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BSP ADOPTS VARIABLE RATE FORMAT FOR RRP

PBBM vows aid for rice retailers; off to Asean meet

BY SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA
@sam_medenilla

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said the government will tap the P6.4-billion sustainable livelihood program (SLP) fund of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to provide aid to small-scale rice retailers affected by the price ceiling under his Executive Order (EO) No. 39.

In his speech before flying to Indonesia to attend the 43rd Association of Southeast Asian Nation (Asean) Summit and related summits, the chief execu-

tive disclosed the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Department of Agriculture (DA) are now coming out with the list of qualified beneficiaries for the initiative through the help of rice retailer associations.

"The rice retailers should have nothing to worry about. We understand that you will face an ordeal [because of EO 39], since you will suffer losses. The government is there to provide you assistance so you can recoup your losses from the price cap," Marcos said in Filipino.

"The DSWD already assured us it has the fund so that once we compute the profit losses of rice retailers, we will provide them with the corresponding aid," he added.

DSWD Secretary Rexlon "Rex" T. Gatchalian confirmed they have sufficient SLP funds to finance the cash grants for the affected retailers.

"We know the capital of the small rice retailers will be affected [by EO 39]. That is where DSWD will come in as ordered by the President to ensure their needed capital will not be exhausted because of the Executive Order," Gatchalian said.

Other assistance

HE said DSWD already has the necessary mechanism in place to immediately facilitate the payout as soon as they get the list of beneficiaries from DTI and DA.

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The cash aid was among the measures discussed during the meeting of Marcos with concerned Cabinet members and rice stakeholders on Monday to help retailers and farmers affected by EO 39.

Aside from the SLP, the government will provide the affected retailers with loan programs, logistics support and market linkages through DTI.

As for farmers, they will be linked to supermarket chains and other retailers, finding alternative markets, and promoting bulk buying or advance purchases as well as providing transport for rice stock purchased at the level of the price ceiling or above to Diskwento Caravan sites and selling directly to consumers.

Necessary measure

EO 39 imposed a price cap of P41 per kilogram (kg) for regular milled rice (RMR) and P45 per kg for well-milled rice (WMR) nationwide to address the surge in the price of the food staple.

Marcos defended the need for the price ceiling to address the recent spike in rice prices, which he attributed to attempts of smugglers and hoarders to manipulate the prices of the food staple amid the ongoing harvest season.

"As much as possible, I don't want to tamper with the market and let it do its work...but our market is being manipulated so the government has to step in by putting in place the price ceiling for the price of rice," he said.

To help keep the prices stable, the DA will also conduct inventory and supply management of rice among major rice producers as well as intensify its enforcement of rice prices.

Meanwhile, the rice trader members of the Philippine Rice Industry Stakeholders Movement (PRISM) have committed to sell rice at P38 per kilogram.

The price cap will continue to take effect starting on September 5, 2023 until it is lifted by the President.

The chief executive said he expects the price cap will be temporary until the peak of the harvest season and the arrival of the rice imports from the private sector.

"The rice supply will be coming in the second week of September. These include the harvest from the Philippines and those which are imported. There will be no reason to raise the price of rice and we can bring it back to the price that we are used to," Marcos said.

Based on DA's weekly monitoring report in Metro Manila, the retail price of RMR is P51 per kg and P52.45 for WMR from August 28, 2023 to September 1, 2023.

Constant monitoring

MARCOS said he will continue to monitor the situation on rice prices even during his participation at the ongoing 43rd Asean Summit in Jakarta, Indonesia from September 5 to 7.

At the summit, he said he will push for Philippine priorities in Asean and to work with other Asean Member States.

The priorities include a rules-based international order, including in the South China Sea, strengthening food security, calling for climate justice, tapping the potential of the digital and creative economies, protecting migrant workers in crisis situations, as well as combating Trafficking-in-Persons.

"My administration will continue to ensure that our constructive engagements with Asean, our Dialogue Partners, and stakeholders serve our national interest and the well-being of the Filipino people," the President said.

The chief executive will also lead in government initiatives to secure more foreign investments from Indonesia.

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HOUSE, DBM TWEAK '23 BUDGET FOR P2-B RICE RETAILERS' AID

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ

[@joveemarie](#)

THE House of Representatives is working closely with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to allocate P2 billion in cash assistance for retailers affected by the rice price ceiling imposed by the Palace, Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez announced on Monday.

Romualdez instructed Ako Bicol Party-list Rep. Elizaldy Co, the chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations, to immediately coordinate with DBM for the swift allocation of the P2 billion.

"Our goal is to ensure that we can extend assistance to rice retailers

who may be affected by this rice price ceiling, as it is a directive from our President aimed at protecting consumers," Romualdez explained.

Co said his committee has coordinated with DBM Secretary Amenah Pangandaman to explore avenues for the allocation under the 2023 General Appropriations Act.

"We will promptly engage with the DBM to expedite the release of the P2 billion funds for our rice retailers," Co said.

Romualdez vowed Congress's commitment to fortifying and bolstering the resilience of essential food supply chains.

He earlier disclosed plans to also engage with leaders of rice retailers

later this week to hear their concerns on potential financial losses from the rice price ceiling.

"The government is not insensitive, so we want to listen to their concerns, and we will try to find a solution to address their fears of incurring losses," the Speaker said.

"We are aware that they have high costs from traders, but our priority is the public's difficulty in buying rice," he added.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on Friday issued Executive Order No. 39, setting prices at P41.00 per kilo for regular milled rice and P45.00 for well-milled rice starting September 5. This action was prompted by government intelligence indicating that certain un-

scrupulous traders planned to hike rice prices to as high as P70.00 per kilo.

Romualdez compared this situation to what occurred with onion prices when onion cartels raised them to P800 per kilo.

"Naturally, the President had to act swiftly to counter this ill-intentioned plan by a select few," said Romualdez.

Retailers, however, expressed their dissatisfaction, noting that they procure rice from traders for nearly P50 per kilo.

"But rest assured, the government is committed to supporting our retailers affected by this executive order," said the Speaker.

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Gambit

HOUSE Committee on Ways and Means Chairman Joe Sarte Salceda backed the setting of a rice price ceiling "as a signal against potential

price manipulation and hoarding in the domestic rice market" and said that "it worked" as a signal to the global market.

"As long as we have a gameplan

for the next steps—such as boosting local rice supply and diversifying our import sources—we will come out of this crisis strong," Salceda said.

"As a signal to the global market, the actions of the Marcos administration have also worked. You see, the behavior of the Philippines massively affects the movement of global rice prices. So, our signaling that we will be aggressive against price manipulation seems to have shown the world market that we will not condone artificial jumps in the price of rice," he elaborated.

As a sign that the initial shock in price last July was "artificial," Salceda cited world rice spot prices, which, at USD332.4 per metric ton, are now lower than the July peak of USD 384 and are almost at the pre-Indian export ban price of USD 332.

This, he said, basically says "that we should be able to source from other countries. Asean partners like Vietnam and Thailand are also some of the world's leading producers. We should work on hammering out agreements with them by now."

Salceda also said the country should consider sourcing from other non-Asean countries like Pakistan and the United States.

"We also did something similar during an earlier rice price crisis, in 2008, when the NFA imported rice from California and distributed it to its outlets."

"We've seen this crisis before. We know how to deal with it. It mostly involves signaling to our world partners that we will not over-import, so that they don't anticipate and drive prices up."

Salceda recalled that in the 2008 rice price crisis, India imposed a similar export ban, which also disturbed the world rice markets and pushed up the price of rice in the Philippines.

"This will dissipate because the source of the world price increase is artificial. The world price situation is also starting to normalize," Salceda added.

Flexible order

SALCEDA, however, appealed that EO 39 "be made more flexible to address regional market conditions."

"The situation will vary per region, so a national rice price ceiling should be made more responsive to local supply-demand dynamics."

"In rice deficit or totally rice-dependent areas like NCR, the situation will be different from, say, a rice-surplus region like Region II. So, some update to that EO will be necessary most likely when it plays out later," he said.



Gov't stands firm: Rice price caps start today

Aid for small retailers eyed

By HELEN FLORES

Market manipulation prompted the government to intervene and impose a price ceiling on rice to control the spike in prices, **President Marcos** said yesterday, as he committed financial aid for retailers that would suffer losses due to the price cap.

Signed by Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin on Aug. 31, Executive Order 39 set the price ceiling for regular milled rice at P41 per kilo and P45 a kilo for well-milled rice nationwide, effective today.

"We cannot see good reasons why the price of rice will increase like this, exceeding P50 per kilo. But our markets are being manipulated so the government must intervene and that's what we're doing – we implemented price ceilings for rice," Marcos said in his speech before departing for Jakarta, Indonesia for the 43rd Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit yesterday.

"Now, in our study, the only reason for this is that there are really smugglers and hoarders," the President said.

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Marcos stressed the price ceiling would not last long as the supply of the staple is expected to increase with the onset of the harvest season and the arrival of rice imports.

"We need to explain that this (price cap) is just temporary," he said.

He added that the government is readying financial assistance for rice retailers who may be affected by the mandated price ceiling.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) and Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) will come up with a list of retailers and the corresponding losses they may incur due to the price caps.

Earlier in the day, Marcos, who is also the agriculture secretary, met with officials of several government agencies at Malacañang to discuss mitigating measures in connection with the implementation of EO 39.

During the meeting, Social Welfare Secretary Rex Gatchalian presented the proposed livelihood assistance or the Sustainable Livelihood Program for small-scale rice retailers and the proposed social safety net for affected rice retailers.

Latest data from the DA showed that imported commercial rice ranges from P47.50 to P57 per kilo while local commercial rice is priced slightly higher at P51 to P59 a kilo.

P2-B aid for retailers

In Congress, Speaker Martin Romualdez directed a committee of the House of Representatives to find ways to allocate P2 billion to help retailers cope with possible losses as a result of the government's cap on rice prices.

"Our goal is to ensure that we can extend assistance to rice retailers who may be affected by this rice price ceiling, as it is a directive from our President aimed at protecting consumers," he said, as he instructed chairman Rep. Zaldy Co to coordinate with the budget department.

The Ako Bicol party-list congressman, for his part, agreed and vowed to coordinate with Department of Budget and Management (DBM) Secretary Amenah Pangandaman to swiftly explore avenues for the allocation of the specified amount.

"We will promptly engage with the

DBM to expedite the release of the P2-billion funds for our rice retailers," said Co, chairman of the chamber's 54-member Party-list Coalition Foundation Inc.

Romualdez also warned rice hoarders that their establishments will be shut down and business taken over as the government continues its efforts to bring down the price of rice in the market.

"Don't try to scare the government. The government can take over and do the importing itself and just break even or subsidize. At the end of the day the people – over 100 million Filipinos – should not be overcharged and go hungry," he insisted.

"We won't stop until the President is successful in achieving his targets. We're very serious about it. And we're not going to stop here in Luzon, we'll go to the Visayas and Mindanao. We're going to hit every region," Romualdez said, referring to their joint raids with the Bureau of Customs.

At the Senate, Sen. Cynthia Villar expressed support for the price cap.

"I think the President should implement a price ceiling as I don't think traders will lose money even

if there's a price ceiling because the cost of rice has not risen really," said Villar, chair of the Senate committees on agriculture and food and on environment and natural resources.

"The cost of producing rice in Vietnam is P6 per kilo of palay... you multiply it by two – the cost of rice is P12 per kilo. So you can sell it at P25 – you have a 50 percent margin. If you have to pay for transport and taxes – P38 is very reasonable," she added.

Villar pointed out the country's problem is with the cartel, where middlemen try to influence trading by creating an artificial shortage so they can increase the price of rice in the market.

Fines, imprisonment

Meanwhile, Bureau of Plant Industry director Glenn Panganiban called on retailers to comply with the price cap, as there are penalties awaiting the violators.

"We are continuously encouraging our retailers to comply as there are penalties for those who will not follow," Panganiban said, noting that violators face fines and even imprisonment.

He said the Department of the

Interior and Local Government and the Philippine National Police would help the DA and DTI in enforcing the price cap.

Importers monitored

The Bureau of Customs is monitoring traders bringing imported rice into the country to ensure that the price cap ordered by President Marcos is properly imposed.

Customs assistant commissioner and spokesman Vincent Philip Maronilla said they recently had a meeting with rice importers.

"We are monitoring the cost of their imports and the duties that they need to pay so we can see the landed cost and make sure that they will meet the price set by the President," Maronilla said during the Laging Handa briefing.

"We are monitoring so we can avoid traders who will say that they cannot meet price ceiling when in fact they can, based on government data," Maronilla said. "We encourage those involved in trading and selling to comply for the benefit of the consuming public." – With Bella Cariaso, Louise Maureen Simeon, Delon Porcalla, Cecille Suerte Felipe

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FIRST PERSON

ALEX MAGNO

Capped

Starting today, the price cap imposed on retail prices for rice comes into effect. I fear this bureaucratic measure will open a Pandora's Box of endless trouble for our economy.

The price cap is mandated by an Executive Order issued by **President Marcos**. It sets maximum retail price for well milled rice at P45 and for regular milled rice at P41. It prescribes rather hefty penalties for violating the price caps, including jail terms and a fine of up to P2 million.

The price cap is supposed to be temporary although we are given no indication of its timeline. There are some hints that the retail cap will be lifted as soon as local harvests are able to flood the market with the staple commodity – although, over the past few years, our domestic rice production has failed to bring us to self-sufficiency.

If I were a rice retailer, I would use the rains as an excuse to keep my shop closed today. The prevailing price for wholesale rice yesterday was P48 per kilo. Unless I am in the business of charity, conforming with the price caps will bring me ruin.

If I were a wholesaler, I would likely close shop too. My stock of well-milled rice was bought at P45 per kilo or more. If I sell for less than the purchase price, I will be committing an act of charity.

