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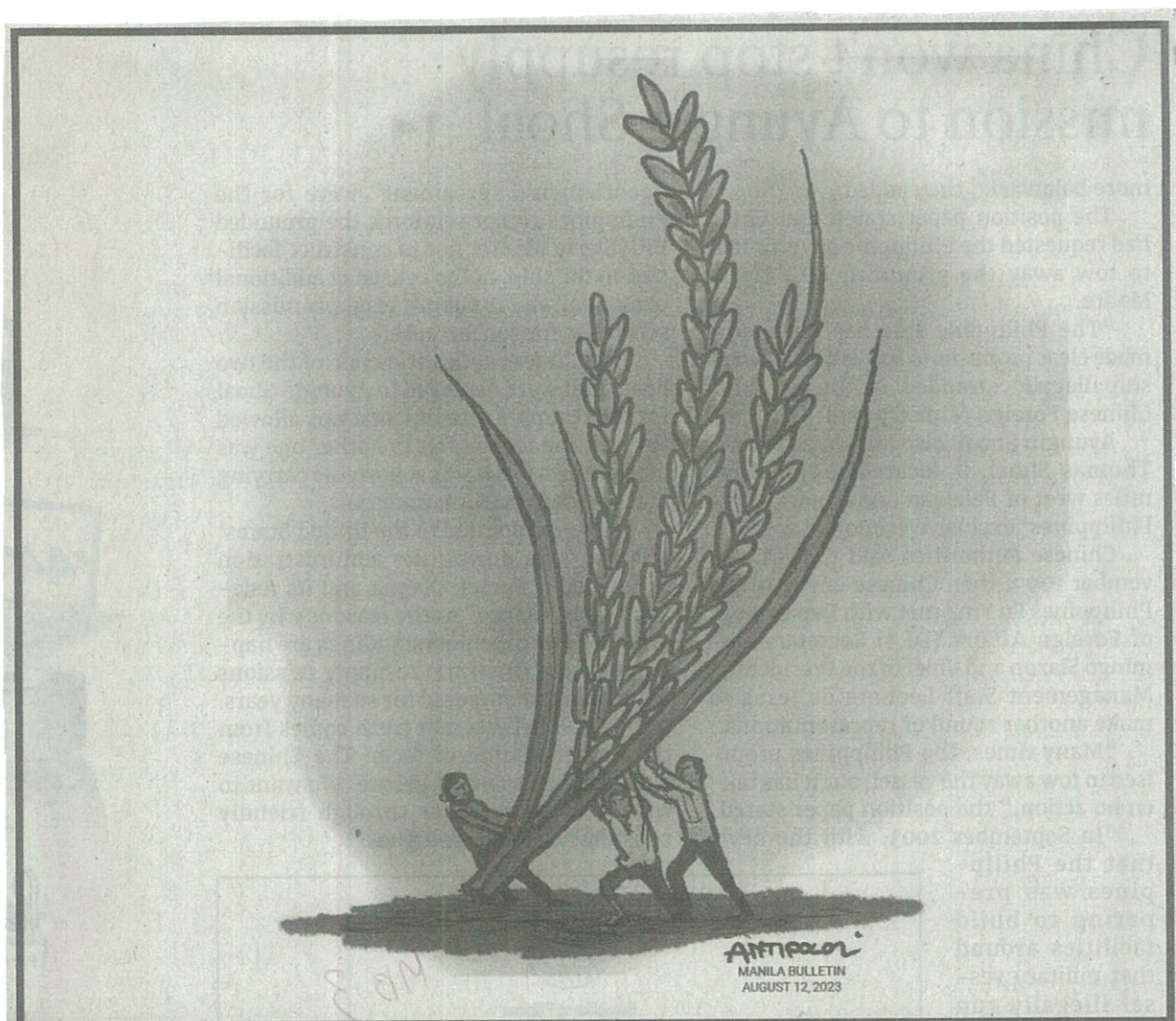
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# MANILA BULLETIN

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## First of all, let us prioritize rice

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**A**mong the many food products, Filipinos are most concerned with rice, the staple food that completes every meal. This grain is so important that it has become a political commodity: every administration's performance is gauged in part on how it manages the supply and prices of the various rice varieties, especially the ones most popular with the masses.

