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REP. BRIAN YAMSUAN

Sa nakaraang linggo, nasaksihan po natin ang patuloy na pamamahagi ni Pangulong Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. ng mga smuggled na bigas sa mga mahihirap na pamilya.

Sa ilang lalawigan sa Western Visayas, at sa lungsod ng Taguig, Metro Manila naman nagpunta ang Pangulong BBM nitong nakaraang linggo para maipamigay ang mga sakosong bigas sa libo-libong benepisyaryo ng Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps).

Laking pasasalamat ni Mayor Lani Cayetano sa tulong na dala ng Pangulo, na pinuri naman ang Taguig sa urban farming program nito.

Tulad ng mga naunang naipamigay na bigas ng Pangulo sa Zamboanga, Camarines Sur at Cavite, nanggaling ang ipinamahagi sa Visayas at Taguig sa 42,180 sakong imported rice na kinumpiska ng Bureau of Customs.

Istratehiya po ito ng Pangulo para hindi na mapakinabangan pa ng mga walang konsensiyang smuggler ang mga pinuslit nilang bigas at makapagbigay ng direktang tulong sa mga mahihirap na pamilya.

Sa rice distribution na naganap sa Taguig din inihayag ng Pangulo

ang pagtatanggal ng price control na pansamantalang pinataw sa regular milled rice at special milled rice.

Natupad na ang layunin ng price control na mapababa ang presyo ng bigas kaya't tinanggal na ito ng Pangulong BBM. Panahon na rin ng pag-aani ng bigas kaya't dadami na ang suplay nito sa merkado.

Ang pagtanggap ng price control ay para na rin sa kapakanan ng ating mga magsasaka. Mas makabenta sila ng kanilang ani sa magandang presyo kung wala na ang price control.

Makikita sa mga hakbang na ginawa ng Pangulo na bagama't mabilis siyang magdesisyon ay masusi niya munang pinag-aaralan ang mga mungkahi sa kanya. Ang kapakanan pa rin ng mahihirap ang inuuna ng Pangulo kaysa sa pagpapaganda ng kanyang imahen sa publiko.

Isang halimbawa na lamang ay ang mungkahi sa kanya na tanggalin o ibaba muna pansamantala ang taripa sa inaangkat na bigas para bumaha ng imported rice at mapababa ang presyo ng bigas sa merkado.

Madaling gawin ito para tumigil na ang mga ilang bumabatikos sa Pangulo. Pero alam ni BBM na ang talo rito ay ang mga magsasakang Pilipino.

Panahon ng pag-aani kaya't walang kikitain ang mga rice farmer kung tatanggalin ang taripa sa imported rice.

Matatabunan kasi ng imported rice ang kanilang ani kaya't siguradong lugi pa sila kung magbebenta sa merkado.

Kinatigan at pinuri natin ang Pangulo sa kanyang desisyong hindi ibaba ang taripa sa bigas. Napakalupit nga naman ito para sa ating mga magsasaka kung ginawa ito ng gobyerno sa panahon na sila ay nag-aani na ng bigas.

Bukod pa ryan, ang nakokolektang taripa sa imported rice ay napupunta sa Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) na pondo para sa mga programang ang layunin ay gawing makabago ang sektor ng agrikultura at mapataas ang kita ng mga magsasaka.

Dito sa RCEF kumukuha ng pondo para mabigyan ng karampatang training, makabagong gamit, pasilidad, teknolohiya at ayuda ang mga magsasaka. Kung tatanggalin o ibaba ang taripa sa imported na bigas, mababawasan ang pondo na inilaan ng gobyerno para umasenso ang kanilang kalagayan.

Tulad ng nasabi ko na po, para patuloy na magtanim ang ating mga magsasaka, kailangang makita nilang tama ang patakaran na pinapatupad ng gobyerno at maramdaman nilang may malasakit ito sa kanilang kapakanan. Ito ang pinakita sa kanila ng Pangulong BBM sa pagtugis sa mga smuggler ng bigas at pagtanggap ibaba ang taripa sa imported rice.



NEWS BRIEF

Produksiyon ng pagkain sisirit sa RCEP - Romualdez

HINDI lamang mapataas ang produksiyong agrikultura partikular ang bigas kundi masiguro ang sapat na supply ng pagkain para sa bawat Pilipino ang gagawing dagdag na tulong na ibibigay ng pamahalan para sa mga magsasaka mula sa sobrang makokolekta sa Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEP).

Sinabi ito Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez bilang pag-suporta sa direktiba ni Pangulong Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. sa mga opisyal ng Department of Agriculture (DA) na gamitin ang sobrang makokolekta mula sa rice tariff para tu-

lungan ang mga magsasaka.

"This gesture manifests the unwavering resolve of President Marcos, Jr. to boost agricultural production, particularly of rice, to ensure a stable supply of food for every Filipino family at affordable prices and uplift the lives of our farmers," ayon kay Romualdez.

"The excess collections from rice tariffs channeled into supporting our rice farmers will enable them to access modern farming technologies, improve their agricultural practices, and ultimately increase their productivity," dagdag ng lider ng Kamara. (Eralyn Prado/Billy Begas)

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SUPPLY SHORTAGE SEEN

DA EYES PORK IMPORTS AHEAD OF CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
@jordeenelagare

The Philippines will likely import pork in time for the Christmas season but industry stakeholders said the country still has a sufficient supply of pork.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said on Tuesday that the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** is considering importation to cover the projected shortfall in the fourth quarter of this year.

De Mesa, also the spokesperson for the DA, said the country had a supply surplus of 10 days in the third quarter but it might need to source additional pork from abroad to meet the expected increase in demand during the holiday season.

"Our pork supply is a little tight. We expect a 10-day deficit in our local supply by the end of fourth quarter," de Mesa said.

"There might be a need to import during the last quarter when the demand for pork is really strong based on historical data," he told reporters.

But agricultural group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura said the Philippines has enough stockpile of pork as evidenced by the huge volume of pork stocks in cold storage

facilities nationwide, and the decline of farm-gate prices of live hogs.

According to the National Meat Inspection Service, the inventory of frozen pork in accredited cold storage facilities stood at 87,338.57 metric tons (MT) as of Sept. 18, up by 2.02 percent from 85,606.60 MT in the same period a year ago.

However, this was 16.9 percent lower than 105,054.41 MT recorded the previous week.

De Mesa said there was "a need to balance our local production" with importation to stabilize retail prices and meet the country's pork requirement as the hog sector is contending with different issues such as the prevalence of African swine fever.

De Mesa also said the DA was studying whether to impose a suggested retail price (SRP) on pork products.

"We can look into it if we observe price manipulation. But as of now, we don't see the need to implement an [SRP]," he added.

The DA official said they observed the farm-gate price—or the selling price between producers and traders—of pork ranges between P170 to P190 per kilogram and in certain areas, reaches P200 per kg. **INQ**



House panel: No confidential funds for OVP, DepEd, DA, DICT, DFA

By DELON PORCALLA

The Office of the Vice President (OVP) and the Department of Education (DepEd), both under Sara Duterte, will no longer have confidential funds under the proposed P5.768-trillion budget for 2024, lawmakers announced yesterday.

The House of Representatives has removed a total of P1.23 billion in confidential and intelligence funds (CIF) for the OVP, DepEd and three other agencies.

The **Departments of Agriculture (DA)**, Information and Communications Technology (DICT) as well as Foreign Affairs (DFA) were also not allotted CIF.

The DFA had earlier declined the Senate's offer to have CIF to augment its diplomacy work overseas.

The decision to strip the OVP, DepEd, **DA**, DICT and DFA of CIF was made by a "small committee" that Speaker Martin Romualdez tasked to realign budget allocations for 2024.

"We believe that the House is on the right side of history. We are responding to the call of the times," Marikina Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo,

senior vice chair of the House committee on appropriations, said at a press briefing. "The volatile situation in the West Philippine Sea calls for immediate and decisive action to protect our national sovereignty."

Quimbo was accompanied at the media briefing by Ako Bicol party-list Rep. Zaldy Co, who chairs the House appropriations committee, Majority Leader Zamboanga Rep. Manuel Jose Dalipe and Minority Leader Marcelino Libanan of 4Ps party-list.

A total of P1.23 billion in CIF was realigned to security agencies in charge of monitoring and protecting the country's territorial rights in the West Philippine Sea.

The National Intelligence Coordinating Agency received P300 million in CIF; National Security Council, P100 million and Philippine Coast Guard, P200 million.

The Department of Transportation was allotted P381.8 million worth of CIF for airport development and expansion of Pag-asa Island Airport. The amount is part of the P3-billion total allocation for the said airport.

The P381 million was the only portion taken from confidential funds.

Budget allocations for the national

security agencies reached P981 million.

The balance of P285 million was earmarked to other agencies for MOOE or maintenance and other operating expenses, instead of confidential funds.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources received P30 million; DICT, P25 million; DFA, P30 million and Office of the Ombudsman, P50 million.

The DepEd's Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education program was allotted P150 million.