If I were a rice importer, it will be more prudent for me to postpone further purchases. Prices in the international market for rice spiked the past few weeks after India, Thailand and Vietnam (who account for most of the tradable rice supplies) curtailed exports. International prices are now higher than the price caps imposed starting today.

If I were a palay buyer, I would convince farmers to sell their harvest at P15 per kilo or less. It has already been trading over P20 per kilo. By forcing palay prices down, the market will likely force farmers to bankruptcy, considering they invested in farm inputs months ago in expectation of higher prices.

India, worried about the effects of widespread flooding in Pakistan, the looming shortage in grains caused by the war in Ukraine and the uncertainties posed by the El Niño phenomenon, curtailed rice exports to ensure her domestic food security. Thailand and Vietnam, for the same considerations, eventually curtailed their exports as well.

India alone accounts for 40 percent of the world's tradable supply of rice. Tradable grains, including rice, has always been thin – therefore easily pierced by production failure anywhere.

If I were a bureaucrat in any of the agencies charged



with enforcing the rice price caps, I would worry about finding the means to enforce the President's order. My agency will not have the manpower to police the tens of thousands of retailers, many of them doing business informally.

Surely, we will not have the brigade of lawyers required to prosecute the violators of the price caps. Without those resources, the price caps will not be credible. It will simply induce a rice black market where the scarce commodity might be had at real prices – with vastly less market transparency.

Price caps, highly localized, work during periods of extreme calamity when profiteering happens. Kept for a longer period, price caps are soon undermined by the onset of market reality. I have not seen price caps work for any sustained period.

Price capping is a political measure intended to override the operation of market forces. It is convenient only for the wielders of political power but often penal for everyone else.

In our present case, the root of the problem is supply shortage – something the administration has been trying to deny for weeks. Price capping will not add to our production output. It will not add a kilo of supply to our buffer stock.

At worse, the disruptions to our supply and value chains will magnify the shortage – therefore magnifying the price speculation that price capping is precisely poised to kill.

Fairy tale

For weeks, our leaders have been trying to convince the population that rising rice prices are due to hoarding and smuggling. That is a politically more profitable narrative to peddle. It has the appropriate evil men to blame and takes the focus from the more complex issues relating to our agricultural failure.

In furtherance of this questionable economic narrative, even the Speaker of the House had himself photographed in the unlikely role of leading "raids" on warehouses. Rice supplies were of course found in these warehouses – but no evidence of hoarding. Rice stocks are not prima facie evidence of hoarding.

This official narrative about what is wrong with our rice situation provides the basis for the decision to impose price caps. The caps are intended to "burn" the alleged price speculators. But if there are no speculators, the caps will end up burning the farmers and retailers instead.

But the official narrative is a fairy tale. It snows under the complex issues that led to our agriculture becoming as weak as it is. It covers up government's failure to take decisive steps to make our domestic production more efficient and less reliant on subsidies.

The failure is politically sensitive since the President concurrently serves as Secretary of Agriculture. Over the past 14 months, there has been little evidence of reforms, much less structural changes, in our agriculture.

As our rice buffer stock dwindles, we are instead treated to a political carnival.

★



HOUSE SETS P2-B AID TO EASE IMPACT OF RICE PRICE CAP

**By Julie M. Aurelio
and Jerome Aning**
@Team_Inquirer

The House of Representatives is earmarking P2 billion to ease the impact of the price ceiling on rice on retailers who bought their stocks above the cap of P41 a kilo for regular-milled and P45 for well-milled rice set under Executive Order No. 39, which takes effect today.

Speaker Martin Romualdez

on Monday said he had asked House appropriations panel chair Rep. Elizaldy Co to coordinate with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) on the allocation for rice retailers.

Co said his committee would sit down with Budget Secretary Amenah Pangandaman to explore fund sources for the P2-billion aid to rice retailers.

"We will promptly engage with the DBM to expedite the release of the P2 billion funds

for our rice retailers," he added.

The Office of the House Speaker said the P2 billion would primarily come from the 2023 national budget.

The country's biggest business organization also appealed to consumers not to panic since there is enough supply of rice in the local market.

"There's enough for us to cover the market demand. The message here is that we hope that the public will not be too

overly concerned or frantic about hoarding or buying too much," Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) president George Barcelon said in a phone interview.

President Marcos, who left for Jakarta late Monday to attend the Association of South-east Asian Nations Summit, said he would monitor the enforcement of EO 39—reiterating that studies conducted by the Department of Agriculture

(DA) and other agencies "found no good reason" why the price of rice should exceed P50 a kilo. The President concurrently heads the DA.

"[Based on] our study, the only reason for this is that smugglers and the hoarders are really there," he said in his departure speech at Villamor Air Base.

He added that as much as possible he did not want to intervene in the market dynamics and preferred to "let the market

do its work."

"But our market is being manipulated. That is why the government has to step in and this is what we did—we put a price ceiling for rice," Mr. Marcos said.

The Presidential Communications Office said Mr. Marcos on Monday had earlier met with officials of the DA, DBM, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and



House sets P2-B aid to ease impact of rice price cap

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the Department of the Interior and Local Government to discuss the agencies' proposals on how to assist rice retailers.

He said the government "understands" the plight of retailers who would naturally protest being compelled to sell at a price lower than that of their suppliers.

The President said the DA and the DTI would identify and list the rice retailers affected by the price cap, adding that the DSWD would soon prepare the assistance for them.

"After we calculate the losses of our rice retailers, we will give the equivalent assistance," Mr. Marcos said.

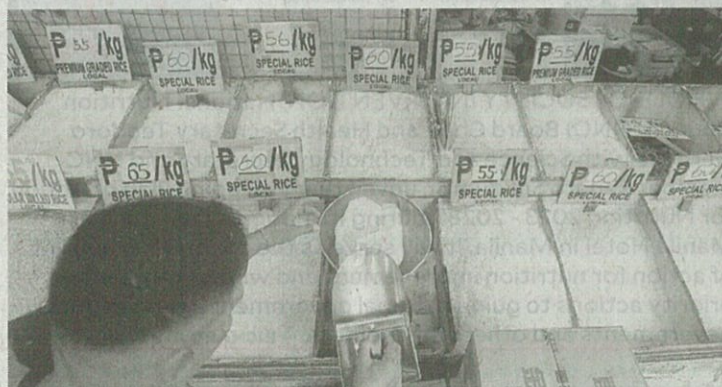
The DTI, on the other hand, will implement financial assistance, loan programs, logistics support and market linkages to retailers in wet markets and neighborhood sundry stores or "sari-sari" stores.

Other initiatives include linking local farmers with supermarket chains and other retailers, finding alternative markets, and promoting bulk buying or advance purchases as well as providing transport for rice stock purchased at the level of the price ceiling or above to Diskwento Caravan sites, where they would be sold directly to consumers.

The DA will also have an inventory and supply management of rice among major rice producers, and will intensify the Bantay Presyo Task Force that will enforce rice prices.

Revenues from rice imports

Social Welfare Secretary Rex Gatchalian said the assistance to affected retailers would be in the form of a financial payout under the "sustainable livelihood program"—which the agency offered during the pandemic lockdown to distressed sectors such as tourism establishments and small businesses.



MONITORING Rice prices in Cartimar, Pasay City, on the eve of the price ceiling which takes effect today. —**MARIANNE BERMUDEZ**

"The DSWD mechanism for the payout is ready. We're just waiting for the list [of qualified retailers] from the concerned agencies," Gatchalian said.

Also on Monday, House Deputy Speaker Rep. Ralph Recto urged the government to tap the P38.52 billion in tax revenues from rice imports, to aid farmers who would be affected by the price ceiling.

Recto noted that farm-gate prices of palay had plunged to P19 a kilo, from P23 early this year, as a result of EO 39.

Since the cap is below current retail prices, traders have to lower their offer to palay farmers since they still have to spend for milling, storage and transportation and add their profit margin to their selling price for rice.

"If half of the forecast palay

harvest for this year is affected, that's 10 million metric tons. Farmers will lose P40 billion during [the current] harvest season," Recto estimated.

He proposed that farmers be compensated by tapping the rice import tariff collections from January to August this year.

Recto noted that the Bureau of Customs collects P80 million a day from the import duties on rice, adding that these tariff collections are pooled under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

Republic Act No. 11203, or the Rice Tariffication Act, states that P10 billion of the RCEF will be returned to farmers in the form of equipment and farm inputs purchased by the DA.

Other solutions

RA 11598, or the Cash Assistance to Filipino Farmers Act, provides that the DA may tap the excess of P10 billion from the RCEF as direct cash aid to rice farmers tilling two hectares

of land or less.

Recto also called on Congress to amend the Rice Tariffication Law to "authorize direct cash payments to farmers using past RCEF collections as this will benefit the rice-producing poor."

"The money in the RCEF should be given to all rice farmers and not just those working on two hectares of land or less, and the cash component should not be sourced from the excess of P10 billion," he said.

He also urged the President to "temporarily reduce import duties to benefit the rice-consuming poor."

RA 11203 authorizes the President to allow the importation of rice at a lower tariff rate if there is an imminent or forecast shortage or any other situation requiring the government's intervention.

The President may exercise this power only when Congress, which will go on break by Sept. 29, is not in session. —**WITH A REPORT FROM ALDEN M. MONZON INQ**



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Not the solution to rice problem

Today, President Marcos' Executive Order No. 39 setting price caps on the prices of both regular- and well-milled rice, at P41 and P45, respectively, takes effect. It was supposed to be effective immediately after Mr. Marcos signed the order on Aug. 31, but several small-scale rice traders balked that they might stand to lose a lot of money. Rice retailers in the provinces of Bulacan, Oriental Mindoro, Leyte, and Cebu, among others, expressed disappointment with EO 39's price caps on rice, saying that they bought their rice stocks several weeks back, and paid more than P50 per kilo as capital. Selling their stocks of rice at less than P50 will make them lose around P500 per sack of rice.

Many rice traders are reportedly "groaning" after hearing this news; they are dismayed that this order came as a surprise to them since the prices of rice spiked inordinately a few weeks back, but the government did not say anything about it. They are requesting that the government should give them time to sell their existing stocks that they bought at more than the ceiling prices set by EO 39. One long-time rice retailer (40 years) in Tacloban City, Imelda Dy, is quite dismayed at this order, saying that "if we follow this order, we would lose money and may have to close down."

"Government should put its money where its mouth is," said Sen. Francis "Chiz" Escudero, criticizing Mr. Marcos' issuance of the executive order setting a price cap on rice, which is the Filipinos' main staple food. Escudero echoed Sen. Risa Hontiveros who called the issuance of the executive order a "lazy job," arguing that the intention to set



KRIS-CROSSING MINDANAO

RUFA CAGOCO-GUIAM

caps on the prices of rice will not address the illegal price manipulations and hoarding by rice traders. Hontiveros said further that if there are people doing these illegal acts, these people should be caught. She also noted that prices of rice have naturally spiked due to the government's failure to "provide aid and insurance to farmers whose crops were affected by recent weather disturbances."

The Makabayan bloc in the House of Representatives has dismissed Mr. Marcos' move as a "public relations stunt." For House Assistant Minority Leader Rep. Arlene Brosas, EO 39 is actually a "desperate move to quell the people's mounting frustration over his failure to deliver his campaign promise" of making the price of rice as low as P20.

Issuing EO 39 is a consequence of the lack of a strategic plan to address the perennial problems that beset our agriculture-based economy—a manifestation that the prime agency with this mandate tends to react to these problems on a

knee-jerk, reactive basis. It is compounded with the fact that Mr. Marcos has not relinquished his leadership of this vital department and has not appointed someone who could provide much more holistic, pragmatic, and strategic solutions to our agricultural problems.

Reducing the prices of basic commodities like rice without programs to address the runaway prices of farm inputs and other related farm expenses is addressing only part of the problem of the perennial insufficiency of rice production, in a country that boasts of several areas considered "rice granaries." A holistic, strategic plan that factors in all aspects of this perennial problem is needed, not a price ceiling that will only have a palliative effect.

Ironically, an institutional rice institute was established in this country to ensure that we will have access to cutting-edge technology in rice cultivation that could propel us to be Asia's foremost rice supplier. This institute even trained rice farmers in other countries like India and Vietnam. Thanks to the training their rice technicians went through here, these countries are now among the suppliers of rice to the Philippines.

We are all facing a dire situation with the prices of our basic food and other important items increasing rapidly. Yet this government thinks it can solve this by simply setting a price ceiling of rice, without putting in place safety nets for those who get to lose in the process. This is an indolent way of addressing a deep and basic problem that privileged government officials do not face on a daily basis.

Comments to rcguiam@gmail.com

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Farmers want onion importation stopped

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
@jordeenelagare

Onion farmers in Nueva Ecija and Pangasinan are appealing to **President Marcos**, who is the concurrent Agriculture Secretary, to stop the entry of imported onions until the end of November as they continue to incur losses in selling their produce.

Members of the Nagkakaisang Magsisibuyas ng Nueva Ecija, Pangasinan at Mindoro trooped to the Department of Agriculture's main office in Quezon City on Monday to present their case before the agency.

The farmers said the Philippines has more than 3 million bags of onions that can be sold to the market.

However, they are barely making any profit despite offering onions at discounted prices.

According to onion farmers, they are spending more as the price of storage ranges from as low as P75 to as high as P110 per kg.

"Because consumers prefer smaller ones, we cannot just release our produce from cold storage facilities. No matter what we do, our sales are decreasing," the farmers said.

"We believe that in this situation, it would be best not to allow the entry of



CHEAPER ONIONS Customers buy white onions at discounted prices from the Kadiwa Store at the Department of Agriculture in Quezon City. —INQUIRER FILE PHOTO

imported onions until the end of November. Instead, it is prudent to use up all our existing supplies first or at least half of it," they added.

Importation, they said, would only benefit countries where onions will be sourced instead of local producers who are in need of support from the government.

They are also urging the DA to monitor the situation and strike a balance between stabilizing supply and keeping retail prices in check.

