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## DA readies unscrupulous traders blacklist

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary **Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** has formed a blacklisting committee to strengthen the government's drive against unscrupulous manufacturers, suppliers, contractors, consultants and

hoarders of agricultural products.

Laurel issued Special Order 11 creating the blacklisting committee, which coincided with an ongoing DA revamp.

"In the interest of the service and to ensure the proper conduct of investigations related to the

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complaints involving the commission of offenses or violations during competitive bidding and contract implementation by manufacturers, suppliers, distributors, contractors and consultants, in accordance with Republic Act 9184, otherwise known as the Government Procurement Reform Act... a blacklisting committee is hereby created which shall serve as the central blacklisting body of the Department of Agriculture (DA)," he said.

Laurel designated DA legal service director Willie Ann Angsiy and procurement division chief Melinda Deyto as chair and vice chair, respectively, of the blacklisting committee.

He also appointed DA internal audit service director Christopher Bañas to be a member of the committee.

Laurel added that under SO 11, the blacklisting committee is tasked to evaluate complaints initiated by the bids and awards committee and verify the grounds for blacklisting.

The committee will also "gather facts and evidence or take testimony to ascertain the truthfulness of the allegations in complaints, summon parties to hearing where it may examine further documentary evidence, receive verbal testimony and propound questions to the witnesses that may be presented, determine if reasonable cause exists to recommend the issuance of suspension or withdrawal of the respondent-

contractor and the forfeiture of bid security."

Laurel gave the blacklisting committee 30 days from the receipt of complaints to issue a resolution containing its findings and recommendations.

Lawmakers have questioned the failure of the Bureau of Plant Industry to blacklist importers allegedly involved in hoarding and manipulation of agricultural products.

### Task force

Meanwhile, Benguet farmers yesterday called on the DA to strengthen the operation of the National Anti-Smuggling Task Force against smuggled vegetables, as they blamed the flooding of agricultural products in the slump in the farmgate price of highland vegetables, particularly carrots and cabbage.

In a radio interview, Benguet Farmers Marketing Co-operative general manager Augusta Balanoy said that carrots, cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower are rotting as there are no buyers. "Actually, since last year, we have been appealing to the government to revive the operations of the National Anti-Smuggling Task Force, as many smuggled vegetables enter the country," Balanoy said.

She added that highland vegetables are given away for free in various areas because of a lack of buyers. "As of today, many highland vegetables have yet to be sold. Farmers are only harvesting now after they did not harvest in December and many vegetables are still in the farms," Balanoy said.

She said that December was supposed to be a peak season amid high demand during the holidays.

"The demand should be doubled. Farmers prepared for the peak season and increased their production. However, the demand was very low. There was only an increase of 30 to 40 percent in the purchase of the buyers. We conducted relief operations. We coordinated with the barangays instead of dumping the vegetables," she said.

Farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura chairman Rosendo So confirmed a slump in the farmgate price of cabbage, as it reached between P5 and P10 per kilo. So added that despite the decrease in the farmgate price of vegetables, the retail price of agricultural products remains high.

He said Kadiwa centers should be tapped to allow Benguet farmers to market to their products.

"The Kadiwa centers in Manila should be mobilized as the prices of vegetables are still high," So said in an interview with **The STAR**. He also encouraged the public to eat more vegetables to support the farmers. "The consumers should support our vegetable farmers with the low prices," So said.

He said the low farmgate price does not reflect the retail price.

"The difference between the farmgate price and retail price is still big. That is the problem when the President was still the secretary of the DA and up to now, it is still the problem," So said.





## Ex-DA chief, farmers' groups back replacing Sebastian

By BELLA CARIASO

Former Department of Agriculture (DA) secretary Leonardo Montemayor and other farmers' groups yesterday backed the move of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. to implement a major revamp at the agency, after he replaced Undersecretary Leocardio Sebastian as undersecretary for rice industry development, the flagship program of the agency.

"It's Secretary Laurel's call as to who will constitute his team. Ultimately, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Regarding Usec. Leo (Sebastian), technically, I think he was not removed. He resigned or chose to retire. Although he was effectively sidelined as a mere member of the secretary's technical advisory group," Montemayor told **The STAR**.

Sebastian opted to retire effective Feb. 1, after he was replaced as undersecretary for rice industry development by officer-in-charge Roger Navarro.

Laurel issued Special Order No. 1 downgrading the position of Sebastian to a member of his technical advisory group.

For his part, Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) national manager Raul Montemayor said that it is the prerogative of Laurel to reorganize his agency.

"The DA needs a thorough assessment of its programs, new ideas and approaches and a fresh restart, because the billions being poured into agriculture in the past few years do not appear to be generating the desired effect, especially in the rice sector," Montemayor said in a separate message to **The STAR**.

He noted that the DA continued its programs despite no significant outputs.

"We noticed that the DA has maintained old programs despite not proven effective. The DA tends to repeat the previous programs and

ask for additional funding," Montemayor added.

He said the DA lacks analysis on the effectiveness of current projects.

"The Department of Budget and Management keeps on funding the projects without actually determining if the program was actually a success. It prioritizes the release of funding to agencies who utilize their budget. What kind of budgeting is

that?" Montemayor asked.

Farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura chairman Rosendo So maintained that the national rice program of the DA was slow under the leadership of Sebastian.

"Under the leadership of Sebastian, the P5,000 cash assistance for farmers in 2023... only started to be released in 2024," So said.

He added that Laurel should not include the DA regional offices in the major shakeup.

"It is better to maintain the status quo in the regions. The delay in the implementation of the rice program was in Manila. The regions were effectively implementing the programs," So said in a separate interview with **The STAR**.

On the other hand, he questioned the appointment of Navarro.

"Usec. Navarro was formerly with the Philippine Maize Federation Inc. I am not too confident that he can handle (rice industry development) as his previous experience was with the corn industry. The corn industry did not prosper when he handled PhilMaize," So noted.

### Supply worries

Meanwhile, Montemayor said yesterday that the 90-day rice stocks as claimed by the DA will only be good until the end of March 2024, adding that the 500,000 metric tons of the imported staple from India will last for only 12 to 14 days.

"The DA has been saying that the rice stocks last Dec. 31 will be enough for 90 days, that means that by the end of March, we will no longer have stocks of rice and if no rice imports arrive, we will have a problem. We will experience tightness in the supply anew," he said in a radio interview.

Montemayor was reacting to the statement of Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa that with the total imports of 3.5 million metric tons and more than 20 million metric tons of local harvest, the country's inventory will be enough for 80 to 90 days.

"They announced that 500,000 tons (of imported rice) will arrive, but that is too small compared to our daily consumption. It is only good for 12 to 14 days consumption," he added.

Montemayor said the retail price of the staple food has in-

creased in the last three weeks.

"There was a slight increase as traders anticipate the tightness in supply starting February or March," he said.

Montemayor said that rice stocks are now in the hands of the traders, as the harvest already ended in November 2023.

"They (traders) are dictating the price and aside from this, the retailers also increase their price for additional revenues," he noted.

According to Montemayor, lower class well-milled rice ranged between P52 and P55 per kilo and P60 per kilo for high quality.

He also discounted the possibility that the retail price of rice will return to P41 per kilo.

"One factor is the high price in international trade. Our deficit for one year is almost three million compared to our production and our total consumption. We import 20 percent (of our total rice requirement). If imported rice is high, the tendency is for the local rice to increase. Until we improve our local production, we don't expect the retail price

of rice to normalize and go down below P50 (per kilo)," Montemayor added.

He said palay production is also being threatened by the El Niño phenomenon.

Montemayor said millers are also involved in speculation as they limit the release of rice in the market.

"They are involved in speculation, speculative behavior as millers see the continued increase in the prices because of possible tightness in the supply in March," he noted.

At the same time, Montemayor urged the public to stop the wastage of rice. "We should not only look at the supply side but also the demand. We are encouraging the public not to waste rice," he said.

He warned that the shortage in the supply of rice can be felt starting significantly in the third quarter.

"We anticipate that we will have problem starting July, August, September as starting March, our stocks are almost depleted, but the harvest will come in, and then in May, June, when rains will not come in, farmers will not be able to plant. So, from May, June, all the way to September, we don't have harvest. The next harvest after March will be October, November. If we cannot have a good harvest in May and April, we will have bigger problems," Montemayor said.





# December inflation slows to 3.9 percent

NIÑA MYKA PAULINE ARCEO,  
CATHERINE S. VALENTE AND RED MENDOZA

**I**NFLATION eased to 3.9 percent in December, sustaining a two-month downtrend, the Philippine Statistics Authority reported on Friday.

The December inflation rate was down from November's 4.1 percent and was also significantly lower than last year's 8.1 percent.

It was within the 3.6 to 4.4-percent range of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas

(BSP) and lower than the 4.0-percent median in a *Manila Times* poll of economists. It was also the slowest rate since February 2022.

"The downtrend in the overall inflation in December 2023 was primarily brought about by the lower year-on-year growth in the index of housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels at 1.5 percent in December 2023 from 2.5 percent in the previous month," the PSA said.

Food and alcoholic beverages accounted for a little over half — 53 percent share or 2.1 percentage points — of overall inflation.

Food inflation fell to 5.5 percent from 5.8 percent in November, which the PSA attributed to a 9.2-percent drop in the prices of vegetables, tubers, plantains, cooking bananas and pulses.

Core inflation, which excludes volatile

► InflationA2





food and energy items, slowed further in December to 4.4 percent from 4.7 percent in November and 6.9 percent a year earlier.

The overall inflation rate, however, hit 6 percent, well over the BSP's 2- to 4-percent target. Core inflation, meanwhile, averaged 6.6 percent.

The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) said the inflation rates for the majority of commodity groups either decelerated or maintained their previous levels in December.

The NEDA highlighted a surge in rice inflation, climbing to 19.6 percent in December from 15.8 percent in November.

The increase was pivotal in driving overall inflation for December, contributing 1.7 percentage points (ppt).

