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## PH ends ban on poultry imports from two US states

By GABRIELL CHRISTEL GALANG

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has lifted the temporary ban on the entry of domestic and wild birds from Iowa and Minnesota, United States into the Philippines.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. had imposed the ban last year in response to an avian influenza outbreak in the two US states as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of the virus domestically.

Tiu Laurel ordered on

Tuesday, March 26, that live poultry, poultry products, and by-products like day-old chicks and hatching eggs can be imported to the Philippines effective immediately unless revoked by the DA.

"This decision was based on the official report of US veterinary authorities to the World Organization of Animal Health [WOAH] that all affected counties in Iowa and Minnesota had been free of the highly pathogenic avian influenza cases since January 10 this year," he said.



## Aquaculture reallocation to keep fish prices stable

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it supports the decision of the Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) to reallocate more areas of the country's largest fresh water lake for aquaculture as this can help stabilize fish prices.

The LLDA earlier this week published a January resolution modifying the allocation of 9,200 hectares of Laguna de Bay devoted to aquaculture, setting aside 53 percent of the area for small fishermen and 47 percent to private corporations.

Prior to the modification, small fishermen were allotted 60 percent of

the aquaculture area and 40 percent for private firms.

This effectively reduces the area small fishermen could use for aquaculture by 644 hectares to 4,876 hectares.

"This move by LLDA, an attached agency of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, will surely increase the production of fish in Laguna Lake and hopefully maintain the prices of bangus and big head carp, if not lower them a bit," said Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

DA said the Bureau of Fisheries and

Aquatic Resources (BFAR) is ready to assist small fishermen who may be adversely affected by the LLDA decision.

Tiu Laurel said as early as January, BFAR has been ordered to check the lake's water quality and measure its capacity.

DA, citing data from the LLDA, said the Laguna Lake currently has a total area of 90,000 hectares that produces as much as 90,000 tons of fresh water fish a year and provides livelihood to about 13,000 fishermen and remains a major food source for millions of residents of Metro Manila and nearby provinces. *-Jed Macapagal*



## DA lifts ban on poultry from Iowa, MN

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has lifted the temporary ban on the entry of domestic and wild birds from Iowa and Minnesota, following updates that bird flu incidence in the affected states were resolved, as reported to the World Organization of Animal Health (WOAH).

In a related move, the declared Sultan Kudarat province as officially free of avian influenza (AI), easing the restriction on the movement of chickens, ducks, and other poultry and poultry products within and beyond the province's borders.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the order lifting the ban will take effect immediately and re-

main in force until revoked.

The DA enforced the ban in 2023 due to the outbreak of avian influenza (AI) in the two states.

The US continues to be a major source of poultry products for the Philippines with total exports of poultry meat and products reaching \$180.5 million in 2023.

The clean bill of health came after more than 90 days of extensive cleaning, disinfection, and rigorous testing, the DA said.

The restriction period has surpassed the WOAH guidelines, ensuring a complete eradication of the AI threat. **Othel V. Campos**



## Chinese chopper harass, hurt marine scientists off Pag-asa

FILIPINO scientists and researchers conducting a marine resource assessment on Pag-asa Island in the West Philippine Sea were hurt by the debris caused by a Chinese Navy helicopter hovering low over them on Sandy Cay this weekend, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources said.

Also, a BFAR crew manning an underwater drone almost drowned because he could not come out of the water due to the strong winds generated by the helicopter. The person was eventually rescued by a colleague, the bureau added.

The harassment happened on the same day that China Coast Guard vessels fired water cannon at the Philippine resupply boat *Unaizah* May 4 during the rotation and resupply mission in Ayungin Shoal, injuring three Filipinos.

*Next page*

### Chinese...

*From A1*

In a video released by BFAR, a People's Liberation Army Navy helicopter with tail number 57 was seen hovering above Sandy Cay 3 and 4 and monitoring the Filipinos' activity.

The research team was made up of researchers from the BFAR, the University of the Philippines Institute of Biology, and the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute.

The helicopter continued to hover close to the sand bar, where some researchers were conducting their assessment.

According to BFAR personnel, the researchers were frightened after the helicopter started to drop to as low as 50 feet from the ground for about 10 minutes.

Some of the scientists and BFAR crew sustained cuts and scratches from the debris kicked up by the strong wind from the hovering chopper.

The research divers also reported hearing "ping" sounds with three-second intervals while diving at Cay 3.



