

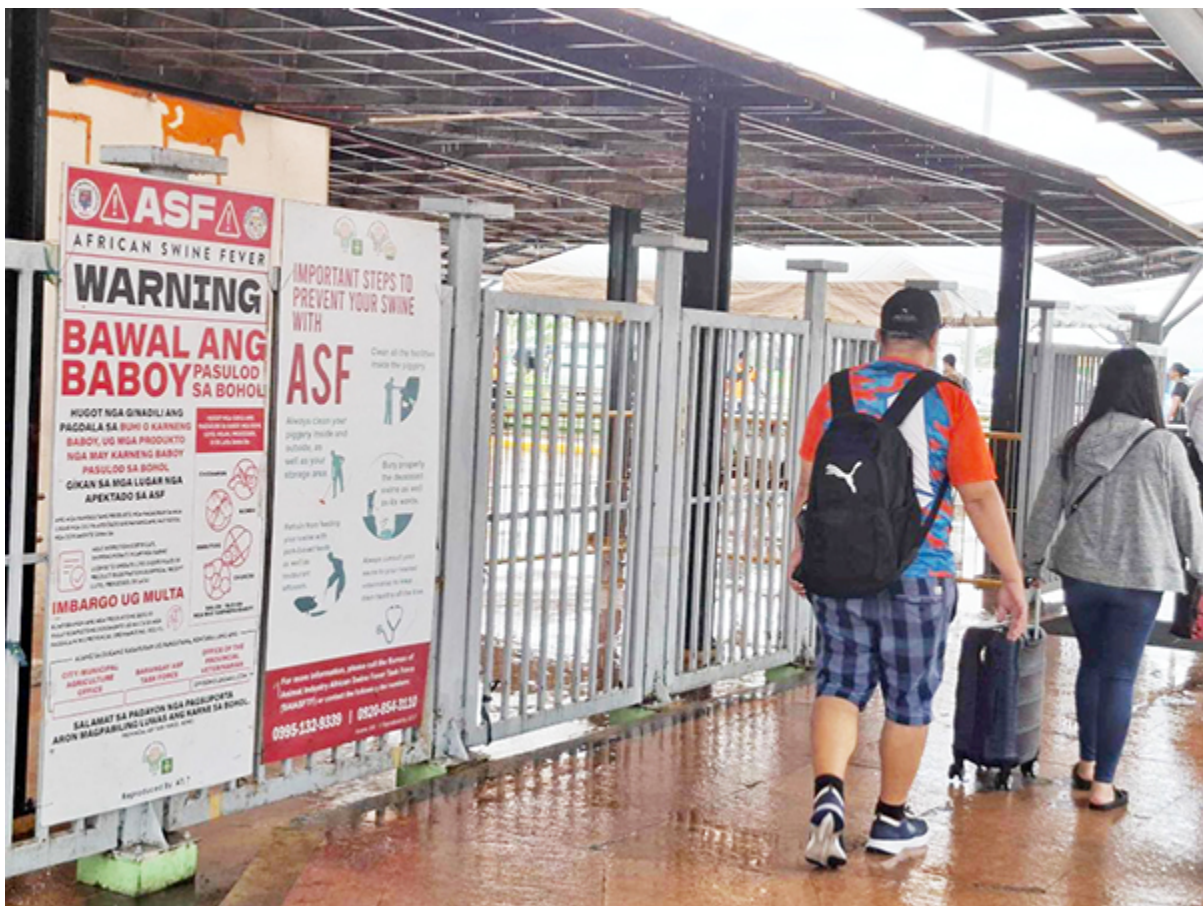
MANILA BULLETIN:

Bohol steps up preventive measures vs ASF

BY CALVIN CORDOVA

Apr 30, 2024 03:36 PM

CEBU CITY – The provincial government of Bohol has intensified its preventive measures and containment of suspected cases of African Swine Fever (ASF) especially in three barangays in one of the province’s 47 towns.



A TARPAULIN posted at the Tagbilaran City port warns passengers that bringing pork and pork-related to Bohol is banned. (Calvin D. Cordova)

Although three barangays in Dauis town have logged ASF cases, Bohol remains under “light green” zone, the Provincial ASF Inter-Agency Task Force said. A green zone means ASF was not detected and considered a moderate risk in mainland Bohol.

Dr. Constante Palabrica, Department of Agriculture assistant secretary and Bureau of Animal Industry officer-in-charge, disclosed that a team was sent to barangays Mayacabac, Biking, and Mariveles in Dauis to check on the situation.

Dr. Anthony Damalerio, head of the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office, emphasized the need for public cooperation in strengthening the task force's efforts to protect the province's P6-billion hog industry from the contagious ASF. "Let's help each other. We urge the public to fully cooperate," Damalerio said.

Damalerio said efforts have to be intensified to contain the ASF and prevent its possible spread to mainland Bohol.

There are about 48,000 hog raisers in mainland Bohol with 80 percent categorized as small backyard with the remaining 20 percent commercial.

Dr. Stella Marie Lapiz, Office of the Provincial Veterinarian (OPV) head, said the task force's main priority at the moment is to contain the disease in Dauis.

The ASF Task Force has been working on a traffic route plan between mainland Bohol and Panglao Island based on an executive order issued by Gov. Aris Aumentado. The traffic route plan mainly aims to prevent the disease from spreading to other mainland areas.

Vehicles are being checked as transporting live pigs, meat, and other pork-related products from Panglao Island to other areas is prohibited.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/30/bohol-steps-up-preventive-measures-vs-asf>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Recto sees lower GDP in Q1 2024

BY XANDER DAVE CEBALLOS

Apr 30, 2024 01:36 PM

Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto said he expects the economy to grow within the target band of 5.8 percent to 6.3 percent in the first quarter of this year.

These estimates were based on the high base effect from last year wherein the economy grew by 6.4 percent during the first quarter, Recto said.

“Anything higher than 5.5 (percent) is a win. Because last year, you grew by 5.5. So if you grow by 5.8, that's good enough. That should be one of the highest in the region, if not one of the highest in the world,” he told reporters at the sidelines of the Bases Conversion and Development Authority and Maharlika Investment Corporation memorandum of agreement signing.

To support the economic targets of six percent to seven percent for this year, the government has increased the budget for the Department of Agriculture (DA) to P197.84 billion, up by six percent from the previous year's budget allocation of P186.54 billion.

It also hiked the contributions of government-owned or -controlled corporations (GOCC) to 75 percent of their annual net earnings last year from 50 percent.

Republic Act 7656, which is commonly referred to as the Dividends Law, requires GOCCs to remit a minimum of 50 percent of their net earnings to the national government.

Recto earlier said that the government does not see the need for implementing tax measures this year and will instead look for other ways to increase revenues such as promoting the Ease of Paying Taxes law.

Furthermore, the DOF chief said he will meet with officials of the DA, along with the Development Budget and Coordination Committee (DBCC), to discuss interventions for food inflation.

For April's inflation rate, Recto said he remains firm with the two-percent to four-percent target band, but expects this to be breached again from last month's readout.

The country's inflation rate has been swelling for two months this year, with the March readout standing at 3.7 percent from the 3.4 percent in the previous month brought about by increasing food prices, especially on rice.

Meanwhile, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) estimated inflation to grow between 3.5 percent to 4.3 percent in April.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/30/article-2229rectoseeslowergdpinq12024>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Romualdez eyes 'close to P30 per kilo rice' by June; pushes for return of 'NFA rice'

BY ELLSON QUISMORIO

Apr 30, 2024 05:19 PM

AT A GLANCE

- House Speaker Martin Romualdez announced on Tuesday afternoon, April 30 the solons' goal of amending Republic Act (RA) No.11203 or the Rice Tarrification Law (RTL), which he said would ultimately result to cheaper rice priced at around P30 per kilo.



