

MANILA BULLETIN:

Cutting water supply, rationing not being considered amid El Niño —DENR

BY [JEL SANTOS](#)

May 2, 2024 01:15 PM



DENR Secretary Maria Antonia 'Toni' Yulo-Loyzaga (MANILA BULLETIN PHOTO/ JEL SANTOS)

Despite the declining water supply due to the El Niño phenomenon, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) on Thursday, May 2, said cutting water supply and rationing water are still not being considered by the government.

“We do not anticipate as you might say, ‘extreme measures’—cutting off water as far as rationing is not part of our discussion,” DENR Secretary Maria Antonia “Toni” Yulo-Loyzaga said during the launching of the Philippine-Canada Partnership on Nature-based solutions for Climate Adaptation.

“As much as possible (we) would not like for water disruptions to actually happen,” she added.

According to the DENR chief, managing the water flow and pressure is one of the ways the agency is implementing to ensure unhampered water supply to communities.

Environment Undersecretary of Integrated Environmental Science Carlos Primo David earlier said the agency has reduced the water pressure for households every night to conserve water.

When asked if the DENR plans to impose fines to force Filipinos to conserve water, Loyzaga said the imposition of fines is not within the agency’s authority.

“However, we do request the local governments to actually work with their constituents in order to observe conservation on the ground,” said Loyzaga.

“And that’s where we have to work through as part of the government’s decision to aggressively address the current shortage of supply,” she went on.

‘Angat’s water level quite alarming’

On April 30, David said the decrease in the water level of Angat Dam, Metro Manila’s primary source of water, amid the El Niño phenomenon, is “quite alarming.”

Metro Manila is heavily reliant on Angat Dam as 90 percent of its water supply comes from it. Meanwhile, 10 percent of the metropolis’ water supply comes from other sources, including Laguna Lake, recycled water, and deep wells.

The DENR undersecretary stated that Angat Dam’s current water level is at 188 meters, noting this is still above the minimum operating level of 180.

“However, I should say that while the supply is still enough, the decrease in water level in terms of its rate is quite alarming,” he said during the joint media briefing of Task Force El Niño.

Angat’s water level drops by about 0.4 to half a meter every day, David stated.

The state weather bureau, he noted, has forecasted that the rainfall for May and June will still be below normal. David said normal rainfall is expected by August.

DENR’s interventions to conserve water

As early as May, the environment department and its partner agencies have been implementing measures to conserve the water from Angat Dam, the undersecretary said.

Aside from reducing the water pressure every night, he said the DENR, in collaboration with the toll regulatory board and water service providers, fixed water leaks during the Holy Week. David added that they did not even go through the proper government process because the department will be required to secure so many permits just to excavate the street and repair it.

El Niño’s damage to agri

Based on the most recent data from the Department of Agriculture (DA), El Niño’s damage to the Philippines’ agriculture sectors has soared to P4.39 billion.

A total of 85,232 farmers and fisherfolk in 11 regions in the country, the agency said.

The DA said 11 regions have been devastated by El Niño were Cordillera Administrative Region, Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon), Mimaropa (Mindoro Occidental, Mindoro Oriental, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan), Bicol Region, Western Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Davao Region, and Soccsksargen (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos City).

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/2/cutting-water-supply-rationing-not-being-considered-amid-el-nino-denr>

MANILA BULLETIN:

BARMM under state of calamity due to El Niño

BY [KEITH BACONGCO](#)

May 2, 2024 03:31 PM

DAVAO CITY – Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) interim Chief Minister Ahod Ebrahim has placed the entire region under a state of calamity due to the impact of the prolonged dry spell as a result of the El Niño phenomenon.



A PARCHED cornfield in North Upi, Maguindanao del Norte. (Keith Bacongco)

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Ebrahim signed Office of the Chief Minister (OCM) Proclamation No. 002, Series of 2024, on April 29, declaring a state of calamity.

In a statement, the Bangsamoro government said that the declaration will aid the affected communities and expedite the significant interventions of the interim government, including response operations and recovery efforts.

“This declaration will effectively control the prices of the basic goods and commodities for the affected areas and afford the BARMM and its LGUs ample latitude to utilize and appropriate funds for rescue, recovery, relief, and rehabilitation efforts of, and to continue to provide basic services to, affected populations, in accordance with the law,” Ebrahim said.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) climate outlook said Maguindanao del Norte and Maguindanao del Sur are among provinces in the country with below normal rainfall this month.

The State weather bureau noted that the provinces of Maguindanao were among the seven provinces in Mindanao with dry spell conditions. An area under a dry spell condition has experienced two consecutive months of below normal rainfall condition or 21 to 60 percent average rainfall reduction.

Last month, the BARMM Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Agrarian Reform (MAFAR) initially reported that 19,731 hectares of corn and 5,472 hectares of rice in the region have been destroyed due to extreme heat.

Almost 700 hectares of vegetable farms, 45 hectares of fruit trees, and 56 hectares of root crops were also destroyed, MAFAR added.

The Bangsamoro government urged the concerned BARMM ministries, offices, and agencies (MOAs) to exert the necessary measures to address the ongoing calamity.

“All ministries and other government agencies concerned are hereby directed to implement and execute medical assistance, relief, and rehabilitation work in accordance with pertinent operational plans and directives.”

The BARMM is composed of the provinces of Basilan, Maguindanao del Norte, Maguindanao del Sur, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi.

With a population of at 4.4 million as of 2020, the region has consistently registered the highest poverty incidence among families at 34.8 percent in the first semester of 2023, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/2/barmm-under-state-of-calamity-due-to-el-nino>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Unfair to label PCG personnel as cowards for not retaliating water cannon attacks— Tariela

BY [JEL SANTOS](#)

May 2, 2024 06:30 PM



Two Chinese Coast Guard vessels subjected a Philippine Coast Guard patrol ship to water cannon attacks near the Bajo de Masinloc on Monday, April 29, 2024. (Photo taken from the video posted by PCG spokesperson for WPS Comm. Jay Tariela on X (formerly Twitter).

After getting unsavory comments on social media for not retaliating against the water cannon attacks of the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG), an official of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said it is unfair for some Filipinos to label the PCG personnel as cowards.

On April 29, a PCG patrol vessel incurred damage in the wake of yet another episode of harassment by CCG ships, which utilized powerful jet stream water cannons in the vicinity of Bajo De Masinloc.

“I think it is unfair for the Philippine Coast Guard na i-label na duwag kayo, ayaw nyong gumamit ng water cannon (I think it is unfair for the Philippine Coast Guard to be labeled as cowards just because they refuse to use water cannons),” Commodore Jay Tariela, PCG spokesperson for the West Philippine Sea (WPS), said during a radio interview on Thursday, May 2.

Contrary to the comments of some netizens calling PCG personnel as cowards, he said PCG members are brave for publicizing what is really happening in the West Philippine Sea.

“On the first place, do they really think kung duwag ang coast guard we should have already stopped doing thison the first place. We should have stopped publicizing all these... Kaya nga natin pinaguusapan to kasi matatayang ang coast guard personnel natin (We are discussing this now because our coast guard personnel are brave),” said Tariela.

The spokesperson emphasized that despite the danger and provocations from the CCG, PCG personnel courageously continued their patrols in the West Philippine Sea.

“Ang coast guard natin araw-araw pinapatrolya pa rin yan kahit alam nya na i-wa-water cannon sya, babangain sya, and nakasalalay ang buhay nya rito (Our coast guard continues to patrol it every day even though they know they'll be water cannoned, rammed, and their lives are at stake),” he said.

Meanwhile, Tariela called on Filipinos to stop saying that PCG members are cowards.

He acknowledged the urge to retaliate but underscored the necessity of de-escalating tensions to prevent China from justifying the deployment of additional vessels.

“We should not be the one to be the reason na sasabihin ng China, ‘O kita mo na naman o, talagang itong mga to sila mismo ang nag-provoke, nag-water cannon din.’ What will come next? They are going to elevate the tension once again, and they are going to have an excuse na magdala na naman ng maraming coast guard vessel or even the Navy warships (We should not be the one to be the reason why China will say, ‘See, it's them again, they're the ones provoking, they're the ones who provoked, they also used water cannons.’ So what will come next? They are going to escalate the tension once again, and they are going to have an excuse to bring in many coast guard vessels or even Navy warships),” the spokesperson said.

Increased gov't presence in WPS

On April 25, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) said the increased presence of the Philippine government in the West Philippine Sea gives Filipino fisherfolk confidence to fish in the disputed waters.

According to BFAR spokesperson Nazario Briguera, there are currently over 300,000 Filipinos fishing in the WPS.

^[1]_{SEP}“Nasa mahigit 300,000 ang bilang ng ating mangingisda sa West Philippine Sea. ‘Yung konteksto nung sinasabing nadaragdagan ang mga mangingisda, ito po ‘yung increased presence noong mga mangingisda na naiulat natin nitong mga nakaraang buwan doon sa Scarborough Shoal (The number of our fishermen in the West Philippine Sea is over 300,000. The context when it was said that fishermen are increasing, this is the increased presence of fishermen that we have reported in recent months at Scarborough Shoal),” he stated. Amid the tension in the WPS, Briguera said various government agencies, such as the PCG, are now working together to ensure the safety and protection of Filipino fishers.

LAYAG-WPS

The BFAR formally launched Livelihood Activities to Enhance Fisheries Yields and Economic Gains from the West Philippine Sea (LAYAG-WPS) in Subic, Zambales on April 16.

LAYAG-WPS intends to enhance the quality of life for Filipino fishing communities that front the West Philippine Sea by utilizing the abundant resources of the fishing ground and promoting opportunities for fisheries as a means of subsistence in the regions of MIMAROPA (Mindoro Occidental, Mindoro Oriental, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan), Central Luzon, and Ilocos.

During the launching, the BFAR turned over 62-footer Fiber Reinforced Plastic (RFP) vessels complete with modernized fishing equipment to select fisherfolk associations from Central Luzon and the Ilocos Region.

They also provided livelihood inputs such as gillnets to around 100 fisherfolk, while 50 women fisherfolk underwent post-harvest training and received post-harvest implements.

Earlier, BFAR had announced that the Philippines has allocated at least P2.5 billion to purchase new floating assets to increase the government's presence and accompany Filipino fishers in the WPS.

In July 2016, China's nine-dash line claims in the South China Sea were rejected by an arbitral tribunal at the Permanent Court of Arbitration. The case was brought by the Philippines based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/2/unfair-to-label-pcg-personnel-as-cowards-for-not-retaliating-water-cannon-attacks-tariela>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Philippine gov't summons Chinese diplomat anew over latest WPS incident

BY [JOSEPH PEDRAJAS](#)

May 2, 2024 02:46 PM

The Philippine government on Thursday, May 2, summoned one of China's top diplomats in Manila to explain the latest harassment incident in the country's waters.

The latest diplomatic action came after the China Coast Guard (CCG) fired a water cannon at Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) vessels conducting a food resupply mission in the waters off Bajo de Masinloc on April 30.

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) demanded an explanation from Zhou Ziyong, the deputy chief of mission of the Chinese Embassy in Manila, regarding the incident.

Previously, Zhou, as well as Chinese Ambassador to Manila Huang Xilian, had been summoned by the Philippine government multiple times in the past to protest Beijing's repeated harassment.

The Philippines has been using all available diplomatic means in asserting its sovereignty and sovereign rights over the West Philippine Sea and its features.

But those have seemed futile. The Philippines has filed 154 diplomatic protests under the Marcos administration, 20 of which since the start of 2024.

"The Philippines protested the harassment, ramming, swarming, shadowing and blocking, dangerous maneuvers, use of water cannons, and other aggressive actions of China Coast Guard and Chinese Maritime Militia vessels," DFA said in statement.

"China's aggressive actions, particularly its water cannon use, caused damage to vessels of PCG and BFAR," it added.

The Philippine government also demanded the Chinese vessels to leave Bajo de Masinloc and its vicinity immediately.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/2/philippine-gov-t-summons-chinese-diplomat-anew>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Food terminal on Panay Island embraces e-commerce

BY [TARA YAP](#)

May 2, 2024 02:29 PM

ILOILO CITY – The designated food terminal for Panay Island in San Miguel town, Iloilo province has embraced e-commerce.



THE San Miguel Public Market and Farmers Bagsakan Complex in San Miguel town, Iloilo province. (Tara Yap)

The digital portal for the San Miguel Public Market and Farmers Bagsakan Complex was launched on Wednesday, May 1, which also marked the formal reopening of day-to-day operations after the pandemic.

Mayor Marina Luz Gorriceta said the mobile platform known as Bagsakan app aims to address the challenges and gaps in marketing and selling agricultural products of those belonging to the Bayanihan Tipon Center (BTC) Network which was established in 2018 with a grant from Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA).

