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# Laurel backs farm-to-market digital logistics system

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. vowed to support the establishment of a farm-to-market digital logistics integrated backbone system, after farmers' group Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) had asked President Marcos to order its implementation.

Former agriculture secretary and FFF chairman Leonardo Montemayor said that this was the commitment made by Laurel during a meeting with him at the Department of Agriculture (DA) central office

in Quezon City.

"Secretary Laurel expressed appreciation and support for Philippine Trackway Corp. (Philtrak)'s Farm-to-Market Digital Integrated Logistics Backbone system, which the Federation of Free Farmers has endorsed to President Marcos," Montemayor said.

He said the project will help farmers and fishers mass transport their produce directly to urban markets, thus increasing their incomes and making food more affordable to consumers.

"It will optimize the use of the same physical space of de-

commissioned or abandoned government railways by also including food production, post-harvest facilities, public markets, mass housing and other service facilities," Montemayor added.

Philtrak president Francis Yuseco was also present during the meeting with Laurel.

Marcos has ordered a review on the proposals of FFF, including the nationwide solar-powered irrigation program for 1.5 million rain-fed palay farmers and a nationwide electronic commodity exchange system that will enable farmers to sell

their products directly to buyers in urban areas using idle warehouses of the National Food Authority as delivery and storage areas for farmer products.

In an earlier interview with **The STAR**, Montemayor said he submitted a memorandum to the President containing at least seven recommendations.

"There is still no specific decision from the President as it is too soon, as the memorandum was only sent last week. Although he did promise to order its review. He thinks it's reasonable," he said.

Montemayor added that the

FFF can provide details of the seven proposals if asked by Malacañang.

Montemayor said the proposed solar-powered irrigation program will also cover at least 200,000 underserved service areas of the National Irrigation Administration.

He said that a memorandum of understanding between the Panay Railways Inc., the Department of Science and Technology and Philtrak was signed for the establishment of a farm-to-market digital logistics integrated backbone system.

Other proposals of FFF include the return of the Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. to the DA; issuance of an executive order creating an office for agricultural cooperatives within the DA; a review of the agricultural guarantee program of the Philippine Guarantee Corp., and strengthening of farmers' and other stakeholders' representation in the DA, particularly in the management of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund and the Agricultural Competitiveness Enhancement Fund.

- With Danessa Rivera





# Gov't eyes food stamps, advanced importation

## Extends tariff cuts for rice, pork, corn imports

By XANDER DAVE CEBALLOS, CHINO S. LEYCO, and ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

**T**he government may boost the deployment of food stamps and advance the importation of commodities that are expected to be in shortage as steps to counter the adverse effects of the El Nino phenomenon, National Economic and Development Authority Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said.

"We work with, we advise, for example, DSWD, to accelerate the deployment of food assistance sa food stamps, to ramp up their deployment of food stamps, (we also) advise the ► **6**





## Gov't eyes food stamps, advanced importation 1◀

Department of Agriculture to preposition by way of importing the expected shortages," he said.

"[So] that when that time comes na may talagang shortage, we have enough in storage to release," he added.

The El Niño phenomenon is seen to last until the second quarter of next year and may hit over 65 provinces.

Balisacan said the government created a Task Force on El Niño to consolidate various efforts of agencies in mitigating the adverse effects on water, power, health, and public safety.

### Tariff cuts extended

President Marcos also extended the temporary reduction of tariffs on key agricultural products to mitigate the impact of the El Niño phenomenon on consumer prices.

Balisacan said Malacañang has given the green light for the extension of the reduced most favored nation (MFN) tariff rates on agriculture commodities, including pork, corn, and rice, under Executive Order No. 10, until Dec. 31, 2024.

Originally set to expire on Dec. 31, 2023, EO 10 has been recommended for a one-year extension by the eco-

nomics managers, including Balisacan.

The tariff rates for swine meat imports were maintained at 15 percent for shipments within the minimum access volume (MAV) quota and 25 percent for those exceeding the quota.

