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Rice supply is more than enough, DA Usec assures

By JEL SANTOS

The country has more than enough supply of rice for the coming months despite the recent typhoon that caused damage to crops, the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** assured.

In a recent Laging Handa public briefing, Agriculture Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian stressed that there is no rice shortage in the country.

"Our rice supply is more than enough for our needs for the next few months," Sebastian said. "We are at the peak of planting, we expect that this month there will be harvests, and in September there will be many harvests. We have a sufficient supply of rice."

The DA also clarified that the National Food Authority's (NFA's) buffer stock of rice is different from the stocks of rice for the whole country.

"The persistent popular reference to buffer stocks held by the National Food Authority as the ► 3

Rice supply is more than enough, DA Usec assures 1◀

country's rice supply source when local production is short is no longer valid under the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) of 2019," it noted. "Under the RTL, NFA buffer stocks are solely for emergency requirements like calamities. Thus, NFA's buffer stocks should no longer be based on national daily consumption."

The DA said previous reports stating that NFA's stocks are at alarming levels of one to two days are "flawed and irrelevant" considering the buffer stock level set by RTL at 300,000 to 350,000 metric tons (MT) at any given time.

Moreover, Agriculture Undersecretary

Mercedita Sombilla pointed out that it would be faulty to compute NFA buffer stocks based on the average national daily consumption of 37,362 MT since NFA stocks are now limited to emergency relief and for the requirements of the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

The official disclosed that there's 5.7 million MT of palay harvested during the dry season, an additional 1.9 million MT of imported rice in stock, and 1.8 million MT carry-over stock from 2022.

The country also has new harvests in July and August, albeit minimal, he added.

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Egay's damage to agriculture now at ₱4.47 B; death toll rises to 29

By JEL SANTOS and MARTIN SADONGDONG

Super typhoon Egay's damage to agriculture has now reached ₱4.47 billion, the Department of Agriculture (DA) disclosed.

Based on DA's Bulletin No. 12 released on Aug. 3, the number of affected farmers and fishers has risen to 170,510.

The DA said the super typhoon caused the loss of 152,041 metric tons of agricultural products from 195,539 hectares of agricultural areas.

The estimate of the DA covers the Cordillera

Administrative Region, Ilocos Region (Region 1), Cagayan Valley (Region 2), Central Luzon (Region 3), Calabarzon (Region 4A), Mimaropa (Region 4B), Western Visayas (Region 6), Zamboanga Peninsula (Region 9), Soccsksargen (Region 12), and Caraga (Region 13).

"The affected commodities include rice, corn, high value crops, livestock and poultry, and fisheries," the DA said.

Moreover, it also noted damage incurred in irrigation systems, agricultural and fishery infrastructures, and fishing ▶ 4

Egay's damage to agriculture now at ₱4.47 B; death toll rises to 29 1◀

paraphernalia.

The DA said it has provided farmers with ₱65.3 million worth of rice seeds and fertilizers; ₱94.7 million worth of corn seeds and pesticides; and ₱39.6 million worth of assorted vegetable seeds.

For fisherfolk, the agriculture department said it distributed ₱62,000 worth of tilapia, carp, and catfish fingerlings to affected fisherfolk from Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR); ₱5.9 million worth of fuel assistance for fisherfolks specifically in CAR, Regions 1, 2, and 3; and ₱1.9 million worth of repair and maintenance assistance for damaged motorized boats.

In addition, the DA said it made available ₱200 million worth of Survival and Recovery (SURE) Loan Program from the Agricultural Credit Policy Council (ACPC) with loanable amount of up to ₱25,000 payable in three years at zero interest; and ₱500 million worth of Quick Response Fund (QRF) for the rehabilitation of affected areas.

'Egay' death toll jumps to 29

Meanwhile, two more fatalities were reported by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), which brought the death toll of Egay to 29 as of Friday, Aug. 4.

The NDRRMC said 14 fatalities were logged in Cordillera Administrative (CAR), including two newly reported deaths.

