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LAUREL ASSURES SECURE FOOD SUPPLY

## DA VOWS INSURANCE, AID FOR FARMERS, FISHERS AS EL NIÑO LURKS

By Meg J. Adonis  
@MegINQ

With El Niño expected to persist during the summer season next year, the Department of Agriculture (DA) on Friday said it was working to mitigate its impact on the entire food production system.

In a statement, the DA said the Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. (PCIC) had set aside P1.8 billion to insure 916,759 farmers and fishermen between January and June next year, ensuring they would be compensated from the onslaught of El Niño.

PCIC would also shell out P500 million as credit support for some 200,000 borrowers who may be affected by the long period of dry spell via the Survival and Recovery Loan Program of the Agriculture Credit Policy Council.

In the second half of 2023, the DA said PCIC was able to insure 1.27 million farmers, or 76 percent of the target group.

"We are leaving no stones unturned in our effort to ease the impact of El Niño on our farmers and fishermen as well as consumers by ensuring food production is sufficient and supply is secure during the expected dry spell that could affect a majority of provinces and millions who depend on agriculture and fisheries," Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said.

At the same time, the DA's Bureau of Soil and Water

Management had requested P112 million for cloud seeding operations to supplement the water requirement for crops during periods of low rainfall.

### Cloud seeding

According to the DA, which did not say where the fund would be sourced, the cloud seeding would be undertaken together with the Department of Science and Technology and the Department of National Defense, which was expected to provide information for optimum operations, including the provision of aircraft.

Laurel noted the DA had so far rehabilitated 740 kilometers out of 843 km of irrigation canals across the country, while 40 units of small-scale irrigation systems covering 1,477.5 hectares had been repaired and rehabilitated to distribute water "more effectively and efficiently."

The agency is also planning on distributing 56,169 animals to 297 farmer groups and 470 individual farmers under the Philippine Native Animal Development Program.

Earlier this week, the DA announced that nearly 500,000 metric tons (MT) of imported rice would arrive in the Philippines between this month and February next year to boost local inventory in the wake of El Niño.

Around 76,000 MT of rice from Taiwan and India were expected to arrive until early January, the DA said. INQ





# Rice farmers get cash aid from excess tariffs

By **DANESSA RIVERA**

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has started distributing nearly P12 billion in cash aid to 2.38 million rice farmers – equivalent to P5,000 each – sourced from excess tariff collection to help sustain their productivity.

The DA's Rice Industry Development said that as of Dec. 28, 458,435 farmers' accounts have been credited the cash aid despite the many bank holidays of the past week.

Meanwhile, 44,719 farmers have withdrawn their cash, through the efforts of the Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP) and remittance giant Universal Storefront Services Corp. (USSC), a Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas-licensed e-money issuer.

Farmers from the Cordillera Administrative Region, Caraga and Mimaropa were among the first to receive their cash assistance, and this is expected to increase in the next days as the letters of instruction from the DA's regional offices are issued.

The DA said more farmers are expected to avail themselves of the cash assistance in the coming days by going to any of the more than 700 stores of USSC nationwide, or by withdrawing from any BancNet ATM.

DA Undersecretary for rice industry development Leocadio Sebastian said the smallholder rice farmers can use the cash they receive for daily subsistence and personal needs.

Farmers are able to withdraw cash with their Interventions Monitoring Card (IMC), an innovative product jointly developed by the DA, DBP and USSC.

The IMC contains both an EMV chip (for secure transactions in ATMs) as well as a unique QR code linked to the individual rice farmer registered in the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture.

USSC, formerly known as RCPI, is one of the country's largest remittance companies and is known for its partnership with Western Union, as well as with other global remittance companies.

"We pride ourselves in making sure our rice farmers get the cash assistance, stipulated by law, in the fastest, most convenient way possible," USSC president and CEO Jose Xavier Gonzales said.

"Through our partnership with DBP, we have issued e-wallets to the rice farmers, ensuring that they are finally included in our financial system. Because of this, they can now reap the benefits of quick cash transfers to their account, which they can access at any time, any day of the week, through our mobile app or through any BancNet ATM," he said.

As mandated under Republic Act 11598 or the Cash Assistance to Filipino Farmers Act of 2021, the Rice Farmers Financial Assistance Program – an unconditional cash grant for farmers tilling below two hectares – is funded through the excess tariff collection from rice importations in 2022, totaling P12.7 billion.

President Marcos had approved the release of the P12-billion financial package to rice farmers owning two hectares and below, saying this would "help them cope with the increasing cost of production and sustain their productivity even in the face of challenges like the coming El Niño."

## Mitigating El Niño

The DA has commenced implementing measures to mitigate the impact of El Niño on food production, and on farmers and fisherfolk to be adversely affected by the weather phenomenon.

Interventions undertaken by the DA include the repair and rehabilitation of irrigation canals, cloud-seeding, dispersal of farm animals and provision of alternative livelihoods to farmers and fishermen, implementation of low-water use technology for rice farming and quick-turnaround strategy, Agriculture Secretary **Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** said in a statement.

"We are leaving no stone unturned in our effort to ease the impact of El Niño on our farmers and fishermen as well as consumers by ensuring food production is sufficient and supply is secure during the expected dry spell that could affect a majority of provinces and millions who depend on agriculture and fisheries," he said.

Of the 843-kilometer irrigation

canals target, 740 kilometers have been improved and constructed as of November.

Meanwhile, 40 units of small-scale irrigation systems covering 1,477.5 hectares have been repaired and rehabilitated to distribute water more effectively and efficiently.

The DA's Bureau of Soil and Water Management has also requested P112 million for cloud-seeding operations for 2024 to supplement the water requirement of standing crops during periods of low rainfall.

The agency said cloud-seeding operations will be done in collaboration with the





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Department of Science and Technology and Department of National Defense, which will provide information for optimum cloud-seeding operations and aircraft, respectively.

Through the Philippine Native Animal Development Program, the DA will distribute 56,169 animals to 297 farmer groups and 470 individual farmers.

Alternative livelihood and technologies adaptive to climate change will also be provided to fishermen in Bicol, Central Visayas and Zamboanga peninsula.

Laurel said the DA will en-

tice more rice farmers to use alternative wetting and drying technology to save water.

