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## PARTNER COOPERATIVE QUESTIONED

# DA, FTI OFFICIALS SUSPENDED OVER ONION PURCHASES

By Dempsey Reyes  
@dempseyreyesINQ

The Office of the Ombudsman has imposed a six-month preventive suspension on concerned officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Food Terminal Inc. (FTI) in connection with the alleged anomalous purchase of onions for Kadiwa stores.

In a four-page order dated Aug. 1, Ombudsman Samuel Martires suspended without pay for six months Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista, Administrative Officer Eunice Biblanias and Chief Accountant officer in charge Lolita Jamela,

as well as FTI's vice president for operations John Gabriel Benedict Trinidad III and budget division head Juanita Lualhati.

The five face charges of grave misconduct, gross neglect of duty and conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service, in connection with the alleged manipulation of the prices and supply of onion prices as well as FTI's procurement of the staple from Bonena Multi-Purpose Cooperative.

### Agreements

According to Martires, the DA had entered into a memorandum of agreement (MOA)

with FTI on a Kadiwa Food Hub project—while FTI had also entered into an agreement with Bonena for the delivery of 8,845 sacks of onions.

Among the violations cited by the Ombudsman were the questionable selection of the cooperative, noncompliance with the MOA and “doubtful deliveries” by Bonena.

The Ombudsman said evidence against these officials was “strong.”

“Considering... that respondents’ continued stay in... office may influence potential witnesses and may prejudice the case filed against them due to their continued access to doc-

umentary evidence relative thereto, this Office exercises its power to place respondents under preventive suspension,” Martires said.

Also named respondents were DA Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban and FTI president and CEO Robert Tan, although Martires did not include them in his suspension order.

The suspension order was sent to the agriculture secretary or his authorized representative and to the human resource divisions and resident auditors of both the DA and FTI. President Marcos is concurrent agriculture secretary. INQ



# PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

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BAD FOR LOCAL FARMERS

## PLANNED GOV'T-TO-GOV'T RICE IMPORTATION BUCKED

By Julie M. Aurelio  
@JMAurelioINQ

A Makabayan lawmaker on Tuesday opposed President Marcos' proposal for government-to-government rice importation, arguing that he should boost the local rice industry instead.

House Assistant Minority Leader Rep. Arlene Brosas said the government should "invest in our farmers and prioritize their welfare to achieve food security and agricultural self-sufficiency."

"We urge Mr. Marcos to veer away from his proposed government-to-government importation of rice and instead focus on strengthening our local rice industry," she said in a statement.

The Gabriela Women's party list representative noted that the current shortage of rice stocks should be addressed, but "the solution lies in supporting our local farmers and improving our domestic rice production."

Brosas called for the repeal of Republic Act No. 11203, or the Rice Tariffication Law and the

prioritization of the Philippine rice industry instead.

"The increasing prices of rice and dwindling of stocks is proof that RA 11203 was never the solution in the first place as it allowed the influx of imported rice and consequently depressed the farm gate prices of palay," Brosas added.

She made the remarks after Agriculture Assistant Secretary Rex Estoperez said the President will preside over an inter-agency meeting to discuss the government-to-government importation of rice.

Under RA 11203, Mr. Marcos is authorized to approve government rice importation during emergencies.

### 'Food security at risk'

The President earlier said he was considering importing rice from India.

Brosas warned that dependence on rice imports "puts our food security at risk and undermines the livelihoods of our local farmers."

"We need sustainable and long-term solutions that prioritize self-sufficiency and agricul-

tural development," she said.

For House Deputy Speaker Rep. Ralph Recto, the importation of rice when local production slows down "is not as straightforward anymore due to convulsions in the world market."

"It's not easy to order unli-rice over the globe. Other nations only let go of their surplus production because their priority is local demand," Recto said in a separate statement.

He noted that India, the number one rice exporter with a 40 percent share of the world market, has imposed a ban on

the export of non-Basmati rice.

"You don't need a Nobel to sagely predict that it will have a ripple effect on all grain prices considering the big hole it will cause," he said.

Recto warned that the Philippines might be hit "directly and painfully" by Vietnam's decision to slash its annual rice exports to 4 million tons by 2030 from 7.1 million tons last year.

He noted that the Philippines sourced 2.5 million metric tons or 85 percent of its rice imports from Vietnam in 2021. INQ





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## Gov't urges traders to increase rice imports

By Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza  
Reporter

THE PHILIPPINE government plans to boost its rice inventory following the onslaught of two typhoons and in preparation for the impact of the El Niño weather pattern on domestic production.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) called on the private sector to import over a million metric tons (MT) of rice amid worries over supply.

A farmers' group, however, said the target may not be met due to the absence of incentives for local traders, who have to deal with rising international prices and compete with foreign importers who can bid at a higher rate.

Agriculture Undersecretary Mercedita A. Sombilla said the government is now preparing the schedule for the importation of 1.3 million MT of rice.

"We have already something like 1.3 million MT volume of applications that are already pending there. So, what we are going to be doing is to really encourage the private sector to get this," she said at a Palace briefing after a Cabinet meeting with President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.

Mr. Marcos, who heads the Agriculture department, will hold

discussions with the private sector on the issue of rice supply, Ms. Sombilla said.

"I think we really need the help of the private sector in situations like these," she said.

Ms. Sombilla said the rice imports will be scheduled properly to protect local farmers.

The Philippines has been battered by Super Typhoon Egay (international name: Doksuri) and a southwest monsoon that dumped heavy rainfall for almost a week now. This was followed by Typhoon Falcon (international name: Khanun) which brought strong rains to parts of Luzon, including Metro Manila.

The damage to agriculture caused by Egay and the monsoon reached P1.94 billion, with the rice sector accounting for P950 million of the total, Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel V. De Mesa told the same briefing.

In a video statement after the Cabinet meeting, Mr. Marcos said the DA had assured him there is enough supply of rice and corn seeds that will be distributed to farmers affected by the typhoon.

The DA is set to distribute 111,873 bags of rice seeds, 14,426 bags of corn seeds, and 2,582 kilograms of assorted vegetable seeds to regions affected by Egay.

Rice, SI/9



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Rice,  
from SI/1

"With rice supply projected to reach 5.47 million MT in the third quarter of 2023 and demand expected to reach 3.79 million MT, ending stock in the third quarter is projected at 1.69 million MT, enough to last 45 days at present consumption," the Presidential Palace said in a statement, citing the DA.

At the Palace briefing, Ms. Sombilla said the country has rice stocks good for only 39 days following the typhoon.

She said the government expects the biggest rice production to start by the end of September or sometime in October. "So, we will be beefing up our supply and, of course, the usual supplies that we will be getting from imports."

But Raul Q. Montemayor, national director of the Federation of Free Farmers, said the country needs stocks good for 60 days until the harvest season begins in October, noting that the import requirement should be between 650,000 and one million MT.

"The fact that the Bureau of Plant Industry has issued quarantine import certificates for 1.3 million tons is meaningless if the importers feel it is too risky to import rice now that international prices are going up," Mr. Montemayor said in a Viber message.

He said some rice suppliers have also reneged on their contracts to supply local importers, "opting to sell their inventories to higher bidders."

Mr. Marcos earlier said the Philippine government was looking into the possibility of entering into a supply deal with India under a government-to-government arrangement after New Delhi imposed an export ban on non-basmati white rice.

The India export ban will only have minimal impact on the Philippines because the affected variant only accounts for 25% of India's total rice exports, Ms. Sombilla said.

Vietnam is Manila's largest source of rice, accounting for 80% of its rice imports in 2022.

"It would be easier for the Philippines to buy rice from Vietnam than India because Hanoi has not imposed any limits on its exports," Mr. Montemayor said, noting that India accounted for only 0.6% of Philippine rice imports in the same year.

"We can buy rice from any exporting country as long as we are willing to pay the price."

The country will likely rely on "traditional" rice

sellers such as Vietnam, Thailand, and India, Ms. Sombilla said.

Aside from the Indian export ban, the government is also looking at the possible impact of Russia's termination of the Black Sea Grain initiative, which drove up global prices of wheat, Ms. Sombilla said.

## CONCERNS

"The Rice Tariffication Law indeed allows the private sector to import rice. But what is alarming is that the government has to encourage the private sector to do so, and not simply allow the market to make its own decision," Leonardo A. Lanzona, who teaches economics at the Ateneo de Manila University, said in a Facebook Messenger chat.

The government should be more concerned about domestic production and how to provide farmers with resources to address the impact of the recent typhoons and El Niño, he said.

"The government already has a lot of problems on its own," Mr. Lanzona said. "It has no business telling the private sector to import unless it is the official policy now to just import rice in the face of these challenges."

## FULL STORY



Read the full story by  
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PHILIPPINE STAR/WALTER BOLLOZOS

## Ombudsman orders suspension of agri, FTI officials over onions

THE PHILIPPINE Ombudsman has ordered the suspension of Agriculture and Food Terminal, Inc. (FTI) officials for misconduct and neglect of duty over what it said were anomalous purchase of onions under President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.'s Kadiwa program.

In an order made public on Aug. 1, Ombudsman Samuel R. Martires ordered the six-month suspension of an Agriculture assistant secretary and accountant and the FTI officers for violating the Procurement law in the delivery of 8,845 bags of onions to Kadiwa food outlets, which sells farm products to the poor.

"Documents show that violations of the Procurement law were allegedly committed by the respondents in relation to the Kadiwa Food Hub project," he said in the ruling, a copy of which was posted on state-run PTV4's Twitter page.

The ombudsman cited a questionable 50% advance payment of the contract price and a "lack of parameters" in the procurement of onions.

He said the suspension would prevent the officials from influencing potential witnesses during the investigation and legal proceedings.

The order stemmed from the Ombudsman's probe of the involvement of traders and Agriculture officials in soaring prices of red and white onions in the market early this year.

The Agriculture department and FTI were under investigation for price manipulation after it was alleged that the latter had paid inflated prices for the commodity to set a high benchmark price for the rest of the market.

In January, Agriculture deputy spokesman Rex C. Estoperez said FTI's P537 a kilo of domestic onion order followed procurement rules amid allegations of collusion by government officials and the private sector to rig onion prices.

Last week, Executive Secretary Lucas P. Bersamin said the government had identified smugglers and hoarders based on intelligence reports and would soon file cases against them.

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

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

The Department of Justice earlier said it had formed a task force to go after agricultural smugglers and hoarders.

The agency would go after farm smugglers by filing criminal cases including economic sabotage, Justice Undersecretary Raul T. Vasquez told a news briefing on July 26. — John Victor D. Ordoñez





## Rice buffer supply sufficient

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

**PRESIDENT** Marcos Jr. yesterday assured the public the country has enough buffer supply of rice despite the massive damage to agriculture of by super typhoon Egay in Luzon.

"It looks like the supply for now is okay," the President said in a video message after he met with officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA) in Malacanang where they discussed ways to ease the effects of Egay on the agricultural production, especially rice. The President is concurrent DA secretary.

Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa in a briefing after the meeting, said damage to agriculture due to Egay reached P1.94 billion.

The President said the DA will distribute 111,873 bags of rice seeds; 14,426 bags of corn seeds; and, 2,582 kilograms of assorted

vegetable seeds to regions affected by Egay.