Following closely were food and beverage services, as well as housing rentals, each contributing 0.5 ppt.

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan underscored the significance of Executive Order 50, which extends the Most Favored Nation's (MFN) reduced tariff rates for essential agricultural commodities such as pork, corn and rice.

"Amid an uptrend in international rice prices and the expected negative impact of the El Niño phenomenon, the Interagency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook will closely monitor the situation and propose further temporary tariff adjustments if necessary," Balisacan said.

"We will also push for trade facilitation measures to reduce other non-tariff barriers. While our medium-term objective to boost agricultural productivity remains, it is important to augment domestic supply to ease inflationary pressures on consumers, particularly those in low-income households," he added.

Reacting to the inflation downtrend, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Friday promised that his administration will continue to work hard to keep the prices of commodities affordable this year.

Amid the decline in the December inflation rate, Albay 2nd District Rep. Jose Maria Clemente Salceda called on the government to sharpen its focus on rice pro-

duction and importation to better stabilize prices.

Salceda said the figure is aligned with his office's earlier projections that inflation would drop below the BSP's target range of 2 to 4 percent by the end of the year.

He also projected the country's annual average inflation rate would settle at 6 percent.

He stressed that rice inflation rose to 19.6 percent, while other commodity prices remained under control.

"For example, the 12.2 percent inflation rate for fruits and nuts can be attributed to seasonal consumption during the Christmas season. The price increase on water supply, meanwhile, is subject to regulation. All other commodity prices are either in single-digit or negative inflation," Salceda, the chairman of the House Ways and Means committee, said.

Salceda is also optimistic that Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiù Laurel will work on the corn price problem, noting that corn inflation has gone negative, resulting in a 0.2 percent inflation for meat.

"We can be optimistic that corn prices will continue to stabilize while improving local yields, making us less sensitive to fluctuations in the world market," he said.

He warned that with world rice prices rising, the Philippines must focus on import source diversification and increase domestic yields, as India maintains its rice export controls and an El Niño episode is forecast for 2024.

Among the solutions he proposed is to call on multilateral lending institutions like the Asian Development Bank to provide India and other rice-producing countries financing assistance to bridge their food subsidy needs.

On the domestic front, Salceda said a bumper crop must be achieved this year, which includes making drought-resistant varieties available in areas where El Niño is expected to hit hardest.

"Rice accounts for as much as one-fifth of household budgets. Keeping its price stable has significant implications on wages and economic growth. If we can right the price of rice, 2024 will be a good year for the economy," he said.



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## Inabuso, nilokong mga magsasaka? IpaBITAGmo!

GUSTO kong makita ang accomplishment na ipagmamalaki ng tanggapan ng Department of Agriculture (DA) sa pamumuno ng bagong upong Secretary na si Frannie Tiu-Laurel.

Tulungan ang ating mga magsasaka kung saan sila'y nagtatandaan at napapabayaang na. Ang kanilang mga anak, nawawalan ng ganang magsaka dahil nasaksihan nila ang matinding paghihirap ng kanilang mga magulang.

Masisisi ba natin sila?

Inaasahan ko sa aking kaibigan na si Secretary Laurel na magiging agresibo na ang ahensiya at hindi mapapabayaang ang kapakanan at karapatan ng mga magsasaka natin.

Lalo ngayong may paparating na El Niño. Inaasahan ang mga binhi, fertilizer at patubig.

Kinakailangan din na bisitahin ng Kongreso o Senado ang tinatawag na devolution of role ng ilang ahensiya ng gobyerno sa mga lokal na pamahalaan.

Tama lamang na bantayan ng mga local o municipal agricultural officer ang mga magsasaka sa kanilang nasa-



sakupan. Pero hindi tama na ang kanilang dinidiyos ay ang mayor ng kanilang lugar.

Dapat, isailalim sila diretso sa pamantayan at panuntunan ng DA. Hindi 'yung utos ni Mayor ang batas kahit pa napagsasamantalahan na ang mga pobreng magsasaka.

Meron pa ryan, mga partylist na nirerepresenta umano ang mga magsasaka subalit wala namang nagagawa at ambag sa buhay ng mga magsasaka.

Nakakahiya hindi ba? Ang kakapal ng mukha.

Sa binhi, fertilizer, patubig at farming equipment pa nga lang, kandautot na kayo. Paano n'yo pa maipagtatanggol ang mga magsasaka sa mga manloloko't mapagsamantalang negosyante na pinapakyaw ang kanilang mga paninda sa barat na presyo.

Kung minsan, dinodorobo pa't hindi na binabayaran.

O 'yung mga lupang sinasaka nila na pilit nire-reclassify

(Sundan sa pahina 5)

### BEN TULFO... Mula pahina 4

at idedeklarang unproductive para mabili ng mga negosyante't matayuan ng kanilang mga pabrika?

Kaya ang BITAG, walang kiyemeng hinahambalos, iti-

natabla ang laban ng mga magsasaka.

Karangalan ng BITAG na pagtiwalaan kami ng mga magsasakang biktima ng pang-aabuso't panloloko.





## 2 Agri usec nagbitiw sa balasahan

NAGRERETIRO na ang mga nagbabangayang undersecretary ng Department of Agriculture.

Ayon sa DA, nagbitiw noong Disyembre 29, 2023 si Agriculture Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban at nakatakdang magretiro naman sa Enero 31, 2024 si Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian.

Nauna ang pagretiro ni Panganiban sa inanunsyong balasahan ng mga undersecretary sa DA ngayong linggo.

Kasama sa binalasa si Sebastian

na tinanggal sa rice program at ibang pang mga proyekto ng DA at inilipat sa Office of the Secretary bilang miyembro ng Technical Advisory Group.

Nilinaw ni DA spokesperson Arnel de Mesa na nagretiro si Sebastian at hindi nagbitiw sa tungkulin.

Una nang nagtangkang magbitiw si Sebastian sa kasagsagan ng bintang ng katiwalian laban sa kanya dahil sa pag-angat ng asukal noong 2022 ngunit hindi ito tinanggap ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

Si Sebastian ang pumirma sa Sugar Order No. 4 para sa pag-angat ng 300,000 toneladang asukal. Kasunod ng problema sa asukal, inilipat naman si Sebastian sa rice program ng DA.

Bukod sa pagbabalasa ng mga tao sa DA ngayong linggo, nagtatag si Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. ng blacklisting committee para tutukan ang mga reklamong may kinalaman sa mga bidding sa kagawaran. (Eileen Mencias/Natalia Antonio)





FOR BETTER PROCUREMENT

## AGRI DEP'T SETS UP BLACKLIST BODY

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**  
@jordeenelagare

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is setting up a committee that will weed out delinquent contractors based on complaints on alleged offenses or violations during the procurement process in the department as well as its bureaus and attached agencies.

The DA is doing so to ensure the proper conduct of investigation of the alleged offense in the bidding process and implementing contracts to carry out government projects, subject to existing laws and regulations.

Based on DA Special Order No. 11 dated Jan. 4, the committee that will serve as its central blacklisting body is tasked with looking into complaints

during the competitive bidding and contract implementation done by contractors.

Within 30 days from the date of receipt of a complaint, the committee should issue a resolution containing its findings and recommendations to the head of procuring entity.

"The committee shall exercise appellate authority over offices, bureaus, regional field offices, attached agencies and corporations under the department's jurisdiction," the order said.

Specifically, the committee is responsible for evaluating complaints lodged by the bids and awards committees and verifying the existence of grounds for blacklisting.

To ascertain the veracity of such complaints, the body will

gather facts and evidence or take testimony and summon involved parties to examine further documentary evidence, receive additional verbal testimony and question witnesses.

The committee will also determine whether or not there is a reasonable cause to recommend the suspension or withdrawal of the contractor in question and forfeit the bid security.

According to the guidelines released by the Government Procurement Policy Board, a person or entity blacklisted by a procuring entity or those included in the consolidated blacklisting report of the Government Procurement Policy Board will be prohibited from participating in the bidding of government projects for a given period unless delisted. **INQ**



# The Manila Times<sup>®</sup>

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**PLANTING SEASON** Farmers plant in Sitio Sinarol, Siniloan, Laguna on Thursday afternoon, Jan. 4, 2024. In a report by the Department of Agriculture, around 44,719 farmers received P5,000 unconditional cash assistance pledged by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. under the P12-billion Rice Farmers Financial Assistance (RFFA) program. As an unconditional cash grant, beneficiaries can use the amount for daily subsistence and personal needs. PHOTO BY ISMAEL DE JUAN





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# Higher rice imports likely due to El Niño

RICE imports could rise this year due to the impact of the El Niño weather pattern on domestic production, an economist said.

"[An] El Niño drought could reduce rainfall that would reduce production of rice and other agricultural products, thereby would lead to more rice imports," Michael Ricafort, chief economist at Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., said.

He also noted that rice imports could become more expensive as global and Asian rice prices were con-

tinuing to rise. This will necessitate calibrated and well-timed importations, he added, especially during the lean season.

"Structural solution would still be the need to further boost rice and agricultural productivity to increase production while also reducing production costs at the same time through increased mechanization," Ricafort continued.

Data from the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) showed that rice imports just before the

end of 2023 were down on an annual basis and the full-year volume most likely also ended lower.

Inbound shipments of the staple totaled 3.48 million metric tons (MT) as of Dec. 28, 2023, down 8.96 percent from the record-high 3.82 million MT of the same period in 2022, according to BPI.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa acknowledged that world prices of the grain remained high at around \$600 per metric ton.

➤ Imports B2

## ■ IMPORTS FROM B1

# Higher

Because of this, the Agriculture department does not see an immediate decline in prices.

"Hopefully, other sources that we can get have lower prices because [rice prices] in Vietnam and Thailand are quite expensive," de Mesa said.

The Federation of Free Farmers (FFF), meanwhile, said the global rice situation was an opportunity

to focus and improve local production.

FFF national manager Raul Montemayor said that "hopefully," the higher palay (unmilled rice) prices would encourage more farmers to plant and expand production.

