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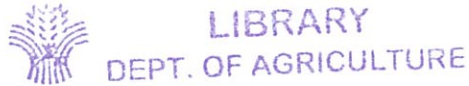
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DA ensures stable fish supply amid import ban

By GABRIELL CHRISTEL GALANG

The Department of Agriculture ensured that the recent importation ban of alumahan, galunggong, and tulingan won't affect the local fish supply and the canned fish industry.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. said on Thursday, April 4, that the suspension of imports was in time with the open fishing season, which means that there is ample supply in the market.

The DA recently reported the issuance of Memorandum Order 14 which states that sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances of the three pelagic species are

indefinitely banned to avoid reaching the wet markets.

The order was made after 100,000 tons of imported galunggong, tulingan, and alumahan were being sold to the wet markets, avoiding Value-Added Tax.

"The problem is that if some 'crafty' importers diverted and sold part of their frozen fish inventory to wet markets, where the sale of marine products are exempted from Value-Added Tax," Laurel said. "The problem is diversion. If they (importers) imported mackerel and diverted it to wet markets, they will fall short (of their required supply)," he said.

Subsequently, MO 14 allowed

mackerel importation for canning purposes, given that "the volume thereof shall be based on VAT-able sales of the canned products from the previous year with additional 10 percent (10 percent) of said sales for buffer."

"Technically, importers should be able to import 10 percent more than what they are using now. So, I don't see any reason why they fear a possible shortage in the supply of mackerel for canning," DA chief said.

Despite this, Laurel explained that there is no need to investigate wet market vendors who sell imported fish, because fish importers are the one carrying the illegal act.



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DA chief: No supply drop, price hike of canned mackerel

AGRICULTURE Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said there is no reason for a supply drop and price increase in canned mackerel.

This came following the Department of Agriculture's (DA) issuance of Department Administrative Order (DAO) 14, series of 2024, suspending the release of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances for round scad (galunggong), mackerel, and bonito.

"I do not believe iyong sinasabi nila. Basically, ang nakalagay doon sa aking department administrative order, hindi naman sila mawawalan

ng kanilang canned mackerel eh," Laurel said at the Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon briefing in response to the concerns of Canned Sardines Association of the Philippines.

Laurel clarified that they can still import the same volume of mackerel for canning purposes, based on their product sales, subject to value-added tax (VAT).

"Kasi a n g

problema dito diversion eh. Kung pinasok nila iyan tapos dinivert [divert] nila, talagang masu-short sila," he said.

"Pero kung ang VAT sales nila says ganito ang kanilang nabentang mackerel at may equivalent tonnage iyan, they can still import," he added.

The Agriculture chief also underscored allowing additional import volume.

"Technically, they should be able to import 10 percent more of what they are using now. So, I don't see any reason kung bakit sila nagpi-fear na masu-short sila eh," he said.

Laurel earlier said the issuance of DAO stemmed from reports of the alleged technical diversion of imported fish from institutional use, including canning and processing, to wet markets.

Initial reports claim that at least 90,000 to 100,000 tons of fish imports are diverted annually, or equivalent to 30,000 tons per quarter.

PNA



TIU LAUREL



In Leyte, bird flu traced to wild fowls

DA exec says poultry production 'still good' despite cases; 16 provinces remain free of avian disease

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
@jordeenelagare

The Philippines' battle against bird flu took a step back after logging an outbreak of avian influenza affecting thousands of chickens and ducks in a poultry farm in Leyte province.

In a report to the World Organization for Animal Health (Woah), the country said highly pathogenic avian influenza subtype H5N1 infected a farm at Barangay Naghalin in Kananga town.

"The affected farm is surrounded by rice field paddies and a river which are frequented by wild waterfowls," the report said.

"These free-flying wild birds could have introduced the virus via their droppings, as the first building to be affected was at the back of the farm nearest to the rice paddies," it added.

The report said 4,480 cases of avian influenza had been recorded in the area, as confirmed by laboratory test results on March 19. The disease killed 4,475 chick-

ens, ducks and quail as of Thursday while 56,054 others had been culled.

The outbreak was first recorded on March 7.

The report also noted that control measures including movement control, disinfection and destruction of animal products and disposal of carcasses, byproducts and waste had been applied while surveillance within and outside the restricted zone would be carried out.

No cases

Despite the prevalence of avian influenza in the country, 16 provinces remain free of the animal disease, it said.

These are Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Pangasinan, Benguet, Isabela, Aurora, Rizal, Batangas, Quezon, Camarines Sur, Capiz, South Cotabato, Cotabato, Maguindanao del Sur, Sultan Kudarat and Davao del Sur.

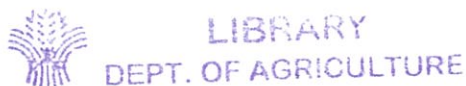
Woah's terrestrial animal health code states that a previously free country or zone may regain its avian influen-

za-free status at least 28 days after completing a stamping-out policy and disinfecting the last affected establishment, and that ensuing surveillance demonstrated the absence of infection.

The Bureau of Animal Industry, in its latest report on March 26, indicated that the bird flu had affected duck, quail, chicken and broiler breeder chicken in the provinces of Pampanga, Kalinga and Leyte.

"We still have cases but they are immediately contained so it doesn't have a big impact, and our meat production level is still good," Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa of the Department of Agriculture (DA) said during the government's "Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon" television program on Friday.

Last month, the DA temporarily banned the entry of poultry imports from Iowa and Minnesota in the United States as well as from Sweden and the Czech Republic in Europe to avert the spread of avian influenza. **INQ**



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

CHIT U. JUAN

It's Filipino Food Month 2024

After last month's celebration of Women's Month, we are off to the next big event to toast local food. A proponent of what is now a law designating April as Filipino Food month is the Philippine Culinary Heritage Movement (PCHM), a private sector-led advocacy group led by chef Jam Melchor along with book author Nina Daza-Puyat, food editors Nana Ozaeta and Marilen Fontanilla. During her watch as **Department of Agriculture (DA) Undersecretary for High Value Crops, Evelyn Laviña** supported this bill until it became a law. If you ask me, why was there a need to enact a law for this?



Because it was simply getting easy to forget our own food recipes with the deluge of foreign brands and international-themed restaurants, food imports and ingredients coming into the country. We needed something to remind everyone where we came from – from pre-colonial Philippines, the Spanish times and then the Hollywood influence which has remained in our pop culture and continues to dominate our food scene.

The coming of tourists from China also brought about new trends like hot pots, as Korean telenovelas and K-pop introduced Korean fried chicken and maintained old Korean favorites *kimchi* and *bulgogi* in the Pinoy menus. In the 70s when droves of Japanese tourists first came to Manila, that was also when we also started serving *sushi*, *sashimi* and *ramen*. And when we learned to eat *tempura* and *sukiyaki*.

If one were to wake up only today or be born only in this decade, Filipino food may be just a blurred memory as the dining table has been inundated with foreign influences, from MSG instead of rock salt, and *kimchi* instead of *atchara*.

This is why we need to remind ourselves what Filipino flavors are all about. It is especially crucial to let children taste *sinigang*, *adobo* and *paksiw* before these flavors are totally forgotten. While we advocate for continuous consumption of local fruits like *santol*, *mabolo*, *atis*, *caimito* and *chico* so they may not disappear, we should not forget recipes. Recipes are handed down from one generation to the next using local ingredients like *kamias*, *sampaloc*, *batuan* and *sua* for *sinigang*. Regional recipes call for the use of turmeric for *bringhe* in Pampanga, coconut milk and chilies for Bicolano cuisine and burnt coconut and other spices called *palapa* for Sulu or Tausug cuisine.

It is the hope of PCHM to continue the celebration with younger chefs and cooks, students and even

grade school children, who will be our next generation of consumers. With April as Filipino Food Month, we have reason to focus on remembering our *kaluto* – the local term for recipes. I have recently written about younger chefs who focus their restaurant theme on local ingredients – and perform creative play or twists to recipes that may introduce local ingredients but as a modern Pinoy version. That is such a welcome addition to our list of restaurant choices, which have been mostly Continental and Asian.

Filipino food events must also not forget our pre-colonial ways of preserving meat (*itag*, *kini-ing* and *lunis*) and preserving vegetables through pickling and fermentation (*atchara* and *buro*, respectively). I know there will be regional events to focus on locally available ingredients like coconut for southern Luzon and preserved sausages like *longganisa* which every province, every region has a claim to having the best kind or best recipe for. Lucban, Tuguegarao and Ilocos are just some of the origins of *longganisa*, with different flavor profiles – different ratios of garlic to meat, a sprinkling of sugar and/or salt or a unique way of sealing the local sausage with bamboo sticks like Pangasinan's.

