

MANILA BULLATIN:

DA to boost support for horticultural farmers affected by El Niño

BY GABRIELL CHRISTEL GALANG

May 3, 2024 03:56 PM

Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. has announced plans to extend support and improve technical knowledge for horticultural farmers whose production has decreased due to the effects of El Niño.

On May 3, Friday, Tiu Laurel suggested that in order to boost production, the DA can make use of open areas that are available, stating that “horticulture and urban agriculture are very important because we have a lot of unused land in our cities... we have to utilize all the areas possible.”

“As far as horticulture is concerned, there are a lot of available plants and varieties that can be produced. We’re just lacking market right now,” he added.

During the Horticulture and Urban Agriculture Summit 2024, the DA chief also mentioned that the market for ornamental plants, like flowers, is growing in cities.

“Regarding the landscaping, I was told that there’s a lack of supply versus demand. So there’s still a good opportunity for [expansion].”

Subsequently, Tiu Laurel believed that boosting exports would help scale up the livelihoods of local farmers.

“We have a lot of plants set out for export to other countries and there are those valued at P1 million to P2 million, so it’s something to look into, especially with our green-thumb stakeholders... I think we have a good export potential for that.”

In February, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said that exporting horticultural products like coconut, cashew nuts, and algae to India could garner \$1.12 million or P68.9 million.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/3/da-to-boost-support-for-horticultural-farmers-affected-by-el-nino>

MANILA BULLATIN:

Poor Pinoys need cheaper rice: Solons react to Cynthia Villar's rejection of Rice Tarrification Law revision

BY ELLSON QUISMORIO

May 3, 2024 02:16 PM

AT A GLANCE

- Amending Republic Act (RA) No.11203 or the Rice Tarrification Law (RTL) will help poor Filipinos get access to cheaper rice.
- Deputy Majority Leader Tingog Party-list Rep. Jude Acidre and Deputy Majority Leader Isabela 6th district Rep. Faustino “Inno” Dy had this to say to Senator Cynthia Villar after she opposed the proposed amendments to the RTL.



Senator Cynthia Villar (Senate PRIB)

Amending Republic Act (RA) No.11203 or the Rice Tarrification Law (RTL) will help poor Filipinos get access to cheaper rice.

Deputy Majority Leader Tingog Party-list Rep. Jude Acidre and Deputy Majority Leader Isabela 6th district Rep. Faustino “Inno” Dy had this to say to Senator Cynthia Villar after she opposed the proposed amendments to the RTL.

No less than House Speaker Martin Romualdez is leading the charge in tweaking the 2019 to once again allow the National Food Authority (NFA) to directly sell relatively cheaper rice to the market.

This return of "NFA rice" will result to rice that will only cost around P30, Romualdez said.

On Thursday, Villar, the Senate Committee on Agriculture chairperson, shot down the idea and said that it could revive corruption in NFA.

Acidre says that preventing possible corruption should not mean denying people the opportunity to buy rice from NFA, especially since it is significantly cheaper than prevailing retail prices

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

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

Dy, who hails from a major rice-producing province, says he supports the return of NFA's market intervention mandate.

"NFA acts, as before, it acts as a safety net para po sa ating mga kababayan. 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 cheaper rice in the market)," he explained.

"Hopefully that will lower the prices of other competing well-milled rice, other types of rice," Dy said.

Responding to Villar's concerns about corruption in NFA, Dy says safeguards could be included in the amendments to RTL, which are now being discussed by the House Committee on Agriculture and Food.

"Now that we are crafting a new law, or amendments to the RTL law, we can introduce kung ano po 'yung mga kinakailangan na amendments para pagandahin po natin 'yung sistema...so meron mga improvements na kailangan talagang gawin at i-introduce.

(We can introduce whatever amendments are needed to improve the system...so there are really improvements that really need to be made and introduced.)

"But it doesn't mean that we should not entertain the idea of introducing the NFA function again kasi kinakailangan nga pong may ganito tayong paraan para may access din po ang ating mga kababayan sa mas murang bigas," he stressed.

(Because we need to have this way of providing our countrymen with access to cheaper rice.)

Rice is the staple food of Filipinos.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/3/poor-pinoys-need-cheaper-rice-solons-react-to-cynthia-villar-s-rejection-of-rice-tarrification-law-revision>

MANILA BULLATIN:

Banks released higher agri loans – BSP survey

BY LEE C. CHIPONGIAN

May 3, 2024 06:15 PM

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) reported Friday, May 3, that the share of agriculture loans and services in 2022 went up to 18.1 percent versus 17.6 percent in 2021 with rural and cooperative banks providing bulk of the funding, based on its latest Countryside Bank Survey (CBS).

The 2022 CBS is only the second survey of such kind released by the BSP. The first report was issued in February 2023, covering the year 2021.

According to the 90-page survey report, in 2022 the total value of agricultural loans increased by 36.7 percent to P213.07 billion from P155.90 billion in 2021.

The BSP said surveyed banks attributed the improvement to the growing demand for agricultural loans to the gradual end of the pandemic and Republic Act No. 11901 which induced “flexibility on banks’ compliance on Agri-Agra requirements and thus allowed for alternative forms of investment that count toward their compliance.” RA 11901 was also known as the Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development Financing Enhancement Act of 2022.

“Furthermore, banks increased their marketing efforts to attract new borrowers and renewed and expanded loans for established, creditworthy borrowers,” said the BSP.

It also noted that the allocation of funds for basic crops in these agricultural loans significantly decreased to P12.73 billion from P53.33 billion because of the “lower demand for basic crop loans, uncontrolled risks such as extreme weather conditions, rising costs and declining profits in basic crop farming, and the lingering effects of the pandemic on some borrowers.”

The value of non-agricultural loans also increased by 34.2 percent to P2.8 trillion in 2022 from P2.1 trillion in the previous year. “For banks that increased the value of granted non-agricultural loans, the growth was due to higher demand for personal and business loans by new borrowers, better marketing to small business owners, and a less restrictive borrowing environment,” said the BSP.

The CBS also noted an expansion in loan products for agricultural needs such as seeds, fertilizer, working capital, and farm equipment, sustainable projects, digitalization of farming activities, and agri-tourism activities.

Basically, the 2022 survey which included 5,560 banking units, established baseline data to monitor banks' compliance with RA 11901 and includes questions about specific agricultural loan products and services offered in 2021 and 2022 that are consistent with the said law.

The CBS cited several key assessment including a review on the demand for agricultural loans which it said was 40 percent from rural and cooperative banks and 74 percent from government banks.

It said the distribution of loan borrowers across banking groups showed that rural and cooperative banks have maintained “a strong commitment to supporting agricultural borrowers, including small-scale farmers and fisherfolk.

Regional distribution of agricultural borrowers likewise showed that universal and commercial banks have a higher concentration in Luzon while the smaller banks are the same but with notably fewer borrowers in the National Capital Region (NCR).