Buffer stock

The Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) earlier said the importation of red onion was being considered to build a buffer stock although the country has enough supply until mid-December.

BPI Assistant Division Chief of National Plant Quarantine Services Division Hen-

rick Exconde had said they were evaluating the existing inventory to ensure that consumers would not run out of the commodity, especially during the holiday season.

Retail prices

The country might need to secure 34,000 metric tons of red onions good for two months. On a monthly basis, the per capita consumption of red onions is 17,000 MT.

So far, the country's red onion stocks have reached 78,674.80 MT, based on the BPI's tally as of Aug. 11. All these are produced locally.

Local red onion retails from P120 to P190 per kg in Metro Manila from P140 per kg a year ago, based on the Department of Agriculture's price monitoring as of Monday.

Imported red onion is not available. **INQ**



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EDITORIAL

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Black-letter day for rice

TODAY, September 5, may prove to be a black-letter day for the Philippines.

On this day, President Marcos Jr.'s order setting a ceiling on rice prices will take effect. Under Executive Order 39, Marcos ordered a price ceiling of P41 per kilogram for regular-milled rice and P45 for well-milled rice. This presidential directive comes at a time when the prices of rice are indeed flying through the roof, in the range of P50 per kilo for regular varieties to P100 a kilo for glutinous or black rice.

According to the Department of Agriculture (DA), local regular milled rice increased to P42 to P55 a kilo on Sept. 1 from P35 to P40 on Jan. 12 this year and P38 on Sept. 1 last year. Well-milled rice climbed to P47 to P57 a kilo from P38 to P44 on Jan. 12 this year and P40 in the same period last year.

Despite the threat of punishment, fines and even imprisonment, rice traders and retailers especially in Eastern Visayas and Metro Manila defiantly maintained they will not follow the price cap order.

'... strengthening local rice production, rather than relying on imports, is the solution.'

Their reason is simple and easily understandable: No businessman will survive in this capitalist economy by buying high and selling low

for a loss. The retailers are asking the President to give them time to dispose of their rice stock in the market before imposing the price ceiling. That way, they could at least recover their initial capital or suffer only small losses, since they acquired their rice for sale at nearly P50 per kilo from traders.

Speaker Martin Romualdez, who a couple of days ago led a group of Bureau of Customs inspectors in "raiding" and closing a rice warehouse in Bulacan which contained suspected hoarded rice, only had his ears to offer the stakeholders in the rice industry. He said the government is not numb to their requests, and they will do something to alleviate the situation.

Lower-ranking members of the House did better than the Speaker, as they proposed concrete measures to be taken by those badly impacted by EO 39. Albay Rep. Edcel Lagman said rice retailers should submit their sworn statements to the DA and the Department of Trade and Industry containing their rice inventories and purchase costs to address their concerns on the price caps. He also suggested that the National Food Authority buy the retailers' inventories at a price higher than their procurement costs, and resell these to the public even at a loss.

Party-list Rep. France Castro said farmers belonging to the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas took into account the median price of palay purchased by rice traders, as well as expenses for drying, milling, hauling, transportation, and other costs, and came up with price range of only P30 to P37.40 a kilo, way below PBBM's ceiling.

She also asked government "to take sincere steps in dismantling the rice cartel, composed of opportunistic importers, traders, and businessmen with connections to the DA, who manipulate the supply and price of rice in the local market."

Aside from this, she said, strengthening local rice production, rather than relying on imports, is the solution. We fully agree.



Marcos orders cash aid for small rice traders

Blames smugglers, hoarders anew for high prices

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR
and WENDELL VIGILIA

PRESIDENT Marcos Jr. yesterday ordered the immediate release of cash aid and other forms of assistance to "small" rice retailers and traders who would be adversely affected by the imposition of a

temporary price ceiling that starts today, assuring them government would not ignore their plight.

The President, in a speech before leaving for Indonesia, said he would continue to monitor the rice situation in the country while he is abroad and ensure that measures to ease the impact

of the price cap on the small traders are implemented while rising prices of rice are being controlled.

Social Welfare Secretary Rex Gatchalian, in an interview on the sidelines of the departure ceremony for the President, said there is no definite date yet as to when the government would start

the distribution of the cash aid but the President's order is to distribute the assistance immediately.

He also said the aid it would be sourced from the department's Sustainable Livelihood Program which is usually given as a

.....
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BLAMES

start-up capital to those who want to put up a business, for capital build-up especially for the vulnerable sector who may be affected by calamities or emergencies, and for employment grants.

At the House, Speaker Martin Romualdez ordered the committee on appropriations to earmark P2 billion to aid rice retailers to be affected by the price ceiling. He instructed the panel to coordinate with the Department of Budget and Management in finding funding sources under this year's national budget to support rice retailers.

"Our goal is to ensure that we can extend assistance to rice retailers who may be affected by this rice price ceiling, as it is a directive from our President aimed at protecting consumers," he said.

Romualdez earlier announced his intention to engage with leaders of rice retailers nationwide later this week to hear their concerns regarding potential financial losses stemming from the rice price ceiling.

Marcos last week issued Executive Order 39 that mandates a temporary price ceiling for regular milled rice at P41 per kilo, and P45 per kilo for well-milled rice.

The President again reassured the public that there is enough supply of rice in the country, as he pointed anew to smugglers and hoarders as being behind the rising prices. He said efforts to stop the smugglers and hoarders will continue.

"I hope the public would not worry. We know these are new strategies... we are forced to do this because of some forces that refuse to help our fellowmen. We are doing this to ensure that the people will not spend too much for their food, for rice," he said in Filipino.

Marcos acknowledged some small retailers will be affected by the price cap, especially those who bought their rice supply at a price that is higher than the ceiling.

He said the price cap is temporary and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Agriculture (DA), and Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) are finalizing the cash aid program.

He said the government is calculating how much will be lost by the rice retailers due to the price cap and the government is making sure the DSWD has funds ready to be distributed once the amount of loss is determined.

Gatchalian said the initial grant

under the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) is usually between P15,000 and P20,000 under a five-year program, which increases to about P100,000 to P250,000 in the succeeding years depending on the sustainability of the venture that the beneficiary pursued.

For the rice retailers, Gatchalian said the DTI and DA will identify who the beneficiaries are and how much aid would be provided to them.

Gatchalian said he does not expect the financial assistance "to be very long" since the rice price ceiling is temporary, or a "stopgap measure" to lower the prices of the staple food.

The President did not say when the price cap would be lifted but said that he expects the rice supply to further increase starting in the second week of September when locally harvested rice becomes available and rice imports start to arrive.

TASK FORCE

Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual ordered the creation of a rice task force that will ensure the efficient implementation of price EO on price ceiling.

The task force, in coordination with the DA, local government

units (LGUs), and the Local Price Coordinating Councils (LPCCs), will also handle the profiling and validation of aid beneficiaries. It would also mobilize associations to gather a list of retailers and properly identify potential beneficiaries.

Pascual said among the measures that the DTI, in coordination with other agencies, will implement are grant of financial assistance especially to retailers and wholesalers in wet markets and neighborhood sundry stores; loan programs; logistics support such as free transport of rice from traders to retailers and market linkages from farmers to supermarkets, retailers bulk buyers like restaurants, hotels, resorts, and other commercial establishments.

AID TO FARMERS

House deputy speaker Ralph Recto urged the House leadership to amend the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) to allow direct cash aid to farmers by tapping the Department of Agriculture's Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) since farmgate prices of palay (unhusked rice) have already gone down from P23 to P19.

"If half of the forecast of palay harvest this year – around 10 mil-

lion metric tons – our farmers will lose by P40 billion. This happens now when it's harvest season," he said in Filipino.

To compensate for the losses, Recto said the government can tap the P38.56 billion rice import tariff collections from Jan. 1, 2022 to Aug. 26, 2023 which is pooled under the RCEF to be returned to farmers as indemnity for market losses.

"These plowbacks are mostly in the form of equipment and inputs purchased by the DA," he said. "The formula of RCEF plowbacks are legislated under Republic Act 11203, the Rice Tariffication Law: 50 percent for equipment; 30 percent for seeds; 10 percent for credit assistance; 10 percent for extension."

This year, Recto said, the government collects P80 million daily from the 35 percent import duty on rice.

Since there is direct payouts to farmers, Recto said, "the government is denied the flexibility to undertake rapid-response relief that will ease the plight of farmers during exigencies."

Recto also said Congress may amend Section 13 of the RTL to allow direct cash assistance to farmers so that the money will go "straight to their pockets, straight

to their stomachs."

Rep. France Castro (PL, ACT) said EO 39 is a temporary solution to the larger problem of rice affordability in the country as she stressed the need for a "more comprehensive approach to address the issue."

"The release of Executive Order 39 by Malacañang is a clear indication that inflation is expected to rise this month due to the exorbitant prices of rice and other commodities. The government allowed the price of rice to skyrocket to P50 to P60 and even more per kilo before imposing the price ceiling, which is already within its mandate," she said.

The Makabayan bloc lawmaker emphasized the need for the government "to take sincere steps in dismantling the rice cartel, composed of opportunistic importers, traders, and businessmen with connections to the DA, who manipulate the supply and price of rice in the local market."

"We urge the repeal of RA 11203 or the rice liberalization (tariffication) law and the restoration of the National Food Authority's mandate to directly procure a significant volume of palay from Filipino farmers. Strengthening local production, rather than relying on imports, is the solution," she said.



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Rice retailers set to receive subsidies

By **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**
Reporter

THE GOVERNMENT will extend financial assistance to retailers affected by price ceilings on rice,

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. said on Monday.

The goal is to compensate rice retailers who are expected to lose income due to the price ceilings on regular and well-milled rice, he said in a speech before flying to Indonesia for a

summit of Southeast Asian leaders.

The President said the Agriculture and Trade agencies are now preparing the list of rice retailers and their associations, as well as identify the amount of assistance needed

to compensate them for their losses.

An executive order setting a nationwide price ceiling on rice will take effect today, Sept. 5. The order mandates a maximum price of P41 per kilo for regular milled rice and P45 for

well-milled rice, as part of government efforts to protect consumers amid a surge in the food staple's retail prices.

"We'll have to consider how authorities can first afford to do this and how they will fund the subsidy," ING Bank N.V. Manila

Senior Economist Nicholas Antonio T. Mapa said in a Viber message.

He said the government needs to ensure that there will be "a clear method for all retailers to enjoy the support and not just a few."

Subsidies, S1/9



Subsidies, from S1/1

"If not all retailers receive support, we may see inefficiencies surface anew," he said.

House Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez, Mr. Marcos' cousin, said he had instructed the Committee on Appropriations to look for ways to allocate P2 billion for the subsidy program.

"Our goal is to ensure that we can extend assistance to rice retailers who may be affected by this rice price ceiling, as it is a directive from our President aimed at protecting consumers," he said.

Ako Bicol Party-list Rep. Elizaldy "Zaldy" Co, chairman of the House Appropriations panel, said the committee would work with the Department of Budget and Management to expedite the release of the P2 billion.

However, the move to provide subsidies is unsustainable given that there are thousands of small retailers nationwide, said Enrico P. Villanueva, a senior lecturer at the University of the Philippines Los Baños.

"It is inefficient, hard to implement and unsustainable," he said via Messenger chat, noting that the government should instead lower rice tariffs.

In his departure speech, Mr. Marcos said the Department of Agriculture and other agencies have found no acceptable reasons behind the spike in rice prices, which are now above P50 per kilogram.

He said the government does not want to intervene in the market as much as possible but has been forced to impose price ceilings on rice due to alleged smugglers and hoarders' disruption of the basic law of supply and demand.

"The people have suffered already, that's why the government has been forced to impose price controls," he said in Filipino. "This is a temporary measure; the rice supply will be coming in the second week of September."

Social Welfare Secretary Rexlon T. Gatchalian described the price control as "a temporary stop-gap measure."

"We don't expect it to be long," he told reporters on the sidelines of the departure ceremony for Mr. Marcos.

He said the department would implement a sustainable livelihood program for small-scale rice retailers.

The imposition of price control has been heavily criticized by economists, who said the order could limit the supply of the food staple and lead to black-market trading.

They also said traders might hesitate to buy rice from farmers, who will be left with no choice but to lower farmgate prices.

Mr. Marcos met with officials of the Trade department and other agencies hours before his departure speech.

The Presidential Communications Office said that aside from assistance, loan programs for rice retailers were also considered during the meeting.

"Instead of using the limited resources, we have to modernize our agricultural production and distribution system, we are going to use funds to give loans to retailers who themselves are embroiled in a messy and inefficient distribution system," said Leonardo A. Lanzona, who teaches economics at the Ateneo de Manila University.

"For what purpose? To save face after making campaign promises to produce rice at P20 per kilo?" he asked.

The economist reiterated his call for the government to revoke the price control order and "instead, develop systems and mechanisms to reduce transaction costs by matching the needs of farmers and the demands of consumers."

Earlier, Mr. Lanzona said that if the government sees hoarding and smuggling as the key drivers of the surge in rice prices, it should encourage more players to enter the market, such as micro, small and medium enterprises and farmers, who can transact directly with consumers.

The Palace said the government is also eyeing logistics support "like providing government transportation for transferring sacks of rice from traders to retailers/wholesalers."

It said programs that could link local rice farmers with supermarket chains and other retailers were also discussed during the Monday meeting.

In a separate statement, the Palace said Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual has ordered the creation of a special task force that will profile and validate the list of rice retailers.



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PH agriculture sustains ₱1-B damage

By JEL SANTOS

The Department of Agriculture said on Monday, September 4, that agricultural damage in the country from typhoon "Goring" has reached ₱1.07 billion.

Over 31,000 farmers were affected by Goring in Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon or the Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal,

and Quezon area, Western Visayas, Mimaropa or the Mindoro Oriental and Occidental, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan.

The DA said production loss was pegged at ₱46,811 metric tons (MT) covering 42,333 hectares of arable land.

Production loss for rice is 36,794 MT with a total value of ₱905.92 million, it said.