The Filipinos' high expectations about the Marcos administration's handling of rice issues — its supply, prices, quality and stock — may be traced to the fact that President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. is also the agriculture secretary, and he has vowed to remain holding the position in concurrent capacity until such time that the many problems hounding the Department of Agriculture (DA) have been solved.

Many Filipinos are also hoping that the President would be able to deliver on his campaign promise of reducing the price of rice to ₱20 per kilo, from the current ₱35 to ₱49 a kilo.

PBBM watchers saw a glimmer of hope recently during the inauguration of a provincial Kadiwa store, where President Marcos announced that the government is nearing its target of slashing rice prices in the regular markets, not just in Kadiwa.

In answer to the concerns raised by the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) and Bantay Bigas that a shortage of the staple grain could occur during the lean months of July to September 2023, Marcos met with the Private Sector Advisory Council (PSAC) and the Philippine Rice Stakeholders Movement (PRISM) in Malacañang early this week.

According to the Presidential Communications Office, the President called the meeting to discuss with stakeholders the status of the rice industry and measures to ensure sufficient rice supply in the country. Following the meeting, the President

declared that "the rice situation is manageable and stable. There is enough rice for the Philippines up to and after the El Niño next year."

Assuming that our farmers only maintain present production levels, the projected ending stock for 2023 is 1.96 million metric tons (MMT), enough to last for 52 days, Agriculture Undersecretary Merceditas Sombillo said.

She explained that the ending stock projection based on data from the Philippine Statistics Authority presents an even better scenario as the ending stock is projected at 2.12 MMT, which would last for 57 days. Palay harvest season usually runs from September until November.

With a population of 108.66 million Filipinos, the country's total annual consumption would amount to 12.9 MMT, said the Department of Agriculture in a report. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, a Filipino consumes a total of 118.81 kilos of rice annually on average. This is equivalent to 325.5 grams of milled rice daily.

PRISM lead convenor Rowena del Rosario-Sadicon was satisfied with the positive outcome of the meeting, adding the public may be assured that there would be enough rice supply until the end of the year. The agriculture group of the PSAC which is composed of leading entrepreneurs and tycoons in the food industry meanwhile thanked the President for his pro-active initiative to periodically check on the supply of rice to avert any problems.

Present-day disruptions in the supply chain, such as India's decision to ban the export of its non-basmati white rice, triggering worries about a forthcoming increase in the grain's international prices, all point to the timely need for the Philippines to ramp up production.

We are confident that the DA, under President Marcos, is working along this strategy.

# The Manila Times®

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## BPI: Onion imports to ensure stable supply

ONION importation will ensure prices remain stable and supply will be enough, the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) said.

Henrick Exconde, BPI assistant division chief, said on Monday that 4,313.56 metric tons (MT) of yellow onions arrived on Aug. 3, 2023 for buffer stocking.

"The importation we've done from May to now is for buffer stocking to ensure that if local supplies are exhausted, we would still have a source for fresh onions," he said.

Based on the price monitoring report of the DA, prices of imported onions range between P110 and P160; and local onions from

P110 to P190.

Exconde noted that importations of yellow onions is continuous as long as these are covered with valid Sanitary and Phytosanitary Import Clearance.

He also noted that supply is enough despite the importation. "We will ensure that it (supply) will not deplete," he said.

BPI added that there is also a plan to import red onions to ensure supply, especially with the upcoming holiday season.

"Based on our monitoring, [the supply] is until December. But just to ensure enough supply, especially for the holiday season, we are evaluating existing supplies

if we need to import red onions," Exconde said.

During a hearing on Wednesday, BPI Director Gerald Glenn Panganiban told members of the House Agriculture and Food Committee that the supply of red onions is more than enough.

Panganiban said that the current supply of red onions as of July 14, 2023 is good for 162 days and said that it is "more than ample."

Meanwhile, current supplies of yellow onions are enough for at least two months with additional 25,000 MT of imports arriving in November.

Importation is likely to continue until two months of buffer stock

is completed, according to the official. This is equivalent to 8,800 MT for yellow onions while 34,000 MT for red onions.

