

A. SEC. FTL Jr. QUOTED

No stories

B. DA FAMILY

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

Group warns of worse hunger as rice prices spike

BUSINESS WORLD

Weak production remains at heart of rice market volatility

BUSINESS MIRROR

DA plans to deploy intervention for boosting rice output

REMATE

El Niño pinaghahandaan na

C. AGRI-RELATED STORY

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

Inflation still top concern for Pinoys

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Editorial: Cabinet revamp to combat inflation

THE MANILA TIMES

South China Sea biodiversity at risk

'Topmost problem' last year: Inflation

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT

Lender sees Filipinos' resilience to sustain PH growth by 6.2%

BUSINESS WORLD

FAO team in town to consult with industry on farm modernization

BUSINESS MIRROR

Inflation 'topmost' problem? Not surprising – think tank

PSA: Coco oil, pineapple exports fall in Jan-Nov

PILIPINO STAR NGAYON

Editorial: Habulin ang smugglers para makalikom ng buwis

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL

Laguna LGU distributes fingerlings to grow Laguna's food yield

ABANTE TONITE

Mga magsasaka ng gulay lugi na naman

D. FOREIGN STORY

BUSINESS WORLD

Indian coffee exports set to surge thanks to global price rally

BUSINESS MIRROR

FAO conference trains spotlight on Asia Pacific farm sector

Biodiversity credits gain traction but questions persist

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT

Corn, soybeans plunge



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Group warns of worse hunger as rice prices spike

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The watchdog group Bantay Bigas over the weekend warned of an increase in hunger incidence in the country amid the continued spike in retail prices of rice.

Cathy Estavillo, Bantay Bigas spokesperson, cited as indicator the confirmation given by retailers of a drop in the volume of rice that consumers buy in the market.

"No less than the retailers were saying that there was a drop on the number of kilos of rice being bought by consumers," Estavillo said in a radio interview.

She added that even in rice-producing provinces Central Luzon, the retail prices of the Filipino's staple food are "high."

"It is frightening that you can no longer buy regular milled rice, the lowest (retail

price) is now P54 (per kilo). The government should not allow (a scenario where) the lowest will be P60 (per kilo) as the lowest (price) for imported rice is already P62 (per kilo). If the government will not do anything, the number (of Filipinos) who are experiencing hunger will further expand," Estavillo pointed out.

Estavillo also noted that the National Food Authority

(NFA) failed to utilize its P9-billion funding to buy palay from farmers "because of its high standard."

"The NFA failed to use its P9-billion budget to buy palay despite increasing its buying price to P23 (per kilo) because of its high criteria, like 100 percent clean and 14 percent dry. We all know that the farmers don't have post-harvest facilities and they need to sell their produce

immediately to pay for their debts," she said.

She also contradicted claims that the farmgate price for palay reached as high as P32 per kilo.

"Based on our monitoring on the ground this past harvest season, there was no such thing (P32 per kilo) as the farmgate price only ranged between P20 and P22 per kilo," Estavillo said.

Bantay Bigas also cited the

country's overdependence on importation as among reasons for the increase of retail prices of rice.

"Since the implementation of Republic Act 11023 (Rice Tariffication Law) five years ago, we saw a spike in the retail price of rice. This is (still) happening because the Marcos administration only continued the programs of the previous administration of Duterte," Estavillo said.



Weak production remains at heart of rice market volatility

By Adrian H. Halili
Reporter

UNSTABLE rice prices and supply are expected to continue if the Philippines does not address its production shortcomings, industry officials said.

Federation of Free Farmers National Manager, Raul Q. Montemayor, said that the industry needs to deal with higher production costs, a lack of post-harvest infrastructure, and low output.

"These problems have to be addressed once and for all; otherwise, price and supply volatility will continue to confront us," Mr. Montemayor said in a Viber message.

Last week, the Department of Agriculture (DA) ruled out plans to impose a suggested retail price (SRP) scheme on rice and other agriculture commodities in response to price pressures.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. said an SRP would be "counterproductive" as producers are likely to cite the price caps in pressuring farmers to lower their selling prices.

Jayson H. Cainglet, executive director of Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura said an SRP would also penalize retailers without addressing unduly high prices.

"Instead of the SRP, we are suggesting that the DA talk to all the players across the value chain for each commodity," Mr. Cainglet said in a Viber message.

Mr. Montemayor said that the Philippines will need to rely on imports to augment its supply and minimize speculation about a looming supply crunch in the coming months.

"Together with the high cost of imports, this is what is driving up prices now," he said.

To bolster supply, the DA said that rice imports of about 500,000 metric tons are set to arrive by

February to serve as a buffer stock for when El Niño intensifies.

The worst of El Niño may extend until the second quarter, affecting 63 provinces with droughts or dry spells, according to PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), the government weather service.

"State reserves and investing in cold storage facilities will likely help reduce prices, but these will also be very costly," Leonardo A. Lanzona, an economics professor at the Ateneo de Manila, said in a Viber message.

"The government has really no other choice but to allow prices to increase, hoping that this will incentivize farmers to be more efficient and productive," Mr. Lanzona added.

Philippine Institute for Development Studies Senior Research Fellow Roehl M. Briones said that the government should also conduct an "adequate study" on rice stockpiling to address increasing prices.

"In the medium to long term, (the government should) invest in a more competitive rice sector by promoting high-productivity rice farm clusters, together with support for more modern rice processing and marketing," Mr. Briones said in a Viber message.

In a recent meeting, Mr. Laurel said that agricultural and fisheries councils had recommended increased investment and the construction of agricultural infrastructure like cold storage facilities.

The DA has also said that it will draft implementing rules and regulations to properly exercise its powers under the provisions of Republic Act 7581, or the Price Act.

These include the authority to procure, purchase, import, or stockpile basic necessities or prime commodities in times of scarcity or emergency. The DA is also authorized to conduct market operations to influence prices of these commodities.



DA plans to deploy interventions for boosting rice output

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is keen on deploying interventions that will allow rice planters to increase their output during the dry season.

The DA said in a statement that the cluster meetings that kicked off last week will formulate plans for the deployment of interventions like seeds, fertilizer discount vouchers and soil amelioration and bio-control agents.

The agency said it started the cluster meetings for the Masagana Rice Industry Development Program to map out and "fine-tune" intervention strategies to mitigate

the impact of an expected prolonged dry spell caused by the El Niño on rice production.

The DA is already implementing the agri-input assistance and scaling of rice technologies.

For starters, the DA mandated the adoption of alternative wet and dry technology to rice cultivation that will drastically reduce the amount of water needed to produce a kilo of rice to one liter per kilo from the current five liters.

