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Marcos calls for infra, agri projects support

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. urged lawmakers to approve the funding of infrastructure and agriculture initiatives under the Build Better More program included in the Philippine Development Plan (PDP).

The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) on Wednesday submitted to the House of Representatives the proposed P5.768-trillion national budget for 2024, approved by Marcos.

"This program, which seeks to continue and expand the Golden Age of Infrastruc-

ture of the country, will receive a total of P1.418 trillion. This is equivalent to 5.3 percent of GDP (gross domestic product)," the President said.

"This includes the Public Sector Infrastructure budget of the DoTr (Department of Transportation) and the DPWH (Department of Public Works and Highways), amounting to P176.4 billion and P801.2 billion, respectively," he added.

Marcos is hoping for the speedy approval of the proposed 2024 National

Expenditure Plan (NEP) amounting to P5.768 trillion, which is equivalent to 21.7 percent of the country's GDP and 9.5 percent higher than the P5.628 trillion under the 2023 General Appropriations Act (GAA).

In a message submitted to Congress, Marcos listed the following as priority initiatives: food and water security, infrastructure development, affordable and clean energy, education and skills development, health and nutrition,

social protection, generation of more quality jobs and competitive products, housing, ease of doing business and bureaucratic efficiency, digitalization and advanced technologies, the Climate Agenda, sound fiscal management, and open government partnership.

Marcos, who concurrently serves as head of the Department of Agriculture (DA), is seeking an additional budget to increase agricultural production.

► **ProjectsA8**



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Marcos calls for infra, agri projects

"To continue the upward trajectory of agricultural output and meet our PDP goal of increasing the Philippines' food security index, we will increase funding for the national programs of the Department of Agriculture on rice, corn, livestock, and high-value crops, among others," he said.

The President noted that among the social infrastructure programs and projects laid down since he assumed office, "a total of P40.6 billion has been allotted for the construction or improvement of public school buildings, including efforts to make these disaster-resilient, while P15.3 billion has been allocated for the construction, repair, and/ or improvement of

public hospitals and health centers nationwide."

Marcos added that of the current 194 big-ticket infrastructure flagship projects of the country, 123 were initiated during this administration.

The House of Representatives aims to approve the proposed budget before its October break.

"We will make sure that every centavo of the national budget will be spent wisely," House Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez said, noting the House would deliberate on the matter "in a very transparent manner" and would "get the widest consensus for the spending plan."

Ako Bicol Rep. Elizaldy Co, chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations, said they will work overtime to meet the internal dead-

lines of the House while ensuring that every centavo is allotted precisely where needed.

"By 'properly,' I mean making sure that we look at the Budget of Expenditures and Sources of Financing with a keen eye," he said.

Marikina City Second District Rep. Stella Quimbo, vice chairman of the House appropriations panel, said the budget briefings will start on Aug. 10, 2023.

Under the 1987 Constitution, the President shall submit to Congress within 30 days "from the opening of every regular session, as the basis of the general appropriations bill, a budget of expenditures and sources of financing, including receipts from existing and proposed revenue measures."

The 19th Congress opened its second regular session last July 24.

The Constitution states that all appropriation bills shall originate exclusively in the House, but that the Senate might propose or concur with amendments.

The DBM presented a copy of the 2024 NEP to Marcos on July 25, a day after his second State of the Nation Address.

Under the Constitution, the State "shall assign the highest budgetary priority to education."

The proposed 2024 budget allocates P924.7 billion to the education sector, which includes the Department of Education, state universities and colleges, the Commission on Higher Education, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda), and other education-related agencies.

The allocations for other priority sectors in the proposed 2024 budget are: P822.2 billion for the public works sector; P306.1 billion for the health sector; P259.5 billion for the interior and local government sector (excluding education-related agencies); P232.2 billion for the defense sector; P214.3 billion for the transportation sector; P209.9 billion for the social welfare sector; P181.4 billion for the agriculture sector; P57.8 billion for the judiciary; and P40.5 billion for the labor and employment sector (excluding Tesda).

Budget Secretary Amenah Pangandaman said there was, "across all agencies," a P4.3-billion confidential fund and a P4.9-billion intelligence fund under the proposed 2024 budget.

She said that there were guidelines from the Commission on Audit (CoA) on how to use confidential and intelligence funds.

"There is also a document submitted to CoA," she said.

"There's full transparency in terms of the request for these funds," she added.

KRISTINA MARALIT
AND REINA TOLENTINO



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BBM to help tobacco farmers

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Wednesday assured the public that his administration is fully committed to protecting the livelihood of tobacco farmers amid changes in health policies that affect the industry.

Marcos made the commitment as he recognized the tobacco industry as a "vibrant catalyst for economic growth," especially in parts of Northern Luzon and Mindanao.

"For many of our people, it is an indispensable bedrock that generates income, livelihood, opportunities, and employment,

particularly in areas where its cultivation spans generations and holds pivotal significance in the way of life of its communities," Marcos said in his speech delivered by Ilocos Norte Gov. Matthew Marcos Manotoc during the first International Tobacco Agricultural Summit.

"It is a significant source of tax

revenues that are used to fund government programs," he added.

But these past years, the President noted that we had seen "so much change in our health policies that affected the tobacco industry."

"As such, we must seek ways to protect the livelihood of thousands of our tobacco farmers. Hence, this summit is a good opportunity to discuss strategies to innovate the industry in ways that safeguard the well-being of people and the environment," Marcos said.

He also urged the Department of Agriculture and the National Tobacco Administration, along with the academe and the private

sector, "to explore other crops that can be grown alongside tobacco, so it can also contribute to our goal of food security."

"Let us embark on a journey of continuous exploration and engage in profound, future-driven discussions that would help bring tobacco farming and its allied industries into the future," Marcos said.

The President hails from Ilocos Norte, which is part of the Ilocos region, the top producer of tobacco in the country.

Meanwhile, the National Tobacco Administration (NTA) projected revenue losses from the illicit tobacco trade this year to reach over P30 billion.

"I think that would be a little higher than P30 billion; that is the projection for this year," NTA Regulation Manager Rohbert Ambros told reporters on the sidelines of the International Tobacco Agriculture Summit on Wednesday.

Representatives Jericho "Koko" Nograles and Joey Salceda expect annual losses to be about P26 billion and between P30 billion and P60 billion, respectively.

"We have a coordinating mechanism, especially in the export-import processing system. All our processes are interconnected. The BIR [Bureau of Internal Revenue], Customs, and the NTA are part of the trade net portal," Ambros said. With Niña Myka Pauline Arceo



Imprison smugglers, economic saboteurs

ECONOMIC sabotage means destroying the country's economy through illegal activities, like what the smugglers and hoarders of agricultural products have been doing. Economic sabotage is a serious crime because it cripples the economy and intensifies the problem of poverty.

Sugar smuggling, for example, not only deprives the government of revenues but it also adversely affects domestic sugar prices, to the detriment of our sugar producers. Hoarders of onion, on the other hand, create artificial scarcity in supply, which leads to price increases. The retail price of red onions in Metro Manila on New Year's Eve made unpleasant headlines when it hit P700 per kilo. It was easily the inflation leader in 2022, and made Philippine onions the most expensive onion on Earth. At that time, onion prices in Singapore was around P85 per kilo; P55 in Vietnam; and P35 in China and in India.

Responding to the call of President Marcos for Congress to pass amendments to the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act, Quezon 4th District Rep. Keith Micah Tan last Tuesday filed a bill declaring "large-scale" agricultural smuggling, hoarding, cartelization, profiteering, and other acts of market abuse as economic sabotage. He said House Bill 8600 seeks to amend Republic Act 10845, or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016. **(Read, "House bill declares 'large-scale' crop smuggling as act of economic sabotage," in the BUSINESSMIRROR, July 26, 2023).**

"RA 10845 was signed into law with the primary objective of protecting Filipino farmers and their families from the rise in agricultural smuggling in the country. Since the law's passage in 2016, however, even if there have been several reports of seizure of smuggled products, there have been no prosecution of individuals, groups, or corporations. It appears that some people have mastered how to circumvent the law in order not to be punished," he said.

"The present condition of our farmers and the rising price of agricultural products because of their scarcity reflect the failure of national government agencies to fully implement the law," Tan said, adding that "RA 10845's potential to finally end illegal activities that sabotage the country's economy and the livelihood of farmers had not been fully utilized over the years."

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

Based on the records of the Bureau of Customs, he said a total of P1.2 billion worth of smuggled agricultural products have been confiscated in 2022. "The government is losing millions of revenues as a result of smuggling, which is estimated at P250 million per year," the lawmaker said.

Tan said it is high time to introduce amendments to the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016 in order to address and hopefully end not only smuggling, but also the issues of hoarding, profiteering, and cartelization of agricultural products.

The proposed legislation will consider as economic sabotage the hoarding, profiteering, and cartel of sugar, corn, pork, poultry, garlic, onion, carrots, fish, and cruciferous vegetables in the amount of P1 million, and rice in the amount of P10 million. To strengthen the enforcement and implementation of the law, an Inter-Agency Council on Economic Intelligence will be created under the proposed measure.

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

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

Smugglers and economic saboteurs make the whole country suffer. It's about time for the government to put its foot down. Let's put all smugglers and hoarders of agricultural products behind bars for life. Let's get rid of these deplorable



National govt allots P30.9B for rice program

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA

[@sam_medenilla](#)

THE national government is allocating some P40 billion under its proposed 2024 budget to boost the country's rice production.

In his message for the 2024 National Expenditure Program (NEP), President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said the bulk, or P30.9 billion, of the amount will go to the National Rice Program (NRP).

The implementation of the NRP is expected to help the country achieve food self-sufficiency and make rice more affordable.

Another P10 billion will be

allocated for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), which will be used for seed development, propagation, and promotion; rice credit assistance; and the acquisition of agricultural equipment.

The government is also setting aside P9 billion for the procurement of 473,684 metric tons of palay from farmers for the buffer



A FARMER in Central Luzon plants rice in this BUSINESSMIRROR file photo.

stocking program of the National Food Authority (NFA).

As part of government efforts to help farmers and fishermen cope with the impact of natural calamities, a budget of P4.5 billion is

being proposed for the Philippine Crop Insurance Corp.

To ensure food security, Marcos said the government is earmarking around P20 billion for programs aimed at increasing the production



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of other agricultural commodities.

These include the P5.3 billion for the National Corn Program, P4.3 billion for the National Livestock Program, P1.9 billion for the National High Value Crops Development Program, P1 billion for the Sugarcane Industry Development Program, P6.9 billion for the National Fisheries Program, and P211 million for the Boosting Aquaculture Production Program.

To create "a flexible credit facility" for small farmers and fisherfolk, Marcos said the government will allot P2.8 billion for the Agro-Industry Modernization Credit and Financing Program.

Under the 2024 NEP, the National Soil Health Program will get P916 million, while agriculture-related research and development could receive P1.57 billion.

The said initiatives will be augmented by the agriculture infrastructure budget, which includes the P31.2 billion for the National Irrigation Administration so it can provide water to 31,548 hectares of farmland.

The proposed budget next year also contains a P356-million allocation for the Water Supply and Sanitation Program of the Local Water Utilities Administration.

Under the 2024 NEP, the government will construct farm-to-market roads worth P17.3 billion and P4.9 billion worth of fishing-related infrastructure.

The Department of Budget and Management submitted the 2024 NEP to the House of Representatives last Wednesday, which it will use as basis for the passage of the 2024 General Appropriations Act.

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Marcos asks tobacco farmers to adopt crop diversification

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. is urging tobacco farmers to practice crop diversification to increase their income and help beef up the country's food supply.

Marcos issued the statement in his speech, which was read by Ilocos Norte Governor Matthew J. Marcos Manotoc, during the first International Tobacco Agricultural Summit (ITAS) held last Wednesday.

"I urge the Department of Agriculture, and the NTA [National Tobacco Administration]—together

with the academe and the private sector—to explore other crops that can be grown alongside tobacco so it can also contribute to our goal of food security."

The President said the initiative will help in expanding the role of the tobacco industry as "vibrant catalyst for economic growth" through job creation and tax revenues.

"For many of our people, it is an indispensable bedrock that generates income, livelihood opportunities, and employment, particularly in areas where its

cultivation spans generations and holds pivotal significance in the way of life of communities."

Marcos lauded the conduct of the ITAS, saying it will help in generating innovations to help the tobacco industry cope with tougher government policies on tobacco products.

Among the said policies are the Sin Tax Law, which imposed higher taxes for tobacco products, and Republic Act 10643, which required the placement of images of the adverse health effects of smoking on tobacco

product packaging.

"May the ideas and best practices that will be shared in this summit be of use to the government in coming up with measures that will promote responsible agricultural practices, ensure jobs and livelihood for our tobacco farmers, and address requirements for food security," Marcos said.

According to the NTA, there are 43,960 tobacco farmers and 1.56 million workers and "dependents," who rely on the tobacco industry, nationwide. **Samuel P. Medenilla**

PEOPLE'S JOURNALS

Everybody's Newspaper

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P20 RICE STILL FEASIBLE – DA

THE administration of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. remains hopeful that it will fulfill his campaign promise of lowering the price of rice to P20.00, despite the current rice productivity in the country, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

DA Undersecretary Mercedita Sombilla told reporters in a press briefing in Malacañang on Tuesday that the P20.00 per kilo of rice is still feasible once the country reaches its sufficient production of rice.

"In the long run, kapag talagang gumanda ang ating productivity, and that is what DA is really aiming for, the government is aiming for," Sombilla said when asked if the P20.00 per kilo price market of rice is still achievable.