House Speaker Martin Romualdez (Speaker's office)

Rice retailing at around P30 per kilo by June.

House Speaker Martin Romualdez announced this target on Tuesday afternoon, April 30 as he highlighted solons' effort to amend Republic Act (RA) No.11203 or the Rice Tarrification Law (RTL).

The key amendment being sought would once again allow the National Food Authority (NFA) to bring lower-priced to the market, or the "NFA rice" of years past.

"Yung tina-target natin na by June (Our target by June is) we should bring the price of rice down by at least P10 or even P15 [or] close to P30 [per] kilo," Romualdez told reporters in a chance interview.

"We will do this by having the NFA bring to the market affordable rice para sa lahat ng mamamayan na pwede silang bumili ng abot kaya na presyo ng mga P30 (so that all of our countrymen can buy affordable rice of around P30)," he items.

Enacted in 2019, the RTL prevented NFA from directly selling rice to the market. Rice is the country's staple food.

Romualdez, leader of the 300-plus strong House, left plenary session early Tuesday in order to go to Malacañang and request from President Marcos the certification as urgent of the measures seeking to amend the RTL.

He expressed confidence that Marcos would grant the request. "Malamang po, malamang po (It's very likely)."

Kasi this is a priority of the President, kasama po kami dyan sa urgency niyan kasi alam mo naman yung ating mahal na Presidente ayaw na ayaw na mahihirapan ang ating mamamayang Pilipino, the consumers, and all of course the rice buyers. Dapat magkakaroon ng tamang presyo ng bigas na abot kaya ng lahat," he said.

(Because this is a priority of the President, we share in that urgency because as you know, our beloved President doesn't want Filipinos to suffer, the consumers, and all of course the rice buyers. Rice should be priced properly and affordably.)

"Sa totoo lang aalis na ako ngayon pupunta ako sa Malacañang. Etong, kaya sinasabi ko sa yo (Actually I'm on my way to Malacañang now. That's why I told you), I will consult with him. But I'm sure he feels this is a very urgent matter," he said of the Chief Executive.

Well-milled rice is usually priced P55 per kilo and up.

Romualdez said that House Committee on Agriculture and Food will carry put "daily" hearings on the proposed amendments to the RTL in order to expedite the matter.

When asked if it was possible to pull down rice prices to P20 per kilo at retail, Romualdez smiled and answered, "That is the aspiration."

"Yun po ang parang target, kasi alam naman natin na yung world market prices, e free market price—ay mataas talaga," noted the Speaker.

(That is like the target, because as we know, the world market price is a free market price--it's really high.)

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/30/romualdez-eyes-p30-per-kilo-rice-by-june-pushes-for-return-of-nfa-rice-1>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Areas under state of calamity due to El Niño now at 131—Palace

BY BETHEENA UNITE

Apr 30, 2024 04:15 PM

There are now 131 cities and municipalities placed under state of calamity due to El Niño around the country, a Palace official bared.



Presidential Communications Office (PCO) Assistant Secretary Joey Villarama, who serves as Task Force El Niño spokesperson, disclosed that these cities and municipalities under state of calamity were scattered across the country.

Seven provinces—Occidental Mindoro, Antique, Sultan Kudarat, Basilan, Maguindanao del Sur, Maguindanao Del Norte, and South Cotabato— have been under a state of calamity due to the phenomenon, Villarama added.

"As of the latest update from the Office of Civil Defense nasa 131 cities and municipalities na po yung nadeklara ng state of calamity, kalat kalat po iyan sa buong Pilipinas (there are now 131 cities and municipalities declared under state of calamity, it is scattered around the Philippines)," Villarama said in an interview on Tuesday, April 30.

"Sa bilang po na ito meron po pitong buong probinsya. Nandiyan po yung Occidental Mindoro, Antique, Sultan Kudarat, Basilan, Maguindanao del Sur, Maguindanao Del Norte, at yung nadagdag po is yung South Cotabato (Of this number, there are seven provinces. These

include Occidental Mindoro, Antique, Sultan Kudarat, Basilan, Maguindanao del Sur, Maguindanao Del Norte, and South Cotabato was added)," he also said. Villarama explained that "practically" the entire Philippines is suffering from the effects of El Niño but in "varying degrees," stressing that not all areas are experiencing drought.

At present, he said there are at least 41 areas experiencing drought.

The official further said that the estimated damage to agriculture due to El Niño grew to P4.39 billion, which is equivalent to 77,731 hectares.

Of the over 77,000 hectares damaged by the phenomenon, 77 percent is recoverable.

The government, Villarama said, is hoping that by the end of May the country's climate pattern would transition to neutral condition. However, people should not be complacent about it, given the threats of looming La Niña.

"Sa ngayon po meron pa po tayong isang buwan, Mayo, na kailangan bunuin bago hopefully mag-transition to neutral condition po yung climate pattern (As of now, we still have one month before, hopefully, our climate patter transitions to neutral condition)," Villarama said.

"So, alam naman natin sa projection or sa forecast din ng PAGASA, pwede mag-shift to La Niña yung climate pattern. Pero it doesn't mean na kahit nandoon na tayo sa tail-end ng El Niño eh kailangan na tayo maging complacent (We know that the projection or forecast of PAGASA, the climate pattern might shift to La Niña but it doesn't mean that because we are already at the tail-end, we would be complacent)," he added.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/30/cities-under-state-of-calamity-due-to-el-nino-now-at-131-palace>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

‘Traders must explain soaring prices of goods in probe’

[Delon Porcalla](#) - The Philippine Star

May 1, 2024 | 12:00am



Customers visit the Paco Market in Manila to check on the goods that are put up for sale on April 6, 2024.

STAR / Ryan Baldemor

MANILA, Philippines — Traders and middlemen must give the proper responses to congressmen, once the House committee on trade and industry continues its inquiry on the soaring prices of basic goods despite plunging farmgate prices, Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez said last Monday.

Romualdez vowed that people would be made accountable if the invited traders won't be able to justify the runaway prices of their products.

“We will call the traders, the middlemen. We will ask why there is a huge gap... This is the farmgate and what you're selling is this – which has a large difference,” the House Speaker said at a press conference with Deputy Majority Leader for

Communications and ACT-CIS Partylist Rep. Erwin Tulfo and trade panel chairman, Iloilo 4th District Rep. Ferjanel Biron.

“So, we will inquire as to why that is. If there is no adequate explanation, if they’re too greedy for the profits, we need to tell them to moderate that. Because if not, we’ll all be affected and of course, someone will be held responsible for that, right?” Romualdez said.

Earlier Monday, the committee held the briefing on the growing disparity between farmgate prices and retail prices, as ordered by the Speaker himself.

Romualdez, Tulfo and Biron all expressed disappointment over the admission of resource persons from the Department of Agriculture (DA) and Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) that there was no immediate solution to the disparity.

So now, it’s the traders and middlemen who will be the resource persons in the next hearing, said Romualdez.

“So, to the profiteers, to the traders, to the middlemen who are too greedy with their profits, pay attention. Moderate your greed and try to be more reasonable,” said the leader of the 300-plus strong House of Representatives.

Romualdez said the growing disparity between farmgate prices and retail prices must be abated for the sake of Filipino farmers and consumers.

He said that while he has nothing against businessmen who are out to make a profit, they should still be mindful of their countrymen who are struggling to make ends meet.

“We have no problem with traders needing to make a profit, but it must be just enough – not so much that consumers are being overly-affected. Life is already hard, especially in this hot weather, right? We need to show a little sympathy to our fellow Filipinos.” Romualdez said.