He said the technology has been successfully used by over 1.2 million farmers and implemented on 9,210 hectares of rice fields.

The agriculture chief said 17,660 hectares of rice fields have been targeted for implementation of the quick-turn-around strategy, wherein all rice farmers will immediately replant rice without waiting for months to take advantage of the remaining moisture in the soil.

Moreover, the DA has tasked the Philippine Crop

Insurance Corp. to indemnify affected farmers.

Between June and November this year, it has insured 1.27 million farmers, around 76 percent of the target group.

From January to June next year, PCIC has set aside P1.8 billion to insure a total 916,759 farmers and fishermen.

The DA chief said the PCIC has also set aside P500 million as credit support under its Survival and Recovery Loan Program of the Agriculture Credit Policy Council for some 20,000 borrowers who may be affected by calamities, including the El Niño phenomenon.



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## DA sets strategies to tackle El Niño impact in 2024

By GABRIELL CHRISTEL GALANG and CHINO S. LEYCO

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. said yesterday that precautionary measures are being implemented to battle the effects of the El Niño phenomenon which is expected to affect food production, farmers, and fisherfolk.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Interagency Task for

El Niño have started preparations to mitigate the adverse effects of the weather phenomenon. These include the repair and rehabilitation of irrigation canals, cloud-seeding, dispersal of farm animals and provision of alternative livelihoods to farmers and fishermen, implementation of low-water- ► 4





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## DA sets strategies to tackle El Niño impact in 2024

use technology for rice farming, and quick-turnaround strategy.

"We are leaving no stones unturned in our effort to ease the impact of El Niño on our farmers and fishermen as well as consumers by ensuring food production is sufficient and supply is secure during the expected dry spell that could affect a majority of provinces and millions who depend on agriculture and fisheries," Laurel said.

The DA chief shared that 740 kilometers out of the 843 kilometers irrigation canals have been built and upgraded since November this year.

Around 40 units of small-scale irrigation systems covering 1,477.5 hectares were also repaired for more effective and efficient water distribution.

To further prepare for the El

Niño effects, the Bureau of Soil and Water Management, an attached-agency of the DA, has sought cloud-seeding operations that would supplement the water requirement of standing crops during the dry season next year.

According to the bureau, the agency has requested a P112 million support to proceed with the weather modification.

The rain production operation will be in partnership with the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and the Department of National Defense (DND), where they can also acquire aircraft for the cloud-seeding strategy.

Furthermore, the DA will also push the Philippine Native Animal Development Program, wherein 56,169 animals are distributed to

297 farmer groups and 470 individual farmers.

Adaptive livelihood and technologies will also be given to fishermen located in Bicol, Central Visayas, and Zamboanga.

"The DA will entice more rice farmers to use alternative wetting and drying technology to save water," Laurel said.

"The technology has been successfully used by over 1.2 million farmers and implemented on 9,210 hectares of rice fields," he added.

According to Laurel, the next target for the quick-turnaround strategy will be done on 17,660 hectares of rice fields.

The quick turnaround would mean that all rice farmers must replant rice without waiting for months to take advantage of the remaining soil moisture.

"The Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. [PCIC] has been tasked to indemnify affected farmers, and between June and November this year has insured 1.27 million farmers, around 76 percent of the target group," Agri Chief explained.

Sometime around January to June 2024, the PCIC will insure P1.8 billion

to 916,759 or nearly a million farmers and fishermen.

"The PCIC has also set aside P500 million as credit support under its Survival and Recovery Loan Program of the Agriculture Credit Policy Council for some 20,000 borrowers who may be affected by calamities," he said.

### Gov't to address expected rise in prices

President Marcos' chief economic manager assured that the government will address the expected rise in consumer prices, as inflationary pressures are projected to continue until next year.

Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno said that their top priority is to maintain macroeconomic stability and keep the inflation rate at manageable levels in order to protect the purchasing power of Filipino consumers.

"As we enter the new year, you can count on the government to mobilize all efforts toward addressing inflationary pressures," Diokno said in a statement.

Inflation soared in 2023, averaging 6.2 percent from January to November, far exceeding the government's target range of two percent to four percent.

The Bangkok Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) forecasted on Friday, Dec. 29, that inflation for the final month of the year could fall between 3.6 percent and 4.4 percent.

According to the BSP, rising rice and meat prices are expected to drive prices up in December, while lower prices for agricultural products like vegetables, fruits, and fish, as well as reduced electricity and petroleum prices, are likely to push prices down.

"The IAC-IMO [Inter-agency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook] recognizes the pertinent upside risks that need to be addressed in the near term," Diokno said.

"Keeping the inflation rate within manageable levels to protect the Filipino people's purchasing power and maintaining macroeconomic stability shall remain our top priority," he added.



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## DA seeks P112-M addl fund for cloud seeding amid El Niño threat in 2024

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS

[@jearcalas](#)

**T**HE Department of Agriculture (DA) is seeking an additional budget of P112 million next year to bankroll its cloud seeding operations as part of its mitigating measures against El Niño.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiù Laurel Jr. said the DA's Bureau of Soil and Water Management has already requested the additional fund for its cloud-seeding operations "to supplement the water requirement of standing crops during periods of low rainfall."

"Cloud-seeding operations will be undertaken in collaboration with the Department of Science and Technology, and the Department of National Defense, which will provide information for optimum cloud-seeding operations, including provision of aircraft, respectively," Laurel said in a statement on Friday.

The DA said the inter-agency Task

Force on El Niño has started implementing various mitigating measures to cushion the anticipated effect of the prolonged dry spell on domestic food production.

Laurel also disclosed that the DA is fast-tracking the repair and rehabilitation of various irrigation canals nationwide.

At the end of November, Laurel said that about 740 kilometers out of the 843 kilometers target irrigation canals have been repaired and rehabilitated.

On top of these, the DA has fixed 40 units of small-scale irrigation systems that cover about 1,477.5 hectares of farms, Laurel said.

The DA said it would distribute 56,169 animals to 297 farmer groups and 470 individual farmers under its Philippine Native Animal Development Program. The distribution of the livestock would serve as alternative livelihood to farmers in Bicol, Central Visayas and Zamboanga Peninsula.

Furthermore, Laurel urged rice farmers to adapt the use of alternative wetting and drying technology to save water, a critical resource during prolonged dry spell.

