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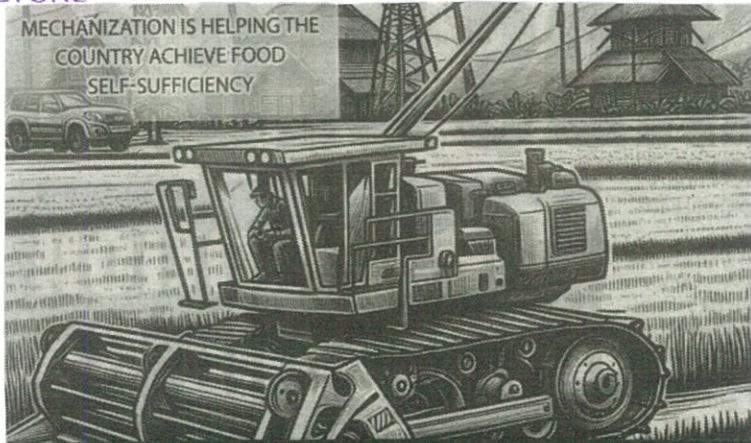
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EDITORIAL

Farm mechanization

DOUBTLESS, farm mechanization plays a pivotal role in attaining food self-sufficiency.

Agricultural mechanization is the use of machinery and equipment, such as tractors and harvesters, to perform various agricultural operations.

With the help of these state-of-the-art "wonders of modern technology," the Philippines is expected to achieve food self-sufficiency.

"Let's remember that we have now more than 100 million Filipinos, many of them poor, to feed," according to a low-salaried government employee.

That's why we commend the Department of Agriculture (DA) for opening the nation's first Agricultural Machinery Design and Prototyping Center.

Known as the AMDPC, the facility is located at the Philippine Center for Post Harvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech) in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu-Laurel said the foreign-funded facility is seen to provide farmers with affordable but quality machinery and equipment.

The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and the Philippine government funded the construction of the P370.5 million facility.

Of the amount, P289 million was provided by KOICA.

Two other Korean firms are supporting the project, according to the Agriculture secretary.

These are the Korea Institute for Development Strategy and the Korea Agricultural Machinery Industry Cooperative.

Clearly, the government, with the help of friends in the international community, is doing a great job mechanizing Philippine agriculture.

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QUICK RESPONSE MECHANISM

AGRI DEP'T STARTS MARKET VISITS TO MONITOR COMMODITY SUPPLY, PRICES

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
@jordeenelagare

Amid the seasonal uptick in prices, the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** has started making visits to public markets in Metro Manila to ensure stable prices and supply this Christmas season.

In a statement, the DA said it will discuss with other agencies that are part of the National Price Coordinating Council what interventions could be done to stabilize prices as well as ensure

imported goods do not flood the market and undermine local producers.

So far, the DA observed a sufficient supply of meat, poultry, vegetables and fish in the Mega Q-Mart and Kamuning Public Market in Quezon City.

Price Act

Under the Price Act, the DA has jurisdiction over basic or prime commodities such as rice, corn, fresh eggs, fresh pork, beef and poultry, fruits

and vegetables.

The law created the council comprised of representatives from the government and the private sector to coordinate the government's productivity, distribution and price stabilization programs, project and measures.

It is also responsible for coming up with comprehensive strategies to keep prices of basic necessities and prime commodities affordable.

Based on the DA's price

monitoring, local regular milled rice is sold from P38 to P52 per kilogram as of Friday from only P38 per kg a year ago. Local well-milled rice ranged from P45 to P57 per kg compared to P40 per kg previously.

Imported regular milled rice is unavailable in the markets while imported well-milled rice is priced at P52 per kg, higher than last year's P42 per kg.

Local red onion is sold from P120 to P220 per kg, lower than P280 per kg previously and im-

ported red onion retailed for P130 per kg.

Local white onion ranged between P100 and P150 per kg while imported white onion is priced from P80 to P150 per kg.

Markets in the metro sold milkfish (*bangus*) from P150 to P250 per kg against P180 per kg in the past year and tilapia from P110 to P180 per kg as opposed to P140 per kg.

Local round scad (*galunggong*) is priced between P200 and P300 per kg, lower than

P240 per kg. Imported round scad is sold from P180 to P260 per kg against P240 per kg.

Bittergourd (*ampalaya*) is offered from P70 to P120 per kg compared to P100 per kg a year prior. Squash (*kalabasa*) retailed from P35 to P80 per kg from only P50 per kg.

Meanwhile, eggplant is sold from P70 to P130 per kg as opposed to P90 per kg in the previous year. Tomato retailed from P30 to P100 per kg from only P90 per kg. **INQ**

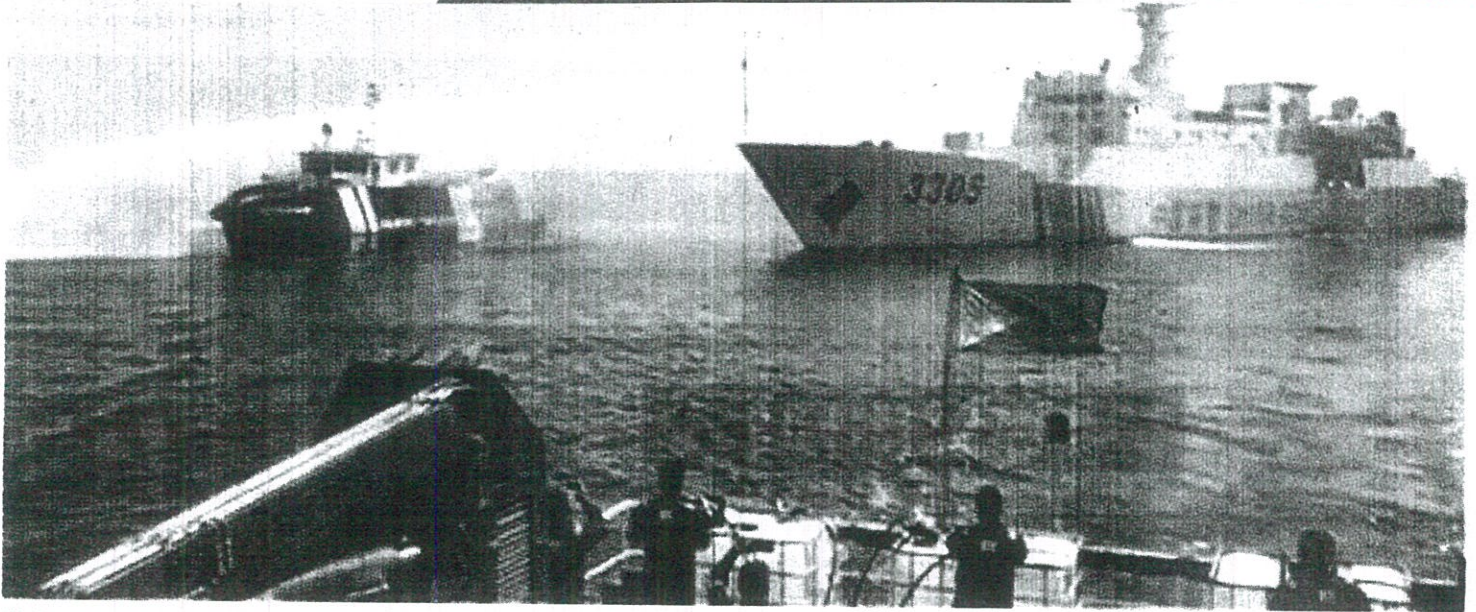


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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

