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A. SEC. PBBM QUOTED

MANILA BULLETIN

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THE PHILIPPINE STAR

China's donated fertilizers assist 160,000 Filipino rice & corn farmers

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MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT
Wheat, soybeans advance



Mooncake Festival is harvest season, China's donated fertilizers assist 160,000 Filipino rice & corn farmers

By Rose Servidad & Melanie Gornez

The Mid-Autumn Festival is also called autumn harvest festival for farmers, therefore let us recall one recent exemplary example of agriculture assistance to the Philippines from our neighbor China.

Unknown to many, Reuters reported that China is the world's largest producer of urea fertilizer and accounts for one-third of the world's supplies of the nitrogen-based fertilizer which is so important to growing crops.

Just last June 16, the Philippines' 160,000 Filipino rice and corn farmers in Regions 1, 2, 3, 4A and Bicol region covering 200,000 hectares of farms were to be beneficiaries of China's generous donation of 20,000 metric tons of urea fertilizers worth P782.68 million pesos, according to the Presidential Communications Office. The turnover ceremony were led by President Bongbong Marcos and China Ambassador Huang Xilian in Valenzuela City.

President Marcos expressed his gratitude on the donation saying: "On behalf of the Filipino people, let me extend our deepest gratitude and appreciation to the Chinese Government and its people for this donation—a solid gesture of friendship and goodwill that is in keeping with our long and storied history of trade and cultural exchange."



Fertilizers donated to Philippines by China to benefit 160,000 Filipino rice & corn farmers, Pres. Bongbong Marcos received from China Amb. Huang Xilian on June 16, 2023

During the turnover ceremony at the National Food Authority (NFA) warehouse in Malanday, Valenzuela City, among those present with Marcos and Huang were Special Assistant to the President Antonio Lagdameo Jr., Department of Social

Welfare and Development Secretary Rex Gatchalian, Valenzuela Mayor Weslie Gatchalian, Senator Sherwin Gatchalian, Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian, Metropolitan Manila Development Authority Chairperson

Romando Artes, Valenzuela Vice Mayor Lorena Natividad-Borja, and Philippine National Police Chief Benjamin Acorda Jr.

"These generous acts symbolize the value of the relationship between our two countries. We must continue to nurture, we must continue to care for that through acts of mutual assistance and constant and amicable dialogue," President Marcos said.

President Marcos also described China's such generous donation as a "solid gesture of friendship and goodwill."

Ambassador Huang Xilian said the fertilizer aid to the Philippines came after the consensus reached by the two heads of state President Marcos and China President Xi Jinping during Marcos' state visit to China in January this year. He said this donation expressed China's actions and sincerity in implementing the consensus reached by the two heads of state, and demonstrates the Chinese people's friendship with the Philippine people.

Hung said: "We hope that this fertilizer assistance will... help the Philippines to alleviate the fertilizer shortage, and promote the increase of food production and farmers' income in the Philippines".

Can the country which has sufficiently fed 1.4 billion people be able to assist the Philippines in terms of agriculture modernization and global competitiveness?

China's donated fertilizers assist 160,000 Filipino rice, corn farmers



By Rose Servidad & Melanie Gomez

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PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.
presides during the NEDA meeting in
Malacañan Palace on Thursday, Sept. 21.

PHILIPPINE STAR/KJ ROSALES/PPA POOL



In his recent lecture as former Director General of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), UP Professor Emeritus Dr. Dante B. Canlas argued that to help avoid a low middle-income trap, three policy approaches should be given priority: short-run stabilization measures, health measures, and affordable energy. The right priorities to these key policies of competing importance and consequences should be established.

Needless to say, priorities should be implemented preferably to the letter.

But unless the administration is able to get its head together and start on correct prioritization in the last five years of its mandate, it would be like building something without the benefit of a rudimentary blueprint. That could be chaotic; it's like a headless chicken running every which way. It becomes worse when the leadership is less than informed and spirited.

One fundamental issue that begs top priority and decisive management is inflation — the number one issue of national concern based on Pulse Asia's latest poll (June 19-23, 2023). Three out of five Filipinos, or, more accurately, 63% of those surveyed, rated the control of inflation as the most urgent concern that the National Government must address. At about the same time last year, only 57% of those polled were concerned about price movements. And this year, the ABC class topped them at 67%.

If the winning parties in the May 2022 election believed they commanded popular support before the actual voting based on Pulse Asia, it is important that they now heed civil society and do something wise about it. After all, it was the promise to slash the price of rice to only P20 per

SIGNS AND WONDERS DIWA C. GUINIGUNDO

What makes monetary policy appear helpless is the limited ability of Government to undertake non-monetary intervention to directly address the mounting supply pressures. Unfortunately, even as the issue falls under economic management, it looks like the President is listening more to his political advisers than his technocrats.

kilo that somehow influenced the decision of a good portion of the electorate.

What policy actions have we seen in the last 14 months?

On the demand side, despite the multiple forward guidance issued by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) governor, past and present, and one of the members of the Monetary Board, monetary policy has been on the right track. Like the US Fed last year, the BSP subscribed to the view that the supply shocks were only transitory, only to realize they were more persistent with destabilizing secondary effects. Under then-newly minted Governor Philip Medalla, the Monetary Board was forced to do an off-cycle monetary tightening and, at one point, an unprecedented 75 basis point adjustment after a couple of baby steps. Even the peso was hit by the wider differential with the US rate, sending it beyond P59 to a dollar. From an initial level of 2%, the BSP jacked up its policy rate to 6.25% or by a cumulative 425 basis points.

With actual and projected inflation way above the 2-4% target

and mounting supply shocks from food, energy, transport, and wage adjustments, the BSP correctly ruled off the table any talk of possible policy rate cuts in 2023. This is a far cry from the representation of some quarters that some monetary policy normalization is on the cards. The current BSP governor, Eli Remolona, was right in saying that the possible rate hike in November may not be the last hike for the year considering the nature and duration of those shocks. Even the usual observation of some that the BSP monetary tightening has weakened the economic momentum did not sell to the BSP: "For a rate cut, you need the economy to slow down significantly and inflation to maybe go below the target range."

That remark of the BSP clarified that, one, monetary tightening has been working but with a lag; and, two, with GDP at a first-half average of 5.3%, the real sector impact was due less from the tight monetary policy than from weak public spending and private investment. The BSP tightens monetary policy to arrest inflation which has so far restrained private consumption and growth. The persistently high core inflation — averaging 7.4% in the first eight months of 2023 against headline average of 6.6% — tells us that the demand component of inflation remains substantial.

What makes monetary policy appear helpless is the limited ability of Government to undertake non-monetary intervention to directly address the mounting supply pressures. Unfortunately, even as the issue falls under economic management, it looks like the President is listening more to his political advisers than his technocrats.

Under this Government, next to rice, the onion has become the symbol of inflation in the Phil-



ippines. It was selling for more than the cost of chicken and beef towards the end of last year. The price of the commodity started rising when supply fell short of the monthly consumption of 17,000 metric tons. Instead of managing supply and demand forces, and filling up any shortfall by imports from China and other Southeast Asian countries, the Government turned to law enforcement rather than to business solutions.

While partly true, smuggling and hoarding became the culprits. We don't know if there were any arrests, but that seems to have even led to a chronic shortage and the phenomenal rise in onion prices beyond the price of meat, according to no less than *Time* magazine.

And of course, the Government's handling of the on-going rice crisis has been very poor. Rice accounts for 9.6% of the consumer basket, and therefore could truly be a game-changing commodity. The President should know that from the time of his father to his, rice has been a big problem in the Philippines.

Instead of putting more money into agriculture to improve farm productivity and strengthen all support infrastructure, from storage to drying to milling to marketing, and allow rice imports to cover any remaining shortfall, the Government instead turned to more palliative solutions. Kadiwa stores were resurrected to sell cheap food commodities including vegetables and rice, but not for long. We have very, very limited fiscal space to make these rolling stores sustainable.

Imports were restricted at a time that the harvest season was still months ahead, and, when the rice supply hit rock bottom, the Government ran after rice smugglers, hoarders, and profiteers. When rice prices escalated be-

yond P50 a kilo, the Government imposed price caps without thinking that they would ultimately result in more shortages and a black market for the commodity. When the rice retailers complained that they were losing money because of administered prices, the Government extended to them some small subsidies. No one knows when these ceilings would last, but the Government should be prepared to subsidize farmers, middlemen, and wholesalers when their inventories run out.

We don't know what is happening in the Palace, but even Finance Secretary Ben Diokno and NEDA Secretary Arsi Balisacan protested. They were not consulted, they admitted, but nonetheless they supported the move on the ground that price ceilings would be in place only for a limited time.

Is anyone in charge?

It looks like no one is.

This Government missed one good short-term solution to the rice crisis, and this is to temporarily reduce the rice tariff to around 10% or even lower to help immediately reduce rice prices. But the President rejected it. The President appears to be under the impression that rice prices are about to go down. This is far from the truth.

Key major producers like India are restricting rice exports and jacking up global rice prices by almost 10%. A prolonged El Niño dry spell and fertilizer deficit could only result in short supply and high prices. Nobody should take it against India if it decided to prioritize domestic consumption and lower prices at home.

It is unthinkable that some would miss the news that even in Thailand, the world's second largest rice exporter, rice prices have risen so much. Domestic milled rice prices rose by almost

20% following India's decision to curtail rice exports.