# NFA steps up palay procurement operations

By Othel V. Campos

**T**HE National Food Authority (NFA) is boosting its palay procurement operations with an eye on at least 300,000 metric tons this year pursuant to its buffer stocking policy to be able to meet increased demands during the lean months and in times of calamities.

The agency said since Sept. 20 last year, it has increased its buying price for clean and dry palay to P23.00 per kilogram (kg). It also buys fresh palay with a moisture content of 22-29 percent at P19/kg.

NFA acting administrator Larry Lacson said a key strategy to compete with private traders is to collaborate with local government units (LGUs) through the Palay Marketing Assistance Program for Legislators and Local Government Units (PALLGU).

The program allows LGUs to contribute additional funds, thereby boosting the NFA's buying price.

Camarines Norte, for instance, is one of the LGUs actively working with the NFA to heighten palay procurement and boost the national inventory.

The province agreed to supplement the NFA's buying price by P5 per kilogram, following the signing of a memorandum of agreement (MOA) last Feb. 27 to enforce the PALLGU program.

With the MOA in place, farmers get to sell their produce for clean and dry palay in Camarines Norte at P24 to P28/kg. for wet or fresh harvest.

Lacson said other LGUs across the country contribute to the NFA's procurement program.

The provinces of La Union, Bukidnon, and cities and municipalities like Zamboanga City, Midsayap in North Cotabato, Cagayan City in Oriental Mindoro, Candon in Ilocos Sur, Malolos in Bulacan and Conner in Apayao have also started offering premiums ranging from P1 to P5 per kilogram.



# DOST: Brace for longer dry spell before La Niña

FROM A1

By Melvin Gascon  
@melvingasconINQ

Filipinos must brace for a longer duration of the dry spell and continue their water-conservation measures as the El Niño weather phenomenon shifts to a La Niña in the coming months, Secretary Renato Solidum Jr. of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) said on Tuesday.

"The [effects of] El Niño in the tropical Pacific continues to weaken but the impacts [such as] hotter and drier conditions will continue. Although El Niño will transition to neutral by April to June 2024, there is also the increasing probability of La Niña at 62 percent in June to August," he said at a press briefing in Malacañang after a sectoral meeting with President

Marcos on the government's response to the extreme weather condition.

## Opposite effect

La Niña is a weather phenomenon that has the opposite effect of El Niño, wherein trade winds are stronger than usual, pushing more warm water and increased rainfall toward the Asian region, thus raising the risks of floods and landslides in vulnerable areas.

According to Solidum, however, a predeveloping La Niña, which is characterized by below-normal rainfall, would likely cause a delay in the onset of the rainy season, worsening the effects of the prevailing El Niño.

"If we look at the impacts of the ongoing El Niño starting October [last year], we have seen some provinces are under a dry spell; but up to March, we have seen an increasing num-



LOST SEASON Severe heat due to El Niño has dried up farms, such as this one in Imus, Cavite, in this photo taken on March 2. The government expects the dry spell to linger as El Niño transitions to La Niña by June. —RICHARD A. REYES

ber of provinces affected by dry spells and drought," he said.

## Water lack to persist

Citing data from the weather bureau, Solidum said that as of Sunday, 37 provinces have experienced drought condi-

tions, while 17 provinces were under a dry spell and 13 others under a dry condition.

According to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa), a drought prevails over an area that has

experienced up to five straight months of below normal amounts of rainfall.

A dry spell is declared in an area if it has seen three months of a 60-percent reduction in rainfall, and a dry condition is when it has two to three months of below-normal rainfall.

Solidum said Pagasa forecasts that by April, more than 60 percent of the country would experience below normal amounts of rainfall—a condition that could persist until May.

"By May, it will be 54 provinces to be affected by drought and 10 [under] dry spell," he said.

Solidum said the government was bracing for the effects of a prolonged drought through the mitigation of a water shortage.

"There's still a lack of water and so the lack of water will be the main factor for the different

responses of both the government and the public," he said.

## Data for public use

According to Solidum, President Marcos has directed government agencies to continue doing the operations for El Niño preparedness while keeping in mind that they need to prepare for La Niña in the second half of the year.

The President has also ordered the activation of the El Niño Southern Oscillation Online Platform, a centralized repository of data for understanding, monitoring and addressing the impacts of El Niño and La Niña.