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'INHUMANE' The National Task Force for the West Philippine Sea said Saturday's water cannon attack by the China Coast Guard (CCG) caused "significant damage" to the Datu Bankaw (left). It condemned the CCG's action as "not as only illegal but also inhumane" for it was directed at a humanitarian mission. —SCREEN GRAB FROM PHILIPPINE COAST GUARD VIDEO

CHINA SHIPS FIRE WATER CANNONS AT BFAR BOATS

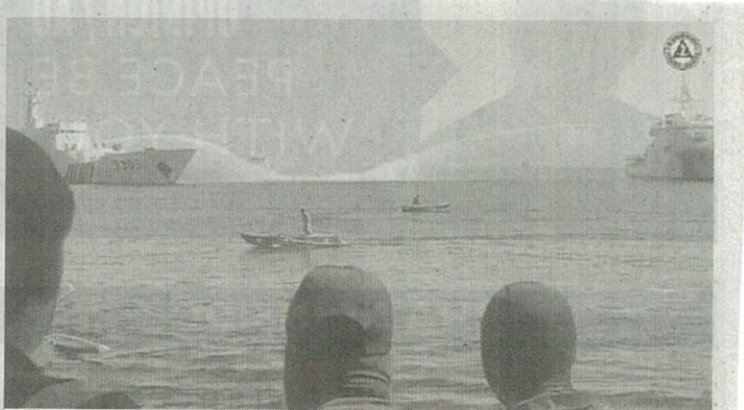
It was the third time this year that the China Coast Guard used water cannons to block Philippine civilian vessels in the West Philippine Sea. This time it was meant to stop the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) from delivering fuel and other supplies to Filipino fishermen waiting near Bajo de Masinloc, a rich fishing ground under Chinese control since 2012. **A2**

FROM A1

By Dexter Cabalza
@dexcabalzaINQ

Three vessels of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) became the latest targets of water cannon attacks by the China Coast Guard (CCG) in the West Philippine Sea.

The National Task Force for the West Philippine Sea (NTF-WPS) "vehemently condemn(ed) the illegal and aggressive actions" taken by the CCG and the Chinese maritime militia against the BFAR boats, which were then on their way



'DELIBERATELY TARGETED' A screen grab from a video provided by the Philippine Coast Guard on Saturday shows two China Coast Guard vessels firing water cannons at one of the vessels of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources to stop them from reaching Bajo de Masinloc, which has been under Chinese control since 2012.

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

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to bring supplies to Filipino fishermen near Bajo de Masinloc (Scarborough Shoal) off Zambales province.

According to the task force, the Datu Sanday, Datu Bankaw, and Datu Tamblot were on a "regular humanitarian and support mission" on Saturday morning to deliver fuel and groceries to more than 30 Filipino fishing boats waiting about a nautical mile to the entrance of the shoal.

The incident was the third time this year that the CCG used water cannons to stop Philippine civilian vessels. In earlier blockade attempts, the Chinese used similar tactics on the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) resupply missions to the BRP Sierra Madre, the grounded ship serving as a military outpost at Ayungin (Second Thomas) Shoal, on Aug. 5 and Nov. 10.

Located some 220 kilometers west of Zambales, Bajo de Masinloc, also called Panatag Shoal, lies within the country's 370-km exclusive economic zone.

China seized control of the shoal in 2012 after a tense standoff with the Philippine Navy. The government under then President Benigno Aquino III filed an arbitration case against Beijing before an international tribunal the following year. China does not recognize the 2016 arbitral ruling that invalidated its claim to up to 90 percent of the South China Sea, including Bajo de Masinloc.

'Most aggressive'

According to Filipino TV journalists who covered the BFAR mission, the bureau's vessels encountered two CCG ships—with bow numbers 3305 and 3302—and at least four maritime militia boats some 2.6 km away from Bajo de Masinloc.

The CCG ships started firing their water cannon around 9 a.m. to prevent the BFAR boats from approaching the Filipino fishing vessels. This went on up to around 1 p.m., according to the journalists who posted what they were witnessing on social media.

An NTF-WPS statement, which was issued at 4 p.m. to condemn the latest Chinese harassment, said the BFAR mission was still ongoing at the time.

The task force spokesperson, Jonathan Malaya, said the Chinese used their water cannons at least eight times and caused "significant damage to BFAR vessel Datu Tamblot's communication and navigation equipment, as it was directly and deliberately targeted by the CCG."

The BFAR, an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture, said it was the "most aggressive action" ever faced by its personnel at sea and the first to be inflicted upon them by the CCG using water cannons.

Earlier BFAR missions to the shoal were met only with radio challenges or merely shadowed by the CCG and the Chinese maritime militia, it said.

LRAD also used

The NTF-WPS said the maritime militia also took part in the blockade by making "dangerous maneuvers" and targeting the BFAR vessels with a long-range acoustic device (LRAD), the latter "causing severe temporary discomfort and incapacitation to some Filipino crew."

The NTF-WPS also reported that the Chinese deployed teams on inflatable boats to drive away the Filipino fishermen who had been waiting for the BFAR mission.

"To prevent the distribution of humanitarian support is not only illegal but also inhumane," Malaya said.

The Filipino fishermen later told authorities that they saw the CCG installing a floating barrier at the southeast entrance to Bajo de Masinloc earlier on Saturday. In September, on President Marcos' orders, the PCG removed a similar barrier put up by the CCG in the area.

"We stress that Bajo de Masinloc is a high-tide feature with territorial sea, per the 2016 arbitral award. It forms an integral part of the Philippine national territory under the Constitution. The Philippines

exercises sovereignty and jurisdiction over the shoal and its territorial sea," Malaya said.

"The 2016 arbitral award has also clarified that Filipinos have traditional fishing rights in the waters of Bajo de Masinloc protected by international law," he added.

The NTF-WPS demanded that Beijing take "immediate action" to stop the CCG's aggressive activities and uphold the principles of international law.