‘DA inutile’

House leaders have observed that government agencies tasked to ensure the low cost of basic commodities in the market seemed “inutile” or useless in fighting the continued skyrocketing of prices.

“During our hearing, it was revealed that the Department of Agriculture has in fact monitoring, surveillance and adjudication powers, but they’re inutile. It was never done by the department,” Biron told reporters.

“We asked them what did they do to profiteers, wholesalers, middlemen that have been violating for the longest time, and it was very unfortunate when they revealed

they did nothing,” the Iloilo congressman recounted further, as shown during the panel’s Monday hearing.

Panel chairman Biron himself noticed that the “mark-up” was 200 percent, as reckoned from farmgate prices of these basic commodities at the retail outlets in the market, primarily because even “importers have low import cost or landed cost for their commodities.”

“It still ends up with a very high price once it is already in the retail market,” he observed. “It was an eye-opener for the committee to pursue serious actions against all these violators. So, in our subsequent hearings, I’m sure we will be able to know who these people are.”

For one, Biron got a confirmation from the Organization of Supermarkets that their profit margin was only pegged at eight percent, while they have 10 percent for “refrigerated commodities.”

“In other words, the profit of the end-user, the supermarket, is very miniscule,” he said.

Tulfo, for his part, declared that profits of these unscrupulous businessmen, along with middlemen, were way above what should be fair. “Their profit is too much. That’s why the Speaker said they should moderate their greed.”

“For now, we are requesting them to please lower their prices, but of course, we also have the power to direct the DA or the DTI to use their powers of prosecution, as in Congress I believe we can do that,” the former broadcast journalist warned.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/01/2351706/traders-must-explain-soaring-prices-goods-probe>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Romualdez: Marcos may certify rice tariff law amendments as urgent

By: [Gabriel Pabico Lalu](#) - Reporter / [@GabrielLaluINQ](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 06:55 PM April 30, 2024

MANILA, Philippines — Proposed amendments to Republic Act No. 11203 or the rice tariffication law can be certified as urgent by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., according to House of Representatives Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez.

Romualdez told reporters at the Batasang Pambansa complex on Tuesday that he would consult with Marcos on the possible amendments, adding that he hopes the Senate would prioritize this issue too.

Earlier, the Speaker said that rice prices could go down by P10 to P15 — close to the P30 per kilogram mark — if the said law is amended by June.

“More likely because this is a priority of the President, we are part of that urgency because you know our beloved President does not want the masses, the consumers, the rice buyers, to suffer. There should be a right price for rice,” Romualdez said just after the session was called to order.

“I would go to Malacañang; that’s why I am telling you that I will consult with him. But I am sure he feels this is a very urgent matter, this is a top issue, so we will work together with the executive, with the OP (Office of the President), with the DA (Department of Agriculture), with the NFA (National Food Authority), with the NIA (National Irrigation Authority), with what they can do, and we will also ask our friends in the Senate to support this initiative,” he added.

Deputy Majority Leader and ACT-CIS party-list Rep. Erwin Tulfo meanwhile assured the public that there is enough time for the proposed amendments to be discussed and eventually passed by the House.

Tulfo said the House committee on agriculture under Quezon 1st District Rep. Wilfrido Mark Enverga has vowed to conduct as many hearings as possible to assess the proposed changes to the rice tariffication Law.

“Not impossible, that’s not impossible because we have three weeks, the committee on agriculture can conduct hearings daily. I’ve talked to Congressman Enverga, we will do this almost every day. So, it’s up to the President if he can appeal to the Senate, that they can do this too, because we have three weeks. I think we can handle that,” Tulfo said.

“We would just tinker with it, adjust it a little bit, we will not repeal the law [...] almost all congressmen agree, based on my talks with lawmakers in the past few days, [...] they were saying that they agree with such proposals,” he added.

Tulfo earlier also said that amending the rice tariffication law is essential to lowering rice prices because the NFA has been prevented from selling cheap rice after the law’s enactment.

The House committee on agriculture and food has conducted two hearings in as many days since the session’s resumption, all focused on discussing amendments to R.A. 11203.

Among the bills discussed are the following:

- House Bill (HB) No. 212 seeking to amend R.A. No. 11203’s Section 13 (Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund or RCEF), to lift the quantitative import restriction on rice, authored by Nueva Ecija 1st District Rep. Mikaela Angela Suansing
- HB No. 404, seeking to repeal the whole R.A. No. 11203, authored by Gabriela party-list Rep. Arlene Brosas

- HB No. 1562, seeking to authorize the Bureau of Customs' excess tariff revenues from rice importation and other possible sources as a special emergency fund, and be used as financial aid for rice farmers, authored by Camarines Sur 2nd District Rep. LRay Villafuerte Jr.
- HB No. 9030, seeking to create a national rice emergency response, authored by Marikina 2nd District Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo
- HB No. 9547, seeking to extend the RCEF, authored by Nueva Ecija 3rd District Rep. Rosanna Vergara

The Rice Tariffication Law, which was signed into law last March 2019 during the term of former President Rodrigo Duterte, created the RCEF which is funded by the tariff revenues. While the RCEF seeks to assist farmers, opposition figures back then claimed that the law made the situation worse for farmers as they faced stiff competition from cheaper imports.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1935461/romualdez-marcos-may-certify-rice-tariff-law-amendments-as-urgent>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Romualdez: Rice prices down P15 if rice tariff law amended by June

By: [Gabriel Pabico Lalu](#) - Reporter / [@GabrielLaluINQ](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 04:46 PM April 30, 2024

MANILA, Philippines — Rice prices can drop by P10 to P15 if Republic Act No. 11203 or the rice tariffication law is amended by June, Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez said on Tuesday.

Romualdez, in an ambush interview at the Batasang Pambansa complex, announced that they are targeting to bring down rice prices close to the P30 per kilogram mark by June so that poor Filipino families can have access to cheaper rice.

“So our target is by June, we should bring the price of rice down by at least P10 or up to P15, close to P30 per kilo, we will do this by having the NFA (National Food Authority) bring to the market affordable rice so that people can buy affordable rice,” he told reporters.

“So there are amendments we have laid down, that the committee is discussing, and we also urge our friends in the Senate to make this urgent, and we will coordinate with the Office of the President, because this is the goal of our President (Ferdinand Marcos Jr.) — that rice prices be brought down for our people,” he said.

Deputy Majority Leader and ACT-CIS party-list Rep. Erwin Tulfo explained in a separate interview after Romualdez that the rice tariffication law prevented the NFA from directly selling rice to farmers, which eventually impacted people’s access to cheap varieties.

“Kasi the RTL, the rice tariffication law prohibited NFA from selling rice directly. Right now, it took away the powers of the NFA to sell rice, what the NFA does now is to store and store rice for calamities, for DSWD (Department of Social Welfare and Development), but 10 years ago, before this RTL law, NFA sold rice, right?” Tulfo said.

“Those who do not have money buy NFA rice. Now you cannot buy NFA rice, and grains are expensive — P56, P50 (per kilogram), that’s what we intend to bring down. That’s why the Speaker is fast-tracking the review of the RTL now [...] And at the same time he will talk to the President to whisper to the Senate that this bill be a priority so that NFA can sell rice again,” he added.

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Goal not attained

Committee chairperson and Quezon 1st District Rep. Wilfrido Mark Enverga said during the hearing that while R.A. No. 11203 has helped farmers through cash assistance, it has been detrimental to the local supply due to the deluge of imports.

“The gains and pains of Republic Act No. 11203, the rice tariffication law, has always been one of the main topics or issues in the agriculture sector,” Enverga said.

“We cannot deny the fact that the law has accorded millions of rice farmers the much-needed assistance. However, the law is always challenged when it comes to rice supply and rice prices,” he added.