Co said they would transmit the House amendments to the 2024 General Appropriations bill to the Senate on Oct. 25.

Libanan said the House panel heard the concerns of all stakeholders.

Meanwhile, Quimbo branded as "fake news" allegations that the House of Representatives has at its disposal about P1.6 billion in confidential funds.

"Congress has no confidential funds. The allegation on social media about the P1.6 billion is actually extraordinary expenses," Quimbo told reporters.

She explained that while extraordinary fund is lumped under the same heading with the CIF, it is subject to full scrutiny by the Commission on Audit.

Realignment

The House small committee introduced a total of P194 billion in budget realignment to enhance food production and combat inflation:

- P20 billion to DA for rice subsidy program
- P40 billion to the National Irrigation Administration
- P2 billion to the Philippine Coconut Authority for massive planting/replanting of seedlings
- P1.5 billion for vaccines against the African swine fever
- P1 billion to the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority to build fishery and post-harvest facilities in Palawan and Kalayaan Group of Islands.

To invest in people and the country's future, funding was also allocated to the following: P43.9 billion to the Department of Health, P1 billion to UP Philippine General Hospital, P35 billion for the Department of Social Welfare and Development,

P17.5 billion to the Department of Labor and Employment for the TUPAD program, P10.4 billion for the DOLE-Technical Education and Skills Development Authority and P17.1 billion for the Commission on Higher Education.

'Abolish all CIF'

Cause-oriented groups are not satisfied with the decision of lawmakers stripping five government agencies of confidential funds.

Renato Reyes, president of Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, said it is not enough that confidential funds are removed or transferred.

"Confidential funds must be abolished. Public funds should be itemized in the budget and subject to regular audit," Reyes said in a statement.

Peasant group Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) said President Marcos should also be stripped of CIF worth P4.5 billion.

"Confidential and intelligence funds are the modern-day pork barrel. It greases the wheels of corruption and bureaucrat capitalism," KMP secretary general Ronnie Manalo said. — **With Emmanuel Tupas**



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Local pork supply to fall short by yearend

By DANESSA RIVERA

Local pork supply is projected to fall short in the fourth quarter of the year due to the expected surge in demand during the holiday season, requiring importation of the commodity to ensure adequate supply and stable prices, an official of the Department of Agriculture (DA) said yesterday.

The agency is projecting a supply shortfall on local pork of up to 10 days, DA Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa told journalists yesterday.

"The supply situation can be addressed by importation during the last quarter when demand for pork is high," De Mesa said.

"The shortage only covers local supply. That's why there is a need to balance our local production with our need to import, especially with African swine fever (ASF) cases in the country," he said.

De Mesa said that importation would keep the balance on our requirement, to ensure pork prices remain affordable.

Based on the DA's monitoring in Metro Manila markets, pork shoulder or *kasim* retails at P260 to P330 per

kilo and belly or *liempo* at P290 to P400 as of yesterday.

While ASF continues to be an issue in the local pork industry, the DA is looking into the possibility of price manipulation with current farmgate prices of pork at P170 to P200 per kilo.

Factoring the expenses and profit of traders and retailers of P50 to P70, retail prices should only be around P220 to P250 per kilo, De Mesa said.

"That's what we're looking into after rice. Why prices are too high in the market and if there are market abuses," he said.

Imposing a suggested retail price will be recommended if investigation will show price manipulation in pork, the DA official said.

According to the DA, there are 98 barangays in 19 provinces with active cases of ASF, the latest of which is in Oriental Mindoro.

De Mesa said hog population in the entire Mindoro is around 70,000 to 80,000 heads, relatively small compared to the overall population of 10 million.

"It's not a major producing area. Nevertheless, we need to look at it because it's an island province. We need to ensure their need for pork is met," he said.

De Mesa said the government has five approaches in dealing with ASF—control in infected areas, prevention, information campaign, biosecurity measures and repopulation.

Farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) condemned the push to import more pork when local producers continue to bear the costs of addressing the spread of ASF.

Local hog raisers are prepared and well-equipped to fight ASF and the problem lies with the lack of first border facilities, SINAG executive director Jayson Cainglet said in a statement.

"It will not matter if we impose the strictest movement protocols and bio-security measures for local hog raisers and in the transport of live hogs, but continue to have unlimited entry of untested imported pork at the port of first entry," Cainglet said.

He said the country also has ample pork supply as evidenced by the huge volume of pork stocks in cold storages across the country, the large numbers of pork imports and the decline of farmgate prices of live hogs. — With Romina Cabrera, Delon Porcalla



EDITORIAL

Baby step toward reforms

After several days of deliberations, the House committee on appropriations has finalized the list of government agencies that will have zero confidential funds in their 2024 budget. In addition to the Office and the Vice President and the Department of Education, which were the first agencies to be identified by the House of Representatives, the committee has added the **Department of Agriculture**, the Department of Information and Communications Technology and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

DFA Secretary Enrique Manalo has said the department does not need confidential funds. The DICT has been taken to task by lawmakers for low utilization of its regular annual appropriation. The DA is headed concurrently by President Marcos, who has over P4 billion in secret funds at the disposal of the Office of the President.

Vice President Sara Duterte, the concurrent education secretary, had requested P150 million in confidential funds for the DepEd and another P500 million for the OVP. The House committee has instead approved P150 million, but as part of the maintenance and other operating expenses of DepEd, and specifically allotted for state assistance for students and teachers in private education. Unlike the confidential and intelligence funds or CIF, the MOOE is subject to regular

government auditing rules.

Also getting certain amounts for MOOE are the DICT, DFA, Office of the Ombudsman and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources. Of the P1.23 billion in realigned confidential funds, P300 million will go to the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency and P200 million to the Philippine Coast Guard. Another P100 million will go to the National Security Council and P381.8 million to the Department of Transportation for airport development, including the expansion of the airport on Pag-asa Island in the West Philippine Sea.

The realignment is a baby step toward the bigger task of rationalizing not only the allocation of secret funds to national government agencies, but also the wide discretion granted to local government units to declare large chunks of their budgets as confidential funds. Billions of pesos in public funds, declared as confidential by LGU executives, are escaping proper scrutiny by state auditors. This is against constitutional provisions and laws on transparency and accountability in the utilization of public funds.

The issue can be brought to the Supreme Court, but Congress can do its part by legislating institutional changes. The House realignment of CIF is a good start. Now the momentum must be sustained toward far-ranging reforms.



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ASF state of calamity in 2 Mindoro towns

By **ROMINA CABRERA**

Two towns in Oriental Mindoro have been placed under a state of calamity after reporting their first cases of African swine fever (ASF).

The Sangguniang Panlalawigan declared a state of calamity in Roxas and Mansalay on Monday upon the recommendation of Oriental Mindoro Gov. Humerlito Dolor.

He said three confirmed cases were recorded in Barangays Bagumbayan and Dangay in Roxas while hog deaths were reported in Mansalay in the past week.

Dolor issued Executive Order No. 66 banning the transport of hogs and pork products from the two towns to prevent the spread of the swine disease.

The Department of Agriculture said it would send test kits to five more barangays in Roxas and one barangay in Mansalay to determine if there are

other ASF cases.

The province has been ASF-free in the past four years.

Meanwhile, the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) gave assurance that there is no pork shortage in the country despite recording new ASF cases.

SINAG executive director Jayson Cainglet called for more stringent border protection measures to protect the local hog industry.

"The ASF is a global phenomenon, yet the impact and devastation is longer and more destructive in our country. This is because we continue to be the only country without first border inspection facilities," Cainglet said.

He said local producers are bearing the cost of increased biosecurity even as he lamented that there is "no real quarantine inspection" of imported pork.

He pushed for indemnification for local hog raisers to ensure proper reporting of ASF cases.



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5 agencies to lose confidential funds in 2024

By ELLSON QUISMORIO

Five agencies – including a combined three that are directly under the control of the top two officials of the land – will be stripped of their confidential funds under the ₱5.768-trillion General Appropriations Bill (GAB) or proposed national budget for 2024.

Getting zero confidential funds under next year's GAB are the Office of the Vice President (OVP) and the

Departments of Education (DepEd), Information and Communications Technology (DICT), Agriculture (DA), and Foreign Affairs (DFA), Marikina City Rep. Stella Quimbo announced in a press conference Tuesday afternoon, October 10.

Quimbo is a senior vice chairperson of the House Committee on Appropriations and is part of the "small committee" tasked to collate individual amendments of House members to the 2024 GAB.

Based on the panel's recommendation, a total of ₱1.23 billion in confidential funds were realigned in the budget measure.

Another small committee member, appropriations panel chairman Ako Bicol party-list Rep. Zaldy Co, announced on September 27 that the confidential funds of the OVP and DepEd – both under Vice President Sara Duterte – would be reallocated.

The DA is under President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr who has

served as the agency's Secretary since his first day in Malacañang on June 30, 2022.

