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## NFA fails to meet palay procurement target in Feb

By JASPER EMMANUEL ARCALAS

The National Food Authority (NFA) continues to struggle in beefing up its rice buffer stock as its buying price remains uncompetitive against private traders, worsened by lesser harvest in February.

The NFA's latest report on its palay procurement program showed that it was only able to buy 618.9 metric tons of unmilled rice, a measly 2.28 percent of its target of 27,140 metric tons.

"Decrease in procurement is due to lesser palay harvest, since February is not a harvest season hence the procured palay is just a spill over of the last cropping season," the NFA said recently.

The NFA report indicated that the buying price of private traders for dry palay remains above the P23 per kilogram maximum buying price of the state grain agency.

At present the NFA buys as much as P23 per kilogram for dry palay with P19 per kg as the base buying price and P4 per kg as incentive.

This is the second consecutive month this year that the NFA was unable to meet its palay procurement target based on its reports.

The latest report showed that the NFA's inventory as of Feb. 29 stood at 41,285 MT. The report indicated that 99.9 percent of the rice stocks in February were safe and consumable, while the remaining 0.1 percent was non-consumable.

In terms of rice distribution, the NFA accomplished 27.8 percent of its target for February. The state grains agency distributed 5,293 MT of rice versus its target of 19,047 MT.

The NFA said it distributed 4,478 MT to government agencies and local government units' rice requirement while 796 MT went to relief operations and calamity response. Some 18.25 MT were distributed to one-time rice assistance for government workers.

Last year, the

NFA faced multiple challenges in procuring palay from local farmers. It was only able to buy 78,418 MT of palay, only 15 percent of its approved target of 495,000 MT.

Some of the hindrances cited by NFA were "stiff" competition and "aggressive" buying by private traders, palay harvest did not confirm with the agency's quality standards, and the lack of post-harvest facility like mechanical dryers.



# Calamity declaration for El Niño ruled out

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

**P**RESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Monday said there was no need to declare a nationwide state of calamity for El Niño, saying the government would adopt a regional approach in dealing with the impact of the weather phenomenon.

Speaking to reporters in Bacolod City, the President said every province has its unique situation when it comes to addressing the drought and dry spell conditions induced by El Niño.

"It is not a shotgun like a one-size-fits-all. We look at each area and see what it is that they need ... that's the way we are handling the local state of calamity that the local governments are declaring," Marcos said.

He said the government has

implemented measures, such as the building of dams and the development of irrigation systems, to mitigate El Niño's impact.

"We are trying new techniques of planting. We are harvesting more palay now than we did last year despite the El Niño. So, it is taking effect," Marcos said.

Task Force El Niño spokesman Joey Villarama on Friday said that nearly 20 local government units have declared a state of calamity due to El Niño.

The calamity areas include Oriental Mindoro and some municipalities in Occidental Mindoro, Palawan, Romblon, Ifugao, Antique and Zamboanga City, Villarama said.

Majority of the areas under drought conditions are in Luzon, he said.

"There are other provinces mulling over or thinking of declaring a state of calamity, but they must meet the criteria. Fifteen percent of the population must be affected, 30 percent of livelihood must be affected, and some structures must also be affected," he added.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said losses in the agriculture sector due to the scorching heat have reached more than P2.63 billion.

Villarama said the government has distributed P1.1 billion worth of cash assistance, gas assistance, food packs and equipment to farmers and families affected by El Niño.

"The damage worth P2.63 bil-

lion cannot be offset by the P1 billion in aid, but the suffering of people affected by El Niño has been somehow alleviated. Farmers are affected, but their families, in terms of individuals, are affected too and number about half a million," he said.

According to the latest government figures, 54,203 farmers and fishers, or 105,816 families, are affected by El Niño. This translates to 512,630 individuals.

Close to 54,000 hectares of agricultural lands in Regions 1, 2, 3, the Cordillera Administrative Region, 4A, 4B, 5, 6, 9 and 12 were also affected.

Twelve cities and municipalities are experiencing water service interruptions.

The El Niño is characterized by the abnormal warming of sea surface temperature in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, coupled with below-normal rainfall.



## Palace rules out nationwide state of calamity for El Niño

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. said on Monday that the government does not see the need to declare a state of calamity nationwide for El Niño, and expressed a preference for more focused local declarations.

