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Agri sabotage bill certified as urgent

PBBM wants measure passed amid high rice prices

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

PRESIDENT Marcos Jr. has certified as urgent the approval of the proposed Anti-Agricultural

Economic Sabotage Act, which is now under plenary deliberation at the Senate.

The proposed measure, Senate Bill No. 2432, repeals the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act (Republic Act No. 10845) and seeks to punish the smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, and cartel of agricultural and fishery products as acts of economic sabotage, punishable with life

imprisonment and a fine thrice the value of confiscated goods.

SBN 2432 defines agricultural economic sabotage as any act or activity that disrupts the economy by creating artificial shortages, promoting excessive importation, manipulating prices and supply, evading payment or underpayment of tariffs and customs duties, threatening local production and food security, gaining excessive or exorbitant profits by exploiting situations, creating scarcity, and entering into agreements that contravenes fair competition to the

prejudice of the public.

In a letter dated September 20 and addressed to Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri, the President underscored "the necessity of the immediate enactment" of SBN 2432 amid the rising prices of and shortages in agricultural products, especially rice, partly due to the nefarious acts of smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, and cartel.

Marcos has already imposed a price cap on regular and well-milled rice sold in the markets amid the rising cost of the grains. The government is giving a

P15,000 subsidy to micro and small rice retailers affected by the price ceiling.

He has also started distributing smuggled imported sacks of rice confiscated by the Bureau of Customs to poor households.

The bill is one of the expanded Common Legislative Agenda discussed during the 3rd Legislative Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) meeting last Tuesday.

SBN 2432 is the consolidated version

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of various similar bills filed in the Senate. It is contained under Committee Report No. 18, which was sponsored in the Senate floor by Sen. Cynthia Villar, who is the chairperson of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform.

In endorsing the approval of the bill, Villar has noted that the Philippine government has been losing at least P200 billion in revenues every year due to agricultural smuggling.

The Senate on Wednesday closed the period of interpellation for the measure, while a Technical Working Group is finalizing the version of the bill at the House of Representatives.

Aside from imposing grave penalties against agricultural eco-

nomie saboteurs, the President said the measure will promote the productivity of the agriculture sector, protect farmers and fisherfolk from unscrupulous traders and importers, and ensure reasonable and affordable prices of agricultural and fishery products for consumers.

INTER-AGENCY COUNCIL

The measure proposes the creation of an Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Council that will be chaired by the President, with members coming from the Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Justice (DOJ), Department of Finance (DOF), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of Transportation

(DOTr), Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC), and the Philippine Competition Commission (PCC).

The Council shall also have one representative from each of the following agricultural sectors—sugar, rice and corn, livestock and poultry, vegetables and fruits, fisheries and other aquatic products; and tobacco.

A special team of prosecutors shall be formed by the DOJ that would assist in the expeditious prosecution of criminal cases covered by the Agricultural Economic Sabotage law.

An Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Enforcement Group shall also be formed to assist in the stoppage of smugglers, hoarders, and profiteers.

The group shall include representatives from the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), Philippine National Police (PNP), Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), Philippine Ports Authority (PPA), Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), DA-Inspectorate and Enforcement (DA-I&E), Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), and various agricultural sectors.

Under the proposed legisla-

tion, any government officer or employee who will be found as an accomplice of agricultural smugglers, hoarders and profiteers shall “suffer the additional penalties of perpetual disqualification from holding public office, from exercising the right to vote, from participating in any public election, and forfeiture of employment monetary and financial benefits.”

In case the offender is a juridical person, criminal liability shall be filed against all the officers who participated in the decision that led to the commission of the crime and suffer the penalty of perpetual absolute disqualification to engage in any business involving importation, transportation, storage and warehousing, and domestic trade of agricultural and fishery products.

The proposed measure, when enacted, allows government authorities to confiscate the agricultural and fishery products that are the subject of economic sabotage, and the properties that were used in the commission of the crime such as vehicles, vessels, aircrafts, storage areas, warehouses, boxes, cases, trunks, and other containers of whatever character used

as receptacle of agricultural and fishery products.

National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Arsenio Balisacan on Thursday said they would soon meet and discuss with the President the current rice situation in the country, including when to lift the temporary price cap imposed by Malacañang and other possible measures to keep the prices of rice down.

Balisacan, in a briefing after the NEDA Board meeting in the Palace, said one option to lower rice prices is to reduce the tariff on rice imports.

“We will meet soon to recommend other options. There are as I said earlier, there are options for example, we have made mention about reducing the tariff while world prices are rising,” he said, adding that these options have yet to be discussed with the President or in the Cabinet level.

“We have a meeting soon on that where we will present the options. The issue is, basically, that world prices of rice are rising and have risen quite sharply in recent months. And so the question is: Do we allow those high prices to

be reflected in our local markets, particularly for our consumers? What do we need to do to ensure that we can protect our consumers so that we can still be rice-secured even as world prices are rising? So there are options to achieve that objective,” he added.

Balisacan said among the factors to be considered in maintaining or reducing the current tariff is world prices.

He said if the world prices are not rising, the tariff should not be reduced, but “when world prices are rising sharply and you don’t want that to come down to the level of our markets like for example the retail or the wholesale or even at the farm gate, of course, you have to find other options of protecting our people. And reducing the tariff temporarily would be such an option.”

The economic managers previously proposed a reduction in the current 35 percent rice import tariff rates, ranging from zero percent to 10 percent for both ASEAN and the most-favored nation (MFN).

Balisacan said the government is closely monitoring global rice prices and the export volumes of major rice-exporting nations.

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GOV'T ASKED: WHY STILL NO RICE SMUGGLERS CHARGED?

STORY BY MELVIN GASCON AND JEROME ANING

Citing the recent successful raids by the Bureau of Customs on warehouses found keeping smuggled rice in Cavite, Las Piñas and Zamboanga, Sen. Francis Escudero wonders 'why there is a crime but still no criminals at this time.'

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

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FROM A1

By Melvin Gascon
and Jerome Aning
@Team_Inquirer

Sen. Francis Escudero on Thursday challenged the Bureau of Customs (BOC) to file criminal charges against suspected hoarders and smugglers of rice to bolster the government's crackdown against the alleged rice cartel in the country.

Escudero said he was baffled by the BOC's delay in filing charges against owners of warehouses that were targeted in the recent series of raids on suspicion that these were involved in rice smuggling and hoarding.

"A crime definitely took place. And I am wondering why there is a crime but still no criminals at this time?" Escudero asked.

Escudero made the remark following the string of raids on rice warehouses in Cavite province and Las Piñas City by the BOC, the latest of which netted an estimated P40 million worth of suspected smuggled rice from Vietnam, Thailand and China.

P44-M seizure

Last week, the BOC also

reported having seized more than 42,000 sacks of rice worth about P44 million from a warehouse in Zamboanga City.

The senator noted that President Marcos has already started the distribution of the seized smuggled rice on Wednesday in Zamboanga City to some 3,000 indigent beneficiaries under the administration's Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, and yet BOC officials "appear to be slow" in filing criminal cases.

"I have yet to hear a name that is responsible for the hoarding of the rice that BOC has raided. And why is it that not a single case has been filed against any individual, much less the disclosure of their names?" the senator said.

The crackdown on rice hoarding came after the President imposed a price cap on the Filipino staple early this month and directed the BOC to raid suspected warehouses to combat hoarding and smuggling.

It's been 3 weeks

"It has been three weeks since (the Zamboanga raid), but why is there a seeming utter silence on the filing of charges against those involved?" the senator noted.

According to Escudero, the BOC should file criminal cases



SMUGGLED, SEIZED AND GIVEN AWAY President

Marcos leads the distribution of confiscated rice to 4Ps beneficiaries in Zamboanga City on Sept. 19. —PNA PHOTO

against suspects for violation of Republic Act No. 10845, or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016.

He said the law considers smuggling of agricultural products as economic sabotage if it involves "at least P1 million worth of sugar, corn, pork, poultry, garlic, onion, carrots, fish and cruciferous vegetables, in their raw state, or which have undergone the simple processes of preparation and preserva-

tion for the market, or a minimum of P10 million worth of rice, as valued by [BOC]."

"I have said this before and I will say it again: our campaign should not end with raids alone; we should file charges against all those responsible," Escudero said.

"In simple language, there could not be a crime without a criminal. With all the raids that [the BOC] had conducted, with all the voluminous stocks of rice seized which had been tagged as an act of hoarding, why has no one been charged?" the lawmaker added.

Priority bill

On Wednesday, Escudero already aired his disappointment over the supposed failure of the BOC to file cases when the Senate plenary tackled the committee report on Senate Bill No. 2432, which seeks to define the crimes of agricultural economic sabotage, provide penalties, and create an inter-agency council to implement the law.

Mr. Marcos has asked the Senate to prioritize the passage of the measure, certifying it as urgent on Wednesday through a letter addressed to Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri.

"The need to facilitate the passage of this important piece of

legislation is imperative, especially now that the country is beset by rising prices and shortages in agricultural products, partly due to the nefarious acts of smuggling, hoarding, profiteering and cartel," Mr. Marcos said in his letter.

"It will also promote the productivity of the agriculture sector, protect farmers and fisherfolk from unscrupulous traders and imports, and ensure reasonable and affordable prices of agricultural and fishery products for consumers," he added.

The bill is undergoing interpellation in the Senate, while its counterpart version in the House of Representatives is being finalized by a technical working group.

Disrupting economy

SB 2432 defines agriculture economic sabotage as "any act or activity that disrupts the economy by creating artificial shortage, promoting excessive importation, manipulating prices and supply, evading payment or underpayment of tariffs and customs duties, threatening local food production and food security, gaining excessive or exorbitant profits by exploiting situations, creating scarcity, and entering into agreements that defeat fair competition to the prejudice of the public."

The bill creates the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Council, to be chaired by the President, to ensure the implementation of the measure and formulate a national plan to address and counter agricultural economic sabotage crimes, among other functions.

Life sentence

The body will also have the power to deputize and enlist the assistance of government agencies in going after persons involved in agricultural economic sabotage, direct the speedy investigation and prosecution of the suspects, and freeze their funds, assets and records.

The council's members are the agriculture, trade, justice, finance, interior and transportation departments, the Anti-Money Laundering Council, the Philippine Competition Commission, and representatives of six agricultural sectors, namely sugar, rice and corn, livestock and poultry, vegetables and fruit, fisheries, and other aquatic products, and tobacco.