Thailand also expects lower production this year because of El Niño and recent floods. In the Philippines, in August alone, our statistics authority reported that unmilled rice or *palay* was selling at a farmgate price of P22.16 per kilo or nearly 26% over last year's prices.

The tariff reduction would have been ideally accompanied by the lifting of the price caps on both regular- and well-milled rice. Unfortunately, while the NEDA initiated the proposal, the broadsheets the other day confirmed the report that it was also NEDA that agreed to drop the idea in view of what it called a declining trend in global rice prices! While rice futures indeed show some recent moderation in rice prices, the wild card is El Niño and all that it implies to global supply.

Too bad that we have been languishing under this brand of policy making for so long that we seem to have been numbed to it. If public policy were a little smarter, with some coherence to it, domestic inflation could have been more moderate like that of many of our neighbors.

Easing monetary policy should not be a difficult decision and forward guidance could have been more singular. Someone should be in charge. ■

DIWA C. GUINIGUNDO is the former deputy governor for the Monetary and Economics Sector, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP). He served the BSP for 41 years. In 2001-2003, he was alternate executive director at the International Monetary Fund in Washington, DC. He is the senior pastor of the Fullness of Christ International Ministries in Mandaluyong.





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2024 NAT'L BUDGET OK'D **By Jester Manalastas**

VOTING 296 as against three and no abstention, the proposed national budget for 2024 was approved on third and final reading.

House Bill 8980 or the General Appropriations Bill contains the proposed budget amounting to P5.768 trillion or 9.5 percent higher than this year's budget of P5.267 trillion, and is equivalent to 21.7 percent of the country's gross domestic product.

Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez has lauded the timely passage of the 2024 GAB, stating that it not only demonstrated the commitment of the House to upholding its constitutional role but also underscored its dedication to serving the Filipino people with transparency and accountability.

Earlier, President Ferdinand Marcos has certified the measure as urgent, allowing the Lower Chamber to pass it on second and third reading on the same day.

In his speech before adjourning the session, Romualdez stressed the

House's steadfast commitment to fulfilling its constitutional duty of overseeing the national expenditure program with the highest levels of transparency and diligence.

The House leader noted that the budgeting process was marked by rigorous discussions, particularly concerning confidential and intelligence funds, which the House meticulously scrutinized to ensure accountability and responsible utilization.

"We underscored the need for agencies to abide by the strict accounting and auditing rules governing the handling and release of such funds and emphasized the need to safeguard its efficient and responsible utilization," Romualdez said.

The education sector receives the largest allocation at P924.7 billion, including funds for the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education program, textbooks, and feeding programs. The Department of Education sees a 5.37 percent increase to P758.6

billion.

Infrastructure priorities include the North-South Commuter Railway System and Metro Manila Subway Project Phase 1. The Department of Public Works and Highways gets P822.2 billion with allocations for road improvement. The Department of Transportation's budget doubles to P214.3 billion, focusing on mass transport and rail systems.

Agriculture receives P181.4 billion, supporting rice, corn, and high-value crops production. The Department of Health gets P306.1 billion, while the Department of Social Welfare and Development sees a 5.2 percent increase to P209.9 billion. The Department of National Defense's budget rises by 14.16 percent to P232.2 billion.

Meanwhile, Speaker Romualdez said the approval of the 2024 GAB stands as a testament to the House's commitment to the welfare of the Filipino people and their enduring pursuit of a more prosperous and equitable nation.



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**PBBM, NEDA
to discuss rice
price cap impact**

NATIONAL Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said they will likely meet with President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. next week to discuss the outcome of the imposition of the price cap on rice.

"We'll more likely meet again next week because he did say he wants us to meet again and see the numbers, see the indicators, see the outcomes versus the objectives of the price cap and we'll make a decision," Balisacan said during the sidelines of the launch of the National Innovation Agenda and Strategy Document (NIASD) at the Manila Metropolitan Theater on Wednesday.

PNA



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REY MARFIL

Naka-full alert ang antena at radar ng mga Marites nating tropapips sa politika kung aalisin, este ililipat ni PBBM si Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno, na "Boy Taripa" ang tawag ngayon ng ilan dahil sa gusto niyang alisin o bawasan ang taripa sa pag-aangkat ng bigas.

Habang isinusulat natin ito, si Diokno pa rin ang bossing ng DOF pero sinopla na ni PBBM ang rekomendasyon niya na gawing zero o kaya eh ibaba sa 10% ang 35% na sinisingil na taripa sa imported rice.

Mukhang hindi nabola, este nakumbinsi ni Diokno ang pangulo sa paliwanag niya na kailangan na alisin o ibaba ang taripa para makapag-angkat ng bigas ang pribadong sektor para mapababa raw ang presyo ng bigas at matulungan daw ang mga magsasaka.

Pero kung ang mga ayudanatics nating tropapips ang tatanungin, hindi mo na sila mapapaniwala na bababa ang presyo ng bigas sa merkado kahit pa bumaha ng imported rice. Kasi nga, ginagawa na noon pa man ang pag-import ng bigas pero dehins nga naman bumababa ang presyo nito.

Ang pumapasok sa isip ng mga duderong

Lalarga na kaya si 'Boy Taripa'?

ayudanatics nating tropapips, baka raw kapag ibinaba ang taripa, tiba-tiba na naman sa pag-import ang mga mapagsamantalang negosyo. Pero sa halip na ibuhos sa merkado ang inimport na bigas, sa magic bodega lang nila itatambak.

At kapag nagkaroon na ng moro-morong shortage ng suplay sa merkado, biglang pangrang kabute na magsusulputan ang mga inimport na bigas na mas mahal na siyempre ang presyo. Lyon eh tamang duda lang naman nila. Pero posibleng may tama.

Kaya lang, mukhang hindi nga bumentak kay PBBM ang gusto ni Diokno sa tangal o tapyas taripa. Katuwiran ng pangulo, bakit nga naman gagalawin pa ang taripa gayung inaasahan na pababa na ang presyo ng bigas. Kahit nga sa Pilipinas, magsisimula na ang anihan.

Isa rin nga sa ikinatatapot ng mga lokal na magsasaka na magsisimula na ang anihan ng palay, kapag bumuhos ang imported na bigas, yari na naman ang palay nila at tiyak na babaratin dahil maraming suplay.

Ang matindi nito, gaya ng mga nagdaang kuwento sa senaryo ng mga buraot na negosyante, kapag maraming suplay ng bigas, babaratin ang palay ng mga magsasaka para bilhin. At kapag nabili na, itatago sa bodega ang mga nabiling palay na ginawa nang bigas, at ilalabas din lang kapag may shortage na kuno para maibenta sa mas mahal na presyo.

Puna ng mga tropapips natin, tila na kadalawang sablay na si Diokno pagdating sa usapin ng bigas. Una raw ay hindi pagkonsulta ni PBBM sa kaniya tungkol sa ipinatu-pad na price cap na P41-P45 per kilo ng bigas. Noong una, sinabi ni Diokno na "shock" sila sa economic team sa ginawa ng pangulo at may hindi raw magandang epekto ito. Kulang na lang eh sabihin niyang kontra siya sa ginawa ng boss niya.

Pero sa sumunod na pahayag, in support na raw sila at naglatag na lang siya ng ilang rekomendasyon kasama na nga itong pag-alis o tapyas sa taripa. Kung tutuusin, hindi naman talaga ganoong katindi ang epekto ng price cap dahil dalawang uri lang naman ng bigas ang saklaw ng price cap -- ang regular milled rice at well-milled rice.

Ang ibang tindero o negosyante na mataba ang utak, hinaharuan ng pangit na klase ang regular milled rice at well-milled rice para kumita pa rin. At hindi rin naman nawala ang iba pang klase ng bigas na mahigit P50 per kilo ang presyo. Kaya tuloy pa rin ang ligaya nila, at may natanggap pang ayuda.

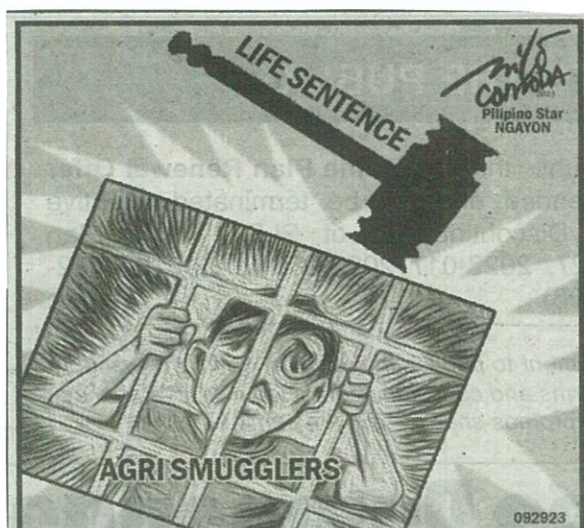
Kung tama ang bulong-bulungan ng mga Marites, ang Congressman for All Season na si Ralph Recto ang isa sa mga kinakausap ng Palasyo na pumalit kay Diokno. Kung pumayag ang mister ni Ate Vi, hindi malayong magkaroon ng bagong bossing sa DOF. Basta wag lang niyang itataas ang singil sa VAT. Tandaan: "Bata mo ko at Ako ang Spy n'yo."

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Editorial

Life sentence sa agri smugglers

SANG linggo makaraang ipag-utos ni Pres. Ferdinand Marcos Jr. sa dalawang Kapulungan ng Kongreso na madaliin ang pagpapasa ng batas na magpapataw nang mabigat na parusa sa mga masasangkot sa economic sabotage, mabilis na kumilos ang mga mambabatas at agad naipasa ang panukala. Nakakuha ito ng 289 na boto, walang sumalungat at wala ring abstention.