The other two small committee members are House Majority Leader Zamboanga City Rep. Mannix Dalipe and House Minority Leader 4Ps party-list Rep. Marcelino Libanan. All four were present in the press conference.

Quimbo said the move to strip the five agencies of their confidential funds was made through a "unanimous decision" of the small

committee.

"Instead, bulk of the funding will be channeled to agencies in charge of ensuring national security especially in the West Philippine Sea (WPS)," she said.

"We believe that the House of Representatives is on the right side of history. We are responding to the call of the times and the volatile situation in the (WPS) calls for the immediate and decisive action to protect our national sovereignty," added Quimbo.



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2 towns in Oriental Mindoro under state of calamity due to ASF outbreak

By JERRY ALCAYDE

CALAPAN CITY, Oriental Mindoro — The Sangguniang Panlalawigan (SP) on Monday night, October 9, placed two towns in this province under a state of calamity following confirmation of an African Swine Fever (ASF) outbreak.

This is in response to the request of Gov. Humerlito Dolor to place the towns of Roxas and Mansalay under a state of calamity to contain the infection.

"The SP passed a resolution in a regular session this afternoon, October 9, declaring a state of calamity in Roxas and Mansalay," Provincial Board Member Roland Ruga said in an email.

In a social media post, Dolor said he also signed Executive Order 66 banning pork or pork products from leaving the two towns to prevent the spread of ASF to other parts of the province.

He said the Department of Agriculture-Mimaropa is sending initial two boxes or 360 test kits for immediate testing of samples from five barangays in Roxas and one in Mansalay.

In his letter to the SP on October

9, Dolor cited Republic Act 10121, also known as the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010, which empowers the SP to declare a province under state of calamity when two or more of its towns are affected by a natural or man-made disaster, upon the recommendation of the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (PDRRMC).

"The World Animal Health Organization defines African swine fever as a highly contagious viral disease of domestic and wild pigs," Dolor told SP members in his letter.

"ASF poses a grave threat to food security and biodiversity. While studies show the ASF does not imperil humans, its mortality rate for pigs is 100 percent. Considering that hogs are sources of food and income for many Oriental Mindoreños, the proliferation of the virus in local hogs and farms will affect hog raisers, farmers, and the public," he added.

"For the past years, Oriental Mindoro was able to prevent the entry of ASF. Stringent border control, rigorous surveillance of suspected cases,

and wide-spread information dissemination regarding the virus kept ASF out of the Province since 2019," Dolor said.

Three ASF cases were confirmed in Barangays Bagumbayan and Dangay in Roxas and from hog mortalities in Mansalay.

Latest reports of the Provincial Veterinarian's Office also said ASF has penetrated some piggeries in the province. (with reports from PNA)



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DOE: Conflict could push up oil prices

THE government said the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine may lead to higher fuel prices although this impact is not expected to be long-term.

The Department of Energy (DOE) said the Philippines does not source fuel directly from Israel but traders fear the possible involvement of Iran could affect global supply. Iran is a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

"We do not expect the effects of the attacks on Israel to oil and gas pricing to be long term, unless the conflict escalates. We do not directly source supply from Israel but (from) its neighbors in the Middle East, almost all of them are our sources of crude oil," said Rodela Romero, DOE assistant director of the Oil Industry Management Bureau, in a televised interview yesterday.

Romero said the price of crude has increased by \$3 to \$4 per barrel on Monday and might not immediately result to higher prices locally.

She said next week's local prices would trail movements in global crude cost in the remainder of the trading days this week.

Romero said experts project a crude supply deficit globally until the end of the year but its impact on prices could be tempered by higher central bank interest rates, a stronger US dollar and weaker economic activities of the world's top economies.

Meanwhile, the Department of Agriculture (DA) assured the tensions will not greatly affect local agriculture production.

Israel has been a long-time partner of the DA in various initiatives particularly in water management and fertilization but Philippine agriculture exports to that country is only 6 percent of total shipments.

The Philippines imported \$3.28 million worth of fertilizer from Israel in 2022.

Israel has been buying desiccated coconut, pineapple juice and concentrates and other mixtures from Filipino producers.



Govt tells SC: Fisheries administrative order lawful

BY ASHZEL HACHERO

SOLICITOR General Menardo Guevarra yesterday asked the Supreme Court (SC) to reverse and set aside the June 1, 2021 decision of the Malabon City Regional Trial Court declaring the Fisheries Administrative Order No. 266 as unconstitutional.

Guevarra made the appeal during the oral arguments on the government's petition asking the High Court to issue a temporary restraining order and/or writ of preliminary injunction against the implementation of the lower court's ruling.

The OSG is representing the Department of Agriculture (DA), Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) and Oceana Philippines International.

The Fisheries Administrative Order No. 266 requires the use of a vessel monitoring system or VMS

and an electronic reporting system or ERS that enables the government to monitor all duly registered commercial fishing vessels and ensure that they are operating within authorized fishing grounds.

The data gathered from the VMS guides government agencies in the adoption of conservation and management measures and in the prosecution of fisheries law violations, including commercial fishing in municipal waters.

"A declaration of unconstitutionality of FAO 266 frustrates the State's effort to honor its international commitments and renders it powerless to uphold the shared goals these commitments represent," Guevarra told the justices.

"For failure to honor such commitments, the country may lose access to foreign markets for its fish exports," he added.

The solicitor general also warned that \$320 million worth of fish products bound to Europe every

year will be in danger of being rejected if the Philippine government fails to certify that such fish products were not caught through illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing (IUUF).

The value of Philippine fishing products exports amounted to around \$1 billion in 2021.

"As we have emphasized in our submissions, irresponsible use of our marine resources endangers their very existence. Enjoining FAO 266 removes one of the most effective tools of the government against IUUF," Guevarra said.

"Thus, unless and until administrative regulations are proven to have clearly and manifestly exceeded the bounds of the law, including the Constitution, (the) validity and legality (of FAO 266) must be upheld," he stressed.

Guevarra also stressed that FAO 266 did not violate the respondents' right to equal protection of the law under the Constitution.



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SINAG SAYS

No need to import pork

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) yesterday said there is no need to import pork as frozen pork supply remains ample in cold storages.

SINAG issued the statement after the Department of Agriculture (DA) said it is considering the facilitation of the importation to fill a projected 10-day deficit until the end of the year and the anticipated shortage due to the African swine fever (ASF).

Data from the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) showed as of September 30, 10 regions, 18 provinces, 44 municipalities and 97 barangays have active ASF cases.

The DA did not specify the projected volume of deficit but said fourth quarter historically marks higher demand for pork.

Jayson Cainglet, SINAG executive director, said in a statement "there is no cause for alarm" as local hog raisers expect sporadic cases of ASF.

Cainglet cited data from the National Meat Inspection Services that as of September 18, a total of 87,338.57 metric tons (MT) of frozen pork are stored in accredited cold storages. Bulk or 85,306.30 MT are imported while the remaining 2,032.27 MT are from local producers.

"Local producers are bearing the cost of increased biosecurity at the farm level, continued regular testing of pigs for ASF and related diseases, stricter ordinances on pig movement; yet, there is no real quarantine



Deficit. The Department of Agriculture is considering the facilitation of pork importation to fill a projected 10-day deficit until the end of the year and the anticipated shortage due to the African swine fever. (File Photo)

inspection of imported pork. Worse, there is also no more indemnification for local hog raisers when hit by ASF so there is reluctance to report as raisers will not get any indemnification," Cainglet said.

Data from BAI showed from January to August this year, 405.92 million kg of pork entered the Philippines.

Meanwhile, Oriental Mindoro Gov. Humerlito Dolor yesterday said he has declared state of emergency in municipalities of Roxas and Mansalay due to confirmed ASF cases in these areas.

In a radio interview, Dolor said he placed the two towns under state of emergency on Monday night to prevent the spread of ASF in the province and other areas.

Dolor said three ASF cases in Roxas town were confirmed based on samples taken from hogs from Barangay Bagumbayan and Dangay.

He said there are also "hog mortalities from samples originating in Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro" but he did not give figures.

Dolor said he has activated a task force against to implement

measures, including the conduct of checkpoints, to prevent the spread of the ASF outside of Roxas and Mansalay.

He added the Department of Agriculture (DA) is sending 350 kits need for ASF testing at "areas of concerns" in these towns.

He said test kits from other regions are also due to arrive in the province, pending emergency procurement of test kits by the DA.

He said there is also a need to conduct ASF testing in nearby Bulalacao and Bongabong "to ensure that ASF will not spread outside of the containment zone." - **Victor Reyes**



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BRIEFS

Trading with Israel continues

AS ISRAEL has declared itself at war with the Palestinians, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Tuesday that the conflict is not likely to cause a major disruption to the Philippines' long-standing agricultural trade with the Jewish state.

"The Israel government has been a long-time partner of the DA in various initiatives particularly in water management and fertilization, and so we hope for the immediate resolution of the conflict in the Middle East," DA spokesman Arnel V. de Mesa said in a statement.