It also called on China to desist from actions that would infringe on Philippine sovereignty and endanger the lives and livelihood of Filipino fishermen, for whom the shoal is a traditional fishing ground.

"China's illegal exercise of maritime law enforcement powers, interference with Philippine vessels, harassment and intimidation of Filipino fishermen, or any other activity that infringes upon the Philippines' sovereignty and jurisdiction in Bajo de Masinloc, are violations of international law, particularly, Unclos (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) and the arbitral award," Malaya said.

'Control measures'

"We firmly insist that these Chinese vessels leave Bajo de Masinloc immediately," he added.

Defending its actions against the BFAR mission, the CCG on Saturday said it undertook "control measures" in accordance with Chinese laws, insisting that the Philippine vessels were the ones that "intruded" into the waters around Huangyan Island, the name China gave to Bajo de Masinloc.

The CCG statement was posted on the X (formerly Twitter) account of the People's Daily, the official news outlet of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party.

Saturday's incident also took place a day after a civilian humanitarian convoy left Manila on a three-day voyage to bring Christmas gifts and other supplies to Filipino forces and island settlers in the West Philippine Sea. INQ



China fires water cannon on Phl humanitarian ships

By GHIO ONG

Chinese vessels have once again harassed Filipino boats and ships on a humanitarian mission at Bajo de Masinloc, also known as Panatag or Scarborough Shoal, in the West Philippine Sea.

"China Coast Guard (CCG) ships utilized water cannons to obstruct and prevent BFAR (Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources) vessels from approaching the Filipino fishing vessels eagerly awaiting the oil subsidy and grocery packs," according to a statement from the National Task Force-West Philippine Sea (NTF-WPS).

The task force referred to three BFAR vessels – *Datu Sanday*, *Datu Bankaw* and *Datu Tamblot* – on a "regular humanitarian and support mission of providing oil subsidy and grocery packs to over 30 Filipino fishing vessels near Bajo de Masinloc in the West Philippine Sea" yesterday.

The BFAR ships approached "1.4 to 1.9 nautical miles" from Bajo de Masinloc when the CCG fired their water cannons,

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China fires From Page 1

which were used "at least eight times," according to the NTF-WPS.

The impact of the water cannons used by the CCG caused "significant damage" to Datu Tamblot's communication and navigation equipment after it was "directly and deliberately targeted."

Aside from the CCG vessels, the NTF-WPS said those from the Chinese maritime militia "engaged in dangerous maneuvers and deployed what is understood to be a long-range acoustic device against the BFAR vessels, causing severe temporary discomfort and incapacitation to some Filipino crew."

Chinese maritime authorities also sent rigid hull inflatable boats "to disperse and drive away Filipino fishing vessels eagerly awaiting the distribution of fuel subsidy and food supplies from the BFAR ships," the task force added.

The Filipino fishermen present at Bajo de Masinloc also filmed a "small boat" from the CCG that "illegally install(ed) a floating barrier at the southeast entrance."

In videos posted on X by Philippine Coast Guard Commodore Jay

Tarriela, two CCG patrol vessels fired water cannons directly at the boat believed to be Datu Tamblot. The water cannon was dismantled later on, but it continued spewing water.

The NTF-WPS asserted Bajo de Masinloc is "a high-tide feature with territorial sea per the 2016 arbitral award" and "forms an integral part of the Philippine national territory under the Constitution."

According to the 2016 ruling, the Philippines also declared "Filipinos have traditional fishing rights in the waters of Bajo de Masinloc protected by international law."

"China's illegal exercise of maritime law enforcement powers, interference with Philippine vessels, harassment and intimidation of Filipino fisherfolk or any other activity that infringes upon the Philippines' sovereignty and jurisdiction in Bajo de Masinloc are violations of international law, particularly UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) and the Arbitral Award," the NTF-WPS maintained.

Panatang Shoal is located within the Philippines' 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Beijing

seized it in 2012 and forced fishermen from the Philippines to travel further for smaller catches.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea, a conduit for more than \$3 trillion of annual ship-borne commerce, including parts claimed by the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei. The Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016 said China's claims have no legal basis.

The task force warned CCG and Chinese maritime militia vessels to "leave Bajo de Masinloc immediately" and at the same time "demand(ed) that the Chinese government take immediate action to halt these aggressive activities and uphold the principles of international law, and desist from actions that would infringe on Philippine sovereignty and endanger the lives and livelihood of Filipino fishermen who have traditionally fished in the area."

China said earlier that it took "control measures" yesterday against three Philippine fishing vessels in the South China Sea that had intruded into waters near Panatang Shoal, state media reported.

Ally support

Posting on X (formerly Twitter), United States Ambassador MaryKay

Carlson said, "We condemn PRC (People's Republic of China)'s aggressive, illegal actions against BFAR vessels lawfully operating in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone."

She added that China's aggressive action in Philippine waters "violates international law and endangers lives and livelihoods."

"We stand with our Philippine friends, partner, allies, in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific," Carlson added.

For his part, Japanese Ambassador Koshikawa Kazuhiko expressed "serious concern about the dangerous actions by CCG vessels against Philippine vessels, which endanger lives and livelihoods and pose a threat to the peace and stability in the South China Sea."

"We reiterate the importance of upholding international law, particularly UNCLOS, and 2016 Arbitral Award," Kazuhiko posted on X, referring not only to the international law of the sea, but the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling that affirmed Philippines' sovereign waters and invalidated China's nine-dash line.

European Union Ambassador Luc Véron also reiterated the EU's support to the Philippines, adding that the UNCLOS laid down "dispute

settlement mechanisms (that) contribute to maintaining and advancing the rule of law."

"The 2016 UNCLOS Tribunal Award is legally binding and useful for peacefully resolving disputes. Water cannons aren't!" Véron posted on X.

In a separate statement, Sen. Francis Tolentino said he "strongly condemns China's use of water cannons against civilian research vessels near Bajo de Masinloc within the Philippines' EEZ, undermining peace and stability in the region."

Tolentino appealed for China to stop its harassment of Filipino vessels in the spirit of Christmas, especially with a civilian convoy on its way to the general vicinity of Ayungin Shoal to bring Christmas food packs.

"As a flotilla of civilian Filipino vessels prepare to deliver Christmas gifts within the Philippine EEZ, we hope the international community will remain united against harassment, and that the festive spirit of generosity and goodwill will not be overshadowed by the forces of intimidation," he said.

"The Chinese Coast Guard should not spoil our Christmas with unwarranted aggression," Tolentino added.
— With Marc Jayson Cayabyab, Reuters

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Screengrab from a Philippine Coast Guard video shows a Chinese coast guard ship blasting Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources vessels with water during a resupply mission for fishermen near Bajo de Masinloc yesterday.

