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PH eyes P230B halal investments
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Marcos: Agri sector needs to be industrialized

By ALEXIS ROMERO

The agriculture sector needs to be industrialized and businesses should engage with local communities, President Marcos said as he led the inauguration of San Miguel Corp. (SMC)'s P3.34-billion Magnolia poultry farm in Davao del Sur yesterday.

"We can no longer depend on the informal production of food in the way that we have depended on for a very long time," Marcos said.

"Because the population density, the geopolitical situation right now... just became a great deal worse. All of these factors come together and that is why we have pushed hard to make sure that in the Philippines, we are able to feed our people... Facilities such as this are showing the way how to do it. We must industrialize our agriculture," he added.

Marcos said he asked SMC president and chief executive officer Ramon Ang to involve local communities in the business.

"It will not succeed if you do not involve the local community. The local community should be able to say that the plant has been established here, that we are feeling its benefits, our lives improved, we secured jobs, we are doing something, we learned something," he noted.

"The engagement with the local community is absolutely important because there is a tendency sometimes, when we talk about food supply and food security, we forget the farmers, broilers, producers. Their livelihood should improve too," he added.

The Magnolia poultry farm is situated

on a 921.91-hectare property in Hagonoy, Davao del Sur and is considered the country's largest poultry facility. The mega farm is the first of 12 that SMC will build.

The facility, which started commercial operations in September, would establish 28 world-class climate-controlled farmhouses that will produce 80 million chickens every year.

Around 1,000 jobs are expected to be generated.

As for price concerns, Marcos said consumers would no longer have to worry about the supply of poultry products and the disparity in prices during holidays and peak season if more industrialized agricultural facilities were built nationwide.

He also expressed optimism that the continuous supply of goods, particularly fresh eggs and chicken meat, would prevent excessive price fluctuations.

"The demand will rise but the supply is huge so the supply curve is relatively flat. Perhaps prices won't change that much," he said.

As for vaccines against avian influenza, swine flu and avian flu, Marcos said they are going to acquire jabs.

"The vaccine for avian influenza is now available. We will acquire the avian influenza vaccine. There (is no vaccine yet) for swine flu. It is still in its pilot stage," he said.

Marcos noted that they are addressing the imminent threat of the Panama disease affecting banana plantations by disseminating information on technologies and measures that would control its spread.

— With Bella Cariaso

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CTALK CITO BELTRAN DA 8888

While President Bongbong Marcos is unable to find or convince a suitable candidate to become the next secretary of agriculture, he should take advantage of the time to learn more about the level of corruption inside the Department of Agriculture.



I recently learned first-hand about a situation where a group of businessmen had undertaken a project to promote a particular product used for large-scale agriculture. As a pre-requisite the investors and associates asked for guidance from industry experts, submitted their product to independent researchers and laboratories for evaluation and participated in trials and field tests.

The product was so good that they easily got approval from the government regulatory body in charge of such products and was quickly picked up by national distribution firms and cooperatives. Inspired by such positive results and reception, someone who had access to PBBM allegedly informed "Malacañang" about the product that could be a big boost to PBBM's push for local food production. The story I picked up was the product was referred to people at the Department of Agriculture who "thumbed down" or disapproved the product.

The "mystery" lies in the fact that it took the private group several months of academic and laboratory research and tests, actual farm site testing and regulatory challenge and processing to get where they were, and it only took the DA people a few weeks to determine the product was not good enough. In other words, not even the interest of the President is enough to make certain groups inside the DA think twice before blocking any direct competition to their preferred products, brands or suppliers.

Speaking of fearless, an insider has told me that an official suspended by the Office of the Ombudsman was known to join meetings with people making presentations and proposals at the department. The official would act very helpful to representatives of companies and suppliers, who were clueless that the guy being nice to them has been under suspension for some time! From what I know, individuals who are under investigation, under suspension or facing administrative cases are not supposed to be anywhere inside the premises of the government office.

Early this week, I got to know a journalist from the south who knew a lot of things about biddings and procurement of the Department of Agriculture. As I listened in on the conversation, the gentleman said that if a company wants to sell its agricultural product, they have two choices:

First is to sell direct to farmers and earn very little and do lots of work going from farm to farm or presenting to cooperatives. In the end very few are willing to pay even for a very good product because the government through the DA has institutionalized a system of hand-outs or giving things away for free to farmers.

The second and more attractive option is to sell to the DA in bulk but at a higher price in order to cover "corruption related contingency expenses," cut a deal with the RED or Regional Executive Director, and let the DA pay the bill and give away the product to farmers. My fellow journalist emphasized that as distasteful and disgusting as the case maybe, no RED stamp of approval – no business.

Sadly, it does not end there. The journalist reminded me that agricultural development at the provincial LGU level is also dependent on the approval of the governor. In some cases, the RED may have a *suki* while the governor has a campaign contributor who has products or services to sell. The decision is often dependent on how greedy or how much of a bully the governor is.

This series of incidents is just for relatively simple off the shelf products. This does not include supply of machineries, technology transfer or infrastructure development. Given that hundreds of millions of taxpayers' money is ploughed into these giveaways, why has there been no investigation and prosecution of wrongdoing?

Former officials of the DA who have resigned or gone into early retirement out of disgust or political pressure all tell tales, but Malacañang and Congress have acted like the proverbial three monkeys who see nothing, hear nothing and say nothing. Of course, they know everything, they just choose to do nothing!

If PBBM is serious about there being no room for corruption in his New Society, then prove it! Set up an inter-agency task force to thoroughly study the depth and extent of corruption in the Department of Agriculture as well as among industry participants and corruptors. At the very least do that: clean your own house before you pass it on to someone else; set up DA 8888?

* * *

The DPWH and Secretary Manny Bonoan have been under a lot of criticism for causing traffic jams resulting from their continuous road repairs or asphalt patch work in the past several weeks. As far as I am concerned, it's a case of "damned if you do and damned if you don't" – either way the traffic jams will happen due to potholes or due to patch work.

I myself would be happy if Secretary Manny Bonoan would direct one of his road crews to our neighborhood here in Barrio Kapitolyo, Pasig where the once good quality roads East and West Capitol have now been destroyed by unusually heavy traffic volume due to the construction of the Lawton-Santa Monica bridge from BGC to Shaw.

This was the fear of residents from the very beginning and hoping against hope, we somehow wished the DPWH would proactively maintain the road, particularly West Capitol Drive. So now, more cars are forced to drive even slower, which defeats the entire purpose of the bridge through Kapitolyo. At the very least please have the decency to fix the roads.

* * *



Aim for rice self-sufficiency

The rice problem—rising prices and shortage of supply—is a concern not only confined to the Philippines. It is actually a global phenomenon considering that rice feeds more than half of the world.

In fact the United Nations' International Fund for Agricultural Development said that high prices of rice may cause global social unrest.

In the Philippines, **President Marcos** moved to arrest the rising cost of rice by imposing a price cap in September 2023. It was lifted a month later when rice prices stabilized.

As a continuing effort to address the problem, the President certified as urgent Senate Bill No. 2432 or the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act.

Acting with dispatch, the House of Representatives passed on third and final reading on Sept. 27 its own version of the bill—the proposed Anti Agri-Fishery Commodities and Tobacco Economic Sabotage Act—seen as a measure to give more teeth to the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act (Republic Act No.10845).

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

Violators face life imprisonment and a fine thrice the value of the agricultural and fishery products subject of the crime as economic sabotage. If the offender is a government officer or employee he or she may

suffer perpetual disqualification from holding public office, exercising the right to vote, and participating in any public election, and forfeiture of employment monetary and financial benefits in addition to life imprisonment and the fine.

And just last week, President Marcos called on the public to help the government in the battle against rice smugglers and hoarders.

"I would like to take this opportunity to urge you to take part in the fight against smuggling and hoarding, and syndicates who keep on exploiting our countrymen," the President said while distributing rice to beneficiaries at the Augusto Legaspi Memorial Sports and Cultural Center in Kalibo, Aklan. "Help our agencies to catch and punish those who are sabotaging the agricultural sector and our economy."

The call underscores the magnitude of the rice problem—the urgency of a whole-of-nation approach to address it.

These moves are steps in the right direction.

But apart from these punitive measures, the government should find ways to improve rice production.

We should aim for rice self-sufficiency to cushion the impact of any outside force—lack of imported supply, smuggling, hoarding, and other factors.

While the country has lost a vast expanse of our farmlands to commercial purposes, there are still areas ready to be tapped for rice production.

The government could start with extending financial assistance and other incentives to our farmers to bring them back to rice farming. We can't encourage them to continue rice farming if they keep on losing. They need a modest profit to enable them to have food on the table for their families and live a decent life.

Our rice farmers need government support. Let's give it to them.



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National News

President cites San Miguel megafarm

By BETHEENA UNITE

What is possible abroad can also materialize in the Philippines as far as food security is concerned.