"It's a website so [users] don't need to download. But it's very easy to use. You can see interactive maps... the forecast and the actual El Niño events, the affected areas... [as well as] conservation strategies for both water and electricity," he said.



## DOST SEES PROLONGED DRY SPELL

### FROM A2

Once La Niña fully sets in, the country would experience more destructive typhoons caused by stronger winds and heavier rains, according to Analiza Solis, head of Pagasa's climatology and agrometeorology division.

"So these are two things that we need to watch out for in the possible arrival of La Niña—either the typhoons are rain-bearing or will pack stronger winds, especially during the southwest monsoon season," she said.

However, Solis said they were expecting fewer typhoons making landfall this year, but warned that the lead time to prepare for any typhoon could be shorter as the weather disturbances might form nearer the Philippine landmass.

Solis said that between 13 and 16 typhoons were forecast for 2024, or below the annual average of 19 to 20.

"There is always the possibility of destructive typhoons, not only in terms of strong winds but also potentially heavier rainfall, so that is what we need to prepare for given the combined effects" of the incoming La Niña and the fading El Niño pattern, Solis noted.

### Gov't aid not enough

Meanwhile, the peasant women's group Amihan on Tuesday called out the government's response to the El Niño crisis, calling it "useless and criminally neglectful" since the financial aid was

too little and generally lacked preparation.

Amihan noted the P1.75 billion worth of damage the dry spell had so far wrought on agriculture.

"Instead of a comprehensive plan from the government and the DA (Department of Agriculture), to think this extreme drought was already forecast last year, only credit assistance has been offered by the government," Cathy Estavillo, secretary general of Amihan, said in a statement.

The group also found the P3,000 to P5,000 financial aid given to farmers to be too small compared to their expenses which can reach P60,000 per hectare per cropping season.

### Iloilo damage

It demanded proper compensation for all the crops that were irreversibly damaged and financial aid for farmers whose fields can still be saved.

In Iloilo province, the damage to crops (mainly rice and corn) and fisheries due to El Niño has been placed at P526.61 million.

Gov. Arthur Defensor Jr. said the provincial government was considering giving affected farmers some pigs to raise as livestock or alternative crops not requiring much water.

The provincial board now wants to declare a state of calamity so it can access the quick response fund to help farmers, he said. —WITH REPORTS FROM RUSSEL LORETO, JACOB LAZARO AND JOEY MARZAN INQ





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## SUCCESSIVE CASES OF CRUELTY TO PETS CITED

# POE PUSHES BILL GIVING ANIMAL WELFARE LAW MORE TEETH

By **Tina G. Santos**  
@santostinaINQ

Sen. Grace Poe urged her colleagues on Tuesday to immediately act on a proposed measure that seeks to revise the Animal Welfare Act as another case of animal cruelty sparked outrage when a still unidentified person mutilated the ears of a pair of 10-month-old shih tzus in Legazpi City.

The incident happened even before the furor could die down over last week's killing of a golden retriever named Killua in Camarines Sur province.

"It is disheartening to hear more cases of torture, neglect and maltreatment of animals after we pushed for the amendment of the Animal Welfare Act in the Senate," Poe said in a statement.

"We hope that the strong public reception to our cause is well-received by our col-



Grace Poe —SENATE PRIB

leagues in Congress for them to immediately act on the proposed measure," she added.

Poe also welcomed Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri's commitment to make the measure a priority in the chamber.

In a viral post on social media, the owner of the shih tzus, Maris Icleo Aguilar, said she arrived home past 1 p.m. on Wednesday in Barangay 8-Bagumbayan to find the

dogs weak and bloodied.

One of them, Luna, had one ear missing, while the other one, Bonbon, had both ears cut off.

Aguilar believed that a burglar entered her house, where only the dogs were around, and lashed out at the pair upon finding nothing valuable to steal.

### Deterrent sought

Senate Bill (SB) No. 2458 seeks a revised Animal Welfare Act to strengthen animal welfare standards, policies, rules and regulations, implementation and enforcement, and impose tougher penalties on violators. It is now pending in the Senate committee on agriculture.

Poe said she hopes to pass the measure soon and put an end to despicable incidents involving animals.

Under SB 2458, an Animal Welfare Bureau with city, municipal, provincial and region-

al offices will be created and placed under the Department of Agriculture.

Any person found subjecting any animal to cruelty, maltreatment or any of the prohibited acts under the measure faces a penalty of imprisonment from one year and six months to three years, and a fine of not less than P30,000 but not over P100,000.