There are BTC in the four provinces of Panay Island, in the towns of Alimodian, Lambunao, San Miguel, and Tubungan in Iloilo; Jamindan and Tapaz in Capiz province; Libacao and Madalag in Aklan province, and Patnongon, Sebaste, and Tobias Fornier in Antique province.

The Bagsakan app can be used by both sellers and their potential customers, including restaurants, hospitals, and key businesses in Iloilo City, the regional capital of Western Visayas.

There are three cooperatives at the forefront of business services in the Bagsakan Complex. These cooperatives trade rice, grains, fruits, vegetables, livestock, and poultry.

Three cooperatives focusing on rice and grains, fruits and vegetables, and livestock meat and poultry have been tasked to manage the hub.

Iloilo Rep. Michael Gorriceta said agricultural products at Bagsakan Complex can be sold at cheaper prices as the system removes middlemen.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/2/food-terminal-on-panay-island-embraces-e-commerce>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Another Ilocos Norte town under state of calamity due to El Niño

BY [FREDDIE LAZARO](#)

May 2, 2024 02:17 PM

LAOAG CITY, Ilocos Norte – The town of Dingras, this province, was placed under a state of calamity due to the dry spell caused by the El Niño phenomenon.



The municipal council passed Resolution No. 2024-12-473 declaring the town under a state of calamity as scarcity of water resources significantly impacted agricultural productivity, posing imminent threat to livelihoods, food security, and overall well-being of residents.

“By proclaiming a state of calamity, we aim to mobilize all available resources and implement swift measures to address the challenges posed by this drought emergency,” the municipal council said.

Thirty percent of the municipal calamity fund shall be utilized for the rehabilitation of affected areas.

“Our priority is to ensure the provision of essential support and assistance to affected individuals and communities. We urge all residents to remain vigilant and cooperative during this critical period,” the municipal council said.

“Let us unite our efforts to mitigate the impacts of the drought and work towards sustainable solutions for the betterment of our municipality. Together, let us face this challenge with resilience, solidarity, and unwavering determination,” it added.

Dingras is the second town in this province to declare a state of calamity due to El Niño following Solsona.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/2/another-ilocos-norte-town-under-state-of-calamity-due-to-el-nino>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Scientists condemn CA moratorium on planting of Bt eggplant, Golden Rice

BY [LIZST TORRES ABELLO](#)

May 2, 2024 01:27 PM

The National Academy of Science and Technology Philippines' (NAST PHL) Agricultural Sciences Division issued a statement on Thursday, May 2 in response to the Court of Appeals' (CA) recent decision to impose another suspension on the use of Bt "Talong" and Golden Rice.



Photo from Pixabay

“NAST reiterates its support for the use of modern biotechnology in plant breeding and expresses its concern that the court decision unnecessarily delays its overdue innovations,” NAST PHL-Agricultural Sciences Division said.

It said five national scientists, 42 academicians, and three corresponding members from its various divisions have signed a new agreement to strengthen their position.

NAST PHL noted that CA granted the petition of environmental group Greenpeace and its affiliates on April 17 to impose a moratorium on the use of Bt Talong and Golden Rice “to stop the use of modern methods to solve the problems of poverty, hunger, and degradation of the environment through plant breeding.”

NAST PHL said Bt Talong is a kind of eggplant that safeguards the plant and its fruits from a “very destructive” insect pest, while Golden Rice is a variety of rice that can help humans with Vitamin A deficiency.

“We are finally concerned that the continuing delay in the use of Bt Talong and Golden Rice is causing more harm than good. As we try to placate the minority which is ideologically against these modern technologies, who will be satisfied only if these technologies are kept away permanently from farmers and consumers, millions die and more suffer from the harmful effects of technologies they seek to replace,” it said.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/2/scientists-condemn-ca-moratorium-on-planting-of-bt-eggplant-golden-rice-1>

MANILA BULLETIN:

New MSME Dev't Plan focuses on digitalization -- DTI

BY [KHRISCIELLE YALAO](#)

May 2, 2024 04:46 PM

Digitalization is at the heart of the national government's new micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME) Development Plan 2023-2028, which aims to integrate artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies to strengthen domestic enterprises.

“The new MSME Development Plan is more than a policy document; it is a blueprint for the future, ensuring that our enterprises are competitive, innovative, and resilient,” said Trade and Industry (DTI) Secretary Alfredo Pascual in a statement.

“By focusing on digitalization, we are preparing our MSMEs to meet the challenges of the modern economy and ensuring they continue to be a critical driver of our nation’s growth,” he added.

The newest, fourth version of the MSME Plan was presented by DTI to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in a sectoral meeting in Malacañang on April 30. It was graced by the Departments of Agriculture (DA), Labor and Employment (DOLE), Interior and Local Government (DILG), Science and Technology (DOST), Budget and Management (DBM), Information and Communications Technology (DICT), and the Office of the President (OP).

The MSME Development Plan involves incorporating AI-driven tools like a Machine Learning-based Credit Scoring Model to streamline and speed up the loan approval process for microenterprises.

AI-powered financial platforms will also be more utilized to make financial services for MSMEs more efficient.

Given that MSMEs make up 99.59 percent of businesses in the Philippines, comprising 65.1 percent of the workforce, the agency said the plan will also establish Business Starter Support Programs for assist entrepreneurs, as well as institutionalize Shared Services Facilities.

The development plan also aims to institutionalize funding support for micro-enterprises through the Pondo Para Sa Pagbabago program, initiate purchase order financing for MSMEs to manage their cash flow and fulfill larger orders, and increase the capital of the Small Business Corporation so it can provide loans and financial assistance to growing MSMEs.

If successful, the new plan is seen to generate more registered MSMEs, and more jobs, in line with the expected outcomes of the Philippine Development Plan and the ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for SME Development.

"The new MSME Development Plan is a testament to our government's commitment to fostering a dynamic business environment that nurtures innovation and inclusivity. By aligning our efforts across all levels of government and integrating digital technologies, we aim to build a stronger, more resilient MSME sector that is well-equipped to face the challenges of today and tomorrow," said Pascual.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/2/new-msme-dev-t-plan-focused-on-digitalization-dti>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Cynthia Villar says no one wants to discard Rice Tariffication Law

By: **Charie Abarca** - @inquirerdotnet

INQUIRER.net / 07:35 PM May 02, 2024



Sen. Cynthia Villar Senate PRIB file photo / Bibo Nueva España

MANILA, Philippines — “Wala namang nagsasabi na ibasura ang Rice Tariffication Law.” (There is no one saying to discard the Rice Tariffication Law.)

These were Senator Cynthia Villar’s words on Thursday when she nixed speculations that there are people supposedly scrapping the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

“Wala akong nadidinig na ganon, in fact ang [Department of Agriculture] sinabi nila na they want to renew RTL. Anong masama noon na gagawin nating competitive ang ating rice farmers?,” Villar asked.

(I haven’t heard of such a thing. In fact, the Department of Agriculture said they want to renew RTL. What’s wrong with wanting to make our rice farmers competitive?)

Villar, who chairs the Senate’s panel on agriculture, food, and agrarian reform and also one of the proponents of the law, said only importers and middlemen are veering themselves away from RTL.

She said the measure, which is set to expire in 2024, has to be renewed.

Reinstate mandate of NFA to sell rice?

In the same interview, Villar likewise addressed proposals to amend the RTL by reinstating the mandate of the National Food Authority (NFA) to buy and sell rice at a cheaper price.

“Tinanggal nga yun eh kasi... alam mo, dati.. Ang NFA siya ang nag import exclusively ng bigas and napansin ng gobyerno na hindi nagmumura ang bigas in spite na sila walang tariff,” said Villar.

(It was actually removed... because you know... NFA used to import our rice exclusively, but the government noticed that the price of our rice is not going down in spite of zero tariff.)^A

RTL was signed by former President Rodrigo Duterte into law in 2019.

The measure specifically created the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund which sought to improve the competitiveness of rice farmers and increase their income amidst liberalization of the Philippine rice trade policy.

“Wala akong nadidinig na nagreklamo sa Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund. In fact, tuwang tuwa sila dito kasi finally magiging mechanized na sila at maganda ang seeds nila,” Villar emphasized.

(I haven't heard anyone complaining about the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund. In fact, they are very happy about this because finally seeds will be mechanized.)

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1936529/cynthia-villar-says-no-one-wants-to-discard-rice-tariffication-law>

El Niño damage to PH agri nears P6B

By: **Jordeene B. Lagare** - @inquirerdotnet

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 05:32 AM May 03, 2024



ALL DRY A farmer in Pagadian City in Zamboanga del Sur province visits her rice farm, now all dried up due to the absence of rain amid the El Niño weather phenomenon. The Zamboanga Peninsula is among the 11 regions in the country worst hit by the dry spell and drought. **PHOTO COURTESY OF PAGADIAN CITY AGRICULTURE OFFICE**

MANILA, Philippines — The El Niño-induced drought continues to wreak havoc on crops and livestock across the country, raising the value of losses to more than a third of what the Department of Agriculture (DA) reported just a week earlier.

The DA said on Thursday that the extreme heat and lack of rain had resulted in P5.9 billion in agricultural damage as of April 30, equivalent to about 34.9 percent of the P4.3 billion recorded in its April 23 bulletin.

The agriculture department has been monitoring the effects of the El Niño weather phenomenon since its onset in July 2023 and started reporting the damage from the drought it has been causing in January this year.

It reported on Thursday that the drought had affected 113,585 farmers and fishers in 12 of the country's 17 regions with the volume of production losses amounting to 255,467 metric tons in 104,402 hectares (ha) of agricultural land.

Rice farms worst hit

Rice accounted for 53.21 percent, or P3.14 billion, of total losses with 129,350 MT in 58,226 ha damaged.

Corn comprised 29.8 percent, or P1.76 billion of the overall damage. High-value crops accounted for P958.06 million, or 16.23 percent of the total.

Losses to fisheries, and livestock and poultry amounted to P33.8 million and P7.9 million, respectively.

The DA said crops being raised in 75,873 ha affected by the long dry spell could still be recovered, but it did not give an estimate of their potential production volume.

The affected regions are Cordillera, Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Western Visayas, Eastern Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Davao and Soccsksargen.

Past losses

The losses from the effects of the current El Niño are not as severe as during the period from the late 1990s to the 2010s, according to DA records.

In terms of value lost, the agriculture sector suffered P17.44 billion worth of damage with 555,102 ha affected during the 2009 El Niño episode, the biggest since the late 1990s.

The DA said that 1997 was the worst of all the "strong and mature" El Niño years as it affected 677,441 ha, the largest area affected during that period. Losses in that year amounted to P3.07 billion.

Another severe episode was recorded in 2015 when El Niño-induced drought caused P15.2 billion in losses from 556,721 hectares.

In May 2019, El Niño damaged close to P8 billion worth of crops and fisheries, affecting 247,610 farmers and 227,889 ha across the country.

Then Agriculture Undersecretary Ariel Cayanan said that total production losses in rice alone reached P4.04 billion, affecting more than 100,000 farmers cultivating 140,000 ha.

According to a December 2019 report by the Asian Development Bank, the Philippine agricultural sector suffered a P4.1-billion loss during the 1992-1993 El Niño episode.

3 billion affected

The DA said it provided various forms of aid worth P2.18 billion to farmers and fishers to alleviate the effects of El Niño on their livelihoods.

These include the P1.065 billion in financial assistance to rice farmers in Cagayan Valley and Mimaropa, and P658.22 million in production support provided by its regional offices.

A punishing heat wave sweeping across the country is sending the heat index to dangerous levels, which the weather bureau has determined to be 42 degrees Celsius to 51°C.

Heat index, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa), is a measure of the combined effects of heat and humidity that reduces the body's ability to cool itself, thereby increasing the sensation of a higher temperature. People exposed to such levels of heat could suffer from heat cramps or exhaustion if active outdoors.

Across the entire country, around 3 million people have been affected by the relentless heat, the Department of Social Welfare and Development said in its disaster report on May 1.

Pagasa on Thursday logged 23 areas with dangerous heat index levels.

At Ninoy Aquino International Airport in Pasay City, the heat index reached 41°C. But the northern cities of Dagupan and Aparri had a searing 48°C — the two hottest areas on Thursday.

‘Unbearable’

Officials have cautioned residents to limit outdoor activity, replenish fluids and protect themselves against heat stroke.

But for many from urban poor communities like Ilya and Antonia, who sell flowers outside La Loma Cemetery, there’s little choice but to remain outdoors, making an already brutal summer even more punishing.

They’ve been sweltering over the past weeks on a patch of pavement, struggling against the stifling conditions.

“The heat is unbearable, I get dizzy sometimes,” Ilya told the Inquirer.

Antonia nodded in agreement.

“My flowers wilt easily these days. We have to use a block of ice for the flowers to survive,” she said.

Hottest days

Buying ice is not an option as these would be an extra expense they can ill afford.

“Even when it’s nighttime, it’s like we’re being baked,” Ilya said.

