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Unforced errors

One can only shake one's head in disbelief at the growing number of unforced errors on the part of the current administration. It shows lack of capability as well as a reluctance to hear the views of those who are able to contribute good, even if contrary, insights in crafting vital decisions.

Google defines "unforced error": (in sports, especially tennis) a mistake in play that is attributed to one's own failure rather than to the skill or effort of one's opponent or simply, a careless or foolish mistake as in: "how can he portray himself as a leader-in-waiting when he makes that sort of unforced error?"

DEMAND AND SUPPLY



BOO CHANCO

There are a number of unforced errors now after almost a year and a half. But two stand out: rice price cap and Maharlika fund.

On the rice cap, the President lifted EO 39 or the retail price cap after a month. It is an admission of failure to keep rice at P41/kg for regular-milled and P45/kg for well-milled rice.

Indeed, data from the Philippine Statistics Authority indicate the average retail prices of rice in August before the price cap was P43.30/kg for regular milled and P47.63 for well-milled. In September, the price of regular milled was P47.50/kg and for well-milled it was P52.70/kg.

PSA also found out that only 21.8 percent of the rice varieties were sold at the government mandated prices. Former NEDA Sec. Winnie Monsod wrote that this was the basis of the statement of PSA head Dennis Claire Mapa that there was "prevalent non-compliance of (by) rice retailers."

Former DA Usec. Fermin Adriano wrote: "the PSA reported that our inflation rate significantly rose to 6.1 percent in September from 5.3 percent in August. This is way above the government's inflation target for this year at two to four percent."

"The major driver of the higher inflation rate was expectedly "food and non-alcoholic beverages" which registered almost a double-digit figure at 9.7 percent. More than half (61percent) of the 6.1 percent inflation rate in September was accounted for by this commodity group. Rice inflation was the main contributory factor to food inflation as it rose to 17.9 percent in September from only 8.7 percent in August."

The administration argued that the data PSA used when it conducted its survey to measure the monthly inflation rate coincided with the time when rice prices were just about to decline due to the imposition of the rice price cap. Thus, data derived then still yielded higher rice prices.

But Dr. Adriano commented: "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 the 'special' and 'premium' rice varieties which are better tasting, but more expensive and were not under the price cap. Seeing this, retailers switched to selling the higher-priced rice varieties as they are easy to sell and they will not lose money since these are not under the price cap."

We, the taxpayers, paid the cost of the price cap's failure. The President ordered the DSWD to help the small retailers impacted negatively by EO 39. So, P15,000 was given to each of 24,400 sari-sari store owners and micro-retailers (pre-validated by the DTI) under DSWD's Sustainable Livelihood Program. That's about P366 million.

Then, after farmers complained that the farmgate buying price of palay (unhusked) went down after the rice cap, the NFA Council (with The President as chairperson) increased NFA's farmgate buying price of palay P3 to 4 pesos. This was to compensate the farmers for the drop in farmgate prices they experienced as a result of the price ceilings. No official figures are available but estimated cost to taxpayers is around P4 billion.

On Maharlika... economists in one of my Viber groups were quick to react with "we told you so" comments as soon as Landbank and DBP sought BSP relief from usual regulations on capital adequacy after turning in their contributions to the fund.

BSP Governor Eli Remolona said the regulatory relief being asked for by the banks was due to the capital infusion they provided to MIF, which "may make them non-compliant with our capital requirements." Landbank and DBP remitted P50 billion and P25 billion, respectively, to the Bureau of the Treasury for the initial capital of the MIF.

Under the BSP's regulations, universal banks are required to have a minimum capitalization of P3 billion up to P20 billion, depending on the number of branches. Landbank has an authorized capital stock of P200 billion, while DBP has an authorized capital of P35 billion.

Another admission that the mistake is starting to bite is Malacañang's issuance of an EO that adjusted the percentage of net earnings to be declared and remitted by Landbank for Calendar Year 2022 from 50 percent to zero.

Said one ex-banker: "If DBP has done its proper homework, their Chief Risk Officer and Compliance Officer should have already RED FLAGGED this matter to the full board, and alerted them that giving the full contribution outright would cut their capital ratios drastically."

"It is also not factual for DBP president CEO Michael de Jesus to say that their request for regulatory relief is a "preemptive move." A preemptive move is when you do something in anticipation of an event still to happen. But when DBP remitted the P25 billion to MIF last September, that event already happened and DBP is already below the minimum capital requirement! That's CATCH UP, not preemption."

Said another ex-banker: "DBP and LBP making large investments in MIF, which has no track record or clear investment plan, and which could pose systemic risk are papered over by the sovereign guarantees, which are also problematic. Without sovereign guarantees, the Monetary Board should appreciate that these moves by the LBP and DBP, which require regulatory capital relief and exemption from dividends to the government, are unsafe and unsound."

When unforced errors are complicated by hubris, things could get worse. Humility and honesty should help.

