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## **EDITORIAL**

# **Transparency, accountability**

The administration has defended the allocation of about P10.14 billion for confidential and intelligence funds in the proposed national budget for 2024. Such assurances must be matched by actions that will allay public fears of the CIF being used mainly to skirt transparency and accountability in the utilization of people's money.

In general, the public can understand the need for confidentiality in the use of public funds for intelligence gathering on matters of public safety and national security. Government auditing rules are relaxed in these cases.

Confidentiality, however, must be kept to a minimum when it comes to handling public funds. The country has stringent laws against the misuse of people's money, and these laws must be properly applied, ensuring that public funds are utilized for their intended and officially specified purposes. State auditors have also stressed that even CIF is subject to general auditing regulation.

Of the P10.14-billion CIF in the P5.768-trillion 2024 national expenditure program proposed to Congress by the executive branch, the bulk or P4.5 billion is allocated to the Office of the President, including a higher outlay for overseas trips.

The Department of National Defense will get P2.68 billion. The Department of the Interior and Local Government, which supervises the Philippine National Police, Bureau of Jail Management and Penology and Bureau of Fire Protection,

is allocated P906.62 million in CIF while the Department of Justice, which oversees prisons and the National Bureau of Investigation, is getting P471.29 million.

Most controversial is the P500 million in CIF allocated to the Office of the Vice President, plus another P150 million to the Department of Education, which is headed concurrently by Vice President Sara Duterte. Some quarters are asking why P150 million is being set aside for confidential purposes when public schools lack almost everything from classrooms to teachers and school supplies.

The Department of Information and Communications Technology will get P300 million while the Department of Agriculture, which President Marcos concurrently heads, will get P50 million. The rest of the CIF is divided among several other agencies.

Some critics have likened the CIF to the congressional pork barrel that the Supreme Court had abolished for being unconstitutional. The SC had prohibited the earmarking of projects for funding after the annual General Appropriations Act has been passed. Use of the CIF goes beyond this, the critics says, because it allows a degree of secrecy in the use of people's money.

The issue, like the pork barrel, may also end up in court. The executive should not wait for a court ruling in reassuring the nation that public funds are being used judiciously, with transparency and accountability.





# RICE PRODUCTION ZONES PROPOSED

**By Camille P. Balagtas**

THE country should start weaning itself from imported rice and reduce the risk of food insecurity by establishing rice production zones (RPZs) and inundating it with government support and attention.

Senate President Juan Miguel "Migz" Zubiri said he made the proposal to President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos during the dinner hosted by the Chief Executive for members of the Philippine Senate Wednesday evening.

In their discussions, Zubiri said the topic veered to talks about the supply of rice in the country and how senators were expressing concerns about the recent announcement of India on a ban on non-Basmati rice exports.

"I told the President about my proposal to establish RPZs, and he found it to be very interesting. In my opinion, we cannot be certain about our food security today and then be insecure tomorrow because of fac-

tors beyond our control, or just because our sources of rice imports such as India have become uncertain," Zubiri said.

"Typhoons Egay and Falcon blew a big hole in our food basket regions in the North. This will surely have an effect on the supply of agricultural products, including rice. The earlier we build our RPZs, the sooner we buffer our rice supply and mitigate the effects of calamities on food security," he added.

Under Zubiri's proposal, provinces can be grouped into one RPZ and President Marcos, as concurrent Secretary of Agriculture, can assign an Undersecretary or Assistant Secretary to handle a specific RPZ each and to make sure they handhold the farmers until their crops reach maximum efficiency of production. They will focus on enhancing capabilities to produce rice, like pouring support for seedlings, fertilizers, pest control and modernized equipment.

The senator from Bukidnon said in establishing RPZs, the

government can take its cue from RA 8435 or the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act of 1997, which mandates the Bureau of Soils and Water Management to identify Networks of Protected Areas for Agricultural and Agro-industrial Development (NPAAADs).