Abandoning animals, operating an animal facility without permits and using animals for shows, research or scientific purposes without the required permits will also be penalized.

Those who engage in dog meat trading face a penalty of not less than P5,000 per dog and imprisonment of one to four years or both, according to the measure.

"There are cases of animal cruelty everywhere we turn. It is time for us to provide more teeth to the law to stop the abuse," Poe said. INQ



## Rice imports as of mid-March 886,963 MT

By **JASPER EMMANUEL ARCALAS**

The country's rice imports as of mid-March have surpassed the total volume recorded in the entire first quarter of last year by a double-digit rate, to over 880,000 metric tons, government data showed.

Latest Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) data showed that rice imports from Jan. 1 to March 14 reached 886,963.112 metric tons, about 10.6 percent over the 801,732.019 MT recorded in the first three months of last year.

Of the total volume arrived, more than half or about 493,962.72 MT came from Vietnam, which has been the Philippines' top supplier since the domestic rice trade regime was liberalized in 2019.

It was followed by Thailand at 230,559.43 MT and Pakistan at 109,803.5

MT, based on BPI data.

The BPI data also showed that the country also imported rice from the following countries: Myanmar (48,960 MT), Cambodia (1,620 MT), Japan (1,815.37 MT), India (235.5 MT) and Italy (6.6 MT).

BPI data indicated that 109 eligible entities imported the 886,963.112 MT recorded volume as of March 14.

The top rice importer during the reference period was Orison Free Enterprise Inc. at 103,408.35 MT, followed by BLY Agri Venture Trading at 55,419.99 MT, based on BPI data.

Meanwhile, the BPI issued 424 sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances (SPSICs) from March 1 to 13 with a corresponding total import volume of 358,188.5 MT.

The import clearances are required before any eligible entity can import rice.

Under present rules and regulations, the approved rice import must enter the country within 30 days after the SPSIC was issued.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) hiked its rice import forecast for the Philippines this year to 4.1 million MT (from its estimate of 3.9 million MT in February), the most in the country's history, to meet its growing demand for the staple as local production contracts due to El Niño.

The USDA hiked its import forecast for the Philippines due to foreseen "smaller crop" harvest. Given the new rice import forecast, the Philippines is projected to remain the world's largest importer of the grain for the second consecutive year.

If the import forecast materializes, it would be the first time that the country's rice imports reach a 4-million MT mark.



# Marcos wants more dams built

**BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE**

**P**RESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. wants more dams to be constructed to ensure the country's water supply, the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) said Tuesday.

NIA Administrator Eduardo Guillen said building additional dams would address several issues simultaneously.

"What the President wants now is for us to build high dams so that we will have a long-term solution. He said, 'When you have a high dam, you have

flood control, you have irrigation, you have power generation, aquaculture. What more can you ask?' So, this is the focus of our President," Guillen said at a Palace press briefing, noting many of the country's dams like Magat and Pantabangan were aging.

"That is what we are doing now because every time we have water problems, it is because the big dams we depend on, Magat and Pantabangan, were built way back in the time of Marcos Sr. Pantabangan is turning 50 years in September. Unfortunately, following administrations did not construct projects of such nature," he added.

Guillen said Marcos expects three to five large dams to be finished before his term ends in 2028, which include the Tumauni River Multipurpose

Project in Cagayan Valley, the Panay River Basin in Panay Island, and several more in the Ilocos Region.

The NIA chief added that the construction of 10 medium dams was expected to be finished by the end of 2024 or early 2025.

Guillen said these were on top of

around 20 medium-scale irrigation projects the NIA was tasked to construct across the archipelago during Marcos' term.

He added that the NIA was developing solar-powered irrigation for farmers in remote areas that had yet to be reached by the government's irrigation system.



## El Niño effects to be felt until Aug

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

WHILE there is now a 62 percent chance that the country will experience the La Niña phenomenon by June this year, the effects of the ongoing El Niño phenomenon, such as drought, would continue to be felt until August, Science and Technology Secretary Renato Solidum Jr. said yesterday.

El Niño is described as an abnormal warming of sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean and below normal rainfall.

Solidum, in a briefing after the sectoral meeting in Malacañang on the El Niño situation and outlook for La Niña, cited projections of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and As-

tronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) that the impacts of El Niño will continue to be felt throughout the country.