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Sugar retail, mill gate prices out of sync — millers

SUGAR millers said retail prices are not reflecting the decline of mill gate prices for raw sugar, and questioned why no corresponding “adjustments” have emerged for sugar sold to the public.

While acknowledging the typical lag time for retail prices to adjust to movements in the mill gate price, Philippine Sugar Millers Association (PSMA) Executive Director Jesus L. Barrera said in a statement on Tuesday that “there should be market adjustments in the retail prices.” “Otherwise, the drop in farm gate prices is

not trickling down and benefiting consumers.”

PSMA said that the average trading prices for milled sugar declined to slightly above P2,500 per 50-kilogram bag (LKg) on Oct. 12, with one mill selling at P2,700/LKg.

“Overall, our mill gate prices in the first six weeks of the new season are way below (those of) last season,” it added.

Citing the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA), PSMA said mill gate prices last year averaged P3,021.04/LKg and

peaked at P3,798.24/LKg. The price was P3,000/Lkg at the end of last year.

“It is our sugar producers, particularly our small farmers, that are feeling the squeeze from inflation and lower prices especially now that they are just starting to harvest their crop,” Mr. Barrera said.

Headline inflation accelerated for a second straight month to 6.1% in September from 5.3% in August amid a surge in food and transport costs, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

The SRA has said that raw sugar was trading below its P3,000 per bag target, with prices between P2,500 and P2,700 per bag.

SRA Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona called trading abnormal, with prices fluctuating by P100 or more on a weekly basis.

He added that the oversupply of sugar was a main factor in the decline of trading prices.

The SRA also delayed the release of about 150,000 metric tons of imported sugar to ensure fairer prices for farmers. — **Adrian H. Halili**



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NDA, Malaysia's Farm Fresh tie-up to breed dairy cattle

THE National Dairy Authority (NDA) said it entered into a partnership with Malaysia's Farm Fresh Bhd. to set up a dairy cattle breeding farm.

In a statement, the NDA said that Farm Fresh is looking for a 200-400 hectare site for the farm.

"Farm Fresh is actively collaborating with the Philippine government to materialize a significant \$20-million investment, primarily focused on cattle breeding for milk production," NDA said.

The proposed farm will hold 3,000 head of cattle, to be managed by the company's Philippine subsidiary, Farm Fresh, Inc.

The farm investment will be paired with a 6,000 square-meter dairy processing facility, which will also take in the output of dairy farms, raising the possibility of raising farm incomes, NDA Administrator Gabriel L. Lagamayo said.

Farm Fresh has said that it is considering locations in Batangas and Laguna for the breeding farm, with operations to start by 2028.

The company also owns a 6,000-sq.m. site in San Simon, Pampanga, on which the \$5-million processing facility will rise.

"The Philippines and Malaysia exhibit remarkable similarities in terms of topography and climate. We see tremendous potential in the Philippines," Farm Fresh, Founder Tuan Ee Loi said.

Farm Fresh operates five dairy farms in Malaysia and one in Australia. The company also has two processing facilities in Malaysia and one in Australia. — **Adrian H. Halili**



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Expect lower sugar retail prices, consumers told

By **DANESSA RIVERA**

Consumers should see lower retail prices of sugar soon to reflect the drop in millsite prices in the current crop year, according to the Philippine Sugar Millers Association (PSMA).

In a statement yesterday, PSMA executive director Jesus Barrera said crop year 2023-2024 started with lower millgate prices of sugar so there should be "downward adjustments in retail sugar prices."

"There is a lag time for the retail market to mirror lower millgate prices as the sugar moves through the supply pipeline, but nevertheless, there should be market adjustments in the retail prices. Otherwise, the drop in farmgate prices do not trickle down and benefit consumers," Barrera said.

Based on data from the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA), millgate prices last crop year averaged P3,021.04 per 50-kilogram (LKg) bag

on Sept. 4 and peaked at P3,798.24 by Oct. 2 of the same year.

Mill site prices closed at P3,000 per LKg last year.

For the current season, SRA data showed the average millsite price stood at P2,825.35 per LKg on Sept. 10 and further went down to P2,702.73 on Sept. 17.

Sugar price at millsite on Oct. 12 showed farmgate average prices sliding to slightly above P2,500 per LKg with only one mill selling at P2,700 per bag.

Overall, the PSMA said that millgate prices in the first six weeks of the current crop year are way below than the last season.

Barrera said millgate prices of sugar dropped amidst an uptick in inflation in September.

The Philippine Statistics Authority recently reported that headline inflation accelerated to 6.1 percent last month compared to 5.3 percent in August, primarily due to a surge in

food and fuel prices.

"It is our sugar producers, particularly our small farmers, that are feeling the squeeze from inflation and lower prices, especially now that they are just starting to harvest their crop," the PSMA said.

Last week, sugar planters in Bacolod urged government to timely calibrate the importation of refined sugar to protect the local industry as the milling season just started but farmgate prices are already depressed.

SRA board planters' representative David Andrew Sanson said the right time to import is after the milling season.