Ang House Bill No. 9284 (Anti Agri-Fishery Commodities and Tobacco Economic Sabotage Act) ay nag-aamenda sa Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act na ipinasa noong 2016. Naging inutil ang batas na ito sapagkat lumipas ang pitong taon mula nang maipasa ni isa man ay walang nahuli at naparusahang agri smugglers o hoarders. Pinagdebatehan ang batas na ito noon pero nasayang lang. Ito marahil ang dahilan kaya pinag-utos ni Marcos na madaliin ang HB 9284.

Sa ilalim ng panukala ang smuggling ng bigas at iba pang produktong agrikultura ay ituturing na "economic sabotage" at papatawan ng habambuhay na pagkakakulong ang mapapatunayang sangkot sa smuggling. Maparusahan nang walang katulad ang mga nananabotahe sa ekonomiya.

Ayon kay House Speaker Martin Romualdez, malapit nang matapos ang mga masasayang araw ng agri smugglers, hoarders at mga nagka-cartel. Nabibilang na ang araw ng agri smugglers at kapag tuluyan na itong ipatutupad, titiyakin na maparurusahan ang mga may sa demonyong gumagawa nito. Ayon kay Romualdez ang agri smugglers ang nagpapahirap sa mamamayan. Sa kasalukuyan, mataas ang presyo ng bigas at maski si President Marcos ay nagtataka kung bakit tumataas ang presyo ng bigas. Nag-isyu si Marcos ng EO na nagtatakda ng P40 hanggang P45 na price ceiling sa bigas.

Ngayong naamyendahan na ang inutil na Anti-Agri Smuggling Act, aabangan ang paggulong ng bagong batas laban sa agri smugglers. At harinawang hindi ito matulad sa dating batas. Labis na matutuwa ang mamamayan kung mayroong mahuhuling agri smugglers at hoarders at mabubulok sa piitan. Kung maipatutupad ang bagong batas, maaangat na ang pagpasok sa bansa ng bigas, asukal, sibuyas, carrots, at iba pang agri products.

Dahil sa smuggling ng mga produktong agrikultura, nawalan ng P30 bilyon ang pamahalaan noong 2022. Ang mga nakinabang ay mga salot na smugglers at mga kasapakat nila sa Bureau of Customs. Napakalaking pera ang nawala na sana ay nagamit sa pagpapaunlad ng bansa at pagpaparami ng ani ganundin, naitulong sa mga magsasaka.

Inaasahan na ang mga nasa likod ng mga natutuklasang libu-libong sako ng mga bigas sa mga bodega sa maraming panig ng bansa ang unang makakatikim ng parusang habambuhay na pagkakulong. Sana, mangyari ito at hindi panaginip lang.



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Rubbing the wounds of the salt industry

Our salt industry is in a very sad state. We have 36,000 kilometers of shoreline, the fifth largest in the world, which the government could tap for job creation and poverty reduction in the poorest sector of our economy. And yet, we import 93 percent of our salt requirements.

We now import salt from Australia (72 percent), China (19 percent), Thailand (4 percent) and New Zealand (2 percent). Such was not the case before. We were very much self-sufficient. In fact, we were even planning to become a significant salt exporter.

In 1995, the well-intentioned Asin Law (Republic Act No. 8172) was passed. It required the iodization of all salt produced for human consumption to address iodine deficiency.

Though the law had some success after seven years, the Department of Health statistics showed the following: (1) pregnant women had iodine levels of 105 micrograms per liter (mcg/L), way below the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommended level of 150-249 mcg/L; and (2) lactating women had 77 mcg/L, also below the WHO minimum of 100

COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDOÑEZ

mcg/L. Other iodine-improvement measures must definitely be taken to address this issue.

Unexpected outcome

But from a different perspective, the required iodization of salt had a devastating effect on our salt industry. Small and medium scale producers could not produce the facility and machines necessary to fortify salt with iodine. We went from 100-percent to just 7-percent salt sufficient.

Furthermore, our export markets mostly required natural salt, thus rejecting iodized salt. Ironically, we also cannot export any of our products that contain iodized salt.

Therefore, our exporters need to have two production lines for a single product: one for domestic, and another for the export market. This increases costs and makes us uncompetitive. We are losing the opportunity to export not only our salt, but also all our products that have iodized salt.

What is the solution? First, we should continue to promote iodized salt. However, we should look for other ways to improve our iodine deficiency problem without overly relying on iodized salt.

Second, we should amend and improve provisions in the Asin Law requiring all our salt to be iodized. Apart from encouraging the production of non-iodized salt, we should also have other industry development initiatives.

We will not only recover lost jobs, but also create a very significant number of new jobs as we address both of our strong domestic and massive export potential.

Supplemental support

Different sectors are also pushing for the following improvements to the Asin Law: (1) require a public-private sector salt road map to rebuild and strengthen our industry; (2) include automatically in all fishpond lease agreements salt farming production as "a valid activity that may be undertaken by the lease holder;" (3) provide funding and technical support needed for "the maintenance, repair

and upgrading of existing small farms and newly constructed salt projects;" (4) for the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Department of Agriculture to "enhance the capabilities and global competitiveness of potential and existing producers and exporters of sea salt."

To support small producers, the DTI has identified the contribution of director Andie John Tadeo of the Fisheries and Training Institute of the Don Mariano Marcos State University. He has developed a production technology that should be implemented as a small-scale barangay initiative. It costs much lower than setting up a salt bed and it is easily scalable and very adaptable.

The government should promote both iodized and non-iodized salt. Help our salt industry to thrive, and for sure job creation and poverty reduction in our nation's poorest sector of coastal communities will certainly follow. **INO**

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



APPEAL TO PROTECT LOCAL VEGGIES

TRADE PACT DISPLACING CORDILLERA CROPS, SAYS FARMERS' GROUP

By Vincent Cabreza
@InqNational

BAGUIO CITY—Legally imported vegetables are again displacing locally grown produce in Metro Manila markets, and salad vegetable producers in Benguet province are fearful that this is due to an Asia-Pacific free trade agreement that has been “abused.”

The League of Associations at the La Trinidad Vegetable Trading Area urged the Benguet provincial board and the Department of Agriculture (DA) to review provisions of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) that apply to fresh vegetables.

In a set of Sept. 15 letters obtained by the Inquirer on Wednesday, the group, represented by its president Nora Ganase and her Divisoria (Manila) cluster counterpart Rodolfo Bulawan, insisted that the RCEP “may be abused or used as an excuse [to explain] the proliferation of smuggled vegetables.”

Buyers from Metro Manila, particularly traders from Pasig City, have either reduced or stopped orders for broccoli and cauliflower produced in Benguet’s vegetable gardens, and have shifted to imported products sold in market trading centers in Manila, Sariaya town in Quezon province and Batangas province.

RCEP was ratified by the Senate in February despite objections from the agricultural sector, and took effect in the country in June. The agreement involves Australia, China, Vietnam, as well as Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand and Singapore.

The league appealed to government enforcers to allow only the entry of processed imported vegetables.

“Vegetable entries to the country must be limited to processed only. Fresh vegetables should not be included,” it said.

Price cap

It requested the government to revisit the RCEP’s internal rules and regulations to determine if entry protocols are strict and would protect local produce.

The league also urged the

government to consider imposing ceiling and floor prices for vegetables to prevent “skyrocketing prices” in the markets that have justified importation.

Historically, high vegetable prices allowed traders and suppliers to negotiate for much lower wholesale buying prices for locally grown crops that cut farmers’ revenues, the league said.

Benguet and parts of Mountain Province and Ifugao supply 80 percent of Metro Manila’s daily salad vegetable demand. Benguet ships out an average of 1.7 million kilos of vegetables daily, and a high of 3.3 million kilos during periods of oversupply, the league said.

It said the free trade deal should have policies that “empower” local farmers to be competitive.

“This early, we are experiencing the effects of RCEP when our production is not that high,” the group said, citing this year’s strong typhoons, like “Egay” (international name: Doksuri) in July, which damaged and delayed seasonal cropping.

Lamenting the impact of competition with foreign vegetables in the markets, it said medium-sized and third-class carrots are being given away as relief items or bought for as low as P5 a kilo, which is way below the cost of production.

“Due to the typhoons and monsoon rains that hit our region, only 10 percent of our total carrot production had been sold for P60 to P130 per kilogram,” the group said.

It added: “Disposers and suppliers have been complaining of a supply glut even if the volume of carrots and the other vegetables is not that high.”

Impact

The group has been monitoring the impact of imported potatoes on Benguet varieties harvested before the storms hit to prevent bigger losses.

Benguet transported potatoes categorized as “marble,” “extra large” and “triple large.” Extra large potatoes sell for P130 a kilo.

But like carrots, only a smaller volume of potatoes reached the markets because farmers, who usually harvest six tons of potatoes, ended up harvesting only two tons, the group said. INQ



FRESH The Baguio City public market, shown in this photo taken in April, offers residents and tourists a variety of fresh and cheap vegetables harvested from farms in the Cordillera.

—NEIL CLARK ONGCHANGCO



DA ensures adequate food supply during holidays

There will be enough food supply during the holidays with the expected increase in demand in the "ber" months, Department of Agriculture (DA) Undersecretary Deogracias Victor Savellano said yesterday.

In a poultry forum in Quezon City, Savellano said local stakeholders gave assurance that they could meet the increased consumption of pork, chicken and eggs during the Christmas season.

