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## Rice farmers group opts out of Kadiwa

A rice farmers group based in Nueva Ecija province has stopped selling its harvest at the Kadiwa store run by the Department of Agriculture in its main office in Quezon City after its requests to meet with the agency's officials went unheeded. Unigrow Philippines vice president Edna Arnado said they had asked for a meeting to present a proposal on how they can further lower the price of the staple. —STORY BY JORDEENE B. LAGARE

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# Kadiwa rice supplier opts out, feels snubbed by DA execs

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**  
@jordeenelagare

Citing the **Department of Agriculture's (DA)** apparent lack of interest to meet with them and discuss their proposal on reducing rice prices, a group of rice farmers from Nueva Ecija province—considered the country's rice granary—has stopped selling their produce at the agency's Kadiwa store at its main office in Quezon City.

The Novo Ecijano farmers who call themselves Unigrow Philippines said on Thursday that they earlier sought a meeting with DA officials to discuss their proposal to lower the price of rice but were disappointed by the response they received.

"We wrote three times and then we were referred to Agriculture Undersecretaries Domingo Panganiban and Leocadio Sebastian," Unigrow

Philippines vice president for marketing Edna Arnado said in a phone interview.

"We finally got a response from Panganiban but it took a long time for him to reply. It took us three to four letters before we finally got a response which implied that they were not interested in our proposal," Arnado added.

The DA has yet to respond to the Inquirer's request for comment as of this writing.

### P25 per kilo

Arnado said that Unigrow Philippines sold rice at P25 a kilo at the DA's main Kadiwa store from April 25 to Aug. 5 after they were approached by Agriculture Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista.

At one point, the group also briefly sold their stocks at Kadiwa stores in Cavite and Laguna provinces, at 500 kilos per day

for each location.

Their group, according to Arnado, can sell rice at a lower retail price because their cost of production only ranges from P7 to P8 per kilo, substantially lower than the average production cost of P14 to P17 per kilo for palay.

"Our group uses biofertilizer which eliminates the need for insecticide which is very expensive and hazardous to our health. This translates into savings for us," she said, adding that biofertilizers not only cut production costs but also increase yield.

### Limited inventory

Asked if their group would be willing to sell their rice stocks again at the DA's Kadiwa store, Arnado said that they would do so if either Panganiban or Sebastian would grant them an audience and listen to

their proposal.

At the moment, Unigrow Philippines sells its produce to local governments although it refused to identify them. The group's inventory, however, is limited because of the challenges in drying palay given the erratic weather conditions in Nueva Ecija.

As of Thursday, local commercial rice per kilo retailed from P41 to P62 in Metro Manila markets compared to P38 to P50 during the same period a year ago, based on the DA's price monitoring.

Imported rice was being sold from P43 to P65, also higher than last year's P38 to P52.

Authorities earlier reported a spike in rice prices, with some selling the staple at P56 a kilo. This prompted an assurance from **President Marcos** on Aug. 18 that the DA, where he serves as the concurrent secretary, and

the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) were "closely monitoring" price movements to stop manipulation.

In November 2022, **Mr. Marcos** led the simultaneous launch of the Kadiwa ng Pasko stores in 14 sites nationwide. According to him, the stores would sell rice at P25 per kilo, closer to his campaign promise of P20 per kilo.

### Marcos Sr. project

A brainchild of his parents, former President Ferdinand Marcos Sr. and former first lady Imelda Marcos, the Kadiwa stores sold goods at more affordable prices under the program whose aim was to create a direct and efficient farm-to-consumer food supply chain, and eliminate intermediaries.

The Kadiwa program was revived by former President

Rodrigo Duterte but the stores were not established nationwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Mr. Marcos** initially said that the program may continue until February or March this year although in July, government agencies signed a memorandum of agreement to institutionalize and sustain the establishment of the Kadiwa ng Pangulo (KNP) at the local level.

Under the agreement, the DA would serve as the lead convener of the KNP operations, while the DTI, Department of Labor and Employment and Department of the Interior and Local Government would be co-conveners.

According to the DA, as of June 16, there were 342 Kadiwa outlets nationwide while as of July 31, the Kadiwa program had benefited 151 farmers cooperatives and associations. —WITH A REPORT FROM INQUIRER RESEARCH AND





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## BRIEFS

### NIA hit over project delays

ONLY 38 of 80 irrigation areas have upgraded their facilities as of August despite ample budget given to the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) over the years, a senator said on Thursday.

"This is infuriating," said Senator Rafael "Raffy" T. Tulfo, noting that NIA's delayed projects have been pending for more than two decades and "were left to rot."

During the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee hearing, Mr. Tulfo cited NIA's own data in June 2022 showing that only a little over 65% of the country's 3,128,000-hectare total irrigation area were irrigated.

Agriculture Undersecretary Leocadio S. Sebastian told the same hearing that he was not satisfied with the country's performance in irrigation for rice production. — **John Victor D. Ordoñez**

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# No cartel? BOC padlocks Bulacan warehouse storing P505M worth of imported rice stocks

By RAADEE S. SAUSA

[@raadeeboy](#)

**A**MID the swirling rice cartel issue, the Bureau of Customs (BOC) has found huge bulk of suspected smuggled imported rice from various warehouses in Bulacan on Thursday.

Customs Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio led the inspection of warehouses of Great Harvest Rice Mill Warehouse, San Pedro Warehouse and FS Rice Mill Warehouse in the province.

These are located inside the Intercity Industrial Complex in San Juan, Balagtas, Bulacan, and were found to contain about 202,000 sacks of imported rice grains from Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand.

Earlier, the Department of Agriculture (DA) briefed the House agriculture panel about the need to import rice to augment existing stocks in preparation for El Niño—a policy that drew criticisms from some lawmakers who asked why the Philippines would not focus instead on improving domestic production of the staple.

Meanwhile, an official of the Samahang

Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) said it is difficult to prove the existence of a rice cartel in the country.

"It is difficult to say that there is a cartel with the number of players and layers of the rice industry," Jayson Cainglet, executive director of Sinag said on Thursday.

Earlier, DA Undersecretary for Rice Industry Development Leocadio Sebastian said during the House hearing that "I don't believe [that] there is a rice cartel [in the country]."

Baring additional details on the operation, Customs chief Rubio said, "I have ordered the

owners of these warehouses to present the necessary documents that will support its rice importation, as well as the amount of rice they have been keeping in these warehouses."

"Smuggling agricultural products, in particular rice, as this is a staple food in every Filipino home, poses a grave threat to our economy. It creates a ripple effect that impacts the core of our agricultural sector—our farmers," Rubio pointed out.

For his part, Intelligence Group Deputy Commissioner Juvymax Uy underscored the role of the BOC to get into the bottom of

hoarding issues that drive up the cost of rice in the market.

"If proven true, hoarding such a huge amount of rice grain will have legal consequences. There is no space in our fight against smuggling and hoarding for these kinds of operations. Together with key agencies, our commitment remains steadfast—it is time to put an end to the crippling impact of smuggling," he said.