Similarly, the rates for corn remained at five percent (within the MAV quota) and 15 percent (exceeding the MAV quota), while the tariff rate for rice stayed at 35 percent in both scenarios.

Balisacan said the tariff rates on pork, corn, and rice will be reviewed on a semestral basis.

"The proposed extension of reduced tariffs will help ensure an adequate supply of agricultural commodities and maintain stable and affordable prices, thereby better managing potential inflationary pressures," the NEDA chief said.

President Marcos also maintained the duty-free status for coal imports, but altered the assessment frequency for the coal tariff rate from semi-annual to annual basis.

On Wednesday, Balisacan expressed concerns over the potential impact of the El Niño phenomenon on next year's commodity prices.

This statement followed Science and Technology Secretary Renato

Solidum Jr.'s warning on Tuesday that at least 65 provinces in the country could face drought conditions due to El Niño.

Balisacan said the Inter-Agency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook (IAC-IMO) will be closely monitoring the situation and utilizing various government tools, including trade policy measures, to minimize the negative effects of El Niño.

He emphasized the government's commitment to intervene promptly and effectively to mitigate the price spikes associated with the expected drought.

In November, inflation, which gauges the pace of price hikes for goods and services, slowed to its lowest level in 20 months due to a reduced uptick in food and transportation expenses.

The earlier high inflation, which led to increased interest rates, was held responsible for the sluggish economic growth in the second quarter of the year.

However, economic growth rebounded to 5.9 percent in the third quarter, attributed to the government's increased expenditure, which counterbalanced the decrease in household spending during that

period.

The NEDA chief had earlier tempered the economic growth to 6.5 percent as the El Niño, global conflicts, and high-interest rates may impact the economy next year.

For the first three quarters, the gross domestic product averaged 5.5 percent. The country would need to attain 7.2 percent in the fourth quarter to achieve the lower end of the six to seven percent target.

### Water supply measures

Marcos has called on concerned government agencies to boost their efforts to ensure there would be enough supply of water in the areas projected to be gravely affected by the looming El Niño phenomenon.

Marcos said this during the inauguration of Maynilad's Poblacion Water Treatment Plant (WTP) in Muntinlupa City on Friday, Dec. 15, a few hours before he departed Manila for Japan.

In his speech, the President recognized the project's timeliness considering the ongoing El Niño forecasted to last until April 2024.

"With El Niño projected to last until the second quarter of 2024, we must prioritize the repair of water pipes to prevent leakages and the completion of ongoing water supply projects to ensure that we have ad-

equated supply," he said.

"And so, let us call upon the pertinent government agencies to intensify their vigilance in overseeing the construction of water supply facilities, particularly in regions grappling with water scarcity," he added.

The ₱11-billion Poblacion WTP is Maynilad's third facility that taps into Laguna Lake as an alternate raw water source. It aims to supply an additional 150 million liters per day (MLD) of water to consumers in Parañaque, Las Piñas, Muntinlupa, and Cavite.

The facility is part of Maynilad's ₱220-billion Service Enhancement Program from 2023 to 2027 which seeks to promote enhanced water sustainability and climate resilience.

Meanwhile, President Marcos encouraged the private sector to continue working with the government to provide a clean water supply to consumers across the country.

"As we confront present and future challenges, this project is a testament to the positive outcomes that we might achieve when the public and private sectors unite for a greater good," he said.

"I invite the private sector once more to further explore opportunities to collaborate with the government in addressing our water supply challenges," he added.





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## Rice prices higher; lower imports seen

RICE prices increased by 2.2 percent in November amid projections that imports of the staple will be lower this year compared to 2022.

Latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed that the average price of well-milled rice stood at P47.21 per kilo (kg) in November, higher than October's P46.20 per kg.

Year on year, the price was higher by 23.9 percent from P38.35 per kg.

In comparison to the average price of P38.28 per kg posted in the first month of 2023, the latest price of well-milled rice was 23.32 percent higher.

