

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# Farmers' group warns lawmakers of proposal to subsidize NFA rice sale

BY JEL SANTOS

May 9, 2024 05:01 PM



The proposal to subsidize the sale of National Food Authority's (NFA's) rice to the public is detrimental to the country's rice farmers, the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) said on Thursday, May 9.

In a statement, the group stated that proposed scheme could be costly and difficult to manage.

The studies conducted by the FFF showed that the NFA rice subsidy of P10 per kilo will require P31 billion a year to service the 4.4 million poor households covered by the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps).

“If the beneficiaries will include low-income and middle-class households, as proposed by some congressmen, the annual cost would balloon to over P119 billion per year,” the group pointed out.

The aim to stabilize the rice prices is good, according to FFF national manager Raul Montemayor, but he said that “the cost of doing this might become prohibitive.”

Instead of distributing rice, the farmers’ group suggested issuing vouchers, which beneficiaries can use to purchase rice from accredited outlets.

NFA’s aggressive rice distribution, Montemayor said, could end up depressing palay prices for farmers.

“If the NFA sells rice at P10 below the market price, local traders will have to lower their palay buying price by P6 per kilo in order to compete with the NFA,” he said.

On May 5, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said it is backing the proposal to revive NFA’s authority to purchase rice and sell it at a cheaper price.

Speaker Martin Romualdez stated that on April 30, the House of Representatives (HR) will pass a bill revising the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) to reinstate the NFA's right to buy and sell rice at a lower price, among other improvements.

Romualdez made the statement after the House Agriculture and food panel held its first hearing on proposed RTL amendments.

Based on DA’s price monitoring as of May 7, the cheapest retail price of rice of the National Capital Region (NCR) is P46 a kilo (Local Regular Milled).

Meanwhile, the priciest rice in the metropolis is 65 per kilo (Imported and Local Special).

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/9/farmers-group-warns-lawmakers-of-proposal-to-subsidize-nfa-rice-sale-1>

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# **PBBM, First Lady Liza provide aid in Zamboanga Peninsula**

**BY LIZA JOCSON**

May 9, 2024 07:21 PM

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. and First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos arrived in Zamboanga City on Thursday, May 9, to spearhead the distribution of millions of pesos worth of assistance from the national government.



**PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. leads national and local government officials in giving financial assistance to Zamboanga Peninsula residents. (City Hall PIO)**

A total of P60 million was given to Zamboanga City and three other provinces of Zamboanga Peninsula.

Zamboanga City received P10-million worth of assistance while Zamboanga Sibugay received P20.3 million.

The provinces of Zamboanga del Norte and Zamboanga del Sur received P14.2 million and P14.35 million, respectively.

Marcos led a program at the Summit Center in Barangay Tetuan where he distributed financial assistance to farmers and fisherfolk from Zamboanga City. The beneficiaries were affected by the dry spell from the El Niño phenomenon.

The President was accompanied by Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Interior and Local Government Secretary Benhur Abalos Jr., Special Assistant to the President Antonio Lagdameo, Social Welfare and Development Secretary Rex Gatchalian, Zamboanga City Rep. Mannix Dalipe, and Zamboanga City Mayor John Dalipe.

The First Lady arrived at the Western Mindanao State University in Zamboanga City to head the LAB for All Caravan, a program which provides free medical and legal services to its beneficiaries.

The arrival of the presidential couple started the delivery of millions of pesos worth of financial assistance by the national government under the Bagong Pilipinas Serbisyo Fair.

From May 10 to 11, at least 49 government agencies will participate in the delivery of services and assistance under the Bagong Pilipinas Serbisyo Fair caravan in a Zamboanga City high school.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/9/pbbm-first-lady-liza-provide-aid-in-zamboanga-peninsula>

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# **NIA: P29 rice won't compete with traders**

**BY GABRIELL CHRISTEL GALANG**

May 9, 2024 05:00 PM

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The National Irrigation Administration (NIA) assured that selling rice would not compete with traders, and instead would assist them.

In a statement, the NIA shared its plan to sell a kilo of rice for P29 by August, through the Contract Farming program. This initiative would allow farmers to produce rice at a predetermined market price for procurement.

NIA Administrator Eduardo Guillen expects the program to produce 100 million kilos of rice within 40,000 hectares of land.

“This step would consolidate the farmers does not mean any competition against traders, rather we want to help them,” Guillen clarified.

When asked how the volume of rice would be produced, he described two seed varieties— inbred and hybrid. He stated “If it’s inbred, the regular yield would be at around 5 tons. With the National Food Authority’s [NFA] formula, we could produce 3,150 kilos, resulting in a P9.50 total production cost.”

If 100 percent yield is given to farmers, NIA believed this would cost around P30,000.

“Even if the production costs amount to less than P20 per kilo, farmers will still earn from this.”

On the other hand, Guillen said that hybrid seeds are quite an investment, but would still exert large amounts of harvests.

The program is a collaborative effort with various Agriculture agencies, like the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (Philmech), the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice), the National Rice Program (NRP), and more.

The NIA chief also commends the Irrigators Association (IA) for helping them bring down the rice price to P20 per kilo in Kadiwa stores.

Guillen believed that farmers and farmer cooperatives would gain earnings from the initiative.

“If we sell rice for P40 a kilo, we’re adding 20 pesos to our cooperatives,” he said.

The NIA also predicted that this year alone could generate 5 million kilos of rice worth P1 million, if “we could produce 5 tons in production for every 1,000 hectares of rice land.”

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/9/nia-p29-rice-won-t-compete-with-traders>

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# 72 farmers complete sustainable agriculture training

**BY ZALDY COMANDA**

May 9, 2024 02:11 PM

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Seventy-two farmers from Benguet and Baguio City have completed the Kabalikat sa Kabuhayan sustainable agriculture training program of the SM Foundation Inc.



**SEVENTY-TWO farmers have completed the Kabalikat sa Kabuhayan (KSK) sustainable agriculture training program of the SM Foundation Inc.**

The foundation held a moving forward ceremony at SM City Baguio for the three KSK batches on May 3.

These graduates were from Sitio Liwliw, Barangay Camp 4, Tuba, and Sitio Calamay, Barangay Bayabas, Sablan in Benguet, and Purok 1, Happy Hollow, Baguio City.

They completed a 14-week comprehensive training on sustainable farming and business techniques that equipped them with the knowledge and skills to contribute to local food production and security.

SM Foundation said it continues to empower local communities through the KSK program to strengthen modern agriculture, agripreneurship, and food security.

The SM Foundation, through the KSK program, said they uplift vulnerable Filipino farmers by enhancing agripreneurship and economic opportunities and ensuring food security in communities across the Philippines.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/9/72-farmers-complete-sustainable-agriculture-training>

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# Marcos wants beefed-up drive vs tobacco, vape products smuggling

BY ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

May 9, 2024 01:06 PM

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## AT A GLANCE

- The tobacco industry provides livelihood to 2.2 million Filipinos. In 2023, the tobacco excise tax composed four percent of total government revenues or P135 billion.
- The government earmarks 50 percent of excise tax collection for Universal Health Care under the Department of Health (DOH) and PhilHealth as well as for the Health Facilities Enhancement Program (HFEP).

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President Marcos told the Bureau of Customs (BoC) and the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) to step up their efforts to protect the country's tobacco industry against the smuggling of tobacco and vape products.



*President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. (Noel Pabalate)*

Marcos said this during the sixth Private Sector Advisory Council-Agriculture Sector Group (PSAC-ASG) meeting in Malacañan on Wednesday, May 8.

In his remarks, the President recognized the government's anti-smuggling measures but asked the BOC and the BIR to intensify their enforcement.

"Enforcement and anti-smuggling and all that. You really have to beef them up and I think we're doing that," he said.

"There will be [more efforts] with the Bureau of Customs and BIR so that we can improve performance in that regard," he added.

In response, Special Assistant to the President on Economic and Economic Affairs Frederick Go said the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Consumer Protection Group will assign a significant number of people dedicated to monitoring the vape industry.

BIR Commissioner Romeo Lumagui Jr. told the President that his agency has intensified its crackdown against smuggled vape products and will implement a tax stamp system to fish out the illicit ones.

For its part, the PSAC-ASG made several recommendations and policy requirements to protect the tobacco industry.

The advisory body pushed a move tasking the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to release funds as prescribed under Republic Act No. 4155 for the National Tobacco Authority (NTA) Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP).

It also sought amendments to the Anti-Agri Smuggling Act of 2016 to include tobacco products. The body also wants provisions on minimum retail price (MRP) and penalties for distributing and selling smuggled products.

The body also called on the DTI to set a deadline for the registration of importers and manufacturers of vapor products and the BIR to start imposing tax requirements on tobacco and vapor products.

"There must also be sustained enforcement of laws against smugglers and retailers of smuggled tobacco and vapor products," the group said.

"Operations involving these products should also be reported to the Office of the President on a monthly basis," it added.

The tobacco industry provides livelihood to 2.2 million Filipinos. In 2023, the tobacco excise tax composed four percent of total government revenues or P135 billion.

The government earmarks 50 percent of excise tax collection for Universal Health Care under the Department of Health (DOH) and PhilHealth as well as for the Health Facilities Enhancement Program (HFEP).

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/9/marcos-wants-beefed-up-drive-vs-tobacco-vape-products-smuggling>



**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# Marcos keen on making PH world's no. 1 coconut exporter

**BY BETHEENA UNITE**

May 9, 2024 12:51 PM

There is a great opportunity for the country to become the world's no. 1 coconut exporter, President Marcos said.



(Photo courtesy of Malacañang)

Marcos made the statement after the Private Sector Advisory Council-Agriculture Sector Group (PSAC-ASG) recommended the launching of a massive coconut tree planting program by increasing seednut production.

“This is really a great opportunity to the country. We have a chance to do it because [of] the market. Every single part of the nut [has] use and can be sold,” he said during the meeting with PSAC on Wednesday, May 8.

At present, the Philippines is the second biggest coconut exporting country in the world, next only to Indonesia.

In order to achieve this, the Philippine Coconut Authority plans to plant 100 million coconut trees by the end of Marcos administration.

However, PSAC-ASG member Christopher Po of Century Pacific Group, said the program is not feasible due to limited funding.

Marcos said he will see to it that enough funding will be given to the PCA to carry out the program.

Moreover, the advisory body made several recommendations to remedy the problem. They proposed to task the PCA to outline a roadmap to accelerate the launch of the coconut planting program.

They also recommended the PCA to enter into contract farming with local salt farmers to supply salt as fertilizer.

The PSAC's recommendation on salt development is consistent with Republic Act No. 11985 or the Philippine Salt Industry Act. The law provides that LGUs shall identify the appropriate areas for local salt production in their respective localities.

According to PSAC, a P2.5-billion budget allows the fertilization of 55 million coconut trees and doubling of local salt production. This could result to 25 percent increase in nut productivity and additional profit to farmers, the body said.

For this year, the PCA aims to replant 8.5 million coconut seedlings in 59,744 hectares. It also intends to fertilize 2.8 million trees in 28,341 hectares.

Meanwhile, PSAC also wants the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) and LGUs to pilot areas for salt production. It also urged the Department of Energy (DOE) to develop a roadmap for the gradual implementation of the Biodiesel Act increasing biodiesel from B2 to B59 over three years.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/9/marcos-bent-on-making-philippines-as-world-s-no-1-coconut-exporter>

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

## **PBBM, First Lady due in Zamboanga City**

**BY LIZA JOCSON**

May 9, 2024 12:43 PM

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. and First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos are expected to arrive in Zamboanga City on Thursday, May 9, to provide assistance from the national government to thousands of residents here and the Zamboanga Peninsula region.