"Better seeds could also be used to counteract the impact of rising temperature on rice yield. It is estimated that a 1 degree Celsius

increase in temperature could reduce yield by 10 percent," it said.

"While rice need solar radiation for carbohydrate assimilation, low temperature is preferred for optimum yield."

Around 275,000 hectares of rice fields had been earlier identified as vulnerable to the impact of an El Niño-induced dry spell.

Early indications suggest that number could decline given the high water elevation of some dams used to irrigate rice fields.

Last December, the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) said it updated its mitiga-

tion measures to cope with the projected decline in rainfall this year.

The DOST said 65 out of the country's 82 provinces are projected to suffer drought in the coming months due to El Niño.

The agency noted that majority of global climate models suggest that El Niño will likely persist until the second quarter of next year.

"Based on recent conditions, moderate to severe drought conditions are likely from February to May 2024. And by the end of May, 77 percent of the provinces of the country will have potential for drought—that would be around

65 provinces," DOST Secretary Renato U. Solidum said in a press briefing in Malacañang.

"We need to further intensify our efforts to make sure that we are ready for this especially on the various fields that were already mentioned like health, water, agriculture, sanitation and of course, peace and order; and we also need to involve everyone in this effort."

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. ordered the creation of a task force led by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council to coordinate the El Niño-related efforts of the government.

REMATE

ANG DIARYO NG MASA

Date: 11 5 JAN 2024 Page: 5



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

EL NIÑO PINAGHAHANDAAN NA

KAILANGAN nang maghanda ang lahat sa posibleng epekto ng El Niño kung saan nagsisimula nang nararanasan ng ilang lugar sa Norte kabilang ng mga lalawigan sa Cordillera Administrative Region.

Bagaman nakararanas ngayon ng lamig ang mga probinsya ng Abra, Ifugao, Benguet, Mountain Province, Kalinga at Apayao bunsod sa nasa mataas na lugar ito at preskong simoy ng hangin dulot ng hanging Amihan subalit unti-unti nang nararamdaman ng mga tagaroon ang kakulangan ng suplay ng tubig.

Ayon sa PAGASA o Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Service Administration, kapag hindi nagtipid sa paggamit ng tubig ang mga residente sa naturang mga lugar, posibleng mararanasan pa nila ang epekto ng kwaresma sa susunod na mga buwan na tinatayang aabot hanggang Abril.

Kaya naman agarang ipinatupad ng DSWD o Department of Social Welfare and

Development ang project LAWA o Local Adaptation to Water Access sa ilang rehiyon na inaasahang tatamaan ng El Niño upang banggain ang epekto nito lalo na sa mga magsasaka na pinaniniwalaang hindi maiiwasan ang tagtuyot sa mga pananim.

Kaakibat ng proyektong ito ang pagsasagawa ng pangmatagalang solusyon at makatotohanang pagtugon kaugnay sa masamang epekto ng El Niño kabilang ang pagpapatayo ng Small Farm Reservoirs at iba pang water impounding facilities kung saan naglalayong may sapat na suplay ng tubig ang mga nagtatanim para sa kanilang mga halamang itinuturing na pangunahing pagkain ng sambayanan.

Ang implementasyon ng project LAWA na sinimulang ipatupad noong nakaraang



taon pa ay dahil sa pakikipagtulungan ng DSWD, Department of Agriculture at United Nation World Food Program kung saan sagot ng una ang pambayad sa mga trabahador ng water impounding facilities samantalang magbibigay naman ng teknikal na tulong ang pangalawang ahensya at materyales naman ang igagawad ng huli.

Kabilang ang proyektong ito ng DSWD na hinangaan ng taumbayan sa ilalim ng pamumuno ng aktibong kalihim ng kagawaran na si Rex Gatchalian kung saan mas lalo pang pinaigting ang pagtulong sa mamamayan bukod sa pamimigay ng iba't ibang tulong lalo na sa sektor ng mahihirap na itinuturing na nasa laylayan ng komunidad.



Inflation still top concern for Pinoys

By LOUELLA DESIDERIO

Despite inflation easing in December, it remains the top concern for many Filipinos as prices of rice, the country's staple food, continued to pick up, think tank GlobalSource Partners said.

In a report, former Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas deputy governor Diwa Guinigundo, now country analyst at GlobalSource, said it is not surprising that a majority of Filipinos continued to express concern over inflation, as shown in the December survey of Pulse Asia Research Inc.

Pulse Asia's survey showed that 72 percent of Filipino adults identified controlling inflation as an urgent national concern.

Guinigundo said the survey also indicated that public opinion on national urgent concerns did not significantly change from that of the previous quarter.

"Filipinos continue to place grave concern about price movements, then and now," he said.

While inflation slowed down to 3.9 percent in December 2023 and was within the central bank's

two to four percent target range, average inflation for full-year 2023 reached six percent and exceeded the target band.

Guinigundo said food inflation also remained high, with rice inflation rising further to 19.6 percent in December 2023 from 15.8 percent the previous month.

The December 2023 rice inflation is the highest since the 22.9 percent in March 2009.

"With rice being the staple food of most Filipinos, movements in its price significantly affect consumers' views of the government's ability to control inflation," Guinigundo said, adding the same dynamics could have been driven by selected basic items like onions and garlic, and key fuel prices.

He said households and even companies may have also moved out of the so-called zone of "rational inattention."

Outside of such zone, he said a downtrend in inflation could have limited influence on behavior.

Turn to B3

Inflation From B1

"They could be more attentive to just a few items. This is very true for Filipinos who are attentive to price movements of basic commodities including rice, meat, fuel and utilities," he said.

In addition, he said respondents could still be focusing on absolute price levels.

"While inflation is showing some easing, price levels continue to be prohibitive especially for the lowest 30 percent of all income households," he said.

He also cited the Monetary Board's assessment that upside risks to inflation continue to be dominant, with the El Niño dry spell expected to last through the end of the second quarter this year.

The Pulse Asia survey showed the second most urgent concern cited was increasing workers' pay (40 percent), followed by creating more jobs (28 percent), reducing poverty (25 percent), fighting graft and corruption (19 percent), assisting farmers and addressing involuntary hunger (both at 18 percent) and fighting criminality (15 percent).

"Clearly the top four urgent concerns are gut issues for the population including the need to help farmers address the issue of involuntary hunger," Guinigundo said.



EDITORIAL

Cabinet revamp to combat inflation

After months of intense speculation, Deputy Speaker Ralph G. Recto finally took his oath as the new secretary of the Department of Finance (DOF) last week, replacing Benjamin Diokno who in turn took the last seat on the powerful Monetary Board, the highest policymaking body of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas.