The bill imposes the penalty of life imprisonment on economic sabotage with a fine thrice the value of the agricultural and fishery products involved in the crime. **INQ**



Marcos gets tough on economic saboteurs

Bill stipulating stiffer penalties on agri sabotage certified urgent

By ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS
and ELLSON QUISMORIO

President Marcos has certified as urgent the bill that would protect farmers and fisherfolk from unscrupulous traders and importers amid rising prices and shortages of agricultural

products due to what he called "nefarious acts."

In his letter to Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri dated Sept. 20, President Marcos stated that he wanted the immediate enactment of Senate Bill No. 2432, which would define the crime of agricultural economic sabotage, provide penalties,

and create an anti-agricultural economic sabotage council.

"The need to facilitate the passage of this important piece of legislation is imperative, especially now that the country is beset by rising prices and shortages in agricultural products," he said.

Marcos said these rising prices

and shortages were partly due to "nefarious acts" such as smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, and cartels.

According to the President, the measure would promote the productivity of the agriculture sector and protect farmers and fisherfolk from unscrupulous traders and importers.

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Marcos gets tough on economic saboteurs 1◀

He added that the proposed bill, which would repeal the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016 (Republic Act No. 10845), would likewise ensure reasonable and affordable prices of agricultural and fishery products for consumers.

Based on the proposed measure, government officers or employees found to be an accomplice in the commission of the crime shall "suffer the additional penalties of perpetual disqualification from holding public office, exercising the right to vote, from participating in any public election, and forfeiture of employment monetary and financial benefits."

When an offender is a juridical person, criminal liability shall be attached to all officers who participated in the decision that led to the commission of the crime, with a penalty of perpetual absolute disqualification to engage in any business involving importation, transportation, storage and warehousing, and domestic trade of agricultural and fishery products.

Government authorities also have the right to confiscate the agricultural and fishery products involved in the prohibited acts and the properties used in the commission of the crime of agricultural economic sabotage like vehicles, vessels, aircraft, storage areas, warehouses, boxes, cases, trunks, and other containers of whatever character used as a receptacle of agricultural and fishery products.

The proposed measure was among the expanded Common Legislative Agenda discussed during the third Legislative Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) meeting in Malacañan on Wednesday.

The bill is now pending in the period of interpellations in the Senate, while a Technical Working Group is currently finalizing the version of the House of Representatives.

Agri-smugglers to get life imprisonment

In the House version, which was already approved by the Committee

on Agriculture and Food, individuals found to have committed agricultural smuggling will be meted the penalty of life imprisonment.

Quezon 1st District Rep. Wilfrido Mark Enverga, chairman of the Committee on Agriculture and Food, detailed in an interview just how more serious the penalty for agricultural smuggling would be if the measure gets enacted.

"Economic sabotage is now uniform for smuggling, hoarding, cartelizing, and profiteering. So of course, the most guilty person who will get caught will get life imprisonment. The penalties are quite higher," he said.

He said the maximum penalty under the current law is a 30 to 40-year jail term.

The measure is among the 20 identified by the LEDAC that's slated for approval on third and final reading by the House of Representatives before year's end.

The Quezon solon hopes the bill can get passed on second reading in plenary this week.

Enverga said the substitute bill also tasks the Department of Justice (DOJ) to create a special prosecution team. "It will only focus on cases involving economic sabotage."

The measure also allows the filing of charges by the Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and National Bureau of Investigation (NBI). Originally, only the Bureau of Customs (BOC) can pursue cases.

The bill also requires traders to register with the DA and submit inventory figures monthly.

House Speaker Martin Romualdez instructed the congressmen to pursue amendments to RA No.10845 as an offshoot of the Enverga panel's very revealing, and lengthy, inquiry on the onion price surge.



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NEDA to present rice price control options to PBBM

By XANDER DAVE CEBALLOS

The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) said it will discuss with President Marcos other ways to reduce the rising prices of rice instead of using a price cap.

In a briefing on Thursday, Sept. 21, NEDA Secretary Arsenio M.

Balisacan said the rice price ceilings imposed by the President will only be temporary, citing the need for the government to find a better option.

For one, Balisacan said that reducing the tariff on rice imports will help arrest the surge in prices.

"There are options, for example, we have made mention of reducing the tariff while world prices are

rising," the NEDA chief said.

Previously, Balisacan and Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno suggested decreasing rice tariffs after Congress adjourns.

The economic managers proposed a reduction in the current 35-percent rice import tariff rates, ranging from zero percent to 10 percent for both ASEAN and the

most-favored nation (MFN).

"Of course, when the world prices are not rising, you don't want to reduce the tariff but when the world prices are rising sharply and you do not want that to come down to the level of markets for example the retail, or wholesale, or even at the farmgate," the NEDA chief added.

Balisacan, meanwhile, said they are closely monitoring global rice prices and the export volumes of major rice-exporting nations.

He cited the current situation in India, where rice exports

have been recently restricted, and the external pressures faced by other exporting countries like Vietnam and Thailand.

"Other exporting countries like Thailand and Vietnam would also want to protect their local population from this external pressure and they may also decrease their exports so those are the ones that are causing prices in the global market to rise," he further said.

Additionally, the NEDA chief acknowledged that El Niño could also be a factor contributing to the increase in global rice prices.



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Underestimating rice



VANTAGE
POINT

VAN
YBIERNAS

IN last week's (Sept. 15, 2023) column, I pointed out that in more established and developed Southeast Asian historiography, rice production and — more importantly — distribution were vital national political, economic, cultural and religious concerns that could undo a leader's fitness for leadership. This matter is quite instructive for the current situation in our country.

In the case of Cambodia, Angkor ("city") is both the (ancient) capital city and kingdom. Quoting Michael Vickery, Kenneth Hall wrote: "the boundaries of the realm were never clearly defined, and Angkor is best understood as a growing confederation of populations willing to submit to a central authority." That central authority often endeavored to erect temple complexes to publicly display their religious piety as the leading light of the empire.

Yet, the temple complexes also featured a more practical purpose. Hall said:

"Several rulers constructed enormous reservoirs ("baray") and a network of canals around their capital city to provide a secure source of irrigation that would significantly increase their realm's agricultural productivity, and to reinforce the ritual symbolism of their capital."

Many of these barays and canal networks were integrated in temple complexes in Angkor and served as the lifeblood of the empire. During the monsoon season, rains would flood the fields. In the dry season, rice fields needed water supply for irrigation. Thus, the rest of the realm submitted itself to Angkor, in part because the reservoirs and canals under the control of the centralizing authority proved invaluable to the rice-based economy, not to mention society and culture, including the religious aspect.

This is not as pronounced in the Philippines because, as mentioned in last week's column, the country was both a rice-producing and maritime trade-oriented aggregation of polities. Nevertheless, even

in the maritime trade-oriented polities in the archipelago, rice was an important staple and a paramount social and cultural symbol.

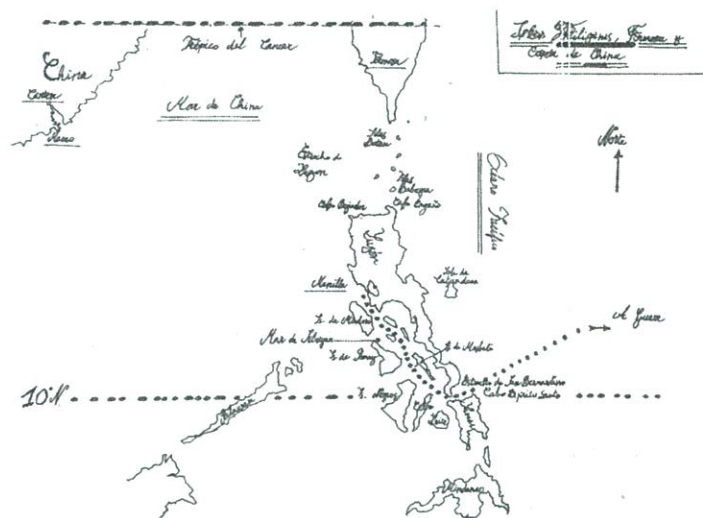
The visiting Ferdinand Magellan expedition in 1521, for instance, did not appreciate the full weight of the Filipino gesture toward them in this manner. Antonio de Pigafetta wrote:

"...we saw a boat coming toward us with nine men in it... The captain-general, seeing that they are reasonable men, ordered food to be set before them, and gave them red caps, mirrors, combs, bells, ivory, bocasine, and other things. When they saw the captain's courtesy, they presented fish, a jar of palm wine ... figs more than one palmo long (i.e., bananas) and others which were smaller and more delicate, and two cocoanuts. They had nothing else then, but made us signs with their hands that they would bring umay or rice, and cocoanuts and many other articles of food within four days."

Touched by the foreigners' generosity during their encounter, the Filipinos gave the Magellan expedition what they had and promised to return with their most valuable food item: rice. The value of rice to Filipinos can be seen in the report of the conquistador Captain Miguel Loarca in the late 16th century:

"If one lends another rice and a year passes without the debt being paid, since rice is something that is planted, if it is not repaid in the first year of sowing, double the amount of the loan must be paid in the second year, and four times the third, and so on at this rate."

Rice production was so important that Spanish Governor-General Sebastian Hurtado de Corcuera, who was in office from 1636 to 1644, included in his extensive memorandum the initiative "to encourage agriculture and promote the cultivation of rice in the lands around Manila."



■ A facsimile of a map showing the Manila Galleon route that was found aboard the 'Nuestra Señora de Covadonga' after it was taken by Commodore George Anson in 1743. IMAGE FROM ARAPAIMA VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



■ (From left) Jose Rizal, Marcelo H. del Pilar and Mariano Ponce. IMAGE FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Rice (and other food items) was a crucial contribution by Filipinos to the Galleon Trade, essentially an indirect trade between Chinese and Japanese goods on the one hand, and Mexican/Latin American silver on the other. Francisco Maniago led one of the most serious rebellions against early Spanish rule in the 1660s after the Kapampangan farmers were not compensated for the rice that was appropriated by the colonial government through the "vandalia" system that had accumulated to astronomical sums over the years.

