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DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

What the national budget actually represents

In the early days of our Republic, when the annual budget was barely P10 million, the coffers were downloaded by the retreating revolutionary government from trains in duffel bags. But today, in this era of trillions-peso expenditure plans, it is downloaded electronically. While the budget's magnitude and the manner by which it is allocated has drastically changed, one bedrock principle remains: it has to be scrutinized and appropriated by the elected representatives of the people.

One thing has also remained constant—the national budget is more than a money bag. First and foremost, it is a toolbox for development. It funds our nation's progress, turns our collective dreams into reality, and our people's hopes into happiness.

This is why for the coming year the budget that the House of Representatives and the Senate ratified earlier this week finances our children's education to the tune of P975.763 billion so we can nurture a national talent pool that can identify and seize opportunities, solve problems, and win

the future.

The 2024 budget also appropriates a huge outlay for infrastructure, including hundreds of kilometers of roads, bridges, and railways so that people and their produce can be transported safely. It also allocates up to P221.659 billion for the agricultural sector, representing an increase of roughly 27.7 from the 2023 budget for the Department of Agriculture and its attached agencies of P173.574 billion. This was done to address the scarcity of affordable food, and the poverty of those who grow and raise them, recognizing that no nation can survive if it does not reward the sweat of its farmers and fisherfolk.

Steps were also taken so that the 2024 budget bankrolls our health sector, represented by the Department of Health, to the tune of P319.089 billion, not just to cure the sick, but also to prevent more of our countrymen from falling ill, and our families from being one hospitalization away from



BETTER DAYS
SENATOR SONNY ANGARA

bankruptcy.

The budget also downloads a little less than 20 percent of total appropriations to the regions, provinces, cities, and municipalities—through a national tax allotment worth P871.4 billion—so that our local government units and their communities will be empowered to pursue their own path to development and prosperity.

Sizable funds have also been set aside towards keeping our people secure in their homes, and our streets safe for our children, through increased allocations for the Philippine National Police, the Bureau of Fire Protection, the Philippine Coast Guard, and our other uniformed personnel.

And then upon the instructions of Senate President Migz Zubiri, the 2024 budget also includes up to P238.357 billion for the Department of National Defense and its attached agencies, including the different service branches of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. The budget is also the means through which we shield our territory from intruders, and uphold our sovereignty across our waters.

The budget is also an emergency kit. It brings relief to people hit by misfortunes, repairs places devastated by calamities, and rebuilds livelihood wrecked by disaster—such as the homes shaken by the recent earthquakes in Mindanao or inundated by floods in Samar. Hence, the budget sets aside P21 billion for the national disaster risk reduction and management or NDRRM Fund, formerly known as the calamity fund, not just for responses

to, but resilience against, calamities, of which, due to our geographic misfortune, we withstand many annually.

This budget is a huge safety net, setting aside funds for various forms of ayuda, across several agencies, in programs that will not only catch those who have fallen between the cracks, but installs a scaffolding through which they can pull themselves up. Such ayuda includes government's longstanding conditional cash transfer program, financial assistance during crisis situations, cash-for-work initiatives, social pensions for indigent senior citizens, supplemental feeding, and even fuel subsidies for the transport sector, as well as our farmers and fisherfolk.

Ultimately, the national budget is more than a mere spreadsheet of numbers. It is a manifesto of the values we share—an expression of our collective aspirations as a nation. And as it aligns closely to the avowed goals of the Marcos administration to usher in a new Philippines, the 2024 budget is another year's embodiment of our shared commitment to building a better, more prosperous, more nurturing, and more humane society. (sonnyangara@yahoo.com | Facebook, Twitter & Instagram: @sonnyangara)

(Senator Sonny Angara has been in public service for 19 years — nine years as Representative of the lone district of Aurora, and 10 as Senator. He has authored, co-authored, and sponsored more than 330 laws. He is currently serving his second term in the Senate.)

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DA assures sufficient rice supply until next harvest

By GABRIEL CHRISTEL GALANG

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said the country's rice supply is sufficient until the next harvest season, supported by steady local production and imports.