Meanwhile, eight deaths were noted in Ilocos Region, four in Calabarzon, two in Western Visayas, and one in Davao Region (Region 11).

The NDRRMC said 805,621 families (3,028,040 individuals) have also been affected in 14 regions. There were 165 persons who got injured while 11 others remain missing in CAR, Cagayan Valley, and Ilocos Region.

Of those affected, 15,473 families (57,226 individuals) were still staying in 648 evacuation centers.

The NDRRMC said ₱248 million worth of relief assistance has been provided to all the typhoon victims.

Egay left the Philippine area of responsibility (PAR) on July 27.



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200 kilos of 'hot' meat seized in Imus markets

IMUS CITY, Cavite: The city government of Imus, through Task Force Bantay Karne and in collaboration with the **National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS)**, launched a simultaneous meat inspection drive in the city's public markets on Friday, August 4.

Imus City veterinarian Dr. Maribel Depayso-Reyes said the task force confiscated meat products from traders who failed to show their meat inspection certificates and business permits.

She added that business owners with meat products fit for human consumption would be given enough time to obtain the necessary certifications to retrieve their confiscated products before they are donated to charitable institutions or destroyed.

Shops that do not have the necessary permits or documents were also closed for operation.

Reyes said there were shops that were already padlocked by the government but are still selling meat products at Green Gate Village in Barangay Malagasang 2B.

Around 200 kilograms of hot meat were confiscated by the task force.

"The purpose of our operation is to ensure that the meat products in Talipapa and public markets are safe for every Imuseño to eat and ensure that they provide the requirements of the NMIS that come from the legit slaughterhouse and with LGU certificates," Reyes said



NO PERMIT The Task Force Bantay Karne confiscates more than 200 kilograms of meat for lack of documentation and permits on Friday, Aug. 4, 2023, from the different public markets in Imus City.
PHOTO BY DENNIS ABRINA

in an interview.

"Some of the meat we confiscated do not have any inspection certificates and for the frozen meats they violated the handling of meat products."

For store owners whose goods were confiscated, they need to secure proper documents so they can

resume their business, explained Reyes.

She said the confiscated meats will be checked to determine if they are still suitable for human consumption otherwise they will be taken to a condemnation area in Malagasang 1G.

The city government of Imus,

under the leadership of Mayor Alex Advincula, said the local government is determined to protect the health of its citizens from unsafe meat through regular inspections in accordance with Republic Act 9296 or the "Meat Inspection Code of the Philippines."

DENNIS ABRINA



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Go calls for stronger govt interventions in agriculture

SEN. Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go called for immediate and stronger government interventions in the agricultural sector amid concerns over the global rice market following India's ban on rice exports.

In an interview on Thursday, August 3, Go addressed fears of a rice crisis due to the exportation ban by India.

"What is important here is the immediate action of our Department of Agriculture; we need immediate government intervention," said Go in Filipino.

"We cannot blame India, They have their own priority. They also need to feed their own people. They have their own market. Exporting rice to us is not their priority," he added.

Go's call to action is a significant response to the growing concerns about India's export ban on non-basmati white rice, a move that could impact global rice markets.

The senator stressed the need to focus on supporting local farmers and boosting the domestic production of rice through multiple means, such as providing drought-resistant rice seeds, more fertilizers, additional irrigation, increased training, and easy access to credit facilities with low-interest rates.

"Most of our farmers are poor, they're penniless. They're 'hand-to-mouth' people. Let's support them so we can produce rice for our consumption," Go said.

India's decision to ban rice exports has implications far beyond its borders, as the country accounts for more than 40 percent of the global rice trade.

The timing of the ban is particularly unfortunate for the Philippines, as the nation is already grappling with flooded rice fields due to recent typhoons and monsoon conditions.

With Vietnam, the main supplier of the Philippines' rice imports, already increasing its price, Go's call for self-reliance and strengthening of the local agricultural sector

becomes even more important.

