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Chocolate cravings are going to get more expensive to satisfy



Senators to assess govt capability to deal with El Niño impact

By BUTCH FERNANDEZ

[@butchBM](#)

SENATE probers, acting on a resolution filed by Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian, are on track to mount an inquiry to verify the level of government's capability to mitigate the impact of El Niño.

The Gatchalian resolution cited the urgency amid an early reminder by weather authorities that the El Niño phenomenon will likely persist until the first quarter of next year.

The senator recalled that President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. had also conveyed his concern, reminding senators and congressmen, during his second State of the Nation Address, the "importance of addressing the impact of the El Niño weather phenomenon."

The Chief Executive also assured that the Marcos-led government is already "implementing efforts, including cloud seeding, to counter its effects."

Gatchalian's Senate Resolution No. 691 was prompted by the declaration made by the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Service Administration (PAGASA) on the onset of El Niño, noting that "its potential consequences on inflation due to reduced food production and potentially higher electricity prices could exacerbate poverty levels."

"There is an urgent need to assess the capability of concerned government agencies and determine the planned interventions to mitigate the impact of El Niño. The entire Philippine government

should be prepared to cushion the detrimental effects of the El Niño phenomenon on the country's food, energy, and economic security," the senator said.

This, as the weather phenomenon was also foreseen likely to "diminish the agriculture sector's contribution to the country's GDP."

Citing a 2019 World Bank report, Gatchalian noted that recurring El Niño occurrences in the country are estimated to cause national GDP losses ranging from -0.29 percent to -1.57 percent and agricultural output losses of between -1.73 percent and -6.9 percent.

Moreover, he projected that "had El Niño emerged in 2022, it could have translated to estimated losses of P57.84 billion to P313.11 billion in national GDP

and between P30.85 billion and P124.31 billion in the agricultural sector's [output], based on the country's economic data."

The senator recalled that previous El Niño occurrences brought drought nationwide and water supply shortages due to lower-than-average rainfall in the country, greatly affecting farmers who rely heavily on rainfall for their livelihood.

The El Niño weather aberration is characterized by the abnormal warming of sea surface temperature in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean that causes prolonged episodes of drought and lower-than-average rainfall in some areas. The phenomenon occurs anywhere between 2 to 7 years and may last up to 18 months.



Heavy rainfall expected anew as 'Falcon' turns into typhoon

THE Philippine weather bureau on Sunday warned of heavy rains, floods and landslides in mountainous areas of the country, with intensifying severe tropical storm "Falcon" (international code name: Khanun) forecast to develop into a typhoon.

Falcon is expected to "steadily intensify within the next three days," the Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) said in its 5 a.m. advisory. It is forecast to become a typhoon between late evening Sunday or Monday early morning and reach its peak intensity on Tuesday.

Aid for Egay victims

THIS developed as President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. assured the government would provide immediate housing repair assistance and "emergency support" for residents of Northern Luzon who were affected by the onslaught of typhoon "Egay" (international code name: Doksuri).

In an interview, Marcos assured typhoon victims in the evacuation centers that the government will fast track the rehabilitation efforts so that they will be able to go back to their respective houses and rebuild their homes.

The President said the government is now in the process of identifying the people whose houses were either totally or partially damaged by the typhoon so that the necessary assistance can be provided.

"For those whose houses have been destroyed—completely destroyed houses—there is emergency support that will be

provided by DHSUD [Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development], the human settlements, and there is also assistance from NHA [National Housing Authority]. They can work together to provide assistance and help build houses," he added.

But one of the biggest concerns is restoring the supply of electricity in the region, particularly in Ilocos Norte, Marcos said, noting the province sustained extensive damage to its power lines.

Restoring power will take time because linemen have to meticulously repair the entire system before the power supply can be switched on, the President said.

Marcos said the government would also provide construction materials to the victims to allow them to rebuild their homes.

Some residents in Egay-hit areas in Northern Luzon are temporarily taking shelter at evacuation centers where medical teams and other government assistance have been provided to ensure their safety.

While Falcon is on a northward path over the Philippine Sea and appears to be heading away from landmass, heavy rainfall is expected as the storm and super typhoon Egay, which hit the country last week, boost the Southwest Monsoon, Pagasa said. This will bring "occasional" monsoon showers over the western parts of Luzon and the Visayas, Pagasa said.

The water level of the capital region's Marikina River reached 16.1 meters (52.8 feet) Saturday evening, nearing the 18-meter level that triggers a forced evacuation of certain

parts of Marikina City, it was reported.

The Philippines is affected by an average of 20 tropical cyclones a year, making it one of the world's worst hit countries, according to Pagasa.

Egay, which struck last week, destroyed more than P1.3 billion worth of agricultural crops and caused an estimated P2.66 billion of damage to infrastructure, including bridges and roads, according to local media reports that cited the agriculture and public works departments.

The super typhoon affected half a million people mostly in the northern parts of main Luzon Island and left 14 dead, according to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council. It flooded more than 258 villages in the Luzon provinces of Bulacan and Pampanga, located north of Manila.

Falcon is moving at 15 kilometers an hour with maximum sustained winds of 95 kilometers per hour (kph) near the center and gusts of up to 115 kph, Pagasa said. It's forecast to move north northwestward before veering northwestward Monday, according to the weather bureau.

The tropical storm may exit the Philippines Monday evening or early Tuesday before turning west northwestward and passing close to Japan's Okinawa Islands in the Ryukyu Archipelago on Tuesday morning and then entering the East China Sea.

Inventory

PRESIDENT Marcos also said the government is now conducting an inventory to determine

the number of public schools in Northern Luzon that were affected by Egay ahead of the opening of classes next month.

He said that an inventory of the damaged public schools would be conducted so that the government can determine the extent of the damage left by typhoon in schools to ensure a smooth opening of classes in August.

The President emphasized that the idea was brought up by Senator Imee Marcos, who accompanied him during today's visit to Egay-hit areas in Northern Luzon.

The Chief Executive presided over a series of briefings last Saturday in Bangued, Abra; Laoag City, Ilocos Norte; and Tuguegarao City, Cagayan, where he received initial reports on the effects of typhoon Egay in Northern Luzon.

The President also conducted aerial inspections of the affected areas in Abra and Ilocos Norte.

Meanwhile, Marcos has expressed satisfaction with the government's response to Egay, as he promised to continue providing aid to those affected, particularly food, potable water, medicine, and shelter assistance.

He noted that the country has to get used to the new weather pattern because of the obvious effects of climate change.

Government responders are working to reach isolated areas to bring food and basic necessities, using all means to provide assistance to far-flung communities, Marcos said, adding that the good thing is that the government was able to preposition food packs in critical areas before the typhoon struck.

Bloomberg and Jovee Marie N. Dela Cruz



PH-MALAYSIA PRIVATE SECTOR COOPERATION. Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. joined ASEAN Business Advisory Council (BAC) Philippines Chair and Go Negosyo founder Joey Concepcion as they met with Malaysian business leaders in a roundtable meeting and business forum last July 27, 2023 during the President's State Visit to Malaysia. In the photo are (from left) ASEAN BAC Malaysia Chair Tan Sri Nazir Razak, Concepcion, President Marcos, Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry President George Barcelon, and AirAsia CEO Tony Fernandes.

PH, MALAYSIA ASEAN BAC EXPLORE AGRI COOPERATION AND MSME DEVELOPMENT

Two private sector groups representing Malaysia and the Philippines signed a Memorandum of Understanding here last July 27, 2023 to explore joint efforts in agriculture development, focusing on palm oil, rubber and other agricultural commodities that may thrive in the Philippines and Malaysia. The MOU was signed on behalf of ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN BAC) Malaysia and ASEAN BAC Philippines by their respective Chairs, Tan Sri Nazir Razak and Joey Concepcion. The signing was witnessed by Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. during his meeting with Malaysian business leaders as part of his three-day State Visit to Malaysia.

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"Public-private partnerships are essential as we move toward regional economic integration and make our agriculture industries productive and competitive," said Concepcion. "We have already several of these big-brother models in the Philippines covering prime commodities like tobacco, coconut and rice, with large Philippine companies like Universal Leaf, Lionheart Farms and Yovel East successfully implementing their inclusive models in the communities where they operate," he said. Concepcion said they are aiming to encourage more big-brother companies to participate.

The MOU between the Philippines and Malaysia concerned specifically the possibility of jointly conducting studies and mentorship channels for potential agriculture, agriculture technology, food security, agriprenurship business models, and value chain development.

Also present during the private sector meet were Department of Trade and Industry Sec. Alfredo Pascual, and ASEAN Business

Advisory Council members Antony Fernandes Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry President George Barcelon and Air Asia CEO Anthony Fernandes.

The MOU will also aim to identify the business requirements to develop trade and investment opportunities in palm oil, rubber, fruits, poultry, agricultural technology, and other agricultural products and services of Malaysia and the Philippines. "We are confident, that with this partnership with ASEAN BAC Malaysia and the leadership of Chairman Nazir Razak, that both our countries will benefit from sharing our experiences in these areas," said Concepcion.

Razak said that ASEAN-BAC Malaysia is happy to facilitate potential partnerships between prominent players in relevant fields from the two countries. "Food security is a major challenge for Malaysia, with imports of food accumulated to RM482.8 billion while our food export was only RM39 billion between 2012 to 2022," said Razak. "Malaysia needs to not only reduce our food import bills but also become competitive in food agriculture," he said.

Concepcion said he was elated that President Marcos was present to witness the signing, and vowed to continue in various efforts for MSMEs in the Philippines and in the region. Already, the ASEAN Mentorship for Entrepreneurs Network (AMEN), which is the Philippines's legacy project from its chairmanship, has already been rolled out to the ten ASEAN member-states



ASEAN BAC Philippines Chairman Joey Concepcion shares with Malaysian businessmen, and President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. the Philippine experience with Kapapid Angat Lahat sa Agri Program, and how the MOU explores expanding it through the partnership with ASEAN BAC Malaysia.

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Concepcion said that similar agreements will be explored with countries that have a strong agriculture industry, such as Indonesia Vietnam Thailand Cambodia and possibly Myanmar.



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Anti-smuggling enforcement focus should be prevention, not penalties, farmers say

THE government's approach to containing agricultural smuggling must focus on prevention rather than harsher penalties, industry officials said.

Raul Q. Montemayor, national manager of Federation of Free Farmers, added in a messenger chat that President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. did not mention his plan to reinstate pre-shipment inspections of farm imports during his second State of the Nation Address last week.

Mr. Montemayor said such inspections involve an independent entity checking cargoes for weight, contents, value, and quarantine clearance before they are shipped to the Philippines.

"Without such preventive measures, cargoes can be easily spirited out of our ports, misdeclared and undervalued, and then government will have to exert a lot of time and money running after the smuggled goods," he said.

Mr. Marcos, who is also Secretary of Agriculture, warned the smugglers and hoarders as he said they are the reason behind rising prices of agricultural commodities.

"One of the reasons for rising prices is the presence of smugglers, hoarders, and those who manipulate the prices of agricultural products. We will look for them and file complaints against them," he said.

"What they are doing is not right, they are committing fraud. Not only farmers are affected, but consum-

ers as well. That's why we won't allow such practices. The days of smugglers and hoarders are numbered," he added.

He also urged Congress to amend Republic Act No. 10845 or the Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016.

The law defines the crime of large-scale agricultural smuggling as the illegal import of at least P1 million worth of sugar, corn, pork, poultry, garlic, onion, carrots, fish, and cruciferous vegetables — either raw, processed, or preserved. The threshold for rice is P10 million.

Sonny A. Africa, executive director of think tank Ibon Foundation, said that Mr. Marcos "could have done so much" in his first year against smugglers and hoarders. "It's not as if they only just showed up after he came to power."

"Choosing to focus on smugglers and hoarders... fails to grasp that the biggest factor in expensive food is the chronic lack of trade protection and domestic support for Filipino farmers and fisherfolk," he said.

Mr. Africa said the liberalization of trade in agricultural goods is one of the factors limiting the government's capacity to curb smuggling and hoarding.

"Controlling smugglers and hoarders is also a function of government capacity and unfortunately this capacity is exactly what has been eroded by decades of agricultural liberalization and deregulation," he said. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**



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No rice shortage amid Egay onslaught - DA

By **BELLA CARIASO**

A ranking Department of Agriculture (DA) official yesterday gave assurance of enough supply of rice despite the devastation brought by Typhoon Egay in the country.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Rex Estoperez cited the projection of the office of Undersecretary for policy, planning and regulations Mercedita Sombilla, which calculated a surplus of rice for at least 67 days at the end of the year.

"The super typhoon (Egay) happened after the harvest. Right now, the affected standing palay crops are still in the early stage," Estoperez said in an interview with **The STAR**, adding that the wet season harvest would start by late September and run until December.

The targeted palay production for 2023, according to the official, could still be reached if the affected farmers will be able to plant again for the wet season and "if no other calamity will hit us, like the expected El Niño phenomenon."

He added that aside from the good

palay harvest during the first six months, rice imports also contributed to the country's inventory. Based on data from the Bureau of Plant Industry, 3.8 million metric tons (MT) of imported rice already arrived in the country as of June 2023.

Meanwhile, Estoperez also warned that the spike in the retail prices of rice would persist after the decision of India to ban its export of the staple food.

"The export ban of India will further result in the increase in the price of rice in the world market," he said.

According to Estoperez, based on the information from importers, the rice in the world market increased to \$560 per MT from \$520 per MT and may go up further.

"The imported rice was already high and Vietnam increased its prices. There was also information that other rice importing countries also source their rice from India and the ban will further result in the spike of rice prices in the world market," he added.

Following this, Estoperez said efforts are now being done to improve local palay production to lessen the country's

dependence on importation.