Even the lechon or roasted pig has versions from Cebu compared to those served in Manila. *Adobo* has versions called *puti*, classic and *tuyô* (dried) which chef Claude Tayag has a book on – all kinds of *adobo* depending on spices used.

You will find history in our cooking as many dishes did not need refrigeration – *paksiw* and *adobo*, because these were created when refrigeration was not yet available. That must have been the Spanish time, before the Americans came with refrigerators.

Our *sinigang*, *tinola* and *nilaga* were one-pot meals with meat and vegetables served for big families. Drying fish is a way to preserve the bounty of the sea. Thus we have all kinds of dried fish, again needing no refrigeration.

Filipino food will not be complete without our famous desserts like *kakanins*, made with rice and coconut in various permutations. Our way of cooking *bibingka* is also a response to the old way of "baking" as ovens had not yet been invented then. It is also again made of rice flour and not wheat, which we do not grow and must be imported.

This April, think about the food served on your family table and give a thought to why the recipes are such. Was it pre-colonial, or influenced by Spanish or American occupations?

Filipino food is a melange of influences – and you are a collaborator in shaping our food culture with what recipes you choose to serve in your home. They say a people with no culture is a people without a soul. So let us enrich our already checkered food heritage with our continuous choice of local ingredients and let us bring back those recipes our forefathers (and grandmothers) passed on to our parents.

Check out the schedules of talks, markets, celebrations in and around the country this month. Filipino Food Month will be a month-long fiesta around the country. Check the hashtag #PreserveFilipinoFood in social media and you will be led to the very colorful calendar of events.

Give it a thought. Whenever you eat a home-cooked Filipino meal, you actually are giving homage to our rich heritage. And it goes on this month and hopefully, for many more months and years to come.



'Bird flu, ASF vax being smuggled in travel luggage'

By **JASPER EMMANUEL ARCALAS**

Unauthorized vaccines against bird flu and African swine fever (ASF) are reportedly being smuggled into the country in tumblers and plastic glasses concealed in travel luggage from Vietnam and nearby countries, according to the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI).

Based on the letter of BAI OIC-director Enrico Miguel Capulong to Customs Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio, significant quantities of ASF and avian influenza (AI) vaccines have entered the country through small tumblers, plastic glasses and similar improvisations with dry ice as preservative.

"These items were alleged to be concealed in travel luggage originating in Vietnam and other nearby countries in Asia to avoid apprehension," Capulong said in his letter.

He emphasized that the entry and possible use of premature and unauthorized vaccines could lead to unwanted flare ups of animal disease outbreaks.

"We have already witnessed the effects of ASF and AI and with its ramifications to our overall economy, it is clear that our continued coordinative efforts at the border are a matter of national security," he said.

Rubio, meanwhile, instructed Customs personnel to coordinate with the BAI if they discover shipments containing smuggled AI and ASF vaccines during their inspections.

In a memorandum, Rubio directed all district collectors, support collectors and other personnel concerned to exercise control in preventing the entry of the smuggled vaccines to the country.

"And further, to impose appropri-

ate penalties in compliance with customs laws, rules and regulations," Rubio's memorandum stated.

Experts have warned that the use of unauthorized vaccines may cause animal disease viruses to mutate and develop immunity, therefore reducing the efficacy of available authorized vaccines.

The absence of an authorized, commercially available ASF vaccine is one of the reasons behind the slow repopulation of hogs in the country, experts said.

Last month, Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. assured hog raisers that an ASF vaccine will be approved by regulators within the year.

"The good news is there are already vaccines that are on the way that may be accredited within the year by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) with assistance from DA," Laurel said.



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THE PHILIPPINE STAR

TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

APR. 06, 2024
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PhilRice: 95% rice sufficiency by 2028 possible

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The Philippines can achieve 95 percent rice sufficiency by 2028 through the use of both hybrid and inbred varieties of palay, the **Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice)** said yesterday.

PhilRice deputy executive director

for special concerns Flordeliza Bordey backed the statement of National Irrigation Administration head Eduardo Guillen's claim that the Philippines can achieve rice sufficiency in 2028 as palay production is expected to go up this year despite the El Niño.

Bordey said that PhilRice will provide the seeds and technology while

the National Rice Program of the Department of Agriculture (DA) helps through the production of seeds and support services.

Hybrid seeds will be distributed to at least 30 to 40 percent of the major rice-producing areas and 60 percent will use inbred seeds.

She noted that under the Rice

Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), inbred seeds are being distributed to 42 low to medium yield provinces while hybrid seeds focus on 15 high yielding areas.

"Hybrid varieties cover 15 provinces like Nueva Ecija, Isabela and Pangasinan while the RCEF funds are

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PhilRice From Page 1

brought to the rainfed areas or those who use certified inbred seeds like the Visayas, Negros Occidental, Leyte, Samar and Panay Island," she said.

However, many farmers still prefer inbred variety over hybrid seeds as it is cheaper at P1,600 compared to P5,000 per 15 kilos for hybrid seeds, according to PhilRice Technology Management and Services Division training lead Lea Abaoag.

Meanwhile, Albay Rep. Joey Salceda said yesterday the government's "game-plan" should be focused on rice production to ease the impact of rising inflation on this basic commodity.

"It's all about rice. Food inflation accounts for some 57 percent of the total inflation this March. Without the abnormal price of rice in the global market, inflation would have been closer to 3.1 percent, which is well within acceptable range," he noted.

He added that rice is the "greatest driver" of overall prices, and rice "requires the most irrigation of all major crops, the greatest upside risk to inflation moving forward is El Niño."

In 2023, the DA reported at least 20.05 million metric tons of rice harvest while rice imports reached 3.6 million metric tons.

On the other hand, AGRI party-list Rep. Wilbert Lee urged the DA to speed up the release of ultra-low glycemic index and protein-rich variety of rice to farmers to greatly aid in the reduction of diabetes mellitus cases in the country.

"We all know that Filipinos are primary consumer of rice across the world. It is a permanent staple for us and this is connected to the rising cases of diabetes in the Philippines," he said.

In 2023, deaths in the Philippines due to diabetes mellitus reached 14,416, making it the fourth leading cause of death in the country.

- With Sheila Crisostomo



'Traders divert imported fish to evade VAT'

By **JASPER EMMANUEL ARCALAS**

Unscrupulous fish importers are diverting frozen stocks of round scad (*galunggong*), bonito (*tulingan*) and mackerel (*alumahan*) to the wet markets to evade paying value added tax (VAT), the Department of Agriculture (DA) said yesterday.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said that some "crafty" importers sold some of their frozen imported fish inventory to the wet markets, where the sale of marine products is exempt from VAT.

Tiu Laurel made the statement a few days after he ordered an impending import ban on the three fish species for

most of the country's canners, processors and institutional buyers, which include hotel and restaurants.

Canners are still allowed to import mackerel as long as they comply with the government's import rules, including the additional requirement of including a proper label on the imported stocks, the agriculture chief said.

He explained that canners may import mackerel based on the total VAT-able volume of canned products they sold last year. He noted that he even allowed canners to import an additional 10 percent of the total canned mackerel they sold to serve as canners' buffer stock.

The DA earlier pointed out that a crackdown on erring importers would

help the government collect the right taxes. Furthermore, it would also "protect" local fishermen "from unfair trade practices that undermine their livelihood," the DA added.

According to the DA's estimates, roughly 100,000 metric tons of imported fish products, including round scad, are being diverted to wet markets each year.



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18 LGUs declare state of calamity

Funds to cushion effects of El Niño ready for distribution, task force says

By JEL SANTOS

A total of 18 local government units (LGUs) in the country have declared a state of calamity due to worsening effects of El Niño, a task force spokesperson revealed on Friday, April 5.

Presidential Communications Office (PCO) Assistant Secretary Joey Villarama, Task Force El Niño spokesperson, said agricultural damage caused by the phenomenon is now at ₱2.63 billion, not ₱2.76 billion as reported by the Department of Agriculture (DA) on Thursday.

“Based po doon sa talaan ng OCD [Office of Civil Defense], halos 20 na local government units ang nag-declare ng state of calamity dahil sa El Niño (Based on OCD data, almost 20 local government units have declared a state of calamity due to El Niño),” Villarama said on the sidelines of the Food Security Cluster Communications Workshop in Nueva Ecija. These are: 11 municipalities in Occidental Mindoro; Bulalacao and Mansalay towns in Oriental Mindoro; San Vicente, Palawan; San Andres, Romblon; Mayoyao, Ifugao; Sibalom, Antique; and Zamboanga City. ▶6



18 LGUs declare state of calamity 1◀

He said most of the LGUs that declared a state of calamity are from Luzon, where most areas are currently experiencing drought.