NTF-WPS to Beijing: Remove your vessels

By **JOSE RODEL CLAPANO**

The National Task Force for West Philippine Sea (NTF-WPS) yesterday demanded that China remove its vessels from Bajo de Masinloc (Panatag Shoal) where they had interrupted a humanitarian mission of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources

(BFAR) for Filipino fishermen.

"We firmly insist that these Chinese vessels leave Bajo de Masinloc immediately," the NTF-WPS said, as it condemned attempts by the Chinese coast guard and militia to stop – using water cannons – the BFAR from distributing grocery packs and oil subsidy to over 30

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NTF-WPS From Page 1

fisherfolk near Bajo de Masinloc early yesterday.

"We demand that the Chinese government take immediate action to halt these aggressive activities and uphold the principles of international law and desist from actions that would infringe on Philippine sovereignty and endanger the lives and livelihood of Filipino fishermen who have traditionally fished in the area," the NTF-WPS said.

The water cannon blast "left significant damage" to the communications and navigation equipment of BFAR vessel Datu Tamblot. The two other BFAR vessels involved in the incident were Datu Sanday and Datu Bankaw.

The mission continued as of press time despite Chinese harassment.

It added it remains "committed to protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippines in the West Philippine Sea."

"To prevent the distribution of humanitarian support is not only illegal but also inhumane," the task force said.

Meanwhile, a geopolitical analyst is urging the government to continue working with like-minded states in addressing concerns in the West Philippine Sea in 2024.

Stratbase ADR Institute president Dindo Manhit made the statement during a forum entitled, "Fostering Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Towards 2024," organized by the Stratbase ADR Institute on Nov. 28.

Manhit said that this year saw like-minded states repeatedly express their support for the Philippines' arbitral victory.

"The international community is an advocate of promoting peace and stability in the region... Our united front allows us to remain firm against aggressive and coercive acts disrupting our peace," Manhit said.

"As we close 2023, the Philippines should be in a better position to confront the risks in the West Philippine Sea by building on its capabilities and ironing out interoperability with like-minded states. In the same manner, it should continue to involve the public and expose the coercive tactics employed by aggressive states," he added.

Manhit said the Philippines became a focal point of geopolitical tension in the Indo-Pacific this year, as China continued to conduct gray zone operations in key areas of the West Philippine Sea.

These include the intimidation of civilian Filipino fishing vessels, conducting a series of water cannon incidents, damaging coral reefs and spreading disinformation.

He also warned of the emergence of new security challenges in 2024.

"Cybersecurity will be at the center of foreign relations and military strategies in the coming months. This is gaining more traction as more people experience cyber risks in their daily use of the internet. As we confront exist-

ing and evolving risks, the national interest must remain paramount in our policy implementation," he explained.

"As our Institute continuously advocates, our interconnected and interdependent futures hinge on fostering collaborative efforts and sustainable partnerships among nations while ensuring that our shared goals align with the evolving needs of the Philippine society. Let us continue to do so in the coming years," he said.

Moya Collett, Australian deputy head of mission to the Philippines, said these are consequential times for the Indo-Pacific region.

She identified recent significant developments in Philippine-Australia relations, most notably the elevation of the two countries' bilateral partnership to a strategic partnership during the visit of Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to Manila in September this year.

"The key focus is maritime cooperation," said Collett, adding that Australia is also a maritime country that depends on a region governed by accepted rules and norms.

"We want a peaceful South China Sea where laws are respected and waterways are open for trade," she said. "Adherence to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea is vital to the region."

South Korean Ambassador Lee Sang Hwa also emphasized the importance of a stable maritime architecture for both the Philippines and South Korea.

"Cementing rules-based order in this region is key to taking a leap forward for both Korea and the Philippines. As the Philippines seeks to become an upper middle-income country soon and Korea aspires to be included in the G7+ group, securing a stable and thriving maritime architecture has become vital for both countries," the Korean ambassador said.

"Our shared destiny is intrinsically linked to our ability to harness the potential benefits of the seas and to overcome its challenges. The geostrategic center of gravity shift to the Indo-Pacific, we firmly believe that a free and open Indo-Pacific is the key to thriving, connected and stable regional environment," he also explained.

PCG commandant Adm. Ronnie Gil Gavan said that maritime cooperation among countries is not limited to capacity and equipment, and that a country can only win if it is supported by a strong industrial base.

"Any armed service is a function of the economy," he said.

The PCG is open to partnerships with anyone as it pursues its mission to help achieve peace based on rules, Gavan said, adding that they are reaching out to friends and partners to develop the local shipbuilding industry.

"We can only win if we are supported by a strong industrial base," Gavan added.

He enumerated the PCG's three main pursuits: maritime domain awareness and response including law enforcement, coastal state administration and international cooperation and engagement.



DA starts holiday market visits

The **Department of Agriculture (DA)** started its market visits yesterday to ensure that the supply and prices of commodities are stable for the holidays.

DA Undersecretary for Operations Roger Navarro led the first round of random market inspections around Metro Manila, starting with Quezon City.

Navarro assured the public that there is a sufficient supply of meat, poultry, vegetables and fish when he inspected the Mega Q-Mart and Kamuning Public Market in Quezon City.

He said that aside from market inspections, the DA is discussing with other government agencies possible interventions to ensure that prices remain stable.

He said that the DA is coordinating with the National Price Coordinating Council to ensure that imported goods also do not flood the market and undermine local producers.

Representatives from the Department of Trade and Industry-Fair Trade Enforcement Bureau also joined the market inspections.

— Romina Cabrera



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DA, KOICA launch agri design prototyping center

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

The Department of Agriculture, through the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech) and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) recently launched the country's first

agricultural machinery design and prototyping center (AMDPC), aimed at accelerating farm mechanization in the country.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. led the inauguration of the 2,000-square meter facility located at PhilMech in the Science City of Munoz, Nueva Ecija.

Officials said the construction of the facility is essential to accelerate the country's mechanization by enhancing PhilMech's capability to design, develop, and manufacture agricultural machinery and prototypes.

The initiative also seeks to provide farmers with affordable, locally-manufactured machinery, utilizing modern technology to boost production and income.

The facility used cutting-

edge prototyping equipment to showcase and disseminate innovative technology that have achieved commercial viability and user acceptance.

"This multi-million US-dollar state-of-the-art facility can revolutionize the way we see agricultural machinery production today. With modern fabrication equipment and top engineering design and simulation software, what more can we not do, what more efficient machines can we not produce?" Laurel said.

The AMDPC is valued at P370.545 million, of which \$5.78 million or P289 million is funded by KOICA. The Philippine government shared P81.545 million for the project.