Meanwhile, House Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez ordered a renewed campaign to bring down the price of onion in the market.

This came after monitoring reports showed that hoarders are active once again in manipulating the price of the commodity.

"We will nip this problem in the bud. We will not allow the prices to spike at a level ordinary people can't afford," Romualdez said in a statement.

**JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL**



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## DA eyes rice imports from India, Vietnam

BY KRISTINA MARALIT

**T**HE Department of Agriculture (DA) is now in talks with Vietnam and India for additional rice imports, Malacañang disclosed on Friday.

Said development came following the earlier directive of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to the DA to ensure sufficient rice supply at more affordable prices.

The DA has already initiated negotiations with Vietnamese traders

who have given price quotations that are \$30 to \$40 lower than what was estimated in their recent meeting in the Palace.

India, meanwhile, has allowed "imports to continue on humanitarian grounds" after it announced an export ban

on non-basmati rice products. Meanwhile, Vietnam accounts for nearly 90 percent of the country's rice imports in the first seven months of the current year.

"This will hopefully pave the way for the country to get better terms for the additional 300,000 to 500,000 metric tons [of] rice importation for this year," the Presidential Communications Office quoted DA Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban as saying.

"This will help lower the prices of rice as it will further beef up our national inventory which, even

without importation, is expected to last for 52 to 57 days by the end of 2023," he added.

To recall, Marcos, who also concurrently serves as the Agriculture chief, has assured the public that the country has enough rice stockpile despite the damage incurred by the sector due to the recent typhoons and the effects of the El Niño phenomenon.

He recently met with the agricultural officials and traders where they discussed their recommendations to address issues on rice supply in the country.

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## Lower rice prices seen as PH begins talks with Vietnam, India

By JEL SANTOS

The government is expecting rice prices in the country to decrease as the Department of Agriculture (DA) started talks with Vietnam and India and received favorable quotations from potential suppliers.

In a statement released on Friday, Aug. 11, Agriculture Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban said the DA opened talks with Vietnam and India upon the order of President Marcos, who is DA secretary in concurrent capacity.

"As a result, Vietnamese exporters have given price quotations that are US\$30-40 lower than what was quoted in their recent meeting in Malacañang," it stated.

According to the DA official, this ► 4

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will result in better terms for additional 300,000 to 500,000 metric tons (MT) of rice imports that are anticipated to increase the country's rice supply.

The agriculture department is also working with the government of India "to allow imports (to continue) on humanitarian grounds," he added.

Panganiban hopes this will also "pave the way for the country to get better terms for the additional 300,000 to 500,000 MT rice importation for this year."

"This will help lower the prices of rice as it will further beef up our national inventory which, even without importation, is expected to last for 52 to 57 days by the end of 2023," he added.

### Rice production growth

Recently, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) revealed in its report that the rice output from January to June 2023 increased to nine million MT, up from 8.7 million MT produced in the same time last year and in 2021, which was greater than what the DA had previously estimated.

The three percent growth in rice production over the same period in 2022 is excellent news, according to Agriculture Undersecretary for Rice Industry Development Leocadio Sebastian.

"With the three percent production growth in the first semester, we can expect that barring the occurrence of destructive typhoons, the production for 2023 could surpass

20 MMT," he stated.

"The country's rice production will continue to grow considering the good palay price in the previous cropping and provision of various interventions by DA (of seeds, fertilizers, biofertilizers, soil ameliorants, farm machinery extension support)."

Earlier, Marcos assured the public that the agriculture department has an ample supply of rice despite the agricultural damage wreaked by super typhoon Egay in Northern Luzon and the El Niño phenomenon.

The chief executive recently met with agriculture officials and traders at the Malacañan Palace where they shared their recommendations to address issues on rice supply in the country.

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## Lower rice prices seen after talks with India, Vietnam

By HELEN FLORES

Prices of rice are expected to drop after the Philippines received lower export quotations from Vietnam and the government continues talks with India, another top rice exporting country, to procure the staple.

In a statement re-

leased by Malacañang yesterday, Department of Agriculture (DA) Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban said Vietnamese exporters have quoted rice prices that are \$30 to \$40 lower to Filipino private traders following a meeting at the Palace.