He said apart from Egay, the government is also preparing for El Nino.

"We are making a schedule as to where we would source production; where to buy locally, if there is need to import, we will import," he said.

Government projects rice production would reach 5.47 million metric tons (MMT) in the third quarter and while demand is expected to reach 3.79 MMT, ending stock in the third quarter is projected at 1.69 MMT, enough to last 45 days at present consumption.

DA Undersecretary Mercedita Sombilla, in the same briefing, said the buffer stock of rice is good for 39 days, which is expected to be sustained by harvest in late September to October and the planned importation.

Sombilla, however, said they

will also be looking into reports the supply of the National Food Authority (NFA) rice has gone down to two days.

She said what is certain is there is a need for NFA to beef up its rice stocks.

Sombilla said they also discussed the impact of global developments such as Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative, India's ban on rice exports, and the El Niño.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative specifically allows for commercial food and fertilizer (including ammonia) exports from three key Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea.

Sombilla said that while Russia's and India's actions are expected to have a "very minimal effect" on the Philippine market, problems will emerge depending on how exporting countries would respond

See RICE > Page A2

## RICE

to these global events.

She assured the public the DA is closely monitoring the situation.

Sombilla attributed the rising rice prices to the effects of the increase in prices of fertilizer and fuel primarily due to the Black Sea Grain Initiative.

Sombilla, meanwhile, said the P20 per kilo promised by the President is not achievable at present and that it will only be doable if rice production will increase.

"With the things that are happening now - fertilizer cost, fuel cost, El Niño, back-to-back typhoons- we do not see it (P20 per kg of rice) happening in the short run. Over the long run, if we are able to increase our productivity, I think we can achieve that," she said.

Meanwhile, the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) is seeking a budget of up to P500 million next year to implement projects that promote urban agriculture under the DA's National Urban

and Peri-Urban Agriculture Program (NUPAP).

Glenn Panganiban, BPI director, told reporters in an interview yesterday NUPAP has been running for two years without budget allocation and operates only through partnerships with the private sector.

"Our focus is production support and we will distribute seeds. We also have production equipment and facilities, controlled environment farming if we have partners that will provide a space.

We also have training and information dissemination....," Panganiban said.

"We have a lot of participants but many of which also drop out but the main goal is to sustain at that critical mass for us to have efficiencies. We will push what is appropriate for an area. For example, in Pasig, rooftops are prevailing so they grow chili while Navotas has vertical farms so they grow lettuce," Panganiban added. -with  
Jed Macapagal



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## Japanese lawmaker supports Phil agri, infra programs

A group of Japanese lawmakers has expressed support for the Philippines' development programs and is pushing for a government-to-government cooperation on the defense industry, Malacañang said yesterday.

President Marcos met with Moriyama Hiroshi, chairman of the Japan-Philippines Parliamentarians Friendship League, at Malacañang yesterday and discussed key areas of partnership between the two countries.

The Japan-Philippines Parliamentarians Friendship League is composed of members of the Japanese Diet across party lines.

According to a statement by the Presidential Communications Office (PCO), Marcos received expressions of support from Moriyama for the Philippines' development initiatives particularly in agriculture, infrastructure, defense and security and the Mindanao peace process.

"Regarding the agriculture, we see – it is important and also the digital relation. Also, agriculture infrastructure is very important," Moriyama was quoted by the PCO statement as saying.

"We'd also like to see government-to-government cooperation on strengthening the defense industry, which is a priority. That's why regarding the OSA, official security assistance, the Philippines is one of the first candidate countries for OSA," he added.

According to Moriyama, Japan is pleased to see the Philippines' achievement on defense, particularly the implementation of joint training in the past months.

Marcos told the Japanese law-

maker that having a strong agriculture sector has been a priority of his administration. "It is something that we feel is important, not only for the survival of our populace, the food supply of our populace, but also it is necessary... if the rest of our industrialization can continue, if the rest of our digitalization can continue, it must be based on a strong foundation of agriculture sector," Marcos, also the agriculture secretary, said.

The President noted that Japan has been a partner of the Philippines in infrastructure and agricultural development through the Japan International Cooperation Agency. He described Tokyo as a "key factor" in Manila's infrastructure efforts.

The President likewise reiterated his desire to boost defense ties between the two countries.

In the Senate, lawmakers adopted a resolution celebrating the friendship between Japan and the Philippines.

"Japan remains a true partner to the Philippines in every essence of the word," said Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri, who sponsored Senate Resolution No. 77 that was supported by all senators.

Zubiri said the relationship between the Philippines and Japan – which marked 67 years of diplomatic relations last July 23 – is a prime example of the power of reconciliation and the triumph of friendship.

In Congress, the House of Representatives on Monday adopted House Resolution 1146 that sought to strengthen the mutual cooperation between the Philippines and Japan.

– Alexis Romero, Cecille Suerte  
Felipe Delon Porcalla

# THE PHILIPPINE STAR

TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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President Marcos presides over a sectoral meeting with officials of the Department of Agriculture at Malacañang yesterday.

KRIZJOHN ROSALES





## Marcos assures ample rice stock despite 'Egay'

The country has enough buffer stock of rice despite the heavy damage brought about by super typhoon Egay.

President Marcos gave this assurance in a video message, where he expressed confidence that the Department of Agriculture (DA), which he heads in concurrent capacity, is ready to address the impact of the super typhoon on the country's rice production.

Marcos also said that the DA is exploring ways to ensure sufficient supply of rice.

"Mukha naman, sa ngayon (It looks like, for now), the supply is ok," he said.

The chief executive held a sectoral meeting with DA officials in Malacañang on Tuesday, a week after Egay wreaked havoc on parts of Northern Luzon, leaving an estimated ₱1.94 billion worth

► 5



**'HABAGAT' AFTERMATH** — An aerial shot of Barangay Frances in Calumpit, Bulacan, on Tuesday, Aug. 1, 2023, shows the extent of the flooding in the community where residents have resorted to wading through waist-deep waters or negotiating the streets with the use of bancas. (Mark Balmores)

## Marcos assures ample rice stock despite 'Egay' 1◀

of agricultural damage.

Marcos also shared that sufficiency of "agricultural inputs" is being ascertained to ensure that the price of rice in the market will not increase in the aftermath of the typhoon.

Rice supply is projected to reach 5.47 million metric tons (MMT) in the third quarter of 2023, but with a projected demand of 3.79 MMT, it is expected that the country will have a buffer stock of 1.69 MMT in the third quarter.

The DA said this buffer stock would be enough to last 45 days, while they look to increase the local production of rice through supporting farmers and through importation from rice-producing neighbor-countries.

In a Malacañang press briefing, Agriculture Undersecretary Mercedita Sombilla assured that the Philippines has a 39-day buffer supply of rice amid the threats of the El Niño phenomenon and the challenges of importing rice from neighboring countries.

"And I think, you know, we are prepared; the production for up to the second quarter, we have something like 39 days of stocks and then will continue, you know, the

DA has already prepositioned ways by which we could really increase production," she said.

During the sectoral meeting, DA's preparedness for the El Niño phenomenon was also tackled.

"So, gumawa na...kami ng schedule kung saan tayo kukuha ng production; kung saan tayo bibili dito sa local; kung kailangan mag-import, mag-i-import na naman tayo (So, we made a schedule where we're going to get production; where we're going to buy locally; if we need to import, we will import)," Marcos said. "Mabuti naman at sa usapan namin, nakita naman na ang pag-import natin ng bigas ay pababa naman nang pababa. Ngunit pagka may emergency na ganito ay kailangan talaga nating tignan kung nangangailangan pa ng pag-import (It's good and based on our talks, it was noted that the need to import rice has been decreasing. But when there's an emergency like this, we really need to determine if we need to import)," he added.

Earlier, the President shared that the country might negotiate with India since there is tough competition among neighboring countries for the supply of rice.

He, however, assured that im-

porting rice would be studied carefully and that the DA assured him of stock of rice and other high-value crops that would be distributed to affected farmers.

The DA is expected to distribute 111,873 bags of rice seeds, 14,426 bags of corn seeds, and, 2,582 kilograms of assorted vegetable seeds to regions affected by Egay.

It also recommended the ramping up of local production of rice and production support to ensure sufficient supply of rice and other agricultural commodities.

Other recommendations by the DA include the fast-tracking of the distribution of readily available assistance to rice farmers, especially those in calamity-stricken areas, as well as ensuring the availability of the Quick Response Fund for the immediate rehabilitation of affected areas.

The agency is also studying the possibility of purchasing available rice stocks at the lowest accessible price and ensuring the availability of affordable rice, especially to the less fortunate households, through the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) or the Food Stamp Program (FSP). (Raymund Antonio)



# MANILA BULLETIN

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FOCUS ON AGRI — President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' R. Marcos Jr. (right) presides during a sectoral meeting with officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA) in Malacañang on Tuesday, August 1, 2023. (Photo from the Office of the President)



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## PHL, MALAYSIA PRIVATE SECTOR EXPLORE AGRI COOPERATION, MSME DEVELOPMENT

**T**WO private sector groups representing Malaysia and the Philippines signed a Memorandum of Understanding in Kuala Lumpur 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.

The initiative will aim to replicate an agri model similar to Kapatid Angat Lahat sa Agri Program (KALAP) to achieve inclusive and sustainable agriculture through the integration of small farmers into the value chain of large companies and allowing them to benefit from the transfer of technologies and economies of scale. KALAP is an initiative of Go Negosyo, the non-profit founded by Concepcion to promote entrepreneurship and advocate for the development of Filipino MSMEs.

"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 added.

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



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 Air Asia CEO Tony Fernandes.

agriculture, agriculture technology, food security, agripreneurship business models, and value chain development.

Also present during the private sector meet were Department of Trade and Industry Secretary 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 after securing funding from the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund.

"With AMEN now ongoing and successful, we want to move a step further. We need to scale up our farmers, fix the land issues so that we achieve the minimum viable point of 24 hectares to achieve scale, and help farmers use technology and incorporate them into the value chain of big corporations while making sure they receive their equitable share," he said.

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.



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## 1.3-MMT RICE IMPORTS PUSHING THROUGH—DA

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA

@sam\_medenilla

**D**ESPITE assurances by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. that the country has sufficient buffer stock of rice in the aftermath of typhoon Egay (international name: Doksuri), the Department of Agriculture (DA) will still push through with importing 1.3 million metric tons of the staple to ensure the food supply until the end of the year.

The DA made the pronouncement amid global supply chain concerns and the "low" rice buffer stock of the National Food Authority (NFA).

Meeting with agriculture officials on Tuesday, Marcos, the concurrent Secretary of DA, said he was informed that rice production for the third quarter of the year is expected to reach 5.47 million metric tons (MMT) of rice, exceeding the 3.79 MMT demand for the food staple.

The 1.69 MMT excess rice is enough to last 45 days at present consumption, according to the DA. "It appears our supply is okay for now," Marcos said in a video message.

### Rice importation

HOWEVER, in a press briefing in

Malacañang, Agriculture Undersecretary Mercedita A. Sombilla said they will still encourage the private sector to push through with their rice importation to help sustain the NFA's buffer stock, which is used during times of emergencies.