### **PRESIDENT Marcos (FB)**

Mr. Marcos is expected to provide assistance to thousands of farmers and fisherfolk during a distribution activity at the UZ Summit in Barangay Tetuan.

Expected to grace the event are Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., House Majority Leader Zamboanga City Rep. Mannix Dalipe, and Mayor John Dalipe here, among others.

The First Lady will grace the LAB for All Laboratoryo, Konsulta, at Gamot para sa Lahat program at the Western Mindanao State University (WMSU) gymnasium here.

The LAB for All program started last May 5 at the Baliwasan Central School covered court and was also held the following day at the Flamingo covered court in Upper Calarian and at the Ayala Covered Court on May 7.

Among the services it provided were medical consultation, oral health services, health promotion, laboratory services, and free medicines.

Free legal services, which included counselling, documentation, and the administration of oaths, were also provided to residents through the program.

The two programs are forerunners of a bigger national program which had Zamboanga City as pilot area: The Bagong Pilipinas Serbisyo Fair, now on its 16th leg, scheduled from May 10 to 11.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/9/pbbm-first-lady-due-in-zamboanga-city>

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# viving a lost textile may be key to reviving a lost crop, Part 1

BY [YVETTE TAN](#)

May 10, 2024 05:39 AM



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## AVANT GARDENER

The Philippines has lost a lot of indigenous and endemic crops that have, because of commercial reasons, stopped being cultivated. One of these is Philippine cotton.

Textile conservationist and cultural advocate (just two of the many hats he wears) Raffy Tesoro plans to revive the cultivation of Philippine cotton alongside a plan to revive Philippine textiles, in this case, kulambo.

“It’s dead. Nobody makes it,” Tesoro said.

When most people hear the word “kulambo,” they think of plastic netting, sometimes in bright colors, hung around one’s bed to keep mosquitoes out at night. But before the mass takeover of plastic kulambo, mosquito netting used to be made from a type of muslin. “[It] was originally an Indian technique. You’re supposed to use a very fine cotton thread and you have to weave it softly so that you can get enough spacing so it’s light and airy but the holes are small enough so that mosquitoes don’t get through.... You drape it over the beds. You see it in the old movies. You could still see it in old houses back in the day.”

Tesoro estimates that plastic mosquito netting entered the Philippine market in the 50s, fully replacing muslin in the 70s or 80s.

Most of the kulambo produced used to be made in Ibaan, Batangas. “[While there are a few weavers] who remember how to make it when they were kids, but they’ve not had an opportunity to [practice]—they’ve completely lost [the art],” Tesoro said.

“So that [died] out, and it’s sad because... kulambo may seem like a very mundane fabric... but the creation of it was actually very technical. It was a high skill requirement fabric.... [If]

you still had the plastic kulambo, you remember rolling on it and feeling itchy and icky, because it's plastic? You'd never feel that way with a cotton kulambo. That all went out of style because plastic came in. So we lost that, and we also lost the raw material. Philippine cotton."

Tesoro has been on a mission to reviving the Philippine cotton industry because it is essential to revitalizing the country's textile industry. Unfortunately, it isn't easy. "...back then, the weavers would grow their own cotton in their own backyards or in a farm. Around 40s, 50s or so. They would spin it themselves and they would make it into fabric. So it wasn't just kulambo," he said. "That was a loss."

He acknowledges that there are still some farms who plant Philippine cotton, but the production isn't enough, and the country doesn't have the technology to create the very fine thread needed to make muslin. "...there are only four thread factories in the Philippines (two government, two private), but the problem with the government one is they only have one gauge of thread, a very thick thread that's good for making katsa (cheesecloth), and they don't grade the cotton because there is no way to get rid of the ungraded or below grade cotton, so they just mix the entire lot."

This means the rival of kulambo isn't just dependent on teaching weavers a lost art, it also means cultivating a crop that isn't cultivated on a large scale anymore while developing post production processes and facilities to produce the right materials, in this case, thread, for the product.

This highlights the link of agriculture to textile, a link that is often forgotten, especially in a market flooded with synthetics and a mass clientele whose idea of fashion doesn't extend beyond what a garment looks like.

In the next part of this series, we talk about why Philippine cotton stopped being cultivated and how it affected, not just the local textile industry, but the country's potential economic prospects as well.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/10/reviving-a-lost-textile-may-be-key-to-reviving-a-lost-crop-part-1>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Agriculture chief exempts bonito from import ban

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

May 10, 2024 | 12:00am



Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. STAR / File

MANILA, Philippines — Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. has allowed canners to import frozen bonito more than two weeks after he ordered a temporary import suspension of the fish, following reports that imported fish stocks are diverted to the wet markets.

In issuing Memorandum Order 18, Tiu Laurel allowed the issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearance for the importation of bonito “for canning purposes.” An SPSIC is issued by the government to certify that an imported good is safe for humans, plants and animals. It is required to be secured before any imported goods enter the country.

Tiu Laurel earlier issued MO 14 to suspend the issuance of the SPSIC for the importation of frozen round scad (galunggong), mackerel (alumahan) and bonito (tulingan) after finding that at least 100,000 metric tons of imported galunggong were diverted to wet markets in the last nine months.

According to Tiu Laurel, the issuance of the memorandum order was necessary to curb and prevent the diversion of frozen imported fish stocks intended for canners, processors and institutional buyers.

He also ordered a crackdown on importers involved in the diversion of imported fish stocks to the wet market.

Danilo Fausto, Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food president, said the issuance of MO 18 would ensure that local canneries have sufficient raw material supply and prevent price spikes.

He noted that most of the imported fish products are not locally available or insufficient to meet canners' requirement.

Fausto said local canners are experiencing "pressure" from government agencies in minimizing their price hikes since prices of canned items like sardines are regulated by the government.

"Also, local prices for similar species are often higher than imported ones. Consequently, it has squeezed canneries' profit margins leading to the sale or closure of some canneries," he added.

Based on the Department of Agriculture monitoring, the retail price of local galunggong ranged between P150 and P250 per kilo; Indian mackerel, between P200 and P360 per kilo; bonito, between P140 and P200 per kilo; sardines or tamban between P100 and P200 per kilo; tilapia, between P100 and P160; bangus or milkfish, between P130 and P240 per kilo; and salmon head, between P140 and P260 per kilo. – **Jasper Emmanuel Arcalas**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/10/2353975/agriculture-chief-exempts-bonito-import-ban>



**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# DA backs early rice tariff collection certification

[Jasper Emmanuel Arcalas](#) - The Philippine Star

May 10, 2024 | 12:00am



Photos show workers unloading sacks of rice from a truck along Dagupan St. in Manila on February 7, 2024. STAR / Ernie Penaredondo

**MANILA, Philippines** — The Department of Agriculture (DA) is supporting the proposed earlier certification of tariffs collected from rice imports to fast-track the rollout of programs aimed at aiding farmers such as cash assistance.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said making the tariff certification earlier than the current April 15 deadline would allow the DA to complete necessary bidding and procurement processes within the first quarter.

This will allow the DA to roll out additional programs for the improvement of rice farmers' productivity faster especially since it is proposing that more items that can be funded by the excess tariff collections aside from just financial assistance.

Under the current proposal, the DA wants the rice tariffs collected in excess of P15 billion to be used for crop diversification, solar-powered irrigation systems, small water impounding systems and financial assistance.

Furthermore, the allocation of the excess rice tariffs shall be determined by the DA secretary, based on the department's proposed amendments to the rice tariffication law (RTL).

Last Tuesday, Albay Rep. Joey Salceda proposed that the Bureau of the Treasury certifies the total tariff collections from rice imports not later than 30 days from the end of each fiscal year.

This is earlier than the April 15 deadline given to the Bureau of Customs (BOC) to certify the total rice tariff collections made in the preceding fiscal year, under existing rules and regulations.

Salceda's proposal was adopted and approved by the House committees on agriculture and food, as well as ways and means.

Under existing rules and regulations, the DA shall await the rice tariff collection certification issued by the BOC before it can start undertaking bureaucratic process of getting the fund for its rice farmers financial assistance (RFFA) program.

At present, all excess rice tariffs are used for the RFFA program where farmers tilling two hectares and below get P5,000 each.

Modification to the use of the excess rice tariffs is part of the proposed amendments to the RTL as the legislative and executive branches of government seek to extend the rice competitiveness enhancement fund (RCEF).

Created under the RTL, the RCEF seeks to improve rice farmers' competitiveness through the provision of seeds, machinery, credit and training after the government liberalized and deregulated the country's rice trade regime.

Rice tariff collections as certified by the BOC reached a record-high of P29.9 billion in 2023, with nearly P19.9 billion in excess collection to be used for the RFFA.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/05/10/2353861/da-backs-early-rice-tariff-collection-certification>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Retailers open to voluntary price freeze – DTI

[Louella Desiderio](#) - The Philippine Star

May 10, 2024 | 12:00am



Manufacturers and retailers voiced their position at a recent meeting with Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual. BusinessWorld / File

**MANILA, Philippines** — Manufacturers and retailers are open to a voluntary price freeze on essential goods amid possible spikes in prices due to effects of the El Niño phenomenon, according to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

Manufacturers and retailers voiced their position at a recent meeting with Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual.

At the meeting were representatives and officers of Monde Nissin Corp., Unilever Philippines Inc., Coca-Cola Beverages Philippines, Universal Robina Corp., Nestle Philippines Inc., Procter and Gamble Philippines Inc., Century Pacific Food Inc., Alaska Milk Corp., CDO Foodsphere, NutriAsia, SM Supermarket and Robinsons Supermarket.

The DTI said discussions on a possible price freeze are ongoing amid risk of sharp price hikes due to El Niño.

Under the Price Act, prices of basic necessities are automatically frozen at prevailing prices for up to 60 days in an area under a state of calamity.

“At DTI, we are deeply committed to monitoring market conditions, advocating for consumer rights and guiding our nation through these challenges. We are profoundly grateful for the industry’s partnership in protecting the welfare of our community,” Pascual said.

“What is good about this effort is that the voluntary price freeze will be felt by everyone, not only in areas under a state of calamity, but every Filipino consumer,” Trade Assistant Secretary Amanda Nograles said.

Also discussed during the meeting were DTI’s ongoing projects such as the Clark Mega Food Hub and the Nueva Vizcaya Agricultural Terminal Online, designed to strengthen the link between farmers and retailers, support the local economy and ensure availability of affordable food.

Pascual emphasized the DTI’s commitment to balancing consumer protection, while promoting a thriving business ecosystem.

“We understand the difficulty experienced by Filipino families due to El Niño. The DTI is focused on ensuring right prices, protecting consumer welfare and ensuring retailers are responsible in running their business,” he said.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/10/2353994/retailers-open-voluntary-price-freeze-dti>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Another Negros Occidental city under state of calamity

[Roel Pareño](#), [Gilbert Bayoran](#) - The Philippine Star

May 10, 2024 | 12:00am

BACOLOD CITY, Philippines — San Carlos City in Negros Occidental is now under a state of calamity due to drought amid the El Niño phenomenon.

The City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office chaired by Mayor Renato Gustilo recommended the state of calamity declaration, which was approved by the Sangguniang Panlungsod during its special session on Monday.

Damage to agriculture was placed at P17.6 million, with 375 hectares of land and 518 farmers affected.

Kabankalan City and San Enrique town, also in Negros Occidental, had earlier been placed under a state of calamity due to the effects of El Niño.

Damage to crops in the entire province was placed at P214 million as of May 3.

Negros Oriental was placed under a state of calamity last week as damage to agriculture has increased to P240 million. It was the eighth province placed under calamity status.

Meanwhile, the provincial government of Negros Occidental is preparing for the rainy season following the announcement by the Department of Science and Technology that there is a 62 percent chance that the La Niña phenomenon would develop from June to August.