Likewise, an increment of 3.1 percent was observed in the price of regular milled rice. The staple recorded an average retail price of P43.88 per kg during the month, higher than P42.56 per kg posted last October.

The average price of special and premium rice, meanwhile, was at P52.62 per kg during the same month and was higher by 1.8 percent from the P51.7 per kg logged last month.

Meanwhile, the average price of premium rice went up by 1.4 percent to

P51.33 per kg from P50.62 per kg.

With the increasing prices of the commodity, both local and international, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said that the country's rice imports for 2023 could be lower in comparison to the previous year's imported volume of 3.826 million metric tons (MT).

From January to end-November, DA reported that inbound shipments of rice totaled 3.03 million MT, down by about 14 percent from the year-earlier 3.5 million MT. The Philippines imported 3.82 million MT of rice last year.

The department noted that the full-year import figure could reach around 3.6 million MT, with the expected arrival of about 620,000 MT of rice in the latter month of 2023.

Based on historical data, the country imported about 299,714 MT of rice in December 2022.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. chief economist Michael Ricafort has noted that the high prices of rice, both local and global, somehow reduced the import level.

**JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL**



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## House okay of water dep't creation hailed

By Jester Manalastas

DEPUTY Minority Leader Bagong Henerasyon Party-list Representative Bernadette Herrera has expressed elation over the approval of the proposed National Water Act.

Herrera said House Bill No. 9663 aims to establish a national framework for water resource management, creating the Department of Water Resources (DWR) and the Water Regulatory Commission (WRC).

"This approval is a testament to our collective dedication to sustainable water governance and reflects the culmination of persistent efforts aimed at addressing the complexities of water management," said Herrera, principal author of the bill.

"This legislation not only marks a historic achievement but is a forward-thinking approach to securing our nation's water resources. The creation of the DWR and WRC is pivotal for a more organized and strategic response to the challenges

we face," she added.

Herrera has been advocating for this measure since the 15th Congress, during her initial tenure as a member of the House, consistently filing the bill since then.

The lawmaker emphasized the importance of the measure in safeguarding the country's water supply for present and future generations.

"With the House approving the bill on final reading, we set the stage for a more resilient water future. It underscores our responsibility to protect and manage this precious resource for current and future generations," Herrera stressed.

Under the approved bill, DWR is designated as the primary agency responsible for the comprehensive and integrated identification and mapping of all water resources.

DWR will play a crucial role in planning, policy formulation, and management related to ownership, appropriation, utilization,

exploitation, development, and protection of water resources in the Philippines.

This encompasses ensuring optimal use for domestic and municipal water supply, sanitation, irrigation, hydropower, industry, navigation, flood management, recreation, and water utilization aspects of fisheries or aquaculture.

Moreover, the agency will spearhead planning and policy formulation aimed at achieving universal access to safe, adequate, affordable, and sustainable water supply, in addition to enhancing sanitation services for all Filipinos.

DWR will coordinate policy, program, monitoring, and evaluation with the following attached agencies: Local Water Utilities Administration, Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System, National Irrigation Administration, and Laguna Lake Development Authority.



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CLIMATE ACTIVISTS LUKEWARM ON COP28 DEAL

## MARCOS WANTS WATER-RELATED PROJECTS PRIORITIZED AMID EL NIÑO

By **Nestor Corrales**  
@NCorralesINQ

President Marcos on Friday renewed his order to government agencies to finish water-related projects as he warned that the El Niño phenomenon expected to hit the country next year would be “a serious problem.”

The Philippines is forecast to experience the worst drought in decades due to the El Niño phenomenon in 2024, the Department of Science and

Technology said on Tuesday.

“With the El Niño projected to last until the second quarter of 2024, we must prioritize the repair of water pipes to prevent leakages and the completion of ongoing water supply projects to ensure that we have adequate supply,” the President said in a speech during the inauguration of the Poblacion Water Treatment Plant (WTP) in Muntinlupa City.