Savellano said sufficient supply would ensure that there would be no abrupt increase in retail prices this holiday season.

He said that while he could not control the retail prices of agricultural products, he wanted to ensure a steady supply of farm commodities during the "ber months."

"If there is a problem in the supply, it is expected that retail prices will also increase so if we have enough supply, if there is a movement (in retail prices) it is minimal," Savellano said.

He said efforts are being made to unify the data used by the DA and the local agriculture industry.

"I am asking them (livestock and poultry raisers) to come up with a position paper. They are the ones who experience (the problem of over importation). We need to see the data to be used as a basis on the volume needed to be imported and

the volume of production so that we will determine if there is a need to import or not," he said, adding he is coordinating with Interior Secretary Benhur Abalos in gathering data for the agriculture sector.

Egg prices up

Retail prices of eggs have increased amid a drop in the production after the onslaught of typhoons Egay and Goring, according to the Philippine Egg Board.

United Broiler Raisers Association chairman and Philippine Egg Board chief Gregorio San Diego said the farmgate price increased between P0.15 to P0.20 per piece, noting that egg producers have no control in the spike in retail prices.

"The retail prices have increased, first because of the problem last year. There was a drop in the farmgate price... all suffered losses, that is why many small egg producers lessened their production because of the losses they incurred and after that because of the typhoons, the damage was big, especially in Ilocos," San Diego said.

The DA earlier reported that Egay and Typhoon Falcon left P386.45 million worth of damage to the livestock and poultry sector. The southwest monsoon, enhanced by typhoons Goring and Hannah, left P10.42 million worth of damage to the sector.

— Bella Carias



Sugar farmgate prices drop, but retail still high

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Farmgate prices of sugar have dropped to P60 per kilo, but its retail prices remain high at P110 due to overpricing, Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) head Pablo Azcona said yesterday.

Azcona said the P110 per kilo of refined sugar is a branded one being sold in supermarkets.

"We monitored that brand

and it is consistently high. The charter of SRA (crafted) in 1986 made sure that we could not do something about pricing. What we do is through the supply and demand, we can bring down the retail prices, ensure that we have supply and as of now we have enough supply," he said.

Based on the monitoring of the Department of Agriculture (DA) in Metro Manila markets, retail prices of refined sugar ranged between P80 and

P110 per kilo, washed sugar between P80 and P95 per kilo and brown sugar between P75 and P95 per kilo.

"At present, our sugar supply is more than twice the level compared to last year but the retail is still the same. The farmgate price even dropped to P60 (per kilo). Yesterday, farmers were selling at more or less P58 (per kilo)," Azcona said.

Based on computation, if raw sugar is at P60 per kilo,

the farmgate price should be at P75 per kilo.

"Supposedly our problem here is even if it is branded, the source is still the same, the difference is the branding, it depends on the store. If the raw price of sugar, which is the farmers,' is low and there is enough supply but the retail prices do not go down, that's the problem," Azcona said.

He said the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) is

tasked to monitor the retail prices of sugar in the market.

"It should be the DTI but since the start of February, we have been trying to arrest the retail price and bring down the price. At least we now have P85 (per kilo) in the market, but when you say SRP, it is only the suggested retail price. The enforcement is the problem," he said.

Azcona said there will be no more sugar imports until

the end of the year after the importation of the additional 150,000 metric tons under Sugar Order No. 7.

He said the next importation would be done in April or May 2024 after the milling season.

He said that for crop year 2023 to 2024 or from Sept. 1, 2023 to Aug. 30, 2024, the SRA estimates that the total sugar production will reach 1.85 million metric tons.



DBP backs innovative farming solution in Albay

STATE-owned Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP) has granted a P500-million funding support to various farmer cooperatives in Albay as part of efforts to advance sustainable and efficient farming practices in the province, a top official said.

DBP President and Chief Executive Officer Michael O. de Jesus said the amount will finance the "Digital Rice Clustered Farming (DCRF) Project, which combines advanced automation, precision farming techniques, and data analytics to optimize resource utilization and increase small farmers' annual yield by up to 30-percent.

"DBP recognizes the immense potential of this innovative farming initiative to elevate Philippine agriculture to greater heights," de Jesus said. "Through this project, DBP is able to bring forward a revolutionary farming technology to the market and empower farmers to thrive in an ever-changing agricultural landscape."

DBP is the eighth largest bank in the country in terms of assets and provides credit support to four strategic sectors of the economy – infrastructure and logistics; micro, small and medium enterprises; environment; social services and community development.

The DCRF Project is funded under the DBP's Expanded Rice Credit Assistance under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (ERCA-RCEF) which aims to promote inclusive growth and build a stronger rice sector in the country.

De Jesus said that the project will be implemented through joint efforts with the Provincial Government of Albay, the Department of Agriculture, the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization, the National Food Authority, and the Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation.

He said that the agencies will collaborate in the areas of planning and coordination, technical assistance and capacity building, infrastructure development, development financing, and value chain development.

"By combining our resources and expertise, we are able to create a robust framework that would address the needs of our farmers. This convergence also serves as a testament to our collective commitment to serving the best interest of our nation and fostering sustainable development in the agricultural sector," de Jesus said.

De Jesus said that the DCRF initiative would consolidate individual rice farm holdings into larger farms which would result to lower production costs and improved farmers' income by



DBP President and Chief Executive Officer Michael de Jesus said the amount will finance the "Digital Rice Clustered Farming Project, which combines advanced automation, precision farming techniques, and data analytics to optimize resource utilization and increase small farmers' annual yield by up to 30 percent.

leveraging on economies of scale.

He said that the technology-enhanced farming solution would be utilizing a Digital Transformation Platform which includes the use of satellite imagery, machine learning, and artificial intelligence seen to significantly boost rice production by 28,000 metric tons (MT) annually with 2,000 hectares of land with upside production by up to 70,000 MT covering a cluster farm size of 5,000 hectares.

"DBP remains committed in providing the necessary funding assistance that will enable transformative agricultural initiatives to flourish, improve food security and contribute to the nation's overall development," de Jesus said.

De Jesus said that the DCRF Project will be piloted in the Province of Albay and has initially identified five farmer cooperatives to participate in the cluster farm project.

He said that the farm clustering and consolidation technique is recognized by the DA as one key strategies to scale up the Philippine agricultural sector, adding that the "...cluster farm system potentially being seen to become the epicenter of rice production in Albay..."

"The Bank's funding support for this initiative signifies our relentless efforts to empower small farmers and agribusinesses to adopt new technologies and contribute to the achievement of the nation's sustainable development goals," de Jesus said.



The future of PHL agriculture looks promising

RESEARCH BY
EDISON JOSEPH GONZALES

AGRICULTURE has been a vital industry in the Philippines for centuries, and it continues to rise in importance today. With a growing population and increasing demand for food, the country's agricultural sector is faced with new challenges and opportunities. In recent years, advances in technology and farming practices have helped to improve productivity and sustainability, making Philippine agriculture more competitive in the global market. From rice and corn to fruits and vegetables, the country's diverse range of crops and livestock provide ample opportunities for farmers and agribusinesses alike.

President Ferdinand "Bongbong" R. Marcos Jr. (BBM) has been a stalwart supporter of agricultural development for nearly four decades. He has a proven track record of success, having

overseen significant expansion in rice and corn production as well as in livestock during his time as Governor of Ilocos Norte. Under his leadership, the province became rice self-sufficient and sustained more than 100% self-sufficiency in corn and other major commodities. He has also filed numerous agriculture-related bills during his term as Senator.

Now, as the country's 17th President, BBM has taken the unprecedented step of designating himself as the concurrent head of the Department of Agriculture to address the looming global food crisis. He recognizes that the agriculture sector "cries for urgent attention" after years of neglect and misdirection. His plan of action includes increasing the yield of the country's main staple and providing support to those in need of government



Department of Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban welcomed the team of experts from the World Bank led by new Southeast Asia Agri Practice Manager Paavo Eliste on September 26, 2023. The officials discussed the progress of the ongoing World Bank-funded projects with the DA and identified new collaborative projects in the agriculture and fisheries sector for the country's food security.



assistance. He is also pushing for multi-year planning focused on the restructuring of the food value chain to ensure sustained growth in the farm sector. BBM has called upon the members of the DA family to work fast and efficiently to surmount the numerous challenges that threaten the country's food supply and stymied the growth of the farm sector for decades.

The future of Philippine agriculture looks promising

The future of Philippine agriculture looks promising, as evidenced by various studies and research conducted in the field. One study examined the technical efficiency of rice farms in different agroclimatic zones in the Philippines (Mariano et al., 2011). The findings suggest that Philippine rice producers have been able to adapt their crop management strategies to suit their specific agroclimatic conditions. This adaptability is a positive sign for the future of agriculture in the country.

Furthermore, the study highlighted that although there was an initial increase in productivity and technology utilization, there was a stagnation in the mean environment-metatechnology gap ratios in the later years of the study period. This indicates that there is room for improvement and further technological progress in the agricultural sector. Efforts to enhance technological advancements and increase total factor productivity can contribute to the future growth and development of Philippine agriculture.

Another study conducted a systematic review of two decades of rice research in Indonesia and the Philippines (Cuaton & Delina, 2022). This review provides insights into the social sciences aspects of rice research and identifies research gaps and future

research agendas. By addressing these research gaps, policymakers and stakeholders can make informed decisions and implement strategies that will drive the future growth of the agricultural sector.