Citing the crucial role of farmers in ensuring food security, Go has been consistently pushing for stronger agricultural support systems and infrastructure.

He was one of the authors of the measure that became Republic Act 11901, expanding the agriculture, fisheries, and rural development financing system.

He has also been advocating for other programs to support farmers and fisherfolk in the country, such as the enhancement of the irrigation of farmlands and expansion of the National Rice Program.

Go also co-authored Senate Bill (SB) 1804 or the "New Agrarian Emancipation Act" which was already approved by the Senate. The measure seeks to condone loans that agrarian reform beneficiaries incurred in owning lands under the government's agrarian reform programs.

Moreover, the senator also filed SB 2117 which aims to provide full crop insurance coverage for agrarian reform beneficiaries, as well as SB 2118 which aims to provide better insurance coverage and services to farmers and help mitigate the impact of natural disasters on the agricultural sector.

Earlier, Go also emphasized the importance of improving competitiveness and safeguarding local farmers and industries amid the recently ratified Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement.

Go believes that with open competition as a result of RCEP, the prices of goods should decrease and ordinary Filipinos, especially the poor and those in the agricultural sector, must benefit from it.

He likewise backed proposals to convert idle government lands into agricultural areas to boost food production in the country.

"We must work together to protect our farmers, stabilize prices, and safeguard the welfare of our consumers," he added.

JAVIER JOE ISMAEL



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USDA: PH positioning itself as a halal food hub

THE Philippines is an ideal gateway for the suppliers of halal products from the United States, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) said.

The USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service said in its Global Agricultural Information Network report that the Philippines is an emerging market for such products because of the country's growing Muslim population.

"The country is positioning itself as a halal food processing hub for export to other countries and regions with significant Mus-

lim populations," it said.

The Department of Trade and Industry, in partnership with the local halal industry, is positioning the Philippines as a processing hub where local and imported raw products are processed, branded and exported to Muslim-majority countries.

"One factor that sets the Philippines apart is its large population of Filipino workers overseas, which serves as a natural market," it said.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, the Phil-

ippines has the third-largest Muslim population in Southeast Asia and is growing at 3 percent annually.

In 2022, the Philippines imported \$120 million worth of halal products, including dairy products, beef, poultry meat and products, glucose syrup and animal fats with more than 40 percent originating from the United States.

Majority or 63 percent of the country's imported halal beef was sourced from India, followed by Brazil with 30 percent, Australia and Ireland with 5 percent and 2 percent, respectively.

The National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) was mandated by Republic Act 9997 to develop the Philippine

Halal industry and accredit halal-certifying bodies.

"The law ensured that halal certification became the responsibility of the private sector, while the government, through NCMF, focused on accrediting halal certifiers," it said.

Moreover, the Department of Agriculture (DA) and Brunei discussed new trade ventures including the latter's exportation of halal beef, lamb and other meat products to the Philippines.

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Megawati Manan laid out the possibilities of opening Brunei to Filipino industries as a production hub of Halal products.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

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NTA cites BIR chief for drive against illicit tobacco products

INTERNAL Revenue Commissioner Romeo D. Lumagui Jr. was awarded by the National Tobacco Administration (NTA) under the Department of Agriculture for his consistent leadership and programs against illicit tobacco products.

Commissioner Lumagui received his award during the NTA event on August 3, 2023. Here, he discussed ramping up government initiatives to combat illicit trade.

"Illicit tobacco products is a scourge of our economy. The BIR will hunt down all illegal traders of tobacco. We must level the playing field so we can attract investors. We have

done nationwide raids of illicit tobacco products, and we will continue to do so," the commissioner stated.

Under the administration of Commissioner Lumagui, the Bureau of Internal Revenue had its first nationwide raid of illicit tobacco products last January 2023. He repeated this historical feat by having another nationwide raid last July 2023.

Lumagui, and the whole of BIR, appreciated the award given by the NTA, saying it serves as a recognition of the efforts made by hundreds of revenue officers who participated in the nationwide raids against illicit tobacco.



