

CLIPPINGS FOR WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 08, 2022

A. SEC. FTL Jr. QUOTED

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

**DA: Enough food supply for holidays
A full-time DA chief**

MANILA BULLETIN

New DA chief favors production over importation

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT

Editorial: Just being forthright

ABANTE TONITE

NEDA suko sa P20 per kilong bigas

REMATE

Editorial: I-seguro presyo ng mga bilingin sa pasko

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL

New DA chief to feel pulse of farmers, fishermen

B. DA FAMILY

MANILA BULLETIN

Looking forward to early passage of 2024 nat'l budget

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT

**PAFMI to govt: Extend reduced tariff on corn
NIA signs P1.94B contract to build Bulacan dam
NEDA backs new agri chief: P20/ kilo rice not yet feasible
PH clinches \$600M purchase deals at CIIE**

BUSINESS MIRROR

Govt readies measures for sectors amid easing inflation

PILIPINO STAR NGAYON

DA-ATI demo farm

ABANTE

Teknolohiya sa agrikultura

C. AGRI-RELATED STORY

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Easing food prices tamed inflation in October to 4.9%

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

Unhappy farmers

MANILA BULLETIN

Marcos orders support for provinces that won't be affected by El Niño

THE MANILA TIMES

Inflation slows in Oct as food prices decline

BUSINESS WORLD

Agri sciences company introduces augmented reality game for promoting...
Inflation slows to 4.9% in October

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT

Inflation slows to 4.9%

BUSINESS MIRROR

Editorial: Panama Canal drought to push food prices up
Oct inflation just at 4.9%, but hints at low growth
Durian, Banana: PHL secures \$603M worth of fruit purchasing agreements in...

ABANTE

Pagtaas sa presyo ng pagkain bumagal

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL

Inflation eases

D. FOREIGN STORY

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT

Wheat drops, soybeans firm
Indonesia to set lower rice import quota

Date: NOV. 08, 2023 Page: 1 of 2



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DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

DA: Enough food supply for holidays

By **ROMINA CABRERA**

There will be no pork shortage as the holiday season approaches, the Department of Agriculture (DA) assured the public.

"This Christmas season, we are making sure that pork, chicken, rice and vegetable supplies are stable. The local production of

pork and chicken is stable and additional imports will arrive by fourth quarter," DA Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said in Filipino over radio *dzBB*.

De Mesa added that newly appointed Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. has made it his goal to improve the production of

Turn to Page 2

DA From Page 1

agricultural commodities.

Laurel earlier said he plans to conduct a performance review of current officials before implementing a possible shuffle within the agency.

He is also planning to implement changes in rice

farming to lower the cost of production through modernization, better irrigation and use of higher-yielding varieties.

Laurel said that President Marcos' campaign promise of P20 per kilo of rice is currently not possible, especially as the prices in the world market are still high.



SKETCHES

ANA MARIE PAMINTUAN

A full-time DA chief

With a new secretary of agriculture appointed, is the campaign promise of P20-a-kilo rice finally attainable?

Not today, according to fishing tycoon Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

Facing the media for the first time since his appointment to the Department of Agriculture (DA), Laurel said the P20 rice "aspiration" was "not possible" at this time, when global rice prices are at a 15-year high.

The best that can be done at this point, he said, is to make rice more affordable. As instructed by President Marcos, Laurel said this means modernizing and mechanizing farming as well as providing sufficient irrigation and the right seeds.

In fact, with palay prices already at P22 per kilo as of October and a possible strong El Niño ahead, the rice situation could worsen in the coming months. There's speculation that BBM finally let go of his concurrent post as DA chief to avoid having the issue drag down his survey ratings further.

Apart from dashing hopes for P20-a-kilo rice, another interesting declaration of Laurel, a boyhood pal of Ferdinand Marcos Jr., was that his appointment was no payback for his P30 million contribution to BBM's political party Partido Federal ng Pilipinas during the 2022 election campaign.

Perhaps the more accurate phrase is that the appointment was *not merely* political payback. After all, several agriculture industry organizations have lauded the appointment, saying Laurel, who was president of Frabelle Fishing Corp. prior to joining government, has the credentials for the job.

Surely BBM, who will be held to his "aspiration" for P20-a-kilo rice until his final moment in office, will want someone of competence to at least make a credible effort to deliver on that campaign OPM (oh promise me).

Taking on the DA portfolio in a concurrent capacity, BBM had explained, was his way of showing the importance he gave to agriculture. When he finally let go of the post, after food-fueled inflation pulled down his ratings, capability must have been a factor in his selection of a full-time secretary of agriculture.

The campaign support, however, certainly didn't hurt; P30 million (the declared amount; there's unavoidable speculation about the undeclared) is nothing to sneeze at. Some time ago there was coffee shop talk about a prominent candidate who reportedly lost that amount in personal funds for his campaign and drank himself to death, literally.

Laurel doesn't have to be defensive about it; payback is part of Philippine realpolitik. A president appoints to his official family only persons he knows and trusts, and political supporters are natural priority choices.



Laurel's family business, however, will be under constant scrutiny for ways by which that P30 million might be recovered, with a handsome return on investment.

Small-scale fishers' groups were among the first to express concern about his appointment. The fishers fear that Laurel will push for allowing the entry of large commercial fishing vessels (like Frabelle's) into municipal waters (within 15 kilometers from the coastline) where only small fishing boats are currently allowed.

More than the speculative reports about political payback, Laurel must confront the high expectations surrounding his appointment.

Now that the DA chief is no longer an absentee secretary, people are expecting dramatic improvements in food supply and prices, outside the heavily subsidized Kadiwa outlets.

But because the country's agriculture system, from farm to market, has deteriorated as badly as the quality of Philippine education, dramatic improvements can be a tall order.

The calamitous state of agriculture is one of the major factors in the sustained high poverty rate in the Philippines. Instead of boosting domestic production, the country has become increasingly dependent on imports for basic agricultural commodities including rice, sugar and meats.

* * *

It's a national shame that we import up to 93 percent of our salt needs. We're even importing large *galunggong* or round scad, which the Chinese are believed to be catching in our own sovereign waters in the West Philippine Sea.

It says a lot about the sorry state of agriculture that fisheries is the worst economic performer in our agriculture sector.

If Laurel fails to pull off a miracle in the P20-a-kilo rice OPM, perhaps he can make dramatic improvements in his field of business, fisheries.

Along with questions about how much better Laurel can be as DA chief than his predecessor, who was constantly distracted by plans for his next overseas trip, there's speculation on the impact on BBM's survey ratings of his bowing out of the DA.

Now that he has distanced himself a bit from food security issues and that P20-a-kilo rice hallucination, will BBM's rating slide stop?

High performance ratings make governance easier in this country. It allows a president to maintain a super majority in Congress and make local government executives behave less like independent republics.

A steady decline in ratings will inevitably be interpreted as an indication that an official is doing something wrong. Loyalty and friendship are tenuous in Philippine politics. An official who suffers a sustained ratings fall can see erstwhile friends avoiding him like he has the Alpha strain of pre-vaccine COVID.

It will be catastrophic for BBM if, after his disappointing stint in the DA, his choice as replacement fails to do better.

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Date: NOV- 08, 2023 Page: 1 Y 10



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New DA chief favors production over importation

By JEL SANTOS

"I believe that Filipinos can produce more."

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel stressed this as he pushes

for production over importation.

"Hindi ako pro-importation, I am pro-production (I am not pro-importation, I am pro-production). I am a producer in my past life. While I import, I produce a lot more," he said

during a media briefing on Monday, Nov. 6.

According to Laurel, data-driven importation will take place only when it is truly necessary.

"But then, we really have ► 10

New DA chief favors production over importation 1◀

to import when it is needed. But in order to make the right balance, we need to have the right data to manage it properly," he said.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) secretary said current data available to the department is incomplete.

"Iyong data natin, hindi ganoon ka-accurate, eh (The available data is not accurate). I am not blaming anybody on this," he said.

With this, Laurel said he intends to bring back the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics for the DA to have accurate data on where it can base its importation decisions.

When President Marcos was still the concurrent head of the DA, he stated that he wanted the Philippines to lessen its reliance on imports.

Intel group vs corruption

Meanwhile, Laurel said he will create an intelligence group that will be tasked to fight corruption in the DA.

"I will be creating my own intelligence group... Well, one of the directives of the President is if there's something, bring it up," Laurel said when asked how he'll address corruption.

Drive vs smuggling, hoarding continues

The new DA secretary said he will also wage war on agricultural smugglers and hoarders who are the enemies of farmers and consumers.

"Well, that is one of the prime directives of the President to continue 'yung (the) anti-smuggling and anti-hoarding campaign ng (of the) DA," the secretary said.

President Marcos had earlier urged the public to help the government in battling rice smugglers and hoarders as they are the ones disrupting the market's flow of supply and demand for the country's primary staple.

In the past few months, several officials of the agriculture department have been suspended while put under probe over corruption allegations.

The DA's ₱140-million procurement of onions in 2022 from Bonena Multipurpose Cooperative is currently under investigation.

In August, Ombudsman Samuel R. Martires ordered the preventive suspension of five officials of the agriculture department over alleged irregularities in the procurement of onions. They were charged with "grave misconduct, gross neglect of duty, and conduct prejudicial to the best interest of service."



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EDITORIAL

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Just being forthright

NEW Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. started off on the right foot in his highly challenging journey as head of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

In his initial press conference last Monday, Laurel said that President Bongbong Marcos' campaign promise to bring down the price of rice to P20 per kilo is "not possible" yet due to spikes in global market pricing.

"Today, it is not possible, but with the directive of the President to modernize, irrigate and use right seeds, mechanize... We are getting ready to do our best to try and make rice affordable," Laurel said.

Saying it as it is, without embellishment or the cavalier style of Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno, Laurel is correct in saying that the P20 per kilo price of rice is only an aspiration -- in other words, a lofty goal.

The newly-appointed DA chief explained that the price of the grain is now in a 15-year high in the world market. The previous \$230 per ton from Vietnam is at \$700 per ton today.

'Several farm experts have pointed out that our agriculture program is very rice-centric, when in fact we have good potential in growth in high-value crops.'

Secretary Laurel is not even sure whether the P20 per kilo price of rice will be achieved during the Marcos administration, stressing that price movement is dictated by global events.

Laurel explained what many of us have been aware of all along: "The problem now of the world is it's so complicated. There's climate change, El Niño is now here, and it will continue until the middle of next year. Anything can happen. We also don't know if war will break out in another part of the world. We don't know if another ship will block the Suez Canal. It is possible to lower the price, but we need to have our silos, we have to have buffer stock and we have to change some laws, I believe," he said.

Like all aggie secretaries before him, Francisco Tiu Laurel believes that the government's thrust to modernize the country's agricultural sector will help in making the price of rice in the country more affordable. If we cannot lower it to the fantastic price of P20 per kilo, at least they should make the prices of the staple grain affordable to the poor.

For the purpose of comparison, the current prices for local well-milled rice are between P45 to P53 per kilo while regular milled rice is at P41 to P45 per kilo. The price of imported well-milled rice is at P45 to P48 per kilo.

Imported rice ranges from P55 to P60 per kilo for the special variety and P47 to P58 for premium. For local rice, the special variety costs P50 to P65 per kilo and premium, P50 to P60 per kilo.

It is reassuring to note that the marching order of President Marcos to Laurel is to increase production in almost all sectors of agriculture, all commodities, but with special emphasis on rice. He talked about modernizing irrigation, the use of the correct type of fertilizers and the planting of the right type of seeds.

Several farm experts have pointed out that our agriculture program is very rice-centric, when in fact we have good potential in growth in high-value crops.

Perhaps the new DA head will also put in efforts, research, and funds in developing crops such as coconut, sugar, durian, mango, banana and others which will boost the country's revenues from exports.