For this crop year 2023-2024, the milling season started on Sept. 1 and will end by April or May.

Sanson said farmgate prices are dictated by market forces, so when there is more than enough supply in the market, it depresses farmgate prices.

— With Romina Cabrera



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Extension of tariff reduction bucked

REDUCED most favored nation (MFN) tariff rates on rice, corn and pork has not been beneficial to consumers and even worsened the plight of local producers, according to the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG).

SINAG called on the government to reject proposals to extend further the duty reduction ahead of the hearing of the Tariff Commission on Monday.

"Three years of reduced tariffs on rice, pork and corn have not resulted to any significant decrease in retail prices. (Prices) even went up. Our experience with tariff reduction is crystal clear; it has not benefitted the farmers, it has not favored the consumers and resulted in revenue losses to the government," SINAG said in a statement yesterday.

"Only a few privileged import-

ers and favored traders are the true beneficiaries of tariff reduction," the group added.

SINAG also said there is no shortage of the products at the moment.

Executive Order (EO) 10 issued last year extended the lower MFN tariff rates on pork, corn, rice and coal until December 31 this year to stabilize supply and prices.

With EO 10, duty rates on pork for in quota shipments were maintained at 15 percent and 25 percent for out quota shipments until the end of the year.

EO 10 also maintained tariffs of in quota and out quota rice to 35 percent and placed corn tariff to 5 percent for in quota and to 15 percent for out quota until the end of 2023.

The policy also maintained the zero tariff on coal beyond the end

of the year but will be subject to a semestral review after the said period.

Monitoring by the DA on public markets in the National Capital Region as of Monday showed the price of local well-milled rice is between P45 and P48 per kg; and regular milled ranged from P41 to P45 per kg.

The price of imported well milled rice is at P45 to P48 per kg and imported regular milled is at P43 per kg.

Imported rice ranged from P53 to P60 for special variety and P52 to P58 for premium.

For local rice, special variety was at P54 to P62 per kg and premium at P47 to P60 per kg.

Pork kasim was also at P260 to P330 per kg while pork liempo was at P290 to P400 per kg. -*Jed Macapagal*



Sugar prices seen easing

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Philippine Sugar Millers Association (PSMA) expects the retail price of sugar to be pulled down soon by the current lower mill gate prices.

"Given the lower mill gate prices of sugar at the start of the current crop year 2023-2024, which started in September 1, there should be downward adjustments in retail sugar prices," said Jesus Barrera, PSMA executive director, in a statement.

However, Barrera said "there is a lag time for the retail market to mirror lower mill gate prices as the sugar moves through the supply pipeline but nevertheless, there should be market adjustments in the retail prices. Otherwise, the drop in farm gate prices do not trickle down and benefit consumers."

Citing data from the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA), PSMA said mill gate prices last crop year reached an average of P3,021.04 per 50-kilogram bag (LKg) on Sept. 4, 2022, and peaked at P3,798.24 per LKg by Oct. 2, 2022, with mill site prices closing at P 3,000 per LKg.

PSMA said for the current season, average mill gate prices have gone down to P2,825.35 on September 10 and slightly went down to P2,702.73 per LKg on September 17.

The group added sugar price at mill site on October 12 shows farm gate average prices sliding to slightly above P2,500 per LKg with only one mill selling at P2,700 per bag.

"Overall, our mill gate prices in the first six weeks of the new season are way below than last season... It is our sugar producers, particularly our small farmers, that are feeling the squeeze from inflation and lower prices especially now that they are just starting to harvest their crop," Barrera added.

Earlier, SRA ordered the suspension of the reclassification, distribution and disposal of imported sugar so as not to depress local prices during the ongoing local milling season.

Based on the Department of Agriculture's monitoring of public markets in the National Capital Region, prevailing retail price as of Monday ranges from P82 to P110 per kg for refined sugar, P79 to P95 per kg for washed sugar and P70 to P95 per kg for brown sugar.



Prevailing retail price as of Monday ranges from P82 to P110 per kg for refined sugar, P79 to P95 per kg for washed sugar and P70 to P95 per kg for brown sugar. (PNA Photo)



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Sugar prices seen dropping

RETAIL prices of sugar should go down in relation to the lower mill gate prices at the start of the current crop year, the Philippine Sugar Millers Association (PSMA) said.

PSMA added that it might take a while for the retail market to mirror lower mill gate prices but there should be changes on prices in the market.

"Given the lower mill gate prices of sugar at the start of the current crop year 2023-2024, there should be downward adjustments in retail sugar prices," said Jesus Barrera, PSMA executive director.

Data from the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) showed that mill gate prices during the last crop year reached an average of P3,021.04 per 50 kilograms (kg) on Sept. 4, 2022, and reached the peak at P3,798.24 per 50 kg by Oct. 2, 2022.

"There is a lag time for the retail market to mirror lower mill gate prices as the sugar moves through the supply pipeline, but nevertheless, there should be market adjustments in the

retail prices," said Barrera.