This was **President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s** remark when he led the inauguration of San Miguel Corp.'s world-class controlled-climate poultry megafarm in Hagonoy, Davao del Sur on Thursday, October 12.

Marcos underscored that establishing such facility is the vision the country must have and show investors it is doable.

"I came here so that we could highlight to other investors around the country and even internationally that there is a way to do this," he said.

"We have to also explain to our people. We also have to show them that this is the way forward. This is the way of the future," he added.

The President stressed that putting up megafarms that are expected to produce up to 80 million chickens annually to address the increasing demand for poultry products could also be done in the country.

"Iyong sasabihin natin masyadong mahirap 'yan. Doon lang sa abroad 'yan, 'yung mga malalaking lugar (We say that is difficult. It can only be done abroad, in big places)," Marcos said.

"And this goes to show that that's not necessarily the case. We can definitely do anything that they do abroad, anything that we can see that are advantageous to the food supply. We can adopt here and adjust it to the Philippine conditions," Marcos added.

He said that the people must realize that "this is the way forward" and "we can no longer depend on the informal production of food in the way that we have depended on for very, very long time."

Marcos expects that the facility would provide jobs to more than 1,000 Filipinos and generate multiple opportunities for small businesses and farmers.

The Chief Executive joined San Miguel Corp. President Ramon Ang in inaugurating the facility which is one of the 12 planned poultry megafarm projects around the country.

A project by San Miguel Foods Inc. (SMFI), the megafarm anticipates the production of 80 million birds or about 200 million kilos in live weight per farm to be harvested annually.

The farm features environmental controls, biosecurity measures, modernized feeding and watering systems, efficient waste management, and a modern farm layout and house design, among others. These enhancements ensure optimal conditions for poultry rearing, resulting in high-quality and safe products.

It will also implement the Antimicrobial Policy, aiming for a 100 percent antibiotic-free operation, except when necessary for disease treatments.

The farms prioritize local sourcing, utilizing raw materials from nearby producers and businesses for feed production and value-added processes.

The farms also implement rain-water harvesting systems to minimize groundwater extraction, while incorporating solar power energy to lessen fuel consumption.

According to Malacañang, SMFI's poultry megafarm projects are aligned with the government's 2022 Strategic Investment Priority Plan (SIPP) List of Priority Projects, specifically under the Tier 2, No. 5 Food Security-Related Activities, as these projects aim to provide long-term security and sustainability of the domestic poultry supply in the country.



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PH to buy avian flu vaccines; P3B poultry farm to address demand

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. yesterday said the government would soon procure avian flu vaccines which would help end, if not minimize, the culling of fowls and address threats to the poultry industry.

The President made the announcement during the inauguration of the "World-Class Controlled-Climate Magnolia Poultry Farm" in Hagonoy, Davao del Sur, which is expected to produce up to 80 million chickens or around 200 million kilos annually and address the demand for poultry products in Mindanao.

Marcos said the government will continue to mitigate the adverse effects of diseases in the poultry industry such as the avian flu even as the government pursues measures, together with the private sector, that would promote and revitalize the industry.

The President, who is the concurrent agriculture secretary, last month met with leading Indonesian animal health firm PT Vaksindo Satwa Nusantara which intends to invest \$2 million for veterinary vaccine development in the Philippines.

Vaksindo, together with its local partner, Univet Nutrition and Animal Healthcare Company Inc. Philippines, has committed to provide the Philippines with avian influenza vaccine.

The President visited the poultry farm of San Miguel Foods Inc. (SMFI) to highlight and convince

people that the future of the agricultural sector lies in its modernization.

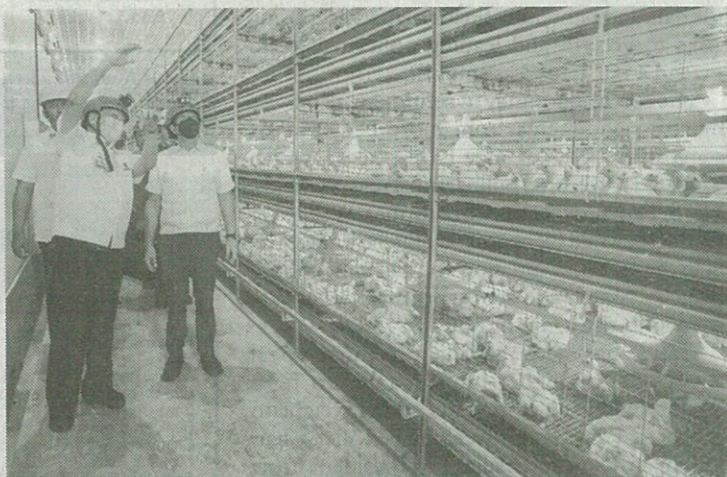
The P3.34-billion Magnolia Poultry Farm situated in a 921.91-hectare property in Hagonoy aims to house 28 world-class climate-controlled farmhouses that will produce 80 million birds annually.

The facility targets to produce dressed whole chickens, processed chickens (marinated and deboned) and other chicken parts (liver, intestines, etc.). It has an estimated total annual capacity of 66.81 million kilograms.

The farm features environmental controls, biosecurity measures, modernized feeding and watering systems, efficient waste management, and a modern farm layout and house design, among others, which would ensure optimal conditions for poultry rearing, resulting in high-quality and safe products.

It also implements an antimicrobial policy, aiming for a 100 percent antibiotic-free operation, except when necessary for disease treatments. SMFI has implemented the policy in Isabela province and parts of Bicol region and aims to eliminate the use of antibiotics nationwide.

The SMFI farms also prioritize local sourcing, utilizing raw materials from nearby producers and businesses for feed production and value-added processes of its popular Magnolia Chicken "Timplados."



President Marcos Jr. leads the inauguration of San Miguel Corp.'s world-class climate-controlled Magnolia poultry farm in Davao del Sur. (PCO Photo)

Each farm is also expected to generate approximately 1,000 job opportunities, both directly and indirectly, with each facility prioritizing the employment of individuals from the surrounding communities.

The President welcomed the increased poultry supply especially with the nearing holidays and peak season.

Marcos said an increase in prices of commodities is expected due to the demand surge but with modern farms such as SMFI's, consumers will no longer have to worry about poultry products supply and disparity in prices.

He welcomed SMFI's plans to put up similar modern poultry farms in 11 other areas around the

country, adding that with the increase and safe poultry production, the needs of the people would be satisfied.

Marcos said this poultry production would not affect the small fowl producers because the finished product would serve different markets.

Ramon Ang, San Miguel president and chief executive officer, said the Magnolia production would be used for its ready-to-eat products and would not be supplied to wet markets.

Ang said he built the modern chicken farm in response to the call of the President for him and the private sector to help the government ensure food security in the country.

BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

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Poultry tour. President Marcos Jr. is given a tour of San Miguel Corporation's world-class climate-controlled Magnolia Poultry Farm in Hagonoy, Davao del Sur that is expected to produce 80 million chickens annually. PCO PHOTO

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Philippines set to procure avian flu vaccine—PBBM

BY SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA

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PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on Thursday announced that the country is set to buy avian influenza (AI) vaccines to ensure the protection of the local poultry industry from the dreaded disease.

During the inauguration of the San Miguel Foods Inc.'s (SMFI) P3.34-billion controlled-climate Magnolia Poultry Farm in Davao Del Sur, the Chief Executive said the measure aims to mitigate the possible agricultural losses from AI.

"The [vaccine] for Avian Flu appears to be already effective, that is

why we will buy [some doses] so we can give it [to farmers] and reduce those which need to be culled after being infected with Avian Flu," Marcos said in Filipino during his speech in the SMFI event.

He did not disclose the number of doses and brand of vaccine the government will procure.

The country suffered an AI outbreak in 17 provinces last year, resulting in the death of 182,968 fowls and the culling of over 1.2 million based on data from the Department of Agriculture (DA).

The DA-Bureau of Animal Industry announced last August it is drafting the guidelines for the AI vaccination.

In the previous month, PT Vaksindo Satwa Nusantara signed a \$2-million cooperation agreement with its local partner, Univet Nutrition and Animal Healthcare Company (Unahco Inc.) Philippines for the local production of the Indonesian firm's AI vaccine.

Modernized production

MARCOS stressed the need to support in modernizing the agriculture sector through similar initiatives of the SMFI mega poultry farm to help the country achieve food security.

SMFI partnered with local farmers to establish its poultry farm in Hagonoy, Davao Del Sur, which is expected to produce 80 million

poultry annually and generate 1,000 new jobs.

San Miguel President and CEO Ramon S. Ang said he decided to launch the initiative in response to the request of President Marcos for the private sector to invest in local food production.

"We will make sure that we will continuously develop and make more meaningful projects to help create jobs and minimize the [country's] reliance on imported food," Ang said.

Marcos said he supports the plan of SMFI to build 11 more similar facilities nationwide, including in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

"We put a high premium on investments in agriculture, as it is the key to combating hunger and poverty, and achieving our goal of food sufficiency and security across the country," the President said.