"Their stock really is very low. They really need to beef up their stocks," the DA official said.

She said 1.3 MMT volume of rice are set to be imported based on their pending Sanitary and Phytosanitary Import Clearances (SPSIC) applications.

"I think the President will really have to do some discussions/consultations with the private sector so that, you know, for them to help us," Sombilla said. The importation, she said, will help ensure the country's rice supply until the next harvest season by the end of September or early October.

### Contract growing

ASIDE from importation, DA is also eyeing to use contract growing to boost the NFA rice buffer stock.

Under that scheme, the government will provide incentives to farmers so they will directly sell their rice to the NFA, DA Assistant Secretary for Operations Arnel V. de Mesa said.

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## 1.3-MMT RICE IMPORTS PUSHING THROUGH—DA

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He said the incentive will be in the form of seeds, fertilizers, machinery, and drying fee.

"NFA can provide an additional incentive of about 250 pesos for the drying. So, buying price could range from 21 to 22 [per kilogram] especially for the upcoming harvest for the wet season," De Mesa said.

### Global situation

DA wants to ramp up the country's supply and other food commodities as it monitors three global events, which could affect the country's international food supply and prices.

These factors include the withdrawal of Russia in the Black Sea Grain Initiative; India's ban on non-basmati white rice exports, and El Niño.

She said Black Sea Grain issue may affect the price of fertilizers, which is one of the main input expenses by local farmers.

Meanwhile, the ban by India can indirectly affect the country through the response of other rice exporters like Vietnam and Thailand.

Marcos and DA are also wary of the negative impact of severe and strong El Niño on agriculture, particularly on rice and corn production.

"So we have a schedule where we will get the [food production]; where we will buy locally and when we will import," Marcos said in Filipino.



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## Savellano appointment to DA welcomed

A GROUP recently welcomed the appointment by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. of its vice chairman as a new undersecretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Putting politician and bamboo advocate Deogracias Victor Barbers Savellano in the key position bodes well for multi-sector efforts to develop the domestic bamboo industry, according to the Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Council (PBIDC).

PBIDC executive director Butch Madarang said Savellano, who served as Ilocos Sur governor and later, as a deputy speaker of the House of Representatives, has been given due recognition for contributing to poverty reduction and economic development through the industrialization of the bamboo sector.

"His appointment would bring not only a wealth of experience in local governance and legislation but also a full grasp of the real needs of the

common farmer and the things to be done to make their lives better," Madarang said.

Savellano took his oath of office as Agriculture undersecretary in Malacañang on Monday afternoon.

As a lawmaker, he authored House Bill 9576 or the Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Act, which was passed earlier this year, while the Senate is still deliberating on its own version of the proposed law.

The PBIDC, an attached agency to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), said it targets to capture a significant share of the global bamboo market, which will generate over USD92 billion by 2027, according to projections by United Nations Comtrade.

The processing of bamboo into high-value finished products can potentially catapult many micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the country to industrial status, the council added.





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NEWS

## 'Egay' agri damage close to P3 billion

The Department of Agriculture said losses due to Typhoon "Egay" (international name: Doksuri) has surged to P2.89 billion, affecting some 142,000 farmers and fishers in nine regions. Egay left the Philippine area of responsibility (PAR) late last week but was followed by another storm, "Falcon" (international name: Khanun), which developed into typhoon on its way out of PAR. —STORY BY JORDEENE B. LAGARE

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# Agri damage nears P3B; but food supply assured

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**  
@jordeenelagare

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has estimated the damage wrought by Typhoon "Egay" (international name: Doksuri) at nearly P3 billion, although it said that additional losses were expected in areas affected by continuous rains and strong winds.

In its latest bulletin issued on Tuesday, the DA placed the agricultural losses due to the weather disturbance at P2.89 billion, up from the P1.94 billion reported previously.

Rice accounted for 38.9 percent of the total at P1.13 billion, with some 33,063 metric tons of produce spanning 92,179 hectares affected. Next was corn at P998.2 million, equivalent to 34.4 percent; infrastructure (irrigation facilities and farm structures), P351.7 million; high-value crops, P235.6

million; fisheries, P175.4 million; and livestock and poultry, P11.9 million.

Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) director Gerald Glenn Panganiban, however, said there was no reason for consumers to panic as the country had enough food supply despite the agricultural losses.

### Resilience

"It will take us a bit of time to recover but owing to the resilience of our farmers... when farmer-representatives from Region 2 visited, they are saying that farmers have started to rebuild," Panganiban said at an event held in Makati City.

"Filipinos are very resilient. With the help of the government, the private sector [and] LGUs (local government units), I think we can recover rapidly from this," he told reporters.

Pablo Luis Azcona, acting

Sugar Regulatory Administration administrator, said that Egay also damaged some sugar cane plantations, although the impact on the industry was expected to be "minimal."

Based on the DA bulletin, a total of 142,365 farmers and fishers were affected in the following regions: Cordillera, Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon (composed of Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon provinces), Mimaropa (Mindoro Oriental and Occidental, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan provinces), Western Visayas, Soccsksargen (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and Sarangani provinces and the cities of General Santos, Koronadal, Tacurong and Kidapawan), and Caraga (Agusan del Sur and Norte, Dinagat Islands, Surigao del Sur and Norte, and the cities of Butuan, Bayugan, Bislig, Cabadbaran, Surigao and Tandag).

Egay also wiped out 98,217 MT of commodities, including rice, corn, high-value crops, livestock and poultry, and fisheries covering 163,722 ha of agricultural areas. Farm and fishery infrastructures, as well as fishing paraphernalia likewise took a hit.

### Support for farmers

Panganiban said the BPI had started distributing urban agriculture kits and providing support to affected farmers. A total of 111,873 bags of rice seeds, 14,426 bags of corn seeds and 2,582 kilograms of assorted vegetable seeds were available for distribution, he added.

The DA was also prepared to provide drugs and biologics for livestock and poultry, while the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources would distribute P62,000 worth of tilapia, carp and catfish fingerlings to affected fisherfolk. **INQ**





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## SRA says weather does not favor August start to milling season

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said the recent bout of unfavorable weather weakens planters' arguments for an August start to milling season, with the wet conditions expected to depress yields from cane.

"We are just getting ready for milling, although the weather is not cooperating. That's one of the reasons why we're pushing for a Sept. 1 start," SRA Acting Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona said at a briefing.

"And because August is generally wet in Negros, it is really hard to mill," he added.

The SRA has held to its position of stating milling on Sept. 1, rejecting calls from planters to start in August.

Mr. Azcona said that milling in rainy weather decreases the purity and sugar content of cane, adding, "Fields are being damaged... (with proper weather), you can ratoon."

Ratooning is the harvesting of above-ground plants while leaving the roots and shoots intact, setting the stage for the next crop.

He said the SRA originally estimated that 85% of sugar farmers will not have access to water with the onset of El

Niño, leading to a forecast decline of 10-15% in cane output.

Meanwhile, Mr. Azcona said 4,000 tons of smuggled sugar that has been seized will be donated to the Department of Agriculture (DA), to be sold at Kadiwa stores at P75 per kilogram.

"Once the (memorandum of agreement) is signed, the stocks will be moved... maybe after repacking," he said.

In a statement, the DA announced the receipt of the sugar from the Bureau of Customs (BoC) following the signing of a deed of donation.

The smuggled sugar originated in Thailand and was seized in April at the port of Batangas.

"We firmly believe that, through DA, this donation will reach various communities and enable our fellow Filipinos to conveniently access sugar," BoC Commissioner Bienvenido Y. Rubio said.

As of July 31, the retail price of a kilogram of refined sugar in Metro Manila markets was between P86 and P110, washed sugar between P82 and P90, and brown sugar between P78 and P90, according to DA price monitors. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**



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## DA, FTI execs suspended over Kadiwa onion supply deal

BY PETER TABINGO

THE Office of the Ombudsman yesterday placed three officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA) and two executives of the Food Terminal Inc (FTI) under preventive suspension for six months effective immediately in relation to an ongoing probe into the latter's alleged anomalous agreement with an onion supplier for Kadiwa stores.

Ombudsman Samuel Martires signed the order dated August 1, 2023 covering DA assistant secretary for Consumer Affairs Kristine Y. Evangelista, administrative officer Eunice Biblanias, and DA acting chief accountant Lolita Jamela.

From the FTI, those covered by the suspension order were vice president for operations

See DA, FTI > Page B3

### DA, FTI

John Gabriel Benedict Trinidad and FTI Budget Division head Juanita Lualhati.

The five officials, along with DA Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban and FTI president Robert Tan, are facing complaints for grave misconduct, gross neglect of duty, and conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service in connection with the shortage of supply of onions in local markets, its price manipulation, and the questionable procurement of onions by FTI from the Bonena Multi-Purpose Cooperative.

The Ombudsman said that the DA, through Panganiban, entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with FTI for the Food Mobilization (Kadiwa Food Hub) project. The FTI, meanwhile, signed a Letter of Agreement (LOA) with Bonena for the delivery of 8,845 bags (approximately 28 kilograms/bag) of onions as part of the said Kadiwa Food Hub.

Martires announced the start of the probe into the deal in January this year after the price of onions soared to P700 in the last quarter of 2022 despite assurances from DA officials that there was no shortage of supply.

A panel of investigators from the Ombudsman's Field Investigation Office (FIO) recommended placing the respondents, except Panganiban and Tan, under preventive suspension noting that their continued stay in office "may influence potential witnesses and may prejudice the case filed against them due to their continued access to documentary evidence relative thereto."

"In view of the foregoing, it appears that the evidence of guilt

of respondents Evangelista, Biblanias, Jamela, Trinidad III, and Lualhati is strong and the charges against them involve grave misconduct and gross neglect of duty which may warrant their removal from the service," the FIO panel said.

The FIO said Panganiban and Tan were excluded from the suspension order because their supposed participation in the illegal acts were not established by evidence on record.

It said: "Documents further show that violations of Republic Act No. 3019 (Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act) in relation to Republic Act No. 9184 or the Procurement Law were allegedly committed by the respondents in relation to the said Kadiwa Food Hub Project, i.e. lack of parameters in the selection of cooperative that will supply and deliver the onions, questionable advance payment of 50 percent of the contract price, non-compliance of the MOA, partial implementation of the contract, and doubtful deliveries by Bonena."

The Ombudsman added that, together with the preventive suspension, the respondents have likewise been required to submit their coun-

ter-affidavits addressing the allegations against them as part of the criminal aspect of the investigation.



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## P2B SIDA fund eyed; govt to sell seized sugar

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) targets to restore to P2 billion the amount allocated for the Sugar Industry Development Act (SIDA) fund to further improve the local sugar sector.

This developed as the Department of Agriculture (DA) formally received 4,000 metric tons (MT) of white refined sugar from the Department of Finance through the Bureau of Customs that is eyed to be sold at various Kadiwa markets and stalls for a fixed price of P70 per kg.

Pablo Azcona, SRA acting administrator, told reporters in a briefing yesterday the approved budget for SIDA this year and next year is at P1 billion.

SIDA was aimed at helping the sugar industry become competitive by allotting a yearly fund of P2 billion starting 2016. However, yearly allocation for the fund varies

as it was hardly tapped by farmers.