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'Egay' agri damage climbs to P4.47B; 29 die

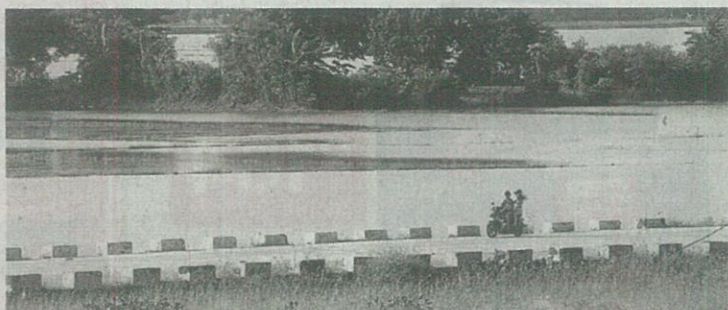
By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
and **Dexter Cabalza**
@Team_Inquirer

The agriculture sector has so far sustained the largest loss this year after Typhoon "Egay" (international name: Doksuri) wiped out P4.47 billion worth of commodities, although the typhoon ravaged parts of the Philippines for less than a week.

In a report, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said the weather disturbance affected 170,510 farmers and fishers with the total volume of production loss pegged at 152,041 metric tons covering 195,539 hectares of agricultural areas.

The death toll caused by Egay rose to 29, 14 of which were from the Cordillera Administrative, including the two newly reported deaths, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council said in its report on Friday.

Egay dealt a fatal blow to rice



RETAKEN The Candaba swamp, which farmers turned into rice fields, regains its lost territory below the Candaba Viaduct Bridge in Pampanga. —**NIÑO JESUS ORBETA**

and corn. Aside from high-value crops, livestock and poultry and fisheries, irrigation systems, agricultural and fishery infrastructures, and fishing paraphernalia were likewise affected.

Rice incurred P1.75 billion in losses with the affected area at 111,547 ha and the volume of production loss at 42,754 MT. This is equivalent to 0.21 percent of the total annual production target volume for rice at

19.76 million MT.

In the case of corn, damage totaled P1.74 billion, affecting 95,658 MT of produce on 81,998 ha of land. This represents 1.03 percent of the total annual production target volume for corn at 9.30 million MT.

DA assistance

The typhoon hit infrastructure amounting to P354.92 million; high-value crops, P296.58

million; fisheries, P175.39 million; and livestock and poultry, P154.27 million.

Affected regions are the Cordillera, Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Marikina, Western Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Soccsksargen and Caraga. Egay's impact on the sector is significantly higher than the P50.84 million worth of damage caused by Tropical Depression "Amang" in April.

Meanwhile, the DA has prepared assistance for distribution to affected farmers and fishers, including P65.3 million worth of rice seeds and fertilizers and P94.7 million worth of corn seeds and pesticides.

It is providing assorted vegetable seeds amounting to P39.6 million as well as tilapia, carp and catfish fingerlings totaling P62,000.

The DA is also giving P1.9 million for the repair and maintenance of damaged motorized boats. **INQ**

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COA flags P1.2-B worth of delayed, scrapped irrigation projects

By **Dempsey Reyes**
@dempseyreyesINQ

State auditors have called out the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) for the delays or termination of 83 projects covering three calendar years and amounting to a total of P1.2 billion.

In its annual report on the NIA, the Commission on Audit (COA) noted "significant delays" ranging from one month to 780 calendar days or more than two years for irrigation projects programmed for completion by 2020, 2021 and 2022.

The COA said its conclusions on the delayed projects were a "reiteration" of its previous audits of the NIA.

Auditors said 33 contracts, worth a total of P99.7 million and constituting a majority of the delayed projects, were under the Magat River Integrated Irrigation System (Mariis) in Isabela province.

