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House bill declares 'large-scale' crop smuggling as act of economic sabotage

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ

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RESPONDING to the call of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., a lawmaker has recently filed a bill declaring "large-scale" agricultural smuggling, hoarding, cartelization and profiteering, and other acts of market abuse as economic sabotage, even as smuggled agricultural products confiscated by authorities last year reached the P1.2-billion mark.

In House Bill 8600, or the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage of 2023, filed last Tuesday, Quezon 4th District Rep. Keith Micah Tan said his proposal seeks to amend Republic Act 10845, or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016.

Tan said RA 10845 was passed into law with the primary objective of protecting Filipino farmers and their families from the rise in agricultural smuggling in the country.

"Since the law's passage in 2016, however, even if there have been several reports of seizure of smuggled products, there have been no prosecutions of individuals, groups, or corporations under the law. It may

appear that some have mastered how to circumvent the law in order not to be punished," he said.

During his second State of the Nation Address (SONA), the President asked Congress to pass amendments to the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act.

With this appeal from the President, Tan said, obviously, RA 10845's potential to finally end illegal activities that sabotage the country's economy and the livelihood of farmers had not been fully utilized over the years.

"The present condition of our farmers and the rising price of agricultural products because of their

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scarcity reflect the failure of national government agencies to fully implement the law," he said.

According to Tan, the Economist's 2021 Global Food Security Index (GFSI) reveals that the Philippines ranked 64th out of 113 countries in terms of four dimensions of food security: food availability, food accessibility, food utilization, and stability.

"The difficulty of the country to cope with other countries in terms of food security is apparent in the rising prices of basic commodities and the scarcity and shortage of such commodities," he said.

"Also, the country has been experiencing the highest price of onion in recent history—an all-time high of P700 per kilogram. This was made worse by reports of smuggling and price manipulations by unscrupulous people," he said.

Based on the records of the Bureau of Customs, he said a total of P1.2 billion worth of smuggled agricultural products have been confiscated in 2022.

"Millions worth of revenues that the government is losing as a result of smuggling, which is revealed to be P250 million per year," the lawmaker said.

In light of this, Tan said it is high time to introduce amendments to the law, in order to address and hopefully end not only smuggling,

but also the issues of hoarding, profiteering, and cartelization of agricultural products.

The proposed legislation will consider as economic sabotage the hoarding, profiteering, and cartel of sugar, corn, pork, poultry, garlic, onion, carrots, fish, and cruciferous vegetables in the amount of P1 million or rice in the amount of P10 million.

Moreover, in order to strengthen the enforcement and implementation of the law, Inter-Agency Council on Economic Intelligence will be created under the proposal.

This will be co-chaired by the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Trade and Industry, and the Bureau of Customs, and will include the Department of Justice, National Bureau of Investigation, Department of the Interior and Local Government, the Philippine National Police, the Philippine Competition Commission, National Security Council, and National Intelligence Coordinating Agency.

The bill said the penalty of life imprisonment and a fine of twice the fair value of smuggled agricultural products or products subject to hoarding, profiteering, or cartels, and the aggregate amount of the taxes, duties, and other charges avoided, shall be imposed on any person who commits any of the acts enumerated under the proposal.

‘The state of the nation is sound and improving’

PRESIDENT Marcos delivered on Monday his second State of the Nation Address (SONA), which focused on hot-button social and economic issues close to the heart of Filipinos. Reporting that the government was able to “revive and rejuvenate” the economy, he vowed to keep the country’s economic growth on track by attracting more investments, sustaining infrastructure projects, upskilling our workforce and going after smugglers and hoarders of agricultural products.

“We live in difficult times brought about by some forces of our own making, but certainly, also by forces that are beyond our control. But we will continue to find solutions,” Marcos said.

Citing the country’s economic expansion that peaked at 7.6 percent in 2022, the highest growth rate in 46 years, Marcos declared: “We are still considered to be among the fastest-growing economies in the Asian region and the world. It is a testament to our strong macroeconomic fundamentals.”

The sound policies crafted by his economic team helped keep inflation in check, easing to 5.4 percent in June from 8.7 percent in January, the President said, adding that inflation is expected to further ease by the end of the year and settle at 2.9 percent by 2024.

To foster continued economic growth, Marcos said the government will continue to invest in public infrastructure, food, education, health, jobs and social protection. He also assured the people that his administration is gearing up for the effects of El Niño.

These programs are expected to help in the government’s target of generating jobs for the remaining 4.3 percent of our workforce, as well as for the 11.7 percent underemployed Filipinos.

Published and online reactions to the President’s SONA showed there was unity across the aisles for his economic policies, which is seen moving the country in the right direction.

Pundits welcomed his proposed tax reforms: Excise tax on single-use plastics; value-added tax on digital services; rationalization of mining fiscal regime; and motor vehicle user charge. Also cited were his proposed amendments to the Fisheries Code; Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act; and Cooperative Code.

Jonathan L. Ravelas, senior adviser at professional services firm Reyes Tancandong & Co., told BUSINESSMIRROR that the President was able to address several pain points such as education and jobs; affordable healthcare; and efforts to address inflation and strengthen the economy. **(Read, “Experts give mixed reviews of second Marcos SONA,” in the BUSINESSMIRROR, July 25, 2023)**

Ser Percival K. Peña-Reyes, Ateneo Center for Research and Development associate director, told BUSINESSMIRROR the President’s SONA was a “well-articulated speech.” What mostly appealed to him were the discussion on inflation, food production, particularly agriculture and fisheries as well as jobs creation. “I hope we can attract more FDI for the renewable energy projects mentioned in the speech,” he said. “I just wish housing would figure more prominently in our infrastructure push.”

Neda Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said the objectives Marcos has set are all “doable.” “Most of what the President has mentioned are actually in the Philippine Development Plan, but I think the way he put it up made it more clear and relatable to the public,” he said. “The goals, the policy directions, the strategies that are needed to achieve the objectives, I think those were really set out and the visions are there and I think it’s great. It’s one of the best SONAs I’ve heard,” he said.

“The President was not fishing for applause. He was choosing fewer sound bites so he could mention more sound programs,” said Deputy Speaker and Batangas 6th District Rep. Ralph G. Recto. “The speech was designed not to get people excited, but to get us thinking for a long time on the hard work ahead.”

The President’s second SONA has given us a glimpse of more good things to come. It was a comprehensive accounting of the state of the nation, which is “sound and improving.”



Agriculture still on track under BBM

FIRST of all, I would like to congratulate **President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.** on his second State of the Nation Address (SONA) delivered on July 24, 2023, where he reported substantial developments for the country's agriculture sector, also stating the sector recorded a 2.2-percent growth in the first quarter of the year.

Among the factors he cited for the growth were putting in place measures like consolidation, modernization, mechanization and improvement of value chains, while the timely and calibrated importation of select food products was still undertaken to ensure the country's food security.

Furthermore, our President said that the government's method of attaining food security is being guided by both science and nature. This, as there is a need to ensure that food production is both sustainable and responsible, and will also benefit the future generations.

One of the measures he identified as helping farming become more sustainable is the use of biofertilizers under the Balanced Fertilization Strategy (BFS) that was kicked off by the Department of Agriculture in mid-2022 under my watch.

The BFS can reduce inorganic fertilizer use by farmers by up to 50 percent and increase yields as soil health improves. I mentioned in my column last week ("Using less resources to grow food" published on July 18, 2023) that prior to the formal launching of the BFS in May 2022, the DA-Philippine Rice Research Institute reported farmers using the strategy getting palay (unmilled rice) yields of up to 7 metric tons per hectare



MOVING FORWARD
WILLIAM D. DAR

(MT/ha) from field trials using a combination of inorganic and inorganic fertilizers. This is way above the average palay yield in the Philippines of 4 MT/ha.

When it comes to modernizing the country's agriculture sector, President Marcos said the government through the DA provided over 28,000 units of modern machines and equipment to farmers across the country. Also, the Chief Executive distributed huge quantities of rice, corn and various vegetable seeds to farmers, while more than 100,000 coconut seedlings were planted in almost 10,000 hectares of land throughout the country.

The President also disclosed in his SONA the preparation of the Geo-Agri map of farm-to-market roads (FMRs) for the entire country to better connect farms to markets. This will result in the building of 600 more kilometers of FMRs in different parts of the country.

Also, the government has established at least 24 multi-species hatcheries to help increase the fish production.

Strengthening laws

President Marcos also committed to ask Congress to amend the Fisheries Code and Cooperative Code to incorporate and strengthen science-based analysis in the management of the

country's fishing areas. He said the amendments to the Fisheries Code should protect the interests of the fisherfolk and the country's aquatic resources.

There is also a need to amend the Cooperative Code as more and more farmers are consolidating and clustering to facilitate economies of scale. The consolidating and clustering of farmers and fisherfolk is being sustained by the Marcos administration, with the clustered groups of food producers numbering 300 made up of almost 900 co-operatives and more than 200,000 hectares of farmland.

I am happy that this administration is sustaining the clustering efforts started amid the pandemic, as clustering also facilitates the distribution of assistance to farmers and allows them to enter into supply agreements with big agribusiness companies through the "big brother-small brother" partnership.

I also believe that amendments to the Cooperative Code should include provisions to facilitate the forging of more "big brother-small brother" partnerships and protect the interests of clustered or organized farmers.

One of the measures I wanted to hear from President Marcos' SONA is how the government is preparing for the impending El Niño or long dry spell. Among the measures he mentioned were cloud seeding and the installation of around 6,000 rainwater collection systems across the country.

Going after smugglers

Perhaps one of the strongest pronouncements our President made

in his SONA is his warning against individuals and groups engaged in smuggling and hoarding activities.

"One of the reasons for the price increase is smugglers, hoarders and those who manipulate the price of agricultural products. We will pursue and sue them. Their work is simply not right, nor is it compatible with our good purpose," Marcos said.

He added that smugglers, hoarders and price manipulators harm both farmers and consumers, and that their days are numbered.

Kadiwa sale hit millions

And as a continuation of the Kadiwa ng Pangulo program launched in September 2019 by the DA, the department held more than 7,000 Kadiwa events that benefited more than 1.8 million families. President Marcos said sales of almost P700 million were generated from the Kadiwa events held nationwide, benefiting farmers, fisherfolk and small entrepreneurs.

I am sure that there are quarters and sectors who wanted to hear more from the Chief Executive when it comes to agriculture from his SONA. However, let us take note that agriculture was badly affected by the pandemic, and the ensuing geopolitical crisis made matters more challenging for the sector.

Hence, leveling up the country's agriculture sector cannot be done by just one man and one department — we need collective and concerted action, and convergence of efforts, with President Marcos providing the directions. And let us rally to level up Philippine agriculture!



Government to file cases against farm smugglers soon, says palace

THE GOVERNMENT has identified smugglers and hoarders based on intelligence reports and would soon file cases against them, the presidential palace said on Wednesday.

The suspects are known to have smuggled farm products in past governments, Executive Secretary Lucas P. Bersamin said in a statement.

He said a Department of Justice (DoJ) task force against smuggling was still gathering evidence, adding that it had not forwarded its report to the Office of the President.

In his second state of the nation address (SONA) to Congress on July 24, Mr. Marcos Jr. scored hoarders and smugglers, whose "days are numbered."

He asked Congress to pass a bill seeking to revise the country's Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016.

"That is a personal undertaking of the President," Mr. Bersamin said. "He really means to deal with these people, the justice that they deserve."

He said the timeline for the campaign against smugglers would depend on the strength of evidence.

Also on Wednesday, DoJ vowed to go after agricultural smugglers and hoarders.