Recto's designation as finance secretary and de facto head of the Marcos administration's economic team was met with a warm reception by the private sector, with some of the country's largest and most influential business groups praising his "wealth of experience" and "impeccable track record of exemplary public service" in Congress. Enunina Mangio, president of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said Recto was "perfectly suited for the job."

Resident numbers genius

"He has the experience, expertise, and political backing that are critical if he is to oversee the strengthening of the country's economic and fiscal positions," said Mangio, noting that Recto authored some landmark measures that helped the country weather economic crises even if these were unpopular, such as the expanded value-added tax and the rice tariffication law.

Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri described Recto as the "resident numbers genius" in the Senate, because of his perceived ability "to immediately see the big picture" behind budget, taxation, and finance numbers. "More than most, [he] understands how to bridge the gap between the abstractions of mathematics and the very concrete realities that we face as a nation," Zubiri said.

Recto's appointment to one of the most important posts in the executive department marked the conclusion of a major Cabinet revamp that included the appointment of Frederick Go as Secretary of the Office of the Special Assistant to the President for Investment and Economic Affairs and the previous appointment of Francisco Tiu Laurel as agriculture secretary.

Public disappointment

That President Marcos deemed fit to replace Diokno—a drastic move considering that the heads of the DOF of the last two administrations completed their six-year terms—was no doubt triggered by the massive drop in his approval ratings in September last year, from 80 percent to 65 percent, according to the September 2023 Pulse Asia Survey.

The double-digit decline was mainly attributed to public disappointment over the Marcos administration's shortcomings in reining in food prices and persistently high inflation that had forced the majority of Filipinos to tighten their belts.

Ultimately, Diokno had to go, especially as controlling inflation remains the top national issue that the majority of Filipinos are concerned about, and also the one issue where the Marcos administration received the lowest marks, according to the December survey of Pulse Asia.

Lingering challenges

Indeed, seven of 10 Filipinos surveyed disapproved of the Marcos administration's performance on controlling inflation, which is expected to remain a source of concern this year even if it has slowed down to a two-year low in December given the possible adverse effects of the El Niño weather phenomenon on agricultural production and food prices.

This means that Recto does not have the luxury of time to bask in the praise coming from all sides and will instead have to hit the ground running. After all, with the reshuffling and injection of new blood into the Marcos administration's economic team comes heightened expectations that effective programs and policies will be put in place so that lingering challenges such as persistently high inflation that has weakened Filipinos' purchasing power will finally be overcome.

Mr. Marcos himself gave Recto's marching order, saying in the news briefing following the oath-taking ceremonies that his economic managers must make basic commodities more affordable for Filipinos who are being squeezed by inflation and the lingering effects of the pandemic.

Intense scrutiny

Mr. Marcos said Recto must also be "at the forefront" of the antimuggling drive and pursue "tax cheats, starting with the habitual ones who have raised tax evasion not just to an art but into a business."

Recto will likewise have to contend with intense scrutiny as he is perceived to be more of a politician who may not have enough technical skills to handle such an important portfolio.

Recto, however, should be encouraged by the President's big faith in him and the willingness of various sectors to give him a chance to harness his unique set of skills and experience to do a lot of good.

Ibon Foundation executive director Sonny Africa said Recto, as an astute politician, should have a better appreciation for and be more sensitive to what concerns or affects ordinary Filipinos compared to dyed-in-the-wool technocrats such as Diokno.

Expectations are high and it will be now up to Recto to prove that his appointment was not payment for a political debt but a good choice that will help alleviate the plight of his suffering countrymen.



South China Sea biodiversity at risk

BY FRANCO JOSE C. BAROÑA

THE biodiversity of the South China Sea has been declining to critical levels mainly because of the building of artificial islands and the construction of outposts of rival claimant nations over the last 10 years, a study showed.

The damage was uncovered after years of research by the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). It has been updated to include last year's discovery by Philippine authorities of the severe destruction of the marine environment and coral reef in the Rozul (Iroquois) Reef.

The South China Sea is home to 571 of the world's 1,683 reef-forming coral species and eight of the 10 global species of giant clam.

The CSIS found that several species of giant clams were vulnerable as a direct result of the destructive poaching methods.

Vast swathes of coral reefs have also

► biodiversityA2



BIODIVERSITY FROM A1

South China Sea biodiversity at risk

been damaged by the massive harvesting of giant clams, whose shells are sold as ornaments, tableware and floor-tiling materials.

Poachers dig up reef surfaces by dragging boat propellers to break up the coral growths and harvest the giant clams embedded in them.

Another method of giant clam harvesting is using a high-pressure water pump to suck sediment from the seabed. The practice destroys the seabed and sends abrasive sediment drifting to nearby areas.

A surge of giant clam harvesting was recorded between 2012 and 2015, carried out mostly by fishermen from the port of Tanmen on China's Hainan Island.

In September 2023, Philippine authorities confirmed reports of severe damage to the marine environment and coral reef in Rozul Reef in the West Philippine Sea (WPS), an area covered by the country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) but is still part of the South China Sea.

They made the discovery after Chinese Maritime Militia (CMM) vessels that were monitored "swarming" in the area had left.

Expressing suspicion that the CMM vessels have been harvesting the corals, Manila said it will pursue the filing of environmental cases against China for its destructive activities in the West Philippine Sea.

The Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam are also known to harvest giant clams.

The Philippines is, in fact, considered the epicenter of an illegal global trade in giant clams.

According to a report published by a wildlife trade monitor, the country accounts for 99.7 percent of the 121,391 metric tons, or nearly the entire volume of confiscated giant clams, from January 2003 to December 2022.

Hundreds of uninhabited islets,

reefs, atolls and seamounts in the South China Sea are the subject of competing claims by several countries.

The CSIS reported that among the claimants, China has caused the most destruction to the marine environment, inflicting 75 percent of the damage, or 8,572 hectares of coral reef, through its massive island expansion program.

Killing marine life

From 2013 to 2017, China dredged to build its artificial islands. The process, which removed essential reef substructures, disturbed the seafloor and created clouds of abrasive sediment, killing nearby marine life. It also caused irreparable damage to coral reefs as it affected its capacity to repair itself, the CSIS said.

In the 18 features in the South China Sea that China has occupied, about 6,691 hectares of coral reef have been damaged by its artificial island building.

Three of the biggest artificial islands — Panganiban (Mischief), Zamora (Subi) and Kagitingan (Fiery Cross) — have a combined total of 1,500 hectares of coral reefs that have been damaged.

All three of these features are also claimed by the Philippines.

Giant clam harvesting by Chinese fishers has damaged an additional 6,618 hectares of coral reef.

Vietnam has also contributed to coral reef destruction over the years as it builds its own artificial islands in the South China Sea.