These projects were delayed from 32 to 368 calendar days, the COA said, citing such factors as "unsatisfactory performance" by contractors, insufficient manpower and equipment, unresolved right of way (ROW) issues, late release of funds, change or revision of

plans, and "poor project planning, supervision, monitoring and control."

The audit agency noted further that the NIA granted contract time extensions (CTEs) to several irrigation contracts, "which further delayed their completion [and] thus deprived the intended beneficiaries of the timely use of these irrigation projects."

'Deficiencies'

But other circumstances had also disrupted some of the projects, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, standing crops and unworkable sites brought by bad weather.

Apart from the contracts under Mariis, the remaining 50 delayed projects are a P2.7-million contract under the Irrigation Management Office (IMO) of Apayao province; two contracts worth P16.9 million under the Lower Agno River Irrigation System Improvement Project; 14 contracts worth P764.2 million under the NIA's regional office in Cagayan Valley; 24 contracts worth P255.6 million under Isabela's IMO; a P4.7-million contract under the IMO of Cagayan and Batanes provinces; a P3.5-million contract under Palawan's IMO;

and seven contracts worth P81.2 million under Camarines Sur's IMO.

The COA cited the same reasons for their delay, from "unsatisfactory performance" to bad weather.

Regarding the stalled irrigation projects in 2020 and 2021, the audit agency said "issues on [their] delayed implementation ... have not been resolved yet by the NIA management in CY (calendar year) 2022."

As for last year's delayed projects, auditors cited their "deficient planning and monitoring."

"These have been recurring as management has not fully addressed these deficiencies noted in previous years," the COA added.

'Wastage'

The NIA had also terminated 14 irrigation contracts worth a total of P139.46 million, which the COA said was due to either the "contractor's fault" or the NIA's decision to end some of these contracts "for convenience," if still in compliance with law.

Thirteen of these contracts were under the NIA's regional office in Zamboanga Peninsula and had an estimated total of P127.8 million.

The remaining contract, estimated at P11.6 million, was under the IMO of Camarines Sur. The COA noted a delay in the termination itself, spanning 86 calendar days.

These terminated contracts "resulted in wastage of government funds," the audit agency said, adding that the NIA should "ensure that no bidding and awarding of contracts [be] made unless detailed engineering investigations, surveys and designs, including the acquisition of the ROW ... and other relevant conditions are duly considered."

The NIA should also require contractors to regularly submit progress reports, and impose liquidated damages on contractors who delay their projects.

The agency was advised further to file charges against erring or defaulting contractors and impose sanctions on officials and personnel found to be "remiss [in] their duties," state auditors said.

Reached by the Inquirer on Friday, the NIA said "its concerned offices are still consolidating information and ... were given 30 to 60 days to directly respond to auditors." —WITH A REPORT FROM JORDEENE B. LAGARE INQ

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Villar cites tobacco industry's contribution to PH economy

By Camille P. Balagtas

SENATOR Cynthia Villar has reiterated that tobacco is included in the agricultural products covered by her proposed Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act of 2023.

She said this law will amend the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act to include hoarding, profiteering and cartel of agricultural products as economic sabotage.

"And Tobacco will be included in the agricultural products covered by this law," said Villar who was Guest Speaker in the International Tobacco Agricultural Summit held at Shangri-La in BGC, Taguig City today, Aug. 3.

The senator noted that it is her advocacy to support Filipino farmers as they are the 'backbone' of the Philippine agriculture sector.

She likewise acknowledged the tobacco industry plays a vital role in the economy of the Philippines, being one of the world's largest tobacco producers.

The National Tobacco Administration said the tobacco industry significantly contributes to employment and revenue generation in the country,

supporting around 2.2 million Filipinos directly or indirectly.

"According to the Oxford Business Group's Economic Impact Report in June 2022, tobacco cultivation was present in 23 provinces across 12 regions in the Philippines, with the Ilocos Region being the top producer at 69%, followed by Cagayan Valley at 23%, and Northern Mindanao ranking third, as of April 2022," related Villar.