"We are currently requesting if the 2024 allocation may be restored back to P2 billion. Fifty percent of SIDA is for farm-to-market roads and the rest goes to research and development and mechanization, scholarships and socialized credit. If any of the four sharing will be underutilized, the whole fund will be reduced," Azcona said.

He added: "If we get the P2 billion, we can double the current amount of block farm and more machineries can be provided as well as for research. The general goal is to increase yield and productivity and veer away from imports."

Meanwhile, the BOC has donated 4,000 MT equivalent to 80,000 bags of forfeited Thailand white sugar to the DA, through the

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## P2B

signing of the Deed of Donation and Acceptance yesterday.

BOC cited records that subject donated sugar arrived at the Port of Batangas on January 12 on board M/V Sunward without the required Notice of Arrival. Consequently, the Port of Batangas immediately issued a Warrant of Seizure and Detention against the subject sugar and

M/V Sunward, which were later ordered forfeited in favor of the government through a decision dated April 14.

BOC said SRA Memorandum Circular No. 4, Series 2022-2023 provides that "seized sugar with commercial value and capable of legitimate use may be disposed by the BOC through donation to government institutions."

As per the latest supply and demand situation of the SRA, the current sugar supply is more than enough to sustain existing demands as there is a physical stock of 262,328.30 MT of raw sugar, 448,106.45 MT refined sugar and 148,264.29 MT molasses as of July 16.

Based on DA's latest monitoring of public markets in the

National Capital Region as of yesterday, prevailing retail price of sugar ranges from P85 to P110 per kg for refined sugar, P82 to P90 per kg for washed sugar and P78 to P90 for brown sugar.

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





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## BOC donates 4,000 MT of seized sugar to DA

By EVELYN MACAIRAN

The Bureau of Customs (BOC) yesterday donated to the Department of Agriculture (DA) 4,000 metric tons of refined sugar from Thailand that it seized in January for lack of proper documents.

In a statement, the BOC said the 80,000 bags of Thailand white sugar arrived at the Port of Batangas on Jan. 12 on board motor vessel *Sunward*.

Since the shipment was reportedly not accompanied by a notice of arrival, the bureau issued a warrant of seizure and detention against the

shipment and the *Sunward*.

On April 14, the BOC decided to forfeit the shipment in favor of the government.

On July 21, Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno approved a proposal to donate the sugar.

Customs Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio and DA Senior Undersecretary Domingo Pangiban yesterday signed the Deed of Donation and Acceptance for the commodity.

Rubio thanked the Department of Finance, the DA and the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA)

for their support to the BOC, which he said made the donation possible.

"We believe that through DA, this donation will reach various local communities and enable our fellow Filipinos to conveniently access sugar," Rubio said.

### P70 per kilo

The sugar will be sold at P70 per kilo in Kadiwa markets and stalls of the DA, according to acting SRA administrator Pablo Luis Azcona.

"Once the MOA is signed, the stocks will be transferred and re-packed," Azcona said.

The donation is in compliance with a directive of President Marcos to address the rising prices of basic commodities, particularly sugar, and achieve food security.

As per the latest supply and demand situation of the SRA, the current sugar supply is more than enough to sustain existing demands.

The report noted a physical stock of 262,328.30 MT raw sugar, 448,106.45 MT refined sugar and 148,264.29 MT molasses as of July 16.

Based on DA's monitoring in Metro Manila wet markets, refined sugar is sold from P86 to 110 per kilo,

while raw sugar from P78 to 90 per kilo as of Monday.

In a report, the BOC said the total value of smuggled goods seized by the bureau reached P23.851 billion from January to June.

This is part of the 603 anti-smuggling operation seizures conducted during the six-month period.

For the first half, illegal items caught by the BOC included counterfeit goods, agricultural commodities, tobacco products, illegal drugs and general merchandise.

— With Danessa Rivera, Louise Maureen Simeon



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## CTALK

CITO BELTRAN

### Economies of scale? Dream on!

Upon arrival in Taiwan two weeks ago, the first to "greet" us was a young man holding up a sign that read: "FILIPINO CONTRACT WORKERS IN TAIWAN - BAKASYON - NON-PICK UP - PILA PO DITO SALAMAT."



I smiled and walked on but decided to go back to him and ask what office he worked for. I mistakenly assumed that it would be the Manila Economic and Cultural Office, but it turns out that he represented the DOLE or Department of Labor-Phil and the service was for free. This simple service made me appreciate government. Congratulations to DOLE Taiwan and to Secretary Benny Laguesma.

Walking out of the tube and corridor, I noticed a large stuffed dog that was a mascot of some sort and when I read the notice it said: "Do not bring meat products into Taiwan." It had a drawing of a plane with a pig on top of the plane and a smaller wild pig riding piggyback representing ASF or the African swine fever. Below all that was the most important message: "The maximum reward for report reaches NTD5 Million." (Almost P10 million)

The same mascot and warnings were placed above the luggage carousel as well as areas of high visibility as a warning to passengers and to people seeing off others or doing business at the airport. On our return flight, the China Airline crew announced that they would have to spray the floor as well as shoes of passengers as a deterrent to the ASF virus. During one of our day tours, I noticed a similar sign advising persons who have traveled to a farm recently to inform personnel, again to prevent the spread of disease.

All these precautions reflect the destructive impact of ASF, the consequences of weak or half-hearted response and the need for continuous control measures. While the Philippine government has conducted a lot of dialogues, warnings and status reports on ASF cases all over the country, the Department of Agriculture has not done enough consultation or shared with ALL stakeholders the big-ticket items that are designed to restore the hog raising industry to its pre-ASF and pre-pandemic state.

If the vaccine ever comes out before all the pigs are wiped out, the government's direction is for hog raisers to fork out P1,200 for two doses of the vaccine. The ideal number of piglets per litter is 12 to 14 piglets, that equals P14, 400 to P16, 800. If each piglet sold at the "wish ko lang" price of P5,000 pesos, you're left with P3,400. When you factor in feeds, electricity, water, medicines and vitamins for two months, you lost money on every piglet.

The problem of hog raisers is not limited to preventing ASF. Even with a potential vaccine on the horizon,

many former raisers remain unconvinced to get back in the business because it has been ruined and undermined by capitalist traders who buy imported pork, fill up all the cold storage facilities they control and flood the market with pork that was slaughtered, chilled, shipped and frozen starting from two months ago.

In the meantime, the national government is more concerned with pleasing consumers and campaign contributors instead of creating a level playing field for farmers and livestock producers. Instead of tapping major food and livestock corporations, we are now rolling out the red carpet for foreign companies to compete with Philippine dairy producers, coffee producers, feed millers and distributors.

The national government's excuse is because we have entered into treaties and trade agreements, so we must open our markets. But what about tax breaks, incentives, subsidies or simple technical and stock support?

This is why opinion writers and industry leaders have been pushing for the Department of Agriculture to establish training and breeding facilities for hog raising in every region, do more about bio-security training for all, especially backyard raisers whose production used to cover 65 percent of the country's demand for pork.

Then follow-up with repopulating backyard farms by implementing the time old dispersal formula where a recipient of a female piglet or sow is required to turn over a third of future litters or female piglets up to two cycles for redistribution or dispersal to other raisers. All these can be introduced or implemented by farm extension workers and would surely be welcomed, even by politicians as well as LGUs because it revives the livelihood, generates employment and is a more affordable formula for repopulation. It also makes politicians popular!

Lack of knowledge, training and the now prohibitive costs of acquiring livestock for breeding and propagation are the leading reasons why agriculture has taken a serious blow. Government policy and activities have moved farther and farther away from their most important stakeholders: farmers and backyard producers.

There is also the fallacy or the persistent focus on "economies of scale" as a necessary requirement to justify doing something. The so-called experts and economists say that we need to integrate land, do corporate farming in order to have economies of scale. They have said that time and time again, but have not achieved any real "economy of scale" or any actual integration that is legitimate and pro-farmer. They simply say, "It can't be done" and do nothing more.

Well, what about accepting that we will simply have to do patchwork farming or plot size agricultural development, increase the knowledge of farmers, equip them with what they really need, improve their quality of life and step back and view the quilt that naturally comes together.

Why is it that when a rich retired executive or millionaire's wife gets into hobby farming with one or two hectares, they say it's cool, etc. but when it's a poor farmer, it isn't! It is the person who owns it who will do the most work, not the economists and politicians who only talk but get nothing done!

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## DA asec, 4 others suspended amid onion probe

By JANVIC MATEO

Ombudsman Samuel Martires has ordered the preventive suspension pending investigation of five officials of the **Department of Agriculture (DA)**

and the Food Terminal Inc. (FTI) over alleged irregularities in the procurement of onions later sold at Kadiwa stores.

Suspended pending the results of the investigation are DA Assistant

Secretary Kristine Evangelista, DA administrative officer Eunice Biblanias, DA officer-in-charge chief accountant Lolita Jamela, FTI vice president for operations John Gabriel Benedict Trinidad III and FTI budget division head

Juanita Lualhati.

In a four-page order dated Aug. 1, Martires said the respondents are being charged with grave misconduct, gross neglect of duty and conduct

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## DA From Page 1

prejudicial to the best interest of service "in connection with the shortage of supply of onions in the Philippine markets, its price manipulation and the questionable procurement of onions by FTI from Bonena Multi-Purpose Cooperative."

Specifically, he noted that violations of the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act in relation to the Procurement Act were allegedly committed when the DA entered into a memorandum of agreement with the FTI for the procurement of onions for the Kadiwa Food Hub project.

FTI, in turn, entered into a letter of agreement with Bonena Multi-Purpose Cooperative for the delivery of 8,845 bags (about 247 metric tons) of onions.

Among alleged violations were the lack of parameters in the selection of cooperative that will supply and deliver the onions, questionable advance payment of 50 percent of the contract price, non-compliance of the memorandum of agreement, partial implementation of the contract and doubtful deliveries by the cooperative, according to Martires.

"It appears that the evidence of guilt of respondents Evangelista, Biblanias, Jamela, Trinidad and

Lualhati is strong and the charges against them involve grave misconduct and gross neglect of duty which may warrant their removal from the service," the ombudsman's order stated.

"Considering further that respondents' continued stay in the office may influence potential witnesses and may prejudice the case filed against them due to their continued access to documentary evidence relative thereto, this office exercises its power to place respondents under preventive suspension," it added.

The five officials have been placed under preventive suspension without pay for the duration of the proceedings, but not exceeding six months.

"When the delay in the disposition of the case by this office is due to the fault, negligence or petition of the respondents, the period of such delay shall not be counted in computing the period of suspension," Martires said.

Based on the order, DA Senior Undersecretary Domingo Pangniban and FTI president and chief executive officer Robert Tan – the signatories of the memorandum of agreement – were also included in the complaint, but they are not among those ordered suspended.

The DA and FTI have yet to issue statements regarding the preventive suspension of the five officials.



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## Gov't to import 1.3 MMT of rice

By **HELEN FLORES**

The government is planning to import 1.3 million metric tons (MMT) of rice as President Marcos expressed concerns over the combined impact of Typhoon Egay, the El Niño phenomenon and Russia's with-

drawal from the Black Sea Grain initiative on the country's supply of the grain, an official said yesterday.