Provinces are affected by the drought-causing weather to varying degrees, Mr. Marcos noted.

“The problem is different in every area. It can’t be a shotgun, a one-size-fits-all approach,” he told reporters in Bacolod City, as quoted in a transcript provided by the Palace.

“So that’s the way we are handling the local states of calamity that the local governments have declared,” he added.

At least 18 cities and municipalities have declared states of calamity due to El Niño, which brings about dry spells and droughts, according to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

Agricultural damage caused by El Niño has risen to P2.63 billion, while the government has handed out assistance worth P1.1

billion, the Department of Agriculture has said.

The number of El Niño-affected provinces could hit 80 by the end of April, with the dry spell’s effects possibly lasting until June, according to the government weather service.

El Niño has triggered class suspensions in many areas, especially in the Western Visayas, due to extreme heat. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**



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MARCOS ON SEA ROW

## PH 'TRYING EVERYTHING' TO COOL DOWN WPS TENSION

By **Melvin Gascon**  
@melvingasconINQ

President Marcos on Monday said the Philippine government was "trying everything" to engage countries and cool down the tension in the West Philippine Sea (WPS) to avoid a repeat of incidents of China's aggression.

"Anything that we can do, we are doing it to get the Chinese leadership to talk, that they would not escalate the situation because we can still talk so that we will no longer have incidents [such as] the ramming or firing of water cannon," the President said on the sidelines of the ceremonial tapping of the Cebu-Negros-Panay 230-kilovolt backbone power project in Bacolod City.

Mr. Marcos, calling them nothing out of the ordinary, played down the quadrilateral military exercises on Sunday between the Philippines and allies United States, Japan and Australia that China matched with its own "combat" exercises in **A2** the South China Sea.



# PH 'TRYING EVERYTHING' TO COOL DOWN WPS TENSION

## FROM A1

"[These exercises are] par for the course. The cruises that we are doing, something [similar] has been [done before]," he pointed out.

"That's the usual reaction from the (People's Liberation Army). They would bring out their own ships. So, it's almost normal already for us, unfortunately," the President added.

He allayed some sector's concerns that the quadrilateral exercises could further raise the tension in the West Philippine Sea as Manila's line remains open to Beijing.

"We are trying everything. We still continue to talk [to China] at a ministerial level, at a subministerial level, at a people-to-people level," he noted.

Mr. Marcos said he was optimistic that the latest military exercises would help improve the Philippines' maritime capability.

"The interim reports that I am getting is that these exercises are indeed very useful in terms of the interoperability so that each navy knows how the other navy operates," he said.

The President said he hoped that these joint patrols would deter any harassment of Filipino vessels sailing within the country's exclusive economic zone.

### Cooperation among allies

In Congress, Sen. Francis Tolentino on Monday said he believed the multilateral mar-



**TRAINING WITH ALLIES** The Philippine Navy's BRP Antonio Luna leads three other participating ships during the first Multilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity between the Philippines, the United States, Australia and Japan, in the West Philippine Sea over the weekend. —ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES PHOTO

itime activity held on Sunday would become a "regular occurrence."

"It is not just a one deal or one stand-alone military patrol exercise. There will be more patrol operations with Australia and Japan. Of course, the US has always been there," he told reporters in a briefing.

Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri said he was also in favor of multilateral programs or projects that would "assist the Philippines on freedom of navigation in the WPS, on the rule of law, and in the adherence to the [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea] where all parties in the Asian region are party of, including our neighbor in the north."

According to Tolentino, the joint naval patrols will "signal a strengthened alliance with

like-minded countries and signify a commitment to mutual defense and security cooperation among allies."

He added that it would also be a "strong deterrence" that the Philippines could not be easily bullied.

Apart from the ongoing maritime cooperation, Tolentino said he was looking forward to the involvement of the country's allies, particularly the US Navy, in assisting in cloud-seeding operations in different parts of the country to help ease the impact of El Niño and help Filipino farmers.

### Call for demilitarization

"Maybe our existing cooperation with them involving humanitarian missions is not only for [the usual] calamities. El Niño is also a calamity," he said.

The opposition Bayan Muna party list, meanwhile, urged Mr. Marcos to take action to demilitarize the South China Sea in an effort to ease escalating tensions in the strategic waterway.