“I am hoping that there will be rain, but no typhoons,” Gov. Eugenio Jose Lacson said.

In Zamboanga peninsula, President Marcos yesterday distributed P58.9 million in financial assistance to farmers and fisherfolk affected by El Niño.

The President also distributed fuel subsidy, farming inputs as well as funds to rehabilitate and install solar-powered irrigation systems, among other related programs.

The cash assistance came from the Socio-Civic Projects Fund, formerly known as the President's Social Fund.

Zamboanga del Norte received P14.26 million; Zamboanga del Sur, P14.3 million; Zamboanga Sibugay, P20.3 million, and Zamboanga City, P10 million.

“President Marcos has repeatedly mentioned (the need) to focus on affected farmers, fisherfolk and their families because... they are the frontliners of our food security,” Assistant Secretary Joey Villarama, spokesman for Task Force El Niño, said. - **Alexis Romero**

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2024/05/10/2353954/another-negros-occidental-city-under-state-calamity>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Marcos orders crackdown on tobacco, vape smuggling

[Alexis Romero](#) - The Philippine Star

May 10, 2024 | 12:00am



“Enforcement and anti-smuggling and all that – you really have to beef them up, and I think we’re doing that,” Marcos said during the sixth Private Sector Advisory Council-Agriculture Sector Group meeting at Malacañang last Wednesday.

STAR / File

MANILA, Philippines — President Marcos has directed the customs and internal revenue bureaus to enhance their efforts against the smuggling of tobacco and vape products, during a meeting that tackled measures aimed at protecting the Philippines’ tobacco industry.

“Enforcement and anti-smuggling and all that – you really have to beef them up, and I think we’re doing that,” Marcos said during the sixth Private Sector Advisory Council-Agriculture Sector Group meeting at Malacañang last Wednesday.

“There will be (more effort) with the Bureau of Customs and BIR (Bureau of Internal Revenue) so that we can improve performance with that regard,” he added.

Special Assistant to the President on Investment and Economic Affairs Frederick Go said the trade department’s consumer protection group has assured him that a “significant” number of personnel would be tasked to monitor the vape industry.

BIR Commissioner Romeo Lumagui Jr. told Marcos that the tax bureau has strengthened its crackdown on the smuggling of vape products and is set to implement a tax stamp system to determine which of them are illicit.

In a recent memorandum circular, the BIR said the internal revenue stamps would be required for all manufactured vape products in the market by June 1 to ensure that the right amount of taxes are paid.

Last November, Lumagui said as much as P60 billion in taxes was lost in 2023 because of the illicit tobacco trade, which he said provides an unfair advantage that leads to the decline of the tobacco business.

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2024/05/10/2353956/marcos-orders-crackdown-tobacco-vape-smuggling>



**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Marcos Jr. vows to fund coconut export program

[Alexis Romero](#) - The Philippine Star

May 10, 2024 | 12:00am



Measures that seek to develop the coconut industry and key issues affecting the farm sector were discussed during Marcos' meeting with the Private Sector Advisory Council-Agriculture Sector Group (PSAC-ASG) at Malacañang last Wednesday.

BusinessWorld / Lean S. Daval, Jr.

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**MANILA, Philippines** — President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has announced a new Presidential Communication Authority (PCA) program that aims to plant 100 million coconut trees by the end of his term to reach the goal of making the Philippines the number one coconut exporting country in the world.

Measures that seek to develop the coconut industry and key issues affecting the farm sector were discussed during Marcos' meeting with the Private Sector Advisory Council-Agriculture Sector Group (PSAC-ASG) at Malacañang last Wednesday.

A Presidential Communications Office (PCO) statement quoted PSAC-ASG member Christopher Po as saying that the program on coconut trees is "not feasible due to limited funding."

Po, also the executive chairman of Century Pacific Food, said the group is recommending the acceleration of the launch of a massive coconut tree planting program by increasing seednut production.

Marcos promised to see to it that sufficient funding would be given to the PCA to implement the program.

“This is really a great opportunity (for) the country. We have a chance to do it because (of) the market. Every single part of the nut (has) use and can be sold,” the President said.

The Philippines is the second biggest coconut exporting country in the world after its fellow Southeast Asian country Indonesia.

In a separate statement, PSAC said Marcos had proposed a “comprehensive” restructuring of the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan Fund to ensure a more efficient allocation of resources and to support PCA’s replanting strategy.

The PCA seeks to replant 8.5 million coconut seedlings in 59,744 hectares this year. It also aims to fertilize 2.8 million trees in 28,341 hectares.

According to the PCO, the PSAC-ASG presented several recommendations to address funding issues, including directing the PCA to outline a roadmap to fast-track the launch of the coconut planting program.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/10/2353967/marcos-jr-vows-fund-coconut-export-program>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Economy expands at faster clip of 5.7%

[Louella Desiderio](#) - The Philippine Star

May 10, 2024 | 12:00am



Photo show the skyscrapers of the Ortigas Center in the central business district as seen from Pasig City on January 9, 2024 afternoon. Michael Varcas / The Philippine STAR

## In first quarter

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippine economy expanded at a faster pace of 5.7 percent in the first quarter from 5.5 percent in the fourth quarter of 2023, helping the country retain its position as a leading force among emerging economies in Asia.

However, the first quarter gross domestic product (GDP) growth was slower than the 6.4-percent expansion in the same quarter last year.

In a press briefing, National Economic and Development Authority Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said the performance in the first quarter retains the country's position as a leading force among Asia's emerging economies, with the GDP growth rate about the same as Vietnam's and above the growth in other major economies such as China's 5.3 percent, Indonesia's 5.1 percent and Malaysia's 3.9 percent.

“From the start of the year, we have been experiencing several shocks, the major ones being the long period of the heatwave, and related to that, the El Niño and geopolitical tensions. Our first quarter economic performance is a testament to our people's and industries' resilience,” Balisacan said.

Despite the damage caused by El Niño, the agriculture sector still managed to record a 0.4-percent growth in the first quarter.

Other major economic sectors also posted year-on-year growth in the first quarter, with the industry sector growing by 5.1 percent, driven by the growth in manufacturing, while the services sector rose by 6.9 percent, supported by the continued recovery of tourism-related activities.

On the demand side, household spending grew by 4.6 percent in the first quarter this year, slower than the 6.4 percent in the same quarter in 2023 and the previous quarter's 5.3 percent.

National Statistician Dennis Mapa said the first quarter household spending growth rate was the slowest since the 2.6 percent in the third quarter of 2010, excluding the pandemic years.

Balisacan said household spending slowed "due to elevated prices of major food items and the heatwave."

Likewise, government spending posted a slower growth of 1.7 percent in the first quarter from 6.2 percent in the same quarter in 2023.

Gross capital formation grew by 1.3 percent in the first quarter, a deceleration compared to the 12.8-percent growth in the same period of 2023.

Balisacan attributed the slowdown to the effects of elevated interest rates in the past four to five quarters, which are still being felt today and may linger for a while.

Despite these developments, he said the turnaround in net export performance, which rebounded to 9.5 percent in the first quarter from contractions posted in the same period and in the fourth quarter last year, is fueling optimism.

"The primary driver of this increase in our merchandise exports was the recovery in exports of electronic products," he said.

While the El Niño and the prolonged period of heat affected certain sectors including construction, he said mitigation efforts put in place by the government helped soften the impact.

"I think that unless we see a reversal in the gains that we are making and in tempering the inflation, particularly in food and energy, I don't see any reason why the second quarter [growth] should be any weaker than in the first quarter," he said.

With hard work and the right policies, he said the government is confident the six to seven percent growth target would be achieved this year.

He said ensuring food security remains a top goal and addressing the impact of climate change is seen as urgent.

With the high heat index disrupting schooling, work and the economy and even endangering the lives of the most vulnerable, he said the swift decision to revert to the old school calendar is a crucial step to protect the health of students and teachers.

“However, much more needs to be done. It is important to develop an action plan to ensure the health and safety of all, especially the vulnerable; install the necessary cooling features in workspaces, schools, homes and public spaces; adjust work schedules as necessary, but ensure business and service continuity,” he said.

Oikonomia Advisory & Research Inc. president and chief economist John Paolo Rivera said in an email that the first quarter performance is indicative of the impacts of slower private and public spending reinforced by steep policy rates, as well as inadequacies in capital formation and the undermined performance of the agricultural sector.

“This calls for reforms on macroeconomic policies as it encompass a lot of variables to be considered,” he said.

ING senior economist Nicholas Mapa said the El Niño weather disturbance is expected to impact economic performance in the second quarter on the income side, possibly weighing on agriculture output.

HSBC Global Research said high interest rates may lead to a moderation in growth in the Philippines in the second half, but not slow enough to be a cause of concern for the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP).

“Nonetheless, we expect growth to remain robust in 2024 at 5.8 percent. So the BSP has a lot of leg room to work with when it comes to timing its rate cut,” it said, adding BSP is expected to trim rates after the US Federal Reserve, which will be in the fourth quarter of this year.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/05/10/2353880/economy-expands-faster-clip-57>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# **Bonito fish imports allowed if meant for canning**

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 02:10 AM May 10, 2024

MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Agriculture (DA) is now allowing institutional buyers to import bonito (tulingan) as long as the commodity will be used solely for producing canned goods.

This is laid down through Memorandum Order (MO) No. 19 signed by Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. on May 8, which took effect immediately.

When sought for elaboration, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) spokesperson Nazario Briguera said that the DA's directive will "ensure that the supply for canning purposes will not be affected."

Through MO 19, the DA is making another exception following MO 14 that was promulgated last April 1.

MO 14 disallowed the entry of imported frozen round scad (galunggong), bonito (tulingan) and mackerel (alumahan)— except for the latter, if intended for canning.

Still, the volume of mackerel to be shipped in for canning purposes must be based on the sales of the canned products from the previous year, plus an additional 10 percent for buffer.

## **Imports allegedly diverted to wet markets**

The DA issued MO 14 in response to several reports that the agency received, which stated that such imports were being diverted to wet markets, instead of going to the factories at the expense of local fishers.

Briguera said earlier that redirecting frozen fish to wet markets is an illegal act that could disrupt supply and demand and would have a repercussion on the industry.

“The top commodities that are identified as prone to diversion [to local wet markets] are round scad, bonito and mackerel,” MO 14 read.

The DA has since then also issued MO 18—and the latest one, MO 19—to lay out additional rules on putting off the issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances for frozen fish.

MO 18, issued on April 26, stated that those fish caught by Philippine-registered fishing vessels carrying valid fishing permits in distant waters—or outside Philippine territory—are not considered “imported.”

Still, MO 18 states that such fish shipments are “subject to all import duties and taxes when the same is landed in duly designated fish landings and fish ports in the Philippines.” —*JORDEENE B. LAGARE*

<https://business.inquirer.net/458049/bonito-fish-imports-allowed-if-meant-for-canning>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Scrutinize plan to re-allow NFA to buy and sell rice, senators say

By: [Charie Abarca](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 12:18 AM May 10, 2024



(INQUIRER FILE PHOTO / GRIG C. MONTEGRANDE)

MANILA, Philippines — Three senators on Thursday said the government needs to tread lightly and carefully study plans to reinstate the mandate of the National Food Authority (NFA) to buy and sell rice.

Senator Sonny Angara recalled how corruption hounded the agency when it still had the power to sell rice supposedly at a cheaper price.

“We should be careful there. Alam natin [that] when the NFA was given power to grant quotas to import, grabe ang korapsyon dyan. Grabe ang kita dyan. So I don’t know if we want to return to that kind of a system,” said Angara in a press conference.