Sombilla added that the price of rice in the market will go down especially when the Philippines is no longer affected by price increases in fertilizer and fuel, the looming effects of the El Niño phenomenon, and the weather disturbances.

She also underscored the importance of people's cooperation in achieving the administration's goal of lowering the prices of rice in the market.

President Marcos is also the concurrent secretary of the DA.

PCO



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DBM submits P5.77-trillion national budget to House

By Beatriz Marie D. Cruz
Reporter

THE MARCOS administration submitted to Congress on Wednesday its proposed P5.768-trillion national budget for 2024, which sought to increase allocations for education, infrastructure, agriculture and defense.

The 2024 National Expenditure Plan (NEP) is 9.5% higher than this year's budget and is equivalent to 21.7% of the gross domestic product (GDP).

"The proposed budget seeks to provide the necessary funds for the operations of

government and for the continuing pursuit of our plan for economic transformation," President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. said in his budget message.

As mandated by the Constitution, the education sector received the biggest allocation at P924.7 billion, 3.3% higher than this year's budget. This includes P51.12 billion for the implementation of the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education program, P12.04 billion for textbooks and other instructional materials and P11.71 billion for feeding programs in schools.

The Department of Education alone will see a 5.37% increase in its budget to P758.6 billion for 2024, as most public

schools are now implementing in-person classes.

"Infrastructure development is one of the key drivers of our continuing economic growth. As such, we will sustain this momentum through the 'Build, Better, More' program with P1.42 trillion, equivalent to 5.3% of gross domestic product," Budget Secretary Amenah F. Pangandaman said during a briefing at the House of Representatives.

She noted the program will prioritize physical connectivity infrastructure such as road networks and railway systems, particularly the North-South Commuter Railway System and the Metro Manila Subway Project Phase 1.

Budget, SI/9

Budget, from SI/1

The Department of Public Works and Highways received the biggest allocation among departments with P822.2 billion, but this was 8% lower year on year. Of this, P148.1 billion will go to building or improving roads, while P115.6 billion will be allotted for preventive maintenance of existing roads.

On the other hand, the Department of Transportation (DoTr) saw its proposed 2024 budget double to P214.3 billion from P106 billion this year, as the government sees the need to improve mass transport system and reduce road congestion.

The bulk of the DoTr budget or P163.7 billion will go to the rail transport program.

Meanwhile, the agriculture sector has been allocated P181.4 billion for next year, 4.5% higher than this year's budget.

Ms. Pangandaman said the NEP continues to support programs that boost the local production of rice, corn and other high-value crops.

For instance, the National Rice Program has been allotted P30.87 billion, while the programs for corn and high-value crops will receive P5.28 billion and P1.94 billion, respectively. The budget also allocated P10 billion for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund.

The budget also included P17.27 billion to be allotted for farm-to-market roads in key production

areas, and P31.18 billion to irrigate farmlands.

Under next year's budget, the Department of Health will receive P306.1 billion, 2.7% lower than this year's budget. The Philippine Health Insurance Corp. will get a P101.51-billion budget.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) saw a 5.2% increase in next year's budget to P209.9 million.

"In support of the Social Protection Floor Framework, a higher allocation of P112.8 billion will be provided to assist 4.4 million households under the DSWD's Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program," Ms. Pangandaman said.

Another P1.89 billion will go to the food stamp program, while the budget for the social pension for indigent citizens was doubled to P49.81 billion.

The budget for the Department of National Defense was also increased by 14.16% to P232.2 billion.

However, the budget for the labor and employment sector dropped by 14% to P40.5 billion. This includes the allocation for the Departments of Labor and Employment and Department of Migrant Workers.

"The budget for social services and protection looks to fall with cuts or only increments in the budgets for social welfare, labor, health and housing. Even the bud-

get for environmental protection is cut. On the other hand, there are hugely disproportionate increases in the budgets for infrastructure, military and police, and debt servicing," Jose Enrique A. Africa, IBON Foundation executive director, said in a Viber message.

Around 11.6% or P670.5 billion of the 2024 proposed national budget will cover interest payments on the government's domestic and foreign debt.

Terry L. Ridon, a public investment analyst and convener of thinktank InfraWatch PH, also expressed concern over the increase in the defense budget in "stark contrast to significant cuts in essential agencies, including health and labor and employment."

"The Marcos Jr. administration has set up a national budget proposal that is largely dysmorphic and full of misprioritization. Congress has a lot of questioning — and correcting — to do," he said in a Viber chat.

Meanwhile, the Development Budget Coordination Committee will hold a briefing before the House Committee on Appropriations on Aug. 10.

Marikina Rep. Stella A. Quimbo, vice-chairman of the Committee on Appropriations, said the House is targeting to begin plenary debates on the budget on Sept. 18, and approve it on third reading by the end of September.



Calamity state

A declaration of a "state of calamity" allows local government units (LGUs) to start drawing on their "special" funds allocated for emergencies. Without such a declaration, based on an appropriate assessment, these emergency funds cannot be disbursed. Moreover, such funds are earmarked specially for emergency relief and recovery, and cannot be used for other purposes.

In recent days we have had many Luzon towns and cities, including provinces such as Bulacan and Pampanga, all having local councils declaring a "state of calamity." All because of strong rains, flooding, and the damage these caused. In Bulacan and Pampanga, the rains were due to the southwest monsoon, as enhanced by typhoons.

Simply put, the rains and flooding, and resulting damage, were not caused by the typhoons directly but by monsoon rains. And not all LGUs, particularly the smaller ones, can afford to budget yearly for disaster relief and recovery. So, they make annual contributions to a "calamity" fund that can be disbursed for the purpose, but only after the official declaration of a state of calamity.

In short, the process of declaration, and the release of funds

STATIC MARVIN TORT

for disasters, is not an easy process. In the case of Bulacan, the Provincial Council needed to first assess the damage, after the first hit, and then pass Panlalawigan Kapasiyahan Blg. 579-T'2023 for the calamity declaration. And this was after 228,648 residents from 171 barangays were already affected by the rains.

And then there was the Bulacan governor's call for Congress to prioritize legislation on mitigating the flooding problem in the province, where a new airport is also being erected. News reports indicated that as of Tuesday morning, 16 towns and three cities in Bulacan were still dealing with floods six inches to seven feet deep.

As for Pampanga, the Sangguniang Panlalawigan unanimously approved Resolution No. 8058 on Monday declaring a state of

calamity. Without that, the province could not disburse money from its Quick Response Fund for relief efforts. Abra and Apayao made similar moves ahead of Bulacan and Pampanga. The National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council (NDRRMC) reports that 113 cities and towns have been placed under a state of calamity in at least six regions.

And here lay several problems. I am sure not all LGUs have managed to set aside funds for disaster relief. In some areas, as I had observed when reviewing past audit reports of smaller towns, some LGUs have deficits as far as relief funds are concerned, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic hit. In this line, their getting financial assistance from the National Government will also be like moving a mountain with bare hands.

I suspect that after the pandemic hit in 2020, in succeeding years some LGUs may have stopped contributing to disaster funds because of budget deficits.

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I am sure local business tax collection went down in 2020 to 2022 after many small businesses closed or suspended operations due to the pandemic. And now that we are grappling with disasters, their treasuries are just as ravaged as well. In this line, the National Government will need to find a way to extend assistance.

The other concern is food supply.

The President already raised the need to import particularly rice, to boost the buffer stock, also because of the El Niño phenomenon. Typhoons tend to impact harvest and supply, resulting in higher prices. In the case of rice, usual rice exporters Vietnam and India have said they are temporarily staying out of the market.

In a press briefing, the President noted that Indonesia was importing, but Vietnam already said it has exported all it could, while India has stopped exports meantime. This leaves Thailand as a possible supplier, but the

whole of Southeast Asia is preparing for El Niño's long droughts. So, all countries are buying at the same time. And this is going to drive up prices.

When rice prices go up again, that is when the real state of calamity begins. And no national declaration or release of "emergency" funds can remedy that situation. Our rice sources like Bulacan and Pampanga are among those hit hard by torrential rains and flooding. The adverse impact on planting and harvest is inevitable.

The present situation, including the negative effects of El Niño, all require urgent but comprehensive and meticulous study and planning, particularly by the **Agriculture department**. More important, the National Government should be prepared to allocate the necessary resources needed to mitigate higher food prices and its overall impact on inflation.

In this line, there should be clearer lines on responsibility and accountability as far as ad-

ressing the rice situation — and food inflation — are concerned. This will entail making somebody else responsible for the problem. Otherwise, in case of failures, the President cannot fire himself as Agriculture chief.

I agree with Senator Grace Poe's call for a full-time Agriculture Secretary to address the issues hounding the agriculture sector, instead of President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr. who is concurrently heading the Department of Agriculture. It was only recently that the President, after over a year in office, finally appointed a permanent Health Secretary.

The present situation requires focus by the Agriculture department, and this necessitates the appointment of a permanent Agriculture secretary. The President already has a full plate, and finding an expert to focus on the rice and food situation and to implement long-term solutions can be the difference between declaring a state of calamity and the Philippines becoming a calamity state. ■

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AERIAL VIEW of the areas affected
by 2022 Super Typhoon Karding.



Rice, vegetable prices up amid rains, floods

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

A spike in prices of rice and vegetables following typhoons and the southwest monsoon has pushed the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to implement a price freeze in certain areas of Luzon hit by calamity.

Local rice prices, however, are expected to rise in the next few days as the supply of local palay continues to decrease.

Bulacan traders at the Intercity Industrial Estate and Golden City Business Park yesterday said that current palay prices are P28-P29 per kilo, compared to P20 per kilo in March.

The wholesale price of vegetables in the Nueva Vizcaya trading post has already doubled, particularly for tomatoes, carrots, potatoes and cabbage, Agricultural Terminal general manager Gilbert Cumila said in a radio interview.

Price freeze on basic necessities is being implemented in more areas in the Central Luzon region which declared a state of calamity due to Typhoon Egay, Typhoon Falcon and the enhanced southwest monsoon, according to the DTI.

Mountain Province, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Cavite, Dagupan City in Pangasinan, Sanchez Mira in Cagayan and Sablayan in Occidental

Mindoro have earlier implemented a price freeze.

Pampanga, Bulacan, Bataan, Zargosa in Nueva Ecija and Camiling and Paniqui in Tarlac have also implemented a 60-day price freeze after declaring a state of calamity.

Jun Cid, a palay classifier, told **The STAR** that unhusked rice is priced at P28-P29 per kilo due to the diminishing arrival of palay stocks from the rice crop-producing provinces in Luzon.

Tony Santos, a rice trader, said that palay prices might go beyond the P30 range in the next days.

Roderico Sulit, another rice trader, said he did not expect sugar prices to rise.

The retail price of commercial rice might rise to P55 per kilo, according to Federation of Free Farmers national manager Raul Montemayor.

Montemayor noted that prices might continue to rise in September as traders and millers fight over limited stocks while the price of imported products increases and supplies dwindle.

"The spike in the retail prices of rice will go on since (President Marcos), despite being the secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA), did not act to control the prices (of rice)," Bantay Bigas spokesperson Cathy Estavillo said in a text message

to **The STAR**.

For her part, Agriculture Undersecretary for Policy, Planning, and Regulations Mercedita Sombilla gave assurance that the country still has 39 days of rice stocks despite the agriculture damage caused by the typhoons.

Based on monitoring of the DA on Wednesday, the retail price of local regular milled rice reached as high as P44 per kilo; local well-milled rice at P49 per kilo; local premium rice at P55 per kilo and local special rice at P62 per kilo. Imported well-milled rice reached as high as P48 per kilo; imported premium rice at P52 per kilo and imported special rice at P58 per kilo.

Based on monitoring of the DA in Metro Manila markets, the retail prices of carrots and Baguio beans reached as high as P200 per kilo; pechay tagalog and potatoes at P180 per kilo; ampalaya at P170 per kilo; tomatoes and cabbage at P160 per kilo; eggplant, pechay Baguio and ginger at P150 per kilo; squash at P60 per kilo; chayote at P75 per kilo and chili at P300 per kilo.

At least P235.6 million worth of high-value crops covering 1,874 hectares were damaged due to the flooding brought by the typhoons and southwest monsoon.

"We are currently in close co-

ordination with our Regional and Provincial Offices within the affected areas to monitor the situation of our kababayans and to ensure the stability of prices and availability of supply of products under our jurisdiction," Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual said earlier.

"We also activated our monitoring teams to check if establishments are complying with the price freeze. The DTI will take immediate action against those who will be caught doing unfair and unjust sales practices," he added.

Republic Act No. 7581 or the Price Act penalizes businesses that will violate the price freeze.

Areas that declare a state of calamity will automatically freeze the price of basic necessities at their prevailing prices for 60 days.

Pascual urged consumers to avoid panic buying and report to the DTI issues related to overpricing, hoarding and other unfair and unjust sales practices.

Minimal impact

The recent typhoons that hit the country will have minimal impact on inflation and the national economy, according to the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA).

"I think the damage is not that

substantial. And so, I do think that the impact on the overall national economy is not serious at this point," NEDA Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said in an interview with ANC yesterday.

While the data on the impact of the typhoon is still incomplete as the southwest monsoon continues to bring significant rainfall, Balisacan hopes the effect on the agriculture sector would not be as bad as in previous episodes of monsoon rains.

"So far, in the case of basic commodities like rice, we have adequate stocks. I think that a lot of the imports came in the first half of the year and that I think allows us to have that buffer," he said.

Meanwhile, headline inflation eased for the fifth straight month to 5.4 percent in June from 6.1 percent in May, primarily due to the slower increases in food prices.

This brought the average inflation rate to 7.2 percent in the January to June period.