During a Palace briefing, Agriculture Undersecretary Mercedita Sombilla said they have yet to set the dates of importation,

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## Gov't From Page 1

but noted there are pending applications for sanitary and phytosanitary certificates.

"I think the President will have to discuss or consult the private sector for help. I think we need the help of the private sector in situations like these," she said.

Marcos, who also serves as agriculture secretary, said the agency has enough buffer stock of rice despite the damage left by Egay in Northern Luzon.

The President met with officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA) at Malacañang yesterday, a few days after Egay devastated the north.

Egay left approximately P1.94 billion worth of damage to agriculture.

Sombilla said the supply and demand of rice in the country remain reliable so far.

Marcos said the government is looking at some "agricultural inputs" to ensure that prices of rice in the market will not increase.

With rice supply projected to reach 5.47 MMT in the third quarter of this year and demand at 3.79 MMT, ending stock in the third quarter is projected at 1.69 MMT, which is enough for 45 days based on present consumption, the DA said.

Aside from the effects of the super typhoon, Marcos said that government's preparations for the buffer stock with regard to the impact of El Niño was also discussed during the meeting.

"In our discussion, we saw that our rice imports are going down. In an emergency like this, we need to see if we still need to import," Marcos said, adding importation must be studied carefully.

The possibility of immediate procurement of available rice stocks at the lowest accessible price to cover the 15-day buffer stock is among the recommendations presented by the DA to Marcos.

Amid the effects of the three global issues, Sombilla said the DA is ready to increase the country's rice production.

"The largest rice production will still come, if not by end of September, it will be sometime in October. We will be beefing up our supply," she said.

She said the decision of Russia to withdraw from the Black Sea grain initiative would have "minimal effect" on the Philippine market,

similar to the effect of the decision of India to ban rice exports.

As these developed, House deputy speaker Ralph Recto warned that the Philippines may experience severe rice shortage due to the typhoons and the decisions of some rice producing countries to prioritize local consumption.

Recto described as a "quadruple whammy" the impact of the decision of India to ban rice exports, Vietnam's move to cut its exports by half and the scuttling of the Ukraine grain deal as well as the typhoons.

"These developments are the sound of empty pots clanging," Recto said, noting the Philippines remains the world's second and sixth largest rice and wheat importer. "This will really be a strong jab on our stomachs and we should all prepare for this," he said. "You don't need a Nobel to sagely predict that it will have a ripple effect on all grain prices considering the big hole it will cause."

Recto warned the public that what could hit the Philippines "directly and painfully" is Vietnam's decision to slash its rice exports to four million tons by 2030 from 7.1 million tons in 2022.

He said the floods spawned by Typhoons Egay and Falcon would adversely affect the supply chain as these battered three regions: Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon.

"It would impact rice and corn supply as the affected regions account for 44 percent of the national rice production and 79 percent of corn," he said.

Recto suggested that rice and substitute crops should be produced in areas hardly hit by storms, like Mindanao.

### Vegetable prices up

Retail prices of vegetables in local markets have increased by as much as P30 per kilo as the agriculture sector incurs over P1.69 billion in losses due to Egay.

Kristine Evangelista, spokesperson for the DA, said they have seen vegetable prices go up by around P20 to P30 in retail markets, and P10 in government-run Kadiwa centers.

Evangelista said the flow of vegetables to wholesale distributors and retailers was also affected by the typhoon.

She said local government units have been urged to put up more Kadiwa centers to bring in more affordable commodities for their residents. — With Delon Porcalla, Romina Cabrera, Emmanuel Tupas





## PH rice stocks to last 39 days

MALACANANG gave assurances that the country's rice stocks will last 39 days despite the massive destruction suffered by the agricultural sector from two recent typhoons.

"We are prepared. The production for up to the second quarter, we have something like 39 days of stocks [of rice]," DA Undersecretary Mercedita Sombilla said on Tuesday.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is concurrently the Agriculture secretary.

Sombilla said the Department of Agriculture (DA) "has already

prepositioned ways by which we could really increase production. The biggest rice production will still come sometime ... if not end of September, sometime in October."

She added that the rice stocks will be augmented by rice imports.

"So, we will be beefing up our supply and, of course, the usual supply that we will be also getting from imports," Sombilla said.

She added that the DA had already scheduled the importation of 1.3 million metric tons of rice to add to the country's stockpile.

Apart from the destruction caused by the back-to-back weather disturbances, Sombilla cited the withdrawal of Russia from the Black Sea Grain Initiative, the ban imposed by India on exporting non-basmati white rice and the El Niño phenomenon as threats to the stabilization of rice supply in the Philippines.

"So the President really, you know, consulted and discussed with the DA various interventions that the Department of Agriculture is now going to be preparing for.

► StocksA2

### ■ STOCKS FROM A1

## PH rice stocks to last 39 days

Actually, many of them are already ongoing in response to whatever the effects of these three global events are," she said.

The onslaught of typhoons "Egay" and "Falcon" left an estimated damage of P1.94 billion to agricultural crops, the DA said also on Tuesday.

Of the figure, P950 million was incurred by the rice sector and P730 million by the corn sector.

"So, those were the effects of super typhoons Egay and Falcon accompanied by the habagat (southwest monsoon)," National Food Authority Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said in a Malacanang briefing.

De Mesa noted that interventions by the DA are now in place, in coordination with its regional offices and local government units in all typhoon-hit areas, especially Regions 1 and 2 (Ilocos and Cagayan Valley) and the Cordillera Administrative Region.

"But again, as the President is very much worried, we really have to discuss ways by which we could really mitigate, you know, further effects of these events that are now unfolding," he said.

KRISTINA MARALIT





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## Sugarcane output seen dropping due to El Niño

DOMESTIC sugarcane output could drop by up to 15 percent because of the droughts associated with the El Niño weather pattern, the **Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA)** said on Tuesday.

"The problem during the extended dry season is the growing cultivating stage because not everybody has access to water," SRA Administrator Pablo Luis Azcona said.

"About 85 percent of our farmers will not have access to water, so we were estimating a 10- to 15-percent drop if we're growing sugarcane during the dry season," he added.

The estimated drop in production will be equivalent to 180,000 metric tons (MT) to 200,000 MT or about 4 million bags.

The impact of El Niño on sugarcane production will likely be seen in the next cropping season, Azcona said.

For now, however, he described the country's situation as "looking good."

"We're just battling a bit of weather disturbances. We've had a little flooding in the south of Negros which will affect us a bit," Azcona added.

As for prices, the SRA chief said that they were hoping to maintain a P3,000 farmgate price — equivalent to P60 per kilo — for raw sugar.

"When it comes to retail ... we have a very ample supply of refined sugar compared to last year" when the country was at 'the brink

►El Niño B2

### ■ EL NIÑO FROM B1

## Sugarcane

of a shortage."

In a related development, the Agriculture department on Tuesday said that it had received a donation of 4,000 metric tons (MT) or 80,000 bags of white refined sugar from the Bureau of Customs.

The sugar, which had been smuggled into the country from Thailand and seized at the Port of Batangas, will be sold at government-run Kadiwa stores.

"The said move is in compliance with the directive of Presi-

dent Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to address the rising prices of basic commodities — particularly sugar — and achieve national food security," the Agriculture department said.

Based on latest Sugar Regulatory Administration data, the country's physical stock of raw sugar was at 262,328.30 MT, refined sugar at 448,106.45 MT and 148,264.29 MT molasses as of July 16.

As of July 31, the retail price of refined sugar in Metro Manila markets ranged from P86 to P110 per kilo, washed sugar was at P82 to P90, while a kilo of brown sugar was between P78 and P90.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL





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# 151 areas under state of calamity

## 'Habagat' rains may persist despite Falcon's exit

By MARTIN SADONGDONG  
and ELLALYN DE VERA-RUIZ

A total of 151 cities, municipalities, and provinces have declared a state of calamity in their respec-

tive localities due to the devastation left by super typhoon Egay and the enhanced southwest monsoon, or "habagat."

As of 5 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 1, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management ► **5**





# MANILA BULLETIN

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Council (NDRRMC) said the areas that declared a state of calamity were located in Ilocos Region (Region 1), Cagayan Valley (Region 2), Central Luzon (Region 3), Calabarzon (Region 4A), Mimaropa (Region 4B), and Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR).

## THE AREAS UNDER A STATE OF CALAMITY ARE:

- Region 1 – 25 areas (Ilocos Norte with 23 and La Union with two)
- Region 2 – 29 areas all in Cagayan
- Region 3 – 36 areas (Pampanga with 21, Bataan with 12, Bulacan with two, and Tarlac with one)
- Region 4A – 23 areas all in Cavite
- Region 4B – Sablayan in Occidental Mindoro
- CAR – 37 areas (Abra with 27 and Mountain Province with 10).

The number is expected to further increase as the NDRRMC said it was waiting for a copy of the resolution declaring a state of calamity from the local "sanggunian" in one more area in Bataan.

The areas placed under state of calamity may utilize their quick response fund (QRF) for relief and recovery programs.

Officials said the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Fund may be released to augment local funds in areas that will still need additional money for relief and rehabilitation efforts.

The regions where areas were placed under state of calamity are among the hardest-hit by Egay and habagat.

The combined effects of Egay and habagat have affected 2.4 million individuals, 50,000 of them still in evacuation centers.

## ₱1.94 B damage to agri

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said Egay wiped out almost ₱2 billion worth of agricultural goods.

Assistant Secretary for Operations Arnel de Mesa gave this latest assessment of the DA on the damage caused by the typhoon to the Philippine agriculture sector.

The losses and damage due to Egay climbed from the ₱1.54 billion reported by the Agriculture department on July 30.

is already at ₱1.94 billion," he told reporters during a media briefing held in Malacañang.

The official said the affected commodities include rice at ₱950 million and ₱713 million for corn.

Analysts had earlier warned the losses in high-value crops and other agriculture goods are likely to drive inflation up as the fishery sector was likewise affected by the typhoon.

## Falcon exits; rains may persist

Meanwhile, typhoon Falcon (international name: Khanun) left the Philippine area of responsibility (PAR) at 3:30 p.m., Tuesday, Aug. 1, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said.

PAGASA last located Falcon 835 kilometers northeast of extreme northern Luzon as of 4 p.m.

It was moving west-northward at 15 kilometers per hour (kph), while packing maximum sustained winds of 175 kph near the center and gusts of up to 215 kph.

However, PAGASA said the habagat, being enhanced by Falcon, may continue to bring occasional rains to western Luzon.

In the next 24 hours, scattered to widespread heavy rains may persist in Zambales and Bataan, while occasional moderate to heavy rains may prevail over Metro Manila, Pangasinan, Pampanga, Bulacan, and Occidental Mindoro.

Meanwhile, scattered light to heavy monsoon rains may continue in Ilocos Region, Cordillera Administrative Region, Cagayan Valley, Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon), Nueva Ecija, Aurora, Tarlac, Oriental Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan.

## Gusty conditions

PAGASA may no longer raise tropical cyclone wind warnings over the extreme Northern Luzon due to Falcon, but warned that the enhanced southwest monsoon may bring gusty conditions over several parts of Luzon.