The task force spokesperson said the number might further increase as four municipalities in Iloilo are also mulling the declaration of state of calamity, but he noted that they should meet the criteria to do so.

For an area to be declared under a state of calamity, Villarama said it must meet the criteria including: 15 percent of the population are affected, 30 percent of livelihoods are impacted, and there must be damage to structures or vital installations.

“Kailangan pong pumasok sa criteria para po maayos po o tama po ang paggamit ng calamity fund (They should meet the criteria for an orderly utilization of the calamity fund),” he stated. “As much as we want local government units to declare a state of calamity para po magamit iyong local calamity fund at iyong tulong mula sa national government, kailangan pong sundin natin ‘yung mga panuntunan para po maayos po ang proseso (for them to utilize the local calamity fund and the assistance from the national government, we have to follow the guidelines for an orderly process).”

Villarama assured the public that amid the intensifying effects of the El Niño phenomenon, the national government’s fund to cushion its effects is ready for distribution to aid affected farmers.

“Kasi prinoject naman po natin na ang maapektuhan by end of April is 80 out of 82 provinces but in varying degrees (We had projected that by the end of April, 80 out of 82 provinces will be affected but in varying degrees),” he said.

In addition, he said: “Ang budget po ng Task Force El Niño ay nanggagaling sa lahat ng principal agencies na kabilang dito—so mayroong agency regular budget at may quick response fund po at kung sakali pong magkulang ay may other avenues tayo or ways na pwedeng pagkunan sa tulong po ng tamang proseso at as long as approved po ng Department of Budget and Management (The budget of Task Force El Niño comes

from all principal agencies that are part of the task force—so there’s agency regular budget and the quick response fund, and if these fall short, there are other avenues or ways to get assistance through the appropriate process as long as it is approved by the Department of Budget and Management).”

10 regions hit

So far, the El Niño phenomenon has devastated 10 out of the 16 regions of the country, Agriculture spokesperson Assistant Secretary Arnel De Mesa said.

He said the dry spell has affected 54,203 farmers, mostly rice farmers.

Per the data of the DA, the affected regions are Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), Region 1, Region 2, Region 3, Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon), Mimaropa (Mindoro Occidental, Mindoro Oriental, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan), Region 5, Region 6, Region 9, and Region 12.

De Mesa said Mimaropa is the region that has incurred the biggest damage to agriculture at ₱770 million; followed by Region VI at ₱739 million.

Damage to rice fields, he said, is now ₱1.7 billion; followed by corn with recorded damage of ₱591 million. Damage to livestock, on the other hand, was estimated at ₱59.6 million.

Arable lands affected

The land area of the rice fields damaged by El Niño is now at 34,264 hectares, De Mesa said.

Only about 10,000 hectares were totally damaged by the drought, representing one percent of the total area planted with rice which is one million hectares, the DA spokesperson added.

Meanwhile, he noted that 25,000 hectares of rice fields were partially damaged but these can still recover.

De Mesa said El Niño is still expected to intensify, with the state weather bureau forecasting it will reach its peak this April.

The phenomenon is expected to subside gradually by May, he added.

The DA official said the government has provided at least ₱1.08 billion worth of assistance to farmers affected by the El Niño phenomenon.



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Rice, meat prices tagged as inflation rises to 3.7%

BY NIÑA MYKA PAULINE ARCEO

INFLATION rose for a second straight month in March as prices of key food items — particularly rice and meat — and transport costs rose, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported on Friday.

Consumer price growth picked up to 3.7 percent from February's 3.4 percent but stayed within the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' (BSP) 2.0- to 4.0-percent target.

It also fell within the central bank's 3.4- to 4.2-percent estimate for the month and was slightly lower than the 3.8-percent median in a *Manila Times* poll of economists.

Inflation a year earlier was 7.6 percent, which was the first time the rate fell below 8.0 percent after hitting a 14-year high of 8.7 percent at the start of 2023.

Core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy items, decelerated in March to 3.4 percent from the 3.6 percent seen in the previous month and 8.0 percent a year earlier.

Year to date, headline inflation and core inflation averaged 3.3 percent and 3.6 percent, respectively.

Primary contributors

"The uptrend in the overall inflation in March 2024 was primarily influenced by the higher year-on-year increase in the heavily-weighted food and nonalcoholic beverages at 5.6 percent during the month from 4.6 percent in February 2024," the PSA said in a statement.

Food and alcoholic beverages accounted for over half — a 57.3-percent share or 2.1 percentage points — of overall inflation.

The uptrend was also fueled by a 2.1-percent rise in transport inflation during the month from an annual decline of 1.2 percent in February.

Food inflation rose to 5.7 percent from 4.8 percent a month earlier but was lower than the 9.5 percent in March last year.

The PSA said this was due to slower year-on-year declines in vegetable, tuber, plantain, cooking banana and pulse prices, at 2.5 percent from 11.0 percent in February.

Meat prices rose faster, by 2.0 percent compared to 0.7 percent in the previous month.

The inflation rate for cereals and cereal products, which includes rice, corn, flour, bread, pasta and other cereals, also rose to 17.3 percent from 17.0 percent.

Rice inflation, in particular, picked up to 24.4 percent from 23.7 percent in February, accounting for 1.8 percentage points or about 48 percent of overall inflation.

This was the highest since the 24.6 percent recorded in February 2009.

Higher inflation likely

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) warned that inflation could rise further and surpass the target over the next two quarters.

This is due to "the possible adverse impact of adverse weather conditions to domestic agricultural output and positive base effects," it said in a statement.

"The inflation outturn is consis-

tent with the BSP expectations that inflation will likely remain within the target range in the first quarter 2024 due largely to negative base effects," the central bank added.

Upward risks to the inflation outlook include higher transportation costs, food price hikes due to supply constraints, rising power rates, higher global oil prices and potential legislated minimum wage increases.

"Looking ahead, the Monetary Board will consider the latest inflation outturn in its upcoming monetary policy meeting on 8 April 2024," the BSP said.

"The BSP also continues to support the National Government's nonmonetary measures to address supply side pressures on prices and sustain the disinflation process," it added.

The central benchmark rate currently stands at 6.50 percent, the highest since 2007, following 450 basis points of increases beginning May 2022 as inflation surged in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Monetary authorities have held fire for the last three policy meetings and are again expected to

➤ **Inflation B2**

INFLATION FROM B1

Rice, meat

keep interest rates unchanged on Monday.

With inflation still to settle firmly within target, analysts have said that rate cuts will likely only start in the second half of this year.

Govt priorities

In a separate statement, Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan

said the government was committed to ensuring food and energy security while addressing price fluctuations amid ongoing El Niño conditions and upcoming La Niña threats.

"The government is closely monitoring weather conditions and their effects on the supply of key commodities, such as food and energy, to protect Filipino households from sudden price increases," he added.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources is monitoring water supply to ensure that farmers have enough for the dry season while the Department

of Agriculture is providing assistance to drought-affected farmers, Balisacan claimed.

Preparations for the La Niña weather pattern, which will bring heavy rainfall and possible floods and landslides, are also underway to safeguard food and energy security, water supplies, and public health and safety, he added.

To alleviate the impact of high electricity prices on vulnerable Filipinos, Balisacan said that eligible consumers could claim a 100-percent discount on their monthly bills through a government lifeline

rate program.

Some 4.9 percent of the 4.6 million Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program beneficiaries were said to have already enrolled in the program.

"While we continue to face multiple risks, such as potential adjustments in transportation fares, wages and service utility fees, the Marcos administration is committed to managing the country's inflation," Balisacan said.

"This will be key to sustaining our growth momentum and providing a better life for our countrymen."



'All about rice': Inflation busters should focus on rice production

By JOYEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ

ALBAY Rep. Joey Salceda said Friday that with the recorded increase of inflation in March, the government's gameplan to help ease the burden of rising prices of basic commodities should be focused on rice production.

Salceda, the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, said that food inflation accounts for 57 percent of the total inflation in March, which saw an increase in overall inflation to 3.7 percent from the previous month's 3.4 percent.

"As I said last month, once again, it's all about rice. Food inflation accounts for some 57 percent of the total inflation this March. Without the abnormal price of rice in the global market, inflation would have been closer to 3.1 percent, which is well within acceptable range," Salceda said in a statement.

Salceda explained that corn prices, as well as the cost of fish,

vegetables, bread and even bread, are declining.

"The gameplan must be focused on rice," he declared.