The project is also supported by the Korea Institute for Development Strategy (KDS) and the Korea Agricultural

Machinery Industry Cooperative (KAMICO).

Laurel said the modern facility serves as an avenue for local manufacturers, agricultural engineers, and researchers from various research and development institutions and state colleges and universities to launch their ideas and translate their creative minds to problem-oriented and highly relevant agricultural machines, technology and equipment.

"I can imagine this center as the realization of ideas and a birthing place of solutions to improve the way we farm or fish today through the machines that can be improved and produced in this facility," Laurel said.

The agriculture chief also expressed gratitude to the Republic of Korea, through KOICA, for its generosity in

sharing knowledge, skills, and resources to the Philippines.

"Thank you for building with us a bridge that will help our country move towards the modernization and mechanization of the agriculture sector. We will always value our partnership," Laurel said.

According to the DA, the AMDPC is also expected to enhance the institutional networking between the Korean government and DA research agencies.

Laurel was joined by Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the Philippines Sang-Hwa Lee, KOICA vice president Yung Young Lee, Nueva Ecija Governor Aurelio Umali, Congresswoman Mikaela Angela Suansing of District 1, Cong Joseph Gilbert Violago of District 2, and Cong Rosanna Vergara of District 3.



NIA commits to accelerated irrigation, RE development

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

The **National Irrigation Administration (NIA)** has inked two memorandums of understanding (MOUs) aimed at accelerating irrigation development and utilization of NIA's assets for renewable energy development.

In a statement, NIA said it signed MOUs with BPE Corp. (BPEC) and China Railway Construction Corp. Ltd.

NIA acting administrator Eduardo Eddie Guillen and BPE Corp. (BPEC) president Jesus Francisco Gabriel Delgado signed the MOU for the feasibility study on the pilot installation of a micro-hydro power system at the weir of the Angat Maasim River Irrigation System (AMRIS) South Main Canal in the municipality of Angat, Bulacan.

"The project is entitled Project GENIHAR or Generate-Irrigate-Harvest. The MOU signing denotes the joint effort of NIA and BPEC to optimize the utilization of irrigation water for renewable energy development," NIA said.

It emphasized that given the challenges brought by climate change, investing in renewable energy is the best option for sustainable development.

"With the signing of the MOU, NIA and BPEC have strengthened their partnership and efforts to develop more economically viable, environmentally sensible, and socially responsible renewable energy projects in the years to come," it said.

According to the NIA, the MOU symbolizes the collaborative efforts of the two parties to pursue Public-Private Partnership

(PPP) initiatives.

The MOU identified three priority projects, particularly the Ilocos Norte-Ilocos Sur-Abra Irrigation Project, Upper Banaoang Irrigation Project, and Tumauni River Irrigation Project.

"With NIA's pursuit in developing climate-smart, multipurpose irrigation systems, and in increasing irrigated areas to contribute in the overall agricultural productivity and attain food security, PPP is eyed to fast-track and expand irrigation development through private sector expertise," the agency said.

The NIA was created through Republic Act 3601 with the purpose of expanding irrigated farmlands to support crop production, increase the productivity of farmers, and ensure a stable supply of farm commodities.

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UP scientists warn about 'infectious parasites' in raw vegetables, seafood

By SONNY DAANOY

Researchers from the University of the Philippines Diliman (UPD) reminded the public to thoroughly wash and cook market-bought fresh vegetables and seafood to prevent parasite-related health issues.

Based on the study's findings, *Toxoplasma gon-* ► **6**



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UP scientists warn about 'infectious parasites' in raw vegetables, seafood 1◀

dii (*T. gondii*) emerges as a highly infectious parasite, standing out as one of the most contagious in the world.

Toxoplasma gondii is a single-celled cyst-forming protozoan and is often characterized as one of the most successful parasites, primarily attributed to its widespread distribution.

Its impact is pervasive, affecting nearly a third of the global population, with a notable emphasis on vulnerable groups, particularly pregnant individuals and those with compromised immune systems.

Cielo Emar M. Paraoan, Ren Mark D. Villanueva, and Marie Christine M. Obusan, researchers from the UP

Diliman College of Science's Institute of Biology (UPD-CS IB), led the study.

Their investigation revealed that the parasite, *Toxoplasma gondii*, is common in vegetables and oysters obtained from local markets in Central Luzon.

"Among the vegetables tested were lettuce, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, and mung bean sprouts," UPD said in a statement.

"The most sustainable approach for reducing the risk of *T. gondii* exposure through the consumption of seafood should focus on reducing *T. gondii* contamination at its source, as well as mitigating the flow of contaminated runoff to water bodies," the

authors said in their paper, published in the October 2023 issue of the Philippine Journal of Science.

While most individuals infected with the disease remain asymptomatic, some may experience flu-like symptoms, including fever, headache, and muscle aches.

In more severe cases, toxoplasmosis can result in inflammation of the brain and blurred vision. For infected parents, the potential consequences extend to their newborn infants, who may experience issues such as excessive fluid in the brain and developmental problems.

Fortunately, this disease related to the parasite is treatable, and there

are available treatments for toxoplasmosis, which is considered a leading cause of death attributed to foodborne illness in the United States.

Thus, individuals experiencing symptoms are strongly advised to seek prompt medical attention.

Out of the sixty collected vegetable samples, six (10 percent) contained traces of *T. gondii*, with leafy vegetables exhibiting higher contamination than root vegetables.

Likewise, 9.09 percent, or four out of the 44 samples, were also found to be contaminated in the case of oysters.

"The researchers noted that the *T. gondii* traces found on vegetables and oysters are of Type I genotype," UPD noted.

"The researchers aim to investigate further the genotypes of *T. gondii* that will be detected in the country, as Asia is reported to have a high degree

of genetic diversity," it added.

The study presents compelling evidence suggesting that *T. gondii* may be transmitted through vegetables and oysters available in supermarkets and public markets.

However, it's crucial to note that the researchers conducted tests on a relatively small sample size, emphasizing the need for more extensive studies with larger sample sizes.

Currently, they are undertaking an ongoing study aimed at detecting the parasite in environmental samples.

The authors underscored the imperative for improved management of biological pollutants.

Additionally, they highlighted the significance of thorough preparation of fresh produce and seafood, not only to eradicate *T. gondii* but also to eliminate the presence of other potential parasites.



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China Coast Guard fires water cannon at BFAR vessels in Bajo de Masinloc

By MARTIN SADONGDONG

A China Coast Guard (CCG) ship reportedly blasted water at Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) vessels that were delivering supplies to fisherfolk communities in Bajo de Masinloc (Scarborough/Panatang Shoal) on Saturday, Dec. 9, the latest in a string of aggressive incidents shown by Chinese vessels within the Philippine waters.