On Wednesday, Aug. 2, gusty conditions caused by the habagat may continue to affect Batanes, Babuyan Islands, Ilocos Region, Nueva Vizcaya, Aurora, Zambales, Bataan, Bulacan, Pampanga, Metro Manila, Southern Luzon, Bicol Region, Western Visayas, the western portion of Northern Samar, and most of the Cordillera Administrative Region.

On Thursday, Aug. 3, gusty conditions may persist in Batanes, Babuyan Islands, Ilocos Region, Cordillera Administrative Region, Nueva Vizcaya, Aurora, Zambales, Bataan, Bulacan, Pampanga, Metro Manila, Southern Luzon, Bicol Region, Northern Samar, and Western Visayas. (With a report from Raymond Antonio)





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## 3 DA, 2 FTI officials suspended for 'questionable' Kadiwa onion deliveries

By CZARINA NICOLE ONG KI

The Office of the Ombudsman ordered the preventive suspension without pay for six months of five officials of the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** and the Food Terminal Incorporated (FTI) for "questionable procurement" and "doubtful deliveries" of onions for the Kadiwa Food Hub project.

The four-page order, signed by Ombudsman Samuel R. Martires on Tuesday, Aug. 1, preventively suspended DA Assistant Secretary Kristine Y. Evangelista, Administrative Officer V Eunice F. Biblanias, and officer-in-charge Chief Accountant Lolita M. Jamela, and FTI Vice President for Operations John Gabriel Benedict C. Trinidad III, and Budget Division Head Juanita G. Lualhati.

The order stated that the preventive suspension without pay was in line with Section 24 of Republic Act No. 6770, the Ombudsman Act of 1989.

Section 24 provides: "The Ombudsman or his Deputy may preventively suspend any officer or employee under his authority pending an investigation, if in his judgment the evidence of guilt is strong, and (a) the charge against such officer or employee involves dishonesty, oppression or grave misconduct or neglect in the performance of duty; (b) the charges would warrant removal from the service; or (c) the respondent's continued stay in office may prejudice the case filed against him."

Those suspended were charged with grave misconduct, gross neglect of duty, and conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service.

The order stated that DA Senior Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban entered into a memorandum of agreement with FTI for the Kadiwa Food Hub project. FTI, a government owned and controlled corporation, then entered into a letter of agreement with Bonena Multi-Purpose Cooperative for the delivery of 8,845 bags of onions as part of the Kadiwa Food Hub.

But the order stated that the DA officials named in the complaint failed to observe the provisions of RA 9184, the Procurement Law, since there was lack of parameters in the selection of the cooperative that will supply and deliver the onions.

The order also stated there was a "questionable" advance payment of 50 percent of the contract price despite the "doubtful deliveries" by Bonena.

"In view of the foregoing, it appears that the evidence of guilt of respondents Evangelista, Biblanias, Jamela, Trinidad III, and Lualhati is strong and the charges against them... may warrant their removal from office," the order stated.

"Considering further that respondents' continued stay in the office may influence potential witnesses and may prejudice the case filed against them due to their continued access to documentary evidence relative thereto, this Office exercises its power to place respondents under preventive suspension," it added.

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## ■ Customs donates forfeited Thai sugar to DA

The Bureau of Customs has given the forfeited Thailand white sugar to the Department of Agriculture (DA) to be distributed to various local communities. Customs Commissioner Bienvenido Y. Rubio and Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban on Tuesday, Aug. 1, formalized the donation of 4,000 metric tons of forfeited sugar. The donated sugar, which arrived at the Port of Batangas last Jan. 12 aboard M/V Sunward without the required Notice of Arrival, was subject to immediate action by the Port of Batangas. Customs issued a warrant of seizure and detention against the undocumented sugar and M/V Sunward. Eventually, on April 14, the sugar and the vessel were officially forfeited in favor of the government. Under the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) Memorandum Circular No. 4, Series 2022-2023, it is stated that seized sugar may be donated by Customs to government institutions. In accordance with this rule, the DA, the Department of Finance (DOF), and Customs have come together and agreed upon the terms through a memorandum of agreement. On July 21, 2023, the Secretary of Finance approved the proposed donation of 4,000 metric tons, equivalent to 80,000 bags of refined sugar to the DA. In his message, Rubio expressed his heartfelt gratitude for the untiring support of the DOF, DA and SRA in the donation process. "I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the DOF, DA, and SRA for your invaluable contributions, guidance, and unwavering support to BOC, which made this donation possible," Rubio said. "We firmly believe that, through DA, this donation will reach various local communities and enable our fellow Filipinos to conveniently access sugar," he added. (Chino S. Leyco)





## 'QUADRUPLE WHAMMY' TO HIT PINOYS' GUT

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ

[@joveemarie](#)

INDIA'S rice export ban, Vietnam's move to halve its exports, typhoons like Egay, and the scuttling of the Ukraine grain deal are "the quadruple whammy" that will hurt the Philippines, the world's second and sixth biggest rice and wheat

importer, said Deputy Speaker Ralph Recto on Tuesday.

Recto said the government should look into experts' suggestions to address "the quadruple whammy."

*"Ito ang suntok sa sikmura na dapat paghandaan nating lahat. [This is the punch in the stomach that we should all prepare for]. These developments are*

the sound of empty pots clanging," Recto said in a statement.

President Marcos's warning that rice prices could go up is the refreshing honesty of telling the truth to the people that should spur a whole-of-nation action on how to meet the crisis ahead, he added.

SEE "QUADRUPLE WHAMMY," A2

### Quadruple whammy...

CONTINUED FROM A1

Among the measures experts are suggesting is ramping up production "of rice and substitute crops" in areas like Mindanao, which are not on the usual typhoon path, Recto said.

Recto said flooding caused by typhoons Egay and Falcon would impact rice and corn supplies as the three affected regions—Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, and Central Luzon—account for 44 percent of national rice production and 79 percent of corn.

"These are agricultural powerhouses that not only serve as our grain granaries but are also major suppliers of poultry, pork, and other livestock," he said.

However, the easy solution of importation when local production dips "is not as straightforward anymore due to convulsions in the world market."

"It is no longer easy to order rice. The only thing other countries give up is their surplus production. They prioritize local demand. And this is where grain nationalism comes in. Because if there is no rice on the table, people will rise up in protest," he said.

India, the number one rice exporter with a 40-percent world market share, has imposed a ban on the export of non-Basmati rice.

#### Ripple effect

"YOU don't need a Nobel to sagely predict that it will have a ripple effect on all grain prices considering the big hole it will cause," Recto said.

But what could hit us "directly and painfully," Recto warned, is Vietnam's decision to slash its rice exports a year to 4 million tons by 2030 from 7.1 million tons in 2022.

The Philippines, he said, sourced 2.5 million metric tons, or 85 percent, of its rice imports from Vietnam in 2021; "that's why the painful joke is that Vietnam is said to be the biggest rice-producing province in the Philippines."

But, Recto added, "the flipside is, can we leverage our being the No. 1 customer into a favored recipient status? Do we have that diplomatic gravitas?"

Even the failure to free embargoed Ukraine wheat, after Russia bombed grain stores in Ukraine and pulled out of a deal that would have allowed safe passage of food exports through the Black Sea, "will shrink Pinoy pan de sal sizes while boosting its price."

"What most people don't know is that we are not only the champion rice importer, but we are also the sixth placer in importing wheat because noodles are our national food," Recto said.

Recto, a former director general of the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda), said the country is about 81 percent rice-self-sufficient.

One "interesting data" that Recto discovered is the jump in rice utilization.

"If you look at 2022 rice utilization data, it was 135 kilos per capita for that year, up from 118 kilos per Pinoy prepandemic. What is the reason for this?" he wondered aloud.

#### 'Department of Rice Importation?'

MEANWHILE, Gabriela Rep. Arlene D. Brosas criticized the proposed government-to-government importation of rice.

In a statement, Brosas highlighted the need to repeal RA 11203, or the Rice Liberalization Law, and prioritize strengthening the Philippine rice industry instead.

"While we acknowledge the need to address the current shortage of rice stocks, we believe that the solution lies in supporting our local farmers and improving our domestic rice production. The President must be reminded that he is running the **Department of Agriculture** and not the Department of Rice Importation," Brosas stated.

"The increasing prices of rice and dwindling stocks are proof that the Rice Liberalization Law was never the solution in the first place as it allowed the influx of imported rice and consequently depressed the farm gate prices of palay," she added.

Brosas is the author of House Bill 405 or the Rice Industry Development Act (RIDA), which proposes a massive overhaul of the rice industry, with the government paving the way with adequate public investment, support, mechanisms, and infrastructure.



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## DA gets 4,000 MT sugar from BOC

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has formally received 4,000 metric tons (MT) of white refined sugar from the Bureau of Customs (BOC) to be sold at various Kadiwa stores on Tuesday.

The BOC donated 4,000 MT (80,000 bags) of forfeited Thailand White Sugar to the DA.

The sugar, which was shipped from Thailand and later rendered as forfeited by the Port of Batangas in April, was cleared for donation and consumption based on the guidelines specified in the DA-Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) Memorandum Circular 4, series of 2022-2023 as

well as the Republic Act (RA) 10863 or the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act.

The donation is in compliance to address the rising prices of basic commodities—particularly sugar—and achieve national food security.

As per the latest Supply and Demand Situation of the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA), the current sugar supply is more than enough to sustain existing demand.

The report noted a physical stock of 262,328.30 metric tons (MT) raw sugar, 448,106.45 MT refined sugar, and 148,264.29 MT molasses as of July 16. *Raadee S. Sausa*



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## Nakumpiskang mga asukal, idinonate ng BOC sa DA

Nasa 4,000 metriko tonelada o 80,000 bags ng mga nakumpiskang Thailand white sugar ang idinonate ng Bureau of Customs (BOC) sa Department of Agriculture (DA) upang maipahagi sa mga komunidad sa pamamagitan ng mga programa ng gobyerno sa pagkain.

Pinirmahan kahapon ang Deed of Donation and Acceptance sa

pagitan nina BOC Commissioner Bienvenido Y. Rubio at DA Senior Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban.

Nabatid na nasam-sam ang naturang mga asukal noong Enero 12, 2023 nang dumating sa Port of Batangas lulan ng M/V Sunward ngunit natagpuan na walang kaukulang Notice of Arrival. Tuluyan itong nakapasakamay

ng gobyerno sa isang desisyon nitong Abril 12. "[Seized sugar with commercial value and capable of legitimate use may be disposed by the BOC through donation to government institutions", nakasaad umano sa Paragraph D.1 ng

Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) Memorandum Circular No. 4 series of 2022-2023. Nitong Hulyo 21 naman

inaprubahan ng Department of Finance ang panukalang donasyon ng 4,000 MT refined sugar sa DA.

Sinabi ni Rubio na inaasahan niya na sa pamamagitan ng DA ay makakaabot ang naturang donasyon sa iba't ibang mga lokal na komunidad at magkaroon ng access ang mga mahihirap na Filipino sa asukal. (Danilo Garcia)



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## Suplay ng bigas sapat, buffer stock hanggang 39 days - DA

Nananatiling maaasahan ang supply at demand ng bigas sa Pilipinas sa kabila ng nagbabadyang epekto ng maraming mga kadahilanan kabilang ang desisyon ng Russia na umatras mula sa Black Sea Grain Initiative, ang desisyon ng India na ipagbawal ang pag-export ng bigas, at ang El Niño phenomenon.