Montemayor added that he expected lower imports in 2024 due to continued high international prices, "although our demand for imports will increase, especially if our production is adversely affected by El Niño."

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL





### **Oversupply na repolyo binenta sa 'Kadiwa ng Pangulo'**

Nakatulong sa mga magsasaka ng Cordillera na nagkaroon ng sobrang ani ng repolyo ang naging aksiyon ng mga ahensiya ng gobyerno kung saan ay ginamit ang 'Kadiwa ng Pangulo' para maibenta ang kanilang mga produkto.

Nagkaroon umano ng oversupply sa ani ng repolyo dahil nasabay ito sa pagbaba ng presyo ng naturang gulay sa mga trading post sa La Trinidad, Benguet.

Dahil dito, ikinarga

sa mga trak ng 'Kadiwa ng Pangulo' ang mga sobrang repolyo at nag-ikot sa iba't ibang ahensiya ng pamahalaan upang maibenta ito, ayon kay Regional Agriculture and Fisheries Information Service head Aida Pagtan.

Aniya, umabot sa siyam na tonelada ng mga repolyo ang naibenta nitong Biyernes, Enero 5.

Hinimok umano ang mga empleyado ng iba't ibang ahensiya ng gobyerno na bumili ng repolyo upang matulun-

gan ang mga magsasaka sa pagkalugi ng kanilang ani.

May mga ahensiya naman na pinayagan ang 'Kadiwa ng Pangulo' sa kanilang bakuran upang makapagbenta sa publiko tulad ng National Economic and Development Authority, Professional Regulation Commission, Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Public Works and Highways, Department of Agriculture, at Social Security System.





## PBBM PRAYORIDAD SAPAT NA SUPLAY NG PAGKAIN SA TAGTUYOT

**PINAKILOS** na ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr. ang lahat ng mga ahensiya ng pamahalaan na pwedeng makatulong upang malabanan ang matinding epekto nang nakaambang tagtuyot dulot ng El Niño.



Sa totoo lang, noon pang nakaraang taon ay pinaghandaan na ng Pangulong Marcos ang matinding epekto ng El Niño nang buhayin niya ang presidential task force na gagawa ng hakbang para paghandaan ang tagtuyot, kasama ang iba't ibang ahensiya ng pamahalaan, partikular siyempre ang Department of Agriculture para matiyak ang seguridad sa pagkain.

Ang isa pang ahensiya na talagang pinupukpok ng Pangulong BBM para magtrabaho nang husto ay ang National Irrigation Administration nang atasan niyang madaliin ang pagsasaayos ng mga irigasyon para hindi kapusin sa tubig ang mga sakahan.

Pinamamadali rin niya ang mga nakalatag na mahahalagang imprastraktura na magagamit upang hindi maubusan ng supply ng tubig, hindi lamang ang mga magsasaka, kundi ang mga industriya at kaba-

hayang na apektado rin ng tagtuyot.

Sabi nga ni Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro, kabilang sa bumubuo ng task force, kailangan talagang gumana ang lahat ng 'irrigation system' sa buong bansa dahil posibleng makaranas ng matinding tagtuyot ang may 63 lalawigan sa bansa batay na rin sa pagtaya ng meteorological agencies.

Sabi ng Pangulo, kinailangang gawin ang lahat ng hakbang para bago maubos ang supply ng tubig, may nakahandang patubig para ma-suplayan ang mga malalaking lungsod at malalaking industriya at higit sa lahat ay ang patubig sa agrikultura para patuloy na makapagtatanim ang mga magsasaka at matiyak ang supply ng pagkain.

Naniniwala si PBBM na hindi lamang ang DA at NIA ang magpapasiya kung alin ang mga lugar na dapat madaliin ang pagkumpuni ng irigasyon kundi dapat ay ta-

nungin nila ang mga magsasaka dahil sila ang nakakaalam ng mga pangangailangan para matiyak na hindi kakapusin sa patubig ang kanilang mga pananim.

Priority ng Pangulo ang pagtiyak na magiging sapat ang supply ng pagkain at magagawa lamang ito sa panahon ng tagtuyot kung magiging maayos ang sistema ng lahat ng irigasyon sa bansa.

Ang mahirap lang, kapag ang mga tiwaling opisyal sa NIA na ang pangunahing agenda ay ang kumita ng salapi kapalit ng palpak na pagtatayo ng irigasyon ay pawang nandoon pa. Tiyak, gutom ang aabutin ng maraming Pinoy kapag tumindi ang epekto ng El Nino.

Maaring magpadala ng inyong puna at reklamo sa aking email address na jr-reyes.0428@gmail.com o pwede rin magpadala ng mensahe sa 0995-1048357.



# REMATE

ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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## Taiwan, nag-donate ng 1,000 MT ng bigas sa Pinas

NAG-DONATE ang Taiwan ng 1,000 metric tons ng milled rice para magsilbing karagdagang suplay sa "relief at pro-poor programs" ng Department of Social and Welfare Development.

Tinurn-over ni Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in the Philippines Representative Wallace Chow ang donasyon kay Manila Economic and Cultural Office Chairman Silvestre Bello III sa isang seremonya sa Makati, araw ng Huwebes.

Kinilala ni Chow ang Pilipinas bilang "most vulnerable countries" na nakakayanan ang bigat ng climate change.

"The issues on food security and food safety have never failed to take center stage of attention, especially when it involves humanitarian concerns caused by natural disasters, or escalating violent conflicts happening around the world," anito.

Sinabi pa ni Chow na ang TECO ay magdo-donate ng 2,000 metriko tonelada ng bigas sa kabuuan, para sa first batch.

Ang donasyon ay bahagi ng nagpapatuloy na inisyatiba ng TECO sa Pilipinas, kabilang na ang operasyon ng Taiwan Technical Mission on Agriculture sa Tarlac, Mushroom Demonstration Farm sa Baguio, at Filipino Young Farmers Internship Program sa Taiwan. Samantala, dumalo rin sa seremonya ang mga kinatawan mula sa Department of Agriculture.

KRIS JOSE





## MARCOS VOWS FOOD SECURITY AS DECEMBER INFLATION EASES TO 3.9%

By Nestor Corrales  
@NCorralesINQ

President Marcos on Friday vowed to improve agricultural and food production as the country's inflation eased to 3.9 percent in December 2023.

The President said he was pleased as the Philippine Statistics Authority reported that inflation for December 2023 further slowed down to 3.9 percent from 4.1 percent in No-

vember 2023, bringing the full-year average inflation rate to 6.0 percent.

In a statement posted on his official X (formerly Twitter) account, Mr. Marcos said "the government continues to work hard to improve the condition of our economy."

"This new year, we will further strengthen programs for agriculture, and focus on measures to keep the prices of food and other basic commodities

affordable," he added.

In a statement, the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) said the government would continuously monitor prices and inflation risks. Neda added it will also implement measures to protect the purchasing power of Filipino households.

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan pointed out the importance of Executive Order No. 50, which

extended the reduced tariff rates on rice, corn and meat products for one more year "to ensure sufficient food supply for Filipinos and prevent spikes in prices of these commodities."

### El Niño threat

In December, the Department of Science and Technology issued a warning that 65 provinces in the Philippines may experience long dry spells and drought from February to

May this year due to the effects of a stronger El Niño phenomenon.

Balisacan earlier said El Niño will directly affect agricultural production. Mitigation measures were laid out such as growing plants that do not require lots of water and would need lesser time to harvest.

In a speech last year, the President said there could be no economic growth without a

productive agriculture sector.

"We have seen that no matter what we do to improve the economy, if we do not fix agriculture, we will not be able to improve and strengthen our economy," he said.

Mr. Marcos had also ordered agriculture officials to prioritize farm-to-market roads. He also vowed to improve rice production in the country and bring down the price of rice to P20 a kilo. INQ





# Inflation cooled to 22-month low in Dec, thanks to cheaper veggies

**3.9% consumer price increase finally within central bank's elusive 2-4% target range**

By Ian Nicolas P. Cigaral  
@ipcigaral

Inflation softened to its lowest level in 22 months in December on the back of a milder uptick in utility costs and cheaper vegetables, but a spike in rice prices continued to create unease for policymakers.

Inflation, as measured by the increase in consumer price index, eased to 3.9 percent year-on-year in the final month of 2023, from 4.1 percent in November, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported on Friday.

It was the lowest print since the 3 percent recorded in February 2022, and the first time since March 2022 that inflation settled within the 2 to 4 percent target range of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP).

The latest reading also fell within the BSP's 3.6 to 4.4 percent forecast range for December and

marked the third straight month of slower price growth.

Dissecting the PSA's report, inflation for housing, water, electricity and gas slowed to 1.5 percent in December, from 2.5 percent in the previous month. That decline was responsible for 59.6 percent of the downtrend in the headline rate last month, National Statistician Claire Dennis Mapa said in a press conference.

Another major contributor to the softer price growth in December was the milder food inflation, which cooled to 5.4 percent from 5.7 percent in November. Data showed a big drop in prices of vegetables (-9.2 percent), as well as a slower increase in the price of meat (0.2 percent) and coffee (3.6 percent).

## High rates to remain

Despite the more manageable inflation last month, the



SOURCE: RETAIL PRICE SURVEY OF COMMODITIES FOR THE GENERATION OF CONSUMER PRICE INDEX, PHILIPPINE STATISTICS AUTHORITY

INO GRAPHICS

BSP said it deems it necessary to "keep monetary policy settings sufficiently tight until a sustained downtrend in inflation becomes evident."

While the monthly inflation figure returned to a level

within the BSP's goal, the 2023 average of 6 percent marked the second straight year that the inflation-targeting central bank had missed its target. At the same time, rice price inflation accelerated for the second

consecutive month in December to 19.6 percent, the briskest pace since March 2009.

Amid the threat of a prolonged El Niño dry spell that may jack up food prices and power costs, Secretary Arsenio

Balisacan of the National Economic and Development Authority said the government may further cut tariffs on important food items "if necessary".