(We should be careful there. We all know that when NFA was given the power to import, corruption took place. So I don't know if we want to return to that kind of a system.)

House Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez earlier said that [amending the Rice Tariffication Law can result in rice prices going down by P10 to P15.](#)

But according to Angara, the government can look at other ways if the goal is to lower rice prices.

“Kaya nga natin ginawa yung landmark reform na Rice Tariffication. Kasi kapag binalik natin yung powers under the NFA, e sila ang mamimili – ito lang ang pwede mamili, ito lang... itong kaibigan ko. E ngayon lahat pwedeng mag import di ba? Mas equitable sya. Even if you ask economists [ay] mas okay yun,” he added.

(That's why we created a landmark reform called the Rice Tariffication. Because if we bring back the powers of the NFA, they would be able to choose the importers they prefer. They can have certain biases to friends. Right now, everyone can import, right? It's more equitable. Even if you ask economists, it's better.)

Senator Nancy Binay likewise expressed concern on the proposed move, reminding lawmakers to look back at data on NFA's history.

“Magandang tingnan siguro ng mga counterpart namin — maganda siguro na balikan nila yung naging transcript ng mga hearings dito sa Rice Tariffication [at] siguro magandang tingnan nila yung history ng NFA. Kasi for the longest time ‘di ba? Tuwing may pumuputok na rice smuggling laging lumalabas ang ahensya ng NFA,” said Binay.

(Maybe it would be better if our counterparts can look at the transcript of our hearings here on Rice Tariffication. Maybe they can also look at the history of NFA. Because for the longest time, right? Everyone a rice smuggling scandal erupts, NFA is involved.)

Meanwhile, noting that the NFA has been “rocked with scandals and alleged questionable and corrupt practices through the years,” Senator Imee Marcos thumbed down proposals to reinstate the agency’s power to directly import and sell rice.

She instead suggested the conduct of a government-to-government importation of rice amid “rice emergency” as well as the creation of a presidential commission on rice sufficiency.

Sen. Marcos said there is also a need to extend the annual P10 billion Rice Fund, adding the necessity to “cut out” middlemen “to solve the huge disparity between farmgate and retail prices.”

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1939195/three-senators-on-nfa>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# PH tariff regime up for major review

By: [Ian Nicolas P. Cigara](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 02:26 AM May 10, 2024

MANILA, Philippines — The Marcos administration is conducting a “comprehensive” review of the tariff regime in the country to address “distortions” being experienced by sectors enjoying low tariffs on their output but paying high import duties for raw materials needed for production.

At a press conference on Thursday, Secretary Arsenio Balisacan of the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) said the competitive edge brought about by a low-tariff regime on certain manufacturing output was being negated by high tariffs on production inputs.

The review will cover tariffs on agricultural products to help ease pressures from elevated input costs at a time when the country is battling persistently high inflation. In the case of rice—which is already covered by the Rice Tariffication Law—Balisacan said Neda would seek legal advice from the Department of Justice to determine if the staple grain could be included in the review.

The new tariff structure that will come out after the review will be implemented from 2025 to 2028, the Neda chief said.

“So you know many sectors are affected by highly distorted tariff structure. That’s what we are trying to streamline and to restructure, so that we can have a much more broad-based source of growth,” Balisacan said.

Government data showed inflation had quickened to 3.8 percent in April, from 3.7 percent in March, on the back of high food and transport costs.

Meanwhile, S&P Global's latest survey of Philippine manufacturers showed that production costs continued to rise in April due to higher prices of raw materials. This, in turn, prompted local factories to increase their selling charges, albeit still at competitive levels, as input price inflation last month stayed "modest overall."

## EVs included

Once the review is finished, Balisacan said the restructured tariff regime would be implemented via an executive order (EO). The draft EO will be lined up for approval of the Neda board, which is chaired by President Marcos.

The high-level body will convene again in June.

Apart from agricultural products, Balisacan also wants to include in the comprehensive study the tariff regime on electric vehicles (EVs), the subject of a separate review of an existing EO.

EO 12, signed by Mr. Marcos in January last year, lowered the tariff rate for certain types of EVs from a range of 5 to 30 percent to zero import duty.

The document is undergoing a mandatory review by Neda, which is also hearing some proposals to include hybrid EVs in the suspension of import tariffs. Such a suggestion had been opposed by the trade department, arguing that including hybrid cars in EO 12 would go against the original policy purpose of promoting and expanding the use of pure EVs.

"We wanted to bring in e-vehicles and hybrid ones and some of them are already folded in [EO 12]. We have yet to agree whether we should fold it in [the comprehensive tariff review] or still a separate [EO]," Balisacan said. "So we needed guidance there."

<https://business.inquirer.net/458048/ph-tariff-regime-up-for-major-review>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Marcos vows amid El Niño: ‘Malacañang will go to the people’

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

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 03:34 PM May 09, 2024

MANILA, Philippines — President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Thursday vowed to make Malacañang’s presence felt across the country as it reels from the effects of El Niño.

During a government aid distribution to farmers in Zamboanga City, Marcos said he had to see the damage caused by the drought with his own eyes.

“Hindi sapat na mabasa ko lang ang mga ulat ng suliranan ng inyong hinaharap, hindi lang dapat umasa sa mga report ng mga serbisyo at ayuda na dumadating sa inyo. Kailangan personal kong makita at marinig ang inyong mga hinaing, makita ng aking sariling mata ang kalagayan ng ating mga kababayan,” said Marcos.

(It is not enough that I read reports about your problems; it is not enough to rely on reports of the services and aid that reach you. I need to see personally and hear your concerns, to see with my own eyes the condition of our countrymen.)

The president was accompanied at the event by Social Welfare Secretary Rex Gatchalian, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., and Interior Secretary Benjamin Abalos Jr. Marcos said that different agencies were there to provide other forms of government aid.

“Lalarga tayo sa buong kapuluan. Walang rehiyon na maiiwan, walang lalawigan na makakaligtaan. Hindi ang lokal na pamahalaan ang dudulog sa Malacañang. Ang Malacañang ang pupunta sa mamamayan,” said Marcos.

(We will travel the whole country. There is no region left behind, no province skipped. The local government will not go to Malacañang. Malacañang will go to the people.)

According to the Palace, Marcos extended aid amounting to P58 million to the city of Zamboanga and the provinces of Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, and Zamboanga Sibugay.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1938946/marcos-vows-amid-el-nino-malacanang-will-go-to-the-people>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Marcos to provide funds for PCA's plan to plant 100 million coconut trees

By: [Jean Mangaluz](#) - Reporter / [@JMangaluzINO](#)  
INQUIRER.net / 12:40 PM May 09, 2024



Coconut farmers in the village of Robocon in Linamon, Lanao del Norte (File photo by RICHEL V. UMEL / Inquirer Mindanao)

MANILA, Philippines — President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. vowed to provide the necessary funding for the goal of Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) to plant 100 million coconut trees, according to the Palace on Thursday.

Marcos held a meeting with the Private Sector Advisory Council (PSAC) – Agriculture Sector Group on Wednesday, where they tackled recommendations for bolstering the coconut industry.

PSAC Agricultural Sector Group Member Christopher Po of Century Pacific Group said the administration's massive tree planting program should be expedited.

However, it would not be possible without the funding, he noted.

“The President said he will see to it that enough funding will be given to the PCA to carry out the program,” said the Presidential Communications Office (PCO).

“This is really a great opportunity to the country. We have a chance to do it because [of] the market. Every single part of the nut [has] use and can be sold,” Marcos said.

The Palace said the PCA is tasked with creating a roadmap to accelerate the coconut program launch.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1938873/marcos-to-provide-funds-for-pcas-plan-to-plant-100-million-coconut-trees>



**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Farmers group fears cost of rice will be ‘prohibitive’ if NFA will sell it

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

INQUIRER.net / 06:02 PM May 09, 2024



IMPORTED RICE Workers unload sacks of rice from the Vietnam cargo ship in the port of Tabaco, Albay. (INQUIRER file photo / EDWIN BACASMAS)

MANILA, Philippines — A farmers’ advocacy group asked lawmakers on Thursday to study proposals to allow the public sale of National Food Authority (NFA) rice.

According to Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) National Manager Raul Montemayor, the proposal may harm local farmers in the country.

“The intention to stabilize rice prices is good, especially for poor Filipinos. But the cost of doing this might become prohibitive,” said Montemayor.

He explained that selling cheap rice can cause traders to lower their buying prices to compete with the NFA rice sales.

“If the NFA sells rice at Php 10 below the market price, local traders will have to lower their palay buying price by Php 6 per kilo in order to compete with the NFA,” he said.

“Moreover, instead of distributing rice, it might be more efficient to issue vouchers, which beneficiaries can use to purchase rice from accredited outlets,” he suggested.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1939016/farmers-group-fears-cost-of-rice-will-be-prohibitive-if-nfa-will-sell-it>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# San Carlos declares state of calamity; cites drought damage to crops

By: [Carla Gomez](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[Inquirer Visayas](#) / 04:03 PM May 09, 2024



**DAMAGED CROPS** One of the corn farms in North Cotabato province severely battered by El Niño. INQUIRER file photo / BONG S. SARMIENTO

**BACOLOD CITY** – San Carlos City in Negros Occidental was placed under a state of calamity amid the devastation brought about by the El Niño phenomenon.

The town’s council approved the recommendation of the City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council headed by Mayor Renato Gustilo on Monday, May 6.

The City Agriculture Office reported that the damage to crops in San Carlos has hit P17,681,328.50 affecting 518 farmers tilling 375.72 hectares of agricultural land.

“In order to hasten the coordination and mobilization of resources aimed at prioritizing immediate response and early recovery efforts to the affected populace, the CDRRMC necessitates the declaration of a state of calamity,” it said.

San Enrique town and Kabankalan City in Negros Occidental also declared states of calamity earlier.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1938948/san-carlos-declares-state-of-calamity-cites-drought-damage-to-crops>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Marcos: Boost salt, biodiesel, coconut industries to create more jobs

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

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 05:25 PM May 09, 2024

MANILA, Philippines — President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said on Thursday that bolstering the salt, coconut, and biodiesel industries will help create more jobs.

Marcos met with the Private Sector Advisory Council-Agriculture Sector Group on Wednesday, and the group provided the President with its recommendations to bolster the agricultural sector.

“Sa pagpapaigting ng produksyon ng niyog, pagpapaunlad ng salt farming, at pagsulong sa biodiesel, hindi lamang natin binubuksan ang pintuan sa libu-libong trabaho kundi pinalalakas din natin ang ating posisyon sa pandaigdigang merkado,” Marcos said in an Instagram post.

(By strengthening coconut production, improving salt farming, and advancing biodiesel, we are not only opening the door to creating thousands of jobs but also strengthening our position in the global market.)

Tingnan ang post na ito sa Instagram

In March, Marcos signed the Philippine Salt Industry Development Act.

The Philippines’ salt industry has suffered since the passing of An Act for Salt Iodization Nationwide in 1995, which made it difficult for local farmers to produce salt.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1939010/marcos-boosting-salt-biodiesel-coconut-industries-to-create-more-jobs>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Marcos orders BOC, BIR to bolster anti-smuggling efforts vs illegal tobacco, vape

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

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 08:28 AM May 09, 2024



President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. speaks at the 503rd anniversary of the Battle of Mactan in Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu, in this file photo taken on April 27, 2024. (Photo from an RTVM video posted on Facebook)

MANILA, Philippines — President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ordered the Bureau of Customs (BOC) and the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) to enhance anti-smuggling efforts against illicit tobacco and vape products.

According to a Palace statement Thursday, Marcos held the 6th Private Sector Advisory Council-Agriculture Sector Group meeting in Malacañan Palace last Wednesday.