She said the industry's significance to rural economic highlighted by a 47.8% increase in the area planted for tobacco between 2019 and 2022.

The sin taxes for tobacco and alcohol implemented since 2013, now funds the national health budget, including Universal Health Care (UHC).

Sin tax revenue, primarily from tobacco collections (mainly cigarettes), accounted for 58% of all sin tax collections and comprised 54% of the health budget in 2020.

The tobacco industry contributed nearly 16 billion pesos to the country's GDP in 2021.

This illicit competition leads to reduced prices and demand for locally grown tobacco, resulting in income loss among our farmers.



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Over 200 kilos of 'hot meat' seized in Imus City

By Dennis Abrina

IMUS City, Cavite – More than 200 kilos of meat that has not undergone the required inspection were confiscated yesterday during surprise inspections conducted in different public markets in this city.

The city government of Imus, through its Imus Task Force "Bantay Karne," and in collaboration with the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS), launched the simultaneous meat inspections in its public markets.

The move was to counter the proliferation of illegal meat selling in the locality.

Around 200 kilos of "hot meat" were confiscated by the Task Force.

According to Imus City veterinarian Dr. Maribel Depayso-Reyes, the Task Force confiscated meat products from sellers who failed to show their meat inspection certificates and business permits.

She added that businesses with meat products fit for human consumption would be given enough time to obtain the necessary certifications to retrieve their meat before its donation to charitable



CLOSED FOR SELLING 'HOT MEAT.' The Task Force "Bantay Karne" puts a closure signage on one of the meat stalls selling "hot meat" or meat that has not undergone the required inspection. The Task Force confiscated more than 200 kilos of "hot meat" during the operation conducted yesterday in different talipapa and public markets in Imus City, Cavite.

Photo by Dennis Abrina

institutions.

There were also stalls that did not have the necessary permits or papers and were immediately closed.

Some closed by the local government were found selling in Green Gate Village in Bgy. Malagasang 2-B.

"The purpose of our operation is to ensure that the meat products in talipapa and public markets are safe for every Imuseño to eat and ensure that they provide the requirements of the NMIS that come from the legit slaughter-

house and with LGU certificates," the city vet said.

"Some of the meat we confiscated do not have any inspection certificates and for the frozen meats they violated the handling of meat products," she added.

The city government of Imus under Mayor Alex Advincula said it is determined to protect the health of its citizens from unsafe meat through regular inspections, in accordance with Republic Act 9296 or the Meat Inspection Code of the Philippines.

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Higit 200-kilong 'hot meat' nakumpiska

CAVITE -- Nasa mahigit dalawang daang kilo ng kameng baboy na itinuturing na "hot meat" ang nakumpiska matapos ang ikinasang joint operation ng Imus Local Government Unit at National Meat Inspection Services sa Imus Public Market kahapon.

Dalawang grupo ng inspection team ang umikot sa ilang pamilihan at palengke kabilang na ang Imus Public Market kung saan dito nakumpiska ang mga frozen meat products.

Ayon sa NMIS, undocumented imported meat, kawalan ng meat inspection certificate at kasalukuyang kondisyon ng mga ibinebentang produkto ang mga pangunahing dahilan kaya kinumpiska nila ang mga ito na maaaring makasama o makaapekto sa mga consumers at mamimili.

Pagkatapos ng inspection, agad na nai-turn over sa Imus slaughter house ang mga nasamsam na frozen meat para sa proper disposal nito. (Cristina Timbang)

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Ang mga nasabat na 'hot meat' sa isang bodega sa Caloocan City.

P30-M expired meat, frozen goods nadiskubre sa Caloocan warehouse

Nadiskubre ng Bureau of Customs (BOC) ang may P30 milyong halaga ng expired meat at iba pang frozen goods sa isinagawang inspeksyon sa isang bodega sa Caloocan City.

Nabatid na ang inspeksiyon ay isinagawa ng mga ahente ng BOC noong Agosto 1, katuwang ang mga kinatawan ng Department of Agriculture (DA), Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), at National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS).

