

CLIPPINGS FOR SATURDAY, AUGUST 26, 2023

A. SEC. PBBM QUOTED

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
Undoable

MANILA BULLETIN
Marcos Oks 3 new laws

ABANTE TONITE
BBM: Bigas matinding problema sa 'Pinas

B. DA FAMILY

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
Vegetable prices spike; tomatoes at P170 a kilo

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
'Inept leadership' in DA blamed for high rice prices
Sandiganbayan clears Ex-DA chief Alcala of graft
Gov't vows to revitalize coco industry

THE MANILA TIMES
Editorial: Safeguarding rice supply should be regular business
BFAR revives Apayao's inland waters

C. AGRI-RELATED STORY

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
Food security of yesteryears

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
Bulacan cleared of ASF but stays as 'Buffer Zone'

THE PHILIPPINE STAR
Lengthy El Niño hit on inflation seen

THE MANILA TIMES
Rice: Ganito kami noon... paano kayo ngayon?

D. FOREIGN STORY

BUSINESS MIRROR
US corn harvest is in trouble
Perfect storm for global rice supply: Dearth in harvest, El Niño and...



FIRST PERSON

ALEX MAGNO

Undoable

Asked by legislators if the price of rice will climb down to P20 per kilo before the end of the current presidential term, officials of the Department of Agriculture hewed and hawed.

There were too many factors in play, including global market conditions and the effects of climate change, they said. In the end, they conceded it might be "difficult."

The poor bureaucrats could have been more forthright. They could have said: "No. It is not going to happen."

Their bosses – including the Secretary of Finance and the Economic Planning Secretary – were still playing the Pied Piper's tune. Rice at P20 per kilo was doable, they say, without providing a convincing path to that goal.

The Secretary of Agriculture, a.k.a. the President of the Republic, ought to have stepped up to the plate. He should have spared his officials all the hewing and hawing by saying the price goal for rice was misspoken. It is no longer the goal.

Recall Cory Aquino's promise to bring down the price of *galunggong*, the poor man's fish, while she was campaigning for the presidency against the incumbent's father. The price of that particular fish just went up and up through her presidency. She avoided reminding anybody about that promise.

It was as if she simply shrugged her shoulders and muttered something about election campaign promises being meant to be broken.

Today, we actually import *galunggong* – from China, of all places. We have overfished our waters. At present prices, it is lucrative to fish the round scad.

The last few days, the price of rice is closing in on P60 per kilo. That is triple the price of rice promised during the election campaign. Given price stickiness, it is unlikely rice prices will turn around and head south.

Palay, unmilled rice, is now selling at about P35 per kilo. If we want to bring down the price of milled rice to P20, we will have to bring down palay prices to about P12 per kilo. The farmers will never accept that. We will have an agrarian rebellion on our hands.

The simple reason unmilled rice is selling at that price is the higher cost of farm inputs. Fertilizer and transport costs are higher. Those costs are not about to reverse, unless we court a calamitous deflation.

If we force the farmers to sell unmilled rice at a lower price than what is currently prevailing, they will simply stop farming. Tending to rice fields is not an act of charity. It is a means for economic survival.

If we start tampering with the market price for rice, our production will likely decline. That will create a greater need to import.



It used to be that we imported rice to avail of lower prices elsewhere. That is not the case anymore. After India banned exportation of non-basmati rice, the price of the commodity spiked in the global marketplace.

Because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and all the economic sanctions imposed on the aggressor, the price of fertilizer spiked as well. If we want to increase our rice yield, we will have to invest in more fertilizer inputs. We do not have the means to do so.

The sooner we abandon this delusion about dropping the price of rice, mainly through political and bureaucratic means, the better we will be able to avoid causing any unwarranted instability in our already feeble agricultural sector.

Defenestration

There is such a word: defenestration.

The root of that term is the Latin word for windows: *fenestre*. It refers to the act of throwing a troublesome political personality out of the window. Literally.

In the Middle Ages in Europe, it was not rare for mobs to rush a troublesome personality and push him out of the window. That brought an immediate end to whatever troubles were fomenting.

When Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin led a short-lived coup attempt against Vladimir Putin, analysts expected his life expectancy to have greatly shortened. He was warned against staying close to windows (a number of people who presented Putin problems mysteriously fell out of windows) and be very guarded about his intake of anything (a bigger number of troublesome personalities were poisoned, Novichok being the murderous substance of choice).

Last Wednesday, a private plane flying out of Moscow towards St. Petersburg apparently lost one of its wings and crashed, killing all on board. The fight manifest indicated Prigozhin and some senior Wagner leaders among the casualties. For now, it is presumed the controversial mercenary leader is dead.

Prigozhin was an asset by Putin's side, providing him a private army to leverage the regular military hierarchy. After the invasion of Ukraine lost steam and the Russian forces were forced back, only Prigozhin won any battle. But he used men recruited from Russia's prisons and thrown into battle like cannon fodder. He managed mercenary groups operating in the Middle East and Africa that pursued Russia's geopolitical objectives with the thinnest veneer of deniability and maximum for brutality.

After his aborted march on Moscow, Prigozhin became an intractable problem. He was not arrested for treason but allowed to move his forces to nearby Belarus. He continued with his operations in Africa. Their close personal friendship notwithstanding, he was effectively a threat to Putin's grip on power.

Prigozhin was not pushed out of the window. That was too medieval.

Moscow promised a thorough investigation of the incident. But no one really puts much faith in such investigations under Putin.

★



Marcos OKs 3 new laws

By ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has approved three significant laws that aim to protect the welfare of disabled military veterans, improve the country's business system, and strengthen the conservation and protection of Philippine cultural heritage.

In a statement, the Presidential Communications Office said Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin has signed the transmittal letters to Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri and House Speaker Martin Romualdez on August 24.

The letters, which will be transmitted on August 29, will notify

Congress regarding the approval of Republic Acts (RA) 11958, 11960, and 11961.

The first law that Marcos approved was RA 11958 which rationalizes the disability pension of veterans. It aims to provide a monthly disability pension to a veteran who is disabled due to sickness, disease, wounds, or injuries sustained in the line of duty under the rates provided by the new law.