These NPAAADs, Zubiri further said, are ideal RPZs and can be a good starting point because the bureau maps out all fertile, rich and irrigable lands suitable for crop production, including the planting of rice.

"The two recent typhoons badly hit Regions I, II and III, which roughly accounts for 40% of rice input and 80% of corn production. Kaya kailangan tayong tumingin sa ibang lugar para mapunan ang deficit," he said.

Zubiri also pushed for quick turnaround programs for affected farmers in the North for replanting to allow the immediate recovery of rice granaries in typhoon-hit areas.

Under the 2023 General Appropriations Act, the main

programs under the DA-Office of the Secretary that can be used to aid rice farmers include:

1. National Rice Program -- a. Production support services - P22.86 billion; b. Extension support services - P1.26 billion; c. Research and Development - P708.52 million; d. Agricultural Equipment and Facilities - P4.73 billion;

e. Irrigation - P721.24 million; 2. Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Program (P10 billion) -- a. P5 billion for rice farm equipment; b. P3 billion for the development, propagation and promotion of inbred rice seeds; c. P1 billion for credit, to be managed by LBP and DBP; d. P1 billion for extension services on rice crop production.

The Senate President said the government can tap the unutilized portions of these funds to help affected farmers.

"Our farmers need help in bouncing back from the adverse effects of Egay and Falcon. Helping our farmers also helps the country's food security cause," said Zubiri.





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# BOUNTY FROM THE SOUTH SEAS

## One-third of the Philippines's fish production comes from BARMM

LAKE Lanao, Lanao del Sur. MARY GRACE VARELA | DREAMSTIME.COM

By MANUEL T. CAYON

**D**AVAO CITY—A third of the country's total fish production comes from the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), maintaining its performance as the country's top fish producer for the last three years.







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BARMM contributed 31.6 percent of the total fisheries production for the first quarter of this year, according to the Fisheries Situationer released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) on June 29.

The BARMM was followed by Region IX (Zamboanga Peninsula) with 11.6 percent, Region III (Central Luzon) with 10.8 percent, and Region IV (Calabarzon) with 8.6 percent.

The BARMM recorded the highest fishery production in the entire Philippines for two consecutive years in 2021 and 2022, with production volume of 4.25 million metric tons (MMT) and 4.34 MMT, respectively.

These accounted for the two years' 30.57 percent and 41.27 percent growth, respectively.

Last year's production for the country's fisheries sector was an all-time-high growth of 2.16 percent in production volume since 2010.

### Collaboration

PENDATUN PATARASA, director-general for fishery services of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fishery and Agrarian Reform (Mafar), attributed the performance "to the strengthened collaboration between relevant government instrumentalities, the private sector, the fisherfolk, and other key stakeholders."

Patarasa added, "The fac-



**MAFAR Director General for Fisheries Services**  
Pendatun S. Patarasa. [MAFAR.BANGSAMORO.GOV.PH](mailto:MAFAR.BANGSAMORO.GOV.PH)

tors in sustaining the fisheries production increase are the continuing technical assistance and capacity building, provision of appropriate production support on capture, aquaculture, and post-harvest and marketing to the fisherfolk, and strengthened Fishery Regulatory, Quarantine, and Law Enforcement across the region."

To sustain the gains in the fisheries sector, the ministry, he said, must double its efforts to ensure the implementation of plans and programs that

maximize its contribution toward improving the regional economy, increasing fisherfolk's income, and achieving a food-secure Bangsamoro region.

In April this year, officials from **DA's Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR)** and Mafar met to discuss the recent directive of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to expand the country's fisheries production by 10 percent.

BFAR Director and Assistant National Director Isidro Velayo, BFAR National Director Atty. Demosthenes Escoto, Regional Director Sammy Malvas, Fisheries Planning, and Evaluation Chief Maria Abegail Albaladejo, met Mafar's Patarasa, Director II for Fisheries Operations Dr. Macmod Mamalangkap, and Director for Agrarian Reform Support Services Dr. Tong Pinguaman.