He said that for April, the PAGASA has said that 48 provinces will be affected by drought and 24 provinces will be under a dry spell.

The numbers will increase to 54 provinces affected by drought and 10 provinces affected by dry spell in May.

"The drought-affected provinces will continue to persist based on DOST-PAGASA's outlook - 25 (provinces) by June, 23 (provinces) by July, and 10 (provinces) by August," Solidum said.

As of March 24, he said, 37 provinces are

See EL NIÑO ► Page B3

## EL NIÑO

experiencing drought, 17 provinces under a dry spell, and 13 provinces with dry conditions.

Solidum said that as El Niño transitions to neutral between April to June, there is a 62 percent probability of La Niña occurring between June to August - up from the 55 percent projection made in early March.

La Niña is described as having above-normal rainfall conditions.

Solidum said that historically, the pre-developing La Niña period brings below normal rainfall, so there will likely be a slight delay in the onset of the rainy season.

"Hence, we need to continue doing the operations for El Niño preparedness but also keeping in mind that we need to prepare for La Niña in the second half of the year," he said.

DOST-PAGASA's Analiza Solis said that with the continuing El Niño and expected La Niña, they are projecting around 13 to 16 typhoons this year, which is below the average 19 to 20 typhoons that hit the country every year.

As this developed, President Marcos Jr. ordered the activation of the El Niño Southern Oscil-

lation Online Platform (ENOP), a centralized repository of data created by the DOST for understanding, monitoring and addressing the impacts of El Niño and La Niña.

"The public can actually look at the platform to know more about these different sectors, what the government agencies are doing. But they can also look at information materials that can help them prepare for El Niño and later on, La Niña and to make sure that they contribute to the preparedness of their communities for these hazards," Solidum said.

He said the public can also contribute by reporting, through the website, their personal observations.

He said the website will show

the forecast and the actual El Niño affected areas.

### DAMS

In the same briefing, National Irrigation Administration (NIA) Administrator Eduardo Eddie Guillen said the President wants more "high dams" put up through-

out the country as part of the long-term solutions for water needs, especially for irrigation, aquaculture and supply; for power generation, and for flood control, among others.

Guillen said existing high dams in the country, among them the Pantabangan Dam, are about 100 meters high, are limited, and

already about 50 years old.

Asked how many dams can be completed by the end of the term of the President in 2028, Guillen estimated around 20 "medium dams" and three to five high dams.

He said at present, the NIA is planning to build the Tumauni Dam in Isabela, and a dam each in

Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur.

He said there are also ongoing dam projects in the Visayas, such as the Jalaur Dam, and another one near the Panay River Basin, as well as in Mindanao, such as the Antung Dam located near the Pulangi River, and the Malmar and Malmar II dams in Lower Malitubog.



## Rice imports at mid-March exceed 1<sup>st</sup> quarter 2023 total

THE PHILIPPINES imported 886,963.11 metric tons (MT) of milled rice as of March 14, exceeding the first-quarter total for 2023, the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) reported.

The mid-March shipments were 10.6% ahead of the pace of the first quarter 2023 total, pointing to a substantial pickup in imports this year.

Inbound shipments between March 1 and 14 period amounted to 118,796.62 MT.

The US Department of Agriculture projects Philippine rice imports to hit 4 million MT this year, downgrading its earlier projection of 4.1 million MT,

when it had been expecting a smaller domestic crop on the assumption of a severe El Niño.

The BPI reported that Vietnam remained the country's top supplier of rice, accounting for 55.7% of imports with 493,962.72 MT.

In January, the Vietnamese government signed a memorandum of understanding to supply the Philippines with 1.5 million to 2 million MT of rice annually for five years.

Thailand supplied 230,559.43 MT during the period, or 26% of all shipments.

Meanwhile, the volume of rice imports from Pakistan during the period totaled 109,803.5 MT, accounting for 12.4%.

Rounding out the top five sources were Myanmar and Cambodia which accounted for 48,960 and 1,620 MT of rice imports, respectively.

Meanwhile, the National Food Authority (NFA) said that it signed a memorandum of agreement with various local government units (LGUs) for its palay procurement for the dry season harvest.

In a statement, the NFA said: "One of the strategies of NFA to compete with private traders is tapping the help of

LGUs to add a premium to the NFA's buying price through Palay Marketing Assistance Program for Legislators and Local Government Units," NFA Administrator Larry R. Lacson said.