Thrift banks have a higher number of borrowers in Mindanao while government banks show similar borrower numbers outside the NCR, with slightly more borrowers in Mindanao, said the BSP.

“In 2022, the average interest rates on agricultural loans ranged from 12 percent to 18 percent, higher than those on non-agricultural loans, which ranged from 7.5 percent to 16 percent,” noted the BSP.

Rural and cooperative banks within the NCR reported the highest rates, ranging from 16 percent to 21 percent. The smaller banks outside the NCR and the thrift banks showed a slightly broader range of rates, from 13 percent to 20 percent. In contrast, the big banks and government banks had lower interest rates on agricultural loans, ranging between 4.6 percent and 7.2 percent, and 3.3 percent and 6.6 percent, respectively, said the BSP.

The central bank reported that surveyed banking units had an average overall repayment loan rate of 67 percent, with government banks recording a higher rate of 70 percent. Some banking units attributed lower repayment rates in 2022 to the impact of the pandemic.

The overall non-performing loan (NPL) ratios for agricultural loans slightly declined from 7.3 percent in 2021 to 7.2 percent in 2022, with NCR-located rural and cooperative banks experiencing significant decreases in their NPL ratios for agricultural loans in 2022.

The survey also observed the following: strong financial performance and strategic capabilities of the surveyed banking units with increased net income; and most still require traditional loan securities from agricultural borrowers, mainly favoring real estate mortgages.

The CBS also noted that banking units “often face challenges when lending to the agricultural sector due to inherent risks like exposure to natural disasters, uncertain crop yields, fluctuating borrower incomes, and an aging population.”

The BSP said they “see it crucial to adopt measures that address information gaps in agricultural lending to boost confidence in extending credit to this sector.”

Generally, the report said the surveyed banks are optimistic about the next twelve months. “They anticipate favorable lending conditions for agricultural borrowers. Specifically, they foresee improvements in loan volumes and quality, aiming to enhance profitability,” said the BSP.

The 2022 CBS is a collaborative effort between the Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Credit Policy Council and the BSP. The report aims to examine lending trends and policy implications concerning agricultural financing by leveraging branch-level data.

The CBS also evaluated banking units' agricultural lending activities in 2022 compared to 2021 including data on loan demand, borrower profiles, interest rates, repayment dynamics, profitability, risk management, challenges, and future plans.

The survey was done electronically nationwide and also includes digital banks, besides the traditional brick-and-mortar banks.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/3/banks-released-higher-agri-loans-bsp-survey>

MANILA BULLATIN:

Was Philippine flag the target of water cannon attack? PCG answers

BY DEXTER BARRO II

May 3, 2024 03:29 PM

AT A GLANCE

- The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said on Friday that the China Coast Guard (CCG) sought to immobilize the vessel BRP Bagacay during their latest water cannon attack.



Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Spokesperson Commodore Jay Tristan Tarriela answers questions from the media (Dexter Barro II/MANILA BULLETIN)

San Narciso, Zambales—The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said on Friday that the China Coast Guard (CCG) sought to immobilize the vessel BRP Bagacay during their latest water cannon attack.

“Well for the coast guard, ang alam naman natin, we notice na tinitira ng water cannon yung mga (What we do know is that we noticed that the water cannon was fired on the) communication equipment and the navigation equipment,” said PCG Spokesperson Commodore Jay Tristan Tarriela during an interview with the media here.

“And of course, we are relatively dependent sa ating (on the) communication equipment and navigation equipment. So, for us, ang intensyon talaga nila doon is to target all those antennas na nasa superstructure natin (their real intention there is to target all those antennas on our superstructure),” he added.

On Tuesday, April 30, two government vessels on a resupply mission to Bajo de Masinloc (Scarborough Shoal) were once again blasted with water cannon by the CCG.

This latest attack was described to be “potentially deadly” since the jet stream pressure used was enough to damage a steel railing and canopy of the BRP Bagacay.

In a drone footage shown by a GMA News reporter, the CCG vessel was seen directly aiming the water cannon at the Philippine flag on the PCG ship.

“Doon sa question na flag ba talaga ang intentionally na tina-target ng (As for the question, was the flag really intentionally targeted by the) People’s Republic of China, well, we can say na that could be possible,” noted Tarriela.

“But the objective of the water cannoning no’ng nakaraang insidente noong (during the previous incident on) April 30, is for them to terminate the mobility ng coast guard vessel and BFAR,” he stressed.

Tarriela, however, admitted that this could be interpreted as a bigger deal given that the country’s own flag was seemingly targeted.

“Ito talaga napakasakit sa atin bilang Pilipino (This really hurts as Filipinos),” he emphasized.

Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Spokesperson Ambassador Ma. Teresita Daza says she is pleased with the public’s reaction to this incident.

“I am happy that the people are pained by it just as I think that it’s important that we realize that this issue that is happening in the West Philippine Sea is an issue of the entire country. It’s not just an issue of those in Zambales or the nearby areas,” said Daza.

She noted that the DFA will further investigate this matter. “It’s difficult to say that this should be protested,” she said.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/3/was-philippine-flag-the-target-of-water-cannon-attack-pcg-answers>

MANILA BULLATIN:

CHED, UPLB partner to offer free review for agri students

Free online program to give agri students in 15 SUCs better chances of passing LEA

BY MERLINA HERNANDO-MALIPOT

May 3, 2024 09:37 PM

To help more agriculture students pass the Licensure Examination for Agriculturists (LEA), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) on Friday, May 3, formally announced their partnership to offer free online review classes.



(Photo courtesy of CHED)

Officials of CHED, UPLB, and 15 selected State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) attended the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) signing to launch ExcelLEArate: A Review and Strategy Program to Empower Students for Licensure Examination for Agriculturists.

“We will use the expertise of the UP Los Baños to conduct free licensure classes for our agriculture students who are preparing for the LEA,” said CHED Chairman Popoy De Vera.

“We do this because I recognized the struggles faced by the graduates from SUCs in remote regions during my visits,” De Vera said. “Hence, we came up with this project on a free review program on agriculture approved and funded by CHED,” he added.

Low passing rates

Based on its data analytics, CHED said many SUCs are offering BS in Agriculture that are “performing below” the National Passing Percentage (NPP) for the last five years.

CHED noted that the average national passing rate of the LEA Board Examination for the last five years, 2019-2023, is 35.56 percent.

Students in these areas, CHED said, fail the licensure tests because “there are no review schools in the area or they have to travel far to attend review classes.”

Another factor is the high cost of review classes from ₱10,000 - ₱15,000 plus the living expenses during the duration of the classes.

Recognizing these challenges, De Vera tapped UP President Angelo Jimenez, UPLB Chancellor Jose Camacho Jr., and the presidents and representatives from identified SUCs to come together for the initiative.

For his part, Jimenez said UP's vision is transformative education and service to the nation --- thus, all the academic achievements of UP will only be meaningful if they change the lives of the Filipino people.