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NEWS BRIEF

NEDA suko sa ₱20 per kilong bigas

Hindi pa uubra sa ngayon ang pangako ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. na ₱20 kada kilo ng bigas.

Sa press briefing sa Malacañang, sinabi ni National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Undersecretary Rosemarie Edillon, marami pang kailangang gawin bago maabot ang minimithing bente pesos kada kilo ng bigas.

Sang-ayon ang opisyal sa naging pahayag

ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., na imposible pa sa ngayon ang bente pesos na presyo ng bigas pero posibleng mangyari sa mga darating na araw.

“Yung sinabi ni DA Secretary, actually mas alam nga n’ya ‘yun noh. At this time hindi pa talaga pupuwede. Going forward yes, we can attain that pero ‘yun nga, marami pang kailangang mangyari muna,” ani Edillon.

(Aileen Taliping)

Date: 08 NOV 2023 Page: 5



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

EDITORIAL

I-SEGURO PRESYO NG MGA BILIHIN SA PASKO

HINDI lang ang mga mambabatas ang nanawagan sa bagong kalihim ng Department of Agriculture na si **Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** na maging responsable sa magiging papel niya sa kanyang posisyon kundi maging ang mga mamamayan.

Ang mga senador ay nagsabi na gamitin ni Laurel ang kanyang karanasan at kaalaman bilang isang negosyante upang matiyak ang kapakanan ng mga sektor na kanyang pinaglilingkuran at upang matugunan ang malalim na mga problema ng DA.

Sinabi ni Sen. Grace Poe, dapat na pagtuunan ng pansin ng bagong kalihim ang sektor ng mga magsasaka at mangingisda at isaayos ang kabuhayan ng mga ito.

Giit ni Poe, ang mga masisipag na magsasaka at mangingisda na nagdadala ng pagkain sa hapag-kainan ng mga Pilipino ay hindi dapat magutom at hindi dapat manatiling mahirap.

Kailangan din, ayon sa senadora, na mahabol ng ahensiya ang mga nagmamanipla sa merkado at sa presyo ng mga produktong agrikultura. Isama na rin ng DA ang paglaban at pagpaparusa sa smugglers, hoarders at price fixers.

Samantala ang ordinaryong mamamayan ay nananawagan sa bagong upong kalihim na masiguro na mananatili ang presyo ng mga bilingin sa darating na Kapaskuhan.

Bagaman hindi trabaho ng DA secretary ang pag-monitor ng presyo ng bilingin, hiniling pa rin ng mga consumer na dapat manatiling maayos ang suplay ng baboy, manok at iba pang produktong mula sa ani ng mga magsasaka.

Dalangin ng mga ordinaryong Pinoy na takot sa pagtaas ng presyo tuwing darating ang Kapaskuhan na huwag sanang tumaas ang presyo ng lechon, queso de bola at maging hamon. Ang mga nabanggit na produkto ay madalas na ihain sa hapag kapag Noche Buena at Medya Noche.

Normal na kapag darating ang Pasko ay lumolobo ang presyo ng karneng baboy, baka at manok at tumataas din ang iba pang produktong mula sa paghahayupan.

Sana nga naman ay magpakitang-gilas si Laurel at huwag niyang ipahiya ang Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr., sa pagpili sa kanya bilang kapalit sa puwesto nito bilang kalihim sa loob ng mahigit isang taon.



New DA chief to feel pulse of farmers, fishermen

NEWLY appointed Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. on Monday said he plans to go around the country to better assess the situation of farmers and fisherfolk.

In a press briefing after the flag ceremony at the DA headquarters in Quezon City, Laurel said the DA under his helm will step up efforts to increase food production and modernize the agricultural sector.

"Sa mga susunod na araw iikot po ako sa halos lahat ng probinsya at kakausapin ko direktang mga farmer and fishermen. Gusto kong marinig ng personal kung ano 'yung kailangan nila, ano 'yung hinaing nila at ano 'yung nakikita nilang vision nila. Gusto kong makita ang kalagayan nila (In the com-

ing days in almost every province, I will directly talk to the farmers and fishermen. I want to personally listen to their needs, their complaints, and their vision. I want to know their situation)," he said.

Laurel said the marching order of

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. is to modernize agriculture with the goal of achieving food security, reducing import dependence, and lift millions of farmers and fisherfolk out of poverty by the end

of his term in 2028.

"By modernizing the agriculture sector, we could make it a more profitable venture and attract a younger generation that would ensure the country's food security in the decades to come," Laurel said.

Aside from boosting food production and modernization, Laurel emphasized the need to address alleged price manipulation and smuggling to ensure stable supply and prices.

He said the DA will coordinate and work closely with relevant law enforcement agencies to apprehend and prosecute those engaged in illegal trade.

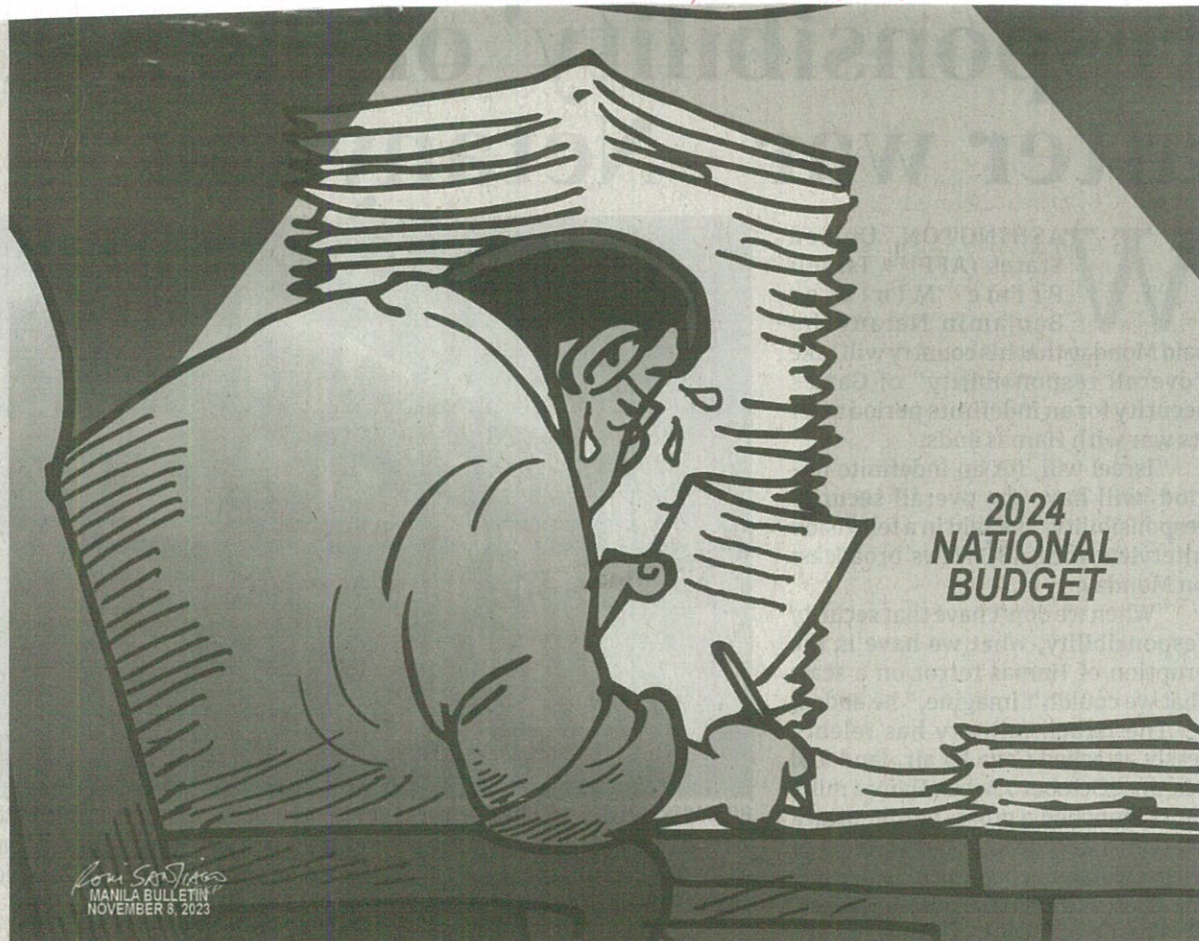
Laurel called for unity and cooperation in the agricultural community to achieve their shared targets.

"I'm ready to work but I can't do this alone. I need your full cooperation and teamwork for us to achieve our targets," he said.

Asked whether rice production is main priority, Laurel said while rice is the country's staple food, there are other equally important sectors like livestock, poultry, fisheries and high value crops that require government attention and support.

PNA





Looking forward to early passage of 2024 nat'l budget

The government may experience a merry Christmas this year as it prepares to face the challenges of the coming year.

Congress is eyeing the enactment of the ₱5.768-trillion General Appropriations Bill (GAB) or the proposed 2024 national budget before Christmas this year.

"Our confidence is high because of our early submission to our brethren in the Senate. And I'm sure they will do everything in order to finish the budget so it may get signed by our beloved President before Christmas," House Speaker Martin Romualdez said during the turnover to the Senate of the copy of the GAB for 2024. Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri, who was present at the turnover ceremony, also vowed that the upper chamber of Congress will pass the GAB this month.

With this commitment, the government is now more or less assured it will run smoothly in 2024 according to Malacañang's National Expenditure Program (NEP), and not on a reenacted budget.

The House of Representatives, which first scrutinized the NEP before it was transmitted to the Senate, passed the proposed 2024 national budget on third and final reading on Sept. 27.

But the passage of the proposed budget was not a breeze. It was meticulously scrutinized.

In the end, ₱194.5 billion worth of realignments were made to fortify the country's national security, shield Filipinos from the impacts of global inflation, and guarantee food security.

Among the largest items realigned were ₱33.282 billion for the Department of Social Welfare and Development's (DSWD) Assistance to Individuals on Crisis Situations (AICS) Program, ₱30.3 billion for

the Medical Assistance to Indigent Patients (MAIP), ₱25.5 billion for the system/ communal irrigation system, ₱20 billion for agri-business and marketing services-rice subsidy, ₱17.5 billion for the Department of Labor and Employment's (DOLE) Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/ Displaced Workers (TUPAD) and Government Internship Program (GIP), and ₱15 billion for solar-driven pump irrigation projects. Also realigned was ₱1.23 billion worth of confidential and intelligence funds proposed for civilian agencies, like the Department of Education and the Department of Information and Communications Technology. Instead these funds were appropriated for frontline agencies in charge of ensuring national security and protecting the country's territorial rights in the West Philippine Sea—the Philippine Coast Guard and the **Bureau of Aquatic Fisheries and Resources (BFAR)**, among others.

With the proposed budget now in the Senate, it will be the turn of the Senate Committee on Finance chaired by Sen. Sonny Angara to lead in scrutinizing the budget measure.

But after having been carefully pored over by the House, passage of the budget measure in the Senate may be a breeze.

While we join the nation in hoping for the early passage of the proposed budget for 2024, we also look forward to the Senate's usual exercise of due diligence in legislative matters so the government will have a budget that fits the needs of all sectors.

Early passage of the budget measure is necessary to give President Marcos ample time to review it before signing it into law. In doing so, the government will have a ready budget at the start of 2024.



PAFMI to govt: Extend reduced tariff on corn

THE Philippine Association of Feed Millers Inc. (PAFMI) said the government must consider extending the reduced tariff on corn, which now stands at 5 percent, regardless of volume, beyond the end of the year.

PAFMI said in a statement this will fill the supply gaps and help in sustaining local production of quality meat, eggs and fish while keeping prices at affordable levels.

PAFMI said that while the updated demand and supply report released by the Department of Agriculture - National Corn Program showed an increase in local corn sufficiency from 64 percent to 73 percent since July 2023, implications of major weather disturbances such as typhoons and dry spells in the first half of the year have yet to be reported.