Balisacan noted the government is still expecting to hit the six to seven percent economic growth target for this year.

The Philippine Statistics Authority is scheduled to release second-quarter gross domestic product data on Aug. 10. — With Ramon Efren Lazaro, Bella Cariaso, Louella Desiderio



DA hikes budget for urban farming

By **DANESSA RIVERA**

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is scaling up its urban agriculture program with a higher budget and more partnerships to aid in achieving food security.

The DA is increasing its budget for its National Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Program (NUPAP) next year while forging more partnerships to push for urban farming, DA program director Gerald Glenn Panganiban said during the launch of its partnership with Nestlé yesterday.

From P376 million this year, the DA sought to increase this to almost P500 million next year.

"It is only this year that we started to have a budget support. Previously, we only get contributions from Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) for training, a bit of budget from the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI)... But as a national program, the budget this year is still small considering its importance," he said.

The proposed NUPAP budget will be spread out to all regions and will focus on production support such as provision of seeds, equipment and facilities, as well as training and information dissemination.

To sustain the program, the DA also forges partnerships with the private sector.

"We were running the program for two years without a budget. We cannot do this alone...we need partnerships with the private sector to make it sustainable," Panganiban said.

As an example, the DA – through

Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) – has partnered with Nestlé Philippines through the MAGGI Sarap Sustansya Advocacy to advance efforts to promote urban agriculture in Filipino communities to achieve food self-sufficiency, improving their access to and consumption of more plant-based food.

Under the three-year partnership, the DA and Nestlé established a MAGGI Sarap Sustansya Garden to the BPI center of excellence in Los Baños to serve as a demo farm and learning facility to share best practices in vegetable production.

This aims to help entrepreneurial individuals and communities who are interested in generating income from growing and selling their produce.

The MAGGI Sarap Sustansya garden will also be replicated in other satellite offices of the DA-BPI nationwide.

"We have five national research and development centers. We started in BPI Los Baños... Then we will have in the other four national centers in Baguio, Davao, Negros and Guimaras," BPI assistant director Herminigilda Gabertan said.

She said these demo farms would help empower communities to have access to safe and nutritious food, grow their own food and gain livelihood by selling crops.

The partnership will also enable BPI and MAGGI to jointly conduct skills-building activities that demonstrate sustainable ways of growing vegetables in the home, or under-utilized areas of communities, schools and other urban spaces,

while enriching families' abilities to create nutritious, delicious and balanced meals using their own homegrown produce.

MAGGI will be responsible for creating programs to engage with communities, which include on-ground and online workshops featuring expert agriculturists from BPI who will teach science-based methods of vegetable crop production in limited spaces.

Meanwhile, the MAGGI culinary team will coach participants on how to use their vegetable harvest in making Sarap Sustansya dishes that are delicious, nutritious, budget-friendly, and guided by the Pinggang Pinoy food plate model.

Under the agreement, MAGGI will produce and distribute learning materials on vegetable production and affordable plant-based recipes, as well as starter kits that contain planting essentials such as seed trays or basic implements; along with compost and various vegetable seeds produced by BPI.

"Nestlé Philippines believes in a collaborative approach to building communities, and we are proud to stand alongside the Department of Agriculture in inspiring a farm-to-fork movement among Filipino families and communities," Nestlé Philippines corporate affairs head Joey Uy said.

"We believe that food security is key to the health of all, and that there's no better way to build a strong nation than by ensuring that healthy food is accessible to everyone," he said.



Egay death toll climbs to 27

By **MICHAEL PUNONGBAYAN**

The death toll from Typhoon Egay and the southwest monsoon has risen to 27 as of yesterday.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) has yet to validate some of the casualties.

Latest data from the NDRRMC showed 53 people were injured from the bad weather while search and rescue operations were ongoing for 13 others reported missing.

The number of affected families nationwide climbed to 765,024 or approximately 2.9 million people.

Up to 15,604 families or 57,740 people are staying in 677 evacuation centers in various provinces.

Damage to infrastructure is estimated at more than P3.5 billion as 154 cities and municipalities have been placed under a state of calamity.

The NDRRMC said the government has so far provided over P187.4 million worth of assistance to typhoon victims.

Egay destroyed P3.17 billion worth of agricultural products in nine regions, according to the Department of Agriculture.

DA records showed at least 142,365 farmers and fisherfolk were affected in the Cordilleras, Ilocos region, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Western Visayas, Soccsksargen and Caraga.

Affected commodities include

rice, corn, high-value crops, livestock and poultry and fishery.

Total volume of production losses was placed at 98,217 metric tons, covering 163,722 hectares of agricultural areas, the DA said.

Up to P1.13 billion worth of palay covering 92,179 hectares were affected by the super typhoon.

Corn with an estimated value at P998.2 million in 69,669 hectares was destroyed by the typhoon.

Drowning

Meanwhile, two more persons were reported to have drowned in Bulacan at the height of Egay's fury.

Up to 201 villages in the province remain under floodwaters as of yesterday.

Reports received by Manuel Lukban Jr., chief of the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office, identified one of the victims as James Ivan Magtira, who drowned in Barangay Sto. Niño in Hagonoy.

The other victim has yet to be identified, although reports said a male drowned in nearby Barangay Palapat.

The latest fatality brought the total number of flood-related deaths in Bulacan to six, including four from drowning.

Lukban said 17 municipalities and three cities in the province remain under water.

Bulacan Gov. Daniel Fernando and local officials led the conduct

of relief operations in flood-stricken villages.

In Pangasinan, at least 116 barangays in 11 towns and cities remain flooded, according to the PDRRMO.

In Pampanga, classes were suspended yesterday until tomorrow in all schools due to floods and heavy downpour.

Cash assistance

Up to P23 million in cash assistance has been ordered released for families who lost their homes and property to Egay and the monsoon.

Human Settlements and Urban Development Secretary Jose Rizalino Acuzar on Tuesday directed DHSUD Undersecretaries Avelino Tolentino III and Randy Escolango to start downloading the fund to regional offices affected by the typhoon.

The DHSUD said the cash assistance is on top of the emergency assistance and housing loans to be provided to typhoon victims by its attached agencies National Housing Authority and Home Development Mutual Fund or Pag-IBIG Fund.

The Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office launched relief efforts for typhoon victims in Northern Luzon, particularly in Ilocos Sur, Ilocos Norte, La Union and Kalinga.

— With **Bella Cariaso, Elizabeth Marcelo, Rainier Allan Ronda, Danessa Rivera, Ric Sapnu, Ramon Efren Lazaro, Cesar Ramirez, Rudy Santos**



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Full-time agriculture secretary needed – Poe

By CECILLE SUERTE FELIPE

The Philippines needs a full-time agriculture secretary after India recently announced plans to halt exports of non-basmati rice to the global market, according to Sen. Grace Poe.

President Marcos has held the agriculture portfolio since taking office in June 2022 as part of his commitment to prioritize the sector.

"May we suggest he appoint a full-time agriculture secretary? A farmer-in-chief, perhaps?" Poe said in her privilege speech on Tuesday.

"We were promised P20 per kilo of rice during (Marcos' presidential) campaign. The cheapest is now P36 per kilo. I hope that famine will not overtake us without a proper plan," she added.

Poe noted that the Philippines has imported 10,045 metric tons of rice from India, "but this does not exclude us from the collateral impact of their decision."

"Non-basmati rice accounts for roughly 81.2 percent of India's total rice exports. This is the category subject to their ban. This means that, in one fell swoop, India has created a 17.86 million metric ton shortage in the global rice market. Those who will fill that gap can certainly charge a premium," she explained.

Poe said that Vietnam, which supplies more than 90 percent of the country's rice imports, increased its price to \$600 per metric ton.

"We should be climate-proofing and disaster-proofing our rice fields. We need to adopt variants that can survive the drier days to come. El Niño, after all, is just around the corner. We also need an outpouring of support for our farmers in technology and funds

or value chain integration," she added.

Poe hopes the Department of Agriculture (DA)'s proposed 2024 budget "will not only get bigger but be spent faster on the things which our rice farmers need to succeed."

In the latest Social Weather Stations survey, three out of every 10 Filipinos are "food poor" or unable to buy enough food, according to Poe.

The Philippines is only 81.5 percent rice self-sufficient according to the Philippine Statistics Authority, she added.

Onions

Meanwhile, more public officials should be charged for the suspected irregularities in the procurement of onions sold at Kadiwa stores, according to farmers' groups.

"We are not privy to the details of the deal involving Food Terminal Inc. (FTI) and Bonena Cooperative. We just hope that the investigation will lead to those truly culpable be charged accordingly... We are looking forward to other investigations... that will identify and charge those in government that are in cahoots with smugglers, hoarders and profiteers," Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura executive director Jayson Cainglet said on Wednesday.

"The investigation of officials involved in smuggling of agriculture should cover not only the DA but also the Customs, the National Bureau of Investigation and the Bank of the Philippine Islands. It should not stop with the suspension of officials. Charges should be filed against those involved and necessary penalties should be imposed," said Bantay Bigas spokesperson Cathy Estavillo.

— With Bella Cariaso

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FIRST PERSON

ALEX MAGNO

Quandary

We are in a bit of a quandary over our rice supply.

On one hand, our buffer stock of the staple crop is thinning. We now have less of the buffer standing policy requires us to have. That puts us in peril of shortages should extreme weather take its toll on domestic rice production.

On the other hand, government under the present policy regime is prohibited from importing rice for our buffer stock. Importation is strictly reserved for private traders. The National Food Authority (NFA), whose role it is to look after the rice reserves we keep, can only procure from domestic producers.

The reasoning behind the present policy regime is clear. For many years, government importation of rice has been a source of corruption. Imported rice is cheaper than the prevailing domestic rice price regime. The NFA profited hugely from importation.

The profit made from buying cheap and selling at much higher prices to match the cost of domestically produced rice went to subsidizing palay procurement, milling, warehousing and distributing rice stock. But that has not always been the case, of course. Issuance of permits to import rice was always politicized.

Liberalization of rice importation is supposed to cure this. It is also supposed to cure the problem of delayed bureaucratic responses to looming rice shortages. In theory, private importers are supposed to read market signals more accurately and import more promptly.

Over-importation will drive prices down – a disincentive for greedy traders. It will also impoverish our farmers, leading to reluctance to plant the staple crop. Market forces are supposed to work perfectly, moderating the greed of traders while incentivizing our rice farmers. But market forces do not always work perfectly – or at least in a timely manner.

Right now, it seems there is not enough profit to be made for our traders to import rice. There has not been enough domestic production for the NFA to procure for the buffer stocks.

To compound things, some major rice exporting countries have restricted sale of the commodity to protect their local supplies in a climate of uncertainty. Even if we had the money to procure the rice we need, the commodity might not be for sale in the countries we usually import from.

And so we are hemmed in. The NFA cannot directly import even as some of our best rice lands are flooded. The private sector is hesitant to import a commodity with low profit margins.

The only way we can break out of this bind is to allow rice prices to rise. This will, however, fuel inflation and inflict great political costs to government.



What will the Secretary of Agriculture, who is also President of a people groaning about inflation, do?

Overlapping

The provincial government of Cavite and the local government of Bacoor are fighting over two separate reclamation projects. The fighting might not have been necessary had the Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA) been more diligent in the discharge of its duties.

It turns out the PRA awarded separate reclamation projects within Bacoor Bay that overlapped.

The first project is an 844-hectare reclamation project signed with the Cavite provincial government and Cavite Holdings, Inc. on Dec. 18, 2012. This award is based on a 1994 joint venture agreement that subsists.

The second project was awarded by the PRA in 2016 to the city government of Bacoor involving a 944-hectare reclamation project. Bacoor is undertaking the project in a joint venture with Frabelle Fishing Corp. and Diamond Export Corp.

The boundaries of the two projects overlap. In response, Cavite Governor Juanito Victor C. Remulla and Cavite Holdings CEO Leonides J. Virata filed a complaint against PRA chairman Alberto C. Agra and general manager Janilo A. Rubiato for violation of the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act. The complainants allege that the two top PRA officers did not only "commit grave misconduct but also showed manifest partiality, evident bad faith and inexcusable negligence in giving premature and unwarranted benefits, advantage and preference to the other reclamation project."

Both of the respondents are lawyers. Agra was former solicitor general, government corporate counsel and secretary of justice. Rubiato belonged to a law firm based in Davao City where Deputy Ombudsman Warren Rex Lion was a partner. Lion was suspended some months ago in connection with another case lodged at the Office of the Ombudsman.

Recently, the ombudsman ruled that both Agra and Rubiato were administratively liable for grave misconduct. As a consequence, both officials were suspended for a year without pay or fined the equivalent of six months' worth of salary should the suspension not be enforced due to their separation from service.

The suspension order is without prejudice to the filing of criminal cases against the two for violation of the anti-graft law.

With the two senior officials of the PRA ordered suspended, the fate of the two competing – and overlapping – reclamation projects is uncertain. If the two suspended officials are eventually replaced, the PRA will still have to sort out the mess created by the approval of reclamation projects that overlapped.

Both projects were supposed to bring huge economic benefits for the province of Cavite and the city of Bacoor. By their nature, such projects are capital-intensive and require a large amount of financing. Even if work on the two projects are suspended because of the legal issues surrounding the sloppy decisions of the PRA, financing costs will continue to run.

The two high-impact projects are now on hold, causing so much economic opportunities to be missed.



AFTERMATH UPDATE

'EGAY' DEATH TOLL CLIMBS TO 27; 52 INJURED

**By Frances Mangosing
and Jordeene B. Lagare**
@Team_Inquirer

Deaths from Typhoon "Egay" (international name: Doksuri) have reached 27, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) said on Wednesday.