Rice lands were also at the center of the so-called agrarian revolts of the mid-18th century. Rice land ownership changed from com-



■ Then-president Elpidio Quirino (behind microphone) receives Hukbalahap leaders, including 'Huk Supremo' Luis Taruc (second from left), at Malacañang Palace on June 21, 1948. MALACANANG PHOTO VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

munal during the age of the datu to the control of the religious corporations by the 18th century. These contentious properties were referred to in history books as the "friar lands." Land tenure controversy consumed the writings of Jose Rizal, Marcelo del Pilar and other nationalists of the 19th century. Historians have already highlighted the connections between these contentious rice lands and the 1896 Revolution. Moreover, Benedict Kerkvliet's influential book on the Huk Rebellion traces the roots of that conflict to (rice) land and land tenure problems.

With its long and turbulent history, the Marcos government would be ill-advised to take the current rice issue lightly.



Bill on agri sabotage certified as urgent

AMID rising prices and shortages of agricultural products, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. certified as urgent the measure that seeks to impose severe penalties on the crimes of agricultural economic sabotage.

In his letter to Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri dated September 20, Marcos called for the immediate enactment of Senate Bill 2432, or an "Act defining the crimes of agricultural economic sabotage, providing penalties therefor, creating the anti-agricultural economic sabotage council."

"The need to facilitate the passage of this important piece of legislation is imperative, especially now that the country is beset by rising prices and shortages in agricultural products, partly due to the nefarious acts of smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, and cartel," Marcos said.

"It will also promote the productivity of the agriculture sector, protect farmers and fisherfolk from unscrupulous traders and importers, and ensure reasonable and affordable prices of agricultural and fishery products for consumers," he added.

The bill will repeal Republic Act 10845, or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016, and promote the productivity of the agriculture sector.

It also imposes severe sanctions on the smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, and cartel of agricultural and fishery products, including a penalty of life imprisonment and a fine thrice the value of the agricultural and fishery products subject of the crime as economic sabotage.

Any government officer or employee found to be an accomplice in the commission of the crime shall "suffer the additional penalties of perpetual disqualification from holding public office, exercising the right to vote, from participating in any public election, and forfeiture of employment monetary and financial benefits."

When the offender is a juridical person, criminal liability shall be attached to all officers who participated in the decision that led to the commission of the crime, with a penalty of perpetual absolute disqualification to engage in any business involving importation, transportation, storage and warehousing, and domestic trade of agricultural and fishery products.

Government authorities can also confiscate agricultural and fishery products, which are subject of the prohibited acts.

The measure was among the expanded Common Legislative Agenda discussed during the third Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) Meeting in Malacañang on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the LEDAC has also approved several measures for inclusion in the Common Legislative Agenda for the 19th Congress.

"There is an additional measure, added by our economic team, and we are committed to support this as well. We don't see anything controversial," Zubiri said in an interview following the LEDAC meeting.

"We do not see anything that will harm our countrymen. That's the good thing about these LEDAC meetings. We, our President, see it, and it is in line to help the Filipino people, especially our poor countrymen," he added.

The additional measures are the Amendments to the Government Procurement Reform Act, Excise Tax on Single-Use Plastics, Amendments to the Cooperative Code, Amendments to the Fisheries Code, the New Government Auditing Code, Rationalization of the Mining Fiscal Regime, and the Philippine Defense Industry Development Act.

The Philippine Maritime Zones Act, Open Access in Data Transmission Act, and Amendments to the Right-of-Way Act were also included. **CATHERINE S. VALENTE**



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Marcos vows fight vs illicit tobacco trade

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. promised to fight the illicit tobacco trade in the country and to help tobacco farmers find other sources of income.

In his speech delivered by Ilocos Norte Gov. Matthew Joseph Manotoc during the First International Tobacco Agricultural Summit, Marcos said the government lost P16 billion this year to tobacco smuggling.

"These past years, we had seen so much change in our health policies that affected the tobacco industry. As such, we must seek ways to protect the livelihood of thousands of our tobacco farmers," said Marcos, who is also the Agriculture chief.

The President said the tobacco industry has been a "vibrant catalyst for economic growth in the country," particularly in Mindanao and Northern Luzon.

"For many of our people, it is an indispensable bedrock that generates income, livelihood, opportunities, and employment, particularly in areas where its cultivation spans generations and holds pivotal significance in the way of its communities," Marcos said. "It is a significant source of tax revenues that are used to fund government programs," he added.

The President directed the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the National Tobacco Administration (NTA) to explore other crops that can be grown alongside tobacco to introduce additional or alternative sources of income for tobacco farmers.

In a separate farmers' pre-tripartite conference in Vigan City, Agriculture Undersecretary De-

ogracias Victor Savellano said the DA and NTA will encourage farmers to adopt a multiple cropping system. Savellano said technical assistance will be extended to farmers so they may also plant rice, corn, sugarcane, vegetables, garlic, onion and bamboo, along with other high-value crops.

To raise farmers' income, he said that the DA will carry out an intervention program for the industry. "Our main goal is to export our tobacco. That's why we should produce high-quality tobacco in order to be competitive in the world market and earn the dollar revenue we deserve," Savellano said.

The tobacco industry provides a livelihood for 2.1 million people.

Savellano said the tobacco industry is also a key contributor to public sector revenues, with excise tax collection amounting to P160 billion in 2022. Tobacco, he said, comprised 54 percent of sin tax collection in 2022.

"The tobacco industry is a foreign exchange generator and finances the government's health programs. Export values rose by 46.3 percent from 2018 to 2022," Savellano said. "The tax revenue from tobacco products is reinvested in the government's universal health-care program. A total of P74.48 billion has been earmarked for (UHP) in 2022 out of the tobacco excise tax collections," he added. NTA Regulatory Head Robert Ambros said the government's revenue loss due to the illicit tobacco trade is expected to exceed P30 billion by the end of the year.

CATHERINE S. VALENTE



Marcos ratings show 'significant' decline

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. continues to enjoy the trust and approval of the people, despite having "significant" drops in his ratings, PUBLiCUS Asia Inc.'s third quarter survey released on Thursday showed.

The September 7 to 12 survey results showed 55 percent of 1,500 respondents appreciated the President's work performance, a seven-point decline from the 62 percent in the second quarter.

The President recorded lower ratings in Metro Manila (61 percent in second quarter to 52 percent in third quarter), North Central Luzon (60 percent to 56 percent), South Luzon (55 percent to

49 percent), and Visayas (71 percent to 52 percent).

His approval rating rose slightly from 63 percent to 64 percent in the Visayas.

"Connected to the less positive sentiments of Filipinos this quarter, approval ratings of the top country officials take a significant blow, hitting lowest in five quarters," PUBLiCUS said.

►DeclineA2



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■ DECLINE FROM A1

Marcos ratings show 'significant' decline

"All regions except Mindanao contribute to the overall weakened approval but in varying extents," it added.

The President's trust ratings also dropped from 54 percent to 47 percent.

Vice President Sara Duterte had a 62-percent approval rating and a 55-percent trust rating.

Senate President Juan Miguel "Migz" Zubiri continues to have a steady approval rating of 43 percent and 33 percent trust rating, while House Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez had a stable approval rating of 37 percent and a 29 percent trust rating.

Chief Justice Alexander Gesmundo's approval (36 percent) and trust (29 percent) ratings were unchanged.

The survey also showed that Duterte — who concurrently serves as Education secretary — had the highest approval rating among Cabinet members at 52 percent.

Duterte was followed by Marcos, with a 49 percent approval rating, for his role as head of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

The approval ratings of other Cabinet officials: Defense Secretary Gilberto "Gibo" Teodoro Jr. (46 percent), the late Migrant Workers Secretary Maria Susana "Toots" Ople

(45 percent) Social Welfare Secretary Rexlon "Rex" Gatchalian (43 percent), Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno (41 percent), Interior Secretary Benjamin "Benhur" Abalos Jr. (40 percent), Science and Technology Secretary Renato Solidum Jr. (39 percent), Health Secretary Teodoro "Ted" Herbosa (36 percent), Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco (34 percent), Labor Secretary Bienvenido Laguesma (33 percent), Transportation Secretary Jaime Bautista (32 percent), Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo (32 percent), Information and Technology Secretary Ivan John Uy (32 percent), National Economic and Develop-

ment Authority Arsenio Balisacan (31 percent), Budget Secretary Amnah Pangandaman (31 percent), Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual (31 percent), Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin (31 percent), Public Works Secretary Manuel Bonoan (31 percent), Environment Secretary Toni Yulo-Loyzaga (31 percent), Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin "Boying" Remulla (30 percent), Housing Secretary Jose Rizalino Acuzar (29 percent), Agrarian Reform Secretary Conrado Esrtrella 3rd (29 percent), and Energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla (29 percent).

Approval of the President's self-appointment as Agriculture secre-

tary also dropped to 53 percent in the third quarter from 57 percent in the second quarter.

"As secretary, he must address the 'shortage' in rice, sugar and other agricultural products, which is likely a contributory factor to the most pressing issue on inflation," PUBLiCUS said.

Agreement with Duterte's appointment as secretary of the Department of Education (DepEd) also "significantly weakened," from 66 percent in the second quarter to 60 percent in the third quarter.

The P150-million confidential and intelligence fund (CIF) for DepEd "is now at the forefront as the most pressing issue hurting her overall performance," PUBLiCUS said.

Duterte has said the proposed CIF was for the agency's anti-insurgency efforts.

"Education is intertwined with national security. It's important for us to mold children who are patriotic, who will love our country and defend our country," said Duterte, who is also the co-vice chairman of the government's anti-communist insurgency task force, the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict.

The noncommissioned survey was conducted from September 7 to September 12. Its respondents were randomly drawn from the market research panel of over 200,000 Filipinos maintained by the Singapore office of PureSpectrum, a US-based panel marketplace.

The respondents were spread across five geographical areas — National Capital Region, North Central Luzon, South Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.

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PBBM certifies as urgent bill vs agri economic sabotage

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA

@sam_medenilla

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has certified as urgent a bill imposing stiffer penalties against "agricultural economic sabotage," Malacañang said on Thursday.

This after the Chief Executive sent a letter to Senate President Juan Miguel "Migz" F. Zubiri last Wednesday certifying as urgent the approval of Senate Bill No. (SBN) 2432, which will repeal Republic Act No. 10845, or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016.