“Hence, we extend our support and expertise to CHED through these free review classes for agriculture students. Rest assured, this will be replicated in our Fisheries program,” he added.

Camacho, on the other hand, shared that De Vera instructed him to utilize the ILab Project granted to UPLB by CHED to extend help to SUCs by providing free review classes to students after he heard of their struggles during his campus visits.

“Actually, this is just one of many projects of CHED and UP for capacity building,” he said. “This will ripple to faculty development, coaching, mentoring, and many more,” he added.

Giving more agri students a boost

Through the review program, CHED expressed confidence that agriculture students in 15 SUCs will now get a boost in passing the LEA.

Among the objectives of the free online review program is to help students from SUCs in far-flung areas address the challenge of not having review centers.

Sulu State College President Charisma Ututalum shared that one of the problems in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) is the lack of a review program.

“Our students have to travel to Dipolog to take review classes. Hence, we are grateful to CHED and Secretary De Vera because he heard and took action to resolve our concern,” she said. “We are also grateful to UP for opening their door by partnering with SUCs to help our agriculture students achieve their dreams,” she added.

A total of 15 SUCs were identified to participate in the online review class based on their performance in the LEA, geographical location, presence of internet connectivity, and absence or presence of review centers within their areas.

Among which are Basilan State College, Batanes State College, Capiz State University (Tapaz Campus), Isabela State University (Palanan Campus), Kalinga State University, Mindanao State University (Sulu Campus), North Eastern Mindanao State University (San Miguel Campus), Northwest Samar State University (San Jorge Campus), Quirino State University, Romblon State University (Cajidiocan Campus), Southern Luzon State University (Tayabas Campus), Sulu State College, Tawi-Tawi Regional Agricultural College, University of Eastern Philippines (Catubig Campus), and University of Rizal System (Tanay Campus).

CHED said the review program is expected to start in June of this year before the 2024 October LEA.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/3/ched-uplb-partner-to-offer-free-review-for-agri-students>

MANILA BULLATIN:

Indian port operator eyes Bataan for operations expansion

BY ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

May 3, 2024 08:51 AM

AT A GLANCE

- Marcos said the government is developing the country's gateways for tourists and business travelers and for the country's agricultural products to be moved around affordably and reliably.

A high-ranking official of India's Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Limited (APSEZ Ltd.) expressed the company's intention to invest in the Philippines, citing the country's stability in regulation and business environment.



NEW VENTURES — President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. meets officials of India-based Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Limited (APSEZ Ltd.) in Malacañan on May 2, 2024. (Malacañang photo)

APSEZ Ltd. Managing Director Karan Adani said this during a courtesy call to President Marcos in Malacañan on Thursday, May 2.

In his remarks, Adani said the main consideration for choosing the Philippines is the stability it offers to businesses.

"As a private sector, what we always look for is stability. Stability in the regulation, stability in the environment that we are operating in. That is what, as you said, you are providing," he told Marcos.

According to Adani, APSEZ Ltd. is looking at Bataan for its port development plan, noting that it could be a good opportunity for the company.

The company plans to develop a 25-meter-deep port that can accommodate Panamax vessels. The Adani Group, on the other hand, is planning to invest in ports, airports, power, and defense.

President Marcos welcomed APSEZ expansion plans in the Philippines, suggesting it may focus on ports handling agriculture products to enable the Philippines to eventually compete globally.

In a Facebook post, the President said APSEZ's plans help modernize the country's ports and ensure additional jobs for Filipinos.

He said the government is developing the country's gateways for tourists and business travelers and for the country's agricultural products to be moved around affordably and reliably.

"Sa tulong ng mga foreign investor gaya ng APSEZ Ltd., isinusulong natin ang modernisasyon ng ating mga pantalan (With the help of foreign investors like APSEZ Ltd., we are modernizing our ports)," Marcos wrote.

"Matitiyak nito ang masiglang kalakalan at dagdag na trabaho sa ating Bagong Pilipinas (It ensures a healthy trade and additional jobs in the New Philippines)," he added.

President Marcos suggested that the India-based port operator start regionally. The ports could also cater to local or domestic shipping before shifting to the international market.

Meanwhile, the Chief Executive highlighted the importance of cooperation between the public and the private sectors as his government opens up the Philippine economy.

"I always say in my speeches I consider the private sector a full partner in this— it's a 50/50 agreement. The government cannot do everything and there are many things that the private sector does better than government. So, we should recognize that," Marcos said.

APSEZ Ltd. was incorporated as Gujarat Adani Port Ltd. in May 1998. It is the largest commercial port operator in India accounting for nearly one-fourth of the cargo movement in the country.

It employs more than 1,900 people.

Headquartered in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India, the Adani Group was founded in 1988 by Gautam Adani. APSEZ Ltd. under the Adani Group.

Comprised of several publicly listed entities with a combined market capitalization of more than \$242.73 billion, among its business areas are energy, ports and logistics, mining and resources, gas, defense and aerospace, and airports.

It employs more than 43,000 workers.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/3/indian-port-operator-eyes-bataan-for-operations-expansion>

MANILA BULLATIN:

New US Indopacom chief vows to help AFP in countering China's claims in West Philippine Sea

BY MARTIN SADONGDONG

May 4, 2024 12:03 PM



Admiral Samuel J. Paparo (Photo by Martin A. Sadongdong / MANILA BULLETIN)

HONOLULU, Hawaii – Admiral Samuel J. Paparo, the newly installed 27th commander of the United States military's Indo-Pacific Command (Indopacom), made a commitment to sustain their robust military cooperation with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) amid China's increasing aggressive behavior in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

Paparo succeeded Admiral John C. Aquilino, who retired after serving in the US military for 40 years. Aquilino worked closely with the AFP to build up its capabilities over the last three years as the Indopacom chief.

“Our world faces a complex problem set in the troubling actions of the People's Republic of China [PRC] and its rapid build up of forces. We must be ready to answer the PRC's increasingly intrusive and expansionist claims in the Indo-Pacific region,” Paparo said in his speech during the Change of Command ceremony at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam here on Friday, May 3 (US time).

Paparo, a native of Morton, Pennsylvania, said that the Indopacom's partnership with allies and strategic partners, such as the Philippines, “makes us more capable and these relationships will help preserve peace in the Indo-Pacific.”

He said the command, together with partners, is “positioned to deny and defend against attempts to break the peace” accorded by the international rules-based order.

China has been claiming majority of the South China Sea, including parts of the waters within the Philippines’s 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

Last April 30, China Coast Guard (CCG) vessel “3305” fired a water cannon which hit the starboard astern of BRP Bankaw (MMOV-3004), a multi-mission offshore civilian patrol vessel of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) during a patrol operation in the waters near Bajo de Masinloc (Scarborough or Panatag Shoal).