RA 11960 titled An Act Institutionalizing the One Town, One Product (OTOP) Philippines Program, Appropriating Funds Therefor, and for Other Purposes, otherwise known as the OTOP Philippines Act, aims to develop a self-reliant and independent national economy effectively controlled by Filipinos through policies

and programs that drive inclusive local economic activity and boost national economic growth.

It seeks to provide adequate and effective support services for local micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) led by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) with the collaboration of various agencies such as the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) and the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Marcos also approved RA 11961 which amends the National Culture Heritage Act of 2009.

This measure strengthens the conservation and protection of Philippine culture heritage through cultural mapping and enhanced cultural heritage education programs.



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

BBM: Bigas matinding problema sa 'Pinas

Aminado si Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. na ang bigas ang pinakamatinding problema ngayon ng bansa.

Inihayag ito ng Pangulo sa ambush interview sa kanya sa San Antonio, Zambales nitong Biyernes nang umaga (Agosto 25).

"Right now, rice is our most critical problem and that is something that we are attending too with all of the partners that we have, both in government and in the private sector," pahayag ng Pangulo.

Bagama't mayroon ng mga ani ng palay mula sa Cagayan Valley at Central Luzon, mataas pa ang presyo ng bigas sa mga palengke na umaabot ng mahigit P50 per kilo depende sa klase nito.

Una na ring sinabi ni Pangulong Marcos na mayroong sapat na supply ng bigas hanggang sa dumating ang anihan subalit ang problema ay ang mataas na presyo nito.

Kada linggo nagpapatawag ng sectoral meeting ang Pangulo sa Malacañang at isa ang isyu ng bigas sa madalas na tinatalakay kasama ang mga opisyal ng Department of Agriculture at pribadong sektor. (Aileen Taliping)

Date: 26 AUG 2023 Page: 123



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Vegetable prices spike; tomatoes at P170 a kilo

By BELLA CARIASO

Retail prices of vegetables continue to increase a month after the devastation from Super Typhoon Egay and enhanced monsoon rains in many areas in the country.

Tomato prices have

reached as high as P170 per kilo after a slump in prices in April due to oversupply, when costs went down to as low as P3 per kilo.

Based on the monitoring of the Department of Agriculture (DA), the retail prices

Turn to Page 3

Vegetable From Page 1

of tomatoes ranged between P60 and P100 per kilo on July 20, prior to the destruction of Egay.

Egay entered the Philippine area of responsibility on July 21.

On April 2 the DA confirmed that the farmgate price of tomatoes dropped to P3 to P5 per kilo amid the oversupply, particularly in Regions 2 and 3.

Aside from tomatoes, retail prices of most vegetables also went up.

Based on the latest monitor-

ing of the DA, the retail prices of cabbage reached as high as P180 per kilo compared to P150 per kilo a month ago; Baguio beans, P210 per kilo compared to previous level of P120 per kilo; potatoes, P150 per kilo compared to the previous price of P140; *pechay* Baguio, P180 per kilo compared to P140 per kilo; *sayote*, P110 per kilo, compared to the previous P70 per kilo; bitter gourd, P160 per kilo compared to 120; *pechay* Tagalog, P140 per kilo compared to P100 per kilo and eggplant, P140 per kilo, compared to

previous P120 per kilo.

On the other hand, the retail prices of rice recorded an increase of P11 per kilo compared to its previous level on July 20.

Data from the DA showed that the retail prices of local regular milled rice ranged between P36 and P44 per kilo a month ago, compared to the latest prevailing price of P55 per kilo.

The retail prices of local well-milled rice a month ago ranged between P40 and P49 per kilo, compared to the latest price of P57 per kilo.

Meanwhile, the retail prices of local premium rice a month

ago ranged between P42 and P49 per kilo compared to P60 per kilo; and local special rice, between P48 and P60 per kilo, compared to the latest prices of 54 to P62 per kilo.

The DA has said the damage of Egay to high value crops in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), Ilocos Region (Region 1), Cagayan Valley (Region 2), Central Luzon (Region 3), CALABARZON (Region 4-A), MIMAROPA (Region 4-B), Western Visayas (Region 6), SOCCSKSARGEN (Region 12) and Caraga (Region 13) reached P200.8 million covering at least 1,510 hectares.



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

'DA HAS CENTRAL ROLE'

'INEPT LEADERSHIP' IN DA BLAMED FOR HIGH RICE PRICES

By Marlon Ramos
@MRamosINQ

Just look at the mirror.

Sen. Risa Hontiveros on Friday said the "inept leadership" in the Department of Agriculture (DA), headed by President Marcos as its concurrent secretary, was to blame for the current high prices of rice in the markets.

The opposition lawmaker said Malacañang and the DA should stop using unnamed individuals behind the supposed hoarding and price manipulation of the country's staple food as a convenient excuse to escape accountability.

"Malacañang should not look for culprits elsewhere as the main culprits are within the DA itself," Hontiveros said in a statement.

She said while it may be true that hoarders and price manipu-



RICE STOCKS Sacks of rice are stockpiled at the National Food Authority warehouse in Quezon City in this photo taken in 2020. —FILE PHOTO

lators were affecting the price and supply of rice, the DA "should acknowledge its central role in the alarming rise in rice prices."

"The DA's meddling in the implementation of the Food Safety Act slowed down rice importation, resulting in low inventories," she added.

According to Hontiveros, the Bureau of Plant Industry, an office under the agriculture department, did not issue a single sanitary and phyto-sanitary import clearance (SPSICs) for rice from June to December 2022.

Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban, she

added, was behind the "premeditated" limitation on the issuance of such permits during the first three months of the year.

This was apparently among the reasons why the reserve stocks of the National Food Authority (NFA) were not enough to cover the country's demand for rice during the lean months, the senator said.

Hontiveros said the NFA also failed to purchase sufficient rice for the required reserves of some 500,000 metric tons for third quarter of the year.

"I don't trust [Panganiban's] supposed expertise on this matter and the proposal for the NFA to be the importer of rice again," she said.

"SPSICs should not be used to stop rice importation as a way to supposedly protect rice farmers," she added. **INQ**



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

BUT FORMER AIDE FOUND GUILTY

SANDIGANBAYAN CLEARS EX-DA CHIEF ALCALA OF GRAFT

By Dempsey Reyes
@dempseyreyesINQ

The Sandiganbayan has cleared former Agriculture Secretary Proceso Alcala of graft in connection with the alleged irregular accreditation of a farmers' foundation that was found to have been incorporated by his executive assistant.