The group said these could impact on the supply and quality of corn which in turn could increase the cost of meat, eggs and fish.

Edwin Mapanao, PAFMI presi-



PAFMI has raised concerns over possible issues on supply and quality of local corn which may cause the further hike in prices of meat, eggs and fish.

dent, said corn is a staple crop in the Philippines as it serves as a vital food, animal feed and industrial raw material.

"Yellow corn comprises up to 60 percent of the formulation of animal feeds and is utilized in food and bioethanol production. As it plays a role in many industries,

ensuring the country has access to affordable and good quality corn is an issue that not only affects the livelihood of farmers but also has broader implications on food security and economic stability for the rest of the community," Mapanao said in a statement. - **Jed Macapagal**



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NIA signs P1.94B contract to build Bulacan dam

THE National Irrigation Administration (NIA) signed a contract with Fedstar Builders Contractors/China International Water and Electric Corp. for the construction of the Bayabas Rockfill Dam in Bulacan.

NIA said the contract signed on Monday is valued at P1.94 billion.

The facility will cover 17 municipalities in Bulacan and an additional four in Pampanga that will benefit approximately 20,000 farmers.

NIA said the Bayabas Rockfill Dam stands at 74.10 meters, stretching across a length of 345 meters, with a total storage capacity of 55.48 million cubic meters.

The project was funded by the General Appropriations Act from 2022 to 2027 and the Country-wide Development Fund with a construction period of 1,524 calendar days, inclusive of 311 unworkable days.

Apart from serving as an essential irrigation water source from the Bayabas river, the project is also set to address multiple challenges in the region including flooding, aquaculture development, utilization of solar-powered pump irrigation and its likely potential as a tourist attraction.

-- *Jed Macapagal*



NEDA backs new agri chief: P20/kilo rice not yet feasible

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

THE P20 per kilo of rice promised by President Marcos Jr. during his 2022 presidential campaign is not feasible yet, but the Marcos administration is on the right track in providing affordable rice to consumers, an official from

the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) yesterday said.

NEDA Undersecretary Rosemarie Edillon, in a briefing after a sectoral meeting in Malacañang, made the statement a day after

See NEDA ► Page B3

NEDA

newly-appointed Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said that the cheap price of rice is "not possible today."

Edillon said an assessment study made by the NEDA showed that there are still a lot of improvements needed in the agricultural sector to be able to realize the P20/kilo of rice.

She said the President has already acknowledged that a lot still needs to be done and improvements have to be made, especially on the areas of research and development (R&D), irrigation, and the consolidation and clustering of farms, before his government can deliver on his campaign promise.

"So talagang ano, at this time,

hindi pa talaga pupuwede. (So, at this time, it is not yet possible)," Edillon said, adding that going forward, "we can attain that".

Apart from bringing down the price of rice to P20 per kilo, Edillon said part of the President's commitment is to ensure the food security and value chain in the country even amid challenges like the onslaught of the El Niño.

EL NIÑO

Edillon said the President has ordered the Department of Agriculture (DA) to intensify support to provinces less affected by the El Niño phenomenon that would allow them to increase food production, as well as to provide seeds and plants that do not demand much water in areas

that will be heavily affected by the dry spell.

She said the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) would provide the DA with the list of provinces that would be least affected by the dry spell such as those in Mindanao, the Visayas and eastern portion of Luzon and those that would be heavily affected.

Edillon said the administration also vowed to continued assistance to the most vulnerable sectors even as inflation eased in October. The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that inflation in October significantly slowed down to 4.9 percent from 6.1 percent in September.

Food prices are expected to remain high during the El Niño

which is expected to strengthen until the first quarter of 2024. El Niño will bring below normal rainfall across the country and may adversely impact agricultural production as well as energy generation.

Edillon said one program to cushion the impact of El Niño is the Department of Social Welfare and Development's (DSWD's) food stamp program, which is currently on a pilot run. It will be scaled up by mid-2024.

The FSP aims to provide one million of the poorest families in the country with a P3,000 monthly assistance that they can use to purchase nutrition food in accredited markets and groceries. The program, which will run until 2027, requires the beneficiaries to seek employment or undergo

technical and skills training to be able to find jobs later.

The pilot implementation, which started in July, involves 3,000 fami-

lies from Tondo, Manila; Dapa, Siargao; San Mariano, Isabela; Garchitorena, Camarines Sur; and Parang, Maguindanao.



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PH clinches \$600M purchase deals at CIIE

THE Philippines is seen clinching \$700 million worth of purchase agreements of fruits, including durian, from its participation at the China International Import Exposition (CIIE) being held until November 10 in Shanghai, China.

That is the target set by the government for the country's Philippine Pavilion at the 6th CIIE, participated in by 20 companies of which four are small and medium in size.

In a press briefing yesterday, Ana Abejuela, agriculture counselor to the Embassy of the Philippines in Beijing, said on the first day of the CIIE alone, Philippine companies secured \$600 million agreements for 2024 for bananas, durian, pineapple, banana chips and coconut.

Abejuela said banana is still the top import of China from the Philippines, but great opportunity for durian.

Benjamin Belviz from the Durian Industry Association of Davao in the same briefing said for the year, exports of fruits to China surged to more than 6,000 metric tons (MT), largely with the addition of durian, from 2,300 MT last year. The first shipment of durian to China was made in April 2022.

China imports 95 percent of durian from Thailand, valued at \$4 billion in 2022.

According to Belviz, the country faces challenges in exporting durian to China.

"Unlike bananas which is led

See PH > Page A2

PH

by multinational corporations, durian farming is mainly backyard and farmers are mostly small and medium. We have to change their mindset from subsistence

to entrepreneurial farming," Belviz said.

He added durian from the Philippines takes longer to reach China shores, about 10 to 14 days,

compared to those from Vietnam and Malaysia which are nearer.

Abejuela also said the Philippines is also facing constraints in meeting the volume demanded

by China.

"Under the DA's production plan for 2024, we hope to expand the land planted to durian by 4,000 hectares," she said. - Irma Isip



Date: NOV. 08, 2023 Page: A1 & A2

Govt readies measures for sectors amid easing inflation

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA

[@sam_medenilla](#)

DESPITE the easing of inflation in October, the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) is now bracing for more economic headwinds in the coming months due to an intensified El Niño and the impact on prices of holiday spending.

Among the proposed government measures to keep prices of

basic goods stable during the period is the extension of the reduced Most Favored Nation (MFN) tariff rates under Executive Order (EO) No. 10, Series of 2022 until next year.

Last Tuesday, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that the inflation rate significantly slowed down to 4.9 percent in October from 6.1 percent in the previous month.

SEE "NEDA," A2

Neda...

CONTINUED FROM A1

The improvement was attributed to the deceleration of inflation for food, particularly rice and vegetable due to the onset of the peak of the harvest season.

Christmas spending

HOWEVER, Neda Undersecretary Rosemarie G. Edillon said they are wary of the potential impact of the Christmas season, when workers receive their bonuses and usually buy more goods and services.

The increased spending can translate to a faster inflation like last year, when it rose to 8.1 percent in December from 8 percent in the previous month.

"What is actually important is that we protect those most vulnerable, we make sure that they are able to meet their needs. That is why the subsidy program is important for them and also the food stamp program," Edillon said in a press briefing in Malacañang last Tuesday.

She said this augmented by the government's efforts to provide sustainable income to the vulnerable by increasing their employability through skills training as well as bringing in more job-generating investments in the country.

When asked if the Neda will support pending legislated wage hikes, Edillon said they think such measures are unnecessary since the existing wage-setting measures are "working" properly.

Citing the report of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), she said 11 regional wages have issued new wage increases.

EO 10 extension

TO keep the price of some basic commodities affordable, the Economic Development Group (EDG) also recommended the extension of EO 10.

The issuance, which will lapse on December, sets the MFN rates for the following goods: meat of swine (fresh, chilled or frozen) at 15 percent (in-quota), 25 percent (out-quota); corn at 5 percent (in-quota) and 15 percent (out-quota); rice at 35 percent; and zero duty for coal.

Edillon said the EDG proposed EO 10 to remain in effect until the end of 2024 "subject to a mid-year review."

El Niño preparations

NEDA said the government is also making preparations to mitigate the economic impact of the droughts caused by El Niño by the first quarter of 2024.

"This is expected to bring below-normal rainfall across the country and may adversely impact agricultural production and also energy generation," Edillon said.

She said President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. ordered the Department of Agriculture to provide production support to provinces, which are less "likely to be hit by El Niño" and experience "normal rain" next month.

Such provinces are located in Mindanao, Visayas and Eastern Luzon.

Among the interventions to be provided in the said areas are high-yielding variety of seeds, fertilizers and access to irrigation.

As for farmers in areas which are expected to be severely affected by El Niño, Edillon said they will be given seeds for crops, which have minimal water requirement as well as emergency employment opportunities.

She said the measures are on top of government interventions to address "longstanding challenges in agriculture" through improved farm productivity, additional investment in irrigation, research and development, and post-harvest facilities.

Ngayong araw na ito ay ibabahagi ko sa inyo ang isa sa Demo Farm ng Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Training Institute (DA-ATI) na makikita sa Elliptical Road, Diliman, Quezon City.

Hindi lamang outdoor garden at conventional farming ang itinuturo ng mga agriculturist ng ATI maging ang Aquaponics at Hydroponics, na pamamaraan ng pagtatanim sa loob ng gusali o indoor garden.

Ang pagpapalagapan at pagtuturo ng indoor garden ang siyang bagong proyekto na isinusulong ngayon ng ATI sa mga nais matuto ng pagtatanim kahit sa loob bahay at building.

Ayon kay Justin Paolo Interio, Agriculturist II, ng ATI, laging bukas ang kanilang opisina para sa lahat ng gustong matuto na magtanim ng iba't

ibang variety ng lettuce sa indoor garden kahit nasa 25-araw pa lamang muna noong maitanim.

"Ang vision namin ay 'Food availability and affordability for every Filipino family through excel-



Ang mga tanim sa DA-ATI.



Indoor at outdoor garden...

DA-ATI DEMO FARM

ibang uri ng halaman sa pamamagitan ng organikong pamamaraan.

"Nagbibigay kami ng libreng seminar, libreng binhi at nagsu-supervise kami ng mga grupo na nais magtanim ng kanilang sariling pagkain," ani Justin.

Nais ng ATI na magkaroon ng "food sufficiency" sa bansa dahil ito ang pangunahing mandato sa kanila ng Pangulong Ferdinand Bongbong Marcos.

Nasilip rin ng ATI na malaking bentahe sa larangan ng agrikultura lalo na sa urban gardening ang indoor garden dahil "all year round" ay puwede kang magtanim at umani ng gulay.

"Hindi nakakatakot na maapektuhan ng bagyo, tagtuyot, lindol at iba pang kalamidad ang mga tanim na halaman sa indoor garden kaya tuloy-tuloy ang pagtatanim at pag-ani," sabi ni Justin.

Halos lahat ng green leafy vegetables at ilang fruit bearing trees ay may tanim sa Demo Farm sa ATI.

Nang bisitahin ng team ng Masaganang Buhay at Magsasakang Reporter ang Demo Farm ng ATI ay kasalukuyang may lima silang green house sa isang bahagi ng garden na conventional at hydroponics method ang pamamaraan ng pagtatanim habang ang indoor garden ay makikita sa ikatlong ng gusali.

Ready to harvest na ang mga tanim na iba't

lent extension services in agriculture and fisheries. Habang ang aming mission ay Empowerment and building capacities of agriculture and fisheries stakeholders for sustainable development," pahayag pa ni Justin.