"We are not going to be weakened by the so-called lack of action before in respect to smugglers and hoarders," Justice Undersecretary Raul T. Vasquez told a news briefing.

"We assure the general public that we will go after them in the strongest possible sense, by the filing of the gravest crime that may be charged and that could be economic sabotage," he added.

But the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura criticized the Justice department for failing to prosecute smugglers.

"Smugglers and hoarders, and their cohorts in government if any, continue with their criminal ways since no one has been convicted of agriculture smuggling," it said in a statement.

It added that the Justice department had only received 159 large-scale agricultural smuggling cases from the Bureau of Customs and Department of

Agriculture between 2016 and February 2023.

Of the total, 76 cases were dismissed for insufficient evidence, the group said. "Only nine have been filed, but there are still zero convictions."

It said economic managers have been conveniently attributing inflation to low farm output.

"Five years is enough, our economic managers should accept the realities of unlimited importation and reduction of tariff on basic commodities like rice, pork, chicken and corn did not reduce retail prices," it said. "Hoarders, profiteers and smugglers are to blame for high prices."

The Federation of Free Farmers earlier said the President

should have mentioned his plan to reinstate the pre-shipment inspection system for imports in his SONA, saying it "a more effective deterrent to smuggling than running after smugglers."

Meanwhile, minority congressmen said Mr. Marcos had failed to outline policies to lower inflation and curb smuggling.

Albay Rep. Edcel C. Lagman told the House of Representatives plenary the President had failed to specify the policies his government had adopted to lower inflation.

"Brave words are not enough," he said of the President's warning against smugglers. "Swift and resolute actions are imperative."

Minority Leader and Party-list Rep. Marcelino C. Libanan

said the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act has not been fully enforced.

"The Bureau of Customs has been violating its provisions with impunity," he said. "Misinvoicing, misdeclaration, and other falsities in declaration have been going on right under the very nose of Customs authorities."

He added that the government's infrastructure projects had been delayed by lack of funds.

Assistant Minority Leader and Party-list Rep. Arlene D. Brosas said the taxes proposed by the President would burden the masses amid spiraling prices. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza, Beatriz Marie D. Cruz and John Victor D. Ordoñez**



Phl, Malaysia to boost ties in agri, digital economy

By HELEN FLORES

KUALA LUMPUR – The Philippines and Malaysia agreed yesterday to convene joint meetings in October to increase collaboration in various areas of mutual interest, including

transnational crime, agriculture and digital economy.

At a joint press briefing with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, President Marcos said the meetings would help accelerate discussions on priority areas of cooperation between

the two nations.

"We agreed to convene the next Philippines-Malaysia Joint Commission Meeting in the near future. I believed the date that we decided upon was around sometime in October," Marcos said.

"We do this so that our government agencies will have an avenue to discuss priority cooperation in detail, most especially in the areas of transnational crimes, agriculture, halal industry, Islamic banking, education,

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tourism and culture, sports and the digital economy," he said.

Marcos said the Malaysian government offered to build capacity in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, especially in priority sectors such as halal, Islamic

banking and food security.

"We continue to work on the corresponding MOUs in these fields and have them signed – we'll have them signed in the near future," the Chief Executive said.

The Malaysian government, Marcos said, has offered their expertise to train Filipino personnel and officials to strengthen the country's

capabilities in these "increasingly important sectors."

He said Malaysia is one of the leading halal economies in the world.

For his part, Anwar said they have agreed to convene the joint commission to boost diplomatic ties between the two countries.

"Finally, I think the issues that we relate upon is the is-

sue of the joint commission that's going to meet towards the end of the year. And we have outstanding MOUs, which both of us agreed to accelerate the process and where we should find ways to resolve and then hopefully sign prior to the – or during the commission meeting," the Prime Minister said.

The last JCM was held in

Manila in 2011. According to the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the 8th JCM was supposedly scheduled in 2013, which was supposed to be hosted by Malaysia.

Malaysia was the 10th largest trading partner of the Philippines last year, with trade totaling \$8.84 billion.

Malaysia also ranked as the country's 11th export

destination and 9th import source valued at \$2.46 billion and \$6.38 billion, respectively, in 2022.

In terms of investments, Malaysia ranked 22nd among the Philippines' top investment partners in 2022 and the fourth source of foreign direct investment with \$105.7 million, up by 56.4 percent from January to September 2022.



Ignoring food security flashpoints

In the list of priorities that the President often refers to, agriculture and food security rarely fails to catch my attention. Even as global supply chains are returning to normal, a host of other developing conditions continue to act as potential flashpoints to a food crisis for the country.

Being a net importer of food items, the Philippines continues to be vulnerable to fluctuations in international food prices and supply chain disruptions. Therefore, such factors as population growth, limited agricultural resources, and natural disasters become huge risks.

BIZLINKS



REY GAMBOA

Locally, while past efforts to modulate our population growth has resulted to a modest rate of 1.5 percent, the country's large population base continues to pose challenges in securing food resources given the declining contribution of domestic agriculture for the nation.

Among the global issues that continue to percolate, climate change by far represents the biggest threat to our food security. When the simple supply shortage of imported onions sent our inflation data on a tailspin, it worries me how even a whiff of a rice shortage can affect us.

Even if we import only a small percentage of our rice needs, the absolute numbers represent a sizable amount for the dining tables of many households, usually those in the low-income levels, should the country fail to secure importations for whatever reason.

When major rice producing and exporting countries like Thailand and India report potentially poor harvests because of droughts, flooding, or even the drying up of major water sources for agriculture, assurances of adequate stocks in *bodegas* are not guarantees of stable prices.

While current agrarian laws have somehow blunted the weight of rice on the country's consumer price index, the reality remains that the Philippines is the world's single largest rice importer, and is, therefore, vulnerable

to any significant curtailment of rice exports.

Reviewing the RCEF

For this reason alone, the government needs to prioritize rice self-sufficiency. This means focusing on raising our own rice production, which does not only mean providing more subsidies to encourage farmers to go back to rice farming.

The Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), which receives P10 billion annually until 2026, should be closely monitored especially now that it has been around for half its life. The RCEF, according to the Rice Tariffication Law that created it, should have provided for financial assistance to rice farmers to improve their productivity.

But more than that, half of its yearly funds should have gone to the mechanization and modernization of rice farming. By now, we should have been seeing significantly increased rice production through the use of better farming implements.

Shouldn't the President ask for a progress report on this, not just in his capacity as agriculture chief, but as the guardian of food security for a nation of over 110 million Filipinos? Now is not too early. We might wake up one morning to news of widespread corruption in administering the RCEF, which by now should have received over P30 billion already.

Kadiwa's vulnerability

The President, during his first State of the Nation Address (SONA) last year, delved much more on food security. Then, he talked of improving the production of agricultural commodities by enhancing the value chain system from production to retail.

In this year's SONA, BBM boasted about how the Kadiwa stores, a resurrected project of his parents half a century ago, has been bringing down prices of agricultural products by cutting out middlemen and reducing price markups along the supply chain.

The Kadiwa stores, unfortunately, are dependent on government support to survive, such that any withdrawal of funds and logistics that have been oiling this initiative would make the whole program grind to halt almost instantaneously.

It is highly improbable that the structure on how it operates will induce sustainability so that target farmers and fisherfolk will set up their own systems to bring their produce to the Kadiwa stores, thereby bypassing a well-entrenched and well-financed lo-

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gistics system.

At the current near-poverty state of our farmers and fisherfolk, hiring a jeep to bring their produce to the nearest Kadiwa store may not be feasible. Without the necessary funds, they would rather cede such marketing functions to the all-too-willing middleman.

On the other hand, if the government were to act as middleman, the amount needed to sustain this role would be go beyond the agriculture department's budget. This is the very reason why the Kadiwa stores of yesteryears faltered.

Full-time agriculture chief needed

How much time has the President really allocated to agriculture during his first year? His inability to name someone more capable who can give full time and energy to oversee many of the country's agriculture-related projects and programs has become detrimental to his intention to establish the country's food security.

Are the machineries and modern agricultural implements working to improve farm productivity? Or the more basic question is if the RCEF money really goes to our rice farms and farmers? We may wake up one morning to another scandal, perhaps much bigger than the P10-billion pork barrel fund anomaly in 2013 where the Department of Agriculture figured prominently.

We'd like to see the President, or someone with truly a heart for Philippine agriculture and the country, working hard to see that the farmlands, fisheries, orchards, poultries, and livestock farms teem with produce and become profitable to those who tend them.

Six hundred thousand of our farmers may have been freed from a big part of their debts, but that does not ensure that they will be on the road to a better life. The real work has only started, and someone has to do it.

Facebook and Twitter

We are actively using two social networking websites to reach out more often and even interact with and engage our readers, friends, and colleagues in the various areas of interest that I tackle in my column. Please like us on www.facebook.com/ReyGamboa and follow us on www.twitter.com/ReyGamboa.

Should you wish to share any insights, write me at Link Edge, 25th Floor, 139 Corporate Center, Valero Street, Salcedo Village, 1227 Makati City. Or e-mail me at reydgamboa@yahoo.com. For a compilation of previous articles, visit www.Bizlink-Philippines.net.



Kadiwa ng Pangulo ikakalat sa 'Pinas

Tiniyak ng Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) na patuloy silang magpapatupad ng mga polisiya at programa na sumusuporta sa Kadiwa ng Pangulo program upang mas maraming Pilipino ang makabili ng pagkain sa presyong abot-kaya.

Ito'y bilang suporta sa layunin ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. na magkaroon ng food security sa bansa.

Lifestyle

Ayon sa DILG, patuloy rin nilang paigtingin ang ugnayan sa pagitan ng national at local governments para sa pagtatayo ng mga regular na Kadiwa centers sa iba't ibang lugar upang maabot ang mas marami pang tao.

Hinikayat din ni DILG Secretary Benjamin Abalos Jr. ang lahat ng mga local chief executive na magtatag ng mga Kadiwa stall sa kanilang mga barangay at hingin ang kooperasyon ng civil society

organizations at ng pribadong sektor para na ipatupad ang isang 'whole-of-nation' approach sa pagtiyak sa food security.

Ang Kadiwa ay isang farm-to-consumer market chain program. Wala ng mga middleman sa mga produkto at pinahihintulutan ang mga magsasaka at mangingisda na direktang ibenta ang kanilang mga produkto sa mga tao sa abot-kayang halaga.

Samantala, iniulat rin ng DILG na ang kanilang Halina't Magtanim ng Prutas at Gulay (HAPAG) sa Barangay Project ay nakapaglaan na ng mahigit sa 881 ektarya ng lupa para sa paghahalaman sa mga pamayanan sa 19,188 barangay sa buong bansa.

Inilunsad ngayong taon ang HAPAG sa Barangay Project na humihikayat sa mga barangay at mga pamilya na magtanim ng sariwa, masustansya at abot-kayang prutas at mga gulay sa kanilang bakuran o espasyo sa tahanan sa pamamagitan ng community garden sa mga hindi ginagamit na lupa sa kanilang lugar. **(Dolly Cabreza)**

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P20 PER KILO RICE? POSSIBLE --

THE administration of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. is concentrating on major palay-producing areas with the goal of maximizing their production levels to attain its target of having P20 per kilo of rice, Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin said on Tuesday.

In an interview by Pinky Webb on CNN Philippines, Bersamin said that the Marcos administration is doing everything to lower the price of rice and other commodities.

"Tyong 20 peso per kilo, as we started out saying, was an aspiration. Ibig sabihin noon, it may

not be soon, it may be later... maaabutan din natin iyan," Bersamin said.