The Poblacion WTP of Maynilad Water Services Inc. is an P11-billion facility that taps

into Laguna Lake as an alternate raw water source.

Meanwhile, activists in some of Asia’s most climate-vulnerable nations responded to the COP28 agreement with disappointment on Thursday.

The deal, approved by nearly 200 countries on Wednesday, contains their first call for a transition from fossil fuels, language hailed by US President Joe Biden as a “milestone.”

Lavetanalagi Seru, a Fiji-based climate activist, ac-

knowledgeed that the language was “an incremental step in the right direction.”

However, “it falls short of climate justice and equity for our front-line communities,” he said.

It “continues to allow for dangerous distractions and loopholes ... which is deeply disappointing.”

Representatives from some of the most climate-vulnerable nations in the world—small island states, which face inundation by rising seas—were not even in the room when the deal

was approved.

Marshall Islands negotiator John Silk described the deal as a “canoe with a weak and leaky hull, full of holes.”

“We have to put it into the water because we have no other option.”

In Bangladesh, regularly ranked as one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change, activist Sohanur Rahman also worried about what the deal leaves undecided.

“Though we demanded phas-

ing out fossil fuels, they adopted transitioning away,” said Rahman, executive coordinator of Youth-Net, Bangladesh’s largest youth network for climate justice.

“It remains a question as to how they’ll implement it. More actions are needed on this. It has many loopholes.”

Among the concerns expressed by experts is a lack of clear goals for what countries should do on the move away from fossil fuels and by when.

—WITH A REPORT FROM AFP INQ



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## PBBM to sign 2024 nat'l budget soon; awaits final bicam report

BY BETHEENA UNITE and ELLSON QUISMORIO

While the expected signing of the 2024 national budget before his Japan trip this week did not push through, President Marcos said it may happen in the coming days.

Marcos said he is just waiting for the

bicameral committee to come up with the final version of the P5.768-trillion national budget for next year.

"Wala pa yatang report ang bicam (There is still no report from the Bicameral Committee). We're waiting for that. So, they're putting the finishing touches on it," Marcos said

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in a media interview on Friday, Dec. 15, on the sidelines of the inauguration of the Poblacion Water Treatment Plant in Muntinlupa City.

"Baka (Maybe) today or in the coming days. But certainly, the minute it is finalized, then we will immediately, of course, pass the budget," he added.

Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno said last month that Marcos could sign the proposed 2024 General Appropriations Act (GAA) before he leaves for Japan for the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit.

Marcos left for Tokyo on Friday, Dec. 15.

The President, however, expressed optimism that the budget will be signed in the coming days as he does not see any issues arising to delay its signing.

"We have been going through the consultations through the whole of the year for that matter and I would be very surprised if there are other issues that will suddenly arise that we hadn't anticipated or hadn't resolved, put it that way. So, I don't see any problem to that," he said.

### Boost to LGUs

Local government units (LGUs)

won't be left out in the cold as far as the proposed P5.768-trillion 2024 national budget.

House Speaker Martin Romualdez gave this assurance as the Congress-ratified General Appropriations Bill (GAB) awaits the President's signature.

In remarks keynoting the awarding of the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) to outstanding LGUs at the Manila Hotel on Thursday, Dec. 14, Romualdez said the 2024 spending plan contains more funds for LGUs that would allow them to deliver more services to the people.

He said the House crafted the budget "to bring about balanced development, propagating progress not just in urban areas but across the archipelago, so that every Filipino, from the northernmost provinces to the southernmost islands, can thrive with peace and abundance".

It outlines the funds for infrastructure projects, educational reforms, healthcare improvements, business development, and agricultural support, he added.

"It also contains provisions for the effective implementation of the Mandanas ruling, ensuring that local governments have the resources at the

local level," noted the House leader.

"We hope that the inclusion of these provisions will encourage more LGUs to endeavor to take on the challenge of attaining the [SGLG]," he said.