Moreover, Customs Intelligence and Investigation Service (CIIS) Director Verne Enciso said the BOC coordinated with the Philippine National Police in Balagtas, and

the local government of Brgy. San Juan to implement the Letter of Authority (LOA) signed by Rubio.

"Only after the LOA was acknowledged by the warehouse representatives did the team proceed to inspect the storage, where they found hundreds of thousands of sacks of rice grain we suspect to be lacking the necessary importation documents," he said.

"[In line] with our protocol, the team padlocked and sealed the warehouse temporarily and proceeded with the inventory of the found goods," Enciso added.





## P505M smuggled rice found in Bulacan warehouses

BY WENDELL VIGILIA

A TEAM led by the Bureau of Customs (BOC) yesterday raided and padlocked warehouses in Bulacan after finding P505 million worth of suspected smuggled rice.

Customs Commissioner Bien Rubio, together with Customs Intelligence and Investigation Service (CIIS) Director Verne Enciso, CIIS-Manila International Container Port (CIIS-MICP) agents, and Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Task Force Aduana, found the

imported rice in the warehouses of Great Harvest Rice Mill Warehouse, San Pedro Warehouse, and PS Rice Mill Warehouse, which are all located inside the Intercity Industrial Complex in San Juan, Balagtas, Bulacan.

The 202,000 sacks of imported rice grains were from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand.

Speaker Martin Romualdez and Reps. Mark Enverga of Quezon, who chairs the House Committee on Agriculture and Food, Ambrosio Cruz Jr. of Bulacan and Erwin

Tulfo (PL, ACT-CIS) also joined the raid on the invitation of the BOC.

Rubio said he has ordered the owners of the warehouses to present the necessary documents that will support its rice importation, as well as the amount of rice they have been keeping in the storage facilities.

"Smuggling agricultural products, in particular rice as this is a staple food in every Filipino home, poses a grave threat to our economy. It creates a ripple ef-

fect that impacts the core of our agricultural sector—our farmers," Rubio said.

Romualdez said the House team joined the "fact-finding mission" upon Rubio's invitation and as part of the exercise of their congressional oversight powers.

"Yung karamihan ng (rice) supply dito aabot na ng three months e, technically that's hoarding (Most of the rice supply here will last for three months so technically,

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### P505M

that's hoarding)," the Speaker told reporters.

Enciso said the BOC coordinated with the Philippine National Police (PNP) in Balagtas, as well as with personnel from Barangay San Juan to implement the Letter of Authority (LOA) signed by Rubio.

"Only after the LOA was acknowledged by the warehouse representatives did the team proceed to inspect the storage, where they found hundreds of thousands of sacks of rice grain we suspect to be lacking the necessary importation documents," he said. "As with our protocol, the team padlocked and sealed the warehouse temporarily and proceeded with the inventory of the found goods."

Customs examiners conducted the inventory of the goods, which was witnessed by agents from the CIIS, PCG, Enforcement and Security Service (ESS) as well as warehouse representatives.

If found without proper importation and proof of payment documents, the corresponding seizure and forfeiture proceedings will be conducted against the subject shipments for violation of Sec. 1400 (misdeclaration in goods declaration) in relation to Sec. 1113 (property subject to seizure and forfeiture) of Republic Act No. 10863, also known as the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act (CMTA).

For the past few weeks, the price of rice has been steadily rising with retailers selling at P50 to P62 per kilogram in Metro Manila.

"We need to know if there is truly some basis to accusations that hoarders are responsible for the spike of rice prices in the market. Inspections such as these send a powerful signal to all the hoarders and manipulators out there to stop burdening the Filipino people for profit," said the Speaker, who earlier ordered Enverga's panel to look into the matter.

Reps. Luis Raymund Villafuerte of Camarines Sur, Brian Yamsuan of (PL, Bicol Saro) and Wilbert Lee (PL, Agri) have filed bills seeking to strengthen anti-agricultural smuggling laws and impose stiffer penalties for hoarders, price manipulators and even government officials involved in the crime.

For his part, Davao City Rep. Paolo Duterte has filed House Bill No. 7711 proposing the construction of postharvest facilities in every palay-producing city and municipality in the country, beginning with the building of a rice mill and a warehouse in every legislative district with at least one rice-producing town.

The bill provides that the construction of these postharvest facilities be later expanded to include every rice-producing municipality and city in the country.

"Aside from our oversight functions under the law, we are also

doing this in aid of legislation, as we have pending measures in the House of Representatives that seek to penalize the act of hoarding rice and other basic agricultural necessities," Romualdez said.

### NIA

Sen. Raffy Tulfo on Thursday slammed the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) for being remiss in carrying out its mandate of providing sufficient water supply to the more than 3 million hectares of irrigable lands in the country.

Tulfo said water remains inadequate in reaching far-flung areas.

"As of June 2022, only 65.28 percent of the 3.128 million hectares of total irrigable areas in the Philippines are irrigated and only 36 of the 80 target provinces and chartered cities have received agricultural machinery, equipment, facilities, and small-scale irrigation projects," he said during the hearing of the Senate blue ribbon committee, which he chairs.

NIA administrator Eduardo Guillen, during the panel's hearing on alleged irregularities in the agency, said that with the present "small budget" of their office, it will take them a century to make water accessible in all nooks and corners of the country.

"At the rate we're going, at the budget we have, it will take us maybe 80 to 100 years bago natin ma-irrigate 'yung remaining 1.1

million hectares na potentially irrigable natin (it will take us maybe 80 to 100 years before we can irrigate the remaining 1.1 million hectares which are irrigable)," Guillen said.

Tulfo noted several irrigation projects, which started years ago, remain unfinished until now.

"Several irrigation projects have been pending for completion for more than five years. Some irrigation projects are not functioning or operating despite being issued a Notice to Proceed. Some projects have failed, uncompleted and have used substandard materials. Rigged public bidding," Tulfo said.

He said if all NIA irrigation projects were completed on time, the country would already be self-sufficient and no longer be overly dependent on the importation of rice.

"Sa libu-libong irigasyon, kung namo-monitor niyo lamang at nagawaan ng paraan, aba by the thousands 'yan, millions of millions tonelada ng bigas ang harvest natin. We don't need to import kung nagawa. Tama? (We have thousands of irrigation projects and if we had only monitored or found ways to fast track their construction, we would already be harvesting thousands, million tons of rice. We don't need to import if they were done right. Am I correct?)" Tulfo asked Guillen.

Tulfo said other issues hounding the NIA include contractors submitting fake accomplishment reports, and contractors being paid

in advance even if projects have yet to be completed.

On one occasion, he said an P890 million funding was allocated for several projects but their

construction never started. He added that most of the anomalous ventures "were allegedly approved by deputy administrator (C'zar) Sulaik." — *With Raymond Africa*





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# High palay prices benefiting farmers

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

**H**igh prices of dry palay (unmilled rice) are benefiting local farmers, the **Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice)** said.

Based on PhilRice-Philippine Rice Information System (Prism) data, palay prices nationwide have risen to as high as P25 per kilo (kg).