BFAR vessel BRP Datu Bankaw (MMOV-3004), a 30-meter multi-mission offshore patrol vessel, was accompanied by BRP Datu Sanday (MMOV-3002) and BRP Datu Tamblot (MMOV-3005) on a resupply mission in Bajo de Masinloc when it was blocked by 99-meter CCG vessel 3305 and at least four 60-meter Chinese maritime militia vessels, according to maritime expert Ray Powell, director of SeaLight project at Stanford University's Gordian Knot Center for National Security Innovation.

BFAR said their vessels were supposed to hand out free oil, food, and other supplies to fisherfolk communities living in Bajo de Masinloc when

the Chinese vessels issued radio challenges and warned the Filipino vessels to go away as they claimed ownership of the waters.

However, the Filipino crew refused to leave and insisted on bringing the supplies to the fishermen. They also told the Chinese crew that the operation was lawfully carrying out the mission within the territory of the Philippines as Bajo de Masinloc is located within Manila's 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

At the height of the confrontation, CCG 3305 allegedly directed its water cannon at BRP Datu Bankaw and fired blasts of water to drive the Philippine vessel away. The incident occurred around 9 a.m. and lasted for three hours.

After this, the CCG vessel again allegedly directed its water cannon at BRP Datu Sanday, and directed the water at the vessel around 1 p.m.

For its part, the CCG, said in a statement that it only took "control measures" in accordance with their laws as the Philippine vessels "intruded" into the waters adjacent to Huangyan Island — the Chinese

name they gave to Bajo de Masinloc. The statement was cited by Chinese newspaper People's Daily China on its X (formerly Twitter) account.

According to BFAR, this was the first time that Chinese ships directly fired a water cannon at their vessels as the foreign ships only used to shadow or tail them when they were conducting resupply missions. It said this has been the "most aggressive" action done by the CCG towards BFAR vessels during a supply run.

In 2014 and 2015, there had been recorded incidents where Chinese vessels fired water cannon at Filipino fishermen to block them from accessing the area.

The entry to the lagoon of Bajo de Masinloc is heavily guarded by Chinese coast guard, navy, and maritime militia vessels after a standoff between the Philippine Navy and Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy in 2012 resulted to the area being "seized" by the Chinese government.

In October, a Philippine Navy gunboat was confronted by Chinese vessels while making routine patrols in the vicinity of Bajo de Masinloc.



AT SCARBOROUGH SHOAL

Chinese water cannons stop PH ships anew

BY FRANCO JOSE C. BAROÑA, JAVIER
JOE ISMAEL AND FRANCIS EARL CUETO

THEY were at it again. For several hours on Saturday, the China Coast Guard (CCG) and Chinese Maritime Militia (CMM) ships water cannoned and subjected three Philippine vessels to “continuous illegal and aggressive actions” off Bajo de Masinloc or Scarborough Shoal in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

The three vessels — BRP Datu Sanday, — belonged to the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) that were

on a mission to provide oil subsidies and grocery packs to over 30 Filipino fishing vessels in the area.

National Task Force for the West Philippine Sea (NTF-WPS) spokesman Jonathan Malaya said that based on reports, the “harassment” started at about 9 a.m. as the BFAR ships approached Bajo de Masinloc, which was about 1.4 to 1.9 nautical miles away. The CCG ships began utilizing water cannons in an effort to “obstruct and prevent” the Philippine vessels from approaching the Filipino fishing boats.

Likewise, the CCM vessels reportedly engaged in dangerous maneuvers and deployed what is believed to be a long-range acoustic device (LRAD) against the BFAR vessels, said Malaya.

An LRAD, or sound cannon, is a specialized loudspeaker that produces high-powered sound for communicating at a distance. It has been used for crowd control and is known to cause permanent hearing damage because of its extremely high decibel capacity.

➤ **CannonsA2**



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■ CANNONS FROM A1

Chinese water cannons

The sound pressure emitted by the LRAD apparently caused severe, temporary discomfort and incapacitated some Filipino crew, he said.

The use of water cannons by the CCG resulted in "significant damage" to BFAR vessel Datu Tamblot's communication and navigation equipment, which was believed to have been targeted, he said.

Malaya also denounced the deployment of Rigid Hull Inflatable Boats (RHIBs) to disperse and drive away Filipino fishing vessels eagerly awaiting the distribution of fuel subsidies and food supplies from the BFAR ships.

"To prevent the distribution of humanitarian support is not only illegal but also inhumane. Moreover, Filipino fishermen have reported and documented the Chinese coast guard launching a small boat early this morning to illegally install a floating barrier at the southeast entrance of Bajo de Masinloc. The actions of the Chinese coast guard and Chinese Maritime Militia hindered the BFAR vessel from accessing the

entrance of the shoal," he said.

'Provocation'

China, however, reiterated that it has "indisputable sovereignty" over Nanhai Zhudao (South China Sea islands), consisting of Dongsha Qundao (Pratas Island), Xisha Qundao (Paracel Islands), Zhongsha Qundao (Macclesfield Bank) and Nansha Qundao (Spratly Islands), and their adjacent waters, and has sovereign rights and jurisdiction over relevant waters.

In a statement released on Saturday by the China Embassy in Manila, Chinese Ministry of Information spokesman Wang Wenbin said: "For some time, the Philippines has been sending people to Tiexian Jiao and other uninhabited islands and reefs of China's Nansha Islands and sending aircraft and vessels to intrude into adjacent waters and airspace of China's Nansha Islands and Huangyan Dao (Scarborough Shoal)."

Wang said the Philippine vessels' moves "severely violate Chi-

na's sovereignty, endanger China's security, go against the spirit of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DoC), and undermine peace and stability in the South China Sea."

He said China has made "serious démarches nearly 100 times and officially expressed our protest to the Philippines."

The Chinese coast guard has reportedly issued warnings to the BFAR vessels to stay away from the area, claiming that the Scarborough Shoal is Chinese territory.

The BFAR vessels, however, ignored the warnings, insisting on the country's rights over its exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

'Inhumane'

The NTF-WPS denounced the "inhumane acts" made by the CCG and CMM against the three Philippine ships and said the "mission was ongoing" as of press time.

Malaya reiterated that Bajo de Masinloc is a high-tide feature with territorial sea, per the 2016 Arbitral Award, and forms "an integral part of the Philippine national territory under the Constitution."

The Philippines, Malaya

said, exercises sovereignty and jurisdiction over the shoal and its territorial sea.

Malaya also noted that the 2016 Arbitral Award has also clarified that Filipinos have traditional fishing rights in the water of Bajo de Masinloc protected by international law.