Sa mga nais matuto ng iba't ibang uri ng pamamaraan ng pagtatanim, maka-avail ng libreng seminar at binhi bisitahin lamang ang website na <https://ati2.da.gov.ph/ati-main> o i-text si Justin at Jomar Tabor sa 09672661079

kay Justin at farm tour sa DA-ATI Demo Farm sa programang Masaganang Buhay TV at Radio Show ng Magsasakang Reporter.

Samantala, sa mga nagnanais naman po na mapalalim pa ang kaalaman kaugnay ng natural at organic farming ay pa-noorin po ninyo ang mga video tutorial ko sa aking Youtube Channel na ANG MAGSASAKANG REPORTER tungkol sa step by step na pagtatanim, pag-aalaga at sikreto ng pagkakaroon

TV, Channel 1 ng TV-5. Mapapakinggan din po sa Radyo Singko 92.3 News FM.

Maaari rin kayong manood at mag-subscribe sa aking Youtube Channel na ANG MAGSASAKANG REPORTER at Facebook na Mer Layson at Facebook page na Ang Magsasakang Reporter, TV host Vlogger para sa iba pang kaalaman at impormasyon sa pagtatanim ng iba't ibang uri ng halaman sa pamamagitan ng organikong



Ang Magsasakang Reporter, kasama si Justin Paolo Interio.

o magsadya ng personal sa main office ng ATI, Elliptical Road, Diliman, Quezon City, katapat lang ng Quezon City Circle.

Sabihin lang po ninyo na nabasa ninyo rito sa Pilipino Star Ngayon (PSN) ang tungkol sa ATI.

Sa darating na araw ng Linggo, November 12, 2023; mapapanood ninyo ang aking panayam

ng magandang tanim na halaman.

Para sa iba pang tips at sikreto sa pagtatanim ng iba't ibang uri ng halaman ay maaari po kayong manood at makinig ng aking TV at Radio program na Masaganang Buhay tungwing Linggo, alas-7:00 hanggang alas-8:00 ng umaga sa OnePH Signal

pamamaraan.

Regular ninyong mababasa ang aking kolum dito sa Pilipino Star Ngayon (PSN) ng Star Group of Publications.

Sa mga tanong at komento ay maaari ninyo akong i-text, huwag po tawag, sa 09178675197. STAY SAFE, HAPPY FARMING, GOD BLESS US ALL.



BASTA BICOLANO, SARO

REP. BRIAN YAMSUAN

Sa panahon ngayong tinatawag na digital age, ang paggamit ng teknolohiya ay tila ba pangkaraniwan na sa pang-araw-araw nating mga gawain. Pero sa sektor ng agrikultura sa bansa, karamihan sa ating mga magsasaka ay mga tradisyonal na pamamaraan pa rin ng pagtatanim ang ginagamit.

Malaki po ang maaring maging ambag ng teknolohiya para mapaunlad ang agrikultura sa ating bansa. Bukod diyan, ang ating Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. ay naniniwala na ang paggamit ng mga cutting-edge technology sa agrikultura ay maari ring makakumbinsi sa kabataan na sa sektor na ito humubog ng kanilang magandang kinabukasan.

Puwede po nating simulan sa paggamit ng satellite technology para matulungan ang mga magsasaka na malunasan ang mga maaring maging problemang dala ng climate change.

Gagamitin po ang teknolohiyang ito sa pagbubuo ng crop climate calendar.

Ang crop climate calendar ay naglalaman ng impormasyon patungkol sa pagtatanim at ang mga maaring maging banta at panganib na masasagupa ng mga magsasaka dahil sa climate change. May impormasyon din po sa crop climate calendar patungkol sa paggamit ng patubig at pataba sa kanilang mga pananim.

Bawat crop climate calendar ay nakaangkop sa lugar na pagsasakahan.

Napakahalaga po nito ngayon dahil ramdam na natin ang mga masamang epekto ng climate change. Kundi man malalakas na pagbagyo at pagbaha ay matinding tag-init at tagtuyot naman ang sumasalanta sa ating mga sakahan.

Nakapaloob po sa ating House Bill (HB) 9129 ang panukalang patungkol sa paggamit ng crop climate calendar ng ating mga magsasaka.

Nakasaad sa bill na dapat ay sa simpleng Ingles, Filipino o sa lokal na diyalekto nakasulat ang mga impormasyong nilalaman ng mga crop climate calendar. Dapat po kasi ay madaling maintindihan ng ating mga farmer ang mga nakasulat na impormasyon.

Ang Department of Agriculture (DA), Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) at mga lo-

kal na pamahalaan ang siyang dapat na magtulon-tulong para mabuo at maipamahagi ang mga crop climate calendar, ayon sa bill.

Katuwang din po nila ang Philippine Space Agency dahil dito mangagaling ang datos na hango sa kanilang mga satellite na gagamitin sa pagbuo ng crop climate calendar.

Kapag ang ating bill po ay naisabatas na, magkakaroon na ng malakas na instrumento ang ating mga magsasaka laban sa climate change.

Sa tamang paggamit ng crop climate calendar, mababawasan ang mga maaring maging lugi ng ating mga magsasaka dahil sa epekto ng climate change. Magagamit din ang crop climate calendar para mapag-alaman nila ang pinakamainam na paggamit ng patubig at pataba sa kanilang mga pananim.

Tulad ng lagi kong nababanggit, napakabilis po ng pag-usad ng teknolohiya kaya't dapat ay nakakasabay tayo.

Ang mga small farmer po natin sana ang dapat na unang nakikinabang sa mga makabagong pamamaraan ng pagsasaka. Simulan na natin ngayon ang malawakang paggamit ng teknolohiya para umasenso ang ating sektor ng agrikultura.

END OF REPORT

Date: NOV 08, 2023 Page: B1-B4



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Easing food prices tamed inflation in October to 4.9%

By **Ian Nicolas P. Cigara**
and **Ronnel W. Domingo**
[@InquirerBiz](#)

Inflation significantly eased in October on the back of slower increase in prices of key food

items, with rice posting a milder price growth after being the main driver of resurgent inflation back in September.

Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), cooled for the first time in three

months to 4.9 percent year-on-year in October, from 6.1 percent in September, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported on Tuesday.

Data showed the slowdown was enough to trim the 10-month

average to 6.4 percent, albeit still far above the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' (BSP) 2 to 4 percent annual target. The latest reading was also better than the BSP's own forecast that pegged the figure at between 5.1 and 5.9 percent.

The October data provided relief for Filipino consumers who have been trying to further stretch their paychecks amid rising costs of living. But National Statistician Claire Dennis Mapa offered the most hopeful

news: barring any price shocks, inflation would likely go on a downtrend for the remaining months of 2023.

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan agreed with

B4

Date: NOV. 08, 2023 Page: B1 + B4



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EASING FOOD PRICES TAMED INFLATION

FROM B1

Mapa, adding that inflation would likely return to target "early next year" if the current pace of deceleration is maintained. But he remains wary of the seasonal surge in demand during the Christmas shopping season and damage from the El Niño dry spell.

Figures showed the October CPI was mainly pulled down by softer food inflation, which moderated to 7 percent from 9.7 percent in the previous month.

Harvest season

Broken down, the onset of harvest season and arrival of imported supply tempered rice price inflation to 13.2 percent in October, from the 14-year high of 17.9 percent back in September.

The October inflation figure would be a key data point for a central bank that has yet to decide whether it would tighten monetary policy further at its Nov. 16 meeting, or slam the brakes on rate increases. This, following an out-of-schedule decision in late October to lift the key rate by 25 basis points to 6.50 percent, a fresh 16-year high.

Banks typically use the BSP's benchmark rate as a guide when charging interest rates

on loans. By making borrowing costs more expensive, the central bank wants to rein in strong demand for commodities with limited supply, thereby tempering inflation. But this could also slow an economy that historically gets 70 percent of its juice from consumer spending.

HSBC economist Aries Dacanay shares the view that inflation may indeed continue to soften in November and December, but said it might pick up yet again in early 2024, especially if temporary measures intended to bring down the cost of key food imports are not extended further after they expire at year-end.

Dacanay was referring to the expiration of Executive Order No. 10, which temporarily reduced the tariff rates for rice, corn, coal, and pork until Dec. 31.

"We estimate its expiration to add 1.4-percentage-point to the inflation outlook," Dacanay said. "That said, the discussion of whether [EO] 10 will be extended or not will be key."

He said it would be useful to monitor the view on this matter of newly minted Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., which will be a gauge of what the inflation outlook will be for 2024. INQ



Unhappy farmers

The latest Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas business expectations survey shows that agribusiness firms continue to have a negative outlook for the next 12 months, even as all sectors of the economy are upbeat for 2024. *LaMB*, a local agribusiness magazine, editorialized that the administration should take more meaningful steps to boost the morale of agribusiness enterprises, regardless of their size.

The pattern of skepticism among agribusiness people appears to have begun in the last quarter of 2021, according to *LaMB* publisher and editor Fermin Diaz. But, as

DEMAND AND SUPPLY



BOO CHANCO

the survey shows, "it became more pronounced at the start of 2023 after the government had miserably failed to address lingering issues..."

Diaz observed that "It is crucial at this point to encourage them to keep doing their routine, yet noble task of producing, processing, and distributing farm and food products for consumers. Otherwise, we could be facing a serious food and animal feed security threat that might ignite political unrest and socioeconomic disorder in the near to medium term..."

"Given the sense of despair prevailing in the farm sector, the urgent task now is to create a more conducive business environment by which agriculture and food actors should be enabled to not only survive, but more importantly, to have their enterprises thrive and grow sustainably in order for everyone to enjoy a well-fed and prosperous country."

The BSP survey report shows the negative outlook next year among agri-fishery enterprises runs counter to the generally upbeat business expectation in 2024 expressed by companies from mining and quarrying, manufacturing, electricity, gas and water.

The BSP survey reveals the index for overall business confidence next year in these industries, including construction, wholesale and retail trade, and services, has improved to 59.7 for the Q3 survey period this year from 58.5 for Q2 2023. In

contrast, agriculture, fishery and forestry has its business outlook index significantly drop to 23.7 for Q3 from 39.8 for Q2.

Among the reasons cited for the agribusiness sector's pessimism include bureaucratic corruption and lack of state support. Government's helplessness in addressing devastating animal diseases, particularly African swine fever and avian flu, have also dampened their enthusiasm to keep going and nurtured a pessimistic business outlook in the next 12 months. Indeed, there is fear that ASF, FMD (foot and mouth disease) and avian flu will drive up prices of pork, beef, and chicken in the coming months.

The BSP survey says that while firms in mining and quarrying, as with electricity, gas, and water indicated they will hire more people in the next 12 months, agri-fishery and forestry enterprises are likely to cut their workforce during the same period. There is a sharp drop in the latter's job hiring index from 11.5 for Q2 2023 survey to 4.1 in the latest survey.

The agriculture, forestry, and fishing (AFF) sector is an important leg of our economy that has been struggling to stand up. It had barely grown in the last few years and only grew 2.2 percent this year.

Festering structural problems with agriculture have been neglected by all of our post WW2 administrations. Neighboring countries have attended to basic land issues before their agricultural sectors started to boom. In our case, our social experiment with agrarian reform basically failed and we stubbornly refuse to acknowledge that and move on. We can't expect an upbeat mood for our agribusiness sector until we address key land ownership issues.

The President recently declared that much work needs to be done to fix what's wrong with Philippine agriculture. Besides the need to address logistical bottlenecks and provide more production support subsidies, the President has said nothing about the imperative of addressing bottlenecks in land property rights.

Dr. Fermin Adriano, a former DA usec and UPLB professor, points out that history tells us agricultural social transformation leading to agricultural development will not happen without a clear plan and effort in ensuring certainty over land property rights.

Dr. Adriano suggests that we ought to fix our land reform

law to allow those who want to farm to own land more than five hectares up to around 25 hectares, which is the economically viable farm size for most crops. This will also promote family-based or middle-class farmers who are better educated, have small capital, open to innovation, and knowledgeable about the market, etc.