The official also said that the government still targets to achieve the P20 per kilo of rice promised by **President Marcos** during the campaign period in 2022.

"We can still hit the P20 per kilo on the assumption that we provide all the farm inputs needed by our farmers," he said.

According to Estoperez, the government's focus is to attain food security and address the impact of climate change.

"The problem is climate change, that is why the President said it is important to address food security and climate change. We can still achieve food security but we cannot prevent the movement in the retail prices every time there is a calamity," he noted.

Based on monitoring of the DA, the retail prices of local regular milled rice are pegged to as high as P44 per kilo; local well-milled rice, P49 per kilo; local special rice, P60 per kilo; imported well-milled rice, P48 per kilo; imported premium rice, P50 per kilo and imported special rice, P58 per kilo.



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A SONA for all



STREET TALK

VINCE SOCCO

It was all the news. The lead-up to it was hard to miss. The hype was extremely palpable. Yes, the second State of the Nation Address (SONA) of President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos, Jr. (PBBM) was front and center all of last week.

At slightly past four in the afternoon of Monday, July 24, 2023, PBBM walked into the session hall of the Batasan Pamabansa. He took to the podium, shaking hands with lawmakers and government officials along the way – even stopping for a selfie, at one point! He was going to address the joint session of the Philippine Congress and give the nation a report on his first year of office and a glimpse of his agenda for the next five years of his term.

My take: it was a SONA for all. The spirit of inclusiveness threaded the speech from start to finish. In one hour and eleven minutes, PBBM made his report to the whole of government, the diplomatic corps and Filipino citizens who took time to tune in.

SONAs are aimed at informing the people about the current state of affairs of the country with a focus on achievements and wins. The report is meticulously crafted, so the audience usually pays attention to all that is said and, as importantly, to all that is left out. Likewise, it is an opportunity for the President to put forth his platform of government for the immediate term and rest of his stay in office. People dissect the more apparent messages and discern the pregnant undertones of the report. It is, in many ways, an exercise in understanding as much as speculation. You might even be led to believe that SONAs are purposely designed to be as specific and deliberate as they are vague and opaque.

But mine is a simple mind. I try to stay away from all the second-guessing and hone in on how sane and sorted the SONA comes together in its entirety – trying to focus on the forest than the trees. As an ordinary Filipino, I try to find the inspiration that the SONA provides.

Overall, the tone of the SONA was businesslike. It started with a rundown of the accomplishments of government, citing key facts and figures to support the claims. The second part shifted to a slightly more impassioned appeal for the pri-

orities of PBBM going forward.

The review of accomplishments was very much to the point and unembellished. The numbers did much of the talking, though I could already hear the pundits saying that it's not just about the numerical achievements but as much about the dispersion and distribution of the gains throughout society. So when last year's 7.6 percent GDP growth was touted – the best in 46 years! – the groans could almost immediately be heard that this did not filter down to the middle and lower income families. When the drop of inflation from a peak of 8.7 percent in January to 5.4 percent in June was acclaimed, the cries of high food prices could already be heard instantaneously.

I suppose that there really is no pleasing everybody – despite best efforts at offering some token of accomplishment to all, for all. Certainly, though, I did not think that any of the claims could be labelled as a mere “consuelo.”

The review of accomplishments was the set-up to rising hopes for an even better second year and rest-of-term for PBBM. Among the priorities he made that resounded with me was a promise to bring electrification to every household in the country by the end of his term in 2028. This seems like a really huge aspiration but one that I think is so basic to any country wanting to elevate itself to a middle income economy. After all, power is an essential driver of production and productivity.

Another big message was PBBM's desire to purge the agricultural sector of smugglers and hoarders who were manipulating the supply chain of basic goods for their personal gain. PBBM's use of “insidious” to describe these people (I think in another speech) was too kind. They are, in my mind, the scourge of a nation who must be billed as “public enemies number one”. The suffering they inflict is beyond forgiveness.

Finally, I was encouraged again by the focus on increasing investments to the country, promoting job creation and growing infrastructure. This is the backbone of the nation. For the longest time, economic development was tethered to a seemingly endless love affair – for all the right reasons – with the service sector. However, I was really happy to hear the renewed focus on manufacturing and agriculture.

I would have preferred a more empowering and inspiring SONA. But I believe that what PBBM delivered made his point well, “...the state of the nation is sound and improving.”

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Marcos sees rice prices going up due to El Niño

By RAYMUND ANTONIO
and ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

President Marcos admitted his growing concern over the impact of the El Niño phenomenon, particularly on the prices of the country's staple grain.

The Chief Executive also expressed his worry over the country's rice supply stock and is eyeing India as a possible import source.

"I'm thinking about the national supply of rice," the President told officials in Tuguegarao City on Sat-

urday, July 29, when he went there to assess the devastation caused by Typhoon 'Egay' (international name Doksuri).

"Everybody is preparing for El Niño, lahat ng nasa Southeast Asia, sabay-sabay nagbibilihan (all in Southeast Asia have been buying simultaneously)," Marcos, who also serves as the Agriculture chief, noted.

"Kaya ninenerbyos ako dahil tataas na naman ang presyo kahit mag-import tayo (That's why I'm becoming nervous because ► 4

Marcos sees rice prices going up due to El Niño 1◀

prices will increase even if we import," he added.

He is worried because Indonesia has been importing massively and supplies are dwindling in neighboring rice-rich countries.

However, the President is optimistic about sourcing from India, saying that "I think I can make a deal with India, baka meron tayo mapakiusapan doon (we might be able to ask help from someone there)."

Originally, the Philippines, one of the world's biggest rice importers, buys rice from Vietnam but the President lamented it might be hard to do so now because of the competition.

"But we have to start importing already. Vietnam said nailabas na raw lahat ng kanilang ilalabas. Thailand pwede pa (they already released all that they can release. Thailand is still possible)," he said.

However, India had just put a ban on exporting non-basmati white rice because retail prices climbed by three percent recently due to damage to crops brought by monsoon rains.

India is the world's largest exporter of rice, accounting for more than 40 percent of world rice exports.

The cut in shipments of non-basmati white rice could inflate food prices already driven up by the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Get used to effects of climate change

Marcos said Filipinos should start getting used to the effects of climate change as he noted the new weather's effects in the country.

Marcos said this as he visited the areas in Northern Luzon ravaged by Super Typhoon Egay on Saturday, July 29.

In an interview in Ilocos Norte, the President said he was satisfied with

how the government responded to the typhoon's aftermath despite the weather's unpredictability.

"Mukha namang ang response ng (I think the response of the) national government is satisfactory. I can say that it's ok. But talagang mabigat itong nangyari dahil the (But we really took a toll from what happened because) rains were much, much heavier than what we have had in recent times," he said.

"We have to really get used to the new weather—the effects of climate change," he added.

Heavy rains, flooding, and damage to agriculture and infrastructure prompted the State of Calamity declaration in several Northern Luzon provinces.

In a press briefing, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) said the heavy flooding caused by Super Typhoon Egay could help mitigate the effects of the impending El Niño phenomenon in the country.

"May mga beneficial effects din naman ang mga pag-ulan dahil for example, tumaas ang lebel ng ating mga dams (These rains have a beneficial effect as they increased the water level in dams)," Pagasa Deputy Administrator Nathaniel Servando said in a news forum in Quezon City on Saturday.

Servando also confirmed that the water supply is enough for the rest of the year despite the expected rainfall reduction by the last quarter as a side effect of El Niño. Eleven typhoons or storms are still expected to enter or pass through the Philippine area of responsibility before the end of the year.

He likewise assured the public that Pagasa continuously monitors for possible changes in the current weather forecast, saying that even if

typhoons are expected to lessen by the last quarter of the year, it is anticipated that the tropical storms will be stronger as an effect of El Niño.

The Marcos Administration, through the National El Niño Team, has been developing various water conservation programs which seek to mitigate the effects of the looming dry spell in the country.

In his second State of the Nation Address (SONA) on July 24, President Marcos noted that progressive, livable, and sustainable communities will never be complete without appropriate and responsible action to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change.

"We can never lose sight of our responsibility to the future. The economic agenda cannot and will not ever be incompatible with our climate change agenda," he said.

According to Marcos, climate change has become an essential criterion in the government's policies, planning, decisions, and implementation of programs.

"The potential advantages of such enlightened policies extend to jobs and livelihood, with the unlocking of the development of the green and blue economies," he said.

The President said the Philippines had adopted the "circular economy" concept to keep raw materials in a closed loop.

"In our world with scarce resources, the circular economy allows us to fully use these resources, minimize waste and reduce the need for new resources—just as it is in nature," he said.

"Only a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach will enable us to do all of these. It is necessary to apply all the resources that are at hand if we are to progress as quickly as we need to," he added.

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PBBM ORDERS

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on Saturday ordered all local government units adversely affected by the onslaught of super typhoon Egay to submit a detailed report on the damages to agriculture to address the particular needs of the farmers to recover from the effects of the storm damage.

The President issued the order during the situation briefings he presided separately with the governors of Regions 1 and 2 and Cordillera Administrative and various government agencies involved in disaster response efforts.

He presided briefings in Bangued, Abra, Laoag City in Ilocos Norte and Tuguegarao, Cagayan where he received initial reports on the effects of super typhoon Egay.

The local officials concerned briefed the President on the initial damage assessment in their respective provinces.

Initial reports showed that approximately Php1.243 billion worth of damage and losses to agriculture were reported in the three regions. The figure, however, is expected to go up in the coming days as more LGUs submit their respective reports.

Based on initial reports from Region 1, some 170 houses were totally damaged with 7,830 partially damaged, leaving some 8,000 damaged residential units. Additional initial reports from the region indicated that 48 other infrastructure were also damaged, total Php643.51 million worth.

Three bridges and 18 road sections were impassable and 8,004 houses were damaged by the super typhoon Egay in the Ilocos Region while operations of the Laoag International Airport were suspended until Sunday due to damage in its ceilings and doors.

In the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), particularly in the province of Abra,

around Php1.03 million worth of damage and losses were reported, affecting 17 farmers and fisherfolk.

Abra officials reported that four houses were totally damaged with 412 partially destroyed, affecting 416 in total, affecting 43,470 families or 142,995 individuals. Of the figure, 10 families or 42 individuals are currently taking temporary shelter in four evacuation centers.

Officials said 43 roads were closed to traffic and 165 road sections were one-lane passable when super typhoon Egay made landfall on Wednesday over Fuga Island in Aparri, Cagayan. The affected roads are now open to traffic.

PBBM SATISFIED WITH GOV'T RESPONSE

The President expressed satisfaction on Saturday with the government's response to the devastation caused by Super Typhoon Egay, as he promised to continue providing aid to those affected particularly food, potable water, medicine, and shelter assistance.

"So, that's more or less the general issues that we have been talking about. Mukhanamanang response ng national government ay satisfactory," President Marcos said in an interview after the situation briefing in Laoag, Ilocos Norte.

"I can say that it's okay but talagang mabigat itong nangyari dahil the rains are much, much heavy than we have had in recent times and even kagaya dito sa Ilocos Norte tinitingnan ko kung saan nagbaha, ganon na naman... 'yung mga dating hindi binabaha (ang) nabaha. May mga baha na dinaanan na hindi dati dinadaan."

The country has to get used to the new weather pattern because of the obvious effects of climate change, he noted.

Government responders are

working to reach isolated areas to bring food and basic necessities, using all means to provide assistance to far-flung communities, Marcos said, adding that the good thing is that the government was able to preposition food packs in critical areas before the typhoon struck.

"I first called Secretary Rex [Gatchalian] about this last Monday, bago ako umalis (papunta) ng Malaysia. I. We already talked about it and I said mag-pre-position ka and that's what exactly he did and

then we alerted all of the agencies so naka-ready sila. Ang mahirap lang 'yung mga isolated pa at 'yung mga kalsadang hindi pa madaanan," Marcos said.

For those whose houses have been totally destroyed or partially damaged, the government will be providing them emergency shelter support, he said.

"Merong emergency support na gagawin ang DHSUD (Department of Human Settlement and Urban Development), ang human settlements at meron din gagawin ang NHA (National Housing Authority) para magtulungan sila and merong assistance at magpapatayo rin ng bahay," the President pointed out.

"We are now at the phase where we are providing—we will have to provide construction materials. So kamina... and para hindi na maabala ang tao, gamitin na lang nila 'yung mga gamit para maayos nila ang kanilang bahay."

But one of the biggest concerns is restoring the supply of electricity in the region, particularly in Ilocos Norte, Marcos said, noting the province sustained extensive damage of its power lines.

Restoring power will take time because linemen have to meticulously repair the entire system before power supply could be switched on, the President said.

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DAMAGE LIST

INVENTORY OF DAMAGED PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The government is now conducting an inventory to determine the number of public schools in Northern Luzon that were affected by the onslaught of super typhoon Egay, ahead of the opening of classes next month.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said that an inventory of the damaged public schools will be conducted so that the government can determine the extent of the damage left by super typhoon Egay in schools to ensure a smooth opening of classes in August.

The President emphasized that the idea was pointed out by Senator Imee Marcos who accompanied him during today's visit in Egay-hit areas in Northern Luzon.

"Senator Imee pointed out very correctly that the school year is about to begin at may-roon tayong kukunin, gagawa ng listahan ng mga damaged school buildings na hindi magamit. Tignan natin what we can do in a month, kasi we have one month, August 28 ang pasukan," President Marcos said.

"So... these are the general elements that we have, looking at this is what we have been getting from the agencies, the responding agencies to all of these," he added when asked about the government's post-Egay efforts.

The chief executive presided over on Saturday a series of briefings in Bangued, Abra; Laoag City in Ilocos Norte; and Tuguegarao City, Cagayan where he received initial reports on the effects of super typhoon Egay in Northern Luzon.