He said Israel purchases desiccated coconut, pineapple juice and concentrates, and other mixtures from local producers. "Part of the trading agreement between the Philippines and Israel is the importation of different processed products, including orange and grape juice, as well as other fructose," he added. — **Adrian H. Halili**



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Retail-farmgate divergence may trigger pork price caps

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said price controls on pork are under consideration in the event that the price difference at the retail and farmgate levels continues to widen.

"That's what we have to look at, after rice. The problem is... why it is higher in the markets," DA Spokesperson and Assistant Secretary Arnel V. de Mesa told reporters on Tuesday, referring to the retail-farmgate divergence.

He added that the DA may consider price caps on pork if retail prices continue to rise, or if any "manipulation" is found.

The DA projects the supply of domestic pork to decline to a deficit equivalent to 10 days' demand at the height of the yearend holidays.

"There might be a need to import during the last quarter where demand is much higher," he added.

Mr. De Mesa said there is a need to balance local production with imports.

"It is still a priority of our government to strengthen local production; this is the only way to ensure that there is a balance and avoid an increase in prices," he said.

"We need to consider the welfare of our producers and at the same time that of the consumers, as well," he added.

The Philippines imported about 59.13 million kilograms of pork in the eight months to August, according to the Bureau of Animal Industry.

"When the imported pork meat comes in, they will keep (supply and demand) in balance," he said.

Mr. De Mesa said the pork surplus will be equivalent to 10 days' demand at the end of the third quarter.

He said that African Swine Fever (ASF) is still affecting the supply of pork.

"There are about 19 provinces with active cases of ASF," he added.

He said the disease remains present in 98 barangays, though the outbreak has subsided to a level where case numbers are nowhere near their peaks.

On Monday, Oriental Mindoro province detected its first case of ASF. — **Adrian H. Halili**

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GROUP FLAGS UNTESTED PORK IMPORTS RISK

THE "unlimited entry" of "untested imported pork" at the port of first entry will continue to pose difficulties to the local hog sector, according to the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag).

The farmers' group also accused the Department of Agriculture (DA) of having "a continuing bias" for pork imports.

"[They removed] insurance and compensation for local hog raisers while [DA] pushed for the tariff reduction of imports that remain untested for African swine fever [ASF]," Jayson Cainglet, Sinag executive director, said in a statement.

The group said the government should impose first-border protection measures to protect the domestic hog population from ASF, which has devastated a number of farms in the Philippines.

"The ASF is a global phenomenon, and yet the impact and devastation is longer and more destructive in our country. This is so because we continue to be the only country without first-border inspection facilities," it said.

"It will not matter if we impose the strictest movement protocols and biosecurity measures for local hog raisers and in the transport of live hogs, but continue to have unlimited

entry of untested imported pork at the port of first entry," the group added.

It noted that local producers are bearing the cost of increased biosecurity at the farm level, continued regular testing of pigs for ASF and related diseases, strict ordinances on pig movement yet there is no inspection of imported pork.

First case in Oriental Mindoro

THE group issued the statement after the local government of Oriental Mindoro said Monday it detected the first ASF cases in the province.

SEE "PORK," A2

Pork...

CONTINUED FROM A1

A Philippine News Agency report indicated that the Sangguniang Panlalawigan (SP) on Monday night placed the towns of Roxas and Mansalay under a state of calamity, on the request of Governor Humerlito Dolor, following confirmation of an ASF outbreak.

"The SP passed a resolution in a regular session this afternoon, October 9, declaring a state of calamity in Roxas and Mansalay, Provincial Board Member Roland Ruga said in an email.

In a social media post, Dolor said he also signed Executive Order 66 banning pork or pork products from leaving the two towns to prevent the spread of ASF to other parts of the province.

In his letter to the SP on October 9, Dolor cited Republic Act 10121, also known as the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010, which empowers the SP to declare a province under state of calamity when two or more of its towns are affected by a natural or man-made disaster, upon the recommendation of the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

Enough supply

DESPITE the ASF outbreak in Oriental Mindoro, Sinag said there is no cause for alarm as local hog raisers "expect" sporadic cases of the fatal hog disease.

"We have enough pork supply as evidenced by the huge volume of pork stocks in cold storages across the country, the large numbers of pork imports, and in the decline in the farmgate prices of live hogs," the group said.

Data from the National Meat Inspection Service showed that the inventory of frozen pork in accredited cold storage facilities reached 87,338.57 metric tons (MT) as of September 18, or 2 percent higher than the previous year's inventory of 85,606.6 MT.

The figure, however, is lower than the September 11 inventory of 105,054.41 MT. *Cai U. Ordinario*

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PSA: FORMULA FOR RICE SSR FOLLOWS GLOBAL STANDARDS

By CAI U. ORDINARIO

@caiordinario

AMID concerns expressed by the Department of Agriculture (DA) on the computation of the country's Self-Sufficiency Ratio (SSR) in rice, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said the formula is consistent with international standards recommended by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

On Tuesday, BusinessMirror published a story on the Philippines's SSR in rice which fell to 77 percent in 2022, the lowest in more than two decades, as the country remained one of the world's largest importers of the staple (**full story: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/10/10/rice-sufficiency-level-falls-to-24-year-low/>**).

"The SSR measures domestic production as a share of domestic utilization. (It) indicates the extent to which a country relies on its own production, i.e. the higher the ratio the greater the self-sufficiency," PSA said in a message to BusinessMirror on Tuesday.

PSA explained that the SSR indicated the extent to which a country relies on its own production, i.e. the higher the ratio the greater the self-sufficiency.

This means, if the SSR is less than 100 percent, there is an inadequacy of production to cope with demand and if the SSR is equal to 100 percent, there is just enough produced to support

population food needs. If the SSR is higher than 100 percent, there is more than enough to support domestic requirements.

Further, last 02 February 2021, a tripartite meeting among Department of Agriculture represented by Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian; National Economic and Development Authority (represented by) former Secretary Karl Kendrick Chua; and PSA (represented by) Undersecretary Claire Dennis Mapa to discuss Harmonization on Agriculture and Fisheries data. In this meeting, the PSA clarified and explained the procedures and data being used for the computation of SSR for rice," the PSA said.

Agriculture Undersecretary Mercedita A. Sombilla agreed that there have been discussions between DA and the PSA regarding the SSR formula. But the main concern of DA was the use of the Supply Utilization Accounts (SUA) of Selected Agricultural Commodities.

The SUA is based on production or supply and treats rice consumption as merely a residual after computing for the rice stocks and removing exports and waste, among others.

"This is because of their SUA methodology where residuals are added to food use. Food use is therefore food availability, no food demand. So if imports are huge and residual is huge, then the SSR is lowered. PSA SUA should not be used to compute SSR," Sombilla told BUSINESSMIRROR.

CONTINUED ON A3

PSA: FORMULA FOR RICE SSR FOLLOWS GLOBAL STANDARDS

Continued from A18

Population factor

MEANWHILE, Monetary Board Member Bruce J. Tolentino told this newspaper that one factor that was not discussed by the story published by BUSINESSMIRROR is the growth of

the Philippine population.

Tolentino said the increase in the country's population affects the self-sufficiency in commodities, including rice. However, he said what is more important to consider is food security rather than self-sufficiency.

"When the Philippines achieved marginal self-sufficiency for a year or two around 1979, population was just around 40 million. Now, how many are we feeding? Moreover, as rice prices become affordable, consumption will grow. One way to ensure self-sufficiency is to allow rice prices to increase so much that Filipinos will not be able to afford it," Tolentino said.

On Tuesday, Agriculture Undersecretary for Rice Industry Development Leocadio S. Sebastian said it is important to check the formula used by the PSA in calculating the rice SSR.

Sebastian pointed out that the PSA's formula takes into account importation as part of the country's overall supply base, and does not consider the local demand in a given year.

The PSA's formula for SSR in any commodity is as follows: local production divided by the total supply (production plus imports minus exports) multiplied by 100 percent.

"Hence, if you have more rice imports, the rice sufficiency will go down. The formula is not local production minus exports divided by local demand," Sebastian told the BUSINESSMIRROR.

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ORIENTAL MINDORO RECORDS ASF CASES

CALAPAN CITY: Despite putting up measures to contain the entry of pigs and meat products in Oriental Mindoro, the Provincial Veterinary Office (ProVet) confirmed on Monday, October 9, that three cases of the African swine fever (ASF) were recorded in one of the southern towns of the province.

In a text message to *The Manila Times* on Monday afternoon, Dr. Grimaldo Catapang of ProVet said that they have so far monitored three confirmed cases

of ASF in the town of Roxas.

"We have three confirmed cases. We already had ordered the setting up checkpoints in the boundaries of Bongabon to Roxas and Mansalay to Roxas. We are still in the process of finally confirming the infection, and we are going back there tomorrow (Tuesday) to check if we need to cull the infected pigs," Catapang said in his message.

Catapang also said they were closely monitoring the adjacent town of Mansalay for possible infection.