"Because rice is the greatest driver of overall prices, and rice requires the most irrigation of all major crops, the greatest upside risk to inflation moving forward is El Nino," he continued.

He lauded the efforts of the Department of Agriculture in helping farmers increase agricultural production, citing progress in the area of delivering programs such as the Survival and Recovery (SURE) Loan program of the Agricultural Credit Policy Council (ACPC).

"Secretary Tiu-Laurel has been more aggressive with distributing rice production support this quarter. He has brought machinery distribution, for example, to about 92 percent of target. The P12-billion rice farmer financial assistance is also set to be completed this June—again, just in time for planting," Salceda added.

"The Philippine Crop Insurance

Corporation has also begun to issue indemnity insurance payments to farmers affected by drought," he added.

All of these efforts, Salceda said, will reap benefits for farmers in the future.

"There is significant progress being made in the DA, and his governance cleanup of the NFA will also help make cheap rice available to the poor, as well as provide a better market for rice farmers," he expressed.

As it is the dry season, Salceda advised farmers to stock up on water as a valuable resource during the long dry spell.

"In the instances where it is available, we should be able to impound water. Farmers with on-farm reservoir systems tend to endure El Nino better—not to mention providing additional opportunities in fish production," he said.

"That also makes them less reliant on large-scale irrigation projects,

which, while optimal, tend to take years to complete."

Salceda noted Pagasa's forecast that the droughts will begin in May, and the rain that will be experienced this month should provide ample opportunity to impound water.

"We will still see some rain—so we should impound that. The worst droughts will be in May, with the hardest-hit regions being Central Luzon and Bicol. But models suggest that El Nino will taper off in June," the lawmaker from Albay said.

"Over the long term, we must address the fragility of the country's food systems. President Marcos has been clocking in very strong rice harvest figures—and recorded the biggest harvest in history in 2023. The path forward with rice is to address pre-harvest costs and post-harvest losses, while making the system more resilient from trade shocks and adverse climate conditions."



Govt tracks El Niño impact on vulnerable sectors as March inflation hits 3.7%

By REINE JUVIERRE S. ALBERTO

AS higher food prices drove the inflation rate to increase in March, Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto said the government is monitoring the effects of El Niño in vulnerable sectors to mitigate inflation.

The Department of Finance (DOF) said that despite the effects of El Niño in March, the government maintained the inflation rate within the target band at 3.7 percent due to "vigorous" implementation of measures that ensured "sufficient" imports of key commodities and "improved" agricultural production.

"The Inter-Agency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook is all hands on deck in monitoring weather-related disturbances as well as other external factors and their effects on the prices of essential goods to protect Filipinos' purchasing power," Recto assured the public.

The food inflation rate was tempered by the slower price increases of eggs and other dairy products at 2.3 percent from 3.5 percent, fruits at 7.9 percent from 8.7 percent, bread and other cereals at 4.6 percent from 5.1 percent, and ready-made food products at 4.3 percent from 4.6 percent.

A decline in prices was also recorded for fish at -0.9 percent from 0.7 percent, vegetables at -2.5 percent from -1.0 percent, and sugar at -2.9 percent from -2.4 percent.

"Rest assured, we are doubling down on our efforts to address the ongoing El Niño situation while actively preparing for the anticipated La Niña phenomenon in the latter part of the year," Recto said.

The Finance department laid out the national government's interventions to ensure food and energy security, clean water supply, and public health safety, as well as targeted support to vulnerable sectors of El Niño and the looming La Niña.

Among these is the Department of

Agriculture's (DA) Fertilizer Discount Vouchers (FDVs) continuously provided to farmers to boost agricultural production.

The DOF also said the DA is supporting the rehabilitation of irrigation systems, targeted cloud seeding operations, and the promotion of water-saving technology that rice farmers can apply to reduce their water use in irrigated fields.

Farmers also received P362.56 million in financial assistance through the Rice Farmers Financial Assistance (REFA).

The Agricultural Credit Policy Council (ACPC) also allotted P500 million under the Survival and Recovery (SURE) Loan Program to assist 20,000 borrowers, including farmers and fisherfolk, who will be affected by calamities in 2024, the DOF added.

Meanwhile, the National Irrigation Administration is expanding the distribution of solar-powered irrigation systems to major rice-producing areas to provide stable irrigation, ensure sufficient water supply, and support farmers during the drought season.

Water regulatory bodies, such as the Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA), Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS), and the National Water Resources Board (NWRB), are undertaking programs to provide sufficient water supply in the country amidst El Niño.

In terms of electricity prices, the DOF said the government is encouraging distribution utilities to avail themselves of the Anti-Bill Shock Program to protect end-users from a sudden increase in electricity rates by allowing electric cooperatives to implement rate adjustments on a staggered basis.

To protect the marginalized sector from the burden of high electricity prices, eligible consumers can receive a 100-percent discount on their monthly bills through the Lifeline Rate Subsidy Program of the government, the DOF added.



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Rice spurs inflation – Salceda

**By Jester
Manalastas**

THE higher inflation in March can again be attributed to rice, according to Albay Rep. Joey Salceda

Salceda, chairman of the House Committee on Ways and Means, said inflation or the cost of commodities has reached 3.7 percent in March from 3.4 percent in January.

Among those with higher prices are the key food items like vegetables, meat and rice, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said

Salceda said the food inflation accounts for some 57 per-



cent of the total inflation this March.

Without the abnormal price of rice in the global market, inflation would have been closer to 3.1 percent, which is well within acceptable range.

“The gameplan must be focused on rice,” Salceda said.

The higher cost of rice is the effect of worsening El Nino, Salceda said

Because rice is the greatest driver of overall prices, and

rice requires the most irrigation of all major crops, he added.

To date, the Department of Agriculture has been more aggressive with distributing rice production support this quarter.

The agency has brought machinery distribution, for example, to about 92 percent of target.

The P12 billion rice farmer financial assistance is also set to be completed this June – again, just in time for planting.

The DA has also been more active with delivering programs from the Survival and Recovery (SURE) Loan program of the Agricultural Credit



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₱560M danyos ng El Niño sa Region 2

Nasa P560.9 milyon ang pinsala ng agrikultura sa buong lalawigan ng Region 2 dahil sa epekto ng El Niño phenomenon mula nitong February 7 hanggang March 7, ayon sa Department of Agriculture-Regional Field Office 2 (DA-RFO2) kahapon, April 5.

"This is despite putting together efforts to combat the dry spell and drawing up interventions to cushion its impact," ani DA-RFO2 executive director officer-in-charge Rose Mary Aquino.

Samantala, sa report ni DA-RFO2 field operation division chief Engr. Monico Castro Jr., mahigit 17,949 hektarya ang naapektuhan at tinatayang 35,905.22 metric tons (MT) na mga tanim na palay, mais ang high-value crops sa Quirino, Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya at Cagayan.

"In our log, out of the total affected crop area, 16,174.55 hectares were partially damaged, while 1,774.48 hectares were damaged," ani Castro. **(Allan Bergonia)**



IRRI tinukuran sa bigas na iwas diabetes

Nanawagan ang isang mambabatas sa Department of Agriculture (DA) na makipagtulungan sa International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) upang dumami ang mga mag-sasaka na nagtatanim ng ultra-low glycemic index (GI) at protein-rich variety ng bigas sa bansa.

Ayon kay AGRI party-list Rep. Wilbert Lee, ang naturang variety ng bigas ay makatutulong upang mabawasan ang mga Pilipinong may diabetes mellitus.

"Hindi naman po kaila sa atin na ang Pilipinas ay isa sa mga nangungunang consumer ng bigas sa buong mundo. At dahil tila permanenteng parte na ng ating pagkain ang kanin, hindi maikakaila

ang koneksyon nito sa dami ng may diabetes sa bansa," sabi ni Lee.

Ayon sa IRRI, ang ultra-low GI high protein rice variety ay nasimulan ng itanim sa mahigit 10 probinsya at plano nilang ilunsad ng malawakan sa 2025.

Sinabi ng IRRI na ang presyo ng ultra-low GI high protein rice ay kapareho lamang ng mga normal na bigas na nabibili sa merkado.

"Kapag mas may access at nagawa pa nating mas abot-kaya sa Pilipino ang ganitong klase ng bigas, mas marami ang matutulongan nating makaiwas o mabawasan ang alalahanin sa mga chronic disease tulad ng diabetes at kaugnay nitong mga sakit," sabi ni Lee.

"Dahil sinasabi rin

ng mga eksperto na mas mabilis tayong makakaramdam ng pagkabusog sa bigas na ito, mas kaunti rin ang ikokonsumo natin. Bawas na sa pangamba sa sakit, bawas pa sa gastos," dagdag pa ng solon.