"Last season's price was only P15 to P17/kg. My fellow farmers were also pleased with the increased palay prices, which rekindled their interest in planting," said Arsenio Mariñas, a rice farmer and municipal agriculturist in Villaverde, Nueva Vizcaya.

He added that the 10.2-ton palay harvest from his 1.7-hectare land could now be sold at P25/kg.

The farmer said that financial

gains were high with palay prices staying above P20/kg and as they also received free seeds and fertilizers from the government.

PhilRice-Prism data showed that from July 31 to Aug. 6, 2023, the average price of fresh palay stood at P17.83/kg while dry palay was priced at P19.33/kg, benefitting the early planters this 2023 wet season.

In June, the peak price of dry palay per kilogram reached P25 in Nueva Ecija; P24 in Bataan; and P23 in Bulacan.

Data from the Department of Agriculture (DA)-National Rice

Program also showed that palay prices reached P17.69/kg for fresh and P19.73/kg for dry in March, higher than the P15.99/kg for fresh and P18.41/kg for dry palay in the same period a year earlier.

The DA earlier said that farmers are getting better prices for their palay harvest.

"For the longest time, Filipino farmers have always been at the losing end of the rice sector. But now, Filipino rice farmers are enjoying better prices from their fresh harvest," Agriculture Undersecretary Leo Sebastian said.

He cited that this was "perhaps sparked by global fears of a shortage resulting from the adverse impact of El Niño, forcing world suppliers to tighten supply in the world market."

In Zamboanga del Sur, women farmers of the Mahayag Farmers

Integrated Multi-purpose Cooperative reported that their cooperative bought their produce at P25 to P28 per kg.

"We're lucky that we're able to sell at a good, high price, from the previous low prices of P13 to P18 [per kg]. We're enjoying this price because we're the first to harvest but we expect prices to not be as high as the harvest peaks," the group said.

While the group expressed appreciation with the development, they also hope that something can be done so consumers can still purchase rice at an affordable price.

Based on DA's price watch report, local special rice is sold between P52 and P62/kg; premium rice at P47 to P60/kg; well-milled rice range between P45 and P57/kg; and regular-milled rice at P41 to P55/kg.





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## Raging rice prices

**L**AST week, when I looked at international prices for Vietnam rice, well-milled (5-percent broken) was almost hitting the \$650 per metric ton mark, whereas it was lower than \$500 a few months ago. Similarly, it was reported that Thai 5-percent broken rice had breached \$700 when it was less than \$600 earlier this year.

Undeniably, the Indian government's decision to ban exports of non-basmati (white) rice triggered speculative activities in international rice trading. Indian rice constitutes 40 percent of total world export supply. Although non-basmati rice makes just a quarter of total Indian exports, it is still a substantial amount withdrawn from the



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world market.

The other factor driving international rice prices upwards is the intensifying conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Russia is an oil exporter, and inorganic fertilizer is mainly extracted from oil. An increase in oil prices leads not only to a rise in transportation costs but also those of running farm machinery and other equipment (e.g., irrigation pumps, milling machines, etc.) that use fuel.

Ukraine, meanwhile, is a major supplier of wheat and corn. The bombings of grain warehouses in Ukrainian ports by Russia results in the shortage of these cereals in the world market. Consumers in

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## ■ FINER FROM B1

### Raging rice

Other countries whose staple is bread (made from wheat) have no option but to shift to consuming rice. Most of these consumers are in poor sub-Saharan and North African countries.

Unfortunately, all these challenges have simultaneously happened during the lean palay (unmilled rice) harvest season in the Philippines. May to August coincide with the local palay planting season and hence there is not much harvest that traders or the **National Food Authority (NFA)** can buy. Buyers will have to depend on imports whose prices, unlucky for us, are skyrocketing.

Our elbow room to maneuver given the current situation is to say the least tight. The most logical option is for the private sector to import so that the shipments arrive when we need them most, which are the months of August to September. If the government does the importation, it will be delayed because it needs to raise the funds, negotiate with foreign exporters and

ship the imports.

Most likely, government imports will arrive at the peak of the harvest season, sometime in late October, November and December. This will lead to a significant decline in the farmgate prices of palay and expectedly hurt our palay farmers.

The Department of Agriculture has assured the public that around 300,000 metric tons of rice imports will arrive this month. Another equivalent amount or higher may arrive in September. However, it was reported that traders in the exporting countries are raising their prices, reneging on previously agreed lower prices.

Private sector importers complain that they do not have the money to cover the additional price increases. They fear that given market instability, there is no assurance that their losses will be covered, assuming prices start to decline a few months once rice imports arrive.

The quagmire we are in has triggered numerous calls for the revision of Republic Act 11023 or the "Rice Tariffication Law (RTL)." The RTL prohibited the NFA from importing but stipulated that it should build a buffer stock for emer-

gency purposes. The stock should be sourced from local farmers, which is a good idea because we are using government funds to patronize local produce.

However, the NFA has reported that the nine-day recommended buffer stock was down to two days and that it could not procure palay because prices were now beyond its stipulated buying price of P19 per kilo.

It was reported by a farmers' lobby group that this happened because the NFA diverted its stocks to Kadiwa stores to partially fulfill the President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s pronouncement of selling rice at P20 per kilo (Kadiwa stores sold it at P25).

As for the P19 per kilo price ceiling, all it requires is for the NFA Council to approve a higher procurement price to enable the agency to buy the palay harvests of farmers at P21 or P25 per kilo.

Note that the RTL is being blamed for its inability to arrest the rising rice prices. A couple of years and a year ago during the peak harvest season, it was being blamed by detractors for falling prices of palay.

The irony of it is that significant increases in rice prices also happened in the past, particularly in 1995, 2008 and 2018 before the passage of RTL in 2019. Similarly, the decline in rice prices normally happened during the wet harvest season, which is the peak harvest season and when drying palay is more challenging, years and decades before the RTL became a law.

It should also be noted that the midterm review of RTL should have been conducted last year or three years after its passage in February 2019. This is one of the provisions clearly stipulated in the law.

Congress did not have the time to conduct it last year when we did not have this rice problem. With the temporary rice crisis we are currently experiencing, it seems that Congress is now interested in doing so because the quagmire we are in provides its members ample media opportunities.

It is critical that we inject scientific analysis to the situation instead of responding in a knee-jerk fashion. What lessons did we learn from the 2008 and 2018 rice crises? Did prices remain elevated for a year or two, or are we only experi-

encing a temporary upward glitch? If it is a temporary phenomenon, will the proposed solutions create more problems in the future? Will we resurrect all the ills of the previous rice policy regime just because we are in panic mode?

My take is that we need to mobilize our economists, particularly agricultural economists and rice scientists, to undertake a more long-term (even midterm) view of the rice industry and how it is affected by the dynamics of the international rice trade and then goad them to formulate a mathematical model to forecast future rice prices under varying scenarios.