Two more CCG vessels with bow numbers “3105” and “5303” employed their jet stream water cannons which hit BRP Bagacay (MRRV-4410), a Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) multi-role response vessel which accompanied BRP Bankaw.

The incident damaged the railing and canopy of the PCG vessel.

Such coercive and dangerous actions by the PRC were dubbed by Paparo as “ICAD”, a term that he said was originally coined by AFP chief General Romeo Brawner Jr., which he considers as a "friend," to refer to China’s grey zone tactics in the South China Sea.

China's grey zone tactics refer to military and non-military coercive actions in the South China Sea.

“My friend, General Brawner from the Republic of the Philippines, has a phrase called ICAD and he has renamed grey zone, which sounds otherwise benign and dull, into ICAD which is ‘illegal, coercive, aggressive, and deceptive.’ This demonstrates the wisdom of our allies and partners,” Paparo said, with Brawner among the crowd to witness the ceremony.

Paparo is a US naval aviator, a graduate of Topgun or the US Navy Fighter Weapons School, and has flown over 6,000 hours in the F-14, F-15, F/A-18, and 1,100 carrier landings.

Meanwhile, Aquilino commanded the Indopacom from 2021 to 2024. The Indopacom is the United States' oldest and largest combatant command. It has 380,000 soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, guardians, coast guardsmen, and Department of Defense (DoD) civilians. It is responsible for all US military activities in the Indo-Pacific, covering 36 nations and more than 50 percent of the world's population.

He took command a year into the Covid-19 pandemic and on his watch, the Indopacom delivered more than 130 million doses of life-saving vaccines and other medical supplies from the Philippines to Fiji.

Partnership

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin III, who graced the ceremony, said America and its partners and allies, including the Philippines, are working together “in unprecedented ways” due to China’s “coercive behavior” in the South China Sea.

On May 2, Department of National Defense (DND) Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. attended a quadrilateral defense leaders’ meeting in Hawaii with Austin, Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Richard Marles, and Japanese Minister of Defense Kihara Minoru.

The four defense chiefs reiterated “serious concern” over the PRC’s repeated obstruction of Philippine vessels’ exercise of high seas freedom of navigation and the disruption of supply lines to Ayungin (Second Thomas) Shoal in the WPS, which, they said, “constitute dangerous and destabilizing conduct.”

Austin said that the PRC remains as the US defense department’s “pacing challenge” since it is the only country with both the will and, increasingly, the capacity to “dominate the Indo-Pacific, and to reshape the global order to suit its autocratic vision.”

But the US defense chief expressed confidence that “historic progress” was already made with their partners and allies to strengthen Washington’s regional force posture in the Indo-Pacific region.

In the Philippines, he cited the US’ expanded access to four new sites under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) last year.

The four new sites – Naval Base Camilo Osias and Lal-lo Airport in Cagayan; Camp Melchor Dela Cruz in Isabela; and Balabac Island in Palawan – allow the US military to access these areas under the 2014 military pact.

The AFP and the US military are also currently engaged in Balikatan Exercise, the most prominent annual military training between the treaty allies, which will culminate on May 8.

“Our allies and partners know that we will stand by them because that’s what America does,” Austin said.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/4/new-indopacom-chief-to-help-afp-in-counter-acting-china-s-intrusive-expansionist-claims-in-west-philippine-sea-1>

MANILA BULLATIN:

Rice Tarrification Law author Suansing explains why Act needs to be amended

BY ELLSON QUISMORIO

May 4, 2024 10:18 AM

AT A GLANCE

- Even an author of the 2019 Rice Tarrification Law (RTL) in the House of Representatives, Nueva Ecija 1st district Rep. Mikaela Angela Suansing, has admitted the need to amend the controversial statute, if only to ease the burden on poor Filipinos.



Nueva Ecija 1st district Rep. Mikaela Angela Suansing (Ellson Quismorio/ MANILA BULLETIN)

Even an author of the 2019 Rice Tarrification Law (RTL) in the House of Representatives has admitted the need to amend the controversial statute, if only to ease the burden on poor Filipinos.

Assistant Majority Leader Nueva Ecija 1st district Rep. Mikaela Angela Suansing reckoned that Republic Act (RA) No.11203 must be revisited “because we’ve seen the impact of it, the tangible impact of it to the Filipino consumers”. Nueva Ecija is top rice producing province.

Suansing gave this remark in reaction to Senator Cynthia Villar's opposition to the proposal to amend RTL, with the latter saying that it can revive corruption, particularly at the National Food Authority (NFA). The RTL was Villar's pet measure.

Suansing and her fellow House members who are calling for RTL amendments want to do so in order to restore NFA's power to direct sell cheaper rice in the market. They believe this will give the poor access to rice that they can actually afford to buy.

No less than House Speaker Martin Romualdez is leading the effort. He said that this would result to rice P10 to P15 cheaper than what is currently on the market.

“Maraming paraan para panagutin ‘yung NFA [sa corruption]. Ngayon po na i-introduce namin ‘yung amendments, pwede naming kasi siyang i-craft yung mismong provision at ‘yung implementing rules and regulations such that ma-limit yung access ng NFA in the parts of the processes that may solicit corruption on their part,” said Suansing.

(There's are a lot of ways to address corruption in NFA. When we introduce the amendments, we can craft the actual provision and implementing rules and regulations such that NFA's access to parts of the processes that may solicit corruption would get limited.)

"So may nakikita po kaming paraan na maaari nating maibalik yung mandato ng NFA na makabenta ng bigas ng direkta sa merkado and at the same time kaya po natin na i-limit in such a way na hindi po prone to corruption,” said the solon, who took up her Masters at Harvard University.

(We see a way to restore NFA's mandate to directly sell rice to the market and at the same time limit it in such a way that it's not prone to corruption.)

Suansing stressed: “And babalik po tayo na ang talagang objective natin ay matulungan ‘yung mga Pilipino lalo na po ‘yung mga mahihirap na pamilya na mag karoon po ng abilidad na bumili ng bigas sa mas affordable na halaga.”

(And we go back to our real objective which is the help the Filipinos, especially the poor families, to buy rice at an affordable price.)

"Kung ano man ‘yung mga nangyayari sa NFA hindi dapat ito ‘yung maging dahilan na tanggalin natin ‘yung NFA rice at mawalan ng access ‘yung mga Pilipino sa mas murang bigas,” she said.

(Whatever is happening at NFA, this should not be the reason to remove NFA rice from the market and strip Filipinos of their access to cheaper rice.)

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/4/rice-tarrification-law-author-suansing-explains-why-act-needs-to-be-amended>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

DA backs allowing NFA to sell rice in markets

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

May 4, 2024 | 12:00am



De Mesa added that under Section 10 of the Price Act, the DA is empowered to intervene to address high retail prices of agricultural products. *STAR / File*

MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Agriculture supports the move of Speaker Martin Romualdez to amend the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) to allow the National Food Authority (NFA) to sell rice in the markets, DA Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa said yesterday.