"Most of the damage and losses

on rice are in (the) vegetative and reproductive stage," it added.

Corn production loss was pegged at 9,694 MT or ₱147.43 million.

"Most of the damage and losses in corn are in reproductive and maturity stages," the DA said.

The Agriculture department said affected commodities were rice, corn, high-value crops, livestock, and poultry.

Rice farmers were most affected

by Goring as they account for 84.8 percent of affected farmers in the country.

Corn farmers followed with 13.8 and the remaining 1.4 percent were farmers of high-value crops, livestock, and poultry.

The DA said it has provided ₱100-million worth of rice, corn, and assorted vegetable seeds to affected farmers.

The government has also

distributed drugs and biologics for livestock and poultry.

The agency said it has made available the Survival and Recovery (SURE) Loan Program from the Agricultural Credit Policy Council (ACPC) with a loanable amount of up to ₱25,000 which is payable in three years at zero interest and Quick Response Fund (QRF) for the rehabilitation of affected areas.



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Rice price cap now in effect

Marcos orders quick release of aid to retailers; House leader seeks allocation of ₱2-B assistance

By ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS, BETHEENA UNITE, and ELLSON QUISMORIO

President Marcos convened representatives from various government agencies to discuss the enforcement of retail price ceilings on rice that takes effect today, Sept. 5.

Marcos presided over the meeting on Monday just hours before he flew to Jakarta, Indonesia, for the 43rd Association of

Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit.

According to Malacañang, the meeting focused on mitigation measures for rice retailers affected by Marcos' Executive Or-

der (EO) No. 39, which mandated a price cap on the staple grain. EO 39 mandated the price ceiling for regular milled and well-milled rice at ₱41 per kilogram, and ₱45 per kilogram, ▶ 9

MANDATED RICE PRICE CEILING

REGULAR MILLED ₱41/kilo

WELL-MILLED ₱45/kilo

respectively.

During the meeting, Trade Assistant Secretary Dominic Tolentino Jr. reported the various concerns raised by the retailers, traders, and farmers cooperatives and the assistance they are seeking from the government.

Retailers requested that the EO's implementation be delayed so they could sell the rice stocks they purchased at a high price and get government assistance to find and access cheaper rice.

They likewise requested toll and fuel discounts to offset their cost.

Retailers in wet markets, on the other hand, requested a moratorium on fees and rentals to offset their loss.

Among the proposed measures is financial assistance to retailers in wet markets and sari-sari stores to cover the difference between the cost of the current inventory of rice and the price ceiling.

PBBM orders release of payout

Realizing that retailers will be the most affected in the implementation of the price ceiling, Marcos directed the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to immediately release the payout to the affected parties.

"Ang marching order ng Pangulo: DSWD, bilisan n'yo yung pag-payout (The President's marching order to DSWD was to release the payout immediately)," DSWD Secretary Rex Gatchalian told Malacañang reporters.

"So, after this we will reach out to DTI to obtain the list and parameters you're asking about. We stand ready nationwide. We have special disbursement of-ficers nationwide and we will tap them to release the payout immediately."

He disclosed that the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and Department of Agriculture (DA) are coming up with a list of rice retailers and associations who will take the hit of the price

cap implementation.

"And while that is being done, we are calculating the expected losses of rice retailers due to the price cap, so we are ensuring that the DSWD has funds so that when we get the numbers, we can give them the necessary assistance," Marcos said.

According to Gatchalian, the DSWD will tap its Sustainable Livelihood Program—the same program used by the government to help affected small businesses during the Boracay rehabilitation and Covid-19 lockdown—for the payout.

The DSWD chief said the assistance that will be given to the affected retailers will be "commensurate with their possible losses."

"It is a temporary stop-gap measure," Gatchalian said.

Allot ₱2-B aid to rice retailers

Aside from the assistance from the DSWD, Speaker Martin Romualdez has directed the House Committee on Appropriations to find ways to set aside ₱2 billion to assist retailers affected by the rice price cap.

"Our goal is to ensure that we can extend assistance to rice retailers who may be affected by this price ceiling, as it is a directive from our President aimed at protecting consumers," Romualdez said in a statement on Monday.

The Committee on Appropriations, chaired by Ako Bicol Party-list Rep. Zaldy Co, is currently scrutinizing the ₱5.768-trillion National Expenditure Program (NEP) for 2024 in the House of Representatives.

Co, for his part, promptly coordinated with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) under Secretary Amenah Pangandaman to swiftly explore avenues for the allocation of the



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PRICE UPDATE — Social Welfare and Development Secretary Rex Gatchalian gives an update on the price ceiling for rice as President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. orders price caps for the commodity amid soaring prices of basic goods. (Ali Vicoy)

₱2-billion assistance.

"We will promptly engage with the DBM to expedite the release of the ₱2 billion funds for our rice retailers," Co assured the public.

Loan, logistics support

Aside from financial assistance to retailers, Tolentino also suggested loan programs, logistics support like providing government transportation for transferring sacks of rice from traders to retailers or wholesalers, market linkages, and support such as linking local rice farmers with supermarket chains and other retailers and finding alternative markets.

Another recommendation was to have Kadiwa-Diskwento Caravan wherein current rice stocks purchased at the price ceiling or above would be transported to the Kadiwa-Diskwento Caravan sites and sold directly to consumers.

Marcos has also directed the DA, which he heads in concurrent capacity, and the DTI to ensure the strict implementation of the mandated price ceilings, monitor and investigate

abnormal price movements of rice in the market, and provide assistance to affected retailers with the help of the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG).

The President likewise urged the public to report those who would sell overpriced rice.

DILG warns of jail terms, fines

With the rice price cap now in effect, the DILG warned that violators face one-year imprisonment to 10²-year jail term and penalties ranging from ₱5,000 to as much as ₱1 million upon the court's discretion.

The DILG also asked the public to comply with the rice price cap or the face penalties as stated in Section 15 and 16 of Republic Act No. 7581 (the Price Act).

Individuals or groups involved in illegal price manipulation of prime commodities face jail terms not lower than five years and not more than 15 years and pay penalties of at least ₱5,000 up to ₱2 million.

DILG Secretary Benhur Abalos reiterated that the department will conduct an extensive information drive in compliance with EO 39.

Rice price cap a compromise — SINAG

Meanwhile, farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) said the ₱41 to ₱45 rice price ceiling of the government serves as a compromise for groups that have varying positions on the cap.

Recently, farmers' group Kilusang Magbubukid ng Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) said the price of rice can be further reduced to ₱37 per kilo. Other groups, meanwhile, expressed opposition to the ₱41 to ₱45 rice price cap.

"Those who oppose [the price cap] are extreme—either they want to bring down the retail price further, the others want a higher retail to increase the

farmgate price of palay (rice), so the ₱41 to ₱45 ceiling price, is a compromise," Jayson Cainglet, SINAG executive director, said in a statement.

SINAG said consumers will benefit from the government's ₱41 and ₱45 per kilo of rice for regular and well-milled rice. Meanwhile, KMP said this is still unaffordable for consumers given that prices of other commodities have also spiked amid high prices of petroleum products.

"From the current retail of ₱60 [per kilo] it will now become ₱45 [per kilo], definitely the consumers will benefit here," said Cainglet. "The mere fact that you will bring down the regular and well-milled rice to ₱41 and ₱45, respectively—the benefit will be immediate."

No rice shortage

Cainglet has belied claims that there is a shortage in the supply of rice, saying the country has ample supply of rice.

"Based on the assurance of the millers and all in the industry, nobody is saying there is a shortage (of rice). There is probably hoarding and profiteering but not shortage," he said. "The expected harvest is at seven million metric tons (MT). If there is no shortage, how come there is a spike in the retail price of rice? The price ceiling will solve the high cost of the grains."

SINAG also urged the National Food Authority (NFA) to take advantage of the harvest season and buy rice from the farmers.

"The real solution here is by harvest time, the NFA should buy palay (rice) as they will also earn. It is not true they suffer losses when procuring palay (rice) as they will also sell rice. The NFA can compete and buy at ₱22, ₱23 per kilo, that should be their buying price during harvest time," Cainglet said. (With reports from Chito Chavez and Jel Santos)

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Israel shares agri expertise with PH

By JOSEPH PEDRAJAS

Israel has shared its agricultural expertise with the Philippines in response to a call for assistance from President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., who is also the concurrent chief of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

According to the Israeli Embassy in the Philippines, it "invited an agricultural research expert to share with the Philippines his insights on how Israel became a world leader in agriculture."

It was also shared how Israel "modernized its agricultural research and development (R&D) agenda as well as the country's modern technologies, techniques, and best practices

for its agricultural sector," the embassy added.

Deputy Director of Volcanic Institute of Israel Prof. Uri Yermiyahu discussed with Philippine agriculture officers Israel's agricultural research and development agenda, as well as joined panel discussions, which made comparison and contrast to the agricultural R&D agenda of the two countries and how to build an R&D agenda particularly on the balanced fertilization strategy.

"Sharing Prof. Uri's expertise with the Philippines exemplifies creating bridges of innovation and technology between our two nations," Israeli Ambassador to the Philippines Ilan Fluss said.

Uri is a Senior Researcher at the

Agricultural Research Organization (Volcani Center) of Israel, a center that supports Israeli agriculture research, focusing on plant sciences, animal sciences, plant protection, soil and environmental sciences, food sciences, and agricultural engineering.

"This initiative is a response to the call of President and DA Secretary Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. for Israel to help the agriculture sector of the Philippines," Fluss added.

Uri also partnered with the Israel Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (ICCP), with whom he shared insights on the intricate science of plant nutrition. He also met various Philippine departments and members of the private sector that are relevant to agriculture.



PBBM INAPURA SUBSIDY SA MGA TINDERO NG BIGAS

Inaasahang makatatanggap ng tulong pinansiyal mula sa Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) ang mga kuwalipikadong small rice retailers na apektado ng mandated price ceilings sa bigas sa bansa.

Sa isang panayam sa press, sinabi ni DSWD Secretary Rex Gatchalian na inatasan sila ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. na gamitin ang kanilang sustainable livelihood program upang tulungan ang mga rice traders at retailers sa ilalim ng mandato ng 'capital build-up' ng programa.

"Napag-usapan namin ng Pangulo kaninang umaga na gagamitin ulit 'yung sustainable livelihood program ng DSWD para naman magtulungan 'yung ating mga maliliit na retailers na naapektuhan nitong pansamantalang Executive Order o 'yung price cap sa bigas,' ayon kay Gatchalian.

Tanging ang maliliit na rice traders at retailer, o ang mga mahihinang grupo lamang ang tatanggap

ng tulong ng gobyerno, ayon kay Gatchalian.

Ang sustainable livelihood program ng DSWD ay may tatlong mahahalagang mandato tulad ng start-up capital, na para sa mga gustong magsimula ng maliit na negosyo; ang pagbuo ng kapital para sa mga kaso na katulad ng mga epekto ng EO 39 sa maliliit na negosyante; at ang mga gawad ng trabaho.

"So ang gagamitin natin dito 'yung capital build-up kasi alam naman natin maapektuhan ang kapital ng mga maliliit nating mga rice retailer kaya kailangang pumasok ang DSWD sa utos ng ating Pangulo para masigurado natin na 'yung kapital nila hindi mauubos o hindi makain kaagad itong nangyayaring Executive Order," pahayag ng Kalihim.

Ipinunto ni Gatchalian na may handang mekanismo ang DSWD para sa sustainable livelihood program dahil ganoon din ang ginamit ng ahensiya noong Boracay rehabilitation at COVID-19 pandemic.

Bago umalis patungong Indonesia nitong Lunes, sinabi ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. na aalamin at sisiguruhin ng Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) at ng Department of Agriculture (DA) ang listahan ng mga apektadong rice traders at rice retailers na kuwalipikadong bigyan ng ayuda mula sa pamahalaan. Iniutos ni Pangulong Marcos sa DSWD na magbigay ng kinakailangang tulong.

Sinabi ni Secretary Gatchalian na agad nilang ibibigay ang kinakailangang tulong kapag natanggap na nila ang verified list mula sa DTI at DA. Binigyang-diin niya na handa silang simulan ang payout sa buong bansa.

"Ready 'yung paggamit ng DSWD para sa payout. Hinihintay na lang natin 'yung listahan mula sa mga concerned agencies. Pero kanina sabi ng Pangulo doon sa aming tatlo na mga ahensiya na involved, bilisan ang pagkilos," pahayag ni Gatchalian na tumutukoy sa DA at DTI.

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EDITORIAL

PRESYO NG BIGAS DAHIL LANG SA HOARDING?

NOONG nakaraang linggo, nagsagawa ng raid ang Bureau of Customs kung saan tinatayang nasa P519 milyong halaga ng imported na bigas at lokal na palay ang natunton at nakumpiska mula sa apat na magkakaibang bodega sa Bulacan.

Kasama ng BOC sa ginawang raid sina House speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez at mga mambabatas na sina Representatives Erwin Tulfo, Wilfrido "Mark" Enverga, Ambrosio Cruz Jr. at Edvic Yap kung saan umabot sa 154,000 sako ng imported na bigas at 60,000 sako ng palay ang kanilang natuklasang itinatago ng mga kompanyang Gold Rush Ricemill/warehouse sa Balagtas at Bocaue; JJS Ricemill/Warehouse sa Bocaue at isang walang pangalang bodega sa Intercity Industrial Complex sa Balagtas, pawang sa Bulacan.

Hinahanapan pa ng mga dokumento ng BOC ang mga mayari ng bigas at sakaling hindi sila makapagpakita ay tinitiyak na puslit ang mga ito kaya iminungkahi ni Speaker Romualdez na kumpiskahin ng gobyerno at ibenta sa mababang halaga.

Sinabi ni BOC Commissioner Bien Rubio na mismong si Pangulong Bongbong Marcos ang humiling sa kanilang tanggapan na magsagawa ng raid upang mapigilan ang walang tigil na pagtaas ng presyo ng bigas.