Pandering to our emotions, ideologies or to the views of pamphleteers will only aggravate the current situation instead of alleviating it. Let us inject science, scrutinize the empirical evidence and be guided by the results in addressing our rice problem.

The great science writer Isaac Asimov once said: "The saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom."

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## *Phl: No objection to Japan's release of Fukushima water*

By PIA LEE-BRAGO

The Philippines did not object to Japan's release of 1.3 million metric tons of treated radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean from its tsunami-wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant yesterday as it recognizes the International Atomic Energy agency's (IAEA) technical expertise on the matter, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said.

"The Philippines continues to look at this issue from a science- and fact-based perspective and its impact on the waters in the region. As a coastal and archipelagic state, the Philippines attaches utmost priority to the protection and preservation of the marine environment," DFA said in a statement yesterday.

According to an IAEA report, Japan's plans to discharge the ALPS (Advanced Liquid Processing System) treated water into the sea will have negligible radiological impact on people and the environment and is consistent with relevant international safety standards.

Japanese Ambassador Kazuhiko Koshikawa earlier said Japan would manage the annual discharge volume of tritium so it will not exceed 22 trillion Becquerel, which is equivalent to the target discharge management value for the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station before the accident in March 2011.

"It is worth noting that other countries also discharge tritium into the sea in compliance with their own domestic laws and regulations; for instance, according to the China Nuclear Energy Association website, China is discharging 112 trillion Bq from Yangjiang Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) in 2021," Koshikawa said.

"The amount of tritium in the ALPS treated water is far smaller than the amount of tritium discharged from many nuclear power plants and other facilities in other countries," he added.

The ambassador said Japan will take all possible measures to ensure the safety of the discharge into the sea even after it begins,

and will not discharge anything that could adversely affect the health or environment.

On the other hand, fishers' group Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) criticized the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) yesterday for their failure to take a stand on the matter.

According to Pamalakaya vice chairman Ronnel Arambulo, the radioactive wastewater might reach the western part of the Pacific Ocean with the onset of the northeast monsoon, posing potential hazards in the country's eastern seas, including the resource-rich Philippine Rise (formerly Benham Rise) which is not only rich in fisheries resources but also gas deposits and mineral resources.

"The DENR and BFAR should issue statements on the impending catastrophe brought by the release of treated wastewater as it will have a big effect in the Pacific Ocean. It will kill our fishermen and affect our food security," Arambulo said.

He warned that toxic treated wastewater could also reach the Bicol region and other parts of the southern archipelago during the northeast monsoon.

"We don't believe that the radioactive chemical was already treated," Arambulo said.

He said that other countries like South Korea have also opposed the discharge of radioactive wastewater from Japan.

"We should not allow the Pacific Ocean to be used as a sewerage system. It is the obligation of the DENR and BFAR to have a position as what is at stake here is the livelihood of the fishermen," Arambulo said.

At a separate press conference, Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration deputy administrator for operations and services Bonifacio Pajuelas said the state weather bureau is part of the panel that studies the implication of the discharge of Japan's treated radioactive water.

— With Bella Cariaso, Evelyn Macairan





## ASF vaccination inter-agency panel formed

An inter-agency technical working group has been created in preparation for the vaccination of hogs against African swine fever (ASF).

**Department of Agriculture (DA)** Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban issued Special Order No. 1027 designating Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) Director Paul Limson as panel chairperson.

BAI Assistant Director Arlene Asteria Vytiaco and BAI veterinary laboratory division chief Rainelda dela Peña were appointed as co-chairpersons.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is reviewing the certificate of product registration of the ASF vaccine.

Panganiban stressed the need to review how vaccination can be integrated into the ASF control and prevention policy in the country.

"In the event of vaccine availability, there is a need for an inclusive multidisciplinary and multisectoral approach in determining how ASF vaccination should be implemented, with due consideration on the benefits provided by and risks associated with the ASF vaccines and vaccination," he said.

Panganiban said the inter-agency technical working group would also study approaches to ASF vaccinology.

The panel will provide technical advice to the BAI regarding the results of ASF vaccine trials being conducted in the country, he added.

The BAI plans to import 600,000 doses of ASF vaccines this year once the FDA issues a certificate of product registration.

AGAP party-list Rep. Nicanor Briones had said losses incurred by the hog industry due to ASF have reached almost P200 billion.

Briones said the swine disease has affected 50 percent of the total hog population in Luzon.

The DA said ASF remains a significant threat to the country's swine production.

Pork Producers Federation of the Philippines Inc. president Rolando Tambago said the swine industry should grow by 30 percent to fill the supply gap due to losses caused by ASF.

While production increased in the second quarter, Tambago said it was a "slow growth" compared to the losses. — **Bella Cariaso, Danessa Rivera**





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## Rice traders can't sustain P38/kilo rice

By BELLA CARIASO

The Philippine Rice Industry Stakeholders Movement (PRISM), a group of rice traders, yesterday admitted that its members could not sustain supplying rice at P38 per kilo

amid a spike in prices.

To be able to sell the grains at P38 per kilo, PRISM lead convenor Rowena Sadicon said in a radio interview that rice traders now shoulder at least P500 of the cost of a 50-kilo sack of rice.

"The P38 per kilo of rice is not available in all markets... When we started in July, our subsidy was only for P4 to P5 per kilo. At present, our subsidy is P10 per kilo or P500 per 50 kilos," Sadicon said.

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## Rice From Page 1

"In particular, the P38 kilo became a blockbuster at Commonwealth Market (in Quezon City)... This is voluntary. If our stakeholders are open to add, aside from the allocation they committed, we will welcome it and we hope it will increase," she added.

She noted that the quality of the rice sold at P38 per kilo is equivalent to those sold at P45 or P46 per kilo in some retail stores.

The retail prices of local regular milled rice reached as high as P55 per kilo; local well-milled rice, P57 per kilo; local premium rice, P60 per kilo and local special rice, P62 per kilo.

Sadicon said she already appealed to other members of the rice trading group to supply the P38 per kilo of rice.

"We have been coordinating with them (Department of Agriculture officials) but for some reasons we don't know, the sale of rice at P38 per kilo in Kadiwa stores in the National Capital Region has yet to start, but it is already available in Cagayan de Oro City," she revealed. She also remains hopeful that retail prices would start to go down in the next two to three weeks, given the upcoming harvest season.

According to Sadicon the farmgate price of palay remains high at P25 per kilo for fresh harvest and P33 per kilo for dry palay.

Meanwhile, the Bureau of Customs-Customs Intelligence and Investigation Service (BOC-CIIS) yesterday discovered an

estimated P505 million worth of suspected smuggled rice stored in three warehouses in Bulacan province.

BOC-CIIS director Verne Enciso said they inspected the Great Harvest Rice Mill Warehouse, San Pedro Warehouse and FS Rice Warehouse – all located inside the Intercity Industrial Complex in San Juan, Balagtas, Bulacan – and found that the three contained around 202,000 sacks of rice grains that might have been illegally imported from Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand.

Customs examiners, he added, are conducting an inventory on the supply and that they have temporarily placed padlocks and seals on the said warehouses.

House Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez, ACT-CIS party-list Reps. Erwin Tulfo and Edvic Yap, Quezon province Rep. Wilfrido Mark Enverga and Bulacan Rep. Ambrosio Cruz Jr. were among those who witnessed the inspections.

Romualdez said he and his colleagues conducted the fact-finding mission to find out if there is really a shortage in the supply of the country's staple food.

Based on their findings, Romualdez said there is no rice shortage and that rice traders have confirmed that locally produced rice would start arriving in the next few weeks.

He also advised rice importers to conduct their business the right way and pay the taxes due the government. – With Evelyn Macairan, Ramon Efren Lazaro



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## **NIA probed over P121 B anomalous projects**

By **MARC JAYSON CAYABYAB**

**National Irrigation Administration** chief Eduardo Guillen yesterday promised to weed out corruption in the NIA as the agency faces a Senate investigation into its alleged anomalous and unfinished projects.

During the resumption of the Senate Blue Ribbon committee hearing, Guillen was cornered by Sen. Raffy Tulfo to admit that there is corruption

**Turn to Page 2**

## **NIA probed** From Page 1

that caused delays in irrigation projects.

Tulfo had alleged in his privilege speech that there is wide-scale corruption in the NIA because of delayed irrigation projects that received maintenance fees even when these are unfinished.

He also accused the NIA of awarding contracts to companies with a record of not finishing its projects.

During the hearing, Agriculture Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian, who also serves as the NIA board chairman, pointed to "errors" in computations or specifications on the irrigation projects as among the reasons for the delays.

Guillen vowed to weed out corruption in the agency, which he started heading in December 2022. Before his appointment, he was mayor

of Piddig town in Ilocos Norte.

He noted that some delays were not due to corruption, but to "lapses."

"Lapse is different from corruption. Just admit that there is corruption so that cases will be filed and heads will roll. Do not sugarcoat the corruption present in government left and right," Tulfo said.

At a press briefing after the hearing, Blue Ribbon committee chair Senator Francis Tolentino said more documents are needed to prove corruption in NIA's unfinished projects.

He said some projects might have been delayed because of the devolution to the local government units of the communal irrigation systems, pursuant to a 2021 executive order from Malacañang on the devolution of powers due to the Mandanas ruling.



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BLUE RIBBON PROBE

## SENATORS UNCOVER 'CASH COWS' OF NIA OFFICIALS

By **Melvin Gascon**  
@melvingasconINQ

Senators on Thursday pushed the filing of corruption charges against **National Irrigation Administration (NIA)** officials who were allegedly responsible for numerous abandoned and defective irrigation projects that purportedly became cash cows for unscrupulous personnel over the years.

At the Senate blue ribbon committee hearing, Sen. Raffy Tulfo hit former and current NIA officials for their negligence in tolerating defective, incomplete and ghost irrigation projects, which, he said, should have helped the country's farmers increase their rice production.

"In a lot of cases, unscrupulous individuals are raking in profits from these irrigation projects, like seeking funding for maintenance, but in truth, no maintenance is done and the funding only goes straight to their pockets. That's the reason we're here because we want to hold responsible people accountable," he said.

The Senate inquiry stemmed from Tulfo's May 16 privilege speech, wherein he exposed the alleged irregularities in irrigation projects,

many of which were delayed by more than five years.

He cited a report by the team he sent to verify the projects, which found that many of these were not functioning, supposedly due to poor workmanship or use of substandard materials while others were abandoned because of failed contracts.

In many of the projects, the contracts were awarded to "favored" contractors, he said.

The NIA also supposedly gave credence to falsified reports of completion, which became the basis for the payment in full of contractors.

### 28 anomalous projects

"According to the NIA Inspection and Assessment Team, there are 28 anomalous irrigation projects, [while] P890 million was allocated for projects but the project's construction was never started," he said.

"Filipino consumers are wailing due to the high price of rice, which further worsened their situation because they can now barely afford to buy rice; sadly, our farmers cannot produce enough because the funds for their irrigation is being plundered at the expense of the farmers and the people," he said.

The senator vowed to in-

troduce legislation to prevent a repeat of the abuses committed in the implementation of irrigation projects.

Tulfo lamented that the NIA has managed to irrigate only 65.28 percent of the 3.13 million hectares of total irrigable areas in the Philippines, and only 36 of the 80 target provinces and chartered cities have received agricultural machinery, equipment, facilities and small-scale irrigation projects.

### Need more evidence

"With the thousands of your irrigation projects, if only these were implemented properly and were constructed, we would perhaps not need to import rice by now; instead, we may already be exporting rice," he said.

Sen. Francis Tolentino, chair of the Senate blue ribbon committee, said they will summon private contractors and other personalities in the coming hearings to provide testimonies on the reasons for the defects and the delays, amid suspicion that some of them may be in cahoots with erring NIA officials.

But the senator was quick to clarify that his committee will need to receive more evidence, showing caution not to preempt the panel's findings. INQ



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CONTINUED DISEASE MONITORING

## DA DECLARES AURORA, QUEZON FREE OF BIRD FLU

The provinces of Aurora and Quezon are the latest areas to be declared free of bird flu or avian influenza, marking another step toward the government's battle against this animal disease.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said Quezon recorded two confirmed cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza subtype H5N1 in Candelaria town affecting ducks and quails on April 4 and April 13 this year. On the other hand, Aurora reported a case of H5N1 in Maria Aurora town affecting chicken

layers on Oct. 26, 2022.

"More than 90 days have elapsed since the end of the cleaning and disinfection operations and that surveillance activities yielded negative [avian influenza] test results," the DA said on Wednesday.

"Continued disease monitoring and surveillance in the 1-km (kilometer) and 7-km surveillance zones surrounding the affected farms yielded negative test results for influenza type A virus," it added.

The provincial governments

of Aurora and Quezon, in coordination with the DA regional office in Central Luzon and the Bureau of Animal Industry, conducted disease investigation, immediate depopulation, cleaning and disinfection, movement restrictions and surveillance in the affected areas.

According to the World Organization for Animal Health, a previously free country or zone may regain its avian influenza-free status at least 28 days after completing a stamping-out policy and disinfecting

the last affected establishment, and that ensuing surveillance demonstrated the absence of infection.

During the National Sectoral Committee on Poultry and Livestock's special meeting held early this month, Generoso Rene Romo Jr. of the Philippine College of Poultry Practitioners said the Philippines was grappling with H5N1 and H5N8 subtypes, noting that mutations were possible as a side effect of using nonaccredited vaccines.

—JORDEENE B. LAGARE INQ





## P4.1B fertilizer voucher ng DA kinuwestiyon

TINAWAG ni Gabriela Women's Party Rep. Arlene Brosas na "fertilizer fund scam version 2" ang nabistong ilegal na paggamit umano ng Department of Agriculture (DA) ng P4.1 bilyon para sa fertilizer voucher program.