"The need to facilitate the passage of this important piece of legislation is imperative,

especially now that the country is beset by rising prices and shortages in agricultural products partly due to nefarious acts of smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, and cartel," the letter read.

The bill is now pending in the period of interpellations in the Senate, while its counterpart measure in the House of Representatives is being finalized by a technical working group.

SB 2432 mandates the creation of the Anti-agricultural Economic Sabotage Council.

It also defined the crime of agricultural economic sabotage, which will include smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, and cartel of

agricultural and fishery products.

Those engaged in the said illegal acts will face stiff penalties including life imprisonment and a fine thrice the value of the agricultural and fishery products.

Any government officer or employee, who will be found to be involved in such crimes will face additional penalties of perpetual disqualification from holding public office, exercising the right to vote, from participating in any public election, and forfeiture of employment monetary and financial benefits."

"When the offender is a juridical person, criminal liability shall be attached

to all officers who participated in the decision that led to the commission of the crime, with a penalty of perpetual absolute disqualification to engage in any business involving importation, transportation, storage and warehousing, and domestic trade of agricultural and fishery products," a Palace statement read.

"Government authorities also have the right to confiscate the agricultural and fishery products which are subject of the prohibited acts and the properties used in the commission of the crime of agricultural economic sabotage such as, but not limited to, vehicles, vessels, aircraft, storage areas, warehouses, boxes, cases, trunks, and other containers of whatever character used as receptacle of agricultural and fishery products," the statement added.

SBN 2432 is among the expanded Common Legislative Agenda discussed during the Third Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council meeting last Wednesday.



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Marcos asks Senate to fast-track approval of bill vs farm smugglers

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. has certified as urgent a bill that seeks to amend the country's anti-smuggling law by imposing harsher penalties on smugglers and hoarders of farm products.

In a letter to Senate President Juan Miguel F. Zubiri dated Sept. 20, the President said Senate Bill 2432 is crucial since it would protect farmers and fisherfolk from illegal traders. The measure would also ensure reasonable farm prices, he added.

"The need to facilitate the passage of this important piece of legislation is imperative, especially now that the country is beset by rising prices and shortages in agricultural products partly due to nefarious acts of smuggling, hoarding, profiteering and cartel," Mr. Marcos said.

The priority measure will lower the total value of smuggled agriculture and fishery products to P1 million from P10 million for the act to be considered economic sabotage.

Violators face life imprisonment and a fine worth thrice the value of agricultural and fishery products that they smuggled.

The government has been losing at least P200 billion in revenue each year to smuggling, Senator Cynthia A. Villar, the bill's author and head of the Senate agriculture committee,

earlier said, citing government data. The proposal reached the Senate plenary on Sept. 11 for deliberations.

Under the bill, agri-fishery commodities include rice, sugar, corn, pork, poultry, beef, lamb, garlic, onion, carrots, cruciferous vegetables, coconut, coconut oil, palm oil, palm olein, wheat, fish and shellfish. Manufactured tobacco products and tobacco plants and leaves are also covered.

The House of Representatives food and agriculture committee approved a counterpart bill on Wednesday.

Senator Francis "Chiz" G. Escudero has urged the Bureau of Customs to file criminal complaints against rice smugglers, who he said were responsible for spiking grain prices.

In his second state of the nation address to Congress on July 24, Mr. Marcos scored hoarders and smugglers, saying their days were numbered.

Justice Undersecretary Raul T. Vasques said in July his agency would go after smugglers and hoarders and ensure their prosecution.

"Smuggling is one of the reasons why many of our farmers continue to live in poverty," Ms. Villar said. "The illegal entry of agricultural products threatens their livelihood and the welfare of two-thirds of our population who depend on agriculture." —

John Victor D. Ordoñez



Agri economic sabotage bill certified as urgent

By ALEXIS ROMERO

President Marcos has certified as urgent a measure that defines and imposes penalties for agricultural economic sabotage as his administration grapples with escalating prices of rice and other farm goods.

In a letter sent to Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri on Sept. 20, Marcos certified the need to immediately pass Senate Bill 2432, citing the rising prices of agricultural products caused by hoarding, smuggling and other illegal activities.

"The need to facilitate the passage of this important piece of legislation is imperative, especially now that the country is beset by rising prices and shortages in agricultural

products, partly due to the nefarious acts of smuggling, hoarding, profiteering and cartel," the President said.

"It will also promote the productivity of the agriculture sector, protect farmers and fisherfolk from unscrupulous traders and importers and ensure reasonable and affordable prices of agricultural and fishery products for consumers," he added.

The certification exempts the measure from the rule that a bill can only be passed on final reading three days after its approval on second reading.

If enacted, Senate Bill 2432 would repeal Republic Act 10845 or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016.

The Senate vowed to pass the bill on final reading next week, with Zubiri saying on

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Wednesday that the urgent passage of the bill would make agricultural smuggling an act of economic sabotage, a non-bailable offense.

Sen. JV Ejercito, who authored RA 10845 that it seeks to repeal, said the bill would undergo the period of amend-

ments next week and would immediately be passed from second to third reading because of the certification of urgency.

The Senate will go on break from Sept. 30 to Nov. 5.

As proposed, Senate Bill 2432 slaps severe penalties on

smuggling, hoarding, profiteering and cartel of agricultural and fishery products, including life imprisonment and a fine thrice the value of the agricultural and fishery products subject of the crime of economic sabotage.

A government officer or employee found to be an accomplice in the commission of the crime shall also

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be perpetually disqualified from holding public office, voting and participating in any public election and their monetary and financial benefits forfeited.

It also provides that when the offender is a juridical person, the criminal liability shall be attached to all officers who participated in the decision that led to the commission of

the prohibited act.

Any person found guilty of any crime covered by the measure shall also be penalized with perpetual absolute disqualification to engage in any business involving importation, transportation, storage and warehousing and domestic trade of agricultural and fishery goods.

Senate Bill 2432 also provides government authorities the right to seize the agricultural and fishery products that are the subject of the prohibited acts and the properties used in the commission of agricultural economic sabotage such as vehicles, vessels, aircraft, storage areas, warehouses, boxes, cases, trunks and other containers used to store farm and fishery products.

To make it work, the bill provides for the creation of the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Council to be led by the President or his designated permanent representative.

The council, which will ensure the proper implementation of the provisions against agricultural economic sabotage, will consist of the Departments of Agriculture, Trade, Justice, Finance, Transportation and the Interior and Local Government; Anti-Money Laundering Council; Philippine Competition Council and one representative each from the sugar, rice and corn, livestock and poultry, vegetables and fruits, fisheries and other aquatic products and tobacco sectors.

Senate Bill 2432 is among the expanded common legislative agenda discussed during the third Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) last Wednesday.

It is pending in the period of interpellations in the Senate while a technical working group is finalizing the version of the House of Representatives.

Other economic measures in LEDAC's expanded common legislative agenda are the

amendments to the Government Procurement Reform Act; bill imposing excise tax on single-use plastics; amendments to the Cooperative Code; amendments to the Fisheries Code; proposed New Government Auditing Code; bill rationalizing the mining fiscal regime; proposed Philippine Defense Industry Development Act; proposed Philippine Maritime Zones Act, proposed Open Access in Data Transmission Act and amendments to the Right-of-Way Act.

During plenary debates on Wednesday, senators raised questions on how the bill will crack down on agricultural smugglers, whose cartel acts of hoarding and profiteering create an artificial shortage and manipulate food prices.

"I have read on several occasions for the past weeks, several raids being conducted and it is a crime to hoard so much quantities of rice. It may, in fact right now, under existing laws, be considered as economic sabotage," said Sen. Francis Escudero.

"Why is it that up to now I have yet to hear a name that is responsible for the hoarding of rice that the Bureau of Customs has raided? And why is it that not a single case has been filed against individuals?" Escudero added.

The Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act considers as large-scale the smuggling of more than P1 million worth of sugar, corn, pork, poultry, garlic, onion, carrots, fish and cruciferous vegetables, and P10 million worth of rice—both tantamount to the non-bailable offense of economic sabotage.

With a special team of prosecutors to be created by the Department of Justice in filing charges against smugglers, the bill effectively removes from the Bureau of Customs the sole mandate of filing charges against smugglers, according to the bill's sponsor, Sen. Cynthia Villar. — With Marc Jayson Cayabyab



HOARDERS, PROFITEERS, SMUGGLERS BEWARE

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has certified as urgent a measure defining the crime of agricultural economic sabotage, providing penalties, and also creating an anti-agricultural economic sabotage council.

The President certified as urgent the approval of Senate Bill No. 2432 on Wednesday, through a letter addressed to Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri.

The bill repeals Republic Act No. 10845, or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016, and seeks to promote the pro-

ductivity of the agriculture sector and to protect farmers and fisherfolk from unscrupulous traders and importers and ensure reasonable and affordable prices of agricultural and fishery products for consumers.

The bill also imposes severe sanctions on the nefarious acts of smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, and cartel of agricultural and fishery products, including a penalty of life imprisonment and a fine thrice the value of the agricultural and fishery products subject of the crime as economic sabotage.

Any government officer or employee found to be an accomplice in the commission of the crime shall "suffer the additional penalties of perpetual disqualification from holding public office, exercising the right to vote, from participating in any public election, and forfeiture of employment monetary and financial benefits," the bill read.

The bill is now pending in the period of interpellations in the Senate, while a Technical Working Group is currently finalizing the version of the House of Representatives.

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Hirit ni PBBM sa Kongreso

Mabigat na parusa vs agri hoarders, smugglers bilisan!

NI GEMMA GARCIA

Pinamamadali na ni **Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr.** sa dalawang Kapulungan ng Kongreso ang panukalang patawan ng mas matinding parusa ang mga masasangkot sa economic sabotage.

Sa liham na pinadala ng Pangulo kay Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri ay sinertipikahan nito bilang "urgent" ang Senate Bill 2432 na naglalayong itaguyod ang pagiging produktibo ng sektor ng agrikultura at protektahan ang mga magsasaka at mangingisda laban sa mga mapagsamantalang negosyante at importer.

Gayundin para matiyak at rasonableng presyo ng mga produktong agrikultura at pangisda.

Nakasaad din sa panukalang batas ang mas mahigpit na parusa sa smuggling, hoarding, profiteering at kartel ng mga agricultural at fishery products.