"But you know, factors of production, hindi tayo masyadong ano dahil marami ng areas na hindi na nagpu-produce ng rice... But those areas that are producing rice, we try to maximize iyong production levels nila. That's another thing that we are doing now in order to reach that aspiration."

According to Bersamin, reaching that rice price point is not an entirely unrealistic ambition or aspiration, although there are



BERSAMIN

several factors that might impact government initiatives.

BERSAMIN

Those factors include weather conditions, climate change, and the looming El Niño phenomenon that may affect agricultural production, he said.

"Pero ginagawa ng gobyerno lalo na iyong Department of Agriculture na experts ay gamitin ito na advantage din kasi there are species of rice that thrive in moderate, even during moderate El Niño—prediction of moderate El Niño occurrences," Bersamin said.

"Gumagawa ng paraan ang Department of Agriculture upang hindi masyadong mahirap ang

epekto sa rice production."

Asked if the administration has a timetable in attaining that goal, the Palace official did not give a timeline, but expressed confidence that it may soon be realized.

"Hindi ko naman sinasabing matagal na ma-attain iyan; hindi ko rin sinasabing madaling ma-attain iyan. But I am saying that I am very confident that for as long as government is doing things right to attain these goals, that aspiration may soon be realized. Bakit hindi?" Bersamin said.

PCO

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Farm-to-market roads

CONSTRUCTIVE critics of the administration would do well to accept that the government means well and is determined to uplift the well-being of people in the countryside.

Admittedly, poverty-stricken farmers, fishermen and other agricultural workers in the rural communities comprise the bulk of the country's more than 110 million population.

That's why we, like many other Filipinos, commend President Marcos' government for its decision to construct more farm-to-market roads (FTMRs) across the Philippines.

This was bared yesterday by Agriculture Undersecretary Mercedita Sombilla during a Post SONA Discussions held at the Hilton Hotel in Pasay City.

"This is very important. It has already been mentioned that we need connectivity, especially in rural areas that are really far from consumers and cities, where products are needed," she said.

Sombilla said additional farm-to-market roads would make it easier for farmers and fishermen to transport their produce, which will give them more income.

Official records show that the government has built more than 660 kilometers of FTMRs, benefiting farmers, fishermen, traders and consumers.

Aside from these FTMRs, the Department of Agriculture (DA), which remains to be headed by President Marcos, has also constructed 670 lineal meters of bridges.

The national government is set to build an additional 64,156 kilometers of FTMRs in various parts of the country to hasten our socio-economic development.

We, thus, call on other concerned government offices and agencies to exert all efforts to transform far-flung villages into flourishing communities.

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DILG PUSHING KADIWA FOR FOOD SECURITY

THE Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) on Tuesday said it will continue to implement policies and programs supporting the "Kadiwang Pangulo" program in line with President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s goal of ensuring food security.

In a post-State of the Nation Address (SONA) forum, DILG Secretary Benhur Abalos said his department will continue to intensify engagements between national and local governments to put up regular Kadiwa Centers in different localities to make food accessible and affordable to Filipinos.

"The Kadiwa program is an important measure that quickly responds to food insecurity and is also a useful measure to introduce high-nutrient foods to malnourished populations. That is why the DILG, in partnership with the local government units (LGUs) and concerned national government agencies (NGAs), aims to bring this initiative down to our communities so we will be able to reach more Filipinos, especially the poor," Abalos said.

He also urged all local chief executives to establish Kadiwa stalls in their

barangays and seek the cooperation of civil society organizations and the private sector to employ a "whole-of-nation" approach to ensuring food security.

The Kadiwa Program is a farm-to-consumer market chain program that eliminates intermediaries, allowing local producers to sell directly to consumers at affordable prices.

The DILG also reported that its Halina't Magtanim ng Prutas at Gulay (HAPAG) sa Barangay Project has so far allocated over 881 hectares of land for community gardening in 19,188 barangays nationwide.

Launched early this year, the HAPAG sa Barangay Project encourages barangays and households to produce fresh, healthy and affordable fruits and vegetables from their backyards and spaces through the establishment of community gardens in vacant and unused areas of their villages.

Sombilla said there are three types of Kadiwa stores: the regular Kadiwa, the Kadiwang Pangulo (formerly Kadiwa ng Pasko) and Seafood Kadiwa.

PNA

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3 gov't agencies eyed in aggie smuggling probe

By Hector Lawas

THE Bureau of Customs (BOC), Bureau of Plant Industry, and Department of Agriculture (DA) are now under scrutiny and may face investigation for their potential involvement in the smuggling of agricultural products.

According to Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla, the officials in those agencies have potential influence on the supply side of agricultural commodities.

"We have several names from various agencies that are being looked into regarding the entry and issuance of permits for the commodities in question," said Remulla in Filipino.

When asked about the possible charges that could be filed against those involved, Remulla pointed to "economic sabotage."

Remulla emphasized that the BoC holds responsibility for monitoring and preventing the entry of smuggled agricultural products through sea ports, while the Bureau of Plant Industry is tasked with issuing import permits.

Additionally, the DA oversees the release of other permits required for importation.

"We are examining individuals with connections to these events where syndicates take advantage of our nation, manipulating prices and controlling the market for goods that Filipinos use daily," Remulla explained.

To combat this illegal activity, Remulla stressed that the campaign against agricultural smuggling employs a multi-pronged approach.

"It's a multi-pronged approach, not just limited to prosecution. The government will utilize all available means to hold those involved accountable through various avenues," he said.

Senators called for a stop to rampant smuggling activities insisting that this kind of activity is really damaging the country specifically in the agriculture sector. Senate President Juan Miguel

Migz Zubiri confirmed President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s for issuing strong words and warning against those who are involved in smuggling operations in the country.

"The President is very serious about this. He considered smuggling as economic sabotage, especially in the agriculture sector. Pagkain yan ng taong bayan. Dapat hulihin ang sinuman mananamantala at mag manipulate ng presyo tulad ng garlic, onion at iba pang pangangailangan ng ating mga kababayan," Zubiri said.

The Senate chief confirmed that there are "groups" controlling the prices of important agricultural products in the country.

"Kailangan may sampulan. Kailangan may makasuhan at maku-long para mahinto na ang ganitong pananamantala," Zubiri said.

Senator Imee Marcos urged the Executive department to issue a strong statement against smugglers and urges his brother, President Marcos Jr., to file the necessary criminal charges against those who are reportedly involved in smuggling activities in the country.

Senator Christopher Bong Go lauded Marcos' commitment to enhance the agriculture sector and his stance versus smuggling activities in his SONA last Monday.

"President Marcos has laid out a clear and well-guided plan that champions our farmers and the entire agricultural sector. He places this vital segment of our nation at the heart of our development trajectory," Go said.

"Huwag natin pabayaang local farmers, sila po ang may binubuhay na mga kababayan natin. Sila po ang kadalasang isang kahig, isang tuka. Dapat po suportahan natin sila," Go added.

Senator Cynthia Villar for her part said it is high time that Congress approved the creation of special court that will handle cases like smuggling, hoarding and price manipulation.

With Camille P. Balagtas

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DILG todo-suporta sa 'Kadiwa ng Pangulo'

Tiniyak ng Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) na patuloy silang magpapatupad ng mga polisiya at programa na sumusuporta sa "Kadiwa ng Pangulo" program upang gawin itong mas accessible at abot-kaya para sa lahat ng mga Pinoy.

Ito'y bilang suporta sa layunin ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. na matiyak ang food security sa bansa.

Ayon sa DILG, patuloy rin nilang pailigtingin ang ugnayan sa pagitan ng national at local governments para sa pagtatayo ng regular na Kadiwa Centers sa iba't ibang lokalidad upang

maabot ang mas marami pang tao.

"The Kadiwa program is an important measure that quickly responds to food insecurity and is also a useful measure to introduce high-nutrient foods to malnourished populations. That is why the DILG, in partnership with the local government units (LGUs) and concerned national government agencies (NGAs), aims to bring this initiative down to our communities so we will be able to reach more Filipinos, especially the poor," ayon kay DILG Secretary Benjamin 'Benhur' Abalos Jr.

Hinikayat din ni Aba-

los ang lahat ng mga local chief executives na magtatag ng mga Kadiwa stalls sa kanilang mga barangays at hingin ang kooperasyon ng civil society organizations at ng pribadong sektor na ipatupad ang isang "whole-of-nation" approach sa pagtiyak sa seguridad sa pagkain.

Ang Kadiwa Program ay isang farm-to-consumer market chain program na nagtatanggal ng intermediaries, at pinahihintulutan ang mga local producers na direktang ipagbili ang kanilang mga produkto sa mga consumers sa abot-kayang halaga. (Mer Layson)

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Officials sa onion smuggling, kasuhan na

GAYA nang nasabi ko sa aking column kahapon, walang mangyayaring smuggling ng mga agri products kung walang padrinong pumuprotekta sa mga smugglers na may mataas na katungkulan sa pamahalaan. Ito'y reaksiyon ko sa sinabi ni Presidente Bongbong Marcos sa kanyang SONA na bilang na ang araw ng mga smugglers at hoarders ng agricultural products. Kaya ang hamon ko sa Presidente ay gawin without ifs and buts ang kanyang banta. Patunayan sa gawa at hindi lang sa salita ang kanyang tapang.

Kakasuhan na aniya ang mga kontrabidang ito sa ekonomiya ng bansa. Bakit sila lang? Dapat kasama ang mga opisyal ng pamahalaan na kakutsaba ng mga ito dahil sa halip na gumawa para sa ikabubuti ng mamamayan, gumagawa sila sa ikabubuti ng kanilang lukbutan. Ayon sa Department of Justice, hawak na ng tanggapan ang pangalan ng mga opisyal ng pamahalaan na kasangkot lalo na sa pagpupuslit ng sibuyas. Huwag nawang mangimi si President Bongbong



Aksyon
NGAYON
 NIAL G. PEDROCHE

na tuluyan ang mga taong ito kahit nakatulong sa kanya noong eleksyon.

Hindi isiniwalat ni Justice Secretary Crispin Remulla ang mga pangalan. Okay lang iyan para naman hindi sila sumailalim sa trial by publicity. Pero sana, totooanin at apurahin ang pagsasampa ng karampatang demanda laban sa mga ito. Kung mapapatunayang nagkasala, lapatan ng pinakamabigat na parusa. Kung may parusang bitay, dapat talagang bitayin ang mga iyan na sumasabotahe sa ekonomiya habang marami tayong kababayang dumaranas ng gutom.

Katumbas ng mass murder ang ginagawa nila kung tutuusin. Ayon kay Remulla, marami silang sinisiyasat na pangalan mula sa iba't ibang tanggapan ng pamahalaan. Malamang, kasama ryan ang Bureau of Customs, Bureau of

(Sundan sa pahina 7)

AKSYON NGAYON

... Mula pahina 6

Plant Industry at ang pinamumunuang departamento mismo ng Presidente, ang Department of Agriculture. Ani Remulla, ang mga ito ay may kinalaman sa paglala-bas-pasok ng mga kalakal

sa bansa.

Ngunit ang Bureau of Plant Industry ay sangay ng Department of Agriculture na pinamumunuan mismo ni Presidente Marcos. Bakit ito nada-dawit pa sa kaso ng smuggling kung ang nakatutok mismo ay si Marcos? Ang buong

akala ko, kaya inupuan ng Presidente ang DA ay sapagkat layunin niyang mawala ang mga anomalya rito. Kung sa departamentong kanyang pinamumunuan ay talamak ang katiwalian, ano pang buti ang maaasahan sa ibang tanggapan na hindi niya sakop?