In a post on his social media page also on Monday, Gov. Humerlito Dolor said that the Sangguniang Panlalawigan (Provincial Board) had approved his request to place the towns of Roxas and Mansalay under a state of calamity because of the reported ASF cases.

"We requested the declaration of a state of calamity to fast-track actions to prevent the spread of the infection in the province. I also signed Executive Order 66 banning the egress of pork meat from Roxas and Mansalay," Dolor said.

The governor said that the first cases were reported from the villages of Danggay and Bagumbayan in Roxas town. He added that he had ordered the testing of samples from five more barangay (villages) in the said town and another barangay from Mansalay town.

"Starting today (Monday), we are also banning the egress of meat at the Danggay Port or Roxas Port," Dolor said.

Dolor also said that ProVet was awaiting the first two boxes or 360

test kits from the Department of Agriculture Mimaropa for the immediate conduct of confirmatory tests for the other samples that show signs of the infection.

Catapang said that they had not determined yet where the infection originated in the province but noted that the Roxas Port is directly linked to Panay Island through the roll-on, roll-off (RoRo) vessels that ply the Roxas-Caticlan route.

IRE JOE V.C. LAURENTE



Taking PH agriculture to the next level

BY WILLIAM DAR

OVER the last decade, Philippine agriculture grew by 2 to 2.5 percent, which is not enough as the country's economy from 2013 to prior to the pandemic grew by an average of 6 percent annually.



Philippine agriculture has grown by 2 to 2.5 percent annually in the past decade, falling short of the country's pre-pandemic economic annual growth rate of an average of 6 percent. PHOTO BY RENE H. DILAN

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One of the reasons is that the cultivation of rice, corn, and coconut uses up to 74 percent of the country's arable land, which has made farmers remain among the poorest of the poor. Other countries in Southeast Asia have diversified to production of other crops that can give farmers better earnings and access to the export market.

What are the factors that have led to the above or contributed to the current state of the country's agriculture sector? One of the most overlooked problems are fragmented and miniscule farmlands, preventing economies of scale. These fragmented lands also make it harder to mobilize farmers to implement climate resiliency measures, which must be made a priority by the government.

Non-time-bound protectionist policies also discourage innovation while a rice-centric budget for agriculture limits diversification in agriculture. Farmers, meanwhile, still have limited access to agricultural credit and insurance, and the current windows for those need to be expanded significantly.

To get Philippine agriculture to the next level or to make it resilient and globally competitive, the following can be undertaken:

- Make the provincial-led agriculture and fisheries extension systems (PAFES) work;
- accelerate farm clustering;

- enhance the establishment of farmers' cooperatives;
- elevate capacity-building for change agents and farmers/fishers;
- engage the youth;
- digitalize agriculture;
- enhance market linkages;
- scale-up the use of technologies;
- enhance the delivery of extension services;
- affordable and accessible credit;
- strengthen public-private partnerships;
- promote farm diversification;
- build a resilient agriculture;
- enhance rice production;
- establish agro-industrial business corridors; and
- push the One Town One Product (OTOP) initiative.

In making the PAFES work, the local chief executives should be the primary "rowers" of the agricultural development process in their localities while the Department of Agriculture "steers" the course. The challenge here is how to make devolution a real tool for people empowerment and socio-economic development.

For accelerating farm clustering, there is a need to promote and support land consolidation arrangements like block, contract, and corporative farming to achieve economies of scale and/or the reduction in the cost of production. Simultaneously, the incomes of farmers should increase. The

private sector is also highly encouraged to practice clustering to bring about efficiency, innovation, and market linkages.

When it comes to organizing farmers, meanwhile, there is a need to enhance the establishment of farmers' cooperatives to promote collective strength, enhance bargaining power, and foster economic resilience within the agricultural community. It is also through cooperativism that farmers can pool resources, share knowledge, and access markets more effectively. A stronger cooperative movement will also foster a collaborative environment.

In elevating capacity-building for change agents and farmers/fishers, there is a need to provide up-to-date training and resources in areas such as modern farming techniques, climate-resilient practices, market analysis, and sustainable resource management. These will allow them to effectively transfer knowledge and empower farming communities.

Along with those, change agents and farmers/fishers should be encouraged to build a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship so they can explore new market opportunities and value chains.

In engaging the youth in agriculture, meanwhile, the call is to make agriculture "sexy" and a promising career choice. This can be achieved by providing access to modern agricultural technologies, such as precision farming and smart irrigation systems – among the areas that are highly appealing to the tech-savvy younger generation.

The youth should also be shown the diverse and lucrative potential in agribusiness. They can also act as infomediaries or knowledge brokers and advocates in agriculture, leveraging their communication skills, digital literacy, and innovativeness.

And while digitalization is becoming a trend in the country, let us make sure that also finds its way into agriculture. By integrating advanced technologies into

agriculture, farmers can improve productivity, optimize resource use, and enhance decision-making processes.

To achieve a comprehensive digital agriculture ecosystem, collaboration between governments, private sector companies, research institutions, academe, and farmers' organizations is essential. Let us also get ready to apply artificial intelligence in farming and fisheries.

On enhancing market linkages, the requirement is to establish farmer cooperatives or producer groups to consolidate farmers' output, enabling them to have more collective negotiating power. Building strong and strategic partnerships with private sector stakeholders, such as retailers, processors, and exporters, can also enhance market access.

For scaling up the use of technologies, priority should be given to investments in research, innovation, and infrastructure.

► WILLIAM DARH2



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■ WILLIAM DAR FROM H1

Taking PH agriculture

Also, supportive policies and incentives can encourage the private sector to invest in developing and deploying agricultural technologies that are not limited to the digital sphere.

More importantly, farmers must be provided access to cutting-edge innovations so they can lower their cost of production using the best of technologies.

With so much technology and innovation now available for agricultural producers to adopt, there is also a need to enhance the delivery of extension services including the setting up of demo farms with the DA and the government taking the lead.

Extension services play a pivotal role in disseminating knowledge, providing technical assistance, and promoting best practices. Demo farms, meanwhile, can serve as learning hubs. Also, partnerships can provide technical expertise, funding, and access to the latest innovations.

To make farmers and cooperatives more productive, they should be given access to affordable and accessible credit. This can be attained by strengthening rural financial institutions and expanding their reach.

The government must also intervene in the management of risks and design of appropriate financial products and services tailored to farmers' needs. This can include flexible repayment schedules that align with farmers' cash flow cycles and seasonal income patterns. Specialized agricultural credit programs, digital financial solutions, and the like can also be offered.

Getting the private sector involved in agricultural development is also essential, hence the need to strengthen public-private partnerships (PPPs). Through PPPs, cutting-edge technologies and innovations can be introduced to the agriculture sector especially those from the private sector.

Also, the private sector can make additional investments to support infrastructure development, technology adoption, and value chain strengthening that will ultimately benefit farmers, fishers and the entire agricultural ecosystem.

Farmers and fishers can be made part of the value chain system of private companies. One good example of a PPP initiative forging partnerships between clustered farmers and major food and agribusiness companies is the Kapatid Angat Lahat Agri Program of Go Negosyo.

Diversification, meanwhile, happens to be one of the most overlooked strategies to protect farmers from price and market instability, weather

events and calamities, and pests and diseases. By diversifying output, farmers spread their risks, ensuring sustained production and income. Farm diversification can also enhance soil health and contribute to the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices.

Resilient agriculture should also be pursued through the adoption of climate-smart systems and components such as drought-resistant crops, efficient water management, and soil conservation techniques, among others. Practices like agroforestry, crop rotation, balanced fertilization, and conservation help maintain soil fertility, prevent erosion, and preserve ecosystem services.

Regenerative agriculture is also a case in point as it focuses on restoring and enhancing natural ecosystems, improving soil health, promoting efficient water management, and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Much of those mentioned to attain a greener type of agriculture must be applied to increase rice production to attain higher productivity. Also, the alternate wetting and drying technology for rice can help manage water use and reduce methane emissions while increasing yield.

The balanced fertilization strategy must also be pursued in rice production for better yield, optimal nutrient uptake, and enhanced crop resilience. The use of high quality inbred and hybrid seeds can also increase the yield of rice farms.

More agro-industrial business corridors (ABCs) can be established to integrate elements of the agricultural value chain, agribusinesses, and supporting industries within a geographical area. The objective is to create synergies to enhance competitiveness and sustainability.

The establishment of ABCs requires effective PPPs, supportive policies, and investments in infrastructure and capacity building. A hub-and-spokes model can also be created to facilitate the aggregation and processing of agricultural products for local and global markets.

In promoting the OTOP approach, lastly, the government and private sector must promote products that enhance market visibility and consumer awareness and increase demand and consumption. OTOP also aims to promote value addition, local heritage, and strengthen community identity. Furthermore, the OTOP approach enhances competitiveness and opens export opportunities.

Philippine agriculture has a lot of promise when it comes to contributing to the country's overall growth and alleviating poverty. Also, a stronger and globally competitive agriculture sector can help ensure food security for the country, especially during these times.