"In the Philippines, due to the protracted implementation of the agrarian reform program and the land ownership retention of five hectares per family, family-based farms, or our middle-class farmers, have been practically wiped out. The middle-class farmers could have served as the catalyst for greater farm productivity because they are fairly educated, have access to capital, open to the use of innovative technologies, have a better understanding of the workings of the market, etc. Unfortunately, the current structure of our land ownership system will not allow them to develop.

"This partly accounts for the low commercial operations of our farms. While politicians tell us that the goal is to transform farmers into agri-entrepreneurs, the very structure of our land ownership system will not allow this to happen because economies of scale in production cannot be achieved due to our miniscule farm sizes."

Because we neglected the land issue, an army of subsistence tillers was created, Dr. Adriano explains. And their survival depends on an array of government subsidies that has to be administered continuously for every cropping season. Our peasant-based farming, with farm sizes of a little over a hectare, is keeping our farmers poor, with many of them growing just enough to feed the family.

Dr. Adriano said the main contributor to GVA growth in agriculture is not palay/rice despite DA spending more than half of its budget on rice. It is the triumvirate of corn, live-stock, and poultry sector. The reason for this is the growth of the fast-food chains (Jollibee, McDo, etc.) which created huge demand for poultry and livestock products, and in turn created the demand for yellow corn as animal feed.

We have to fix land ownership issues first to fix agriculture and make farmers happy. That's a tough one requiring lots of political capital. That's the President's job.

Boo Chanco's email address is bchanco@gmail.com. Follow him on X or Twitter @boochanco



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Marcos orders support for provinces that won't be affected by El Niño

By BETHEENA UNITE

Provinces that are expected to be less vulnerable to El Niño must also be provided with government interventions as the country will bank on them for agriculture production, President Marcos said.

According to National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Undersecretary Rosemarie Edillon, the President ordered wanted the less vulnerable provinces supported for stable food supply amid the dry spell phenomenon.

"[I]n December, there will be a number of provinces that will be less likely to be hit by El Niño. And so, in the briefing this morning – that was actually the

instruction of the President – to make sure that we target the production support to these provinces," Edillon said in a Palace briefing on Tuesday, Nov. 7, following a sectoral meeting with Marcos.

Production support will be given to the less vulnerable provinces that will still experience normal rainfall, Edillon said.

During the meeting, Edillon said it was reported to the President that the country was already experiencing moderate El Niño, which is expected to strengthen until the first quarter of 2024, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA).

It is expected to bring below-normal rainfall across the country and may adversely impact agricultural production

and energy generation, prompting the President to order agencies to also support the less vulnerable provinces.

While the government intends to also protect the less vulnerable provinces, Edillon stressed that the most vulnerable areas must be protected to ensure that they are able to meet their needs.

"At the same time, it is important to ensure that the most vulnerable sectors of the society are protected and provided assistance especially while food prices remain high amid the expected El Niño," Edillon said.

"So, in line with this, the DSWD is currently implementing the pilot run of the food stamp program which will be scaled up by mid-2024. And the Economic Development Group is also

recommending the extension of the reduced tariff rates for the most favored nation under Executive Order No. 10, Series of 2022 until the end of 2024 subject to a mid-year review," she added.

Managing the effects of El Niño, the NEDA official stressed, are among the measures that must be taken to address the effects of inflation.

"While we are providing short term measures to address these effects of inflation through subsidies and importation, we also need to address the longstanding challenges in agriculture and food production, and help our local farmers boost their productivity and resilience through investment in irrigation, RND, post-harvest facilities and others," she said.



Inflation slows in Oct as food prices decline

BY NIÑA MYKA PAULINE ARCEO

INFLATION markedly slowed last month as prices of key food items fell, the government reported on Tuesday.

October's 4.9-percent result, down from September's 6.1 percent, snapped a two-month run of consumer price hikes that began in August and was also lower than the 7.7 percent posted a year earlier.

It was much lower than the 5.1-5.9 percent estimated by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP)

for the month and the 5.4-percent median in a *Manila Times* poll of economists.

"The downtrend ... was primarily brought about by the slower year-on-year increase in the heavily weighted food and nonalcoholic beverages at 7.0 percent in October 2023 from 9.7 percent in the

previous month," the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said in a statement.

Food and alcoholic beverages accounted for a little over half — 53.7 percent or 2.6 percentage points — of overall inflation.

Food inflation, in particular, fell to 7.1 percent from 10.0 percent in September, which the PSA primarily attributed to a sharp deceleration in price growth — to 11.9 percent from 29.6 percent — for vegetables, tubers, plantains, cooking bananas and pulses.

Rice inflation, which was a main

driver of September's inflation spike, saw price growth slow to 13.2 percent from 17.9 percent.

Restaurants and accommodation services, which had a 12.3-percent or 0.6-percentage point share, also contributed to the overall drop in October with inflation in this category easing to 6.3 percent from 7.1 percent.

These more than offset a slight inflation rise for housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels to 2.6 percent from 2.4 percent a month earlier. This commodity

➤ **Prices B3**

■ PRICES FROM B1

Inflation slows in Oct

group was the third-biggest contributor to overall inflation with an 11.3-percent or 0.6-percentage point share, the PSA said.

Core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy items, further decelerated in October to 5.3 percent from the 5.9 percent seen in the previous month and a year earlier.

Year to date, overall inflation rate reached 6.4 percent, still well over the BSP's 2.0- to 4.0-percent target. Core inflation, meanwhile, averaged 7.0 percent.

Govt pledges continued support

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan, in a separate statement, said the government would continue supporting vulnerable sectors, especially with the El Niño weather pattern expected to linger up to the middle of 2024.

The country is currently experiencing

a mild El Niño, the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) said, but this is expected to strengthen moving forward. The weather pattern will lead to below-normal rainfall that is likely to weigh on agricultural output.

The NEDA chief noted that the Social Welfare department was piloting a food stamp program and that the Economic Development Group had recommended extending the reduced Most Favored Nation tariff rates up to the end of next year, subject to a midyear review.

"While we are providing short-term measures to address effects of inflation through subsidies and importation, we also need to address long-standing challenges in agriculture and food supply chain, and help our local farmers boost their productivity and resilience through investment in irrigation, flood control, supply chain logistics and climate change adaptation," Balisacan said.

In Malacañang, NEDA Undersecretary Rosemarie Edillon said that it was crucial to continue monitoring prices amid global challenges such as El Niño and geopolitical uncertainties.

She said that President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. had directed concerned government agencies to intensify support to provinces less affected by the El Niño phenomenon to increase food production.

Edillon said the government was prioritizing the safety of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) as well as energy conservation in case the Israel-Hamas war escalates.

"Right now, the consensus is that it will be contained — that's the general consensus," she told reporters.

"But in the event that it escalates, again, we are very clear with regard to our priorities," she said in English and Filipino.

"Number one is to make sure that our OFWs there are safe; that we can bring them back safely. And then, number two, we've discussed also the need for energy conservation measures, beginning with those in government."

WITH A REPORT FROM
CATHERINE S. VALENTE



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Agri sciences company introduces augmented reality game for promoting product stewardship among Filipino farmers

AGRICULTURAL sciences company FMC Corp. on Tuesday said it is the first in the Philippine agricultural industry to introduce an augmented reality (AR) game designed to promote product stewardship among farmers.

"The FMC AR game is a new addition to FMC Philippines' FMC on Wheels initiative, a multi-purpose vehicle that brings training and crop advisory services right to the

doorsteps of farmers," FMC said in an e-mailed statement.

The game allows players to take on the persona of a farmer, allowing them to choose the appropriate personal protective equipment for a range of FMC products while offering guidance on how to use them correctly and the recommended dosage.

"The gamer can also learn about harmful insects and combat the pests in a game to win small prizes," FMC said.

Veronica Tiburcio, FMC Philippines country manager, said FMC on Wheels is a unique learning platform that reaches farmers for crop protection solutions treated with the company's technology.

"The addition of the AR game is a differentiated value-add that not only allows us to deepen our engagement with farmers, but to share product knowledge while encouraging good agricultural practices," she added.

FMC said the project travels to rural areas, where it gathers farmers for a mini crop exhibition showcasing both untreated and FMC-treated crops.

It also provides educational talks on agricultural practices and showcases FMC products, all in a single vehicle, the company noted.

Since the project's launch in 2022, it has reached over 15,000 Filipino farmers, according to FMC. — **Miguel Hanz L. Antivola**



Inflation slows to 4.9% in October

By Keisha B. Ta-asan
Reporter

ANNUAL INFLATION sharply slowed in October after two straight months of acceleration, reflecting easing prices of key food items, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said on Tuesday.

Preliminary data from the PSA showed headline inflation eased to 4.9% in October from 6.1% in September and 7.7% in October 2022.

This was significantly slower than the 5.7% median estimate in a *BusinessWorld* poll last week. The figure was also below the 5.1-5.9% forecast of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) for the month.

The latest inflation print was the slowest pace in three months or since the 4.7% in July. However, October marked the 19th straight month that inflation breached the central bank's 2-4% target band.

Stripping out the seasonality effects on prices, the consumer price index (CPI) declined by 0.2% month on month.

For the 10-month period, inflation averaged 6.4%. This is still above the BSP's 5.8% full-year forecast.

"If we don't see any shocks, supply shocks, our view is that inflation rate will go down," National Statistician Claire Dennis S. Mapa said at a briefing on Tuesday.

Core inflation, which excludes food and fuel volatile prices, further slowed to 5.3% in October from 5.9% in September. Year to date, core inflation stood at 7%.

Mr. Mapa said that the sharp slowdown in October inflation reflected easing food prices.

The heavily weighted index for food and non-alcoholic beverages eased to 7% year on

year in October from 9.7% in September.

The food-alone index likewise slowed to 7.1% in October from 10% in the previous month. The deceleration in food inflation was mainly due to lower prices of vegetables and rice.

The annual growth of vegetables, tubers, plantains, cooking bananas and pulses slowed to 11.9% from 29.6% in September.

Rice inflation also eased to 13.2% in October from the 14-year high of 17.9% in September.

Mr. Mapa said the average price of regular milled rice last month went down to P45.40 per kilogram from P47.50 in September. The average price of well-milled rice also slid to P51 per kilo in October from an average of P52.70 a month earlier.

However, rice prices remained higher than last year when prices of regular and well-milled rice stood at P39.70 per kilo and P44 per kilo, respectively.

"Rice inflation slowed down following the onset of peak harvest and import arrivals. The stable supply of vegetables as harvest season comes likewise resulted in a slower inflation rate of the commodity," National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said in a statement.

Also, Mr. Mapa noted food inflation contributed 2.5 percentage points (ppts) to the overall CPI basket.

Inflation of the following commodities also decelerated: fish (5.6% from 6.1%), bread and other cereals (7.4% from 8.1%), sugar (4.9% from 9%), and meat (0.8% from 1.3%).

The inflation rate of restaurants and accommodation services slowed to 6.3% in October from 7.1% in September, which Mr. Mapa said was due to high base effects, lower prices of food items, and easing utility rates.

Inflation, SI/3



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Inflation, from SI/1

Transport inflation also slowed to 1% in October from 1.2% a month ago despite the P1 jeepney fare increase. This was due to the lower pump prices during the month.

In October, oil companies slashed pump prices for gasoline by P3.1 per liter, diesel by P0.45 per liter, and kerosene by P4.40 per liter, data from the Energy department showed.

Other commodity groups that reported slower annual increases in October include alcoholic beverages and tobacco (9.3% from 9.8% in September) and furnishings, household equipment and routine household maintenance (5.3% from 5.4%).

Faster inflation was seen in clothing and footwear (4.8% from 4.7%); and housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels (2.6% from 2.4%).