While Vietnam used the less destructive method of using clam-shell dredgers and construction equipment for landfills, coral reefs where sediments are extracted and deposited were still destroyed.

A total of 567 hectares of coral

reefs from the 16 features in the South China Sea that Vietnam has occupied have been damaged.

Asian Century Philippines Strategic Studies Institute (ACPSSI) President Herman Tiu Laurel said Beijing had taken steps to restore coral reefs damaged by its island-building projects.

Laurel said that recovery work by China started as early as 2019.

"The Chinese government is working to restore the ecosystem of coral reefs in the disputed South China Sea amid concerns that its land reclamation operations have damaged the environment," said Laurel.

He said facilities to protect and recover coral were installed on Panganiban, Zamora and Kagitingan reefs, three of China's biggest artificial islands.

China has also imposed an annual fishing ban from May to July and a fishing moratorium on thousands of its fishing vessels.

What the AMTI report failed to mention is that the United States was responsible for the destruction of coral reefs in an area covered by Philippine territory, he said.

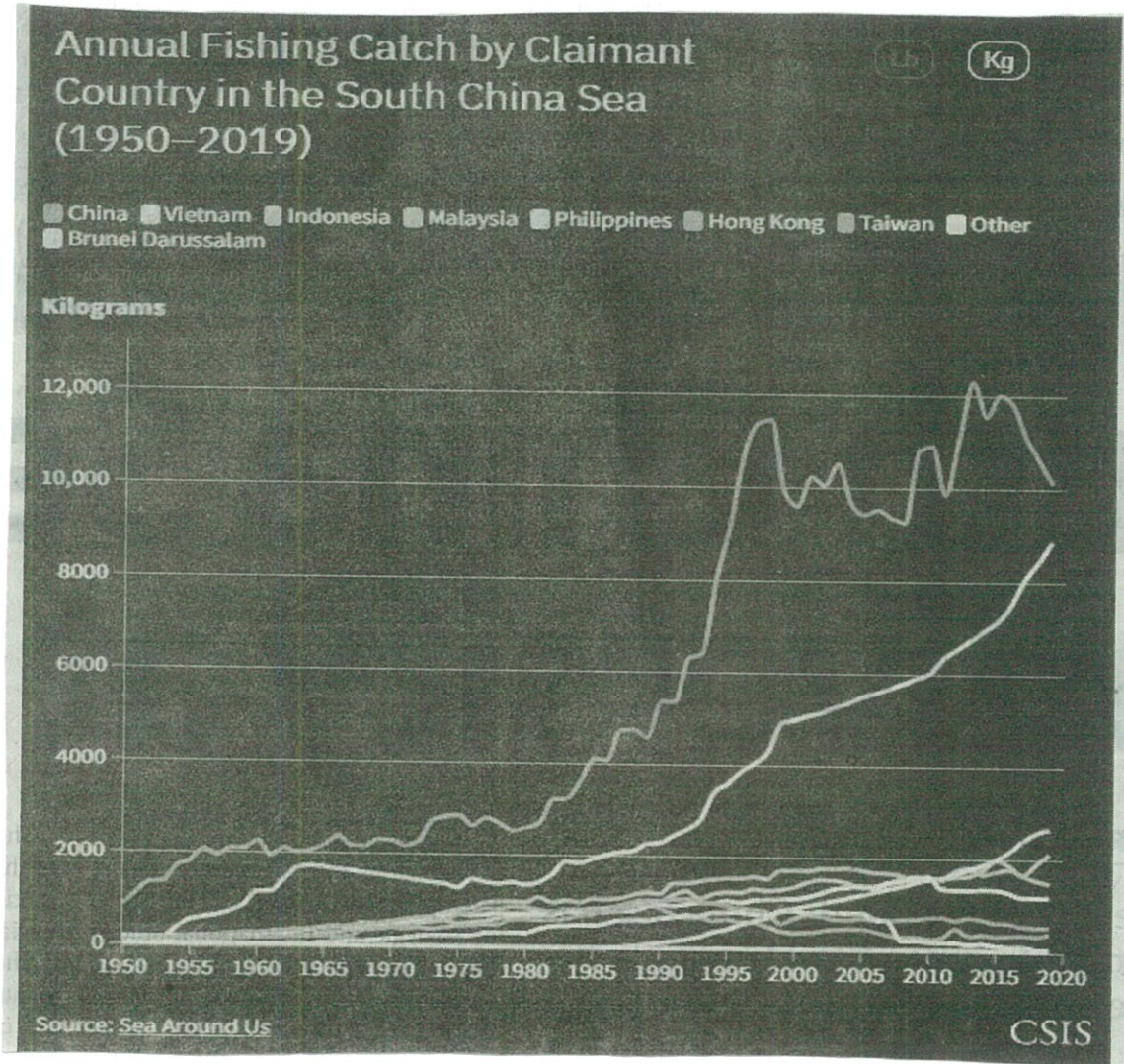
Laurel said the USS Guardian grounded in Tubbataha Reef off Palawan in 2013 and destroyed 25,240 square feet of corals.

"Nobody knows how many such incidents of lesser magnitude go unreported," he said.

Laurel said the coastal states ringing the South China Sea should "get together and come to terms with the regional need to plan and agree on a common plan to protect and restore damaged coral populations, set up fishing moratorium systems, and reach consensus on the Code of Conduct to establish a durable sense of security for all nations in the region."



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE





LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

'Topmost problem' last year: Inflation

BY NIÑA MYKA PAULINE ARCEO

FILIPINOS remain concerned about rising prices, which was the country's 'topmost problem' last year, a US-based think tank said.

Former Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) Deputy Governor Diwa Guinigundo, writing for GlobalSource Partners, noted that public opinion inflation had not significantly changed based on a December national poll by Pulse Asia Research Inc.

"Filipinos continue to place grave concern about price movements, then and now," he said in a report.

"In fact, the same set of con-

cerns prevailed as conveyed by the results of the same survey in the first three quarters of 2023," Guinigundo added.

"Inflation has thus remained the topmost problem in the country last year."

The Pulse Asia poll found 72 percent of the respondents saying that controlling inflation was the biggest national concern. Broken down, 42 percent, 20 percent and 10 percent ranked it as the first,

second and third most pressing issue in the country.

The survey also "cut across all geographic areas and socio-economic groupings," Guinigundo pointed out.

The survey respondents, he noted, "could still be focusing on absolute price levels."

"While inflation is showing some easing, price levels continue to be prohibitive, especially for the lowest 30 percent of all income households."

Inflation eased to 3.9 percent in December, finally returning to the BSP's 2.0 to 4.0 percent target after hitting a 14-year high of 8.7 percent in January. The full-year average, however, was still above target at 6.0 percent.