Agriculture sector readies for El Niño's impact

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

SINCE the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) announced the onset of the El Niño phenomenon in July, the government has started preparing for



The government prepares for the possible impacts of El Niño in the country. PHOTO BY RENE DILAN

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its possible impacts, especially on the agriculture sector.

The **Department of Agriculture (DA)**, in particular, said it had readied various interventions for farmers to safeguard their crops, particularly rice.

Leocadio Sebastian, Agriculture undersecretary for rice industry development, told *The Manila Times* that the department was also developing strategies aimed at mitigating the effects of the weather pattern.

"In agriculture, you have to take advantage of the positive effects of El Niño and, at the same time ... mitigate [its] negative impacts," he said.

Citing Pagasa's forecast, Sebastian said it would "be a strong El Niño starting [from] November to February, and that is what we are preparing for."

Proposed impact-mitigating measures include changing the planting calendar, developing detailed maps of drought-prone and water-def-

icit areas, crop diversification and irrigation.

"We promote early planting for the dry season in water-deficit areas [and building] irrigation canals..." Sebastian said.

If the water available cannot sustain an entire rice-planting season, it's better for farmers to diversify their crops, he added.

The DA has mapped out areas where water can be provided as there are still about 153,871 hectares of rice fields vulnerable to drought this year and the next. That figure would translate to 600,000 metric (MT) of rice lost.

Despite this scenario, the DA still expects rice production to be higher this year than last year's.

"Our production [in] the first 6 months is already higher, from 8.7 million (MT) last year to 9 million MT," Sebastian said.

He admitted, however, that a typhoon hitting the country in October to November — the peak of the harvest season



The National Irrigation Administration (NIA) recently receives an additional P40-billion 2024 budget, which NIA Administrator Eduardo Guillen says will be used to implement solar pump irrigation projects and other initiatives to help mitigate the effect of the upcoming El Niño. PHOTO FROM NIA



The Department of Agriculture says it had readied various interventions for farmers to safeguard their crops, particularly rice, throughout the dry season. PHOTO BY NESTOR ABREMATEA



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— would be a cause for worry. “When [that] happens, then it will be like the situation in 2009, [when] production declined. It went down even when El Niño hadn’t even started,” Sebastian said.

Improving water systems, meanwhile, is another measure proposed by the DA to cushion El Niño’s impact. This includes the application of water-saving technology, irrigation canals and other

supplemental sources of water.

“As of now, I am meeting with regional staff to operationalize these plans, because once we harvest the main crop, our measures for El Niño should be ready,” Sebastian said.

Action plan

The National Irrigation Administration (NIA) has crafted its own El Niño Action Plan, which contains different mitigation measures such as implementing a water delivery schedule, utilizing alternate wetting and drying technology, crop diversification and using early maturing and drought resistant crop varieties.

NIA Administrator Eduardo Guillen empha-

sized the role of irrigation in President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s 8-point socioeconomic agenda.

“Number one [on that agenda] is food security, and we know that [the] number one thing for food security is irrigation infrastructure,” Guillen said.

A competitive irrigation system will help increase production, reduce poverty and address El Niño, he added.

In addition to the action plan, the NIA is also monitoring and regularly updating local field conditions, such as dam hydrological data and dam discharge, as well as holding information, education and communication activities.

The agency also adjusted the planting calendar during the wet season to minimize the impact of typhoons, and early planting for the dry season in water deficit areas.

The normal cropping periods for the wet and dry seasons were originally in May and November, respectively. In the adjusted calendar, the wet

season will start in February and the dry season, September.

The NIA said it planned to use an additional P40-billion allocation given by lawmakers in its proposed 2024 budget for El Niño-mitigating measures, as well to boost food security programs.

Guillen said his agency was looking to implement a solar pump irrigation project using the additional funds so that there would be fertigation.

“[W]e have many more projects at NIA that we are doing right now to teach our farmers how to save money and how to use the right rice variety for El Niño,” he added.

The NIA said it remained confident that the country would be able to overcome the challenges posed by El Niño through collaboration with other government agencies, including the DA, Pagasa, and the Department of Science and Technology, as well as local governments and irrigators’ associations.



SARA BINOKYA NG KAMARA SA SPY FUND

Limang ahensiya ng gobyerno ang tinanggalan ng confidential fund sa ilalim ng panukalang 2024 national budget, ayon kay House Committee on Appropriations chairperson at Ako Bicol Party-list Rep. Elizaldy Co.

Sinabi ni Co na kabuuang P1.23 bilyong confidential funds ang inalis sa Office of the Vice President, at Departments of Education (DepEd) na pinamumunuan ni Vice President Sara Duterte, Information and Communications Technology (DICT), **Agriculture (DA)** na pinamumunuan ni Pangulong Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. at Foreign Affairs (DFA).

Ang pondo ay inilipat umano sa mga frontline agency na nagbabantay at nagbibigay ng proteksiyon sa teritorial rights ng bansa sa West Phil-

ippine Sea tulad ng National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (P300 milyon); National Security Council (P100 milyon); Philippine Coast Guard (P200 milyon); Department of Transportation (DOTr) para sa development/expansion of Pag-asa Island Airport (P381.8 milyon).

Sinabi ni Co na sa halip na confidential fund, makatatanggap ng dagdag na Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) ang Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (P30 milyon), DICT (P25 milyon), DFA (P30 milyon), Office of the Ombudsman (P50 milyon) at Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education ng DepEd (P150 milyon). **(Billy Begas/Eralyn Prado)**

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Bong Go: Food security dapat tutukan ng DA

HINIMOK ni Senator Christopher "Bong" Go, miyembro ng Senate committee on agriculture at vice chair ng Senate committee on finance, ang Department of Agriculture na palakasin ang pagsuporta sa mga manggagawang pang-agrikultura para matiyak ang seguridad sa pagkain sa bansa.

Tiniyak ng senador na suportado niya ang DA gayundin ang iminungkahing badyet at mga programa nito para sa susunod na taon.

Ginawa ni Go ang pahayag kasunod ng survey kamakailan ng Pulse Asia ukol sa tulong sa mga magsasaka, pagtaas ng suweldo ng mga manggagawa, at pagsugpo sa kahirapan bilang

mga kagyat na pambansang isyu.

Sinabi ng senador na nani-niwala siya kung mapopondohan nang maayos ang DA ay mapalalakas ang seguridad sa pagkain at mapabubuti ang buhay ng mga manggagawa sa agrikultura.

Kaya naman idiniin ni Go ang kanyang suporta sa panukalang budget ng Agriculture Department sa pagding ng Senate finance sub-committee na pinangunahan ni Senator Cynthia Villar.

"Dapat po ay masaya ang ating mga farmer, dapat po sa pagtitinda nila ng kanilang mga produkto ay dapat po may sapat na kita sila. Kapag hindi masaya ang ating farmers, marami pong maaapektuhan, marami pong maghihirap. Government inter-

vention ang dapat palakasin," sabi ni Go.

Binigyang-diin ni Go na gulugod ng supply ng pagkain sa bansa ang mga dedikadong manggagawang pang-agrikultura kaya dapat na mabigyan sila ng sapat na suporta at resources.

Si Go ay isa sa mga may-akda ng Republic Act No. 11901 na nagpalawak ng balangkas sa pagpopondo sa agrikultura, pangisdaan at pag-unlad sa kanayunan.

Co-sponsor at co-author din siya sa isang panukala na kalaunan ay naging RA 11953, mas kilala bilang New Agrarian Emancipation Act.

Bukod dito, ipinakilala rin ni Go ang Senate Bill No. 2117 na naglalayong mabigyan ng kom-

prehensibong crop insurance coverage ang agrarian reform beneficiaries.

Inihain din niya ang SBN 2118 na magpapahusay sa saklaw ng insurance at mga serbisyo para sa mga magsasaka. Makatutulong ito para mabawasan ang epekto ng mga natural na kalamidad sa sektor ng agrikultura sakaling maging ganap itong batas.

"Sa lahat ng ito, ang importante ay sikapin nating walang magutom na Pilipino," ani Go.

Higit pa rito, sinuportahan ni Go ang mga hakbang na gawing agricultural zone ang mga hindi nagagamit na lupain ng pamahalaan upang isulong ang produksyon ng pagkain sa loob ng bansa.

RNT



₱1.9B SINIKSIK SA KAMARA, SENADO

PINASINUNGALINGAN ni House Committee on Appropriations chairperson at Ako Bicol Party-list Rep. Elizaldy Co ang kumalakat sa social media na mayroong P1.6 bilyong confidential funds ang Kamara de Representantes.

Sa isang press conference, natanong si Co kaugnay ng umano'y pagkakaroon ng Kamara ng P1.6 bilyong confidential fund samantalang si Vice President Sara Duterte ay mayroon lamang P150 milyong sa ilalim ng Department of Education.

"So in short, that's (P1.6 billion) fake news," sabi ni Co.