Metro Manila recorded one of its hottest days on Saturday last week with the temperature rising to 38.8°C. Last Sunday, Iba, capital of Zambales province was seared by a heat index of 53°C, the highest in the country so far this year.

Over the next two days, the weather bureau forecasts 35 areas nationwide could experience dangerous heat index levels — from Sinait, Ilocos Sur, in northern Luzon to Iloilo City in the Visayas and Zamboanga City in Mindanao. —***WITH REPORTS FROM RUSSEL LORETO AND INQUIRER RESEARCH***

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1936587/el-nino-damage-to-ph-agri-nears-p6b>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

‘Leave shoal,’ China told in 151st Marcos protest

05:30 AM May 03, 2024



‘NOT ONLY SHOCKING BUT APPALLING’ A frame grab from video footage released by the Philippine Coast Guard shows its ship, the BRP Bagacay, being hit by water cannon from Chinese coast guard vessels near the Chinese-controlled Scarborough Shoal in the West Philippine Sea. Also hit on its way to the shoal was the BRP Bankaw of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources. **AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippines on Thursday demanded that China “immediately” leave Bajo de Masinloc (Panatag or Scarborough Shoal) and its vicinity as it protested the dangerous water cannon assault by its coast guard on two government vessels during a humanitarian mission at the shoal this week.

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) conveyed the Philippines’ protest against the Chinese actions near Panatag to Chinese Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission Zhou Zhiyong, who was summoned by the DFA on Thursday.

The Philippines is protesting against China’s “harassment, ramming, swarming, shadowing and blocking, dangerous maneuvers, use of water cannons, and other

aggressive actions” against vessels of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) that were en route to Bajo de Masinloc last Tuesday, the DFA said.

The DFA said that for this year until April 9, the Philippines has filed 17 diplomatic protests against China.

Thursday’s diplomatic protest was in addition to the 150 others that had been filed against Chinese illegal activities in the West Philippine Sea since the start of the Marcos administration on July 1, 2022.

Damage assessment

A PCG officer said that the force of the water cannon bursts could be “fatal.”

“China’s aggressive actions, particularly its water cannon use, caused damage to vessels of PCG and BFAR,” the DFA said after meeting the Chinese Embassy’s second highest official.

“The Philippines demanded that Chinese vessels leave Bajo de Masinloc and its vicinity immediately,” it added.

PCG commandant Adm. Ronnie Gil Gavan on Thursday said that he had directed an immediate damage assessment on BRP Bagacay (MRRV-4410), a 44-meter multirole response vessel, that was attacked by the Chinese with water cannons last Tuesday.

Rear Adm. Armando Balilo, the PCG spokesperson, said that the Bagacay’s superstructure, or the ship’s main area, was damaged and that the ship’s “structural integrity” was under evaluation to determine the needed repairs.

Crew members of the ship were also provided with medical checkups to “ensure their well-being.”

“Our personnel know the risks, yet they continue to fulfill their duties as public servants,” Balilo said in a statement. “We want to make sure that the command provides their needs while in the performance of the PCG’s mandated functions.”

China claims nearly the entire South China Sea, including the West Philippine Sea, waters within the 370-kilometer exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Philippines, which includes Bajo de Masinloc.

Embassy justifies action

These sweeping claims have been invalidated by an arbitral tribunal which upheld the Philippines’ sovereign rights to these waters in a 2016, which was rejected by Beijing.

In a statement, the Chinese Embassy in Manila said its coast guard’s actions were justified because the PCG and BFAR vessels went near Bajo de Masinloc “without Chinese permission, which seriously infringed on China’s sovereignty.”

It said the shoal, which it calls Huangyan Dao, “has always been China’s territory” and that China “has indisputable sovereignty over Huangyan Dao and its adjacent waters.”

“China Coast Guard took necessary measures to expel them in accordance with the law. The operations on the ground were professional, rational, reasonable and legitimate,” it added.

The Chinese Embassy also dismissed the National Security Council’s statement that China obstructed the humanitarian mission to deliver food and fuel to Filipino fishermen.

“According to the temporary special arrangements by the Chinese side in 2016, Filipino fishermen can fish with small fishing boats in designated waters except the lagoon of Huangyan Dao,” said the embassy, adding that all Philippine government vessels and aircraft should refrain from entering the waters within 22 km (12 nautical miles) and corresponding air space of the shoal.

That distance refers to the territorial sea of a coastal nation which Beijing insists on applying to Panatag that the 2016 arbitral award also rejected.

‘Special arrangements’

The embassy said these “special arrangements” were “unilaterally disrupted” by the Marcos administration that dispatched its coast guard ships and official vessels to “intrude” into the waters of the shoal and “encouraged the Filipino fishermen to challenge the arrangements to help promote its political agenda.”

It did not give details of these arrangements.

It was the first time that the Chinese Embassy has mentioned the alleged “special arrangements” and that these were reached during the first year of the Duterte administration.

It was unclear from the statement whether these arrangements were part of the “gentleman’s agreement” that both the Chinese foreign ministry and former President Rodrigo Duterte had confirmed separately last month.

A foreign diplomat who is familiar with the discussions on the gentleman’s agreement, recently told a group of reporters, including from the Inquirer, that the deal was made with Duterte in November 2021.

Koko suggestion

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino “Koko” Pimentel III suggested that as regards the water cannon attacks by the Chinese coast guard, the PCG should respond in kind.

“Do our PCG vessels have their own water cannons? They should also have, because we should be able to water cannon, too, those who we believe are violating our laws and sovereignty rights up to our EEZ,” Pimentel told reporters.

He said water cannons are standard coast guard vessel equipment used to drive away intruders violating maritime laws.

“Why they haven’t thought about it when it has been a decades-old standard?” Pimentel added.

In a statement, Sen. Francis Tolentino said that some PCG vessels are equipped with water cannons.

But he said their use were guided by policies of the Department of Transportation and “approved by the President which would be balanced by national security concerns.”

Why not retaliate?

Sen. Robinhood Padilla also earlier suggested using water cannons against attacks in the West Philippine Sea.

“Whenever supplies are delivered to the BRP Sierra Madre, Philippine vessels are hit with water cannons. I’ve said it many times before, why don’t we use water cannons too?” he said at a press briefing on April 15, a day after the China Coast Guard reportedly monitored and tailed the mapping vessel BRP Hydrographer Ventura and its PCG escort BRP Gabriela Silang en route to Bajo de Masinloc.

“Why do we always have to be at a disadvantage? Don’t we have water cannons so we, too, can retaliate?” Padilla added.

He later said that cooler heads should prevail and that the issue should be handled through diplomacy.

“We cannot afford to join the chaos that is already happening in other parts of the world, such as in the Middle East and Eastern Europe,” Padilla said.

Coast Guard Commodore Jay Tarriela said in a radio interview on Thursday that the PCG understood the call for retaliation and lamented accusations from some Filipinos that their men were “cowards.”

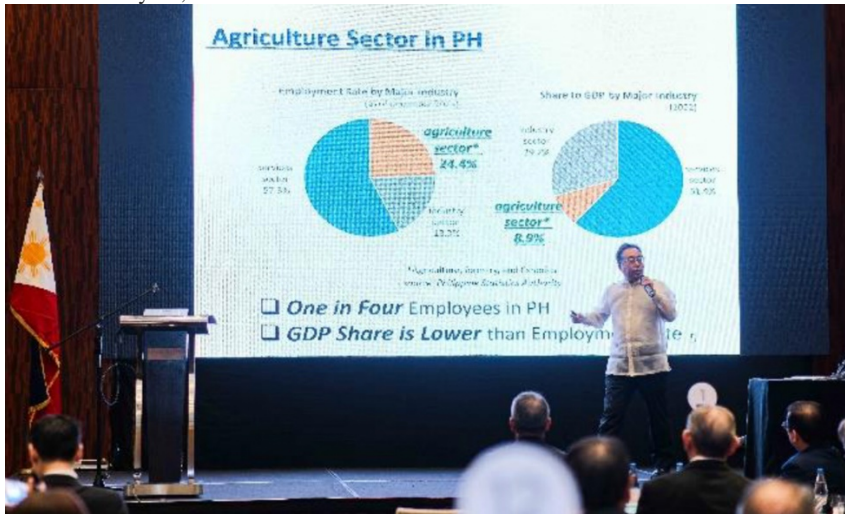
“What we need to realize is we need to deescalate the tension and we should not be the reason for China to say that we are the ones provoking them. They are going to

elevate the tension once again and they are going to have an excuse to bring in more coast guard vessels, even their warships from the PLA (People's Liberation Army) Navy," he explained. —***WITH REPORTS FROM TINA G. SANTOS AND DEMPSEY REYES***

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/234381/leave-shoal-china-told-in-151st-marcos-protest>

JICA: Agriculture is key to PH development

03:01 PM May 02, 2024



JICA Philippines Chief Representative Sakamoto Takema during his presentation at the 40th Joint Meeting of PHILJEC and JPECC. PHOTO FROM PHILJEC

MANILA, Philippines—A ranking official of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has identified agriculture as the backbone of the Philippine economy.

In a presentation at the 40th joint meeting last March of the Philippine-Japan Economic Cooperation (Philjec) and Japan-Philippines Economic Cooperation Committee (JPECC), JICA Philippines Chief Representative Sakamoto Takema cited data showing the pivotal role that agriculture plays in the Philippine economy.

He said in 2022, almost a quarter of the Philippine labor force is in agriculture. Employment in the sector used to be higher in the past, he said.

The decline in agricultural employment, Sakamoto said, mirrors the negative perception, especially among younger generations, of agriculture as antiquated and unprofitable.

He said job creation is one of the challenges facing the Philippines coupled with the need for food security.

Sakamoto cited statistics showing that agricultural communities have the highest poverty incidence at 30 percent compared to the national average of just 18.1 percent.

These, he said, were indicators of the need to modernize and develop Philippine agriculture.

On rice, Sakamoto said, the Philippines used to enjoy a self-sufficiency rate of 100 percent in the late 1970s. This has gone down to just 77 percent in 2022, he said.

But the average rice yield per hectare has been improving over the years. Philippine rice yield is now higher than the average for countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), he said.

Sakamoto said while efforts still have to be exerted to improve food production, it was also important to reduce post-harvest losses.

He cited as example the post-harvest loss rate in rice, which was estimated to be 15 percent compared to only eight percent in Vietnam.

Sakamoto said data showed that Philippine agriculture most needed modernization and development to bring higher income to farmers and provide a stable and affordable supply of food to Filipinos.

JICA has had a rich history of cooperation in the agriculture sector in the Philippines, dating back to the 1970s.

Over the decades, JICA has been supporting Philippine agriculture through the development infrastructure, like irrigation facilities and farm-to-market roads.

JICA also brought Japanese technology, experts and programs to develop the skills of Filipino agricultural professionals, according to Sakamoto.

JICA's cooperation continues to evolve with current trends and needs of the agriculture sector.

In recent years, JICA has also incorporated market-oriented approaches and public-private partnership (PPP) promotion in its programs.

Possible cooperation in improving post-harvest process in rice is being explored by JICA.

Sakamoto said to bring affordable food to Filipino consumers, there was a need to streamline, improve and modernize every stage of the value chain from production, logistics to marketing.

Concerted efforts to attract more employment in the agriculture sector, through higher incomes, will be essential for sustainable development not only in the countryside but nationwide.

Sakamoto said the private sector will also play an increasingly important role in modernizing Philippine agriculture to complement collaborative efforts by farmers, government agencies and development partners, like JICA.

He asked Philippine and Japan private sector representatives at the forum to invest proactively in agriculture and take advantage of the sector's tremendous commercial opportunity.

The annual bilateral conference aims to promote and strengthen business relations between Japan and the Philippines. Top officials and executives from the public and private sectors of both countries were in attendance.

<https://business.inquirer.net/457145/jica-agriculture-is-key-to-ph-development>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

PH summons Chinese envoy over latest water cannon attack

By: [Charie Abarca](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)
INQUIRER.net / 01:00 PM May 02, 2024



This frame grab from handout video footage taken and released on April 30, 2024 by the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) shows the Philippine Coast Guard ship BRP Bagacay (C) being hit by water cannon from Chinese coast guard vessels near the Chinese-controlled Scarborough shoal in disputed waters of the South China Sea. The Philippines said the China Coast Guard fired water cannon on April 30 at two of its vessels, causing damage to one of them, during a patrol near a reef off the Southeast Asian country. Agence France-Presse

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippines was up in arms when China used water cannons anew against Filipino vessels in the Scarborough Shoal.

On Thursday, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said it summoned Chinese Embassy’s Deputy Chief of Mission Zhou Zhiyong over China’s harassment of Philippine vessels conducting a routine and regular humanitarian mission to Bajo de Masinloc on April 30.

“The Philippines protested the harassment, ramming, swarming, shadowing and blocking, dangerous maneuvers, use of water cannons, and other aggressive actions

of China Coast Guard and Chinese Maritime Militia vessels against the vessels of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) enroute to Bajo de Masinloc,” said DFA Spokesperson Teresita Daza in a statement.