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PCIC to remain under Finance dept

By RAADEE S. SAUSA

THE chief of the Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. (PCIC) said the Governance Commission for Government-owned and -controlled corporations (GCG) decided it will remain under the Department of Finance (DOF).

"I think there's already a decision on that with the GCG, right now we're still will be under the DOF," Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. (PCIC)

President Jovy C. Bernabe said last Tuesday. The Department of Agriculture (DA) earlier proposed that the PCIC be brought back under its supervision to "harmonize" its operations for "better" food production and food security.

Gideon D.V. Mortel, GCG commissioner, confirmed Bernabe's statement citing their recent meeting with officials of the PCIC, the DOF, the DA, the Department of Budget and Management department and the

performance management system.

The discussion is really for the PCIC to remain under the wing of the DOF," Mortel added.

"Right now, we are focusing on our financial operations and we're getting a lot of good inputs from our financial economic managers, while we are under the DA," Bernabe said.

"So we have to make sure that the financial status remains robust and being under the DOF really is helpful to the PCIC," he added.

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CCA Manila ties up with govt, IRRI to develop rice recipes

CCA Manila has partnered with the Department of Agriculture-Philippine Rice Research Institute (DA-PhilRice) and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) to develop a range of recipes using Malusog Rice as the main ingredient.

The culinary schools said the 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.

"We are excited to partner with the Malusog Rice Program to develop Malusog Rice Recipes that not only showcase the versatility of this remarkable rice variety but also contribute to addressing the pressing issue of vitamin A deficiency in our country," Dr. Ma. Veritas Luna, Chancellor for Education of CCA Manila, said in a statement.

"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."

Rice, the very heartbeat of Filipino cuisine, constitutes almost 40 percent of the Filipinos' diet.

"But as much as we adore this staple, it falls short in providing essential micronutrients, like vitamin A. Improving the nutritional content of rice could have a significant impact on the nutritional intake of rice-consuming countries like the Philippines, where dietary inadequacy remains high among all socioeconomic classes, compromising the health and potential of our children and families," said CCA Manila.

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 percent 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.

"By combining culinary expertise with scientific innovation, the recipes will revolutionize the way Filipinos perceive and consume rice in their daily lives," said CCA Manila.

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Retail price of refined sugar up 24%—report

THE prevailing retail price of refined sugar as of July 9 went up by nearly a quarter compared to last year's level, according to data from the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA).

SRA indicated in its report on the country's sugar supply and demand situation that the prevailing retail price of sugar reached P105 per kilogram (kg), 24.26 percent higher than the P84.50 per kg recorded a year ago.

Data from the SRA also showed that the prevailing prices of raw and washed sugar went up by 35.94 percent and 34.85 percent to P87 and P89 per kg, respectively.

In contrast, the prevailing wholesale price of refined sugar

declined by 1.2 percent to P4,100 per 50-kg (Lkg) bag, compared to the P4,150 per Lkg recorded a year ago.

The prevailing wholesale prices of raw and refined sugar, however, were higher during the period. Raw sugar was priced at P3,650 per Lkg while washed sugar was sold for P3,800 per Lkg.

Data from the SRA also showed that raw sugar supply during the period fell by 5.25 percent to 1.937 million metric tons (MMT), from last year's 2.044 MMT.

As for refined sugar, figures from the SRA indicated that imports propped up total supply as of July 9. Total physical refined stock more than doubled to 443,841.40

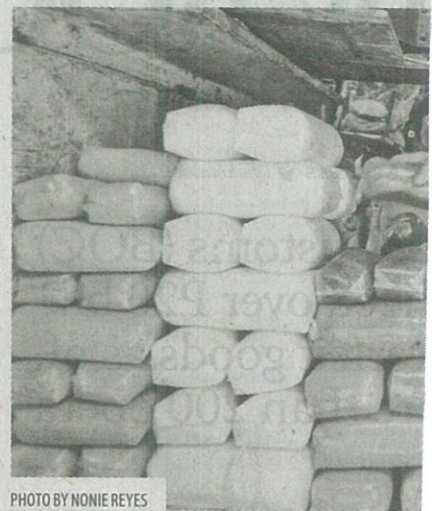
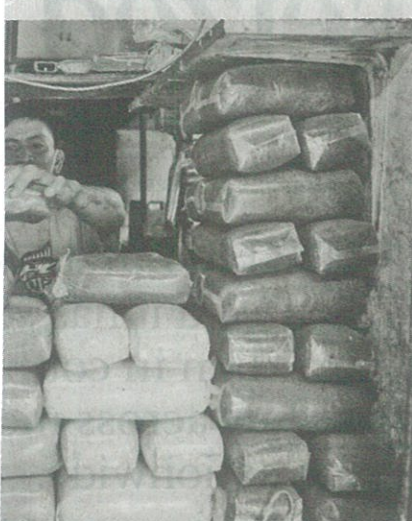


PHOTO BY NONIE REYES

MT during the period from last year's 195,436.45 MT.

Based on the Department of



Agriculture's latest monitoring of public markets in the National Capital Region, the prevailing

retail price of sugar ranged from P85 to P110 per kg for refined sugar, P82 to P90 per kg for washed sugar and P78 to P90 for brown sugar.

On Tuesday, the SRA rejected a proposal from farmer's groups to move the milling of sugarcane to August.

SRA Acting Administrator Pablo Azcona said the start of operations of sugar mills will start on September 1, as scheduled.

Azcona said starting milling operations earlier caused farmers to miss income opportunities worth at least P700 million.

Recently, 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. They said sugarcanes that were planted early need to be harvested soon to preserve their sucrose content.

Sugar Order 1 issued by the SRA in August 2022 estimated that the Philippines will produce 1.876 MMT of raw sugar the current crop year which will end on August 31.

As total domestic raw sugar withdrawal could reach 2,030 MMT, the government had decided to classify all sugar produced in the current crop year as "B" or for the domestic market. Raadee S. Sausa



Agency sustains adlai cultivation

THE cultivation of adlai in the country is being sustained by the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Agricultural Research (DA-BAR) as the crop shows potential to help ensure food security at the local level.

BAR data showed that adlay or adlai has been cultivated in various parts of Asia but remains under-appreciated and underutilized in the Philippines as rice and corn have become the commonly grown staples.

"However, adlay is now gaining renewed interest due to its potential health benefits and adaptability to marginal areas. This renewed interest has led researchers to implement projects that aim to revive adlay farming by introducing intercropping with leguminous crops and promoting sustainable enterprise development," BAR said.

The agency also recommends intercropping adlai with leguminous crops such as groundnut, cowpeas and mung bean to increase soil fertility in the production of the crop.

"Leguminous crops increase the level of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, correct the soil pH and improve the structure of the soil," BAR added.

Among the areas where BAR is coordinating projects for adlai cultivation is in the Zamboanga Peninsula (Region 9). Funded through Republic Act 11494, or the "Bayanihan to Recover as One Act," the project BAR coordinated with the DA-Zamboanga Peninsula (ZamPen) office aimed to a

sustainable adlay enterprise model for farmers in the marginal areas of the region.

DA-ZamPen reached out to adlai farmers in marginalized areas and registered about 486 farmers of the crop and 27 farmer-groups, mostly Indigenous people (IP) and rebel returnees located in Camp Salman, Zamboanga Sibugay, also in support of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict program. The project also provided the women in IP communities additional income through the development of adlai-based food products.

Also, DA-Calabarzon (Region 4A) pushed adlai production through intercropping of leguminous crops in Quezon and Batangas.

The project was implemented in Batangas and Quezon, where farmer cooperators were selected to be allotted at least 1,500 square meters for the project. Soil samplings were also done in the two provinces to determine the nutrient composition of the soil for the application of fertilizers.

"It aimed to increase farmers' income and expand areas for planting materials, processing and other promotional activities, resulting in an expected increase in the adoption rate of the technology," it said, referring to the adlai project for Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon).

The Pulot variety was used as the main crop, while leguminous crops such as peanut (Biyaya 16), soybean (NSIC Sy 8) and mung bean (NSIC Mg 14) were used for intercropping.

CONRAD M. CARIÑO



Salt industry dev't funding set at P100M until 2024

THE budget for developing the salt industry is P100 million until next year, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) told a House committee.

"We have funds (for salt development of) around a hundred million (for) this year and next year," BFAR Planning Officer III Lainie Baraocor told the House North Luzon Quadrangle committee.

Pangasinan Rep. Christopher V.P. De Venecia called for more funding for the industry, especially in the Ilocos region, which received P10 million in 2023.

"Maybe we can work on augmenting that," he said, noting that salt making could be an alternative livelihood for fisherfolk.

"We are proposing that this (funding) be enhanced in the next three to five years as a medium-term plan of the Bureau," Ms. Baraocor said.

She said the BFAR is working with the Department of Agriculture's National Fisheries Research and Development Institute to conduct studies on domestic and imported sources of salt.

"We need baseline data on the status of existing salt producers," Ms. Baraocor told the committee.

Republic Act No. 8172 or the ASIN (An Act for Salt Iodization Nationwide) Law was signed in 1995 to promote the use of iodized salt, aimed at addressing micronutrient malnutrition, particularly iodine deficiency disorders.

The law has been blamed for the decline of domestic salt production. "We can't export our iodized salt because no one wants it," Mr. De Venecia said. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**



DTI sets action plan on food logistics

BY IRMA ISIP

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) is seeking approval of a six-point three-year plan that would manage the country's food logistics challenges, including smuggling and hoarding.

Ruth Castelo, DTI undersecretary, said the proposed food logistics action agenda that has been presented to the economic development group adopts a supply chain control tower approach involving multiple stages from farm gate to storage, distribution and retail.

Castelo said the plan involves the issuance of presidential directives creating an inter agency Committee on Food logistics, the institutionalization of the economic intelligence sub-task group and congressional action through legislation.

"Implementing a control tower approach in the food sector could provide real-time visibility in food availability, pricing, demand and potential disruptions. This could help in managing food security issues, reducing food waste, and curbing cartelization among other benefits," Castelo said in a presentation.

The DTI acknowledges this would require significant investment in technology and infrastructure, data integration from multiple sources as well as coordination among numerous stakeholders in regulatory compliance.



'Bagsakan.' The La Trinidad vegetable trading post which handles 2,000 metric tons of goods daily is shown on June 24, 2021. The DTI aims to use a supply chain control tower approach in multiple stages from farm gate to storage, distribution and retail. (PNA Photo)

"We would like to revolutionize the Philippine food distribution system from farm to port," Castelo said.

The first step involves the upgrade of existing food terminals and the creation of additional food hubs and pilot the concept of agro-industrial business corridors in any of the areas in Baguio, Bataan, Clark, Cavite etc.

Second, Castelo said the DTI hopes to reduce transport and logis-

tics costs by imposing a moratorium on pass-through fees, a moratorium on the imposition of additional port fees and other charges, zero tolerance on gray costs and legislation to regulate high international shipping charges.

Third, Castelo said the plan aims to increase investments in logistics infrastructure, such as transportation and storage.

Castelo said the Department of Public Works and Highways

and the DTI are working on a cold chain integrative distribution system.

Fourth, the plan calls for the adjustment of other supply chain gaps such as logistics and distribution, post-harvest management, market linkages, market information and access to finance.

Fifth, Castelo said the program aims to heighten enforcement

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DTI

measures against hoarding, smuggling, overstaying of food imports, and monitoring of warehouses or cold storage facilities.

"We have already started discussing monitoring of cold storage facilities with the Department of Agriculture. We also want to revitalize the sub-task group on economic intelligence which we have done in the past

and which has actually generated a lot of results. If this is institutionalized, maybe through an executive order or through whatever order of the President, this task group could produce a lot of results and probably help even a bit in preventing smuggling," Castelo said.