The participating LGUs include the provinces of Camarines Norte, La Union and Bukidnon, as well as cities and municipalities of Zamboanga, Midsayap, Cotabato; Calapan, Oriental Mindoro; Malolos, Bulacan; and Conner, Apayao.

According to the NFA, the LGUs agreed to add a premium of up to P5 to the NFA's palay buying price to support farmers. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**



## Chances of La Niña setting in by June now at 62% — DoST

THE Department of Science and Technology (DoST) said on Tuesday that the chance of La Niña taking over in June is now seen at 62%, though the effects of El Niño dry spells could still be felt until August.

“That percentage increases as we move to the latter half of the year,” Science and Technology Secretary Renato U. Solidum told a Palace briefing.

“So, government agencies will continue to implement the El Niño actions and of course later on, transition into preparing for La Niña.”

He said 48 provinces are expected to be affected by drought, and 24 by dry spells. He added that by May 54 provinces will be affected by drought.

At a separate briefing, National Irrigation Administration (NIA) Administrator Eduardo G. Guillen said farmers have increased rice and corn production amid the dry conditions caused by El Niño.

Citing the Philippine Statistics Authority, he said rice and corn production rose 5.9% and 1.1% respectively in the first quarter.

Last week, the Department of Agriculture said damage to agriculture has been valued at P1.75 billion due to intensifying El Niño conditions, displacing at least 29,437 farmers across 32,231 hectares of affected land.

Mr. Guillen noted that the NIA has watered about 99% of irrigated land in response.

He added that farmers have been planting high-value crops such as corn in non-irrigated tail-end areas to maximize land usage.

“Our pronouncement ever since is what we call alternate wetting and drying technology which will greatly help irrigation since we get to save about 30% of water,” he said.

Mr. Guillen said the NIA hopes to build 20 medium-sized dam projects and between three and five larger projects within the term of President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.

He said the President wants more high dams to address the country’s water supply issues. — **John Victor D. Ordonez**



## NIA set to do new cropping calendar, focused on dry season, to boost rice yield

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA

[@sam\\_medenilla](#)

**T**O help boost rice production, the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) is set to finally implement the new dry season-focused cropping calendar this year.

"We will start the actual implementation this October," NIA Administrator Eddie G. Guillen told reporters in an interview with reporters in Malacañang last Tuesday.

Under the proposed cropping calendar, the planting of crops will be scheduled during the dry season instead of the wet season.

"Because when it is the dry season, there is a higher yield. Second, there is also no typhoon. The only challenge there is we are able to provide sufficient irrigation. For those areas, which are not irrigated,

we can plan corn," Guillen said.

He said 99 percent of the country already has irrigation.

Guillen said they are also using the alternate wetting and drying (AWD) planting strategy to reduce water usage during the dry season.

The NIA chief said President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. is pushing for changing the cropping season, a move backed by the results of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). This showed rice production rose by 1.1 percent and corn production by 5.9 percent last February despite the low rainfall caused by El Niño.

"This is what our President wants. To boost our yield and production. So he said we should study if there could be two cropping seasons so that the rainy season will be just a bonus [planting period]. That is the plan of the NIA," Guillen said.



## RICE OUTPUT UP

FARMERS have increased their rice and corn production despite the El Niño phenomenon through the use of a farming strategy which optimizes water use, the administrator of the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) bared on Tuesday.

"May lumabas po na PSA (Philippine Statistics Authority) report lately lamang na ang sinasabi po nitong production natin nitong El Niño time natin, nitong first quarter ay tumaas po iyong production natin ng palay despite na bumaba nga iyong ating nataniman ng palay," NIA Administrator Eduardo Guillen said in a press briefing in Malacañang.

"Hindi lang iyon, pati iyong corn production natin ang laki ng itininaas ano po—mga 5.9 percent kung hindi ako nagkakamali," he further noted.

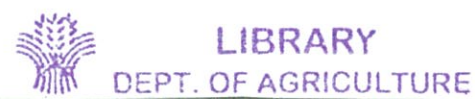
During a harvest festival in Guimba, Nueva Ecija, this week, Guillen said one farmer

harvested at least 12 tons of palay for every hectare, which shows increasing yield with the use of the alternate wetting and drying (AWD) planting strategy. Some farmers even harvested as high 19 metric tons per hectare, he added.