The President also conducted aerial inspections of the affected areas in Abra and Ilocos Norte.

PCO

HELPING HAND

By Ryan Ponce Pacpaco

SPEAKER Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez and Tingog Party-list group have helped more residents of Northern Luzon and even Central Luzon who have been affected by typhoon Egay.

As of noon Sunday, Speaker Romualdez, the head of the 312-strong House of Representatives, and Tingog have sent a total of P287 million in cash assistance, relief goods, generators, and financial aid from the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situations (AICS) program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development under Sec. Rex Gatchalian.

The Speaker and Tingog Reps. Yedda Marie K. Romualdez and Jude Acidre facilitated the release of the AICS funds. The cash assistance and relief goods came from the Speaker's personal funds.

"We hope the relief and financial aid we sent to our kababayan in the typhoon-stricken areas will help them recover from the calamity. It represents our commitment to assist our people in distress to the best extent we can," the House leader said.

In an interview with Isyung Pambayan of veteran anchor and House reporter Milky Rigonan of dzRH, Deputy Secretary General Sofonias "Ponyong" P. Gabonada Jr. of the Office of Speaker said Speaker Romualdez and Tingog Party-list will always be the partners of the Marcos administration in providing immediate assistance during

calamities.

"Nakapaghatid na tayong tulong at patuloy tayong naghahatid ng tulong sa ibat-ibang mga distrito at probinsiyang nasalanta katulad ng Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Cagayan Valley, Benguet, Baguio City, Abra, Apayao, at Malolos City sa Bulacan. Nagsimula po tayo a day after tumama ang bagyo doon sa mga lugar na nasalanta ng bagyong Egay at malugod po nating ibinabalita na isa po tayo sa unang nagresponde, ang opisina ni Speaker Martin G. Romualdez at Tingog Party-list na may partnership sa private sector o groceries kung saan natin binili at binibili ang goods," Gabonada said.

The Speaker told Benguet and Baguio residents that he shared the pain and suffering they were going through because that's what he felt when super typhoon Yolanda caused widespread devastation and deaths in Leyte and other parts of Eastern Visayas in 2013.

Despite the bad weather, he said he traveled to Baguio to heed the plea of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. for officials to ensure that aid reaches typhoon-stricken communities.

"Nagpasya ako na pumunta ngayon dito sa utos na rin ng ating mahal na Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Kadarating lang po namin mula sa Malaysia kagabi. Ang utos ng Pangulo: siguruhin na nakakarating ang tulong ng gobyerno sa lahat ng naapektuhan ng Bagyong Egay," he said.

The President himself handed out financial aid and relief goods to residents of northern Luzon provinces over the weekend.

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Dahil sa pinsala ni 'Egay' sa agri **Presyo ng bigas sisirit**

Kinakabahan na umano si Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. dahil sa posibleng pagtaas sa presyo ng bigas matapos mapaulat ang damage sa agrikultura dulot ng bagyong Egay.

Sa situation briefing sa mga lokal na opisyal ng Tuguegarao, sinabi ng

Pangulo na nag-aalala siya sa supply ng lokal na bigas kaya kailangang palakasin ang stocks para masiguro na handa ang Pilipinas sa epekto ng El Niño sa agrikultura kaya hihingi sila ng supply deal sa India.

Bilang paghahanda sa epekto ng El Niño at ng

super typhoon Egay sa lokal na ani, kaya magsimula na ang Pilipinas na umangkat ng bigas.

Paliwanag pa ng Pangulo na inilisip niya ang national supply ng bigas dahil inimport ito lahat ng Indonesia at nagsara ang Vietnam gayundin ang India, subalit sa tingin umano niya ay maaari siyang makipag-deal sa

NI GEMMA GARCIA
India baka mayroong mapakiusapan dito.

Subalit sa ngayon ay dapat na magsimulang mag-import dahil lahat ngayon ay naghahanda na para sa El Niño, lahat ng Southeast Asia ay sabay-sabay nagbibilihan.

Dahil dito kaya kinakabahan na umano si Mar-

cos dahil sa posibleng pagtaas sa presyo ng bigas kahit pa mag-import tayo.

Sa pinakahuling datos ng National Disaster Coordinating Council o NDRRMC, nasa higit P1 bilyon na ang pinsala ng bagyong Egay sa agrikultura.

Samantala sinabi naman ni Cagayan Gov.

- PBBM

Manuel Mamba sa situation briefing na ang damage sa agrikultura dulot ng bagyo sa kanilang lalawigan ay umabot na sa P539 milyon.

Sa naturang halaga, P327 milyon ang halaga ng corn production, P123 milyon sa high value crops, P41 milyon sa bigas, P47 milyon sa fisheries, P1.05 sa livestock.

Habang ang damage naman sa imprastraktura sa Cagayan ay P862.3

milyon.

Inabisuhan naman ni Marcos ang mga lokal na pamahalaan na magsumite ng detalyadong reports tungkol sa agrikultura damage at sa pangangailangan ng mga magsasaka.

Maari rin umanong magbigay ang Department of Agriculture (DA) ng palay, corn at high-value crops seedlings sa mga magsasaka bilang suporta sa kanila.



Walang iwanan kay PBBM sa 'Bagong Pilipinas'



LRAY VILLAFUERTE

Noong nakaraang Lunes po ay naideliber na ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. ang kanyang ikalawang State of the Nation Address o SONA. Tayo po ay nalulugod sapagkat tuloy-tuloy ang pagtupad ng ating pangulo sa kanyang mga ipinangako noong kampanya na siyang unti-unting nagbibigay sigla at kaginhawahan sa buhay ng mga Pilipino. Lahat uusad, walang maiiwanan.

Ika nga ni Pangulong Marcos sa kanyang nakaraang SONA, "Sa ating pagtahak sa kaunlaran, walang mamamayang Pilipino ang maiiwanan."

Kung kaya't tama ang ating presidente sa kanyang mga sinabi sa SONA na kanyang mga prayoridad para maa-improve ang buhay ng mga Pilipino. Swak talaga na pagtuunan niya nang mas higit na pansin ang anim na priority areas na kinabibilangan ng imprastraktura, seguridad sa pagkain, pagkakaroon ng trabaho, health care, edukasyon at social protection para sa mga mahihirap at iba pang vulnerable sectors.

Alam naman natin na kapag napalakas pa lalo ang ating ekonomiya ay dadami ang trabaho, magiging mas matatag ang commodity supply at presyo ng bilihin at mas maraming makikinaabang na mamamayan dahil magkakaroon sila o mas lalaki ang kanilang mga kita para sa ikabubuti ng kanilang mga pamilya.

Tama rin ang pangulo sa pagtuon niya ng pansin sa kanyang SONA sa inflation o ang pagtaas ng mga bilihin, na aniya ay naging malaking problema ng kanyang pamahalaan. Natatapyasan kasi ng mataas na inflation ang purchasing power ng mga tao, na ang ibig sabihin ay mas kaunting mga bagay bukod sa pagkain, tubig at ilaw ang napupuntahan ng kanilang salapi. Wala na silang savings o ipon at kapos na ang pera na mailaan para sa ibang mahahalaga ding bagay gaya ng pag-aaral ng kanilang mga anak o pagpapagamot.

Kaya naman sa tulong ng ating mga ekonomista ay sinuring mabuti ng pangulo ang sitwasyon at nakapagtatag ng mga polisiya na magiging pundasyon sa paglakas ng ekonomiya, paglikha ng trabaho at pagsasatupad ng mga proyektong mag-aangat sa antas ng kabuhayan ng ating mga kapwa mga Pilipino.

Naglunsad din ng mga estratehiya na magpapalakas sa kakayahan ng ating mga kababayan at sa mga sektor ng ekonomiya na ngayon ay nagpapakita na ng magagandang resulta. Bukod sa pagdami ng trabaho na ibibigay ng mas mataas na infrastructure spending o sa mga itatayong malalaking

proyekto, talagang tinututukan po ng ating pangulo ang pagpapababa ng inflation na kinabibilangan ng pagtiyak na meron tayong sapat na supply ng mga pangangailangan at maibaba pa nang husto ang presyo ng mga bilihin.

Kapag napadami ang may trabaho, mas marami ang magkakaroon ng kakayahang mamili. Kapag mas maraming supply ay mas bababa ang presyo ng mga pangunahing bilihin. Kung mura ang bilihin, mas maraming matitira sa kinita ng ating mga kababayan. Panalong-panalo rito ang mga mamamayan dahil ang parte ng kanilang mase-save mula sa kanilang kita ay maaari pa nilang magamit sa iba pang importanteng gastusin gaya ng pagpapatayo ng bahay, pagpapatayo ng maliit na negosyo o pagtulong sa mga magulang at mga kapatid.

At sa ikakaganda pa lalo ng ating ekonomiya, may 17 panukalang inendorso ang ating pangulo noong SONA kung saan 10 ay mga bago at hindi nakasama sa expanded list ng 44 priority bills na napagkasunduan ng Chief Executive at Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) noong nakaraang taon. Kaya sa pag-uumpisa ng second regular session noong isang linggo, nasa 54 na ang mga urgent bill na kailangang pagtrabahuhan naming mga mambabatas nitong bagong legislative year.

Sa 54 priority bills na ito, 35 ang pasado na sa 3rd reading sa Kamara at nai-transmit na sa Senado. At ikinagagalak ko pong banggitin sa inyo na sa 35 bills na ito ay 28 ang iniakda o kaya naman ay naging co-author ang inyong lingkod.

Kabilang naman sa mga additional priority bill na nais ng pangulo na aksiyunan ng Kongreso ay ang amendatory laws sa Cooperative Code, Fisheries Code, Government Procurement Law and Government Auditing Code; panukalang Tatak Pinoy at Blue Economy laws; at tax reforms sa mining, single-use plastics, digital services, at road users' tax.

Ang 7 pang panukalang binanggit ng pangulo sa kanyang ikalawang SONA na kasama na sa naunang 44 priority bills ay kinabibilangan ng panukalang pagtatag ng Department of Water Resources Management; "functional and sustainable" pension plan para Military and other Uniformed Personnel (MUP); panukala laban sa financial account scams; ang Philippine Immigration Act; pag-amiyenda sa Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act; pagpapagaan sa pagbabayad buwis; at ang automatic income classification ng ating mga local government unit (LGU).

Dito po sa pitong panukalang nabanggit ng ating pangulo, apat rito ay principal author ang inyong lingkod at co-author naman sa tatlo.

Gusto ko rin pong banggitin na nasa tamang landas ang pangulo sa kanyang pagsusulong na magkaroon ng mas mataas na paggastos sa infrastructure buildup sa ilalim ng kanyang "Build Better More"

(BBM) program dahil ang mas maraming "infra investment" ay maraming idudulot na positibong epekto sa ekonomiya at magbibigay ng mas maraming trabaho para sa ating mga kababayan.

Para matiyak na magiging mas accessible sa ating mga kababayan ang murang pagkain, pinapalawak ang "Kadiwa ng Pangulo" outlets nationwide. At bilang concurrent agriculture secretary, tinitiyak na pangulo na mapapataas ang ani ng mga magsasaka, isinusulong ang paggamit ng biofertilizer, hahabulin nang walang humpay ang mga smuggler at hoarder na nagdudulot ng artificial o pansamantalang pagkawala ng supply at pagtaas ng presyo ng bigas, gulay, karne at iba pang agri products. Hindi rin nakakalimutan ang sektor ng mga piggeries at poultry kaya papalawakin ang pagbibigay ng bakuna sa mga hayop upang maiwasan ang mga pesteng pumapatay sa kanila at nang hindi na tayong magkukulang pa sa mga produktong baboy at manok sa mga pamilihan.

Bukod dito, isinasabay ang pagsustena sa infrastructure modernization program at isinulong pa ang mga proyekto ng dating Duterte administration, pinalawak ang inisyatiba sa pamamagitan ng BBM program na bubuhusan ng mas malaking mga proyektong magbibigay ng physical connectivity tulad ng mga kalsada, tulay at mga proyekto sa water management, agriculture, education, energy at health.

Kasama sa mga proyektong ito ang 1,200 kilometer Luzon Spine Expressway network na magkonekta sa mga lalawigan ng Ilocos at sa amin sa Bicol kung saan ang dating travel time na 20 oras ay magiging 9 oras na lamang.

Sa mga ginagawang ito ng pangulo, buo po ang suportang ibibigay ng Kongreso partikular ng Kamara sa pamumuno ni Speaker Martin Romualdez. Buo rin ang suporta ng aming partido na National Unity Party (NUP) para matiyak na magagawa ng pangulo ang kinakailangan upang matupad ang hangad na pag-asenso ng bansa kung saan wala talagang maiiwan.

Hindi naman sa pagyayabang pero ang NUP na aking pinamumunuan ay ang pinakamalaking power bloc sa Kamara sunod sa ruling Lakas-CMD led by Speaker Martin. Kayat malaking bagay po na tuloy-tuloy ang aming suporta sa legislative agenda ni Pangulong Marcos sa Kamara sa liderato ni Speaker.

Kailangan po ng pangulo ang tuloy-tuloy na suporta hindi lamang ng Kongreso kung hindi pati ng iba't ibang sektor gaya ng business community at ng buong sambayanang Pilipino. Sa unang taon pa lamang ay ipinakita ni Pangulong Marcos na tinutupad niya ang pangakong walang iwanan. Sama-sama talaga tayo. Dahil ano ba naman ang magiging kabuluhan ng ating minimithing matinding pag-unlad ng ating ekonomiya kung hindi naman ito magti-trickle down o pakikinaabangan ng ating mga kapwa Pilipino sa lahat ng panig ng bansa?