The last involves the use of information and communication technology in improving logistics

performance, from streamlining and automation of government permits and licenses to the integration of systems within the logistics ecosystem.

Castelo said if approved and legislated by 2026, the plan would have achieved the following results: reduce logistics costs; interoperable transport and logistics related systems created; at least one food hub

in any of the high growth areas in Metro Manila or Region 3 or Region 4-A established; at least one food terminal upgraded into a Mercado; key food logistics infrastructures identified, funded and built; private sector investments in cold storage warehouses technology present; warehouse registry developed and; streamlined government processes and available online.



CCA Manila, PhilRice, IRRI collaborate for Nutrition Month's Masulog Rice recipe

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. 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.

Rice, the very heartbeat of Filipino cuisine, constitutes almost 40% of our diet. But as much as we adore this staple, it falls short in providing essential micronutrients, like vitamin A. Improving the nutritional content of rice could have a significant impact on the nutritional intake of rice-consuming countries like the Philippines, where dietary inadequacy remains high among all socioeconomic classes, compromising the health and potential of our children and families.

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.

"We are excited to partner with the Malusog Rice Program to develop Malusog Rice Recipes that not only showcase the versatility of this remarkable rice variety but also contribute to addressing the pressing issue of vitamin A deficiency in our country," said Dr. Ma. Veritas Luna, Chancellor for Education of CCA Manila. "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."

This partnership between CCA Manila and the Malusog Rice Program signifies a significant step forward in the ongoing efforts to combat vitamin A deficiency in the Philippines. By combining culinary expertise with scientific innovation, the recipes will revolutionize the way Filipinos perceive and consume rice in their daily lives.



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'Egay' topples posts, floods towns in Cagayan

Ilocos Norte placed under state of calamity

BY VICTOR REYES

TYPHOON "Egay" made landfall yesterday in two islands in Cagayan, where it caused flooding, toppled trees and electric posts, damaged structures and crops, and displaced some 15,000 residents.

The Office of Civil Defense reported one fatality, a female who died in a flashflood in Cardona, Rizal last Monday. Two were reported injured -- one in Rizal and one in Aklan.

The northwestern portion of Ilocos Norte was under Signal

No. 3 while eight areas are under Signal No. 2 -- Cagayan (including Babuyan Islands), Kalinga, Abra, rest of Ilocos Norte, Apayao, northern and central portion of Ilocos Sur, western portion of Mountain Province, and Batanes.

Under Signal No. 1 were 16

areas -- Isabela, rest of Mountain Province, Ifugao, Zambales, Pangasinan, Benguet, La Union, Nueva Vizcaya, rest of Ilocos Sur, Quirino, Aurora, Nueva Ecija, Tarlac, Pampanga, northern portion

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ILOCOS

of Bataan, and northern portion of Bulacan.

Egay is forecast to exit the Philippine area of responsibility (PAR) this morning. The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) is monitoring a low pressure area (LPA) that was still outside the country as of 4 p.m. yesterday. The LPA was some 1,615 km east of northeastern Mindanao.

Egay, as of 7 p.m. yesterday, was some 95 km west northwest of Calayan in Cagayan. It was moving northwestward at 15 kph, with maximum sustained winds of 165 kph near the center and gustiness of up to 230 kph.

PAGASA said Egay will move generally northwestward or north-northwestward, passing over the waters south and southwest of Taiwan, in the next 24 hours.

"Outside the PAR region, Egay will cross the Taiwan Strait and make landfall in the vicinity of Fujian, China on Friday morning," PAGASA said.

Egay made its first landfall in Fuga Island in Aparri town at 3:10 a.m., and the second at around 9:30 a.m. in Dalupiri Island in Calayan town.

The Cagayan provincial disaster risk reduction and management office reported flooding in several towns in the province. Its chief, Rueli Rapsing, also said the roof of the Sanchez Mira municipal hall was blown away due to Egay's strong winds which also damaged windows of the town's evacuation center, forcing authorities to send evacuees to multi-purpose centers of the barangays.

"We're expecting huge damage

to agriculture," said Rapsing, noting that farmers have just finished heavy planting crops.

Rapsing said flooding were monitored in the towns of Lal-lo, Pamplona and Claveria. He said some bridges were not passable due to flooding.

"There are barangay roads that are impassable but as to roads and bridges, they are passable," he said.

Rapsing said power outages were reported in the towns of Baggao, Sta Teresita, Gonzaga, Sta Ana, Buguey, and Alcala and in Tuguegarao City. He said power in some of these areas has been restored.

"Hopefully, there will be no further damage to property and infrastructure. We are closely monitoring damage to infrastructure," he said.

Rapsing said they are on alert for possible swelling of Cagayan rivers, noting that Cagayan is a catch basin for nearby provinces.

The National Electrification Administration said 45 electric cooperatives were affected by Egay, and 26 are in normal operations while 13 are experiencing partial power interruption.

DISPLACED

As of yesterday morning, Rapsing said some 4,854 families or 15,843 individuals have been displaced by Egay. These are from 216 barangays in 22 municipalities.

Edgar Posadas, spokesman of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), said "no major untoward incident" was so far reported in Cagayan Valley.

"There were uprooted trees, electric posts were toppled and houses made of light materials

were damaged. They also have evacuees," said Posadas.

"But thank God, they have no casualties and their evacuees are being attended to by DSWD (Department of Social Welfare and Development)," he added.

Posadas said the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) Cagayan Valley was able to contact, through satellite phone, authorities at Fuga Island hours after Egay made landfall in the island.

"Based on their initial report (OCD Cagayan Valley), there was no major incident, or major incident or major event that occurred due to the landfall," he said.

Cagayan Gov. Manuel Mamba said the province's northern portion was battered by strong winds and heavy rains.

"We have localized flooding especially in the coastal areas and there is damage to crops... As to damage to properties, we are still assessing. There are areas where roofs (of structures) were blown away," he said.

STATE OF CALAMITY

Mamba said the assessment will serve as basis for him whether to ask the provincial council to declare the province under a state of calamity.

The provincial council of Ilocos Norte placed the province under a state of calamity.

"The declaration of the state of calamity in the province enables the provincial government to mobilize resources swiftly and efficiently to assist the affected residents," the Ilocos Norte provincial government said in a statement.

"Heavy rainfall, flooding in low-lying areas, power and com-

munication interruptions, and road blockages have been reported throughout the province," it added.

The Ilocos Norte provincial disaster risk reduction and management office is still assessing the extent of Egay's damage in the province.

In a press briefing after a meeting with NDRMC officials at Camp Aguinaldo, Defense Secretary and NDRRMC chairman Gilberto Teodoro Jr said they cannot say if the effect of Egay was minimal as assessment is ongoing.

"We are still in the period of rapid response to, number one, serve our displaced countrymen; number two, to ensure that basic services are restored as soon as possible," he said.

During the meeting, the Office of Civil Defense presented the initial effects of Egay and the southwest it has been enhancing in the past days.

The OCD said 44,356 families or 180,439 individuals have been affected in Ilocos, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol region, Western Visayas, Northern Mindanao and Soccsksargen.

Of the number, 2,796 families or 11,041 individuals are displaced.

AID

President Marcos Jr., who is in Malaysia for a state visit, said government has on standby P173 million worth of funds, in addition to food and non-food relief items that had been prepositioned to areas within the typhoon's path.

He said search, rescue, and retrieval personnel from the Armed Forces, Bureau of Fire Protection, and the Philippine Coast Guard are also prepared to assist.

Data from the Department of Social Welfare and Development-Disaster Response Operations Monitoring and Information Center (DROMIC) showed that 38,991 families or 154,864 persons from the 149 barangays in Regions I (Ilocos), II (Cagayan Valley), III (Central Luzon), IV-A (Calabarzon), IV-b (Mimaropa), VI (Western Visayas), VII (Central Visayas), and XII (Soccsksargen) are affected.

There are 1,393 families (4,024 persons) which includes the 921 families (3,211 persons) staying in 51 evacuation centers and 472 families (813 persons) temporarily staying with their relatives or friends.

The department said P1.049 million worth of aid had already been provided to the affected families while P2.167 billion composed of funds (P173 million) and stockpiles of food and non-food items (P1.99 billion) are on standby.

DAMAGE TO AGRI

The Department of Agriculture said initial damage to the agriculture sector was placed at P255,000 as of 1 p.m. yesterday, equivalent to 4 metric tons of goods tended by 77 farmers in 40 hectares of affected areas.

The DA also said assistance available for distribution to affected farmers and fishers include rice, corn and assorted vegetable seeds; drugs and biologics for livestock and poultry; and fingerlings assistance to affected fisherfolk from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

The agency said the Survival and Recovery loan program from the Agricultural Credit Policy Council with loanable amount of up to

P25,000 payable in three years at zero interest also continues aside from a quick response fund for the rehabilitation of affected areas.

AIRPORTS

Airports in Northern Luzon suspended operations, according to the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP).

CAAP Area Center 1 Manager Ronald Estabillo said airlines were advised to suspend the flight operation in Laoag yesterday until today, July 27 due to heavy rainfall.

CAAP added that flights in Vigan Airport, Lingayen, Baguio, Vigan Airport Rosales Airport, San Fernando and Tuguegarao Airport Basco Airport, Cauayan Airport, and Palanan Airport were also suspended.

According to CAAP, Vigan Airport incurred minimal damage to its facilities while Lingayen Airport's ramp was flooded due to heavy rainfall. Part of the roof of the airport's fire station was damaged by strong winds.

Tuguegarao Airport halted flight operations for the day as commercial electricity has been down. Minor flooding at the airport's taxiway was reported.

Basco Airport, Cauayan Airport, and Palanan Airport continue to experience strong winds and rain. The airports reported no damages to its facilities and commercial electricity remains available.

San Jose Airport's Cebgo flight to and from Manila has been canceled affecting a total of 155 passengers and Iba Airport continues to experience strong winds and rain but reported no damages to its facilities. - *With Jocelyn Montemayor, Jed Macapagal, and Myla Iglesias*



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SONA, in the flesh

There were two SONAs (State of the Nation Address) which I was fortunate enough to witness in the flesh, in the august session hall of the Batasang Pambansa in Quezon City. I was then the Secretary of the Department of Tourism, appointed by President Joseph E. Estrada.

The SONA is a solemn, ceremonious annual event where the nation's lawmakers in the company of the Cabinet, the diplomatic corps, heads of numerous government corporations, leaders of churches and congregations, eminent members of the private sector are gathered, by invitation, to listen to the President's report about his/her achievements and future objectives. Unwittingly, it is also an annual fashion extravaganza that belies poverty in the Philippines.

Not everyone is invited to the SONA, the gates are closed to those who live the nation's problems in the flesh. Avowed activists of the labor, transportation, educational and agricultural sectors, militant NGOs of indigent masses are never invited to vent their own views of the state of this nation.

The President and entourage are usu-

ally flown to the Batasan in government aircraft while others are chauffeured in official vehicles with bodyguards. Tri-media practitioners are given strategic places and vantage points, they make ambush interviews, record sound bites, and snap unguarded moments. It must be more fun now with iPhones, tablets, selfies, etc. My fellow Cabinet members used to tease, "If you want press coverage, stand beside Gemma."

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., (PBBM) delivered his second SONA on July 24. Because of his youth and experience with local government (as governor of Ilocos Norte), I was hoping he would establish a trend by unabashedly acknowledging the gravest problem we face as a nation, before heralding the accomplishments of his two years in office.

Frankly, I wanted PBBM to start by saying something like this: There are disturbing reports about Filipino children whom Dr. Jose Rizal called the hope of the fatherland.