Nakasaad pa sa kautusan na habambuhay na pagkabilanggo at multa na tatlong beses ang halaga ng nasasangkot na agricultural at fishery products para sa krimen na economic sabotage.

Kung sinuman sa mga kawani at opisyal ng gobyerno na mapapatunayang sangkot sa economic sabotage ay may dagdag na habambuhay na disqualification sa pagpasok sa anumang public office, pagboto, pagsali sa anumang pagsali sa public elections gayundin sa pagbawi sa lahat nitong benepisyo.

Bukod dito, may kaso rin kriminal na kakaharapin ang sinuman sangkot at nagkasala at habangbuhay na disqualification sa pagpasok sa mga negosyo na may kinalaman sa importation, storage, warehousing at pangangalakal sa mga agricultural at fishery products.

Nakasaad pa dito na may karapatan ang gobyerno

na samsamin ang lahat ng produktong agrikultural at pangisda na mga ari-arian na sangkot sa krimen tulad ng sasakyan, barko, eroplano, storage area o bodega mga kahon at iba pang container.

Ang iminungkahing panukala ay kabilang sa pinalawak na Common Legislative Agenda na tinalakay sa 3rd LEDAC Meeting.

Nauna nang sinabi ni Sen. Cynthia Villar, chairman ng Senate Committee on agriculture, food and Agrarian Reform na nalulugi ang gobyerno ng tinatayang P200 bilyon na kita kada taon dahil sa smuggling.



AGRI SMUGGLER, HOARDER BULUKIN SA KULUNGAN

SINERTIPIKAHAN na ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. bilang urgent ang panukalang batas na tumutukoy na krimen ang agricultural economic sabotage, pagbibigay ng mga parusa, at paglikha rin ng isang anti-agricultural economic sabotage council.

Pinatunayan ng pangulo bilang kagyat ang pag-apruba sa Senate Bill No. 2432 nitong Miyerkoles, sa pamamagitan ng isang liham na naka-address kay Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri.

Ang panukalang batas ay nagpapawalang-bisa sa Republic Act No. 10845, o ang Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016, at naglalayong isulong ang produktibidad ng sektor ng agrikultura at protektahan ang mga magsasaka at mangingisda mula sa mga walang prinsipyong mangangalakal at importer at tiyakin ang makatwiran at abot-kayang presyo ng agrikultura at pangisdaan mga produkto para sa mga mamimili.

Ang panukalang batas ay nagpapataw din ng matinding parusa sa mga karumal-dumal na gawain ng smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, at cartel ng mga produktong pang-agrikultura at pangisdaan, kabilang ang parusang habambuhay na pagkakakulong at multang tatlong beses ang halaga ng mga produktong agrikultural at pangisdaan na paksa ng krimen bilang economic sabotage.

Ang sinumang opisyal o empleyado ng gobyerno na mapatunayang kasabwat sa paggawa ng krimen ay dapat "magdusa ng karagdagang mga parusa nang walang hanggang

diskwalipikasyon sa paghawak ng pampublikong katungkulan, paggamit ng karapatang bumoto, mula sa paglahok sa anumang pampublikong halalan, at pagkawala ng trabaho sa pananalapi at pananalapi. benepisyu," nakasaad sa panukalang batas.

Kapag ang nagkasala ay isang juridical person, ang kriminal na pananagutan ay dapat ilakip sa lahat ng mga opisyal na lumahok sa desisyon na humantong sa paggawa ng krimen, na may parusa ng walang hanggang ganap na diskwalipikasyon upang sumali sa anumang negosyo na kinasasangkutan ng pag-aangkat, transportasyon, imbakan at bodega, at lokal na kalakalan ng mga produktong pang-agrikultura at pangisdaan.

Ang mga awtoridad ng

gobyerno ay may karapatan din na kumpiskahin ang mga produktong pang-agrikultura at pangisdaan na napapailalim sa mga ipinagbabawal na gawain at ang mga ari-arian na ginamit sa paggawa ng krimen ng pang-agrikulturang pananabotahe tulad ng, pero hindi limitado sa mga sasakyan, sasakyang-dagat, sasakyang panghimpapawid, mga lugar ng imbakan, mga bodega, kahon, baul, at iba pang mga lalagyan ng anumang katangian na ginamit bilang sisidlan ng mga produktong pang-agrikultura at pangisdaan.

Nakabinbin ngayon ang panukalang batas sa panahon ng interpellations sa Senado habang ang isang Technical Working Group ay kasalukuyang tinatapos ang bersyon ng House of Representatives.

Malaya Business Insight

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Price caps lifted soon?



The government has disbursed P69 million in financial assistance to more than 5,000 rice retailers affected by the price caps on the grain. (PNA Photo)

THE government is seriously considering lifting the price caps on rice soon ahead of a special meeting with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Tuesday.

"There is serious consideration to lift (the caps). We will discuss that with the President," said Secretary Alfredo Pascual of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

Pascual said "there is a paper to be the basis of the decision prepared by the National Economic and Development Authority."

Pascual expressed satisfaction to the compliance to the price ceilings on regular milled rice and well-milled rice at P41 and P45, respectively, as well as the rollout of the financial aid to retailers.

To date, P69 million has been

disbursed to 5,000 retailers.

Pascual was scheduled to meet with manufacturers yesterday to tackle their petitions for price increases.

At the Pandesal Forum yesterday, the market leader in pasta and milk vowed to hold off any price increase as a relief to consumers, a move that could set the tone of price adjustments of competitor brands until the end of the year.

Joey Concepcion, president and chief executive officer of RFM Corp., said it has not adjusted prices of pasta since last year due to stable costs of wheat.

Concepcion said RFM has even reduced the prices of Selecta Milk in Tetra Pak to make the products more affordable in view of stiff

competition in this space.

Meanwhile, former Department of Agriculture (DA) secretaries Emmanuel Piñol and Leonardo Montemayor, urged the current administration to undertake a nationwide solar-powered irrigation system (SPIS) program to help attain rice self-sufficiency at price-competitive levels.

The two former officials said in a statement that around 200,000 hectares of land inadequately serviced by the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) will benefit from the recommendation.

These areas are usually located at the tail-end of NIA's dam-sourced irrigation distribution system and gets minimal or no water

See PRICE > Page A2

PRICE

at all, during the dry season palay cropping period. Montemayor said a similar proposal was submitted to the Office of the President early this year by businessman Oscar Violago but has not received any response.

He said there are over 300 various SPIS installed in various parts of the country.

The SPIS program was introduced by Piñol in 2017 in M'lang, Cotabato and later in Lumban, Laguna. - *Irma Isip*

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Fisheries sector requires immediate support

The fisheries sector, composed of capture fisheries and aquaculture production, requires immediate support. For this year's second quarter alone, fish production declined by 14.2 percent.

Consider these inconvenient facts: In 2022, this sector contributed 12 percent to agriculture gross value added (GVA). But based on the Department of Agriculture (DA) budget being discussed by Congress today, this sector was allocated only 6 percent of the purse: P7.1 billion for the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, and P4.9 billion for the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority.

It should get at least a 12-percent budget share, equal to its contribution to agriculture GVA. Why? With an adequate budget, this sector could be tapped for its huge potential in food security, poverty alleviation and foreign exchange earnings.

We have the second longest coastline among Asean countries and China. Our 36,300 kilometers (km) far exceeds the next two longest coastlines, China's with 14,500 km and Malaysia's 4,700 km.

We have 2.2 million registered municipal fishers—but they constitute the poorest sector in our country with a high 30-percent poverty incidence rate.

In 2022, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority, aquaculture produced 2.3 million metric tons (MMT) while fisheries produced a little less at 2 MMT. The latter was divided between municipal and commercial fishers, at 1.1 MMT and 0.9 MMT, respectively.

Relevant issues were discussed during the Sept. 20 press conference of the Phil-

ippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food, Inc. (PCAFI), led by group president Danilo Faustino and Feedmix Specialist Inc. vice president Norbert Chingcuanco.

COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDOÑEZ

Capture fisheries

Commercial production is lower largely because fishing nets with smaller holes are being used. Thus, smaller fishes, used for further breeding, are also caught.

The issue can also be political, with regulations in place allowing commercial fishing only beyond 15 kilometers from the coastline. The previously used science-based criterion of ocean depth should determine which areas should be reserved only for municipal fishers.

Very often, fishers cannot go beyond 5 km because of factors such as boat size, fuel capacity and ice supply. Fish found between 5 to 15 km from the coastline are not caught. This deprives our people of food for their nutrition. Fishers should be provided access to that small stretch from the coastline.

Aquaculture

This is an area that shows great promise, only if it is adequately funded and managed well.

Because we lack hatcheries, we import 70 percent of our fingerlings. Hatcheries are where fishes are spawned until they are large enough to be transferred to a farm or released into the wild.

Chingcuanco identified a

very profitable initiative that should be supported: fish cages.

A fish cage with a diameter of 18 meters (254 square meters) can produce 50 tons per year. Five cages in one hectare can therefore produce 250 tons a year while employing 10 people. This highly productive venture can be done in remote areas where poverty is high because it does not need electricity or big infrastructure.

With the appropriate budget support, local government units can play a critical role in initiatives through: (1) proper zoning and site exclusivity per company or group; (2) long-term permits to encourage long-term investments; (3) prioritization of communities for employment; (4) strict adherence to safety and labor standards; and (5) community access to fish production projects.

During the well-publicized and recorded interviews of the then presidential candidates last year, they all agreed in principle to 12 strategic recommendations from five agriculture organizations. In general, all committed to supporting our neglected fisheries sector and even considered a separate department for it.

At the very least, Congress should significantly increase the fisheries budget for 2024. Of course, this should be done only if a realistic and innovative plan with timetables and accountable targets go along with it. INQ



The author is Agriwatch chair, former secretary of presidential flagship programs and projects, and former undersecretary of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Trade and Industry. Contact is agriwatch_phil@yahoo.com.

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✓ **SIZE OF THE TIMES**

Amid price pinch, Cebu City revives 'half-rice' ordinance

FROM 'UNLI'
TO 'ONLY'



By **Nestle Semilla**
@nestleINQ

A "half-rice" serving may soon be a required item in the menu of food establishments and even school canteens in Cebu City.

Councilor Mary Ann delos Santos is calling for the full implementation of a nine-year-old measure that prescribes the option of a half-rice serving in the food industry to achieve consumption efficiency amid the rising prices of the Filipino staple food.