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## Lower

From Page 1

The DA, concurrently headed by President Marcos, will also work with the government of India to allow export of rice to the country on humanitarian grounds, Panganiban said.

"This will hopefully pave the way for the country to get better terms for the additional 300,000 to 500,000 MT rice importation for this year," he said. "This will help lower prices as it will further beef up our national inventory which, even without importation, is good to last for 52 to 57 days."

Marcos recently met with DA officials and traders at Malacañang where they discussed recommendations to address issues on the country's rice supply.

"The rice situation is manageable and stable. There is enough rice for the Philippines up to and after the El Niño next year," he said during a meeting with the Private Sector Advisory Council and Philippine Rice Stakeholders Movement at the Palace on Tuesday.

DA Undersecretary Merceditas Sombillo had said the government is eyeing to import 1.3 million metric tons (MMT) of the grain. The government, however, has yet to set the dates of importation, she said.

Sombillo said the projected ending stock for 2023 is 1.96 MMT, enough for 52 days. The ending stock projection based on data from the Philippine Statistics Authority was projected at 2.12 MMT, which would last for 57 days, she added.

Palay harvest season is set to start September until November.

### Prices going up

In Nueva Ecija, a farmers' group confirmed that retail prices of rice are going up despite the province being considered as the rice granary of the Philippines.

In a radio interview, Bongabon East Farmers and Fisheries Service Cooperative chairman Dan Alfaro said retail prices of rice ranged between P52 and P60 per kilo.

"Well-milled rice is sold at P52 per kilo, P55 and as high as P60 per kilo," Alfaro said, noting that the farmgate price of palay in Bongabon ranged between P17 and P23 per kilo depending on the quality. He added that the farmers have no control on the retail price of rice after they sell their harvest to traders.

Federation of Free Farmers national manager Raul Montemayor said the spike in rice prices is comparable to the 1998 rice crisis, as he warned of a repeat of the 2018 rice crisis during the Duterte administration.

Based on latest DA monitoring in Metro Manila markets, retail price of local regular milled rice reached P49 per kilo; local well-milled rice, P52 per kilo; local premium rice, P56 per kilo and local special rice, P65 per kilo.

Meanwhile, imported well-milled rice is sold as high as P46 per kilo; imported premium rice, P52 per kilo and imported special rice, P65 per kilo.

### Manipulation

Farmers' group Kilusang Magbubukid

ng Pilipinas (KMP) yesterday urged Congress to probe the possible manipulation in the farmgate price of palay after it reached as high as P36 per kilo.

KMP chairman Danilo Ramos cited reports where millers in Bulacan buy palay between P34 and P36 per kilo, a "record-high" price that caused the recent increase in rice prices.

"It is hard to believe that P34 per kilo is the prevailing price of palay when based on KMP's monitoring of latest palay prices, the palay price in Malolos, Bulacan is at P20 per kilo, P21 to P22 per kilo in Isabela, P20 per kilo in Mindoro Occidental," Ramos said.

He likewise blamed the implementation of Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Liberalization Law as the culprit behind the increasing rice prices, as he called on the Marcos administration to stop its importation policy amid the very volatile rice supply and price situation.

### Imported rice arrives

Two million sacks of imported rice from Vietnam have arrived to augment the tight supply in the local market, according to rice traders at Golden City Business Park and Intercity Industrial Estate in Bocaue, Bulacan.

As the rice lean months peak this August, the rice traders – who do not want to be identified – said palay prices have shot up to P33 to P34.50 a kilo, from the average of P20 a kilo in March this year. The increase in palay prices translated to a higher cost of rice in the local market. – With Bella Cariaso, Ramon Efren Lazaro

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BUFFER STOCK

## GOV'T EYES IMPORTATION OF RED ONIONS

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**  
@jordeenelagare

The government is considering the importation of red onions if the need to build a buffer stock arises, the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) said on Friday.

In a Zoom interview, BPI Assistant Division Chief of National Plant Quarantine Services Division Henrick Exconde said there was no definite plan yet to import red onions because the Philippines is assured of ample supply until mid-December.