Of these, only two have been confirmed—one each from Calabarzon and Western Visayas. The other 25 fatalities recorded from the regions of Cordillera, Ilocos, Calabarzon, Western Visayas and Davao were still being validated.

Fifty-two people sustained injuries, while 13 individuals—eight in Cordillera, four in Cagayan Valley and one in Ilocos—were still missing.

The typhoon has affected

around 2.8 million individuals or 765,024 families in 13 regions. Of these, 57,740 persons are taking shelter in 677 evacuation centers.

A total of 50,371 houses were damaged, with 1,876 totally destroyed, the NDRRMC said.

As of Wednesday, 595 areas remained flooded as rains continued due to the southwest monsoon.

Damage to infrastructure was pegged at P3.5 billion, while agriculture losses were at P1.9 billion.

The government has so far provided P187 million worth of aid.

The agriculture sector continues to take a hit from Egay, with the aggregate amount of losses exceeding the P3-billion threshold, yet it made a minimal dent in the country's rice

and corn production.

In its latest bulletin issued on Wednesday, the Department of Agriculture (DA) reported that agricultural losses brought about by the typhoon hit P3.17 billion from P2.89 billion recorded a day ago.

It affected 146,260 farmers and fishers with the total volume of production loss estimated at 106,453 metric tons spanning 170,843 hectares of agricultural areas.

The latest tally eclipsed the P1.3 billion in damage caused by the confluence of low pressure area, Intertropical Convergence Zone, shear line and the northeast monsoon (amihan) early this year.

"Damage and losses in rice amounted to P1.34 billion with affected area at 98,887 ha and volume of production loss at

38,917 MT or 0.20 percent of the total annual production target volume for rice at 19.76 million MT," the DA said.

"While for corn, damage and losses amounted to P1.03 billion with affected area at 70,003 ha and volume of production loss at 55,513 MT or 0.60 percent of the total annual production target volume for corn at 9.30 million MT.

Aside from rice and corn, other affected commodities such as high-value crops (P244.51 million), livestock and poultry (P34.27 million) and fisheries (P175.39 million).

Agricultural and fishery infrastructures and facilities, as well as fishing paraphernalia totaling P351.74 million, were likewise damaged, but the figures have yet to be confirmed. **INQ**



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SUPPLY SITUATION

BE WARY OF INDIA RICE EXPORT BAN, POE URGES GOV'T

By Melvin Gascon
@melvingasconNQ

Despite claims that the country's balance in the supply and demand of rice remains "sound," Sen. Grace Poe on Wednesday urged the government to take steps to ease price pressures because of India's decision to ban the export of rice.

The senator made the call after Undersecretary Mercedita Sombilla of the Department of Agriculture (DA) assured consumers on Tuesday that the country's supply situation remained sound.

Sombilla said the DA was closely monitoring developments in the prices of fertilizer and fuel, the Black Sea grains initiative and India's rice export

ban, but fertilizer and fuel prices were the most worrisome.

She said farmers should take the opportunity to boost production because of developments in the global food situation.

But Poe, chair of the Senate committee on economic affairs, said the Philippines should not feel immune from the possible collateral impact of India's rice export ban even with limited Philippine dependence on Indian rice.

"The decline in global supply from the biggest rice exporter is expected to cause a spike in global rice prices because of speculation," she said.

She cited how Vietnam, which supplies more than 90 percent of the Philippines' rice imports, has already increased

its price to \$600 per metric tons from the previous \$500 per MT.

"We (in government) have an obligation to feed 113 million Filipinos, especially the 3.4 million youth who rely on the government's feeding program," said Poe.

Demand will continue

The senator said demand for rice will continue among Filipinos, who consume an average of 118.81 kilograms, or more than two sacks of rice each year, mainly because of their "unlimited rice" mentality.

"The reasons for such high import dependence are too many to discuss here. Simply put, our agriculture sector is not blessed with either good geography or

good governance," Poe said.

Poe said that in 2022, the Philippines imported 3.79 million MT of rice, with 3.16 million MT coming from Vietnam. The next largest trade partners were Myanmar, Pakistan, Thailand and India.

Citing data from the Philippine Statistics Authority, Poe said the Philippines is only 81.5 percent rice self-sufficient, which would mean that the rest of the requirement is being imported.

"This means that in one fell swoop, India has created a 17.86 million MT shortage in the global rice market. Those who will fill that gap can certainly charge a premium," she said.

Poe said she looks forward to scrutinizing the 2024 budget that the DA will propose. INQ



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₱5.768-T budget for 2024 proposed

₱9.2 B earmarked for confidential, intelligence funds

By ELLSON QUISMORIO and ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

The Marcos administration is proposing a ₱5.768-trillion National Expenditure Program (NEP) for 2024, ₱9.2 billion of which is allocated to confidential and intelligence funds.

This was bared by Budget Secretary Amenah Pangandaman on Wednesday, Aug. 2, following her submission of the NEP to the House of Representatives in Batasan Complex, Quezon City.

President Marcos, in his budget message, expressed hopes that Congress will approve the proposed 2024 national budget, ►4



₱5.768-T budget for 2024 proposed 1◀

saying its approval would bring the Philippines one step closer to achieving the government's transformative vision for the country.

The President said his administration will continue working closely with the private sector and other branches of government for the vital pieces of legislation that are needed along the way.

"With the Congress' approval of the proposed FY 2024 national budget, we will be one step closer to achieving our transformative vision for the country, the Agenda of Prosperity," he stated. "Our journey has just begun. We will march on—one nation, one people building a better future together."

"The dawn of a new Philippines—ang Bagong Pilipinas—has arrived," he added.

President Marcos said the proposed 2024 budget is vital to the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2023–2028, which aims to strengthen the capabilities, protect the Filipinos' purchasing power, and enhance production sectors to generate more quality jobs and competitive products.

"These strategies are to be supported by an enabling environment characterized by macroeconomic stability, infrastructure development, bureaucratic efficiency, strong rule of law, and effective climate action," he said.

Expense Class

Marcos said maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) take the most significant bulk of the budget at 37.4 percent or ₱2.156 trillion. These expenses support:

- Regular operating requirements of government agencies
- Implementation of government programs and services
- Subsidies to GOCCs
- Allocation to local government units (LGUs)

The administration's priority programs in education and social welfare are covered in the said amount.

Personnel Services (PS) was given ₱1.695 trillion. This will be used for the salaries, benefits, pensions, allowances, and other compensation of government officials and employees. The said amount likewise covers the wages of healthcare workers and the pension of retired military and uniformed personnel.

The administration allocated ₱1.264 trillion to capital outlays (COs), which cover major road and transport programs, and Marcos' Build Better More infrastructure program.

Meanwhile, financial expenses constitute the smallest share of the FY 2024 NEP at ₱670.5 billion. This is for supervision/trusteeship fees, interest expenses, guarantee fees, bank charges, commitment fees, and other financial charges incurred by the government for ownership or rent of an asset or property.

Sector

President Marcos said the social services sector got the largest allocation in the proposed 2024 budget, with ₱2.183 trillion or 37.9 percent of the NEP. This sector comprises health, education, culture, manpower development, social security, welfare, and employment, among others.

The social services sector got an increase of ₱178.7 billion, or 8.9 percent, compared to its allocation in the 2023 GAA.

The economic services covering communications, roads, transport, agriculture, agrarian reform, and trade and industry got the second-largest budget share with 29.6 percent of the NEP with ₱1.709 trillion.

General public services will receive ₱893.3 billion. This will fund expenses for general administration, public order and safety, and other governance and regulatory services.

To address the debt burden, Marcos said ₱699.2 billion was allocated for interest payments on the national government's domestic and foreign debt amounting to ₱670.5 billion, and net lending was earmarked at ₱28.7 billion.

Meanwhile, the Defense Sector got ₱282.7 billion, registering an increase of 21.6 percent from 2023. This will support the land, air, and naval forces' defense programs and the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission, among others, to ensure domestic security.

Recipient Unit

National government agencies (NGAs) will continue to receive the largest share in the proposed budget with ₱3.866 trillion or 67 percent of the total expenditure program.

"The amount will provide funding for operations and implementation of key programs and projects of departments and agencies," President Marcos said.

LGUs will be allotted ₱1.008 trillion, and the biggest bulk of this allocation will fund the National Tax Allotment (NTA), which will receive ₱871.4 billion.

The allocation of LGUs



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also includes ₱80.6 billion for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

Meanwhile, ₱1 billion was earmarked for the Marawi Siege Victims Compensation Program, which will allow the Marawi Compensation Board to provide tax-free compensations and/or reparations to all qualified claimants whose properties and possessions were damaged due to the 2017 Marawi Siege.

Government-owned and -controlled corporations (GOCCs) will receive ₱222.5 billion to finance priority programs and projects, such as the National Health Insurance Program, irrigation, housing, electrification, and rice buffer stocking.

Lastly, creditors have an allocation of ₱670.5 to cover interest payments on the government's domestic and foreign debt.

Confidential, intelligence funds

Meanwhile, Pangandaman said the total allocation for confidential and intelligence funds across all agencies under the latest spending plan is ₱4.3 billion and ₱4.9 billion, respectively.

"I think the amount is the same as the 2023 level, almost the same," Pangandaman said in a press briefing after the ceremonial turnover of the NEP—the precursor of the national budget.

Asked for a breakdown of the amounts, Pangandaman said the Office of the President sought ₱4.5 billion worth of confidential and intelligence funds.

She said the Office of the Vice President was allotted ₱500 million,

while the Department of Education (DepEd) was allocated ₱150 million. Vice President Sara Duterte is DepEd secretary in concurrent capacity.

The Department of National Defense (DND) will get ₱1.7 billion in confidential and intelligence funds based on the 2024 NEP, Pangandaman added.

At any rate, the DBM chief assured the public that there's "full transparency" when it comes to the actual use of such funds.

"Mayroon naman pong guidelines yan from COA (Commission on Audit) on how to use the funds. Hindi naman ho siya budget na parang, pagkabay, they can actually disburse it and use it. Mayroon din pong dokumento na sina-submit sa COA (There are guidelines from COA on how to use the funds. It's not like a budget that they can actually disburse and use upon receiving it. There's a document that is submitted to COA).

"There's full transparency po in terms of the request for these funds," she said.

Meanwhile, Marcos said Expense Class, Sector, and Recipient Unit classify the proposed 2024 NEP.

Budget to boost agriculture sector

House Speaker Martin Romualdez said the proposed ₱5.768-trillion budget is tailor-made to boost the production of the local agriculture sector, among other things.

"The national budget will provide increased allocations for the **Department of Agriculture's (DA)** banner programs to boost the production of prime commodities such as rice, corn and high-value crops, and fisheries among others," Romualdez. Leyte's 1st District representative, said in a statement. "Higher

investments will also be provided for the construction of more fish ports and farm-to-market roads all over the country."

A briefer on the 2024 NEP showed that ensuring food security has been identified as a "spending priority" under the proposed budget.

Under the latest NEP, ₱31.2 billion was allocated for irrigation services, ₱30.9 billion for the National Rice Program, ₱10 billion for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), and ₱9 billion for the Buffer Stocking Program—all crucial items in rice production.

In all, agriculture agencies—including the Department of Agriculture (DA), its attached corporations, and the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR)—will get ₱181.4 billion next year.

In comparison, the 2023 General Appropriations Act (GAA) that provides an allocation of ₱173.6 billion to these agencies.

Targeted spending needed

House Deputy Speaker and Batangas 6th District Rep. Ralph Recto, in a separate statement, said pagkain or food is one of the "elephants in the room" in the upcoming House scrutiny of the NEP.

"Pagkain now takes centerstage. We may view the budget from various standard prisms," Recto said.

"Pero ang pananaw ng ordinaryong mamamayan ay ganito: Ang perang mula sa kaban ng bayan ba ay magpupuno ng mga kalderong nauubusan ng laman? (But the ordinary people's view is this: Will money from public coffers fill up the empty food pots?) "While agriculture spending must be boosted, it must be targeted well, with expenditures linked to productivity outcomes."



PH primed as manufacturing hub of heated tobacco products

BY IRMA ISIP

THE expected decline in demand for conventional tobacco products and the corresponding shift to heated tobacco products (HTPs) present an opportunity for the Philippines to specialize and be globally-competitive in this emerging segment, according to Trade Undersecretary Ceferino Rodolfo.

With that, the **National Tobacco Administration (NTA)** will seek higher floor prices of unprocessed tobacco leaves to boost the income of farmers.

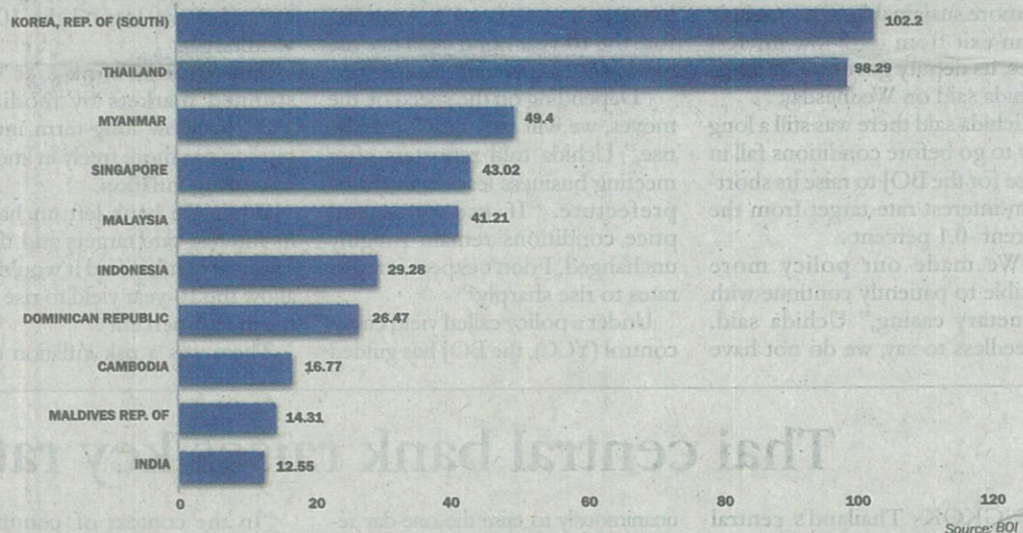
In his presentation at the International Tobacco Summit in Taguig City yesterday, Trade Undersecretary Ceferino Rodolfo said through free trade agreements, the Philippines can serve as a manufacturing hub to supply HTPs to key markets.