In a resolution, Delos Santos says City Ordinance No. 2409, or the Rice Conservation **A2**

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

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AMID PRICE PINCH, CEBU CITY REVIVES 'HALF-RICE' ORDINANCE

FROM A1

Ordinance of Cebu City, can help in the national government's efforts to teach the public about the importance of rice conservation.

"As a legislator, initiating legislation is a potent tool to take concrete action in this time of uncertainty. This ordinance is a policy tool that demands full activation," she notes.

It was in 2014 when Delos Santos authored the rice con-

servation ordinance of Cebu City, about the same time when then President Benigno Aquino III issued Presidential Decree No. 494 in a bid to attain rice sufficiency and to engage the general public to be responsible rice consumers.

Wastage

Studies conducted by the Food and Nutrition Research Institute show that every Filipino wastes about two tablespoons of cooked rice or nine grams of uncooked rice every meal.

"In 2010 alone, our wasted

rice is equivalent to 13 percent of the total rice imports of the same year, amounting to P6.2 billion or the consumption of nearly P2.6 million Filipinos in a year," says a portion of the ordinance.

Unfortunately, Ordinance No. 2409 has not been implemented until now.

Under the directive, business establishments involved in the preparation and sale of meals such as restaurants, schools, offices, hospitals, cafeterias, catering operations, fast food chains, and other food-re-

lated services are required to include a half-rice serving option in their menu.

No specific measure

No specific volume or standard weight is given for a "half-rice" serving. It may therefore vary depending on the servings of particular establishments.

The city health office is tasked to inspect food establishments and to submit within two months a list of those that do not comply with the law.

Those found violating the ordinance will be fined P1,500

for the first offense, P3,000 for the second, and P4,000 for the third infraction. A fine of P5,000 and suspension of the business permit due to continued noncompliance will be imposed on the fourth and final offense.

DA directive

The Department of Agriculture (DA), Delos Santos notes, also issued a directive urging local governments to pass an ordinance requiring members of the food service industry to include the half-

rice serving in their menus. Delos Santos says she is hopeful that the ordinance will bring about positive changes in communities.

"The implementation of this ordinance will make a difference to rice conservation. That is why I revived this ordinance because of the rice issue (currently besetting the country)," she points out.

The country is facing a shortage in local supply, causing prices to rise and forcing the government to resort to importation. **INQ**

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Kadiwa ng Pangulo launched in La Union

SAN FERNANDO CITY, La Union – The provincial government launched the localized Kadiwa ng Pangulo (KNP) at the old Boy Scout of the Philippines parking grounds in Barangay Sevilla here.

Gov. Raphaelle Veronica “Rafy” Ortega-David led the launching of the KNP which was open from September 18 to 20 in collaboration with the regional and provincial offices of the Departments of Trade and Industry (DTI), Interior

and Local Government (DILG), and Agriculture (DA), and National Food Authority (NFA).

Officials here said their KNP is line with the Marcos administration’s goal to achieve food security and stability in the country.

The KNP in this city provided local farmers and micro, small, and medium enterprises with a ready market and offered consumers access to high-quality and safe food products. (Liezle Basa Iñigo)



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DA highlights bamboo industry's potential

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is aiming to boost the local bamboo industry in recognition of its potential in supporting the country's economic growth.

In a statement on Thursday, DA Undersecretary Deogracias Victor Savellano emphasized the importance of bamboo in the agriculture sector and its contribution to the national economy.

"We need bamboo for our livelihood, especially farmers and fishers. When we talk about bamboo, the number

one problem is the raw materials," said Savellano.

"We are now preparing to present the bamboo economics because we want the bamboo industry to be developed during the time of President 'Bongbong' Marcos," he added.

Under Executive Order 879, the DA is mandated to identify idle and marginalized agricultural areas suitable for bamboo plantations, as well as establishing bamboo nurseries and its propagation.

In her message delivered on the cel-

ebration of the World Bamboo Day and Philippine Bamboo Month on September 18, Sen. Cynthia Villar emphasized the economic and long-term benefits of propagating bamboo.

"According to the Sustainable Development Goals, bamboo has the potential of supporting sustainability in economic growth as it grows very fast and can be grown easily in different climate conditions and altitudes and thus, reduces the pressure on trees producing timber for products for wood," said Villar.

The event was the inauguration of the Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Council's (PBIDC) Shared Service Facility (SSF) housed at the Center for Innovation and Technology for Enterprise (CITE) in Marikina City, which is seen to help boost Philippines' vision to industrialize bamboo.

The SSF has training machines, equipment, function rooms, a dormitory for in-house training and offices while CITE has a Bambusetum, a depository of bamboo genetic species.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



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The need to beef up our rice stock

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is predicting that the palay harvest during this wet planting season will yield more than 11 million metric tons (MT). The Bureau of Plant Industry just recently announced that there would be an additional 1.4 million MT of rice this October alone.

With a milling efficiency of 65 percent (on the optimistic side as other agricultural economists claim it to be nearer 60 percent), we theoretically will have a rice inventory of around 6.5 to 7 million MT. Since we consume 35,000 MT of rice per day, multiplying this by 30 means an average monthly consumption of around 1,050,000 MT. This means the predicted rice inventory will be sufficient for around 6 months.

Also note that the announced 1.4 million MT of harvests this October, if converted into rice with a milling efficiency of 65 percent, translates to around 2.3 million MT, far from the predicted 11 million MT in palay harvests.



FINER
POINTS

**FERMIN
ADRIANO**

Assuming that Filipino consumers begin eating into stocks this September, the predicted inventory will last till February next year even without rice imports. It should be noted that the latter part of December till the end of February is the lean harvest season that coincides with the dry planting season. Hence, there will be little supply of rice during that time as harvests start in late February till April.

Again, note that our official weather forecaster Pagasa has predicted that the effect of El Niño might be severe during late December and the first quarter of next year. This will affect the dry planting season harvest. It is most likely that palay (unmilled rice) production will dip during the first semester of next year.

There is, of course, one unpredictable element that can douse cold water on the DA's optimistic projection of a record palay yield this coming wet harvest season, which is if

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The need

the country's rice-growing areas are visited by destructive super typhoons. If they do, palay yields will decline.

If this happens, we will be facing a tight supply situation. Worse, the supply shortage will be aggravated by early next year during the palay planting season coinciding with the onset of the El Niño weather pattern.

The DA has a rule of thumb that in the proper management of rice inventory, an ending stock good for 60 to 90 days should be maintained at the end of the calendar year. This will help stabilize rice prices during the first quarter of the year or the lean harvest months. Sixty to 90 days worth stock is equivalent to 2 to 3 million MT of rice.

I am not sure if we will be able to achieve an ending stock of 60 to 90 days if we just rely on the predicted record high palay harvest. This means that the alternative is to import the balance but given rising prices of imported rice, traders are not willing to do so because they will surely lose money due to the imposition of a rice price ceiling.

This is the major reason why the Foundation for Economic Freedom (FEF) proposed to reduce the tariff on rice imports temporarily from 35 percent (if coming from Asean countries) to 10 percent. Other economists are even argu-

ing for a zero tariff given that the mandated P10 billion for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund was already secured as early as August.

Around P17 billion has already been collected, according to the Bureau of Customs, and the FEF is also arguing that the surplus of P7 billion from the tariff collection should immediately be given to the rice farmers as cash assistance.

With 5-percent broken rice from Vietnam now priced above \$600 per MT, the 35-percent tariff will bring the landed cost of imported rice to more than \$1,000 per MT. With a 10-percent tariff, 5-percent broken rice will almost be at parity with locally produced rice. This will make it attractive for traders to import what is needed to fill the supply gap toward the end of the year.

During a hearing on the FEF's petition to lower the rice tariff at the Tariff Commission, detractors said that small palay farmers should be protected from resulting price declines. One group also complained that the price cap (via Executive Order 39) was already depressing palay farmgate prices because traders were refusing to buy at higher prices.

The other group, on the other hand, said the EO was needed to combat hoarders, cartels and profiteers. To strengthen its argument, it cited that Vietnam export prices had declined because of the price cap. If that is so, isn't it logical that the group should recommend making the price cap a permanent

fixture of our rice policy?

The FEF stressed that the proposed tariff reduction was a temporary measure in response to the abnormal times that the rice industry is in. Once international rice prices stabilize, the tariff can be re-imposed. Even with this, however, the objectors were unconvinced.

In response, I noted that our concern should not just be protecting the interests of small farmers but also the welfare of the 110 million Filipino consumers affected by high rice prices. The poorest of the poor are particularly hit hard because the bulk of their food expenditures goes to purchasing rice.

If rice prices keep on rising, there will be little left from their incomes to buy nutritious food outside of rice. This accounts for the widespread malnutrition in the country — in fact, we have the highest malnutrition level in Southeast Asia.

A cardinal principle in sound policy formulation is that the policy should obtain the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Sure, there are winners and losers in most policy decisions. But the task of a good and responsible leader is to come out with policies that will benefit the greatest number of his or her people.

Reducing the tariff on rice is one policy that will redound to the interest and benefit of the more than a hundred million Filipino consumers.

(fdadriano88@gmail.com)



Date: 22 SEP 2023

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Food security concern: NIA urges House to restore P91-B capital outlay allotment

THE National Irrigation Administration (NIA) has appealed to the House of Representatives to restore P91 billion in capital outlay (CO) allotment slashed by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) in the 2024 national expenditure program, saying the substantial reduction will stall projects intended to significantly increase rice production and ensure food security.

Under the proposed national expenditure plan, the DBM set a budget of P41.2 billion for NIA, whose original proposal during the

government's budget call was a ceiling of P132.4 billion.

In a letter to House Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez and Appropriations Committee Chair Elizaldy Co, NIA acting Administrator Engr. Eduardo Guillen said his recommended annual allocation of P200 billion for irrigation aims to shorten full coverage to 10 years from 80 years to quickly address problems in food security, agricultural productivity, and job creation.

Only 66 percent of agricultural land in the Philippines is covered by irrigation, which constantly needs maintenance to function efficiently.

Guillen said the budget proposal also includes immediate measures to cope with an impending El Niño that could severely impact farm production due to water and irrigation shortages.

"We firmly believe that our original budget ceiling request aligns with these factors and would allow us to fulfill our mission better and serve the interest of the Filipino people," Guillen said in his letter.