"Actually, we are monitoring the situation on the ground and once we gather all the in-

formation, we will conduct stakeholders' consultation to verify the information on the available stocks," he said.

The BPI is also evaluating the existing inventory to determine whether or not to import red onions to ensure that Filipino consumers have enough supply of this commodity, especially during the holiday season.

If authorized, Exconde said the country might need to import 34,000 metric tons of red onions good for two months.

On a monthly basis, per capita consumption for red and yellow onions is placed at 17,000

MT and 4,500 MT, respectively.

As of now, the Philippines is procuring imported yellow onions. Citing data, Exconde said the volume of yellow onion imports reached 4,313.56 MT as of Aug. 3.

This is equivalent to 36.4 percent of the 240 sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances issued by the BPI for the importation of 11,835 MT of yellow onions.

Exconde explained that the government authorized the importation of red and yellow onions on a regular basis to complement or plug any supply gap ahead of the harvest season. **INQ**



## 600 kilo ng puslit na karne nakumpiska

ABOT sa P250,000 halaga ng puslit na manok, baboy at iba pa mula umano sa China ang kinumpiska ng Department of Agriculture - National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS) sa apat na tindahan sa Parafiaque City noong Huwebes.

Sa ulat, nadiskubre ng ahensiya na pineke ang meat inspection certificate ng 600 kilo ng manok,

baboy at pato.

Ayon kay Dr. Jun Padasas ng NMIS Central Office Enforcement, lumilitaw na inisyu ang certificate sa San Simon sa Pampanga pero nakalagay dito ay National Capital Region (NCR).

Hindi rin aniya tinukoy kung sino ang nag-isyu ng certificate dahilang para ideklara nila itong hot meat.

Sinabi ni Padasas na mahalagang matukoy kung saan nagmula ang mga inangkat na karne upang maiwasan ang pagpasok ng mga sakit katulad ng bird flu kung saan kabilang ang China sa mga bansang apektado ng African Swine Fever (ASF).

Tinutukoy na aniya ang may-ari ng nasabing mga tindahan para maimbestigahan at makasuhan.

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# Presyo ng bigas posibleng bumaba Vietnam, India pagkukunan ng suplay

Inaasahang bababa na ang presyo ng bigas matapos makakuha ang Pilipinas ng mababang export quotations mula sa Vietnam habang patuloy naman ang pakikipag-usap ng gobyerno sa India na isa rin sa nangunang rice exporting country.

Sa pahayag ni Department of Agriculture (DA) Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban, ang Vietnamese exporters ay nagbigay ng quotation sa Filipino private traders ng \$30 hanggang \$40.

Bukod dito, makikipag-

ugnayan na rin umano ang DA na kasalukuyang pinamumunuan ni Pangulong Bongbong Marcos sa India para payagan ang bansa na mag-export ng Basmati rice sa kabila ng ipinapatupad na ban.

"This will hopefully pave the way for the country to get better terms for the additional 300,000 to 500,000 MT rice importation for this year," sinabi pa ni Panganiban.

Sinabi ni Panganiban na umaasa ang ahensiya na may magandang terms na mapapagkasunduan sa dagdag na rice imports

**Nina GEMMA GARCIA at ANGIE DELA CRUZ**  
ngayong taon.

Malaki anya ang maitutulong ng rice importations para maibaba ang presyo ng bigas at may malaking tulong na maitaas ang national inventory.

Gayunman, sinabi ni Panganiban na kahit walang rice imports ay may national rice inventory ang bansa na inaasahang tatagal ng hanggang 52 hanggang 57 araw

sa pagtatapos ng taong 2023.

Matatandaan na siniguro ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. sa taumbayan na mayroong sapat na supply ng bigas

ang bansa sa kabila ng matinding pinsala sa agrikultura ng magkasunod na bagyong Egay at Falcon gayundin ng habagat sa Northern Luzon, at sa inaasahang epekto ng El Niño sa pananim ng mga magsasaka.

Base sa pinakabagong ulat ng Disaster Risk Reduction and

Management Operation Center ng DA, ang damage sa bigas dulot ng mga nagdaang bagyo ay umaabot na sa P1.79 bilyon kung saan 114,735 hektarya ang naapektuhan at production losses na 42,778 MT o 0.22% ng total annual rice production target na 19.76 milyon metrik tonelada.