The Supreme Court's (SC) Mandanas ruling, so-called after Batangas Governor Hermilando Mandanas who filed the petition that prompted the pronouncement, increases the share of LGUs from national revenues.

Romualdez encouraged more local government officials to aspire for the SGLG awarded by the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG).

"We understand that undertaking this endeavor may seem difficult for first-timers. What today's awardees show is that it can be done," he said.

The Leyte 1st district congressman promised support for local officials "who desire to empower our fellow Filipinos so that they are able to pursue their ambitions."

"My office is open to establishing an institutional mechanism that will enable and facilitate better coordination between the House of Representatives and local government units," he said.





## EO 10 to temper inflation but reforms still needed

BY NIÑA MYKA PAULINE ARCEO

**F**OLLOWING the approval of the extension of reduced tariffs on rice, pork and corn, analysts said that measure could offer some assistance in managing inflation but cautioned of potential risks.

"It may help somewhat, but the longer we extend, the less likely the tariffs will be raised to their original levels," Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI) senior economist Emilio Neri said in a Viber message.

"Local producers may feel the pinch from cheaper imports," he added.

During a Malacañang briefing on Thursday, Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan announced that the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Board approved the proposed executive order to extend the reduced most favored nation (MFN) tariff rates on spe-

cific commodities, such as pork, corn, and rice, covered under Executive Order (EO) 10, series of 2022, until Dec. 31, 2024.

EO 10, issued in December last year, approved the extension of reduced MFN tariffs on rice, corn, pork and coal that were implemented by the previous administration to combat stubborn inflation.

The lower tariffs on rice, corn and pork are scheduled to expire at the end of this year, while those for coal will remain in effect but subject to a periodic review.

Balisacan stated that the extended tariff rates for pork will stay at 15 percent in-quota and

25 percent out-quota. For corn, it will be 5 percent in-quota and 15 percent out-quota, and for rice, it will remain at 35 percent both in-quota and out-quota.

The NEDA Board also endorsed the Committee on Tariff and Related Matters' proposal to change the review frequency of the tariff rate on coal from semi-annual to annual.

In contrast, tariff rates for pork, corn, and rice will be reviewed semi-annually.

"The proposed extension of reduced tariffs will help ensure an adequate supply of agricultural commodities and maintain stable and affordable prices, thereby better managing potential inflationary pressures," Balisacan said.

He added that this would encourage seeking alternative supplies, diversifying the country's market sources, and establishing a forward-looking trade policy to respond effectively to potential supply and price shocks from chal-

lenges like the worsening African swine fever (ASF), expected impacts of the El Niño phenomenon, and ongoing increases in global commodity prices.

While the extension could alleviate supply-side pressures, ING Manila Bank senior economist Nicholas Antonio Mapa suggested implementing structural reforms to enhance the production, storage, and efficient transportation of essential items, with the aim of strengthening food security.

"Structural reforms are important to push our economy forward, but we reiterate that these reforms need not be undertaken only during periods of elevated borrowing costs," Mapa said.

"Thus, supply side measures, alongside structural reforms in the agricultural sector, will go a long way to ensuring price stability, food stability and inflation expectations, more than any rate hike could given the supply side nature of our recent inflation episodes," he added.



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# Marcos taps private sector vs El Niño

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

**P**RESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is asking the private sector to help the government boost its efforts to ensure adequate water supply, particularly in areas that will be adversely affected by the El Niño phenomenon.

The President made the call as he led the inauguration of Maynilad's Poblacion Water Treatment Plant (WTP) in Muntinlupa City.

In his speech, Marcos acknowledged the project's timeliness, given the ongoing El Niño that is feared to last until the second quarter of 2024.

"With El Niño projected to last until the second quarter of 2024, we must prioritize the repair of water pipes to prevent leakages and the completion of ongoing water supply projects to ensure that we have adequate supply," Marcos said.