“China’s aggressive actions, particularly its water cannon use, caused damage to vessels of PCG and BFAR,” she added. According to Daza, the Philippines demanded that Chinese vessels leave Bajo de Masinloc and its vicinity immediately.

Apart from firing water cannons, PCG earlier said China also installed a 380-meter floating barrier covering the entrance of Scarborough Shoal.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/234319/ph-summons-chinese-envoy-over-latest-water-cannon-attack>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

This Texas veterinarian helped crack the mystery of bird flu in cows

Associated Press / 03:11 PM May 02, 2024



This photo provided by Sunrise Veterinary Service in May 2024 shows Barbara Petersen. The first calls the Amarillo veterinarian received in early March 2024 were from dairy owners worried about crows, pigeons and other birds dying on their Texas farms. Then came word that barn cats — half of them on one farm — had died suddenly. Within days, she was hearing about sick cows with unusual symptoms: high fevers, reluctance to eat and much less milk. (Sunrise Veterinary Service via Associated Press)

The first calls that Dr. Barb Petersen received in early March were from dairy owners worried about crows, pigeons and other birds dying on their Texas farms. Then came word that barn cats — half of them on one farm — had died suddenly.

Within days, the Amarillo veterinarian was hearing about sick cows with unusual symptoms: high fevers, reluctance to eat and much less milk. Tests for typical illnesses came back negative.

Petersen, who monitors more than 40,000 cattle on a dozen farms in the Texas Panhandle, collected samples from cats and cows and sent them to Dr. Drew Magstadt, a friend from college who now works at the veterinary diagnostic laboratory at Iowa State University.

The samples tested positive for a bird flu virus never before seen in cattle. It was the first proof that the bird flu, known as Type A H5N1, could infect cows. As of Wednesday, 36 U.S. herds had confirmed infections, according to the U.S. Agriculture Department.

“It was just a surprise,” recalled Petersen. “It was just a little bit of disbelief.”

At the same time, on almost every farm with sick animals, Petersen said she saw sick people, too.

“We were actively checking on humans,” Petersen said. “I had people who never missed work, miss work.”

So far, two people in the U.S. have been confirmed to be infected with H5N1, most recently a Texas dairy worker linked to the cattle outbreak, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About two dozen people have been tested and about 100 people have been monitored since the virus appeared in cows, Dr. Demetre Daskalakis, a CDC respiratory diseases official, told reporters Wednesday.

Daskalakis said CDC has seen no unusual flu trends in areas with infected cows, but some experts wonder if anecdotal reports of sick workers mean more than one person caught the virus from the animals.

Petersen said some workers had symptoms consistent with flu: fever and body aches, stuffy nose or congestion. Some had conjunctivitis, the eye inflammation detected in the Texas dairy worker diagnosed with bird flu.

Dr. Gregory Gray, an infectious disease epidemiologist at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, has been taking samples from livestock and people on two Texas farms. On farms with confirmed cattle infections, there have also been reports of mild illnesses among the workers, he said.

His research has been difficult. Many workers are reluctant to be tested. That may be because they have limited access to health care or fear divulging private health information.

Without confirmation, no one knows if the sick workers were infected with the bird flu virus or something unrelated, Gray said.

“They seem to be linked in time and space, so one would say it’s biologically plausible,” said Gray.

Some of the workers who fell ill sought treatment and were offered oseltamivir, an antiviral drug sold under the brand name Tamiflu, Petersen said.

Some farm workers who were exposed to infected animals or people were offered the medication, CDC spokesman Jason McDonald said. State health officials are responsible for evaluating and providing treatment, according to federal guidelines.

Health officials in Texas provided Tamiflu to the person known to be infected with H5N1 and household members, plus two people on a second dairy farm who tested negative but were exposed to infected animals, said Chris Van Deusen, a spokesman for the Texas Department of State Health Services. He said he wasn’t sure if others had been offered the antiviral.

Farmers have been hesitant to allow health officials onto their land, said Dr. Kay Russo, a Colorado veterinarian who consulted about the outbreak with Petersen.

“This particular disease is looked at as a scarlet letter,” Russo said. “It has this stigma associated with it right now.”

Russo called for wider testing of cattle, people and milk.

“We do not know what we do not measure,” she said. “Unfortunately, the horse left the barn and took off a lot faster than we were able to mobilize.”

Gray worries that a recent federal order requiring testing of all lactating dairy cows moving between states could hinder cooperation even further. All labs that conduct tests must report positive results to the Agriculture Department. But many farmers may simply decide against testing, hoping to outlast the outbreak, he said.

The reluctance of workers and farmers to allow testing is “greatly hampering” understanding of how the virus spreads, how large the outbreak is now and how quickly it may grow, Gray said.

“It’s a negative, very negative, effect,” he said.

Petersen said she understands workers’ and farmers’ fears. She praised the farmers who had been willing to let her gather the first samples that confirmed the outbreak and reflected on what the results could mean.

“You immediately think about the cows, the people that care for them and the families that have these farms,” she said. “You’re thinking about the big picture, long term. Your mind starts to go down that entire path of concern.”

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/234329/this-texas-veterinarian-helped-crack-the-mystery-of-bird-flu-in-cows>

Traders, middlemen blamed for soaring commodity prices

Delon Porcalla, Marc Jayson Cayabyab - The Philippine Star

May 3, 2024 | 12:00am



Vendors are seen selling various fresh produce at the Baguio City Market on April 25, 2024.

.STAR / Andy Zapata Jr.

MANILA, Philippines — The soaring prices of basic commodities in the market despite the wide gap in farmgate and retail prices are brought by as much as 200 percent profit of middlemen and traders, according to administration lawmakers.

“There is somebody earning so much from the farmgate prices up to the time it reaches the retail outlets,” Iloilo Rep. Ferjenel Biron said earlier this week.

“It was an eye-opener for the committee to pursue actions against all these violators. So in our subsequent hearings, I’m sure we will be able to know who these people are,” Biron, who chairs the House panel on trade and industry, added.

Biron said he got confirmation from the Organization of Supermarkets that their profit margin was only eight percent and 10 percent for frozen commodities.

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

Rep. Mikaela Angela Suansing of Nueva Ecija's first district, a member of the House committee on agriculture and food security, agreed with Biron.

Suansing said the problem lies in the "wide gap between traders and middlemen," not farmers and retail owners.

Suansing, who authored the Rice Tariffication Law, said they were able to bring down the cost of production for farmers, but the problem lies in the supply chain.

The lawmaker also said that while efforts should still continue to help ease the burden of farmers, the P10 billion yearly allocation for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund should be increased to P15 billion.

Biron and Speaker Martin Romualdez were dismayed in the way the Departments of Agriculture and Trade have been handling the soaring prices of goods.

Curb inflation - senators

Meanwhile, senators yesterday urged the government to curb inflation and improve social services as more Filipinos experience involuntary hunger in the first quarter of the year.

They were reacting to the results of a Social Weather Stations survey from March 21 to 25, which showed that 14.2 percent of respondents saying their families experienced involuntary hunger or "being hungry and not having anything to eat at least once" in the past three months.

It was up from 12.6 percent in December 2023 and the highest since the 16.8 percent hunger rate in May 2021.

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel III said the hunger incidence was worsened by the El Niño phenomenon.

Pimentel urged the government to improve social welfare assistance.

"I call on the government to accelerate the welfare programs for the people like AICS," he said, referring to the Department of Social Welfare and Development's Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation program.

Sen. Francis Escudero said the government should "be able to curb inflation to lower involuntary hunger."

Sen. Francis Tolentino called for a price freeze on basic commodities such as rice to curb inflation during the dry season.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/03/2352191/traders-middlemen-blamed-soaring-commodity-prices>

P97 million aid distributed to Pinoys affected by El Niño

Delon Porcalla - The Philippine Star

May 3, 2024 | 12:00am



Locals walk over the dry part of Intang Lake in Pantabangan, Nueva Ecija on April 22, 2024.

STAR / Walter Bollozos

MANILA, Philippines — Filipinos affected by the severe dry spell amid El Niño have received P97 million in “relief assistance” from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

About 695,000 families or 2.9 million people nationwide have been assisted, DSWD spokesperson Irene Dumlao yesterday told reporters during a weekly forum.

Beneficiaries came from Northern Luzon, Visayas and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Dumlao noted.

Dumlao said this was done under Social Welfare Secretary Rex Gatchalian’s leadership and his water sufficiency and food security programs.

These programs are Projects LAWA or Local Adaptation to Water Access and BINHI or Breaking Insufficiency through Nutritious Harvest for the Impoverished.

Last month, 166 residents of Patnanungan town in Quezon started building water harvesting systems and gardening projects through these two programs, Dumlao said.

From April 17 to 19, project beneficiaries underwent comprehensive training encompassing disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and practical skills for water harvesting, gardening, vermicomposting and hydroponics.

Biggest drop in Angat Dam

Angat Dam in Bulacan yesterday suffered the biggest water level drop amid extreme heat caused by El Niño and the dry season.

Its water level dropped to 187.13 meters or just 7.13 meters before its minimum operating level of 180 meters.

On Wednesday, Angat Dam's water level was 187.65 meters.

The 0.52-meter drop also means that Angat Dam's water level was 24.87 meters below its normal high water level of 212 meters, as of 8 a.m. yesterday.

Environment Undersecretary Carlos David said the 50 cubic meters per second allocation for Metro Manila will be maintained for the entire month of May.

Many areas in the country have reported a decline in their water supply, David noted.

"Most of them are concentrated in the west side of the country, from Ilocos, also in Bulacan, there were reports that the water level on the ground dropped," he said.

"Palawan and Zamboanga City were the most extreme cases in terms of water," he added.

Water supply from deep wells has declined based on reports from water districts, David noted.

Zamboanga City has been experiencing water interruptions since February, he said.

Maynilad Water Services Inc. corporate communications head Jennifer Rufo said customers need to manage consumption to help preserve Angat Dam's water elevation, noting that the decision of the National Water Resources Board to maintain Metro Manila's 50 cms allocation is no longer enough amid the current high heat index.

Agricultural damage hits P5.9 billion

Around 113,585 farmers and fisherfolk have incurred losses amounting to P5.9 billion due to El Niño as of April 30, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA)'s latest bulletin on El Niño's effects.

Agricultural damage due to El Niño included 104,402 hectares of agricultural area across 12 regions with an estimated production volume loss of about 255,467 metric tons.

Of the total area affected by El Niño, about 75,873 hectares have a chance of recovery while 28,530 hectares will not recover.

The rice sector recorded the highest damage and losses at P3.14 billion, more than half of the total recorded losses, the DA noted.

El Niño damaged 58,226 hectares of rice farms, resulting in a volume loss of 129,350 MT.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said the 58,226 hectares of rice farms affected by El Niño is “not that huge” compared to the DA’s initial projected damage of about 120,000 hectares.

Government interventions such as the distribution of water pumps and rehabilitation of irrigation canals cushioned the impact of El Niño, De Mesa noted.

Based on the DA report, 616 water pumps were installed to augment water supply in identified regions while 847.8 kilometers of irrigation canals nationwide were concreted to boost water delivery to agricultural areas.

‘Danger’ level in 40 areas

More than 40 areas nationwide are expected to experience “danger” level heat today as the heat index in Pili, Camarines Sur and Metro Manila could reach 48 and 43 degrees Celsius, respectively, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration.

Areas that could experience a dangerous heat index (between 42 and 51 degrees Celsius) today are Dagupan City in Pangasinan and Tacloban City, Leyte at 46 degrees Celsius.

Bacnotan, La Union; Puerto Princesa City, Palawan; Iloilo City and Dumangas, Iloilo and Roxas City may record 45 degrees Celsius.

Laoag City, Ilocos Norte; Aparri, Cagayan; Casiguran, Aurora; Coron, Palawan; San Jose, Occidental Mindoro; and Catarman, Northern Samar could experience 44 degrees Celsius. – **Bella Cariaso, Jasper Emmanuel Arcalas**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/03/2352192/p97-million-aid-distributed-pinoys-affected-el-nio>

Japan commits P84 billion projects for Philippines

[Louise Maureen Simeon](#) - The Philippine Star

May 3, 2024 | 12:00am

MANILA, Philippines — The Japanese government has committed P84 billion worth of projects for the Philippines until early next year, according to the Department of Finance.

The DOF said it would execute roughly 227.6 billion Japanese yen (P83.9 billion) worth of pipeline projects with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Japan's bilateral aid agency, this year until early 2025.

This came after the DOF's International Finance Group met with JICA director general of Southeast Asia and the Pacific department Hayakawa Yuho recently.

Japan also vowed to execute an annual average pipeline of about 249.2 billion Japanese yen or roughly P92.18 billion until 2027.