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## Stop dependence on rice imports, gov't urged

A NEOPHYTE solon urged the national government to focus on improving rice self-sufficiency as he warned against being overly dependent on rice imports.

AGRI Party-list Rep. Wilbert T. Lee said while we thank Vietnam for the assurance that there will be a steady supply of rice to the Philippines, the export policies of other nations are beyond our control and we cannot predict when these will change.

The president of Vietnam's National Assembly had earlier assured House Speaker Martin Romualdez that Vietnam—which currently supplies 90 percent of Philippine rice imports—will continue to provide the Philippines with a stable supply of rice at affordable prices.

On the other hand, the Indian government last month imposed a ban on non-basmati white rice after retail rice prices climbed three percent in a month after heavy monsoon rains caused significant damage to crops.

"As such, the best solution to shield ourselves from unpredictable export policies is for us to ensure our farmers are fully supported by our laws, programs, and policies to be able to plant and harvest rice, katulad ng New Agrarian Emancipation Act na nilagdaan ni Pangulong Bongbong Marcos bilang batas nitong nakaraang buwan

lamang," Lee, a principal author of the new law, stressed.

"Kailangan nating tulungan ang ating mga magsasaka na magkaroon ng kakayahan na makapagtanim at masiguro na mayroon silang aanihin para magkaroon tayo ng sapat na supply ng bigas. Kapag nangyari ito, magiging Winner Tayo Lahat," he added.

The Bicolano lawmaker argued that food security is a key component of national security, saying inadequate access to food can trigger social unrest.

"The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization defines food security as existing when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. When physical and economic access to food is restricted or limited, or if access to food becomes inconsistent or unstable, hindi magtatagal ay posibleng magkagulo," he said.

Farmers' group Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (PCAFI) previously warned that the retail price of rice will have a P4 per kilo increase until the mid-September palay harvest as the price of palay continues to rise.



## Agri usec kinakamada 500K toneladang imported rice

MAYROON ng ginagawang pakikipag-usap ang gobyerno sa Vietnam at India para mag-angkat ng bigas na inaasahang magpapababa sa presyo ng nasabing produkto sa bansa.

Ito ang inihayag ng Presidential Communications Office (PCO) kasunod ng report ni Department of Agriculture (DA) Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban na nagbigay ng mas mababang price quotation ang Vietnam na \$30-40 kada metriko tonelada, mas mababa sa naunang natalakay sa pulong sa Malacañang.

Ayon kay Panganiban, bentahe ang mababang price quotation para sa plangong angkating 300,000 hanggang 500,000 metriko tonelada na inaasahang darating para mapataas ang rice inventory sa bansa.

Sa ganitong paraan aniya ay bababa



ang presyo ng bigas sa bansa.

Sinabi ni Panganiban na kinakausap na ng gobyerno ang India upang payagang makapag-import ng bigas sa kabila ng ipinatupad na ban para mag-export ng basmati rice.

"This will help lower the prices of rice as it will further beef up our national inventory which, even without importation, is expected to last for 52 to 57 days by end of 2023," ani Panganiban.

Nauna rito, tiniyak ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. sa mga Pilipino na mayroong sapat na supply ng bigas ang bansa sa kabila ng matinding pinsala sa agrikultura na iniwan ng super typhoon Egay sa Northern Luzon pati na ang inaasahang epekto ng El Niño phenomenon sa pananim ng mga magsasaka. (Aileen Taliping/Prince Golez)



# MANILA REFINING CORP ₱406M ATRASO SA BUWIS

Ikinakasa ngayon ng Bureau of Customs (BOC) ang pagsasampa ng kaso laban sa mga kompanya na sangkot umano sa bilyon-bilyong halaga ng mga hindi binabayarang buwis sa gobyerno mahigit 10 taon na ang nakaraan.

Base sa nakalap na impormasyon ng online news **Bilyonaryo**, kabilang sa mga nadiskubre ng BOC ang mahigit daan-daang milyong pagkakautang sa buwis ng Manila Refining Corporation (MRC) para sa sobra-sobrang importasyon ng palm oil sa kanilang letter of authority (LOA) noong Setyembre 2021.