"Otherwise, the drop in farmgate prices do not trickle down and benefit consumers," he added.

For the current season, the average mill gate price stood at P2,825.35 per 50 kg on September 10 and slightly went down to P2,702.73 per 50 kg by September 17.

Sugar prices at the mill site on October 12, meanwhile, showed that average farmgate prices slightly exceeded P2,500 per 50-kg bag, with only one mill selling at P2,700 per bag.

"Overall, our mill gate prices in the first six weeks of the new season are way below than last season," said Barrera.

He also pointed out that mill gate prices of sugar dropped amid an uptick in inflation in September.

The Philippine Statistics Authority said that headline inflation accelerated to 6.1 percent in September 2023 compared to 5.3 percent in August, primarily due to a surge in food and fuel prices.

"It is our sugar produc-

ers, particularly our small farmers, that are feeling the squeeze from inflation and lower prices, especially now that they are just starting to harvest their crop," Barrera said.

The SRA announced that it 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 50-kg bag.

SRA Administrator Pablo Luis Azcona said 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 per bag 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.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



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PSA reports drop in price of rice in Sept.

By XANDER DAVE CEBALLOS

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that the average price of well-milled rice dropped in mid-September but still exceeded the government-mandated cap of ₱45.

Based on PSA latest price situation report, a kilogram of well-milled rice at the national level amounted to an average retail price of ₱51.77 during the second phase of the month from Sept. 15 to 17.

In the first phase, before the rice cap was implemented on Sept. 5, the average retail price of well-milled rice had an average retail price of ₱53.19.

While the rice price decreased by 2.7 percent in the second phase, it was still higher by 2.1 percent compared to the ₱50.69 average retail price of well-milled rice recorded in the second phase of August.

Among the country's regions, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) registered the highest average retail price of well-milled rice at ₱57.03 per kilo, while the lowest average retail price was registered in Region XII at ₱47.39 per kilogram during the second phase

of September.

President Marcos lifted the rice price ceiling last Oct. 4.

Meanwhile, the country's rice stocks also swelled to 1.632 million metric tons as of Aug. 1.

Likewise, it also declined by 9.5 percent compared to the previous month's level of 1.80 million metric tons.

Rice stocks in National Food Authority depositories and household sector also saw declines of 62.1 percent and 19.6 percent as of Aug. 1, respectively, as opposed to the stocks recorded in the same period a year earlier.

However, rice stocks in the commercial sector saw a significant increase of 33.6 percent during the month compared to the inventory in August last year.

The rice stocks in August are also lower compared to the inventory in July, with NFA depositories decreasing by 16.3 percent, household sector by 16.1 percent, and commercial sector by four percent.

Of this month's total rice stocks, 57.9 percent were from the commercial sector, 39.0 percent were from the households, and 3.1 percent were from NFA depositories.



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₱10-B budget for imported chemical fertilizer wasteful, harmful — Villar

By HANNAH TORREGOZA

Senator Cynthia Villar on Tuesday, Oct. 17 vehemently opposed the ₱10-billion allocation for the importation of chemical fertilizer, and urged the government to promote the use of organic fertilizers instead which is more cost effective.

Villar expressed her opposition during the Senate Finance subcommittee's hearing on the proposed budget of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

"Gigil na gigil ako dun sa (I am ► 10

very upset over this) ₱10-billion budget for the importation of inorganic fertilizer. Hindi ko ma-imagine gagasta tayo ng ₱10 billion for inorganic fertilizer na masama naman sa soil natin (I cannot imagine that we will spend ₱10 billion for inorganic fertilizer which is harmful to our own soil)," Villar said during the hearing.

The senator noted that inorganic fertilizers have harmful effects to the country's soil which is already 38 percent degraded.

"Ang dami nating basura (we have so much waste)—kitchen and garden waste comprise 50 percent of our waste. Nagkalat lang yan...Imbes na mag-import, eh di linisin na lang natin yung ating kitchen and garden waste. Gawin nating organic fertilizer at libre sa mga farmers natin (These wastes are everywhere. So instead of importing, let's just clean our kitchen and garden waste. Let's turn these

into organic fertilizer and make it free to our farmers)," the senator added.

Given the amount of waste in the country, Villar said the government should invest in composting machines just like what she did in Las Piñas City, where they are able to produce organic fertilizers and give it free to farmers.

"We saved ₱300 million a year for waste management because we recycle our waste," she pointed out.

Villar also berated the Bureau of Soil and Water Management for opposing her suggestion of investing in composting machines.