The rice tariffication law, signed into law last March 2019 during the term of former President Rodrigo Duterte, created the RCEF, which is funded by tariff revenues.

While the RCEF seeks to assist farmers, opposition figures back then claimed that the law made the situation worse for farmers as they faced stiff competition from cheaper imports.

Critics also contested that the law’s goal—to allow imports so that supply will increase and eventually lower prices—has not been attained.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1935432/romualdez-rice-prices-down-p15-if-rice-tariff-law-amended-by-june>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

El Niño sends 131 areas into state of calamity

By: [Jean Mangaluz](#) - Reporter / [@JMangaluzINQ](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 04:22 PM April 30, 2024



President Ferdinand “Bongbong” R. Marcos talks to government officers and representatives during an inspection at an onion and rice field hit by drought due to El Niño in Brgy. Central in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro on Tuesday, April 23, 2024. (PPA POOL)

MANILA, Philippines — A total of 131 localities across the country have declared [a state of calamity due to the El Niño](#) phenomenon, Presidential Communications Office Assistant Secretary Joey Villarama said on Tuesday.

Villarama, who serves as the spokesperson for the government’s Task Force El Niño, said the cities and municipalities under a state of calamity are scattered across seven provinces – Occidental Mindoro, Antique, Sultan Kudarat, Basilan, Maguindanao del Sur, Maguindanao Del Norte and South Cotabato.

“As of the latest update from the Office of Civil Defense, nasa 131 cities and municipalities na po yung nadeklara ng state of calamity. Kalat kalat po iyan sa buong Pilipinas,” Villarama said in an ambush interview in Malacañan Palace.

(Based on the latest update from the Office of Civil Defense, 131 cities and municipalities have declared a state of calamity in different parts of the country.)

Damage to the agriculture sector due to the El Niño has also spiked to around P4.39 billion, Villarama said.

Villarama also reiterated the government’s reminder to save water and electricity amid the prevailing intense heat.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1935420/fwd-areas-under-state-of-calamities>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Over 655,000 families affected by El Niño, says OCD

By: [Adrian Parungao](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 06:58 PM April 30, 2024

MANILA, Philippines — More than 655,000 families have been affected by the ongoing El Niño phenomenon, the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) said on Tuesday.

According to its data as of April 30, this translates to around 2.79 million individuals.

OCD Director Cesar Idio likewise reported in a Senate panel briefing that 131 cities and municipalities have also declared a state of calamity due to El Niño.

“There are 131 cities and municipalities who [have] declared state of calamity particularly in Region CAR, 1, Mimaropa, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, and BARMM (Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao),” Idio said. Meanwhile, agricultural damages were marked at P4.39 billion, with 77,700 hectares of agricultural land affected due to dry conditions. Of the agricultural land affected, 60,000 hectares had a chance of recovery, while 17,700 others did not have a chance of recovery. The OCD added that 85,200 farmers were likewise affected.

In an earlier report of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration, the state seismology bureau said that El Niño will persist until May 2024, while weather conditions are expected to reach a neutral status in the April-May-June 2024 season.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1935462/655000-families-affected-by-el-nino-says-ocd>

BUSINESS WORLD:

BSP sees April inflation at 3.5-4.3%

May 1, 2024 | 12:34 am



A customer buys rice at a stall in Paco Market, Manila, April 6, 2024. — PHILIPPINE STAR/RYAN BALDEMOR

By **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**, *Reporter*

HEADLINE INFLATION may have accelerated further in April and possibly breached the 2-4% target, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said.

The central bank's month-ahead forecast showed that inflation likely settled within the 3.5%-to-4.3% range in April. This is slower than the 6.6% print in April 2023.

The upper end of the forecast would exceed the 2-4% target band for the first time in four months.

On the other hand, the lower end would be slower than the 3.7% inflation recorded in March.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) is scheduled to release April inflation data on May 7.

“Continued price increases for rice and meat along with higher gasoline prices and the peso depreciation are the primary sources of upward price pressures for the month,” the BSP said in a statement on Tuesday.

Latest data from the Agriculture department showed that local well-milled rice averaged P45-P55 a kilo as of April 29 from P39-P46 a year ago. A kilo of regular milled rice averaged P46-P52 as of April 29 from P34-P42 a year ago.

For the month of April, pump price adjustments stood at a net increase of P2.25 a liter for gasoline, and P0.50 a liter for diesel. Kerosene prices had a net decrease of P0.80 a liter.

Earlier this month, the peso sank to the P57 level for the first time in nearly 17 months or since November 2022.

BSP Governor Eli M. Remolona, Jr. earlier said that the BSP “stands ready to manage any unnecessary movement and excessive volatility.” He also noted the peso’s recent performance has been due to the US dollar’s strength amid the Middle East conflict.

“Meanwhile, lower prices of fish, fruits, vegetables as well as lower electricity rates and the rollback in LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) prices could offset the upside price pressures,” the BSP added.

Manila Electric Co. (Meralco) lowered its overall rate by P0.9879 per kilowatt-hour (kWh) to P10.9518 per kWh in April from P11.9397 in March due to a drop in generation and transmission charges.

Prices of LPG were also lower for the month. Petron Corp. implemented a P1 per kilogram rollback in LPG prices for April.

Security Bank Corp. Chief Economist Robert Dan J. Roces said in an e-mail note that food inflation will continue to be a “significant driver” of overall inflation until July.

“Once the base effect from food inflation starts fading in August, and inflation begins to moderate, the central bank may have more flexibility to adjust its monetary policy stance, depending on the broader economic conditions,” he said.

Food inflation rose to 5.7% in March, its fastest print in four months or since the 5.8% seen in November 2023.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Chief Economist Michael L. Ricafort also noted palay (unmilled rice) prices have increased due to the El Niño dry spell.

Agricultural damage due to the El Niño has reached P4.39 billion as of April 23. Rice losses hit P2.71 billion, accounting for 62% of the total agricultural damage.

In March, rice inflation surged to 24.4%. This was its fastest print since the 24.6% in February 2009.

POLICY

PAUSE

Meanwhile, the central bank said that it will “continue to monitor developments affecting the

outlook for inflation and growth in line with its data-dependent approach to monetary policy decision-making.”

Mr. Roces said that the central bank will likely extend its policy pause at its next meeting.

“Given the elevated inflation readings, we anticipate the BSP to take a proactive approach during their upcoming policy meeting on May 16 where we expect steady rates,” he said.

The Monetary Board stood pat for a fourth straight meeting in April, keeping its benchmark rate at a near 17-year high of 6.5%.

From May 2022 to October, the Monetary Board has hiked borrowing costs by 450 basis points.

The BSP is likely to retain its hawkish tone “to signal their commitment to price stability,” Mr. Roces said.

“With inflation projected to overshoot the target in the subsequent months, the BSP will maintain a tight monetary policy stance to anchor inflation expectations and prevent second-round effects,” he said.

Mr. Roces said the BSP may have more room to loosen policy in the second half as inflationary pressures begin to ease.

Mr. Ricafort also noted some US Federal Reserve officials recently signaled cautiousness before cutting rates, “especially in ensuring that inflation is well anchored towards the Fed’s target of 2%.”

The Fed’s two-day policy meeting ends on Wednesday (May 1).

<https://www.bworldonline.com/top-stories/2024/05/01/592096/bsp-sees-april-inflation-at-3-5-4-3/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Fertilizer price hikes to curb PHL rice yields, consumption — ADB

April 30, 2024 | 8:11 pm



DA.GOV.PH

PHILIPPINE rice yields are expected to decline this year and in 2025 because of the rise in fertilizer prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said.