Importante po ang 'trickle-down effect' na ito. Para matawag na tagumpay ang inuumpisahang pagbabago ni Presidente tungo sa pag-asenso, kailangang maramdaman ang biyaya nito ng lahat—hindi lamang ang mga nasa pangunahing lugar sa bansa kundi maging sa kasuluk-sulukang kanayunan at barangay ng Pilipinas. Sabi niya, walang iwanan. Kaya kapit lang po, maaabot na natin ang totooang pag-unlad sa tinatawag ni Pangulong Marcos na "Bagong Pilipinas".

REMATE

ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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EDITORIAL

PINOY, LUGMOK SA PATULOY NA PAGTAAS NG PRESYO

SA State of the Nation Address ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, sinabi nito na unit-unting umaangat ang ekonomiya ng bansa dahil na rin sa unti-unti ring pagbaba ng presyo ng mga bilihin.

Maaaring may ilang panahon sa kanyang panunungkulan sa loob ng isang taon na bumaba ang presyo ng ilang bilihin tulad ng sibuyas, asukal at ilan pang produktong ani subalit ang katotohanan ay patuloy na nahihirapan ang mamamayan dahil sa walang tigil na pagtaas ng presyo ng produktong petrolyo na nagiging basehan sa pagtaas ng presyo ng iba't ibang bilihin lalo na ang pagkain.

Isang araw matapos ang SONA ng Pangulo, nagtaas muli ng presyo ang mga kompanya ng langis sa kanilang mga produkto tulad ng gasolina, krudo at gaas na ayon sa mga kompanya ngang ito ay dahil na rin sa hindi mapigilang pagtaas ng presyo sa pandaigdigang merkado.

Inasahan na ng mga Pinoy na kasunod nang pagtaas sa presyo ng langis ay ang pagtaas din sa palengke at iba pang pamilihan ng mga bilihin na pangunahing pangangailangan ng mga tao tulad ng bigas at pagkain. Kasi nga, ibinabase ng mga negosyante ang presyo ng kanilang paninda sa kanilang gastos tulad ng sa transportasyon.

Siyempre, pagtaas ng presyo ng gasolina at krudo ay magtataas din ang mga negosyante sa presyo ng kanilang produkto.

At ngayon, hindi pa man nakababawi ang mamamayan sa dagok ng pagtaas ng presyo ng langis noong Martes, Hulyo 25, ay muli na namang nakaamba ang pagtaas ng presyo ng produktong petrolyo. Ang masakit pa ay kasabay ito nang pagsirit din ng presyo ng Liquefied Petroleum Gas.

Ayon kay Arnel Ty, presidente ng Regasco, sigurado na ang taas-presyo ng LPG at ang pinag-aaralan na lang ay kung magkano. Hindi na umano bababa sa P4 bawat kilo ang itatas ng presyo ng kanilang mga produkto. At hindi pa nga nakababawi sa pagtaas ngayong unang araw ng Agosto, asahan ang muli na namang pagtaas nito sa loob pa rin ng buwang nasabi sapagkat ngayong buwan ay taglamig.

Kailangan umanong mag-imbak ng LPG hanggang sa buwan ng Disyembre. Magiging sunod-sunod ang pagtaas ng presyo nito sa pagpasok ng "ber" month.

Bukas, Martes, unang araw ng Agosto, tataas ng halos P3 kada litro ang krudo, halos P2 bawat litro sa gasolina at P2.70 bawat litro sa kerosene o gaas.

Gayunman, ang solusyon ng mga mahihirap na nagtrabaho upang makasabay sa pagtaas ng presyo ng petrolyo ay habaan pa ang oras ng kanilang trabaho.

habang ang iba naman ay walang magawa kundi maghigpit ng kanilang "sinturon."

REMATE

ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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PRESYO NG BIGAS TATAAS

INAMIN ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., na labis siyang nag-aalala na kahit pa umangkat ng bigas ang bansa ay maaari pa ring tumaas ang presyo nito bunsod ng pananalasa ng bagyo at El Niño.

Ito ang inihayag ng Pangulo makaraang makipagpulong sa mga lokal na opisyal ng Tuguegarao kasunod ng pananalasa ng super typhoon Egay sa Cagayan at iba pang bahagi ng bansa.

Everybody is preparing for El Niño, lahat ng Southeast Asia. Sabay-sabay nagbibilihan. Kaya ninenerbyos ako dahil tataas nanaman ang presyo kahit nag-iimport tayo. That's the problem that I see in the world. Pwede tayo magbigay ng binhi sa palay, mais and high value crops," pahayag ng Pangulo.

"Ang hirap nito because 'yung palay, iniisip ko na ang supply natin 'pag nag El Niño

talaga. I'm thinking about the national supply for rice because ini-import lahat ng Indonesia, nagsara ang Vietnam, India nagsara. We have to start importing already," aniya pa rin.

Samantala, pinag-aaralan ni Pangulong Marcos na pumasok sa isang rice importation deal sa India sa pangamba na magkaroon ng rice shortage matapos na maapektuhan ng Super Typhoon Egay ang agriculture sector.

Sinabi ito ni Pangulong Marcos matapos pangunahan ang situation briefing ukol sa epekto ng Super Typhoon Egay sa Cagayan Valley.

Inamin ng Pangulo na labis siyang naalarma sa pinsalang dulot ni Egay sa sektor ng agrikultura.

Makikita sa data ng Provincial Government ng Cagayan, ang estimated cost of damage sa agriculture sector ay P539,442,500.93 as of July 28.

Ayon sa Chief Executive, walang magagawa ang bansa kundi ang muling umangkat ng bigas dahilan para tumaas ang presyo ng nasabing produkto.

Ninenerbyos ako tataas na naman ang presyo kahit mag-import tayo. That the problem that I see, anito.

Samantala, sa situation

briefing sa epekto ng Super Typhoon Egay sa Abra, sinabi naman ni Pangulong Marcos na ang pamahalaan ay nakatuon para tiyakin ang sapat na suplay ng bigas.

Kailangan na makahanap ang gobyerno ng rice suppliers upang makapagbigay ang National Food Authority ng lahat ng emergency support.

Dahil apektado rin ng bagyo ang vegetable farms sa Benguet, sinabi ng Punong Ehekutibo na ang local vegetable supply ay rebishain para idetermina ang agarang hakbang para patatagin ang presyo.

KRIS JOSE



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P2B damage to agri, infrastructure from 'Egay'

Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, CAR worst hit areas

BY VICTOR REYES

SUPER typhoon "Egay" left over P2 billion in damage to infrastructure and agriculture, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) said yesterday.

The NDRRMC also said there were 14 fatalities, 13 injured and 20 remained missing. The Office of Civil Defense had higher figures — 15 dead and over 50 injured. Its number of missing persons was the same as that of the NDRRMC.

Egay exited the Philippine area of responsibility on Thursday last week as another weather disturbance, "Falcon," intensified into a tropical depression.

Falcon, now a severe tropical

storm, is not directly affecting the country but is enhancing the southwest monsoon which will continue to bring rains to some parts of Luzon and the Visayas in the next three days, including Metro Manila.

Falcon was in the area of extreme northern Luzon yesterday but remained unlikely to make landfall. It is projected to exit today or tomorrow, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA).

PAGASA also said water level at Angat Dam, the main source of Metro Manila's water needs, was up at 193.84 meters, thanks to Egay and the southwest monsoon it enhanced. The level 13.78 meters

above the dam's 180.06 minimum operating level.

The NDRRMC, in a report, said damage to infrastructure was placed at P1.19 billion in five regions alone — Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Mimaropa, Bicol, and Western Visayas.

It said more than half of the damage was reported in Ilocos Sur, at P643.51 million to infrastructure as of yesterday.

The Department of Agriculture reported P1.54 billion in initial cost of damage to the agriculture sector.

The NDRRMC said damage to infrastructure was also reported in Davao, Soccsksargen and Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)

but it did not give an estimate.

The NDRRMC said damage to agriculture in Cagayan Valley, Calabarzon, Western Visayas and Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) was at P833.88 million.

Cagayan Valley registered P774.24 million in damage to agriculture, of which P419.58 million was in the province of Cagayan.

Ariel Nepomuceno, NDRRMC executive director and Office of Civil Defense (OCD) administrator, said in a radio interview that overall damage to agriculture was almost P1.2 billion.

He said the figure may increase as field personnel were still gathering information about damage

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ILOCOS

incurred, while assisting people affected by Egay.

Citing initial assessment, Nepomuceno said the regions of Ilocos, Cagayan Valley and CAR were the worst hit areas.

AGRI SECTOR

The Department of Agriculture's Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Operations Center said total cost of damage from Egay as of noon yesterday was equivalent to 66,075 metric tons of goods tended by 99,272 farmers in 110,086 hectares of affected areas.

It also said rice, corn, high value crops, livestock, poultry and fisheries were affected in the CAR, Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Western Visayas and Caraga.

Bulk of the recorded damage was from rice at P654.6 million followed by corn at P652.2 million, high value crops at P190.6 million, agricultural infrastructures at P20.8 million, fisheries at P14.1 million and livestock and poultry at P12.1 million.

The DA also said among forms of assistance available for distribution to affected farmers and fishers are 111,873 bags of rice seeds, 24,426 bags of corn seeds

and 2,582 kilograms of assorted vegetable seeds.

Drugs and biologics are also available for livestock and poultry, and fingerlings assistance to fisherfolk from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources

AFFECTED FAMILIES

The NDRRMC said 172,293 families or 608,979 individuals were affected by Egay in 13 regions — Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Western Visayas, Northern Mindanao, Davao, Soccsksargen, BARMM, CAR, and National Capital Region or Metro Manila.

But Nepomuceno said the affected population was already at around 260,000 families or around 921,000 individuals.

Of the affected population, NDRRMC said 24,999 families (86,085 individuals) have been displaced, though the number was down to 4,899 families or 17,666 individuals as of yesterday.

The NDRRMC also said 9,248 houses were "partially" and "totally" damaged by Egay in Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Calabarzon, Bicol, Western Visayas, Northern Mindanao, Davao, Soccsksargen, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and CAR.

Most of these damaged houses were in Cagayan Valley (7,496) and Western Visayas (1,507), the NDRRMC said.

The Office of Civil Defense-Ilocos said many areas in the region remained flooded yesterday but floodwaters are receding.

Nepomuceno said some areas in Central Luzon are still flooded, including in Olongapo City in Zambales.

Several local government units have declared a state of calamity, including Ilocos Sur, Ilocos Norte and Abra.

PCG PERSONNEL

The NDRRMC said its reported 20 missing persons does not include four Philippine Coast Guard personnel who have been accounted for on Saturday morning after being reported missing in Cagayan last Wednesday.

The PCG personnel were on the way to assist crew members of a distressed tugboat when their aluminum boat capsized.

"The good news is that they were found yesterday, they are alive," said Nepomuceno said of the four PCG men.

FALCON

Falcon intensified into a tropi-

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cal depression, from low pressure area, last Thursday, and then to a tropical storm last Friday. It entered PAR last Saturday.

As of 4 p.m. yesterday, Falcon was some 1,170 km east of extreme northern Luzon with maximum sustained winds of 110 kph near the center and gustiness of up to 135 kph. It was moving northward at 20 kph.

Weather specialist Aldazar Aurelio said Falcon is unlikely to make landfall.

Falcon is forecast to move north northwestward before turning northwestward today.

"On the track forecast, the tropical storm may exit the Philippine area of responsibility tomorrow (Monday) evening or on Tuesday early morning," said PAGASA in a bulletin issued at 5 p.m. yesterday.

"Outside the PAR region, Falcon will turn west northwestward and pass close to Okinawa Islands in the Ryukyu Archipelago on Tuesday morning before entering the East China Sea," PAGASA added.

AID

Government has so far distributed P45 million in cash aid to four provinces affected by Egay: P20 million to Abra, P10 million each

to Benguet and Mountain Province, and P5 million to Kalinga.

President Marcos Jr and Special Assistant to the President Anton Lagdameo on Saturday handed over checks to Governors Dominic Valera of Abra, Melchor Diclas of Benguet Bonifacio Lacwasan Jr. of Mountain Province and James Edubba of Kalinga, when Marcos Jr. visited Cagayan.

The President said he is satisfied with the government's response to the devastation caused by the typhoon as he vowed to continue providing aid to those affected particularly food, potable water, medicine, and shelter assistance.

Marcos on Saturday presided over a series of briefings in Bangued in Abra, Laoag City in Ilocos Norte, and Tuguegarao City in Cagayan, during which he received initial reports on the effects of Egay in Northern Luzon. He also conducted aerial inspections of the affected areas in Abra and Ilocos Norte.

The President said one of the biggest concerns is restoring the supply of electricity in the region, particularly in Ilocos Norte, his home province, where the powerline was extensively damaged.

Restoring power will take time because linemen have to meticulously repair the entire system

before power supply could be switched on, the President said, adding that the country has to get used to the new weather pattern because of the obvious effects of climate change.

Marcos also said government responders are working to reach isolated areas to bring food and basic necessities, using all means to provide assistance to far-flung communities, adding that the good thing is that the government was able to preposition food packs in critical areas before the typhoon struck.

At the House, Speaker Martin Romualdez facilitated the release of P287 million in cash assistance, relief goods, generators, and financial aid from the DSWD's Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situations (AICS) program. A huge part of the cash assistance and relief goods came from the Speaker's personal funds.

On Friday, Romualdez travelled to Baguio City to join officials in distributing aid to residents of the city and Benguet province. Since then, additional distressed households in Abra, Apayao, Benguet, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Cagayan, Apayao, Pangasinan, Pampanga, and Malolos City in Bulacan have been helped. — *With Jed Macapagal and Wendell Vigilia*



BFAR's fish hatcheries missed 2022 completion target: COA

BY PETER TABINGO

THE Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) has missed completion deadlines on 17 fish hatcheries, including eight that were wrongly reported as "completed," the Commission on Audit revealed.