Base sa intelligence report na natanggap ng BOC, maraming negosyante ng bigas ang nagtatago ng nasabing produktong agrikultura upang masabing nagkakaroon ng kakulangan sa suplay nito upang may dahilan para maitaas ang presyo.

Pero hoarding nga bang maituturing ang pag-iimbak ng bigas ng mga negosyante sa mga ni-raid na bodega? Hindi kaya, nagkaroon sila ng problema sa ilang tanggapan ng pamahalaan na bagaman nagbayad sila ng mga kaukulang buwis ay patuloy silang ginagawang "milking cow"?

Hindi kaya ang walang habas na pagtaas ng presyo ng petrolyo ang isa sa mga dahilan kung bakit walang tigil sa pagsirit ang presyo ng bigas at iba pang bilinghin?

Mapagtanto sana ng ilang ahensya ng pamahalaan na ang walang habas nilang pangongotong at pandaraya sa mga negosyante na nagbabayad ng tama subalit hinihingan nila nang patago ang isa sa mga dahilan kung bakit mataas ang presyo ng mga bilinghin lalo na ang mga imported na produkto tulad ng bigas?

Hindi kaya ang dahilan kaya nangyayari ang smuggling ay dahil na rin sa ilang proseso sa pamahalaan na hindi katanggap-tanggap?

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REMATE OPINION

ANG INYONG LINGKOD

NI DR. HILDA C. ONG

IPINATUTUPAD na ngayong September 5, 2023 ang ipinagutos na rice price ceilings sa buong bansa alinsunod sa Executive Order No. 39 na nilagdaan ni President Ferdinand "BBM" Marcos, Jr. kamakailan.

Itinakda ang presyo ng pagbebenta ng regular milled rice sa Php 41.00 habang nasa Php 45.00 naman sa well-milled rice.

Base ito sa rekomendasyon ng DA o Department of Agriculture at ng DTI o Department of Trade and Industry bunsod na rin ng patuloy na pagsipa ng halaga ng bigas sa merkado kahit na wala namang shortage sa suplay.

Inaatasan ang DA at DTI, katuwang ang DILG o ang Department of the Interior and Local Government, para sa istriktong implementasyon ng mandated price ceilings, imbestigahan ang anomang abnormal price movements, at magkaloob ng tulong sa mga apektadong rice retailer.

Inutusan din ang BOC o ang Bureau of Customs na ipagpatuloy ang pagsasagawa ng mga inspeksyon at raid sa mga warehouse para mapigilan ang hoarding at illegal importation at magsagawa ng pagkumpiska ng mga smuggled rice alinsunod sa proseso ng batas.

Hinikayat naman ni Pangulong BBM ang publiko na ngayong may mandated price ceiling na para sa dalawang klase ng bigas ay i-report sa kinauukulan ang mga malalaman nitong lumalabag sa pamamagitan ng 8888 Citizens Complaint Center.

Bagama't hindi lahat ay aprubado sa paglalabas ng EO No. 39, sinabi naman ng PRISM o Philippine Rice Industry Stake-

RICE PRICE CEILING, EPEKTIBO NA NGAYONG ARAW

holders Movement na naiintindihan nila ang posisyon at aksyon ni Pagulong BBM.

WALANG LABIS O KULANG NA REKOMENDASYON SA PAG-AABONO, HANDA NANG IBAHAGI SA MGA MAGSASAKA

Sa tulong ng Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund o RCEF, tukoy na ang tamang dami, uri, at panahon ng paglalagay ng abono gamit ang Minus-One-Element technique o MOET.

Inaasahang 200 na munisipyo ang mabibigyan ng rekomendasyon sa pag-aabono bago matapos ang taon. Nasa 312 na mga bayan naman ang makatatanggap na rin ng rekomendasyon na naaayon para sa kanila hanggang 2024.

Kabilang sa mga munisipyong may nakahanda ng rekomendasyon sa pag-aabono ay nasa probinsya ng Kalinga, Ifugao, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino, Aurora, Pampanga, Bataan, Bulacan, Zambales, Cavite, Laguna, Quezon, Masbate, Albay, Sorsogon, Antique, Aklan, Biliran, Bohol, Negros Occidental, Davao del Norte, Davao Oriental, Misamis Occidental, Misamis Oriental, Kalinga, Masbate, at Maguindanao.

Samantala, hinihikayat ni Flordeliza H. Bordey, pinuno ng DA-PhilRice RCEF Program Management Office ang lokal na pamahalaan ng mga sakop na probinsiya ng RCEF na bukod sa pagbabahagi ng rekomendasyon ay suportahan din ang pagpatupad ng iba't ibang programa base sa mga naibigay na rekomendasyon sa pag-aabono na maaaring makatulong sa mga magsasaka na mas mapataas pa ang kanilang ani at kita.

Dagdag pa ni Bordey na mainam na hindi labis o kulang ang sustansiya ng palay upang maging maganda ang bulas at pantay-pantay ang mga uhay.

Para sa karagdagang impormasyon sa pagpapalayan, mag-text o tumawag sa PhilRice Text Center bilang 0917 111 7423.



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Romualdez kinamada P2B ayuda sa mga retailer ng bigas

INATASAN ni Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez ang Appropriations Committee ng House of Representatives na gumawa ng paraan para makahanap ng P2 bilyong pondo para ilaan sa pagbibigay ng tulong sa mga rice retailer na maaapektuhan ng price ceiling sa bigas na itinakda ng Malacañang.

Sinabi ni Romualdez na partikular niyang inatasan si Ako Bicol Party-list Rep. Elizaldy "Zaldy" Co, chairman ng Appropriations Committee, na makipag-ugnayan sa Department of Budget and Management (DBM) para maglaan ng P2 bilyon sa mga rice retailers.

"We want to ensure that we can provide assistance to rice retailers who may be affected by this rice ceiling, which they need to comply with because it is an order from our president to protect consumers," ani Romualdez.

Ayon naman kay Cong. Co, agad siyang nakipag-ugnayan sa DBM sa pamumuno ni Secretary Ameh Pangandaman para agad mahanapan ng alokasyon ang naturang pondo.

"We will immediately work with the DBM for the immediate release of the P2 billion funds for our rice retailers," ani Rep. Co.

Ipinaliwanag ni Romualdez na ang naturang inisyatiba ay bilang patunay na ang Kongreso ay seryoso na masiguro na maayos at masigla ang food supply sa bansa.

Kamakailan laman ay inanunsiyo ni Romualdez na makikipagpulong siya sa mga lider ng mga rice retailer sa buong bansa para pakinggan ang kanilang mga hinaing ukol sa itinakdang price ceiling ni President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.



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DILG ikukulong pasaway sa rice price cap

NAGBABALA si Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Benhur Abalos na makukulong at pagmumultahin pa ng P1 milyon ang sinumang lalabag sa price ceiling sa bigas na magiging epektibo ngayong Martes, Setyembre 5.

Ang price cap sa bigas ay nakapaloob sa Executive Order (EO) 39 na inisyu ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. at ang paglabag dito ay may katapat na kaparusahan na pagkakulong ng mula isang taon hanggang 10 taon at pagbabayad ng multang P5,000 hanggang P1 milyon depende sa pasya ng korte.

Itinatakda sa EO na ang presyo

ng regular milled na bigas ay dapat P41 per kilo habang P45 per kilo naman sa well-milled.

Samantala, dumami naman ang grupong humihiling sa gobyerno na ipagpaliban muna ang implementasyon ng price ceiling sa bigas para maibenta ang kanilang kasalukuyang supply.

Ayon kay Jason Cainglet, Executive Director ng Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG), hinihiling nila kay Pangulong Marcos na ipagpaliban muna ng isang linggo ang implementasyon ng EO No. 39 upang mabigyang pagkakataon ang rice retailers na maibenta ang kanilang supply para hindi malugi. (Aileen Taliping)



PBBM orders DSWD to fasttrack assistance to rice retailers affected by rice price ceilings

QUALIFIED small rice retailers affected by the mandated price ceilings on rice in the country are expected to receive financial assistance from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), according to Secretary Rex Gatchalian.

In an interview with the press, Gatchalian said President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has instructed them to utilize their sustainable livelihood program to assist rice traders and retailers under the "capital build-up" mandate of the program.

"Napag-usapan namin ng Pangulo kaninang umaga na gagamitin ulit 'yung sustainable livelihood program ng DSWD para naman magtulungan 'yung ating mga maliliit na mga retailers na naapektuhan nitong pansamantalang Executive Order o 'yung price caps bigas," Gatch-

alian said.

Only small rice traders and retailers, or the vulnerable groups will receive the government's aid, according to Gatchalian.

The sustainable livelihood program of the DSWD has three important mandates such as the start-up capital, which is intended for those who wish to start a small business; the capital build for cases similar to the effects

of the EO 39 to small businessmen; and the employment grants.

"So ang gagamitin natin dito 'yung capital build-up kasi alam naman natin na maapektuhan ang kapital ng mga maliliit nating mga rice retailers kaya kailangang pumasok ang DSWD sa utos ng ating Pangulo para masiguradonatin na 'yung kapital nila hindi mauuboso hindi makain kaagad itong nangayaring

Executive Order," Gatchalian said.

Gatchalian pointed out that the DSWD has a ready mechanism for the sustainable livelihood program because the agency used the same during the Boracay rehabilitation and Covid-19 pandemic.

Before leaving for Indonesia on Monday, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Department of Agriculture (DA) will be coming up with a list of the affected rice traders and rice retailers who will receive the government's assistance.

President Marcos met with the DTI, DA, DSWD, and other officials before departing for Indonesia to ensure that necessary government assistance will be provided to affected rice retailers and traders across the country.



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Romualdez, maglalaan ng P2-B sa rice retailers na apektado ng price cap

Inatasan ni Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez ang House Appropriations Committee na gumawa ng paraan

phy, ang napakahalagang papel ng naturang mga pasilidad kasabay ng taospusong pasasalamat sa lokal na pamahalaan ng Nabas, Aklan.

Aniya, ang matagumpay na pagtatayo ng mga Super Health Center ay nagpapakita ng dedikasyon ng pamahalaan na dalhin at mailapit ang serbisyong pangkalusugan sa ating mga kababayan. Layunin nitong tiyakin na hindi na kailangang maglakbay nang malayo para makakuha lang ng mga pangunahing serbisyong pangkalusugan.

Muling iginiit ni Go na magpapatuloy siya sa pagsusulong na lalo pang pahasayin ang sektor ng kalusugan sa bansa.

para makahanap ng P2 bilyong pondo para ilaan sa pagbibigay ng tulong sa mga rice retailers na maaapektuhan ng price ceiling sa bigas na itinakda ng Malakanyang nitong Biyernes.

Sinabi ni Romualdez na partikular niyang inatasan si Ako Bicol Partylist Rep. Elizaldy "Zaldy" Co, chairman ng komite na agad makipag-ugnayan sa Department of Budget and Management (DBM) para maglaan ng P2 bilyon sa mga rice retailers.

"We want to ensure that we can provide assistance to rice retailers who may be affected by this rice ceiling, which they need to comply with because it is an order from our president to protect consumers," ayon kay Romualdez.

Sinabi naman ni Cong.

Co, agad siyang nakipag-ugnayan sa tanggapan ng DBM sa pamumuno ni Sec. Amenah Pangandaman para agad mahangpan ng alokasyon ang naturang pondo.

Ipinaliwanag ni Romualdez na ang naturang inisyatiba ay bilang patunay na ang Kongreso ay seryoso na masiguro na maayos at masigla ang food supply sa bansa.

Kamakailan lamang ay inanunsyo ni Romualdez na makikipagpulong siya sa mga lider ng mga rice retailer sa buong bansa para pakinggan ang kanilang mga hinaing ukol sa itinakdang price ceiling ni **President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.**

"But definitely, the government will help our retailers affected by this E.O.," anang Speaker. (Joy Cantos)

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PHL issued 2K SPSICs in 2 mos for rice-gap imports

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS [@jearcalas](#)

THE Philippines issued over 2,000 sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances (SPSICs) for the importation of close to 2 million metric tons (MMT) of rice in the past two months to plug the shortfall in its local supply.

Latest Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) data showed that it has approved some 2,082 SPSICs for rice imports from July to August, which would be allowed to enter the country until October under existing rules and regulations.

The total number of SPSICs has a corresponding combined volume of 1.969 MMT, according to the BPI, which regulates rice importation as mandated by the rice trade liberalization law.

The BPI issued 1,319 SPSICs with an import volume of 1.273 MMT in July and at least 763 SPSICs last month with a volume of 696,163.75 MT, according to the agency's data report as of August 24.

Manila-based Orison Free Enterprise Inc. had the most issued SPSICs at 277 with a corresponding import volume of 417,720 MT, according to the BPI data.

It was followed by Pangasinan-

based Morsi Agri Trading with 96 SPSICs for a total import volume of 152,280 MT.

Rice imports with approved SPSICs can enter the country within 60 days from issuance if they are sourced from Asean countries or within 90 days if from Myanmar and outside the Asean region.

The Philippines is projected to import a record level of 3.9 MMT of rice this year to plug the shortfall in its production and meet growing local demand for the staple, according to the United States Department of Agriculture.

BPI data showed that some 156,711.75 MT of rice entered in July and 206,461.398 MT arrived from August 1 to 24.

From January to August 24, the country has already imported about 2.203 MMT of rice, with Vietnam accounting for nearly 90 percent of the total volume.



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Rice imports from Vietnam, as of August 24, reached 1.981 MMT, according to the BPI.

International rice market watchers have reported that the price of the grain in the global market, from Vietnam and Thailand, has risen in recent months due to India's export ban on non-basmati white rice and broken rice.

"India's prohibition of Indica white rice exports also occurred at a time of seasonal tighter availabilities in major global suppliers of rice, particularly those located in Asia, where new crops are still being planted for harvest as of September/October," the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization said in an earlier report.