The NIA has noted a significant increase in the yield of irrigated farms. In Nueva Ecija, where the Pantabangan dam supplies water to thousands of hectares of rice

lands, farmers can crop 2.5 times a year with an average yield of 7 tons per hectare. The national average rice production is around 4 tons per hectare.

In areas without irrigation, where farmers rely on rainfall, they could only plant and harvest rice once a year.

"This is not ideal, considering the urgent need to address food security and uplift the livelihoods of our farmers. To expedite the progress and substantially contribute to accelerated and inclusive economic growth, I strongly recommend a dramatic increase in funding for irrigation

infrastructure," Guillen added.

With insufficient domestic production, the Philippines has relied on importation to fill the gap in rice supply, making the country susceptible to adverse events from major rice exporters, unscrupulous rice traders, and smugglers.

A decision by India, the world's biggest rice exporter, to suspend exports of non-basmati rice varieties has pushed rice prices significantly higher. This forced President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to impose a price ceiling on regular and well-milled rice to tame inflation and buy time to go after rice smugglers and hoarders.

Rice has a heavy weight in the consumer price basket used to determine inflation, which is closely watched by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas to set interest rates. The BSP has raised interest rates aggressively since May last year to slow inflation and has tripled its overnight rates to 6.25 percent from 2.00 percent to do so.

Higher interest rates make funding for businesses more expensive, and credit cards, home mortgages, and car loans are more expensive to pay, hurting the economy and stalling job creation.

Jovee Marie N. Dela Cruz



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BRIEFS

Dairy promising in Lanao del Sur

THE NATIONAL Dairy Authority (NDA) said on Thursday that it aims to expand the dairy industry in Lanao del Sur. "[The area's] favorable conditions for dairy farming, including ample land, abundant freshwater resources, and a cool climate, making it an ideal location for dairy production," NDA Administrator Gabriel L. Lagamayo said in a statement.

The NDA said that it has distributed 10 dairy cattle to local farmers Hanes Integrated Farm and Agri-Marketing Cooperative (HI-FAMCO) in Kapai, Lanao del Sur. The agency also provided liquid nitrogen tanks containing cattle semen for breeding.

"This initiative is an integral part of NDA's livestock program, focusing on animal upgrading through artificial insemination, it said.

"While Lanao del Sur is agriculturally rich, livestock farming has been marginal. With this support, our aim is to introduce dairy farming as a sustainable income source," NDA Southern Mindanao Department Assistant Manager Rayan Ysulat said. — **Adrian H. Halili**



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Former agri secretaries support solar-powered irrigation systems

SOLAR-POWERED irrigation systems have the potential to transform underserved upland farms, two former agriculture secretaries said.

In a joint statement issued by the Federation of Free Farmers, former agriculture secretaries Emmanuel F. Piñol and Leonardo Q. Montemayor urged the administration to roll out a solar-powered irrigation program nationwide.

They said that about 200,000 hectares of farm areas are inadequately served by the National Irrigation Administration (NIA).

"These areas, which are located at the tail end of NIA's dam-sourced irrigation distribution system, get minimal or no water especially during the dry season cropping period," they added.

Mr. Piñol and Mr. Montemayor said that about 1.5 million hectares of rain-fed uplands could be potential areas for planting rice or high-value crops like soybean and vegetables during the dry season.

"The beauty of solar-based irrigation is that it is free (coming

from the sun), renewable, environmentally sound. It reduces farmers' irrigation expenses since it does not require increasingly costly diesel fuel," they added.

About 300 solar irrigation projects have been established by the **Departments of Agriculture** and Agrarian Reform, as well as local government units, according to Mr. Montemayor.

Mr. Piñol said that under the previous administration a P40 billion soft loan was offered by the government of Israel to develop over 6,000 solar irrigation units covering almost 500,000 hectares.

"[It] had been unacted upon by the economic team of the previous administration," he added.

Mr. Montemayor added that earlier this year a proposal was submitted to develop a similar project, "Malacañang's response is still being awaited."

"These and future development plans need to be coordinated and scaled up to achieve rice and food security goals at the soonest time possible," he said. —

Adrian H. Halili



DTI mulls lifting rice price caps

By **ALEXIS ROMERO**
and **BELLA CARIASO**

The government is seriously considering lifting the cap on rice prices, Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual said yesterday as President Marcos and concerned officials are set to meet next week to review the implementation of the controversial measure which took effect on Sept. 5.

"There is a serious consideration for the lifting," Pascual told reporters. "There is already a paper to be the basis of the decision. There is a basis made by NEDA (National Economic and Development Authority), in consultation with us.

"Maybe (in) another two weeks we will have a good idea of the availability of supply. Maybe within two weeks we should be able to lift, or to see whether we can lift the price cap already," he said.

"The mandated price ceiling, when that order was issued, that's very clear – it's temporary. So as soon as we can see a better option of addressing that and we have achieved already the objective, then it should be lifted," he added.

Asked if the government is far from achieving its objective of protecting consumers and keeping the country rice-secure, the NEDA chief replied: "No, that's why we will meet soon to recommend other options."

Executive Order No. 39 imposes a price ceiling for regular milled rice at P41 per kilo and P45 per kilo for well-milled rice.

Price monitors from the Department of Agriculture (DA) showed that the prevailing price of local regular milled rice ranged between P40 and P45 per kilo, lower than the

P41-P52 per kilo on the first day of the price cap implementation.

Similarly, the prevailing price of well-milled rice stood at P45 to P49 per kilo yesterday, compared to the P45 to P53 per kilo range on Sept. 5.

Pascual emphasized earlier that the imposition of the price cap for rice is not a standalone measure of the government.

The DTI said earlier it would implement various forms of assistance to rice retailers / wholesalers, including small supermarkets, that would be affected by the price ceiling, in coordination with other government agencies and stakeholders.

These include financial assistance, loan programs, logistics support and market linkages and support.

As part of the support for retailers affected by the price ceiling, the government has started the distribution of the P15,000 financial assistance for affected retailers, through the Department of Social Welfare and Development's Sustainable Livelihood Program.

Market linkages

The DTI added that the government would also provide transportation in delivering rice from traders to retailers to reduce logistical costs.

Market linkages will also be established to link local farmers with supermarket chains and other retailers and promote bulk buying or advance purchase of supermarkets, restaurants, hotels, resorts and other commercial establishments.

Bureau of Plant Industry director Glenn Panganiban said the DTI and DA may now recommend to President Marcos the lifting of the price ceiling, as rice prices have begun to stabilize.

"The prices have started to stabi-

lize. Once the DA and the DTI find it stable, we can already recommend to the President on what should be done," Panganiban said, adding that more than 90 percent of the rice retailers were able to comply with the price cap.

Based on DA monitoring in Metro Manila markets, the retail prices of local regular milled rice ranged between P40 and P45 per kilo; local well-milled rice, P43 and P49; local premium rice, P49 and P60 per kilo; and local special rice, P54 and P65 per kilo.

Imported regular milled rice, P45 per kilo; imported premium rice, between P48 and P58 per kilo and imported special rice, P53 and P63 per kilo.

Panganiban stressed that efforts are being made to boost local rice production.

"Over the years, our rice sufficiency has increased, our sufficiency is now 80 to 90 percent and we complement that with our imports. If you ask if we have enough supply, yes, we have enough," Panganiban said.

Solar-powered irrigation

As the country struggles to achieve food self sufficiency, former agriculture secretaries Manny Piñol and Leonardo Montemayor have urged the Marcos administration to undertake a nationwide solar-powered irrigation program.

Piñol and Montemayor said at least 200,000 hectares inadequately serviced by the National Irrigation Administration would benefit from a solar-powered irrigation program.

"An additional 1.5 million hectares of rain-fed uplands can be planted to rice and/or high value crops like soybean and vegetables during the dry season," Montemayor said.

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Former DA chiefs push solar-powered irrigation program

By DANESSA RIVERA

Former agriculture secretaries Emmanuel Piñol and Leonardo Montemayor are urging the government to undertake a nationwide solar-powered irrigation program to help achieve its goal of rice self-sufficiency at price-competitive levels.

In a statement, the former secretaries said the proposal could irrigate some 200,000 hectares of rice areas, which they said are inadequately serviced by the National Irrigation Administration (NIA).

Located at the tail-end of NIA's dam-sourced irrigation distribution system, these areas get minimal or no water especially during the dry season cropping period.

Meanwhile, an additional 1.5 million hectares of rain-fed uplands can be planted to rice or high value crops like soybean and vegetables during the dry season.

"The beauty of solar-based irrigation is that it is free (coming from the sun), renewable, environmentally sound. It reduces farmers' irrigation expenses since it does not require increasingly costly diesel fuel," Piñol and Montemayor said.

The solar-powered irrigation system (SPIS) program was introduced by Piñol during the Duterte administration, and the first project was launched in M'lang, Cotabato in 2017.

In 2018 to 2019, the Department of Agriculture

(DA) completed an SPIS in Lumban, Laguna built by the LK Group of Israel and the country's largest SPIS in Llanera, Nueva Ecija in co-operation with the Filipino-owned Ramon Uy Foundry and Machine Shop Corp. based in Bacolod City.

Piñol said he had proposed an Israeli-funded nationwide program through a P40-billion soft loan offer to cover 6,000 units of SPIS for 500,000 hectares, but was not acted upon by the economic team of the previous administration.

Meanwhile, Montemayor said a similar proposal was submitted to the Office of the President early this year by Oscar Violago, developer of the successful Casecnan multi-purpose power generation and irrigation dam project in Nueva Ecija in the late 1990s.

"Malacanang's response is still being awaited," Montemayor said.

The Casecnan project is currently servicing 137,000 hectares in Central Luzon, the country's rice granary.

Montemayor said there are currently over 300 various solar irrigation projects already established by the DA, the Department of Agrarian Reform, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, and local government units.

"These and future development plans need to be coordinated and scaled up to achieve rice and food

Turn to B3



'Budget bill certification ensures timely passage'

By DELON PORCALLA

The certification by President Marcos of the General Appropriations Bill (GAB) of 2024 (House Bill 8980) as "urgent" will ensure its passage on time as the House of Representatives conducts plenary deliberations on government agencies' proposed allocations, lawmakers said.