Onsite inspection by the audit team of 20 hatcheries totaling P150 million earlier listed by BFAR as completed projects showed eight still had ongoing work on various components.

These are located in Perez, Quezon (P40 million); Baybay, Leyte (P20 million); Maasin, Southern Leyte (P20 million); Guiuan, Eastern Samar (P20 million); Calbayog City, Samar (P20 million); Lapinig, Northern Samar (P20 million); Aklan (P30 million); and Sultan Naga Dimaporo, Lanao del Norte (P40 million).

"Twenty projects were reported as completed in the report, however eight of them have components that are still not accomplished as of year-end. The reasons for the delays... were not disclosed/communicated by the management," the Commission on Audit said.

The audit team said the 20 hatcheries were part of 57 such projects funded by various Republic Acts passed by Congress, of which 13 were listed as "construction in progress" (CIP), 11 have ongoing feasibility studies, six are under processing of tenurial (occupancy) instruments; three were due to warding by the local government, three were still under site identification, and two have just completed feasibility studies.

Out of the 13 CIP, the COA said nine had delivery deadlines in 2022 that have already overshot their completion dates.



Irrigated farms can produce 8MMT of rice—DA

THE government is targeting to produce 8 million metric tons (MMT) of unmilled rice from irrigated areas under a program that seeks to raise the domestic production of the staple.

Department of Agriculture (DA) Undersecretary for Rice Industry Development Leocadio Sebastian said producing 8 MMT of rice can be done if it would be planted in 1 million hectares of irrigated areas.

Sebastian said planting rice in both national and communal systems of the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) could lead to a yield of 8 tons per hectare, which could be harvested early next year via the government's Masagana Rice Industry Development Program (MIRDP).

"If we are able to do this, we don't need to worry about our rice

supply next year," he said in a statement. "And if sustained, we can reach our President's [Ferdinand Marcos Jr.] self-sufficiency goal of 97.5 percent."

Achieving this goal would entail the involvement and cooperation of various agencies including the Bureau of Soils, the Philippine Research Institute (PhilRice), Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization, the Cooperatives Development Authority, and the Department of Agrarian Reform.

The DA official said the government is hopeful that the private sector would get involved in the MIRDP and that farmers would receive advice on how they could avail of government interventions and technologies which they could use to maximize their production.

"We need to mainstream the

transformation efforts into policies, programs and investment plans."

Meanwhile, NIA Acting Administrator Eddie Guillen said

the agency aims to fast-track the implementation of public irrigation projects nationwide.

As of December 31, 2022, NIA

... said it irrigated 68 percent of the total 3.12 million hectares of irrigable land nationwide.

The Marcos administration is targeting to irrigate the remaining 998,000 hectares to boost agricultural production.

The agency said it is keen on public-private partnership (PPP) schemes to fast-track irrigation development.

It has identified 50 potential projects for PPP with seven revenue streams, namely, hydroelectric power, solar power, aquaculture, wind energy, bulk water supply, water treatment and carbon credits.

So far, the NIA Board of Directors has approved the development and implementation of the three priority irrigation projects for PPP.

With an aggregate amount of P37.9 billion, the projects

identified for possible implementation via PPP were Ilocos Norte-Ilocos Sur-Abra Irrigation Project II (INISAIP II), Tumauni River Multipurpose Project (TRMP), and Upper Banaoang Irrigation Project.

The Philippines imported a record high of 3.826 million MMT of rice last year, according to data from the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI).

BPI data showed the Philippines overshot the projected 3.8 MMT import volume cited by the United States Department of Agriculture-Foreign Agricultural Service in Manila.

International market watchers and local experts have pointed out that the country imported a lot of rice last year to compensate for the reduction in domestic palay output due to reduced fertilizer application. *Raadee S. Sausa*



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'Egay' and monsoon kill 16; farm damage rises to P1.3B

BY RENE ACOSTA
@reneacostaBM
& RAADEE S. SAUSA

THE government said the death toll from Super typhoon Egay and the prevailing southwest monsoon rose to 16.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) also said in its latest bulletin that losses incurred by farmers and fishers climbed to P1.3 billion.

The latest casualty number was reflected in the report of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) on Sunday, but said the number of deaths is still being validated, as it reported that flooding in some areas of the country have already receded.

Severe flooding was also reported in some areas in Central Luzon due to the rains brought by Egay, the enhanced southwest monsoon and tropical storm Falcon, which the state weather bureau said will develop into a typhoon on Sunday evening or on Monday.

The NDRRMC said response agencies and personnel continued to deliver emergency relief goods

and other forms of quick assistance to typhoon and flood-affected provinces around the country, including in Ilocos Norte where United States Marines and Filipino soldiers brought and unloaded emergency supplies.

Members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Philippine National Police and the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) have been in the forefront of the ongoing humanitarian assistance and disaster response operations.

The uniformed services and other agencies of the government were also in the thick of road clearing and rehabilitation efforts, including restoring power supply and telecommunication lines. At least 124 cities and municipalities are yet to be reconnected to power supply.

As of Sunday, the NDRRMC said at least 291,262 families or 1,029,724 individuals in 2,615 barangays in Northern, Central and Southern Luzon, Southern Tagalog, Bicol region, National Capital Region, Cordillera Administrative Region, and a large part of the Visayas and Mindanao have been affected by Egay.

SEE "EGAY," A2

The PCG said its search and rescue teams were continuing to look for its four personnel who have gone missing after an attempt to rescue crewmen of a vessel in Cagayan four days ago.

In Binangonan, Rizal, the PCG has already stopped its underwater search, and rescue and retrieval operations for victims of a motorized banca that flipped over on Thursday in Talim Island wherein at least 27 passengers died and 43 others rescued.

Its teams also responded to the vessel M/Tug Sedar 7 that ran aground in the vicinity waters off Palau Island, Barangay San Vicente, Santa Ana, Cagayan on Saturday, and assisted the crew members of M/Tug Iroquois in the waters of Camiguin Island, Calayan, also in Cagayan.

The NDRRMC said at least 21,978 houses were either damaged or

destroyed while at least P4 billion worth of infrastructure projects were likewise destroyed.

Production loss

THE DA said the typhoon affecting 98,969 hectares of agricultural lands and 91,268 farmers.

"The increase is because of the updated reports from Cordillera Administrative Region, Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley, Western Visayas, and Central Luzon," the agency said. Egay destroyed commodities like rice, corn, high value crops, livestock and poultry, and fisheries.

The typhoon destroyed 38,401 metric tons (MT) of corn planted in 58,497 hectares. The corn crops were worth P648.2 million.

It also destroyed rice crops worth P486.8 million and P182-million high-value crops.



DoF orders agencies to address underspending

THE DEPARTMENT of Finance (DoF) ordered government agencies to come up with a "catch-up" plan to address underspending in the first half of the year.

"We talked to agencies, and we asked them to come up with their own catch-up plan. The problem is they are underspending. Their budget has been increased significantly this year (but) they're still not spending," Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno told reporters at the DoF office in Pasay City, Friday.

"We are still optimistic they will be able to catch up."

The National Government's budget deficit narrowed by 18% to P551.7 billion in the January-to-June period as revenue collections exceeded the target while spending slowed. However, it was 28.49% lower than the P771.5-billion program for the period.

State spending inched up by 0.42% to P2.41 trillion in the first half but missed its P2.58-trillion expenditure program by 6.6%.

"I'm worried we aren't meeting our expenditure target. I'm not happy with a smaller deficit," Mr. Diokno added.

This year, the government has set a budget deficit ceiling of P1.499 trillion, equivalent to 6.1% of the gross domestic product.

Mr. Diokno said agencies may have been underspending due to "birth pains" as the Marcos administration has only had one year in office.

"There are adjustments. Let's call it birth pains. Congress made a lot of changes in the budget, there are new projects introduced in the budget. And since they are new, they may not have feasibility studies and engineering (plans) so they cannot start building," he said.

"Though our underspending is not as big, unlike other years. This time, it's just a matter of procurement delays. The weather was co-operating in the first six months," he added.

Mr. Diokno expressed optimism that government agencies will still be able to catch up with spending in the second half.

Data from the Department of Budget and Management showed that government agencies' budget utilization rate stood at 98% at the end of the second quarter, slightly slower than the year-ahead pace of 99%.

As of end-June, the newly formed Department of Migrant Workers registered the lowest utilization rate at 44%.

This was followed by the Department of Agriculture (76%), the Office of the Vice-President, the Department of Information and Communications Technology, and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (80%).

REVENUES

Meanwhile, Mr. Diokno said that the government is planning to maintain its full-year revenue program for the year.

Underspending, SI/11

*Underspending,
from SI/1*

"We're not revising. In fact, for the Bureau of Customs (BoC), we actually adjusted it downward. That's mainly because oil prices have gone down significantly, and the peso has stabilized. If you look at the peso value of our oil imports, there was a huge decline. So, we adjusted the target of the BoC," he added.

The government plans to collect P3.729 trillion in revenues this year, equivalent to 15.2% of gross domestic product.

In the first half, revenues rose by 7.68% year on year to P1.86 trillion, exceeding the P1.81-trillion program by 2.72%.

According to the BoC's Financial Service, the agency's adjusted collection goal for this year is at P874.166 billion. This is lower than its previous target of P901.3 billion.

The Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) raised its revenue collection goal for this year to P2.64 trillion, slightly higher than its previous target of P2.599 trillion.

Mr. Diokno said that the government has been efficient in collecting nontax revenues.

"I think we are really performing very well. Right now, if my recollection is correct, we (have raised) around P90 billion from privatization. During other administrations, that's what they achieved from their entire term. We are very quick to deal with privatization, that's why nontax revenues grew much faster than tax revenues, though both are above target," he added.

Nontax revenues rose by 9.13% to P203.1 billion in the January-to-June period. Revenues from other offices, which include privatization proceeds, fees, and charges, jumped by 34.26% to P110.2 billion, surpassing its P81.7-billion target.

Mr. Diokno also said that the government is also working on reviewing the regulations of its collection agencies to improve the ease of doing business.

"We continue to review our existing regulations for both the BIR and BoC. There is a plan to do e-invoicing for the BoC... so importation will be more efficient. We continue to improve the regulations, simplify requirements," he said. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**



NEDA may apply rice tariff model to other farm commodity imports

THE Rice Tariffication Law can serve as a model for imports of other farm commodities, National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said.

"We must learn from the lessons from the implementation (of the Rice Tariffication Law) and see how we can expand that to other commodities. We need to make our trade policy more transparent and supportive of our economic agenda," Mr. Balisacan told reporters on Friday.

Signed in 2019, the Rice Tariffication Law liberalized rice imports by allowing private parties to import rice, formerly a mo-

nopoly of the National Food Authority (NFA). Importers must pay tariffs on Southeast Asian grain of 35%, earning revenue for the government in the process.

The law also limited the NFA's functions to maintaining a rice reserve to stabilize prices and supply grain to calamity-hit regions.

Mr. Balisacan said that the law has so far achieved its objective of keeping rice prices stable.

"Our assessment so far is that the law has done a good job in achieving what we wanted, and that is stabilizing the price of rice, making the market more predict-

able and efficient so that when there are sharp swings in the prices, the private sector can respond quickly or (the government) can respond quickly," he said.

"We have to strike a balance, of course, in achieving those objectives, particularly food security and this whole business of picking up the industry and getting it to generate more quality jobs," he added.

In the five months to May, the Philippines imported 1.62 million metric tons (MT) of rice, the Bureau of Plant Industry estimated. This was 7.69% higher year on year. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jacson**



Food logistics action plan could be implemented as early as this year

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said its food logistics action plan could be implemented this year, with economic managers declaring their support for the proposal.

Trade Undersecretary Ruth B. Castelo told reporters on the sidelines of the Post-State of the Nation Address discussions in Pasay City last week that the members of the Economic Development Group (EDG) have been supportive of the proposal.

"Yes (it can be rolled out this year) ... We have short-term, immediate-term plans. There are things that we can do now," Ms. Castelo said.

"There were a lot of questions and then the challenges that it posed, but generally, the

other members of the EDG are kind of supportive. We hope that this (support continues) until it reaches the President," she added.

The EDG members include the DTI, Department of Finance, the National Economic and Development Authority, the Presidential Management Staff, the Department of Budget and Management, and **Department of Agriculture**.

According to Ms. Castelo, the projected budget for the logistics plan is still being prepared.

"The enumerated deliverables are due by 2026, if we (start) now," Ms. Castelo said.

On July 25, Ms. Castelo presented the DTI's food logistics plan, which also seeks address hoarding and smuggling.

Ms. Castelo said the plan would require an executive order or legislation before being implemented.

Some of the measures included in the six-point agenda include a moratoriums on pass-through fees and additional port fees and charges, as well as zero tolerance on gray costs and legislation to regulate high international shipping charges.

"Controversial, but once it's done, it's going to provide us the results that we want," Ms. Castelo said.

Ms. Castelo added that the DTI will adopt a supply chain control-tower approach that would oversee the supply chain from the farm gate to retail. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**



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Site selection ongoing for agri mechanization facility

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it is evaluating locations for an agri-machinery assembly center to be established in partnership with the Korea Agricultural Machinery Industry Cooperative (Kamico).

"For the site, the President gave us three months," Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel V. de Mesa told reporters on the sidelines of Post-State of the Nation Address briefings last week.

"There are now candidate sites that we are looking at, one of which is in Cabanatuan,

the second in Tiaong, Quezon, and a third in Batangas," he added.

The DA and Kamico signed a memorandum of understanding on the assembly center partnership last month.

The facility will have a research and development center and a training area.

Kamico's initial investment is \$30 million for phase one of the project, rising to \$90 million in the second phase, the Presidential Communications Office said.

A technical working group was created to finalize the details of the project, including the project site, investment scheme, institutional arrangement, among others.