Additionally, the Philippine government has recognized the importance of agriculture and has implemented various initiatives to support its development. The Department of Agriculture has launched programs aimed at improving productivity, promoting sustainable farming practices, and providing support to farmers. These initiatives include the provision of financial assistance, access to modern technology, and training opportunities for farmers.

Furthermore, the Philippines has a favorable climate and abundant natural resources that are conducive to agricultural production. The country has a diverse range of crops, including

rice, corn, fruits, and vegetables, which contribute to its agricultural diversity and potential for growth.

The future of Philippine agriculture looks promising. The adaptability of farmers to agroclimatic conditions, the potential for technological advancements, and the government's support for the sector all contribute to a positive outlook. By addressing research gaps, implementing sustainable practices, and providing support to farmers, the agricultural sector in the Philippines can continue to thrive and contribute to the country's economic growth and food security.

Growing the future

Agriculture plays a significant role in the economic growth of the Philippines. Several studies have explored the factors contributing to the rise of agriculture in the country.

One study found that growth in the nonfarm economy is a key driver of growth in agricultural wage rates in the Philippines (Tiffin & Irz, 2006). This suggests that the development of other sectors of the economy, such as industry and services, can have positive spillover effects on agriculture. Another study highlighted the importance of social, organizational, and institutional factors in the growth of organic agriculture in the Philippines (Salazar, 2013). Factors such as training opportunities, resource access, and organizational support have accompanied the growth of organic farming in the country.

Non-agricultural growth has also played a crucial role in reducing rural poverty in the Philippines (Fuwa et al., 2015). Micro-level studies have shown that non-agricultural growth has increased the relative returns

to human capital compared to agricultural land, leading to poverty reduction in rural areas. However, the slow pace of poverty reduction in the Philippines compared to other East Asian countries suggests that there is still room for improvement in agricultural development.

The agricultural sector in the Philippines is also vulnerable to natural disasters such as tropical cyclones and storm surges (Needham et al., 2015). Storm surge impacts can be particularly pronounced in areas where coastal mangroves have been converted to agriculture or aquaculture. These natural disasters can cause significant losses in the agricultural sector, highlighting the need for resilience and adaptation strategies.

Restrictive agricultural policies, such as the ban on biotech crops, can also have implications for the agriculture sector in the Philippines (Gonzalvo et al., 2022). A study explored the perceptions and attitudes of biotech corn farmers on the ban

and discussed how this policy could affect rural communities. The findings suggest that restrictive policies can have both positive and negative effects on major stakeholders in the agriculture sector.

The aging generation of farmers is another challenge facing the Philippine agriculture sector (Manigo, 2021). Stereotypes about farming and the lack of interest among the younger generation pose a threat to the sector. Promoting agripreneurship and providing support to agriculture students can help revitalize the sector and attract young people to engage in farming.

The rise of agriculture in the Philippines is influenced by various factors, including nonfarm growth, organic farming, poverty reduction, natural disasters, agricultural policies, and demographic changes. Understanding these factors and implementing appropriate strategies can contribute to the sustainable development of the agriculture sector in the country.



DA's P167.5-B National Expenditure Program gets thumbs up from Congress

THE 2024 National Expenditure Program (NEP) of the Department of Agriculture (DA) amounting to P167.5 billion (B), which is six percent higher than its 2023 funds under the General Appropriations Act (GAA), has been approved by the House of Representatives on September 25, 2023.

In line with the directives of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to boost the country's local agricultural production for food security and economic growth, the DA's 2024 NEP focuses on investments that lower production costs, improve the value chains, and promote consolidation and modernization.

The DA will allocate P30.869B for the National Rice Program, P6.09 Bfor the National Fisheries Program, and P5.28B for the National Corn Program. The National Livestock Program, National High Value Crops Development Program, National Organic Agriculture Program, National Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture Program, and the Halal Food Industry Development Program will each receive P4.35B, P1.94B, P921 million (M), P436M, and P19M, respectively.

Isabela Representative and DA budget sponsor Antonio "Tonyet" Albano said the proposed budget "is a clear articulation of the administration's agenda for agricultural development that is the very foundation of our nation's sustained growth in the years ahead."

He added that with the said budget, the DA shall pursue the reduction of production costs,

enhance capabilities for local production, provide essential support services from farm inputs to requisite farm machinery and infrastructure, and promote farm and fisheries modernization.

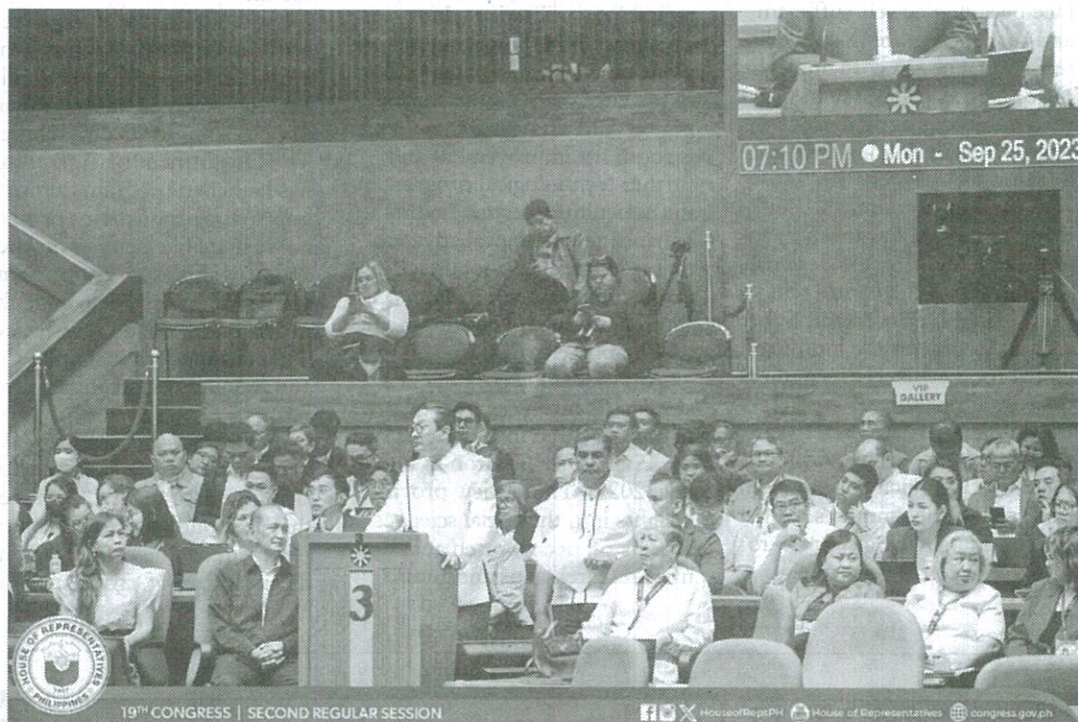
The DA NEP's salient features include the allocation of P9.80B for the hybrid rice seed assistance, P9.55B for fertilizer assistance, P2.750B for agri credit programs, P2.49B for yellow corn seeds and fertilizers, and P2.20B for hog repopulation and recovery.

Moreover, P1B will be allotted for Quick Response Fund, P492.7M for the Kadiwa Program, P374M for onion cold storage, P236.6M for aquaculture and mariculture, P230M for legislated hatcheries, P149.31M for durian expansion, and P30.91M for community gardens.

The DA Family led by Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban extended its gratitude to the House of Representatives for approving the proposed DA budget for 2024.

Undersecretary Panganiban also thanked the employees and members of the DA family for their hard work and dedication in the budget preparation and defense.

The Congress also approved on second reading House Bill 9284, as amended, which would expand Republic Act 10845 or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016. It seeks to declare as economic sabotage large-scale smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, cartelizing, and other acts of market abuse of agri-fishery commodities and tobacco.



The 2024 National Expenditure Program of the Department of Agriculture amounting to P167.5 billion has been approved by the House of Representatives on September 25, 2023.



DA rolls out permanent KADIWA stores

AFTER assessing the market value of agribusiness hubs in government premises with direct access to the public, the Department of Agriculture kicked-off the roll out of permanent KADIWA stores in various DA-Bureau of Plant Industry (DA-BPI) research centers in the country.

KADIWA is a flagship project of the DA through its Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service, in partnership with DA bureaus and attached agencies, and local farmers. This project aims to support the Marcos administration's thrust to develop the agriculture sector of the country by supporting local agricultural production, augmenting the income of local farmers.

The pilot launch was conducted in DA-BPI Guimaras National Crop Research Development and Production Support Center (NCRDPSC) on September 4 and 5, 2023 while the second store was launched in DA-BPI-NCRDPSC in Los Baños, Laguna on September 15, 2023. Succeeding launches will be conducted in Davao, La Granja in

Negros Occidental, and Baguio City on September 18, 22, and 28, 2023, respectively.

During the launch at the DA-BPI-NCRDPSC in Los Baños on September 15, DA-BPI Assistant Director for Research, Development, and Production Support Services Dr. Hermenegilda Gabertan said that, "If we look at the whole agri-value chain, it has credit, inputs — where BPI comes in for quality seeds, there is also our production management, and this marketing so that our farmers can market their products at low prices."

For her part, DA-BPI Los Baños NCRDPSC Center Chief Flora Jarilla said that the KADIWA activity will serve as an avenue for affordable and accessible agricultural products. She is hopeful that the BPI Kadiwa will contribute to the June 2023 data of 926 identified farmer associations and organizations supporting almost 500 Kadiwa centers.

The BPI Los Baños KADIWA is expected to cater fresh produce to consumers every second Friday of the month.