"And so, let us call upon the pertinent government agencies to intensify their vigilance in overseeing the construction of water supply facilities, particularly in regions grappling with water scarcity," he added.

The P11-billion Poblacion WTP is Maynilad's third facility that taps into Laguna Lake as an alternate source of raw water. It aims to supply an additional 150 million liters per day of water to consumers in Parañaque, Las Piñas, Muntinlupa and Cavite.

The facility is part of Maynilad's P220-billion Service Enhancement Program from 2023 to 2027, which seeks to promote enhanced water sustainability and climate resilience.

Marcos encouraged the private sector to continue working with the government to provide a clean water supply to consumers across the country.

"As we confront present and future challenges, this project is a testament to the positive outcomes that we might achieve when the public and private sectors unite for the common good," Marcos said.

"I invite the private sector once more to further explore opportunities to collaborate with the government in addressing our water supply challenges," he added.

Meanwhile, Marcos said the country could maintain good food buffer stock until early next year.

"We must prepare and apply some of the lessons that we have learned during the pandemic when it comes to the supply of agricultural products, of food, of the efficiency of the supply chain — all of these will be affected if our water resources are inadequate," he pointed out.

"And so, and that is why we have now begun in government an accelerated effort to prepare for that. We, for all intents and purposes, have a good buffer until maybe the end of first quarter," he added.

Marcos said the thrust of the government and all other sectors "is to prepare in increasing water capacity so that should the El Niño extend to the second quarter of next year, the country could still, at the very least, supply potable water, especially in the urban areas."

By ensuring stable supply, he said, water could still be supplied to the agriculture and industrial sectors, as well as to medical fa-

cilities that could hardly operate without water.

"We think about those major uses of water. We also have to be thinking about our hospitals. Hospitals cannot operate without water, and with the onset of a drought, that would become more, more important as it goes on," Marcos said.

With water projects such as the one opened in Muntinlupa City — in collaboration with the private sector — the President expressed optimism that the country could weather the impact of the dry spell.

He said there would be another such facility in Mandaluyong, and three more would be opened in Cavite.

"That will all be — that is all the good, and we have to get those facilities built and operating so that we can consider ourselves at least minimally ready for the arrival of the drought that will be coming next year," the President said.

"Now, I do not need to frighten anyone off... but it is a serious problem. But there are, and we are familiar with the capabilities of both the private and public sectors. Put such together, and there is much that we can do, and let us do," he added.





# A TRIP DOWN SOUTH TO A SOLAR-POWERED SHRIMP FARM

By DAWN SOLANO

**G**eneral Santos City, aside from being the Tuna capital of the Philippines, has deepened its venture into the expansion of the prawn and shrimp farm business in its areas.

For farmers like Chie (real name withheld upon request), shrimp farming has been his day-job that helps him raise his three children for six years.

Chie, 39, wakes up at dawn to feed the shrimps at San Andres Aqua Culture Corporation II (Sanacor II) to sustain his family's daily needs.

For the time he has spent on the farm, he knows which seasons are most profitable for shrimp production and how these seasons affect shrimp development.



Located in Alabel, Sarangani, the farm runs on solar power technology that not only provides job security for its farmers like Chie, but also cuts its own electricity costs and environmental-damage costs.

Mindanao's cost of electricity is P9 to P10 per kilowatt hour (kWh) and the farm saves P800,000 a month because of the solar power.

"It is most useful in the morning. Shrimp needs oxygen. Without it, they will die within minutes," Chie tells **PhilSTAR Tech** in a mix of Filipino and English.







Chie says that the shrimp farm entirely depends on electricity, and he learned that especially when the farm made the shift to solar technology in 2020.

Shrimp production in the country was stagnant during the early years of the pandemic, according to a report of the 13th Philippine Shrimp Congress three years ago.

It reported that local farms have reduced stock production due to the weak purchasing power of Filipinos during the pandemic.

The farm's engineering supervisor Shawna Velasco revealed that they also faced difficulty during the installment of the solar panels due to mobility restrictions and low manpower.