"Kamico is the umbrella organization of the Korean agri-machinery industry. The group will bring in private investments," Mr. De Mesa said.

Kamico has a membership of about 700 Korean agricultural machinery manufacturers. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

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Agencies ordered to draw up spending catch-up plans

The Department of Finance (DOF) has ordered state agencies to come up with their spending catch-up plans as the government expressed concern that their low budget utilization may impact growth this year.

In a briefing, Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno said he is worried the administration is not meeting its expenditure target even as the budget deficit continues to ease.

"We talked to the agencies and we asked them to come up with their own catch-up plan because the problem there is they are underspending," Diokno said.

"While their budget has increased significantly this year, they are still not spending that [much], so we expect them to come up with their catch-up plan," he said.

This comes as the cash operations report for the first semester showed that the budget gap shrank to P552 billion as revenue collections exceeded targets.

But on the downside, government spending moved by just less than a percentage to P2.41 trillion. This is also 6.6 percent short of the P2.58 trillion programmed spending set by the economic team for the period.

One year into the Marcos administration, Diokno said government agencies are still going through adjustments, which he referred to as "birth pains."

"Sometimes Congress makes a lot of changes in the budget so there are new projects introduced, and since they are new, they do not yet have feasibility studies or detailed engineering," Diokno said.

"The underspending is not that big unlike in previous years. This time it's just a matter of procurement delays," he said.

Nonetheless, the economic team head maintained that there is a need to meet spending targets as these are needed to hit growth expectations for the year.

Diokno said the El Niño forecast could help fast-track infrastructure projects for the remainder of the year.

Data from the Department of Budget and Management showed government agencies recorded a slightly lower utilization rate of 98 percent in the first semester, from 99 percent in the six-month period

in 2022.

The Department of Migrant Workers still registered the worst utilization rate as of June at only 44 percent of its cash allocations totaling P3.22 billion out of the P7.3 billion allocation.

The Department of Agriculture came in second with a utilization rate of 76 percent at P30.78 billion out of P40.24 billion, while the Office of the Vice President, Department of Information and Communications Technology and Department of Social Welfare and Development were tied in third with a spending rate of 80 percent.

On the revenue side, the govern-

ment saw total collection in the first half improving 7.68 percent to P1.86 trillion as against the P1.73 trillion in the same period last year, as both tax and non-tax revenues increased.

It also surpassed the programmed revenue collection of P1.81 trillion or by nearly three percent.

As of now, Diokno said the government is sticking to its full year target of P3.7 trillion. —Louise Maureen Simeon



State of calamity up in Bataan, Pampanga

By RIC SAPNU AND BELLA CARIASO

Floods and heavy downpour spawned by Super Typhoon Egay have prompted authorities to place the province of Bataan and four municipalities in Pampanga under a state of calamity.

Meanwhile, the provincial government of Bulacan is considering a similar declaration due to floods that affected 12 towns and two cities.

Bataan Gov. Joet Garcia announced on Saturday that the province is under a state of calamity due to the recent typhoon and the bad weather caused by the southwest monsoon and Tropical Storm Falcon.

Garcia said the bad weather destroyed up to P22.38 million worth of agricultural crops.

Up to 639 families are staying in different evacuation centers, he said.

As this developed, the towns of Macabebe, Masantol, San Simon and Sto. Tomas in Pampanga have been placed under a state of calamity due to massive floods.

Sto. Tomas was the latest to be placed under a state of calamity following a special session by the municipal board yesterday morning.

Several major roads in the province such as portions of the Apalit-Macabebe-Masantol Road, Bahay Pare-San Luis-Sto. Domingo Road and the Candaba-San Miguel Road were impassable to all types of vehicles as of yesterday.

Meanwhile, Bulacan Gov. Daniel Fernando said he might declare a state of calamity, although he would finalize it once he arrives from South Korea.

"I am scheduled to go home tonight (last night) from my mission (in South Korea). We are preparing the data for the declaration," Fernando said.

Earlier, Ilocos Norte was the first province in Northern Luzon to declare a state of calamity followed by Cagayan, Ilocos Sur, Abra and several towns and cities in Pangasinan.

The provincial government of Bulacan blamed the release of water from Bustos Dam for the massive flooding.

Fernando said he has called the attention of the National Irrigation Administration (NIA), which handles the operation of Bustos Dam.

"According to a report from our PDRRMO, at least 700 cubic meters per second of water were released. I was furious," Fernando said, referring to the provincial disaster risk reduction and management office.

Based on video footage provided to him by the PDRRMO, he said the volume of water released from the dam was way more than what the NIA claimed.

"I saw the video. The flow of water at the releasing gate was big," he said, adding that at least five gates of the dam are currently releasing water.

"I have been questioning the (stability) of the gates. Only five of the six gates are functioning and these five are unstable," he said.

Fernando said the flooding was exacerbated by the high tide and the monsoon rain.

"Rains are expected to persist as Typhoon Falcon will enhance the monsoon," he said.

The Calumpit District Hospital in Calumpit, Bulacan stopped accepting patients yesterday afternoon due to the flood.

In an advisory sent to the provincial government, hospital administrators said patients who have appointments were advised to reset their schedules.

Patients currently admitted in the hospital were transferred to the Bulacan Medical Center in Malolos for continuous treatment.

Emergency cases were given first-aid before being transferred to other hospitals, the advisory read.

Price freeze

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) is implementing price control on prime commodities in all areas hit by the calamities.

DTI Secretary Alfredo Pascual told journalists in Laoag, Ilocos Norte that traders should follow the price freeze order, otherwise they would face consequences.

Republic Act 7581 or the Price Act provides that prices of basic commodities should automatically be frozen in areas placed under a state of calamity.

DTI personnel will be deployed in typhoon-hit areas to monitor and ensure that the price freeze is properly implemented. — **With Jun Elias, Ramon Efren Lazaro**



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DA: Egay agri damage hits P1.53 B

By BELLA CARIASO

The damage of Typhoon Egay to the agriculture sector has reached P1.53 billion, affecting 99,272 farmers and fisherfolk in eight regions, the Department of Agriculture (DA) reported yesterday.

In its latest bulletin, the DA said that at least 66,075 metric tons (MT) of produce were lost, covering 110,086 hectares of agricultural areas in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), Ilocos region (Region 1), Cagayan Valley (Region 2), Central

Turn to Page 6

Luzon (Region 3), Calabarzon (Region 4), Mimaropa (Region 4-A), Western Visayas (Region 6) and Caraga (Region 13).

"The affected commodities include rice, corn, high value crops, livestock and poultry, and fisheries. Damage was also incurred in agricultural facilities and fishing paraphernalia," the DA said.

According to the DA, the damage and losses were recorded for palay, amounting to P654.6 million or 17,705 MT covering at least 50,050 hectares.

Meanwhile, damage to corn plantations reached P652.2 million or 38,587 MT covering at least 58,585 hectares of land.

It added that for high value crops, the total damage reached P190.6 million covering at least 1,452 hectares; livestock and poultry, P12.1 million covering 9,143 heads.

On the other hand, at least P20.8 million worth of agricultural infrastructures were also destroyed by Typhoon Egay.

"These values are subject to validation. Additional damage and losses are expected in areas affected by the continuous rain and strong winds brought by Egay. Through its regional field offices, the department

is assessing the impacts caused by Egay in the agriculture and fishery sector," the DA added.

The DA gave assurance that it is continuously coordinating with local government units (LGUs) to ensure assistance to the affected farmers and fisherfolk.

It said that a total of 111,873 bags of rice seeds, 14,426 bags of corn seeds and 2,582 kilos of assorted vegetable seeds, drugs and biologics for livestock and poultry, and fingerlings to affected fisherfolk were distributed to CAR, regions 1, 2, 3, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, 6 and 13.

According to the DA, the affected farmers and fishers can avail themselves of the P25,000 loan under the Survival and Recovery Loan Program from the Agricultural Credit Policy Council.

It said that at least 500 million was allocated under the Quick Response Fund for the rehabilitation of affected areas.

Damage to Negros agri, livestock

The Provincial Disaster Management Program Division (PDMPD) reported yesterday that the damage to agricultural, livestock and fishery products in Negros Occidental, as a result of Typhoon Egay, is placed at

P91.8 million.

Of the P91,819,666.22 damage, the agricultural sector sustained P45,118,398, while the fisheries sector suffered P46,098,418.11 in losses, and P602,830 losses for the livestock sector.

The PDMPD also reported 697 houses were either destroyed or partially damaged by continuing rains, with 28 families, composed of 102 persons, still staying in evacuation centers as of July 28.

MMDA sends team to CAR

The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) dispatched a 20-man team to CAR to aid ongoing response operations in communities affected by Egay.

MMDA acting Chairman Don Artes announced that the contingent from the MMDA Public Safety Division departed for CAR on Saturday night.

Three teams will be sent to Kabayan, Abra, while one team will head to Benguet, the MMDA said in a statement.

The group will set up water purifiers in communities facing water supply issues. The solar-powered water purifier units that they will bring have the capacity to filter 180 gallons of water per hour.

They will also assist in road clearing operations in areas that experienced flooding and landslides.

The MMDA team is equipped with 50 units of water purifiers, chainsaws, rotary saws, generators, rechargeable lights and other necessary tools.

AFP still looking for terrorist groups

Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief of staff Gen. Romeo Brawner Jr. said that troops being deployed to join humanitarian and relief activities to help residents and localities affected by the typhoon are still on the lookout for communist terrorist group attacks.

Brawner, in a radio interview on dzBB yesterday morning, said that the AFP has noted that rebel groups take advantage of such calamities and post-calamity activities of the AFP to stage armed attacks on government forces, and so have made sure to continue their anti-insurgency operations parallel to humanitarian operations conducted by the military.

"While we help in these so-called HADR or humanitarian assistance and disaster response, with all the core competencies of the Armed Forces... we ensure



we still watch over the security of the state. Firstly, in terms of internal security, we continue our operations against communist terrorists... Sometimes it is really saddening because they even stage ambush attacks on our soldiers who help disaster victims or they seize relief goods meant for the disaster victims," Brawner said in a mix of Filipino and English.

"There were instances when they attacked not only soldiers but policemen, and also civilians. That's why when we have calamities, we remain on red alert," he added.

Marcos wants agri damage reports

President Marcos has ordered officials in all LGUs adversely affected by Egay (Dokuri) to submit a detailed report on the damage to agriculture so the national government can immediately address the particular needs of farmers in their jurisdictions.

Marcos, who is also agriculture secretary, made the directive during situation briefings he presided separately with governors in Regions 1, 2 and CAR on Saturday.

"We will provide as much

as we can in terms of assistance, in terms of seedlings," Marcos told local chief executives during a briefing in Cagayan Valley.

The President said they would determine the variety of rice that would be distributed to affected farmers in Northern Luzon that can withstand the rainy season.

Marcos presided over briefings in Bangued, Abra; Laoag City, Ilocos Norte and Tuguegarao, Cagayan. He also conducted aerial inspection of the affected areas in Abra and Ilocos Norte.

Based on initial report of the Department of Agriculture, the sector incurred approximately P1.243 billion in damage and losses in the three regions.

The figure is still expected to

rise in the coming days as more LGUs submit their respective reports, the agency said.

Marcos said the government would also conduct an inventory of damaged public schools to ensure a smooth opening of classes in August.

Ferry victims' families get support

Meanwhile, bereaved families of those who died in the Binangonan tragedy are getting assistance from the Department of Health (DOH).

According to DOH, mental health and psychological support as well as medical assistance shall be provided to the grieving families.

"The DOH is focused on sending our condolences to the

families left behind and in sending the much-needed support to them," the DOH-Calabarzon said in a statement.

The agency also expressed sadness over the death of health worker who was on her way to perform her duty when the tragedy struck.

"We are deeply saddened by the death of another fellow health worker, who risked her life in the performance of her duty," DOH said.

The *MB Aya Express* capsized in Laguna Lake near Binangonan, Rizal while en route to Talim Island last Thursday, resulting in the death of at least 27 people.

- With Gilbert Bayoran, Mark Ernest Villeza, Rainier Allan Ronda, Helen Flores, Mayen Jaymalin



Storm damage to cause price hikes

FOOD prices are expected to increase in the wake of Typhoon "Egay," which last week battered the northern provinces of the country.

The Department of Agriculture's Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Operations Center reported that the damage and losses caused by the storm had increased to P1.36 billion and 62,259 metric tons (MT) of agricultural products.

"Storm damage could reduce output and supplies that could lead to some uptick in prices and overall inflation," Michael Ricafort, chief economist at Rizal Commercial Bank Corp., said.

"Cagayan Valley and the rest of Northern Luzon are among the biggest producers of rice, corn and other agricultural food products," he noted.

In Metro Manila, locally pro-

duced rice was priced at P37 to P60 per kilogram (kg) as of Thursday, slightly higher than P36 to P60 per kg a week ago, the DA's price monitoring showed.

Prices of carrots ranged from P160 to P260 per kg, higher than the previous week's P120 to P250 per kg. Tomatoes, meanwhile, sold at P80 to P120 per kg from P60 to P100 previously.

► **Price B3**

■ PRICE FROM B1

Storm

The price of whole chicken also increased to P170 to P210 per kg from P160 to P200, and a kilo of round scad or galunggong sold from P200 to P260 compared to the lowest price of P180 the previous week.

"We could see a spike in prices as supply chains are disrupted," Nicholas Antonio Mapa, ING Manila Bank senior economist, said.

"The government should help ensure ample supply of basic goods and services to help mitigate the impact of the storm damage," he added.

In its latest bulletin, the DA

said that Egay had affected 91,268 farmers and 98,969 hectares of agricultural land devoted to rice, corn, high-value crops, livestock and poultry.