In a 40-page decision on Aug. 23, the court's Sixth Division acquitted Alcala "purely on reasonable doubt" but found his former head executive assistant Laureano Mañalac guilty of graft.

Mañalac was ordered to pay the Department of Agriculture (DA) P13.5 million, or the amount equivalent to what was granted to the foundation that was allegedly illegally accredited by the agency.

He was also sentenced six to 10 years of imprisonment and was banned for life from hold-



Proceso Alcala

ing public office.

As for Alcala, the Sandiganbayan lifted the hold departure order against him.

The case involves the DA's accreditation of Isa Akong Mag-sasaka Foundation Inc. (IAMFI) as the agency's development partner for its Agri-Pinoy Trading Center Program and releas-

ing P13.5 million to the foundation.

Under the program, the DA presented a new marketing system that was co-owned, operated and controlled by small farmers and fisherfolk through their cooperative or association.

It was meant to effectively address critical and long-standing concerns of small farmers and fisherfolk such as unfavorable market prices for their produce.

State prosecutors said that Mañalac was actually an incorporator of IAMFI, which violated a rule by the Commission on Audit and was therefore considered irregular.

In clearing Alcala, the Sandiganbayan said prosecutors had failed to prove his guilt beyond reasonable doubt based on the evidence presented during the hearings of the case while it pointed to the guilt of Mañalac.

Prosecutors believed that Al-

cala, being the agriculture secretary who granted the accreditation of IAMFI, should also go to prison "for damage sustained by government" after tapping the foundation as the agency's development partner and entering into a memorandum of agreement.

The court, however, sided with Alcala saying that the former top agriculture official relied on the "multiple layers of review" by his subordinates in accrediting the foundation.

But the court decided to find Mañalac guilty of graft, siding with the prosecution that the IAMFI should have been disqualified since the incorporators were related to him and worse, that he himself was an incorporator.

However, it disagreed with the prosecution that there was conspiracy between Alcala and Mañalac since the prosecution failed to establish such. INQ

Date: July 26, 2023 Page: A11



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Gov't vows to revitalize coco industry

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
@jordeenelagare

The government is moving to enhance capacity-building initiatives for coconut farmers as part of efforts to revitalize the local coconut industry, according to the Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF).

In a statement, PCAF said the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda) had been tasked to reevaluate the skills requirements of the sector to improve farmers' livelihood and productivity.

During a meeting convened by the National Sectoral Committee on Coconut, they recom-

mended the creation of a technical working group to develop and harmonize such programs.

Tesda's Yvette Joy Lazada said the agency was willing to facilitate the development of programs without existing training regulations with the help of industry players.

Training regulations refer to "the competency standards for a national qualification, containing the competency-based curriculum, instructional materials and competency assessment tools," according to PCAF, an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture (DA) that facilitates broad-based participatory processes in the agriculture and fisheries sector.

ATI deputy director Anton-



MODERNIZATION About 2.5 million small farmers are expected to benefit from the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan. —INQUIRER FILE PHOTO

ieta Arceo said their training programs were anchored on the training needs assessment provided by the Development Academy of the Philippines. It

also supports the DA's seed distribution.

"For example, there is a scheduled distribution of seeds or dairy animals, then the trainings

to be conducted in the area will be about seed and dairy," Arceo said.

Arceo said another training assessment would be conducted later this year. This would aid them in crafting the programs for 2024, she added.

Meanwhile, Lazada presented the 2023 work and financial plan along with the programs and initiatives under the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP).

This includes the coconut farmers scholarship program and the listing of initially identified skills requirements as validated by the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA). There is an ongoing PCA survey to determine the priority qualifications/skills in every region.

The CFIDP lays out various programs and projects needed to rehabilitate and modernize the industry, benefiting 2.5 million small farmers nationwide. This serves as the basis for tapping the controversial P75-billion coco levy fund.

In 2022, coconut output increased by 1.45 percent to 14.93 million metric tons (MT) from 14.71 million MT a year ago, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority. The country produced 3.4 million MT of coconut in the second quarter of this year, down by 1.5 percent from 3.5 million MT. Further, coconut oil exports stood at \$2.1 billion in the previous year, an increment of 46.7 percent from \$1.4 billion in 2021. **INQ**

26 AUG 2023

Date:

Page:

A4



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Editorial

Safeguarding rice supply should be regular business

IN a headline-grabbing move this week, House Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez, accompanied by a party that included a number of Philippine Coast Guard and Bureau of Customs personnel, as well as Bulacan Fifth District Rep. Ambrosio Cruz Jr., Quezon First District Rep. Mark Enverga and Rep. Erwin Tulfo of ACT-CIS party-list, conducted a surprise inspection of three rice warehouses in Bulacan, which resulted in one of them being temporarily closed due to a lack of cooperation from its owners.

The activity, as Romualdez explained, was to allow the lawmakers to see for themselves the status of the country's rice supply and to determine firsthand whether hoarding or smuggling is taking place, as that might explain the recent sharp rise in rice prices for consumers. We appreciate the sincerity of Congress in wanting to address the issue of high rice prices and inefficient supply, and it is creditable that some lawmakers are willing to do a bit of fieldwork to better inform themselves of current circumstances.

But the question needs to be asked: Is having the Speaker of the House of Representatives personally carrying out enforcement efforts against smuggling and hoarding really the most effective way to combat those chronic problems?

This is not a criticism of Speaker Romualdez or other members of Congress who engage in such activities; as we said, they should be given credit for being willing to be hands-on with their job responsibilities. Both houses of Congress have shown a keen interest in investigating the recent rise in rice prices and the apparent shortage of supply, but perhaps they need to take one step back and ask, why are these sorts of questions continually raised in the first place?

That is a bit of a rhetorical question, of course. The reason that the country regularly faces a "mystery" of suddenly spiking prices and short supplies of basic commodities is obvious: that, in spite of an overabundance of laws and regulations intended to prevent smuggling and exploitative business practices, enforcement is laughably lax. This time it's rice, but at other times sugar, onions, eggs, fish, or some other common food item that no one should ever have to worry about being able to buy when they need it, at a reasonable price.