Meanwhile, inflation in the National Capital Region (NCR) slowed to 4.9% in October from 6.1% in September, while inflation in areas outside Metro Manila eased to 4.9% from 6% in the prior month.

All regions outside NCR also recorded slower inflation rates, except for Region VII (Central Visayas), which posted a higher annual increase of 4.1% in October from 3.8% a month prior.

Meanwhile, the October inflation rate for the bottom 30% of income households slowed to 5.3% from 6.9% in September and 8.9% last year. The 10-month average stood at 7.1%.

THREATS AND RISKS

For PSA's Mr. Mapa, headline inflation will continue to go down in the coming months barring any supply shocks.

Mr. Balisacan said that even though inflation eased in October, it is still crucial to monitor commodity prices, especially food, transportation, and energy, amid global challenges such as geopolitical uncertainties and the El Niño weather event.

"Moreover, it is important to ensure that the most vulnerable sectors of society are protected and provided assistance, especially while food prices remain high and we expect El Niño to affect local and global food production," he said.

On the sidelines of the Philippine Economic Society Annual Meeting, Mr. Balisacan said



PHILIPPINE STAR/MIGUEL DE GUZMAN

INFLATION slowed to 4.9% in October, significantly lower than the 5.7% median estimate in a BusinessWorld poll last week.

November, December, and January are good months for the agriculture sector, as there are fewer typhoons.

However, demand would be high during the Christmas season, and this may contribute to upward pressures on inflation.

"(Inflation) can probably go (to 2-4%) early next year," he said. "We are now at 4.9%. If we can get another 1.2-percentage-point reduction, that's now within the 2-4% band. But still, we want to see progress in the reduction," Mr. Balisacan said.

In a statement, the Department of Finance (DoF) said the government will continue to implement measures to ensure rice and vegetable inflation will go down for the rest of 2023. This includes the utilization of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund programs, as well as measures to control nonfood inflation such as demand and supply management for energy and water, careful review of wage and transport fare hikes, and monitoring the suspension of pass-through fees for delivery trucks.

"This ensures the protection of the purchasing power of the most vulnerable families and the continued delivery of essential services such as public transportation and agricultural activities," Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno said.

BSP PAUSE?

HSBC ASEAN economist Aris Dacanay said inflation will continue to slow in the coming months due to base effects and easing global rice prices.

"Barring any new and unexpected supply shock, we expect the BSP to keep interest rates steady at 6.5% in the upcoming Monetary Board meeting but remain hawkish in tone," he said in a note.

Last week, the BSP hiked borrowing costs by 25 basis points (bps) in an off-cycle move, bringing the key rate to a fresh 16-year high of 6.5%. The BSP has raised policy rates by 450 bps since May 2022.

The BSP's next policy-setting meeting is scheduled for Nov. 16.

However, even if inflation returns to the 2-4% target range, headline CPI may rise again, Mr. Dacanay said.

"Our baseline scenario is for inflation to average above 4% in the second quarter of 2024. Triggering the inflation flare up will be the expiration of Executive Order No. 10, an order that temporarily reduces the tariff rates for rice, corn, coal, and pork," he said.

"We estimate its expiration to add 1.4 ppts to the inflation outlook. Since this is expected, this will likely lead the BSP to keep policy rates high for a prolonged period. We only expect rate cuts to begin in the third quarter of 2024," he added.

Pantheon Macroeconomics Chief Emerging Asia Economist Miguel Chanco in a note said achieving the 2-4% inflation target band is still doable by the end of the year.

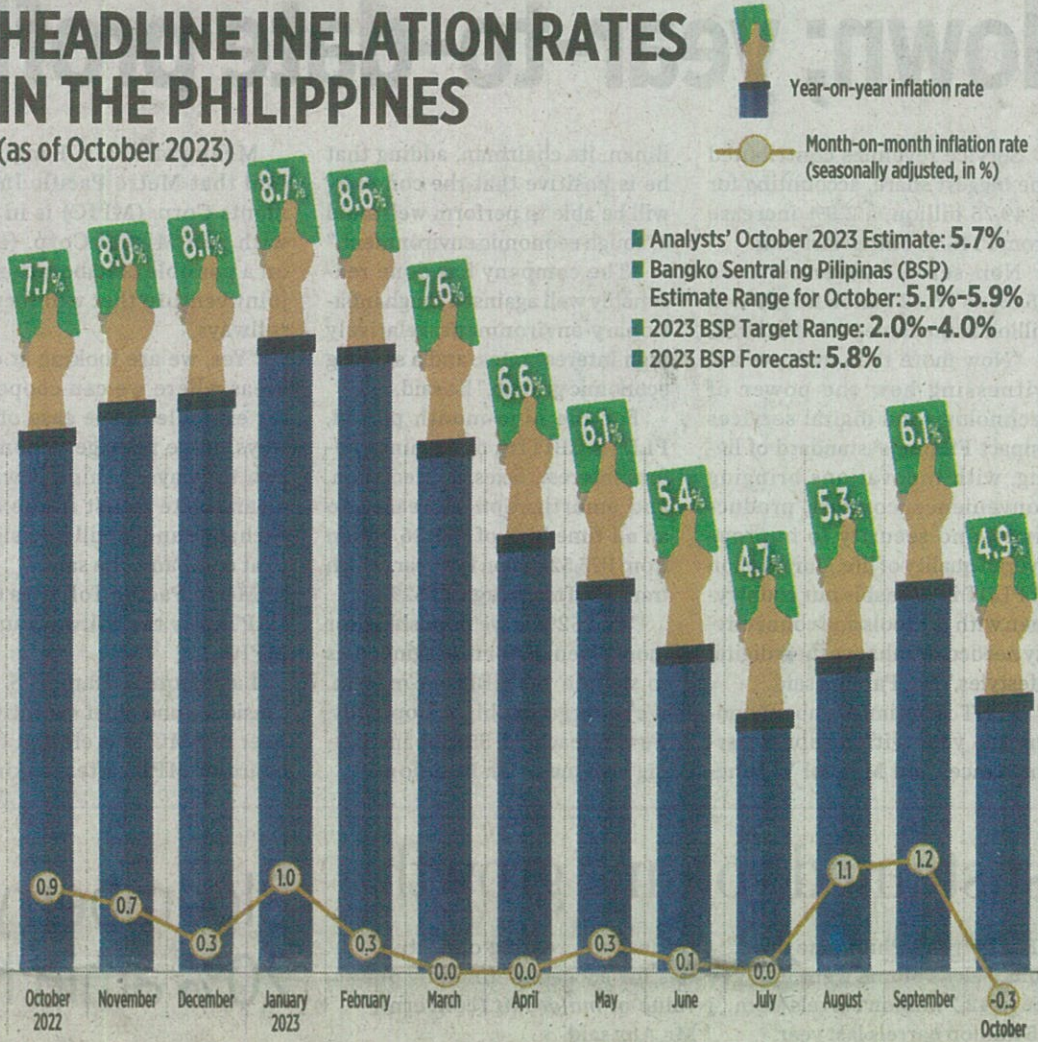
"Not surprisingly from our perspective, today's report shows a big U-turn in food inflation," he said. "We expect this U-turn to continue until early next year, particularly with base effects remaining quite favorable."

Mr. Chanco said the BSP may start cutting policy rates in the first quarter of 2024, with a total of 100-bp worth of easing next year.

The BSP projects the full-year inflation to hit 5.8% for 2023, before slowing to 3.5% in 2024 and 3.4% in 2025. But officials have said they will likely revise their inflation forecasts on Nov. 16. — with inputs from **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

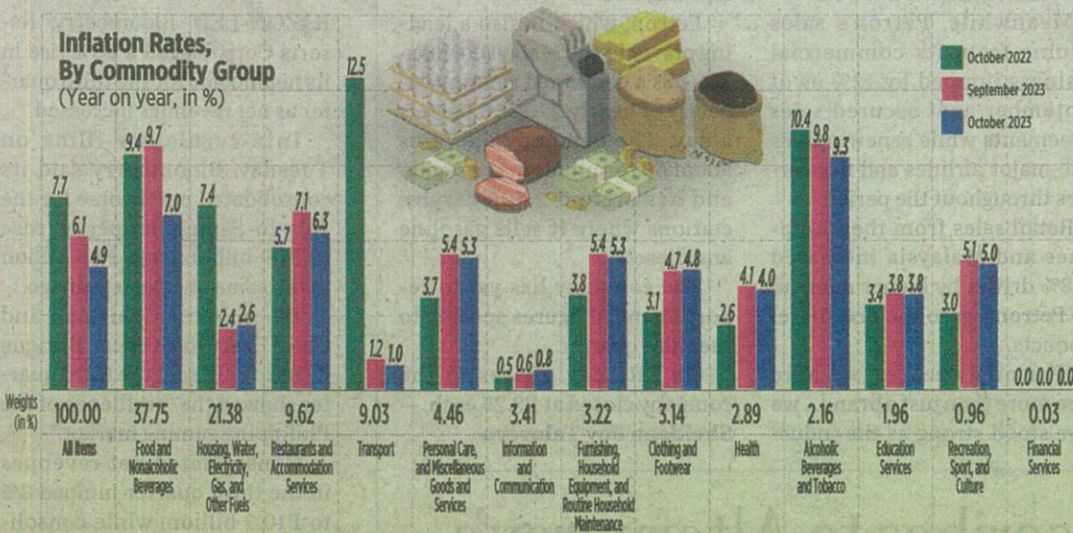


HEADLINE INFLATION RATES
IN THE PHILIPPINES
(as of October 2023)



■ Analysts' October 2023 Estimate: 5.7%
■ Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP)
Estimate Range for October: 5.1%-5.9%
■ 2023 BSP Target Range: 2.0%-4.0%
■ 2023 BSP Forecast: 5.8%

Inflation Rates,
By Commodity Group
(Year on year, in %)



Source: Philippine Statistics Authority (Preliminary data as of Nov. 7, 2023)
BusinessWorld Research: Lourdes O. Pilar BusinessWorld Graphics: Bong R. Fortin



Inflation slows to 4.9%

BY JIMMY CALAPATI

SLOWER annual increases in prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages pulled inflation lower to 4.9 percent in October, the Philippine Statistics Authority yesterday said.

This makes the national average inflation from January to October 2023 at 6.4 percent, still above the 2 percent to 4 percent target range of the government.

Dennis Mapa, national statistician and civil registrar general, said the downtrend in the overall inflation was primarily brought about "by the slower year-on-year increase in the heavily-weighted food and non-alcoholic beverages at 7 percent in October 2023 from 9.7 percent in the previous month."

Mapa said restaurants and accommodation services, with an inflation rate of 6.3 percent during the month from 7.1 percent in September, also contributed to the downtrend of the headline inflation.

He noted slower annual increases in the indices of alcoholic beverages and tobacco; furnishings, household equipment and routine household maintenance; health; transport; recreation, sport and culture; and personal care, and miscellaneous goods and services.