## More manageable

"While our medium-term objective to boost agricultural productivity remains, it is important to augment domestic supply to ease inflationary pressures on consumers," Balisacan said.

For Aris Dacanay, economist at HSBC Global Research, the extension of low tariff rates on key food items and an elevated year-end buffer stock in rice would make inflation "more manageable" in 2024.

"The BSP's tight monetary stance will also continue to stem any price pressures coming from core items such as rent and housing," Dacanay said in an emailed commentary. INQ





## Inflation eases to 22-month-low 3.9% in December

By LOUELLA DESIDERIO

The country's inflation rate eased further in December to its lowest level in nearly two years, driven by the slower increase in utility costs and food prices, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

At a press conference yesterday, National Statistician Dennis Mapa said headline inflation or the rate of increase in the average prices of goods and services typically purchased by consumers slowed down further to 3.9 percent in December from 4.1 percent in November, and 8.1 percent in December 2022.

"This was the slowest since February of 2022 when the headline inflation was recorded at three percent," he said.

The December inflation print, which decelerated for the third straight month, is within the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' 3.6 to 4.4 percent forecast for that month and marks the return to the central bank's two to four percent target range.

Average inflation for 2023 was at six percent, higher than the 5.8 percent in 2022.

Mapa cited housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels as the main driver of the downward trend in inflation as the commodity group registered a lower growth of 1.5 percent in December from 2.5 percent in the previous month.

Food and non-alcoholic beverages also had a slower inflation rate of 5.4

percent in December from 5.7 percent in November.

Inflation for food alone eased to 5.5 percent in December from the previous month's 5.8 percent due to the faster declines in prices of vegetables and oils and fats, as well as slower increase in meat prices.

Rice inflation, however, rose further to 19.6 percent in December from November's 15.8 percent.

Mapa said the December rice inflation is the highest since March 2009, when it hit 22.9 percent. He said the average prices of the three varieties of rice tracked by the PSA went up in December from the previous month.

As rice inflation registered a higher rate in December, National Economic and Development Authority Secretary Arsenio Balisacan underscored the importance of Executive Order 50, which extended the Most Favored Nation reduced tariff rates for key agricultural commodities like pork, corn and rice to ensure sufficient food supply and keep prices affordable.

"Amid an uptrend in international rice prices and the expected negative impact of the El Niño phenomenon, the Interagency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook will closely monitor the situation and propose further temporary tariff adjustments if necessary. We will also push for trade facilitation measures to reduce other non-tariff barriers," he said.

While the medium-term objective is to boost agricultural productivity,

he said it is necessary to augment domestic supply to ease inflationary pressures, particularly to low-income households.

### Wholesale price index

Wholesale prices of goods at the national level picked up at a slower pace in November from the previous month due largely to a decline in fuel prices, according to the PSA.

Data from the PSA yesterday showed the growth of the General Wholesale Price Index (GWPI) in the country eased to 4.2 percent in November last year from 4.4 percent in October 2023.

The GWPI growth in November last year is also lower than the 7.2 percent uptick in the same month of 2022.

"The annual rate of mineral fuels, lubricants and related materials decreased further to 6.7 percent in November 2023 from a 3.7 percent drop in October 2023, which primarily caused the downtrend in the annual rate of the GWPI in the country," the PSA said.

In addition, four commodity groups posted slower increases in November from the previous month such as food at 6.8 percent from seven percent—chemicals including animal and vegetable oils and fats at 1.5 percent from 1.8 percent; machinery and transport equipment at 1.3 percent from 1.5 percent and miscellaneous manufactured articles at 3.3 percent from 3.6 percent.

In Luzon, the GWPI growth also slowed down to 4.1 percent in November 2023 from the 4.4 percent increase in October 2023, and 7.4 percent uptick in November 2022.

The Visayas also registered slower GWPI growth of 5.2 percent in November from 5.3 percent in October 2023, and 6.5 percent in November 2022.

As for Mindanao, the GWPI growth increased further to 3.6 percent in November 2023 from 3.3 percent in October 2023. Mindanao's GWPI growth in November, however, is lower than the 4.8 percent increase in the same month in 2022.

### Food production

The government will further boost food production and implement measures to keep the prices of basic commodities affordable, President Marcos assured the public on Friday as the 2023 inflation rate settled to its lowest level in December. "The government continues to work hard to improve the condition of our economy. For the new year, we will further strengthen programs for agriculture and focus on measures to keep the price of food and other basic commodities affordable," the President said in Filipino in his official X account.

### Inflation

The decline in inflation to below the BSP target range of 2-4 percent by the end of 2023 was expected, House

committee on ways and means chair Joey Salceda said yesterday.

In a statement, Salceda noted that this figure is aligned with his office's estimates. The same goes for the annual average inflation of 6.0 percent.

"As I emphasized last month, the government must zero-in its efforts on rice, which has accelerated its inflation to 19.6 percent. All other commodity prices are under control," he added.

The Albay representative cited, for instance, that the 12.2 percent inflation rate for fruits and nuts can be attributed to seasonal consumption during the Christmas season.

He underscored that the price increase on water supply, subject to regulation, is needed. On the other hand, all other commodity prices are either in single-digit or negative inflation. Corn inflation, in particular is negative, and this has resulted in a mere 0.2 percent inflation for meat.

Salceda underscored the country needs to focus on "import source diversification and increasing our domestic yield significantly" for rice as world prices are once again on the uptrend. He maintained there is a need to engage in solutions both on the domestic and diplomatic fronts.

The lawmaker cited that India has maintained its export controls, and there are expectations of a moderate El Niño this 2024, thus making rice prices more expensive globally.

— With Helen Flores, Sheila Crisostomo





## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

CHIT U. JUAN

### Much ado about salt

**D**id you know that it could take a whole week of 100 percent sunshine to be able to make salt? With intermittent showers or even a slight drizzle a salt maker must start again from zero. That's how hard it is to make salt.



We have heard of *asin buy-o* from Botolan, Zambales which comes in very natural packaging of coconut leaves woven and almost sewn together using the ribs, fronds and twigs. The long bell shape makes it look like a fat wine bottle and distinct from other artisan salt shapes.

There is also the *duldul* or *tultul* from Western Visayas which could have sharp corners, with odd sizes broken from the rectangular salt molds, I guess. In a post made by salt advocate Dr. Kat Apilado of Jose Rizal University, she describes the process as it is done in the town of Jordan on Guimaras island. It is made by burning salt-saturated driftwood gathered along the seashore. The ashes of the driftwood are collected and placed in a bamboo basket secured on an elevated platform. Seawater is then poured onto the ashes to filter it. With this, salt crystals from the driftwood ashes also get dissolved into the trickling liquid, which is collected and mixed with coconut milk.

The solution is then poured into rectangular molds set above a slow fire – allowing all moisture to evaporate. The solution is continuously added as water evaporates, thereby forming layers of compact dense blocks of salt.

They say an Ilocano version is called *tedted*, and this comes in elongated bars probably formed by restrictive rigid molds for the salt water to dry in.

**If you keep using ready-made commercial salt, you will not be helping protect our fledgling salt industry. Make sure you ask for artisan sea salt and the salt makers will be back, using age-old ways of making the planet's favorite food flavoring.**

And yes, that is our artisanal salt industry, needing help from the private sector and hopefully from government too. Did you know we even import salt now? I find it hard to believe that our long coastline and archipelagic state still does not make for a sustainable salt industry. Really, why must we import salt?

The answer is in your hands and on your table or pantry. If you keep using ready-made commercial salt, you will not be helping protect our fledgling salt industry. Make sure you ask for artisan sea salt and the salt makers will be back, using age-old ways of making the planet's favorite food flavoring.

In Balesin island we were shown how salt beds depend on a week of continuous sunshine to be able to form salts they can rake and sell to their visitors. Though they have elevated drying tables, these take longer than making them in natural black vinyl-lined large salt beds. For further appreciation by their guests, Balesin bottles the salts after mixing in some herbs or chili for other variants of the seasoning. You can also have plain salt with just the flavors of the sea, or have them flavored with oregano, basil and other herbs they grow in the island.

In Botolan, Zambales, a group also led by Professor Apilado has supported the salt makers by making a video of their process so customers would be encouraged to support this small-scale operation. Dr. Kat sells them by order and hopes this can also be available in farmers' markets or in street bazaars as well as in supermarkets.

Chefs swear by these salts and prefer them to imported sea salts. As for me, though I use it sparingly, I like to flavor my frozen yogurt with extra virgin olive oil and a pinch of sea salt. Even butter tastes wonderful with a dash of this kind of salt.

Rather than use powdered instant flavors or seasonings, salt (and sugar) are the more natural choices we should use. Rock salt, sea salt and however you wish to call these miracle bits of flavor from the sea, they enhance any dish or recipe. When the recipe calls for salt, make sure you choose sea salt.

Salt is also the main ingredient to preserve fish, meats and other animal sources of protein. You have heard of salted pork, corned beef, dried squid and fish. All of these use salt. Or they may have been caught from salty waters and dried to a level that keeps them bacteria-free.

Salt of the Earth. That is what we say when we talk about the importance of something – we refer to salt. You are the salt of the earth.

Salt is also useful when we are dehydrated. We need mineral salts and there are hydrating drinks containing that – salt and some sugar. Dehydration due to extreme heat can be fatal, so we need a pinch of salt and water.

I find it disappointing when restaurants and cafés just serve iodized salt and offer no alternative that is a little more thoughtful, meaning a little more artisanal and natural. It is not expensive and gives eating places an extra point for attention to detail. Gone are the days when serving iodized salt was more classy. Serving sea salt is now the better choice and says a lot about the food choices of the operators of the establishment.

Mind your salt. Look for artisan salt and look for the origin or source. We pray you will find salt from Zambales, Negros, Guimaras or Balesin. And maybe by using artisanal salt in your everyday cooking, we may just save this industry. So know your salt.





# Rates seen staying high despite slower inflation

BY NIÑA MYKA PAULINE ARCEO

**H**EADLINE inflation has finally returned to target but monetary authorities are unlikely to begin lowering key interest rates anytime soon.