In a briefing on Saturday, Dec. 16, Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel De Mesa said they expect the national rice stock inventory to reach approximately 85 to 90 days by the end of December.

"At the end we're expecting about 85 to 90 days of our national stock inventory by the end of December which is enough to carry us through until the next harvest season comes March or April," De Mesa said. "Siyempre mayroon din namang import na dumarating kasi liberalized naman iyong importation natin - based on historical data, may dumarating din na imports additional during the first quarter (Of course, there are also imports that come because our importation is liberalized—based on historical data, there are also additional imports coming during the first quarter)."

De Mesa said the DA is projecting 20 million metric tons or slightly more by the end of this year's dry and wet harvest season.

As of the end of November, the country's rice imports stand at 3.03 million metric tons, a decrease from last year's 3.5 million metric tons for the same period.

"Last year ang kabuuan is 3.5; we're expecting this year mga 3.2, 3.3 million metric tons wala pa iyong Indian rice. So, kumbaga, magkaroon lang nang kaunting diprensiya, so plus matatag naman iyong ating production (Last year, the total was 3.5 million metric tons; we're expecting about 3.2 to 3.3 million metric tons this year, excluding Indian rice. Therefore, we anticipate only a slight difference, indicating that our production is more stable)," De Mesa explained.

De Mesa also said the DA is expecting the arrival of 95,000 metric tons of Indian rice out of the 295,000 metric tons secured by the government, with additional deliveries scheduled for January.

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Farmgate palay price swells 26% in November

By XANDER DAVE CEBALLOS

The farmgate price of palay or rice per kilogram swelled in November this year, data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed.

Based on the PSA data, the average farmgate price of palay increased to 26.6 percent during the month. This translates to ₱21.96 per kilogram of palay, which is higher compared to ₱17.35 recorded in November last year.

It is also higher compared to the October performance by 6.6 percent at ₱20.60 per kilogram of palay.

Of the regions, the highest farmgate price of palay was seen in Bangsam-

oro Autonomous Region (BARMM) in Muslim Mindanao at ₱24.65 per kilogram while the lowest was recorded in Zamboanga Peninsula at ₱18.88 per kilogram.

All regions recorded positive year-on-year growth rates of the average farmgate prices of palay in November, according to PSA data.

Caraga posted the highest annual increment of 35.7 percent, while the lowest reading of average farmgate prices of palay was recorded in Mimaropa at 14.2 percent.

All regions posted month-on-month increases with the highest rate seen in BARMM at 42 percent.



EDITORIAL

A global concern

FILIPINOS, like other nationalities, agree that "food security" has become a global concern amid the worldwide pressures of inflation.

These pressures stemmed from the COVID-19 pandemic, continued war between Russia and Ukraine, and accelerating climate change.

One of the priorities of the administration, which ends in 2028, is food security, along with economic recovery as well as eradication of poverty.

That's why we doff our hat to the Taiwan government for setting up a five-hectare demo farm in the Philippines, the third of its kind in Southeast Asia.

Filipino and Taiwanese officials attended the recent inauguration of the demonstration farm in Barangay Sapang Maragul, Tarlac City.

The first two farms are in Indonesia and Thailand which, like the Philippines, are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Fully funded by Taiwan, through the International Cooperation and Development Fund (ICDF), the farm is part of a multi-year program that seeks to boost production and income of farmers.

The opening of the demo farm followed the establishment of the Taiwan Technical Mission (TTM) in the country last March 2022.

The farm is not only a training site, but will also provide seedlings for disaster recovery to help farmers recover their income in a short time.

Likewise, it will serve as the implementation site of the Agricultural Cluster Consolidation project in the Philippines, said ACCC project coordinator Tom Peng.

Taiwan will also share best practices on diagnosis of cultivation, harvesting, post-harvest processing, storage, packaging, marketing and organizational management.

Without doubt, the demo farm is seen to boost the income of Filipino farmers at a time when Philippine agriculture is confronted with various problems.