"Once realized, these will ensure a more stable, sufficient, and cost-competitive supply of chicken as well as bolster the food and nutritional needs of our people," he added.



PRICE WATCH

SPEAKER Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez vowed to continue monitoring the prices of onions, rice and other agricultural products.

Romualdez made the commitment as he lauded the Department of Justice (DoJ) and the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) for filing charges against those behind the unreasonable increase of onions of up to P700 a kilo in the latter part of 2022.

Suspecting hoarding and price manipulation, and in line with the desire of President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. to make agricultural products affordable, the Speaker immediately asked the committee on agriculture to inquire into the onion price spike.

The House leader said the filing of criminal and administrative charges against those behind the increase "is a product in part of our extensive investigation."

"We welcome this result and we expect prosecutors to make the charges stick. We will continue to monitor prices and we will not hesitate to exercise our power of oversight by conducting an investigation and prodding agencies so we can protect the public from high prices and inflation," he said.

The House leader also commended the committee on agriculture,



particularly its chairman Quezon Rep. Mark Enverga and its lead investigator Marikina City Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo, for holding a successful inquiry.

The House committee concluded its four-month investigation after Rep. Quimbo succeeded in unmasking the personalities involved in the cartel, which has been responsible for the hoarding and price manipulation of onions.

The congressional hearings resulted in the drastic drop of onion prices from P700 to P160 per kilo.

Meanwhile, Romualdez expressed dismay over the alleged involvement of officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA) in onion price manipulation.

"As public officers, we are expected to protect our people, not to make them suffer from

abusive and illegal practices," he said.

He urged the DoJ-NBI to go after other officials and private citizens suspected of participation in price manipulation and hoarding of onions, rice and other basic staples.

Likewise, the lawmaker asked the concerned government agencies like the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) to sanction complicit organizations under their supervision and their officers.

In a news briefing earlier, DoJ Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla announced that the NBI has filed charges against those they found involved in onion hoarding and price manipulation after a lengthy investigation.

Remulla said they expect the courts to issue warrants of arrest.

Jester Manalastas



RTL, NAKATULONG BA SA MGA KONSYUMER AT MGA MAGSASAKA?

NANG ipasa ang Rice Tarrification Law na pangunahing inakda ni Senator Cynthia Villar na layuning ipahinto ang paghihigpit sa dami ng mga inaangkat na bigas, nagpahayag kaagad si dating Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Karl Kedrick Chua na isa ito sa pinakamahusay na inakdang batas para tulungan ang mga magsasaka at mamimili.

Sabi ni Chua, malulutas raw ng naturang batas ang pangangailangan ng mga mamimili para sa mababang presyo ng bigas at ang makokolektang buwis naman ang magpopondo sa Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund o RCEF na magkakaloob ng tulong sa mga magsasaka.

Ipinagmalaki pa nga niya na noong 2021, nakakolekta sila sa ilalim ng naturang batas ng halos P19 bilyon na naimapamahagi sa mga magsasaka upang mapalaki ang kanilang ani kaya binatikos niya ang mga kumontra sa naturang batas.

Kung totoo ang sinasabi ng dating kalihim, bakit kinapos pa rin ang produksyon ng bigas ang mga magsasaka at bakit tumapas pa rin kaysa dati ang halaga ng mga bigas sa merkado na dahilan para magtakda na ng price cap ang Pangulong Ferdinand "Bong-

bong" Marcos, Jr.?

Hindi naman natin inaalís ang ilang mga kadahilanan tulad ng pananalanta ng sunod-sunod na bagyo sa maliit na produksiyon ng bigas ng mga magsasaka pero dapat siguro, hindi pumalo sa napakataas na halaga ang bigas dahil isang damakmak naman ang importasyon nito sa ibang bansa ng mga rice importers.

Ipinasa kasi noong 2018 ang naturang batas nang magkaroon ng krisis ang bansa sa bigas na ang sinisisi ng pamahalaan ay ang pagkontrol sa importasyon ng bigas.

Sa ilalim ng naturang batas, wala na sa kapangyarihan ng National Food Authority ang pag-aangkat ng bigas pati na rin ang kanilang regulatory power at tungkulin sa price stabilization. Ang natira na lang sa kanila ay ang pag-iimbak ng bigas para ilaan



sa mga lugar na sinalanta ng kalamidad.

Sa datos na isinapubliko ni Raul Montemayor, national manager ng Federation of Free Farmers, noong nakaraang taon ay naitala ang pinakamaraming inangkat na bigas ng bansa na umaabot sa 3.85 milyong tonelada na dahilan ng pagbagsak ng kita ng mga magsasaka.

Sabi ni Montemayor, bagama't hindi naman daw gusto ng mga mambabatas na mangyari ang kasalukuyang sitwasyon, sila pa rin ang responsable sa pangyayari dahil minadali nila ang pagpapasa nito nang hindi pinag-aralang mabuti.

Siyempre, kahit ano pa ang ipaliwanag ng mga hindi sumasang-ayon sa naturang batas, todo-tanggol pa rin dito ang mga may akda sa paniwalang malaking tulong ito sa mga magsasaka at mamimili.



Pinas, bibili ng avian flu vaccine

SINABI ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. na bibili ang Pilipinas ng Avian Influenza vaccine.

"Mayroon na pa lang bakuna ang Avian Influenza. So, mag-acquire na tayo ng Avian Influenza vaccine," ayon sa Pangulo sa isinagawang inagurasyon ng San Miguel mega poultry farm sa Hagonoy, Davao del Sur.

"Iyong sa Avian Flu ay mukhang effective na kaya't tayo --- bibili tayo para mabigyan natin, at mabawasan 'yung mga kina-cull dahil tinamaan ng Avian Flu," dagdag na pahayag nito.

Sa pamamagitan ng pagbili ng bakuna, sinabi ng Punong Ehekutibo na mapagagaan nito ang tinatawag na "agricultural woes of diseases" na may negatibong epekto sa food production sa Pilipinas.

"The vaccine for Swine Flu is still being piloted," ayon sa Pangulo sabay sabing "Hindi pa lumalabas. Hindi pa na-rollout."

Tinuran pa ng Pangulo na naglagay ang kanyang administrasyon ng "high premium" sa investments sa agrikultura.

"It (Agriculture) is the key to combatting hunger and poverty, and achieving our goal of food sufficiency and security across the country," diing pahayag ng Pangulo.

Ang naging anunsyo ni Pangulong Marcos ay tinanggap naman ng United Broiler Raisers Association (UBRA) and the Philippine Egg Board (PEB).

"Well, we asked for it since August last year so although late in coming, it is still great because this is the season for migratory birds," ayon kay Gregorio San Diego, pinuno

ng UBRA at PEB.

Ang Avian influenza o bird flu ay Ang bird flu (o trangkaso na nagmula sa ibon) ay dulot ng virus ng trangkaso na kadalasa'y nakaaapekto sa mga lahing ibon at kamanukan, tulad ng manok at pato.

Ang ganitong klase ng virus ay kadalasang di nakakaapekto sa tao. Subalit, may mga kaso na nakaaapekto sa tao (dulot ng trangkasong A H5N1 and H9N2) na naibalita sa Hong Kong at ibang panig ng mundo.

Samantala, habang ang holidays at peak season ay nangangahulugan ng pagtaas ng presyo ng mga bilingin dahil sa pagtaas ng demand, wala ng dapat pang ipag-alala ang mga mamimili ukol sa suplay para sa poultry products at hindi pagkakapare-pareho ng presyo dahil sa industriyalisadong agricultural facilities na itatayo sa buong bansa.

Sinabi ni Pangulong Marcos na ito'y tugon sa pangmatagalang alalahanin na may kinalaman sa pagsirit ng presyo sa panahon ng holiday season na natalakay sa media interview sa Davao del Sur, araw ng Huwebes.

"Natural, pagka maganda ang supply hindi tataas masyado ang presyo. Siyempre pag Pasko, may increase talaga ng demand dahil maraming party, maraming nagse-celebrate," aniya pa rin.

Kumpiyansa naman ang Chief Executive na ang patuloy na suplay ng mga kalakal partikular na ang mga sariwang itlog at chicken meat ay mapipigilan ang pabago-bago ng presyo.

KRIS JOSE

Abante

UNA SA BALITA

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Abante
NEGOSYO

Supply ng manok sapat

TIWALA ang gobyerno na hindi magkakaroon ng kakapusan sa supply ng manok sa bansa sa mga susunod na araw.

Ito ay matapos pangu-nahan ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. nitong Huwebes nang umaga ang inagurasyon ng malaking poultry farm sa Davao del Sur na mai-

tuturing na world-class controlled climate poultry farm ng isang malaking kumpanya sa bansa.

Sa kanyang talumpati, sinabi ng pangulo na sa pamamagitan nito ay masisiguro ang matatag, suplayante at cost-competitive na supply ng manok sa bansa.