"Bakit ayaw niyo? Itigil ko daw. Gigil na gigil ako roon sa ₱10 billion. Kasi hindi naman kailangan 'yun eh at mas maganda pa ang soil. Binibigyan kita ng ₱2 billion, ayaw mo? Para mamigay ka ng composting machine, ayaw mo? Lahat sila nanghihingi sa akin ng pera ikaw lang ang binibigyan ko. Kasi gusto ko matanggal yung ₱10

billion para sa pag-import ng chemical fertilizers (Why do you not want it? They said I should stop. I'm furious at the ₱10 billion. Because we don't need it, and soil is much better if its organic. I was giving you ₱2 billion but you don't want it? That's supposed to buy and distribute composting machines, you still don't like it? Everyone else is asking for budget, but I just want to give it to you. Because I want to get rid of that ₱10 billion budget to import chemical fertilizers)," she pointed out. "Nasa-shock ako dun sa (I am shocked at the) ₱10 billion para sa importation ng fertilizer. Tinotolerate ko kayo doon, but ano lang yun (that is just), temporary lang yun. Yung importation natin is temporary. We used that to cover yung shortage natin but the permanent solution would be that we produce our own."

The DA has a proposed ₱167.458-billion budget for next year 2024.

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P10-B budget kinontra...

Sen. Villar: Imported organic fertilizer, nakasasama sa lupa

Dahil sa nakakasama sa lupa, maring tinutulan ni Sen. Cynthia Villar ang panukalang P10 bilyon budget para sa pagbili ng imported na organic fertilizer.

Sa budget hearing ng Senate Committee on Finance na pinamumunuan ni Sen. Sonny Angara para sa P167 bilyon budget ng Department of Agriculture (DA) at attached agencies nito para sa 2024, sinabi ni Villar na gigil na gigil siya sa P10 bilyon budget para sa pag-import ng organic fertilizer na masama naman ang epekto sa lupa.

Giit ng senador, marami naman puwedeng pagkunan ng organic fertilizer tulad na lamang sa kusina at garden waste na kanilang ginagawa sa Las Piñas City kung saan nakakagawa sila ng 89 toneladang organic fertilizer kada buwan o isang tonelada sa bawat composting machine.

Nakakatipid umano sila ng P300 milyon kada taon para sa waste management dahil narecycle nila ang mga dumi sa halip na mag-import ng fertilizer.

Kinastigo rin ni Villar ang Bureau of Soil and Water Management dahil sa pagtutol nito sa kanyang panukala na mag-invest sa composting machines.

Sa tingin pa ng senador, pansamantala lang ang importasyon ng inorganic fertilizer at ang pinaka permanente ay ang solusyon na gumawa ng sariling pataba na organic at hindi nakakasira sa lupa. (Gemma Garcia)



La Union increases NFA palay buying to P24/kilo

MALASIQUI, Pangasinan – The La Union provincial government, in coordination with the National Food Authority (NFA) and the Department of Agriculture, is offering an additional procurement price of PHP5 per kilo to encourage farmers to sell their palay harvest to the NFA.

In a phone interview with the Philippine News Agency, NFA-La Union statistician Maricel Baliton said PHP5 will be added to the PHP19 per kilo base buying price, bringing it to PHP24 a kilo.

"We hope the farmers will prioritize selling their harvest to the NFA," she said, adding the new price will make it competitive against the buying price of private traders ranging from PHP20 to PHP25 per kilo.

Baliton said they target to procure some 270,000 50-kilo bags of rice from farmers for this second semester, or from September to December this year.

Aside from the top-up price that is under the Palay Marketing Assistance

Program for Legislators and Local Government Units, the NFA is also offering up to PHP4 per kilo buffer stock incentive for clean and dry quality palay.

Baliton said there are around 68,000 to 70,000 farmers in the province although not all are expected to sell their harvest since some are just planting for their families' consumption.

In a press statement, La Union Governor Raphaelle Ortega-David acknowledged the importance of supporting the farming community that plays an integral role in the province's economic growth.

"She believes that empowering and investing in farmers are key steps toward realizing La Union's vision of becoming the Heart of Agri-Tourism in Northern Luzon by 2025," the La Union Provincial Information Office said.

It said the province has secured a PHP20 million budget that will enable more farmers to benefit from the increased rice price premium. PNA



DTI aims to create warehouse database amid agri products smuggling, hoarding

By ANDREA E. SAN JUAN

[@andreasanjuan](#)

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) is aiming to establish a database for warehouses across the country under the three-year logistics action agenda to enable the government to monitor goods stored inside warehouses to combat smuggling of agricultural goods.

Trade and Industry Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual said the country currently does not have a "registry" of warehouses. With this, he pointed out the need to develop such, as it is difficult to collect data from each municipality.

"Part of the three-year food logistics

action agenda that we developed is the establishment of a warehouse registry," Pascual said in a televised interview on Monday.

The Trade chief said the objective of this database is to "know where the warehouses are and what they are for, and hopefully in due time we will also be able to track what's inside the warehouse."

Pascual said there has been a finding in some cases where a number of warehouses could be raided because a lot of products are stored within the warehouses.

"That has been the finding in some cases or you know it's because they're keeping supply like it's cold storage for

six months because there's only a one-time harvest and you have to store the harvest and sell over time," the Trade chief noted.

Pascual also agreed that this has to be understood better by the public.