Batay sa datos ng International Diabetes Federation, kung saan kabilang ang Philippine College of Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism, sa 66,754,400 na adult population ng Pilipinas noong 2021, may diabetes ang 4,303,899 o 6.44 porsiyento.

Noong 2023, nasa 14,416 ang namatay umano kaugnay ng diabetes mellitus, ang ikaapat na sanhi ng pagkamatay sa bansa. **(Billy Begas/Eralyn Prado)**



18 bayan, siyudad state of calamity sa El Niño

UMABOT na sa 18 bayan at siyudad mula sa iba't ibang rehiyon sa bansa ang nagdeklara ng state of calamity dahil sa El Niño.

Ayon kay Presidential Communications Office (PCO) Assistant Secretary at Task Force El Niño Spokesperson Joey Villarama, kabilang sa mga isinailalim sa state of calamity ang 11 bayan sa Occidental Mindoro, Bulalacao at Mansalay sa Oriental Mindoro, San Vicente sa Palawan, San Andres sa Romblon, Mayoyao sa Ifugao, Sibalom sa Antique at Zamboanga City.

Maraming lokal na pamahalaan ang nagbabalak aniya na sumunod na rin sa pagdeklara ng state of calamity dahil sa matinding epekto ng El Niño sa kanilang mga lugar.

Samantala, umabot na sa P2.63 bilyon ang pinsala ng El Niño sa agrikultura, ayon sa datos ng Department of Agriculture.

Dagdag ni Villarama, nagbigay na ang gobyerno ng P1.1 bilyong halaga ng tulong pinansyal, gasolina, food packs at kagamitan sa mga mag-sasaka at pamilyang apektado ng El Niño.
(Carl Santiago)

Date: APR 06, 2024 Page: 2



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Para iwas diabetes: Magsasaka pinagtatanim ng ultra low glycemic index, high protein na bigas

Upang iwas diabetes, hinikayat ni Agri Partylist Rep. Wilbert Lee ang Department of Agriculture na makipagtulungan sa International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) na mga ultra-low glycemic index (GI) pero matataas ang protina at masustansiya sa kalusugan ang uri ng mga palay na dapat itanim at ibenta ng mga magsasaka sa merkado.

Ayon kay Lee, kung imi-mainstream ang produksiyon ng ganitong uri ng bigas ay makakatulong ito sa pagpapababa ng mga kaso ng diabetes mellitus sa bansa.

"Hindi naman po kaila sa atin na ang Pilipinas ay isa sa mga nangungunang consumer ng bigas sa buong mundo. At dahil tila permanenteng parte na ng ating pagkain ang kanin, hindi maikakaila ang koneksyon nito sa dami ng may diabetes sa bansa," anang solon.

Base sa data ng International Diabetes Federation kung saan ang Philippine College of Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism ay isa sa mga miyembro nasa 66,754,400 populasyon ng mga adult o nakatatanda sa Pilipinas noong 2021 ay nasa 4,303,899 kaso ng diabetes ang naitala.

Noong 2023, ang mga nasawi sa Pilipinas sanhi ng diabetes mellitus ay naitala sa 14,416 na kaso o nasa 6.2% kung saan lumilitaw na ito ang ikaapat na sanhi ng mga pagkamatay ng mga Pilipino.

Ang IRRI ay nais iintrodyus ang Ultra-Low GI, high protein rice na uri ng bigas sa 2025.

Sa pananaliksik at pagsusuri dito ay sinimulan na sa mahigit sa 10 probinsya sa buong kapuluan. (Joy Cantos)



March inflation rate rose to 3.7% as rice price hikes hit 15-year high

But within Bangko Sentral forecast range, below market expectations

By Ian Nicolas P. Cigaral
@ipcigaral

Inflation picked up for the second consecutive month in March, sending policymakers scrambling for a fix as the continued spike in rice prices remained the biggest contributor to the uptick.

Inflation, as measured by the consumer price index (CPI), bolted 3.7 percent year-on-year in March, beating the February reading of 3.4 percent, the Philippine Statistics Authority reported on Friday.

But the price gains in March were below market expectations of a 3.8-percent

inflation rate, which was well within the 3.4 to 4.2 percent forecast range of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) for the month.

At the same time, inflation managed to stay within the 2 to 4 percent target band of the central bank for the fourth straight month, although the figure inched closer to the upper limit.

National Statistician Claire Dennis Mapa told a press conference that rice, a staple food for Filipino households, was mostly responsible for the faster inflation in March. Data showed that rice inflation had soared to a 15-year high of 24.4 percent last month, which

Mapa attributed to stubbornly high global prices.

Costlier rice, in turn, pushed up the overall food inflation to 5.7 percent, the highest since November 2011. That was expected as the staple grain accounts for nearly 9 percent of the CPI basket used to compute inflation.

Mapa said rice prices would likely accelerate at a “double-digit” pace until July 2024 amid the ongoing El Niño dry spell and due to “base effects”—meaning the next readings would be magnified because they would be compared with the figures from last year, when rice inflation was low.

In a statement, Secretary Arsenio Balisacan of the National Economic and Development Authority said the Marcos administration is still wary of extreme weather conditions that could set off food supply problems, including La Niña.

“The government is closely monitoring weather conditions and their effects on the supply of key commodities, such as food and energy, to protect Filipino households from sudden price increases,” Balisacan said.

Higher rates for longer

Meanwhile, state data showed that the contribution of transport to inflation, which has

been close to zero since April 2023, had also expanded to 2.1 percent, from 1.2 percent in February, due to higher oil prices.

Commenting on the March data, BSP Governor Eli Remolona Jr. said inflation could temporarily accelerate above the 2 to 4 percent target range in the next two quarters due to “possible adverse impact of adverse weather conditions to domestic agricultural output and positive base effects.”

“The upside risks to the inflation outlook could emanate from higher transport charges, higher prices of food commodities facing supply constraints, increased electricity rates, higher global oil

prices, and implementation of a legislated increase in the minimum wage,” Remolona said.

When inflation is accelerating, central banks typically stay hawkish—or keep interest rates higher—for a much longer period to avoid sharper increases in prices. Already, the inflation problem has prompted economic officials to temper economic growth goals.

In a commentary, economists at Bank of the Philippine Islands said the BSP would likely keep interest rates steady at 6.5 percent in the first half of the year. The Monetary Board will meet again on Monday (April 8), to decide on interest rates. **INQ**



Inflation accelerates to 3.7% in March

By LOUELLA DESIDERIO

The increase in the prices of goods and services in the country accelerated for the second straight month in March on the back of faster upticks in food and transport costs, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported yesterday.

In a press conference, National Statistician Dennis Mapa said the country's headline inflation or the rate of increase in the average prices of consumer goods and services went up to 3.7 percent in March from 3.4 percent in February.

The inflation print last month was within the 3.4 to 4.2 percent forecast of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP). However, it was lower than the 7.6 percent in March last year.

Driving the uptrend in overall inflation in March was the heavily weighted food and non-alcoholic beverages commodity group, which climbed to 5.6 percent in March from 4.6 percent in February.

For food alone, inflation picked up to 5.7 percent in March from 4.8 percent a month earlier.

Mapa said this was the highest food inflation since the 5.8 percent recorded in November last year.

Rice inflation climbed to 24.4 percent in March from 23.7 percent in February and was the fastest since the 24.6 percent in February 2009.

According to Mapa, the prices of the three classifications of rice such as regular-milled, well-milled and special rice tracked by the PSA registered year-on-year and month-on-month increases in March.

"Our expectation is (rice prices) will actually increase strongly until July because of base effects, unless there is really some intervention that will happen in the market that will lead to a drop in prices. We don't see any for now," he said.

While lower rice prices might start to be seen in August, he said the staple might still have double-digit inflation based on the PSA's computation.

Also contributing to the higher food inflation was meat, which increased to two percent in March from the previous month's 0.7 percent.

Other main drivers of the faster overall inflation cited by the PSA are the transport commodity group, which registered a higher uptick of 2.1 percent in March from the previous month's 1.2 percent, as well as restaurants and accommodation services with a 5.6 percent uptick last month from 5.3 percent in February.

From January to March, inflation averaged 3.3 percent, within the government's target range of two to four percent.

Core inflation, which strips off selected food and energy items, meanwhile, slowed to 3.4 percent in March from 3.6 percent in the previous month. It was also lower than the



Food inflation continued to quicken in March, hitting 5.7 percent from 4.8 percent a month ago.

eight percent booked in March 2023.

