this month — looks set to

spur a rebound in global food costs after a long run of declines. The UN's World Food Price Index hit the lowest since April 2021 in June following five quarterly declines.

India's latest move, plus an earlier curb on broken rice, affect 30% to 40% of the nation's total shipments, although Nomura Holdings Inc. warned restrictions could be extended to cover other categories in the event of uneven rainfall and rising domestic inflation. As it stands, the rules could impact flows to China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and a host of African nations. (Bloomberg)





REUTERS

A REMAINING pig is seen inside an empty pig farm in Nakhon Pathom province, Thailand, Jan. 14, 2022. Picture taken Jan. 14, 2022.

## Vietnam OK's commercial use of first vaccines against African swine fever

HANOI — Vietnam has approved the domestic commercial use of two home-grown vaccines against African swine fever, the government said on Monday, making them the world's first commercial vaccines against the deadly disease.

The vaccines include NAVET-ASFVAC, co-developed by Navetco Central Veterinary Medicine and scientists from the United States, and AVAC ASF LIVE developed by AVAC Vietnam JSC, the government said in a statement.

The approval of the vaccines could pave the way for possible sales abroad, a major breakthrough to tackle the deadly animal disease that regularly ravages pig farms worldwide.

African swine fever has for years disrupted the \$250-billion global pork market. In the worst outbreak in 2018-19, about half

the domestic pig population died in China, the world's biggest producer, causing losses estimated at over \$100 billion.

The ministry of agriculture has told the companies to work out production plans for domestic sales and for exports, the government statement said.

More than 650,000 doses of the vaccines had recently been tested on hog herds in 40 provinces, with an efficacy rate of 95%, according to the government.

"The vaccines are eligible for circulation and use nationwide," the ministry said in the statement.

US Agriculture Secretary Thomas Vilsack said last month there was likely to be interest in precautionary purchases in the United States, despite the country having so far been spared from the virus. — Reuters





## Wheat, corn go up

SINGAPORE- Chicago wheat futures rose to a five-month top on Tuesday, gaining 2 percent as Russia's attacks on Ukrainian ports and grain infrastructure sparked concerns about long-term global supplies and food security.

Corn edged higher, while soybeans eased.

"The slowdown in Ukrainian exports has been priced into the market and buyers are now waiting to see what happens to Russian wheat exports," said one Singapore-based grains trader.

"Any restrictions on movement of ships from Russia will be bullish

for prices."

The most-active wheat contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) added 2 percent to \$7.72-1/2 a bushel after earlier touching \$7.77-1/4, its strongest since Feb. 21. Corn rose 0.1 percent to \$5.69 a bushel, while soybeans lost 0.1 percent to \$14.23-1/2 a bushel.

Russia destroyed Ukrainian grain warehouses on the Danube River in a drone attack on Monday, targeting a vital export route for Kyiv in an expanding air campaign that Moscow began last week after quitting the Black Sea grain deal.

- Reuters