“We support this initiative of the House of Representatives, especially our Speaker. It is important that we will have intervention when the retail price of rice is too high,” De Mesa said.

De Mesa added that under Section 10 of the Price Act, the DA is empowered to intervene to address high retail prices of agricultural products.

ACT-CIS party-list Rep. Erwin Tulfo said that the NFA should be allowed leeway in selling rice to make the commodity more accessible to Filipinos.

Tulfo pointed out that the RTL prohibits the sale of NFA rice in the market.

Meanwhile, De Mesa said that the DA is studying the possibility of implementing anew the labeling of rice in commercial outlets, making it mandatory for retailers to inform consumers whether the staple food being sold are imported or locally produced.

During the time of former agriculture secretary Manny Piñol, retailers were tasked to label the rice as imported or locally sourced.

De Mesa also said that based on latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority, the total rice stocks for the first quarter of 2024 went down by 100,000 metric tons from 4.78 million MT in 2023 to 4.68 million MT in the same period in 2024.

“Last year, we harvested 20.06 million metric tons. This year’s target is 20.48 million metric tons,” he added.

De Mesa said that as of April 2024, total rice imports reached 1.6 million MT.

“This is within the targeted limit of 300 to 350 thousand metric tons (per month),” he added.

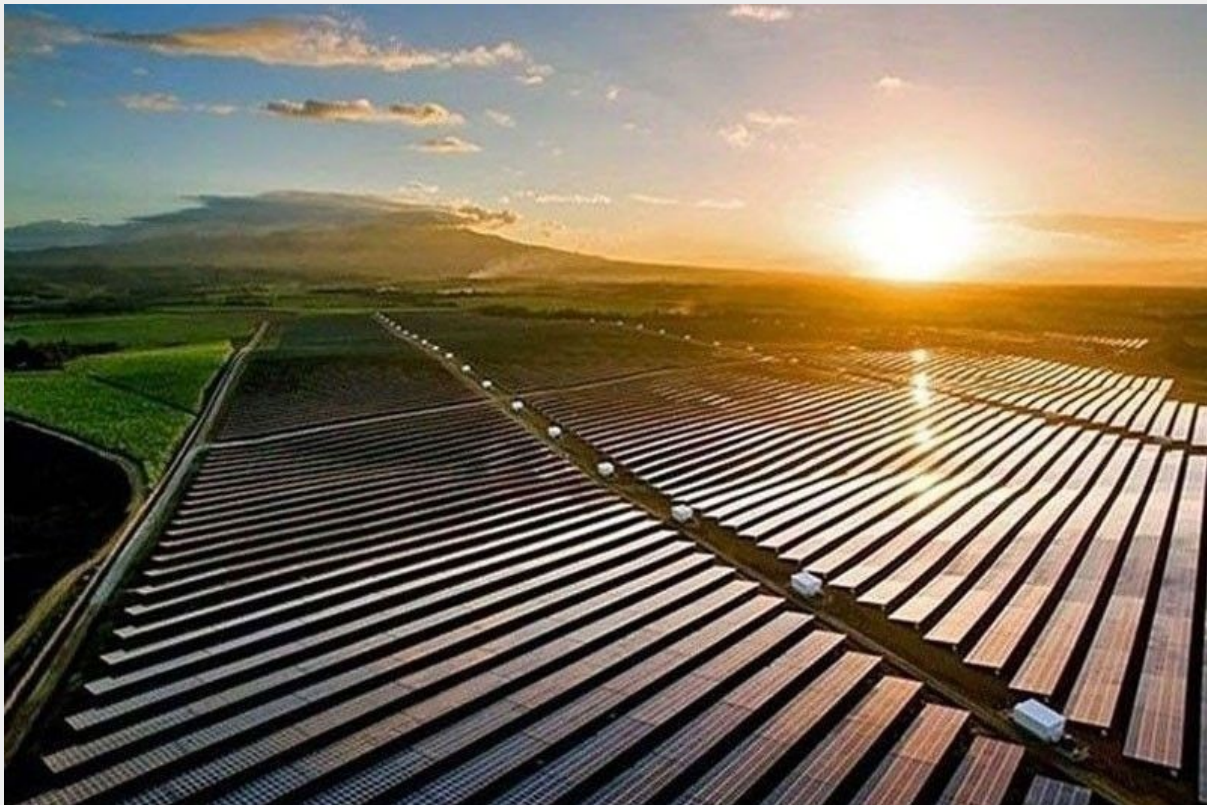
<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/04/2352432/da-backs-allowing-nfa-sell-rice-markets>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

ADB eyes direct financing of renewable energy projects in Philippine

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

May 4, 2024 | 12:00am



In an interview with The STAR here, ADB country director for the Philippines Pavit Ramachandran said RE is an area that the multilateral lender is excited about as it crafts the new CPS. [STAR / File](#)

TBILISI — The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is looking at directly engaging with the Philippine government on financing renewable energy (RE) projects as part of its country partnership strategy (CPS) over the medium-term.

In an interview with The STAR here, ADB country director for the Philippines Pavit Ramachandran said RE is an area that the multilateral lender is excited about as it crafts the new CPS.

“It would be a relatively new sector from the sovereign public sector side because as you know, the Philippines is a largely privatized market,” Ramachandran said.

“But given the focus and the policy ambition to increase renewable energy, there’s a lot of other aspects in the sector that need to be also strengthened,” he said.

For now, ADB is doing work with the private sector in terms of RE through loan deals such as the P5.5-billion sustainability-linked loan with ACEN Corp. of the Ayala Group in December last year.

Just last week, ADB also inked a P675-million loan agreement with Buskowitz Solar Inc. for the installation of solar panel systems on commercial and industrial buildings’ rooftops in the Philippines.

However, Ramachandran said ADB has not directly engaged on the sovereign side.

“Transmission capacity needs to be enhanced. You need to have a lot of the associated infrastructure, for example, port development for offshore wind. There’s also a need for de-risking for sectors like geothermal,” Ramachandran said.

“So that’s something we are looking at in these different areas and what would be the appropriate modality and lending scope,” he said.

In the Philippines, the government has been pushing for the use of renewable and indigenous energy sources amid the need to bring down the country’s dependence on energy imports.

Data showed that only 29 percent of the country’s current energy mix comes from renewables. The Department of Energy would like to bring it up to 35 percent by 2030 or to 50 percent by 2040, as outlined in the RE roadmap.

Further, Ramachandran emphasized that human development is another area that ADB will prioritize in the CPS 2024-2029 for the Philippines to fully tap into its demographic potential.

This is in relation to the Philippines’ goal of securing an upper-middle-income status amid the need to secure human capital foundation through education, health and social protection.

Also, Ramachandran said ADB would further step up support for the Philippines to address the impacts of climate change as one of the core priorities of the Manila-based bank.