"[About] 17,660 hectares of rice fields have been targeted for the implementation of the quick-turnaround strategy, wherein all rice farmers will immediately replant rice without waiting for months to take advantage of the remaining moisture in the soil," he said.

Laurel also said the state-owned Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. (PCIC) has a P1.8 billion budget to insure 916,759 farmers and fishermen in the first half of next year.

The DA chief added that the Agriculture Credit Policy Council has P500-million credit support under its Survival and Recovery Loan Program for some 20,000 borrowers who may be affected by calamities, including the El Niño phenomenon.

"We are leaving no stones unturned in our effort to ease the impact of El

Niño on our farmers and fishermen as well as consumers by ensuring food production is sufficient and supply is secure during the expected dry spell that could affect a majority of provinces and millions who depend on agriculture and fisheries," Laurel said.

The DA earlier disclosed that it is anticipating the entry of about 571,000 metric tons (MT) of imported rice until February 2024 as the country braces for the adverse effects of El Niño. **(Related story: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/12/28/phl-expects-571mt-rice-to-come-in-till-february/>)**

The BUSINESSMIRROR earlier reported that the Philippines's milled rice output in the first half of next year could decline by as much as almost 190 million kilograms because of the projected impact of the El Niño on local farms, based on DA's latest projections.

Based on the National Irrigation Administration estimates, the DA noted that there are about 280,000 hectares of rice farms that would be vulnerable to El Niño. **(Related story: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/12/15/da-sees-domestic-milled-rice-output-decline-in-h1-2024-amid-el-nino-threat/>)**



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## **DA, naghahanda na sa *El Niño***

Naghahanda na ang Department of Agriculture (DA) at iba pang ahensya hinggil sa pagtama ng *El Niño* phenomenon o matinding tagtuyot sa bansa na posibleng makaapekto sa produksiyon ng pagkain.

Ayon sa DA, gumagawa na sila ng mga hakbangin para matulungan ang mga magsasaka at maging ang mga mangingisda na maapektuhan ng dry spell.

Sinabi ni **DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** kabilang sa kanilang mga isinasagawa ay ang pagkukumpuni at rehabilitasyon ng mga kanal sa irigasyon o patubig para sa mga pananim.

"We are leaving no stones unturned in our effort to ease the impact of *El Niño* on our farmers and fishermen as well as consumers by ensuring food production

is sufficient, and supply is secure during the expected dry spell," ani Tiu.

Ayon kay Tiu, ang *El Niño* ay maaring makaapekto sa mga lalawigan at milyong mga mamamayan na nakadepende sa agrikultura at pangisdaan lalo na ang mga magsasaka saka mangingisda.

Ang Bureau of Soil and Water Management ay humiling na ng P112 milyon para sa cloud seeding operations sa 2024 para matugunan ang kinakailangang patubig sa mga pananim.

Mamamahagi rin ang DA ng 56,169 mga alagang hayop para sa 297 grupo ng magsasaka at 47 pang magsasaka.

Mamamahagi rin ng alternatibong kabuhayan para sa mga mangingisda sa Bicol, Central Visayas at Zamboanga Peninsula Region. (*Joy Cantos*)



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**HEAVY TRAFFIC, TOO**

## WHAT PEAK SEASON? VEGGIE FARMERS DECRY SMUGGLING

By Kimberlie Quitasol  
@ktquitasolINQ

**BAGUIO CITY**—Vegetable farmers and traders have again appealed to the government to address the unabated smuggling of vegetables that continue to flood local markets as they blamed the illicit activity for the drop in the demand for local produce during the holiday season.

In an interview on Wednesday, Agot Balanoy, spokesperson for the League of Associations at the La Trinidad Vegetable Trading Areas Inc., said they were expecting that their sales for the Christmas and New Year holidays would pick up because "it's supposed to be the peak season for the vegetable industry."

She said only five of her group's 28 vegetable delivery trucks had managed to double their trips during the Christmas and New Year holidays due to the low demand.

"But those who were able to double their trips

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had difficulty disposing of their load because their delivery was delayed by the heavy traffic in Metro Manila," Balanoy said, noting that each truck carries 20 to 25 metric tons of assorted vegetables per trip.

### Illegal entry

In a statement, the league said the illegal entry of vegetables, most of these coming from China, is "killing the vegetable and agricultural industry, the farmers and the other stakeholders whose livelihood is heavily anchored on agriculture."

Balanoy said the Bureau of Customs (BOC) confiscated smuggled carrots and potatoes in Zambales province on Nov. 10. These vegetables, she said, were discovered in boxes that were passed off as coming from farms in Benguet province.

"But based on our monitoring, these smuggled vegetables

that are actually from China are still being sold in local markets in Luzon until today," Balanoy said.

Local traders said smuggled vegetables like carrots, celery, leeks and cauliflower could easily be distinguished because these no longer have stems and leaves when sold in local markets.

"As for potatoes and broccoli, these usually look the same as locally grown but are already packed in boxes or crates, and come in uniform sizes," Balanoy said.

She said the wholesale prices of smuggled vegetables are lower by at least P10 per kilo.

"There are some illegally imported crops that are more expensive by P10 [per kilo] but buyers prefer the imported ones because of their longer shelf life [due to chemical fertilizers and preservatives]," Balanoy said.

### Senate probe

Benguet and some parts of Mountain Province and Ifugao provinces supply 80 percent of Metro Manila's daily salad veg-



**FARM TO MARKET** In this photo taken in April, workers at the vegetable trading post in La Trinidad, Benguet, keep up with the arrival of delivery trucks unloading freshly harvested vegetables from farms in the province and other areas in the Cordillera region. —ALLAN MACATUNO

etable demand.

Vegetable traders in Benguet alone deliver an average of 1.7 million kilos of assorted vegetables to different markets in Luzon and other parts of the country every day.

Over 58,000 families in Benguet, Ifugao and Mountain Province rely on vegetable farming as their main source of livelihood in 2020, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

According to Balanoy, her group has been urging the national government and concerned agencies to protect local produce from smuggled products, noting that the problem persists despite an investigation launched by the Senate last year.

During the committee-of-the-whole investigation into the unabated vegetable smuggling in the country last year, high-ranking government officials and politicians were tagged as big-time smugglers.