“Enforcement, anti-smuggling and all that. You really have to beef them up and I think we’re doing that,” Marcos told officials present in the meeting.

“There will be [more efforts] with the Bureau of Customs and BIR so that we can improve performance with that regard,” he added.

The Palace said that Special Assistant to the President on Economic and Economic Affairs Frederick Go has been assured by the Department of Trade and Industry Consumer Protection Group that personnel will be dedicated to monitoring the vape industry.

BIR Commissioner Romeo Lumagui Jr. also told Marcos that his agency would implement a tax stamp system to determine which vape products were illegal.

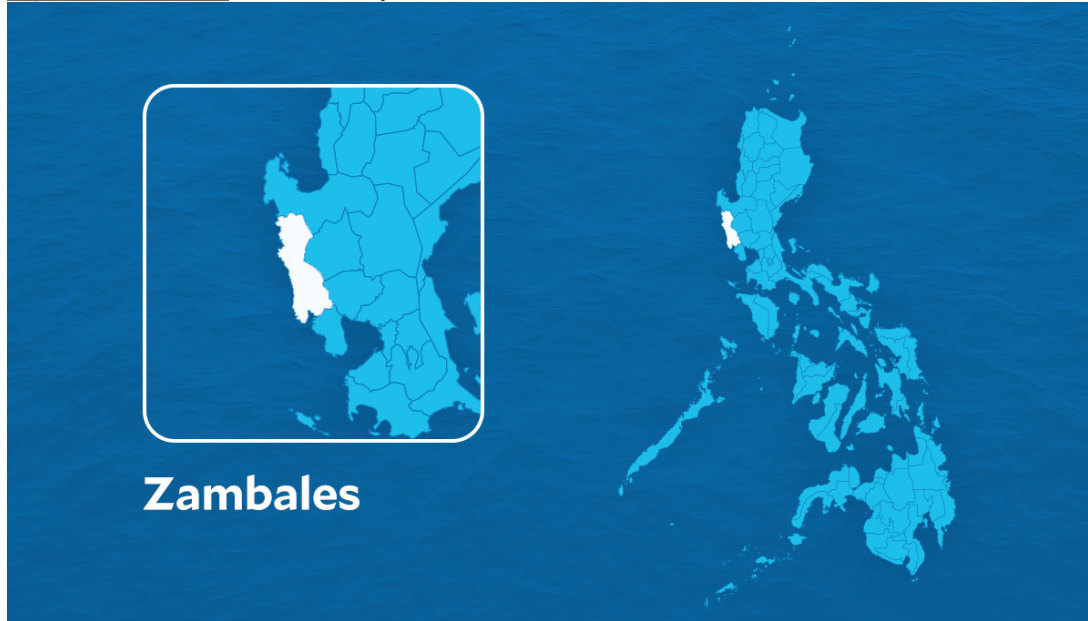
<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1938780/fwd-bbm-order-on-vape-products>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Classes, work in gov't offices in Zambales suspended for Mango festival

By: [Joanna Rose Aglibot](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

Inquirer Central Luzon / 01:42 PM May 09, 2024



## INQUIRER FILES

SAN ANTONIO, Zambales — Classes at all levels in this province's public and private schools are suspended on Friday (May 10) in time for the annual celebration of the Mango festival.

In a memorandum, Gov. Hermogenes Ebdane Jr. said that the suspension of classes will allow employees and students to participate in the scheduled events.

basic and health services, preparedness and response to disasters and calamities, and/or performing other vital services shall continue with their operations and render the necessary services.

The 10-day celebration of mango festivity, also known as the "Dinamulag Festival," started on May 2 will end on Saturday (May 11).

Among the festival's highlights are the street dance parade and competitions, agri-tourism trade fair, and mango-picking activities that will be happening on Friday.



Zambales is known for its distinctively sweet carabao, or dinamulag variety.

In 1995, the Guinness Book of World Records cited mangoes grown in the province as the world's and in 2013, the Department of Agriculture labeled Zambales mangoes as the country's sweetest variety. INQ

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1938894/classes-work-in-govt-offices-in-zambales-suspended-for-mango-festival>

## BUSINESS WORLD:

# Rice imports hit 1.6 million MT in early May

May 9, 2024 | 9:23 pm



BW FILE PHOTO

THE PHILIPPINES imported 1.6 million metric tons (MT) of rice as of early May, the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) reported.

April shipments fell 19.5% year on year to 416,026 MT.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) projects Philippine rice imports of 3.9 million MT this year, downgrading its initial 4.1 million MT estimate.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. added that the USDA's projection is a "worst-case scenario" should domestic production fail to meet demand.

The BPI reported that Vietnam remained the Philippines' top supplier of rice, accounting for 76.3% of imports with 1.12 MT.

In January, Vietnam agreed to supply the Philippines with 1.5 million to 2 million MT of rice annually for five years.

Thailand supplied 271,037 MT during the period, or 16.9% of all shipments, while Pakistan provided 136,124 MT.

Rounding out the top five sources were Myanmar and China which accounted for 62,480 MT and 5,200 MT of rice imports, respectively.

Output of palay, or unmilled rice, fell 2% during the first quarter to 4.69 million MT, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) downgraded its palay target to 20.4 million MT this year, citing the impact of El Niño on domestic production. Its initial target had been 20.8 million MT, when it had hoped to exceed the 20.06 million MT registered in 2023.

Agricultural damage caused by El Niño was estimated at P5.9 billion with rice and corn as the most affected crops, the DA said.

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/09/594052/rice-imports-hit-1-6-million-mt-in-early-may/>

**BUSINESS WORLD:**

## Rid NFA of corruption — lawmaker

May 9, 2024 | 9:01 pm



THE GOVERNMENT seriously considers purging corrupt officials from the National Food Authority (NFA) apart from amending the Rice Tariffication Law to bring down the high retail prices of rice, a congressman said Thursday.

“We should have an NFA leadership that is honest and competent so that it won’t be marred in anomalies,” Party-list Rep. Wilbert T. Lee said in a statement in Filipino, citing how some NFA officials favor certain rice traders, thus, pushing the retail prices even higher.

“NFA’s mandate is to help farmers and consumers, not to be business partners of (rice) traders.”

The House is currently expediting its deliberation on the amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law as part of measures to lower the retail prices of the staple in the market.

House Speaker and Leyte Rep. Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez last week said that amending the Rice Tariffication to allow the NFA to buy rice directly from producers would reduce rice prices by as much as P10 to P15 per kilo. — **Kenneth Christiane L. Basilio**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/the-nation/2024/05/09/594028/rid-nfa-of-corruption-lawmaker/>

**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# President pushing overhaul of coco dev't fund

## — PSAC

May 9, 2024 | 9:28 pm



THE Private Sector Advisory Council's (PSAC) agriculture group said that President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. is calling for an overhaul of the trust fund set up to develop the coconut industry ahead of a major effort to replace ageing coconut trees.

In a statement on Thursday, the PSAC said Mr. Marcos, in a meeting on Wednesday, proposed a comprehensive restructuring of the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP) as the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) embarks on a replanting effort.

Last year, the President ordered the PCA to draft a plan to rehabilitate the coconut industry, including the planting of 100 million coconut trees by 2028.

The rehabilitation plan aims to address the advanced age of the nut-bearing trees. The PCA is seeking to replant about 8.5 million trees this year.

"Efforts are underway to realign the CFIDP to ensure that the growth of the coconut industry is both sustainable and inclusive," the PSAC said.

It said that the Department of Energy will move forward with its plans to increase the biodiesel blend to B5 (indicating 5% coconut oil content) in October.

"This policy aims to improve fuel efficiency while ensuring that the coconut supply for the food sector remains unaffected," it added.

It said that Mr. Marcos has also endorsed PSAC's recommendation to bridge sugar imports during the milling offseason and refine imported raw sugar.

"This strategy, along with a comprehensive review of the Sugarcane Industry Development Act (SIDA), aims to reallocate funds more effectively toward critical agricultural needs such as seed and irrigation," the PSAC said.

SIDA, also known as Republic Act 10659, seeks to raise the competitiveness of the sugarcane industry, and improve the incomes of farmers and workers.

Meanwhile, Mr. Marcos has instructed the Solicitor General to seek clarification and reconsideration of the decision that revoked the biosecurity permits for Golden Rice and Bt Eggplant.

The meeting also discussed increasing funding for the salt industry and stricter measures against tobacco and vape smuggling.

"We are committed to the swift implementation of these strategies to ensure they bring substantial benefits to our agricultural community and bolster the nation's economy," Universal Robina Corp. President and Chief Executive Officer Irwin C. Lee said. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/09/594059/president-pushing-overhaul-of-coco-devt-fund-psac/>

**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# PH gagawing number 1 coconut exporter ni PBBM

May 9, 2024 17:20



MANILA, Philipines – MASIGASIG si Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. na gawing number 1 coconut exporter ang Pilipinas sa buong mundo.

Nakikita ng Pangulo na “great opportunity” para sa patuloy na paglago ng ekonomiya ng bansa.

Sa isang pagpupulong kasama ang Private Sector Advisory Council-Agriculture Sector Group (PSAC-ASG) sa Palasyo ng Malakanyang, nagpahayag ng buong suporta si Pangulong Marcos sa Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) sa hangarin nito na makapagtanim ng 100 milyong puno ng niyog sa 2028.

Sinabi naman ni PSAC-ASG Member Christopher Po ng Century Pacific Group na nirerekomenda ng body na pabilisin ang

paglulunsad ng malawakang coconut tree planting program sa pamamagitan ng itaas ang seednut production.

At para suportahan ito, nangako ang Chief Executive na titiyakin nito na sapat ang pondo na ibibigay sa PCA para maisagawa ang programa.

“This is really a great opportunity for the country. We have a chance to do it because [of] the market. Every single part of the nut [has] use and can be sold,” ayon kay Pangulo Marcos.

Ang Pilipinas ang itinuturing na “second biggest coconut exporting country” sa buong mundo kasunod ng Indonesia.

Sa kabilang dako, inirekomenda naman ng PSAC ang utilisasyon o paggamit ng contract farming kasama ang mga local salt farmers para magsuplay ng asin bilang fertilizer.

Sinasabing ang rekomendasyon ng PSAC ay ‘consistent’ sa Republic Act No. 11985 o Philippine Salt Industry Act, na nagsasaad na maaaring tukuyin ng local government units (LGUs) ang mga tamang lugar para sa local salt production.

“A P2.5-billion budget allows the fertilization of 55 million coconut trees and the doubling of local salt production, which could result in 25 percent increase in nut productivity and additional profit to farmers,” ayon sa PSAC.

Para sa taong 2024, layon ng PCA na muling magtanim ng 8.5 million coconut seedlings sa 59,744 ektarya ng lupain at lagyan ng pataba ang 2.8 milyong puno sa 28,341 ektarya.

Nais din ng PSAC na simulan na ng Department of the Interior and Local Government at LGUs ang pilot sa mga lugar para sa salt production.

Pinahihintulutan naman ng P2.5-billion budget ang fertilization o ang pagpapabunga sa 55 milyong puno ng niyog at doblehin ang local salt production, na maaaring magresulta ng 25% na pagtaas sa nut productivity at karagdagang kita para sa mga magsasaka.



Samantala, para naman ngayong taon ng 2024, layon ng PCA na muling magtanim ng 8.5 million coconut seedlings sa 59,744 ektarya ng lupain at i-fertilize ang 2.8 milyong puno sa 28,341 ektarya.

Nais pa rin ng PSAC na ang Department of the Interior and Local Government at LGUs ay magpa-pilot sa mga lugar para naman sa salt production.