According to Rodolfo, multinational companies are actively

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Top export markets PH tobacco

Export value in USD Millions



PH

exploring the opportunity to manufacture HTPs in the Philippines.

He cited a Euromonitor report which said Philip Morris Fortune Tobacco Corp. plans to invest P 9 billion in a state-of-the-art facility in Tanauan, Batangas that will produce HTPs for its IQOS devices.

Rodolfo also cited other potential leads from Japan Tobacco International, British American Tobacco, China Tobacco (manufacturer of the MOK HTP brands), and manufacturers of locally-distributed HTP brands such as Bohem Cigar, Esse and

Liquor.

Rodolfo said the Philippines is now a global player when it comes to conventional tobacco products.

"Given single-digit growth of global demand for tobacco products and foreseen reduction in the local demand for the conventional cigarettes, HTPs present a viable market opportunity," Rodolfo said.

Citing Euromonitor figures, Rodolfo said volume of sales of traditional cigarettes will decline to 39 billion sticks in 2027 from 47.61 billion in 2022.

Sales volumes of HTPs are seen to grow exponentially to 4.06

billion in 2027 from 664.7 million in 2022.

Rodolfo sees the potential to export HTPs in Asean, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Korea and Hong Kong at zero duty.

On the sidelines of the summit, Belinda Sarmiento-Sanchez, NTA administrator and chief executive officer, told reporters a tripartite meeting is scheduled before the end of the year to set floor prices of tobacco for trading years 2024 and 2025.

Sanchez said the NTA "will try to haggle" with participants to try to increase prices of tobacco.

Tobacco farmers' groups and

tobacco manufacturing companies meet every two years to evaluate and negotiate the floor prices of unprocessed tobacco leaves.

Under various presidential decrees, NTA is authorized to set or fix tobacco floor prices by adopting a tripartite consultative conference.

The average floor price of tobacco is P90 per kilogram.

In 2022, the country produced 8,221.69 metric tons (MT) of native tobacco, 23,422.94 MT of the Virginia type and 16,085.75 MT of other types of tobacco. - **With Jed Macapagal**

Malaya Business Insight

'Egay' death toll now 27; affected persons at 2.86M

BY VICTOR REYES

THE number of individuals affected by super typhoon "Egay" has reached 2.86 million yesterday, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) said.

In a situational report, the NDRRMC also reported one additional death due to Egay which left the country last week. The toll now stands

at 27 dead and 52 injured. Thirteen persons remain missing.

Seven provinces and 17 cities and municipalities in six regions -- Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa and Cordillera Administrative Region -- have declared states of calamity, the NDRRMC report

See EGAY > Page B3

also said.

It said 766,789 families or 2,868,373 individuals are affected in 4,655 barangays in 13 regions -- Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Western Visayas, Northern Mindanao, Davao, Soccsksargen, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region Muslim Mindanao (BARRM), Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), and National Capital Region.

Central Luzon had the most affected population with 329,470 families (1,149,314 individuals) followed by Ilocos (214,141 families or 918,458 individuals) and CAR (104,413 families or 365,471 individuals).

Of the total affected population, NDRRMC said 15,611 families (57,799 individuals) are staying inside 665 evacuation centers, while 57,568 other families (232,105 individuals) are staying with relatives or friends.

The number of affected population was nearly 400,000 higher compared to last Tuesday's figure -- 675,357 families or 2,476,907 individuals.

Meanwhile, the NDRRMC reported one death in Davao region due Egay. This brought to 27 the number of deaths reported by the Camp Aguinaldo-based agency.

The 26 other deaths recorded by the NDRRMC were in CAR with 12, Ilocos with eight, Calabarzon with four, and Western Visayas with two.

AGRI, INFRA DAMAGE

The cost of damage to infrastructure and agriculture in Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Western Visayas and CAR slightly increased to P5.49 billion yesterday, from P5.47 billion last Tuesday.

The cost of damage to infrastructure is now at P3.52 billion (from P3.51 billion) while the cost of damage to agriculture is now P1.97 billion (from P1.96 billion).

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The number of houses "partially" and "totally" damaged by Egay also rose to 50,649, from the previous 41,920. These damaged houses are in Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Western Visayas, Northern Mindanao, Davao, Soccsksargen, BARRM and CAR.

The Department of Agriculture's (DA) Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Operations Center reported P3.17 billion worth of initial cost of damage to agriculture.

Despite damage to rice and corn crops reaching over P1 billion each, the DA said it is still small compared to annual production targets.

The DA attached agency said as of 2 p.m. yesterday, cost of damage is equivalent to 106,453 metric tons (MT) of goods tended by 146,260 farmers in 170,843 hectares (ha) of affected areas.

Damage and losses in rice amounted to P1.34 billion with affected area at 98,887 ha and volume of production loss at 38,917 MT or 0.20 percent of the total annual production target volume for rice at 19.76 million MT.

For corn, damage and losses amounted to P1.03 billion with the affected area at 70,003 ha and volume of production loss at 55,513 MT or 0.60 percent of the total annual production target volume for corn at 9.30 million MT.

Other sectors that suffered damage are infrastructure (P351.74 million), high value crops (P244.51 million), fisheries (P175.39 million) and livestock and poultry (P34.27 million).

The Department of Trade and Industry, through its regional and provincial offices, is monitoring prices of basic necessities and prime commodities to prevent price manipulation, especially after the declaration of the state of calamity.

Meanwhile, the San Juan City in Metro Manila gave P1.5 million in financial assistance to Ilocos Norte. Mayor Francis Zamora said he handed the check to Ilocos Norte Gov. Matthew Marcos Manotoc at the San Juan City hall yesterday.
— With Jed Macapagal and Christian Oineza



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'Typhoon damage on economy not substantial'

BY NIÑA MYKA PAULINE ARCEO

THE economy remained stable despite the damage inflicted on the country by several typhoons, Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said.

"The thing is this June, July, and August is not really the harvest season in many parts of the country for basic agricultural products, so I think that the damage is not that substantial," Balisacan said in an interview on Wednesday.

"We do hope that the impact, especially in agriculture, is not as bad as compared to other episodes

of monsoon rains in the past," Balisacan said.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said damage and losses in the agricultural and fishery sector are estimated to reach P2.89 billion, affecting 142,365 farmers and fisherfolk.

"So far, in the case of basic commodities like rice, we have

adequate stocks. I think a lot of the imports came in the first half of the year and that allowed us to have a buffer," Balisacan said.

Previously, Malacañang asserted that the country's rice stocks will last 39 days despite the massive destruction from Typhoon "Egay" and Typhoon "Falcon."

DA Undersecretary Mercedita Som-billa said that the DA is finding ways to increase production, confirming that the biggest rice production will still come "at the end of September or sometime in October."

While some of the basic commodities are expected to be affected, Balisacan believes that the impact on inflation is "not going

to be that much."

"Inflation is not just typhoons; it's all about supply. If you manage any shortfall that arises from these calamities, then there should be no unnecessary long and elevated prices," he said.

"The cause of high inflation we are seeing in agriculture and food is not from rice, it's from other commodities," Balisacan added. "The way we have addressed the perennial rice problem from the past has contributed to that stability in rice prices. While the rice prices have picked up a little bit, partly reflecting the global environment, it's not the major issue in the scheme of things."



No rice shortage – DA

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL
AND BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Wednesday that the country has enough rice supply despite the damage sustained by the agricultural sector from recent typhoons.

"It is enough for the next few months, we're also in the middle of planting season, and we're expecting harvest by August and September," said Agriculture Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian in a public briefing.

Sebastian said the Philippines has enough rice supply due to the 5.7 million metric tons (MT) of "palay" harvested during the dry season and the additional 1.9 million MT of imported rice in stock.

Earlier, Agriculture Undersecretary Mercedita Sombilla said that the country's stocks of rice is good to last for 39 days, which is less than the mandated stocks good for 60 days.

'Deceptive'

Meanwhile, Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) national manager Raul Montemayor said that the statement that the country has enough supply

of rice is "deceptive," noting the current stocks are set to last only until September and that the next local harvest will come by October.

"But if it will be completely consumed, imports must enter to augment the rice stocks ... but it will be a little bit risky, as imports are lessening due to the higher international prices," Montemayor said.

Sombilla said on Tuesday that the

►DAA2

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No rice shortage – DA

country scheduled the importation of 1.3 million MT of rice to augment the country's stocks.

She 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.

Sen. Mary Grace Poe said the

ban was "unfortunate coming at a time when hectares of fields were flooded due to the typhoons and monsoon conditions."

In 2022, the Philippines imported 3.79 million MT of rice, including 3.16 million MT sourced from Vietnam. The next largest shipments came from Myanmar, Pakistan and Thailand.

Although the Philippines im-

ported only 10,045 MT from India, the world's biggest exporter of rice, Poe said this does not exclude the Philippines from the collateral impact of the export ban.

"The decline in global supply from the biggest rice exporter is expected to cause a spike in global rice prices because of speculation," Poe said.

Data showed that non-basmati rice accounts for roughly 81.2 percent of India's total rice exports, the category subject to the ban.

"This means that in one fell swoop, India has created a 17.86 million MT shortage in the global

rice market. Those who will fill that gap can certainly charge a premium," Poe said.

The senator pointed out that Vietnam, which supplies more than 90 percent of the Philippines' rice imports, already increased its price to \$600 per MT compared to the previous \$500 per MT.

Poe said President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. intended to pursue a rice import deal with India.

"We wish him all the best, especially with the long waiting line. No doubt, the first to bang on India's doors will be their immediate rice trading partners,

such as Bangladesh and Nepal," she said.

Poe authored Republic Act 11037 or the "Masustansyang Pagkain sa Batang Pilipino Act," which provides nutritious food to Kindergarten to Grade 6 public school students.

She said the demand for rice will continue among Filipinos, who consume 118.81 kilograms or two sacks of rice each on the average a year "because of the unli-rice programming in our genes."

Philippine Statistics Authority data said the Philippines is only 81.5 percent rice self-sufficient,

which means the rest of its rice requirement is being imported.

"The reasons for such high import dependence are too many to discuss here. Simply put, our agriculture sector is not blessed with either good geography or good governance," Poe said.

The senator said she looks forward to scrutinizing the 2024 budget that the Department of Agriculture will propose.

"We hope the agriculture budget will not only get bigger, but be spent faster, on the things which our rice farmers need to succeed," she added.



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Lionheart Farms a case of inclusive agribusiness

THE Kapatid Angat Lahat Agri Program (Kalap) team of Go Negosyo had the privilege of visiting Lionheart Farms in Rizal, Palawan, and witnessed firsthand the exceptional and transformative potential of big brother-small brother partnerships.

What we discovered and observed is an inclusive business model where the farming families who are part of the partnership now earn two to four times more. Also, around 1,800 individuals are employed in on-farm and off-farm jobs generated by the partnership.

Lionheart Farms, owned and operated by Christian Moeller, began its mission in 2016 by establishing coconut plantations and leveraging the power of consolidation and convergence of efforts by both the public and private sectors.

Among the government agencies involved in the initiative are the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). Meanwhile, the local governments of Palawan and Rizal made significant



MOVING FORWARD
WILLIAM D. DAR

contributions to the realization of the initiatives spearheaded by Lionheart Farms.

And the farmer-partners of Lionheart Farms also get introduced to new farming techniques to increase their yields and incomes.

1 million tree capacity

So far, 600,000 coconut trees have been planted on 3,500 hectares of land in Rizal, with a capacity to reach 1 million trees over the medium to long term. Also, a replanting project is being undertaken with farmer partners for 500,000 coconut trees.

Lionheart said that increasing the number of coconut trees and the capacity of its processing plant can result in the employment of a total of 10,000 people in five years.

Prior to the initiative of Lionheart Farms in Rizal, most coconut farm-

ers in the area were stricken with poverty. And this should no longer be a surprise as coconut farmers are still considered part of the country's "poorest of the poor," which I find ironic as coconut is the country's top agricultural export.

This means that coconut farmers do not usually get a fair deal when they sell their produce, which is usually dried copra or coconuts. Then there's the perennial issue of aging coconut trees and farmers lack of knowledge of good agricultural practices, or GAP.

Another noteworthy practice of Lionheart Farms is it produces its own fertilizers using only natural ingredients. The biofertilizers it produces are also supplied to other farms in the area.

Moeller saw those issues and moved to create a more inclusive and integrated model to produce not only coconuts but also value-added products. And among the objectives is to export value-added coconut products, creating a better revenue stream for both the company and its farmer partners.

So, Lionheart Farms proceeded to

create a partnership with an Indigenous community in Palawan and included community programs like education and medical assistance in its initiative in the area.

More importantly, the 3,500 hectares of coconut farms that Lionheart established in 20- to 50-hectare plots are surrounded by natural forests, preserving the precious biodiversity in the area. And to reduce the carbon footprint of operations, the processing of coconuts is undertaken in a facility built on the site.