The investigation was made following a December 2021 privilege speech of then Senate President Vicente Sotto III, who named the alleged protectors of smugglers in the country.

During one of the hearings, Balanoy complained about the influx of smuggled vegetables, like carrots, even after the BOC and the Department of Agriculture reported that their teams, in a series of operations, had confiscated smuggled agricultural products from key ports

in the country, including Subic in Zambales.

Balanoy told the committee that Benguet farmers managed to obtain evidence that smuggled carrots had flooded local markets at their expense.

### 'Brazen'

She cited accounts that small warehouses near Divisoria market, a major trading hub for fresh vegetables in Manila, had been releasing imported vegetables to the local market whenever prices of Benguet vegetables shot up.

Benguet vegetable farmers were reportedly losing an average of P2.5 million a day due to declining orders from their customers by up to 40 percent, owing to the influx of smuggled vegetables.

In a recent interview, Balanoy expressed her "disappointment" over the government's "inaction" despite the Senate investigation.

She then described smuggling of vegetables as "more brazen now than ever." INQ





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TO PREVENT ANOTHER OUTBREAK

## PHARMA FIRMS URGED TO BRING BIRD FLU VACCINES TO PH

By Kathleen de Villa  
@kdevillaINQ

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is calling on pharmaceutical firms to bring to the country vaccines against avian influenza, or bird flu, to prevent the reemergence of an outbreak of the zoonotic disease.

According to the FDA, there has been no application for certificate of product registration (CPR) for the manufacture, sale, importation or distribution of avian influenza vaccines. A CPR is a license issued by the FDA for the commercial distribution and sale of a medical device.

This prompted the FDA to recently form Task Force Alectryon, the name which was derived from the Ancient Greek word for "rooster," tasked with streamlining the evaluation of applications for bird flu drugs and vaccines that are "safe, efficacious and of good quality."

"To tackle the ongoing chal-

lenges posed by HPAI (highly pathogenic avian influenza), a proactive approach is essential for effective management of virus spread and its impact," the FDA said in a statement on Thursday.

"This approach involves implementing preventive measures and control strategies, with vaccination playing a crucial role among other strategies," it added.

In 2017, the Philippines confirmed its first case of HPAI. Many of the provinces hit by the outbreak had since been declared free from bird flu, the latest being Maguindanao del Sur and Isabela this month.

"Despite successfully managing the epidemic, the continuous threat of reemergence persists," the FDA noted.

Just last month, the Department of Agriculture released guidelines on the targeted vaccination as a "complementary tool" in the containment of the avian influenza. INQ



## Retail price of chicken up by P20 per kilo

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The retail price of chicken has increased by P20 per kilo days before the New Year's celebration, reaching P210 per kilo from the previous P190, according to monitoring of the Department of Agriculture (DA) yesterday.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa has confirmed a slight increase in the retail price of agricultural commodities this holiday season, which is expected to prevail until the New

Year's celebration.

He said that the DA particularly recorded an increase in the retail price of chicken as he assured the public of continuous monitoring by the department.

Meanwhile, the retail price of pork ham ranged between P270 and P370 per kilo and pork belly or *liempo*, between P300 and P400 per kilo.

De Mesa said the supply of agricultural commodities in the entire country is very stable and that the upward trend of food products is just temporary. — **With Ghio Ong**





## **Poultry raisers: What bird flu outbreak?**

Avian influenza cases in the country are on the rise, but poultry raisers said the industry is unaware because the Department of Agriculture (DA) failed to provide data on the affected areas.

"We have data from the Department of Agriculture that there was an increase in the number of cases of avian influenza or bird flu in the country. It is important for the pharmaceutical industry to apply for a vaccine," Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Policy and Planning Services communication section head Jordan Paguirigan said.

When asked for comment, United Broiler Raisers Association and Philippine Egg Board chairman Gregorio San Diego said they are not aware of the reported rise in bird flu cases.

San Diego lamented that the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) failed to release a situation report.

"They are in chaos or they are deliberately doing it," San Diego told **The STAR**.

BAI data as of Dec. 15 showed that an outbreak of avian flu was reported in Balanga City in Bataan and Concepcion, Tarlac, which affected duck farms.

In November, an outbreak of avian flu was reported only in Balanga.

Paguirigan said the FDA is encouraging veterinary pharmaceuticals to apply for a certificate of product registration to help manage avian influenza.

He said the DA is controlling the spread of bird flu through border inspection and disinfection of affected areas in the absence of a vaccine against the disease.

— **Bella Cariaso**



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## Taiwanese 'agri envoy' to Pinoy youth: There is future in farming

**W**ITH food security wholly dependent on agriculture, farming indeed is the world's present and future. However, with an aging farmer population and a growing lack of interest in rural communities pursuing this line of work, numerous countries in the Philippines are faced with the huge task of encouraging a new generation of farmers—especially coming from the youth—to engage in agriculture.

Claire Huang, a young Taiwanese agribusiness student who recently visited Philippine farms under the 2023 Taiwan Youth Agricultural Ambassadors (TYAA) program, believes young Filipinos will play a significant role in sustaining the sector's local front in the coming years.

Huang said that, coupled with innovation and the use of technology, the potential for farmers to increase their yields and boost revenue is high.

"I think there's a future in farming," the Taiwanese student said, as she recalled a time witnessing how product innovation helped an aging farming town in Taiwan sell its mangoes and bananas.

She shared that the average age of people in the town was about 65 years old.

"Every day, I would see the farmers bring their [mango and banana produce] and try to sell them, but there's no main road crossing in that town so no one is actually passing by often,"



CLAIRE HUANG (second from right) and other Taiwan Young Agricultural Ambassadors at the Harbest Agribusiness Corp. in Pasig City. TECO/PNA

she narrated. "Everyone's producing the same fruits, so they don't need to buy products from each other. It was incredibly sad, because I see them every day and I know they're trying to make a living."

The company where she once served as an intern bought a batch of local mangoes, and used them to make jams.

"The mango jams, compared to fresh mangoes, have a longer shelf life... We also gave it a really nice packaging, and we made 900 jars and sold 500 within one month," she said. "That was the time I knew I could do something."