Sa deliberasyon ng Kamara sa 2024 proposed budget ng DA, inamin mismo ng ahensiya na P4.107 billion mula sa halos P13 billion sobrang kita mula sa rice tariffs ay ginamit para sa fertilizer vouchers.

Giit ni Brosas, ito'y malinaw na ilegal dahil sa ilalim

ng Republic Act 11598 ay nakasaad na ang kita sa rice import tariff na somobra sa P10 billion ay dapat gagamitin para sa direktang pagbibigay ng cash assistance sa mga magsasakang nagbubungkal ng 2 ektaryang lupa at pababa.

"In fact, the DA then already under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. issued memorandum orders authorizing the use of unprogrammed funds worth P4.1 billion excess rice tariff revenues for fertilizer vouchers. Malinaw naman na hindi direct

cash assistance ang fertilizer vouchers. Labag ito sa batas," giit ni Brosas.

Dahil dito, ayon kay Brosas, "Malaking tanong kung paano ginastos itong P4.1 billion. Sinong supplier ng fertilizer ang nakinabang? Nangangamoy fertilizer fund scam version 2.0 ito. Nakakagalit malaman ito sa harap ng unli-importasyon ng bigas."

Tiniyak naman ng DA na magbibigay sila ng report kung paano ginamit ang naturang pondo sa ilalim ng fertilizer voucher program. (Eralyn Prado)



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### Korapsyon sa NIA inamin sa Senado

Aminado si **National Irrigation Administration (NIA)** Acting Administrator Eduardo Guillen na may korapsyon sa kanilang ahensiya.

Sa pagdinig ng Senado ay direktang tinanong ni Senador Raffy Tulfo si Guillen kung naniniwala itong may korapsyon sa loob ng NIA.

Tugon dito ni Guillen, lahat naman ng organisasyon kahit sa abroad ay may korapsyon bagay na hindi naman nagustuhan ni Tulfo dahil NIA lamang ang kanyang tinatanong at hindi dapat idamay ang ibang organisasyon.

Punto pa ng Senador, ang tanging pagkakataon lang na mareresolba ang problema sa NIA ay kung tatanggapin na may korapsyon nga sa ahensiya at hindi puro pagtatanggi na sinang-ayunan naman ng acting Administrator.

Ayon kay Guillen may 'lapses' sa loob ng ahensiya subalit agad itong binara ni Tulfo at sinabing magkabalang usapin ang 'lapses' at 'corruption' at pagsu-sugar coat sa problema ang ginagawa ng opisyal.

Hinamon naman ni Tulfo si Guillen na aminin na niyang mayroon talagang katiwalian para mabigyan ito ng solusyon at masampahan na ng kaso ang mga dapat na mapanagot.

Sa huli ay inamin na rin ni Guillen na mayroong korapsyon sa kanyang ahensiya at nangako na aayusin ang sistema para matugunan ang mga problema.  
(Gemma Garcia)





## NIA BOSS PINIGA SA KORAPSIYON

Inamin ni National Irrigation Administration (NIA) acting Chief Eduardo Guillen na mayroong korapsiyon sa ahensiya matapos dikdikin ni Senador Raffy Tulfo sa pagdinig ng Blue Ribbon Committee kaugnay sa mga irregularidad umano sa mga irrigation project.

Sa pagdinig, tinanong ni Tulfo si Guillen tungkol sa napaulat na korapsiyon sa NIA.

"Sabi po nila lahat daw po yata... ng organisasyon meron pong certain corruption," sagot ni Guillen.

Subalit hindi nasiyahan si Tulfo sa sagot ng NIA chief.

"Kasi the only time you can solve a corruption problem in the agency you are handling is to accept that there is corruption. Kasi, if you don't accept that there is corruption, how can you solve that corruption problem? Denial is not the right answer," giit ng senador.

Muling tinanong ni Tulfo si Guillen tungkol sa korapsiyon sa NIA na kalauna'y inamin na ng huli.

"So you admit that there's corruption? Right? So if there's corruption, we must solve this. So you admit that there's corruption?"

tanong pa ni Tulfo.

"Yes po. Kaya inaayos natin iyong sistema," sagot ni Guillen.

Inamin din ng NIA chief na may naantalang mga proyekto ang ahensiya kabilang na rito ang Balog-Balog Dam sa Tarlac na itinayo sa administrasyon pa ni dating Pangulong Corason Aquino at patuloy pa umanong pinopondohan kahit hindi naman napapakinabangan.

Binanggit pa ni Tulfo na may 500 proyekto ang NIA na may problema, natengga, inabandona, hindi tinapos o 'di kaya'y pinabayaan ng ahensiya.

Kabilang dito ang

Sta. Josefa Pump Irrigation project na aabot sa P119.247 milyon at ang Umayam River Irrigation project na may pondong P258.142 milyon na iniuugnay kay NIA Deputy Administrator C'zar Sulaik.

Ang Sta. Josefa Pump Irrigation project ay kumukolekta na ng pondo para sa maintenance kahit hindi pa tapos at possible rin umano na may "double funding" para sa mga ghost project kung saan si Sulaik ang regional director ng Region 13 ng mga panahong iyon.

Samantala, mali at substandard din umano ang pagkakagawa ng Umayam River Irrigation

project at batay pa sa pag-aaral ng NIA, nang bumisita umano si Sulaik doon ay inutusan nito ang regional office na huwag nang ayusin ng contractor ang nasirang kanal.

Katwiran naman ni Sulaik, nang ipatupad ang mga proyekto noong 2019 ay nasa Central Office na siya ng ahensiya kaya wala siyang alam sa mga ginagawang irrigation project. **(Dindo Matining)**





# P505-M RICE HELD AS PRICES SPIKE NEWS / A3



**SURPRISE CHECK** Is the explanation for the surging rice prices somewhere here? Officials, including Speaker Martin Romualdez, ACT-CIS Rep. Erwin Tulfo, Bureau of Customs Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio, and Customs Intelligence and Investigation Service chief Alvin Enciso, conduct an unannounced inspection of rice warehouses in Bocaue, Bulacan, on Thursday. —**NIÑO JESUS ORBETA**





# P505-M rice held as prices spike

By **Tina G. Santos**  
@santostinaINQ

The Bureau of Customs (BOC) on Thursday said it “temporarily” padlocked several warehouses in Bulacan found storing P505 million worth of imported rice.

Customs Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio led the inspection of the storage facilities identified as Great Harvest Rice Mill Warehouse, San Pedro Warehouse and FS Rice Mill Warehouse, all located inside the Intercity Industrial Complex in San Juan, Balagtas, Bulacan.

The warehouses were found to contain about 202,000 sacks of imported rice from Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand, the BOC said.

“I have ordered the owners of these warehouses to present the necessary documents that will support its rice importation, as well as the amount of rice they have been keeping in these warehouses,” Rubio said in a statement.

The inspection was also conducted by Customs Intelligence and Investigation Service (CIIS) Director Verne Enciso, CIIS-Manila International Container Port agents, and Philippine Coast Guard Task Force Aduana.