ADVERTISING

Four loan agreements are likewise scheduled to be signed before yearend. These will cover projects on maritime safety, roads and flood risk management.

Aside from the usual portfolio of infrastructure projects funded by JICA, the bilateral aid agency is also looking at expanding into other sectors.

These are in agriculture, education and health, which are all part of the administration's development objectives.

Finance Undersecretary Joven Balbosa said JICA expressed openness to scale up its policy-based lending with an intent to co-finance the Climate Change Action Program (CCAP) Subprogram 2 with the Asian Development Bank and Agence Française de Développement.

The CCAP will support the Philippines in implementing its national climate policies, including its nationally determined contribution (NDC).

The program will intensify efforts to transform key sectors toward a climate-resilient and low-carbon economy.

Further, the Philippines and JICA committed to maintain an open dialogue and address any delay to improve overall project management and minimize costs to the government.

The DOF also sought JICA's assistance in bringing in more private sector financing to support the administration's development goals as the Philippines transitions to an upper middle income country status.

Such a status would mean that the Philippines will gradually move away from concessional financing from partners such as JICA.

Japan is the country's largest official development assistance (ODA) partner, with \$12.3 billion in net commitments of loans and grants as of end-2023.

This is 33 percent of the total ODA of the Philippines.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/05/03/2352120/japan-commits-p84-billion-projects-philippines>

BUSINESS WORLD:

El Niño farm damage hits P5.9 billion

May 2, 2024 | 8:22 pm



farmer guides his carabao on dry and cracked farmland in San Juan town, Batangas, April 18, 2010. —
REUTERS/ROMEO RANOCO

AGRICULTURAL damage caused by El Niño has been estimated at P5.9 billion, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

In a bulletin, the DA said that volume losses of farmed commodities was 255,467 metric tons (MT), with rice the most affected crop, accounting for 53.2% of the total.

The dry conditions brought about by El Niño has impacted 113,585 farmers and fisherfolk. The farmland affected by the dry spells was 104,402 hectares.

Damage and loss to rice amounted to 123,350 MT, valued at P3.14 billion. The affected farmland spanned 58,226 hectares.

The DA said that 67.67%, or 39,402 hectares were partially damaged, while 32.33% or 18,824 hectares sustained total crop damage.

The hardest-hit province was Iloilo, where losses were valued at between P500 million and P600 million, followed by Palawan at P350 million to P500 million.

“Most of the damage and losses were to rice in the reproductive and maturity stages,” it added.

Palay production during the first quarter dropped 2% to 4.69 million MT, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The quarter’s result was slightly lower than the 4.82 million MT the PSA projected based on the standing crop as of March 1.

Damage to corn was estimated at 98,937 MT and valued at P1.76 billion. The affected area planted to corn was 39,407 hectares, or 29.8% of the total.

The DA added that the total volume loss for high value crops was 26,826 MT over 6,744 hectares of farmland. The value of the losses was estimated at P958.06 million, or 16.23% of the total.

Damage to fisheries was valued at P22.83 million, with 2,261 fisherfolk affected.

The DA said that it provided P2.18 billion worth of assistance to address the adverse effects of El Niño.

PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), the government weather service, said El Niño is currently weakening, with its effects projected to last until August.

PAGASA said that about 41 provinces were in drought as of the end of April, with 23 undergoing dry spells.

On Monday, Science and Technology Secretary Renato U. Solidum, Jr. said that drought conditions will persist as El Niño into La Niña.

PAGASA said there is a 62% probability that La Niña will develop between June and August. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/02/592500/el-nino-farm-damage-hits-p5-9-billion/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Tobacco farmers press for signing of ‘economic sabotage’ bill before SONA

May 2, 2024 | 8:21 pm



BW FILE PHOTO

TOBACCO growers expressed support for the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, citing the need to address unfair competition from smuggled tobacco products, and asked the President to sign the measure before he addresses Congress in July.

“We believe the bill will help prevent the smuggling of agricultural products and will deter these criminals,” Bernard R. Vicente, chairman of the National Federation of Tobacco Farmers Association and Cooperatives (NAFTAC), said in a statement.

The House of Representatives passed House Bill No. 9284, also known as the “Anti Agri-Fishery Commodities and Tobacco Economic Sabotage Act” on Sept. 27, 2023. The Senate also approved a similar measure on Dec. 11.

Philippine Tobacco Growers Association (PTGA) President Saturnino Distor said that tobacco farming is vital to food security since their members also farm rice, corn, and other primary crops.

“The bill is urgently needed since the agricultural sector is reeling from rampant smuggling that threatens farmers and millions of their dependents,” he added.

According to the National Tobacco Administration, there are currently 2.2 million people financially dependent on tobacco including more than 430,000 farmers, farm workers and their family members.

“We hope that Congress can finally have a Bicameral Conference Committee so it can be signed by President Marcos before his (State of the Nation Address). This is one of the priorities of his administration and a big help to us farmers,” Mr. Distor said.

The President’s home region of Ilocos is a major producer of tobacco.

The Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura estimates that the government loses at least P200 billion in revenue annually due to smuggling.

Smuggled cigarettes are estimated to deny the government at least P30 billion annually in excise taxes.

The Bureau of Internal Revenue reported a 16% decline to P135 billion in excise tax collections in 2023. This was attributed to an increase in the smuggling and distribution of illegal cigarettes and vape products.

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/02/592496/tobacco-farmers-press-for-signing-of-economic-sabotage-bill-before-sona/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Well-milled rice prices average P56.98 per kilo at mid-April

May 2, 2024 | 8:21 pm



Workers load sacks of flour in a delivery truck in Manila, July 11, 2022. — PHILIPPINE STAR/ MIGUEL DE GUZMAN

THE national average retail price of well-milled rice at mid-April was P56.98 per kilogram (kg), according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Rice prices at mid-April dropped from P57.04 per kg during the April 1-5 period, which the PSA calls the first phase of the month. The second phase is April 15-17.

The highest retail price at mid-April was reported in Central Luzon, where the staple averaged P58.90 per kg during the period.

The lowest average rice price was in the Ilocos Region at P54.34 per kg.

The PSA reported that regular-milled rice averaged P51.41 per kg, against P51.38 during the first phase.

The highest price for regular-milled rice was P54.23 per kg recorded in the Central Visayas, while the Western Visayas posted the lowest price at P46.69 per kg.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. has said that the retail price of rice is expected to remain elevated until midyear due to the impact of El Niño.

The PSA said that *galunggong* (round scad) prices averaged P196.29 per kg at retail in mid-April, against the P204.49 posted during the first phase.

The average refined sugar price rose to P87.48 per kg during the period, while brown sugar prices fell to P76.35 per kg.

Tomato sold at retail averaged P68.52 per kg during the period, against P72.01 reported in the first phase of April. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/02/592495/well-milled-rice-prices-average-p56-98-per-kilo-at-mid-april/>

More National Scientists, Academicians, top scientists signed the National Academy of Science and Technology, Philippines (NAST PHL) Position on the Court of Appeals' decision on Bt Talong and Golden Rice

Thursday, May 2, 2024 Journal Online



TAGUIG CITY – The National Academy of Science and Technology, Philippines ([NAST PHL](#)) Agricultural Sciences Division recently released its position on the recent decision of Court of Appeals (CA) which effectively putting yet another moratorium on the use of Bt Talong and Golden Rice.

As of 30 April 2024, **5 National Scientists, 42 Academicians, and 3 Corresponding Members** from various NAST PHL divisions signed and effectively strengthened the said position.

“NAST reiterates its support for the use of modern biotechnology in plant breeding and expresses its concern that the court decision unnecessarily delays its overdue innovations.” NAST PHL Agricultural Sciences Division said in its position.

“We are finally concerned that the continuing delay in the use of Bt Talong and Golden Rice is causing more harm than good. As we try to placate the minority which is ideologically against these modern technologies, who will be satisfied only if these technologies are kept away permanently from farmers and consumers, millions die and more suffer from the harmful effects of technologies they seek to replace.”, it added.

NAST PHL has six divisions: Agricultural Sciences, Biological Sciences, Engineering Sciences and Technology, Health Sciences, Mathematical and Physical Sciences, and Social Sciences, composed of National Scientists, Academicians, and Corresponding members, the top scientists in the country. An attached agency of DOST, it is the government's highest advisory and recognition body in Science and Technology.

The NAST-ASD Position on the moratorium on products of modern plant breeding can be accessed at <https://nast.dost.gov.ph/index.php/publications?id=763>. (*Angelito Navarro/NAST PHL*)

<https://journal.com.ph/position-on-the-court-of-appeals-decision-on-bt-talong-and-golden-rice/>

REMATE:

Agri damage dulot ng El Niño sumampa sa P5.9B

May 3, 2024 07:00



MANILA, Philippines- Nagdulot na ang El Niño phenomenon ng tinatayang P5.9 bilyong pinsala sa Philippine agriculture, ayon sa Department of Agriculture (DA) nitong Huwebes.

“Iyong latest damage natin as of end of April per Bulletin No. 9 ng DA, ang damage is already PHP5.9 billion, pinakamalaki pa rin is sa rice sector (As per Bulletin No. 9, the damage is already at PHP5.9 billion as of end of April, with the rice sector incurring the biggest damage) at PHP3.1 billion,” pahayag ni DA Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa sa isang panayam.

Sinundan ito ng production loss sa mais na nagkakahalaga ng P1.76 bilyon at high-value crops sa tinatayang P958 milyon.

Inihayag ni De Mesa na nananatili ang Mimaropa region na pinakaapektadong lugar sa bansa sa P1.71 bilyon, sinundan ng Region 6 (Western Visayas) sa P1.5 bilyon, Cordilleras sa P768 milyon, at Cagayan Valley sa P562 milyon.

Subalit, iginiit niyang ang 58,000 ektarya ng rice production area na napinsala ay 2.27 porsyento lamang ng kabuuang lupain na may tanim na palay, na halos 2 milyong ektarya.

Samantala, namahagi naman ang DA P2.18 bilyong tulong sa mga magsasaka at mangingisda upang ibsan ang epekto ng tagtuyot. RNT/SA

<https://remate.ph/agri-damage-dulot-ng-el-nino-sumampa-sa-p5-9b/>

REMATE:

Pagpasa ng panukala vs agricultural economic sabotage inihirit sa Kamara

May 2, 2024 18:12



MANILA, Philippines- Hinikayat ng Philippine Tobacco Growers Association (PTGA) at ng National Federation of Tobacco Farmers Association and Cooperatives (NAFTAC) ang Kamara na bumuo ng bicameral conference committee upang talakayin ang panukalang Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act.

Sa press release nitong Huwebes, sinabi ni PTGA president Saturnino Distor na kinakailangan ang panukala "since the agricultural sector is reeling from rampant smuggling that threatens local farmers and millions of their dependents."

Inihayag ni Distor na mahalaga ang tobacco farming sa food security dahil nagsasaka rin ang mga miyembro nito ng palay, mais, at iba pang primary crops.

“We hope that Congress can finally have a bicameral conference committee so it can be signed by President Marcos before his SONA (State of the Nation Address). Ito ay isa sa prayoridad ng kanyang administrasyon at malaking tulong sa aming magsasaka,” pahayag ni Distor.

Inihayag naman ng National Tobacco Administration (NTA) na sa kasalukuyan ay mayroong 2.2 milyong Pilipino na “financially dependent” sa tobacco, kabilang ang mahigit 430,000 magsasaka, farm workers, at kanilang mga pamilya.

Sinabi ni NAFTAC chairman Bernard Vicente na hindi lamang magiging magandang balita sa mga magsasaka ang pagpasa ng panukala kundi makapagpapalapit din sa Marcos administration sa pagtupad sa campaign promise nitong pagbibigay ng abot-kayang agricultural products sa publiko.

“We believe the bill will help prevent the smuggling of agricultural products and will deter these criminals. Sana ay matapos na ang maliligayang araw ng mga smugglers, hoarders, at ang mga nagca-cartel,” giit ni Vicente.

Ipinasa ng Kamara ang House Bill 9284, kilala rin bilang Anti-Agri-Fishery Commodities and Tobacco Economic Sabotage Act, noong September 27, 2023.

Samantala, inaprubahan ng Senado ang parehong panukala, Senate Bill 2432, o ang Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, noong December 11.

Sa ilalim ng panukala, ikokonsidera ang agricultural hoarding na economic sabotage kung ang indibidwal o mga grupo ay nagtatago ng stocks ng agricultural at fishery products bukod sa 30% ng kanilang normal inventory level dalawang linggo matapos ang deklarasyon ng abnormal situation, isang emergency, o state of calamity. RNT/SA

<https://remate.ph/pagpasa-ng-panukala-vs-agricultural-economic-sabotage-inihirit-sa-kamara/>

REMATE:

Red tide alert nakataas sa Masbate, VisMin – BFAR

May 2, 2024 11:41



MANILA, Philippines – Patuloy na nakakaapekto ang paralytic shellfish poison o red tide toxin sa anim na coastal areas sa Masbate, Visayas at Mindanao.