Corn logged the biggest affected area at 58,497 hectares, with 38,401 MT of corn worth P648.2 million said to have been damaged.

Rice recorded a volume loss of 14,707 MT worth P486.58 million while the damage to livestock and poultry and high-value crops reached P11.9 million and P182.4 million, respectively.

The fisheries sector also sustained damage worth P14.1 million, and the damage to agricultural infrastructures was estimated to have hit P20.8 million.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



Senate urged to assess govt plans for El Niño

BY ASHZEL HACHERO

SAYING that the El Niño weather phenomenon could exacerbate poverty levels in the country, Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian yesterday called for a Senate review of the government's readiness to respond to the potential consequences of the climate pattern on inflation, food production and power costs.

"There is an urgent need to assess the capability of concerned government agencies and determine the planned interventions to mitigate the impact of El Niño. The entire Philippine government should be prepared to cushion the

detrimental effects of the El Niño on the country's food, energy, and economic security," Gatchalian said in a statement.

He said the condition is expected to have a negative impact on inflation due to reduced food production and potentially higher electricity prices.

He added it could also affect the agricultural sector's contribution to the country's gross domestic product (GDP).

"Based on a 2019 World Bank report, recurring El Niño's occurrences in the country are estimated to cause national GDP losses from 0.29 percent to 1.57 percent and

agricultural GDP losses between 1.73 percent and 6.9 percent," Gatchalian said.

He said that if the El Niño happened last year, the government could have suffered between P57.84 billion to P313.11 billion losses in the national GDP and between P30.85 billion and P124.31 billion losses in the agricultural sector's GDP.

Gatchalian stressed there is a pressing need for the government to come up with short and long-term actions to cushion the impacts of the El Niño as he reiterated his call for the formulation of comprehensive measures to

address the threat recurring water shortage in the country.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration has warned that the El Niño phenomenon could cause dry spells and droughts in the country in the last quarter of the year until the first half of 2024.

The state weather bureau said that at least 28 areas could experience dry conditions and 36 others may record dry spells by the end of 2023, while at least 26 areas in Luzon, including Metro Manila, may experience drought by January 2024.



'Govt keen on easing trade restrictions on other goods'

By CAI U. ORDINARIO [@caiordinario](#)

THE Rice Trade Liberalization Act (RTL) could serve as a blueprint for the crafting of a similar measure for other commodities, according to the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda).

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan made this pronouncement to reporters on the sidelines of the recent banking reception for the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) 30th anniversary.

Balisacan also said the economic team and the Marcos cabinet will not backtrack on the RTL as they consider it "a success" in terms of stabilizing the price of rice.



BALISACAN

BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

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"(The law was able) to stabilize the price of rice and make the market more predictable and efficient so that when there are sharp swings in the prices, the private sector can respond quickly or we can respond quickly," he added.

University of the Philippines School of Economics (UPSE) Associate Professor Karl Robert L. Jandoc earlier told the BUSINESSMIRROR that there are concerns over a possible reversal of the RTL.

"We are not talking about that (backtracking on RTL), at least among the economic team or in the Cabinet. I think the core assessment of ours is the RTL has done a good job in achieving what we wanted," Balisacan said.

The concerns revolve around allowing the National Food Authority (NFA) to intervene in the international market. But Jandoc said the law is the only reason why rice prices have not been a significant

cause for higher inflation.

Balisacan said expanding the RTL to include other commodities is "a step in the right direction" to achieving "a more transparent trade policy" that is supportive of the country's economic development goals.

This needs to be transparent, nonetheless, should be balanced with the need to achieve food security and making industry more productive.

"My feeling is you must learn from the lessons of that implementation and see how we can expand that to other commodities. I think

we need to make our trade policy more transparent and supportive of our economic agenda," Balisacan said.

These efforts, Balisacan said, will help the economy create "not just jobs but decent jobs" that are able to provide incomes to Filipinos that could keep them out of poverty.

Balisacan said more needs to be done to improve the quality of jobs in the Philippines to reduce poverty. This is despite the unemployment number declining to 4.3 percent, the kind of jobless rate found in developed countries.

He said attaining a low jobless rate is different from creating decent jobs, which would allow the Philippines to bring down the poverty rate to 9 percent by 2028.

By improving the workforce, he said the government can also attract investments that will allow the establishment of factories and new age businesses—those into artificial intelligence—that will ensure the sustainability of the growth of the economy not only today but in the years to come.

By building factories and plants that create new equipment as well as investments in roads and bridges, more businesses will come to the Philippines and provide quality jobs to Filipinos, he added.



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Inflation in 'right direction,' but PHL faces persistent upside risks

THE BANGKO SENTRAL ng Pilipinas (BSP) needs to ensure that the downtrend in inflation is "more permanent," amid persistent upside risks arising from the El Niño weather event and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"Inflation is in the right direction but we have to be able to set in the measures which will make it long term and sustainable. Right now, we're lucky that fuel prices are going down. But that's luck. We need to make it more permanent," Monetary Board member Bruce J. Tolentino told reporters on the sidelines of the annual reception for the banking community on Friday.

At the same event, BSP Governor Eli M. Remolona said it is too early to "declare victory" against inflation, even if it is on its way to the 2-4% target band.

"Core inflation remains high. There are still upside risks to inflation — for example, risks in the form of El Niño and further supply shocks. We will wait and see. We will analyze the data as they arrive, and that analysis will decide monetary policy down the road," Mr. Remolona said.

The BSP expects inflation to return to the 2-4% target range by the fourth quarter this year, with full-year inflation hitting 5.4% in

2023. Inflation is expected to decelerate further to 2.9% in 2024.

According to Mr. Tolentino, the blockage of wheat and fertilizer exports due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine will impact prices of rice and corn globally.

"We're reacting to international developments particularly to fuel, but if Ukraine gives a kick to food and fuel prices, we have a problem," he said.

Earlier this month, Russia quit the Black Sea Grain Initiative which allowed Ukraine to export grain to help prevent a global food crisis.

Risks, SI/11

Risks,
from SI/1

"There're still long-term underlying productivity issues that we have to resolve, and those long-term underlying productivity issues are all about agriculture," Mr. Tolentino said, adding the government should consider amending the tariff structure to support price stability.

National Economic and Development Authority Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said inflation likely further moderated in July, but cited risks from rising oil prices.

"We are seeing oil prices going up a bit. We'll see how Russia moves in the Ukrainian exports of grain, but I will say that it will not be as bad in terms of the global reaction of the markets as before, because I suppose that you know, the world learned from those further shocks," he told reporters on Friday.

Mr. Balisacan also noted the impact of Typhoon Egay, which has caused P1.5 billion in agriculture damage so far.

"That's really a very serious concern because we never expected this kind of flooding. The assessment is still going on," he said.

"They're monitoring the situation, especially the impact on agriculture because it's flooding in the Ilocos Region. Benguet has also been hit hard and that's where a lot of vegetables come from. We don't have much of the data now. Hopefully, it's not that serious," he added.

POLICY

Meanwhile, Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno, a member of the Monetary Board, said that the BSP does not have to match the recent rate hike made by the US Federal Reserve.

"I don't think we have to match, that's my view. We have to monitor other indicators like inflation and what's the impact of this recent adjustment on the global economy and the domestic economy," he said in a press chat on Friday.

The US central bank hiked the federal funds rate target range by 25 basis points (bps) to 5.25-5.5% last week, the highest level in 22 years.

The BSP also raised its key policy rate by 425 bps to 6.25% from May 2022 to March 2023. It will meet again on Aug. 17 to discuss the country's policy settings.

The interest rate differential between the Fed and the BSP now stands at 75 bps.

"When we meet on Aug. 17, we will look at all this. (We also consider) the impact of the slowdown. We have to think, we might have a recession here. We will look at all the numbers. We are data dependent," Mr. Diokno said.

Mr. Diokno said that there have been times where the interest rate differential between the Fed and the BSP is narrow. — **Keisha B. Ta-asan and Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**



Inflation expected to ease anew in July

BY NIÑA MYKA PAULINE ARCEO

INFLATION will likely move closer to falling back within target in July due to base effects and lower energy prices, analysts polled by *The Manila Times* said.

The median forecast in a poll of 11 analysts was 4.8 percent, an easing from the June result of 5.4 percent and near the upper end of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' (BSP) 2.0- to 4.0-percent target range.

Inflation, which began surging last year in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, came in at 6.4

percent in July 2022. It continued to rise for the next six months, hitting a 14-year high of 8.7 percent in January this year.

The rate has since eased for the last five months in the wake of aggressive monetary tightening by the BSP and the run could be extended once data for July is released this Friday, August 4.

Ruben Carlo Asuncion, chief economist at Union Bank of the Philippines, said inflation would likely drop to 4.5 percent but did not provide an explanation.

China Banking Corp. chief economist Domini Velasquez, meanwhile, offered a 4.7-percent forecast and said that lower electricity rates would offset higher food and fuel prices.

She noted that electricity costs were substantially lower, especially in Mindanao and Batangas, compared to the previous month and that this "likely resulted in a negative month-on-month inflation rate for non-food items."

A more robust peso might have also contributed to lower inflation, Velasquez added.

Mitzie Irene Conchada from De La Salle University, who also had a 4.7-percent forecast, said prices had dropped but noted that consumer demand remained high, particularly in the services sector, due to "revenge spending."

HSBC Global Research economist Aris Dacanay, for his part, said inflation may ease to 4.8 percent due to base effects, lower electricity prices and a stronger peso.

"Inflation momentum likely weakened marginally due to the

➤ **4.8% B2**

■ **4.8% FROM B1**

Inflation

rate hikes done last year," he added.

ANZ Research economist Debalika Sarkar also expects a 4.8-percent result and said that core inflation, which eased to 7.4 percent in June, could decline to 6.6 percent in July.

Nicholas Antonio Mapa, senior economist at ING Manila Bank, said inflation could ease to 4.8 percent due to beneficial base effects and lower global commodity prices.

"We could see inflation dip back within BSP's target band as early as September and at the midpoint of the target by October, barring any adverse conditions," he added.

Meanwhile, Philippine National Bank economist Alvin Arogo pointed to the persistence of second-round effects, the potential for climate-related disturbances and the impact of oil

production cuts but forecast a 4.9-percent inflation print "due to favorable base effects and lower Meralco (Manila Electric Co.) charges."

"The favorable base effects will continue to be the main driver for the monthly print of year-on-year price growth to be lower than 4.0 percent in the fourth quarter of 2023," he added.

Makoto Tsuchiya, assistant economist at Oxford Economics Japan, also expects a continued easing but only to 5.0 percent due to base effects and a moderation in food prices.

He noted that a recent turmoil in the rice market, as well as any further shocks to commodity prices from the Russia-Ukraine war, remained risks to the inflation outlook.

Sun Life Investment Management and Trust Corp. Patrick Ella, who had the same 5.0-percent projection, said that rice prices were a concern.

"El Niño is the risk for the balance of the year," he added.

Emmanuel Lopez of the Colegio de San Juan de Letran Graduate School also expects an easing to 5.0 percent, which he said would be due to cheaper imports following the peso's appreciation against the dollar.

He added that the government's relatively robust fiscal position, which allowed the private sector to take on a more active role in the economy, also played a part.

The highest forecast came from Michael Ricafort, chief economist of Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., who based this on a recent increase in rice prices.

"The possible reduction of rice imports by the Philippines would also coincide with the adverse effects of the El Niño drought," he noted, "especially from the fourth quarter of 2023 to the first quarter of 2024, which would potentially reduce local rice output which would also lead to some uptick in local rice prices and overall inflation."



Investors monitor earnings, July inflation

By JAMES A. LOYOLA

The local stock market is seen to take more cues from second quarter corporate earnings' reports as well as the July inflation due later in the week.

"Investors are expected to look forward to more second quarter corporate reports. Hopes that the upcoming second quarter corporate results would be strong may help in sustaining the market's position above the 6,600 support line," said Philstocks Financial Research Manager Japhet Tantiangco said.

In line with this, 2Tradeasia.com said "some softness in consumer retail should offset strength in banking, power, and gaming, which further highlight the value of staying sector selective in the short or medium term."

"Investors are also expected to look towards the country's upcoming July inflation data. A continued downtrend in inflation is seen to spur optimism which in turn could lift the market

higher," added Tantiangco.

2Tradeasia.com warned that "the presence of Typhoon Egay (and potentially Typhoon Falcon early August) may affect August and September inflation given damages in agriculture-heavy regions (Cagayan Valley, Cordilleras, Central Luzon)."

It noted that, "the 6,700 level is proving itself a tough psychological barrier to crack, with the index having peaked here last May. Inflation data and more earnings momentum from big names could help drive more activity, but ultimately brace for some lethargy on the onset of the Ghost festival (Aug. 16 to Sept. 14)."

For stock picks, Abacus Securities Corporation is recommending Aboitiz Power as "its robust earnings performance for the first half is already way ahead of expectations and should thus warrant upgrades."

"At its current price levels, the stock is still trading at 1 standard deviation below its historical mean. Moreover, although energy demand might have softened in the past weeks

due to the rainy season, we expect supply tightness in the grid to persist in the medium term and should thus keep spot prices relatively elevated," it added.

On the other hand, COL Financial

has a BUY rating for Puregold Price Club despite its lower second quarter earnings.

"We continue to like PGOLD as it remains well-positioned to capitalize on improving mobility trends despite

near term inflationary headwinds. We also like PGOLD for its differentiated focus of middle to low-income class consumers through Puregold while it competes in the premium segment through S&R," it noted.



Damage to agri, infra balloons to ₱5.8 B

By MARTIN SADONGDONG, BETHEENA UNITE, and AARON RECUENCO

Two more people were reported to have perished due to the combined effects of Super Typhoon "Egay" and the enhanced southwest monsoon (habagat), bringing the death toll to 16, while damage to agriculture and infrastructure reached ₱5.8 billion.