Of course, there were Coast Guard and Customs personnel accompanying the Speaker to check on whether the rice found in the three warehouses — three, out of thousands across the country — was smuggled, but what are they doing the rest of the time when congressional VIPs and reporters are not present? What is the Department of Agriculture doing? Or the National Food Authority, whose one and only responsibility is to ensure the availability of an adequate supply of the staple that makes up 40 percent of the average Filipino's diet?

Consistent, transparent enforcement

While the exercise of Speaker Romualdez and his colleagues does offer some reassurance that the country's leadership is concerned for the people's well-being, for people to have real confidence that the government is not only addressing the problem, but is in fact carrying out its real responsibility of preventing the problem from arising in the first place, there must be consistent, transparent enforcement operations by the agencies whose job it is to do that.

We suspect that the average unscrupulous speculating trader probably does not worry for a moment that the Speaker of the House or another delegation of congressmen is going to show up on his doorstep despite the warning that such activities as the one earlier this week are intended to deliver. If that trader knows with certainty, however, that enforcement personnel will appear on a regular basis and that he will lose his business and go to jail if they find anything seriously amiss, he is very likely to mend his ways.

If the lack of enforcement is a matter of insufficient personnel or resources, then Congress should prioritize providing the responsible agencies what they need to make that constant excuse finally irrelevant. Yes, it may cost quite a lot to do that, but that cost will still be an inconsequential fraction of the much bigger cost to the entire economy of letting the problem continue.



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

BFAR revives Apayao's inland waters

THE Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) is helping revive inland bodies of water, particularly the Kapayanan Dam, in collaboration with the local government unit of Flora in Apayao province.

Led by Lilibeth Signey, BFAR CAR director, the bureau earlier this month, together with the municipality of Flora, planted some 100 fruit-bearing saplings such as rambutan, avocado, calamansi and coconut, including stocking of carp and red tilapia fingerlings in Kapayanan Dam.

Signey said this recent collaborative activity, also joined by the Anninipan Kapayanan Irrigators Association Inc. (AKIAI), is part of the bureau's Balik Sigla sa Ilog at Lawa (Basil) project. She described its other intentions: "to optimize economic benefits, enhance fisheries toward sustainability and repopulate Indigenous species in support of biodiversity conservation and food sufficiency."

The Basil project is part of the management of inland resources that aims to improve the country's resources and the water quality of degraded inland waters.

"By restoring rivers and lakes, improving fisheries and repopulating fish species — especially native ones — it strives to protect biodiversity, reduce poverty and address food sufficiency," she said.

The Basil project components include site evaluation or profiling, social



readiness/capacity building, rehabilitation through tree planting, creation of a brush park, stock enhancement and continuous monitoring.

The management and rehabilitation of Kapayanan Dam is a mutual initiative of the BFAR and the local government of Flora to effectively and responsibly utilize the inland resource.

Mayor Rodolfo Juan of Flora town said members of the AKIAI, as the beneficiaries of the project who also took part in this initiative, are expected under a memorandum of agreement to perform their responsibilities.

"... The members are tasked to help improve the water-holding capacity of the river through the clearing of aquatic weeds along the periphery of the river and upgrading of the perimeter embankment, among others," Juan said.

Fish repopulation

He also urged members of the associa-

tion to take initiative in the care and maintenance of the said man-made resource. He also encouraged them not to exploit and engage in any form of illegal fishing, giving them assurance that he "will support you and complement your needs."

Richard Pascua, AKIAI president, said the association will propose a measure to be implemented prohibiting fishing activities while fish stocks await to grow and multiply. With this regulation, Pascua said members of the association can wait for the fish to repopulate before catching them ahead of reaching the desired sizes.

Meanwhile, Signey also reminded the members of the association to sustain the project so that government funds will not be put to waste. She said the BFAR has also committed to giving more tilapia fingerlings that are required for the operation of the fish cage installed on the Kapayanan Dam.

LEANDER C. DOMINGO

REVIVING DAM WATER

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) helps revive inland bodies of water, particularly the Kapayanan Dam. Activities include stocking of carp and red tilapia fingerlings.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

CHIT U. JUAN

Food security of yesteryears

Smoking meats and fish has long been a way of preserving food. But did you know that even the source of the wood used in this slow method of cooking matters? I was talking to a chef who smokes pork and beef in his farm and he shared with me some tips: coffee trees which are not productive anymore are used as firewood. He uses *santol* tree cuttings as well.



Another chef who smokes ribs as a specialty travels to Batangas and Quezon in search of *sampalok* (tamarind) tree branches. These are slow-burning wood from trees that grow without chemical sprays. This is probably the same reason they do not use mango branches as they contain toxins, due to the practice of frequent spraying of mango trees to get rid of pests.

These and other tips are stuff you may not be able to read in books, but can only learn from age-old practices of farmers.

At a recent coffee farming seminar, Doc Andy Mojica shares that in Cavite, old folks spoke about coffee tree as "*mahina ang loob*" or faint-hearted because it always needs a companion tree or plant. The truth is, it needs some shade while growing up until it can fend for itself from the harsh sun and unexpected strong rains. It is a good thing to remember when planting coffee. Old wives' tales and tips from our elders are always useful, even if we still do not know the science behind it. But sooner or later, when we read books, we find out the real scientific reason behind some practices that have just been handed down from one generation to the next.

In other parts of the country, farmers refuse to rejuvenate trees – cutting them down to just a foot high in the case of coffee – because the elders or "gods" will get angry. This is why we are hard-pressed to rejuvenate century-old trees, and they grow to heights no longer practical, because one cannot pick fruits 20 or 30 feet high in those trees. That is the case with many coffee trees that grow amidst forest species. They struggle to find sunlight because the trees have grown taller, making them achieve ripeness at a later time, delivering a flavor that is special. So there indeed are trade offs – shade-grown coffee trees are hard to harvest from, but they develop unusual complex flavors during the long struggle for sunlight and a longer period of time consumed to ripeness.