“Doubling fertilizer prices in the Philippines would lead to a 0.24% to 0.28% decline in rice yields from 2022 to 2025,” the ADB said in its report, “The Russian Invasion of Ukraine, Fertilizer Prices, and Food Security.”

Russia is the world's largest exporter of oil and nitrogen, and is the second largest exporter of potash and phosphorus fertilizer. It has suspended fertilizer exports since invading Ukraine in 2022, putting pressure on agricultural production.

“This invasion has increased the price of fertilizer and the uncertainty in fertilizer supply for many smallholder rice farmers worldwide, especially poor smallholders in South Asia and

Southeast Asia. Thus, farm families in low- and middle-income countries are vulnerable to unsustainable rice production and lack of food security,” according to the report.

The report details the impact of three scenarios of fertilizer price increase — 30%, 50% and 100% — on a country’s rice yield, retail prices, consumption, production, farmgate price, and net trade.

According to the report, a 30% rise in fertilizer prices will reduce the Philippines’ rice yields this year by 0.10%, while a 50% increase will lower yields by 0.14%. A 100% increase will result in a 0.24% decrease in yield.

Retail prices of rice could rise 8.66% this year and 8.45% next year.

“For consumers in Thailand and the Philippines, retail rice prices could increase more than for consumers in the People’s Republic of China, India, and Vietnam,” the ADB said.

Higher fertilizer prices could cause Philippine rice consumption to drop in 2024 and 2025, the bank said.

The three fertilizer price rise scenarios will curb Philippine rice consumption by 0.53%, 0.80%, and 1.30% respectively this year.

The bank called on governments and relevant organizations to support domestic rice production, push for crop diversification, and reduce import dependence to temper the effect of higher fertilizer prices.

“The results underscore the importance of continuing to invest in and implement policies aimed at making rice production more price-sensitive, such as the continued use of technology for higher productivity and strengthening farmer organizations,” the ADB said. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/04/30/592046/fertilizer-price-hikes-to-curb-phl-rice-yields-consumption-adb/>

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL:

SEARCA, DEBESMSCAT host inaugural IRODEO confab

Tuesday, April 30, 2024 SEARCA



MASBATE CITY — The Dr. Emilio B. Espinosa Sr. Memorial State College of Agriculture and Technology (DEBESMSCAT) and the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) co-hosted the very first International Research Opportunities, Developments, and Extension Outcomes (IRODEO) Conference held on 10-12 April 2024 at the Masbate Coliseum.

IRODEO is a nod to Masbate’s famous rodeo festival and coincided with the annual horsemanship event.

The inaugural edition of this international event adopts the theme “Bridging Horizons: Integrating Knowledge for Regenerative Futures,” highlighting a forward-looking approach to global challenges. Dr. Glenn Gregorio, SEARCA Center Director, was the first plenary speaker, thus setting the tone for discussions on sustainable development and

innovation.

Gregorio underscored the pivotal role of partnership and collaborative relationships in accelerating agricultural transformation. Emphasizing the need for strategic alliances among academe, industry, and government (AIG), he highlighted their collective potential to effectively address the challenges confronting the agriculture sector.

“SEARCA puts a premium on strengthening AIG interconnectivity,” Gregorio emphasized.

“Most of our research and capacity-building initiatives are in collaboration with like-minded institutions and networks,” he said.

Gregorio explained that as a partner, SEARCA offers access to top-notch professional expertise and technical services in agriculture and rural development from academic and governmental entities across Southeast Asia.

He introduced SEARCA’s joint scholarship projects with institutions like the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Agropolis Fondation, Tokyo University of Agriculture (NODAI), Universiti Putra Malaysia, Sejong University, National Taiwan University, and the Philippine Carabao Center. He also discussed the SEARCA-established Southeast Asian University Consortium for Graduate Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC).

Furthermore, Gregorio shared how the Commission on Higher Education (CHED)-funded, SEARCA-implemented project Leveling-Up Philippine Higher Education Institutions in Agriculture, Fisheries, and Natural Resources (LevelUPHEI AFAR) capacitated the country’s universities in agriculture, fisheries, and natural resources to make them more competitive.

Gregorio also talked about SEARCA’s leadership of the Philippines Partnership for Sustainable Agriculture’s learning alliance working group, which supports research on agriculture and sustainable development, fostering market-driven solutions to uplift smallholder livelihoods.

In terms of innovation, Gregorio said SEARCA plans to create a carbon farming consortium to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and boost rice farmers’ incomes. Meanwhile, the SEARCA Grants for Research towards Agricultural Innovative Solutions (GRAINS) promotes knowledge transfer and technology adoption in agriculture. Additionally, he noted the collaborative efforts in conferences, seminars, and publications.

Notably, SEARCA Senior Fellow Dr. Eing-Ming Wu, a visiting professor at the University of the Philippines Diliman National College of Public Administration and Governance (NCPAG), was also a plenary speaker. He tackled advancing smart public governance across services, infrastructure, people, and financial management.

SEARCA also curated an institutional exhibit at the conference, spotlighting publications on smart agriculture, coastal resources management, environmental studies, gender and development, alongside informative materials detailing its programs and services.

<https://journal.com.ph/searca-debesmscat-host-inaugural-irodeo-confab/>

ABANTE:

P4.39B pinsala ng El Niño sa mga pananim

- [Abante News](#)
- [April 30, 2024](#)

Umakyat na sa P4.39 bilyon ang halaga ng mga pananim na napinsala dahil sa matinding epekto ng El Niño phenomenon sa bansa.

Ito ang inihayag ni Presidential Communications Office Assistant Secretary at El Niño Task Force Spokesperson Joey Villarama kaugnay sa pinaka-huling update ng mga agricultural damage dulot ng nararanasang matinding tagtuyot.

Ayon kay Villarama, katumbas ito ng mahigit 77,000 na ektarya ng mga pananim na natuyot o nasira pero mayroon pa ring na-recover ang mga magsasaka na maaaring mapakinabangan.

“Nasa P4.39 billion na po yung estimated cost of damage and losses to agriculture that’s equivalent to 77,731 hectares, pero ini-emphasize ng DA na mayroong bahagi ng mga pananim na maaari pang ma-recover,” ani Villarama. (Aileen Taliping)

<https://www.abante.com.ph/2024/04/30/p4-39b-pinsala-ng-el-nino-sa-mga-pananim/>

MANILA STANDARD:

Speaker pushes for amending rice law to bring down prices



TIME TO AMEND RICE LAW. Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez announces that the House will work to amend the Rice Tariffication Act to allow the National Food Authority to sell rice to the public at affordable prices. He made the disclosure during an ambush interview with members of the media.

By Maricel Cruz

May 1, 2024, 12:40 am

Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez on Tuesday said the House of Representatives is working on changes in the Rice Tariffication Law to bring down the price of staple by P10-15 per kilo.

He told reporters in an interview that the House of Representatives is targeting to reduce the retail price of rice to P30 per kilo, from the present P40-45 to more than P50.

He said he would ask President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to certify the proposed amendments as urgent so these could be enacted as soon as possible.

“We are doing this because the President said we have to find ways to lower the price of rice. So, what we are targeting is that by June, we should bring the price of rice down by at least P10 or even P15, which is close to P30 pesos per kilo,” he said.

The President also said his administration will do this “by having the NFA (National Food Authority) bring to the market affordable rice so citizens can buy at an affordable price of P30. These are the amendments that we can speed up.”

He added that the House would coordinate with the Office of the President on the proposed amendments.

Romualdez asked the Senate to work on similar changes in the law.

“This is what our President really wants: to lower the price of our rice for the people. That’s our announcement because our Committee on Agriculture will hold these hearings every day to insert these amendments so that we can have a lower price of rice for everyone,” he said

He explained that the amendments would include tariff rates, taxes and the expanded authority of the NFA to purchase palay from farmers.