Kaugnay nito, muling iginiit ni Customs Commissioner Bien Rubio ang commitment ng ahensiya para protektahan ang mga hangganan ng bansa, alinsunod sa direktiba ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

Ibinahagi naman ni In-

telligence Group Deputy Commissioner Juvymax Uy na ang inspeksiyon sa warehouse ay nagresulta sa pagkadiskubre ng P30 milyong halaga ng spoiled frozen meat at iba pang produkto, gaya ng imported ice cream at imported meat balls, at iba pa.

Nagsagawa rin ang mga kinatawan mula sa DA at NMIS ng inisyal na ebalwasyon sa mga meat products, upang matukoy kung akma pa ang mga ito o hindi na sa human consumption.

Ipinaliwanag naman ni Customs Intelligence and Investigation Service Director Verne Enciso na susundin nila ang tamang procedure sa isasagawang prosekusyon sa mga taong may layabilidad sa mga laman ng bodega.

(Danilo Garcia)



Rice price hike may dampen momentum to tame inflation

By CAI U. ORDINARIO

RICE may again be the cause of higher inflation in the coming months as Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data showed that prices returned to levels that were seen prior to the implementation of a law that sought to bring down the price of the staple.

On Friday, the PSA reported that inflation averaged 4.7 percent in July 2023 and was the lowest in 16 months. (Full story here: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/08/04/commodity-prices-hit-16-month-low-in-july-psa/>).

PSA data showed rice inflation averaged 4.2 percent in July 2023, the highest since February 2019 when the increase in the commodity's prices was at 4.5 percent. The Rice Trade Liberalization (RTL) Act was implemented in March 2019.

"Ngayon, hindi pa siya [rice prices] ganun kataas but I agree with your observation na pwedeng ito ang magiging source ng future inflation natin," National Statistician Claire Dennis S. Mapa said.

Mapa said rice prices this year gradually increased starting in February when inflation for the staple posted a 2.2 percent increase; March, 2.6 percent; April, 2.9 percent; May, 3.4 percent; and June, 3.6 percent before reaching 4.2 percent in July.

Further, Mapa said that in July, similar to June, the PSA also recorded increases in the price of all rice varieties that they monitor—regular milled, well-milled, and special rice.

Based on data, Mapa said regular milled rice prices averaged P41.50 per kilo, higher than the P41.20 per kilo in June and P39.60 per kilo in July 2022.

For well-milled rice, Mapa said the average price was at P45.50 per kilo in July, higher than the P45.20 in June and P43.90 in July 2022.

Special rice, Mapa added, averaged P54.60 per kilo in July, higher than the P54.40 posted in June and P53.10 in July 2022.

Data obtained from PSA also showed that average regular milled rice prices started climbing in March 2022 at P38.97 per kilo, while special rice, the most expensive rice variety, started increasing from P52.96 per kilo in June 2022.

"While we continue to experience a downtrend in inflation, we need to be vigilant, especially as we face increasingly volatile weather disturbances as well as external headwinds, such as oil price increases and trade restrictions on food," National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said.

"The government will implement necessary measures to prevent price spikes, protect the purchasing power of Filipino families, and sustain our economic recovery and momentum," he vowed.

To ensure that current weather disturbances will not have a lingering impact on inflation and the economy for the rest of the year, Balisacan said the government has proactively taken steps to deploy its resources to affected areas as well as prepare its policy and on-the-ground response as it expects more typhoons and weather disturbances from the El Niño.

In light of global climate uncertainties and food supply challenges, the Inter-Agency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook (IAC-IMO) and the Economic Development Group (EDG) held a joint meeting last July 20, 2023 to discuss proposed policy adjustments that seek to ensure a more stable supply of agricultural products to meet the demand of different users and end-consumers adequately.

At the same time, the committee reiterated the productivity-enhancing and efficiency-improving strategies laid out in the Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028

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concerning agriculture and agribusiness.