Ang babala na ito ay mula sa Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) kung saan nauna nang naglabas ng red tide bulletin ang ahensya noon pang Marso 16.

Noong Marso 26, naglabas ng panibagong abiso ang BFAR sa pagsasabing umiiral pa rin ang red tide alert sa mga coastal areas sa nasabing mga lugar.

Sa ilalim ng Shellfish Bulletin. No. 08, apektado ng red tide ang mga sumusunod na lugar:

Coastal waters ng Milagros, Masbate
Coastal waters ng Dauis at Tagbilaran City, Bohol
Coastal Waters ng San Benito, Surigao del Norte
Dumanquillas Bay sa Zamboanga del Sur

San Pedro Bay sa Samar
Matarinao Bay sa Eastern Samar

“All types of shellfish and Acetes sp. or alamang gathered from the areas shown above are NOT SAFE for human consumption,” saad sa bulletin na may petsang Abril 30. *RNT/JGC*

<https://remate.ph/red-tide-alert-nakataas-sa-masbate-vismin-bfar/>

REMATE:

Dingras, Ilocos Norte isinailalim sa state of calamity sa El Niño

May 2, 2024 10:10



MANILA, Philippines – Idineklara na ang state of calamity sa Dingras, Ilocos Norte dahil sa tumitinding epekto ng El Nino phenomenon.

Ilan sa mga barangay sa naturang bayan ay nakararanas na ng water shortage sa loob ng tatlong linggo, kasabay ng pagkatuyo ng mga balon at poso.

Sa katunayan, ang mga residente ng Barangay Sulquiano ay umaasa na lamang sa tubig sa irigasyon para sa magagamit sa kanilang mga tahanan.

Ayon sa Dingras Municipal Council, 30 percent ng calamity fund ay ilalaan para sa rehabilitasyon ng mga apektadong lugar.

Kamakailan ay iniulat ng Department of Agriculture na nagtamo na ng P4.39 bilyong halaga ng pinsala ang agricultural sector dahil sa tagtuyot sa malaking bahagi ng bansa.

Nakatutok naman ang Task Force El Niño sa pagtulong sa 85,000 magsasaka at mangingisda na apektado nito. *RNT/JGC*

<https://remate.ph/dingras-ilocos-norte-isinailalim-sa-state-of-calamity-sa-el-nino/>

REMATE:

Water cannon ng China nakamamatay – PCG

May 2, 2024 08:00



MANILA, Philippines – Posibleng magdulot ng kamatayan ang water cannon attack na makailang beses nang ginawa ng China Coast Guard sa mga barko ng Pilipinas sa West Philippine Sea (WPS).

“If you are going to look at how it bent the railing of the Philippine Coast Guard vessel because of the water, obviously that would be very fatal,” pahayag ni Philippine Coast Guard spokesperson Commodore Jay Tarriela sa isang panayam.

Matatandaan nitong Martes, Abril 30, ay binomba na naman ng China gamit ang water cannon ang Philippine civilian vessels na patungo sa Scarborough (Panatag) Shoal sa WPS para sa supply mission.

Nagtamo ng pinsala sa canopy at steel railing ang PCG vessel BRP Bagacay dahil sa water cannon attack ng dalawang malalaking barko ng CCG.

Binomba rin ng water cannon ang barko ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) na BRP Bankaw, na bahagi rin ng misyon.

Inasinta ng China ang watawat ng Pilipinas sa pagbobomba ng tubig gamit ang water cannon.

“It just goes to show that Goliath is becoming more Goliath, they don’t hesitate to use brute force to violate international law,” ani Tarriela.

“We are not going to be deterred we are not going to yield despite all the harassment and provocative action. Hindi kami mapipigilan ng China,” pagpapatuloy nito.

Sa kabila ng panggigipit ng China ay nagpatuloy pa rin ang supply mission ng mga barko ng Pilipinas, 80 kilometro mula sa Panatag Shoal. *RNT/JGC*

<https://remate.ph/water-cannon-ng-china-nakamamatay-pcg/>

MANILA STANDARD:

Ifugao tomato farmers prepare 2nd delivery to Bulacan

By Othel V. Campos May 2, 2024, 7:50 pm

Tomato farmers of Ifugao are poised to deliver the second round of 8.9 metric tons (MT) of local tomatoes to a sardines processor in Bulacan, a deal made possible by the Department of Agriculture Cordillera's (DA-CAR) to help strengthen the market linkage of farmers to prospective institutional buyers or markets.

Tosen Food Inc. earlier agreed to purchase 40 MT of tomatoes every month from the tomato-producing municipalities of Hungduan, Hingyon and Asipulo in Ifugao starting January 2024.

After the initial delivery of 10.8 MT of tomatoes, specific adjustments in the kind of tomatoes produced by the farmers were identified to conform with the quality standards required by the company.

Tosen requires ripe tomatoes that will undergo processing while keeping semi-ripe tomatoes to a minimum before the delivery.

It is also partial to the removal of tomato crowns during consolidation, cleaning and sorting before delivery and segregation of tomatoes by variety with the corresponding markings to determine traceability.

The Agriculture Program Coordinating Office (APCO) Ifugao and the representative of the Provincial Sectoral Chairman for High-Value Crops of Ifugao will oversee monitoring and documentation of the agreement.

Tomato farmers from Ifugao started the delivery of three tons of tomatoes weekly to three companies in Metro Manila in October 2023, after agreeing to the cost structure developed by CAR AMAD and World Food Expo (WOFEX) consistent with the cost envisioned by farmers' cooperative associations.

<https://www.manilastandard.net/business/314442461/ifugao-tomato-farmers-prepare-2nd-delivery-to-bulacan.html>

MANILA STANDARD:

'Let NFA sell cheaper rice in market'

By Maricel Cruz May 2, 2024, 10:30 pm

A party-list lawmaker has reiterated his call to restore the National Food Authority's (NFA) function to buy palay from local farmers then sell it at a lower price in the local market for as low as P37 per kilo.

Rep. Wilbert Lee of AGRI party-list group said if the NFA were allowed to buy local palay and sell it to the public, it might result in P37 to P40 per kilo in the market, from the current P51 to P57 per kilo.

“Sa pag-amyenda ng RTL [Rice Tarrification Law], dapat ibalik na ang mandato ng NFA na pagbili ng palay sa lokal na mga magsasaka, hindi lang para siguruhin ang kita ng ating local food producers, kundi para mapababa rin ang presyo ng bigas (With the RTL amendment, the mandate of the NFA to buy rice from local farmers should be restored, not only to ensure the income of our local food producers, but also to lower the price of rice) ,” the Bicolano lawmaker said.

“Dapat may choice ang consumers, hindi yung napipilitan silang bumili ng mahal na bigas na napatungan na ng mga traders ang presyo. Kung maibabalik ang mandatong ito sa NFA, mapoprotektahan ang kabuhayan ng ating mga magsasaka at ma-e-engganyo silang pataasin ang produksyon. Mas makakamura sa NFA rice ang marami nating kababayan, kung saan ang matitipid na budget ay pwede nang magamit sa ibang pangangailangan, tulad sa panahon ng pagkakasakit (Consumers should have a choice. They should not be forced to buy expensive rice whose price has already been inflated by traders. If this mandate is restored to the NFA, the livelihoods of our farmers will be protected and they will be encouraged to increase production. Many of our people will find NFA rice cheaper, where the saved budget can be used for other needs, such as during illness) ,” he added.

The enactment of the RTL in 2019 prohibited the NFA from directly selling rice stocks to the market and limited its function to storing buffer stocks for calamities.

During a recent briefing at the House Committee on Agriculture and Food, the Department of Agriculture (DA) expressed its commitment to study the proposal to restore the NFA power to sell cheaper rice to the public.

The DA likewise proposed reallocation of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) as follows: 55 percent from 50 percent for farm machinery and equipment, retain 30 percent for Rice Seed Development, and five percent new allotment for the Soil Health Improvement, among others.

Lee, who filed House Resolution 1636 to scrutinize the impact of RCEF, welcomed these proposed amendments, underscoring that the increased allocation for farm machinery and equipment to be implemented by the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech) will greatly boost the productivity of local rice farmers.

While Lee recognizes the high utilization rate of the RCEF Mechanization Program, he pointed out that there must be a proactive effort in supporting potential beneficiaries who cannot comply with the requirements due to lack of resources such as the capacity to construct warehouses.

<https://www.manilastandard.net/news/national/314442600/let-nfa-sell-cheaper-rice-in-market.html>

MANILA STANDARD:

House leaders prod Senate to pass bill on low rice price

By Maricel Cruz May 2, 2024, 11:30 pm

House leaders, including two from top rice-producing provinces, joined Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez in an appeal to senators to prioritize proposed changes in a law that would bring down rice prices by at least P10-P15 a kilo.

In a news conference, Assistant Majority Leader Mikaela Angela Suansing (Nueva Ecija, 1st District), and Deputy Majority Leaders Faustino Dy V (Isabela, 6th District) and Jude Acide (Tingog Party-list) expressed support for the Speaker's plea.

"I very much laud and commend from a personal standpoint the appeal of the Speaker to the Senate to expedite the passage of the amendments of the RTL (Rice Tariffication Law)," Suansing said.

Coming from a major rice-producing province, she said the law, which includes the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), is close to her heart and was the subject of her thesis for her Harvard University master's degree.

She also authored the first bill to amend RTL and introduce improvements in RCEF "to improve its efficacy, to increase the impact on lowering the cost of production, and increase farmer incomes and their yield."

She echoed Speaker Romualdez's prediction that once the proposed amendments were approved, the retail price of rice could go down by P10-P15 per kilo, since the amendment proposals include returning the power of the National Food Authority (NFA) to buy palay from farmers and sell rice directly to consumers.

She said the House Committee on Agriculture headed by Quezon Rep. Mark Enverga is expediting work on the proposed RTL changes and would be ready to endorse a bill next week.

Suansing added that rice and food inflation is a major driver of inflation or the increase in consumer prices.

She pointed out that on a year-on-year basis, rice prices went up by 24.4 percent.

Supporting Suansing statements, Dy, from another major rice producing province, said NFA's market intervention authority should be reinstated.

“The NFA acts as a safety net para po sa ating mga kababayan (to protect our people). Not only that, it becomes a price regulation tool. By allowing NFA to do its function like before, magkakaroon na tayo ng mas mababang presyo ng bigas sa merkado (we will have a lower price of rice in the market). At ngayon (And now), hopefully that will lower the prices of other competing well-milled rice, other types of rice. And again, it becomes a safety net para sa ating mga kababayan na hindi makabili ng premium rice, well-milled rice (And again, it becomes a safety net for our countrymen who cannot buy premium rice, well-milled rice),” he said.

For his part, Acidre said the proposed RTL amendments would give the public access to cheaper rice.

“Ultimately, ang layunin naman natin ay magkaroon ng access sa mas murang bigas ang ating mga kababayan. I think its fundamental for government to ensure na ang pinaka-mahirap, pinaka-vulnerable sa ating pamayanan ay magkaroon ng pagkain sa kanilang hapag kainan,” he said.

(Ultimately, our goal is for our countrymen to have access to cheaper rice. I think its fundamental for government to ensure that the most poor, most vulnerable in our community have food on their dining table)

He said concerns about possible corruption on the part of the NFA could be addressed without denying the poor the opportunity to buy cheap rice.

“I think there are more effective mechanisms to reduce the likelihood of corruption other than taking away the access of the poor to more affordable rice,” Acidre said.

As author of RTL and the proposed amendments, Suansing said, “I will make sure that the way that we craft the provision in terms of reinstating the mandate of NFA would be less prone to corruption, so that’s the assurance that we give on the part of the House...we’ll make sure that the provisions are crafted the right way this time.”

<https://www.manilastandard.net/news/national/314442630/house-leaders-prod-senate-to-pass-bill-on-low-rice-price.html>

MANILA STANDARD:

Garden to table



By Manila Standard Business

May 2, 2024, 11:16 pm

The Department of Agriculture launches the Garden-to-Table Cooking Caravan at the Rizal Park on April 30, 2024 to encourage Filipinos to produce their own food especially in the urban areas and promote healthy eating habits.

<https://www.manilastandard.net/gallery/314442548/garden-to-table.html>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Tarlac's sweet potato products get support

By Jerry M. Hernandez
May 3, 2024

MONCADA, Tarlac: The municipal government here received assistance from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to further develop its sweet potato products.

JICA's support will help address the problem of oversupply and low price of sweet potatoes that serves as the municipality's "One Town, One Product" pride.

In an interview with the Philippine Information Agency, Moncada Mayor Estelita Aquino said JICA helped the local government in processing sweet potatoes.

"We tried different products like sweet potato flour but it was expensive. We tried rice cakes made of sweet potatoes but it was quite complicated. Finally, our sweet potato red wine was a success," she said.