Another area of interest for ADB is agriculture amid several structural and policy challenges that hinder the growth potential of the sector.

“We are looking at other longer-term engagements as well. In Mindanao, we are looking at agro-enterprise development, irrigation projects and some work on port development including roll-on roll-off ports and fishing ports,” Ramachandran said.

“The value chain side of agriculture is very important to create jobs and reduce pre- and post-harvest losses. In terms of rural development, poverty reduction, export potential and more competitiveness, I think you can’t do it without agriculture,” he said.

Despite the new areas, Ramachandran maintained that a lot of investments would still be on the infrastructure side to support the flagship Build Better More program of the government.

ADB is still in the process of preparing the new CPS through consultations and analytical diagnostic work. It will be presented to the ADB Board in early August for approval.

The new CPS will cover 2024 to 2029, with the idea of overlapping it with the new administration by 2028.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/05/04/2352384/adb-eyes-direct-financing-renewable-energy-projects-philippine>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

DENR preparing for worst-case water depletion

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

May 4, 2024 | 12:00am



DENR Undersecretary Carlos David said that the department, through the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) is eyeing to tap the lower level outlet of Angat Dam to ensure water supply in Metro Manila. *STAR* / File

MANILA, Philippines — The government is preparing for the worst scenario amid the continued drop in the water level of Angat Dam, according to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

DENR Undersecretary Carlos David said that the department, through the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) is eyeing to tap the lower level outlet of Angat Dam to ensure water supply in Metro Manila.

As of 8 a.m. yesterday, the water level of Angat Dam dropped by 0.27 meters from its previous level of 187.13 meters. It was 25.14 meters below its normal high water level of 212 meters.

David ruled out the possibility of experiencing a water crisis similar to 2019 despite the impact of the El Niño and the dry season.

“If I recall, 2019 was the worst (water) interruption in recent times. Metro Manila residents queued just to have water. I don’t think we will reach that point because number one, we are activating another outlet where the water will be sourced from a lower level,” David added.

He said that despite the decline in water level of Angat Dam, the DENR and NWRB decided to provide full allocation for irrigation for the entire month of May.

“We are in the last month, last mile of cropping season and therefore we gave full allocation to irrigation and then we harvest by the end of May,” David said.

According to him, the government will implement conservation efforts amid the decision to maintain the 50 cubic meters per second (cms) allocation for Metro Manila.

He said there is still no plan to limit the operation of car washes.

“If you will observe, the car washes are also operating laundry shops as the water from the laundry place is being recycled, they have interventions. They use power hoses, which use less water when we clean our cars with a garden hose. At present, no businesses are prohibited,” he said.

Metro Manila and nearby provinces will not experience water interruption with the current 50 cms allocation from the Angat Dam, Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) manager Patrick Dizon said.

Dizon added that the MWSS does not expect that the water level of Angat Dam will reach its critical level of 160 meters.

Angat Dam supplies more than 90 percent of Metro Manila’s potable water needs and provides for the irrigation needs of 25,000 hectares of farmlands in Bulacan and Pampanga.

No price freeze needed

The Department of Agriculture (DA) bucked the calls of some lawmakers to declare a nationwide price freeze amid the damage brought by El Niño.

The declaration of price freeze is only done when a state of calamity is implemented, according to DA Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa.

“Not the entire country is affected by the El Niño. As we can see, mostly those affected are in the western section. There was a declaration of state of calamity for

each affected local government unit, so if we cover the entire country because of El Niño, there might be problems in other areas,” De Mesa said.

De Mesa said that the total damage of El Niño to the agriculture sector has further ballooned to P5.9 billion, with more than 80,000 farmers affected including 60,000 palay peasants.

He added that the government’s interventions have already reached P2.18 billion.

“We distributed inputs, including the pump engine, totaling to almost P700 million. The Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation has also distributed almost P68 million in indemnification or insurance claims,” De Mesa said.

He said that the Agricultural and Credit Policy Council has distributed P10 million under the Survival and Recovery Loan.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/04/2352435/denr-preparing-worst-case-water-depletion>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

[FOOD AND LEISURE](#)

A global culinary adventure awaits at upcoming THAIFEX - Anuga Asia 2024

Philstar.com

May 3, 2024 | 5:30pm



Comprising 11 distinctive trade show halls and six special shows, THAIFEX - Anuga Asia 2024 will showcase innovative solutions that cater to growing consumer demands. Photo Release

Anticipate unparalleled networking, collaboration and growth opportunities at THAIFEX - Anuga Asia 2024 featuring exhibitors from 45 countries and regions worldwide

BANGKOK, Thailand — [THAIFEX - Anuga Asia 2024](#), Asia Pacific's leading food and beverage (F&B) trade show, returns with a record-breaking surge in international participation from May 28 to June 1, at IMPACT Muang Thong Thani in Bangkok, Thailand.

Comprising 11 distinctive trade show halls and six special shows, each will showcase innovative solutions that cater to growing consumer demands. With a spotlight on 11 current trends exhibited across the entire show, traders and buyers

from around the globe will have a unique opportunity to explore strategies for enhancing the value of their F&B businesses.

"This year's THAIFEX - Anuga Asia is unprecedented—following a record-breaking 2023, the 2024 edition sold out faster than ever before," said Mathias Kuepper, managing director and vice president of Koelnmesse Asia Pacific.

"With the inclusion of new participating countries this year, trade attendees can expect amplified diversity and richness of offerings at THAIFEX - Anuga Asia. As a catalytic platform, our unified goal is to redefine Asia Pacific's F&B commerce," Kuerpper added.

A world of flavors on display



Forty-five countries and regions will be represented in the 2024 edition. Newcomers include Canada, Czech Republic, Egypt, Macau, Monaco, North Macedonia, Romania, Uruguay and Yemen. They will join established exhibitors in presenting a truly global feast for the senses.

Discover the delights of Macau

Macau makes its debut at THAIFEX - Anuga Asia 2024, offering attendees a chance to explore this region's unique flavours and culinary heritage.

"THAIFEX - Anuga Asia marks a momentous stride for Macau's global footprint," emphasized Vincent U, president of Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM).

“For the first time, the institute is coming in as a pavilion and coordinating the participation of Macau SMEs for the event. Bringing Macau’s SMEs to THAIFEX - Anuga Asia is an exciting opportunity for us to showcase our region's distinct flavours and robust wholesale and distribution network on a global stage. We look forward to forging new partnerships and exploring lucrative business opportunities,” he added.

Canadian innovation takes center stage

Canada is bringing a diverse array of innovative companies to this year's event.

Canadian exhibitors like Cross Frontier Merchandise Ltd. offer retailers seeking health-conscious organic snacks and gourmet condiments, Padmashri Naturals Inc. offers herbal supplements promoting holistic health and Royal Classical Agriculture Ltd. emphasizes sustainable farming practices with organic fruits and vegetables.