Other practices of our older farmers actually follow the biodynamic way of farming, where bio or life is mixed with the energy of the cosmos. Though they have no term for it, farmers follow the moon when planting, spray their vitamins (biodynamic conco-

tions) during new moon and the sweeteners during full moon, and only at certain times of that day. Believe it or not, we do it now at the farm, following biodynamic practices and the fruits have never been sweeter and more plentiful. Some say that biodynamic agriculture is a higher form of organic farming.

At a recent radio show I was a guest in, we talked about sustainability and challenges in growing our own food. So I again harped on growing small farms while the hosts talked about the popular topic of land reform and policies. I choose to still insist on small farms to feed the farmers, or producers. Only their excess production must go to consumers. It is considered by many as a dreamy solution. While we argue about mono cropping vs multi cropping a farm, people in Coron, Palawan already have proven they can grow their own vegetables after our talks under The Coron Initiative project in 2012. I now know of small farms supplying hotels and restaurants. When we first went to Coron in 2012, they imported all their vegetables from Puerto Princesa, which were imported from Baguio and Balintawak. It took almost 10 years, but Coron can now be self-sufficient. Necessity is, indeed, the mother of invention.

Another successful insular solution in food production is Isabela City in Basilan. During the pandemic, they were isolated and they realized they had no choice but to grow their own food, fish their own seafood and this actually brought about a growth in their economy. Though they also realized they could not eat rubber (Isabela has plenty of rubber tree plantations), this made the local government and the province rethink their agricultural priorities. Coffee and fruit trees are now the choices in lieu of rubber. So if even a small city can survive on its own, why can we not do this in the other island provinces? To be isolated can actually be a blessing – they contained their COVID cases, and people grew their own food.

Examples like Coron and Isabela City are not accidents in planning or are part of an LGU master plan. They were brought about by sheer need (*matinding pangangailangan*) – the need to be self-sufficient in food production rather than depend on imports from other provinces. Now, take those success stories to a macro-level, that of the whole country. Is it hard to imagine being food secure?

Let us put on our creative hats as our forefathers did. It does not need reading textbooks or hiring consultants. We just follow what our ancestors did – whether it is practicing organic agriculture or biodynamic farming, the solution is right before our eyes.

But did they think of making money? They did not have money. They just hunted and fed their young. They planted and reaped harvests. There was no talk about money. Money is the root that leads to the long discussions about accomplishing most of the time, nothing.

So let's try another route. Self sufficiency through old practices: heirloom seeds that continue to grow each time we plant, growing food for our own families and communities, and keeping our harvested rice for our own use and not for selling.





HOG DISEASE STILL IN SURROUNDING AREAS

BULACAN CLEARED OF ASF BUT STAYS AS 'BUFFER ZONE'

CITY OF MALOLOS—The province of Bulacan has been declared free of the contagious African swine fever (ASF) as the provincial government received P6 million worth of biodisinfectants and cash donations from a sociocivic group in Taiwan, officials said on Friday.

Voltaire Basinang, Bulacan provincial veterinary officer, said the province had been placed in the "pink" category, or buffer zone, after the Department of Agriculture regional office confirmed that there had been no cases of ASF recorded this month.

But Bulacan has yet to be placed in the "green" category (ASF-free zone) since it is still surrounded by infected areas, Basinang said, noting that some localities in nearby provinces remained under the "red" (ASF-infected) and "yellow" (recovered) categories.

Prior to the ASF-free declaration, the province was tagged as a red zone, with about 5,000 backyard and commercial hog raisers affected by the classification, Basinang said.

ASF is a highly contagious viral disease affecting pigs. Symptoms include high fever, weakness or lethargy, loss of appetite, rashes or hives, vomiting, and diarrhea.

Bulacan was also hit by ASF outbreaks in 2017 and 2019, affecting 17 hog-producing municipalities and cities, according to Gov. Daniel Fernando.

Added protection

On Thursday, Fernando led local officials in receiving gallons of biodisinfectants from the Rotary Club of Changwa Central under the Rotary International District 3462 in Taiwan to help the province maintain its ASF-free status.

"The donations will be a big help for our hog raisers as they start anew after being hit by ASF. These biodisinfectants will serve as advance protection for their farms," Fernando said during a ceremony in this city.

In Ilocos Sur province, the city government of Vigan has banned the entry of swine, pork and pork-related products as part of tighter measures to prevent the spread of swine fever in the city.

In an executive order on Thursday, Vigan Mayor Jose Singson Jr. said there was a need to "elevate surveillance" and impose stricter measures to avoid "serious economic and production losses."

The temporary ban covered live pigs and pork products coming from areas in the second district of Ilocos Sur, except for the towns of Santa and Narvaca, the mayor said.

Singson had also ordered the city's slaughterhouse master to ensure that all swine entering the city abattoir had veterinary certificates or livestock inspection certificates.

Village officials were mandated to assist local governments in hog inventory, monitoring and biosecurity surveillance, while the public was urged to report "suspicious incidents of swine mortality."

In Ilocos Norte, the provincial veterinary office earlier asked hog raisers, traders and meat vendors to strictly follow biosecurity protocols to prevent the reemergence of swine fever in the province, which wiped out at least P50 million worth of hog stocks during an outbreak in 2021.

—REPORTS FROM CARMELA REYES-ESTROPE AND JOHN MICHAEL MUGAS INQ



Lengthy El Niño hit on inflation seen

By LAWRENCE AGCAOILI

The full impact of El Niño-related disruptions on inflation in the Philippines is expected to be felt starting in the second quarter of 2024 until early 2025, according to ANZ Research.

In its latest insight titled "The Philippines: Assessing the El Niño Risk," ANZ chief economist for Southeast Asia Sanjay Mathur and economist Debalika Sarkar said the weather condition associated with above-average sea-surface temperatures and sub-normal rainfall could intensify in the coming months and persist into early 2024.

Mathur and Sarkar said El Niño-related disruptions pose a risk to the consumer price index (CPI) and external account dynamics of the Philippines.

"We see an upside risk to inflation on food, which makes up nearly 35 percent of the CPI basket. Power tariffs may also rise if there are supply disruptions," the authors said.

They pointed out that a study by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) showed that the effects of an El Niño shock on inflation would take time and become more pronounced after three to four quarters.