Ang poultry farm ay una sa 11 planong itatag

sa iba't ibang lalawigan ng Poultry Mega Farm projects ng San Miguel Corporation.

"Once realized, these will ensure a more stable, sufficient, and cost-competitive supply chicken as well as bolster the food and nutritional needs of our people," anang pangulo.

Inasahang aabot ng hanggang 80 milyong manok kada taon ang produksiyon ng farm na tutugon sa tumataas na demand sa poultry products sa Davao region at ng buong Mindanao. (Aileen Taliping)



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Imported sugar release delayed in relief to farmers

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said it will delay the release of imported sugar brought in under Sugar Order No. 7 to stabilize declining farmgate prices.

Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona said on Thursday that the SRA needs "to regulate supply and ensure a fair price for farmers and consumers."

Sugar Order No. 7 series of 2022-2023, authorized shipments of 150,000 metric tons of raw sugar which arrived on Sept. 15.

In a resolution signed by Mr. Azcona, the SRA said "it was

deemed necessary to hold in abeyance" all applications of conversion and maintain the classification of all imported sugar as reserve.

The SRA said that it will hold on to the reserve sugar to form a two-month buffer stock.

Mr. Azcona said applications for reclassification will be suspended until farmgate prices stabilize.

Under the resolution, sugar traders were given one month or until Oct. 15 to distribute their stock and show proof of compliance.

"What is more important to us if the farmgate prices decrease

(is that) we should also see a decrease in the retail price," he added.

He said that farmgate prices of raw sugar were currently below the regulators' projections of P3,000 per bag.

During the first two weeks of the sugar trading period the SRA reported that farmgate prices continued to decline "to the detriment of sugar farmers." Oversupply was blamed for the easing prices.

"We had farmers who weren't able to sell at P3,000 which was our target price; at the same time

(there were) farmers groups who sold at P2,550, (equivalent to) P50+ per kilo," he said.

He added that trading has been abnormal with prices fluctuating by P100 or more on a weekly basis.

"Our thrust is expansion of local supply to avoid imports altogether; (Imports) discourage farmers from planting and without the farmers our mills will suffer as well," he said. "We have to ensure (more) local supply (than) we have seen past seven months."

— Adrian H. Halili



Release of sugar imports suspended as farmgate price drops

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The **Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA)** has suspended the release of imported sugar from warehouses amid a drop in the farmgate price of local sugar.

In a resolution issued Sept. 26 but made public only yesterday, the SRA board decided to hold in abeyance all applications of conversion and maintain the classification of all imported sugar as "C" or reserved sugar.

This will allow the regulator to "maintain a reasonable volume of sugar available for domestic use, protect the interests of farmers and millers, and sustain a reasonable farmgate price of raw sugar of about P3,000 per bag," a part of the order reads.

"When the (imported) sugar comes into the country, (these) automatically reserved for domestic (use). Owners have to apply for reclassification... We will hold reclassification until prices stabilize," SRA Administrator Pablo Luis Azcona said in a briefing with reporters.

Azcona said the suspension order covers the 150,000 metric tons of imported refined sugar under Sugar Order 7 issued in July. He added that, of this volume, applications for reclassification would be

put on hold for around 100,000 MT.

The move to stop applications, he explained, stemmed from a "speculative statement" last Aug. 24, which caused farmgate prices to drop.

Azcona noted that the farmgate price of local sugar has dropped to P60 per kilo, but admitted that retail prices remain as high as P110 due to overpricing.

He described the market situation as "abnormal," with farmgate prices moving up or down by P100 on a weekly basis.

At least 550,000 metric tons of sugar were imported this year, including the controversial 400,000 metric tons, which were awarded to three importers, and 150,000 metric tons, now being used as buffer stocks.

Based on the Department of Agriculture monitoring in Metro Manila markets, the retail prices of refined sugar ranged between P82 and P110 per kilo; washed sugar, between P79 and P95 per kilo and brown sugar, between P75 and P95 per kilo.

Azcona said the next importation would be done in April or May 2024 after the milling season, adding that the SRA estimates the total local sugar production to reach 1.85 million metric tons for crop year 2023 to 2024 or from Sept. 1, 2023 to Aug. 30, 2024. — **With Danessa Rivera**

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Farmers' group: DA creating panic on pork shortage

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The Department of Agriculture (DA)'s recent pronouncement on a possible 10-day pork shortage creates panic and may even cause an unnecessary spike in the retail prices of meat products during the holiday season, according to farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag).

"It was also the DA who said that there was a shortage in the rice supply, but it was actually the buffer stock of the National Food Authority. The NFA has no stocks, but there was no rice shortage," Sinag executive director Jayson Cainglet said on Thursday, recalling that the DA had made an "irresponsible" statement that led to an increase in the retail price of rice.

"Why do you have to say there is a shortage? It is creating panic, it only justifies the high retail prices of pork," he added.

On Oct. 10, newly designated DA spokesman Arnel de Mesa said that the government is eyeing pork importation amid a supposed 10-day local supply shortage.

Cainglet noted that the DA's 10-day shortage projection did not include offal or internal organs used as food.

"They only included prime meats. We

all know that the consumption for offals is high as it is used as extender for hotdogs, processed meats," he added.

Data on imported meat in cold storage facilities was also not included.

"Discussions are ongoing as we called their attention for not indicating the data on imports. In fact, they amended their data and sent us an updated volume of imported meats in cold storage," he said.

Based on Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) data, the total stocks in cold storage facilities as of Sept. 30 already reached 458,703,535 kilos.

"BAI also issued sanitary and phytosanitary import clearance totaling to 900 million kilos. Why do they need to request more importation when the arrival of imported frozen pork is ongoing? It did not stop," Cainglet pointed out.

He added that the farmgate price of pork decreased by P20, or P160 per kilo from the previous P180 per kilo.

"The disparity between the farmgate and retail price of pork is big," Cainglet said.

Based on the DA's monitoring, the retail price of pork *kasim* ranged between P260 and P330 and pork *liempo* ranged between P290 and P400.

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Negros farmers' group sells rice at P25 per kilo

BACOLOD CITY – Grateful for the rice production assistance provided by the Negros Occidental provincial government, an association of farmers in the province is selling rice at P25 per kilo.

Pedro Limpangog, president of the Federation of Irrigators' Associations Central Negros Bago River Irrigation System (FIACN BRIS), said five kilos of rice are being allocated per person.

Residents flocked yesterday to the Bigas ng Bayan commercial stall, which was set up at the Food Terminal Market of Negros Occidental in this city, where the cheap rice was sold. Gov. Eugenio Jose Lacson and Mayor Alfredo Abelardo Benitez attended the activity.

Citing the good track record of the farmers' association, the provincial government hired farmers for its rice sufficiency program.

Lacson said job order workers were paid P12,000 a month to plant rice as well as operate rice equipment and machineries to assist rice farmers affected by natural calamities.

Lacson said he was surprised that FIACN BRIS allocated 10 percent of its rice production to sell it to the public at P25 per kilo.

FIACN BRIS, which is composed of 44 irrigators' associations in Central Negros, initially sold rice at P25 per kilo to 455 people.

Lacson said the P25 per kilo of rice is subject to availability of supply.

Benitez thanked the farmers for their generosity, saying he is discussing with the Department of Agriculture-Western Visayas office if the rice production program can be continued.

– Gilbert Bayoran



DA to comply with DOJ directive vs officials

A ranking official of the Department of Agriculture yesterday vowed that the DA will comply with the directive of the Department of Justice after Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla said that graft and corruption charges will be filed against certain officials of the agency in connection with the controversy involving the hoarding and price manipulation on onions in December 2022.

In an interview with **The STAR**, Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesperson Arnel de Mesa gave assurance that DA operations will not be affected in case the officials will be suspended.

"We respect the due process of our legal institution. We are confident that hopefully the truth will come out regarding these allegations," De Mesa said.

Among those who were identified by Remulla are DA Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista, Bureau of Plant Industry Director Gerald Glenn Panganiban and Agriculture Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service officer-in-charge

Director Junibert de Sagun.

Ombudsman Samuel Martires has ordered six months preventive suspension of Evangelista over the alleged irregularities in the procurement of onions later sold at Kadiwa stores.

De Mesa said that Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban can appoint an officer-in-charge to ensure that the operation of the DA will not be affected in case the concerned officials will be suspended.

"It is an SOP (standard operating procedure) that replacements are made if cases will push through," De Mesa.

Remulla has said administrative cases will also be filed against the three officials for inefficiency and incompetence over the questionable deal with Bonena Multi-Purpose Cooperative for the delivery of 8,845 bags or 247 metric tons of onions at Kadiwa stores.

Retail prices of onions reached as high as P720 per kilo in December amid the hoarding and manipulation of the bulbs.

— Bella Cariaso



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A tragedy in agriculture

Aside from missing true development, another tragedy in our agriculture governance is the lack of transparency and accountability.