Diwa Guinigundo, former BSP deputy governor and now country analyst at GlobalSource Partners, said in a brief that the higher inflation in March was expected because there has been little progress in ensuring sufficient food supply in the country, even with monetary policy remaining tight.

"While headline inflation continues to perk up, core inflation is beginning to slow down. This means that supply-side inflation factors remain strong and the government's non-monetary measures seem lim-

ited in its mitigating impact. On the other hand, the tight monetary policy maintained by the BSP proves correct with the moderating core inflation," Guinigundo said.

With inflation settling close to the upper end of the inflation target and with the US Federal Reserve still on hold, ING senior economist Nicholas Mapa said he expects the BSP Monetary Board to keep rates unchanged at 6.50 percent.

As the BSP indicated it expects inflation to go past the upper end of the two to four percent inflation target band in the coming months

due to tight supply for agriculture products because of the El Niño-induced drought, Mapa said the BSP "may extend their pause beyond the upcoming April meeting, with the potential rate cut only likely in the second half of the year."

The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) said the government remains committed to ensuring enough food and energy supplies, while proactively addressing price fluctuations as El Niño conditions persist and La Niña is likely to pose a threat in the latter half of the year.



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Inflation From B1

"The government is closely monitoring weather conditions and their effects on the supply of key commodities, such as food and energy, to protect Filipino households from sudden price increases," NEDA Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said.

"To ensure sufficient water supply and support our farmers during the dry season, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources has been tasked with monitoring water supply in the country. Simultaneously, the Department of Agriculture is proactively extending assistance

to farmers adversely affected by the drought," Balisacan said.

The NEDA chief added that the government is starting preparations for La Niña, with the measures aimed at ensuring food and energy security, availability of clean water supply and public health and safety.

To help ease the burden of high electricity costs, the NEDA said eligible consumers could receive a 100 percent discount on their monthly bills through the government's Lifeline Rate program, which has already registered 4.9 percent of the 4.6 million Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program beneficiaries as of January this year.

With the interagency Development Budget Coordination Committee retaining its target range for inflation at two to four percent for this year until 2028, the government is optimistic monetary and non-monetary measures will rein in commodity prices and prevent future surges.

"While we continue to face multiple risks, such as potential adjustments in transportation fares, wages and service utility fees, the Marcos administration is committed to managing the country's inflation. This will be key to sustaining our growth momentum and providing a better life for our countrymen," Balisacan said.



Inflation to breach 2%-4% target in Q2 and Q3 – BSP

By LEE C. CHIPONGIAN

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) maintains that its inflation outlook could stay within the target range of two percent to four percent in the first quarter but will breach it in the second and third quarters of the year on adverse weather conditions affecting domestic agricultural production.

In a statement Friday, April 5, after the release of the March consumer price index (CPI) of 3.7 percent which was higher than February's 3.4 percent and January's 2.8 percent, the BSP said the CPI turnout is as expected and consistent with its outlook.

"The inflation outturn is consistent with the BSP expectations that inflation will likely remain within the target range in Q1 2024 due largely to negative base effects. However, inflation could temporarily accelerate above the target range in the next two quarters of the year due to the possible adverse impact of adverse weather conditions to domestic agricultural output and positive base effects," said the BSP.

The 3.7 percent was within the BSP's March CPI forecast range of 3.4 percent to 4.2 percent.

It further noted that "the risks to the inflation outlook remain tilted toward the upside."

"The upside risks to the inflation

outlook could emanate from higher transport charges, higher prices of food commodities facing supply constraints, increased electricity rates, higher global oil prices, and implementation of a legislated increase in the minimum wage," the BSP added.

The Monetary Board, the central bank's policy-making arm, will meet on Monday, April 8, for its policy rate meeting. The original schedule was April 4, but the BSP moved the date to wait for the CPI report.

The BSP said the Monetary Board "will consider the latest inflation outturn in its upcoming monetary policy meeting" and that it will continue to "support the National Government's non-monetary measures to address supply-side pressures on prices and sustain the disinflation process."

The BSP has been relying on the government's non-monetary measures to curb supply side pressures on prices particularly since the El Niño weather is expected to last longer than originally expected. The adverse impact of the weather phenomenon on agricultural production will likely hike inflation above the target range from the second quarter.

For now, inflation upside risks continue to be the higher transport charges, increased electricity rates, higher oil and domestic food prices, and the additional impact on food



(Mark Balmores/ Manila Bulletin)

prices of a strong El Niño episode, said the BSP.

As of the last Monetary Board policy meeting on Feb. 15, the BSP's risk-adjusted inflation forecast for 2024 is 3.9 percent and 3.5 percent for 2025. This will be revised next week.

The market expects the BSP will still keep the 6.5 percent benchmark rate for some time. It is unlikely that the BSP will cut its benchmark rate ahead of the US Federal Reserve (US Fed) as this might lead to sharp exchange rate fluctuations. The peso is considered stable at the moment at P55 to P56 level vis-à-vis the US dollar.

Most analysts expect the US Fed will start reducing its own interest rates by June this year.

The BSP tries to maintain an interest rate differential of 100 basis points (bps) to 150 bps between the US Fed rate and the target reverse repurchase rate or the policy rate to remove volatility pressures from the peso-US dollar spot market.

Two factors have put BSP at ease as it remained on a hold stance are the relatively better than expected gross domestic product (GDP) growth performance in 2023, and the decelerating inflation.



Inflation rate rises to 3.7% in March ◀

This figure was brought about by the increase in rice inflation from 23.7 percent to 24.4 percent during the month—almost toppling the comparable high record of 24.6 percent readout in February 2009.

It also contributed 3.7 percent to the headline inflation during the month, which nearly comprised the whole growth price increase last month.

PSA Undersecretary Claire Dennis S. Mapa said that all the price growth in the three types of rice—namely regular, well-milled, special—that they monitor rose during the month.

A kilogram of regular rice cost a consumer ₱51.11 last month, significantly higher than the ₱39.90 in March 2023 and ₱50.44 in February.

For well-milled rice, a kilogram had an average of ₱56.44 in March compared to the ₱44.23 and ₱55.93 recorded previously.

As for special rice, it soared to ₱64.75 last month from ₱54 in March 2023 and ₱64.42 in February this year.

For Filipino poor households or those whose income is below the average national income, the impact of rice was further noticeable as it contributed 80 percent to their inflation rate of 4.6 percent.

Mapa said that some rice farmlands reported damage in their irrigation systems, leading to low rice production but he ensured some farms to have better production.

Earlier, the PSA undersecretary said the uptrend in rice inflation may continue until July or August this year due to low base effect seen last year.

Meat products, particularly pork, were also noted to be a major factor in the higher inflation rate which swelled to 2.7 percent from the previous 0.7 percent.

According to the PSA monitoring chart of meat products, the average price of kasingim or pork shoulder increased to ₱329.52 last month from ₱315.29 in March 2023.

Liempo or pork belly also experienced an increase to ₱344.29 from ₱327.27, while meat with bones had an average price of ₱297.30 from ₱286.49 in March 2023.

Transport-related prices, notably oil, also increased during the month from 1.2 percent to 2.1 percent as prices jacked up during the last days of March.

In a separate statement, National Economic and Development Authority Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said that the government will continue to monitor the weather conditions and its effects on key commodities.

He also noted that they are starting preparations for La Niña which include food and energy security, availability of clean water supply, and public health

and safety.

“While we continue to face multiple risks, such as potential adjustments in transportation fares, wages, and service utility fees, the Marcos administration is committed to managing the country’s inflation. This will be key to sustaining our growth momentum and providing a better life for our countrymen,” said Balisacan.

Earlier, the Development Budget Coordination Committee, an inter-agency responsible for setting economic indicators, retained its target range for inflation at two to four percent for 2024 until 2028 while they reduced the growth target to six to seven band from the previous 6.5 to 7.5 percent.

Inflation ‘most urgent’ concern of Filipinos

Meanwhile, majority of adult Filipinos believe that controlling inflation remains the most urgent issue among the 17 national concerns identified in Pulse Asia’s March 2024 survey.

Based on the survey results, the need to control the spiraling prices of basic commodities was the only national concern considered urgent by 70 percent of Filipinos.

Pulse Asia noted that the same sentiment was mostly observed across geographic areas and socio-economic classes (67 to 77 percent and 69 to 73 percent, respectively).

“Public opinion on the matter hardly changed between December 2023 and March 2024,” Pulse Asia said in a report published on Friday, April 5.

It also found that slightly more than a third of Filipinos (36 percent) are concerned about raising workers’ wages.

A quarter of respondents, on the other hand, believe fighting government corruption (26 percent), creating more jobs (25 percent), and reducing poverty (25 percent) are urgent national concerns.