The House leader pointed out that reducing the price of rice “is a priority of the President.”

“We share in the urgency because you know that our dear President does not want our Filipino people, the consumers, and of course the rice buyers to suffer. There should be a proper price of rice that everyone can afford,” Romualdez said.

As this developed, Quezon Rep. Mark Enverga, chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture and Food, agreed on the need to revisit the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) to enhance its effectiveness and responsiveness to the changing demands of stakeholders in the rice industry.

Enverga expressed his stance during a briefing led by Department of Agriculture (DA) officials, where the committee sought insights into the RTL’s impact, particularly on rice farmers and the broader agricultural sector, five years after its enactment.

In his opening statement, Enverga emphasized the necessity of the review to ensure that the law effectively addresses the challenges and opportunities facing rice farmers and the agricultural sector as a whole.

“The gains and pains of Republic Act No. 11203, the Rice Tariffication Law, has always been one of the main topics or issues in the agriculture sector,” Enverga pointed out.

He also said, “We cannot deny the fact that the law has accorded millions of rice farmers the much-needed assistance. However, the law is always challenged when it comes to rice supply and rice prices.”

The RTL, which came into effect on March 5, 2019, replaced the previous quantitative restrictions on imported rice with tariffs ranging from 35% to 40% and established the Rice Competitive Enhancement Fund (RCEF), funded by the tariff revenues.

Despite its intentions, critics of the RTL argued that the law has not succeeded in reducing the cost of rice. They asserted that it has instead exacerbated the challenges faced by local farmers, as cheaper imports flood the market.

Calls for amendments to address these issues have gained momentum, with both government officials and private stakeholders advocating revisions to enhance the law's responsiveness to public needs.

<https://manilastandard.net/news/314441768/speaker-pushes-for-amending-rice-law-to-bring-down-prices.html>

MANILA STANDARD:

Marcos orders agencies to lead adoption of AI tools for MSMEs



PROMISE FULFILLED. President Marcos led the inauguration of the Malitubog-Maridagao Irrigation Project Stage II (MMIP II) in Pikit, Cotabato. The MMIP II aims to provide irrigation to more than 10,000 hectares of farmland in Cotabato and Maguindanao. More than 4,000 families are expected to benefit, including former Moro Islamic Liberation Front combatants. PCO

By Charles Dantes

May 1, 2024, 12:45 am

President Marcos directed concerned agencies to lead the implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) in micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), citing the need to adapt to new technologies.

In a sectoral meeting in Malacañang on Tuesday, the Chief Executive emphasized the imperative for MSMEs to embrace modern technology to meet the evolving demands of both physical and online markets amid technological advancements.

“We are not teaching them to be engineers, AI engineers. We’re not teaching them to be blockchain engineers. We’re teaching them how to use the system that we have provided. That, I think, we have to be clear about that,” President Marcos said.

“Don’t teach the theory that goes on behind it, but just teach what it is that they need to use the AI. That’s the whole point of AI, you just talk, that’s where we want to get them to,” he added.

President Marcos stressed that the government's initiative to acquaint MSMEs with AI systems is geared towards enhancing the ease of doing business, striving to make it "as easy as possible, as simple as possible" for them.

In 2022, MSMEs constituted 99.59 percent of total establishments in the Philippines, contributing 65.10 percent to total employment. This underscored their significant role in job creation and livelihood enhancement in the country.

The move comes amidst a global push towards digital transformation, with AI emerging as a pivotal tool for businesses seeking to streamline operations, enhance efficiency, and remain competitive in an increasingly digital marketplace.

Editor's Note: This is an updated article. Originally posted with the headline Marcos enjoins government agencies to foster AI-powered MSMEs

<https://manilastandard.net/news/314441541/marcos-enjoins-government-agencies-to-foster-ai-powered-msmes.html>

MANILA STANDARD:

Government to aid El Niño-hit workers—Marcos

By Charles Dantes May 1, 2024, 4:28 pm

Laborers in the agriculture and other sectors whose crops and other sources of income were affected by the El Niño phenomenon are expected to receive financial assistance from the government as part of its ongoing aid program amid the persisting drought.

President Marcos made this announcement on Wednesday, May 1, in time for the annual celebration of Labor Day, which he led in Malacañang. He said the government will prioritize helping those affected in Mindanao.

“In the coming days, we will send financial assistance to those who are severely affected by El Niño nationwide—those whose crops were destroyed and lost their livelihoods because of the drought,” he said in his speech.

The President said the financial assistance to be provided to drought-hit workers is just an addition to the ongoing program of the Department of Agriculture (DA), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE).

Marcos also reiterated his administration’s commitment to advancing the rights and welfare of Filipino workers during the Labor Day celebration, which coincided with the 50th anniversary of the Labor Code of the Philippines (LCP), which his father and namesake enacted in 1974.

“Today, we stand in awe of the remarkable contributions of Filipino workers here in the country and also abroad. I offer them our gratitude and recognition as beacons of hope, as important pillars of our country’s foundation,” he stated. Acknowledging their relentless dedication to improving their lives and those of their families, President Marcos emphasized the importance of the Philippine Development Plan in fostering sustainable economic growth.

The Chief Executive outlined his administration’s commitment to fostering not only job growth but also quality and environmentally friendly employment opportunities aligned with the nation’s vision for a sustainable economy centered on human capital.

In closing, President Marcos extended gratitude to Filipino workers for their unwavering passion, integrity, and professionalism, applauding their resilience and perseverance, particularly amid current challenges.

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<https://manilastandard.net/news/314441852/government-to-aid-el-nino-hit-workers-marcos.html>

State of calamity declared in 131 areas due to El Niño

By **Jocelyn Montemayor**

May 1, 2024

AT least 131 cities and municipalities across the country have declared a state of calamity due to the effects of the El Niño phenomenon, Task Force El Niño spokesman Joey Villarama said yesterday.

Villarama, in a chance interview, said this includes seven provinces, namely, Occidental Mindoro, Antique, Sultan Kudarat, Basilan, Maguindanao del Sur, Maguindanao del Norte, and South Cotabato which have declared a province-wide state of calamity.

He said most of the areas are experiencing drought.

Under a state of calamity, local governments can access their calamity funds and use them to mitigate the effects of a calamity and rehabilitate their jurisdictions.

The government expects the worst of El Niño to last until the end of May before the climate pattern transitions to neutral conditions.

“Pero it doesn’t mean na kahit nandun na tayo sa tail-end ng El Niño e kailangan na tayong maging complacent. So nandun pa rin po iyung panawagan na magtipid tayo sa tubig dahil... patuloy na bumababa iyung resource talaga (But it doesn’t mean that while we are at the tail-end of the El Niño we would already be complacent. The call to conserve water is still there... because our water sources continue to go down),” Villarama said.

Villarama also said that vital sources of water, as well as food, remain stable but due to the prevailing dry conditions, there is a possibility that the food supply will be affected.

“Stable pa po lahat ang ating vital resources, iyun nga lang po patuloy po ang ating panawagan na mag-tipid pa rin po at mag-conserve (the vital resources remain stable, but the call to save and conserve remains),” he said.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has reported that loss and damages to agriculture due to El Niño have reached P4.39 billion. Some areas, such as the Cagayan Valley region and those near the Magat dam, have already requested cloud seeding operations to increase water supply.

Villarama said the government is looking at implementing cloud seeding in mountainous areas to increase surface water supply.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), meanwhile, said P93.569 million worth of food and non-food relief items have been distributed to 2.9 million people or 681,198 families affected by the El Niño.