The Senate is currently deliberating the proposed **Department of Agriculture (DA)** budget of P191.8 billion. This is 3.1 percent of the entire P5.768-trillion national budget.

Although this is much better than the average 2 percent that the department got in the last five years, it is still less than one half of Vietnam's 6.7 percent. It is alarming, too, that one-third of this already meager budget is most probably lost to waste and corruption.

COA findings

The Commission on Audit (COA) had officially reported unliquidated and unexplained expenses in the DA ranging from P21 to 23 billion for each year from 2020 up until 2022. Note that the DA (excluding its attached agencies) had worked on a budget of less than P70 billion for each of those years.

The Alyansa Agrikultura has officially requested the Senate to investigate this, but there has been no response so far.

But even without a Senate probe, there is an effective way—one that has been prov-

COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDOÑEZ

en successful—to stop corruption in the department.

The group had proposed a monitoring system that was implemented by the competent and committed staff of the public-private Philippine Council of Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF). However, the system was abolished by top management in the DA.

How did it work? Each DA regional executive director was required to give a complete list of DA-funded projects in his or her region to the private sector-led regional and provincial agriculture and fisheries councils for monitoring.

But just as past higher management of the DA abolished the critical international trade committee that prevented the private sector from suggesting improvements to international trade agreements like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), they likewise abolished this anticorruption practice.

The international trade committee has already been re-

stored, but not this.

With no monitoring by the private sector, corruption will flourish. Just take a look at what the COA had reported.

RCEP conditionality

Because of its importance, the Agrifisheries Alliance (composed of farmers and fisherfolk led by Arsenio Tanchuling, agribusiness led by Danilo Fausto, and science and academe led by Emil Javier) proposed this practice as a key conditionality for the ratification of RCEP.

Championed by Sen. Loren Legarda, this was stated in the RCEP ratification document passed unanimously by the Senate last Feb. 21. The document further stated that if key requirements are not met, the Senate would recommend a possible withdrawal from the trade deal. It has been eight months since and this conditionality has yet to be implemented.

During the past week, interviews were conducted with elected private sector heads of the regional agriculture and fisheries councils. Not one said he or she has received a complete list of DA projects for monitoring.

Passing the blame

Very often, the DA down-

loads its funds to local govern-

ment units (LGUs) for implementation. Since many LGUs do not liquidate nor explain the use of these funds (with the possibility of connivance with the DA), the DA claims it is not to be blamed for the turnout.

However, it is the DA's responsibility to report these incidences so that corrective action can be done. The COA reports show that no action has been taken. The fund hemorrhage continues, and will not stop unless political will is exercised.

The ball is now in the Senate's court. Will they approve the proposed DA budget without requiring the necessary accountability and transparency?

It is time that the neglected and often abused farmers and fisherfolk know the truth. The senators whom they voted for must now come to their rescue. Such tragedy must be put to a stop. **INQ**



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



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PH eyes ₱230-billion halal investments

The Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) National Halal Strategy is expected to generate ₱230 billion in investments, create 120,000 jobs in five years, and support micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to become part of a global halal ecosystem.

The halal plan, set to launch soon, in time for the Halal Convention Expo on Nov. 21 at the SMX Convention Center, will also address the growing demand for halal products and services from both the Philippines' domestic market and from the 57 countries that are members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) – spanning Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

DTI Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual has

announced previously the country's plans to expand halal-related trade and investments.

"Halal as a way of life is not only for the Muslims. It is increasingly being recognized by many non-Muslim consumers worldwide because of ethical considerations, hygiene, fair trade, and just financing," Pascual said.

"Over the next five years, we plan to achieve ₱230 billion Halal trade and investments and generate 120,000 jobs," he added.

Considering the growing Muslim population of 1.9 billion people, the global Halal market is estimated to reach USD 7.7 trillion in market value by 2025, up from USD 3.2 trillion in 2015.

The halal strategic planning fol-

lowed President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s message to international investors at the World Economic Forum in Davos positioning the Philippines as a gateway to the Asia-Pacific region.

The DTI will be leading the nine-government inter-agency taskforce that will create a roadmap, which will position the Philippines as the most Halal-friendly trade and investment hub in Asia Pacific.

Further, Pascual highlighted that the Halal industry forms part of the DTI's four priorities including promoting regional development; attaining food security; upgrading, upskilling, and upsizing MSMEs; and enabling job skills matching and skills upgrading.

The halal plan is not only confined

to food and food-related products but also includes Islamic finance, halal-friendly travel and tourism, modest fashion, halal pharmaceuticals, and halal cosmetics sectors.

To cover the wide-ranging aspects of Halal economy, the Halal Taskforce will include the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), Department of Agriculture (DA), Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), Department of Tourism (DOT), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Science and Technology (DOST), Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA). (Ma. Joselie C. Garcia)



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Rice and inflation

LAST week, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that inflation significantly rose to 6.1 percent in September from 5.3 percent in August. It was way above the government's 2- to 4-percent target.

The major driver of the higher rate was expectedly food and nonalcoholic beverages, which



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registered almost a double-digit inflation of 9.7 percent. More than

half (61 percent) of September inflation was accounted for by this commodity group. Rice inflation, meanwhile, was the main contributory factor to food inflation as it rose to 17.9 percent from only 8.7 percent in August.

Many critics said the significant increase in rice inflation was

glaring proof of the failure of the government's rice price ceiling policy. The price cap started on September 5 and was lifted on October 4, around a month's implementation.

On the other hand, those supportive of the administration

➤ **Finer B3**



■ FINER FROM B1

Rice and

argued that the data the PSA used when it conducted its survey to measure monthly inflation coincided with the time when rice prices were just about to decline due to the imposition of the rice price cap.

The argument is far from convincing. A better explanation of why the price cap did not achieve its desired objective of lowering rice prices is that the supply of regular and well-milled rice, which were placed under the price ceiling, was limited.

Second, regular and well-milled rice's eating quality did not meet the taste preference of Filipino consumers. As a result, and third, consumers patronized "special" and "premium" rice, which are better tasting but more expensive and not under the price cap. Seeing this, retailers switched to selling these higher-priced rice varieties as these are easy to sell and they would not lose money.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is optimistic that rice prices will decline beginning this month as October to early December is the wet harvest season. However, initial field reports indicate that the price of wet palay (unmilled rice) in Nueva Ecija and Isabela last week hovered around P18 to P20 per kilo while dry ones

were at P23 to P25 per kilo. Normally, during the peak wet harvest season, palay prices fluctuate from P13 to P17 per kilo.

Last week, Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban and Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa declared that rice prices would hover around P36 to P38 per kilo by the end of this month because of bountiful harvests.

But with the National Food Authority (NFA) raising its procurement price to P23 per kilo (dry palay with 14 percent moisture content), it remains to be seen whether the DA's claim that rice prices will start falling will happen. The NFA's buying price usually serves as a benchmark price for traders when procuring palay from the farmers.

The rule of thumb in the industry is that 2 kilos of palay are needed to obtain a kilo of rice, (assuming the costs of drying, milling and transport from the farm to the milling site are included with a 65-percent milling efficiency). This means that a minimum price of P46 per kilo of rice will be charged. But if wholesalers, and particularly retailers, jack up their profit margin and their logistics cost, it is most likely that the average rice price will hover around P50 per kilo in the wet market.

It is imperative that concerned officials closely monitor rice prices this harvest season. If prices remain elevated, expect these to rise during the peak demand

month of December and the lean harvest (planting) season from January to February. Price speculation will worsen if the country is unable to maintain an ending stock of 60 to 90 days at the end of this year. This means around 2 to 3 million metric tons (MT) of rice as our monthly consumption is about a million MT.

The prophets of boom in DA are optimistic that we will have a robust ending stock of more than 60 days, with bountiful local harvests and the entry of significant volume of rice imports. What is not being told to the public is that the calculation assumes that our rice-growing areas will not be visited by destructive typhoons during this quarter. Unfortunately, they did in the past as experienced with Super Typhoons "Yolanda," "Sendong," etc.

Harvard emeritus professor C. Peter Timmer in his essay "Back in the Soup: Now What?," noted that global rice supply for next year would be sufficient. The big "ifs" are whether China will import more than usual, whether India will finally lift its rice export ban, and whether there will be settlement of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

If these three "ifs" persist, expect rice prices to be elevated because production costs have significantly gone up due to rising input costs. For Timmer, the question that should be utmost in the minds of policymakers is not whether there will

be enough supply, but whether expected price increases will be gradual or drastic.

The latter is of importance to him because he noted that rice had become the poor man's staple because of its relatively cheaper price. A supply shortage will certainly cause political unrest and a gradual price escalation will be the best option. But if it turns out to be drastic, then it is likely that political unrest will follow.

Timmer stressed that governments must be honest and transparent regarding their rice supply situations so as not to unduly raise public expectations. Predicting that rice prices will decline soon simply goes against the global rice trade reality. Resorting to political gimmickry will undermine the credibility of the government at a time when it is needed most in the face of the emerging crisis.