**DOCUMENTATION QUESTIONED** Speaker Martin Romualdez and Rep. Erwin Tulfo join customs officials in inspecting a warehouse full of imported rice in Bocaue, Bulacan. —**NIÑO JESUS ORBETA**

Speaker Martin Romualdez and Representatives Erwin Tulfo, Wilfrido Mark Enverga and Ambrosio Cruz Jr. also joined the inspection, according to the BOC.

## Lacking documents

According to Enciso, the BOC coordinated with the Philippine National Police in Balagtas, as well as with personnel from Barangay San Juan to implement a Letter of Authority (LOA) signed by Rubio.

“Only after the LOA was acknowledged by the warehouse representatives did the team proceed to inspect the storage, where they found hundreds of thousands of

sacks of rice grain we suspect to be lacking the necessary importation documents,” he said.

“As with our protocol, the team padlocked and sealed the warehouse temporarily and proceeded with the inventory of the found goods,” Enciso added.

If found without proper importation and proof of payment documents, the corresponding seizure and forfeiture proceedings will be conducted against the subject shipments for violation of Section 1400 (misdeclaration in goods declaration) in relation to Section 1113 (property subject to seizure and forfeiture) of Republic Act No. 10863 known as the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act. **INQ**





## The continuing neglect of the country's agri exports

If we continue to ignore the potential of our agriculture exports, we will not be able to generate the jobs we need to prevent poverty and attain prosperity.

We used to be way ahead of Thailand in this area. But last year, we exported just \$6.8 billion, which is a dismal one-fifth of Thailand's \$35.6 billion.

If only we have the kind of governance that Thailand has, by now our agriculture exports would have been to equal to theirs. Our output in this area could have equaled overseas remittances. We would not have needed to send so many of our people abroad and bear with the social costs of migration.

This coming Aug. 29, the international trade committee of the public-private Philippine Council of Agriculture and Food will be discussing various recommendations to promote exports.

### On export development, promotion and regulation

(1) "An interagency committee will be restored to monitor and approve import regulations." Too many new regulations are being formulated and implemented sans any external reviews. In the end, these regulations discour-

## COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDOÑEZ

age exports, increase transaction costs and make our products uncompetitive.

(2) "An action center/unit must be established to resolve export issues." Absent a body with sufficient authority to resolve conflicting issues, deadlocks may occur, time is wasted and progress will suffer.

### On trade agreements, negotiations and remedies

(1) "Private participation must be held at the very start of discussions, not when the negotiations are almost complete." The government concludes agreements which do not sufficiently address the interests and welfare of the exporters they are supposed to serve. The recommendation will allow the private sector to contribute to the premises on which the negotiations are based.

(2) "Ensure that trade agreement implementation is effective, such as complying to conditionalities, as what is happening now with the Regional Compre-

hensive Economic Partnership." If conditions are not met and implementation is flawed, agreements will only result in harm.

### On monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment

(1) "Impact studies of past fair trade agreements (FTAs) must be made." Instead of entering into more FTAs based on theories and speculation, the impact of such deals on our agriculture trade balances should be quantified and analyzed. This should improve negotiations for future FTAs.

(2) "Performance indicators on trade action should be made, such as the discrepancy between our imports recorded by the exporting country and our own record of these imports, which indicates smuggling." Indicators must be analyzed in depth. Results would be able to suggest accurate and specific solutions to any discrepancies uncovered.

### On antismuggling

(1) "Provide for the proper personnel positions and budget support for the antismuggling effort." If not, we won't be able to see the end of reports such as the United Nations Comtrade's study showing smuggling increasing from P500 billion in 2010 to P1.2 trillion

in 2021. No money, no honey.

(2) "Support third-party pre-inspection of imports at the country of origin." This preventive measure is being implemented in other countries with great success. It provides a safeguard against local authorities who may sometimes be in cahoots with smugglers.

The above recommendations are both urgent and critical. That they have not been done until now shows neglect for our international trade potential.

We must also have an overall agriculture export vision and direction. We must set an ambitious agriculture export target (not the \$8.9-billion five-year target previously stated).

All of the above can only be accomplished with strong political will. If Thailand has done it, so can we. We must not fail our future generations by continuing to neglect our potential in agriculture exports. **INQ**



The author is Agriwatch chair, former secretary of presidential flagship programs and projects, and former undersecretary of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Trade and Industry. Contact is [agriwatch\\_phil@yahoo.com](mailto:agriwatch_phil@yahoo.com)



REGIONS

## US trade mission due in Mindanao

DAVAO CITY—As part of Washington's commitment to deepen bilateral economic ties, a trade mission is arriving here next month to explore investment opportunities in Mindanao, especially in agriculture. The mission will include about eight "big names" in American agribusiness, among them John Deere and Cargill. They'll be looking into prospects in "precision agriculture," according to the US ambassador. —STORY BY RYAN D. ROSAURO **AG**



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# US trade mission due in Mindanao

Envoy says delegation, representing big names in American agribusiness, to explore agriculture investments

By Ryan D. Rosauro  
@InqNational

DAVAO CITY—As part of the US government's commitment to deepen economic ties with the country, a trade mission is due here next month to explore investment opportunities in agriculture in Mindanao.

The mission will include about eight "big names" in American agribusiness, among them John Deere and Cargill, that will be looking into the prospects for "precision agriculture," said US Ambassador to the Philippines MaryKay Carlson.

Carlson was in the city for two days recently for various public engagements held in time for the 38th Kadayawan Festival. She also had separate meetings with Mayor Sebastian Duterte and Vice President Sara Duterte.

"Agriculture is the strength of this region. There's a lot we can do in this area," noted Carlson, describing the Davao region as "the orchard of the Philippines" given its rich potentials for crop farming.

Cavendish banana is Davao region's major crop, which is produced for export to Japan, China, South Korea and the



FRUIT SPREAD US Ambassador MaryKay Carlson tries fresh "buko" juice and pomelo at a Kadayawan Festival fruit booth in Davao City during her visit last week. —PHOTO COURTESY OF US EMBASSY IN THE PHILIPPINES

Middle East. The crop is also cultivated in the provinces of Bukidnon, Lanao del Sur, Cotabato and Maguindanao.

### Food security

Pineapple is also another crop of high-value mainly produced in Mindanao, particularly in Bukidnon and Lanao del Sur, and has recently expanded to Misamis Oriental.

"Mindanao has a lot to offer. You have such a great advantage here when it comes to agriculture," Carlson said.

The trade mission, according to her, will have stops in Davao and Manila.

The development of agriculture is of common interest to both the United States and the Philippines, Carlson said, given that both President Marcos and US President Joe Biden have clearly outlined "the importance of food security" in their respective agendas of government.

Apart from agriculture, the technology sector may also be another bright spot that American investors may look into in

Davao, Carlson said.

"The sky's the limit when it comes to our partnership," Carlson added.

According to the ambassador, bilateral trade between the country and the US hit a record high last year at \$33 billion.

She underscored the importance of making economic development inclusive so that it supports the government's efforts of building peace in Mindanao.