The three-year food logistics action agenda has been developed by DTI in collaboration with the Departments of Agriculture, Transportation, Public Works and Highways and Information and Communications and other partners.

It is in compliance with President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s vision to make the Philippines a logistics hub in Asia. Marcos approved this plan in August.

According to Pascual, this is a program developed by the DTI to mitigate

inflation on a "medium-term" basis, particularly designed to cut down the number of intermediaries between farmers and consumers.

This plan also involves the setting up of food hubs and making the country's logistics system more efficient and having enough cold chain storages for agricultural products.

The logistics action agenda also underscored the intensified drive against hoarding, smuggling, overstaying food imports, and the monitoring of warehouses or cold storage facilities. **(Full story here: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/08/31/three-year-food-logistics-plan-also-seeks-to-bolster-drive-vs-hoarders/>)**

editorial

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An efficient agri system helps PHL to save water

RICE, the staple food of Filipinos, is a crop that requires huge amounts of water. The International Rice Research Institute estimated that the production of a kilo of unmilled rice would require an average of around 2,500 liters of water. The volume of water would depend on other factors, including soil properties and weather, but it is widely recognized that water inputs to rice fields are 2 to 3 times those of other major cereals.

The production of rice and other crops require water on a regular basis. According to the United Nations, agriculture accounts for 72 percent of global freshwater withdrawals. Unfortunately, the UN noted that only 2.5 percent of water is fresh, suitable for drinking, agriculture, and most industrial uses.

The increase in global population and rapid urbanization are putting a stress on freshwater, a resource that is finite. Despite the increasing competition for this crucial resource, the world continues to waste vast amounts of food. According to a UN study, around 13 percent of food produced is lost between harvest and retail, while an estimated 17 percent of total global food production is wasted in households, in the food service and in retail all together.

The Food Waste Index Report 2021 published by the UN Environment Programme found that in nearly every country that has measured food waste, it was substantial regardless of income level. The report noted that most of the waste comes from households, which discard 11 percent of total food available at the consumption stage of the supply chain. Food services and retail outlets waste 5 percent and 2 percent, respectively.

Households, food services and retail outlets continue to waste food at a time when 821 million people are hungry and 3 billion are unable to afford a healthy diet. It happens while nations are struggling to find other sources of freshwater and implement measures that will encourage their citizens to save water. The wasting of food did not stop even when institutions, such as UN, warned that hunger is on the rise and most nations will not be able meet the Sustainable Development Goal of eliminating it by 2030.

It would do well for the Philippine government to heed the call of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to immediately transform its agrifood system. **(See, "Current agrifood models wasteful, unsustainable-FAO," in the BUSINESSMIRROR, October 4, 2023).** We agree with the UN agency that the priorities of nations must be to prevent and reduce food loss and waste at source considering the postharvest losses incurred by Filipino farmers. In rice alone, the Philippines loses some 35 percent of its annual output due to inefficient milling practices.

Aside from increasing food supply, an efficient agrifood system will allow the Philippines to save water. There's an urgent need for the government to work with the private sector and local communities to find ways to produce more food using less water to reduce the stress on a rapidly declining resource.



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ASF breaks out in Tabuk City

BAGUIO CITY — An outbreak of the African Swine Fever (ASF) in several *barangays* of Tabuk City has forced the declaration a State of Animal Health Emergency in the capital of Kalinga province.

Carmen D. Wanas, who heads the City Veterinary Services Office (CVSO), confirmed on Tuesday that the outbreak was declared in a special meeting with members of the city's ASF task force.

Based on CVSO data, 267 hogs have died of ASF in the 13 *barangays* of Tabuk City and that, at present, 46 hogs are stricken with ASF.

Ms. Wanas said a total of 209 hog raisers are affected as a result of the ASF outbreak in the following villages: Dagupan West, New Tanglag, Bulanao Centro, Bulanao Norte, Bulo, Ipil, Gobgob, Naneng, Bagumbayan, Cabaruan, Appas, San Juan, and Agbannawag. — **Artemio A. Dumlao**

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ASF outbreak declared in Tabuk

BAGUIO CITY – A state of animal health emergency due to an African swine fever (ASF) outbreak has been declared in Tabuk City in Kalinga.

City veterinary services office head Carmen Wanas said 267 hogs died due to ASF in 13 barangays.

Wanas said 46 other hogs had been affected by the swine disease.

The affected barangays are Dagupan West, New Tanglag, Bulanao Centro, Bulanao Norte, Bulo, Ipil, Gobgob, Naneng, Bagumbayan, Cabaruan, Appas, San Juan and Agbannawag.

At least 209 hogs raisers were affected.

The ASF task force in Tabuk said an executive order containing the measures to prevent the spread of ASF should be issued.

It said more checkpoints should be put up to prevent the entry and exit of infected hogs.

The task force urged barangay officials to report ASF cases even as it reminded the public to be cautious in buying pork and its by-products.