The town's sweet potato red wine that comes in citrus and strawberry flavors and its ice cream made of sweet potatoes, called "ice kreamote," that comes in buko pandan, chocolate, ube, cookies and cream, and cheese flavors are both available at the Moncada Pabalubong Center located near the municipal hall.

Aquino cited that to sustain the production of sweet potatoes, the municipal government is also maximizing partnership with Farmers Field School of the Department of Agriculture to further enhance the knowledge of local farmers in the proper use of organic fertilizers.

"Aside from the implementation of the DA program, our municipal information office is keen in disseminating proper information on the benefits of sweet potatoes and how to maintain the good production of sweet potatoes. We have a fertile soil in Moncada, so all we need to do is to really take care of our production," the mayor said.

Aquino said Mount Pinatubo's eruption in 1991 improved the fertility of the soil in the municipality, increasing the yield of sweet potatoes, among others.

Moncada recently celebrated its first Kamote Festival to highlight and promote the thriving sweet potato industry.

The town was recognized as the leading producer of sweet potatoes in the province in 2023, contributing 49 percent to the overall supply of Tarlac.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/03/regions/tarlacs-sweet-potato-products-get-support/1944485>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Marcos vows assistance for drought-hit farmers

By Franco Jose C. Baroña , Janine Alexis Miguel and Catherine S. Valente
May 3, 2024

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. assured workers in the agricultural sector and other industries heavily affected by the El Niño phenomenon that the government is ready to assist them to weather the effects of the dry spell.

The promise of help came as the Department of Agriculture (DA) put the agricultural damage caused by the El Niño phenomenon at P5.9 billion, with drought affecting 113,585 farmers and fisherfolk in 12 regions.

The President said the government assistance, which was part of the ongoing program of the DA, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and the Department of Labor and Employment, would "soon" be provided to the affected workers.



In this photo taken on April 25, 2024 Filipino farmer Eddie Balagtas shows a drought-stricken farm in San Antonio, Nueva Ecija. More than half of the Philippines' provinces, including Nueva Ecija, are in drought as El Niño exacerbates hot and dry conditions typical for March, April and May. JAM STA ROSA / AFP

"In the coming days, we will extend financial assistance to those hard hit by El Niño in the country — those whose crops and livelihood are

damaged because of drought," Marcos said in his speech during the Labor Day event in Malacañang on Wednesday.

The government would prioritize helping those affected in Mindanao, he added.

As of May 1, the DSWD said there were 2.97 million persons or 695,149 persons from 3,905 barangay (villages) in 13 regions affected by El Niño.

The DSWD also said P97.275 million worth of family food packs and nonfood relief items have been distributed to affected areas in Regions 1 (Ilocos), 2 (Cagayan Valley), 3 (Central Luzon), 4B (Mimaropa), 5 (Bicol), 6 (Western Visayas), 7 (Central Visayas), 8 (Eastern Visayas), 9 (Zamboanga Peninsula), 11 (Davao), 12 (Soccsksargen), Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

In its latest El Niño bulletin, the DA said the estimated damage to the farm sector in 11 regions — CAR, Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol Region, Western Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Davao Region, and Soccsksargen — stood at P3.94 billion, affecting 73,713 farmers and fisherfolk as of April 16.

A total of 66,065 hectares of farmlands were affected by El Niño. Of this number, 76.87 percent or 50,785 hectares have a chance of recovery, while 23.13 percent, or 15,281 hectares, have no chance of recovery.

The DA said it has distributed assistance totaling P1.09 billion to affected farmers and fisherfolk, including support for production, financial and livelihood assistance, and water management.

"As support to production, high-value crops with lower water requirements were distributed to farmers in Western Visayas amounting to P2.05 million," it said.

The DA said it provided hybrid rice seeds worth P7.87 million and fertilizers worth P7.63 million to non-vulnerable areas in Western Visayas; rice and corn seeds worth P3.51 million in Ilocos Region to maximize production and compensate for incurred losses; and drugs, biologics, and high-density polyethylene hoses worth P840,000 million in CAR.

For financial and livelihood assistance, the DA said it has provided a total of 60,013 native animals to 334 groups and 534 individual farmers nationwide through its Philippine Native Animal Development Program.

"In addition, the Rice Farmers Financial Assistance program has provided financial assistance to 139,002 farmers in Cagayan Valley with a total amount of P701.96 million, and 71,795 farmers in Mimaropa region with a total amount of P362.56 million," the DA said.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources has provided a total of 111 diversified alternative livelihoods and technologies in Cordillera, Bicol, Central Visayas, and Zamboanga Peninsula regions to help fishermen, it added.

The crop areas affected by El Niño rose to 104,402 hectares, with 72.67 percent of land still potentially recoverable. Production loss, meanwhile, was estimated at 184,002 metric tons (MT).

Of this, 129,350 MT was rice or around 1.40 percent of the target production of 9,218,358.28 MT this year. On the other hand, 98,937 MT was recorded to have been lost for corn, and 26,826 MT were recorded for high-value crops.

Mimaropa, which posted the largest loss in terms of value at P1.7 billion, received P460 million in assistance, including rice machinery, loans coconut seedlings, composting facilities, irrigation projects, and marine equipment.

Last week, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. led the inspection of farmlands affected by the drought in Occidental Mindoro.

According to the DA, five towns in Mindoro have recently been declared under a state of calamity as a result of the dry spell. This includes Mansalay and Bulalacao in Oriental Mindoro, and Looc, Magsaysay, and San Jose in Occidental Mindoro.

Moreover, the DA said that cloud seeding operations are ongoing in southern Cagayan, northern Isabela, Quirino corn areas, and Magat Reservoir in Cagayan Valley.

To enhance water supply, the government has also installed 616 water pumps in seven regions, including Ilocos Region, Cagayan, Central Luzon, Mimaropa, Western and Central Visayas, and Davao Region.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, meanwhile, said P541 million in aid — consisting of food packs, rice, roofing sheets, generators and hygiene kits — has been disbursed to at least 10 regions severely affected by the El Niño phenomenon.

These regions were Cagayan Valley, Mimaropa, Bicol, Western Visayas, Central Visayas, Eastern Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Soccsksargen, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, and the Cordillera Administrative Region.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration said the El Niño phenomenon remains active and is expected to persist until this month.

At least 131 cities and municipalities across the country have declared a state of calamity due to the effects of the El Niño phenomenon, as most of the areas are experiencing drought.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/03/news/national/marcos-vows-assistance-for-drought-hit-farmers/1944430>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Tobacco farmers urge passage of SB 2432

By Janine Alexis Miguel

May 3, 2024

TOBACCO farmers' groups urged the Congress to pass Senate Bill (SB) 2432, or the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, before President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s State of the Nation Address (SONA) to counter smuggling, which is harming local tobacco farmers.

The Philippine Tobacco Growers Association (PTGA) and the National Federation of Tobacco Farmers Association and Cooperatives (Naftac) on Thursday called for Congress to already convene a Bicameral Conference Committee before July.

PTGA President Saturnino Distor emphasized the urgent necessity of passing the bill due to widespread smuggling, which not only affects the agricultural sector but also threatens local farmers and their dependents.

"We hope that Congress can finally have a Bicameral Conference Committee so it can be signed by President Marcos before his SONA. This is one of the priorities of his administration and a big help to our farmers," said Distor.

Naftac Chairman Bernard Vicente, meanwhile, said that the approval of SB 2432 would also help the government fulfill its pledge of "affordable agricultural goods and food self-sufficiency" for the Philippines.

"We believe the bill will help prevent the smuggling of agricultural products and will deter these criminals. Hopefully, the happy days of smugglers, hoarders, and cartels will soon be over," said Vicente.

Under the measure, the smuggling of rice and other agricultural products is categorized as "economic sabotage," a grave offense carrying a penalty of life imprisonment.

Additionally, perpetrators will face fines that are triple the value of the smuggled agricultural and fishery products, which the groups said would deter such illicit activities.

Data from the National Tobacco Administration showed that there are currently 2.2 million Filipinos who are financially dependent on tobacco, including more than 430,000 farmers, farm workers and their family members.

Citing reports from the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura, the tobacco farmers said the Philippine government loses about P200 billion in revenue annually due to smuggling, with P30 billion attributed to smuggled cigarettes alone.

The PTGA and Naftac noted that, among the priority bills Congress is working to pass before President Marcos' third SONA, "only the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act will have a direct and lasting impact on Filipino farmers."

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/03/business/top-business/tobacco-farmers-urge-passage-of-sb-2432/1944459>

AO 20: Necessary but not sufficient

By Dr. Fermin D. Adriano, PhD

May 3, 2024

THE sagging popularity of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is no doubt caused by the untamed prices of basic commodities, particularly food. Food prices contribute around 57 percent to our total inflation. Various reputable survey firms have noted that two-thirds of their respondents have expressed dissatisfaction in the manner by which the administration is managing inflation.

Inflation inched up to almost 4 percent in March and there are prospects that the upswing continued in April and will again in the coming months because of increases in the prices of fuel and food commodities. The bottom 30 suffer more because over 60 percent of their expenditures goes to procuring food, leaving little to spend on other goods (e.g., health, education, clothing and shelter).

In the short and even medium term, it is virtually impossible to tame soaring food prices by increasing domestic production. It will take considerable time and proper government prioritization and intervention before significant local productivity gains can be achieved.

As a stop-gap measure, all the government can do to ease food inflation pressure is to allow entry of more agricultural and food product imports. Liberalizing agricultural trading becomes an indispensable tool for immediately responding to supply shortages brought about by low local productivity and instability caused by global geopolitical events.

This was the rationale behind the Office of the President's issuance of Administrative Order (AO) 20 last April 18. It instructed the Department of Agriculture (DA), in coordination with the Department of Trade and Industry, and the Department of Finance to

"streamline the procedures and requirements in the licensing of importers, minimize processing time of application for importation and exempt licensed traders from submission of registration requirements."

In addition, it also ordered the same agencies to remove non-tariff barriers (NTBs) to facilitate entry of agriculture and food imports. NTBs are policy measures, other than tariff duties, "that restrict trade, including but not limited to quotas, import licensing systems, regulations and red tape."

Expectedly, protectionist leaders of civil society, politicians and media personalities immediately assailed AO 20, noting its bias toward promoting imported products rather than increasing local production. They alarmingly declared that we would be flooded by imported agricultural products with this directive.

When asked for my reaction by a number of media outlets, I stressed that while AO 20 was a step in the right direction and potentially could tame food inflation, it is not sufficient. AO 20 will not necessarily result in the smoother entry of imported agricultural and food products because there are implementation details that need to be urgently addressed before the spirit of the directive can be attained.

I noted four of these.

First, there will be a need to conduct a reliable supply and demand (S&D) analysis to determine the sufficient volumes to be imported. Sans a rigorous S&D analysis, agricultural policymakers will inevitably guesstimate, or depend on their political gut feel in deciding the quantity of imports needed instead of basing it on solid empirical evidence.

For instance, the corn supply gap is between 3 and 4 million metric tons (MT) a year. Allowing the entry of imported corn at lower tariff under the minimum access volume (MAV) pegged at 253,000 MT will hardly make a dent, resulting in continued high corn prices.

Second, even if one allows entry of imported agricultural products yet the government limits allocation to a few traders, it will not dampen escalating prices. We saw that in the case of imported sugar where import allocations were distributed to only three traders who were selected based on the government justification that they were "the best and most capable."

The government decision practically resulted in a "state-sponsored cartel" as prices never went down to the previous P44 to P46 per kilo for raw sugar and P52 to P54 for refined sugar. Sugar prices were pegged by the cartel at over P80 to P90 per kilo for raw sugar and P90 to P100 for refined sugar.

Three, if the tariff remains high at 35 percent or higher for agricultural products, importers will be discouraged to import as the cost of imports plus the tariffs might be equal or a bit higher than locally produced products. It will be more profitable to smuggle such products with high tariffs than to go through the legal process of importation.

Four, it will depend on whether there will be a willingness on the part of the DA to comply with the President's directive of liberalizing agricultural trade by streamlining administrative procedures and NTBs on imported agricultural and food products.

To cite a couple of cases, the DA recently announced the approval of the importation of around 25,000 MT of fish to address an expected shortage during the closed fishing season. The basis was the issuance of a certificate of necessity to import (CNI). A CNI falls under the category of an NTB and hence should have been lifted following the AO 20 instruction.

The same DA order also provided that 80 percent of the fish to be imported be allocated to commercial fishers. Again, this is another NTB because it limits market access of other market players to these imports to a few privileged individuals.

The same is happening whenever we import sugar, which is ironic because the country also exports the commodity. A Sugar Regulatory Order is needed before sugar can be imported. Sugar is one of the commodities liberalized when we became a member of the World Trade Organization in 1995.