For some, a 969 square meter of land produced 32 cavans of palay. A cavan is a quantity of rice, palay or corn placed in a sack weighing 50 kilos. "Makita ni Presidente itong ginagawa natin dito, eh matutuwa 'yun. Kita mo 'to ah, El Niño pa," said one festival participant in a video recording.

"At sa ating experience, ito po ay tumataas din ang yield ng ating mga farmers by... ito pong AWD technology natin. So, itong report na nga ng PSA na ito ay nagpapatunay po doon sa ating direction at iyong tama po ang ating ginagawa at ipagpapatuloy po natin iyon, itong sistema na ito," he stressed. **PCO**





# Pinoy scientists, researchers 'hinarass' ng China - BFAR

Hinarass umano ng Chinese helicopter noong weekend ang grupo ng Filipino scientists at researchers na nagsasagawa ng marine resource assessment sa Pag-asa Island dahilan para masugatan ang ilan sa mga ito.

Sa video na ipinalabas ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), makikita ang People's Liberation Army Navy helicopter na may tail number 57 na umaaligid sa taas ng Sandy Cay 3 at 4 at

### NI ANGIE DELA CRUZ

patuloy na sinusubaybayan ang ginagawa ng research team ng BFAR kasama ng mga scientist ng UP Institute of Biology, at National Fisheries Research and Development Institute (NFRDI).

Sinasabing pinilit ng helicopter na makalapit sa sandbar na kinaroroonan ng mga researchers.

Natakot umano ang mga researchers nang bumaba ang helicopter nang may 50

talampakan mula sa lupa, sa loob ng halos 10 minuto.

Dahil dito, nasugatan ang ilang scientists at BFAR crew dahil sa malakas na hampas ng malakas na hangin at debris.

Muntik na ring malunod ang isang BFAR crew na nangangasiwa sa underwater drone dahil hindi siya makaalis sa tubig bunsod ng malakas na hanging dulot ng helicopter pero nasagip naman ito ng kanyang mga

### El Niño mararamdaman hanggang Agosto - DOST

kasamahan.

Nakarinig din umano ang mga research divers ng "ping" sounds na may tatlong segundong pagitan habang sumisisid sa Cay 3.

Dahil sa insidente, pinalik ng mission commander ang research team.

Naganap ang harassment sa parehong araw na binomba ng China Coast Guard vessels ng tubig ang Philippine resupply boat Unaizah May 4 sa rotation and resupply mission sa Ayungin Shoal.

Mararamdaman hanggang sa Agosto ang epekto ng El Niño sa bansa.

Sinabi ni Department of Science and Technology (DOST) Secretary Renato Solidum Jr. sa press briefing sa Malacañang, na magpapatuloy ang El Niño mula Abril hanggang Agosto.

Ayon kay Solidum, mayroong 48 lalawigan ang maapektuhan ng drought o tagtuyot, 24 dry spell, subalit pagsapit ng Mayo ay magiging 54 lalawigan ang maapektuhan ng tagtuyot at 10 dry spell.

Halos magkatulad lang anya kung pagsasamahin ang drought at dry spell subalit ang mga lalawigan na maapektuhan ng drought ay magpapatuloy base sa pagtaya ng DOST-PAGASA na Hunyo 25, Hulyo 23 at Agosto 10.

Paliwanag pa ni Solidum na mayroong mga lalawigan na apektado at pinagsamang epekto ng El Niño at paghahanda sa La Niña.

Dahil dito kaya kailangan na anya na ituloy ang operasyon para sa El Niño at dapat din na maghanda para sa La Niña sa kalahatian ng taon.

Nauna nang sinabi ni Solidum na 62% ang tsansa

na makaranas ang bansa ng La Niña sa Hunyo.

"Although the El Niño will transition to neutral by April, May, June 2024 season, there is also the increasing probability of La Niña at 62% in June, July, August season," ayon pa kay Solidum.

Ang El Niño phenomenon ay abnormal na pag-init ng temperatura ng dagat sa central at eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean at below normal rainfall, habang ang La Niña ay above normal rainfall conditions na mayroong epekto na mga pagbaha at landslides.

(Gemma Garcia)



**Sa kabila ng El Niño..**  
**Mataas na produksyon ng**  
**bigas naitala ng Pinas - NIA**

Inihayag nitong Martes ng National Irrigation Administration (NIA) na pinataas ng mga magsasaka ang kanilang produksyon ng palay at mais sa kabila ng El Niño phenomenon sa pamamagitan ng paggamit ng diskarte sa pagsasaka na nag-optimize sa paggamit ng tubig.