Last week, a state of calamity was declared in Roxas and Mansalay in Oriental Mindoro after reporting their first cases of ASF.

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

However, SINAG called for more stringent border protection measures to protect the local hog industry.

– Artemio Dumlao



Rice, corn stocks dip in August

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

THE country's rice and corn stocks both posted decreases in August, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported on Tuesday.

In its latest inventory report, the PSA said that the country's rice inventory dropped by 9.5 percent and was estimated at 1.63 million metric tons (MT), lower than the 1.80 million MT posted a month earlier.

On a yearly basis, the figure

reflects an annual decline of 0.1 percent from the 1.63 million MT posted in the same period last year.

Rice stocks held by the National Food Authority declined by 16.3 percent to 50,950 MT compared to the 60,840 MT posted in July.

The rice sector also posted an annual decline by 62.1 percent in relation to August 2022's inventory level of 134,610 MT.

Household's inventory also

dropped by 16.1 percent monthly to 636,410 MT from 758,560 MT. This is also lower by 19.6 percent from last year's 791,550 MT.

Meanwhile, the commercial sector logged 945,100 MT of rice stocks in August, which is 4.0 percent lower from last month's 984,760 MT. The figure was higher by 33.6 percent from the previous year's 707,200 MT rice inventory.

On the other hand, rice stocks

in the commercial sector rose by 21.6 percent to 984,760 MT from 809,830 MT recorded a year earlier. In relation to June's stock level of 848,110 MT, a 16.11-percent increase was recorded.

For local corn inventory, the PSA said this declined by 2.1 percent in the same month and was estimated at 806,680 MT. This was lower relative to July's inventory level of 823,760 MT.

The figure, meanwhile, reflects an increase of 14.5 percent from the 704,460 MT logged in the same period of 2022.

From July's level, corn stocks inventory in the household sector recorded a monthly increase of 4.8 percent and was estimated at 61,400 MT.

The commercial sector, meanwhile, posted a 2.6-percent decline, reaching 745,280 MT in the same month.



18 AGRI SCHOLARS STUCK IN ISRAEL NOW BACK IN PH

STORY BY TONETTE T. OREJAS, JACOB LAZARO AND JEROME ANING

Department of Migrant Workers says 17 overseas workers scheduled to arrive in Manila today, while 78 Filipinos in southern Gaza still awaiting safe passage to Egypt or Israel for repatriation.

A3

FROM A1

By Tonette T. Orejas,
Jacob Lazaro
and Jerome Aning
@Team_Inquirer

Eighteen Filipinos participating in the agriculture internship program of Agrostudies, an international training center in one of the heavily bombed cities in Israel, have returned home safely to their families in Pampanga province on Tuesday.

Many of them looked dazed and sleepless, such as Matthew Lacsina, who said the bombings became more frequent after terrorists entered Ashkelon on Sukkot, a holy day, on Oct. 6.



'CATASTROPHIC' Palestinians remove a body from the rubble of a building after an Israeli strike in the southern city of Khan Yunis on Tuesday. —AFP



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No one among them had fresh wounds or bruises.

Paying for their own plane fare from allowances as farm interns for 11 months on Kfar Silver Campus in Ashkelon, they left via Tel Aviv to Dubai then to Manila.

Pampanga Gov. Dennis Pineda had them fetched from Ninoy Aquino International Airport under the Capitol's Balik-Pinas program for returning overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) since the COVID-19 pandemic.

"My sadness and worry are gone because my son returned home safely," said Leonila Lapuz, a resident of Barangay Lourdes in Candaba town.

Her son Gabriel told reporters he was happy to be reunited with his family.

Their leader, Aldrin Pabate, said the Philippine Embassy in Israel, the Aguman Kapampangan and Tropang Kapampangan led by Marvin Dabu Cuellar, as well as Filipino pastors took them away from the bombings, transferred them to shelters to protect them from "ground infiltrations" by the terrorists.

They were stranded for four days to a week in Tel Aviv until their flight home.

Post-traumatic stress debriefing sessions would be available to these graduates, said Angelina Blanco, chief of the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office.

Blanco said they could also seek employment in the office of the provincial agriculturist.

OFWs coming home

Seventeen other Filipinos from Tel Aviv will be arriving in the Philippines today (Wednesday), with the government promising financial assistance worth P100,000 to each of them.

According to the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), the 17 OFWs were to leave the Middle Eastern coun-

try on Tuesday.

Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (Owwa) Administrator Arnell Ignacio said on Tuesday that the repatriated Filipinos would be receiving cash assistance worth P50,000 from Owwa and another P50,000 from the DMW.

He added that the financial assistance for the returning Filipinos was higher than usual to make up for the high salaries that OFWs in Israel were making.

"They have a lot of expenses that will be left pending now since they just lost their jobs," Ignacio said.

There are 30,000 Filipinos in Israel, most of whom work as caregivers for that country's aging population.

The surprise attack by Hamas on Israel on Oct. 7 resulted in the loss of jobs of several OFWs, especially those located in the southern part of Israel that was targeted by the Palestinian strikes.