"When people have a stake in the system, they have a stake in [maintaining] peace," she pointed out.

The sustainability of investor interests in Mindanao, and in the country in general, according to her, will hinge on "transparency and predictability, which means good governance."


"When processes are clear and transparent, it facilitates investment," she said.

In achieving good governance, Carlson emphasized the crucial role of a free and independent press in "keeping the government on its toes so that they provide the services that are important."

This is why the US government is taking the effort to "shine a light on press freedom" in the country, she said. **INQ**



Date: Aug. 28, 2023 Page: 2

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# HUNT FOR HOARDERS

By Jester Manalastas

AMID allegations that hoarders are driving up the cost of rice in the market, Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez led a team from the House of Representatives on a fact-finding mission and inspected large rice warehouses in Bulacan where they concluded that rice hoarding has been happening.

Upon invitation from Bureau of Customs Commissioner Bienvenido "Bien" Rubio as part of the exercise of the oversight powers of Congress, Romualdez joined in inspecting FS Rice Mill, San Pedro Warehouse, and Great Harvest Rice Meal Warehouse located in the boundaries of Bocaue and Balagtas towns in Bulacan.

"Yung karamihan ng [rice] suplay dito aabot na ng three months eh, technically that's hoarding," Romualdez, told reporters in an ambush interview.

"Kasi pag ini-embudo mo, 'pag hino-hoard mo tumataas. Greed 'yan eh 'di ba, gusto mo kumita. Kaya nga nagpapasalamat tayo kay Commissioner Bien [Bienvenido Rubio] at saka 'yung team niya galing sa Customs. Nandito naman tayo kung baga nag-pa-fact finding tayo at ocular inspections just to make sure that lahat ng napapasok na imported tama ang binayaran nilang buwis," he added.

"Yung assessment talaga natin, sapat na suplay lalo na 'yung galing sa ibayong-dagat pero mataas na rin 'yung presyo. Pero nakita din natin sapat na suplay pero medyo matagal na naho-hold. Dapat kung ano 'yung pinasok, inilabas agad, ibaba kaagad at reasonable price dahil masyadong mataas ngayon ang presyo," he said, lamenting that some rice traders have been exploiting the international price adjustments to jack up rice prices in the local market.

"Maski 'yung mga locally produced, hinohold back, minamatch nila 'yung pricing sa international pricing [adjustments]," he sai," Speaker Romualdez said.

"Rice hoarding is economic sabotage in its highest degree. It not only destabilizes prices in the market through arbitrary manipulation, but it also adversely affects the ability of Filipino families to cope with day-to-day living. And for that, hoarders should apply the full force of the law," Enverga said.



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# P505-M 'puslit' na bigas, nadiskubre sa Bulacan warehouse

Nina **DANILO GARCIA** at **JOY CANTOS**

Kasunod ng direktiba ng Pang. Ferdinand Marcos Jr. na protektahan ang agricultural assets sa pamamagitan nang pinaigting na border security, nadiskubre ng Bureau of Customs (BOC) nitong Huwebes ang may P505 milyong hinihinalang puslit na imported na bigas mula sa iba't ibang bodega sa lalawigan ng Bulacan.

Isang team na pinamumunuan mismo ni Customs Commissioner Bien Rubio, kasama sina Customs Intelligence and Investigation Service (CIIS) Director Verne Enciso, CIIS-Manila International Container Port (CIIS-MICP) agents, at Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Task Force Aduana, ang nag-inspeksiyon sa mga bodega ng Great Harvest Rice Mill Warehouse, San Pedro Warehouse, at FS Rice Mill Warehouse.

Ang mga ito ay matatagpuan sa Inter-city Industrial Complex sa San Juan, Balagtas, Bulacan, at natuklasang naglalaman ng may 202,000 sako ng imported rice grains mula sa Vietnam, Cambodia,

at Thailand.

Kasama sa isinagawang inspeksiyon sa mga bodega sina House Speaker Martin Romualdez at Reps. Erwin Tulfo, Wilfrido Mark Enverga, at Ambrosion

Cruz Jr. na pinasalaman din ni Rubio.

Tinukoy naman ni Intelligence Group Deputy Commissioner Juvymax Uy ang papel ng BOC sa layunin ng administrasyong Marcos na

maresolba ang isyu sa hoarding, na siyang nagtutulak upang tumaas ang presyo ng bigas sa merkado.

"If proven true, hoarding such a huge amount of rice grain will have legal consequences. There is no space in our fight against smuggling and hoarding for these kinds of operations. Together with key agencies, our commitment remains

steadfast—it is time to put an end to the crippling impact of smuggling," aniya.

Ayon kay Enciso, nakipag-coordinate ang BOC sa Philippine National Police (PNP) sa Balagtas, gayundin sa mga personnel mula sa Brgy. San Juan upang ipatupad ang Letter of Authority (LOA) na nilagdaan ni Commissioner Rubio.

Kung matuklasang walang kaukulang impor-

tation at proof of payment documents, isasagawa umano nila ang corresponding seizure at forfeiture proceedings laban sa subject shipments para sa paglabag sa Section 1400 (misdeclaration in goods declaration) in relation to Section 1113 (property subject to seizure and forfeiture) ng Republic Act No. 10863 o mas kilala bilang Customs Modernization and Tariff Act (CMTA).



Ang natuklasang mga nakaimbak na bigas sa ininspeksiyong mga bodega sa Bulacan na pansamantalang ipinadlock ng BOC.





## India set to ban sugar exports



Workers harvesting sugarcane in a field in Gove village in the western state of Maharashtra. (Reuters Photo)

MUMBAI/NEW DELHI- India is expected to ban mills from exporting sugar in the next season beginning October, halting shipments for the first time in seven years, as a lack of rain has cut cane yields, three government sources said.

India's absence from the world market would be likely to increase benchmark prices in New York and London that are already trading around multi-year highs, triggering fears of further inflation on global food markets.

"Our primary focus is to fulfil local sugar requirements and produce ethanol from surplus sugarcane," said a government source who asked not to be named in line with official rules. "For the upcoming season, we will not have enough sugar to allocate for export quotas."

India allowed mills to export only 6.1 million tons of sugar during the current season to Sept. 30, after letting them sell a record 11.1 million tons last season.

In 2016, India imposed a 20 percent tax on sugar exports to curb overseas sales.

Monsoon rains in the top cane growing districts of the western state of Maharashtra and the southern state of Karnataka - which together account for more than half of India's total sugar output - have been as much as 50 percent below average so far this year, weather department data showed.

Patchy rains would cut sugar output in the 2023/24 season and even reduce planting for the 2024/25 season, an industry official, who declined to be named, said.

Local sugar prices jumped this week to their highest level in nearly two years, prompting the government to allow mills to sell an extra 200,000 tons in August.

"Food inflation is a concern. The recent increase in sugar prices eliminates any possibility of exports," said another government source.

Retail inflation in India jumped to a 15-month high of 7.44 percent in July and food inflation to 11.5 percent - its highest in over three years. - Reuters