The Mafar has eyed high-impact projects such as post-harvest facilities, including seaweed warehouse, construction, and rehabilitation of existing fish ports/landings to reduce the high fisheries post-harvest losses.

"Mafar is looking at aug-



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menting the production of the regional production both in aquaculture and fisheries," Patarasa said.

### Support programs

THE Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA), the ad hoc Parliament of the region, chipped in to strengthen this huge contribution to the national fisheries production.

Member of Parliament Ali Sangki has proposed the establishment of the Bureau of Agricultural and Fisheries Engineering (BAFE) in BARMM, not only to continue its production performance but also to modernize and "agro-industrialize" the agricultural and fisheries sector in the Bangsamoro region.

The BTA Bill No. 221, or Bureau of Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering Services Act of 2020, aims to strengthen and institutionalize agricultural and biosystems engineering services of the local government units to enhance regional food security and economic prosperity.

PSA data showed that the agri-fisheries sector accounted for the largest share of the region's total economic performance in 2018, contributing 55.6 percent of its 7.2-percent growth rate in the Gross Regional Domestic Product.

The proposed BAFE-BARMM will operate under Mafar, "taking charge of various crucial tasks, such as fisheries mechanization, farm-to-market roads, agri-fisheries infrastructure development, soil and water conservation, rural agro-industrialization, and food logistics infrastructures."

The bureau will also be responsible for preparing, evaluating and recommending engineering plans, designs and technical specifications for agricultural, fisheries and biosystems mechanization, irrigation and infrastructure projects.

As part of the proposal, the agricultural and biosystems engineering groups or units within the first- to third-class provincial, city and municipal local government units in BARMM will be strengthened, institutionalized and transformed into Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering (ABE) offices.

The BAFE-BARMM and other agencies and professional organizations will formulate and implement an Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering Human Resource Development Master Plan.

Earlier in June, the Bangsamoro Parliament introduced Bill No. 180, or the Bangsamoro Integrated Coastal Management Act of 2023, to establish a mechanism and adopt an integrated coastal management policy that will promote sustainable development while preserving the ecological integrity of the region.

The authors of the bill, MPs Amilbahar Mawallil, Rasol Mitmug Jr., Sittie Fahanie Uy-Oyod, Hashemi Dilangalen, and Hamid Malik, said the coastal areas serve as crucial transportation hubs, connecting communities within the region and across the country.

Mawallil also noted that these environments face various threats, including overfishing, pollution, habitat destruction, and the impacts of climate change such as rising sea levels and increasing ocean temperatures.

Regulating fishing practices, reducing pollution, and conserving habitat areas through the establishment of marine protected areas are among the key measures highlighted in the bill to ensure the continued health and productivity of coastal environments.

"By implementing measures to safeguard these valuable ecosystems, we can ensure that they continue to provide benefits to

current and future generations," Mawallil said.

The Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Energy will provide guidelines for coastal zoning and management, including the delineation of coastal areas, identification of land uses, and regulation of activities in the coastal zone.

An Integrated Coastal Management Council will be created to oversee the implementation of the integrated coastal management policy. This council will develop and implement a coastal management plan, take measures to protect and conserve coastal and marine ecosystems, coordinate with law enforcement agencies to enforce laws and regulations, collaborate with the Ministry of Trade, Investments and Tourism to develop sustainable economic activities, and work with the Ministry of the Interior and Local Government to ensure the active participation of local government units and stakeholders in the integrated coastal management process.

### Improvements

BARMM has steadily dusted off the ashes of its reputation of being the poorest among the regions, to set a record-after-record performance. It was recently recognized as posting the 10th fastest economic growth among all regions in the country, with its economy growing at 6.6 percent in 2022.

PSA-BARMM Regional Director Akan Tula reported that the agricultural, fisheries and forestry sector increased to 3.5 percent, industry increased to 6.1 percent, and services sector increased to 9.8 percent.

"The economic performance of BARMM grew by 6.6 percent in 2022, though slower than the previous year's growth rate at 7.5 percent, but still increased—

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## BOUNTY FROM THE SOUTH SEAS

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which indicates good economic performance of the region," Tula said.