Huang continued: "The local farmers were pleased with the product, and I really thought: 'Wow, I can make an impact in this area, and this is very meaningful.' That was the time I knew choosing to study agribusiness is the

right thing for me."

### Sharing best practices

HUANG came with 23 other "agricultural youth envoys" to the Philippines last month. They shared best farming and agribusiness insights with local stakeholders.

The delegates included students and experts on fruit and vegetable cultivation, organic farming, agricultural economics, and aquaculture.

The TYAA program, which ran last month, allowed the 24 to engage with officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA), International Rice Research Institute or IRRI, Southeast Asia Regional Center for Graduates Study and Research in Agriculture or SEARCA, and Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development of the Department of Science and Tech-

nology or DOST-PCAARRD.

They also interacted with farmers from the Tabon San Jose Farmers' Association and Harbest Agribusiness Corp.'s executives.

### Alarming survey

IN the Philippines, a 2020 research study by retired University of the Philippines anthropology professor Florencia Palis said there is a growing preference among Filipino youth to work abroad than to farm.

The survey also found that the majority of the farmers themselves encourage their children to "stay away" from farming.

At least 597, or 64.7 percent, of the 923 surveyed for the study said they "do not want" their children to become rice farmers like them—majority of whom think they would not have a future in the fields, while a portion said their kids are not interested in farming.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., who once led the Agriculture Department, had been encouraging the youth to help increase the sector's productivity.

The government previously launched the "Young Farmers Challenge," which offers financial grants for youths who would engage in new agri-fishery enterprises.

The DA also continues to offer scholarships for agriculture-related courses. **Joyce Ann L. Rocamora/PNA**





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## Rice stocks as of Nov. 1 down to 2MMT—PSA

THE country's total rice stocks as of November 1 declined year-on-year by a quarter to nearly 2 million metric tons (MMT) as stocks across households and commercial entities fell, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Latest PSA report showed that the country's rice inventory at the start of November stood at 1.978 MMT, about 25.33 percent lower than the 2.649 MMT recorded in the same period of last year.

PSA data showed that the overall drop in rice inventory was caused by lower stocks held by households, commercial entities and even by the National Food Authority (NFA).

Despite the 671,000 MT drop in overall inventory, historical PSA data showed that November's stock level was the highest for the year.

"Month-on-month, the volume of rice stocks inventory recorded an increase of 6.4 percent from the previous month's inventory level of 1.86 million metric tons," the PSA said recently.

PSA data showed that bulk of the country's rice inventory were with the commercial sector at 1.017 MMT, while households stored about 901,110 MT. Rice stocks in NFA warehouses were estimated at 60,230 MT, according to the PSA.

"This month's rice stocks inventories in all sectors registered annual declines of 50.0 percent in NFA depositories, 31.8 percent in the household sector, and 13.2 percent in the commercial sector relative to their corresponding levels in the same period

of 2022," the state statistical agency said.

"In comparison to the October 2023 rice stocks levels, month-on-month increases were noted in rice stocks inventories in the NFA depositories by 36.1 percent, household sector by 10.8 percent, and in the commercial sector by 0.5 percent," it added.

Meanwhile, the PSA reported that total corn inventory nationwide rose by 29.1 percent year-on-year to 779,460 MT from 603,670 MT in November 2022.

"Month-on-month, corn stocks inventory exhibited a decrement of 8.7 percent relative to its previous month's inventory level of 853.66 thousand metric tons," the PSA said.

"About 88.2 percent of this month's total corn stocks inventory were from the commercial sector, while the remaining 11.8 percent were from the households," the PSA added.

The PSA said the corn stocks of the commercial sector stood at 687,410 MT, while 92,050 MT were stored by the household sector.

"From the same month of the previous year's level, corn stocks inventory in the commercial sector recorded an annual increase of 38.6 percent, while an annual decline of 14.4 percent was observed in the household sector," it said.

"Relative to the inventory level in October 2023, the volume of corn stocks in the household sector registered a month-on-month decrease of 26.7 percent. Likewise, corn stocks in the commercial sector dropped by 5.6 percent," it added.

Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas





## Editorial

### Filipino fishermen caught in crossfire in WPS

ON December 8, the Thomson Reuters Foundation published a distressing article detailing the plight of Filipino fishermen, mostly hailing from Zambales, who have been driven to financial near-ruin by the ongoing aggression of China in the West Philippine Sea (WPS), particularly around Scarborough Shoal (Bajo de Masinloc). That it has taken a foreign media organization to highlight the issue is emblematic of the disconnect between our government's rhetoric concerning protecting the safety and livelihoods of Filipino fishermen by enforcing the Philippines' internationally recognized right to utilize the waters of the country's exclusive economic zone, and the practical actions, or lack thereof, actually being taken to support them. This must change.

China seized the Scarborough Shoal in 2012 after its ill-advised abandonment by the administration of President Benigno Aquino 3rd, immediately denying the rich fishing grounds inside the shoal to Filipino fishermen who have fished those waters for generations. The situation eased somewhat in 2017 due to friendly overtures to China by former President Rodrigo Duterte, resulting in China "permitting" some access for fishermen, but has deteriorated again in recent months with the increase in tensions in the WPS.

According to the fishermen interviewed by Thomson Reuters, Chinese aggression in preventing fishermen from accessing the shoal has become dangerous, with Chinese forces regularly deploying speedboats and water cannon against Filipino fishermen, and even chasing them in the open sea some distance from the shoal.

As a consequence, fishermen from Zambales have lost an estimated 70 percent of their income. Whereas before the Chinese crackdown, a fisherman working the lagoon of Scarborough Shoal could earn P8,000 to P10,000 per week, incomes have dropped to P2,000 to P3,000 per week.

The loss of income is not the only problem faced by most of these fishermen. Just like many land farmers, the small fishermen often take loans to purchase fuel and supplies, hire helpers, and maintain their boats before fishing trips. If the trip is productive, this is not a problem, but if it is not, as the fishermen of Zambales say is almost always the case now, their debts begin piling up. To make matters worse, not only is fishing in the deep sea away from Scarborough Shoal less productive, it costs more in fuel and other supplies.