The movements in the global rice market have been reflected in the Bureau of Customs' (BOC) reference prices for imported rice.

The reference price for 5-percent broken rice from Vietnam, as of August 27, stood at \$0.623 per kilogram, 23.61 percent higher than the \$0.504 reference price recorded in end-July, according to BOC documents.

BOC documents also showed that the latest reference price for 5-percent broken rice from Vietnam is already 61.82 percent higher than the \$0.385 per kilogram benchmark level recorded in August 2022.

Upward rice price movements locally have been influenced by the

increase in world market prices, tight supply, and weather disturbances, according to pundits. Some government officials have claimed that price manipulation is also driving rice prices to increase.

Inflation driver

NO less than the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) has sounded the alarm that rising domestic rice prices are contributing to faster inflation in the country. **(Related story: <https://BUSINESSMIRROR.com.ph/2023/09/01/bsp-rice-fuel-storms-drove-august-inflation/>)**

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

PSA data showed rice inflation averaged 4.2 percent in July 2023, the highest since February 2019 when the increase in the commodity's prices was at 4.5 percent. The Rice Trade Liberalization (RTL) Act was implemented in March 2019. **(Full story here: <https://BUSINESSMIRROR.com.ph/2023/08/04/rice-price-hike-may-dampen-momentum-to-tame-inflation/>)**



Farmgate price of palay down by P3/kilo

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The farmgate price of palay went down by P3 per kilo a day after President Marcos issued Executive Order 39 imposing a price ceiling of P41 and P45 per kilo of rice for regular and well-milled rice, according to Federation of Free Farmers national manager Raul Montemayor.

In a text message yesterday to **The STAR**, Montemayor said the buying price of dry palay reached P20 per kilo from the previous P23 per kilo and P16 to P17 per kilo for wet palay.

"The next day, a day after the executive order was announced and has yet to take effect, the farmgate price of palay already went down by P3 per kilo. We expect this to go down further as the harvest in October to November peaks," Montemayor said.

"This is a desperate solution," he said, adding that farmers would suffer the brunt of the decision to impose a price cap on the grain.

Based on monitoring of the **Department of Agriculture** in Metro Manila markets, the retail price of local regular milled rice is as high as P55 per kilo; local well-milled rice, P56 per kilo; local premium rice, P60 per kilo and local special rice, P65 per kilo.

The P41 and P45 per kilo price cap on rice will take effect today.

Final guidelines

In Bocaue, Bulacan, rice traders are waiting for the final guidelines on the implementation of EO 39.

Rice wholesaler Tony Santos told **The STAR** that most, if not all, of their buyers who are rice retailers

are waiting if the government would provide them with incentives or subsidies, especially those who procured rice at more than P50 per kilo before the executive order was announced.

A certain Diday, a rice retailer, wonders what will she do with the rice that she bought at a wholesale price of P50 per kilo, citing that it is illogical for the rice to be sold at P41 or at P45 per kilo.

"I will lose big," she lamented.

A wholesale rice trader identified only as Angie confided that she talked to her regular buyers and offered them a self-subsidized rice costing P45 per kilo, but most if not all declined because the retailers would not profit due to the rice price cap.

As of yesterday, the retailers said they have been receiving reports that "it should be seen that they are

selling rice at P41 and P45 per kilo."

Angie told rice retailers that they still have options of selling premium, special and glutinous rice not covered by the price cap, but that they would think about it first.

Hoarders, cartels

To fully address the rising cost of rice in the country, the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP) yesterday sought the arrest of hoarders and those behind the rice cartel.

"The first order of battle is to immediately go after these smugglers, cartels and hoarders who have been 'gaming' the agricultural market and torturing our local farmers for all these years," TUCP vice president Luis Corral said in a statement.

"The key is to address fully and comprehensively the root causes of

skyrocketing prices and farmers' continuing poverty while the layers of middlemen get fatter along with the hoarders and cartels, and they get richer from the miseries of our farmers," Corral added.

Corral said a "band-aid solution" to the current rice predicament would never fully stabilize prices and supply because the crisis is deep-rooted.

Thus, he said, all concerned agencies should prioritize stabilizing prices and ensuring food security rather than profiting from misery.

TUCP also called for a moratorium on agricultural land conversion and extensive support for farmers, as it urged government to pursue an all-out anti-smuggling campaign for agricultural products, especially rice. — **With Ramon Efren Lazaro, Mayen Jaymalin**

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Onion farmers weep over imports, low prices

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Onion farmers from Nueva Ecija, Pangasinan and Mindoro held protests at the **Department of Agriculture (DA)**'s headquarters in Quezon City yesterday amid the flood of imported onions in the market.

The farmers urged President Marcos, concurrently agriculture secretary, to direct the Bureau of Plant Industry to halt the issuance of import permits as the price of local onions in cold storage facilities dropped to P70 per kilo from the previous P130 per kilo.

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Agriculture Assistant Secretary Rex Estoperez told the protesting farmers they are willing to delay the release of imported onions to allow local farmers to release their stocks.

The 78,000 metric tons of local red onions in cold storage facilities will last for three months or until November, while the 827 MT out of 6,000 MT imported red onions that have already arrived in the country can be stored for four months.

"The onions can be stored for

four months, and we will consult with our importers to delay the release (of imported onions) so that local farmers can release their stocks," Estoperez said.

Local farmers should give assurance that the onion supply will be available in the market, he added.

"You should commit that the experience last year will not happen again after retail prices of onions soared (to as high as P720 per kilo) because of hoarding," Estoperez noted.

The farmers present during the dialogue assured consumers of a steady supply.

Bongabon, Nueva Ecija onion farmer Efren Alvares said that farmers are discouraged from planting amid the flooding of imported onions in the market.

Elena Santos, another farmer from Nueva Ecija, called on the DA to ensure that no imported onions will be sold in the market while local stocks are still available in cold storage facilities.

Based on monitoring of the DA, the retail prices of local red onions ranged between P130 and P190 per kilo, local white onions at P120 and P170 per kilo and imported white onions at P100 and P170 per kilo.

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INSIGHTS FROM WORLD LEADER IN AGRICULTURE

EXPERT FROM ISRAEL SHARES BEST AGRI PRACTICES WITH PH

By Tina G. Santos
[@santostinaINQ](#)

Israel is sharing with the Philippines its agricultural expertise, including its modern technologies, techniques and best practices for its agricultural sector.

The Embassy of Israel had recently invited agricultural research expert, professor Uri Yermiyahu, deputy director of the Volcani Institute of Israel, to share his insights on how his country became a world leader

in agriculture and modernized its agricultural research and development (R&D) agenda.

"Sharing Prof. Uri's expertise with the Philippines exemplifies creating bridges of innovation and technology between our two nations," Israeli Ambassador Ilan Fluss said in a statement.

He added that the initiative was a response to President Marcos' call for Israel to help the Philippines' agriculture sector. Mr. Marcos is concurrently

Agriculture Secretary.

Research interests

Yermiyahu's research interests focus on plant nutrition and fertilization of crops, the embassy said, adding that his contributions include understanding influences of plant nutrition on biotic and abiotic stress causing factors, mineral requirements of agriculture in desert environments, salinity and toxicity in plants, and managing nutrients as a function of

irrigation water quality.

During his visit, Yermiyahu discussed with the **Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Soils and Water Management** the context of the agricultural research and development agenda of Israel.

He also met other Philippine agencies as well as segments of the private sector involved in agriculture.

Yermiyahu also joined discussions about comparing the agricultural R&D agenda of Israel and the Philippines, partic-

ularly on balanced fertilization strategy, the embassy said.

In partnership with the Israel Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, Yermiyahu shared insights on the intricate science of plant nutrition.

Talks in Egypt

In a related development, Philippine officials recently met with Egyptian officials, exporters and importers of agricultural products in Cairo to discuss initiatives and projects that will

boost agricultural trade between the Philippines and Egypt.

According to the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Agriculture Attaché for Middle East and Africa Nolet Fulgencio discussed the work plan for the importation of Egyptian citrus products into the Philippines.

She also introduced Philippine agricultural and aquatic products that have high export potential, such as coconut, pineapple, banana, seaweed and tuna, the DFA said. *INQ*

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Price caps make things worse

We've probably all heard the story of a past president who wanted the law of supply and demand repealed. The problem is that it's not a law that is legislated, but a universal principle that holds true under any market system. The P41 and P45 per kilo price caps on regular-milled and well-milled rice, respectively, ordered by the President effective today represent yet another effort to defy that law. Forcing price caps in a largely competitive market where prevailing prices are much higher is, in effect, an attempt to "repeal" the law of supply and demand, the consequences of which could be more disastrous than the problem it hopes to solve.

Rice retailers and rice farmers have been quick to raise a howl over the measure, and even threaten to openly defy it. The president of the 300-strong Grains Retailers' Confederation of the Philippines in Eastern Visayas was quoted as saying: "As far as we are concerned, no, we will not comply ... How can we recover our losses? They should give us a leeway and not give us a deadline. Most of us bought our supplies before the issuance of the rice cap order and doing so would lead to losses." At least two farmers' groups have also aired alarm over the expected result of depressed farm gate prices.

On the other hand, consumer groups have not been jumping with joy, some because they don't think the caps are low enough, but the better-informed and more perceptive among them understand the wider harm that could result. Leading agricultural economist Dr. Roehlano Briones points out that it would hurt consumers because it will lead to shortage, rampant adulteration (where cheap, possibly even stale rice is mixed with and passed off as good rice), deceptive reclassification of rice grades (passing off lower for higher grades), and other tricks in the book that



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have uniquely come about in our rice industry over decades of excessive regulation—all detrimental to consumers.

What consequences could we expect from the caps? A former Department of Agriculture (DA) undersecretary predicts that we will soon see rice shortage, black markets, and rice queues. This is because rice traders who had bought supplies at a higher price would have the natural impulse to sell only in the black market to recover costs—and stop buying any further because it could only mean losses. The result would be reduced market supplies and upward price pressure, cap or no cap. When price is forced lower than the market equilibrium price—that is, the price at which quantities sold would match quantities demanded—more will be demanded than what suppliers would like to sell, leading to a shortage. The only way the price cap could be made to hold would be to ration the available rice and force households to limit purchases to less than what they would wish to buy. Think of what it would cost government to enforce such rationing (would they police every retail outlet?), and the lines that would form in stores as

people would know there just aren't enough stocks to meet everyone's desired purchases.

The other recourse is for government to fill the supply gap, and that would mean direct purchase of rice with taxpayer money, at prices unlikely to be any lower (in fact, likely to be higher) than the price cap, especially with currently elevated world prices. Add to that the huge administrative costs involved, and it all adds up to a futile effort of taking money from our left pocket in order to put it in our right pocket—with leakages along the way. It only makes sense for those who would benefit from the leakage, and in the sad story of our country, that is precisely the reason why we keep seeing government do all the wrong things, especially in our badly battered agriculture sector. Don't be surprised, then, if government decides to overturn the game-changing rice tariffication law and engages in direct importation all over again. I could only weep for our country, as you should, too.

What we should be doing in lieu of price caps is to reduce tariffs on now pricier rice imports, but curb the trading cartels that foil price-lowering market competition. And it's vital that we double up with greatest urgency on improving farm productivity so that our farmers need no longer fear but instead stand up to imports from our neighbors—who, after all, trained their agricultural scientists here once upon a time. It's not as if we can't do it. Experts I constantly talk to know exactly what must be done. But as long as our DA and local governments don't shape up for the task, all that knowledge will not help us.

Meanwhile, price caps could be a cure worse than the disease itself. I'm hoping they're stopped before they can do further damage.

cielito.habito@gmail.com



BOC tasked to intensify inspection of imported rice warehouses

BY ANGELA CELIS

WITH the implementation of the price caps on rice today, the Bureau of Customs (BOC) said it will intensify ongoing inspections of warehouses of imported rice to combat hoarding and illegal importation.

"We have been instructed by the President to inspect warehouses storing imported rice and ensure (the shipments have) undergone the proper processes, paid taxes, and possesses the necessary permits and clearances. We will also check for any hoarding of rice that could affect market prices," said BOC assistant commissioner Vincent Maronilla in a televised briefing yesterday.

Over the past weeks, the BOC has reported the discovery of millions worth of rice grains and palay in several warehouses in Bulacan province.

Maronilla said approximately 500,000 sacks of rice have been



The BOC's latest operation yielded an estimated P519 million worth of rice grains and palay in several warehouses in Bulacan province. House of Representatives Speaker Martin Romualdez (center) joins an inspection of one of the warehouses on Aug. 30, 2023. (Photo courtesy of BOC)

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BOC

subject to inspection.

The warehouse owners are given 15 days to produce the necessary documents.

If these sacks of rice are proven to be smuggled, Maronilla said these can be donated by the government to Kadiwa stores.

Under Executive Order (EO) No. 39, which slaps nationwide price caps on regular milled and well-milled rice, at P41 and P45 per kilogram, respectively, the BOC has been instructed to facilitate the confiscation, seizure or forfeiture of smuggled rice, as may be war-

ranted law. The executive order, signed by Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin on behalf of the President, also mandates the Department of Agriculture (DA) to collaborate closely with the BOC by providing essential assistance, which include the sharing of vital information such as the inventory of rice stocks, a list of accredited rice importers and the locations of rice warehouses.

More stakeholders expressed concern over the price caps.

Cathy Estavillo, Bantay Bigas spokesperson, said the price ceil-

ing is a "palliative measure" that would not resolve pricing and supply issues and that it is in fact not a "threat to big traders, hoarders, smugglers or the rice cartel."

The Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) said "artificially lowering the retail prices of rice without addressing the high cost of farm inputs and other longstanding problems of the domestic rice industry is counterproductive and will considerably favor big rice traders, importers and the rice cartel."

Based on public markets moni-

toring by the DA in the National Capital Region as of Friday, the per kg price of imported rice range from P53 to P65 for special variety; P53 to P56 for premium and; P43 to P52 for well milled.