"It is worth noting that up to this date, the MRC has made no payment despite the demand letters issued against them," ayon sa report na nabasa ng Bilyonaryo.

Base sa dokumento, noong Marso 26, 2013 ay naglabas ng demand letter ang District Collector sa Port of Batangas kung saan inatasan ang MRC na bayaran ang mga utang nito sa buwis na nagkakahalaga ng P79,092,231.00 bukod pa sa multa na P327,515,127.62 para sa hindi awtorisadong importasyon ng palm oil at palm olein na aabot sa P406,507,358.62.

Natuklasan pa sa mga dokumento na noong Set-

**ISKUP**  
Ni Nancy Carvajal

yembre 2021 ay sumobra ang inangat ng MRC ng 15,000 metriko tonelada mula sa alokasyon nito na hanggang 18,000 metriko tonelada.

Binanggit pa sa report na inaprubahan umano ng Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) ang karagdagang alokasyon ng MRC na hanggang 42,000 metriko tonelada noong Disyembre 2012 lamang, o tatlong buwan matapos dumating sa bansa ang langis.

"The issuance of a new LOA in December 2012 in favor of MRC increasing its allowable importation from 18,000MT to 42,000 MT does not cure the fact that the MRC imported palm and olein oil in excess of their allocation September," ayon pa sa report.

Alinsunod sa panuntunan ng PEZA, kinakailangang muna aprubahan

bago magtakda ng order para sa importasyon o bago pumasok ang produkto sa Pilipinas.

"Based in PEZA rules and expressly provided in the September LOA, the bureau respectfully recommends the imposition of duties and taxes plus penalty/fine against MRC for its unauthorized importation and withdrawal of palm oil and palm olein in CY 2012," saad pa sa report.

Nakasaad din sa mga dokumento na ang demand letters ay ipinadala sa MRC na pinamumunuan ni Jesus L. Arranza bilang chief executive officer at president ng kompanya.

Samantala, mariing itinanggi ni Arranza ang paratang umano laban sa MRC.

Aniya, siya pa nga mismo ang lumalaban sa mga smuggler at nagbibigay pa ng datos sa National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) tungkol sa smuggling ng palm oil.

Ayon kay Arranza, sumulat siya kay Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. tungkol dito at nakipagpu-long din kay Department

of Agriculture (DA) Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban sa nasabing isyu.

Hinala ni Arranza na may nagpapagulo ng isyu dahil bilyon-bilyong piso na aniya ang tinitiba ng mga importer ng palm oil na dina-divert o nililihis para ibenta sa mga palengke na dapat sana ay gamiting sangkap sa feeds ng mga hayop.

Ang Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) ang nagbibigay ng permit sa pag-import ng feeds para sa hayop na hindi dapat ginagamit sa pagkain ng mga tao kaya dito napupuslit ang palm oil na binebenta sa mga palengke.

Sabi ni Arranza, malalaking kompanya ang sangkot dito ngunit tumanggi siyang pangalan ang mga ito.

Mali rin aniya ang diskarte ni Panganiban na sa Philippine Coconut Authority patingnan ang problema dahil wala naman itong kinalaman sa smuggling ng palm oil. Sabi ni Arranza, ang BAI ang puno't dulo ng mga pinupuslit na palm oil sa mga palengke.

LOWER RICE PRICES SEEN

## ROMUALDEZ VOWS TO ADDRESS RISING FOOD INFLATION

By Julie M. Aurelio  
and Nestor Corrales  
@Team\_Inquirer

Lawmakers have vowed to address the "pressing concern" of rising food inflation and food security amid a slower 4.3 percent growth in the gross domestic product (GDP) in the second quarter of 2023.

Speaker Martin Romualdez said Congress would focus on the agriculture sector and review and adjust importation policies to stabilize food prices.

"One pressing concern that's evident is the rising food inflation, which has been a significant driver of the economic slowdown. Addressing this is paramount to ensure that every Filipino has access to affordable, nutritious food while also stimulating our agricultural sector," Romualdez said.

In a statement, he added that Congress was working toward a "prosperous, inclusive, and resilient future, where food security and economic stability are foundational pillars."