In our case, a better response would be to build that rice inventory by temporarily reducing rice tariffs, particularly during the lean harvest season, and hope that India will lift its rice export ban after its general election in May next year. Note that contrary to claim that global rice prices are on a decline and hence there was no need to lower rice tariffs, data show that prices will remain elevated till May and start to decline only in June or July next year after the Indian election in May.

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SRA halts release of imported sugar

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) has halted the release of sugar imports in a bid to lift farmgate prices.

The agency said the move would apply to 150,000 metric tons (MT) of the commodity and keep prices directly paid to farmers at around P3,000 per bag.

SRA Administrator Pablo Luis Azcon told reporters that milling "started on September 1, and we

observed that on the bidding day we had farmers who weren't able to sell at P3,000 [per bag], which was our target price."

Raw sugar prices, he added, fluctuated from P2,550 to P3,000 and down again in just two weeks.

"It is not normal for prices to

go up and down by 100 or more on a weekly basis ... it (the price movement) has been abnormal," he added.

The SRA halted all conversion applications and said that all imported sugar would remain classified as "reserved."

"Wherefore, after due discussion and deliberation and upon motion duly seconded, resolves as it is hereby resolved to lift the deadline set for importers under Sugar Order 07, series of 2022-2023 to reclassify, distribute and dispose

imported refined sugar until further notice," the regulator said in Resolution 2023-159, dated Sept. 26, 2023 but only made public on Thursday.

Sugar Order 07, series of 2022-2023, authorized the importation of 150,000 MT of refined sugar that arrived in the Philippines on September 15.

"Whereas, in order to maintain a reasonable volume of sugar available for domestic use, protect the interests of the farmers and millers, and sustain a reasonable farmgate

price of raw sugar of about P3,000 per bag, the Sugar Board deemed it necessary to hold in abeyance all applications of conversion and maintain the classification of all imported sugar as 'Reserved,'" it said.

The deadline for the 30-day conversion and disposition of imported refined sugar required under Sugar Order 07 was lifted.

Eligible importers had been given one month, or not later than October 15, from the actual arrival of shipment and reclassification

to completely distribute their allocations and submit written proof of compliance with actual distribution.

"Despite the fact that the average retail price of sugar remains the same, the average farmgate price of raw sugar, which hovered between P2,500 [and] P2,750 per bag during the first two weeks of CY (calendar year) 2023-2024 continues to go down, to the detriment of the sugar farmers, allegedly by reason of oversupply," the SRA said.

WITH A REPORT FROM PNA



PH eyes P230B halal investments

THE Philippines aims to grow investments in halal to P230 billion, creating 120,000 jobs in five years under a soon-to-be launched National Halal Strategy.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said in a statement the plan will also address the growing demand for halal products and services from both the Philippines' domestic market and from the 57 countries that are members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation spanning Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

The DTI noted the strategy will support micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in becoming part of a global halal ecosystem.

"The Philippines plans to expand its participation in the halal economy by being more active in this multi-trillion US-dollar industry, that is growing at a rapid pace. Considering the growing Muslim population of 1.9 billion people, the global halal market is estimated to reach \$7.7 trillion in market value by 2025, up from \$3.2 trillion in 2015," said DTI Secretary Alfredo Pascual.



A merchant tends to his booth at Manila's first-ever halal food festival on Oct. 11, 2023 at the Kartilya ng Katipunan in Ermita, Manila.

The DTI said the halal plan is not only confined to food and food-related products but also includes Islamic finance, halal-friendly travel and tourism, modest

fashion, halal pharmaceuticals, and halal cosmetics sectors.

DTI leads the nine-government inter-agency task force that will create a roadmap. The task force also

includes the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos, Department of Agriculture, Bangko

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Sentral ng Pilipinas, Department of Tourism, Department of Health, Department of Science and Technology, Department of Foreign Affairs and Mindanao Development Authority.

To integrate MSMEs into the halal plan, the DTI recently signed a partnership deal with the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Mindanao (BARMM)-

Ministry of Trade, Investment, and Tourism, with the budget of P66 million, to promote halal local goods and services provided

by MSMEs.

Next month, a Halal Convention Expo and a halal preparedness and certification training program will be held.

The DTI said more slaughterhouses in the Philippines will soon be halal-certified.

The Philippine Trade Training Center has also signed an agreement with entities in Calabarzon for halal training while more than 100 MSMEs in Marawi are also being prepared to be halal-certified as part of the economic re-

building of the Maranao people.

The DTI's strategic halal plan follows the bilateral talks of the Philippines and Malaysia during the three-day state visit of President Marcos Jr. in July where the Philippines expressed its commitment to closely coordinate efforts to build capacity in the BARMM area, especially on sectors such as the halal industry, Islamic banking, and food security.

Additionally, the Philippines is set to sign another landmark agreement with the United Arab

Emirates (UAE).

Last month, Secretary Pascual and UAE Minister of State for Foreign Trade Dr. Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi reaffirmed

their commitment to enhance and strengthen their economic ties.

Both sides have signed the Investment Promotion and Pro-

tection Agreement in February 2022, and are currently in talks regarding the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. - *Irma Isip*



Sugar imports tagged as reserves

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) ordered the suspension of the reclassification, distribution and disposal of imported sugar so as not to depress local prices during this ongoing local milling season.

Resolution No. 2023-159 issued on September 26 but made public on Wednesday, effectively prevents the release to the domestic market of imported sugar which will now form part of reserves.

In the resolution, SRA also lifted the deadline for the conversion of all imported sugar that entered the country prior to this issuance.

"... to maintain a reasonable volume of sugar available for domestic use, protect the interests of the farmers and millers and sustain a reasonable farmgate price of raw sugar of about P3,000 per bag, the Sugar Board deemed it necessary

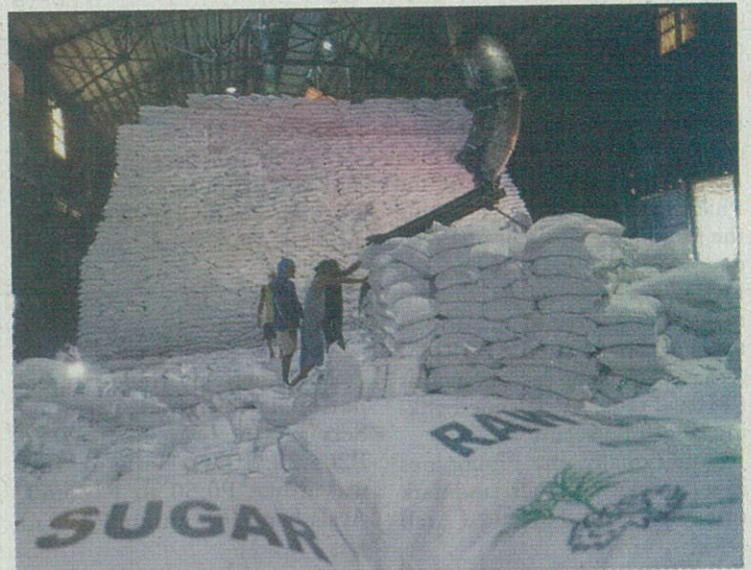
to hold in abeyance all applications of conversion and maintain the classification of all imported sugar as reserves," the resolution said.

Pablo Azcona, SRA administrator, told reporters in a briefing in Bacolod City yesterday the agency noted "irregularities" in a string of sugar farmgate pricing.

Azcona said since milling started on September 1, sugar farm gate prices have been fluctuating to a wider band of lower or higher than P100 per week which is unusual.

SRA said the volatility in pricing was likely caused by speculations of traders of an abundance of imported sugar during the local milling season.

"We tried talking to traders and their reason is that there's just a lot of sugar. With that in mind, we felt we had to regulate and keep some sugar as our buffer," Azcona said.



SRA's order effectively prevents the release to the domestic market of imported sugar so as not to depress local prices during this ongoing milling season. (Photo by Jed Macapagal)



Sliding farmgate prices prompt halt of imported sugar release

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS
@jearcalas

BACOLOD CITY—The Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) has decided to indefinitely hold the release of over 100,000 metric tons (MT) of imported sugar to the domestic market to arrest falling farm-gate prices.

The SRA Board, the highest policy-making body of the agency, approved a resolution that suspended the reclassification of sugar imported under Sugar Order (SO) 7.

The resolution is meant to stabilize farm-gate prices that have fallen by 10 percent since the crop year started.

SRA data showed that farm-gate price of raw sugar has declined to P2,700 per 50-kilogram bag from the P3,000 level registered at the end of the previous crop year.

The decline in farm-gate prices dismayed the SRA board, arguing that SO 7 sugar importers promised that farm-gate prices would not drop below P3,000 per 50-kilogram bag despite the entry

of foreign stocks.

"Despite the fact that the average retail price of sugar remains the same, the average farmgate price of raw sugar which hovered between P2,500 to P2,750 per bag during the first two weeks of crop year 2023-2024 continues to go down, to the detriment of the sugar farmers, allegedly by reason of oversupply," the board resolution read. It was dated September 26 but was released to the media on October 12.