"The joint patrols and military exercises conducted [with] the US and Australia, who are not part of the South China Sea, which China countered with its own military exercises, could lead to further escalation of tension, which is devastating to the Filipino people," Bayan Muna chair Neri Colmenares said in the statement.

Colmenares instead urged the President to work with Vietnam, Brunei and Malaysia to file a joint UN resolution calling for the "complete demilitarization" of the South China Sea.

Armed Forces of the Philippines chief Gen. Romeo Brawner Jr. confirmed on Monday that two Chinese Navy ships were spotted a few nautical miles away from where the joint exercises were conducted.

However, Brawner said the Chinese ships did not cause any trouble during the joint drills.

He noted that the two Chinese ships were 11.11 kilometers (6 nautical miles) away from the participating ships in the joint drills, unlike their distance during the conduct of rotation and resupply missions "where they would be too close with our ships." —WITH REPORTS FROM TINA G. SANTOS, RUSSEL LORETO AND DEMPSEY REYES INQ



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## PBBM: LGUs should take lead in El Niño response

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA  
@sam\_medenilla

WITH the varying impacts of El Niño on each region, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said local government units (LGU) should take the lead in declaring a state of calamity due to water shortages.

A nationwide state of calamity by the national government is unnecessary for now, he explained, since water supply in some parts of the country are still "not critical."

"The problems faced by each area are different. It can't be a shotgun [response] or one-size-fits all...we look at each area

and see what it is that they need. So, that's what we are [doing], that's the way we are handling local state of calamity that the local governments are declaring," Marcos said in an interview with reporters in Negros Occidental on Monday.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) projected that the number of provinces with drought—the status when an area has below normal rain conditions for five consecutive months or way below rainfall conditions for three consecutive months—is expected to increase to 48 this month from 37 last March.

SEE "PBBM," A2

## PBBM...

CONTINUED FROM A1

Likewise, those with dry spells or areas, which have below normal rainfall conditions for three consecutive months or way below normal rainfall conditions for two consecutive months, are expected to increase to 24 in April from 13 in the previous month.

Last week, the Task Force El Niño (TFE) reported that almost 20 LGUs have declared a state of calamity due to water supply issues.

These include Oriental Mindoro, and some municipalities in Occidental Mindoro, Palawan, Romblon, Ifugao, Antique and Zamboanga City,

Marcos said the national government will focus its interventions, including helping farmers, in areas which have no access to irrigation.

"So, those areas, which are not covered by irrigation. Those are the areas that we look at," he said.

The TFE reported agricultural damage from El Niño has reached P2.63 billion.



# BATTLING EL NIÑO

**THE government is carrying out different approaches in tackling the effects of the El Niño phenomenon in the country, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said on Monday.**

In a media interview in Bacolod City, the President said all the regions in the country were affected by the dry spell and the response varied depending on the severity.

"Actually, ang katotohanan niyan, lahat maapektuhan. Kahit gaano kalaang magiging effect ng El Niño. It's really, ang mga probinsya sa Western side na tinatamaan, Western Luzon tapos dito, Region 6. So, those are the areas nag declareng [state of] calamity," Marcos told reporters.

"But the other areas, although ramdam parin, hindi naman critical. As a matter of fact, kasi naglagay nga tayo ng mga dam. Patuloy nating inayos ang ating irigasyon, we should, and we

are trying new techniques of planting. We are harvesting more palay now than we did last year despite the El Niño," he said.

"Hindinaman pwedeng shotgun lang, one size fits all no. So, we look at each area and see what it is that they need. So, that's what

we are, that's the way we are handling local state of calamity that the local governments are declaring," he said.

PCO





## Onion growers' situation watched

**By Jester  
Manalastas**

A House leader said the Lower Chamber is closely monitoring the current state of local farmers, particularly those producing onions.

According to House Deputy Majority Leader

ACT-CIS Party-list Representative Erwin Tulfo, the House Committee on Agriculture and other government agencies are also looking at the activities of the traders because based on the complains of the farmers they are abusive on setting prices of the agricultural prod-

ucts

"Amin pong tinitignan ngayon ang kalagayan ng ating mga local onion farmers, na tila patuloy na pinagsasamantalahan ng mga traders sa paghakot ng kanilang pananim sa hindi makatarungang halaga," Tulfo said



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## Ramadan food waste turned into fertilizer

**KUANTAN, Malaysia:** After breaking their Ramadan fast outside a mosque in Malaysia, people throw their leftovers into a machine that converts the food scraps into organic fertilizer for crops.