Other national concerns include helping farmers (19 percent), addressing involuntary hunger (17 percent), helping small entrepreneurs to restore their businesses (14 percent), protecting the environment (11 percent), fighting criminality (11 percent), enforcing the rule of law (10 percent), reducing taxes (10 percent), defending national territorial integrity (nine percent), and promoting peace (eight percent).

The “least often mentioned” issues were protecting the welfare of overseas Filipino workers (five percent), preparing to face terrorist threats (four percent), and changing the 1987 Philippine Constitution (one percent).

The first quarter 2024 “Ulat ng Bayan” survey, which was conducted from March 6 to 10, has gathered responses from 1,200 respondents nationwide. (With a report from Ellalyn de Vera-Ruiz)

Top 10 Contributors to Inflation (In Percentage Point)

COMMODITY GROUP	FEB 2024	MAR 2024
RICE	2.1	2.2
Food and beverage-serving service	0.5	0.5
Actual rentals for housing	0.4	0.4
Personal care	0.2	0.1
Flour, bread and other bakery products, paste	0.2	0.1
Passenger transport services	0.1	0.1
Meat and other part of slaughter land animals	0.0	0.1
Fruits and nuts	0.1	0.1
Tabacco	0.1	0.1
Water supply and miscellaneous services relating to the dwelling	0.1	0.1
SUBTOTAL	3.8	3.9
Others	-0.4	-0.2
OVERALL INFLATION	3.4	3.7

(@PCGOVPH)

Inflation rate rises to 3.7% in March

By XANDER DAVE CEBALLOS

Consumer prices accelerated for the second consecutive month, driven by faster increases in food and transportation costs, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported on Friday, April 5.

Based on the PSA report, the country’s headline inflation quickened to 3.7 percent in March this year from 3.4 percent in February. ▶5



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Agri damage hits P770M in Region 6

ILOILO CITY: The effects of the El Niño phenomenon have caused over P770 million in damages and losses to the farming and fishing industry in Western Visayas.

The Regional Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (RDRRMC) reported that as of April 4, Iloilo province bore the brunt of the damage, recording agricultural losses amounting to P519 million, followed by Antique with P130 million.

Negros Occidental reported an agricultural damage of P78 million, Aklan with P30 million, and Capiz with P12 million.

The RDRRMC also said that 1,276 hectares of croplands were totally damaged, while an additional 14,306 hectares incurred partial damage, significantly impacting the livelihoods of 20,610 farmers and fisherfolk across the region.

The Department of Social

Welfare and Development, as of March 22, has released P1.6 million or 2,959 food packs to affected families in Negros Occidental.

Meanwhile, the local government of Sibalom placed the town under a state of calamity on March 13, citing substantial losses in key crops like corn and rice, as well as the scarcity of water in various villages.

The Sibalom agriculture office reported losses amounting to P35 million in rice and P242,382 in corn, alongside reports of water shortages in eight villages.

The Antique Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council has also confirmed that the town of Anini-y is also being eyed for a declaration of a state of calamity.

Similarly, in Iloilo, the same declaration is also being considered for four towns, namely Carles, Dumangas, Barotac Nuevo, and Anilao.

RJAY ZURIAGA CASTOR



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El Niño has minimal impact in Pangasinan

BY GABRIEL CARDINOZA

LINGAYEN, Pangasinan: The El Niño phenomenon, which had caused widespread drought in many parts of the country, only had minimal effects in this agricultural province, Gov. Ramon Guico 3rd said on Friday.

"[The province was] affected, but it did not call for us to declare a crisis," Guico told reporters here.

He said that together with the Provincial Agriculture Office (PAgo) and other provincial government offices, they conducted an assessment if El Niño was a threat when it started last year.

"But it was not [a threat]. I even said to the point that since we have a lot of salt, we can do cloud seeding," Guico said.

The governor was referring to the salt harvested from the Pangasinan Salt Center, which the provincial government operates

in Bolinao town.

El Niño is characterized by unusually warmer than average sea surface temperatures at the central and eastern equatorial Pacific, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa).

Last month, Pagasa said that El Niño across the tropical Pacific Ocean had shown signs of weakening and this is expected to persist until May.

"But at least we're past that and slowly, we now experience rainfall," Guico said.

According to a report of the PAgo, due to the dry spell caused by the El Niño phenomenon the province lost 1,140 metric tons (MT) of rice, or about 0.26 percent loss.

Despite this, the province achieved a rice sufficiency level of 209.25 percent, or rice production equivalent to 830,062.18 MT. This means that Pangasinan has a surplus production of 433,382.54 MT, which is consumable for 13 months, the report said.

In addition, PAgo said the province had harvested a total of 148,493 MT of "palay" (unhusked rice) from January to February this year. The harvest is equivalent to 88,798.81 MT of clean rice, which is consumable for another three months.

Because of the rising heat index in Pangasinan, Guico advised Pangasinan mayors to call for suspension of face-to-face classes in their respective towns or cities if they feel that they have to do it.

Guico said that the heat indices

are not the same in the different places of the province, so he said, it is the call of the LGU to declare a suspension of face-to-face classes and go to the alternative mode of instruction.

"It's really hot. And our schools do not have air-conditioners, some do not even have electric fans," Guico said.

Heat index is the temperature that the body feels or the apparent temperature that gives the human body discomfort.

The Pagasa office in Dagupan City has recorded heat indices in Pangasinan ranging from 40°C to 43°C from March 30 to April 4.

Since April 2, face to face classes in public and private schools in the province were suspended, first in one town, and as of April 4, in 15 towns and cities.

Pangasinan had a long weekend starting April 5, which has been declared as a nonworking holiday for the province to celebrate its 444th foundation anniversary.



Rice prices surging as inflation hits 3.7%

By CAI U. ORDINARIO

RICE prices again jumped to a level last seen when the country had to grapple with supply issues caused by export bans imposed by rice-producing nations, according to the latest data released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

In March 2024, rice inflation accelerated to 24.4 percent, the highest since the 24.6 percent posted in February 2009. The highest rice prices recorded was 36.4 percent in July 2008.

PSA said the country's overall inflation rate was at 3.7 percent in March 2024, faster than the 3.4 percent posted in February 2024. However, inflation was slower compared to the 7.6 percent posted in March 2023.

"So, [the] expectation [is], it will actually increase strongly until sometime July because of base effects, unless there is really some intervention in the market [that will suddenly ease the] pressure. We don't see any of that now," National Statistician Claire Dennis S. Mapa said in a briefing on Friday, speaking partly in Filipino.

Asked if there is a possibility that rice prices will exceed the 15-year high, Mapa said he would rather wait for the new data to be released in the next few months before he can comment.

Nonetheless, data showed rice prices have been increasing in the double digits since September 2023, when rice prices increased 17.9 percent and started the year with a rice inflation of 22.6 percent.

Rice prices have been rising since January 2022 at 1 percent from the 0.1 deflation in December 2021 and 0.3 percent increase in January 2021.

The PSA said regular-milled, well-milled, and special rice categories all exhibited double-digit increases year-on-year and single-digit growth month-on-month.

"[In our] overall inflation for all income at 3.7 percent, rice inflation contributed 1.8 percentage points, about 48 percent of overall inflation. As for inflation for the bottom 30 percent, *dito talaga malaki* [this is really big]," Mapa said.