Explore American culinary diversity

USDA proudly showcases exhibitors such as the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council and the California Milk Advisory Board, each spotlighting their unique contribution to America’s rich agricultural landscape.

Bamas Gourmet Sauces and Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute will also present their artisanal sauces and sustainable Alaskan seafood. With the ongoing partnership, USDA has made a landmark declaration to endorse THAIFEX – Anuga Asia from 2025 officially.

"THAIFEX – Anuga Asia has served as a cornerstone for fostering trade alliances and elevating the global stature of American F&B. Looking ahead, we are thrilled to officially endorse THAIFEX - Anuga Asia starting from 2025, as it is a vital platform for showcasing the exceptional agricultural and culinary offerings of the United States within Southeast Asia," highlighted Kelly Stange, regional agricultural counselor at USDA.

Beyond the exhibition floor



THAIFEX - Anuga Asia 2024 offers more than just a vibrant exhibition floor. It provides an exceptional opportunity to explore new market opportunities, forge international partnerships and equip the Asia Pacific F&B industry with a leading edge.

A dynamic lineup of conferences and seminars on the Future Food Experience+ stage, Thailand Ultimate Chef Challenge, and Alternative Protein Flavour and Taste Contest are designed to spark collaboration and knowledge exchange among industry professionals.

Attendees can expect to gain valuable insights into emerging trends, consumer preferences, and market dynamics that will drive the future growth of the F&B sector.

Plus, solidifying its commitment to social responsibility, THAIFEX - Anuga Asia 2024 proudly welcomes participation from esteemed charities, including UNICEF, SOS, ZY Movement, UNHCR, and The Heart Foundation of Thailand this year.



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For more information about THAIFEX - Anuga Asia 2024, including details on exhibitors and conference programmes, and to register your attendance, please visit <https://thaifex-anuga.com>.

<https://www.philstar.com/lifestyle/food-and-leisure/2024/05/03/2352323/global-culinary-adventure-awaits-upcoming-thaifex-anuga-asia-2024>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

DA: Agri damage due to El Niño nears P6B

By: Jordeene B. Lagare - @inquirerdotnet|INQUIRER.net|May 03,2024 - 09:20 AM



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 ongoing El Niño drought is still causing serious damage to crops and animals nationwide, with losses now exceeding a third of what the Department of Agriculture (DA) reported just a week ago.

As of April 30, the DA stated that the extreme heat and lack of rain had caused agricultural damage amounting to P5.9 billion. This is around 34.9 percent of the P4.3 billion recorded in its bulletin from April 23.

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://cebudailynews.inquirer.net/571369/da-agri-damage-due-to-el-nino-nears-p6b>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

DA wary of nationwide price freeze amid El Niño

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

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 12:46 PM May 03, 2024

MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Agriculture (DA) is wary of a nationwide price freeze for basic commodities in response to the El Niño phenomenon.

Amid calls for a price freeze, DA spokesperson Arnel De Mesa said that a price freeze should only be implemented during an emergency.

“Hindi naman buong bansa na affected ng El Niño. Nakikita naman natin mostly yung Western section ng ating bansa ang na-apektuhan at kanya-kanya, yung mga apektadong na ito ay nagkaroon na ng state of emergency, so kung idadamay yung buong bansa na hindi naman apektado ng El Niño, baka magkaroon ng problema,” said De Mesa at the Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon Public Briefing.

(The whole country is not affected by El Niño. We see that mostly the Western section of the country is affected, and each one of these affected areas already has its own state of emergency, so if the whole country is included in the price freeze when not all areas are affected by El Niño, there might be a problem.)

While De Mesa did not specify who he was responding to, Sen. Francis Tolentino had called for a price freeze on basic commodities.

“I call for a price freeze of basic commodities to include rice for the duration of the El Niño season,” said Tolentino.

<https://business.inquirer.net/457251/da-wary-of-nationwide-price-freeze-amid-el-nino>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Was Chinese water cannon attack aiming at PH flag?

By: [Nestor Corrales](#) - Reporter / [@NCorralesINQ](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:25 AM May 04, 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. (Photo by Handout / Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) / AFP)

SAN NARCISO, Zambales—The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) on Friday said it will “investigate” if [China’s latest water cannon attack](#) was aimed at the Philippine flag hoisted by the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) on its vessel.

Meanwhile, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin III has amplified the international condemnation of China’s aggression on April 30, calling it “irresponsible behavior” during a news conference in Hawaii together with his Philippine counterpart, Gilberto Teodoro Jr. on Thursday.

Videos of the harassment taken by the PCG and GMA News showed a China Coast Guard (CCG) vessel aiming its jet of water at the Philippine flag hoisted on the PCG vessel BRP Bagacay.

The [CCG also attacked the Bagacay's accompanying vessel](#), BRP Bankaw of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), and damaged its air-conditioning, electrical, navigation and radio systems.

“I think we have to investigate [if the Bagacay’s flag was targeted]. It’s difficult to actually already say that it should be protested,” the DFA’s spokesperson, Undersecretary Ma. Teresita Daza, told reporters on the sidelines of a workshop on national security in this municipality.

Commodore Jay Tarriela, the PCG spokesperson for the West Philippine Sea, also told reporters here that it was possible the water cannons were targeting the flag, besides the communication and navigation systems of the PCG and BFAR vessels.

Tarriela earlier described as “very fatal” the pressure from the water cannons which damaged a steel railing and canopy frame on the PCG ship.

“So on the question of whether the flag is really being intentionally targeted by the People’s Republic of China, we can probably say that it could be possible, but the objective of the water cannon[ade] is for them to terminate the mobility of the Coast Guard vessel and BFAR,” Tarriela said.

“[But] definitely, for viewers, for ordinary people who can see that our flag has been targeted by water cannons, this is really very painful for us as Filipinos,” he added.

‘Next action’

Daza said the DFA would study the reports to be submitted by the PCG and the National Task Force on the West Philippine Sea to determine its next action.

The Philippine government on Thursday protested the water cannon attacks and demanded that China “immediately” leave Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal.

“The protest is important that it is done, because the protest signifies our position, tells them that we are not happy with what’s happening in the waters. It has both political and diplomatic importance and it’s a legal document,” Daza said.

Tuesday’s incident happened amid the Philippines’ ongoing “Balikatan” exercises with the United States and other allies.

The joint drills, which the Armed Forces of the Philippines has described as the most “expansive” yet, began on April 22 and ends on May 10.

‘Political decision’

In his remarks in Honolulu, Austin said: “We’ve been very clear to everyone, to include Beijing, that the kind of behavior that we’ve seen, where Filipino crews are put in danger, ... sailors have been injured and property damaged, that is irresponsible behavior.”

Austin reiterated US support for the Philippines under their 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT)—which binds the two countries to defend each other in the event of attack, including in the South China Sea.

“Our commitment to the treaty is ironclad and we stand with the Philippines,” Austin said. Teodoro refused to speculate about the conditions in which Manila might invoke the treaty, saying that would be a “political decision.”