### Growing debt, low incomes

The fishermen did acknowledge that the government, mainly through the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), and local government units have made some efforts to provide a measure of livelihood support. BFAR, for example, has an P80-million program for alternative livelihood development and provides some supplies, such as fuel, food and drinking water, to boats at sea. The fishermen expressed frustration, however, that much of these support efforts are wasted. For example, a seaweed farming program intended to give fishermen an alternative source of income was implemented in areas unsuitable for growing seaweed; the fishermen also said that many donated boats are "no good for long fishing trips."

And to whatever degree the government may claim to be helping fishermen caught in the crossfire in the WPS dispute, the proof is in the outcomes: Many fishermen remain burdened with growing debt, and incomes that are so low that basic subsistence is a daunting challenge, and managing loan obligations is completely out of the question.

The plight of the fishermen affected by the dispute must be addressed in a comprehensive, productive manner by the government; a mere P80 million in one flawed program is by no means adequate. The well-being of the fishermen and their families is reason enough to do so, as their troubles are the result of policies and powers over which they have no control.

Beyond that, the government should consider the implications for its position in the WPS dispute. China is clearly trying to strangle a part of the national economy that depends on the sea and the security of the Philippines' EEZ. If that part of the economy can be made to disappear, then so does one important justification for the Philippines' resistance to China's illegitimate expansionist claims. By supporting the fishermen who have been shut out of Scarborough Shoal, the government will ensure that the calculation on China's part is a serious strategic mistake.



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## 2 quakes damage P109-M in irrigation projects, farmlands – NIA

**By Joel dela Torre**

THE recent earthquakes in Regions 8 and Caraga recorded a damage of P109 million in irrigation infrastructures and affected more than 7,000 hectares of agricultural, the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) reported.

NIA administrator, engineer Eduardo Eddie Guillen immediately directed all regional managers in these areas to conduct an inventory and assessment of the damages.

At present, Guillen said the agency is conducting an evaluation on how to effectively address the challenge of repairing the affected irrigation systems/projects to secure unhampered delivery of irrigation service to the farmers.

Reports reaching his office show that the magnitude 5.2 temblor in Region 8 on November 20 had an estimated cost damages of P46,000 in the Samar National Irrigation Project (NIP), with 71 farmers tilling 271 hectares of farmland, affected.

Based on recommendation, the project requires emergency works or remedial measures to immediately restore the service area and save the standing crops.

Meanwhile, the magnitude 7.6 quake in Caraga region on December 2 had a much higher damage at P109,447,000, covering 18 irrigation projects with a service area of 6,970 hectares while affecting a total of 5,353 farmer-beneficiaries.

Guillen said these projects require works to restore the facilities to its original form.

As per report from the Office of the DA Asst. Secretary for Operations, the two earthquakes has a total damage of P109,493,000.





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## Food Port Complex soon in Batangas

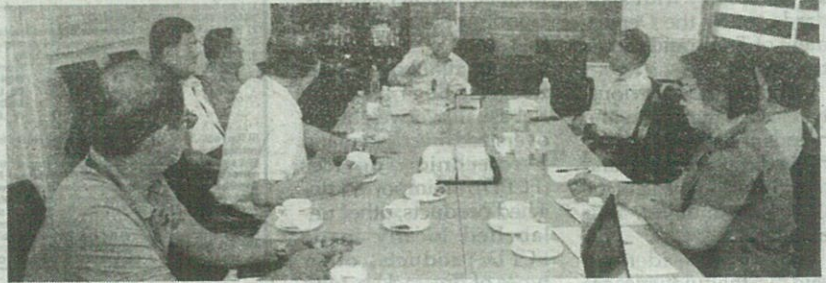
**By Jojo  
Magsombol**

GOVERNOR Hermilando (DoDo) Mandanas, together with representatives from the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA), held an organizational meeting on December 20, 2023, at the OPAG Conference Room in Bolbok, Batangas City.

Discussed during the meeting was the proposed Batangas Food Port Complex Project, which is part of the fish port scheduled to be built in Bgy. Danglayan, San Pascual, Batangas.

The governor asked for guidance and advice from the PFDA regarding the project to be called "Citizen's Fish Table."

According to PFDA Technical Services Division Manager, engineer Danilo Axalan, their office is ready to provide



**Batangas Gov. DoDo Mandanas (center) with Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA) officials during the meeting.**

technical assistance, such as training, so that the province can fully implement the planned fish port.

The Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA) is a government-owned and controlled corporation under the Department of Agriculture that helps manage the nine Regional Fish Ports in the country.



## DISKARTENG SABLAY SA IMPORTED PAGKAIN

PINAYUHAN ni Senador Imee Marcos ang mga opisyal ng administrasyon na huwag palaging umaasa sa pag-import ng agricultural products kahit sabihin pang ibinaba ang taripa ng mga ito para lamang matugunan ang problema sa pagkain sa banta ng El Niño phenomenon.

Ayon kay Marcos, na-

pigilan nga ang pagsipang inflation sa bansa mula nang ipatupad ang bawas-taripa sa bigas, karneng baboy, at mais noong 2021 subalit mataas pa rin ang presyo ng mga bilingin sa pre-2021 level nito.

"As we anticipate the additional worldwide threat of El Niño, can we persist with that failed scheme of cheap importa-

tion to lower food prices?" pahayag pa ng senador.

Sinabi pa ni Marcos na hindi rin maaasahan ang patuloy na pag-angat ng agricultural products para maging matatag ang suplay at presyo ng pagkain dahil ganito rin ang ginagawang iba't ibang bansa para sa food security nila.

"Relying on imports and modifying the rates are not sustainable policies because other countries are limiting their exportation of food to serve their domestic

needs first," ayon kay Marcos.

Giit pa ng senador na sapol o apektado ng bawas-taripa sa mga imported agricultural products ang mga magsasaka sa bansa na umaasa sa ayuda o subsidy na galing sa gobyerno.

Nauna rito ay ibinida ng Department of Agriculture ang paparating umano na kalahating milyong tonelada ng imported na bigas kaya magiging matatag ang suplay nito.





# Inflation may hit 2-4% target range in Dec, says BSP

**Power, food costs down but rice, meat prices pose risks**

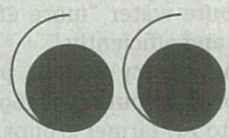
By **Ian Nicolas P. Cigaral**  
@ipcigaral

There's a chance that inflation finally returned to the government's 2 to 4 percent target range in December, as cheaper farm products and utility costs offset the faster increase in prices of rice and meat during the month.

Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, likely settled between 3.6 and 4.4 percent this month, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said in a statement.

If the lower end of the forecast range is realized, then it would mark the third straight month of deceleration after inflation softened again to 4.1 percent in November. Notably, price growth would sustain a downtrend at a time when strong demand during the Christmas shopping season typically pushes up prices of key consumer items.

Explaining its projection, the BSP said higher prices of rice and meat were the primary sources of upward price pressures in December.



**[T]he BSP will continue to monitor developments affecting the outlook for inflation and growth**

**Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas**

Such increases were seen as the prices of so-called "noche buena" items like ham and fruit cocktail had risen by as much as a fifth year-on-year ahead of the holidays in November, according to the new price guide released by the Department of Trade.

**Lower prices**

But the BSP said those price hikes were offset by lower prices of other food items such as

vegetables, fruits and fish.

At the same time, the central bank said cheaper electricity rates and lower petroleum prices also helped temper inflation in December.

**Price rollbacks**

Recall that Manila Electric Co., the largest power distributor in the country, announced a decrease of P0.7961 per kWh in the December electricity rate. Meanwhile, government data showed local oil companies adjusted their prices thrice this month, most of which were decreases.

Moving forward, a within-target inflation will ease the pressure on the BSP to keep its ultra-tight monetary policy settings.

Governor Eli Remolona Jr. early this month said the central bank would only consider cutting its policy rate if both price growth and inflation expectations were in a "comfortable" range. This, amid the threat of a prolonged El Niño weather phenomenon that may jack up food and power costs. **INQ**





## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

CHIT U. JUAN

### A new world order

This 2024, what we thought we would only see in a futuristic movie is now here. And it is a mere five years until 2030, when we should have solved the challenges brought about by climate change. Yes, we must all think of 2030 like we thought of the year 2000 or the big scare of the millennium bug. Days before the clock struck midnight announcing the year 2000, we thought our computers would die, or something would explode somewhere near us.



Notice how we have accepted or started to accept many changes in our lifestyle since the pandemic caused lockdowns. We now find it oh so normal to not carry cash, and instead pay with e-wallets. We also now have to go online for almost anything that we need: ordering food, paying for services, booking a doctor's appointment, among many others.

The pandemic period 2020-2022, almost three years in total, taught us many new things to embrace and to learn to do despite our resistance to change. The pandemic changed us and changed how consumers behave, changed how we react to disease and changed even the way people work or play. Do you agree?

Now that a new year is upon us, it may be worthwhile to sit down and reflect, think about what we still cannot accept as reality and go with the flow so our lifestyles may not be restricted. We need to think about what we cannot change anymore and just move on to the next year with ease.

At the end of 2023 I met a few people who made me realize further that habits must change if we are to leave a greener planet to the next generations. At 37 years of age, this professor, lecturer and practitioner of organic agriculture shared with us how he has embraced teaching about Nature. While he wanted to be a barista in his college years, one thing led to another, which brought him to the agriculture path until he finally went on to get a Doctorate in Permaculture Design and Sustainability. Yes, at this age below 40 he can create change, positive change, among his peers and everyone younger in his school.

But it does not stop there. He also became a master at Drone Technology and is using this new way, not for vlogging or taking beautiful wedding photos, but to "see" Nature improve as man repairs what man has destroyed.

Dr. Jabez Flores is an example of youth embracing the new world order to create positive changes in people's habits, such as farming organic vegetables and consuming only safe and better food. He is

in charge of the Permaculture garden in UP Open University campus in Los Baños, Laguna where he can show the examples of working with Nature for a better tomorrow.

Another impressive person I met accidentally is Maurizio Mariani, a multi-talented consultant for logistics, food literacy and nutrition. He states that children in school are the citizens of tomorrow and must be fed well so they can be better thinkers, while college students are the leaders of tomorrow and must be gathered to spread one gospel: eat well so we can think well.

And both age groups must be taught Food Literacy. Many of us grow old being illiterate about food. We are not aware that there are only two poisons in our food: sugar and salt. We use so much of these two ingredients today to make up for the lack of taste in industrialized food or food produced in plants and not from plants. In the past, we used herbs to flavor food instead of salt and/or sugar. But modern day food production starts with a fertilizer-laden plant that lacks nutrients, so we make up for it by heavy processing so it can still have some taste.

Maurizio further correlates industrial food production with health issues. They follow the same line – as one increases, so does the other. It is because we have little choices in food available for sale, as many farmers have stopped planting on small scale and big producers replace these lost small farmers with mono-cropping food production. Mono-cropping produces food lacking in nutrients which then become processed to simulate what Nature can give naturally, albeit with salt and sugar.

The bigger part of food cost is logistics and he knows what he speaks of, because he has been in the logistics business, transporting food from different countries to one place. Even processed food must be made in a plant which then requires distribution – so we are in fact paying for distribution rather than paying the farmer for what he has done to produce good food. Do we get it? Over 30 percent of what we pay for tomatoes or vegetables does not go to the farmer – it goes to the distribution system. The farther the source, the more we pay for the logistics, and not for the food itself.

Meeting these two gentlemen over two days made me think about what the New Year brings – there is hope but we must strive to learn more about food production and food consumption. The shorter the line between the two, the healthier we can be, and the better we can address new health issues of the future.

Responsible food consumption and production starts with education. If we know where our food comes from, we can start to make changes in how it comes to our plates. We can buy local, buy fresh and generally change the way we shop for food. We want farmers to thrive as they produce food for us to carry on with life.

This New Year, let us eat better by buying wiser and better. And asking – where does my food come from?







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# Inflation could settle within target

BY NIÑA MYKA PAULINE ARCEO

**I**NFLATION could settle within the target of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) but could be higher from November's print.

The BSP forecasts a December inflation figure in the 3.6- to 4.4-percent range ahead of this coming Friday's release of official data for the month.

A 4.4-percent outturn would be a rise from 4.1-percent recorded in November. Meanwhile, 3.6 percent would mean that interest rate hikes had finally dampened infla-

tion back to the 2.0- to 4.0-percent target.