The "urgent" certification means the lower legislative chamber can pass the proposed P5.67-trillion national budget for 2024 on third and final reading next week, or until Sept. 30, before Congress – the Senate included – goes on a recess until Nov. 5.

"The House stands united in its commitment to pass the 2024 national budget and support the government's initiatives aimed at promoting economic growth, social development and the well-being of every Filipino," Speaker Martin Romualdez said.

The GAB that Marcos is expected to sign in early December will have "special emphasis" on the three legacy projects of the President, such as putting up specialty hospitals across the country, the establishment of six million housing units and rice self-sufficiency, Rep. Zaldy Co, chairman of the House appropriations committee, said.

Meanwhile, Basilan Rep. Mujiv Hataman said he has secured a commitment from the Development and Budget Coordination Committee for the funding of the decommissioning of the remaining 14,000 combatants of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the 2024 national budget.

"The decommissioning of MILF combatants is one of the promises that should be kept as this will bring

about total peace in Bangsamoro. We have worked on this for a very long time, that is why we're hoping that we can finally achieve peace with this," Hataman said.

Appropriations committee vice chair Rep. Stella Quimbo bared that the decommissioning allocation for next year is P901 million, which covers the decommissioning of over 9,000 combatants.

Meanwhile, **National Irrigation Administration (NIA)** acting administrator Eduardo Guillen requested the House to restore the P91-billion budget the Department of Budget and Management removed from their original P132.4-billion allocation for 2024.

The NIA chief said his recommended annual allocation of P200 billion for irrigation aims to quickly address perennial problems on food security, agricultural productivity and job creation from 80 years to 10 years.

At the same time, Guillen also lamented that the budget proposal includes immediate measures to cope with an impending El Niño that could severely affect farm production due to water and irrigation shortage.

The NIA official also complained that the substantial reduction in their budget for 2024 "will stall projects intended to significantly increase rice production and ensure food security."

"This is not ideal, considering the urgent need to address food security and uplift the livelihood of our farmers. To expedite the progress and contribute to accelerated and inclusive economic growth, I recommend a dramatic increase in funding for irrigation infrastructure," he said.

– With Neil Jayson Servallas

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PAGSASALAUULA SA WPS AT 'FISHING BAN'

UNAWA ng sambayanan ang layunin ni Pangulong Bongbong Marcos hinggil sa planong pansamantalang pagpapatigil ng pangangisda sa ilang lugar sa bansa upang mabigyan ng pagkakataon na makapangitlog at dumami ang mga nilalang na ito sa ilalim ng karagatan sa gitna nang kinakaharap na suliranin ng 'overfishing' sa bansa.

Sa ngayon kasi may iilang lugar lang sa bansa ang nagpapatupad ng 'closed season' ng pangangisda kagaya sa Visayan Sea kung saan mula Nobyembre 15 hanggang Pebrero 15 ng bawat taon ang pansamantalang pagbabawal nang paghuli ng isda rito.

Kaya naman kapag dumarating na ang tigil-pangangisda sa karagatan na ito, sanib-puwersa ang Philippine Navy at Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources sa pagpapatrulya sa laot ng Cebu, isla ng Panay hanggang Masbate para masigurong sumusunod ang pangangisda sa ipinatutupad na fishing ban.

Bagaman kontra ang grupo ng PAMALAKAYA sa nais mangyari ng Pangulo kaugnay sa fishing ban ngunit kung hihimay-himayin ito malaking tulong upang tumaa ang populasyon ng marine resources

sa karagatan natin.

'Yun nga lang kung isulong man ang plano, marapat na exempted ang maliliit na mangangisda na umaasa sa hanap-buhay na ito upang pantawid-gutom sa kanilang pangaraw-araw na pagkain.

Sila 'yung ordinaryong mamamayan na nakatira sa baybaying dagat na gumagamit ng ligal na lambat at iba pang uri ng pangangisda na hindi naman nakasisira ng kalikasan sa pusod ng karagatan na kailangan hindi maapektuhan sa panukalang fishing ban.

Subalit ang marapat na higpitan ng awtoridad ay ang malawakang operasyon ng mga dambuhalang barko na ginagamit sa commercial fishing sa ilang lugar sa bansang sadyang umuubos sa populasyon ng isda bunsod sa tone-tonelada ang hinahakot

nito mula sa karagatan.

At higit sa lahat, kailangan matigil na rin ang pagsasalaula at pagnanakaw ng Tsino ng yaman-dagat natin sa West Philippine Sea na nagiging salamin ng mga kababayan hinggil sa malamyang pagpapatupad ng batas na nakaumang lang sa maliliit na indibidwal.

Hindi ba't ito ang madalas sabihin ng mamamayan na mahigpit ang pagpapatupad ng batas sa mga Pinoy ngunit hindi naman kayang walisin ng gobyerno ang nambabalahura sa WPS na matagal nang pinagpapasasaan ang yaman dito?

Ngunit kaya ba natin banggain ang China para lang maging patas at parehas sa mata ng sambayanan ang implementasyon ng batas?



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NI NORMAN LAURIO

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Days of onion cartel numbered, says solon

By ELLSON QUISMORIO

The happy days of onion cartel players are numbered.

Thus said Cavite Rep. Elpidio Barzaga Jr. on the heels of the National Bureau of Investigation's (NBI) filing of criminal charges for profiteering against six individuals in connection with the hoarding and price manipulation of onions.

Barzaga said that the filing of charges "only shows that the President (Marcos) is really bent on going after these agricultural smugglers and hoarders. It proves that the Chief Executive means business."

"Your time has come," the former National Unity Party (NUP) president said in a message directed at cartel members.

Barzaga is a senior member of the House Committee on Agriculture and Food which has been investigating the price manipulation of onions and other agricultural products.

Solons learned during the lengthy inquiry that hoarders play a key part in creating an artificial supply shortage of a given produce like onions.

This shortage is then exploited by the controlled release of the hoarded goods when local prices have skyrocketed.

The House of Representatives has been cooperating with the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the NBI in going after the onion cartel. Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla, himself a former Cavite congressman, heads the DOJ.



Key Palace meeting to review rice price controls next week

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said the lifting of the retail price ceiling on rice is being given "serious consideration" following an analysis issued by government economic planners, with a decision possibly coming at a Palace meeting next week.

"We have a scheduled meeting to talk about it next week," Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual told reporters at the Make It Happen in the Philippines Reception Thursday.

"There is already a paper to be the basis of the decision, let's put it that way. It was made by the

National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), in consultation with us," he added.

On September 11, Mr. Pascual said he expected a review of the price controls on regular-milled and well-milled rice in two weeks.

Ask if he will recommend the lifting of the price controls, he said: "There is serious consideration for lifting... soon."

"We are going to talk about this, it will be a collegial decision," he added.

On Aug. 31, Mr. Marcos signed Executive Order (EO) 39 which

imposed price ceilings on regular-milled and well-milled rice.

Under EO 39, the price ceiling for regular-milled rice was set at P41 per kilogram, while well-milled rice was capped at P45.

Mr. Pascual said that the department is satisfied with the compliance shown by rice retailers after the order was issued.

"It shows that the retailers are prepared to abide by the mandated price ceiling," he said.

The DTI and other agencies have been disbursing cash aid to small rice retailers who may have been caught out by the price controls.

Mr. Pascual said the Department of Social Welfare and Development Sustainable Livelihood Program distributed P69 million worth of cash assistance as of Wednesday.

"This is continuing. We have a big list but it is being culled because some of the retailers listed are (no longer operating)," he said.

"The most reliable source is the Business Permits and Licensing Office of the local government units, because every year the businesses register there," he said. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**



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Corn, wheat ease

SINGAPORE- Chicago corn lost ground on Thursday, trading around a near three-year low hit earlier this week, as the advancing US harvest is adding to ample supplies from rival exporter Brazil.

Wheat fell as plentiful supplies from the Black Sea region outweighed signs of renewed demand from large importers.

"We have made a further downward revision to our forecast for the average price of CBOT-listed second-month corn futures in 2023, following our earlier downward revision of June 15," BMI Research, a unit of Fitch Group, said in a note.

"It is now our view that prices will average \$5.55 per bushel through the twelve-month period, which points to an average price level close to \$5.00 per bushel through the remainder of 2023."

The most-active corn contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) slipped 0.4 percent to \$4.80-1/2 a bushel, after hitting its lowest since December 2020 on Tuesday at \$4.67-3/4 a bushel.

- Reuters



London cocoa falls 2%; sugar, coffee prices also down

NEW YORK — London cocoa futures on ICE closed 2% lower on Wednesday, extending the market's retreat from a recent 46-year high, although prices remained underpinned by supply woes in West Africa.

COCOA: March London cocoa settled down £60 or 2% at £2,929 a metric ton.

Dealers said the market had lost some ground this week after a prolonged advance saw prices climb to the highest level in 46 years but the mood remained bullish due predominantly to supply issues in West Africa.

"Heavy rains in West Africa are reported to have triggered the Cocoa Swollen Shoot Virus Disease (CSSVD) and the spread of black pod diseases," the International Cocoa Organization said on Wednesday.

"These fateful incidences including high costs of inputs, have not spared the two leading producers (Ivory Coast and Ghana) and affected their volume of production."

December New York cocoa has also lost 2% to \$3,570 a ton.

SUGAR: October raw sugar settled down 0.65 cent or 2.4% at 26.79 cents per pound (lb), slipping

back from the prior session's 12-year high of 27.62 cents.

Dealers said the recent run-up had been driven partly by concerns that drier than normal weather linked to El Niño is likely to reduce output in India and Thailand.

They noted, however, that the bullish news appeared to now be incorporated in the price so the scope for further gains may be limited. They cited movements by speculators liquidating part of their large long position.

December white sugar fell \$13.50 or 1.8% to \$726.50 a ton.

COFFEE: December arabica coffee fell 2.75 cents or 1.7% to \$1.582 per lb.

Brazil's 2023 coffee crop was seen at 54.36 million bags, government agency Conab said on Wednesday, down from the figure forecast in May.

A strong heat wave moving over Brazil this week is raising concerns about the health of the coffee fields.

ICE said that 6,945 bags of Brazilian arabica coffee were certified on Wednesday, but the overall stocks volume still fell to 440,853 bags as 14,205 bags were stopped.

November robusta coffee fell \$32 or 1.3% to \$2,508 a ton. — **Reuters**