"May lumabas po na PSA (Philippine Statistics Authority) report lately alam na ang sinasabi po nitong production natin nitong El Niño time natin, nitong first quarter ay tumaas po iyong production natin ng palay despite na bumaba na iyong nataniman ng palay," pahayag ni NIA Administrator Eduardo Guillen sa isang press briefing sa Malacañang.

"Hindi lang iyon, pati iyong corn production natin ang laki ng itinaas ano po - mga 5.9 percent kung hindi ako nagkakamali," dagdag pa nito.

Sa isang harvest festival sa Guimba, Nueva Ecija, nitong linggo, sinabi ni Guillen na ang isang magsasaka ay umaani ng hindi bababa sa 12 tonelada ng palay sa bawat ektarya, na nagpapakita ng pagtaas ng ani sa paggamit ng alternate wetting and drying (AWD) planting strategy. Ilang magsasaka pa nga ang umani ng hanggang 19 metric

tons kada ektarya, dagdag niya.

Para sa ilan, ang isang 969 metro kuwadrado ng lupa ay gumawa ng 32 cavan ng palay. Ang cavan ay isang dami ng bigas, palay o mais na inilalagay sa isang sako na tumitimbang ng 50 kilo.

"Makita ni Presidente itong ginagawa natin dito, eh matutuwa 'yun. Kita mo 'to ah, El Niño pa," pahayag ng isang festival participant sa isang video recording.

Ayon sa hepe ng NIA, nagawa ng ahensya na patubigan ang 99 porsiyento ng mga irigasyon na lugar sa bansa sa simula ng tagtuyot, na nag-iwan lamang ng isang porsiyento na hindi natubigan.

Upang mapakinabangan ang paggamit ng lupa, ang mga magsasaka ay nagtanim ng mga matataas na halaga ng mga pananim tulad ng mais sa non-irrigated tail-end area.

"And, then, ang aming pronouncement noon pa ay itong ating ginagawang alternate wetting and drying technology ay malaking tulong po para mapababa ang... mas marami ang ating mapatubigan kasi nakakatipid tayo ng around 30 percent ng tubig," sabi ni Guillen. (Gemma Garcia)

# Tackling food insecurity: Effects on school-age children's nutrition and academic performance

**S**CHOOL-AGE children should have three meals, plus snacks between meals, every day, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Breakfast is important particularly if a child has to walk a long way to school and does not eat much at midday. FAO recommends that children must be given a snack in the mid-morning to keep their energy up for play and study.

Meals in the middle of the day should be as nutrient-rich as possible. Parents are urged to give children food to take to school like bread, sweet potato, plus an egg and fruit. The evening meal should also be healthy and could consist of fiber-rich foods, such as rice, small amounts of meat and fish, and plenty of fruits.

In a country like the Philippines, however, having three meals a day and snacks in between is more of an aspiration than a reality for many school children. A study released by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in December 2023 would attest to this. While it was not the focus of its evaluation, results of its 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) also revealed that more than a third of students in the Philippines reported not eating at least once a week due to lack of money.

OECD said a new question about food insecurity was included in the student questionnaire in PISA 2022. Results showed that in all PISA-participating countries there are 15-year-old students who suffer from food insecurity or those who had to skip one or more meals a week in the month prior to PISA because they did not have enough money to buy food. Data indicated that the proportion of food-insecure students in some rich countries like the United Kingdom and the United States was in double digits.

The OECD study noted that all countries where at least a quarter of students reported not eating at least once a week due to lack of money are among the lowest-performing countries or economies in mathematics in PISA 2022 (i.e. average performance below 400 score points). The Philippines is one of the countries that recorded an average performance of below 400 points in mathematics. The country's PISA 2022 score in mathematics was 355, lower than Thailand's 394.

Access to healthy food is just one of the factors behind the PISA performance of Filipino children, but it is something that can be addressed. For instance, the government has already doubled the budget for the Department of Education's feeding program to P11.27 billion for School Year 2024-2025. This translates to P25 per meal and the program's expansion to a total of 220 feeding days.

The government must now turn its focus to areas outside of the school. The state's intervention will mean nothing if children continue to experience hunger in their own homes. Serious attention must be accorded to increasing the productivity of food production areas and expanding access of all Filipinos to nutritious and affordable food items to enable the next-generation of learners to compete in the international arena.