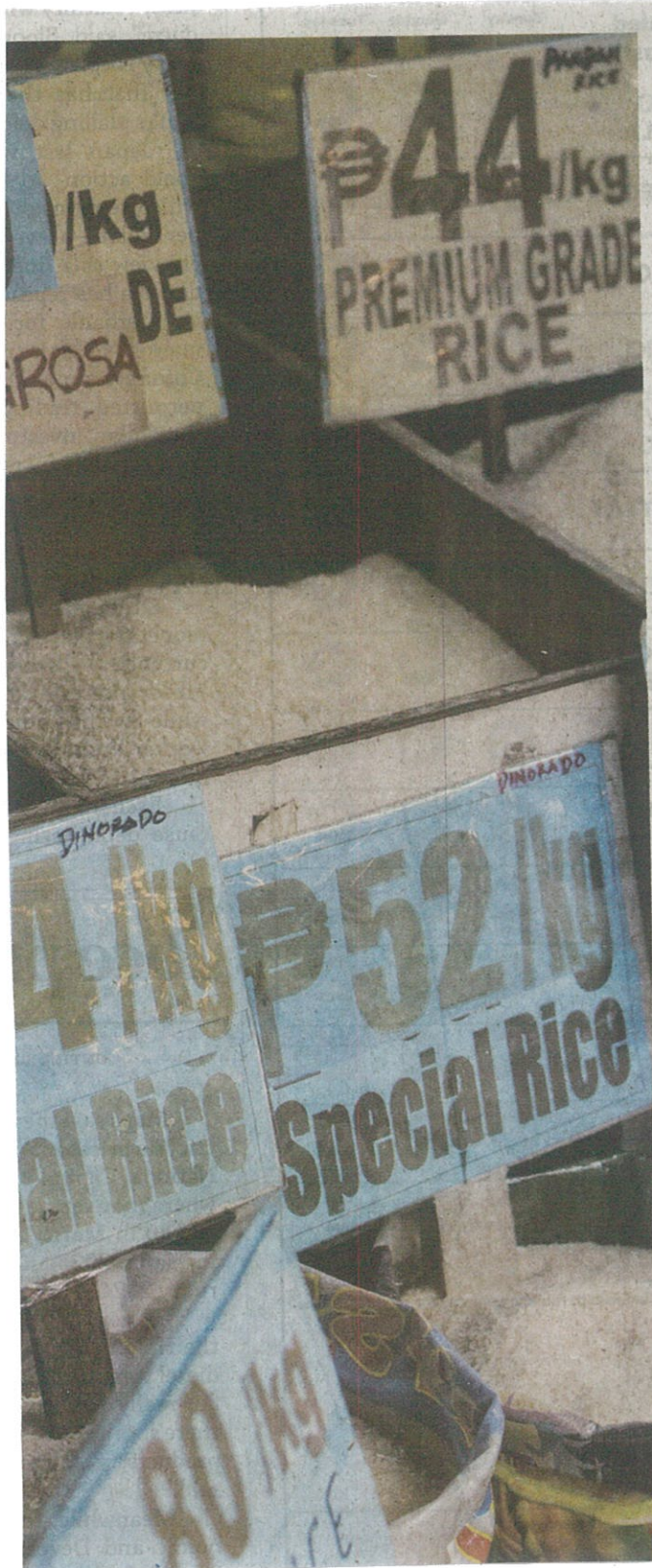
"To the inflation for the bottom 30 percent of 4.6 percent, as reported earlier, the rice inflation contributed 3.7 percentage points. So, its contribution to the March 2024 overall inflation is about 80 percent," he added.

Mapa said regular milled rice increased 28.1 percent to P51.11 per kilo in March 2024 from P39.90 per kilo in March 2023. On a month-on-month basis, there was a 1.3-percent increase from the P50.44 per kilo average in February 2024.

In terms of well-milled rice, prices grew 27.6 percent to P56.44 per kilo last month from P44.23 per kilo in the same period last year.



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NATIONAL Statistician Claire Dennis S. Mapa

On a monthly basis, the growth was 0.9 percent from P55.93 per kilo in February 2024.

Special rice prices, meanwhile, increased 19.9 percent to P64.75 per kilo in March 2024 from P54 per kilo in March 2023. Compared to February 2024, special rice prices increased 0.5 percent from P64.42 per kilo.

BSP's outlook, NG's tracking

"INFLATION could temporarily accelerate above the target range in the next two quarters of the year due to the possible impact of adverse weather conditions to domestic agricultural output and positive base effects," the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said in a statement.

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said, however, that the national government is monitoring weather conditions and their effects on the supply of key commodities, particularly food and energy.

The PSA said food and transport prices were considered the top causes for faster inflation. In terms of transport prices, PSA data showed it increased 2.1 percent on the back of a 3-percent increase in passenger transport services.

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Mapa said the main culprit was tricycle prices in Areas Outside the National Capital Region (AONCR), where the average fare increased to P17.80 in March 2024 from P17.5 in March 2023 and P17.72 in February 2024.

"If you recall, on Tuesday of the Holy Week, prices of gasoline, diesel went up. So, that's part of it. So, really from month to month, there's an increase in prices of oil products, gasoline, diesel," Mapa said.

Meanwhile, the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) said the government will closely monitor food and energy prices moving forward. Secretary Balisacan said these efforts

are crucial in protecting Filipino households from sudden price increases.

These efforts, Balisacan said, include assistance to farmers adversely affected by the drought—being done through the Department of Agriculture—and ensuring sufficient water supply of farmers.

"To ensure sufficient water supply and support our farmers during the dry season, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources has been tasked with monitoring water supply in the country," Balisacan said.

The government's chief economic planner also reported that preparations for La Niña are starting. These measures aim to ensure food and energy security, availability of clean water supply, and public

health and safety.

Moreover, to ease the burden of high electricity prices on vulnerable Filipinos, eligible consumers can receive a 100 percent discount on their monthly bills through the government's Lifeline Rate program. As of January 2024, 4.9 percent of the 4.6 million Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) beneficiaries have registered for the program.

As confirmed in a full Cabinet meeting held on April 3, 2024, the Development Budget Coordination Committee retains its target range for inflation at 2.0 to 4.0 percent for 2024 until 2028. The committee remains optimistic that the monetary and non-monetary measures will rein in commodity prices and prevent future surges.



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Fish kill naitala sa Pangasinan

Dahil sa matinding init ng panahon, ilang lugar sa Western Pangasinan ang nakapag-tala ng fish kill, ayon sa Provincial Aquaculture Industry Operation (PAIO).

Ayon kay PAIO operator Ronald Eugenio, ang teribleng init sanhi ng El Niño phenomenon at biglaang pagbuhos ng ulan ang dahilan ng pagkamatay ng mga alagang isda.

"Mild warm water is needed in fishponds.

If it is disturbed by sudden rainfall, it will result in fish mortality," ani Eugenio.

Sinabi ng opisyal na ang warm weather ay isa sa mga kinakatakutan ng mga fishpond operator dahil hindi pa harvest season ng mga isda.

Aniya, ang halaga ng nawala sa nasabing fishkill na nakaapekto milkfish growers ay kasalukuyan pang ilaalam. **(Allan Bergonia)**



BIGAS PINAKAMATAAS SIPA NG PRESYO

UMAKYAT ang inflation rate sa 3.7% nitong Marso mula sa 3.4% noong Pebrero dahil sa pagtaas ng presyo ng mga pagkain tulad ng bigas at karne.

Ang inflation ay tumutukoy sa bilis ng pagtaas ng presyo ng mga bilhin mula sa pagkain, pamasaha, petrolyo, load sa cellphone, pagpapagupit, renta, tubig, kuryente, at iba pa.

Ayon kay Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) Undersecretary Dennis Mapa, umakyat ang food inflation sa 5.6% nitong Marso mula sa 4.6% noong Pebrero at 76% ang ambag nito sa pagtaas ng inflation.

Sumipa rin ang inflation sa transportasyon kasama na gasolina, diesel, at pamasaha sa tricycle sa 2.1% mula sa 1.2%,

at 16.4% ang ambag nito sa pagtaas.

Nasa 5.8% naman ang ambag ng inflation ng mga restaurant at accommodation services na nagtala ng 5.6% mula sa 5.3%. Malaki ang epekto ng taas-presyo ng pagkain sa inflation ng mga restaurant kung saan nabibilang ang mga karinderya.

Sabi ni Mapa, nasa 24.4% ang inflation ng bigas nitong Marso at malapit na ito sa all time high na 24.6% na naitala noon pang Pebrero 2009 na 24.6%. Halos 9% ang ambag ng rice inflation sa kabuuang inflation rate at ito ang pinakamatimbang sa inflation.

Babala ni Mapa, mananatiling mataas ang inflation ng bigas hanggang sa Hulyo ngunit inaasahan namang huhupa na ito pagpasok ng Agosto.

Ayon kay Mapa, tumaa ang inflation rate sa limang kategorya: pagkain, health, transport, recreation and sports, at restaurant at accommodation services.

Bumaba naman ang inflation ng alak at sigarilyo, upa, tubig, kuryente, household maintenance, personal care at miscellaneous goods and services. Hindi gumalaw ang inflation ng damit at sapatos, information and communication, education, at financial services.

Sabi ni Mapa, pinakamataas ang inflation sa Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (BARMM) na nasa 5% nitong Marso bagamat bumaba na ito mula sa 5.3% noong Pebrero.

Pinakamababa naman ang inflation sa Ilocos Region na nasa 2.2% bagamat umakyat ito mula sa 2% noong Pebrero. Umakyat naman ang inflation sa 11 rehiyon ng bansa.

Tanging sa BARMM, Eastern Visayas, at Soccsargen lamang bumaba ang inflation. Hindi gumalaw ang inflation sa Central Luzon at sa Davao Region na kapwa nagtala ng 4.8%. (Eileen Mencias)