Food inflation remained high, with rice price growth having surged to 19.6 percent last month from 15.8 percent in November.

"With rice being the staple food of most Filipinos, movements in its price significantly affect consumers' views of the government's ability to control inflation," Guinigundo said.

"The same dynamics could have been driven by selected basic items like onions and garlic and key fuel prices," he added.

Households and companies, the former BSP official continued, may have moved out of the so-called zone of "rational inattention."

"Outside of such a zone, inflation, no matter how much it

➤ **Inflation B2**

establishes a downtrend, could have limited influence on their behavior. They could be more attentive to just a few items. This is very true for Filipinos who are attentive to price movements of basic commodities including rice, meat, fuel and utilities."

Guinigundo also noted that the need to raise wages was the second most-cited pressing national concern in the Pulse Asia survey at 40 percent.

Along with controlling inflation, this and generating more job opportunities (28 percent) and alleviating poverty (25 percent) are "clearly ... gut issues for the population, including the need to help farmers address the issue of involuntary hunger," Guinigundo said.

Combating graft and corruption (19 percent), assisting farmers and addressing involuntary hunger (both at 18 percent), and fighting criminality (15 percent) were also top concerns in the Pulse Asia poll.

Issues that garnered the lowest marks were dealing with terrorism and safeguarding the welfare of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) at 5.0 percent each.

The government, Guinigundo noted, "obtained approval" with regard to half of the 14 national issues on which its performance was assessed: protecting OFWs, providing assistance to calamity-hit areas; protecting the environment; promoting peace, defending territorial integrity, fighting criminality, and enforcing the rule of law.

The former BSP official earlier this month said that monetary authorities could keep interest rates higher for longer despite declining inflation, noting that consumer price growth had yet to return firmly to the target band.

He also said that non-monetary measures, particularly those involving agricultural and logistics support, would "definitely ... be helpful to the cause of inflation management."



Lender sees Filipinos' resilience to sustain PH growth by 6.2%



Vendors work at a public market in Quezon City. (Reuters Photo)

FILIPINO consumers and firms have become well-adjusted to Covid-19, allowing domestic demand to improve remarkably over 2020 and 2021. Mobility recovered exponentially especially after March 2022 when the COVID cases started to subside.

As a result, banking giant Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI) said the country's economic output has returned to pre-pandemic level after growing by 5.6 percent in 2021 and 7.6 percent in 2022. The economy has also sustained its recovery with a 5.5 percent growth in the 1st 9 months of 2023. The country's GDP is now 7 percent higher compared to pre-pandemic level.

"While significant uncertainties remain, the country may maintain its position as one of the fastest growing economies in the region with a full year growth rate of 6.2 percent in 2024," BPI said.

Household consumption grew by 5.7 percent in 9M 2023, partly driven by pent-up demand following the easing of restrictions and the expansion of ecommerce. Consumers have

started to spend more again on high-contact services and non-essential items, unlike in the first 2 years of the pandemic when more than half of their budget were spent on essentials like food, housing, and utilities.

The return of face-to-face classes has spurred economic activity especially in establishments surrounding schools. Students are huge drivers of spending, affecting industries like food services, transport, and retail trade.

"Inflation has finally settled within the target of the BSP after 22 months. With global commodity prices remaining stable, the contribution of transport and utilities to inflation has declined. So far, it seems the outlook for commodities like oil will continue to be favorable for the country in the coming months. Commodity prices may remain stable given weaker demand from major economies as they continue to absorb the impact of higher interest rates," BPI said in a statement.

Headline inflation may continue to slow down in the next 3 months

with favorable base effects as the main driver. The contribution of transport and utilities to inflation will likely remain marginal given the outlook for global commodities, particularly oil.

"We also expect a year-on-year decline in the price of certain food items given the surge this time last year. However, inflation may bounce back in the 2nd quarter and could possibly breach the 4 percent target again for a few months, before returning to 2 percent to 4 percent range in the 2nd half of 2024. We expect average inflation for the year to settle at 3.7 percent," BPI said.

Rice continues to be the primary source of risk for inflation as supply constraints will likely persist in the coming months.

According to the DOST, El Nino may last until the 2nd quarter and around 77 percent of provinces in the country may experience drought by May 2024. Importation may help, but since other countries are also seeing a decline in their production, food inflation may continue to rise significantly.



FAO team in town to consult with industry on farm modernization

THE Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) will meet with agriculture industry representatives to support Philippine efforts to modernize farming.

In a statement, the FAO said it will oversee consultations with the government, private sector, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations this week.

"The Philippines has a unique experience in resilient agriculture and fisheries but is also facing unprecedented challenges," FAO

Country Representative to the Philippines Lionel Henri Valentin Dabbadie said over the weekend.

The FAO said that the results of the consultation will form part of the input for its Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (APRC), in which participants will seek to work out a strategy to tackle challenges to agriculture.

"Through this consultation, we look forward to better understanding how we can best support the efforts of the government to achieve

a modern agriculture and fisheries sector," Mr. Dabbadie said.

He added that the conference will "highlight the expertise that the Philippines can share to tackle the impending threats to food security and the environment that we face as a nation, a region, and the whole world."

The United Nations organization said that the conference will generate proposals to guide FAO operations in the Asia-Pacific and ultimately to its global confer-

ence, which is the agency's highest governing body.

The 37th APRC session will discuss current priorities for the agriculture industry, including food production losses and waste, financing for hunger mitigation programs, animal and human diseases, and the transformation of agri-food systems and capture fisheries and aquaculture.

The APRC is a biennial conference with Ministers of Agriculture from FAO member states.
— **Adrian H. Halili**

Date: 11 5 JAN 2024

Page: A1, 2, A4



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Inflation 'topmost' problem? Not surprising—think tank

WITH price levels still prohibitive for the poorest Filipinos, Global Source Partners said it is not surprising that inflation remains the "topmost problem" in the Philippines.

In a brief, Global Source Partners country analyst and former Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas deputy governor Diwa Guinigundo said this in light of the results of the recent Pulse Asia Survey.

The results showed controlling inflation was the most urgent national concern, followed by increasing the pay of workers, creating more jobs, reducing poverty, and fighting graft and corruption in government.

"Most important, the respondents could still be focusing on

absolute price levels. While inflation is showing some easing, price levels continue to be prohibitive especially for the lowest 30 percent of all income households," Guinigundo said.

The inflation experienced by the Bottom 30 percent of Income Households remains higher than All Income Households at 5 percent in December 2023 and 6.7 percent in the full year of 2023, the highest since 2008 when inflation was at 13.6 percent.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed inflation for All Income Households was at 3.9 percent in December 2023 and 6 percent in the full year of 2023.