"In order to maintain a reasonable volume of sugar available for domestic use, protect the interests of the farmers and millers, and sustain a reasonable farmgate price of raw sugar of about P3,000 per bag, the Sugar Board deemed it necessary to hold in abeyance all applications of conversion and maintain the classification of all imported sugar as reserved," it added.

Under existing rules and regulations, the SRA has the power to regulate the use of sugar stocks in the country through classification as part of its mandate of protecting the welfare of

the farmers while ensuring consumers' benefits.

Usually, the SRA classifies imported sugar as "C" or reserved sugar, which means it cannot be used or sold domestically by the importing entity until the stocks are reclassified.

Importers file for reclassification of their stocks as "B" sugar or sugar that will be consumed locally before the SRA board.

Sugar importers were previously given an October 15 deadline by the SRA to fully distribute the entire 150,000 MT volume under SO 7.

But because of the resolution, the remaining volume imported under SO 7, estimated at about 127,775 MT as of September 24, will not be distributed to the domestic market yet.

"We will hold the applications [for reclassification] until such time that farm-gate prices stabilize. What is more important to us is that if we see the farm-gate prices decrease, then we should also see a decrease in the retail prices," SRA Administrator Pablo Luis

S. Azcona said in a press briefing here.

"It is not normal for prices to go down by P100 or more on a weekly basis. It has been abnormal," Azcona added.

Despite downward movements at the farm-gate level, the retail prices of both raw and refined sugar in Metro Manila were unchanged. Raw sugar prices ranged from P80 to P101.75 per kilogram while refined sugar prices were between P95 and P119 per kilogram, according to SRA data.

Azcona pointed out that the farm-gate price of P3,000 per 50-kilogram bag is the acceptable level across all players of the industry from farmers to millers and even consumers.

At such a price level, a kilogram of raw sugar would be at P60, enough for a sugarcane farmer to earn P10 per kilogram. This should translate to about P85 per kilogram at the retail level, Azcona added.

"The reasonable farm-gate price of raw sugar is in the area of P2,850 to P3,000 per bag," he said.



P230-B FUNDS, 120K JOBS EYED IN HALAL ROADMAP

By ANDREA E. SAN JUAN
@andreasanjuan

THE Philippines will launch a National Halal Strategy which aims to generate P230 billion in investments and create 120,000 jobs in five years and support small merchants in becoming part of a global halal ecosystem, according to the Department

of Trade and Industry (DTI).

In a statement it issued on Thursday, the Trade department said the plan will address the "growing" demand for Halal products and services from both the Philippines's domestic market and from the 57 countries that are members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)—spanning Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

Trade and Industry Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual stressed that halal as a way of life is not only for the Muslims. He said it is "increasingly" being recognized by many non-Muslim consumers worldwide because of "ethical considerations, hygiene, fair trade and just financing."

"Over the next five years, we plan to achieve P230 billion Halal trade and investments and generate 120,000 jobs," the Trade chief added.

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Funds...

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Considering the growing Muslim population of 1.9 billion people, DTI said the global halal market is estimated to reach 7.7 trillion in market value by 2025, up from USD 3.2 trillion in 2015.

DTI said it will lead the nine-government interagency Taskforce that will create a roadmap which will position the Philippines as the "most Halal-friendly" trade and investment hub in Asia Pacific.

The Trade chief noted that the halal industry forms part of DTI's four priorities: promoting regional development; attaining food security; upgrading, upskilling, and up-sizing micro, small and medium enterprises; and enabling job skills matching and skills upgrading.

DTI added that the halal plan is not only confined to food and food-related products but also includes Islamic finance, halal-friendly travel and tourism, "modest" fashion, halal pharmaceuticals and halal cosmetics sectors.

To cover the "wide-ranging aspects" of Halal economy, DTI said the Halal taskforce will include the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), Department of Agriculture (DA), Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), Department of Tourism (DOT), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Science and Technology (DOST), Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA).

DTI stressed that the micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) will benefit from DTI's halal initiatives.

Meanwhile, the Trade department listed some of the initiatives that have been signed and are scheduled to kick off.

These include the P66-million partnership deal with the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao-Ministry of Trade, Investment, and Tourism (BARMM-MTIT) to promote halal local goods and services provided by MSMEs. This partnership will create jobs through social entrepreneurship and local tourism, train entrepreneurs, and revive the country's creative sector.

As for international cooperation, DTI said the Philippines is set to sign another "landmark" agreement with the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Last month, DTI said Pascual and UAE Minister of State for Foreign Trade Dr. Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi "reaffirmed" their commitment to enhance and strengthen their economic ties.

"Both sides have already signed the Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (IPPA) during the Philippine National Expo Day at Expo 2020 Dubai in February 2022, and are currently in talks regarding the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)," DTI said in its statement on Thursday.

In terms of regional development, DTI said more slaughterhouses in the Philippines will soon be Halal-certified.

"The Philippine Trade Training Center (PTTC), an attached agency under the DTI, has signed an agreement with entities in Calabarzon for Halal training. More than 100 MSMEs in Marawi are also being prepared to be Halal-certified as part of the economic rebuilding of the Maranao people," DTI noted.



3 DA EXECS FACE RAPS OVER PRICEY ONIONS

By Hector Lawas

JUSTICE Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla has identified three high-ranking officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA) and a group of civilians now facing charges in connection with last year's exorbitant onion price surge.

At a news briefing, Remulla named them as Agriculture Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista, Junibert de Sagun, the Officer-In-Charge of the Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service (AMAS) at the Department of Agriculture, and Gerald Glenn Panganiban, who held the role of Officer-In-Charge at the Bureau of Plant and Industry (BPI).

Civilian individuals from the Bonena Multipurpose Cooperative, represented by Israel Reguyal, Mary Ann dela Rosa, and Victor dela Rosa Jimenez, are also implicated in

the case.

Reguyal, Dela Rosa, and Jimenez are set to face charges for hoarding under Section 5 (1) of RA 7581, also known as The Price Act, in addition to allegations of profiteering under Section 5 (2) of RA 7581, and falsification of private documents under Art. 272 of the Revised Penal Code.

The three government officials, on the other hand, are confronted with charges for violating Section 3(e) of Republic Act No. 3019, commonly referred to as The Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act.

Simultaneously, they are facing an administrative case for perceived inadequacy and incompetence in performing their official duties, as outlined in the Revised Administrative Code of 1987.

The graft charges may also be forwarded to the Office of the Ombudsman

for further action.

Remulla affirmed the continued investigation into onion smuggling, stressing that the pressure is mounting on the respondents.

He anticipated that warrants of arrest would be issued against the civilians once formal complaints are filed in court. "So tuloy tuloy po ang pag-iimbestiga namin ng onion smuggling. And the noose tightening," Remulla stated.

Meanwhile, Senior Deputy State Prosecutor Richard Anthony Fadullon confirmed the conclusion of the Department of Justice's (DOJ) evaluation of complaints filed by the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI).

A regular preliminary investigation is expected to commence shortly.

"The cases have already been evaluated and now ready for filing for the conduct of preliminary investigation," he said.



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Halal industry plan seen generating P230B in investment, 120,000 jobs

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said that the National Halal Strategy it plans to launch is expected to generate P230 billion worth of investment and 120,000 jobs within five years.

"Halal as a way of life is not only for the Muslims. It is increasingly being recognized by

many non-Muslim consumers worldwide because of ethical considerations, hygiene, fair trade, and just financing," Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual said in a statement on Thursday.

"By maximizing our potential in the halal industry, together we will help realize the vision

of President Marcos Jr. in gaining more investment, which will mean higher economic activity and more quality jobs, and then a better life for all Filipinos," he added.

The National Halal Strategy is also expected to support the micro-, small- and medium-sized

enterprises in becoming part of the global halal ecosystem.

The DTI will be leading an inter-agency taskforce that will create a roadmap which aims to position the Philippines as a halal-friendly trade and investment hub in the Asia-Pacific. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**



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Well-milled rice prices average P50.69/kg in late Aug.

THE national average retail price for well-milled rice in late August was P50.69 per kilogram (kg), the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said in a report.

Prices rose 8% in the Aug. 15 to 17 period, which the PSA refers to as the second phase of July, compared with prices between Aug. 1 and 5, or the first phase.

The PSA said that the highest retail price was recorded in Zamboanga Peninsula at P54.24 per kg.

At the low end was Western Visayas with well-milled rice prices at P48.84 per kg during the period.

The PSA said that regular-milled rice averaged P45.68 per kg, or 2.64% lower compared to the first phase.



PHILIPPINE STAR/EDD GUMBAN

Northern Mindanao posted the highest average price at P43.32 per kg, while Cagayan Valley was lowest at P37.01 per kg.

The national average retail price for refined sugar was P83.4 per kg.