Those affected came from 3,780 barangays in Regions I (Ilocos), II (Cagayan Valley), III (Central Luzon), IV-B (Mimaropa), V (Bicol), VI (Western Visayas), VII (Central Visayas), VIII (Eastern Visayas), IX (Zamboanga Peninsula), XI (Davao), XII (Soccsksargen), Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

EXTREME HEAT

Ana Solis, chief of the climate monitoring and prediction unit of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said the country is likely to experience a high heat index up to the first week or first half of May.

During the “Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon” public briefing, Solis said: “So we need to refresh and rehydrate because based on DOST-PAGASA monitoring, we will continue to experience high heat index or discomfort level, around 42 to 51 (degrees Celsius) or what we call danger level (heat index).”

Solis said that with El Niño waning, there will be a decrease in the number of areas experiencing high heat index.

“What will happen is, there will be a reduction of areas because we will continue to experience high heat index or discomfort level even in the the months of May or even June and July. There will just be a reduction of areas with high heat index,” she also said.

Yesterday, the PAGASA said Dagupan City in Pangasinan is expected to experience a heat index of 48 degrees today, while 35 other areas will have similar but lower danger level heat index.

Four of these areas are Tuguegarao City and Aparri town in Cagayan, Iba town in Zambales, and Aborlan town in Palawan, which are forecast to have a heat index of 46 degrees.

Thirty-two areas, on the other hand, will have a heat index of 42 to 45 degrees. These are Quezon City, Pasay City, Sinait town in Ilocos Sur, Laoag City and Batac town in Ilocos Norte, Bacnotan town in La Union, Bayombong town in Nueva Ecija, Echague town in Isabela, Clark in Pampanga, Munoz town in Nueva Ecija, Baler and Casiguran towns in Aurora, Olongapo City in Zambales, Sangley Point in Cavite, Tanauan town in Batangas, Calapan town in Oriental Mindoro, Puerto Princesa and Coron town in Palawan.

It will also be swelteringly hot in San Jose town in Occidental Mindoro, Virac town in Catanduanes, Masbate City in Masbate, Pili town in Camarines Sur, Roxas City and Mabusao town in Capiz, Iloilo City and Dumangas town in Iloilo, La Carlota City in Negros Occidental, Catbalogan town in Samar, Tacloban City in Leyte, Guian town in Eastern Samar, Zamboanga City in Zamboanga del Sur, and Cotabato City in Maguindanao del Norte.

A heat index ranging from 42 to 51 degrees Celsius has been classified by PAGASA under the danger level. It said heat cramps and heat exhaustion are likely to be experienced by residents, while heat stroke is possible under this condition.

In a hearing in the Senate, PAGASA chief Nathaniel Servando said the country may still experience hot weather conditions from March to May next year.

Servando said, though, that the hot conditions will ease a little due to the expected rainfall caused by the La Niña phenomenon.

“By next year, we are expecting naman na La Niña. So, based on historical records, during La Niña, that’s a little bit cooler compared to El Niño,” Servando said during the Committee on Basic Education hearing on the effects of the summer heat on schools.

Servando, however, said that while La Niña is expected next year, this does not mean that there will be more rainfall during the summer season.

LEARNING CAMP

In a related development, the Department of Education said it is mulling the holding of a three-week national learning camp if face-to-face classes remain suspended due to extreme heat.

As of April 25, DepEd data show that 7,188 schools nationwide out of the 47, 678 total number of schools are implementing alternative distance learning mode.

DepEd assistant secretary and deputy spokesperson Francis Cesar Bringas acknowledged that learning has been affected by the suspension of in-person classes.

Bringas said though students learn from alternative distance learning, it is not enough compared to what they learn during F2F classes.

“Based on our experience during the pandemic noong wala tayong face-to-face classes, merong natutunan ang mga bata sa asynchronous classes pero hindi sapat gaya ng natututunan kapag naka face-to-face or synchronous classes (Based on our experience during the pandemic when we have no face-to-face classes, students also learned during the asynchronous classes but these were not enough if compared to what they learn during face-to-face or synchronous classes),” Bringas told TeleRadyo Serbisyo.

To address the learning gap, Bringas said the department is setting its sights on conducting a three-week national learning camp, especially if in-person classes remain suspended in May.

“Kung hindi magkaroon ng face-to-face classes hanggang May, malamang ay hindi na magkakaroon ng opportunity this month na magkaroon ng interventions for them but ikakasa ng DepEd ‘yung national learning camp by July (If face-to-face classes remain suspended until May, we may have opportunity this month to do interventions but the DepEd is planning to hold a national learning camp by July),” Bringas said.

If the plan pushes through, Bringas said attendance in the learning camp will be voluntary but, he added, that the DepEd will encourage students, especially the academically challenged, to participate.

Last year, close to one million Grades 7 and 8 students nationwide registered for the national learning camp, a voluntary three-to-five-week learning recovery program meant to improve the students' learning performance and teachers' skills and capacity.

The national learning camp is part of the overall learning recovery initiatives of the DepEd to improve the quality of basic education in the country, especially after the pandemic when schools were physically closed and students had to cope with blended learning. – *With Victor Reyes, Raymond Africa and Ashzel Hachero*

https://malaya.com.ph/news_news/state-of-calamity-declared-in-131-areas-due-to-el-nino/

BUSINESS MIRROR:

DA-BFAR warns vs red tide in 7 areas

Roderick Abad

May 1, 2024

RED tide is threatening at least seven areas in the archipelago.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources cautioned that eating shellfish from these areas is dangerous and may result in death.

In Shellfish Bulletin 8 Series of 2024 dated April, BFAR warned against eating shellfish harvested from coastal waters of Milagros in Masbate, Dauis and Tagbilaran City in Bohol, San Pedro Bay in Samar and Matarinao Bay in Eastern Samar, Dumanquillas Bay in Zamboanga del Sur, and San Benito in Surigao del Norte.

Marine resources collected and tested from these sites “are still positive for Paralytic Shellfish Poison [PSP] or toxic red tide that is beyond the regulatory limit,” the bulletin signed by BFAR Officer-in-Charge Isidro M. Velayo Jr., said.

“All types of shellfish and *Acetes* sp. or alamang gathered from these areas are not safe for human consumption,” it added.

Health experts said PSP’s symptoms like numbness, dizziness, weakness, gastrointestinal discomfort, pricking sensation, difficulty in speech or swallowing, and headaches can occur within 12 hours of ingesting aquatic invertebrates with shells.

In such cases, it’s important to take action immediately by seeking urgent medical attention at the nearest health center or hospital.

The BFAR, however, clarified that other seafoods such as “fish, squids, shrimps, and crabs are safe for human consumption.”

It reminded the public that they are still fit to be eaten “provided that they are fresh and washed thoroughly, and internal organs such as gills and intestines are removed before cooking.”

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/01/da-bfar-warns-vs-red-tide-in-7-areas/>

BUSINESS INSIGHT:

PSA: Palay output fell slightly in Q1; Central Luzon still top producer

Ada Pelonia

May 1, 2024

THE country's unmilled rice production declined slightly in the first quarter of 2024, based on the Philippine Statistics Authority's (PSA) survey of production volume.

Data from the PSA showed that palay output in January to March slid by 1.96 percent to 4.69 million metric tons (MMT) from the 4.78 MMT recorded in the same period in 2023.

The agency defined crop production as the quantity produced and actual harvested for a particular crop during the reference period. It includes palay harvests that have been damaged, stolen, given away, consumed, given as harvester's share, or reserved.

"It excludes those produced but not harvested due to low price, lack of demand, force majeure, or fortuitous events," PSA said.

Its data also showed that palay output in irrigated and rainfed farms declined in the first quarter.