Hiniling naman ng advisory body sa Department of Energy (DoE) na i-develop ang roadmap para sa unti-unting implementasyon ng Biodiesel Act, magtataas sa biodiesel mula mula B2 hanggang B59 sa mahigit na tatlong taon. *Kris Jose*

<https://remate.ph/ph-gagawing-number-1-coconut-exporter-ni-pbbm/>

# Jalaur Dam starts impounding water

By Rjay Zuriaga Castor

May 10, 2024

**ILOILO CITY** – The Jalaur High Dam started impounding water on Wednesday, May 8.

The dam is part of the Jalaur River Multi-Purpose Project Stage 2 (JRMP 2) in Calinog, Iloilo. JRMP 2 spokesman Steve Cordero told The Manila Times that in the impoundment process, they will gradually fill the high dam's reservoir of around 600 hectares of land with water. "We have already lowered our gates to close the diversion tunnel of our Jalaur High Dam [...] We have already sealed off the inlet, the entrance of the diversion tunnel, to allow the water to flow through our waterway towards the dam," he said.

During the construction of the dam in 2019, Cordero said Daewoo Engineering and Construction Co., Ltd., the project's contractor, constructed a 310-meter-long diversion tunnel around the dam site to redirect the river flow.



Personnel from the National Irrigation Administration sealed off the inlet of its diversion tunnel, marking the commencement of the initial phase of water impoundment into the reservoir of the Jalaur High Dam on Wednesday, May 8, 2024. PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY JRMP 2

"At the moment, we are in the initial stages of the impoundment process. We are now focusing on the waterway, which is our current target for the plugging procedure," Cordero said.

National Irrigation Administration (NIA) projections showed that in the first month of the impounding procedure, they are targeting the water level of the dam to reach an elevation of 123 meters or 39 meters above sea level.

After 13 months, the water level is projected to increase to 189 meters or 105 meters above sea level.

The Jalaur High Dam has an estimated capacity of 250.70 million cubic meters for domestic irrigation in the province of Iloilo.

The NIA has warned locals near the vicinity of the reservoir and buffer zone of the dam not to construct structures like stalls, pens, and fishponds.

Activities such as slash-and-burn farming, agriculture, and planting within the reservoir and buffer zone are also strictly prohibited.

NIA also prohibited hiking and swimming in the river, hunting, and fishing, as well as other activities that may be submerged by water in the reservoir and the buffer zone.

As of the end of April this year, the actual physical accomplishment of JRMP 2 is at 74.45 percent.

The Jalaur High Dam reached its designed height of 109 meters or an elevation of 194 meters above sea level in November 2023.

Meanwhile, the completion of the 38.5-meter Jalaur Afterbay Dam was achieved in February of the preceding year, while the 10-meter Alibunan River Catch Dam concluded construction in December 2021.

Currently, the NIA is engaged in the construction of the 81-kilometer high line canal, the main conveyance structure of JRMP 2.

Clearing, grubbing, and construction of canals and siphons are simultaneously done in portions of the towns of Calinog, Lambunao, Janiuay and Cabatuan.

The construction of JRMP 2 is scheduled to be completed by September 2024, with its full operation projected to commence in late 2024 or early 2025.

"We are still on track on the implementation of the JRMP II. In fact, the impounding is a milestone and part of the scheduled activities for the dam," Cordero said.

Once operational, JRMP 2 will irrigate 31,840 hectares of farmland, generate 6.6 megawatts of hydroelectric power, and provide bulk water supply of 86 million liters per day for Iloilo.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/10/regions/jalaur-dam-starts-impounding-water/1945543>

# 100 fiberglass boats up for distribution

By Mahatma Randy V. Datu

May 10, 2024

**BOTOLAN, Zambales** – Rep. Doris Maniquiz of the second district of Zambales announced on Thursday that 100 pieces of 20-foot fiberglass boats are to be given to local fishermen to help boost their source of livelihood.

Maniquiz said House Speaker and Leyte 1st District Rep. Martin Romualdez and wife Tingog Rep. Yedda Marie Romualdez will spearhead the distribution of the boats.

Maniquiz said the couple has been instrumental in the establishment of various big projects in the province, including the multimillion peso auditorium in San Antonio town.

The Romualdez couple and Rep. Jude Acidre of Tingog are scheduled to visit the province on May 16 and 17 to check out other projects they helped build, such as the rehabilitation of the public market in San Narciso, which Tingog partly funded with its P20-million contribution.

They are also going to inspect the construction of a sports complex in Botolan worth P60 million courtesy of Sen. Mark Villar, another market in Candelaria and a mini coliseum in Sta. Cruz town.

Maniquiz said Senators Jinggoy Estrada and Aquilino Pimentel III also helped provide the funds to build these infrastructure projects in the province.

Maniquiz also announced the inauguration of the "Bahay Kalinga" medical facility, which is the first in Zambales.

She said the construction of the hospital was a collaboration between her and Zambales Gov. Hermogenes Ebdane Jr., also citing the financial support of the House Speaker.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/10/regions/100-fiberglass-boats-up-for-distribution/1945535>

# DTI: Retailers eye price freeze imposition

By Janine Alexis Miguel

May 10, 2024

LEADING manufacturers and retailers have expressed willingness to explore a voluntary price freeze on essential goods amid the El Niño, according to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual took the lead on implementing necessary actions to address rising prices of some basic commodities due to the weather phenomenon during a meeting with industry stakeholders.

"We are deeply committed to monitoring market conditions, advocating for consumer rights, and guiding our nation through these challenges," Pascual said on Thursday.

Industry players present during the meeting include representatives from Monde Nissin Corp., Unilever Philippines Inc., Coca-Cola Beverages Philippines, Universal Robina Corp., Nestle Philippines Inc., Procter and Gamble Philippines, Inc., Century Pacific Food Inc., Alaska Milk Corp., CDO Foodsphere, Nutri Asia, SM Supermarket and Robinsons Supermarket.

DTI Assistant Secretary Amanda Marie Nograles, meanwhile, said that the voluntary price freeze "will be felt by everyone, not only in areas under a state of calamity, but every Filipino consumer."

Prices of basic commodities are automatically frozen for up to 60 days in areas declared under a state of calamity as mandated under the Price Act.

Report from the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council showed that as of May 6, some 204 cities and municipalities have declared a state of calamity due to the El Niño.

This covers areas in the Ilocos Region, Mimaropa, Western Visayas, Central Visayas, Eastern Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Northern Mindanao, Soccsksargen, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and the Cordillera Administrative Region.

Pascual said that the DTI is committed to ensure that retailers are responsible for the proper operation of their businesses as well as protecting consumers' welfare.

"We understand the difficulty experienced by Filipino families because of El Niño. The DTI is focused on ensuring the correct prices of goods, protecting consumer welfare and ensuring that retailers are responsible for the proper operation of their businesses," the trade chief said.

Among the topics discussed during the meeting include the department's ongoing projects, such as the Clark Mega Food Hub and the Nueva Vizcaya Agricultural Terminal Online, seen to strengthen farmers and retailers' connection and in turn, ensure the availability of affordable food.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/10/business/top-business/dti-retailers-eye-price-freeze-imposition/1945485>



# Consumer spending seen growing by 6.4%

By Niña Myka Pauline Arceo

May 10, 2024

DESPITE elevated inflationary pressures and high levels of debt weighing on consumer spending, a Fitch Group unit said that the outlook remains positive with a projected growth of 6.4 percent for this year.

"We have a positive outlook for consumer spending in the Philippines with an acceleration in real household spending growth," BMI Country Risk & Industry Research said.

The Fitch Group unit expects consumer spending to accelerate to 6.4 percent this year, up from previous projections of 6.3 percent.

It, however, warned that spending will continue to be affected by persistent high inflation and by the burden of high debt and associated servicing costs.

Nevertheless, improving inflation conditions and a strong labor market will bolster spending, BMI said, as real wage growth turns positive, thereby enhancing purchasing power throughout the year.

Inflation slightly picked up to 3.8 percent last month from March's 3.7 percent. This is due to increasing prices of key food items and transport costs.

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) previously said that inflation could remain higher than the 2.0- to 4.0-percent target until the third quarter of this year due to the effects of the El Niño weather disturbance.

Inflation rate is expected to return within the target range in the latter part of the year and settle until 2025.

"Easing inflationary pressures will provide relief on real household income and enable growth in spending," BMI said.

It expects inflation to fall from 6.0 percent in 2023 to 3.9 percent in 2024.

"While the central bank will likely be in a position to cut rates, we expect it to be a follower to the US Fed[eral Reserve]," BMI said.

"Any delays in rate cuts in the US will directly impact the timing of rate cuts in the Philippines. This has implications on the outlook for [Philippine] peso," it added.

BMI noted that consumers still need to adjust to higher-than-usual inflation in the short term. Additionally, if nominal income growth does not keep up with inflation, consumers' purchasing power will decline, impacting their spending.

Prolonged inflation, BMI said, especially in food prices, will require consumers to allocate more of their disposable income for basic necessities.

"The end of El Niño by June and the start of La Niña should create a cooler weather pattern for increased agricultural supplies and likely ease food inflationary pressures," BMI said.

It said that there are still risks in their consumer spending forecasts if inflation remains elevated longer than anticipated, which could further erode purchasing power.

"While weather remains a risk factor, geopolitical risks are also evident given the current tension in the Middle East between Iran and Israel," BMI said.

It added that if oil prices increase due to geopolitical tensions, "inflation is likely to linger for longer."

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/10/business/top-business/consumer-spending-seen-growing-by-64/1945486>

# Farm group warns of negative effects of ‘subsidized’ rice

By **Jed Macapagal**

May 10, 2024

The Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) called on legislators to carefully study the proposal to restore the National Food Authority’s (NFA) ability to sell subsidized rice to the public.

The group warned that the scheme could be costly, difficult to manage and detrimental to rice farmers.

“The intention to stabilize rice prices is good, especially for poor Filipinos. But the cost of doing this might become prohibitive,” said Raul Montemayor, FFF national manager, in a statement yesterday.

FFF said at least P31 billion annually will be needed if the NFA will provide a P10 per kilogram rice subsidy for the 4.4 million poor households covered by the PantawidPamilyang Pilipino Program.

If the beneficiaries of the subsidy will also include low income and middle-class households as proposed by some congressmen, the annual cost would balloon to over P119 billion per year.

The FFF also pressed government to prevent the adulteration or diversion of subsidized rice, such as by establishing dedicated distribution outlets rather than relying on rice retailers in public markets.

Montemayor said instead of distributing rice, it might be more efficient to issue vouchers that could be used to purchase rice from accredited outlets, noting that an aggressive rice distribution program may also pull down palay prices for farmers.

“If the NFA sells rice at P10 below the market price, local traders will have to lower their palay buying price by P6 per kg in order to compete with the NFA,” Montemayor warned.

Last Tuesday, the Committee on agriculture and food of the House of Representatives approved a substitute bill amending the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) that was first enacted in February 2019.

Among the proposed amendments are provisions authorizing the NFA to buy or, if necessary, import rice and distribute these to the public, presumably at subsidized rates, in order to stabilize prices.

Under the current version of the RTL, NFA is limited to buying palay or rice only from local farmers and releasing its buffer stocks only during calamities.

[https://malaya.com.ph/news\\_business/farm-group-warns-of-negative-effects-of-subsidized-rice/](https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/farm-group-warns-of-negative-effects-of-subsidized-rice/)

# Govt addressing El Niño effects – Marcos

By **Jocelyn Montemayor**

May 10, 2024

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) continues to monitor and study strategies such as cloud seeding in selected areas, improving the irrigation systems and building climate resilient projects even as the national government is busy crafting measures to address, if not lessen the impact, of the El Niño that is affecting the country, President Marcos Jr. said yesterday.