Sa kaparehong press conference, sinabi ni Appropriations Committee Vice-chairperson at Marikina City Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo na sa ilalim ng 2023 General Appropriations Act ang Kamara ay mayroong P1.6 bilyong extraordinary funds at hindi confidential funds.

"Squarely, wala pong confidential funds ang Congress (House). 'Yun pong sinasabing P1.6 billion ay extraordinary expenses," sabi ni Quimbo.

Sinabi ni Quimbo na bagama't nasa isang kate-

goriya ang confidential, intelligence, at extraordinary funds ay magkaiba ito. Ang extraordinary funds ay maaaring i-audit hindi gaya ng confidential and intelligence funds (CIF).

Bukod sa Kamara, ang Senado naman ay sinasabing mayroon namang P331 milyong confidential fund sa 2024 kaya aabot sa P1.931 bilyon umano ang confidential fund ng dalawang kapulungan ng Kongreso.

Nauna rito ay isiniwalat ni Rep. Co na limang ahensiya ng gobyerno ang tinanggalan ng confidential fund sa ilalim ng panukalang 2024 national budget.

Kabuuang P1.23 bilyong confidential funds ang inalis sa Office of the Vice President, at Departments of Education (DepEd) na pinamumunuan ni Duterte, Information and Communications Technology (DICT), Agriculture (DA) na pinamumunuan ni Pangulong Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. at Foreign Affairs (DFA). Ang P150 milyong confidential fund ng DepEd ay nilipat sa kanilang Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE).

Ang pondo ay inilipat umano sa mga frontline agency na nagbabantay at nagbibigay ng proteksiyon sa teritorial rights ng bansa sa West Philippine Sea tulad ng National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (P300 milyon); National Security Council (P100 milyon); Philippine Coast Guard (P200 milyon); Department of Transportation (DOTR) para sa development/expansion of Pag-asa Island Airport (P381.8 milyon). (Billy Begas/Eralyn Prado)

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Giyera ng Israel at Palestine may konting epekto sa Agri – DA

Inihayag ng Department of Agriculture (DA) na maliit lamang ang epekto sa produktong agrikultura sa bansa kung may gulo sa pagitan ng Israel at Palestine.

Ayon kay Agriculture Assistant Secretary for Operations Arnel de Mesa, matagal nang ka-partner ng Pilipinas ang Israel.

"The Israel government has been a long-time partner of the DA in various initiatives particularly

in water management and fertilization, and so we hope for the immediate resolve of the conflict in the Middle East," pahayag ni de Mesa.

Anyang ginagamit sa Pilipinas ang Israeli-technology na fertigation para sa drip irrigation ng palay sa bansa at tinatangkilik ng mga magsasaka sa Pilipinas ang fertigation.

"Aside from innovative farm and water systems, we have longstanding trade partnerships with Israel,"

pahayag ni De Mesa.

Sinabi nito na matagal nang bumibili sa bansa ang Israel ng desiccated coconut, pineapple juice at concentrates, at iba pang mixtures.

Noong nakaraang taon lamang, umabot sa 3,441,855 kilograms ng iba't ibang produkto ang nai-export ng Pilipinas sa Israel.

Bahagi rin aniya ng importasyon ng dalawang bansa ang orange, grape juice at fructose. (Angie dela Cruz)

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OVP, DepEd, DICT, DA, DFA zero confidential funds na

Zero confidential funds na ang Office of the Vice President (OVP), Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), Department of Agriculture (DA) at Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) sa ilalim ng P5.768 trilyong 2024 national budget ng pamahalaan.

Ito ang inihayag ni House Committee on Appropriations Chairman Rep. Elizaldy Co matapos ang pagbusisi kung anu-anong mga ahensya at tanggapan ng gobyerno ang tatanggalan ng confidential funds lalo na ang wala namang mandato sa pambansang seguridad.

Sa halip ay ibubuhos ang malaking pondo sa mga ahensya na pangunahing nangangalaga sa pambansang seguridad ng West Philippine Sea (WPS).

Ginawa ni Co ang pag-aanunsyo sa mga tinanggalan ng confidential funds sa gitna na rin ng patuloy na paghirit ng kampo ni Vice Pres. Sara Duterte ng confidential fund na P500 milyon sa OVP at P150 sa DepEd.

Sinabi ni Co na base sa rekomendasyon ng panel nasa P1.23 bilyong confidential funds ang nailipat sa mga frontline agencies na ang mandato ay magmonitor at protektahan ang teritoryal na integridad ng WPS.

Kabilang dito ay P300 milyon sa National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA); P100-M sa National Security Council (NSC), P200-M sa Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) para sa intelligence activities at pagbili ng mga bala at P381.8-B sa Department of Transportation (DOTr) para sa pagpapaunlad at pagpapalawak ng Pagasa Island Airport, isa sa mga inookupang isla ng Pilipinas sa pinagtatalunang teritoryo.

Sa halip na confidential funds ang mga sumusunod na ahensiya ay makakatanggap naman ng dagdag na alokasyon tulad ng P30-M sa Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), P25-M sa DICT, P30-M sa DFA; P50-M sa Office of the Ombudsman at P150-M sa DepEd. (Joy Cantos)

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Palay ng mga magsasaka sa NE, bibilhin ng NFA at Kapitolyo

Magsasanib-pwersa ang **National Food Authority (NFA)** at provincial government ng Nueva Ecija sa pagbili ng mga bagong aning mga palay ng mga magsasaka rito.

Sa kanyang lingguhang teleradio program na "Usapang Malasakit sa Lipunan," inihayag ni Gov. Aurelio Umali na kinausap na siya ng NFA tungkol sa plano ng ahensya na bumili ng palay sa mga magsasakang Novo Ecijano ayon na rin sa direktiba ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos. Nauna rito, itinaas ng

Pangulo ang presyo ng pagbili ng NFA para sa palay sa P19-P23 para sa tuyo at P16-P19 kada kilo para sa basang palay. Ang Pangulo rin ang kalihim sa Agrikultura at chair ng NFA Council.

Sinabi naman ni Umali na "Pangunahin naman talagang layunin ng pagkakabuo ng Provincial Food Council (PFC) ang matulungan ang mga magsasakang Novo Ecijano at sa apat na taon nang pag-iimplementa ng programa ay pumayag silang tulungan ang NFA,

lalo na at kabilang naman ang ahensya sa PFC."

"Sa mahabang panahon kasi ay ang tuyo at malinis na palay ang binibili ng NFA kaya bago sa kanila ang pamimili ng sariwang palay," dagdag pa ng gobernador.

Sa pakikipagtulungan ng NFA, sinabi ni Umali na bubuo sila ng isang sistema o modelo na maaaring gamitin bilang blueprint ng iba pang local government units sa pagpapatupad ng palay-buying program na ito. (Christian Ryan Sta. Ana)



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P20-M facility to boost yield of island farmers in Surigao Norte

BUTUAN CITY – Rice farmers in the island village of Opong in the Surigao del Norte town of Taganaan received vital irrigation facility support from the government to help them increase their yields.

In an interview on Monday, Noel Escabal, president of the local irrigators association, said the government intervention, through the **National Ir-**

rigation Administration in the Caraga Region (NIA-13), is proof of the continuing care for the rice farmers especially those in far-flung areas.

Barangay Opong is a small island about 30 minutes by boat from Taganaan in mainland Mindanao. Based on the 2020 census, Opong has a total population of 966 or 5.58 percent of the total population of the town. **PNA**



Bong Go: Gov't needs to focus on food security, uplifting agriculture workers

SENATOR Christopher "Bong" Go, a member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and vice chair of the Senate Committee on Finance, urged the Department of Agriculture (DA) to strengthen government support for agricultural workers to help ensure food security in the country while also expressing his support to the current efforts of the department as well as its proposed budget and programs for the next year.

Go's statement follows the result of a recent Pulse Asia survey, which identified assistance to farmers, increased pay for workers, and poverty reduction as urgent national issues.

The senator said he believes that a well-funded DA can help bolster food security and improve the lives of agricultural workers. It is for this reason that Go extended his support for a substantial proposed budget for the agriculture department during the Senate Finance sub-committee hearing which was presided by Senator Cynthia Villar.

"Dapat po ay masaya ang ating mga farmers, dapat po sa pagtitinda nila ng kanilang mga produkto ay dapat po (may) sapat na kita (sila). Alam mo kapag hindi masaya ang ating mga farmers, marami pong

maaapektuhan, marami pong maghihirap. Government intervention (ang dapat palakasin)," said Go in an interview after his visit to Antipolo City on October 5.

"Itulong n'yo po sa mahihirap nating kababayan. Ibigay n'yo po sa mga farmers, ibigay n'yo po sa mahihirap, sa mga poor and indigents na ating mga kababayan. Dapat po mapakinabangan nila ang pondo ng bayan. At wala pong masayang na pondo, wala pong ma-underutilized na hindi nagagamit. Gamitin n'yo po ang pondo, pera po ng tao 'yan, pera ng gobyerno 'yan. Ibalik n'yo po sa tao ang pera ng gobyerno sa pamamagitan ng maayos na serbisyo. Sa panahon ng krisis, dapat government intervention kaagad," he urged.