Aggressive tightening since May of last year saw consumer price growth ease to 3.9 percent in December — within the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' (BSP) 2.0- to 4.0-percent goal and the slowest in nearly two years.

The full-year average of 6.0 percent, however, remained well over target, and the BSP on Friday said that its policymaking Monetary Board "deems it necessary to keep monetary policy settings sufficiently tight until a sustained downtrend in inflation becomes evident."

"The BSP will continue to monitor inflation expectations and second-round effects and take appropriate action as needed to bring inflation back to the target, in keeping with the BSP's price stability mandate," it added.

While the central bank said that consumer price growth could moderate further in the coming months, it also noted potential pressures stemming from fare, power and fuel price hikes, and the impact of the El Niño weather pattern on food prices.

The Monetary Board kept key

interest rates unchanged during its last policy meeting in December. It will next meet on February 15, during which it will have the benefit of inflation data for January.

The BSP's benchmark rate currently stands at 6.5 percent — the highest since 2007 — following rate hikes totaling 450 basis points since May 2022. This was in response to surging inflation caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The economic impact of rate hikes, however, comes with a lag and it was only in February last year that inflation began moderating. A third-quarter rise prompted an off-cycle rate hike and BSP officials have repeatedly said that cuts would only be considered once inflation falls comfortably within the target range.

The central bank's risk-adjusted forecasts as of December sees infla-

tion still breaching the target this year at 4.2 percent, albeit down from 4.4 percent a month earlier, and only returning to the target range in 2025 at 3.5 percent.

The BSP, however, also said that collated external forecasts indicate that inflation could fall within 2.0 to 4.0 percent this year and the next.

Analysts asked to comment on the December result agreed with both the inflation outlook and the BSP's continued hawkishness.

"After two years of above-target inflation, we think the BSP will remain alert for any possible breach of the inflation target this year," China Banking Corp. chief economist Domini Velasquez said.

Velasquez estimated that inflation could average 3.5 percent in 2024 but noted that risks remained, especially with regard to

► **Inflation B2**

## ■ INFLATION FROM B1

# Rates seen staying

food and transport prices.

"Prices remain at risk from dry weather conditions and trade restrictions in rice-exporting countries," she said.

"On a positive note, President [Ferdinand] Marcos [Jr.] approved another one-year extension of lower tariff rates for rice, pork and corn until end-2024."

HSBC Global Research economist Aris Dacanay also expects 2024 inflation to settle within target at 3.5 percent but warned that rice was the biggest risk to the outlook.

While overall price growth fell in December, data from the Philippine Statistics Authority showed a surge in rice inflation to 19.6 percent from 15.8 percent in November.

"In fact, elevated rice prices will likely put a floor under how much inflation can moderate in the Philippines, and, perhaps, in the rest of Asean (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)," Dacanay said.

"That said, any further price shock in rice can risk delaying the BSP's plan to cut policy rates," he added.





## SENTINELLING PROGRAM BEGINS

# ASF in Negros Occidental under control

BY EUGENE ADIONG

**B**ACOLOD CITY: After successfully curbing the African swine fever (ASF) outbreak in the province, the government of Negros Occidental will begin the sentinelling program and restocking its hog population this year.

Dr. Placeda Lemana, the provincial veterinarian, said on Thursday, January 4, that they will follow the protocol laid by the Provincial Veterinary Office (PVO) and start the sentinelling program in the first quarter of 2024.

Some hog raisers, however, have already purchased sentinel pigs to

revive their hog production.

Lemana, however, said they still could not declare Negros Occidental as free from ASF and hog cholera but they are moving in that direction.

"We can just say that ASF and hog cholera have been controlled," she said.

"In the last quarter, there were hog raisers who proceeded sentinelling on their own, but they are being monitored by the PVO district offices. After they started raising pigs again in their own

backyard, no mortalities have been reported so far. It means our pre-sentinelling measures, such as disinfection and other related preventive activities, are effective," she added.

The sentinelling program is a science-based approach to detecting the presence of the virus from diseases, such as ASF in a particular area.

In 2023, Negros Occidental recorded almost 18,000 hog mortalities in 20 local government units due to various diseases, mainly ASF

and hog cholera.

The province has a P6 billion swine industry and is one of the top backyard hog-producing provinces in the country.

Lemana added that sentinelling applies in affected areas with zero swine deaths for about 40 days.

The hog farmer is also required to implement Biosecurity Level 1, the level of farm biosecurity in compliance with minimum standards set by the Philippine College of Swine

Practitioners.

"As agreed, based on our program, the raiser will initiate the sentinelling with the assessment of LGU technicians to ensure that they follow the protocol. There should be a footbath and perimeter fence in their backyard farms. Then, by the second quarter, we will proceed with the restocking," Lemana said.

She is optimistic that hog production can return to normal in the province by the third or fourth quarter of this year.





# Aklan's Piña Weaving shines on Unesco stage

## A cultural triumph for Ph's pineapple textile heritage

**A**KLAN, Philippines — In a significant cultural milestone, the ancient craft of handwoven piña, or pineapple textile, hailing from the province of Aklan in the Philippines, has secured its place on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The momentous declaration took place in December 2023 during the 18th Session of the Intergovernmental Committee in Kasane, Botswana, hosted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco).

Aklan's piña weaving joins an esteemed group of cultural treasures as the fifth intangible cultural heritage (ICH) element from the Philippines to receive this prestigious recognition. The hudhud chants and the punnuk ritual of the Ifugao, the Darangen epic of the Meranaw, and the buklog ritual of the Subanen were previously inscribed on the Representative List, while the NCCA's School of Living Traditions found their place in Unesco's Register of Good Safeguarding Practices.

The Unesco Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) serve as a means to enhance the protection, awareness, and recognition of ICH elements globally. The Representative List showcases elements that exemplify the diversity of cultural heritage, while the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding emphasizes elements requiring immediate measures to ensure their survival.

Additionally, Unesco maintains the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices, enabling stakeholders to share successful safeguarding experiences.

The annual Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, chaired during the 18th session by Mustaq Moorad, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the Republic of Botswana to Unesco, witnessed the inscription of six elements on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, 45 elements on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and the selection of four programs for the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices.

As a result of these additions, Unesco's Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists now boast 694 elements representing 140 countries, while the register includes 37 practices corresponding to 31 countries.

### Story of piña handloom weaving

At the heart of this recognition is the "haboe nga piña," or piña handloom weaving — a craft deeply embedded in the cultural tapestry of the Philippines. Piña, the Philippine pineapple textile, stands out for its unique use of pineapple leaf fibers, distinct from the more common cotton and abaca fibers used in local handwoven textiles. The resulting fabric is translucent, boasting an elegant luster and a subtle ivory color, celebrated for its delicacy and simplicity.

The piña, now recognized on the Unesco Representative List, is not merely a fabric but a revered material employed in formal attire such as the terno and the barong

Tagalog, as well as in finery and various objects that serve as canvases for creative expression.

Often passed down as heirloom pieces, piña products are cherished for their beauty and the intricate craftsmanship involved.

The tradition of piña weaving dates back approximately two centuries, emerging with the introduction of the pineapple to the Philippines. The Akeanon people of the province of Aklan, particularly in the barangays of Old Buswang and New Buswang in the capital town of Kalibo, have been the custodians of this intricate craft. Over time, the practice has expanded to nearby municipalities and even to other provinces, including Antique, Capiz, Leyte, Camarines Sur, and Palawan.





■ Sen. Loren Legarda shows the product of the indigenous tradition to Unesco in Kasane Botswana.

Piña weaving is not merely a historical relic but a living heritage in Aklan, passed down through generations within families and communities. Recent initiatives by both governmental and non-governmental organizations, such as the School of Living Traditions of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, aim to preserve and transmit this invaluable knowledge.

Piña-making process unveiled

The production of piña begins with the cultivation of the Red Spanish pineapple cultivar, locally known as pinya Bisaya, across 15 municipali-

ties in Aklan. After 18 to 24 months, mature leaves are harvested, and fibers are meticulously extracted through a process involving a porcelain shard and a coconut shell.

Subsequent steps include degumming, washing fibers in rivers, air-drying, and bundling. The fibers are then transformed into continuous strands, coiled and spooled around bamboo bobbins, and prepared for weaving using wooden upright pedal looms with foot-operated bamboo treadles.

Common patterns include ringgüe, pili, and tablero, or combinations thereof.

Beyond the weavers, the piña-making process involves a network of individuals, including farmers, scrapers, knotters, warpers, and designers, creating a tightly-knit community bound by the art of piña textile making. This livelihood, passed on to younger generations, fosters a sense of belonging, mutual respect, and interdependence among practitioners and bearers.

The inscription of piña on the Unesco Representative List not only elevates Aklan's traditional craftsmanship but also positions the piña as a cultural marker for the Philippines, a living heritage treasured by the global community. As piña continues to weave its way into the world's cultural consciousness, its recognition on the international stage amplifies the rich tapestry of the Philippines' diverse and vibrant heritage.



■ Senate President Pro Tempore Loren Legarda and other public officials laud the latest recognition for the Aklan Piña handloom weaving.





# PH inflation eases to 3.9% in December

By XANDER DAVE CEBALLOS and CHINO S. LEYCO

**T**he rate of increase in consumer prices continued to slow in December, while the country's annual inflation climbed to its highest level in 15 years, data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed.

Last month's consumer price growth showed sustained signs of easing, with headline inflation dropping to 3.9 percent from November's 4.1 percent and marking a significant decline from the 8.1 percent recorded in December 2022.