"Higher prices of rice and meat are seen as the primary sources of upward price pressures in December," the central bank said.

"Meanwhile, lower prices for agricultural items such as vegetables, fruits, and fish along with lower electricity rates and petroleum

prices are expected to contribute to downward price pressures," it added.

The BSP said it would "continue to monitor developments affecting the outlook for inflation and growth in line with its data-dependent approach to monetary policy decision-making."

Inflation is currently on a decline, nearing the upper-end target in November, however, it appears that the Philippine central bank has not yet done its tightening cycle.

Currently, the policy rate stands at 6.50 percent, marking a 16-

year peak. This follows a series of cumulative rate hikes amounting to 450 basis points (bps) that commenced in May of the previous year in response to the surge in inflation.

In October, an unscheduled 25-basis-point hike was implemented due to rising inflation in August and September after six months of decline.

Additionally, the El Niño episode is anticipated to further impact prices, with the average for this year still expected to be well above the target at 6.0 percent, and the outlook for 2024, while

reduced, remains above the upper limit at 4.4 percent.

BSP Governor Eli Remolona Jr. has mentioned that inflation might dip below 3.0 percent in the first quarter but is anticipated to surpass 3.0 percent from April to July. Hence, further tightening is still expected.

Remolona noted that the risks to the inflation outlook are mostly on the upside. He mentioned potential upward pressures from increased transport charges, higher electricity rates, and elevated oil prices.

On the other hand, factors such

as a relatively weak global recovery and government actions to address El Niño's impact could lessen the central bank's forecast.

The central bank aims to keep inflation between 2.0 to 4.0 in 2024. For the upcoming year, inflation is expected to be closer to the upper limit, around 4.0 rather than the middle at 3.0 percent, according to Remolona.

He mentioned that if various factors, including expectations, align favorably, settling inflation comfortably around 3.0, the BSP will consider reducing interest rates.





## Rice stocks dip, corn up in Nov

BY NIÑA MYKA PAULINE ARCEO

**T**HE country's rice stock declined in November while corn stocks posted an uptick, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said on Friday.

In its latest report, the PSA showed that the country's rice inventory markedly dropped by 25.3 percent to 1.98 million metric tons (MT), down from 2.65 million MT posted a year earlier. Month on month, the inventory of rice stocks witnessed a 6.4 percent rise compared to the preceding month's level of 1.86

million metric tons.

In November, rice stock inventories across all sectors experienced yearly declines of 50.0 percent in National Food Authority (NFA) depositories, 31.8 percent in the household sector, and 13.2 percent in the commercial sector compared to the corresponding levels in November 2022.

Relative to the rice stock levels in October 2023, there were month-on-month increases observed in

rice stock inventories in NFA depositories by 36.1 percent, in the household sector by 10.8 percent, and in the commercial sector by 0.5 percent.

Out of the total rice stocks for the month, 51.4 percent originated from households, 45.5 percent from the commercial sector, and 3.0 percent from NFA depositories.

For local corn inventory, the PSA said that stocks reached 779.46 thousand metric tons, up 29.1

percent from the 603.67-thousand metric ton level in the same period of 2022.

On a monthly basis, the inventory of corn stocks showed a decline of 8.7 percent compared to the inventory level of 853.66 thousand metric tons in the preceding month.

Compared to the same month of the previous year, corn stock inventory in the commercial sector saw an annual increase of 38.6 percent, while

there was an annual decline of 14.4 percent in the household sector.

Meanwhile, a month-on-month decrease of 26.7 percent was observed in the volume of corn stocks in the household sector. Similarly, corn stocks in the commercial sector decreased by 5.6 percent.

The commercial sector contributed 88.2 percent to the total corn stocks inventory for this month, the PSA said, with the remaining 11.8 percent coming from households.



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## BSP: December inflation may settle at 3.6% to 4.4%

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS

✉@jearcalas

**T**HE country's inflation in December could settle between 3.6 percent to 4.4 percent driven by higher prices of rice and meat, according to the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP).

"The BSP projects December 2023 inflation to settle within the range of 3.6 to 4.4 percent. Higher prices of rice and meat are seen as the primary sources of upward price pressures in December," the BSP said in a statement on Friday.

Nonetheless, the BSP noted that lower prices for other commodities, such as vegetables, fruits, and fish would contribute to "downward" price pressures.

Furthermore, lower electricity rates and petroleum prices are

expected to provide support for the slowing down of the country's inflation, the BSP added.

"Going forward, the BSP will continue to monitor developments affecting the outlook for inflation and growth in line with its data-dependent approach to monetary policy decision-making," it said.

Local economists earlier told the BUSINESSMIRROR that certain risks persist against the country's inflation print in December, which includes higher rice prices as well as the Christmas spending.

The country's inflation in December of last year stood at 8.1 percent, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

The state's inflation, which measures the rate of the increase in the prices of goods and services, in No-

vember slowed to 4.1 percent. It was slower than the 4.9 percent recorded in October and 8 percent registered in November 2022.

However, PSA data showed despite the slower headline inflation, certain commodities such as rice posted an inflation rate of 15.8 percent in November, higher than the 13.2 percent posted in October 2023 and the 3.1 percent posted in November 2022. **(Related story: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/12/06/november-inflation-slows-to-4-1-but-risks-cited/>)**

The Marcos administration extended the lower tariff rates on imported pork, rice and corn until the end of 2024 as part of its efforts to keep domestic food supplies sufficient and prices stable amid volatile market conditions that include the threat of El Niño.

The lowering of the tariff rates on key commodities has been one of the measures being implemented by the national government to combat upward price pressures.

"The slower inflation for the month of November is a testament to the Marcos administration's whole-of-government effort to moderate rising commodity prices while protecting the most vulnerable sectors from its effects," Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno earlier said.

In May, the state created the Inter-agency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook (IAC-IMO) through Marcos' Executive Order (EO) No. 28 "as a proactive measure to fight inflation."

"As we enter the New Year, you can count on the government to mobilize all efforts toward addressing inflationary pressures. The IAC-IMO recognizes the pertinent upside risks that need to be addressed in the near term," Diokno said.

"Keeping the inflation rate within manageable levels to protect the Filipino people's purchasing power and maintaining macroeconomic stability shall remain our top priority," Diokno added.