The latest situational report released by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) on Sunday July 30, showed 11 of the fatalities

'Egay' death toll rises to 16 1◀

were recorded in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), two each in Calabarzon (Region 4A) and Western Visayas (Region 6), and one in Ilocos (Region 1).

But the NDRRMC said only one of the fatalities had been validated, a 36-year-old man who drowned in Mansilingan, Bacolod, while the rest were up for confirmation.

There were 52 individuals who were also injured while 20 others were missing in Cagayan Valley (Region 2) and CAR.

Meanwhile, damage to agriculture already reached ₱1,501,183,483.27 while the cost of damage to infrastructure was ₱4,388,703,839.36.

Region 2 incurred the highest number of agricultural loss at ₱1.02 billion followed by Central Luzon at ₱253 million; Mimaropa (Region 4B) at ₱119 million; Region 6 at ₱53 million; CAR at ₱50 million; and Calabarzon at ₱213,500.

CAR on the other hand, had the highest infrastructure loss at a staggering ₱3.1 billion; followed by Region 1 at ₱643 million; Region 2 at ₱483 million; Bicol (Region 5) at ₱52 million; Region 4B at ₱29 million; and Region 6 at ₱1.5 million.

1M affected

The number of affected individuals also climbed to 291,262 families or 1,029,724 individuals in 2,615 barangays across Regions 1, 2, 3, 4A, 4B, 5, 6, Northern Mindanao (Region 10), Davao (Region 11), Soccsksargen (Region 12), Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), CAR, and National Capital Region (NCR).

There were 4,315 families or 15,092 individuals who were staying in 330 evacuation centers.

Typhoon-damaged schools

An inventory of the affected public schools in Northern Luzon during the onslaught of super typhoon Egay is now underway so that the government can determine the extent of the damage left by the typhoon and ensure a smooth opening of classes in August, according to Marcos.

The President reinforced the proposal made by Senator Imee Marcos who accompanied him during his visit to Egay-hit areas in Northern Luzon.

"Senator Imee pointed out very correctly that the school year is about

to begin at mayroon tayong kukunin, gagawa ng listahan ng mga damaged school buildings na hindi magamit. Tignan natin what we can do in a month, kasi we have one month, August 28 ang pasukan (we will come up with a list of damaged school buildings that cannot be used. Let's see what we can do because we have one month before the opening of classes on August 28)," he said.

"So...these are the general elements that we have, looking at this is what we have been getting from the agencies, the responding agencies to all of these," he added.

The Chief Executive presided over on Saturday a series of briefings in Bangued, Abra; Laoag City in Ilocos Norte; and Tuguegarao City, Cagayan where he received initial reports on the effects of super typhoon Egay in Northern Luzon.

The President also conducted aerial inspections of the affected areas in Abra and Ilocos Norte.

He also asked local government units to submit a detailed report of agricultural damages in their respective areas in a bid to help farmers recover from the effects of the typhoon.

DHSUD readies tents, shelter-grade tarps

The Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) is now preparing modular tents, solar lamps and other assistance packages to thousands of families who were displaced and affected by typhoon "Egay."

DHSUD Secretary Jose Rizalino Acuzar said the initial focus of assistance package that also include shelter-grade tarpaulins will be in Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley Region and the Cordillera Administrative Region.

"Following the President's pronouncement, DHSUD has already started processing assistance to people affected by Typhoon Egay, not only in Ilocos Region but also in other areas wrecked by the typhoon," said Acuzar.

"Initially, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration and USAID, we will be distributing shelter-grade tarpaulins, modular tents and solar lamps in Regions 1, 2, and CAR. Priority will be families whose homes were either damaged or destroyed by the typhoon," he added.



Grain, soy futures drop

CHICAGO- Chicago Board of Trade grain and soybean futures fell to their lowest prices in more than a week on hopes that US crop weather will improve and Russia will ease its attacks on Ukraine's grain facilities, analysts said.

Technical selling added pressure to prices.

Heading into August, the key period of development for US soybean crops, much of the country is expected to get a reprieve from significantly above-normal temperatures, the US Department of Agriculture said in a daily weather forecast.

Grain traders said they expect the USDA, in a separate report on Monday, will lower weekly condition ratings for corn and soybean crops because of recent heat.

"All eyes are on the weather daily," said Don Roose, president of broker US Commodities.

The most-active soybean contract slid 15-1/2 cents to close at \$13.82-1/2 a bushel, while front-month soybeans sank 45-1/4 cents to \$14.86-3/4. Most-active corn ended down 12 cents at \$5.30-1/4 per bushel, and wheat declined 8-1/2 cents to close at \$7.04-1/4 per bushel. - *Reuters*



Vegetables in India to cost more on erratic monsoon

KOLAR, India — Vegetable prices in India are set to stay higher for longer, as erratic monsoon rains delayed planting and damaged ripening crops, farmers and traders said.

Vegetable prices, which have a 6% weighting in the overall consumer price index (CPI), hit a seven-month high in June, rising 12% month on month, official data shows.

Prices usually ease from August, when the harvest makes its way to the market, but this year, traders expect costs to remain high until October as supplies stay tight.

"The monsoon is disrupting the vegetable supply chain. This year, we are going to witness higher vegetable prices for a prolonged period," said Anil Patil, a Mumbai-based trader.

Costlier staples such as onions, beans, carrots, ginger, chillies and tomatoes not only feed voter discontent ahead of state elections in the next few months: The higher prices are likely to stoke retail inflation, which is expected to hit a seven-month high in July, diminishing the potential for the Reserve



FREDERIC BARRIOL-UNSPLASH

Bank of India (RBI) to lower rates this year.

"Supply-side measures would be best suited to temper the rise in food prices. The RBI is expected to remain on pause till at least December 2023," said Gaura Sen Gupta, India economist at IDFC FIRST Bank.

Tomato prices are particularly hot, surging more than 1,400% at the wholesale market to a record 140 rupees (\$1.71) per kg in the past three months, prompting many households and restaurants to cut purchases.

Farmers in the third-biggest tomato-producing region in the southern state of Karnataka say poor rainfall, higher temperatures and a virus outbreak have hit the crop, which was planted on less land than a year ago because of a crash in prices.

"Supplies are just 30% of normal as yields," said farmer Srinath Gowda, who manages 200 acres of farmland.

The monsoon has also affected other crops. Key vegetable-producing northern and western states received as much as 90%

above-average rainfall, and some eastern and southern states got up to 47% less rain, according to the weather department.

Some states received no rain for weeks, and then were flooded with a month's worth of rain in a week, an official with the meteorological department said.

The supply disruptions, and the resulting higher food prices, are expected to send retail inflation higher to 6.5% in July, its highest level this year and above the Reserve Bank of India's 2% to 6% target range, HSBC economists said in a recent note.

Economists now expect the RBI to keep interest rates high into mid-2024.

Supplies should start picking up in the next few weeks from crops planted in June, but that will not be sufficient to cool prices, said Rajendra Suryawanshi, a vegetable trader in the western city of Pune.

"Meaningful correction in prices would begin from September, and in October, we could see prices falling to a normal level," Suryawanshi said. — **Reuters**



Global effort to safeguard mangroves steps up—FAO

THE world is making progress towards ending the loss of mangrove forests, according to a new report from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Found on the coastlines of 123 countries worldwide, over 20 percent of mangroves are estimated to have been lost globally over the past 40 years, mainly due to both human activities and natural retraction.

The World's Mangroves, 2000-2020, launched during the International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem last July 26, reports that the total global area of mangroves in 2020 stood at 14.8 million hectares.

But while 677,000 hectares of mangroves were lost between 2000 and 2020, the rate at which they are disappearing fell by almost a quarter (23 percent) in the second decade, according to the report.

The study also reveals that mangroves, unlike other forests, can spread very fast given the chance.

Some 393,000 hectares of new mangrove forests—an area equivalent to 550,000 football pitches—have grown in areas where they were not present in 2000, offsetting more than half of the global loss in the last 20 years.

Asia, which hosts almost half the world's mangroves, showed a 54 percent decrease in mangrove area net loss in the last 20 years. Net loss also decreased in Africa, while North and Central America reversed the trend and recorded a mangrove area net gain between 2010 and 2020. Increases in net loss were reported in South America and Oceania in the same period, however.

"This new study shows positive steps countries are taking towards slowing the loss of mangroves, but also underlines that we must continue to prioritize their restoration, sustainable use and conservation to safeguard

their critical services for people and the planet," said Zhimin Wu, Director of FAO's Forestry Division.

"Mangroves have a vital role to play in helping achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, providing food and livelihoods for coastal communities, protecting our coastlines against natural disasters, storing carbon, mitigating climate change, and harbouring an extraordinary range of biodiversity."

Drivers of loss and gain

PROVIDING some of the most detailed information yet on what is happening to the world's mangroves, the FAO study combined remote sensing satellite imagery and local expert knowledge to collect and analyse data across five regions over the 20-year period, including on the drivers of mangrove loss.

While most aquaculture practices do not affect mangroves, pond shrimp aquaculture, one of the main causes of mangrove loss, went from causing 31 percent of all loss between 2000 and 2010 to 21 percent between 2010 and 2020, according to the report.

Natural retraction was the second most important driver of mangrove loss, causing 26 percent of loss over the 20-year period, at least partly caused by intensifying impacts of climate change such as rising sea levels and temperatures.

Natural disasters accounted for only 2 percent of all loss over the 20-year period. However, the area they destroyed increased threefold and is expected to worsen, the report warns, leaving coastal communities even more vulnerable to storm surges, floods and tsunamis.

In terms of drivers of mangrove area gain, natural expansion accounted for 82 percent of all the gains in mangrove area over the two decades, and restoration for the remaining 18 percent.

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Chocolate cravings are going to get more expensive to satisfy

BAD news has emerged this week for chocolate lovers: it's going to get more expensive to satisfy your cravings.

The cost of wholesale cocoa beans soared to the highest level in more than a decade, and manufacturers are betting prices of the key chocolate ingredient will stay elevated through 2024. That's mainly because production in West Africa, a region that accounts for two-thirds of the world's bean harvest, is faltering.

Heavy rains and a rot-causing disease have ravaged crops there, sparking concerns about supply. Bean processing has also slumped around the world—which is crucial for turning products into chocolate—indicating that factories are struggling to access adequate volumes, according to Fuad Mohammed Abubakar, the head of Ghana Cocoa Marketing Company UK.

That's prompted executives from top manufacturers Lindt & Spruengli AG and Hershey Co. to warn this week that further price hikes can't be ruled out, even after consumers have already had to swallow higher costs for

their products.

"We clearly are in a very tight situation," said Paul Joules, a cocoa analyst at Rabobank in London. "We could see chocolate companies adopt smaller chocolate bars and potentially higher prices."

The world's biggest cocoa producer Ivory Coast is expected to see its upcoming harvest shrink by nearly a fifth from last year, and has suspended sales that bind farmers to delivering goods at specified times in the future. In Ghana, the second-biggest cocoa producer, output is set to fall below historical averages.

That's likely to put the world on track for a third consecutive supply deficit this year and possibly even the following, according to Joules. An El Niño weather pattern threatens to hurt output further, just as farmers contend with the swollen-shoot virus, a devastating disease that can kill trees within years, and black pod disease, which causes beans to rot.

While the pandemic led to a slowdown in global chocolate demand and caused cocoa stockpiles to surge, recovering consumption

and two years of supply shortages have significantly reduced those inventories. Lindt is building up its cocoa bean stocks as a buffer against higher prices and shortages, it said this week. Both Lindt and another Swiss chocolate maker, Barry Callebaut AG, have seen sales volumes suffer as higher prices force consumers to hold back.

For some companies, the effect of soaring wholesale costs might only just be filtering through, due to previous hedging activities that so far shielded them from big price hikes.

"For most players, the impact of the very steep cocoa future prices increases will only kick in from the second half of 2023," Lindt's Chief Financial Officer Martin Hug told analysts in an earnings call on Tuesday. Those feeling additional cost pressure "will therefore most likely feel a need to adjust pricing."

Surging wing prices

THE price of the chicken wing is going up, and that may spell trouble for Wingstop Inc., according to analysts at Wedbush as they

stepped away from their bullish position on the stock a week out from the fast-casual chain's second-quarter earnings.

Wingstop has climbed 20 percent this year, outpacing the 12-percent advance in the S&P Composite 1500 Restaurants index and chains including McDonald's Corp., Cheesecake Factory Inc. and Domino's Pizza Inc. However, wing prices have gradually increased more than 30 percent in the past month, which may impact Wingstop's shares, analyst Nick Setyan wrote in a note.

"During periods of wing cost inflation, Wingstop's share price tends to either stagnate or decline," he said.

Shares of the company slumped 8 percent on Friday in their worst drop since May 2022.

The average price target for Wingstop among analysts tracked by Bloomberg is \$204. Setyan downgraded the chain to neutral from outperform and reduced his price target to \$185 from a shared-Street high of \$240. The stock has six buy ratings, 15 holds and two sells, according to data



A WORKER gathers cocoa pods cut from trees in Azaguie, Ivory Coast. BLOOMBERG NEWS

compiled by Bloomberg.

Wing prices continue to be favorable compared with historical levels but are still high enough that they put estimates for second-half and 2024 cost of goods sold at risk, Setyan said, particularly if the strength Wingstop enjoys from the football season through March Madness basketball occurs.

High wing costs also have a knock-on

effect on sales, with Setyan noting that franchisees often lift prices in response, hurting transaction growth in the process. And while Wingstop has upped the mix from boneless chicken wings, and will likely increase it further, Setyan sees bone-in wings continuing to dictate franchisee pricing decisions for the foreseeable future.

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