LANDSCAPE

GEMMA CRUZ ARANETA

In the first two years of their lives, 12.3 percent are underweight while 7.2 percent are already wasted. In the medical sense, wasting is acute malnutrition caused by periods of undernutrition, lack of sanitation that result in wastage of muscles and fat tissues; a malnourished and wasted child is also a stunted child, his height-to-weight ratio is below accepted standards. What about the child's brain? These go beyond health problems. These are socio-economic issues caused by dire poverty.

The 2020 Census conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority revealed that 11 million children aged zero to four are malnourished, stunted and wasted. The DOH reported that 21.6 percent of infants and toddlers are stunted and that this had plateaued in the last 10 years. The other end of the spectrum is obesity, strangely enough. With no access to nutritious food, children who are now physically inactive are given junk food so they become obese. If it is any consolation, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand have the same malnutrition and obesity problems. Most of the 17 million stunted children of the Asian region live in the Philippines and Indonesia; 49 percent subsist in rural areas while the rest dwell in urban centers. That is why I decided to take the helm of the **Department of Agriculture** because malnutrition, stunting and wasting are socio-economic problems that have to be addressed not only by the President's office but other departments of the government.

Had PBBM mentioned our problems first, it would

have given more context to his success stories of boosting local agricultural production through the consolidation, modernization, mechanization and improvement of value chains augmented by timely and calibrated importation. In the SONA, he said the Department of Agriculture raised food security by 2.2 percent by using scientific methods, minding the balance of nature so production is sustainable enough to benefit present and future generations. He asked Congress to amend the Fisheries Code to include science-based analysis. By clustering farm and fisheries and livestock multiplier farms, there are already 300 clusters of 900 cooperatives. PBBM has also revived Kadiwa.

A Department of Water Resources and Management will be created with an allocation of ₱14.6 billion for water supply projects like the 6,000 rainwater collection systems across the country in preparation for El Niño and the first Wawa Bulk Water Supply for the NCR and Rizal province.

The "Build, Better, More" with an initial budget of ₱8.3 trillion is by far the most spectacular of PBBM's programs as it envisions the physical connectivity of this archipelago not only by farm-to-market roads but by inter-island bridges, a railway system that will take provincial travel to astounding levels, air and maritime ports, more expressways, skyways and a network of subways. That should have a positive impact on the poverty problem. What will PBBM's third SONA be like? (ggc1898@gmail.com, gemmaarazaraneta.com)



DTI proposes 6-action agenda for PH food security

By BERNIE CAHILES-MAGKILAT

Trade and Industry Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual, has proposed that government adopts what he called a "supply chain control tower" approach complete with a six-point action agenda to manage the country's food logistics and challenges and ensure food security.

Pascual, a former academician having served as former president of the University of the Philippines, already presented the DTI 3-year action agenda proposal to the economic development group.

DTI Undersecretary Ruth Castelo unveiled the proposed "supply chain control tower" approach during the post State of the Nation Address briefing by the food security cluster of the Cabinet that includes the DTI, Department of Agriculture, Department of Public Works and Highways, among others.

Topping the six-point agenda is to revolutionize the Philippine food distribution system from farm to port. This would mean upgrading existing food terminals, and establishment of

additional food hubs.

This action agenda calls for piloting the concept of agro industrial business corridors in any of the areas in Baguio and Clark.

The second action agenda is to reduce transport and logistics costs. "We would like to think that this might create a little bit of controversy," Castelo said as this action agenda calls for a moratorium on pass through fees, a moratorium on the imposition of additional port fees and other charges.

Castelo said this means "zero tolerance on gray costs." This action agenda calls to regulate high international shipping charges.

While this is a controversial proposal, she stressed that once done, "it's going to provide us the resource that we want."

The third proposal is to increase investments in logistics infrastructure and storage.

"Of course, we need budgetary support for logistics infrastructure," she said adding that DPWH and the DTI are already working on it.

"We want a cold chain integrated

with distribution system that is the full implementation of the system that is provided by the Philippine cold chain industry roadmap," she said.

Fourth is to address other supply chain gaps such as logistics and distribution, post harvest management, market linkages, market information, and market access to finance.

Fifth is to heightened enforcement measures against hoarding, smuggling overstaying of food imports, and monitoring of warehouses or cold storage facilities. "We have already started discussing monitoring of cold storage facilities with the Department of Agriculture," she said.

This means also revitalizing the sub task group on Economic Intelligence, which has been done in the past and which has actually generated a lot of results. The President may issue an executive order to institutionalize this initiative, she said.

"This task group could reduce a lot of resources and probably help even a bit in preventing, smuggling," Castelo said.

The last action agenda is to use ICT to improve logistics performance

from streamlining and automation of government permits and licenses to the integration of systems within the logistics ecosystem.

All these deliverables require a law through Congress or an executive order to ensure implementation.

If the six-action agenda is approved and legislated by 2026, Castelo said the Philippines would have achieved reduced logistics costs, interoperable transport and logistics related systems. "We will have at least one food hub in any of the high growth areas in Metro Manila or Region 3 or Region 4 and one food terminal upgraded into a Mercato.

Thus, the first task, Castelo stressed, is the approval of this food logistics action agenda.

This should be followed by the issuance of presidential directives, creating an inter agency Committee on Food logistics, and the institutionalization of the Economic Intelligence sub task group and then the consideration of proposed issuances by Congress.

Once done, she said the "supply chain control tower" has been established.



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Egay to drive up vegetable prices – DA

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is expecting retail prices of vegetables to rise due to the impact of Typhoon Egay.

DA Assistant Secretary and spokesperson Kristine Evangelista yesterday

said the agency continues to monitor 13 wet markets in Metro Manila.

Evangelista said that while the increase is expected, the DA would make sure that the adjustment is reasonable.

"We all know that typhoons affect prices in the markets. But we are ready to help in the logistical side,

as it becomes a challenge, causing movement in the retail prices. We are coordinating with the vendors so they are aware when prices move, and how much is acceptable," she said.

Based on monitoring of the DA, the retail price of carrots reached P250 per kilo; cabbage, P160; Baguio

beans, P120; potatoes, P150; pechay Baguio, P120; sayote, P70; bitter gourd or ampalaya, P130; string beans, P130; squash, P60; eggplant, P120 and tomatoes, P120 per kilo.

Retail prices of onions reached P200 per kilo at the Commonwealth Market in Quezon City, and between

P140 and P180 per kilo in other Metro Manila markets.

"All the stocks of onions were in the hands of the traders and we are monitoring the cold storage. We continue to find ways to bring down the retail prices of not only onions but also other commodities," Evangelista said.

REMATE

ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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PAGTUTULUNGAN KONTRA EL NIÑO MAS PINAIGTING



REMATE OPINION

ANG INYONG LINGKOD

NI DR. HILDA C. ONG

BAGAMA'T nagbabanta ang panganib, natutuwa ang Office of the Civil Defense dahil nagsasama-sama na ng lahat ng ahensya ng pamahalaan sa pagkilos para labanan ang epekto ng El Niño weather phenomenon na kinumpirma na ng PAGASA na nagsimula na at mararamdaman hanggang unang bahagi ng taong 2024.

Ito ang naging laman ng coordination meeting na naganap kamakailan na dinaluhan ng iba't ibang sektor.

Pinangunahan ng Department of Agriculture ang food security sector, Department of Energy sa energy security, Department of Health sa health security, Department of the Interior and Local Government sa public safety, at Department of Environment and Natural Resources para sa water sector kung saan kabilang ang Water Resources Management Office at National Water Resources Board.

Iniulat ng bawat lead agencies ang kanilang inihandang interventions na base sa four pillars of Disaster Risk Reduction and Management – ang prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response, at ang rehabilitation and recovery.

Ibinahagi ng DA ang kanilang mga programa kaugnay sa water management, crops, fisheries and livestock na magsisiguro sa pagkakaroon ng makukuha at mabibiling pagkain sa merkado na sapat, ligtas at abot-kaya.

Siniguro naman ng DOE ang pagkakaroon ng tamang suplay ng enerhiya sa buong bansa. Sasabayan ito ng episyenteng distribusyon ng kuryente at kampanya para sa responsable at konserbadong paggamit ng enerhiya.

Inalerto at pinaghahanda na ng DOH ang lahat ng mga pasilidad para sa inaasahang pagtaas ng bilang ng mga tatamaan ng mga kaugnay na karamdaman sa pagtama ng El Niño kabilang ang heat stroke, heat exhaustion, dengue, malaria, cholera, diarrhea, food

poisoning dala ng mabilis na pagkasira ng pagkain, at iba pa.

Pinaghahanda na rin ng DILG ang lahat ng mga lokal na pamahalaan para sa epekto ng weather phenomenon sa kani-kanilang lugar.

Batay sa forecast ng PAGASA, nasa 40 na lalawigan ang malaranas ng tagtuyot dala ng mababang tsansa ng pag-ulan at nasa 26 na lalawigan ang may matinding tagtuyot. Nasa 66 na lalawigan sa kabuuang 82 ang direktang maaapektuhan.

Inalerto na rin ng DILG ang Bureau of Fire Protection para sa posibilidad ng malalaking sunog dala ng mainit na panahon at ang Philippine National Police para sa seguridad ng mga komunidad.

Patuloy namang babantayan ng DENR kasama ng WRMO, NWRB, at ng Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System ang lagay ng tubig ng Angat dam, Ipo dam, at iba't ibang dams sa buong bansa.

Ang mga planong nabanggit ng iba't ibang mga ahensya ay magiging bahagi ng soft, medium at long term plans na tatawaging National Action Plan for El Niño.

Ang plano, ayon sa OCD, ay naglalaman ng "whole-of-government approach" base na rin sa naging direktiba ni President Ferdinand "BBM" Marcos, Jr. simula pa lamang nang magbigay paalaala ang PAGASA kaugnay sa napipintong El Niño season sa bansa simula pa noong March.



Asian regions to lead global farm production

Farm output from South and Southeast Asia will expand the fastest worldwide by 2023, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UN-FAO) said.

"Agricultural output from the region is expected to expand by 20 percent among the fastest of all regions," the FAO said in its Agricultural Output released on Wednesday.

The organization added that over the projection period, South and Southeast Asia would account for the biggest share of global output growth.

"The rate of agricultural production growth is almost double that of its population, suggesting that the value of agricultural output is also set to rise in per capita terms," it said.

Based on the latest UN estimates, Southeast Asia is home to 8.54 percent of the total world population.

The South and Southeast Asian regions are the largest contributor to the total value of global output from agriculture and fisheries with crop production accounting for the biggest share at 52 percent.

"Crop production is expected to expand by 16 percent, resulting in a slight reduction in its share of total agriculture and fisheries output by 2032," FAO said.

It added that increased fertilizer use will contribute to achieving yield gains, "as application per hectare is expected to increase 8 percent by 2032."

FAO noted that the regions also largely contribute to global output for a variety of food products such

as rice, wheat, vegetable oil, pulses and sugar.

"Apart from vegetable oil, where it remains stable, the regions' share in global production is expected to rise for all these products," it added.

The increase in agricultural output for the coming years could lead to higher alternative sources of imports for the Philippines, chief economist at Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Michael Ricafort said.

He also noted the proximity of the Philippines to other Southeast Asian countries could lead to more sources of imports such as rice and food items at greater availability.

"Greater agricultural output or supplies would tend to lead to lower prices of agricultural products, especially rice and other agricultural food products in Southeast Asia and in the rest of the world," said Ricafort.

"It could also lead to lower prices of imported agricultural commodities for the country than otherwise," he added.