In line with this, tariffs on sugar were pegged at 50 percent for the MAV in quota and 65 percent out quota. Sugar from Asean is imposed a 5-percent tariff as part of our membership in the Asean Trade in Goods Agreement. Why then is the Sugar Regulatory Administration still empowered to issue an order to determine the volume of allowed sugar imports? This is clearly an NTB.

The simple explanation is the existence of vested interest groups in the agricultural sector powerful enough to prevent the workings of a competitive market that will adversely affect their profit. The results are continuing food price escalation, widespread malnutrition and hunger among the poor who are unable to afford high food prices and mounting dissatisfaction with the government as manifested in the declining popularity of the President.

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<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/03/business/top-business/ao-20-necessary-but-not-sufficient/1944452>

SKorea's consumer price rises 2.9% in April

By Xinhua News Agency

May 3, 2024

SEOUL: South Korea's consumer price rise slowed to below 3 percent in April despite the still high price for farm goods, statistical office data showed on Thursday.

The consumer price index gained 2.9 percent in April from a year earlier after staying above 3 percent in the previous two months, according to Statistics Korea.

The headline inflation continued to top the Bank of Korea's (BOK) midterm inflation target of 2 percent. The BOK had left its benchmark interest rate unchanged at 3.50 percent since January last year.

Prices for agricultural, livestock and fishery products surged 10.6 percent in April on a yearly basis, lifting the overall inflation by 0.77 percentage point.

Agricultural products prices soared 20.3 percent last month, hovering above 20 percent for three months in a row.

Apple price skyrocketed 80.8 percent, with pear price more than doubling in the month. Prices for tomato and napa cabbage advanced in double figures.

Prices for livestock and fishery products added 0.3 percent and 0.4 percent, respectively.

Oil products price rose 1.3 percent in April from a year earlier after going up 1.2 percent in the previous month.

Prices for industrial products, including oil products, swelled 2.2 percent last month, raising the headline inflation by 0.74 percentage point.

The processed food price picked up 1.6 percent in April after climbing 1.4 percent in the prior month.

Prices for electricity, natural gas and tap water mounted 4.9 percent in the month, pulling up the overall inflation by 0.19 percentage point.

Electricity bill increased 4.3 percent, with city gas and heating costs going up 5.6 percent and 12.1 percent, respectively.

Private service price, including eating-out cost, spiked 2.8 percent last month, while public service price added 2.2 percent.

The eating-out expense gained 3.0 percent, drawing up inflation by 0.42 percentage point.

Housing rent, including Jeonse and monthly rent, stood unchanged in April from a year earlier.

Jeonse is South Korea's unique contract between two households where a landlord grants a two-year residential right to a tenant who, in turn, lends a certain amount of money, or deposit, to the landlord.

The livelihood items index, which gauges the price for daily necessities, was up 3.5 percent in April after expanding 3.8 percent in the previous month.

The fresh food index, which measures the price of fish, shellfish, fruit and vegetables, surged 19.1 percent last month, keeping a double-digit growth for the seventh consecutive month.

Demand-side inflationary pressure remained relatively low. The core consumer price index, which excludes volatile agricultural and oil products, climbed 2.2 percent last month.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development-method core price, excluding volatile energy and food costs, increased 2.3 percent.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/03/business/foreign-business/skoreas-consumer-price-rises-29-in-april/1944383>

El Niño damage climbs to P5.9B

By **Jed Macapagal**

May 3, 2024

Cost of damage to agriculture of the effects of El Niño climbed to P5.9 billion as of April 30, according to latest data from the Department of Agriculture's (DA) Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Operations Center.

The DA attached agency in its advisory yesterday said 104,402 hectares (ha) tended by 113,585 farmers were affected. These are located in Cordillera Administrative Region, Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Western Visayas, Eastern Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Davao and Soccsksargen.

Volume loss is estimated at 255,467 metric tons (MT) of crops.

The DA said 28,530 ha or 27.33 percent has no chance of recovery while the remaining 75,873 ha or 72.67 percent has a chance of recovery.

Lost crops stood at 129,350 MT of rice worth P3.14 billion; 39,407 MT of corn worth P1.76 billion; 26,826 MT of high value crops worth P958.06 million; 2,261 affected fisherfolk worth P33.83 million; 391 heads of livestock and poultry worth P7.93 million; and 140 MT of cassava worth P3.25 million.

The DA said it has so far provided a total of P2.18 billion worth of assistance to affected farmers.

Among the biggest aid provided by the DA were financial assistance to rice farmers in Cagayan Valley and Mimaropa with a total amount of P1.07 billion.

The DA said P658.22 million worth of assistance for production support including inputs, fertilizers, planting materials, pumps and engines, drugs and biologics were provided to regional field offices nationwide.

The Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. also indemnified farmers with a total amount of P67.93 million, so far.

https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/el-nino-damage-climbs-to-p5-9b/

Tobacco farmers seek passage of measure vs agri smuggling

By **Jed Macapagal**

May 3, 2024



A tobacco farm in Ilocos Norte is shown in this undated photo. There are 2.2 million Filipinos financially dependent on tobacco farming. (Photo from NTA website).

The Philippine Tobacco Growers Association (PTGA) and the National Federation of Tobacco Farmers Association and Cooperatives (NAFTAC) called on Congress to pass the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act before the President's next State of the Nation Address in July.

The House of Representatives and the Senate have passed their versions of the measure on September 27 and December 11, respectively.

However, they have yet to convene a bicameral conference committee to reconcile their versions.

Congress will adjourn on May 24.

Saturnino Distor, PTGA president, said the proposed law will criminalize smuggling of rice and other agricultural products as an act of "economic sabotage," which will make it punishable by life imprisonment and huge fines.

Bernard Vicente, NAFTAC chairman, said the proposed law can help lower the cost of agricultural products and ensure food self-sufficiency.

Data from the National Tobacco Administration showed there are 2.2 million Filipinos who are financially dependent on tobacco including more than 430,000 farmers, farm workers and their family members.

PTGA and NAFTAC have 50,000 tobacco producers as members some of them engaged also in farming rice, corn and other crops.

https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/tobacco-farmers-seek-passage-of-measure-vs-agri-smuggling/

Wheat inches higher

By Reuters

May 3, 2024

CANBERRA- Chicago wheat futures edged higher on Thursday as traders assessed whether rainfall in the US and Russian cropping zones was enough to alleviate dryness that threatens yields.

Soybean and corn futures edged higher, but both contracts, along with wheat, were not far from four-year lows due to a strong supply outlook.

The most-active wheat contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was up 0.2 percent at \$6.00-1/2 a bushel, having risen to a four-month high of \$6.33 last week.

The rally to last week's peak was driven partly by investors covering some of their large net short positions and lifted prices higher than was justified, said Andrew Whitelaw, an analyst at Episode 3 in Canberra.

Most analysts still expect a wheat supply surplus this year.

The US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) crop progress report on Monday showed 49 percent of the US winter wheat crop was rated in good-to-excellent condition, the highest for this time of year since 2020.

https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/wheat-inches-higher/

BUSINESS MIRROR:

DA: Key crops bear El Niño brunt, damage hits P5.9 billion

- Ada Pelonia
- May 3, 2024
- DAMAGA caused by El Niño to the country's farm sector has climbed to P5.9 billion, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).
- In its latest report, the DA said the volume of production losses reached 255,467 metric tons (MT). Palay suffered the brunt of the dry spell as the sector lost 129,350 MT for palay; corn, 98,937 MT; and high-value crops, 26,826 MT for high-value crops.
- The DA said the volume of production destroyed by El Niño is equivalent to P3.1 billion for palay, P1.76 billion for corn, and P958 million for high-value crops.
- The agency indicated in its report that the rice production loss of 129,350 MT is equivalent to about 1.40 percent of the 9.22 million MT (MMT) target output for the dry cropping season this year. Also, the corn production loss of 98,937 MT is 2.20 percent of the 4.49 MMT target production in the same cropping season.
- "Most of the corn and rice damaged are in the reproductive and maturity stages," the DA said.
- The report also showed that El Niño affected 104,402 hectares of farm areas as well as 113,585 farmers and fishers.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary and Spokesperson Arnel De Mesa told reporters on Thursday that among the regions that took a major hit from El Niño were Mimaropa which recorded damages amounting to P1.7 billion; Western Visayas, P1.49 billion; Cordillera Administrative Region, P767 million; and Cagayan Valley, P562 million.

"May na ngayon eh patapos na 'yung harvest (of rice) so yung mga area na nagharvest hindi na yun masyadong naapektuhan ng El Niño [It's already May and the rice harvest season is coming to an end. Areas that are currently harvesting crops will no longer be affected by El Niño]," De Mesa said.

The DA said it provided assistance to farmers and fishers affected by El Niño, including the distribution of production support, such as inputs and planting materials, and the repair of irrigation canals.

De Mesa said the government has also given seeds to farmers under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) through the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice), machinery from the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech), and fertilizer vouchers from the DA Regional Field Office.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration noted that the current El Niño episode will weaken by June. However, it added that La Niña may start around the same time.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/03/da-key-crops-bear-el-nino-brunt-damage-hits-p5-9-billion/>

FFF pitches Rice Tariffication Law revisions

- Ada Pelonia
- May 3, 2024
- THE Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) proposed amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), including giving the chief of the Department of Agriculture (DA) control over the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund and additional tariff collections in excess of P10 billion.
- FFF noted that RTL had a provision which provided for the release of funds to, and direct implementation of programs by individual implementing agencies under RCEF. This bypassed the DA secretary and the DA's regular operational structure.
- The group's proposals were contained in a document it submitted to the House Committee on Agriculture and Food, which is currently holding hearings on the RTL.
- "RTL still made the DA Secretary accountable and responsible for the Rice Fund despite depriving him of direct access to, and control over, RCEF," it said.
- "The direct transfer of funds and responsibilities to small research and training entities (mostly under the DA), which have limited manpower and field presence, has resulted in delays and added costs in program implementation, duplication of functions currently performed by regular DA offices and personnel, and concerns about the sustainability of these programs once RCEF funding stops," it added.
- The current scheme, the group said, resulted in the "fragmentation and compartmentalization" of DA programs, with RCEF activities, targets, and budgets often being determined apart from the regular program for the rice sector.
- FFF also called for "flexible allocations" of funds to address localized problems and changes in priorities over time since the RCEF distribution scheme prohibits the realignment of funds across the four major program components.
- Under Article 13 of the RTL, "the unutilized portion of the Rice Fund allocated to the implementing agencies shall not revert to the General Fund but shall continue to be used for the purpose for which it was set aside."
- The group said it recognizes the primacy of fund usage to mechanization, seed support, credit, and farm extension. However, it said the government should consider allocating it to common service facilities, such as soil and leaf analysis laboratories, grains drying and processing centers located near buying stations of the National Food Authority, and storage facilities.

- It said the credit component of RCEF should be transformed into a revolving fund, with every loan collection and all net earnings accruing to the fund be made available for relending to program beneficiaries.
- According to FFF, the current stipulations under RTL do not expressly declare the credit fund under RCEF as a revolving fund.
- “The Department of Budget and Management and Commission on Audit have insisted that the Land Bank and Development Bank of the Philippines should remit all loan collections to the National Treasury after a single lending cycle. In other words, they cannot be relent again and will forever be lost to the Treasury.”
- It also proposed the conversion of the credit fund into a subsidy program for bank interest fees and services fees. Farmers and cooperatives could use this “to subsidize interest charges and service fees while tapping the funds of lending banks for loans.”

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/03/fff-pitches-rice-tariffication-law-revisions/>

ABANTE TONITE:

El Niño halos P6 bilyon na sinira sa agri

May 2, 2024



Umakyat na sa halos P6 bilyon ang kabuuang halaga ng pinsalang idinulot ng El Niño sa sektor ng agrikultura.

“Iyong latest damage natin as of end of April per Bulletin No. 9 ng DA, ang damage is already P5.9 billion, pinakamalaki pa rin is sa rice sector at P3.1 billion,” ayon kay Department of Agriculture (DA) Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa sa isang panayam nitong Huwebes, Mayo 2.

Sapol din ng tagtuyot ang produksiyon ng mais na umabot na sa P1.76 bilyon ang pinsala habang nasa P958 milyon naman ang danyos sa iba pang mga pananim.

Sabi ni De Mesa, ang Mimaropa region pa rin ang pinakamatinding apektado ng El Niño na nasa P1.71 bilyon na ang pinsala kasunod ang Western Visayas (P1.5 bilyon), Cordillera (P768 milyon), at Cagayan Valley (P562 milyon).

Nilinaw naman ng opisyal na nasa 58,000 ektarya ng mga taniman ng palay ang napinsala ng tagtuyot subalit 2.27 porsiyento pa lamang ito ng kabuuang lugar na pinagtataniman ng palay sa buong bansa na mahigit dalawang milyong ektarya.(PNA)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2024/05/02/el-nino-halos-p6-bilyon-na-sinira-sa-agri/>