However, on an annual basis, inflation throughout the first year of the Marcos administration averaged 6.0 percent, its highest level since the 8.2 percent recorded during

► 8

**INFLATION EASES FURTHER** — A store sells rice and other basic commodities on New York St. in Cubao, Quezon City, on Friday, Jan. 5, 2023. The Philippine Statistics Authority said that the inflation rate eased to 3.9 percent in December from 4.1 percent in November to bring the average inflation for 2023 to six percent. The PSA, however, noted that rice inflation increased from 15.8 percent in November to 19.6 percent last month, the highest monthly rice inflation recorded in the country since the 22.9 percent in March 2009. (Noel B. Pabalate)

## MARKET PRICE WATCH

Retail Price Range of Selected Agri-fishery Commodities at NCR Markets

As of Friday, Jan. 5, 2023

### RICE (per kg)

	IMPORTED COMMERCIAL	LOCAL COMMERCIAL
Special	P58-P65	P54 - P68
Premium	P54 - P62	P50 - P62
Well-milled	P51 - P58	P40 - P55
Regular Milled	NOT AVAILABLE	P50 - P53

### FISH (per kg)

Milkfish (Bangus)	P145 - P260
Tilapia	P110 - P180
Local Round Scad (Galunggong)	P220 - P320
Imported Round Scad (Galunggong)	P180 - P260
Indian mackerel (Alumahan)	P280 - P400





LIVESTOCK AND POULTRY PRODUCTS

Beef Rump (per kg)	P360 - P490
Beef Brisket (per kg)	P305 - P460
Pork Kasim (per kg)	P270 - P370
Pork Liempo (per kg)	P290 - P400
Whole Chicken (per kg)	P140 - P200
Egg (medium) per piece	P7.30 - P9.00



HIGHLAND VEGETABLES (per kg)

	Cabbage (Repolyo)	P50 - P90
	Carrot	P70 - P150
	Baguio Beans	P80 - P160
	White Potato (Patatas)	P100 - P160
	Pechay Baguio	P40 - P100
	Sayote	P35 - P70

LOWLAND VEGETABLES (per kg)

Bittergourd (Ampalaya)	P70 - P140
String Beans (Sitao)	P70 - P150
Pechay Tagalog	P40 - P100
Squash (Kalabasa)	P30 - P80
Eggplant (Talong)	P80 - P140
Tomato (Kamatis)	P40 - P100



Markets Covered: Agora (San Juan), Bicutan, Blumentritt, Cartimar, Commonwealth, Kamuning, La Huerta, Las Piñas, Malabon, Madaluyong, Marikina, Maypajo, Mega Q-Mart, Muntinlupa, Muñoz, Murphy, Navotas Agora, New Marulas (Valenzuela), Pasay, Pasig, Pateros, Pritil, Quinta, San Andres, Taguig and Trabajo



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LIBRARY  
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

SPICES (per kg)		
	LOCAL	IMPORTED
Onion (Sibuyas)		Medium
Red	P120 - P200	P100 - P200
White	P100 - P140	P80 - P160
Garlic (Bawang)	P400 - P500	P120 - P180
Ginger (Luya)	P120 - P200	
Chili (Siling labuyo)	P170 - P350	
OTHER COMMODITIES		
Sugar Refined	P73 - P100	
Sugar Washed	P65 - P90	
Sugar Brown	P62 - P90	
Palm Oil - 1L	P60 - P90	
Coconut Oil - 1L	P61 - P100	
FRUITS (per kg)		
Calamansi	P65 - P120	
Banana (Lakatan)	P60 - P130	
Banana (Latundan)	P45 - P100	
Papaya	P50 - P80	
Mango (Carabao)	P130 - P260	

Note: NOT AVAILABLE - No stocks available/sold in the market;  
Local garlic: available only in Malabon and Mandaluyong Markets

Source: <https://www.da.gov.ph/price-monitoring/>





## PH inflation eases to 3.9% in December 1◀

the peak of the global financial crisis in 2008.

The latest figure also surpassed the 5.8 percent seen in 2022 and notably exceeded the government's target band of 2.0 percent to 4.0 percent.

Since assuming office in June 2022, President Marcos has grappled with a surge in inflation, reaching levels not seen in 14 years at the beginning of last year, primarily driven by rising food and fuel costs.

Although inflation slowed between March and July, it picked up again in August and September before decelerating in the fourth quarter.

Following the 15-year high inflation in 2023, National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said the government will be closely monitoring prices and inflation risks this year, while also implementing measures to safeguard the purchasing power of Filipino households.

The Marcos administration's economic team, with Balisacan among its members, is confident that inflation for 2024 will be in line with the government's target of 2.0 percent to 4.0 percent.

"We must remain vigilant in monitoring the prices of our commodities and continue to implement strategies to address short-term and long-term inflation-related challenges," Balisacan said in a statement.

These strategies, he added, include implementing timely deployment of trade policy tools along with sustained investments in irrigation, flood control, supply chain logistics, and climate change adaptation.

Core inflation, which excludes selected volatile food and energy items, settled at 4.4 percent in December from 4.7 percent in the previous month, bringing the average full year 2023 to 6.6 percent.

Based on the PSA data, the largest contributor to the December slowdown was the lower inflation rate on housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels at 1.5 percent.

It contributed 59.6 percent to the total headline inflation and mostly manifested in the lower costs of electricity, liquified petroleum gas, and rentals.

All major commodity groups such as food and restaurants posted lower inflation rates except transport at 0.4 percent in December from the 0.8 percent slowdown in November.

Amid these downtrends, an increase was still observed in rice which had an inflation rate of 9.6 percent and was the highest since March 2009.

Meanwhile, the inflation rate in the National Capital Region (NCR) for December also declined to 3.5 percent, down from 7.6 percent noted in December 2022 and 4.2 percent in November last year.

Lower costs in electricity also contributed to the NCR's inflation downturn at 9.0 percent from November's 20.4 percent.

In terms of food, meat and vegetables also impacted NCR's inflation drop, however, higher costs were noted in rice (13.6 percent from 11 percent) and fish and other seafood (6.1 percent from 5.4 percent).

For areas outside NCR, the inflation rate was posted at 4 percent, a slight drop from 4.1 percent in November 2023 and 8.2 percent in December 2022.

Likewise, lower costs in electricity and food contributed to the decline

in its inflation rate, though a huge increase was seen in the price of rice with an inflation rate of 20.4 percent from 16.5 percent in November 2023.

Of regions outside NCR, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao saw the highest inflation in December last year at 6.2 percent from 5.9 percent reading in November 2023.

Region II or Cagayan Valley experienced the lowest inflation at 1.6 percent from 2.4 percent in November a year ago.

The PSA also noted that all regions had lower inflation rates except Bicol, Central Visayas, Eastern Visayas, Northern Mindanao, Davao, SOCCSKARGEN, and BARMM; while Caraga retained its inflation rate at 4.1 percent.

Further, the inflation for poor households in December 2023 posted a slight increase at 5 percent from 4.9 percent in November last year, yet relatively lower than the 9.4 percent in December 2022.

The prices of food and transport greatly impacted the poor households in December last year which increased to 7.4 percent and 1.5 percent, respectively, the PSA stated.

### Inflation dip misses low-income families

The country saw its lowest inflation rate of the year in December, but unfortunately, low-income Filipino families did not reap the benefits of this downturn, data from the PSA showed.

The PSA's data revealed that the inflation rate for the poorest 30 percent of households rose to 5.0 percent last month from 4.9 percent in November, although it was an improvement from the 9.4 percent recorded in December 2022.

In 2021, the PSA's Annual Family Income and Expenditure Survey identified a household as poor if its monthly income was less than ₱14,655.

For these low-income families, inflation outpaced the headline rate, which dropped to 3.9 percent in the final month of 2023.

The inflation in this income group was primarily driven by higher costs of food and non-alcoholic beverages, which increased to 7.4 percent from 7.2 percent the previous month.

Additionally, transport and health also posted higher annual increases last month, with transport rising to 1.5 percent from 0.9 percent, and health increasing to 3.2 percent from 3.1 percent in November.

At the national level, food inflation for the bottom 30 percent income households remained at 7.4 percent.

In Metro Manila, inflation for the bottom 30 percent income households took a breather, easing to 4.2 percent from 4.9 percent in November. This marks a significant improvement from a year ago, when inflation in the area was at a high 8.4 percent.

Meanwhile, mirroring the national pattern, inflation for the bottom 30 percent income households in areas outside Metro Manila followed an upward trajectory, hitting 5.0 percent from 4.9 percent in November.

This is in contrast to the 9.4 percent recorded in December 2022 for this income group.

In 2023, inflation for the poorest Filipino households was 6.7 percent, up from 6.6 percent in the previous year.



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## Marcos to focus on agri programs, affordable commodities

By ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

President Marcos said that his administration will work on strengthening the country's agriculture programs and focus on measures that would keep basic needs affordable.

Marcos said this as he welcomed reports that the inflation rate dropped to 3.9 percent in December 2023.

This figure is the lowest in the previous years, and lower compared to ► **8**





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## Marcos to focus on agri programs, affordable commodities 1◀

the 4.1 percent recorded in November 2023. It also brings the full-year average inflation rate to 6.0 percent.

In a Facebook post on Friday, Jan. 5, the President said his administration will continue improving the economy.

"Patuloy ang pagsusumikap ng pamahalaan para pagandahin ang kalagayan ng ating ekonomiya (The government will continue to strive to improve the state of our economy)," he wrote.

With this, Marcos vowed to work on keeping basic commodities affordable for consumers and boosting agricultural programs.

"Para sa bagong taon, lalo nating palalakasin ang mga programa para sa agrikultura, at tututukan ang mga hakbang upang mapanatiling abot-kaya ang presyo ng pagkain at iba pang pangunahing bilihin (For the new year, we will strengthen our agricultural programs, and focus on measures to keep the prices of food and other basic needs affordable)," he said.

According to the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), the government continues to monitor prices and inflation risks as it implements measures to protect the purchasing power of Filipino households.

It added that inflation for most commodity groups either slowed down or retained their previous rates during the month.

### Rice prices jump by 19%

The cost of rice shot up by 19.6 percent in December last year, marking its highest increase in over 14 years, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported.

This was also the highest in 2023 since rice inflation peaked in September due to the implementation

of a ceiling on rice prices. It is also higher than the 15.8 percent uptrend in November that year.