"As of today, we are looking at, you know, sound pa rin naman iyong supply and demand natin," ayon kay **Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Mercedita Sombilla** sa isang press briefing sa Malacañang nitong Martes.

Sa kabila ng positibong ulat, sinabi ni Sombilla na si Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., na siya ring Kalihim ng DA, ay nagpahayag ng pagkabahala sa posibleng epekto ng tatlong pangunahing pandaigdigang isyu sa sektor ng agrikultura ng Pilipinas.

Sinabi ni Sombilla na kailangan nilang pag-usapan ang mga paraan upang mapagaan ang karagdagang epekto ng tatlong pandaigdigang isyu "na lumalawak na ngayon" habang binigyang-diin niya na handa ang DA na pataasin ang produksyon ng bigas sa Pilipinas.

"Naghahanda na kami. 'Yung production hanggang second quarter, meron tayong parang 39 days na stocks tapos tuloy. Nag-preposition na ang DA ng mga paraan kung saan mapapalaki natin ang produksyon," sabi ni Sombilla.

"Ang pinakamalaking produksyon ng bigas ay darating pa rin minsan, kung hindi katapusan ng Setyembre, minsan sa Oktubre. So dagdagan natin ang ating supply, at siyempre, ang usual na supply na makukuha rin natin sa imports," dagdag nito.

Binigyang-diin din ni Sombilla na ang presyo ng bigas sa merkado ay maaaring maiugnay sa mga epekto ng pagtaas ng presyo ng pataba at halaga ng gasolina, na pabago-bago pa rin pangunahin dahil sa Black Sea Grain Initiative.

Bagama't may mga hindi matatag na paggalaw sa Black Sea Grain Initiative, binigyang-diin ni Sombilla na magdudulot ito ng "very minimal effect" sa merkado ng Pilipinas katulad ng epekto sa desisyon ng India na ipagbawal ang pag-export ng bigas.

Binigyang-diin niya, gayunpaman, na maaaring lumitaw ang isang problema depende sa kung paano tutugon ang ibang mga bansang nag-e-export sa mga pandaigdigang kaganapan, ngunit mahigpit na sinusubaybayan ng DA. (Gemma Garcia)





## Bigas tumaas presyo ng ₱2 kada kilo

Kinumpirma ng **Department of Agriculture (DA)** nitong Martes na tumaas ang presyo ng bigas ng mula P1.50 hanggang P2 kada kilo matapos ang pananalasa ng bagyong Egay at walang tigil na pag-ulan dulot ng habagat.

"Pagdating naman nitong July, binagyo tayo, tumataas ang presyo. Base doon sa ating price monitoring, hindi lang ho bigas, pati po 'yung ating mga gulay. Gumagalaw po 'yan, lalong-lalo na 'yung imported natin [na bigas]," pag-amin ni DA Deputy

Spokesperson Rex Estoperez.

"Ang iba naman, tubo siyempre ang objective. Paki-usap lang naman namin sana sa kanila, kung ano lang nara-rapat na presyo... Doon sa atin pong bantay presyo, umaabot sa P1.50 to P2 per kilo po [ang itinaas ng bigas]," giit pa ni Estoperez sa interview ng TeleRadyo Serbisyo.

Kaugnay nito, nangangamba naman si Batangas Rep. Ralph Recto na posibleng magkulang ang supply ng bigas sa bansa

dahil sa desisyon ng India na magpatupad ng rice export ban at pagbawas ng Vietnam sa maaaring i-export nitong bigas.

Bukod dito, sinabi ni Recto na naapektuhan din ng habagat at bagyong Egay ang produksyon ng bigas sa bansa at itinigil na ang grain deal ng Ukraine.

"Ito ang suntok sa sikmura na dapat paghandaan nating lahat. These developments are the sound of empty pots clanging," sabi ni Recto. **(Billy Begas/ Eralyn Prado)**





## 5 agri, FTI exec sinuspinde sa sibuyas scandal

PINATAWAN ng 6 na buwang preventive suspension ng Office of the Ombudsman ang ilang opisyal ng Department of Agriculture (DA) at Food Terminal Incorporated (FTI) dahil sa patuloy na imbestigasyon sa pagbili ng mga sibuyas para sa Kadiwa Food Hub project.

Sa utos na may petsang Agosto 1, 2023, pinatawan ni Ombudsman Samuel Martires ng preventive suspension without pay sina DA Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista, Administrative Officer Eunice Biblanias, DA Officer-in-Charge Chief Accountant Lolita Jamela, FTI Vice President for Operations John Gabriel Benedict Trinidad III at Budget Division Head Juanita Lualhati.

Kasama sina DA Se-

nior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban at FTI President Robert Tan sa listahan ng mga respondent sa reklamang inihain sa Ombudsman.

Ngunit sa utos ng Ombudsman, tanging sina Evangelista, Biblanias, Jamela, Trinidad III at Lualhati lamang ang pinatawan ng suspension order.

Sa rekord, ang DA sa pamamagitan ni Panganiban ay pumasok sa isang Memorandum of Agreement sa FTI para sa Food Mobilization o Kadiwa Food Hub Project habang ang bansa ay nahaharap sa kakulangan ng suplay ng sibuyas noong nakaraang taon.

Pagkatapos, ang FTI ay pumasok naman sa isang Letter of Agreement sa Bonena Multipurpose Cooperative

para sa delivery ng 8,845 bag ng sibuyas.

Ang ginawa ng mga nasabing opsyonal ay isa umangong paglabag sa Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act at Government Procurement Act dahil sa kakulangan ng mga parameter sa pagpili ng kooperatiba.

Kinuwestyon din ng Ombudsman ang advance payment ng 50 porsiyento sa contract price, ang hindi pagsunod sa MOA, bahagyang pagpapatupad ng kontrata at kadudang pag-deliver ng Bonena. (Dolly Cabreza)



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## DA: Hoarding ng bigas iwasan

UMAASA ang Department of Agriculture na walang mangangalakal na magho-ward ng bigas dahil sa pagtaas ng presyo nito matapos humagupit ang mga bagyong Egay, Falcon at habagat.

Sa press briefing sa Malakanyang, sinabi ni Department of Agriculture Usec.

Mercedita Sombilla na mino-monitor nila ang bagay at nagdarasal na ang mga mangangalakal lalo na iyong mga umaangkat ng

bigas ay hindi iiisipin na mag-ward ng bigas.

"Sana huwag nilang gawin 'no, na i-ward iyong... whatever stocks they have now. That has to really come out in the market," aniya pa rin.

Sa ngayon, umabot na sa P1.94B ang pinsala sa agrikultura dahil sa pinagsama-samang epekto ng bagyong Egay, bagyong Falcon at monsoon rain.

Sa press briefing sa Malakanyang, sinabi ni Sombilla na umabot

sa P950M ang pinsala sa rice sector habang P713M naman ang sa mais.

Dahil umano sa epektong ito ay tumaas ang presyo ng bigas.

"Nandoon pa rin iyong effect ng ano 'no, iyong fertilizer and fuel cost 'no kasi nagpa-fluctuate pa rin ito primarily because of the siguro Black Sea Grain Initiative kasi mas maraming fertilizer ang nanggagaling doon. And then the fuel cost, nakita ninyo naman, bumaba na siya, umakyat na naman. So the stability of this ...and these are really huge, you know, huge percentage of the total cost of production of palay," ani Sombilla.

KRIS JOSE





## DA eyes ally in fight vs smuggling, ASF

OFFICIALS of the Department of Agriculture (DA) on Monday met with representatives of SGS Philippines Inc. to discuss possible partnerships aimed at addressing challenges affecting the industry, including African swine fever (ASF).

In a statement, the DA noted that the meeting also centered on how to address other challenges related to animal health, as well as curbing agricultural smuggling.

During the meeting, DA officials led by Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban discussed joint activities that may address the challenges faced by the Philippine agriculture sector.

Also present were DA Assistant Secretary for Regulations Paz Bertavidez, Assistant Secretary for Policy Research and

Development Noel Padre, and Assistant Secretary for Inspectorate and Enforcement James Layug.

It added that the attendees have expressed support for a possible alliance that will benefit the country's food industry by protecting locally produced farm products and ensuring healthy stock and swine production.

Operating in the Philippines since 1949, the SGS Philippines has been providing a wide range of solutions in the agricultural sector including testing and inspection services and agricultural contract research.

It has offices and laboratories in Makati, Subic, Mariveles, Navotas, Batangas, Albay, Nueva Vizcaya, Masbate, Leyte, Surigao City, Davao City, and Cebu City. PNA





## TERRIBLE TANDEM

**TYPHOON Egay and the southwest monsoon or habagat have caused significant damage to agriculture and infrastructure in various regions of the Philippines, totaling more than P5.4 billion.**

According to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), the total cost of infrastructure damage in the regions of Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, and Calabarzon reached P3.51 billion.

Meanwhile, agricultural damage was estimated at P1.96 billion in Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Mimaropa, Western Visayas, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), and the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR).

The disaster has also led to the damage of 41,591 houses,

affecting 668,974 families (equivalent to 2,452,738 individuals) in 4,164 barangays. Of those affected, 13,718 families (50,467 persons) are being assisted in 736 evacuation centers, while 63,066 families (262,008 individuals) are receiving aid outside of evacuation centers.

The death toll from the typhoon stands at 25, with 23 still being validated. Additionally, 52 people were reported injured, with 39 of them confirmed. There are also reports of 13 missing persons that are currently being verified.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) reported that the typhoon affected 123,274 farmers and fisherfolk in several regions. The disaster affected a total of 147,063 hectares of land, resulting in a production loss of 86,975 metric tons (MT) of various

commodities, including rice, corn, high-value crops, livestock, poultry, and fisheries. Some farm and fishery infrastructures and equipment have also been damaged, and the exact amount of this damage is still being assessed.

To assist the affected farmers and fisherfolk, the DA is providing various forms of aid, including rice and corn seeds, assorted vegetable seeds, drugs and biologics for livestock and poultry, and fingerlings of tilapia, carp, and catfish. The Agricultural Credit Policy Council (ACPC) is offering a P200 million Survival and Recovery (SURE) Loan Program with up to P25,000 loanable amount payable in three years at zero interest.

Additionally, P500 million worth of Quick Response Fund (QRF) is available for the reha-

bilitation of the affected areas.

The National Irrigation Administration (NIA) reported that "Egay" left damages to irrigation infrastructures amounting to P1.105 billion mostly on washed out structures, embankment, canal lining, protection works among others.

A team headed by Acting Administrator Engr. Eddie Guillen is presently conducting continuous field investigation and site visits to gather further data on crops and irrigation damages in areas severely affected by "Egay."

NIA said that it recorded damages in crops at P2.416-billion as of July 31 while a total of 69,432 farmers cultivating 43,875.55 hectares of agricultural land are affected by the typhoon's fury.