"This means that in 2022, BARMM's per capita household final consumption expenditure was estimated at P56,970, higher by 4.5 percent than the previous year's level, which was estimated at P54,528," he added.

By May this year, BARMM ranked sixth lowest among all re-

gions in the Philippines with a notable inflation rate of 6.1 percent. This figure marks a significant drop from April's 6.7 percent.

By June, BARMM's inflation rate dropped to 6 percent.

In his second State of the Nation Address, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said his administration was proud of the progress in the BARMM.

"It will be self-governing, it will be progressive, and it will be effective," the President said, cit-

ing the transition phase which saw local governments, royal families, Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) all engaged and represented, with the support of the international community.

"Through the BARMM, we have strengthened the nation's prospects for finally achieving sustainable progress anchored on a true and lasting peace in Southern Philippines," he said.



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## NIA dam project sa Bulacan nag-crack

Kuwestiyunable kay Senador Francis Tolentino ang isang dam project ng **National Irrigation Administration (NIA)** na hindi pa natatapos subalit nakitaan umano ng pinsala ang istraktura.

Sa panayam sa radyo nitong Sabado, Agosto 5, tinukoy ni Tolentino ang Bustos rubber dam project sa Bulacan na umano'y matagal nang hindi pa tapos ngunit may mga crack na.

Ayon kay Tolentino,

sa pagpapatuloy ng imbestigasyon ng Blue Ribbon Committee na kanyang pinamumunuan kaugnay sa mga atrasadong proyekto ng NIA, inaasahang kabilang ang rubber dam project sa sisilipin ng mga senador.

"Hindi pa natin sinasabing corruption pero mga proyektong matagal nang 'di pa tapos, 'yong sa Bustos rubber dam 'yon, ngayon crack na siya. Hindi pa tapos may crack na, may mga ba-

sag-basag na, 'pag may crack talagang dadaloy ang tubig doon," ayon ka Tolentino.

Naniniwala ang senador na posibleng may kinalaman ito sa problema ng pagbaha sa lugar.

Nakatakda umanong magsagawa ng ocular inspection ang kanyang komite para alamin ang katatagan ng naturang dam at malaman kung sub-standard ang ginamit na mga materyales.

**(Eralyn Prado)**





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### **Rice export ban ipinatupad ng India** **Krisis sa bigas, ibinabala ni Sen. Go**

Hinimok ni Senador Christopher "Bong" Go ang agarang interbensyon ng gobyerno sa sektor ng agrikultura sa harap ng posibleng krisis sa bigas sa pandaigdigang pamilihan.

Ginawa ni Go ang pahayag sa pagdalo niya sa groundbreaking ng bagong Batangas Provincial Medical Center sa Tuy, Batangas matapos siyang mabahala sa ipinatupad na rice exportation ban ng bansang India.

"Ang importante dito

ay ang ating Department of Agriculture; government Intervention agad ang ating umpisahan dito," ani Go.

"Alam n'yo, 'di naman natin masisisi ang India. May prayoridad din po sila, may pinapakain po sila. May sarili din silang market. S'yempre, tayo, hindi nila prayoridad ang pag-export para dito sa atin," idinagdag ng senador.

Dahil dito, sinabi ni Go na dapat agad kumilos ang pamahalaan at tugunan ang lumalaking alalahanin ukol sa pagbabawal ng India na ma-export ng non-basmati white rice na maaaring makaapekto sa pandaigdigang pamilihan ng bigas.

Binigyang-diin ng senador na kinakailangang suportahan ang mga lokal na magsasaka at palakasin ang domestic production ng bigas sa pamamagitan ng pagbibigay ng drought-resistant rice seeds, karagdang fertilizers, karagdang irigasyon, dagdag na pagsasanay at madaling access sa mga credit facility na may mababang interest rate.

"Ang farmers natin, karamihan po d'yan, ay walang pera po. Isang kahig, isang tuka; suportahan po natin sila para meron na rin tayong kakayahan

na mag-produce ng ating sarili," ani Go.