"The full impact of the current event on inflation could be clearer from the second quarter of 2024 and may last until early 2025," Mathur and Sarkar said.

ANZ said food prices are already on the radar, with a notable uptick since May, as July data showed that around 74 percent of the items included in the food category increased, pushing up overall headline food inflation by 0.49 percent month-on-month.

As annual increases are still

mild owing to a favorable base, ANZ said price increases were sharp for rice at 0.9 percent month-on-month, corn at 1.8 percent and vegetables at 6.1 percent.

If food prices retain their July momentum of 0.49 percent month-on-month, Mathur and Sarkar said inflation may settle 10 basis points higher than ANZ's full-year baseline inflation forecast of 5.3 percent for this year.

"While this may seem mild, we should bear in mind that the base was high at 5.8 percent. This estimate is also a conservative one as it does not take into consideration the more recent spike in rice prices," they said.

According to ANZ, the month-to-date increase in rice prices has been around 12.1 percent.

"Incorporating this pace of increase in rice prices, the full year 2023 inflation will be 30-basis-point higher than our present forecast. Moreover, giv-

en that El Niño-related inflation builds up over several quarters, it will remain elevated through the first half of 2024 when favorable base effects will also fade," the authors warned.

Inflation averaged 5.8 percent in the first seven months of the year, still above the two to four percent target range set by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP).

The BSP sees inflation easing to within the target band by the fourth quarter of the year as it decided to extend its hawkish pause by keeping key policy rates untouched anew on Aug. 17.

To tame inflation and stabilize the peso, the BSP raised interest rates by 425 basis points between May last year to March this year.

"Monetary policy has little ability to control food inflation, but the BSP may need to act if second-round effects become prominent and inflation expectations are de-anchored,"

they said.

The authors also cited that the high share of food in the CPI basket, as well as relatively greater reliance on imported food could have a material impact on both inflation and trade.

ANZ said the Philippines' dependence on imported food makes its external account susceptible to even mild weather shocks and global food price movements.

The country's import dependency ratio for food is 25.1 as it sources nearly a quarter of its food requirements from the rest of the world. Food imports also account for 12 percent of total imports.

For rice alone, the country's import dependency ratio is 18.5.

"All else equal, rice prices alone could swell the Philippines' food imports in 2023 without any domestic production cut. Global rice prices have been rising, driven by India's rice export ban and fears of a

fall in global production," ANZ said.

It said what could make matters worse for the Philippines this time is a low rice inventory.

It warned that there could be additional efforts by rice traders to replenish stocks before the reduced import tariff of 35 percent for rice sourced from outside Southeast Asia expires in December.

ANZ said the impact of a weak El Niño on overall gross domestic product growth would be confined to a fall in agricultural output that accounts for around 10 percent of GDP.

"A one percent fall in agriculture output will reduce GDP growth by 0.1 percent. In the event of a medium to severe El Niño, sectors such as hydropower and food processing will also suffer. From the demand side, losses in agriculture incomes will feed through to household consumption," it said.



Rice: Ganito kami noon ... paano kayo ngayon?

RECENT-
LY,
there
was a
public
uproar



BOILED GREEN
BANANAS

LEONOR
MAGTOLIS BRIONES

over the announced increase in the price of rice. For a country dependent on rice as a staple food, the news triggered panic and anxiety, especially among low-income groups whose incomes remain stagnant even as prices are rising along with rice.

For elderly Filipinos, the news does not come as a surprise. The country has suffered from chronic rice shortages all the time.

► BrionesA6

Thus, one can experience and survive several "rice crises" in a lifetime!

Ironically, even as 100 million Filipinos believe their hunger can only be satisfied by rice, self-sufficiency remains an elusive goal. Through the years, rice production was variously affected by wars, e.g., the revolution against Spain, the Philippine-American War, the anti-Japanese guerrilla war, and the war between Japan and the United States. Storms and typhoons have contributed to the destruction of rice crops. At present, climate change is a major challenge which affects not only rice production but the entire agriculture sector as well. A final contributory factor is political upheavals, changes in international trade agreements and geopolitical considerations.

The Philippines has been importing rice for the longest time. The importation of rice was an established trade policy during the American regime. According to Dr. O.D. Corpuz, economic historian, political scientist and public administration expert, we were already importing rice from Vietnam and Burma over a hundred years ago! Corpuz's book, "Economic History of the Philippines," contains a table listing rice imports from 1901 to 1936 up to the last peso.

The bright spot in our battle for self-sufficiency in rice production is the period of "The Green Revolution" during the regime of the late President Ferdinand E. Marcos Sr. This was the time when the International Rice Research Institute was established at UP Los Baños. Rice scientists from all over the world converged in the facility. A gene bank was established and different varieties of rice were developed.

Information about the "Masagana 99" program was widely disseminated about a new variety of rice which could produce 100 cavans of palay per hectare.

Students from all over the world started coming to UP Los Baños to learn how to produce more rice. The government proudly announced that our country was already exporting rice.

Soon, the chronic problem of rice shortages cropped up again and again for a variety of reasons. In 2008, I wrote a column "Isang Dakot na Bigas" or "A handful of rice" based on a movie of the same title. I warned against the repercussions of rice shortages.

Movies, books, poems and songs linked to rice are part of our cultural heritage. Rice shortages have triggered political, economic and social upheavals. These upheavals are linked to other issues associated with rice, e.g., agrarian problems, particularly land ownership and ideological issues.

Perhaps it's high time we broaden our preference for rice as a staple to other food crops, especially those which will thrive under climate change. There have been efforts and proposals along these lines as early as the 1970s and 1980s.

Climate change, the "inconvenient truth" which we conveniently ignore, cannot be brushed aside any longer.

I am aware that turning to alternative food crops will take time since rice is part and parcel of our national culture. As a corn-eating child in Negros Oriental, I grew up singing "Planting Rice Is Never Fun" without seeing a single stalk of rice. Actually, we ate corn, bananas, camote, gabi, ube and other root crops. I studied pictures of peasants planting and harvesting without seeing such scenes in real life.

It was only when I moved to Dumaguete as a 13-year-old college student that I learned to eat rice. The dominant attitude during that time was that rice was sosyal while corn was eaten by the poor, the peasants and those at the very bottom of the social strata.