Rice had a significant contribution of 1.7 percent to the headline inflation during the month of 3.9 percent, which was the lowest on record since February 2022.

The fast increase in rice inflation was experienced heavily in areas outside the National Capital Region (NCR) which swelled to 20.4 percent, according to National Statistician Claire Dennis M. Mapa.

Meanwhile, rice inflation in NCR had a reading of 13.6 percent in December 2023.

Last year, the government extended the Most Favored Nation (MFN) reduced tariff rates for key agricultural commodities such as rice to ensure sufficient supply and prevent spikes in its prices.

This is also to counter the possible impact of the persisting El Niño which is expected to last until May and hit 65 provinces this year, National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said.

"Amid an uptrend in international rice prices and the expected negative impact of the El Niño phenomenon, the Interagency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook will closely monitor the situation and propose further temporary tariff adjustments if necessary," Balisacan said in a statement.

"We will also push for trade facilitation measures to reduce other non-tariff barriers. While our medium-term objective to boost agricultural productivity remains, it is important to augment domestic supply to ease inflationary pressures on consumers, particularly those in low-income households," he added.

The NEDA chief also called on the quick implementation of the El Niño National Action Plan (NAP), which will provide guidelines for government agencies to mitigate the immediate effects of the El Niño phenomenon.

"We must remain vigilant in monitoring the prices of our commodities and continue to implement strategies to address short-term and long-term inflation-related challenges," he added.

### Solutions

Albay 2nd district Rep. Joey Salceda said rice accounts for as much as one-fifth of household budgets, making its stability crucial on Filipinos' wages and economic growth.

Salceda had correctly predicted last month that the annual average inflation rate would settle at 6.0 percent. This is above the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' (BSP) target range of 2 to 4 percent.

He said the government must "zero in its efforts on rice" as the commodity accelerated its inflation to 19.6 percent.

"We need to focus on import source diversification and increasing our domestic yield significantly. President Marcos has kept the tariff rates for non-ASEAN rice imports to 35 percent, from the usual 50 percent. This is a positive step," he said in a statement on Friday, Jan. 5.

"We must engage in solutions both on the domestic and diplomatic fronts," he added.

"We can be optimistic that corn prices will continue to stabilize while improving local yields, making us less sensitive to fluctuations in the world market," noted Salceda. (With reports from Xander Dave Ceballos and Dexter Barro II)





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## BOI, AgriSpecialist mull biofertilizer partnership

By KHRISCIELLE E. YALAO

**T**he Board of Investments (BOI) is in talks with Agri-Specialist Inc. (ASI) for a potential collaboration in the biofertilizer industry, said the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

BOI, the country's premier investment promotion agency under the DTI, representatives visited the ASI biofertilizer manufacturing facility in Sta. Rosa, Laguna last Dec. 20, and participated in a guided tour led by ASI officials.

A statement released by the DTI on Jan. 2 stated that BOI Resource-Based Industries Service (RBIS) Director Raquel Echague and

ASI President Mario Labadan Jr. discussed market sustainability for biofertilizer producers, especially in marketing them to local farmers.

The agency cited a specific biofertilizer Bio-N developed by the University of the Philippines Los

Banos (UPLB) - National Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology.

It explained that around "five to six 200-gram sachets of Bio-N can reportedly replace two 50-kg bags of urea per hectare planted with rice," and can "potentially crop yields by 11 percent."

With Bio-N, farmers are able to save costs of up to P10,000 per hectare, it added.

To conduct the partnership efficiently, the agency shared that the BOI and AIS "agreed that they should place a premium on having an industrialization partner from the beginning of the research and development (R&D) process."

UPLB Professor and National Scientist Dr. Emil Javier also shared his expertise, stating that public-private partnership (PPP) can possibly "fully optimize existing local researchers in these products."

The Laguna facility, which is producing Bio-N, is being eyed as the potential "first commercial-scale manufacturing plant for biofertilizer," said DTI.

By expanding the facility, it can accommodate 100 percent of the country's biofertilizer requirement for lands planting rice and corn crops.





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## PBBM vows to boost agri output, food production despite lower Dec inflation

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA

**E**VEN with inflation the easing of inflation to below 4 percent last December, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said his administration would continue to intensify its efforts to keep food prices in check amid projected droughts induced by El Niño this year.

"The government will continue its efforts to improve the state of the economy. For the new year, we will continue to strengthen our programs for agriculture, and we will focus on steps to keep the

prices of food and other basic commodities affordable," the Chief Executive said in Filipino in a social media post.

He made the remark after the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported on Friday that the inflation rate in the previous month slowed down to 3.9 percent from 8.1 percent in the same period in 2022 as well as 4.1 percent last November.

Government economic managers attributed the trend to the easing of inflation for housing, water, electricity, gas and food.

Inflation for food and non-alcoholic

beverages remained high at 5.4 percent although it was lower compared to the 5.7 percent in November 2023.

However, the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) is wary that food inflation may rise as El Niño affects local food production.

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said among the said measures was the President's issuance of Executive Order No. 50, which extended the Most Favored Nation (MFN) reduced tariff rates for key agricultural commodities like pork, corn, and rice.

He said they will be pushing for other "trade facilitation measures to reduce other non-tariff barriers" as well as boosting local food production.

The said initiatives together with sustained investments in irrigation, flood control, supply chain logistics, and climate change adaptation, he pointed out, are contained in their El Niño National Action Plan, which he wants to be swiftly implemented.

Balisacan said they would also be monitoring other international developments, which can affect inflation.





## Inflation eases to 3.9% in December with '23 full-year average at 6%—PSA

BY CAI U. ORDINARIO

**P**oor households bore the brunt of the recent uptick in rice prices, accounting for a big chunk of the inflation they experienced in December 2023, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Inflation for All Income Households slowed to 3.9 percent in December 2023 and averaged 6 percent in 2023. **(Full story here: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/01/05/inflation-slows-to-3-9-in-december-2023/>)**

However, inflation for the Bottom 30 percent of income households was higher at 5 percent in December 2023 and 6.7 percent in the January to December 2023 period.

"Rice explains 3.15 percentage points of the 5 percent inflation of the bottom 30 percent. So, malaki [it's big]. More than 60 percent of the inflation of the bottom 30 percent income households basically came from the rice prices," National Statistician Claire Dennis S. Mapa said.

Data showed that rice prices posted a 19.6 percent year-on-year increase and 3.5 percent month-on-month increase in December 2023.

In the Consumer Price Index for all income households, rice prices have a weight of 8.9 percent, while for the Bottom 30 percent of income households, it is higher at 17.9 percent.

Mapa said the average price of regular milled rice reached P46.50 per kilo, while well-milled rice averaged P51.99 per kilo. Special rice averaged

P63.08 per kilo during the period.

Given the recent increase in rice prices, Mapa said it's possible that the rice prices could remain elevated until August 2024.

"Based on the data, [from] January to July last year inflation in rice [was low]—at 2, just above 2 percent. So, which means that if the price of rice continues to be at that level in December, we would expect a higher rise inflation in the coming months until August," Mapa explained.

National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) and Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio

M. Balisacan also raised concerns regarding the elevated rice prices in December 2023.

The Neda chief pointed out that rice prices also contributed 1.7 percentage points (ppt) to the inflation rate for all income households.

Balisacan emphasized the importance of Executive Order No. 50, which extended the Most Favored Nation (MFN) reduced tariff rates for key agricultural commodities like pork, corn, and rice to ensure sufficient food supply for Filipinos and prevent spikes in prices of these commodities.

"Amid an uptrend in international rice prices and the expected negative impact of the El Niño phenomenon, the Interagency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook will closely monitor the situation and propose further temporary tariff adjustments if necessary," Balisacan said.

"We will also push for trade facilitation measures to reduce other non-

tariff barriers. While our medium-term objective to boost agricultural productivity remains, it is important to augment domestic supply to ease inflationary pressures on consumers, particularly those in low-income households," he added.

Balisacan also said the El Niño phenomenon, which the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) expect to continue until May 2024, has added to the threat of higher inflation.

He emphasized the need to hasten the full implementation of the El Niño National Action Plan (NAP), which seeks to increase the resilience of communities against El Niño and guide government agencies in mitigating its immediate effects.

"We must remain vigilant in monitoring the prices of our commodities and continue to implement strategies to address short-term and long-term inflation-related challenges," Balisacan said.

These strategies, he added, include implementing timely deployment of trade policy tools along with sustained investments in irrigation, flood control, supply chain logistics, and climate change adaptation.

On the part of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), it noted that while inflation was within target in December, risks are still tilted to the upside.

Earlier, BSP's month-ahead inflation for December was at 3.6 percent to 4.4 percent year-on-year. **(Full story here: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/12/30/bsp->**



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**december-inflation-may-settle-at-3-6-to-4-4/)**

BSP said "potential pressures" would come from higher transport charges, increased electricity rates, higher oil prices, and higher food prices due to strong El Niño conditions.

"The impact of a relatively weak global recovery as well as government measures to mitigate the effects of El Niño could reduce the central forecast," the BSP, however, said.

"The Monetary Board deems it necessary to keep monetary policy settings sufficiently tight until a sustained downtrend in inflation becomes evident," it added.

Meanwhile, HSBC economist for Asean Aris Dacanay said given the slowdown in inflation in December, the market could now look forward to the start of the BSP's easing cycle.

Dacanay said the BSP "has more leg room to adjust monetary policy with the inflation outlook more benign."

"Inflation is now less of a concern but the yield differential from the Fed still is; we expect the BSP to begin its easing cycle alongside the Fed in 2Q [second quarter] 2024," Dacanay said.

Dacanay said the main concern now is the differential between BSP and Fed rates. Cutting interest rates ahead of the Federal Reserve may stoke inflation.

Given this, Dacanay said it expects the BSP to cut its policy rate and Reserve Requirement Ratio only when the Fed begins its easing cycle.