According to Undersecretary Eduardo de Vega of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), eight of the arriving Filipinos chose to return since they lost their jobs.

Initially, the first batch of eight Filipinos were supposed to arrive on Oct. 16, but their flight was moved for undisclosed reasons and their trip was combined with that of another batch of nine scheduled to arrive on Wednesday.

Safe passage

There are 131 Filipinos in the Hamas-controlled enclave of Gaza and 78 of them have been moved to the southern part of the strip near the Rafah crossing.

But with no open border yet to Israel and Egypt, they are still waiting when they can leave the war-torn region.

The DFA said it was in talks with both Egypt and Israel to open a humanitarian corridor to provide safe passage for the Filipinos.

Speaking at the Bagong Pil-

ipinas Ngayon news briefing on state television, De Vega said the names of the Filipinos desiring to evacuate Gaza have been submitted to the Egyptian government.

He said the Israeli ambassador told the DFA that the Egyptian government was discussing with Israel the process for the border crossing because both sides did not want Hamas militants to escape to Egypt or to enter Gaza bringing fresh ammunition disguised as humanitarian aid.

"[The Israelis] said it could be any day now that the border crossing will open so our countrymen should be ready and Ambassador [to Jordan and Palestine] Fred Santos has been in touch with our countrymen who are in southern Gaza near the border," the DFA official said.

The undersecretary said the situation of the 78 Filipinos already in southern Gaza was not good, citing one Filipino mother who reported eating stale bread to survive.

He said a Filipino woman who lives in the area sheltered some of the evacuees.

"Hopefully, at least by this weekend, they can enter Egypt already because when they're there the repatriation will be faster," he said.

For the evacuation of foreign nationals, De Vega said there would be a "small corridor" of a few kilometers that people leaving Gaza would take to enter the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt.

The Egyptian immigration authorities would be at the end of the corridor and the DFA was hoping the processing would be quick.

From Sinai, the Filipino evacuees would be fetched by bus from the Philippine Embassy in Cairo for a trip of five to six hours.

The evacuees would be given shelter in Cairo while the embassy staff books flights for them.

A5

FROM A3

In Congress, lawmakers on Tuesday pushed for scholarships for the children and other dependents of the three OFWs killed in the ongoing war between Israeli forces and Hamas militants.

Ang Probinsyano Rep. Alfred delos Santos pressed the Commission on Higher Education and state universities and colleges to find ways to include the children of Angelyn Peralta Aguirre, Paul Vincent Castelv and Loreta Alacre, the three OFWs who died in Gaza.

Bagong Henerasyon Rep. Bernadette Herrera said she would nominate the dependents of the three OFWs to become grantees of the Congressional Migrant Workers Scholarship Program under Owwa. —WITH A REPORT FROM JULIE M. AURELIO INQ



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Cocoa hits new 46-year high; arabica coffee consolidates

NEW YORK — London cocoa futures rose to the highest prices in 46 years on Monday as the market remains supported by the outlook of limited supplies, while arabica coffee slipped but remained well above last week's nine-month lows.

COCOA: March London cocoa settled up £69 or 2.3% at £3,109 per metric ton, after earlier hitting a peak of £3,123 per ton, the highest since 1977.

The market remains underpinned by supply woes as a third consecutive global deficit is widely forecast for the 2023/2024 season (October-September).

The International Cocoa Organization, however, said an estimated deficit of 100,000 tons for the 2021/2022 season might be exaggerated as much cocoa was hoarded in Ivory Coast and Ghana, and will appear in the current season's tally.

December New York cocoa rose \$92 or 2.6% to \$3,591 a ton.

COFFEE: December arabica coffee settled down 0.75 cent or 0.5% at \$1.5415 per pound, having hit a 3-1/2-week high of \$1.5615.

Dealers said farmers in top producer Brazil were in no rush to sell as they have few current cash flow needs. — **Reuters**



Soybeans rise

SINGAPORE- Chicago soybean futures inched higher on Tuesday, with concerns over planting delays in Brazil supporting prices, although gains were limited by a rapidly advancing US harvest.

Corn and wheat prices eased.

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) rose 0.1 percent to \$12.87 a bushel, as of 0254 GMT. Corn gave up 0.3 percent to \$4.88-3/4 a bushel and wheat lost 0.3 percent to \$5.75-3/4 a bushel.

Brazil's 2023/24 soybean planting had reached as of last Thursday 17 percent of the expected area, agribusiness consultancy AgRural said on Monday, losing

steam as farmers struggle with adverse weather conditions.

The focus of the soybean market is shifting to South American planting season as US harvest is likely to be completed in coming weeks.

Significant soybean planting delays in Brazil, the world's biggest exporter, are likely to support prices.

In the United States, farmers had harvested nearly two thirds of their soybean crop and 45 percent of their corn by Sunday, while soybean condition ratings improved, according to weekly data from the US Department of Agriculture. - *Reuters*