Studying the inclusive business model Lionheart Farms put in place in Palawan, it is very clear that the big brother-small brother partnership can transform farming enclaves into viable agro-industrial zones. More importantly, the business model of Lionheart Farms fosters ecological balance and respect for the Indigenous people in the area.

More partnerships needed

No less than President and Agriculture Secretary Ferdinand Marcos Jr. supports the extensive participation

of the private sector in leveling up the country's agriculture industry. Hence, we at Kalap have already met with the Chief Executive to make it known to him of the organization's advocacy to transform the lives of farmers and fisherfolk.

Since Kalap was launched in January 2023, it now has under its wings 23 partners coming from the private sector, such as Nestlé Philippines, Universal Leaf, Metro Pacific Agro Ventures and Dizon Farms, just to name a few. There is another set of 28 potential partners that we at Kalap are working with, and they will be onboarded in the weeks or months to come.

And besides the DENR, DTI and NCIP, the other government agencies that Kalap has partnered with include the **Department of Agriculture**, the Department of the Interior and Local Government, the Cooperative Development Authority, and government financial institutions such as the Land Bank of the Philippines and the Development Bank of the Philippines.

Kalap is also working across 18 industry commodities, including rice, cacao, coconut, tobacco and coffee, among others. As we foster inclusive

business models for these commodities, we will push for the business models for the commodities to be part of the relevant roadmaps of our government partners.

At its very core, Kalap promotes the 3Ms as pillars of entrepreneurship: mentorship, money and market.

Now, going back to Lionheart Farms. What we wish to see at Kalap is more coconut-based enterprises learning from the company's success in Palawan and the forging of more small brother-big brother partnerships to help lift more poor coconut farmers from poverty.

Lionheart Farms also clearly demonstrated how a business model can be both inclusive and transformative, and can be emulated by not only big business firms but also by government agencies.

Moeller, during our visit, said he cannot agree more: "Coming together in agriculture can address many social ills: poverty, hunger, joblessness and limited to no access to government and development programs." He is indeed the best person to say this, with his accomplishments in Rizal through Lionheart Farms.

Vizcaya co-op makes strides in coffee

BY LEANDER C. DOMINGO

A COOPERATIVE in Nueva Vizcaya has started to make big strides in coffee farming and value-adding, also demonstrating that government assistance to organized farmers can yield good dividends.

It all started in 2000 when the Department of Agriculture (DA)-Region 2 (Cagayan Valley) office provided a tramline system to enable farmers of Barangay Tiblac in the upland town of Ambaguio in Nueva Vizcaya to transport their produce to the lowlands.

In 2010, the local government of Ambaguio organized farmers in the area, initially numbering 36, to manage and maintain the tramline. This gave birth to the Tiblac Langak Farmers Association, which later became the Tiblac Farmers Agriculture Cooperative (TibFAC).

In 2009, DA-Region 2 also distributed 16,000 coffee seedlings, followed by the provision of coffee processing equipment for the farmers in the area. In 2012, the members of the association were also provided with related training sessions.

In 2013, TibFAC started to manufacture ground coffee products with raw materials from its farmer-members, and the association started selling its products

within the town and the neighboring towns of Bayombong and Solano. From a mere 36 members, the association grew its membership to 200.

Support from DTI

Manilyn Castañeda Ponce, Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Region 2 information officer, said they also gave the association additional coffee processing equipment through its shared service facilities, or SSF program, in 2014.

In addition to this, Ponce said the association benefited from DTI's Kapatid Mentor Me Program and continues to receive assistance through various training programs related to the coffee industry, digitalization and e-commerce.

The DTI said TibFAC, a beneficiary under the DTI's One Town One Product Next Gen program, was able to acquire its Food and Drug Administration license to operate certificate through the collaboration of the DTI and Department of Agrarian Reform.



■ The Tiblac Farmers Agriculture Cooperative, based in Ambaguio, Nueva Vizcaya, is one of the renowned coffee producers and processors in the province. It started with only 36 members. Photo shows the cooperative's processing facility in Ambaguio. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

With those interventions, Ponce said the association was able to attend and participate in the different provincial, regional and national trade fairs and expos, paving the way for the association's numerous transactions to boost its income.

In 2021, the association received

P24 million worth of assistance from the Philippine Rural Development Project to obtain its own coffee production and marketing enterprise building.

It was in August 2022 when the association successfully registered its business as a cooperative and changed its name to Tiblac Farmers

Agriculture Cooperative.

Ponce said the TibFAC is consistently reaping high green grading results for its Arabica and Robusta coffee products in the annual Philippine Coffee Quality Competition or PCQC.

She said the cooperative also continues to thrive with assistance

from the DTI-Region 2 Food Development Program to secure its Halal Certificate.

To showcase its products, Ponce said TibFAC is joining the 17th Padday na Lima Regional Trade Fair from Aug. 7 to 13, 2023, at Festival Mall Alabang in Metro Manila.



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DA: Initial typhoon farm damage, P2.9B

By RAADEE S. SAUSA

X @Raadeebay

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has posted an initial assessment of agricultural and fishery damage from Supertyphoon Egay at P2.89 billion, data showed on August 1.

The latest bulletin of DA shows that the damages was based on the assessment from Regional Field Offices (RFOs) in Cordillera Administrative Region, Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Western Visayas, Soccsksargen and Caraga.

"The damages and losses in the agricultural and fishery sector now

amounts to P2.89 billion affecting 142,365 farmers and fisherfolk, with total volume of production loss at 98,217 metric tons [MT] and 163,722 hectares of agricultural areas," data shows.

"The affected commodities include rice worth P1.13 billion, corn worth P998.2 million, high-value crops worth P235.6 million, livestock and poultry worth P11.9 million, and fisheries worth P175.4 million," the DA data shows.

Damage was also incurred in agricultural and fishery infrastructure and facilities, and fishing paraphernalia.

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DA...

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These figures are subject to validation. Additional damage and losses are expected in areas affected by the continuous rain and strong winds.

Through its RFOs, the Department is assessing the impacts caused by the typhoon in the agriculture and fishery sector.

The DA's assistance to affected farmers and fishers are: 111,873 bags of rice seeds, 14,426 bags of corn seeds and 2,582 kilograms of assorted vegetable seeds from the regions affected by the typhoon (CAR, Regions I, II, III, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, VI, and XIII).

Moreover, affected farmers and fishers will receive drugs and biologics for livestock and poultry; P62,000 worth of tilapia, carp, and catfish fingerlings to affected fisherfolk from Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR).

The agency also has P5.9 million worth of fuel assistance for fisherfolks in CAR, Regions I, II, and III; P1.9 million worth of repair and maintenance for damaged motorized boats.

Also lined up are a total of P200 million worth of Survival and Recovery (SURE) Loan Program from the Agricultural Credit Policy Council (ACPC) with loanable amount of up to P25,000 payable in three years at zero interest; and P500 million worth of Quick Response Fund (QRF) for the rehabilitation of affected areas.

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Davao de Oro planters urged to inspire kids to take up agriculture

By MANUEL T. CAYON

[@awimailbox](#)

DAVAO CITY—The government is encouraging farmers in Davao de Oro to encourage the youth to join the farm mechanization program initiated by the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Dr. Ofero A. Capariño, assistant director of the DA-Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech), said the agency is currently “advocating for youth for mechanization” and has been appealing to the children of farmers to join the program.

“They will be taught on the new farm machines including drone application of fertilizer, how to spray pesticides,” Capariño said. “We hope they will join the program because farming is not difficult as they [think].”

He made the appeal after the PhilMech donated to the province last July 28 facilities worth P7.9 million, including two mechanical grain dryers with biomass and petroleum-based heating systems and one precision rice seeder.

The donation was received by Davao de Oro Governor Dorothy Montejo-Gonzaga in Barangay Pasian, in the municipality of Monkayo.

“Kung may hihingin kami, ito ay alagaan, pakaingatan, mahalín at siguraduhing ang mga libreng makinarya na inyung natanggap ay aabot sa susunod na henerasyon,” Capariño said.

The donation was bankrolled by the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

The rice precision seeder represents a ride-on planting device designed to accurately deposit the appropriate seed quantity at precise depths and intervals, leading to a consistent distribution of plants, the DA information office said. “This innovation reduces the need for extensive labor and lowers planting expenses.”

The mechanical drier is expected to significantly aid rice producers in minimizing postharvest losses, especially when faced with adverse weather conditions. These donations were among the series of farm assistance between 2019 and 2022, totaling P189.8 million, the information office said.

It added that another P875,000 was provided by the DA-Agricultural Training Institute 11 for the Province-Led Agriculture and Fishery Extension System Capability Development Support. This program aims to strengthen the ability of the local governments to implement crucial agricultural and fishery initiatives.

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P30M 'expired' na karne nasamsam sa Caloocan

NASA 70 tonelada ng mga 'expired' na karne na nagkakahagala ng P30 milyon ang nasamsam ng mga awtoridad sa isang storage compound sa Caloocan City noong Martes.

Armado ng search warrant, sinalakay ng pinagsamang puwersa ng Bureau of Customs (BOC), Department of Agriculture (DA), National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS), Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) at lokal na pamahalaan ng Caloocan ang imbakan ng mga pasong karne sa kahabaan Tuna St., Kaunlaran Village ng siyudad bandang alas-

otso nang umaga.

Walang naabutang nagbabantay o guwardiya man lang sa lugar nang dumating ang grupo sa lugar.

Nang buksan ang mga 14-footer na refrigerated container van, bumulaga ang tambak na frozen meat ng baboy, manok at baka at iba pang processed foods.

Bagamat 'frozen' hindi pa rin umano ito ligtas na kainin ng tao.

Base sa marka ng mga karton, galing ang mga karne sa China o Canada.

Ibabaon ang mga ito sa lupa upang hindi na maibenta sa merkado.

(Only Barcala)

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Hontiveros sa Ombudsman: 'Big fish' sa sibuyas deal suspendihin

DAPAT suspendihin din ang mga mataas na opisyal ng Department of Agricultural (DA) kaugnay ng kaniyang pagkakadawit sa maanomalyang Kadiwa onion supply deal.

Ito ang sinabi ni Senadora Risa Hontiveros matapos maglabas ang Office of the Ombudsman ng suspension order laban kina DA Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista, Administrative Officer Eunice Biblanias, DA officer-in-charge Chief Accountant Lolita Jamela, FTI Vice Presi-

dent for Operations John Gabriel Benedict Trinidad III at Budget Division Head Juanita Lualhati.

Hindi kasama sa sinuspinde sina DA Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban at FTI President Robert Tan kahitkabilang sila listahan ng mga respondent sa reklamong inihain sa Ombudsman.

"Umaasa rin ako na hindi lang mababa o mid-level officials ang maparusahan, kundi mas lalo na ang mga boss na siyang nag-uutos

at kumukunsinti sa mga ito," giit ng senadora.

Ayon kay Hontiveros, noong kasagsagan ng krisis sa sibuyas, ang mga mataas na opisyal ng DA ang nag-isip na suplayan ang mga Kadiwa store ng mga smuggled na sibuyas.

"Ang puno't dulo kung bakit may nag-tumbling at nagkandara-pang mga opisyal ay para pagbigyan ang gusto ng presidente na maglagay ng maraming sibuyas sa kanyang Kadiwa stores," ani Hontiveros. (Dindo Matining)

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NIA kinastigo sa walang abisong pagpapakawala ng tubig sa dam

Sinita ng Senado ang umano'y kawalan ng abiso ng **National Irrigation Administration (NIA)** sa mga local government units (LGUs) tungkol sa pagpapalabas ng tubig sa dam dahilan kaya lubog ngayon sa baha ang maraming lugar sa Bulacan.

Sa pagdinig ng Senate Blue Ribbon Committee patungkol sa mga irregularidad ng mga irrigation projects ng NIA, ipinaabot ni Blue Ribbon Committee Chairman Sen. Francis Tolentino ang hinaing ng lalawigan

ng Bulacan dahil wala umano'y koordinasyon ang NIA sa ginawang pagpapakawala ng tubig sa Busto's dam na naging sanhi ng matinding pagbaha sa buong lalawigan matapos ang pananalasa ng bagyong Egay.

Araw umano ng Sabado ng mabigla ang mga residente sa Bulacan sa biglang pagtaas ng tubig at nataong high tide din ng araw na iyon.

Hindi nakapunta sa pagdinig ng Senado si Bulacan Gov. Daniel Fernando dahil abala sa kanyang lalawigan na

ngayo'y nasa ilalim ng 'state of calamity'.

Depensa naman ni NIA Chief Eduardo Ed-die Guillen, mayroong protocol na advance information na ipinadala sa Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRMO) ng Bulacan tungkol sa spilling activity o pagpapakawala ng tubig sa dam.

Dahil sa matinding pagbaha ay apektado rito ang 16 na bayan at tatlong siyudad sa buong lalawigan ng Bulacan. (Gemma Garcia)

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Programa sa bigas pinondohan ng P30.9-B

Naglaan na ang gobyerno ng P30.9 bilyong pondo para sa National Rice Program sa susunod na taon. Sinabi ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr., gagamitin ang pondo para palakasin ang produksyon ng bigas para makamit ang target na "rice self sufficiency."

Paliwanag ni Marcos, sa ganitong paraan ay mabibili ng publiko ang bigas sa murang halaga lamang.

Napag-alaman na sa naturang pondo, P9 bilyon ang inilaan para sa pagbili ng mahigit 473,680 metriko tonelada ng palay para sa buffer stocking program ng **National Food Authority (NFA)**.

Nasa P5.3 bilyon naman ang inilaan para sa National Corn Program, P4.3 bilyon sa National Livestock Program at P1.9 bilyon sa National High Value Crops Development Program.