In the second phase of August, prices in Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon) were the highest at P90.36 per kg. The low was reported in Zamboanga Peninsula at P77.78 per kg.

Brown sugar averaged P83.2 per kg.

The PSA reported that Calabarzon had the highest retail price for brown sugar at P90.36 per kg; while the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao posted the low of P77.85 per kg.

Pork meat with bones averaged P289.51 per kg., with the highest retail price reported in Calabarzon at P311.6 per kg. Central Visayas posted the low of 242.78 per kg. — **Adrian H. Halili**

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POTENTIAL FOR P230B IN INVESTMENTS

GOV'T READIES HALAL INDUSTRY DEV'T STRATEGY

By **Alden M. Monzon**
@AldenMonzonINQ

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) on Thursday said it is set to launch a national strategy to develop the local halal industry, with the aim of generating P230 billion in investments and creating 120,000 jobs in the sector within five years.

The DTI said the plan will address the growing demand for halal products and services from both the Philippines' domestic market and from the 57 countries spanning Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and the Americas, which are members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

"The Philippines plans to expand its participation in the Halal economy by being more active in this multitrillion US-dollar industry that

is growing at a rapid pace," Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual said in a statement.

The trade chief highlighted the growing Muslim population which stands at 1.9 billion today, adding that the global halal market is estimated to reach \$7.7 trillion in market value by 2025.

"By maximizing our potential in the halal industry, together, we will help realize the vision of President Marcos Jr. in gaining more investments, which will mean higher economic activity and more quality jobs, and then a better life for all Filipinos," he said further.

Pascual also said that the halal industry is essential to the government agency's four priorities, which are promoting regional development, attaining food security, upgrading, upskilling, and upsizing micro, small and medium firms. INQ



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We need to support our agriculture industry now if we want a food secure future



AVANT GARDENER
YVETTE TAN

Everybody talks about the need for more young people to consider the agriculture industry as a viable career. Danilo Fausto, president of the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food, Inc (PCAFI), a conglomeration of the different sectors in Philippine agriculture, stated in the organization's general meeting during AgriLink 2023 that "of the 47.35 million employed Filipinos in January 2023, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said 22.2 percent were in agriculture (87.3 percent in agriculture and forestry and 12.7 percent in fishing and aquaculture). With a family of five members, we have around 52.56 million Filipinos dependent on agriculture targeted for slaughter by these so-called economists."

This was said in reference to the Philippine government's continued dependence on importing basic agricultural products instead of bolstering the local agriculture industry. This isn't the policy of a specific administration but an ongoing thing.

"The principles of supply and demand work well in a perfect economic condition.

But with the environment facing the international markets, climate change and geo-political conditions, we should be prudent enough and think that our basic staple should not be relegated to outsiders. We should endeavor hard to have food autonomy specially for our staple commodities. And we cannot achieve this if we keep on giving incentives and encouragement on imports," Fausto continued.

This lack of support isn't just felt by folks in the agriculture industry, but those outside it too, whether they know it or not. The aging of our agriculture practitioners and the refusal of young people to enter the industry can only be detrimental for the future of the Philippines. But Filipinos don't tend to think long-term.

"There is a need to provide support to our young would-be agripreneurs, like providing them with financial incentives, grants, and subsidies as they enter the agribusiness sector. This can help alleviate the initial financial

barriers. Guide them to institutions that offer financial support, grants, or low-interest loans to young individuals who want to start their own agricultural ventures," he added.

Support is important, as there are actually young people who are in or who want to enter the agriculture industry. I was able to talk to two of them when I visited the Bukidnon Integrated Coffee Center (BICC) to hear about Nescafe'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.

Part of the project involves the coffee brand partnering with four Mindanao state institutions to identify 400 beneficiary students, prioritizing children of farmers in agriculture-related courses to be awarded ₱25,000 each to fund their academic requirements.

Queenie Subasco, daughter of a coffee farmer and a beneficiary studying agriculture at Sultan Kudarat State University, said in Tagalog: "I was convinced to (study) agriculture because the number of agriculture students is decreasing and I wanted to show them that [working in] agriculture has a lot of benefits and opportunities waiting."

When asked why young people don't want to go into agriculture nowadays, she said: "Students nowadays choose nursing, education, criminology. They don't see the value of agriculture. They don't see how much the country needs agriculture [practitioners]" adding: "The youth think working in agriculture is dirty. That it has no goal and that studying agriculture is lowly."

An Cristie Tangcalagan, an administrative aide in

the Department of Agriculture Misamis Oriental and an agriculture graduate, added in Taglish: "...in my perspective, we have related farming with poverty, sadly. I am the granddaughter of farmers. Both on my father's and mother's side, both my grandparents are farmers. They [were] really raised in poverty... I relate to farmers and where I was growing up... the farming lands [were] converted into subdivisions, which is very frustrating... [But] We are also fighting [back]. Maybe in your view, we are giving up on agriculture but no, we are still here, a new breed of farmers and agriculturists, and we're really fighting for it. It's just so sad that [the negatives] are what's being highlighted, but we are really trying our best."

It's heartening to hear that there are young people who still want to enter the agriculture industry, but this does not remove the fact that their numbers are dwindling. If we want a strong agriculture industry, all practitioners, not just the youth, should be encouraged through increased wages and earnings, supportive legislation and infrastructure, and a favorable business climate.

Providing cheap food for Filipinos while ensuring agriculture practitioners earn an adequate income (they should earn enough to at least be considered middle class) is a hard balance, but it must be achieved if we are to keep people in the agriculture industry and secure our country's food security, sovereignty, and justice.

As Fausto said: "Providing cheap food for the consumers and fighting inflation through imports is a short-term solution. Producing our own food requirements, although a much longer process, will be more sustainable for our people."



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NEWS BRIEF

Palay bumagsak presyo sa halos ₱20 per kilo

Bumaba ang farmgate price ng palay ng 10% sa P19.90 per kilo nitong Setyembre mula sa P22.16 na naitala noong Agosto, ayon sa Philippine Statistics Authority kahapon.

Kung ikukumpara naman sa Agosto 2022, mas mahal ang presyo ng palay ng 17% dahil P17.06 per kilo lamang ito noong nakaraang taon.

Setyembre nag-umpisa mag-ani ng palay ang mga magsasaka kaya't bumaba ang presyo nito hindi tulad noong Agosto nang matumal pa ang mga ani.

Paliwanag ni Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) Executive Director Jayson Cainglet, ito na kasi ang peak o kasagsagan ng anihan at marami na ang stocks kaya bumaba ang presyo ng palay.

Bukod sa konti lang ang ani, kaunti rin umano ang stock ng bigas sa bansa noong Agosto na hindi naaksiyunan ng mga economic manager kaya't sumirit ang presyo ng bigas at sumipa ang inflation rate.

(Eileen Mencias)



Raw sugar futures prices slip; robusta coffee, cocoa also fall to six-month low

LONDON — Raw sugar futures on ICE were lower on Wednesday with the strong pace of production in Center-South Brazil weighing on the market, while robusta coffee prices were hovering just above the prior session's six-month low.

SUGAR

March raw sugar was down 0.7% at 26.87 cents per pound (lb) at 1350 GMT.

Brazilian mills produced 3.36 million tons of sugar in the second half of September, nearly double the amount seen this time last year and above analysts' expectations.

December white sugar eased 0.1% to \$719.10 a metric ton.

India's government is set to restrict sugar exports after poor monsoon rains, broadcaster ET Now reported on Wednesday, citing agencies.

COFFEE

January robusta coffee fell 0.1% to \$2,243 a metric ton after setting a six-month low of \$2,223 on Tuesday.

Dealers said the harvest was underway in top robusta producer Vietnam, while Brazil robusta exports are running well above last season's pace.

December arabica coffee also eased 0.1% to \$1.4740 per lb.

COCOA

March London cocoa fell 0.5% to £2,957 a metric ton.

Dealers said the market continued to consolidate after climbing to a 46-year high in mid-September.

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 0.55% to \$3,455 a ton. — **Reuters**

Malaya Business Insight

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Soybeans, wheat flat

CANBERRA- Chicago soybean futures held near 22-month lows on Thursday as an upgrade to Argentina's projected harvest raised expectations of plentiful supplies from South America, with traders shrugging off an expected downgrade for the US crop outlook.

Wheat was unchanged as a flood of cheap grain from Russia continued to dominate the market, keeping prices close to last month's three-year low.

Corn futures rose slightly.

The Rosario grains exchange said Argentina's soybean harvest could reach 50 million metric

tons, having earlier predicted 48 million tons.

Argentine production adds to an estimated 154.6 million ton harvest in Brazil, the largest ever. Brazil is the world's biggest soybean exporter and expects an even bigger crop next year.

Shipments from South America are challenging US exports, said Arlan Suderman, an analyst at brokerage StoneX.

"Brazil saw a bin-buster this past year ... soybean shipments from Brazil are slowing, but they're still above levels typically seen this time of year," he said. - Reuters