No data is available on the price of imported regular milled rice.

For local rice, special variety is at P54 to P65 per kg; premium at P48 to P60 per kg; well-milled at P47 to P57 per kg; and regular milled at P42 to P55 per kg.

Compared to the earliest monitoring of the DA for the year last January 2, the price of some rice

varieties has gone up by P15 per kg at most.

Meanwhile, the DA through the Philippine Rice Research Institute (Phil Rice) is optimistic about linking more clustered farm groups with the private sector for sustained collaborations.

Karen Eloisa Barroga, Phil Rice deputy executive director for development, said the Institute, in partnership with other government agencies, continues to cluster; strengthen rice production, entrepreneurial and organizational skills; and link

farmers to market to improve their income as part of their Rice Business Innovations System (RiceBIS) Community Program.

Barroga said RiceBIS has 23 farming communities with 214 clusters composed of 125 farmer organizations, covering almost 10 thousand hectares nationwide.

The agency said its most recent successful linking involved the RiceBIS Negros Agrarian reform Cooperative (NARCO) in Negros Occidental and the RiceBIS Castillejos Farmers Agriculture Cooperative in Zambales. - *Jed Macapagal*



Govt to provide aid to rice retailers

BY KRISTINA MARALIT

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has ordered the immediate release of assistance for rice retailers who will be affected by the imposition of a price cap on the food staple.

Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Secretary Rexlon Gatchalian said that his agency will aid the affected traders through its sustainable livelihood program.

"The President's marching order to DSWD was to release the payout immediately," Gatchalian said during a briefing at the Villamor Airbase shortly after Marcos' departure for Jakarta,

Indonesia to attend the 43rd Association of Southeast Asian Nations Summit.

He said the assistance will be "commensurate with their possible losses."

"It is only a temporary stop gap measure. So, we don't expect it to be very long. That's why our speed or turnaround is important," Gatchalian said.

The DSWD is coordinating with the Department of Trade and Industry for the list of beneficiaries and the distribution guidelines.

"We're set to roll out nationwide. We have disbursement officers nationwide and they will be mobilized for the immediate release of the payout," Gatchalian said.

The President last week issued Executive Order 39 which imposes a price ceiling on rice due to the "alarming increase in the retail price" which has surpassed P60 per kilogram. The order takes effect on September 5.

Under the circular, the mandated price cap for regular milled

rice is P41 per kilo and P45 per kilo for well-milled rice.

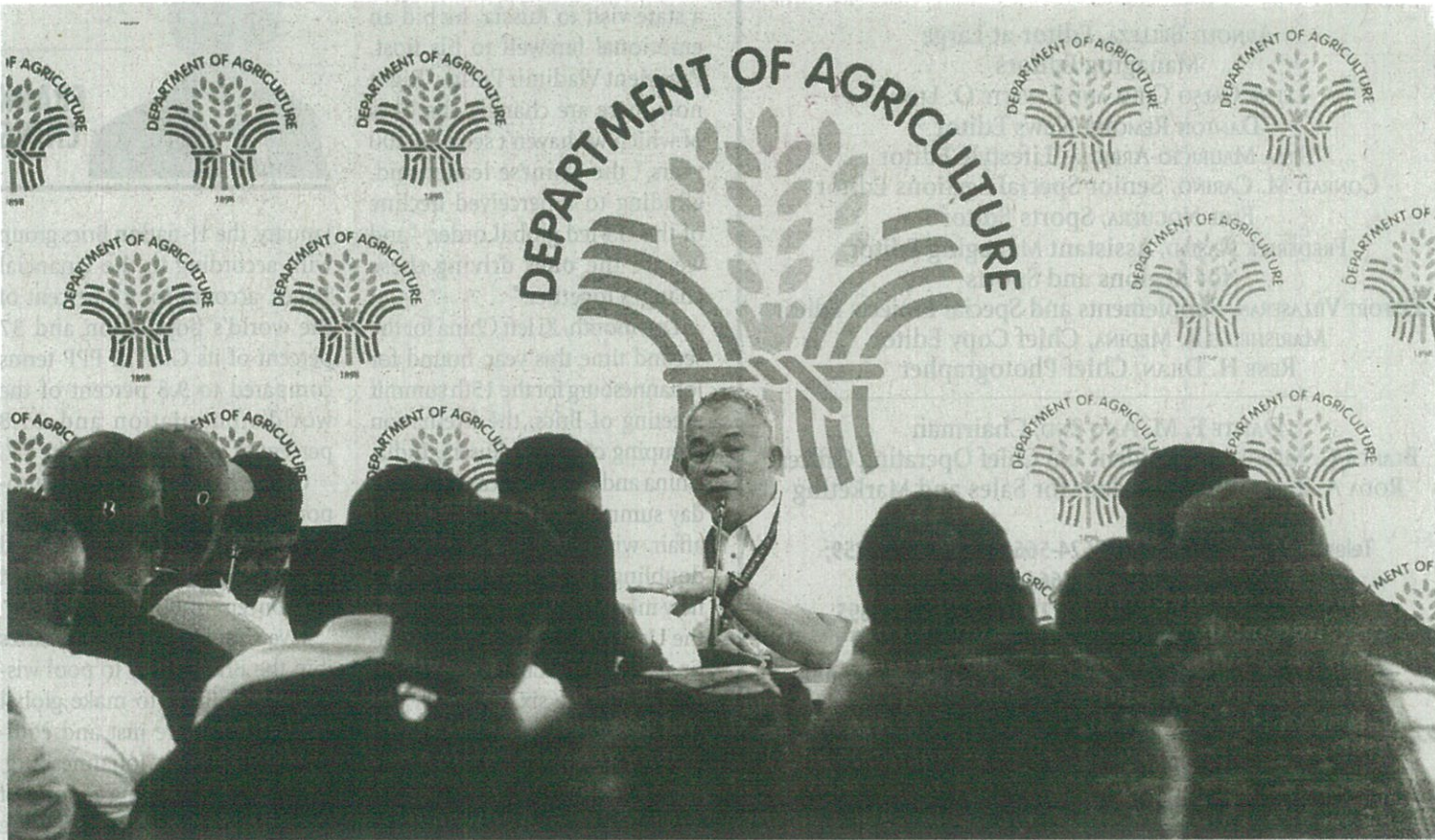
Meanwhile, Albay First District Rep. Edcel Lagman urged rice retailers to be transparent with their inventory and purchase costs so that the government could better address their concerns in relation to the rice price cap.

"Rice retailers must submit sworn statements to the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Trade and Industry on their current rice inventories

and their purchase costs to enable the government to address their concerns that they would lose if they would sell their stocks at the price ceiling," the lawmaker said in a statement.

"The National Food Authority must then be directed to buy the compliant retailers' inventories at a level a little higher than their procurement costs, and the NFA must resell the supply to the public at the regulated price even at a loss, which it traditionally does," he added.

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ALL ABOUT ONIONS Agriculture Assistant Secretary Rex Estoperez holds a dialogue with members of the Pagkakaisa Magsisibuyas ng Pangasinan at Mindoro at the Department of Agriculture Central Office in Quezon City on Monday, Sept. 4, 2023, to tackle their concerns, which include the importation of onions and the difficulty in finding markets for their produce. PHOTO BY ISMAEL DE JUAN

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Minimum ₱22-₱25/kilo palay price pushed

With or without a price cap, local farmers should receive the much-needed and long-overdue support from the government through reasonable price for their yields.

This was pushed by the Integrated Rural Development Foundation (IRDF), which also called to peg the minimum buying price of palay at ₱22-₱25 per kilo to protect local rice farmers.

IRDF Executive Director Arze Glipo said in a statement that even as government imposes the price cap on rice, farmers must get the right price for their product.

With that, IRDF said the government should purchase rice from traders based on their buying price in the previous harvest and set up rolling stores where consumers can buy cheaper rice. The task force must also set a floor price for palay at ₱22/kg - ₱25/kg and conduct consultations to consolidate data and policy proposals for a new rice industry law that protects both farmers and consumers.

The group would like the executive branch of government to convene a rice task force that will mobilize resources from all stakeholders, including the Department of Agriculture, National Food Authority, Department of Trade and Industry, local government units, farmer groups, non-government organizations, private sector millers and traders. The

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task force should work on an emergency plan to combat hoarding, and stabilize rice price.

"This is the opportune time for the government to subsidize the rice program and the rolling stores. The EO will not solve the problem unless the government intervenes by physically putting cheap rice in the market," said Glipo in a statement issued Monday, Sept. 4.

The group also proposed that government should instead send rolling stores to communities and sell through the National Food Authority (NFA) or rice cooperatives at cheaper price, a function that has to be reinstated to NFA by repealing the Rice Trade Liberalization (RTL) law.

Meantime, crop scientist and technical consultant of the National Movement For Food Sovereignty (NMFS), Prof. Ted Mendoza of the University of the Philippines Los Banos, said that Executive Order 39 is a "big joke." The EO caps the price of the staple food at ₱41 a kilo for regular milled and ₱45 for the well-milled rice.

Mendoza said that the country is rice sufficient and the price of rice can stabilize if the government is able to see the urgent factors that causes its instability.

Mendoza added that government should study further how to address the rice situation as EO 39 could backfire.

NMFS is a long-running food sovereignty network convened by IRDF since early 2000 when then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo attempted to open the market to rice importation.

World price is now at \$700 per metric ton. "This is what we have been warning since the Duterte admin passed the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) despite massive protest from the farming sector," said Glipo. He said that working masses are now paying the cost of failed government policy on rice.

IRDF also urged Congress to act fast, review and repeal the Rice Tariff Liberalization, allocate emergency funds for procurement of palay at the minimum of 22/kg for NFA to procure at least 10 percent of total palay production this coming harvest, ink contracts with private millers to lend their dryers as NFA's drying facilities are all gone if not dilapidated, mobilize warehouses of local government and ensure in the next three months that government warehouses have stockpiled rice supply good for 60 days minimum.

Mendoza lamented the loss of more than a million hectares of prime lands for agriculture through land conversion. Per Mendoza's estimate, about 0.7 million hectares at five tons per hectares rice yields at 2 crops per year gives an equivalent to 3.5 metric tons of milled rice.

He also cited the need to address the urgent issue of land conversion.

In the face of worrisome threats due to unabated price rice increase, Mendoza also proposes the government should now turn to a legislation that would totally put a halt on land conversion. (Bernie Cahiles-Magkilat)

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Rice price ceiling suportado ng NEDA

SUPORTADO ng National Economic and Development Authority ang price ceiling sa bigas sa iba't ibang panig ng bansa.

Kasunod ito ng pagtaas ng presyo sa mga lokal na pamilihan.

Ayon sa NEDA, ang price ceiling na ipinag-utos ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. sa pamamagitan ng Executive Order 39 ay pansamantalang hakbang na magpupuno lamang sa ibang inisyatiba ng pamahalaan.

"The imposition of a price ceiling on rice is not a standalone initiative. Law enforcement authorities continue their valiant efforts to crack down on individuals who hoard, excessively profit from, smuggle, or participate in rice cartels," ayon sa kalatas ng NEDA.

"We are confident that the imposition of a price ceiling is only a temporary measure. We expect the rice harvest to commence soon and anticipate that other initiatives will produce the desired result," dagdag na pahayag nito.

Nauna rito, inaprubahan ni Pangulong Marcos ang rekomendasyon

na magpataw ng mandated price ceiling sa bigas sa buong bansa.

Ang pag-apruba ay sa pamamagitan ng pag-iisyu ng Executive Order No. 39 na nilagdaan ni Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin na may petsang Agosto 31.

Layon ng EO na matiyak ang makatwirang presyo at madaling ma-access na mga pangunahing pagkain sa mga Pilipino sa gitna ng nakaaalarmang pagtaas ng mga retail price nito sa merkado.

Ang pagtatakda ng price ceiling ay batay na rin sa rekomendasyon ng **Department of Agriculture at Department of Trade and Industry**.

Inilabas din ito kasunod ng sectoral meeting noong Agosto 29 kung saan na-brief si Pangulong Marcos tungkol sa estado ng mga hakbangin ng pamahalaan upang matiyak ang sapat na suplay ng bigas sa bansa.

Sa ilalim ng EO 39, ang price ceiling para sa regular milled rice ay nasa P41 kada kilo habang ang price cap sa well-milled ay nasa P45 per kilogram. Mananatili ang mandated price ceilings 'in full



Compensate farmers with Customs tax collections --Recto

By Jester Manalastas

FOR Deputy Speaker Batangas Representative Ralph Recto, farmers can be compensated using Bureau of Customs collections from the rice import tariffs.

Recto made the proposal following the decrease of farmgate prices of palay from P23 per kilo to P19 kilo due to the Executive order 39 which puts price ceiling on rice.

"Kung appektado ang kalahati ng forecast palay harvest sa taong ito - mga 10 million metric tons - lugi ang mga magsasaka ng P40 billion. Ngayon pa naman ay harvest season. How can we compensate for their losses?" Recto stressed.

He said, farmers can be

given aid through the P38.56 billion rice import tariff collections from January 1, 2022 to August 26, 2023.

For this year, the BoC was able to collect at least P80 million per day from the 35 percent import duty on rice.

At present, tariff collections are pooled under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) to be returned to farmers as indemnity for market losses.

These plowbacks are mostly in the form of equipment and inputs purchased by the Department of Agriculture.

The formula of RCEF plowbacks are legislated under Republic Act 11203, the Rice Tariffication Law: 50 percent for equipment; 30 percent for seeds; 10

percent for credit assistance; 10 percent for extension.

"I have always maintained that instead of strait-jacketed assistance, we should trust the farmers with the decision on how best to spend the import dividends given to them as indemnity. Dahil walasa menu ang cash transfer, government is denied the flexibility to undertake rapid-response relief that will ease the plight of farmers during exigencies," Recto said.

"Kung sino pa ang mahirapat walang makain, sila pa ang magbebentang pagkainsa itinakdang halaga," he lamented.