On the other hand, FAO noted that the main challenges facing the region is its ability to sustainably increase productivity and innovation, especially during climate change risks, a growing population and resource limitations.

"To continue improving food security, it will need to sustain income growth in a less supportive global environment amid high inflation and ongoing affordability challenges," FAO added.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



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Searca officials meet 3 ambassadors

FOCUSING on the center's upcoming initiatives and potential collaboration opportunities to enhance agricultural development in the region, the leadership of the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) recently met with three ambassadors in a series of diplomatic engagements.

According to Leah Domingo, Searca partnership unit public relations specialist, Searca Director Glenn Gregorio met with ambassadors of Israel, Canada and France to the Philippines, the center's host country, to boost agricultural development in Southeast Asia.

Domingo said two were envoys of associate member countries of the Southeast

Asian Ministers of Education Organization (Seameo), Searca's mother organization.

She said Gregorio met with Israeli Ambassador Ilan Fluss, along with Ester Buzgan, the incoming deputy ambassador to the Philippines, and Dee Urtua, development cooperation officer at the Embassy of the State of Israel.

The meeting was on the sidelines of the National Academy of Science and Technology, Philippines (NAST PHL) Annual Scientific Meeting at the Manila Hotel.

Domingo said Gregorio's talks with the Israeli diplomats revolved around Searca's future projects, and the possible contributions that Israel could make in their co-design and implementation.

In the evening of the same day, a Searca

delegation led by Gregorio attended the celebration of Canada Day at the Grand Hyatt Manila, where he and his colleagues met Canadian Ambassador David Hartman and Eric Russo, counselor and readiness and security program manager at the Embassy of Canada in the Philippines.

During their discussion, Domingo said the Searca team briefed embassy officials in the center, its scope and its mandate, fostering a deeper understanding of Searca's work.

Their most recent partnership was the completed Southeast Asian Upland Agriculture Fellowships funded by the International Development Research Center Canada and implemented by Searca.

Gregorio also attended the Bastille Day celebration at the Embassy of France in the

Philippines on July 14, 2023 where he met French Ambassador Michèle Boccoz.

Domingo said the meeting provided another opportunity to reaffirm the long-standing partnership between Searca and France, particularly in research and capacity development programs.

She said currently Searca is hosting two Master of Science Agronomy students from Isara-Lyon as they undertake their internship.

Edith Coronel is working with Searca on its School-Plus-Home Gardens and School Edible Landscaping for Entrepreneurship projects, while Louise Fau is immersed in the center's web-based Integrated and Spatial Engine and Smart Ecosystem or Wise Carbon and calamansi projects.

LEANDER C. DOMINGO



Tarlac farm makes it big in quail eggs

BY LEANDER C. DOMINGO

FOR guaranteed big profits in quail (pugo) farming, one needs a good ready to lay (RTL) fowl. This is what Jovy Escoto does in his brooder house at JA Escoto Farm in Concepcion, Tarlac.

"Usually, when you buy, the quail should be at least 25 days old when they come out of RTL," Escoto said in an interview for AGRI Ako Diyan, the agribusiness series of The Manila Times TV.

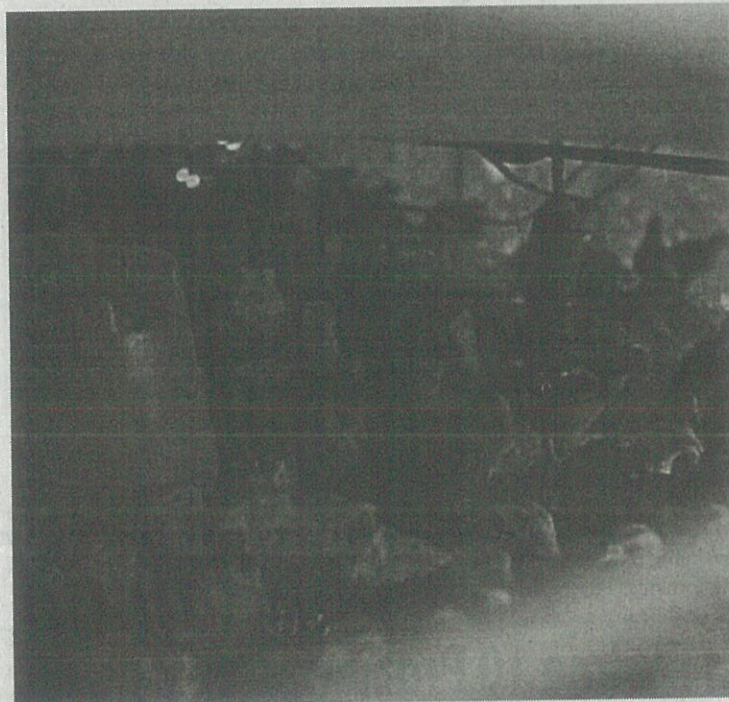
He said the best guide is their size. "If you order 1,000 quails, they should be uniform in size and at least they grow well, and must be brown in color."

In manually transferring quails to their cages once they are delivered to the farm, it should not be held too tight nor too loose so they will not fly away.

section good to accommodate between 80 and 100 heads, or a total of 200 each layer or 1,000 heads in five layers.

"It is important that the quails can move around inside the cage and that they are not overcrowded. The ideal size is 2 meters by 5 meters for half of a cage in a layer," he said.

He added that the size of the cage should be able to accommodate not more than 100 quails, and it shouldn't be too tight or too loose.



■ Quails need to have good ventilation because their bodies are warm.
TMT TV SCREENGRAB



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Especially those that lay eggs, Escoto said their quails are fed in the morning by filling the containers in full and in the afternoon they just add a little when there are still leftovers.

When it comes to building their cages, what he did was to check the internet to see what is the usual design.

He noted that since the quail is unique, their cage should have a flooring that slides forward so that when the quails lay eggs, it is easier to pick them during harvest.

Escoto also suggested that the size of each cage should be two meters by 10 meters with a division in the middle to make each

"If it is too loose, there is a tendency that they will just run and chase each other, and it becomes a bit stressful for the quails," Escoto said.

As to the gender of the quails, he said there are females and males on his farm and that they also breed them there.

"For the plain raiser, these are females which are brown. We can tell the gender by their color, those are the females that lay table eggs," he said.

Escoto also noted that for the breeder, these are black and brown. These are the ones that are partnered to generate fertile eggs, and these are the ones that

are hatched.

At the JA Estoco Farm, one can also notice that there are already bald quails that tell of their age.

This means that they are getting a bit older, which is around four or five months old. At this stage, some of them start to go bald and this is normal because after a few months, the feather comes back, he said.

"But at about 11 months, when they start balding again, that is the sign that they are really getting old," Estoco said.

At the farm, they also maintain records. This is so because when the culling period comes, it is like

first in, first out, he explained.

"Those ones you know are already old or aged, they are the ones you can cull first," Escoto said.

Record keeping is also important, especially when the quail farm is relatively small and the production of eggs is not that big.

"We have to monitor and record our production whether it has increased or when we already reached our target," Escoto said.

He said there are factors or indicators when production is decreasing, quails are stressed; or they are not fed properly, and these should be recorded as a reference

in identifying and addressing any problem that arises.

"Here at the quail farm, the male breeders are sometimes restless and stressed out, including their female mates they chase," he said.

Sometimes, when female quails are stressed or sick, they produce white eggs that have no shell.

He said it is alarming when there are too many white eggs. "It is, however, normal if there are only a few white eggs laid."

Unlike chickens that need to be covered when they lay eggs, quail cages are not supposed to be covered.

Escoto said the birds need good ventilation because a quail's body is warm, and when they are covered, it produces moisture, and they cannot eat well but take in much water instead.

Understanding behavior of quail

Escoto trains his quails to get used to people.

"When they are afraid of humans, and silent and not moving, the tendency is that they feel a little stress," he said, adding that when they hear a little noise, they also suffer.

He said that when one stretches his or her hand near the quail, and the quail pokes it, that is a sign that they are not afraid of humans.

At JA Estoco Farm, a music plays 24/7 for the birds. The noise coming from a transistor

radio helps the quails to ignore the noise coming from outside like the barking of dogs.

"When they only hear the sound coming from the radio, they seem to be complacent, and the noises outside become normal to them," Estoco said, adding that some of the farms he visited play classical music.

He noted that the more noisy the farm is, the better for the quails to get used to so that they will not be stressed when they hear something else.

Also at Escoto's farm, older quails are fed with layer feeds while the chicks and younger female quails are fed with starter and booster.

He said quails do not develop smallpox because they are resilient, and the only thing that hurts them the most is when they acquire colds.

Harvest is done during the night for both pugolot (pugo balut) and chicks at the same time, and then segregated in trays.

"We raise a certain volume and based on orders we need to produce them to be able to supply the number of chicks and pugolot," Estoco said.

Quail eggs sell at P3.80 each. But for cooked eggs, they usually sell them at P5 or P6 per egg or pass them to other resellers at P4.20 to P4.30.

Some eggs are cooked as plain, some sizzling, some are made into gourmet and some make their own delicacies. But most prefer "pugolot" for its creamy sauce.



Sugarcane supply shortage forces Bogo-Medellin to suspend milling operations

LISTED company Bogo-Medellin Milling Co., Inc. (Bomedco) announced on Wednesday that it will have no milling operations for the coming crop year due to the lack of sugarcane supply.

"Due to the insufficient supply of canes, Bogo-Medellin Milling Co., Inc. has no milling operations for this Crop Year starting January 2023 until present," the company told the stock exchange.

"In effect, the company declared a temporary shutdown until further notice," it added.

Sugar Regulatory Administration Acting Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona said in a Viber message that Bomedco has not operated since the last milling in crop year 2022-2023 due to "dwindling cane supply."

"It is true that it is the oldest [mill] in Cebu. They suspended operations in August 2022

and their farmers crossed over Negros via Roro Vessel to have their cane milled," he said.

Incorporated in 1928, the company is primarily involved in the milling and manufacturing of centrifugal raw sugar with molasses as its by-product.

Based on its profile on the Philippine Stock Exchange, Bomedco mills have the capacity to accommodate 3,000 tons of cane per day.

In the second quarter of last year, the company's attributable income stood at P12.81 million, an increase of 0.23% from the P12.78 million recorded a year earlier, citing higher sugar prices and lower operating costs.

During the same period, the volume of sugar produced reached 166.7 million 50-kilogram (kg) bags of raw sugar, which was lower by 41.91% from the 287.09-million 50 kg posted in 2021. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**



PH still 2nd largest exporter of bananas

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Philippines remained the second top exporter of bananas in 2022, according to a market review released by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The report said the Philippines shipped 2.3 million tons of the fruit, a 4 percent drop from 2.4 million tons in 2021.

The Philippines accounted for 12 percent of total banana exports to the world which stood at 19.1 million tons last year.

FAO said the spread of fusarium wilt tropical race 4 disease as well as the high costs of inputs and fertilizers affected production of small-scale banana farmers in the Philippines.

The disease more commonly known as Panama disease, is caused by the soil-borne fungus *Fusarium oxysporum* that enters the banana plant's roots and colo-

nizes the xylem vessels, blocking the flow of water and nutrients which can cause the wilting and death of the crop.

The FAO review said smaller banana producers also struggled to procure agricultural inputs to meet the quality requirements of export markets.

Top exporter Ecuador shipped 5.8 million tons or 30.4 percent of total while three other Latin American countries closely trailed Philippine exports: Costa Rica, 2.1 million tons and Guatemala and Colombia, 2.2 million tons each.

The report said China's imports of bananas from the Philippines dropped 14 percent in 2022 due to the production difficulties.