The Speaker made the remarks after the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that GDP grew by 4.3 percent in the second quarter of 2023, or slower than the 7.5 percent GDP in the same period last year.

Romualdez said the PSA report "highlights both our achievements and areas requiring intensified action" as he commended the Marcos administration's economic managers for "navigating our nation toward recovery amidst challenging times."

He said the lower chamber would "focus on injecting funds into our agricultural sector, promoting modern farming techniques, and improving storage and distribution infrastructure, as this "will help increase yield and reduce postharvest losses."

### Review import policies

Lawmakers will also work on measures that will optimize supply chains and reduce logistical bottlenecks to "ensure that food reaches consumers swiftly, reducing costs and wastage,"

Romualdez said.

He added that the House would also review and adjust import policies if necessary to help stabilize food prices.

"Strategic imports, when local supply is low, can prevent excessive price hikes ... The House supports initiatives to monitor and regulate the prices of essential commodities, ensuring that unscrupulous practices do not exploit Filipinos," Romualdez said.

The Speaker earlier secured Vietnam's commitment to pro-

vide the Philippines with a stable and affordable rice supply.

Rice prices in local markets may soon decline after the government secured lower prices from Vietnamese exporters, Malacañang said on Friday.

In a statement released through Malacañang, Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban said Vietnamese exporters have given price quotations that were \$30 to \$40 lower than what was quoted in their recent meeting in Malacañang. **INQ**



## Black soldier fly helps convert waste into fertilizer

FOUNDED by Joseph Navasero, Insiklo is a startup venture that is turning market and household wastes into feed and fertilizer with the aid of the insect called black soldier fly (BSF).

According to the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca), about 500 kilograms of market waste from Los Baños municipality in Laguna province are sent every week to the Insiklo facility.

Then the larvae of BSF devour food scrap, agricultural debris and manure, reducing the waste volume and odor into a nutrient-rich compost for use as organic fertilizer on crops. The mature larvae are then harvested and processed into high-protein feed for livestock, poultry and fish.

In 2022, Searca Director Glenn Gregorio said the center's Grants for Research toward Agricultural Innovative Solutions (Grains) Searca was awarded to support Navasero in elevating the BSF waste bioconversion system.

"This demonstration of repeat-

edly turning organic waste into valuable farming resources is the essence of circular agriculture in action," Gregorio said.

Thus, the Insiklo project boosted the conversion yield five times by switching to a vertical modular setup compared with the traditional concrete beds. It also created a faster way of physically separating the larvae from the compost using sieves.

Searca said the modular setup of Insiklo treats up to 750 kilograms of biowaste and produces 150 kilograms of fresh larvae with up to 75 kilograms of compost every 15 days.

Also with optimum temperature, humidity and substrate conditions, the insect-rearing system has raised the monthly production capacity of Insiklo between one-half ton and 2 tons of BSF larvae, according to Searca.

### Sustainable waste transformation

Navasero said Insiklo aims to create a lasting, transformative impact



■ The Insiklo bioconversion facility rears black soldier fly larvae that transform organic waste into animal feed and compost for crop production. CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

on organic waste management and agricultural sustainability.

"By promoting sustainable waste transformation, resource recovery and agricultural innovation, the project contributes to building a more environmentally conscious and economically vibrant region," he said.

Searca also noted that with Grains support, Insiklo has estab-

lished protocols in processing and packaging larvae and compost. "The compost is suitable for growing leafy vegetables, such as lettuce, pechay and mustard."

However, Insiklo has also reported challenges in marketing organic compost and recommended raising awareness among potential customers and farmers.

According to Searca, a range of

industry clients are attracted to Insiklo for various applications, such as real estate waste management, poultry manure processing for feed mills and tilapia cage operators, and food waste treatment for meat processing plants.

It said with this growing interest, Insiklo aims to increase larva production by up to 50 tons a month.

Eric Reynoso, Searca Emerging

Innovation for Growth Department program head, said "agritechnology ventures is key to sustainable food production."

"Through Searca Grains, we call on innovators from Southeast Asian countries to pursue their ideas for commercialization and agricultural transformation," Reynoso said.

LEANDER C. DOMINGO