Now I am a faithful rice-eater. I dread the thought of being deprived of rice during a rice shortage. Nonetheless, I know that our country will be shaken intermittently by shortages, and upheavals will be triggered. The pattern will continue as long as we don't face the challenges which have confronted us for generations. We cannot continue clinging exclusively to rice as staple food with climate change wreaking havoc on agriculture and everywhere else.

One of the most unforgettable Filipino films which won national and international acclaim is "Ganito Kami Noon... Paano Tayo Ngayon."

Perhaps, we should ask ourselves a parallel question: We have been importing rice for centuries. We have been experiencing rice shortages regularly. During the colonial period, we imported rice from neighboring countries. At present, we are still at it.

Ganito kami noon ... paano kayo ngayon?



LIBRARY

DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

US

corn harvest is in trouble

SAGGING ears just short of maturity, cobs half bare of kernels as if nibbled, earth so dry that deep cracks criss-cross the fields: The US corn harvest is in trouble.

The signs were already there in South Dakota. Scouts surveying fields there this week found what farmers call tip back, when corn kernels aren't filled all the way to the top of the cob as a result of dryness and poor pollination. It leaves them looking half eaten.

As participants on the crop tour moved deeper into the growing belt, things got worse. In Ohio, scouts found immature ears of grain, indicating that the crop still has weeks left in the growing season. That leaves plants vulnerable to this week's heat wave.

Temperatures topping 100F (38C) are descending on the Midwest. Conditions are changing so fast that even some results from the tour—seen as more timely and less conservative than government estimates—are already out of date.

"Things are changing right in front of our eyes," said Thayne Larson, who has grown alfalfa, hay, and corn in Kansas for 50 years. "It's so disappointing when you have what you thought could be a healthy crop, and then the conditions just become extremely, extremely challenging."

Crops go 'backwards'

With food security already under threat from Europe to Asia, the world has been counting on a big corn harvest to help keep food inflation at bay. A disappointing US harvest could have ripple effects on markets across the globe.

Much will come down to Iowa, the No. 1 US corn grower and where sixth-generation farmer Ben Rieneche is for the first time ever watching his crop go "backwards" because of the heat.

His corn stalks went from bright and green to slightly gray. Instead of sitting tight against the plant, the corn ears are flopping down, the husk has turned brown and the bottom of the stalk—where the plants connects to the roots that go deep underground—looks like it's been burned. It means that the plant is dead.

"We're at the point of no return in Iowa," Rieneche, who farms 15,000 acres in the state, said while he was tending to livestock, making sure they had enough water, food and shade to survive the heat. It was 101F as he spoke late Wednesday afternoon. "I've never seen a crop go backwards like this—literally get killed by the hot, dry weather."

Tour results

EARLY results from the Pro Farmer Midwest Crop Tour are raising concerns that the crop will fall short of the US

Department of Agriculture's (USDA) production outlook. Data collected in the first three days of the tour—which don't fully capture real-time heat damages—show yields are trailing USDA estimates in Ohio, Nebraska, Indiana and Illinois. Only South Dakota looked better-than-forecast.

On Thursday evening, the final tour results will be released.

The heat is hurting soybeans even more as the crop is earlier in its growing season than corn. Pods were falling off plants as the scouts counted them, said Brent Judisch, who's part of this week's crop tour.

"This heat is doing more stress than we thought, because it is 100F outside, but as you walk into the fields you feel the temperature rising," Judisch said. "This is my 11th crop tour, and I don't remember a heat like this. We have never experienced this in Iowa."

For many regions of the US crop belt, this season has been marked by turbulence. High temperatures are hitting Midwest fields just when rains in July seemed to have undone the damages of a hot, dry June.

'Absolutely devastated'

THIS season is the "most stressful" Larson of Kansas has ever had when it comes to challenges from Mother Nature. Drought, strong winds, storms

and hail have all hit crops this summer.

But it's this week's bout of extreme heat that's really sealed the fate for his yields. The plants on his fields are shrinking. They going into "protection mode," he said.

"You look at what's going on in Kansas right now, we had a beautiful crop that in a week has been absolutely devastated," said Gregg Doud, chief economist at Aimpoint Research and former chief agriculture negotiator under the Trump administration.

To be sure, the variability of this year's crop—largely a result of spotty rainfall—suggests that there are beautiful areas that can help to make up for losses in others.

Early measurements in Iowa on Wednesday showed that corn yields can vary from almost 200 bushels an acre at the higher end, to the worst fields in some counties that have yields below 100.

"We were really surprised with the high yield variation that we are seeing," said Brian Grete, leader of the eastern leg of the crop tour and editor of the Pro Farmer newsletter.

For Rieneche in Iowa, the damage from the current high temperatures "is unprecedented," he said.

"Our crop is literally dying right now," Rieneche said. "Corn was not meant to be grown in the desert." *Bloomberg News*



Perfect storm for global rice supply

Dearth in harvest, El Niño and export tightening threaten staple grain supply from Africa to Asia

BY ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL & EVELYNE MUSAMBI
The Associated Press

FRANCIS NDEGE isn't sure if his customers in Africa's largest slum can afford to keep buying rice from him.

Prices for rice grown in Kenya soared a while ago because of higher fertilizer prices and a years-long drought in the Horn of Africa that has reduced production. Cheap rice imported from India had filled the gap, feeding many of the hundreds of thousands of residents in Nairobi's Kibera slum who survive on less than \$2 a day.

But that is changing. The price of a 25-kilogram (55-pound) bag of rice has risen by about a fifth since June, going from the equivalent of about \$14 to \$18. Wholesalers are yet to receive new stocks since India, the world's largest exporter of rice by far, said last month that it would ban some rice shipments.

It's an effort by the world's most populous nation to control domestic prices ahead of a key election year—but it's left a yawning gap of around 9.5 million metric tons (10.4 tons) of rice that people around the world need, roughly a fifth of global exports.

"I'm really hoping the imports keep coming," said Ndege, 51, who's sold rice for 30 years.

He isn't the only one. Global food security is already under threat since Russia halted an agreement allowing Ukraine to export wheat and the El Niño weather phenomenon hampers rice production.

Soaring prices

NOW, rice prices are soaring—Vietnam's rice export prices, for instance, have reached a 15-year high—putting the most vulnerable

people in some of the poorest nations at risk.