Despite the limitations, the building of the facility was completed on time as the company, aside from being able to cut its operational costs, wanted to help the

environment.

Velasco also shared that the local government is active in promoting renewable energy and that companies, like Sanacor, were given rewards in return.

"They're very active in promoting that. That's why it wasn't hard to put up this facility because it is supported by the government," Velasco said.

However, the farm supervisor said that they are still looking to find new technologies that would prolong the daily use of their solar power.

"This solar power plant only functions during the morning. We're right now actively looking for ways that we can use a battery and incorporate it so we can use it 24/7," she said.

"With that in mind, it is also part of our expansion plans because we have plans to expand, and if we get to utilize

solar power, it's going to help us more in our plans to grow our company."

## THE HEART OF SANACOR'S SOLAR TECHNOLOGY

In every solar panel system, an inverter is needed to ensure that generated power is compatible with the grid. Direct current cannot be used by grids, and changing the direct current to alternating current is an inverter's main function. For Sanacor, it uses Huawei's inverter technology to transform the panels' output into reusable energy (RE) to power the farm's requirements.

Jesus Calasara Jr., the service manager of Smart Photovoltaic Huawei, said that RE company WeGen chose Huawei's technology to run the farm because it has already proven its efficiency both in other countries.

"We copied those scenarios and we showed it to them—

WeGen showed it to them. That's why they chose Huawei to be the heart of this system," Calasara Jr. said.

Sanacor's inverter model is the Huawei SUN2000-60KTL-M0, which has a 60,000 W as its maximum output. This amount of output can supply power to a condominium building with 20 floors.

Moreover, the inverter models have no control buttons, which Calasara Jr. finds to be one of its greatest points.

"The control buttons become the point of error. After one to two days, the equipment is still working except for the buttons. That's why, with this, you can connect it to your phone," he explained.

Huawei's inverters include the downloading of an application called FusionSolar, where RE developers and Sanacor's engineers can monitor the operational status of the plant.

WeGen Energy's engineering head Gregorio Corruz Jr. showed that the app can display the solar capacity and low demand of the panels in real time.

"There, we can see how effective the system is and the areas where it lacks," Corruz said.

## FULL VISIBILITY OF ENERGY MANAGEMENT

Due to the app being a tool for Sanacor's farm engineers, it allows them to do remote monitoring and makes their jobs easier from across the country.

Corruz said that this kind of technology has made maintenance much faster because he can track the plant's activity real-time and also look at historical data.

"The maintenance becomes easier because the plant is here in Mindanao while we are in Metro Manila. We have people within Davao who can come here whenever needed."

Aside from being able to monitor the daily yield of each plant, the app also shows the user how much it has helped environmentally.

It shows the amount of carbon emission it has prevented and the number of trees that were prevented from being logged due to the use of traditional power plants.

Additionally, Corruz emphasized that the impact of using RE for running the shrimp farm is better allocation of resources.

He said that with the low electricity costs consumed, the farm can now better support the livelihood and welfare of its laborers and fund the farm's protective equipment.

"So, the impact is within the farm first, and then to the community. Instead of using coal or diesel—clean energy, clean environment. I think that is its greatest impact, which is our goal with this technology here."





## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

CHIT U. JUAN

### The forest is alive

While looking for more partners to join our tree planting mega project with GCash, we hied off to Baras, Rizal where a forest reserve and sanctuary is located at Km 47 and is called the Masungi Geo Reserve. Guess what? Even if the 3,000 hectares have been previously logged and gutted by illegal loggers, the former first lady Imelda Marcos actually caused pine trees to be planted on many of its hills back in 1977 and the trees are so beautiful now.



If the President could see what was done during his father's time and due to his mother's initiative to reforest, I am certain the present administration would do everything to save these forests. You cannot imagine how a dense forest can be accessible to Makati, just some 45 kilometers away towards the east. We drove towards the sunrise and the Marcos Highway going towards the Marilaque (Marikina-Rizal-Laguna-Quezon) highway is wide and smooth. I was wondering why at some parts the lanes would widen to almost eight lanes, like a runway of sorts.