CONTINUED ON A4

Continued from A1

Guinigundo said inflation remained high because of high rice prices which, PSA data showed, increased 19.6 percent in December 2023.

"With rice being the staple food of most Filipinos, movements in its price significantly affect consumers' views of the government's ability to control inflation. The same dynamics could have been driven by selected basic items like onions and

garlic, and key fuel prices," Guinigundo said.

"Inflation, no matter how much it establishes a downtrend, could have limited influence on their behavior. They could be more attentive to just a few items. This is very true for Filipinos who are attentive to price movements of basic commodities including rice, meat, fuel and utilities," he also said.

Earlier, in the Consumer Price Index for all income households, rice prices had a weight of 8.9 percent, while for the Bottom 30 percent of income households, it was

higher at 17.9 percent.

The PSA 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, the PSA said it's possible that the rice prices could remain elevated until August 2024.

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.

Cai U. Ordinario



PSA: Coco oil, pineapple exports fall in Jan-Nov

EARNINGS from the country's agri export winners, including coconut oil and pineapple, declined in January to November 2023, according to preliminary data released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Import and export statistics published by the PSA last week indicated that among all the agri and food exports of the Philippines, coconut oil suffered the biggest decline in terms of receipts during the 11-month period.

Earnings from coconut oil, including crude and refined, fell by

46.8 percent to \$1.064 billion from the \$1.998 billion recorded in the same period in 2022. In November alone, export receipts were down by 27.1 percent.

The drastic decline in earnings from coconut oil was due to the drop in international prices based on data from the World Bank.

BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

Date: 15 JAN 2024 Page: AS



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE



BUSINESSMIRROR FILE PHOTO

According to the world commodities price data compiled by the World Bank, coconut oil in January to December last year averaged \$1,075 per metric ton (MT), lower than the \$1,635 per MT recorded in 2022.

In the fourth quarter of 2023 alone, coconut oil averaged \$1,090 per MT, down from the previous year's \$1,147 per MT.

Earnings from desiccated coconut also posted a huge drop during the period at 34.1 percent to

\$227.62 million, from the previous year's \$345.15 million.

Another coconut-based product that performed poorly in terms of receipts in January to November was activated carbon, as the value of shipments plunged by 33.5 percent to \$97.46 million, from \$146.47 million recorded in 2022.

As for other agri and food exports of the Philippines, data from the PSA indicated that earnings from pineapple and pineapple products fell by 5.2 percent to \$673.83 million in January to November 2023, from the previous year's \$710.67 million.

Receipts from processed food and beverages declined by 5.9 percent to \$737.48 million, from \$783.94 recorded in 2022.

Processed tropical fruits, another dollar earner, went down by nearly 13 percent to \$371.85 million, from \$427.08 million posted

in 2022.

The PSA also said receipts from tuna shipments slid by 1.1 percent to \$337 million from the previous year's \$340.65 million.

The value of natural rubber shipments fell by more than quarter to \$116.24 million from the previous year's \$162.03 million, according to the PSA.

The value of Philippine mangoes, abaca fiber, and chilled and fresh shrimps also declined during the 11-month period.

Among all the agricultural and food products exported by the Philippines, copra meal, fresh bananas and products categorized as other agro-based recorded increases.

Earnings from fresh bananas, one of the top agri exports of the Philippines, rose by nearly 10 percent to \$1.11 billion in January to November, from the previous year's \$1.012 billion.

Date: 15 JAN 2024 Page: 4



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Editorial

Habulin ang smugglers para makalikom ng buwis

TARGET ni bagong Finance Secretary Ralph Recto na makalikom ng P4.3 trillion ngayong 2024 para mapalawak ng pamahalaan ang ginagawang serbisyo sa mamamayan, makalikha nang maraming trabaho at maipagpatuloy ang pagbangon ng ekonomiya sa kabila na nilumpo ng pandemya. Ito ang sinabi ni Recto makaraang manumpa noong Biyernes sa Malacañang. Si Recto, dating Deputy Speaker at Batangas Representative ay itinalaga ni President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. kapalit ni dating Finance Sec. Benjamin Diokno na ini-appoint naman sa Monetary Board ng Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas.

Ayon kay Recto, ang Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) ay may kokolektahing P3 trillion ngayong 2024, ang Bureau of Customs ay P1 trillion at ang National Treasury ay P300 billion. Ipinangako ni Recto na siskapin niyang ang mga makokolektang buwis ay magagastos nang maayos. Bawat peso aniya ay magagamit para sa investment. Ipo-promote umano niya ang ease of paying taxes at ang pagkakaroon ng estratehiya para mapabagal ang inflation o ang pagtaas ng bilihan at serbisyo.

Wala namang binanggit si Recto kung magkakaroon ng bagong reporma sa taxes at kung ano pa ang mga dapat buwisan para makalikom pa nang mas malaki kaysa kanyang inaasahang target revenues. Hindi siya nagbanggit kung dapat pang buwisan ang alak at sigarilyo o ang tinatawag na sin taxes. Wala rin siyang binanggit kung hahabulin ang POGOs na hindi nagbabayad ng buwis. O maaaring nasa isip na ito ni Recto pero hindi pa niya isinisiwalat ang mga plano sa hinaharap at pinag-aaralan pa niyang mabuti.

Isa sa mga dapat gawin ni Recto ay atasan ang Bureau of Customs na sawatain ang talamak na smuggling. Malaki ang nawawala sa kaban ng bansa dahil sa smuggling. Halos lahat ng mga produkto ay nalapasok sa bansa at ang mga nakikinabang ay ang mga smugglers. Sa kasalukuyan, talamak ang smuggling ng agricultural products—bigas, gulay, prutas, at maski kame ng baboy at manok ay bumabaha sa bansa. Bukod sa nadadaya ang pamahalaan, nawawalan ng ikinabubuhay ang mga lokal na magsasaka.

Ayon sa isang business group, nawawalan ang pamahalaan ng P250 billion taun-taon dahil sa smuggling. Ayon sa grupo ang talamak na smuggling ang dahilan kaya maraming lokal na produkto ang nasisira. Marami ang nawawalan ng trabaho at walang nakokolekta ang pamahalaan. Bukod sa agri products, nalapasok din sa bansa ang textile at garments, bakal, goma, liquified petroleum gas tanks, at sigarilyo.

Ipag-utos ni Recto sa BOC ang pagsawata sa smugglers at tiyak na darami pa ang makokolektang buwis. Putulin na ang pamamayagpag ng mga salot na smugglers!



Laguna LGU distributes fingerlings to grow Laguna's food yield

STA. CRUZ, Laguna—The provincial government here has launched a food security initiative to increase the output of local fishponds.