## Pinakamababang inflation, naitala sa 3.9% noong Dec.

Nina MALOU ESCUDERO at ANGIE DELA CRUZ

Ikinatuwa ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. ang naitalang pinakamababang antas ng inflation rate nitong Disyembre 2023.

Iniulat ng Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) na ang inflation para sa Disyembre 2023 ay lalong bumagal sa 3.9 porsyento mula sa 4.1 porsyento noong Nobyembre 2023, na nagdala sa buong taon na average na inflation rate sa 6.0 porsyento.

"Natutuwa akong ibinalita na bumaba pa ang inflation rate sa bansa noong Disyembre 2023 sa 3.9 percent—ang pinakamababa noong nakaraang taon, mula sa 4.1 percent para sa Nobyembre 2023," pahayag ni Pangulong Marcos sa isang social media posting.

"Patuloy ang pagsusumikap ng pamahalaan para mapaganda ang kalagayan ng ating ekonomiya. Para sa bagong taon, lalo na nating palalakasin ang mga programa para sa agrikultura, at tinutukan ang mga hakbang upang mapanatiling abot-kaya ang presyo ng pagkain at iba pang pangunahing bilihin," wika niya.

Ang may malaking ambag sa pagbaba ng inflation ay ang kuryente (-7.8%), house rentals (3.6%) at LPG (3.7%).

Iklawang nagpababa sa inflation ang food at non-alcoholic beverages na may 5.4%.

Binigyang-diin ni Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan ang kahalagahan ng Executive Order No. 50, na nagpalawig sa Most Favored Nation (MFN) na pinababang tariff rates para sa mga pangunahing bilihin sa agrikultura tulad ng baboy, mais, at bigas upang matiyak ang sapat na

suplay ng pagkain para sa mga Pilipino at maiwasan ang pagtaas sa presyo ng mga bilihin na ito.

Sinabi ni Balisacan, na namumuno sa NEDA, na sa gitna ng pagtaas ng presyo ng pandaigdigang bigas at ang inaasahang negatibong epekto ng El Niño phenomenon, mahigpit na susubaybayan ng Interagency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook ang sitwasyon at magmumungkahi ng karagdagang pansamantalang pagsasaayos ng taripa kung kinakailangan.

Isusulong din ng ahensya ang mga hakbang sa pagpapadali sa kalakalan upang mabawasan ang iba pang mga hadlang na hindi taripa.

Bagama't nananatili ang aming medium-term na layunin na palakasin ang produktibidad ng agrikultura, mahalagang dagdagan ang domestic supply upang mapagaan ang inflationary pressure sa mga mami-mili, partikular na ang mga nasa mababang kita na sambahayan, aniya.

At sa banta ng mas mataas na inflation bilang resulta ng El Niño, binigyang-diin ng pinuno ng NEDA ang pangangailangang mapabilis ang buong pagpapatupad ng El Niño National Action Plan (NAP), na naglalayong pataasin ang katatagan ng mga komunidad laban sa tagtuyot at gabay ng mga ahensya ng gobyerno sa pag-iwas sa mga agarang epekto nito.

Ang gobyerno, iginiit niya, ay dapat ding manatiling mapagmatyag sa pagsubaybay sa presyo ng mga bilihin at patuloy na magpatupad ng mga estratehiya upang matugunan ang panandalian at pangmatagalang hamon na may kinalaman sa inflation.





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**Bigas pumalo ng P10 taas-presyo sa Kapaskuhan - PSA**

Nasa P9 hanggang P10 ang tinaas sa presyo ng bigas nitong Disyembre 2023 kumpara sa parehong buwan noong 2022.

Sabi ni Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) Undersecretary Dennis Mapa, umabot sa 19.6% ang rice inflation nitong Disyembre na siyang pinakamataas mula noong Marso 2009 kung saan umabot ito sa 22.9%.

Ang bigas ang pinakamabigat ang timbang sa inflation ng bansa at 8.8% ang kabuuang ambag nito sa

pangkalahatang inflation.

Ayon sa PSA, umakyat na sa P48.50 ang kilo ng regular milled rice nitong Disyembre mula sa P46.73 per kilo noong Nobyembre 2023. Mula Disyembre 2022, P9 per kilo ang itinaas ng regular milled rice o 22.3% dahil P39.63 per kilo lamang ito noon.

Ang well-milled rice naman ay P53.82 per kilo na noong Disyembre, mas mahal kaysa sa P51.99 per kilo noong Nobyembre. Noong Disyembre 2022, P43.98 per kilo lamang ang well-milled rice at P10 na ang tinaas nito na katumbas ng 22.4% na inflation.

Ang bigas ang pinakamatimbang sa gastusin ng mga Pinoy o ang tinatawag na inflation basket.

Ayon sa PSA, kapan-sin-pansin ang pitik ng presyo ng bigas noong Agosto at ito ang dahilan kaya nagpatupad ng price ceiling si Pangulong Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos noong Setyembre. **(Eileen Mencias)**





## MGA PAGKAIN IPAPAKO SA ABOT-KAYANG PRESYO

IKINATUWA ni Pangulong Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos ang pagbagal ng inflation rate noong Disyembre 2023 na umabot lamang sa 3.9% at nangkong tututukan ang mga programang pang-agrikultura upang mapanatili ang abot-kayang presyo ng mga bilihan.

"Natutuwa akong ibalita na bumaba pa ang inflation rate sa bansa noong Disyembre 2023 sa 3.9 percent - ang pinakamababa noong nakaraang taon, mula sa 4.1 percent para sa Nobyembre 2023," pahayag ng Pangulo.

Kaya naman mas palalakasin pa aniya ang mga programang pang-agrikultura upang magpatuloy ang pagbagal ng inflation.

"Para sa bagong taon, lalo nating palalakasin ang mga programa para sa agrikultura, at tututukan ang mga hakbang upang mapanatiling abot-kaya ang presyo ng pagkain at iba pang pangunahing bilihan," sabi ni Pangulong Marcos.

Tiniyak pa nito na patuloy na magsisikap ang kanyang administrasyon upang mapahusay at palakasin ang ekonomiya ng bansa.

Batay sa Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), bumagal ang inflation sa 3.9% noong Disyembre 2023 mula sa 4.1% na naitala noong Nobyembre 2023.

Sabi ni PSA Undersecretary Dennis Mapa, ito na ang pinakamababang inflation mula Pebrero 2022, nang umpisang lusubin ng Russia ang Ukraine.

Ang pagbaba ng inflation sa upa, tubig, kuryente, at gas sa 1.5% mula 2.5% ang may pinakamalaking ambag sa pagbagal inflation, sabi ni Mapa. Sumunod naman ang pagbagal ng inflation sa pagkain at mga inumin sa 5.4% mula 5.7% noong Nobyembre.

Sa kabuuan, tanging ang transportasyon lamang ang nagtala ng mas mataas na inflation samantalang bumaba naman ang inflation ng

walong commodity groups (food and non-alcoholic beverages, clothing and footwear, upa, tubig, kuryente, gas at iba pang mga panggatong, furnishing at household equipment and maintenance, health, at information and communication). Hindi naman gumalaw ang inflation ng alak at sigarilyo, edukasyon, restawran at accommodation services, at financial services.

Samantala, sinabi ni Mapa na ang Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Mindanao ang nagtala ng pinakamataas na inflation noong Disyembre na nasa 6.2% at sa Cagayan Valley naman pinakamababa na nasa 1.6%.

Siyam na rehiyon kasama na ang National Capital Region ang nagtala ng mas mababang inflation samantalang tumaas ang inflation sa pitong rehiyon. Hindi naman gumalaw ang inflation sa Caraga na nanatili sa 4.1%. (Aileen Taliping/Eileen Mencias/Natalia Antonio)





# INFLATION DIP

**PRESIDENT** Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. expressed elation yesterday as the country's inflation rate settled to its lowest level in 2023 last December, as he promised to work hard to further improve the economy and enhance food production.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that inflation for December 2023 further slowed down to 3.9 percent from 4.1 percent in November 2023, bringing the full-year average inflation rate to 6.0 percent.

Inflation for most commodity groups either slowed down or retained their previous rates during the month.

"Natutuwa akong ibalita na bumaba pa ang inflation rate sa bansa noong Disyembre 2023 sa 3.9 percent—ang pinakamababa noong nakaraang taon, mula sa 4.1 percent para sa Nobyembre 2023," President Marcos said in a social media posting.

"Patuloy ang pagsusumikap ng pamahalaan para pagandahin ang kalagayan ng ating ekonomiya. Para sa bagong taon, lalo nating palalakin ang mga programa para sa agrikultura, at tututukan ang mga hakbang

upang mapanatiling abot-kaya ang presyo ng pagkain at iba pang pangunahing bilihin."

In a statement, the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) assured the public that the government is continuously monitoring prices and inflation risks and implementing measures to protect the purchasing power of Filipino households.

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan emphasized the importance of Executive Order No. 50, which extended the Most Favored Nation (MFN) reduced tariff rates for key agricultural commodities like pork, corn, and rice to ensure sufficient food supply for Filipinos and prevent spikes in prices of these commodities.

Balisacan, who heads NEDA, said that in the midst of an uptrend in international rice prices and the expected negative impact of the El Niño phenomenon, the Interagency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook will closely monitor the situation and propose further temporary tariff adjustments if necessary.

The agency will also push for trade

facilitation measures to reduce other non-tariff barriers.

While our medium-term objective to boost agricultural productivity remains, it is important to augment domestic supply to ease inflationary pressures on consumers, particularly those in low-income households, he said.

And with the threat of higher inflation as a result of El Niño, the NEDA chief underscored the need to hasten the full implementation of the El Niño National Action Plan (NAP), which seeks to increase the resilience of communities against the dry spell and guide government agencies in mitigating its immediate effects.

The government, he stressed, must also remain vigilant in monitoring the prices of commodities and continue to implement strategies to address short-term and long-term inflation-related challenges.

These strategies include implementing timely deployment of trade policy tools along with sustained investments in irrigation, flood control, supply chain logistics, and climate change adaptation, he added.