Habang nasa P1.0 bilyon naman ang inilaan para sa sugarcane industry at P6.9 bilyon sa National Fisheries Program. (Gemma Garcia)

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P30M bulok na karne nasabat

TONE-TONELADANG expired at bulok na meat products at frozen goods ang nasabat ng mga awtoridad sa Caloocan City kamakalawa ng gabi.

Sinalakay ng Bureau of Customs (BOC), Department of Agriculture (DA), National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS), Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) at Caloocan LGU ang isang storage compound sa Tuna St. Kaunlaran Village, Caloocan City.

Walang taong nadatnan sa lugar at nang buksan ang limang 14 footer refrigerated container vans, tumambad sa mga awtoridad ang nasa 70 tonelada ng halo-halong karne ng baboy, manok, baka at iba pang processed foods na tinatayang P30 milyon ang halaga.

Ayon sa imbestigasyon ng awtoridad, nabubulok at hindi na maaaring ikonsumo ang mga karne.

Batay sa mga nakitang marka, ang mga karne ay maaaring nagmula sa Canada at China.

Sinabi ng BOC na maglala-bas sila ng warrant of cease and detention kapag napatunayang iligal na ipinasok sa bansa ang mga nasabing karne. Binigyan ng 15 araw ang mga may-ari ng container van para magsumite ng mga kinakailangang dokumento para patunayang ligal ang importasyon.

Nanawagan ang BOC sa mamamayan na kung may malalaman na imbak na mga bulok na karne ay agad itong ipagbigay-alam sa ahensya.

MERLY IRAL

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Poe warns of spike in rice prices

SENATOR Grace Poe has warned that the recent rice export curb by India could further increase global and local food prices.

Poe said the ban was unfortunate coming at a time when hectares of fields were flooded due to the typhoons and monsoon conditions.

India, the world's largest rice exporter, announced on July 20 its ban on non-basmati white rice exports to stem domestic inflation.

"Hindi naman natin masisisi ang India sa kanilang desisyon. May obligasyon silang unahin ang kapakanan ng kanilang 1.4 billion na mamamayan," the chairperson of the Senate committee on economic affairs said.

"Ngunit, may obligasyon rin tayo sa 113 milyon na mga Pil-

ipino. Lalo na sa 3.4 milyon na mga kabataan at mag-aaral na umaasa sa Feeding Program ng gobyerno. Kapag sila ay nagkulang sa timbang, tayo ang may pagkukulang," she added.

Poe authored Republic Act 11037 or the Masustansyang Pagkain sa Batang Pilipino Act, which provides nutritious food to Kindergarten to Grade 6 public school students.

The senator said demand for rice will continue among Filipinos, who consume 118.81 kilograms or two sacks of rice each on the average a year "because of the unli-rice programming in our genes."

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, the Philippines is only 81.5% rice self-sufficient, which means the rest

of the requirement is being imported.

"The reasons for such high import dependence are too many to discuss here. Simply put, our agriculture sector is not blessed with either good geography or good governance," Poe said.

In 2022, the country imported 3.79 million metric tons (MT) of rice, including 3.16 million MT sourced from Vietnam. The next largest import partners were Myanmar, Pakistan, and Thailand.

From India, the Philippines imported a mere 10,045 MT.

"But this does not exclude us from the collateral impact of their decision. The decline in global supply from the biggest rice exporter is expected to

cause a spike in global rice prices because of speculation," Poe said.

Data showed that non-basmati rice accounts for roughly 81.2% of India's total rice exports, the category subject to the ban.

"This means that in one fell swoop, India has created a 17.86 million MT shortage in the global rice market. Those who will fill that gap can certainly charge a premium," Poe said.

Poe recalled President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. saying he intends to pursue a rice import deal with India.

Poe said she looks forward to scrutinizing the 2024 budget that the Department of Agriculture will propose.

PS Jun M. Sarmiento

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By Jester Manalastas

THE Department of Budget and Management (DBM) formally submitted to the House of Representatives the proposed 2024 national budget amounting to P5.768 trillion.

Data from the DBM showed that the next year's budget is 9.8 percent higher than this year's P5.267 trillion.

The amount is equivalent to 21.7 percent of the gross domestic product, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said in his budget message.

According to the DBM, the total proposed budget submitted by different departments and attached agencies is P5.9 trillion but was trimmed down to P5.768 trillion after careful evaluation and review.

Of the budget, P893.3 billion or 15.5 percent will go to general public services, P699.2

or 12.1 percent will go to debt obligations.

Some P2.183 trillion or 37 percent will be allocated to social services; P1.709 trillion or 29.6 percent to economic services and P287.2 billion or 4.9 percent to defense.

Still the Department of Education (DepED) will get the most share with P924.7 billion.

Other agencies with lion shares are: Department of Public Works (P822.2 billion); Department of Health (P306.1 billion); Department of Interior and Local Government (P259.5 billion); Department of Defense (P232.2 billion); Department of Transportation (P214.3 billion); Department of Social Welfare and Development (P209.9 billion); Department of Agriculture (P181.4 billion); the Judiciary (P57.8 billion) and Department of Labor and Employment (P40.5 billion).

Among the priority program

of the administration are the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education (UAQTE) Program; School-based Feeding Program; Provision of Textbooks and other Instructional Materials; Social Pension for Indigent Senior Citizens and the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps).

FOUR BUDGET 'ELEPHANTS'

A lawmaker said Congress will be dealing with four "elephants" as solons scrutinize the proposed 2024 national budget.

Deputy Speaker and Batangas Rep. Ralph Recto said the four 'elephants' — disasters, debts, food and payroll — will be confronted when the budget deliberations start rolling in the House of Representatives.

"Typhoons do not only alter the lay of the land, they also disrupt the fiscal landscape, by causing damages that depress

economic growth, and incurring expenses required to repair them. Rebuilding damaged infrastructure, like a washed out road, is asset replacement; not creation of new assets. Walang idinagdag sa inventory; pinalitan lang," he stressed.

Second is the debt, which is rising and so is the money required to service it.

"Covid has retreated but like in any war, what follows is the arduous task of paying for the high cost of victory. Not all symptoms of long Covid are of the medical kind, the fiscal one is painful too. Taxes being pushed, despite their clever marketing, are basically debt-driven," he pointed out.

Food now takes centerstage, Recto said as it may view the budget from various standard prisms.

The payroll, including pension, is the fastest growing expenditure class for two decades now.



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2024 BUDGET SUBMITTED

ASSURANCE

THE House of Representatives, led by Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez, assured President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and the public that it will approve the proposed P5.768-trillion 2024 national budget before the October congressional break.

Romualdez made the assurance during the formal submission of the President's budget proposal to the House in ceremonies attended by other officers of the chamber led by Senior Deputy Speaker Aurelio "Dong" Gonzales Jr. and Majority Leader Manuel Jose "Mannix" M. Dalipe, other House members and Department of Budget and Management officials headed by Sec. Amenah Pangandaman.

"Let me assure everyone that the House of the People understands full well the need to pass the national budget on time. The national budget is crucial in maintaining economic stability, sustaining the country's growth trajectory and facilitating the seamless implementation of government programs and projects. As such, it demands the House's utmost attention and commitment," Romualdez said.

The House would deliberate "in a very transparent manner and get the widest consensus for our spending plan."

"We will make sure that every centavo of the national budget will be spent wisely and contribute to our goal of reigniting the fires of our economic forges. Sisiguruhin namin dito sa Kongreso na lahat ng buwis na ibinayad ng ating mamamayan ay maibabalik sa kanila sa pamamagitan ng mga programa at proyektong gobyerno. Bawat pisong naidagdag sa kaban ng bayan, mapapakinabangan ng taumbayan," he added.

The House leader has expressed confidence that with the participation and cooperation of his colleagues and officials of the DBM and other agencies, the House "will be able to scrutinize, deliberate and pass the national budget that is free for 2024 before we go on our first recess in October."

He pointed out that the annual national budget is the blueprint of the government's spending priorities.

The proposed national budget for next year will target the improvement of agricultural production such as rice and corn as well as will aim to bring down transportation costs.

"The national budget will provide increased allocations for the Department of Agriculture's banner programs to boost the production of prime commodities such as rice, corn and high-value crops, and fisheries among others. Higher investments will also be provided for the construction of more fish ports and farm-to-market roads all over the country," Romualdez said.

To reduce transportation and logistics costs, the Speaker said the government is determined to maintain high investments in infrastructure through the administration's Build Better More Program.

Romualdez added that the proposed budget also includes increased funding for local government programs on agriculture, fisheries, digitalization, and infrastructure development.

The theme of President Marcos' proposed spending plan for next year is, "Agenda for Prosperity: Securing a Future-Proof and Sustainable Economy."

The House leader said the budget "has been designed to spur the country's high-growth trajectory, with the Philippines targeting to attain upper-middle-income status by 2025 while maintaining strong financial footing."

SOLONS TO WORK OVERTIME

A House leader vowed to work overtime to meet the House of Representatives' internal deadlines on the proposed 2024 national budget, while ensuring that every centavo is allotted precisely where needed.

Ako Bicol Party-list Rep. Zaldy Co welcomed the submission of the National Expenditure Program (NEP) for 2024 by the Department of Budget and Management, a week after President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr.'s State of the Nation Address.

Co hailed Speaker Romualdez for initially showing conviction in passing the budget on time to avoid reenactment.

Co said his committee will scrutinize the NEP properly in keeping with its mandate.

The committee will also be taking into consideration the National Economic and Development Authority's macroeconomic assumptions on which the proposed budget has been based.

Jester Manalastas



Sandigan upholds dismissal of coco levy forfeiture cases

By **ELIZABETH MARCELO**

The Sandiganbayan has upheld the dismissal of a forfeiture case against three firms created out of the Coconut Industry Investment Fund (CIIF), also known as the coco levy funds, during martial law.

In an eight-page resolution proclaimed last July 31, the court's Second Division said the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) failed to raise any new meritorious argument in its motion for reconsideration that would warrant the reversal of the May 16, 2023 ruling dismissing the forfeiture case against Coconut Producers Federation Inc. (COCOFED), Coconut Investment Corp. (CIC) and the Cocofed Marketing Corp. (COCOMARK).

The Second Division had earlier granted the three firms' motion to dismiss the case on the ground of violation of their constitutional right to due process and speedy disposition of cases.

The Second Division noted that

it has been more than 30 years since the civil suit was filed by the PCGG in 1987 but the latter has yet to conclude its pretrial works and commence with the trial proper.

In its latest resolution, the Second Division maintained that the PCGG, represented in court by the Office of the Solicitor General, failed to justify the "inordinate delay" in prosecuting the case.

"Concomitantly, plaintiff failed to appear in pre-trial proceedings countless times, the most recent setting for pre-trial was on Nov. 13, 2000, where plaintiff, once again, unjustifiably failed to appear," the Second Division reiterated.

Associate Justice Arthur Malabaguio penned the resolution with the concurrence of Associate Justices Oscar Herrera Jr. and Edgardo Caldon.

Docketed as Civil Case No. 0033-B, the forfeiture suit covers companies created using the coco levy funds and was one of the eight subdivided coco levy cases filed by the PCGG in 1987, a year after the ouster of the late dictator

Ferdinand Marcos Sr.

Named as primary respondent in the cases was the late San Miguel Corp. chairman Danding Cojuangco Jr., an alleged crony of the Marcoses.

The Supreme Court (SC) in 2021, however, junked six of the civil suits against Cojuangco, citing violation of his constitutional right to speedy trial. Cojuangco passed away in July 2020 at the age of 85.

This same SC ruling was cited by COCOFED, CIC and COCOMARK in asking the Second Division to dismiss the civil suit against them.

The Second Division, in its new resolution, found no merit in the PCGG's insistence the three coco levy firms "were not similarly situated" with Cojuangco.

The Second Division said that even assuming that the SC decision in favor of Cojuangco should be inapplicable in the case of the three coco levy firms, it was still clear that their "constitutional right to due process and speedy disposition of cases were violated."



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Searca engages judiciary on biotech

A PHILIPPINE government-hosted intergovernmental treaty organization has engaged members of the judiciary during the annual biotech outreach of the United States Department of Agriculture-Foreign Agricultural Service Manila (USDA-FAS Manila) to provide members of the judiciary with "knowledge of the complexities and protocols of agri-biotech development."

Glenn Gregorio, Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) director, said the center was continuing its commitment to empowering members of the judiciary to create sound, unbiased, and evidence-based decisions and policy recommendations.

Gregorio said Searca teamed up with the Philippine Judicial Academy (PHILJA), the Philippine Association of Law Schools, USDA-FAS Manila, and the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA) for the "Forum on Improving the Policy Environment for Biotech Industry Development."

Held on July 14 at the Manila Diamond Hotel and online via Zoom, the forum gathered almost a hundred participants composed of judges, lawyers, law students and legal researchers on-site and online.

Gregorio said the forum aimed to equip members of the judiciary with knowledge of the complexities and protocols of agri-biotech development since these modern technologies are expected to be continually developed

in the field.

During the event, he encouraged the participants to collaborate with lead experts and to be kept informed with updates in the field of biotechnology, its science, and its strategic importance and potential benefits for Filipinos, as well as related issues that can potentially usher in much-needed societal transformation, especially in the agricultural sector.

Rhodora Aldemita, ISAAA executive director, also expressed hope "to prepare the judiciary in crafting and approving policies and making science-based decisions for the acceptance and adoption of more biotech crops."

Aldemita said this would immensely contribute to poverty alleviation and a sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture sector in the Philippines, noting that activities like this keep the country's standing as "the premiere country in biotech adoption, biosafety regulation, and communication in the Asia-Pacific."