The Department of Agriculture kicked-off the roll out of permanent KADIWA stores in various DA-Bureau of Plant Industry research centers.



House approves DA's 2024 budget

THE Department of Agriculture's (DA) proposed 2024 budget was approved by the House of Representatives on September 25, which will help the agency in carrying out its programs and initiatives.

The DA's 2024 National Expenditure Program (NEP) amounting to P167.5 billion is 6 percent higher than its 2023 funds under the General Appropriations Act.

"The DA's 2024 NEP focuses on investments that lower production costs, improve the value chains, and promote consolidation and modernization," DA said on Thursday.

DA Senior Undersecretary **Domingo Panganiban** expressed his gratitude to

the House for approving the department's proposed budget and thanked the department's employees "for their hard work and dedication in the budget preparation and defense."

The DA's National Rice Program will receive the largest allocation at P30.869 billion; the National Fisheries Program, P6.09 billion; and the National Corn Program, P5.28 billion.

The budget is also earmarked to the following initiatives P 9.80 billion for the hybrid rice seed assistance; P9.55 billion for fertilizer assistance; P2.750 billion for agri credit programs; P2.49 billion for yellow corn seeds and fertil-

izers; and P2.20 billion for hog repopulation and recovery.

The National Livestock Program will receive P4.35 billion; National High Value Crops Development Program, P1.94 billion; National Organic Agriculture Program, P921 million; National Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture Program, P436 million; and the Halal Food Industry Development Program, P19 million.

The department's Quick Response Fund will receive P1 billion; P492.7 million for the Kadiwa Program; P374 million for onion cold storage; and P236.6 million for aquaculture and mariculture.

P230 million is earmarked for the legislated hatcheries,

P149.31 million for durian expansion and P30.91 million for community gardens.

Isabela 1st District Rep. Antonio "Tonypet" Albano, who sponsored the increase of the DA budget, said the amount allocated "is a clear articulation of the administration's agenda for agricultural development that is the very foundation of our nation's sustained growth in the years ahead."

Albano also said that the said budget will also provide support services from farm inputs, farm machinery, infrastructure and promote modernization in both farming and fisheries.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



A peek behind a coffee brand's latest effort to bring awareness to the coffee value chain

Last week, I and a few other press people were at the Bukidnon Integrated Coffee Center (BICC) in Malaybalay. The BICC, which is co-hosted by Nestlé Philippines, has been around since 2008 and is the center of the country's Robusta program.

Almost 90 percent of the country's coffee is sourced from Mindanao, mainly from Bukidnon and Sultan Kudarat. Most coffee is produced by small farmers, 72 percent of which is Robusta, the preferred variety for instant coffee. Even then, our local production only accounts for 15 percent of the country's total coffee consumption.

The Philippine Coffee Roadmap 2021-2025 reported a 3.5 percent decrease in local coffee production and a 2.1 percent increase in coffee consumption, both in the last three years. In short, there's a need to encourage more farmers to grow coffee and a need to help current coffee farmers increase their yield, especially given that there are projections of a looming global coffee shortage.

The press were given a preview of Nescafé's Kape't Bisig sa Pagbangon project,

which aims to increase awareness and enthusiasm for agriculture among the youth while continuing the brand's commitment to help its partner farmers become agripreneurs.

The project, which will kick off on International Coffee Day, Oct. 1, has two components. The first is a TikTok challenge where Tiktokers are encouraged to lipsync and dance to the Kape't Bisig jingle to bring awareness to the importance of Filipino coffee farmers.

The second is that Nescafé has partnered with the University of Southern Mindanao, Sultan Kudarat State University, and Central Mindanao University to identify 400 beneficiary students, prioritizing children of farmers in agriculture-related courses to be awarded ₱25,000 each to fund their academic requirements for a total of ₱10 million worth of educational assistance. The beneficiaries are third and fourth year students and the one-time assistance will be sent according to their discretion.

There has been a steady decline in enroll-



AVANT GARDENER
YVETTE TAN

ees in agriculture courses through the decades, with farmers themselves discouraging their children from following in their footsteps because of the lack of opportunities that tilling the land has brought them. And who can blame them, when the public perception of a farmer is of a person stuck in a cycle of debt and poverty?

There are many individuals and organizations trying to change this reality by proving that when run like a business, farming can be profitable. They are also trying to educate the public that working in agriculture does not necessarily mean needing to own a farm.

It is hoped that endeavors like this will help encourage students to continue pursuing a career in agriculture. The global average age of a farmer is near senior, and there is a worldwide need for more young people to work in agriculture or else literally everybody is at the risk of starvation.

This is very important in the Philippines, which likes to delude itself into thinking that it's an agricultural country while its farmers remain the poorest of the poor, with no one batting an eyelash at this inconsistency.

Education is important if we want to really become an agricultural nation. Our farmers should be empowered as businesspeople; our agriculture workers should be paid at least middle class wages; and our citizenry should be alerted to the active role they play in the country's bid for food sovereignty by virtue of simply needing to eat. People need to understand that an "agricultural country" that needs to import a majority of its basic food needs such as rice and coffee is fooling itself by spouting things like "pushing for food security" while failing to lay the groundwork to make it so.

In terms of coffee at least, the Philippine Coffee Roadmap's short-term goal is to increase the average yield of coffee growers to two metric tons per hectare (from a baseline crop yield of 235 kg/ha in 2018-2019) by 2026, increasing the country's self-sufficiency to almost 40 percent from the current 15 percent as well as increasing income across the coffee value chain.

Kape't Bisig is just part of Nescafé's overall contribution to this endeavor. It also has Project Coffee+, in cooperation with German development agency GIZ. The project introduced 1,500 farmers to regenerative agriculture and entrepreneurship and according to the brand, 86 percent of these farmers have since crossed the poverty threshold. Farmers in the program aren't beholden to the company and are free to sell to whoever they want.

In 2021, farmers in the project managed to achieve an average of 900/kg per hectare, with 192 top performers increasing their yields to one metric ton per hectare and above. Results have been monitored and evaluated by the Rainforest Alliance an international NGO working with businesses to strengthen agriculture, protect forests, address climate change, and uphold people's rights.

There's a huge market for coffee globally, with worldwide consumption increasing even as production dwindles. The Philippines has a huge opportunity to become a major player in this market, but this can only be done if coffee farmers are properly trained in farming and business techniques and if they are well compensated for their efforts. Kape't Bisig hopes to remind the general populace that coffee farmers exist, and that when done properly, can be a viable career option for agriculturally-minded and profit-oriented youth.



PSA: Palay production costs rise in 2022

By XANDER DAVE CEBALLOS

The average cost to produce palay, or unmilled rice, rose to ₱54,373 in 2022 per hectare, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Among the regions, the PSA said the highest average cost was recorded in Cagayan Valley at ₱69,537, while the lowest was observed in Eastern Visayas at ₱40,033.

Meanwhile, the average cost of producing palay in the country was ₱14.98 per kilogram a year ago.

Among the regions, the highest production cost was recorded in Central Visayas at ₱22.43 per kilogram, while the least production cost was in Central Luzon at ₱12.85 per kilogram.

The PSA said farmers earned an average of ₱0.20 for every peso invested in palay farming with a net profit-cost ratio of 0.20.

Of the regions, the highest net profit-cost ratio was recorded in Northern Mindanao at 0.44, followed by Central Luzon at 0.41, and Soccsksargen at 0.31.

The statistics agency said the

returns of palay farmers—less production costs—amounted to ₱10,836 per hectare in 2022.

Luzon recorded the highest average net returns at ₱25,002 per hectare. It was followed by Northern Mindanao with an average net return of ₱24,627 per hectare, and Cagayan Valley with ₱15,496 per hectare.

Palay prices up in August

The PSA reported that average farmgate price of palay increased by 25.8 percent to ₱22.16 per kilogram in August from ₱17.61 per kilogram farmgate price a year ago.

The average farmgate price of palay on a month-on-month basis increased by 14.3 percent from its price level of ₱19.38 per kilogram in July.

Of the regions, the highest farmgate price of palay in August was recorded in Central Luzon at ₱27.54 per kilogram, while the lowest farmgate price of palay was posted in Eastern Visayas at ₱18.04 per kilogram.

All regions recorded positive year-on-year growth rates in the average farmgate prices of palay. Central Luzon posted the highest annual increment of 56.2 percent, while the lowest annual increase was noted in Cordillera Administrative Region at 0.2 percent.

All regions recorded increases in the average farmgate prices of palay on a month-on-month basis. The highest month-on-month growth rate was registered in Caraga at 31.6 percent, while the lowest decrease was posted in Central Visayas at 2.1 percent



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Data link rice production cost to poverty incidence

BY CAI U. ORDINARIO

[@cauordinario](#)

PALAY (unmilled rice) production cost was the highest in regions where poverty incidence was above 10 percent, according to the latest data released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

PSA said the average cost of producing palay in the Philippines was P14.98 per kilogram in 2022. However, Central Visayas, Calabarzon, and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) posted the highest production cost in palay.

The cost of palay production was highest at P22.43 per kilo in Central Visayas, which had a poverty incidence of 26.8 percent, followed by P20.13 per kilo in Calabarzon with a poverty incidence of 10.6 percent and P19.01 per kilo in BARMM with a poverty incidence of 39.4 percent.

Net profit-cost ratio averaged 0.20. This means that farmers earned an average of P0.20 for every peso invested in palay farming. Among the regions, the highest net profit-cost ratio was recorded in Northern Mindanao at 0.44, followed by Central Luzon at 0.41, and SOCCSKSARGEN

at 0.31," PSA said.