I always dismissed the thought of living in these parts due to the limited access roads and traffic along Rosario in Pasig towards Antipolo. But today, if you pass this new Marilaque route, even bikers find it a joy to ride this route which has good roads and beautiful sights of Laguna Lake and its environs.

I was lucky to meet the civil engineer cum conservationist Ben Dumaliang, who was introduced to the ECHOtrio by the late Gina Lopez, former secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. After the secretary passed in 2019, Ben and I did not see each other until I sought him out to look for forest reserves to plant coffee trees. And guess what? We found coffee, albeit just a few scrawny trees needing extra care, but growing nevertheless and fruiting, too. Soil condition for coffee? Check! Elevation – 550 meters. Check! Now, we just need to count how many trees we can plant on 3,000 hectares. This could be the most important greening project while addressing our coffee shortage. Yes, we drink more coffee than what we grow, causing and costing us a lot in coffee imports. Just this 3,000 hectares can be Coffee Mountain – a treat to see for tourists, conservationists and coffee lovers.

Ben tells us that all one has to do is to leave the forest alone – no man on the grounds – and the forest will reforest itself. Nature does heal herself well. We saw those beautiful pine trees along with thick ground cover (*mani mani* or peanut plant), plenty of

foliage like herbal remedies, rare flowers and a very diverse flora and fauna population. I am told there are mostly nocturnal animals like civets and cloud rats, giving our day tour a fauna-free experience. And with civets around, we can definitely allow them to feed on ripe coffee fruits, creating Masungi's own traceable organic civet coffee.

We got a proper orientation from the trail guides, after which we went on a sample of the hiking trail. The tour can be for four hours or a full day, depending on one's endurance and interest. We were definitely interested to see if any coffee trees were present, so off on the hike we went. You can climb some 200 meters or more as we were at 550 meters at one point, and 300 meters at another. All you need is a good pair of hiking shoes, stamina and it served us well to be in jeans and collared shirts. The guides tell you about the plants you will see in the area as well as tidbits about the Paleocene epoch and how the rocks were formed. I will save this information for you to discover during your own trip to the sanctuary.

Because Ben is a civil engineer, you will see that the structures built around the rocks and trees have structural integrity and the construction is mindful of the preservation of Nature, not harming trees or anything part of the natural habitat. I told him he must be Nature's gift to the forest and that this probably is his life mission. For more than 20 years now, he has been witness to how Nature has repopulated the forests. Wildlings are borne from fallen fruits and are a natural regeneration or seedling spread in forests. Seeds fall on the ground and grow on their own. How wonderful is that?

After two hours of hiking we came to the rest area where you can have boiled bananas with a cinnamon dip, an herbal tisane from *kayomanis* (also called a cinnamon tree), a tree we share with our Southeast Asian neighbors. Its name is *kayo* or wood and *manis* or sweet (both terms in Bahasa language of the Malays). We also had cucumber juice and a special chicken spread made with overnight marination in vinegar, grilled then shredded to make a unique tasting filling.

After the snacks, one exits through the SAWA, a term for a big snake as the ropes and cables envelop a bridgeway as you go up again to get to the starting point for all the different hikes. By the way, all this time everyone has to wear light helmets to prevent injury in case of a fall, as the rocks are sharp and its edges are jagged. You are also encouraged to wear light clothing (not sleeveless) and a sturdy holder or strap for mobile phones which could easily fall between the cracks.

We have found more than just a coffee planting area, we have found a forest that is alive. If everyone could do their part in leaving the forest alone and not live in it, we could save enough forest cover to avert the climate crisis. Yes, the forest is alive and it can regenerate itself.

We hope former first lady Imelda Marcos sees what she has done to the forest and maybe influence her family to do the same.