Recognizing their immense contributions to the country's food production, Go stressed that the backbone of the country's food supply is the dedicated agricultural workforce, and it is essential to provide them with adequate support and resources.

Go was one of the authors of Republic Act No. 11901, which expanded the financing framework for agriculture, fisheries, and rural development. Additionally, the lawmaker was a co-sponsor and co-author in the

Senate for the legislation that later became RA 11953, also known as the New Agrarian Emancipation Act. This law condones loans incurred by agrarian reform beneficiaries, including the associated interests, penalties, and surcharges.

Moreover, Go introduced Senate Bill No. (SBN) 2117, which seeks to provide comprehensive crop insurance coverage for agrarian reform beneficiaries. He also proposed SBN 2118 to enhance insurance coverage and services for farmers, thereby helping to mitigate the impact of natural disasters on the agricultural sector should these bills become laws.

"Nais kong hikayatin ang lahat ng mga lingkod-bayan na makiisa sa pagtulong sa ating mga magsasaka. Ang kanilang mahalagang papel sa ating pagkain at ekonomiya ay dimatatawaran. Suportahan natin sila sa pamamagitan ng pagpapalakas ng kanilang sektor at pagpapalaganap ng mga programa na tutugon sa kanilang mga pangangailangan. Sa pagkakaisa, makakamit natin ang mas maunlad at masaganang buhay para sa ating mga magsasaka," said Go.

"Sa lahat ng ito, ang importante ay sikapin nating walang magutom na Pilipino," he appealed.



ZERO CONFIDENTIAL FUNDS

**By Jester
Manalastas**

SEVERAL government agencies, including the Office of the Vice President (OVP) and the Department of Education (DepEd), will be getting zero confidential funds in the 2024 national budget.

This was the amendment introduced by the small committee of the House of Representatives tasked to finalize the version of the General Appropriations Bill (GAB).

According to the statement released by the House Appropriations Committee chair Ako Bicol Party-list Representative

Zaldy Co, the bulk of the slashed funding will be channeled to agencies in charge of ensuring national security especially in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

The Office of Vice President Sara Duterte is proposing P500 million confidential fund, while the DepEd which Duterte is the Secretary is asking for P150 million confidential fund.

Aside from the OVP and DepEd, also to be given zero confidential funds are the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), Department of Agriculture (DA) and Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA).

Meanwhile, Co clarified that

like in the past, the House of Representatives is also getting zero confidential funds.

Based on the panel's recommendation, a total of P1.23-billion in confidential funds were realigned to the following frontline agencies in charge of monitoring and protecting the country's territorial rights in the West Philippine Sea: P300-million for National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA); P100-million for the National Security Council (NSC); P200-million to the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) for intelligence activities and P381.8-million to the Department of Transportation (DOTr) for the development/expansion of Pag-asa Island

Airport.

"The amount allocated from the confidential funds is only part of the P3-billion total funding for the project," Co stressed.

Meanwhile, instead of confidential funds, the following agencies will receive the following amounts for Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE): P30-million for the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquaculture Resources (BFAR); P25-million for DICT; P30-million for DFA; P50-million for the Office of the Ombudsman; and P150-million for DepEd's Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education (GASTPE).



2 Oriental Mindoro towns under state of calamity due to ASF outbreak

CALAPAN CITY, Oriental Mindoro – The Sangguniang Panlalawigan (SP) on Monday night placed two towns in this province under state of calamity following confirmation of an African swine fever (ASF) outbreak.

This is in response to the request of Gov. Hummerlito Dolor to place the towns of Roxas and Mansalay under a state of calamity to contain the infection.

"The SP passed a resolution in a regular session

this afternoon, October 9, declaring a state of calamity in Roxas and Mansalay, Provincial Board member Roland Ruga said in an email.

In a social media post, Dolor said he also signed Executive Order 66 banning pork or pork products from leaving the two towns to prevent the spread of ASF to other parts of the province.

He said the Department of Agriculture – Mimaropa is sending initial two boxes or 360 test kits for immediate testing

of samples from five villages in Roxas and one in Mansalay.

In his letter to the SP on Oct. 9, Dolor cited Republic Act 10121 also known as the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010, which empowers the SP to declare a province under state of calamity when two or more of its towns are affected by a natural or man-made disaster, upon the recommendation of the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management

Council (PDRRMC).

"The World Animal Health Organization defines African swine fever as a highly contagious viral disease of domestic and wild pigs," Dolor told SP members in his letter.

"ASF poses a grave threat to food security and biodiversity. While studies show the ASF does not imperil humans, its mortality rate for pigs is 100 percent. Considering that hogs are sources of food and income for many Oriental Mindoreños, the proliferation of the virus

in local hogs and farms will affect hog raisers, farmers, and the public," he added.

"For the past years, Oriental Mindoro was able to prevent the entry of ASF. Stringent border control, rigorous surveillance of suspected cases, and wide-spread information dissemination regarding the virus kept ASF out of the province since 2019," Dolor said.

Three ASF cases were confirmed in the villages of Bagumbayan and Danguy in Roxas and from hog



mortalities in Mansalay. Latest reports of the Provincial Veterinarian's

Office also said ASF has penetrated some piggeries in the province. (PNA)



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Corn, soybeans lower

CANBERRA- Chicago wheat futures dipped on Tuesday as export prices in major supplier Russia fell further, although a decline in the size of shipments from the country cemented expectations that supply will tighten in the coming months.

Corn and soybean prices also dipped amid rising supply from the ongoing US harvest and record crops in top exporter Brazil.

Abundant cheap grain flowing from Russia is keeping prices low and a significant change will be

needed for the market to shift, said Andrew Whitelaw at Australian agricultural consultancy Episode 3.

"All that matters is what is happening in the Black Sea," he said.

The most-active Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) wheat futures were down 1.1 percent at \$5.66-3/4 a bushel, near last month's three-year low of \$5.40.

CBOT corn fell 0.4 percent to \$4.86-1/2 a bushel and soybeans were 0.5 percent lower at \$12.57-3/4 a bushel. - *Reuters*



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Raw sugar futures climb; robusta coffee hits 6-month low

NEW YORK — Raw sugar futures on ICE rose on Monday, buoyed by gains in energy markets driven by conflict in the Middle East, while robusta coffee prices slumped to a six-month low.

March raw sugar settled up by 0.44 cents or 1.6% at 27.18 cents per pound (lb).

Dealers said military clashes between Israel and the Palestinian Hamas group had driven up oil prices and also had a supportive spillover impact on some other commodity markets.

Brokers also cited potential production cuts in North America as the weather has been negative for the southern part of the United States and for Mexico. The United States Department of Agriculture will release new estimates on Thursday.

The European Commission raised its estimate of white sugar production in the current 2023/24 season to 15.6 million metric tons, from 15.5 million projected previously, and now 7% above last year's output.

December white sugar rose by \$11.90 or 1.7% at \$721.10 a metric ton.

January robusta coffee fell by \$37 or 1.6% at \$2,243 a ton after hitting a six-month low of \$2,240.

Dealers noted there had been generally favorable weather in top robusta producer Vietnam where the harvest should begin to gather pace next month.

December arabica coffee was little changed at \$1.4605 per lb.

Brazil's coffee group Cecafe will release September export numbers on Tuesday.

March London cocoa fell by 6 lbs or 0.2% to 2,948 pounds per ton.

Dealers said the market had lost ground after climbing to a 46-year high in mid-September and funds were continuing to scale back long positions in both London and New York cocoa.

The market remained underpinned by supply woes in West Africa with a third consecutive global deficit widely forecast for the 2023/24 season (October/September).

Europe's third-quarter cocoa grind, due to be published on Thursday, will however be closely watched for any indication that high prices are curbing demand.

December New York cocoa fell by \$18 or 0.5% to \$3,435 a ton.

— Reuters

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Fertilizer stocks jump

FERTILIZER makers jumped after Hamas' surprise attack on Israel raised concerns over how the conflict could impact global supplies of nutrients used to grow crucial food crops.

Israel's Port of Ashdod, just north of Gaza and a key hub for the country's potash fertilizer exports, is in emergency mode amid the deadly conflict. That's putting as much as 3 percent of global potash supply at possible risk, Ben Isaacson, a Scotiabank analyst, said in a note Monday.

Further, if Iran, a critical nitrogen exporter in the region, is drawn into the conflict, Isaacson said prices of the nutrient needed for grain production could spike due to limited supply and potential premiums in benchmark Dutch TTF natural gas, a commodity used to make nitrogen-based fertilizers.

Nutrien Ltd., the world's biggest potash maker, rose as much as 4.2 percent, the most since July. CF Industries Holdings Inc., the leading nitrogen producer, gained as much as 6.2 percent, the most in more than a month. Mosaic Co. climbed as much as 6.7 percent, the stock's biggest intraday gain in almost a year. *BloombergNews*