Ang desisyon ng India na ipagbawal ang pag-export ng bigas ay may malaking implikasyon dahil ang bansa ay bumubuo ng higit sa 40 porsiyento ng pandaigdigang kalakalan ng bigas.

Partikular itong nakalulungkot para sa Pilipinas dahil ang bansa ay apektado sa mga binahang palayan sa mga nagdaang bagyo at pag-ulan.

Bukod dito, ang Vietnam na pangunahing tagapag-import ng bigas sa Pilipinas ay tumataas na ang presyo.

Kaya nanawagan si Go sa pagpapalakas ng lokal na sektor ng agrikultura na siyang napakahalaga sa bansa.

Isa si Go sa nag-akda ng Republic Act No. 11901 na magpapalawak sa sistema ng pagpopondo sa agrikultura, pangisdaan, at pag-unlad sa kanayunan.

Naghain din ang senador ng SBN 2117 na layong bigyan ng full crop insurance coverage ang agrarian reform beneficiaries, gayundin ang SBN 2118 na magbibigay ng mas magandang insurance coverage at serbisyo sa mga magsasaka. (Gemma Garcia)





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# PEOPLES JOURNALS

Everybody's Newspaper

RICE SUPPLY MORE THAN ENOUGH FOR THE COMING MONTHS



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## EDITORIAL

### No rice shortage

IT is certainly heartening to know that the rice supply in the Philippines is more than enough for the coming months.

Of course, this is good news since rice is the staple food for about 80 percent of the Filipino people.

In fact, it is the single most important agricultural crop in the country, where the world famous International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) is located.

The Department of Agriculture (DA), through Undersecretary Leocadio Santiago, announced the "good news" during a recent "Laging Handa" public briefing.

Concurrently headed by President Marcos, the agriculture department said there's no rice shortage despite the fact that Typhoon Egay ravaged the agriculture sector.

"Our rice supply is more than enough for our needs for the next few months," said Sebastian, adding the rice sector incurred a staggering P1.75 billion in losses.

He 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."

Despite the "good news," concerned government offices and agencies and even the general public ought to remain vigilant not only in the metropolis but elsewhere.

Admittedly, unscrupulous traders may take advantage of the situation, particularly in far-flung communities.

Sigurado, nandiyan lang ang mga walang pusong profiteer, hoarder at iba pang mapagsamantalang negosyante na gustong kumita ng malaki sa madaling panahon.





## BSP ready for key rates adjustments

THE Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) recently reiterated its commitment to adjusting its policy stance to address the expansion of price pressures even as the domestic inflation rate continues to ease.

The rate of price increases slowed further to 4.7 percent in July, the lowest since March 2022, from the previous month's 5.4 percent and the previous year's 6.4 percent, bringing the year-to-date average to 6.8 percent.

The BSP said the deceleration is in line with its expectations of a sustained slowdown to between 4.1 and 4.9 percent in July, and to within the government's 2 percent to 4 percent target band in the last quarter of this year without any supply shocks.

However, it said upside risks continue to dominate the environment due 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."

These factors are expected to be countered by "the impact of a weaker-than-expected global economic recovery."

"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," it said.

The central bank said it "continues to support the timely and effective implementation of non-monetary government measures to mitigate the impact of persistent supply-side pressures on inflation."

In terms of the month-on-month change in the headline inflation rate, Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. chief economist Michael Ricafort said the rate was 0.1 percent last July, slower than the previous month's 0.2 percent.

He attributed the decline to the impact of lagged effects of recent storm damage that resulted in higher prices of some agricultural products, as well as higher prices of domestic fuel prices and the rise in the minimum wage in Metro Manila.

In a reply to questions sent through e-mail by the Philippine News Agency (PNA), Ricafort said he expects the easing of the inflation rate to slow a bit in the coming months because of these factors' lag effect.

He, however, remains optimistic that the monthly rate would decelerate to within the target level in the last quarter of the year.