The President visited Zamboanga Peninsula and led the distribution of cash and other forms of assistance to families, farmers and fisherfolks affected by the phenomenon.

He said he would also visit other regions to distribute government aid.

“Minabuti naming makapaghatid ng sari-saring tulong at suporta sa inyo dahil isa kayo sa pinaka-malubhang naapektuhan ng El Niño. Muli kong ipinapaabot na ginagawa po ng inyong pamahalaan ang lahat ng aming makakaya upang maibsan ang matinding pinsala na dinala dito sa Pilipinas ng El Niño. Hangad po namin na mabigyan kayong lahat ng maayos na buhay kaya naman po ay nagsisikap kami na bigyan ng pansin ang pangangailangan ng bawat probinsya at bayan sa buong bansa (We opted to deliver a variety of help and support to you because you are one of the most severely affected by El Niño. Your government is doing everything it can to alleviate the severe damage brought here in the Philippines by El Niño. We wish to give you all a good life, that’s why we are trying to pay attention to the needs of every province and town across the country),” he said.

Marcos said different government agencies are providing assistance to communities in need, including the Department of Health (DOH) which continues to ensure that the health and water supply needs of those affected by the El Niño are addressed, and the DA to cushion the impact on the agriculture sector.

The Task Force El Niño had said that cloud seeding is still being studied as it requires certain conditions before it could be done, such as the presence of clouds, the direction of the wind, a request from the local government unit concerned, and availability of air assets from the Air Force.

The President said the latest data he received is that 3.6 million Filipinos are already affected by El Niño and damages to agriculture and fishery have reached P5.9 billion.

He said in the Zamboanga Peninsula, more than 3,000 hectares of land and crops have been affected by drought.

Two municipalities and one city out of 67 municipalities and five cities in the Zamboanga Peninsula have been placed under a state of calamity due to huge losses incurred as a result of El Niño.

Some 66,878 families or 334,391 persons in 165 out of 1,904 barangays have been affected in the region as of May 7 this year.

Marcos led the distribution of close to P60 million in financial assistance and various government services to farmers and fisherfolks in the region, which includes a P10 million cash aid to Zamboanga City, P14.26 million to Zamboanga del Norte, P14.35 million to Zamboanga del Sur, and P20.30 million to Zamboanga Sibugay.

The Office of House Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez also handed over five kilos of rice to all the attendees. The President said Romualdez would also distribute more assistance on Friday.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) also distributed P10,000 each to 10 beneficiaries each from Zamboanga City, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, and Zamboanga Sibugay and P10,000 each to 10,000 farmers and fisherfolk.

DSWD is set to implement its Cash for Work Program in Godod, Gutalac, Jose Dalman, Siayan, and Sibuco in Zamboanga del Norte; and in Imelda in Zamboanga Sibugay which would provide a total of P21.9 million in cash benefits.

The department will also implement a city-wide payout in Zamboanga City involving P145 million cash aid to over 56,000 individual beneficiaries under the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situations.

The Bagong Pilipinas Serbisyo Fair will also be held in Zamboanga City from May 10 to 11, with 49 national government agencies providing over 405 different kinds of services to an expected 107,000 beneficiaries.

Other province-wide activities include LAB for ALL services, scholarship programs of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and livelihood assistance for various sectors.

The President said that as the country copes with the effects of El Niño, the government is likewise preparing for the La Nina.

“Extreme weather ang nararanasan natin. Matinding init ngayon at sa mga susunod na buwan naman ay asahan natin ang matindi naman na pag-ulan (We are experiencing extreme weather. Extreme heat now, and next month we expect heavy rains),” Marcos said.

He said local government units should be aware of the needs of their constituents and it is better to be prepared for any eventualities.

“Kaya naman po, nananawagan ako sa lokal na pamahalaan ng Zamboanga at sa mga karatig-bayan, buong rehiyon: Maging handa po kayo sa lahat ng oras (That is why we call on the local government of Zamboanga and nearby towns, the whole region, let us be prepared at all times),” he added.

La Niña is the irregular recurring upwelling of unusually cold water to the ocean surface along the western coast of South America and often occurs following an El Niño episode.

[https://malaya.com.ph/news\\_news/govt-addressing-el-nino-effects-marcos/](https://malaya.com.ph/news_news/govt-addressing-el-nino-effects-marcos/)



# **PBBM wants more protection for tobacco industry**

By **Jocelyn Montemayor**

May 10, 2024

President Marcos Jr. on Wednesday directed the Bureau of Customs (BOC) and Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) to beef up the campaign against the smuggling of tobacco and vape products in the country.

The President, during the 6th Private Sector Advisory Council-Agriculture Sector Group (PSAC-ASG) meeting in Malacañang, acknowledged the current anti-smuggling measures of the government but wants the BOC and BIR to expand and strengthen their efforts to protect the country's tobacco industry.

“Enforcement and anti-smuggling and all that. You really have to beef them up and I think we're doing that. There will be [more efforts] with the Bureau of Customs and BIR so that we can improve performance with that regard,” he said.

BIR Commissioner Romeo Lumagui Jr. reported that his agency has intensified its crackdown against smuggled vape products and it will implement a tax stamp system to determine illicit products.

Special Assistant to the President for Investment and Economic Affairs Frederick Go said the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) Consumer Protection Group has committed to assign a significant number of people to monitor the vape industry.

The PSAC-ASG made several recommendations to the President to protect the tobacco industry which include amending Republic Act (RA) 10845 or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016 to include tobacco products, and to include a provision setting a minimum retail price for tobacco products and penalties for distributing and selling smuggled products.

PSAC-ASG also recommended that the Department of Budget and Management release funds, as prescribed under RA 4155 or the Virginia Tobacco Industry Act, to the National Tobacco Authority for its Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program.

It also called on the DTI to set a deadline for the registration of importers and manufacturers of vapor products and the BIR to start imposing tax requirements on tobacco and vapor products.

“There must also be sustained enforcement of laws against smugglers and retailers of smuggled tobacco and vapor products. Operations involving these products should also be reported to the Office of the President on a monthly basis,” PSAC-ASG said in a news release.

The Philippine tobacco industry provides livelihood to 2.2 million Filipinos while tobacco excise tax makes up 4 percent of total government revenues. It contributed P135 billion in 2023.

The government earmarks 50 percent of excise tax collection for the Universal Health Care under the Department of Health and Philippine Health Insurance Corp. as well as for the Health Facilities Enhancement Program.

[https://malaya.com.ph/news\\_business/pbbm-wants-more-protection-for-tobacco-industry/](https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/pbbm-wants-more-protection-for-tobacco-industry/)

# The devastating impact of El Niño on poor families

BusinessMirror Editorial

May 10, 2024

The latest labor force statistics released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) paint a grim picture of the impact of El Niño on the country's agriculture and fisheries sector. Over a million jobs have been lost in March 2024, with the sector posting the largest decline in employment. This is a stark reminder of the vulnerability of our economy to natural disasters and climate change. **(Read the BusinessMirror story: "Dry spell causes agriculture, fisheries 1 million job loss," May 9, 2024).**

The effects of El Niño are far-reaching, with many Filipino families now struggling to make ends meet. The loss of jobs in the agriculture and fisheries sector has a ripple effect on the entire economy, leading to increased poverty and hunger. According to Ibon Foundation, the number of Filipino families experiencing involuntary hunger has increased to 14.2 percent in March 2024, while 46 percent of families rate themselves as poor.

Unfortunately, the government's response to this crisis has been inadequate. Instead of taking concrete steps to address the root causes of poverty and hunger, policymakers seem more focused on downplaying the severity of the situation. For example, the government has chosen to focus on underemployment, which, while a pressing issue, is only a symptom of a larger problem.

The government's inability to adapt to changing climate conditions is a major concern. As economist Leonardo Lanzona pointed out, policymakers were aware of the El Niño phenomenon as early as last year, but failed to take necessary measures to mitigate its impact. This "institutional inflexibility" will only exacerbate the problem in the coming months, particularly with the onset of La Niña.

It is imperative that the government takes immediate action to address the crisis in the agriculture and fisheries sector. This includes providing support to farmers and fishermen who have lost their livelihoods, as well as investing in programs that promote sustainable agriculture and fisheries practices.

Furthermore, it would do well for the government to prioritize poverty reduction efforts, including increasing the minimum wage to a living wage, implementing meaningful social protection programs, and investing in education and skills training. The passage of bills such as the Apprenticeship Bill, Lifelong Learning Bill, and the Enterprise Productivity Act can also help to create a more agile and adaptive workforce.

While some argue that the impact of El Niño on unemployment is overstated, the undeniable truth is that climate change is posing a significant threat to the livelihoods of millions of Filipinos. The government's focus on attracting foreign investment and promoting digital connectivity, while important for long-term economic growth, fails to address the immediate needs of those suffering the consequences of El Niño. Ignoring the plight of millions of Filipinos struggling with hunger and poverty is not an option.

The El Niño crisis is a wake-up call for our policymakers to take a more proactive approach to addressing poverty and hunger. We cannot afford to ignore the harsh reality of millions of poor and vulnerable Filipinos. It is in times of crisis that true leadership and compassion shine through, and we call upon our policymakers to rise to the occasion and provide the answers and solutions that these families desperately need. Now is the time to take concrete action to ensure that no Filipino family is left behind.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/10/the-devastating-impact-of-el-nino-on-poor-families/>

**ABANTE TONITE**

# **PBBM: Matinding tag-ulan paghandaan**

May 9, 2024

Nanawagan si Pangulong Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. sa mga lokal na opisyal na maging handa sa lahat ng oras dahil sa nararanasang matinding pagsubok dulot ng climate change o pagbabago ng panahon.

Personal na binisita ng Pangulo nitong Huwebes, Mayo 9, ang ilang lugar sa Zamboanga City na tinamaan ng matinding epekto ng El Niño, at namahagi ng tulong sa mga magsasaka at mga benepisyaryo ng Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps)

Sa kanyang mensahe sa mga taga-Zamboanga, sinabi ng Pangulo na hindi lamang ang Pilipinas ang nakakaranas ng matinding epekto ng climate change kundi ang buong mundo kaya dapat na maging handa sa lahat ng oras.

“Extreme weather ang nararanasan natin. Matinding init ngayon at sa mga susunod na pag-ulan. Kaya naman nananawagan ako sa mga lokal na pamahalaan sa Zamboanga at sa mga karatig-bayan sa buong rehiyon. Maging handa po kayo sa lahat ng oras,” wika ng Pangulo.

Sinabi ng Pangulo na sa mga ganitong pagkakataon ng pagsubok ay gobyerno ang lalapit sa mga tao upang aalalayan at tulungan sa kanilang mga pangangailangan.

“Nandito po ako upang personal na masigurong makakarating ang mga tulong ng gobyerno sa mga kababayan natin nangangailangan, lalong-lalo na ngayon na panahon ng krisis,” dagdag ng Pangulo.

Batay aniya sa huling datos na ibinigay sa kanya, umabot na sa 3.6 milyong katao ang apektado ang kabuhayan dahil sa El Niño. (Aileen Taliping/Prince Golez)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2024/05/09/pbbm-matinding-tag-ulan-paghandaan/>

**REMATE:**

## **Pananalanta ng armyworm sa mga taniman ng sibuyas sosolusyunan ng DA**

May 9, 2024 17:07



MANILA, Philippines – Naghahanda ang Department of Agriculture (DA) ng mga kailangang interbensyon para mabawasan ang epekto ng pananalanta ng armyworm sa mga taniman ng sibuyas sa bansa.

“Pest management activities like the provision of technical assistance, pheromone lures, biological control agents, biopesticides, and synthetic pesticides to control the pest are being implemented,” saad sa ulat ng DA-Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) nitong Huwebes, Mayo 9.