From the United States Embassy in Manila, Lorenzo New, the Environment, Science, Technology, Health and Energy Unit chief, emphasized the need for an enabling policy environment for biotech.

"For innovation to flourish, biotechnology needs regulatory systems that not only uphold the highest standards of health and environmental safety but are flexible and follow the science," New said.

"These new technologies promise

to speed up crop development, ensure farmers' accessibility to more sustainable solutions, and give consumers safe, affordable access to foods, but only if policy environments do not unnecessarily discriminate against their use," he added.

Also during the event, experts such as Kristine Tome from ISAAA provided a brief background on the status of biotech in the Philippines.

Leonardo Gonzales from Strive Foundation, Michael Leader from Bayer Australia, and Benigno Peczon from the Coalition for Agricultural Modernization in the Philippines or CAMP, spoke on several issues, including the socioeconomic implications of using unlicensed genetically modified corn seeds and the impact of the glyphosate ban and Writ of Kalikasan on crops.

Among the concerns raised during the open forum that served as a venue for participants to express their thoughts on the topics was the possibility that commercialized biotech crops could be deemed unsafe in the future.

For his part, Justice Jose Reyes Jr., chairman of the Special Areas of Concern and Professorial Lecturer from Philja, challenged the judiciary, lawyers, law students, and legal research staff to take an active role in helping improve the policy environment for biotech industry development. He added that they would be the critical link between biotech innovations in the laboratory and the homes of common Filipinos. **LEANDER C. DOMINGO**



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Agri firms dominate Shell LiveWIRE 2023 list

BUSINESSES related to agriculture dominate the list of entities selected for the Shell LiveWIRE 2023 Acceleration program under the community and tech startup categories.

The entities selected for the program will receive mentorship, training and financial support from Shell Pilipinas Corp. (SPC).

Among the selected businesses are three tech startups, six community enterprises and two Shell Sponsor's A-List entities.

In the tech startup category, two businesses are in agriculture: Lithos Manufacturing OPC, a company focused on adding value to locally sourced minerals for industrial, agricultural, aquaculture and environmental applications; and Farmvocacy Inc., a social climate financial technology startup supporting climate-smart rice farming and environment-friendly and high-yielding farming systems.

In the community enterprise category, six community enterprises that are also into agriculture made it to the list: Samahang Mangangisda ng Dalupaon (Samada), a group of fisherfolks that ventured into fish processing; Philia Variety Store, a direct market conduit for smallholder community farmers of coffee, cacao, coconut and other agricultural products; DLR Foods Supply Trading, a company providing ready-to-eat meals in retort pouches that are halal certified; Odicon Small Coconut Farmers' Organization (OSCFO), an agricultural enterprise specializing in the sustainable processing of coconut byproducts; and Agri-VINO Enterprises, a chicken poultry business providing egg incubation

service to the community, reducing travel costs for fellow growers.

The community enterprises selected for this year support Shell LiveWIRE's vision of strengthening local economies by promoting entrepreneurship, innovation and meaningful employment.

This year, Shell LiveWIRE received 219 applications, 141 of them from tech startups and 78 from community enterprises.

The selection of the shortlisted businesses was done by a panel of judges comprising Shell leaders, Department of Trade and Industry representatives, and venture capitalists who are experts in industry and market requirements.

Shell LiveWIRE is a program that aims to help businesses identify their core strengths and establish a system that can strengthen their capacity to scale, improve their products, expand their market and generate sustainable streams of revenue.

"In these uncertain times, the significance of platforms like Shell LiveWIRE cannot be overstated. They act as catalysts for progress, fostering connections, driving innovation and empowering local enterprises to navigate challenges and thrive in an ever-changing world," Serge Bernal, SPC vice president for corporate relations, said.

The tech startups will get a chance to win P1 million, while community enterprises will receive a P100,000 grant after the program. Also, all participants get a chance to be a part of the Shell Value Chain as suppliers or vendors in the company's ecosystem. **CONRAD M. CARIÑO**

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Batangas Capitol launches 'Kadiwa ng Pangulo'

By Cesar 'Jojo' Magsombol

THE provincial government of Batangas recently joined in the simultaneous launch of the President's 2023 "Katuwang sa Diwa and Gawa para Masaganang Atat Matas ng Kita" (KADIWA) through the Community Food Market project of the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist (OPAg).

Twenty-nine farmers and fishermen's associations, cooperatives, and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) from the province participated in the Community Food Market held at the Regina R. Mandanas Memorial DREAM Zone, Capitol Compound, City of Ba-

tangas.

Batangas Gov. DoDo Mandanas led the launching of the KADIWA, a project of President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. that aims to bring cheap goods from the locals to the people of the province.

Various agricultural products such as rice, vegetables, meat, fruits, and fish, food and non-food products of MSMEs included in One Town, One Product of local government units became merchandise in the community market, and ready-to-eat foods of micro-enterprises.

The implementation of KADIWA in the Capitol was spearheaded by the OPAg staff under the leadership of Dr. Rod Bautista.



TO BENEFIT FROM PRICE RISE

Vietnam to increase rice output

HANOI- Vietnam will increase its rice production this year to take advantage of a price surge, the head of the country's Department of Crop Production said on Tuesday.

The country's unhusked paddy output is expected to rise to more than 43 million metric tons this year, from 42.7 million tons last year, Nguyen Nhu Cuong said in a statement posted on the government's website.

The rice growing area of the upcoming autumn-winter crop in the Mekong Delta will be raised by 7.7 percent from an initial plan to 700,000 hectares, he added.

Vietnam's 5 percent broken rice prices rose to \$580-\$590 per metric ton on Tuesday from \$515-\$525 two weeks ago, traders said, after India on July 20 ordered a halt to its largest export category to calm domestic prices.

"This is an opportunity for us to boost rice exports," Cuong said.

He said Vietnam's total rice exports this year would rise to 7.8 million metric tons from 7.1 million tons recorded last year.

"Increasing exports at this time won't threaten Vietnam's food security," Cuong said.

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 metric 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.

Rice exporters in Thailand and Vietnam are renegotiating prices on sales contracts for around half a million metric tons for August shipments, two trade sources said, as India's ban has tightened global supplies.



A Vietnamese farmer works on her terraced rice field in Pu Luong. (Reuters Photo)

The chairman of Vietnam Food Association said on Monday the country has no immediate plans to restrict rice exports.

"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 tonnes, 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. - Reuters



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Wheat, soybeans jump

SINGAPORE- Chicago wheat jumped nearly 4 percent on Wednesday, rising for the first time in six sessions, while corn gained 2 percent as attacks on Ukrainian ports renewed concerns over supplies.

Soybeans rose for a second session on optimism over strong demand.

"There are talks about fresh attacks on grain infrastructure in Danube which is supporting prices," said one Singapore-based grains trader.

Russian drones attacked port

and grain storage facilities in the south of Ukraine's coastal Odesa region in the early hours of Wednesday, setting some of them on fire, regional governor Oleh Kiper wrote on the Telegram messaging app.

The most-active wheat contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was up 3.8 percent at \$6.77 a bushel, having hit its weakest since July 18 at \$6.43 in the last session, and corn added 2.2 percent to \$5.18-1/2 a bushel. -

Reuters



Global rice supply faces new threat as Thailand urges crop curbs

THAILAND has urged farmers to reduce their rice planting to save water following poor rainfall, a move that poses a fresh threat to global supply after India banned some shipments of the grain.

Farmers in the key central region have already planted most of their rice but the government is encouraging a switch to other crops that need less water, according to a statement from Surasri Kidtimonton, the secretary-general of the Office of the National Water Resources.

Thailand, the world's second-biggest rice exporter, is seeing less rain as the nation braces for a potential drought next year as the El Niño weather pattern leads to drier conditions. Cumulative rainfall so far in the central region is about 40 percent below normal

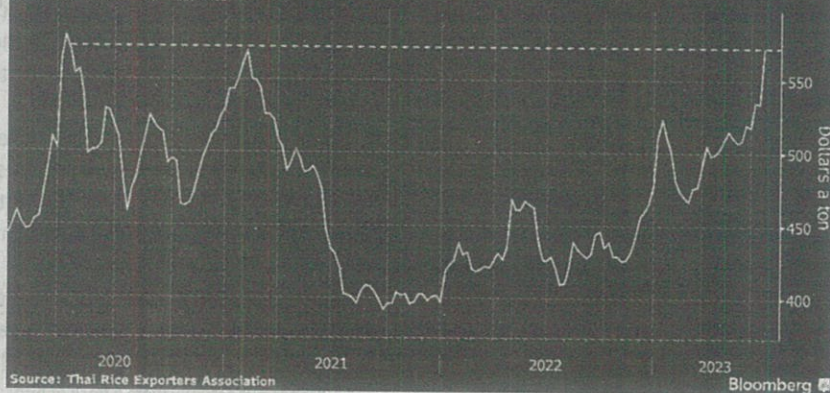
levels and the move to curb planting of the grain is to help conserve water for household consumption, according to Surasri.

Rice prices in Asia surged to the highest in more than three years last month after India—the world's biggest exporter—banned some of its shipments. The grain is essential to the diets of billions of people and further price gains would burden consumers with additional inflationary pressure.

Thailand's central region was expected to account for almost 14 percent of total rice-growing area in 2023 and forecast to make up about 19 percent of the main paddy harvest in 2023/24, according to the Ministry of Agriculture. Water levels in major reservoirs in the area are at about 51 percent of capacity, said Surasri.

Rice Prices Jump on India Export Ban
Asia benchmark at highest since April 2020

■ Thailand White Rice 5% - Last Price



The government previously warned that El Niño could lead to unusually low rainfall, and advised farmers to grow one crop this year instead of the usual two. However, some of the shortage from Thailand should be offset by higher shipments from Vietnam, which

are likely to exceed its target for the year.

Vietnam exported 21 percent more rice in the first six months than a year earlier, with shipments increasing to the Philippines, China and Indonesia, according to the Customs Department. The nation



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says an increase in overseas sales won't affect its food security.

India is by far the world's biggest rice exporter, accounting for 40 percent of global trade, while Thailand and Vietnam make up 15 percent and around 14 percent, respectively, according to the US Department of Agriculture.

Cotton prices

COTTON futures gained for a second day in New York as extreme heat is increasingly risking the health of crops in top US grower Texas, raising concerns that world supplies could become tighter than analysts previously expected.

Conditions in Texas have worsened, with only 17 percent of the crop rated as good or excellent as of July 30, the US Department of Agriculture reported Monday. That is even less than the levels

seen at the same period last season, a year when severe drought led to widespread damages.

Hot weather across the cotton belt is creating uncertainty about the size of the US crop, said Shawn Wade, director of policy analysis and research at Plains Cotton Growers. "It could be anywhere between 14 million bale to 16 million bale crops. You've got some pretty high temperatures settling into parts of Louisiana, Mississippi."

The most-active futures contract climbed as much as 1.3 percent Tuesday to 85.85 cents per pound. Cotton has been on an upward trend since late June, aided by mounting concerns over weather not just in the US but also in India, where El Niño threatens to keep cotton areas dryer than normal. *Bloomberg News*



EU provides more funds to scale up wildlife management program—FAO

THE Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has welcomed €25 million in additional funding from the European Union (EU) to extend and scale up the Sustainable Wildlife Management (SWM) Programme.

Since 2017, the initiative has been working with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries to reduce unsustainable wildlife hunting, conserve wildlife, and strengthen people's livelihoods and food security.

The first phase of the initiative received €45 million from the EU, with co-funding from the French Global Environment Facility (FFEM) and French Development Agency (AFD). This second phase will run from August to May 2029 and will be part of NaturAfrica, the new EU initiative for biodiversity conservation in Africa.

In this new phase, FAO will continue to lead a consortium of partners, which includes the French Agricultural Research

Centre for International Development (CIRAD), the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).

"The SWM Programme has a significant contribution to make as we work towards a sustainable and food-secure world for all," said Maria Helena Semedo, Deputy Director-General, FAO.

"The initiative contributes to the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework as well as to the 'four betters' in the new FAO Strategic Framework 2022-2031."

For example, Semedo said the program is working towards "better nutrition" by promoting safe food across wild and domestic meat value chains, and towards "better environment" by developing innovative approaches to improve practices, build capacities to reduce zoonotic risks and protect ecosystems.

The partnership is working with

national and regional administrations, and over 80 local and indigenous communities, in 16 countries. The initiative is strengthening innovative and collaborative targeted approaches to conserve wild animals, protect ecosystems, and improve the livelihoods of those who depend on these resources.

"Building scalable new models to conserve wildlife and improve food security takes time," said Marjeta Jager, Deputy Director-General, Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG-INTPA), European Commission.

"We need to further develop the models tested by the SWM Programme and to disseminate and scale up the Programme's findings, results and approaches to achieve greater impacts. For this reason, the European Union seeks to provide additional funding to continue the SWM Programme until June 2029."

FAO noted many rural populations around the world continue to

rely on wildlife for food, income and their cultural identity. Wild meat is an important source of protein, fat and micronutrients. However, the increasing demand for wild meat, especially in urban areas, is threatening wildlife populations, ecosystem balance, and food security of indigenous and rural communities in tropical and subtropical regions.

"Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the interdependence between human, animal and ecosystem health, and illustrated the magnitude and diversity of the consequences that the loss or degradation of biodiversity can have around the world."

The program aims to improve the sustainable and legal use of wild animal populations through participatory management of hunting, fishing and wildlife. It also works on reducing urban consumption of wild meat from unsustainable sources by encouraging healthy and sustainable livestock, poultry and fish farming value chains.