He likewise proposed the amendments of the RCEF menu (Section 13 of the RTL) to allow the direct cash assistance.

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'Ala pang napaparusahang smugglers ng bigas

RAMDAM na ng mga Pinoy ang pagsirit ng presyo ng bigas na nagkakahalaga ng P61 kada kilo. Dapat kalampagin ni President Marcos Jr na siya ring Agriculture secretary ang kanyang mga opisyaes upang alamin ang puno't dulo sa pagtaas ng presyo ng bigas sa merkado. Sa palagay ko, sa tuwing mag-i-import ng bigas ang ginagamit na ahensiya ay ang **National Food Authority (NFA)**, subalit kapag dumating na ang mga bigas, bigla na lamang naglalaho ang mga ito sa mga bodega ng NFA. Saan napupunta ang mga bigas na dapat sana'y buffer stock rice ng pamahalaan?

May mga kumakalat na balita may ilang opisyaes ng NFA ang kasapakat ng mga tusong negosyante sa pagkawala ng mga bigas sa bodega ng pamahalaan. Kaya umaangkat ng bigas ang pamahalaan ay upang punuan ang kakulangan ng bigas sa bansa subalit bakit super taas naman ang presyo? Makapangyarihan ba ang smugglers



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at hoarders sa administrasyon? Panay ang salakay ng Bureau of Customs sa mga bodega ng mga tusong negosyante subalit hanggang sa ngayon, walang napaparusahan. Kung tutukan ng atensiyon ni PBBM ang sabwatan ng smugglers, hoarders at BOC, mapuputol ang pamamayagpag ng mga tusong negosyante.

Samantala, dapat magbigay ng ayuda ang pamahalaan sa mga magsasaka sa pamamagitan ng pagbibigay ng mga kagamitan sa pagsasaka gaya ng tractors at harvesters, abono, pesticides at iba pa. Maging ang mga local government units (LGUs) ay dapat pulungin ni PBBM upang matigil na ang walang habas na pag-convert ng sakahan to industrial land. Bigyang prayoridad ito upang makatulong sa food production program.

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Banana growers shift to grains production in Davao del Norte

By MANUEL T. CAYON

[@awimailbox](#) | Mindanao Bureau Chief

DAVAO CITY—Small banana growers have switched to grains production after the pestering Panama Disease kept spreading in sprawling banana farms of Davao del Norte, the Provincial Agriculture Office (PAGRO) has reported.

This came out in the agency's recent monitoring of the total hectareage of agricultural crops, especially for rice and corn areas in Davao del Norte.

From 7,000 hectares several years ago, corn production areas in Davao del Norte have now reached more than 10,000 hectares, said

PAGRO Senior Agriculturist and Provincial Corn Focal Omar T. Ayco.

Ayco attributed the shifting of crops to the "wide devastation" caused by Fusarium Wilt, or Panama Disease, infestation that has affected banana plantations but which has the dire consequence on small-scale banana farms due to

costly management and preventive measures.

He said farmers are now planting their former banana farms with rice or corn, especially with the assistance provided by the PAGRO as part of the "Kawsa sa Agrikultura ug Panginabuhian sa Barangay" or Kaagapay Program.

The provincial government has purchased two units of backhoe to reconstruct banana farms into rice paddies and corn fields, while it provided them with hybrid seeds and fertilizer to restore the productivity of lands left idle and abandoned.

A Yellow Corn Enhancement Program of the PAGRO entitles farmers with free hybrid yellow corn seeds and fertilizers, while the same assistance is also being given to farmers planting white corn "especially now that white corn consumption has increased as alternative to rice consumption," Ayco said.

Ayco has encouraged farmers to maximize the income opportunities of corn production as market buying prices are relatively high at P16.80 to P18.50 per kilo for yellow corn, and P20.00 to P24.00

per kilo for white corn.

PAGRO Senior Agriculturist Jefferson O. Cerbito, meantime said a similar increasing trend of rice production areas in Davao del Norte was also noted.

Cerbito said the rice farms are now about 19,000 hectareage and still expected to increase.

"These used to be rice lands but they converted to bananas, and then they go back to rice farming due to Fusarium Wilt," he said.

Of the 19,000 rice areas, 15,000 hectares are irrigated and 4,000 are upland rain-fed rice areas mostly in tribal communities, he said.

The PAGRO and the Department of Agriculture have extended assistance to them with upland rice seeds for distribution to tribal farmers, as well as giving hybrid and in-bred rice seeds and fertilizer.



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Agri damage due to 'Habagat,' two typhoons now at P584M

AGRICULTURE damage sustained by five regions due to the inclement weather caused by the southwest monsoon and typhoons "Goring" and "Hanna" have now totaled P584,759,593.12, according to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council's (NDRRMC)'s Monday morning update.

This can be broken down into P192,654,708.85 for Region 2; P5,737,325.56 in Region 3; P29,678,492.99 for Mimaropa; P356,128,079.72 for Region 6; and P560,990 for the Cordillera Administrative Region.

Around 16,982 farmers and fisherfolk were reported affected by these damages.

Meanwhile, the NDRRMC placed infrastructure damage at P130,251,200 and these were reported in Region 2, Mimaropa, and Region 6.

It also reported that families affected by these weather disturbances have now totaled 140,101.

This is equivalent to 514,153 persons residing in 1,756 barangays in Regions 1, 2, 3, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Region 6, Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) and the National Capital Region.

Of this number, 915 families or 3,251 individuals are being served in 52 evacuation centers and another 2,410 families or 10,052 persons being aided outside.

The NDRRMC also said that it has a confirmed report of one death in Region 6, even as it is validating another fatality in the CAR along with one missing in Region 6.

Houses damaged were placed at 1,349 and these were reported in Regions 1, 2, 3, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Region 6, and the CAR. **Rex Anthony Naval**



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PSA: Support census for agri, fisheries

BY DEXTER SEE

DAGUPAN CITY: The Philippine Statistics Authority-Regional Statistical Services Office 1 (PSA-RSSO 1) asked the public to support the Census of Agriculture and Fisheries (CAF) from September 4 to October 25 this year.

The survey is in line with the observance of the National Agriculture and Fisheries Census Month pursuant to Proclamation 272 signed by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. recently.

"The 2022 CAF is a large-scale government undertaking in all regions to collect and compile all the basic information on the agricultural and fishery sectors," said Teresa Olarte, supervising statistical specialist and regional focal person of the 2022 CAF.

"The PSA conducts the census every 10 years."

Olarte said that there are 1,097 hired personnel in Pangasinan who will be deployed in the province — 822 of whom are enumerators, 165 are team supervisors, 55 are census area supervisors, and 55 are assistant census area supervisors.

Among the target respondents for the collection of data are operators of crops, livestock, poultry, insect/worm farming, aquaculture, or fishing activities from Jan. 1, 2022 to Dec. 31, 2022.

Data collection will be conducted through house-to-house visits using the computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI) method, pen and paper interviews (PAPI), telephone inter-

views using a mobile phone, landline phone, or tablet, and the self-administered questionnaire (SAQ).

Olarte said that the information to be collected in the census is vital as it will serve as a basis for policy-making, planning, and program implementation for the socioeconomic development in the province and other regions.

Sheila de Guzman, regional director of PSA-RSSO 1, meanwhile said that to ensure the quality of the data to be collected and processed, a series of training for the data collectors were conducted including a discussion of the duties of census enumerators, responsibilities of census supervisors, data privacy orientation, interview procedures, among others.

"PSA-RSSO 1 seeks the cooperation of the target respondents by providing accurate information to the enumerators," de Guzman said.

"PSA-RSSO 1 is assuring the public that the data to be collected in the census will be kept confidential and will only be used to build policies, strategies, and programs for the socioeconomic development of the Philippines."



Troubling data on fisheries

The findings of the latest study on the state of Philippine fisheries in relation to nutrition, food security, livelihood and income, as well as economic contribution, can be quite disturbing yet interesting.

Titled "The State of Fish in Nutrition Systems in the Philippines," the study found that large numbers of Filipinos lack protein intake despite a typical diet of rice, fish, and vegetables, with fish as the main source of protein.

"Only 55.15 of households meet the recommended protein intake," it was pointed out. "The gap is even more stark among individual population groups that are in dire need of this nutritional intake. Only 17.1 percent among pregnant women, 19.1 percent among lactating mothers, and 27.2 percent among the elderly are meeting the recommended intake."

The study also showed a huge difference in consumption between rich and poor Filipinos. With increasing levels of wealth, the quantity of fresh fish consumed also increased among the rich, while the poor have to contend with dried fish or canned and processed fish. But as wealth increased, the amount of consumed processed fish declined. Also, the consumption of mollusks and crus-

taceans like shrimps only increased in the richest households.

While consumption of fresh fish among urban and rural consumers "did not differ greatly at the national level," the study said that rural consumers (where poor Filipinos are mostly situated) "ate significantly greater amounts of canned fish, dried fish, fish paste, and various 'other' fish and crustacean species."

The study, published in 2022 by Oceana, an international organization focused on ocean conservation, and MRAG Asia Pacific, a fisheries and aquatic resources consulting company, was done in cooperation with the Department of Science and Technology-Food and Nutrition Research Institute (DOST-FNRI).

Some of the disturbing findings include the "unreported catch of commercial fishing that contributes to underestimation of fish and seafood supply." The study also found there was "undervaluation of coral reefs' contribution to food and livelihood security considering that these provide 50 times more employment than commercial fishing in



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Exclusive Economic Zones."

While the study said that fishing and aquaculture provide direct employment to 1.35 to 1.41 million workers, and indirect employment to more than half a million people engaged in fish-related activities, it said "there is significant uncertainty surrounding these estimates which stems from data collection issues, discrepancies among various government departments, and a general lack of disaggregated estimates according to target/ culture species and location."

Still, it determined that most fisherfolks are "municipal fishers" and that "the commercial sector likely provided the second greatest contribution in terms of fisher and fish worker employment, primarily through the commercial tuna and sardines industries."

Aquaculture, which produces bangus (milkfish) and tilapia, ranks third in employment, the study said. "But data on employee numbers were often contradictory and no recent disaggregated data of employment by culture environment or species were available," it added.

And speaking of milkfish and tilapia, here's what the study revealed: While milkfish and tilapia were ranked the first and third most consumed species in 2018-19, comprising 26 percent of total seafood consumption per person, the two species "offer fewer nutrients per serve compared to the diverse suite of pelagic species landed by wild capture fisheries."

Greater consumption of wild-caught species correlated with greater amounts of protein, iron, calcium, and vitamin A being obtained from fresh fish, the study said, as it stressed "the importance of

considering the nutritional composition of consumed fish species, rather than just the weight of consumption, when designing policies and programs aimed at improving food and nutrition security."

"The Philippines ranks second in the world with population highly dependent on healthy and vibrant oceans for nutrition, livelihood, and coastal protection," Oceana Vice President Gloria Estenzo Ramos said. "We need to be vigilant in ensuring that the human-induced pressures on our ocean which caused an alarming decline fish population, such as rampant illegal fishing in our municipal waters and continuing destruction of marine habitats, are stopped."

Indeed, stopping the decline of our fish population is vital. Especially so because fish and other aquatic resources are considered the main source of protein for poor Filipinos. It's beyond dispute that consumption of fish, along with vegetables, will provide nutrients that are much-needed against the various forms of malnutrition prevalent in our country.

Taking care of our fisheries will go a long way in battling malnutrition with its grim statistics: 95 Filipino children die daily from malnutrition, 27 out of every 1,000 children do not get past their fifth birthday, one-third of all children here are stunted or short for their age, and stunting after age two can be permanent, irreversible and even fatal.

DOST-FNRI director Dr. Imelda Angeles-Agdeppa is correct when she said that "with food security as one of the new administration's priority agenda, we hope that the direction of development in the fisheries and fishing industry will be towards achieving better nutrition for Filipinos." (Email: finding.lina@yahoo.com)

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Amid rice price ceiling Don't panic, says PCCI

By BERNIE CAHILES-MAGKILAT

Don't panic. This was the call of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) amid a "panicky" situation among consumers following a government decision to impose price ceiling on rice at ₱41 per kilo for regular milled and ₱45 for well-milled, effective Tuesday, Sept. 5.

PCCI President George T. Barcelon said that he discussed with Trade and Industry Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual and agreed to help calm down the situation because there is enough supply. Both are currently attending the 23rd ASEAN Economic Council Meeting in Jakarta in preparation 43rd ASEAN Leaders Summit in Indonesia.

"Don't panic," said Barcelon as he cautioned that the worse that can happen is a panic situation among consumers. He said that the price ceiling on rice is good only for six months and DTI is looking into the price range.

PCCI noticed that there is enough supply so there is "no need to panic". He explained that if the end consumers resort to panic, they will have to buy more than what they need causing shortage in supply.

"Buy only what you need," he



(MB Photos by Noel B. Pabalate)

said as he warned that if there is an artificial supply shortage due to panicky consumers, this can only add to price pressures that could trigger higher inflation level and further bolster the call in the Senate for the proposed ₱150 increase in daily wage rate.

"We know the plight of workers, but we need to look at the bigger picture because other sectors have not yet recovered and there is another call for hike in salary," he said noting that he was informed of two garment firms in Cebu closing due to business challenges affecting an estimated 6,000



workers. "All of these are interrelated, and if we panic, we become part of the problem," he said.

Anyway, he said the government is seriously

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looking into hoarding and price profiteering. "They have to look at supply chain or demand and look at capacity and importation," he added.

Like most businesses, Barcelon said, "I am not in favor of price ceiling." He explained that the market should be allowed to operate based on supply and demand. "If we compromise, this natural play may not work out so as businessmen we prefer sup-

ply and demand to work," he said.

He noticed that when a price control is imposed, the flip side is panic. "So, we need a balancing act. We don't want it (price cap), because that would not end well and not good for the economy," he said.

But added that since EO has already been issued, "We just have to support that."