The production of irrigated farms dipped by 2.34 percent, reaching 3.6 MMT from last year's 3.69 MMT. Rainfed farms, which depend solely on rainfall, produced 1.086 MMT, slightly lower than the 1.094 MMT recorded in 2023.

Meanwhile, the palay output of Central Luzon, the country's rice granary, declined by 10.55 percent to 775,644 MT from last year's 867,084 MT. Central Luzon remained as the country's top rice-producing region during the period.

Cagayan Valley, another top rice producer, had 754,833 MT or nearly 15 percent higher than last year's 657,636 MT.

Based on the PSA's data, palay or unmilled rice production in 2023 reached a record 20.06 MMT. The figure is 1.56 percent higher than the 19.76 MMT recorded in 2022.

Yellow and white corn

Figures from the PSA also showed contrasting results for corn production in the first quarter. The production of yellow corn, which is typically used as feed grains and includes all sorts of corn other than white, went up by 1.85 percent to 2.09 MMT from 2.05 MMT recorded a year ago.

Meanwhile, white corn production fell by 5.23 percent to 445,520 MMT from 470,102 MMT in 2023.

Despite this, the combined output of corn production in the country for the first quarter inched up to 2.53 MMT from the previous year's 2.52 MMT.

The PSA's Palay Production Survey and Corn Production Survey were conducted on the first 10 days of the month following the reference quarter.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/01/psa-palay-output-fell-slightly-in-q1-central-luzon-still-top-producer/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

PhilRice: RTL raised rice yield

- Ada Pelonia
- May 1, 2024

The Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice), a government corporate entity attached to the Department of Agriculture (DA), claimed that the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) improved rice yield and reduced production costs five years after its enactment.

In a paper it presented during a hearing at the House of Representatives last Monday, PhilRice said rice yield per hectare rose by 21 percent to 4.36 metric tons (MT) from 3.63 MT in 2019 and by 9 percent to 4.03 MT during the dry and wet season, respectively. It added that production fell to P13.64 per kilogram (kg) in 2023 from P15.24 per kg in 2019.

The DA urged lawmakers to extend the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) until 2030, citing the “significant gains” it brought to the local rice sector. The said fund, which was created by Republic Act (RA) 11203, is set to lapse this year.

The RCEF allocates P10 billion for farm mechanization (P5 billion), inbred seeds (P3 billion), rice credit assistance (P1 billion), and rice extension service (P1 billion).

“The extension of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund until 2030 and reallocation of funds towards farm machinery, seed development, and training and extension services are recommended, with special attention given to soil health improvement initiatives,” National Rice Industry Development Program Undersecretary Christopher Morales said.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. proposed amendments for the RTL extension to boost farm productivity and improve farmers’ competitiveness. Among the DA’s proposed changes were higher allocation of funds for farm inputs, post-harvest facilities to lessen wastage, and the imposition of timing restrictions on import permits to control arrivals during harvest season.

The department also called for strengthening the regulatory functions of the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) and allowing the National Food Authority (NFA) to secure buffer stock through alternative schemes.

Under RA 11203 or RTL, the NFA was stripped of its function of importing rice and selling it to the public. It has been reduced to keeping an emergency buffer stock of domestically produced rice.

“Our goal is to address existing gaps and better meet the needs of our farmers and stakeholders,” Morales said.

He also said supporting the country’s rice farmers would help the majority of poor Filipino households who spend 20 percent of their budget on rice.

The poorest households bear the brunt of increase in food prices. The Bottom 30 percent of Filipino households spend more than half of their income for food of which rice accounts for nearly 18 percent.

“Our focus on enhancing the competitiveness of rice production in the Philippines is pivotal for improving the livelihoods of our farmers.”

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/01/philrice-rtl-raised-rice-yield/>

BUSINESS MIRRORS:

PHL grapples with rice shortfalls in the wake of severe El Niño

- BusinessMirror Editorial
- May 1, 2024

Nearly three decades ago, the Philippines suffered one of the most severe El Niño episodes in its history. The weather phenomenon that struck the country in 1997 caused below-average rainfall and dried up farmlands. Parched farms failed to produce staple crops, prompting the government to import millions of tons of rice to prop up domestic supply.

According to the World Bank, the 1997-1998 El Niño resulted in \$240 million worth of agricultural damage, including a 27 percent decline in rice production and a 44 percent decline in corn production. As a result of the significant reduction in domestic rice output, the self-sufficiency ratio (SSR) for the staple fell to 72.1 percent (see “Rice sufficiency level falls to 24-year low,” BusinessMirror, October 10, 2023). This meant that the Philippines had to rely on foreign sources to fill up its rice requirements in the immediate years after the El Niño episode ended.

The Philippines will again see the same rice SSR 25 years after, or in 2022, when domestic rice output was able to meet only 77 percent of the country’s requirement. Aside from rice, data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) indicated that the Philippines saw shortfalls in corn, onion, garlic, peanut, mongo, potato, beef, pork, dressed chicken and round scad or galunggong in 2022. SSR indicates the extent to which a country relies on its own production resources; a ratio of less than 100 percent indicates inadequacy to cope with the demand of the population.

As for the 2023 SSR for select crops and farm commodities, the PSA may release data in the fourth quarter of this year. Judging from the recent pronouncements of policymakers and the spikes in commodity prices particularly that of rice, there is a possibility that the SSR data would not be encouraging. Even the country’s chief economist said the Philippines’s production of key agricultural commodities is not enough to meet increasing demand. (See <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/04/26/neda-imports-still-needed-ao-20-vital-to-food-security/>)

To keep prices stable, the Marcos administration took a cue from its predecessor and issued Administrative Order (AO) 20, which called on concerned government agencies to streamline administrative procedures and policies on the importation of agricultural products and remove non-tariff barriers or NTBs. These NTBs include sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances, quotas and even red tape. AO 20 repealed AO 13 issued by former President Duterte in September 2018, a few months before the former chief executive signed the rice tariffication bill.

We agree with the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) that imports remain necessary to ensure the country's food security, particularly at this time when geopolitical risks threaten to boost the prices of inputs and the current dry spell is reducing crops output in some areas. However, the continued implementation of nontariff barriers, such as export bans, by other countries serve as a constant reminder to our policymakers that the Philippines should substantially raise farm output to reduce the country's reliance on imports. The 2022 SSR indicated that it can be done as the Philippines is self-sufficient in vegetables, fruits and some fishery products.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/01/phl-grapples-with-rice-shortfalls-in-the-wake-of-severe-el-nino/>

ABANTE TONITE:

PBBM pinalarga ayuda sa mga agri worker na sapol ng El Niño

May 1, 2024

Asahang makatatanggap ng tulong mula sa gobyerno ang mga manggagawa sa agrikultura at iba pang sektor na apektado ng El Niño ang mga ani at kita.

Ito ang ipinahayag ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. sa ika-122 selebrasyon ng Araw ng Paggawa nitong Miyerkoles bilang bahagi ng patuloy na programa ng gobyerno sa harap ng nararanasang matinding tagtuyot.

Ayon sa Pangulo, ang tulong pinansiyal na ipamamahagi sa mga manggagawa sa sektor ng agrikultura ay karagdagang ayuda sa nagpapatuloy na programa ng Department of Agriculture, Department of Social Welfare and Development at Department of Labor and Employment.

“Sa susunod na araw ay magpapaabot tayo ng tulong pinansiyal sa mga lubhang naapektuhan ng El Nino sa buong bansa—yaong nasiraan ng pananim at kabuhayan dahil sa tagtuyot,” sabi ng Pangulo.(Aileen Taliping/Prince Golez)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2024/05/01/pbbm-pinalarga-ayuda-sa-mga-agri-worker-na-sapol-ng-el-nino/>