FAO said China had previously imported 50 to 75 percent of its total banana imports from the Philippines but the share has plummeted to 40 percent in 2022 of the 1.9 million tons China imported from the country.

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Phl still world's second biggest banana exporter

By DANESSA RIVERA

The Philippines maintained its position as the second largest exporter of bananas last year despite lower shipments.

Based on the latest banana market review of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, the Philippines exported a total of 2.3 million metric tons (MT) last year.

This represents a four percent decline from the 2.4 million MT shipped in 2021, based on FAO's previous report.

The Philippine banana exports have been on a downtrend after 2019, when it shipped over four million MT.

FAO said the Philippine banana output continued to suffer from the spread of Banana Fusarium Wilt Tropical Race 4 (TR4) coupled with high costs of inputs and fertilizers.

"Both developments reportedly had a particularly detrimental effect on small-scale banana producers in the Philippines, who struggled to procure the necessary agricultural inputs to meet the quality requirements of export

markets," it said.

Despite the decline, the Philippines placed second to Ecuador, which remains as the world's top banana exporter with 5.8 million MT shipped last year, representing an "unprecedented" 12.4 percent drop from last year.

Guatemala, which was the third banana exporter, shipped 2.3 million MT last year—a 2.1 decline year-on-year—amid COVID-related difficulties and production shortages.

FAO said global exports of bananas fell 6.1 percent to 19.1 million MT.

Most of the leading global banana suppliers were affected by contraction due to "persistently high costs of fertilizers."

In 2021, producers had already reduced their use of fertilizers, affecting the production quantity and quality standards.

Adverse weather conditions also affected production and yields.

The Philippines was the top exporter in Asia, supplying around 60 percent of bananas globally, the FAO said.

Turn to B3

Phl From B1

However, it faces competition from other rising Asian banana producers, namely Vietnam, Cambodia and India.

The UN agency said strong import demand from China and from some emerging importers in the Middle East supported the investments in banana plantations in the three countries.

The report noted that Vietnam and Cambodia registered double-digit growth in exports last year to 410,000 MT each, while India's export rose 6.3 percent to 360,000 MT.

Moreover, FAO said the Philippines lost some market share for its banana shipments.

"Imports of Filipino bananas, meanwhile, dropped by 14 percent in 2022 due to the continuing production difficulties experienced in the Philippines.

China reduced its imports last year to just 40 percent last year from 50 to 75 percent in previous years.

It also marks a decline in imports by Japan, which the UN agency said "typically sources some 75 to 80 percent of its banana imports from the

Philippines."

"Available trade data by origin accordingly show year-on-year decline in imports into Japan from most origins," it said.

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Wheat hits five-month high after Russia attacks Ukraine port

WHEAT futures pared gains on reports Russia failed to severely damage a key port that is allowing Ukraine to export grains by river into neighboring countries.

Russian drones attacked the port of Reni in the night leading to Monday, driving up grain prices on fears Ukraine would not be able to get crops to buyers. But Reni was operating at maximum capacity Tuesday, with seven ships due to enter, according to Romanian official Gabriel Covrig, who is responsible for ship piloting in the area.

Chicago futures, the most traded global benchmark, retreated by as much as 2.2 percent. On Monday, they jumped by 8.6 percent as traders tried to determine the repercussions of damage to the river port. Shipments by river have become the last major route for grain to leave Ukraine after Russia exited a deal allowing passage through the Black Sea last week.

In the United States, farmers and traders began an annual crop tour in the top wheat

state of North Dakota where dry conditions have hit crop yields and further bolstered crop prices.

Ukrainian exports historically have made an important contribution to global food supply, and escalations in the war have triggered price volatility throughout the conflict. While the world still has a large buffer of wheat stockpiles, the latest events highlight the vulnerability of global food security since the start of Russia's invasion, and as climate change wreaks havoc on certain crops.

"Russia's bombing of port infrastructure along the Danube river in Ukraine has pushed grain prices significantly higher," according to ING analysts Warren Patterson and Ewa Manthey. "This escalation risks spilling over into other parts of the commodities complex, particularly energy."

At least four grain hangars were damaged or ruined by Russian drone strikes, according to Ukrainian prosecutors who launched an investigation into the attack. Reni, along with the port at Izmail, is one of Ukraine's

biggest river ports for grain and is on the Danube at the border with Romania. Local traders had been expanding capacity there in response to Russia's sea blockade.

Still, the strikes will make shipowners and crew more wary of calling at the river ports. "The ports can operate, but the problem is that some crews are not willing to go there for the time being," Constanta-based grain broker Andrei Balasoiu said. He owns barges that sometimes call at Reni. "Some are willing to go, but most are afraid of getting hit by missiles"

The risk to the Danube route has left traders assessing the viability of remaining Ukraine grain export routes. Shipments by land have caused tensions with its Eastern European neighbors. Five countries including Poland and Romania are seeking to extend a ban on purchasing Ukrainian grain after declining prices spurred protests from local farmers. Grain can still transit through those countries.

Lithuania's agricultural minister wrote to the European Union on July 21 to suggest

that Baltic ports be used as an alternative route for transit of Ukraine's agricultural exports, according to a document seen by Bloomberg. While Baltic railways and ports have an annual capacity of 25 million tons, it's unclear how realistic this option is and how quickly this could help boost exports, given the need to switch tracks to a different gauge at the border and insufficient rail cars.

"We proposed to the Polish side an action plan to ensure that the grain will not stay in Poland, and to encourage a tracking system. We hope to have solidarity from the Polish side," Lithuanian agricultural minister Kestutis Navickas said Tuesday.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the Baltic countries have the right to ship Ukrainian grain but Russia will fight attempts to use the channels for any military purposes, according to Interfax.

Shipments

RUSSIA is supplying wheat to Mali, bolstering ties with one of its strongest African allies.

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CLASS one milling wheat ready for harvest in Chelmsford, United Kingdom, on Wednesday, August 3, 2022. HOLLIE ADAMS/BLOOMBERG

News of the shipments comes days after Russia ended an agreement to allow Ukraine—one of the world's biggest wheat producers—to export grain from Black Sea ports. African countries have been among those most impacted by the rise in food prices triggered by Russia's invasion.

A shipment of 50,000 tons of the grain destined for Mali arrived from Russia at the

port of Conakry in Guinea about a month ago, Alfousseyni Sidibé, a spokesman for Mali's foreign affairs ministry, said by phone from Bamako, the capital.

"The wheat was sold to five different mills," said Salif Fofana, an official at a Malian association of grain millers. "Another shipment of 25,000 tons is in Conakry and should arrive in Bamako shortly." **Bloomberg News**

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'Transforming global food systems to cost \$400B per year'

TRANSFORMING global food systems would require \$400 billion a year until 2030, but this amount is far less than the cost of inaction estimated at \$12 trillion a year in environmental, social and economic damage to communities, families, livelihoods and lives.

Alvaro Lario, president of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), made the statement during a high-level panel at the United Nations Food Systems Summit + 2 Stocktaking Moment last July 24.

"The cost of inaction is much higher than the cost of action. If we really want to take people out of hunger, out of poverty, we need investments, not only

[humanitarian] assistance. And those investments need to be very much focused on pro-poor rural policies," said Lario.

"Starving food systems on investment means, quite literally, starving people."

According to the latest figures that the UN released on July 12, 122 million more people are suffering chronic malnourishment since 2019. Currently, over 3 billion people in the world cannot afford a healthy diet.

Food systems are responsible for one-third of greenhouse gas emissions, up to 80 percent of biodiversity loss and up to 70 percent of fresh-water consumption.

"We need to massively scale-up

investments in rural development and across food systems to help small-scale farmers produce more food and more diversified food, access markets, value chains and technologies and adapt to climate change," said Lario.

IFAD, the only UN fund that exclusively focuses on rural areas, is co-leading the financing agenda together with the World Bank Group.

"All the governments represented here today have committed to eliminating poverty and hunger, and to taking urgent climate action by 2030. So, I am here to say loudly and clearly that we will not succeed—that you will not succeed—unless we transform our food systems today. The stakes

are higher than ever. The next few years are critical for financing food security," said Sabrina Elba, who is received an honorable mention at the UN SDG Awards for her work as IFAD's Goodwill Ambassador.

The summit focused on the progress made to create inclusive, sustainable and resilient food systems. The event hosted 2,000 in-person participants and thousands of virtual attendees from 170 countries—including 22 heads of state, 103 ministerial level delegates, close to 100 Food Systems National Convenors, 450 non-state actor (NSA) delegates, and high-level delegates from the UN system and other international organizations.



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Rice importers set for gov't deals amid India ban

SINGAPORE — Global rice importers are likely to seek direct deals with governments in exporting countries as India's ban on shipments of a key variety is squeezing supplies and igniting concerns over food security.

Buyers from Africa to Asia are likely to scramble for rice shipments as supplies tighten in coming months following India's decision last week to ban non-basmati white rice exports.

The ban will cut availability of the staple on world markets by about a fifth, traders and analysts

said, and could lead to importers seeking more government-to-government deals to overcome shortages and tame spiralling prices.

"Export restrictions inherently reduce trust in the dependability of international trade," said Shirley Mustafa, rice market analyst at the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

"Thus, they could result in importing countries looking at government-to-government deals to ensure supplies."

While announcing its export ban last week, India has left the door ajar for such deals, saying that it will consider meeting the requirements of countries in need of rice supplies.

INDIA'S GOVERNMENT DEALS

Last September, India banned exports of broken rice in a bid to cool domestic prices, but since then official data shows the country approved sales of around one million metric tons of broken rice to Indonesia, Senegal, Gambia, Mali and Ethiopia.

"The current ban excludes government-to-government sales, and it remains within the government's prerogative," said B.V. Krishna Rao, president of the Rice Exporters Association.

"A decision will be made based on the needs of importing countries and the supply situation in the local market."

African buyers are likely to approach the Indian government for rice sales, and Asian importers such as Indonesia and the Philippines could sign government-to-government contracts with the

region's top exporters Thailand and Vietnam, traders said.

Indonesia has signed an agreement with the Indian government to potentially import one million metric tons of rice if the El Niño weather pattern hits its domestic supplies.

India last month approved wheat and broken rice exports to a few countries that had requested shipments of grains.

Indonesia's National Food Agency (NFA) said that deals the country has made since end of last year are sufficient for now, while

the National Food Authority in the Philippines can import rice upon approval by the president in an emergency situation.

India has ample stocks as of now to meet such requests, while Vietnam is due to start harvesting its main crop, analysts said.

"India's government stocks of non-basmati rice are ample, standing at around 41 million tons on July 1," FAO's Ms. Mustafa said. "So, they could service the needs of both domestic public distribution and government level trades." — *Reuters*



Corn, soybeans decline

SINGAPORE- Chicago corn futures lost more than 1 percent on Wednesday and soybeans extended losses, as US forecasts for much-needed rains eased concerns over yield losses after recent hot and dry weather conditions.

Wheat slid 2 percent, after rallying to a five-month high on Tuesday following Russia's attacks on Ukrainian ports and grain infrastructure that raised concerns about global supplies.

Rains forecast for this week will ease some of the concerns over dryness in major portions of the

US corn-belt during the last several weeks, an analyst said.

The most-active corn contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) gave up 1.2 percent to \$5.58-3/4 a bushel and soybeans dropped 0.7 percent to \$14.10 a bushel.

Wheat lost 2 percent to \$7.45-1/2 a bushel after climbing to its highest since Feb. 21 at \$7.77-1/4 in the last session.

Forecasts of crop-friendly rains in the US Midwest weighed on corn and soybean futures. -
Reuters