"China's illegal exercise of maritime law enforcement powers, interference with Philippine vessels, harassment and intimidation of Filipino fisherfolk, or any other activity that infringes upon the Philippines' sovereignty and jurisdiction in Bajo de Masinloc are violations of international law, particularly Unclos (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) and the Arbitral Award," he said.

"We firmly insist that these Chinese vessels leave Bajo de Masinloc immediately. We demand that the Chinese government take immediate action to halt these aggressive activities and uphold the principles of international law and desist from actions that would infringe on Philippine sovereignty and endanger the lives and livelihood of Filipino fishermen who have traditionally fished in the area," he added.



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P60 per kilong bigas binabala sa kapaskuhan

Nagbabala ang isang grupo na maaaring pumalo hanggang P60 per kilo ang regular-milled rice ngayong kapaskuhan.

Sa panayam ng Teleradyo Serbisyo nitong Sabado, Disyembre 9, nagpahayag ng pagkabahala si Bantay Bigas spokesperson Cathy Estavillo dahil hindi lamang aniya sa National Capital Region mataas ang presyo ng bigas kundi maging sa iba pang probinsya.

Maaaring magpatu-

loy aniya ang pagtaas ng presyo ng bigas ngayong holiday season at pumalo ito sa P60 per kilo.

Nabatid na naglalaro ngayon sa P52 hanggang 54 per kilo ang presyuhan ng bigas sa NCR at halos ganito rin ang kalakalan sa mga probinsya.

Ayon kay Estavillo, kapag nangyari ito na umabot sa P60 per kilo ang regular-milled rice malamang na walang maging solusyon ang gobyerno kundi ang pag-aangkat.



China bayolente na sa West PH Sea - PCG

Mariing kinondena ng pamahalaan ang nagiging bayolente nang aksiyon ng China Coast Guard laban sa mga barko ng Pilipinas.

Kasunod ito ng panibagong pambobomba ng tubig ng mga barko ng China sa tatlong sasakyang pandagat ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) na maghahatid ng tulong sa mga mangingisdang Pilipino na nasa Bajo de Masinloc o Scarborough Shoal nitong Sabado (Disyembre 9).

Ayon sa National Task Force for the West Philippines Sea, Bukod sa pagbomba ng tubig sa tatlong barko ng BFAR, namataan din ang delikadong pagmaniobra ng mga Chinese Maritime Militia na ginamitan ng

long-range acoustic device (LRAD) ang mga sasakyan ng BFAR.

"Water cannon action resulted in significant damage to BFAR vessel Datu Tamblor's communication and navigation equipment, as it was directly and deliberately targeted by the CCG," ayon sa pahayag ng task force.

Nauna rito ay ibinunyag ni Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) spokesperson for the West Philippine Sea Commodore Jay Tariella na mayroong nagkukumpulang mga barko ng China sa isang bahagi ng West Philippine Sea.

Iginiit naman ng task force na dapat umalis ang mga barko ng China na ilegal na naglalayag sa karagatang sakop pa ng Pilipinas.

Samantala, kinonde-

na rin ni ACT Teachers party-list Rep. France Castro ang panibagong insidente ng pambobomba ng tubig ng China.

Ayon kay Castro, sadyang matigas ang mukha ng China na patuloy na may lakas ng loob na pinaninindigan ang pag-aangkin sa West Philippine Sea (WPS).

Giit pa ng kongresista na dapat manindigan ang bansa laban sa China.

"We must stand firm against China's attempts to undermine our sovereignty. The Philippine government must prioritize the welfare and interests of our people, especially our fisherfolk who heavily rely on the resources in Scarborough Shoal," ayon pa kay Castro.



LOCALIZED AGRI OUTPUT PROGRAM INTENSIFIED

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) have agreed to intensify the implementation of a localized agriculture production program aimed at ensuring food security and alleviating poverty in the country.

The DA and the DILG are the lead agencies in the implementation of the Halina't Magtanim ng Prutas at Gulay, Kadiwa'y Yaman, Plants for Bountiful Barangays Movement (HAPAG Kay PBBM) Program.

HAPAG kay PBBM Program is a whole-of-government initiative that aims to increase access to fresh, safe, and affordable food through urban and peri-urban agriculture and community engagement.



Under the program, the DA will provide technical assistance, seeds and seedlings, fertilizers and pesticides, as well as financial assistance to participating barangays and farmers.

The DILG, on the other hand, will extend training and support to barangay officials on how to implement the program and for mobilizing the participation

of barangay residents in carrying out the initiative.

Simultaneously launched in various pilot barangays in the country, the program gained support from different regions such as the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), Eastern Visayas, and Caraga.

According to its proponents, the HAPAG Kay PBBM Program is still in

the early stages of implementation and the agencies still have to address some challenges such as intensifying barangay and farmer participation to ensure long-term success.

In the Visayas Agricultural and Fishery Councils (AFCs) Congress held in Cebu City last September, proponents acknowledged the need to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of the program and identify areas for improvement.

It was agreed upon during the Visayas Congress that the need for the DA and the DILG to develop a monitoring framework for the HAPAG Kay PBBM Program shall be prioritized to facilitate its progress and identify areas for improvement. PCO

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Barko ng BFAR binomba ng tubig ng China

Tatlong barko ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) ang binomba ng tubig ng Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) habang nasa gitna ng supply mission patungo sa Scarborough Shoal.

Tumagal ang pagtira ng water cannon sa mga barko ng Pilipinas ng tatlong oras mula alas-9 ng umaga hangang alas-12 ng tanghali.

likot sana sa mga isla ang mga barko ng BFAR para mamahagi ng petrolyo at iba pang supply pamasko sa mga mangingisdang Pilipino na lumalaot sa lugar.

Habang binobomba ng tubig ang BFAR vessels, nakabantay naman ang Chinese militia vessels sa 'di kalayuan.

Ayon sa mga opisyal ng BFAR vessel, ito ang unang pagkakataon na binomba sila ng tubig ng Chinese ves-

sel. Dati-rati ay sinusundan lamang umano sila ng mga ito kapag may misyon sila.

Mahigit 30 Pinoy fishing vessels malapit sa Bajo De Masinloc sa West Philippine Sea ang dalhan ng suplay ng BFAR.

Bago ang pambobomba, nag-isyu ng babala ang Chinese vessel na umalis sa lugar dahil sa teritoryo umano ng China ang Scarborough shoal. Hindi ito pinansin ng BFAR vessel na iginiiit na nasa "exclusive economic zone" ng Pilipinas ang bahagi ng karagatan.

Kabilang sa mga hinarang at binomba ng water cannons ay ang BFAR vessels Datu Sanday, Datu Bankaw at Datu Tamblot.

Ayon sa National Task Force West Philippine Sea (NTF-WPS), walong beses umanong binomba ng water

cannons ng Chinese Coast Guard ang BFAR vessels.