The world is at an "inflection point," said Beau Damen, a natural resources officer with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization based in Bangkok.

Even before India's restrictions, countries already were frantically buying rice in anticipation of scarcity later when the El Niño hit, creating a supply crunch and spiking prices.

What could make the situation worse is if India's ban on

non-basmati rice creates a domino effect, with other countries following suit. Already, the United Arab Emirates has suspended rice exports to maintain its domestic stocks. Another threat is if extreme weather damages rice crops in other countries.

El Niño threat

AN El Niño is a natural, temporary and occasional warming of part of the Pacific Ocean that shifts global weather patterns, and climate change is making them stronger. Scientists expect the one underway to expand to supersized levels, and, in the past, they have resulted in extreme weather ranging from drought to flooding.

The impact would be felt worldwide. Rice consumption in Africa has been growing steadily, and most countries are heavily

CONTINUED ON A2



LIBRARY DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

CONTINUED FROM A1

dependent on imports.

While nations with growing populations like Senegal have been trying to grow more of their own rice—many are struggling.

Amadou Khan, a 52-year-old unemployed father of five in Dakar, says his children eat rice with every meal except breakfast, which they often have to skip when he's out of work. "I am just getting by—sometimes, I've trouble taking care of my kids," he said.

Imported rice—70 percent of which comes from India—has become prohibitively expensive in Senegal, so he's eating homegrown rice that costs two-thirds as much.

Senegal will turn to other trading partners like Thailand or Cambodia for imports, though the West African country is not "far from being self-sufficient" on rice, with over half of its demand grown locally, Agriculture Ministry spokesperson Mamadou Aïcha Ndiaye said.

PHL's rice dilemma

ASIAN countries, where 90 percent of the world's rice is grown and eaten, are struggling with production. The Philippines was carefully managing water in anticipation of less rain amid the El Niño when typhoon "Egay" (International code

name: Doksuri) battered its northern rice-producing region, damaging \$32 million worth of rice crops—an estimated 22 percent of its annual production.

The archipelago nation is the second-largest importer of rice after China, and President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has underscored the need to ensure adequate buffers.

India's rice restrictions also were motivated by erratic weather: An uneven monsoon along with a looming El Niño meant that the partial ban was needed to stop food prices from rising, Indian food policy expert Devinder Sharma said.

The restrictions will take offline nearly half the country's usual rice exports this year, said Ashok Gulati of the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relation. Repeated restrictions make India an unreliable exporter, he added.

"That's not good for the export business because it takes years to develop these markets," Gulati said.

Vietnam, another major rice exporter, is hoping to capitalize. With rice export prices at a 15-year high and expectations that annual production to be marginally higher than last year, the Southeast Asian nation is trying to keep domestic prices stable while boosting exports.

The Agriculture Ministry says it's working to increase how much land in the Mekong Delta is dedicated to growing rice by around 500 square kilometers—an area larger than 90,000 football fields.

Already the Philippines is in talks with Vietnam to try to get the grain at lower prices, while Vietnam also looks to target the United Kingdom, which receives much of its rice from India.

But exporters like Charoen Laothamatas in neighboring Thailand are wary. The Thai government expects to ship more rice than it did last year, with its exports in the first six months of the year 15 percent higher than the same period of 2022.

The India factor

BUT the lack of clarity about what India will do next and concerns about the El Niño means Thai exporters are reluctant to take orders, mill operators are unwilling to sell and farmers have increased the prices of unhusked rice, said Laothamatas, president of the Thai Rice Exporters Association.

With prices fluctuating, exporters don't know what prices to quote—because prices may spike again the next day.

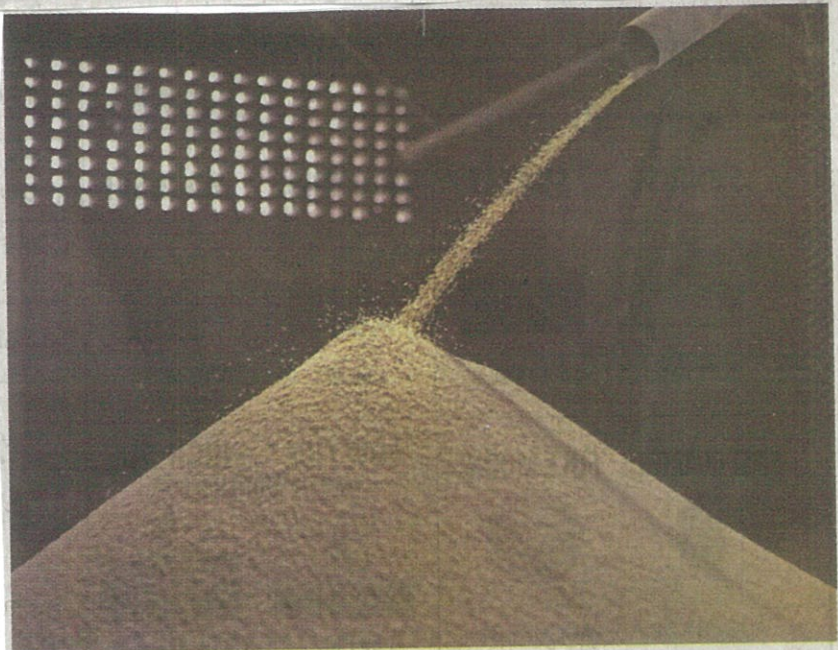
"And no one wants to take the risk," Laothamatas said.



ON July 17, 2023, a Kadiwa market, a marketing initiative by the Department of Agriculture, was set up in front of Pasay City Hall, offering rice at a price of P25 pesos kilo. NONIE REYES



A VARIETY of milled rice prices are showcased in a retail store in Las Piñas City, January 16, 2023. NONIE REYES



RICE is sorted in a factory in Makhu, in the Indian state of Punjab, on March 12, 2021. Countries worldwide are scrambling to secure rice after a partial ban on exports by India cut supplies by roughly a fifth. Even before India's restrictions, countries already were frantically buying rice in anticipation of scarcity later when the El Niño hit, creating a supply crunch and spiking prices.

AP PHOTO/MANISH SWARUP