On a per hectare basis, PSA said the average cost of palay production in 2022 at the national level was P54,373. The highest average cost was recorded in Cagayan Valley at P69,537, while the lowest was observed in Eastern Visayas at P40,033.

Average gross returns in palay production amounted to P65,209 per hectare. Central Luzon had the biggest gross returns at P86,158 per hectare followed by Cagayan Valley at P85,033 per hectare.

PSA said the lowest gross returns amounting to P43,102 per hectare were registered in Central Visayas, where palay production cost was the highest.

Returns after deducting all production costs amounted to P10,836 per hectare. Central Luzon recorded the highest average net returns at P25,002 per hectare.

PSA said Northern Mindanao followed this with an average net returns of P24,627 per hectare and Cagayan Valley with P15,496 per hectare.

The 2022 Survey on Costs and Returns of Palay Production was conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority, with funding support from the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Agricultural Research.

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Kalinga bans entry of meat products from Isabela

TABUK CITY, Kalinga: The provincial government has ordered a total ban on the entry of meat products into the province from Isabela following reported African swine fever (ASF) cases from the neighboring province.

Gov. James Edduba said that the temporary ban covers the transport

and buying of live hogs, and pork and pork-based products to ensure that the province's pork industry will not be affected.

According to reports, cases of ASF from some towns in Isabela had resulted in the depopulation of hogs in the affected farms and their surroundings to prevent fur-

ther spread of the virus.

The governor explained that the implementation of the total ban on the entry, transport and buying of live hogs and pork-based products from Isabela is a precautionary measure for there might be other positive ASF cases in other municipalities in Isabela that may

not have been monitored.

The local chief executive ordered all meat vendors and all other concerned stakeholders to coordinate with the Provincial Veterinary Office should there be any case of shipping in or buying of live hogs, pork and pork-based products from Isabela.

The governor said livestock will be immediately confiscated and destroyed if live hogs and other pork-based products are intercepted at the established quarantine checkpoints along national and provincial roads leading to the various parts of the province.

DEXTER SEE



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Protectionism, the Left and the local elite

ONE of the strengths of European universities and politics is that the Left as a school of thought and a political movement is part of society. I did my graduate work (both masteral and doctoral) in Britain and there the Left is unabashedly represented by the Labour Party and the Right by the Conservative (Tory) Party. Note that the same situation exists in France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, etc.

Members of the Left in Europe



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are highly steeped in philosophy, economics and statistics, and argue their cases based on empirical evidence. Karl Marx did so in his three-volume magnum opus "Das Kapital," where he systematically

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Protectionism, the Left and the

discussed that profit was unpaid surplus labor extracted by the capitalist from his workers. Alexander Chayanov in his work "The Theory of Peasant Economy" showed that left by themselves, peasants will not produce their optimum output because they are content with their subsistence mode of existence. More recently, Thomas Piketty's Capital in the 21st Century, analyzing almost a century of data, argued that the return to capital is much higher than labor and outpaces economic growth. This results in greater inequality as the rich gain more despite doing nothing.

The Left in the Philippines, meanwhile, is a poor counterpart of what it is in Europe and even in Latin America. What we have here is a vulgar form of Marxism that mostly resorts to the conspiratorial thesis to argue a case. For instance, the Left here sees a conspiracy of capitalist countries, led by the United States, to keep Third World nations like the Philippine underdeveloped for as long as they remain within the ambit of the capitalist system.

The problem is that South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore — and now Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and even Vietnam — are fully integrated with the world capitalist system and have economically prospered.

The Left also theorizes that developing countries like the Philippines are forced to remain agricultural because they supply the raw material requirements of factories in the developed countries of the US and the West. Thus, having agriculture as a mainstay of the economy is tantamount to consigning the country to backwardness.

Again, Brazil, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, among others, have large agricultural sectors but they are by no means underdeveloped. New Zealand's major exports are dairy, beef and lamb meat but there is no way that the Philippines is more developed.

As a result of the perceived need to move away from agriculture to be liberated from backwardness, the Left's battle cry is "nationalist industrialization." This means that industrialization is the key to Philippine economic development and that industries must

be owned by Filipinos.

To ensure their growth and protection from cheap imports, these industries and hence, their owners, must be protected. Protection comes in two forms: imports are not allowed to enter (an import ban) and compete with the local produce or, if allowed, a hefty tax (tariff) should be imposed to ensure that the imports are more expensive than local products.

Putting in place and maintaining this protective wall is what the Left and our local elite have in common. Protection guarantees the survival of the local elite despite their being inefficient and uncompetitive vis-a-vis foreign rivals. More importantly, it allows them to rake in profits due to the lack of competition.

Sadly, the Filipino consumers are the victims of protection because they have no choice but to buy expensive and poor quality products as competing imports are barred.

The argument of the Left and the so-called nationalist elite is that they must be protected to be able to nurture their growth and become a linchpin of economic development. The problem is the protection is not time-bound and there is little incentive to innovate and become efficient and competitive.

A litany of examples of poor quality goods and inefficient services can be cited, ranging from telecommunication, transport and utility sectors to our overpriced chicken (around 70 percent more expensive than in Vietnam), pork (double than that of Thailand), rice (almost double the price in Vietnam) and sugar (more than double the price in Thailand).

The other myth peddled by the Left is that protection is needed by small producers and farmers. There might be a case for such but it must also be time-bound to ensure that the small producers and farmers become efficient and competitive. And during the period of protection, productivity or efficiency-enhancing measures must be provided to enable producers and farmers to become productive and efficient, and able to compete against foreign counterparts.

But instead of insisting on the provision of efficiency or productivity-enhancing measures, the Left clamors for more subsidies and protection from the state on a perpetual basis. For leftists, the capitalist market cannot be relied on to protect small producers and cultivators. Only an interventionist state can calibrate the operations of the market by providing price support or subsidies, raising tariffs, imposing an import ban or basically tinkering with the law of supply and demand.

In the same breath, the Left is suspicious of the government, vigorously criticizing it for inefficiently providing price subsidies, poorly managing the supply and delivery of key inputs to farmers and rampant corruption. In other words, the very state they want to intervene more actively in the economy is the very same entity they cannot trust to do its job properly.

A neo-structuralist from China (the so-called new Left) provided a more pragmatic approach as to where government intervention and support should come in. Prof. Justin Yifu Lin argued that to attain rapid economic and sustained growth, governments in developing countries should support products or activities in which they have a comparative advantage.

For instance, if we have a comparative advantage in the production of mango, pineapple, cacao, etc., or services such as the gig industry, Yifu Lin's prescription means that most of the government's attention and resources should be spent nurturing their development.

Unfortunately, the Left in the Philippines will never accept this because it means abandoning protections and subsidies for products and activities where its interests and allies lie. The Left would rather see the Philippines stick to old products and services, and perpetual assistance for these rather than making the necessary shift attuned to global realities.

This is the reason why leftist thinking, represented by protectionism, has become a Jurassic ideology.

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TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATIONS

Brighter farming horizons in the PHL

RESEARCH BY
EDISON JOSEPH GONZALES

THE Philippines, like many other countries, is experiencing a rapid transformation in its agricultural sector due to the emergence of technology and innovations (Lim, 2022). This transformation is driven by the need to increase agricultural productivity and rural enterprise development (Matero & Jumawan-Matero, 2020).

However, there are several challenges that hinder the adoption and implementation of technology in farming practices. These challenges include inadequate technological equipment, lack of technological literacy among farmers, and the failure to consider sociocultural aspects (Toquero, 2020).

To overcome these challenges, it is crucial to stimulate innovative practices among farmers and sustain these practices in the long term (Toquero, 2020).

Malaya Business Insight explores the role of technology and innovations in transforming farming practices in the Philippines and examines various aspects of technology adoption and innovation in the agricultural sector, including the challenges faced, strategies employed, and the potential benefits for farmers and rural communities.

Technology adoption in farming

The adoption of technology in farming practices has the potential to revolutionize the agricultural sector in the Philippines. One area where technology adoption has shown promise is in seaweed cultivation (Valder-

rama et al., 2015). The Philippines has been a major producer of carrageenan seaweeds, but it has faced challenges such as disease outbreaks and political unrest (Valderrama et al., 2015). However, the introduction of technology and innovations in seaweed farming has the potential to overcome these challenges and increase production for export markets (Valderrama et al., 2015).

Innovations in smart farming

Smart farming innovations (SFI) have emerged as a strategy to increase agricultural productivity and rural enterprise development in the Philippines (Matero & Jumawan-Matero, 2020). SFI focuses on the research, development, and market of organic foods as medicine and aims to build social entrepreneurs in using SFI (Matero & Jumawan-Matero, 2020). By integrating technology and innovative practices, SFI has the potential to transform farming practices and improve the livelihoods of farmers in the Philippines (Matero & Jumawan-Matero, 2020).

Farm tourism and economic growth

Farm tourism has gained traction in the Philippines as a means to promote economic growth and create decent work opportunities (Yamagishi et al., 2021). The development of farm tourism aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of promoting development-oriented policies and encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation (Yamagishi

et al., 2021). The Philippines has taken steps to promote farm tourism through national policy guidelines (Yamagishi et al., 2021). By diversifying the tourism sector and promoting rural development, farm tourism has the potential to contribute to economic growth and job creation in the Philippines (Yamagishi et al., 2021).