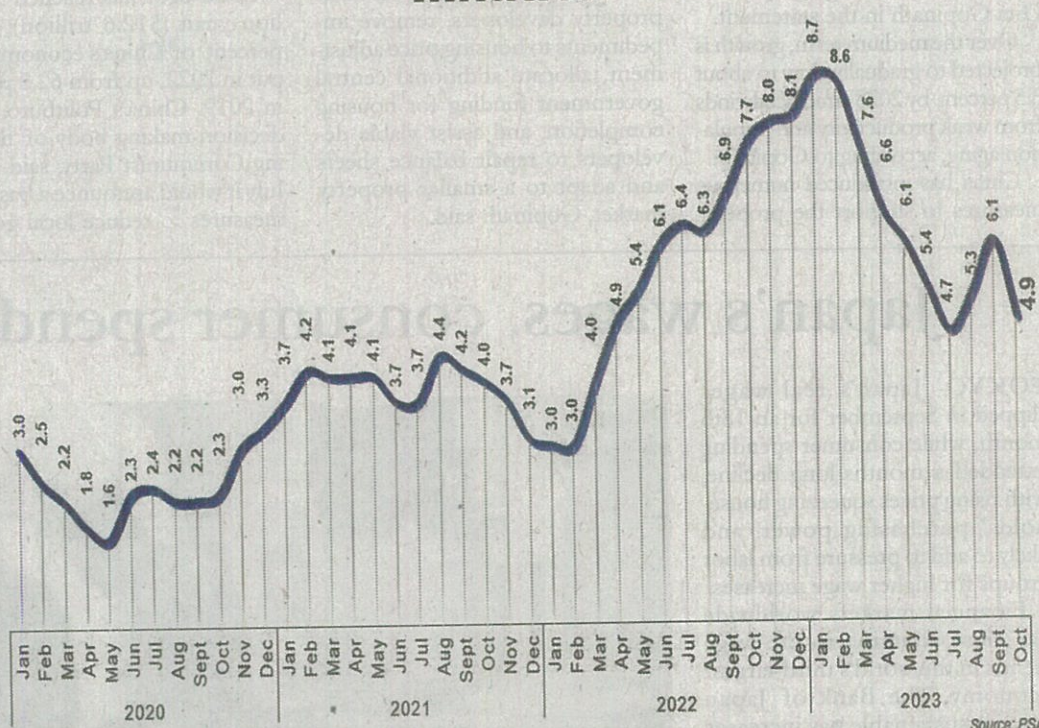
"Food inflation at the national level slowed down to 7.1 percent in October 2023 from 10 percent in the previous month. In October 2022, food inflation was higher at 9.8 percent," Mapa said.

He said the deceleration of food inflation was primarily influenced by the lower annual growth of vegetables, tubers, plantains, cooking bananas and pulses.

This was followed by rice with an inflation rate of 13.2 percent in October from 17.9 percent in September.

Corn index also recorded an annual decrease of 2.4 percent during the month from an annual growth rate of 1.6 percent in September, while oils and fats index decreased further at 2.5 percent annual drop in October from 1.3 percent annual decline in the previous month.

Inflation



Meanwhile, compared with their previous month's inflation rates, higher year-on-year growth rates were observed in the indices of milk, other dairy products and eggs at 7.5 percent during the month from 7.3 percent in September, and fruits and nuts at 13.5 percent in October from 11.6 percent in the previous month.

Inflation rate in the National Capital Region (NCR) also decelerated to 4.9 percent in October from 6.1 percent in September, mainly brought about by the slower annual increase in food and non-alcoholic beverages.

Inflation rate in areas outside NCR likewise slowed down to 4.9 percent in October from 6 percent in September, also mainly due to the slower annual increase in food and non-alcoholic beverages.

See INFLATION > Page A2

Malaya Business Insight

Date: NOV. 08, 2023 Page: A1 & A2



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INFLATION

Decisive, timely actions

Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno said this positive development “is the result of the government’s decisive and timely actions in mitigating inflation.”

“The government will continue to implement a package of measures to address non-competitive market behavior to help ensure that rice and vegetable inflation will further decelerate for the rest of the year, while also supporting farmers and protecting the vulnerable,” Diokno said.

Rosemarie Edillon, National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) undersecretary, said Secretary Arsenio Balisacan ordered that even as inflation has eased, “it is crucial to continue monitoring the prices of commodities particularly food, transportation, energy amid global challenges such as the

geopolitical uncertainties and also the El Niño.”

She said among the measures that the government is implementing or plan to continue implementing to cushion the impact of inflation include subsidies or some form of aid for vulnerable sectors or those heavily affected, and importation to increase the food supply.

“We also need to address the longstanding challenges in agriculture and food production, and help our local farmers boost their productivity and resilience through investment in irrigation, R&D (research and development), post-harvest facilities and others,” Edillon added.

Apart from the inflation update, the Economic Development Group, during the sectoral meeting, also recommended the extension of the reduced tariff rates

for the most favored nation under Executive Order (EO) No. 10, Series of 2022 until the end of 2024.

It will be subject to a mid-year review.

Under EO 10, which the President issued in December last year to address rising prices of commodities, the tariff rates for imported swine meat within the minimum access volume (MAV) quota will be 15 percent while those exceeding the quota will be 25 percent.

Tariff on corn within the MAV quota is 5 percent and those exceeding the quota is 15 percent, while tariff on rice for both within and excess of the MAV quota is 35 percent.

The tariff rate is effective until December 31.

The government will also intensify the utilization of Rice Competitiveness Enhancement

Fund programs, such as farm mechanization, seed development, propagation and promotion, credit assistance, and extension services to improve the productivity of rice farmers, reduce production costs and link them to the value chain, Diokno added.

“The national government continues to undertake measures to mitigate non-food inflation across several fronts, namely on demand and supply management measures for energy and water; careful review of wage and fare hike petitions; and monitoring of the suspension of pass-through fees for delivery trucks as enforced under Executive Order No. 41,” Diokno said, adding the government also aims to complete the provision of financial assistance to the vulnerable sectors.

“This ensures the protection of the purchasing power of the

most vulnerable families and the continued delivery of essential services such as public transportation and agricultural activities,” Diokno said.

Within target data

“There is no urgency for more local policy rate hikes amid stronger peso, lower global oil prices, better weather conditions that help ease food prices, as all of these factors are conducive to the anchoring inflation and the achievement of within target inflation data by early 2024,” said Michael Ricafort, RCBC chief economist.

Ricafort said provided there is no escalation of geopolitical risks particularly on the Israel-Hamas war and the effects on world oil prices and no large storm damage that tends to increase food prices for the rest of 2023, “headline inflation could ease further to a little

over 4 percent from November to December and could ease further to below the 2 percent-4 percent BSP (Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas) inflation target by January 2024 to even below 3 percent by January 2023 and 3 percent levels for February-March 2023.”

“Next local policy rate-setting meeting could match the pause in the latest Fed rate decision to maintain healthy interest rate differentials to support the stability of the peso exchange rate, import prices, and overall inflation,” Ricafort added.

In an off-cycle move, the Monetary Board late last month decided to raise the key rate of the BSP by 25 basis points to 6.50. The interest rates on the overnight deposit and lending facilities were also raised to 6.0 percent and 7.0 percent, respectively.

- With Jocelyn Montemayor



NOV 08, 2023
PAGE: A10

editorial

Panama Canal drought to push food prices up

As the Panama Canal's water levels hit historic lows, the Panama Canal Authority has started cutting vessel traffic, which is seen reaching over 40 percent reduction of vessels by February due to an ongoing drought. This is a worrisome development that could lead to higher food prices. Bloomberg reported that trips were limited to 18 per day, a 50-percent cut from a year earlier (See, "Panama Canal traffic is being throttled by climate change impact," in the BUSINESSMIRROR, November 5, 2023).

The ships that will not be able to use the Panama Canal will likely alter course to the Suez Canal. This will add at least a week to the journey between the United States and China. Additional travel days would mean higher freight costs that could be passed on to consumers.

The end of the pandemic and the eventual reopening of economies have created logistics nightmares that were eventually resolved. Shipping issues created by environmental changes, however, are entirely different things. Coping strategies would have to involve domestic producers of food items and other raw materials for industries.

The current situation highlights the need to increase production. And it would do well for the state and the private sector to work together to encourage Filipinos, particularly the youth, to go into food production. One of the campaign pledges of President Marcos is to strengthen food production and reduce the country's reliance on imported agricultural goods. Instead of compensating foreign food producers, the current administration wants Filipino farmers to benefit from efforts to beef up the local agrifood supply chain.

A review of the latest data on food self-sufficiency released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) indicated that there are a number of opportunities available for aspiring food producers. Based on 2022 data, the Philippines is suffering from a shortage of certain cash crops like coffee, garlic, mongo and peanut. Also, while the world requires a huge volume of cacao, the Philippines could not take full advantage of this global shortage.

Data from the PSA showed that the self-sufficiency ratio (SSR) for garlic reached 5.5 percent, which means the Philippines had to rely on imports for most of its garlic requirements. Coffee SSR stood at 38.1 percent despite the increasing popularity of cafes and coffee shops. Peanut and mongo SSR were at 24.5 percent and 41.2 percent, respectively.

The Philippines is also in need of more beef, as beef SSR stood at 50 percent. This means that foreign sources supply half of the country's beef requirements. Pork SSR stood at 69.6 percent, but this is largely because of the spread of African swine fever, a fatal hog disease that decimated local hog farms.

The drought crisis that struck Panama Canal bolsters the case for improving domestic agricultural production and minimizing the country's dependence on imports given the logistics woes created by changing weather patterns. The state, however, must see to it that the policy environment would encourage aspiring entrepreneurs, particularly the youth, to go into food production. Apart from incentives, spending on innovation and supporting the research and development efforts of micro, small and medium enterprises would go a long way in encouraging their participation in the agrifood supply chain.



OCT INFLATION JUST AT 4.9%, BUT HINTS AT LOW GROWTH

By CAI U. ORDINARIO

✉@caiordinario

SLOWING inflation may be good news for some but this may also indicate weaker demand, thus, lower economic growth, according to local economists.

On Tuesday, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that inflation slowed to 4.9 percent in October. This is the slowest rate recorded since April 2022 when inflation was at the same rate. **(Full story: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/11/07/inflation-slows-to-4-9-in-october/>)**

The inflation rate was also below expectations of most analysts, including the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) which projected inflation to average 5.1

to 5.9 percent in October. **(Full story: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/11/02/bsp-now-projects-october-inflation-at-5-1-5-9/>)**

"It's possible that inflation may have also been slower due to slowing demand. The interest rate hike could also be a factor," Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU) economist Leonardo Lanzona told BUSINESSMIRROR

SEE "INFLATION," A2

Inflation...

CONTINUED FROM A1

on the sidelines of the Philippine Economic Society (PES) Annual Meeting and Conference on Tuesday.

Lanzona said if he were to choose between an economy that had high inflation but fast economic growth and one that has low inflation but slow GDP growth, he would choose the former.

"Essentially you can explain lower inflation because of the slowing down of the economy. But that may not necessarily be a good development because that would mean lesser job opportunities and in general income generation [will be low]. So you might have lower inflation [but] you're not really better off," Lanzona explained.

Base effects?

SOCIOECONOMIC Planning Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan also told reporters on the sidelines of the same event on Tuesday that inflation may have also eased due to base effects, but qualified this later.

It may be noted that inflation was at 7.7 percent in October 2022. At that time, rice prices shot up to 17.9 percent, whereas it has since slowed to 13.2 percent in October 2023.

Balisacan said these significant declines in prices cannot be explained by mere base effects alone. He said there was a real reduction in prices that led to slower inflation in October.

"It's true mayroon din siguro some of the base effects but I think it's not substantial," Balisacan said. "It's [inflation] quite a substantial drop from 6.1 [percent] to 4.9 [percent]."

However, given that prices of rice, the country's staple, still posted double-digit growth in October 2023, this means the government still needs to closely monitor prices, Balisacan said.

This also means, he said, it is crucial to ensure the country's trade policy remains sensitive to the availability of supplies, particularly the level of production so that the country does not experience shortages.

Nonetheless, the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary remains confident that the 4.9-percent inflation would be sustainable.

Balisacan said the country may be able to attain its 2 to 4 percent inflation target early next year, especially if the Philippines can sustain this momentum in the slowdown of commodity prices.

Food is critical

"I THINK the food is the critical thing there. And for so long that energy prices, oil prices would not increase further, I think [there's] a good [chance we will sustain it]," Balisacan said. "November, December, [and] January, those

are good months for the food sector [because there is minimal] risk [of] typhoons, monsoon rain. It's also replanting second crops for many other areas in the country so it should be okay," he explained.