These measures aim to secure the country's food supply, prevent sudden increases in agricultural commodity prices, improve the well-being of farmers and fisherfolk, and ensure the vital contribution of agriculture to other sectors of the economy.

"The balance of risks to the inflation outlook continues to lean towards the upside owing to the potential impact of additional transport fare increases, higher-than-expected minimum wage adjustments in other regions, persistent supply constraints of key food items, El Niño weather conditions, and possible knock-on effects of higher toll rates on prices of key agricultural items. Meanwhile, the impact of a weaker-than-expected global economic recovery remains the primary downside risk to the outlook," the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said.

Nonetheless, the BSP still expect that inflation will gradually decelerate back to the target range by the fourth quarter of 2023 in the absence of further supply-shocks.

"The BSP stands ready to adjust the monetary policy stance as necessary to prevent the further broadening of price pressures as well as the emergence of additional second order effects in view of the persistent upside risks to the inflation outlook," BSP said.

"The BSP also continues to support the timely and effective implementation of non-monetary government measures to mitigate the impact of persistent supply-side pressures on inflation," it added.

Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno, meanwhile, believes the country is "over the hump" when it comes to inflation as this the sixth consecutive month that inflation has eased.

"This the sixth consecutive month that inflation has eased, strongly supporting the likelihood that inflation might be within the

2 to 4 percent target range by the fourth quarter of 2023.

Meanwhile, core inflation, which excludes selected food and energy items, decelerated, too—to 6.7 percent in July 2023 from 7.4 percent in June 2023," Diokno said.

Bottom 30 percent

PSA said the country's overall inflation for the bottom 30 percent income households continued to exhibit a downward trend as it decelerated further to 5.2 percent in July 2023 from 6.1 percent in the previous month, the lowest inflation observed since April 2022 with an inflation rate of 5 percent.

This brings the national average inflation rate from January to July 2023 for this group of consumers to 7.6 percent. In July 2022, the headline inflation for this income group was higher at 7.2 percent.

The main driver of the continued downtrend of the overall inflation in July 2023 was the lower year-on-year increase in the heavily weighted food and non-alcoholic beverages at 6.1 percent in July 2023 from 6.9 percent in the previous month.

This was followed by housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels, which posted an annual mark-up of 3 percent during the month from 4.8 percent in June 2023.

The third main driver to the slowdown was transport, which exhibited an annual contraction of 3 percent from the decline of 1.2 percent in the previous month.

Meanwhile, faster annual increases were posted in the indices of recreation, sport and culture at 6 percent in July 2023 from 5.8 percent in the previous month; and education services at 3.3 percent from 3.2 percent. The indices of the rest of the commodity groups moved at their respective previous month's annual rates.

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Bagyong Egay, Falcon umakyat natodas sa 29

Aabot na sa 232 lugar ang isinailalim sa State of Calamity dulot ng Bagyong Egay at Falcon na sinamahan ng hanging habagat.

Pumalo naman sa 29 ang nasawi mula ito sa Ilocos, Western Visayas, Davao, at Cordillera Administrative Region.

Ayon sa National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), dalawa pa lamang dito ang kumpirmado habang patuloy pang bineberipika ang 27 iba pa. Nasa 11 katao naman ang patuloy pa ring nawawala.

Tumaas naman sa 165 ang bilang ng sugatan.

Samantala, umakyat sa 3,028,040 o 805,621 pamilya ang nasalanta ng bagyo kung saan 57,226 katao o 15,473 indibidwal ang nasa evacuation centers.

Kasalukuyan namang tumutuloy sa ibang lugar ang 229,831 katao o 57,000 pamilya.

Ang iniwang pinsala ng sama ng panahon sa infrastructure ay nasa P3,631,012,164 na habang P1,938,835 naman sa agrikultura.

Nasira naman ang 56,694 mga bahay kung saan 54,406 ang partially damaged habang 2,288 ang totally damaged. (Natalia Antonio)