Samantala nagkaroon din umano ng mapanganib na pagmamaniobra ang Chinese maritime militias na nagdeploy ng Long-Range Acoustic Device (LRAD) laban sa BFAR vessels.

"Water cannon action have resulted in significant damage to BFAR vessel Datu Tamblot's communication and navigation equipment, as it was directly and deliberately targeted by the China Coast Guard," ayon pa sa report.

Nabatid pa na naglagay muli ng mga floating barriers ang Chinese Coast Guard sa southeast entrance ng Bajo de Masinloc.

"We demand that the Chinese government take immediate action to halt these aggressive activities

and uphold the principles of international law and desist from actions that would infringe on Philippine Sovereignty and endanger the lives and livelihood of Filipino fishermen who have traditionally fished in the area," ayon sa NTF-WPS na kinondena ang insidente.

"We firmly insist that

these Chinese vessels leave Bajo de Masinloc (Scarborough Shoal) immediately," dagdag pa ng NTF-WPS.

Nabatid na ang BFAR vessel ay nasa kanilang humanitarian at support mission para mamahagi ng oil at iba pang supplies sa mga mangingisda sa lugar na apektado ng pambu-bully ng China nang mangyari ang insidente.



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Region 1 inflation drops in November

DAGUPAN CITY: The inflation rate in the Ilocos Region (Region 1) dropped from 3.7 percent in October to 2.9 percent in November 2023, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) Region 1 office reported.

In a press statement released on December 6, the PSA also said that last month's inflation rate was 4.8 percentage points lower than the 7.7-percent inflation rate recorded in November 2022.

The press statement was signed by Camille Carla Beltran, PSA chief administrative officer.

Inflation rate, according to the PSA website, is the annual rate of change, or the year-on-year change of the consumer price index, which is computed based

on the weekly and bi-monthly survey on the changes in the prices of commodities consumed and services availed of by an ordinary Filipino household.

Inflation is also interpreted in terms of declining purchasing power of money.

Last month's lower inflation rate in Ilocos Region was primarily influenced by the considerable decrease in the indices of food and nonalcoholic beverages, alcoholic beverages and tobacco, clothing and footwear, furnishings, household equipment and routine household maintenance.

There was also a decrease in the indices of health, transport, recreation, sport and culture, restaurants and

accommodation services, personal care, and miscellaneous goods and services, the PSA said.

But the PSA said there was an increase in the index of housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels from -5.8 percent to -5.1 percent.

The rest of the commodity groups retained their previous month's inflation rates or had zero percent annual growths.

On Ilocos Region's food, inflation rate decreased from 9.3 percent in October to 7.5 percent last month.

The PSA also said that last month's inflation trend on fish and other seafood was at 11.7 percent; oils and fats at -0.2 percent; vegetables, tubers,

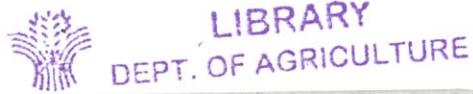
cooking bananas and pulses at -0.3 percent; and sugar, confectionery and desserts at -2.9 percent.

Meanwhile, fruits and nuts retained their inflation rate at 14.6 percent, while the rest of the indices exhibited increases from their previous month's inflation rates.

Among the provinces, Pangasinan posted the highest inflation rate at 3.9 percent last month followed by La Union at 3.7 percent. Ilocos Norte recorded 0.7-percent inflation and Ilocos Sur had -0.3-percent annual growth.

Compared to their respective levels in November 2022, all the provinces in the region recorded lower inflation rates.

GABRIEL CARDINOZA



UP scientists warn vs parasites in raw vegetables, seafood

THOROUGHLY wash and cook your market-bought fresh produce and seafood as a precautionary measure against parasites, University of the Philippines (UP) scientists advised the public.

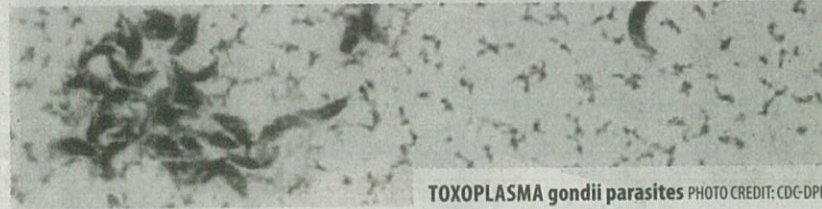
The parasite—*Toxoplasma gondii* (*T. gondii*)—causes toxoplasmosis illness.

Among the vegetables tested were lettuce, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower and mungbean sprouts. Oyster samples were also tested, the researchers said.

T. gondii is one of the most infectious parasites in the world—it affects almost a third of the world's population, most especially vulnerable groups, such as pregnant and immunocompromised.

However, the scientists explained that while most infected people do not present any symptoms, some may suffer flu-like symptoms, such as fever, headache and muscle aches.

But in severe cases, toxoplasmosis can cause inflammation of the brain and blurry vision. Infected parents'



TOXOPLASMA gondii parasites PHOTO CREDIT: CDC-DPD

newborn infants may suffer from excessive fluid in the brain and developmental issues.

Fortunately, treatments are available for toxoplasmosis, hence symptomatic individuals are advised to seek timely medical attention, they added.

Researchers Cielo Emar M. Paraoan, Ren Mark D. Villanueva, and Marie Christine M. Obusan of the UP Diliman College of Science's Institute of Biology (UPD-CS IB) found that *T. gondii* is fairly common in vegetables and oysters that they sampled from markets in Central Luzon.

Six out of sixty (10 percent) of the collected vegetable samples

contained traces of *T. gondii*, with leafy vegetables found to be more contaminated than root vegetables, they explained.

Similarly, for oysters, 9.09 percent, or four out of 44 samples, were also contaminated, they added.

The researchers said that the *T. gondii* traces found on both vegetables and oysters are of Type I genotype.

The scientists aim to investigate further the genotypes of *T. gondii* that will be detected in the country, as Asia is reported to have a high degree of genetic diversity.

They said that the study provides evidence that *T. gondii* may be transmitted through vegetables and

oysters that are being sold in supermarkets and public markets.

However, the researchers noted that they only tested a small sample size, and more studies with bigger sample sizes must be conducted. They have an ongoing study that detects the parasite in environmental samples.

The study also underscores the importance of adequately preparing fresh produce and seafood to eliminate not just *T. gondii* but also other parasites that may be present.

The authors also emphasized the need for better management of biological pollutants.

"The most sustainable approach for reducing the risk of *T. gondii* exposure through the consumption of seafood should focus on reducing *T. gondii* contamination at its source, as well as mitigating the flow of contaminated runoff to water bodies," the authors said in their paper, published in the October 2023 issue of the Philippine Journal of Science.