On rice prices, Bank of the Philippine Islands Chief Economist Emilio S. Neri Jr. told this newspaper on Tuesday that part of the slowdown in rice prices could be traced to the Rice Tariffication as well as the last quarter harvest.

Neri also said as long as global benchmarks for the commodity continue to slow, there is no reason for concern regarding high rice prices.

Given this, Neri said they may not need to adjust their inflation forecast since the latest number is still within their expectations. This, however, assumes that no further shocks occur. In terms of oil prices, University of Asia and the Pacific economist Peter Lee U is uncertain how oil futures are going to behave given the continuation of the Russia-Ukraine war and the conflict between Israel and Hamas.

At best, U said the uncertainty caused by the two conflicts as well as the weakness in the global economy would likely keep oil prices at the current levels.

El Niño

THE NEDA, however, considers the El Niño to be a threat to inflation. The dry spell is expected to linger until the middle of next year.

The country is experiencing a moderate El Niño, which is expected to strengthen until the second quarter of 2024, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa).

NEDA said this is expected to bring in below-normal rainfall across the country and may adversely impact agriculture production and energy generation.

In line with this, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) is currently implementing the pilot run of the Food Stamp Program (FSP), which the agency will scale up in mid-2024.

The Economic Development Group (EDG) also recommended extending the reduced tariff rates for Most Favored Nation under EO No. 10 (s. 2022) until the end of 2024, subject to midyear review.

"It is important to ensure that the most vulnerable sectors of the society are protected and provided assistance, especially while food prices remain high and we expect El Niño to affect local and global food production," Balisacan said in a statement.

"While we are providing short-term measures to address effects of inflation through subsidies and importation, we also need to address long-standing challenges in agriculture and food supply chain and help our local farmers boost their productivity and resilience through investment in irrigation, flood control, supply chain logistics, and climate change adaptation," he added.



Durian, banana: PHL secures \$603M worth of fruit purchasing agreements in China expo

By ANDREA E. SAN JUAN
@andreasanjuan

THE Philippines has so far secured \$603 million worth of purchasing agreements at the China International Import Expo (CIIE) with fresh fruits, such as bananas and durian occupying the larger chunk of the exports pie, according to the Philippines's Agriculture Attaché in Beijing.

During the first two days of the trade fair in China, Anna Abejuela, Agriculture Counselor at the Embassy of the Philippines in Beijing said, "We were busy dealing with turnovers of purchasing commitments from our major importers."

"So as of yesterday (Monday), at CIIE, we were able to produce a little bit over \$600 million and most

of these are fresh fruits," Abejuela told reporters at a virtual media briefing on Tuesday morning.

The agriculture attaché emphasized that Philippine bananas comprised the largest chunk of the purchasing agreements, followed by durian and pineapples.

"Yung major exports natin sa China ang parang number one parin

naman ang bananas eh so expected na bananas would lead the volume and value for exports next year na na-commit dito sa CIIE," the agriculture attaché said.

Abejuela said Philippine trade and agriculture officials have been working with exporters and importers to come up with purchasing agreements for next year, particularly asking them what they can commit to buy Philippine products.

Meanwhile, Glenn G. Peñaranda, Assistant Secretary and Officer-In-Charge for Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) Trade Promotions Group (TPG), divulged that the government has a "fighting target" of \$700 million purchasing commitments from the said expo.

"So hopefully ma-reach natin 'yan. And just to complete the picture, we have agri fresh commitments but then ang CITEM [Center for International Trade Expositions and Missions] naman po is monitoring yung results ng mga individual companies lalo na dun sa processed," Peñaranda added.

For CITEM's part, which is the

DTI's export promotion arm, Rowena Mendoza, Officer-in-Charge for CITEM's Industrial Goods and Services Division reported the export sales which are "booked and under negotiation."

"Yesterday, November 6, we have...this is partial and unofficial. It's \$7,734,290. This represents 14 companies," Mendoza said at the same virtual briefing on Tuesday morning.

The CITEM official noted that they have already received buyer inquiries, which is a combination of booked and under negotiation.

Based on the CIIE 2023 Philippine lookbook sent to reporters on Tuesday, the Philippine exhibitors at the expo include sellers of coconut water, aquaculture food processor, dried fruit producer, snack food firms, banana chips firm, agricultural producers, durian association, among others.

DTI said 16 Filipino food exporters are featured at the National Exhibition and Convention Center in Shanghai, China, which will run from November 5 to 10, 2023.



Abante NEGOSYO

Pagtaas sa presyo ng pagkain bumagal

BUMAGAL ang inflation sa bansa sa 4.9% nitong Oktubre mula sa 6.1% nung Setyembre dahil sa pagbagal ng pagmahal ng presyo ng mga pagkain kasama na bigas at mga gulay.

Ayon kay Philippine Statistics Authority Undersecretary Dennis Mapa, 89.7% ang naging ambag ng pagbagal ng inflation ng pagkain sa pagbaba ng pangkalahatang inflation.

Sabi ni Mapa, nakatulong din ang pagbaba ng inflation sa restawran at mga accommodation services kasama mga karinderya.

Ang pagbaba ng inflation ng pagkain kasama na ang sa restawran at accommodation services ang dahilan kaya bumaba ang inflation sa 15 rehiyon sa

bansa maliban lamang sa Central Visayas na nagtala ng pagtaas ng inflation sa 4.1%.

Gayunpaman, ang pinakamataas na inflation nitong Oktubre ay sa Central Luzon kung saan 6% ang inflation at pinakamababa naman sa Cagayan Valley na 3.4% lamang ang inflation.

Kung hindi magkaipitan ang suplay ng bigas, naniniwala si Mapa na bababa ang inflation sa susunod na mga buwan lalo na't nakikita na ang pagbaba ng inflation sa bigas na 8.75% ang ambag sa kabuuang inflation.

"If we don't see any supply shocks, inflation will go down," sabi ni Mapa. (Eileen Men-cias)



INFLATION EASES

Diokno: Inflation slows down, thanks to Marcos

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s chief economic manager said the government's swift and resolute actions to combat inflation were responsible for the considerable decrease in consumer prices recorded in October.

In a statement, Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno lauded the 4.9 percent headline inflation registered for the last month, highlighting its dip below the average rates seen in September and the previous year.

He also said the October inflation rate fell below the projected range of 5.1 percent to 5.9 percent set by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP).

"This positive development is the result of the government's decisive and timely actions in mitigating inflation, a testament to President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.'s firm resolve to protect the purchasing power of Filipino families," Diokno said.

The October inflation rate brought the 10-month average to 6.4 percent, which approached the Development Budget Coordination Committee's (DBCC) estimated range of 5.0 percent to 6.0 percent for the full year of 2023.

However, it remained significantly higher than

the government's inflation target of two percent to four percent for the year.

The downtrend in inflation was mainly due to slower year-on-year increases in food and non-alcoholic beverages (7.0 percent) and restaurants and accommodation services (6.3 percent).

In October, the three primary commodity groups that made the highest contributions to overall inflation were food and non-alcoholic beverages, accounting for 2.6 percentage points out of the total 4.9 percent.

It was followed by restaurants and accommodation services (0.6 percentage points); and housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels (0.6 percentage points).

Meanwhile, non-food inflation continued to be within the government's target range of two percent to four percent as it decelerated to 3.4 percent from 3.5 percent the previous month.

Main contributors to non-food inflation were food and beverage serving services (0.6 percentage points), housing rentals (0.5 percentage points), personal care (0.21 percentage points), as well as passenger transport (0.16 percentage points).

The sustained elevated inflation in restaurants remains partly attributed to the second-round effects of higher prices of food commodities and high demand for these services.

Meanwhile, the continued high rental cost remains mainly due to increased demand as economic activities normalize after the pandemic.

On passenger transport, inflation was primarily due to the increase in transport fares, particularly those that were implemented for UV express vehicles and LRTs beginning in August and jeepneys in October.

The slower deceleration of fuel prices also contributed to the sustained transport inflation for the month.

Core inflation, which excludes selected volatile food and energy items, continued to decline to 5.3 percent from 5.9 percent in the previous month, bringing the average core inflation to 7.0 percent.

The National Capital Region (NCR) also saw a downtrend in inflation to 4.9 percent from 6.1 percent in September 2023.

All regions outside NCR also recorded slower inflation rates, except for Region VII (Central Visayas), which posted a higher annual increase.



Wheat drops, soybeans firm

SINGAPORE- Chicago wheat futures slid for the first time in five sessions on Tuesday, with the improved condition of the US winter crop boosting the 2024 supply outlook and adding pressure on prices.

Soybeans ticked up, trading close to last session's eight-week high, on weather concerns in top exporter Brazil that has delayed planting and strong Chinese demand.

The Chicago Board of Trade's (CBOT) most-active wheat contract fell 0.8 percent to \$5.71 a bushel. Soybeans added quarter of a cent to \$13.64-1/4 a bushel, while corn gave

up 0.5 percent to \$4.75 a bushel.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) on Monday rated 50 percent of the US winter wheat crop in good-to-excellent condition, up three percentage points from the previous week and the highest for this time of year since 2019 as soil moisture improved in the Plains following a three-year drought.

The market is monitoring uneven crop weather in Brazil, where soybean planting has been delayed. Dryness is a concern in the leading soy-producing state Mato Grosso, while heavy downpours have soaked southern areas. - Reuters



Indonesia to set lower rice import quota

JAKARTA- Indonesia plans to set next year's rice import quota at 2 million metric tons, the country's state food procurement company Bulog said late on Monday, below this year's quota.

The 2024 import realization would depend on domestic supply and demand, Bulog's corporate secretary Awaludin Iqbal said.

Indonesia initially issued 2 million tons of import quota for this year, on top of 300,000 tons of carry over quota from 2022.

Authorities last month decided on an additional 1.5 million tons for this year, though some of this may be realized in early 2024.

The large import quotas were issued to tame rising domestic rice prices due to drier-than-usual weather hurting harvests. Average rice retail prices in October rose more than 19 percent on a yearly basis, government data showed.

The 2024 quota came after the government decided to further extend its rice handout scheme until June, a program that provides 10 kg of rice monthly to 22 million lower-income households to help them cope with high prices of the staple.

The program was previously due to expire next month.

"We decided to extend the program considering the rice price has yet to drop," Trade Minister Zulkifli Hasan told reporters on Monday.

Duties for the 1.5 million tons additional imports will be removed to make sure the imported



Farmers collecting paddy during harvest day at a rice field in Candipuro district, Lumajang, East Java province. (Reuters Photo)

rice remains affordable, the country's National Food Agency said late on Monday.

"This incentive is ... because the prices overseas were quite high and the dollar exchange rate already close to 16,000 rupiah," NFA chief Arief Prasetyo Adi said in a statement, referring to the rupiah's exchange rate to the US dollar.

Indonesia's rice imports in the January to September period stood at 1.79 million metric tons, with Bulog's rice stock at 1.4 million

metric tons as of the start of this month.

Indonesia's trade surplus soared to twice the forecast amount in August as imports such as raw materials and capital goods fell more than expected, government data showed on Friday.

The surplus for Southeast Asia's biggest economy was \$3.12 billion, the statistics bureau reported, far above the \$1.55 billion median forecast of 19 economists surveyed by Reuters and up sharply from \$1.31 billion in July.

Imports fell 14.77 percent to \$18.88 billion, deeper than the 9.33 percent forecast drop. Crude oil imports sank about 39 percent from a year earlier, said Amalia Adininggar Widyasanti, acting head of Statistics Indonesia.

The import drop was influenced by seasonal factors, said economist Irman Faiz at Bank Danamon, who maintained his forecast that imports will rise for the rest of the year due to higher oil prices and an increase in manufacturing.
- Reuters