In an interview on Saturday, Provincial Agriculturist Marlon Tobias said they would continue distributing free tilapia fingerlings to small-scale aquaculturists to help them become more productive.

More than 30,000 tilapia fingerlings were distributed to 25 fish pond operators in December.

The office plans to sustain the program the entire year.

On top of this, the Municipal Agriculture Office (MAO) would also release fingerlings in suitable freshwater lakes and rivers in Laguna to ensure that fisherfolk have enough fishes to catch.

The fingerlings shall be deposited in the different waters of the province, including Laguna de Bay, Seven Lakes, and Caliraya Lake, to ensure that the types or species of tilapia of fish pond

operators are of good breed and grow fast.

"We aim to help raise the livelihood of the other fishing sectors, so that the time will come when they will no longer be called small fishermen but good and prosperous fishermen because they themselves have the capacity to teach and share," he told the Philippine News Agency.

Tobias said operators have dwindled by almost half by the end of 2023,

citing the high price of feeds and quality tilapia seed.

The provincial government is also planning to conduct techno-demo sessions in fishing and distribute starter packages for alternative fish feed production.

"I hope that the cooperation of the members of the fishing industry will continue and be further intensified, so that we can realize that in Laguna, agriculture will flourish," Tobias said.

PNA



AILEEN TALIPING

Tonite

FOR THE
RECORD

Mga magsasaka ng gulay lugi na naman

sasaka sa baba ng presyo ng mga ito.

Ang presyo ng berdeng repolyo ay trese hanggang kinse pesos kada kilo; repolyong puti mula pitong piso hanggang sampung piso kada kilo; carrots P16-P30 per kilo habang ang Chinese cabbage ay sampung piso hanggang dose pesos ang kilo.

Pero pagdating sa mga palengke sa Metro Manila at sa ilang lugar sa Luzon ay mataas pa rin ang presyo ng mga nabanggit na gulay kahit pa maraming supply.

Nakapanlulumo lamang isiping tila walang naitutulong ang local government units sa problemang ito ng mga magsasaka dahil hindi man lang makaisip ng paraan ang mga alkalde at kapitan ng barangay para matulungang maibenta ng mas mataas na presyo ang produkto ng mga magsasaka ng gulay.

Totoo pala ang sinabi ng isang dating opisyal ng Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) na hindi kasama sa prayoridad ng mga gobernador at mayor ang agrikultura kahit pa karamihan sa mga constituent ng mga ito ay mga magsasaka.

Wala silang plano at walang programa para

maiangat ang buhay ng mga magsasaka sa kani-kanilang nasasakupan.

Madalas na naririnig kay Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. na isa sa prayoridad ng kanyang administrasyon ang kapakanan ng mga magsasaka at mapalakas ang produksiyon ng mga ito.

Hindi ba indikasyong lumakas ang produksiyon ng mga magsasaka ngayon dahil sumobra na sa supply ng gulay? Bakit walang ginagawang hakbang ang gobyerno para hindi mabulok at malugi ang mga ani ng mga magsasaka ng gulay?

Palagi nating naririnig sa mga opisyal ng gobyerno ang pagtiyak ng supply ng pagkain para makaiwas sa food crisis pero bakit tila hinahayaan namang mabulok ang maraming supply ng gulay ngayon?

Nasaan na ang mga magagaling na magsali-ta para sa kapakanan kuno ng mga magsasaka? Ningas kugon ba lamang ang mga ito?

Malinaw na walang programa ang gobyerno sa mga oversupply na agricultural products ng mga magsasaka dahil hinahayaan na lamang mabulok at maging pataba ng lupa ang mga ito.

Nakakalungkot ang sinapit ng maraming magsasaka ng gulay sa Central Luzon at Cordillera Region dahil sa malaking pagkalugi sa kanilang mga produkto.

Viral sa social media ang mga gulay na itina-pon na lamang ng mga magsasaka sa gilid ng kalsada o kaya naman ay ipinamigay na lamang sa mga tao dahil sa napakababang presyong pagbili sa kanilang mga produkto.

Malaking dagok ito sa mga magsasaka dahil namuhunan sila sa pagtatanim at pag-aalaga sa kanilang mga gulayan subalit pagdating ng anihan ay babaratin lamang ng mga middleman na bumibili sa kanila.

Bagsak-presyo na ngayon ang mga repolyo, carrot, Chinese cabbage at iba pang gulay sa ilang bagsakan ng gulay sa La Trinidad, Benguet dahil sa dami ng supply ng gulay at talaga namang mapapaiyak na lamang ang mga mag-



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Indian coffee exports set to surge thanks to global price rally

MUMBAI — India's coffee exports are likely to rise as much as 10% in 2024 as a rally in global prices prompts European buyers to pay premiums in order to increase purchases from the country, industry officials told Reuters.

The South Asian country — famous as a tea producer — is also the world's eighth-largest coffee grower, mainly churning out the robusta beans used to make instant coffee. It also produces some of the more expensive arabica variety.

"The demand for Indian coffee, particularly robusta beans, is strong due to firm global prices resulting from production issues," said Ramesh Rajah, president of the Coffee Exporters' Association of India, predicting a rise in exports this year of up to 10%.

Robusta coffee is trading near its highest in at least 15 years as Vietnam, the world's biggest producer, is expected to produce less in 2023/24 than the previous season.

India exports three quarters of its production mainly to Italy, Germany and Belgium. Indian coffee typically commands a premium over the global benchmark because it is grown under shade, hand-picked, and sun-dried.

However, this year, premiums are higher than normal due to a production shortfall, exporters said. Coffee exports in 2024 could jump to 298,000 metric tons from last year's

271,420 tons, said a Bengaluru-based dealer with a global trade house.

Indian robusta cherry is fetching a premium of nearly \$300 a ton over London futures because of strong demand, he said.

While export demand is good, traders are waiting for supplies to increase, which could bring down local prices, the dealer said.

This season's robusta harvest is almost 20% complete, although rainfall in recent days in growing areas has been disruptive, said M. M. Chengappa, a coffee grower from Kodagu, in top producing Karnataka state.

The state-run Coffee Board has estimated that India's production could rise to 374,200 tons in the 2023/24 season, which started on Oct. 1, up from last year's 352,000 tons.

However, farmers are saying that rainfall is limiting the upside in production. "Torrential unseasonal rain in the last few days, along with the rains in December, has caused a lot of fruit droppings," said Mr. Chengappa.

Harvesting is also slowed by labor scarcity, despite offers of higher wages, said exporter Mr. Rajah. "Global prices are rising, but Indian farmers' income is not rising in the same proportion due to higher production costs. They need to spend more on inputs and wages," Mr. Rajah said. —

Reuters



FAO conference trains spotlight on Asia Pacific farm sector

THE Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is set to hold the 37th Session of the Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (APRC) in Colombo next month.