Idinagdag pa na ang mga interbensyong ito ay isinasagawa sa koordinasyon ng local government units (LGUs) at DA field offices sa mga apektadong rehiyon.

Batay sa plant health and pest status report ng BPI, nasa 12,137.92 ektarya ng taniman ng sibuyas ang apektado ng armyworms.

Sa kabuuan, nasa 674.10 ektarya ang totally damaged, at 4,045.03 ektarya ang partially damaged.

Ang mga apektadong lugar ay matatagpuan sa Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, at Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, at Palawan).

Iniulat sa Central Luzon ang may pinakamalaking lupain na apektado ng armyworm infestation na nasa 6,980.49 ektarya.

Sa kabila nito, tanging 18 ektarya lamang ang nagtamo ng total damage.

Naitala naman sa Cagayan Valley ang highest total losses na 612.40 ektarya na totally damaged, sinundan ng Ilocos Region sa 43.80 ektarya.

Samantala, ang Mimaropa ay nagtamo ng partial damage sa 871.60 ektarya, na nagamot na.

Umaasa ang DA na magiging stable ang suplay ng sibuyas kasunod ng magandang produksyon sa peak harvest season sa kabila ng armyworm infestation. *RNT/JGC*

<https://remate.ph/pananalanta-ng-armyworm-sa-mga-taniman-ng-sibuyas-sosolusyunan-ng-da/>

**PEOPLE'S JOURNAL:**

# Save the Children Aids El Niño-Impacted Farming Families in Samar

Thursday, May 9, 2024 Journal Online

The worsening drought and dry conditions in Western Samar are significantly affecting the education and welfare of children in farming households. Save the Children Philippines is responding by offering conditional cash transfers and introducing climate-resilient livelihood options to aid approximately 200 farming families impacted by the [El Niño phenomenon](#). According to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Report, more than 800,000 families in about 5,000 barangays across 14 regions are facing agricultural losses and water shortages. This crisis is impacting around 3.6 million Filipinos, including children, due to heatwaves, droughts, and dry conditions. The economic fallout from agricultural losses has reached P6 billion, with rice, the main crop, accounting for about P3 billion in damages.



Inadequate water for farming compromises soil health, making crops more susceptible to pests and diseases, which in turn drives up food consumption rates. Meanwhile, escalating prices of vital farming resources like electricity and packaging materials add to the challenges. Livestock face heightened risks of contagious diseases, potentially triggering outbreaks like African swine fever, possibly exacerbated by prolonged drought conditions.

The worries of farming families in Western Visayas are evident. Teresita Abides, a 46-year-old mother whose family depends heavily on rice farming, expressed her concerns: “Before, our two-hectare farm used to produce around 70 sacks of rice, but because of the impact of El Niño, we lost everything.” Teresita mentioned that her children had to halt their schooling to help their father cope with the difficulties on the farm caused by the drought. This circumstance has deprived the children of their educational and recreational opportunities.

In response to El Niño’s impact on children and families, Save the Children Philippines partnered with the Western Samar Development Foundation (WESADEF) Inc. to distribute an initial conditional cash grant instalment of P6,000 to 200 farming households in Western Samar.



The purpose of these grants is to assist families in establishing livelihoods that are resilient to climate change. Additionally, each household received five drought-resistant seeds for cultivation in their backyard gardens, ensuring a sustainable food supply capable of enduring dry seasons.



“Families reliant on farming are facing mounting challenges due to the scorching heat, affecting their ability to support their children’s health, survival, and education,” stated Faisah Ali, Humanitarian Manager of Save the Children Philippines.

Apart from providing financial aid and seeds, the 200 farming families engaged in technical training sessions centered on animal husbandry, vegetable cultivation, and crop production. Ali emphasized, “We developed these sessions to encourage sustainable agricultural practices and improve livelihood opportunities for families.”

Teresita Abides expressed optimism that the cash assistance would alleviate financial concerns and pave the way for a better livelihood, despite El Niño’s challenges. “I appreciate the assistance because it helps us endure,” Abides shared. “We recently bought a pig, which we plan to raise and eventually sell.”

Through its Generation Hope Campaign, [Save the Children Philippines](https://www.savethechildren.org.ph) actively advocates for climate adaptation measures to safeguard the well-being of children affected by climate crises. Rex Abrigo, Environment and Climate Change Advisor at Save the Children Philippines emphasized that climate challenges disproportionately impact children, despite their minimal responsibility for causing climate change. Children endure the most severe consequences of these challenges. This disparity highlights the urgent need for proactive measures to protect vulnerable communities, especially children, from the effects of climate change.

<https://journal.com.ph/save-the-children-aids-el-nino-impacted-farming-families-in-samar/>

**PEOPLE'S JOURNAL:**

# Private Sector Advisory Council Supports President Marcos Jr. to Propel Philippine Agriculture Forward

Thursday, May 9, 2024 Journal Online



President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. and members of the Private Sector Advisory Council-Agriculture Sector convene at Malacañan Palace to discuss advancements and strategic initiatives for the Philippine agriculture sector, May 8, 2024. (Photo from PCO)

**Private Sector Advisory Council (PSAC)** lead convenor Sabin Aboitiz, the President and CEO of Aboitiz Group, together with the PSAC Agriculture Sector leaders met with President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. at the Heroes Hall, Malacañan Palace on Wednesday, May 8, 2024. The session covered significant areas including the coconut, sugar, and tobacco industries, as well as biotechnology regulations and agricultural export procedures.

The discussion highlighted a unified effort to optimize the coconut industry's potential through two significant initiatives.

First, President Marcos proposed a comprehensive restructuring of the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan Fund (CFIDP), ensuring a more efficient allocation of resources to support the PCA's ambitious replanting strategy targeting 100 million coconut trees within the next five years.

Second, a substantial increase in funding for the salt fertilization program is being proposed, with a shift towards emphasizing local sourcing and catalyzing the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within the salt industry through collaboration with cooperatives. These initiatives are expected to enhance coconut yields and further develop the local salt industry, which provides crucial inputs for coconut cultivation. Efforts are underway

to realign the CFIDP to ensure that the growth of the coconut industry is both sustainable and inclusive.

In support of the [coconut industry](#), Secretary Lotilla of the Department of Energy announced plans to elevate biodiesel blend from B2 to B5 over the course of three years, commencing in October 2024. This policy aims to improve fuel efficiency while ensuring that the coconut supply for the food sector remains unaffected.

The council also addressed the decision by the Court of Appeals regarding genetically modified organisms (GMOs). President Marcos reassured stakeholders of the government's commitment to continue with the Golden Rice and BT Talong programs, despite legal ambiguities. The Solicitor General has been instructed to seek clarification and reconsideration of the decision, emphasizing its limited scope and potential widespread impact on agriculture and food security.

For the sugar industry, President Marcos endorsed the PSAC's recommendations to bridge sugar imports during off-milling seasons and to refine imported raw sugar domestically for export. This strategy, along with a comprehensive review of the Sugarcane Industry Development Act (SIDA), aims to reallocate funds more effectively toward critical agricultural needs such as seeds and irrigation.

President Marcos and DA Secretary Laurel highlighted the administration's initiative to streamline agricultural exports by significantly reducing procedural delays, thereby enhancing the global competitiveness of Philippine agricultural products.



President Marcos attentively listens to Sabin Aboitiz of the Private Sector Advisory Council during a discussion at a recent council meeting. (Photo from PCO)

The meeting outlined stricter regulatory and tax enforcement strategies in response to the challenges posed by tobacco and vape product smuggling. These include implementing new tax measures, enhancing monitoring, and enforcing stricter compliance protocols to curb illegal trade and ensure public safety.

Irwin Lee, President and CEO of Universal Robina Corporation and a member of PSAC-Agri, expressed optimism about the meeting's outcomes, stating, "Our discussions with President Marcos Jr. today mark a significant step towards strengthening our agricultural sector. We are

committed to the swift implementation of these strategies to ensure they bring substantial benefits to our agricultural community and bolster the nation's economy.”

The PSAC-Agri remains dedicated to collaborating closely with the government to monitor the implementation of these recommendations and ensure that they effectively contribute to Philippine agriculture's resilience and competitiveness.

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### **About Private Sector Advisory Council**

The Private Sector Advisory Council (PSAC) has been established strategically by President Ferdinand Bongbong Marcos Jr to create and strengthen innovative new synergies between the private and public sectors. PSAC comprises business leaders and experts across six main sectoral groups — Agriculture, Digital Infrastructure, Jobs, Healthcare, Build-Build-Build, and Tourism.

The Council helps the government deliver on its commitment to transform the Philippine economy by implementing robust infrastructure programs, creating more jobs and attracting more investors, digitizing processes, and improving agricultural productivity through the recalibration of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), jumpstart Philippine Tourism and ensuring an equitable, sustainable, and inclusive business landscape for Filipinos.

PSAC will continuously recommend modern policy development to the government and report regularly to the President to provide feedback and adjust recommendations based on what is happening on the ground.

<https://journal.com.ph/private-sector-advisory-council-supports-president-marcos-jr-to-propel-philippine-agriculture-forward/>

**ABANTE:**

# Marcos pinush pagtanim ng 100M niyog

- Abante News
- May 9, 2024



Dapat mapabilis ang mga inisyatiba ng gobyerno para sa pagtanim ng 100 mil-yong puno ng niyog upang mapanatili ang Pilipinas bilang isa sa mga pangunahing pinagkukunan ng niyog sa buong mundo.

Ito ang iminungkahi ng Private Sector Advisory Council (PSAC) kay Pangulong Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. sa kanyang regular meeting sa Malacañang.

sa PSAC, kailangang mapalakas ang industriya ng pagniniyog dahil marami ng puno ang matatanda na at ang iba ay natamaan ng cocolisap kaya dapat na

pabilisin ang replanting upang magtuloy-tuloy ang malakas na produksiyon ng industriya.

Sinabi ng PSAC na kinakatawan ng grupo ng mga negosyante sa bansa na maraming maaaring mapakinabangan sa niyog hindi lamang ang bunga nito dahil maaari ring pagkunan coconut methyl ester para sa implementasyon ng biodiesel upang mabawasan ang pagiging dependent sa langis na inaangkat pa sa ibang bansa. (Aileen Taliping)

<https://www.abante.com.ph/2024/05/09/marcos-pinush-pagtanim-ng-100m-niyog/>

**ABANTE:**

# NFA pinalilinis para bumaba presyo ng bigas

- Abante News
- May

9,

2024



Bukod sa pag-amiyenda sa Rice Tariffication Law dapat umanong linisin ang National Food Authority (NFA) upang mapababa ang presyo ng bigas.

Ito ang sinabi AGRI party-list Rep. Wilbert Lee matapos aprubahan ng House Committee on Agriculture and Food ang panukalang ami-yendahan ang RTL na nag-lalayong payagan muli ang NFA na magbenta ng murang bigas sa publiko.

“Pero para mangyari ito, dapat may tapat at maaasahan tayong liderato ng NFA na babaston sa ahensiya, para hindi na ito pamugaran ng ano-malya.

Tungkulin ng NFA na tulungan ang mga magsasaka at consumer, hindi maging kasosyo ng mga trader,” giit ng kongresista.

“Bukod dito, dapat ding maging seryoso ang mga ahensiya ng gobyerno para sugpuin at may masampolan na sa agri smuggling na pumapatay sa kabuhayan ng ating local food producers,” dagdag pa nito.

Sa ilalim ng panukalang pag-amiyenda sa RTL, sinabi ni Lee na maaaring makapagbenta ng bigas sa halagang P37 kada kilo. (Billy Begas/Eralyn Prado)

<https://www.abante.com.ph/2024/05/09/nfa-pinalilinis-para-bumaba-presyo-ng-bigas/>