Constraints to adoption of organic farming

Despite the potential benefits of organic farming, its adoption in the Philippines has been problematic (Lumbo & Salamanca, 2023). The study highlights that a private enterprise perceived to be resource-rich is more likely to sustain the adoption of organic farming compared to farmers belonging to people's organizations (Lumbo & Salamanca, 2023). This suggests that addressing resource constraints and providing support to farmers can facilitate the adoption of organic farming practices in the Philippines (Lumbo & Salamanca, 2023).

Technology and innovations have the potential to revolutionize farming practices in the Philippines. However, there are challenges that need to be addressed, such as inadequate technological equipment and the need for technological literacy among farmers (Toquero, 2020).

By stimulating innovative practices, promoting smart farming innovations, and supporting the adoption of organic farming, the Philippines can harness the potential of technology to achieve sustainable agricultural development and improve the livelihoods of farmers and rural communities.



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SPEAKER CITES RECORD OK OF PRIORITY BILLS

SPEAKER Ferdinand Martin Romualdez is proud to announce the 100 percent approval of Legislative Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) measures three months ahead of time.

The Speaker expressed his "heartfelt appreciation and profound gratitude" to his colleagues, including members of the minority, and House personnel for his chamber's record accomplishment.

He recalled that last July 5, during the second full meeting of the LEDAC, there were 20 priority bills targeted for approval by both houses of Congress by the end of December 2023.

"We are three months ahead of target... Salamat sa tulong ninyong lahat. Mission accomplished po tayo - tatlong buwan bago matapos ang deadlinenna nakagkasunduan ng Senate, House of Representatives at Executive department," Romualdez said.

"I have no doubt that our collective action, imbued with competence and a passion for public service, led us to deliver responsive and relevant legislative measures required to champion social justice and economic development," he added.

Speaker Romualdez cited the proposed P5.768-trillion national budget for 2024 among the priority measures passed by the House.

"We are confident that every centavo reflects the overarching targets of ushering economic transformation towards inclusivity and sustainability and is in line with the administration's medium-term fiscal framework, the 8-point socioeconomic agenda, and the Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028," he said.

He said though the budget deliberations were transparent, they were at times difficult, including discussions on the use of intelligence and confidential funds.

Speaker Romualdez enumerated the 20 LEDAC-agreed priority bills the House has approved, including two the President may sign into law soon: House Bill (HB) 7006, or Automatic Income Classification Act for Local Government Units, and HB 8278 or the Philippine Salt Industry Development Act.

The 14 other measures passed on third and final reading are:

HB 6522 - Philippine Centers for Disease Prevention and Control Act; HB 6518 - Health Auxiliary Reinforcement Team Act; HB 6452 - Virology and Vaccine Institute of the Philippines Act; HB 6687 - Instituting a National Citizens Service Program; HB 6558 - Real Property Valuation and Assessment Reform Act; HB 7327 - E-Governance/E-Government Act; HB 6444 - Waste Treatment Technology Act; HB 6510 - New Philippine Passport Act; HB 7325 - Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers; HB 7240 - National Government Rightsizing Act; HB 7393 - Anti-Financial Account Scamming Act; HB 7446 - Amending the Bank Secrecy Law;

HB 8969 - Military and Other Uniformed Personnel Pension Act; HB 9284 - Anti Agri-fishery Commodities and Tobacco Economic Sabotage Act of 2023; Trabaho Para sa Bayan Act (National Employment Recovery Strategy) as Republic Act (RA) No. 11962; HB 7006 or the "Automatic Income Classification Act for Local Government Units" has been transmitted to Malacañang for appropriate Action; The House adopted Senate Bill 1846 as an amendment to HB 0004 or the Internet Transactions or E-Commerce Law; the House ratified conference committee reports on HB 6527, or the Public-Private Partnership Act, and HBn4125, or the Ease of Paying Taxes Act; HB 8278 or the proposed Philippine Salt Industry Development

Act.

Speaker Romualdez said eight bills had been signed into law since last July when Congress convened for its second regular session.

These are RA 11962 or the Trabaho Para Sa Bayan Act, RA 11956 extending the tax amnesty availment period, RA 11958 increases the disability pension of veterans, RA 11959, or Regional Specialty Centers Act, RA 11960 or OTOP Philippines Act, and RA 11961 amending the National Cultural Heritage Act.

Before the start of the Second Regular Session, the President signed RA 11953, or New Agrarian Emancipation Act, and RA 11954 of Maharlika Investment Fund Act of 2023.

Jester Manalastas



Karne galing Isabela ban sa Kalinga

Naglabas ng temporary ban ang Kalinga provincial government sa pagpasok ng mga karne ng baboy at produkto na nanggagaling sa ilang mga apektadong bayan sa Isabela dahil sa banta ng African Swine Fever (ASF).

Kabilang sa apektadong mga bayan sa temporary ban ngayon dahil sa ASF ay ang Angadanan, Roxas, Luna,

Quirino, Gamu at Echague, lahat sa lalawigan ng Isabela.

Ayon kay Kalinga Gov. James Edubba, ito ay bahagi sa pagtiyak nilang hindi maaapektuhan ang mga nag-aalaga ng baboy sa kanilang probinsya lalo na at maliit lamang ang supply at nag-aangkat din sila sa mga karatig-probinsya. (**Allan Bergonia**)



SUBIC TALAMAK SA SMUGGLING

Pinatututukan ngayon ang Subic matapos umanong makapasok ang P3.6 bilyong halaga ng hinihinalang shabu sa daungan nito at napunta sa isang warehouse sa Pampanga.

Ayon kay Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla, sa isang press briefing ay ito na ang pinakamalaking nasabat na ilegal na droga ngayong taon sa bansa.

Binigyan-diin ni Remulla na dapat mati-

yagang mabuti ang daungan ng Subic dahil dito rin ipinapasok ang mga smuggled na produktong agrikultura at iba pa.

Sinabi ni Remulla na ang shabu ay nagmula sa Thailand sakay ng Sitc Shekou at dumao sa Subic Port, Subic Bay Freeport Zone noong Setyembre 18, 2023.

Nagawa umano ng crack team ng NBI na mapasok ang sindikato at nahubaran ng mas-kara ang mga sangkot

dito.

Kinumpirma ni Remulla na may mga sangkot na dayuhan at may iniimbestigahan na rin na taga-BOC.

"Definitely may foreign involvement kasi international syndicate that we are talking about," ayon kay Remulla.

Inamin ni Remulla na napaka-sopistikado na ng operasyon ng sindikato dahil maski ang K-9 dogs ay nahirapan at dapat na muling sanayin sa pag-amoy

ng ilegal na droga.

"We have a list of people to be arrested it is being worked at by the NBI," ayon pa kay Remulla ngunit tumanggi itong magbigay ng pangalan sa mga taong sangkot sa sindikato.

Binigyan-diin ni Remulla na dapat mati-yagang mabuti ang daungan ng Subic dahil dito rin ipinapasok ang mga smuggling na produktong agrikultura at iba pa. (Juliet de Loza-Cudia)

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Subic mainit sa smuggling - Remulla

MINOMONITOR ngayon ng pamahalaan ang Subic bunsod ng malawakang smuggling na nagaganap sa naturang lugar.

Kinumpirma ni Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla na nasa P3.6 bilyon na halaga ng ilegal na droga ang nakumpiska ng mga law enforcement agency sa Gate 1, Empire 999 Realty Corporation, sa Purok 5, San Jose Malino, Mexico City, Pampanga.

Iginiit ni Remulla na masusi silang nakikipag ugnayan na sa Bureau of Customs upang masugpo ang problema ng smuggling.

"Subic din ang na-pinpoint namin na source ng agricultural smuggling, smuggling ng goods," ani Remulla.

Magugunita na aabot sa 530 kilos ng shabu ang nasamsam. Nabatid na dumating sa bansa ang shipment sa Subic Port noong Sept 18 mula sa Thailand.

Nakasilid aniya ang naturang illegal substance sa 59 na brown box, bawat kahon ay mayroong chicharon at dried fish na may kasamang softdrinks at dog feeds para matakpan ito.

Makikipag-ugnayan din ang NBI sa Anti Money Laundering Council laban sa mga natukoy na korporasyon na ginagamit na conduit sa pagpapakalat ng bawal na droga sa bansa.

Naniniwala si Remulla na marapat nang isailalim muli sa re-training ang mga K-9 units para makasabay sa pagiging high tech na ng pagpapadala ng mga ilegal na droga.

Maging ang mga ahente na nakatalaga sa mga ports para harangin ang mga kontrabando ay kinakailangan ng balasahin dahil hindi na nagiging mahigpit sa pagbabantay. **TERESA TAVARES**



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Wheat, soybeans advance

CANBERRA- Chicago wheat futures regained some ground on Thursday as traders looked beyond low price offers in Europe and shifted focus to forecasts of smaller harvests in Australia and Argentina that are likely to tighten supply later in the year.

Corn and soybeans also advanced as an oil price rally lifted ethanol, an alternative fuel that can be made from either crop.

Wheat harvests in Russia and many other northern hemisphere countries are nearing an end and dry weather has hit crops in southern hemisphere

exporters that harvest later, said Rod Baker, an analyst at Australian Crop Forecasters in Perth.

"While Ukraine and Russia are getting wheat out, prices will remain here," he said. "But after that, you've got a shrinking crop. This is putting a floor under the market."

Most-active wheat futures on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) were up 0.4 percent at \$5.81-1/2 a bushel.

Prices fell to \$5.70 a bushel earlier this month, the lowest since December 2020. - Reuters