The conference, which will be held from February 19 to 24, will discuss and elaborate a strategy to tackle disasters, climate change, poverty, unsustainable practices, and food loss and waste.

The APRC, which is convened every two years, is the official forum where the Ministers of Agriculture and other high officials of FAO Member States in the Asia-Pacific meet to discuss region-specific challenges, opportunities and priorities for food and agriculture.

The conference results in recommendations that guide FAO's work in the Asia-Pacific region and provide further guidance to FAO's global conference, the highest governing body of the UN agency.

This session will discuss current country and regional priorities and pressing issues in the region, such as the State of Food and Agriculture in the Asia-Pacific region, the financing to end hunger

for today and tomorrow, the food loss and waste, the transformation of capture fisheries and aquaculture, the One Health approach to tackle animal and human disease, and the transformation of agri-food systems for better resilience.

In preparation for the regional conference, FAO in the Philippines will convene a National Consultation with members of the government, private sector, academe and nongovernmental organizations to understand the unique challenges and experience of the Philippines to be highlighted during the high-level event.

According to Dr. Lionel Dabadie, FAO Representative in the Philippines: "The Philippines has a unique experience in resilient agriculture and fisheries but is also facing unprecedented challenges."

"Through this consultation, we look forward to understanding better how we can best support the efforts of the government to achieve a modern agriculture and fisheries sector, but also, to highlight the expertise that the Philippines can share to tackle the impending threats to food security and the environment that we face as a nation, a region, and the whole world."



Biodiversity credits gain traction but questions persist

AN international market for biodiversity credits is gaining traction, but as questions arise concerning the risk of greenwashing, proponents are seeking to distance these new instruments from their much-criticized predecessor, carbon offsets.

Momentum has been building since the end of 2022 when almost 200 countries signed the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, a pact dubbed the "Paris Agreement for nature" that calls on signatories to come up with "innovative" financing initiatives—such as biodiversity credits.

A biodiversity credit is a tradable security representing a unit of biodiversity improvement, which is brought about by some form of land-management change.

France and the United Kingdom have led the charge to expedite the market's growth, which the World Economic Forum estimates may reach \$69 billion by 2050. In June, the countries co-launched an international advisory panel on biodiversity credits, chaired by State Street Corp. non-executive director Amelia Fawcett and Sylvie Goulard, a former deputy governor of the French central bank.

In December, Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, extolled the benefits of so-called nature credits, and a

new trading platform was launched by Emsurge in partnership with a carbon market broker called Emstream.

Some countries, like England, have introduced rules requiring infrastructure developers, homebuilders and other companies to provide compensation for any harm they cause to the natural environment. They can do this either on-site by rebuilding a destroyed forest or pond, for example, or they can do it off-site by purchasing so-called biodiversity net-gain units from third parties, typically landowners but also market intermediaries and traders.

An unregulated international market is developing as well, one in which companies can source biodiversity units from across the globe to meet their biodiversity targets. It's similar, however, to the market for carbon offsets, which has faced increased criticism in the past year for being a venue for greenwashing rather than having any substantive positive effect on greenhouse gas emissions.

To address this—and the fundamental issue that biodiversity, unlike carbon dioxide, is not fungible and is highly localized—proponents of biodiversity credits are seeking to make a key distinction. Namely, between their use to offset harm and their use to help finance do-good projects.

Aleksandra Holmlund, chief



URSULA VON DER LEYEN, president of the European Commission, speaks at last month's COP28 climate conference in Dubai. HOLLIE ADAMS/BLOOMBERG

executive of Qarlbo Natural Asset Co., which is developing biodiversity credit projects, said at the recent COP28 climate summit that "you can use offsets to get to net zero and credits to get to net positive."

BloombergNEF has outlined a similar distinction. First, companies must avoid negative biodiversity impacts, and then they must minimize any harm that occurs and restore any damage done to the natural environment. As a last resort, companies can purchase an offset to compensate for any residual impact. A credit, BNEF says, sits outside (or exceeds) that hierarchy. Companies can purchase credits for net positive impact.

It's a narrative that's emerging among carbon market participants as well.

But Alex Bush, a lecturer at Lancaster University, warns that the lack of clear definitions means the biodiversity concept is still preliminary. "On a practical level, we're not quite there

yet," he said. "The market is keen, but until there is regulation on how we define a credit, I don't think we're ready for a market trading system."

Indeed, many of the same flaws that bedevil carbon offsets may afflict their biodiversity brethren. Sam Sinclair, co-founder and director of the consultancy Biodiversify, says many people are seeking to exploit the confusion and sell products that are based on "what they want to be true, rather than what's actually possible."

The overhanging issue remains that there's no current oversight or rules governing the use of biodiversity credits, or the corresponding claims made.

For now, Frédéric Hache, a lecturer in sustainable finance at Sciences Po university and executive director of the Green Finance Observatory, likens this burgeoning market to a salesman selling guns that aren't for shooting or a farmer selling marijuana that's not for smoking.

"The business case for

purchasing nature credits at scale without offsetting is weak," Hache said. The reality is any notion that there's a difference between credits and offsets is "disingenuous," he said.

Sustainable finance in brief

LITIGATION finance, long a lucrative enterprise in America, is now becoming big business in Europe as investors eye huge returns as they contemplate the fallout of new laws addressing ESG compliance. Last year, citizens in the European Union won access to the kinds of class-action lawsuits that have long fueled US litigation.

And another piece of EU legislation nearing passage exposes firms to legal risk if environmental or human-rights violations are detected in their supply chains. Bankrolled by hedge funds and other alternative investors, such lawsuits can target alleged corporate misdeeds such as broken environmental pledges, exploited workers or corporate governance failings.

A successful case can leave a litigation funder with returns well in excess of 25 percent, something that's drawn the scrutiny of legislators.

"Funders are always working in their own economic interests rather than that of claimants," said Axel Voss, a member of the European Parliament. "I don't want to see the legal system becoming a playground for profit seekers." *Bloomberg News*



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Corn, soybeans plunge

CHICAGO- Chicago corn futures plunged to a three-year low on Friday after the US Department of Agriculture reported that US corn stocks swelled to their highest levels since 2018.

Soybeans also fell sharply, with prices at their lowest in 26 months, as traders raced to shed their positions after the government reported larger-than-expected Brazilian crops, as well as bigger US yield and production levels for the recently

harvested crop.

World grain supplies are becoming more flush after tightening due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a major corn and wheat producer, and unfavorable crop weather.

In the United States, a record corn harvest in 2023 and lackluster export sales have contributed to growing stocks and pushed seven corn futures contracts to new lows - including most-active March May and September. -
Reuters