With Joel dela Torre





# RICE SUPPLY STABLE -- DA

THE supply and demand of rice in the Philippines remains reliable despite the looming effects of many factors including the decision of Russia to withdraw from the Black Sea Grain Initiative, the decision of India to ban rice exports, and, the El Niño phenomenon, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

"As of today, we are looking at, you know, sound pa rin naman iyang supply and demand natin," DA Undersecretary Mercedita Sombilla told reporters during a press briefing in Malacañang on Tuesday.

Despite the positive report, Sombilla said that President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., who is also the concurrent DA Secretary, has expressed concerns about the possible effects of the three

major global issues on the Philippine agriculture sector.

Sombilla said that they have to discuss ways to mitigate the further effects of three global issues "that are now unfolding" as she emphasized that the DA is prepared to increase rice production in the Philippines.

"We are prepared. The production for up to the second quarter, we have something like 39 days of stocks and then will continue. The DA has already prepositioned ways by which we could really increase production," Sombilla said.

"The biggest rice production will still come sometime, kung hindi at the end of September, sometime in October. So we will be beefing up our supply, and of course, the usual na

supply that we will be also getting from imports," she added.

Sombilla also emphasized that the price of rice in the market could be attributed to the effects of the increase in prices of fertilizer and fuel cost, which are still fluctuating primarily due to the Black Sea Grain Initiative.

While there are unstable movements in the Black Sea Grain Initiative, Sombilla emphasized that it will cause a "very minimal effect" on the Philippine market similar to the effect on the decision of India to ban rice exports.

She emphasized, however, that a problem may emerge depending on how other exporting countries would respond to the global events, but which the DA is closely monitoring.



Legitimate investors in food production are often the victims of smuggling, hoarding and price manipulation.





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## Sandigan affirms junking of coco levy case

BY PETER TABINGO

THE Sandiganbayan Second Division has affirmed its May 16, 2023 decision dismissing Civil Case No. 0033-B, one of eight subdivided coconut levy cases, against Coconut Producers Federation Inc. (Cocofed), Coconut Investment Co. (CIC), and Cocofed Marketing Corp. (Cocomark).

In its eight-page resolution dated July 31, 2023 penned by Associate Justice Artur O. Malabaguio, the anti-graft court held that the government's appeal failed to raise any new argument that would warrant a modification or reversal of the assailed ruling.

"The motion for reconsideration must be denied. Primarily, the grounds relied upon by the plaintiff have already been carefully and exhaustively considered and passed upon in the assailed resolution," the Second Division ruled.

Associate Justices Oscar C. Herrera Jr. and Edgardo M. Caldonat concurred.

Government lawyers have attempted to convince the Sandiganbayan to reinstate Civil Case No. 0033-B after it was thrown out on the ground that the Republic of the Philippines failed to present its evidence more than two decades after pre-trial was set.

The original complaint docketed as Civil Case No. 0033 was filed way back July 31, 1987 by the

Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG), but due to the number of respondents as well as the interlocking interests of firms funded by the coconut levy funds, the Sandiganbayan ordered the case subdivided into eight separate actions in 1995.

For some of the subdivided cases like Civil Case No. 0033-A involving the United Coconut Planters Bank (UCPB) and Civil Case 0033-F involving 27 percent of San Miguel Corporation, the strategy worked as the PCGG won both cases.

It was a different story for Civil Case No. 0033-B.

Despite pendency in court for 36 years since the filing of the original complaint and 24 years

since being separated from seven other cases, this case did not see even a single day of trial.

In denying the government's appeal, the court stressed that the State carries the burden of proof that there was no violation of defendants' right to speedy disposition of cases.

"The records show that more than two decades have passed, and yet no conclusion of pre-trial proceedings or even initiation for the setting of the next pre-trial schedule has been issued," the Sandiganbayan pointed out.

Over the years, the court recorded "countless times" when government lawyers failed to appear in court without any justification.





# Tariffs from H1 rice imports up, but timing costly to govt

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS [@jearcalas](#)  
& CAI U. ORDINARIO [@caiorinario](#)

**T**HE national government raked in more tariff collections from rice imports in the first half, driven by weaker currency, higher import volume and elevated world market prices.

There is a flipside to that robust revenue, though: The national government's resources are being depleted in favor of rice imports at a time when the peso is weak, according to a local economist.

Based on data culled by BUSINESSMIRROR, Ateneo de Manila University economist Leonardo Lanzona Jr. saw that the decline in rice imports reached 14 percent in January and as much as 45 percent in June.

"In January, a 9-percent increase in foreign exchange caused a 14-percent decline in rice imports. In June, a 7-percent increase in foreign exchange resulted in a 45-percent decline in imports.

This only means that the government resources are being depleted by too much reliance on imported rice," Lanzona said.

Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) Senior Research Fellow Roehlano M. Briones said, however, there is usually a time lag when it comes to the impact of weaker currencies on internationally traded commodities.

"The unit value is rising in 2023 because of increased world price. So far, importers have not reacted in terms of quantity but that's because there is a lag. Peso indeed weaker on semester basis," Briones said, partly in Filipino.

## Customs data

BUREAU of Customs (BOC) data published on its website showed that its rice tariff collections from January to June reached P13.583 billion, about 24 percent over the P10.976 billion it collected in the same period of last year.

Given the latest rice tariff collections, rice farmers are now assured of at least P3.583 billion in cash transfer as mandated by existing laws.

Under Republic Act 11598, rice tariffs collected in excess of P10 billion shall fund the state's Rice Farmers Financial Assistance that provides cash assistance to eligible Filipino rice farmers.

BOC data analyzed by the BUSINESSMIRROR showed that the increase in rice tariff collections was driven by higher import volume and weaker peso. BOC data also showed that the higher rice prices in the world market contributed to the uptick in collections.

Rice import volume during the six-month period rose by 13 percent to 1.848 billion kilograms from 1.636 billion kilograms recorded in the first half of last year, based on BOC data.

BOC data showed the country's

currency weakened by 6.5 percent on an annual basis against the greenback.

For the first half, the exchange rate of the Philippine peso against the US dollar averaged at P55.28 from the P51.9 recorded exchange rate in the same period of last year, based on BOC data.

BOC data indicated that the value of rice shipments increased this year.

On a per metric ton basis, the average rice import value was estimated at P21,000 from P19,000 recorded last year. This means that a kilogram of imported rice was valued at an average of P21 in the first half compared to last year's P19.17 average price.

The Customs bureau earlier cited the depreciation of the Philippine peso against the US dollar in increasing its overall tariff collections amid a drop in import volume of certain key commodities and items.

## Weak peso, costlier rice

MEANWHILE, both economists—Briones and Lanzona—agreed that a weaker peso makes imported rice more expensive.

CONTINUED ON A5

## Tariffs from H1 rice imports up, but timing costly to govt

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This is significant since rice is the country's staple and the Philippines is one of the largest importers of rice in the world.

Efforts to wean the country away from its dependence on rice imports, Lanzona said, requires greater market participation by Filipino farmers.

Lanzona said he is not pertaining to Kadiwa in these terms but to the available opportunities presented by digital technology to allow farmers to reach more buyers without the help of middle men.

"The only way is to put resources into the hands of farmers and to create a distribution system that allows farmers to transact directly with the consumers. Keeping middle men away from the product can reduce transaction costs. The more hands that touch the product before it reaches the consumers, the greater is the cost," Lanzona said.

"I am not talking about Kadiwa. I am talking about reviving the pre-pandemic market of small retailers and allowing greater empowerment of farmers to market their product. This is now feasible given the digital technology if we have the creativity to harness its potential," he stressed.

Earlier, National Statistician Claire Dennis S. Mapa said rice prices have been climbing since January 2023.

Rice inflation reached 2.7 percent in January 2023; 2.2 percent in February; 2.6 percent in March; 2.9 percent in April; 3.4 percent in May; and 3.6 percent in June.

Mapa also said all rice categories, regular, and well-milled as well as special rice prices in June 2023, all increased. Rice, the country's food staple, is a water-loving crop.

Rice has a weight of 8.87 percent of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of the All Households and 17.87 percent weight in the CPI of the Bottom 30 percent of Households.





## Vietnam food group official says no immediate plan to curb rice exports

HANOI - Vietnam has no immediate plans to restrict rice exports, a senior official of the country's food association said after India's export curbs sparked worries about global supplies of the staple.

"At the moment, Vietnamese companies are exporting rice normally," said Nguyen Ngoc Nam, chairman of the Vietnam Food Association, which represents the country's rice processors and exporters and works closely with the government.

India, which accounts for 40 percent of world rice exports, ordered a halt to its largest export category more than a week ago to calm domestic prices, which have climbed to multi-year highs in recent weeks as erratic weather threatened production.

Nam said prices of Vietnamese rice had soared since India's move on July 20, adding that the harvest of the summer-autumn crop was ongoing in Vietnam, which is the world's third largest rice exporter after India and Thailand.

Vietnam's 5 percent broken rice

prices rose to \$550-\$575 per metric ton on Monday, traders said, their highest since 2011, from a range of \$515-\$525 before India's move.

A day after India's export curb announcement, Vietnam's Ministry of Industry and Trade called on the association to ensure sufficient domestic rice supplies and food security, and asked traders to balance between exports and domestic sales to stabilise domestic prices.

Rice shipments from Vietnam in the first seven months of this year were estimated to have risen about 18.7 percent from a year earlier to 4.84 million tons, according to the government's preliminary data. Revenue from rice exports in the period was seen up 29.6 percent at \$2.58 billion.

On Friday, the United Arab Emirates announced it would ban rice exports and re-exports for four months, including rice of Indian origin.

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said on Saturday the country must boost its rice stocks and that he may seek a supply deal with India, worried about the

potential impact of El Nino dry weather on the local harvest and about other suppliers.

The Philippines is Vietnam's largest rice buyer.

Vietnam said last month it aims to cut its rice exports to 4 million tons a year by 2030, down from 7.1 million tons last year.

Vietnam is the world's third-largest rice exporter, after India and Thailand.

The move is aimed at "boosting the exports of high-quality rice, ensuring domestic food security, protecting the environment and adapting to climate change," according to the government document, dated May 26 and reviewed by Reuters.

Rice export revenue will fall to \$2.62 billion a year by 2030, down from \$3.45 billion in 2022, the document said.

"Although Vietnam's rice farming area is shrinking due to climate change and some farmers are switching to growing other crops and raising shrimp, the strategy appears to be too aggressive," a rice trader based in Ho Chi Minh City said. - Reuters



A farmer harvests rice by a paddy field outside Hanoi. (Reuters Photo)





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## Corn, soybeans rebound

SINGAPORE - Chicago corn and soybean futures rose on Tuesday after a U.S. government report showed that condition of both crops suffered amid hot and dry weather, with prices recovering from last session's losses.

Wheat rose for the first time in five sessions as uncertainty over supplies from the Black Sea region underpinned prices.

"There are forecasts of improved weather for the US Midwest but there could be yield losses from heat the crop has already suffered in the last few

weeks," said one Singapore-based trader.

The most-active corn contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was up 0.2 percent at \$5.14 a bushel, soybeans added 0.6 percent to \$13.39-1/2 a bushel. Wheat climbed 0.8 percent to \$6.70-3/4 a bushel.

Good-to-excellent ratings for the US corn, soybean and spring-wheat crops fell by more than expected in the past week as temperatures across the Midwest soared to the hottest of the summer. - *Reuters*