The modest government initiative in central Pahang state aims to reduce wastage, especially during the Muslim holy month, when huge amounts of food are thrown away daily.

The mobile machine has been deployed at a park in the heart of state capital Kuantan during Ramadan, where many families gather every evening to feast on cheap local dishes after a day of fasting.

It processes 25 kilograms (55 pounds) of scraps a day, said Sharudin Hamid, the state director of Solid Waste and Public Cleansing Management Corp., which started the pilot project last year.

The amount is a tiny fraction of the more than 13,000 tons of food sent to landfills around the Muslim-majority country every day, even more during Ramadan, but Sharudin said it was helping to increase awareness about food wastage.

"The main objective is to ensure that the waste is not sent to landfills," Sharudin told Agence France-Presse (AFP). "This has had

a significant impact on us, as people are becoming more aware of environmental conservation, especially in terms of food waste reduction."

Food scraps are thrown into the machine, where they are slowly mixed with rice husks and sawdust for 48 hours.

The brownish-colored waste is then packaged and given to farmers to use as fertilizer on their crops.

"Things that grow from that fertilizer can also become food, which again can be composted into fertilizer. So there's a natural cycle," said Abdul Shukor Mohamad Salleh, 27, as he bought local delicacies at a Ramadan food market in Kuantan, one of many across the country.

On her small plot near the city, Zulyna Mohamed Nordin, 53, sprays organic liquid fertilizer derived from the recycled food waste on her vegetable, banana and pineapple crops.

She receives 30 kg of the fertilizer every month and slightly more during Ramadan.

"I have done away from using expensive chemical inputs since June last year. This is natural, organic and boosts productivity," Zulyna told AFP. "My leafy vegetables are bigger and greener." **AFP**



## Rain, Chinese demand to boost Australia's wheat, barley planting

CANBERRA- Australian farmers are likely to plant more wheat and barley this year, thanks to Chinese demand and wet weather on the country's east coast, while canola sowing should fall amid lower profit margins and dry conditions in the west, analysts said.

Australia is the world's second largest wheat exporter and a key supplier of barley and canola, with the size of its harvests impacting global supplies and prices.

Wheat and barley production is likely to rise by several million metric tons in the 2024/25 season ending in June next year, while canola output could drop by about a million tons, analysts forecast.

"The east coast is looking really good, with lots of rain," said Ole Houe, director of advisory services at IKON Commodities in Sydney.

With sowing just getting underway, additional planting in eastern



Tracks from a tractor seen in paddocks containing crops of wheat on a property located on the outskirts of the town of Mallala, north of Adelaide. (Reuters Photo)

Australia should boost wheat area by 1 percent -3 percent and barley area by 3 percent -15 percent, while canola area could decline by 4 percent -20 percent from 2023/24, analysts estimated.

Dryness in Western Australia is likely to hit canola hardest because it is planted earlier and offers a smaller profit margin than wheat or barley.

"Canola area will be the first

to get cut ... If dry conditions (in Western Australia) push into May, we will start to see wheat and barley area pared back too," said Rod Baker at Australian Crop Forecasters in Perth. - Reuters



## Corn, wheat drop

SINGAPORE- Chicago corn prices extended losses on Monday weighed by expectations of improved US planting weather, while soybeans gained for a second straight session.

Wheat prices gave up some of the previous session's robust gains, which were triggered by tensions in the Black Sea and concerns over French crop conditions.

"Overall, US weather forecast looks favorable for corn planting," said one Singapore-based grains trader. "Early planting has started in the United States and it should pick up in the coming days."

The most-active corn contract on the Chicago Board of Trade

(CBOT) slid 0.2 percent at \$4.33-1/4 a bushel, while soybeans added 0.2 percent to \$11.87-1/2 a bushel.

Wheat lost 0.5 percent to \$5.64-1/2 a bushel.

Rains across the Midwest have boosted soil moisture, although the wet weather has delayed early field work in the central and eastern growing regions. But drier weather favorable to corn planting is likely.

Argentina's Buenos Aires Grains Exchange on Friday trimmed its forecast for the 2023/24 season's corn crop to 52 million metric tons, citing damage from the Spiroplasma bacteria and saying it could not rule out further cuts. - Reuters