President Marcos said last month that any further incident in the West Philippine Sea in which “a Filipino serviceman is killed” will be enough reason to invoke the MDT.

Teodoro said on Thursday “We need to assert our rights but in a manner that safeguards the safety of each and every member of the Philippines’ armed force.” —

WITH A REPORT FROM REUTERS

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/234466/was-chinese-water-cannon-attack-aiming-at-ph-flag>

MANILA STANDARD

Giant produce



By Jay Morales

May 4, 2024, 1:20 am

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., First Lady Liza Araneta Marcos and Bureau of Plants and Industry Director Glenn Panganiban grace the Pagsibol 2024: Philippine Horticulture and Urban Agriculture Summit held at One Ayala in Makati City. Jay Morales

<https://manilastandard.net/gallery/314443015/giant-produce.html>

Red tide alert

Republic of the Philippines
Department of Agriculture
BUREAU OF FISHERIES AND AQUATIC RESOURCES
Fisheries Building Complex, BPI Compound, Brgy. Vasra
Visayas Ave., Quezon City
| do@bfar.da.gov.ph | records@bfar.da.gov.ph |
+63(2) 8539-5685

Shellfish Bulletin No. 09
Series of 2024
03 May 2024

Shellfishes collected and tested from **coastal waters of Daus and Tagbilaran City in Bohol; Matarinao Bay in Eastern Samar; Dumanquilas Bay in Zamboanga del Sur; and coastal waters of San Benito in Surigao del Norte** are still **positive** for Paralytic Shellfish Poison (PSP) or toxic red tide that is beyond the regulatory limit.

**Do not harvest
Do not sell
Do not buy
Do not eat**

Coastal waters of Daus and Tagbilaran City in Bohol

Matarinao Bay in Eastern Samar

Dumanquilas Bay in Zamboanga del Sur

Coastal waters of San Benito in Surigao del Norte

All types of shellfish and *Acetes sp.* or *alamang* gathered from the areas shown above are NOT SAFE for human consumption. Fish, squids, shrimps, and crabs are safe for human consumption provided that they are fresh and washed thoroughly, and internal organs such as gills and intestines are removed before cooking.

The following areas continue to be **FREE from toxic red tide**: coastal waters of Cavite, Las Piñas, Parañaque, Navotas, Bulacan, and Bataan (Mariveles, Limay, Orion, Pilar, Balanga, Hermosa, Orani, Abucay, and Samal) in Manila Bay; mariculture areas in Infanta, coastal waters of Bolinao, Anda, Alaminos, Sual, and Wawa, Bani in Pangasinan; mariculture areas in Rosario, and Sto. Tomas in La Union; coastal waters of Pampanga; Masinloc Bay in Zambales; Pagbilao Bay, Pagbilao, and coastal waters of Walay, Padre Burgos in Quezon; Honda, and coastal waters of Inner Malampaya Sound, Taytay in Palawan; coastal waters of Mandaon in Masbate; Sorsogon Bay, and Juag Lagoon, Matnog in Sorsogon; coastal waters of Borongan, San Dionisio in Iloilo; Sapian Bay (Ivisan and Sapian in Capiz; Mambuquiao and Camand, Batan in Aklan); coastal waters of Altavas, Bataan, and New Washington in Batan Bay, Aklan; coastal waters of Pontevedra; Panay; Pilar; Roxas City and President Roxas in Capiz; coastal waters of E.B. Magalona, Talisay City, Silay City, Bacolod City, Hinigaran, and Victorias City in Negros Occidental; Tambobo, and Silt Bays, Siaton; and Bals Bay, Bals City in Negros Oriental; coastal waters of Darang, Calbayog, and Zumarraga, Cambatutay, Irong-Irong, Maqueda and Villareal Bays in Samar; coastal waters of Guluan in Eastern Samar; coastal waters of Leyte, Calubian, Ormoc, Sogod, and Carigara Bay and Cancabato, Tacloban City in Leyte; coastal waters of Biliran Island; Tantanang Bay in Zamboanga Sibugay; Murcielagos Bay in Zamboanga del Norte and (Sapang Dalaga, and Ballangao) in Misamis Occidental; Panguil Bay, Tangub City, and coastal waters of Ozamiz City in Misamis Occidental; coastal waters of Baroy in Lanao del Norte; Taguines Lagoon, Benoni, Mahinog in Camiguin; Balite, and Pujada Bays, Mati City in Davao Oriental; Tagabuli Bay in Davao del Sur; Malalag Bay in Davao Occidental and Davao del Sur; coastal waters of Hinatuan, Lianga and Cortes, and Bislig Bay in Surigao del Sur. **Moreover, coastal waters of Milagros in Masbate and San Pedro Bay in Samar are now free of the toxic red tide.**

ISIDRO M. VELAYO, JR., MDM
Officer-in-Charge, BFAAR

www.bfar.da.gov.ph /BFAAR.Central

By Manila Standard

May 3, 2024, 11:05 pm

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources under the Department of Agriculture warns against eating shellfish notably mussels and oysters, along with *Acetes* sp. commonly known as alamang collected from the coastal waters of Dauis and Tagbilaran City in Bohol, Matarinao Bay in Eastern Samar, Dumanguillas Bay in Zamboanga del Sur, and San Benito in Surigao del Norte which tested positive for toxic red tide. BFAR said all types of shellfish and alamang taken from these areas are not safe for human consumption, while fish, squids, shrimps, and crabs should be washed thoroughly and the internal organs and gills removed before cooking.

<https://18.142.10.118/gallery/314443042/red-tide-alert.html>

Noveleta revives salt making industry

By Dennis Abrina

May 4, 2024

AFTER several years of inactivity, salt making has returned in Noveleta, one of the two towns in the province of Cavite that is currently producing salt.

With the help of the Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and the Municipal Agriculture Office, salt farmers in Noveleta have been producing 125 sacks of salt per week or roughly 500 sacks per month.

Municipal Agriculture Office chief Mark Anthony Alfaro said salt making in the locality began declining in the 2000s because of Republic Act (RA) 8172 or the Asin Law that seeks to eliminate iodine deficiency disorders by mandating all salt producers and manufacturers to iodize their products.



BACK IN BUSINESS Local salt makers in Barangay San Rafael, Noveleta, Cavite harvest salt on Friday, May 3, 2024. PHOTO BY DENNIS ABRINA

"It was no longer profitable because the sale of salt from other parts of the country like Pangasinan and Mindoro is cheaper," Alfaro said.

But under the Development of Salt Industry Project, the government has lured salt makers back into business.

Olan Palustre, a local salt maker, said they are able to harvest 10 to 17 sacks of salt per day which they can sell in the market for P300 to P350 per sack.

BFAR has identified Noveleta and Barangay Sta. Isabel in Kawit town as the two remaining salt-producing areas in Cavite.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. signed into law on March 11, 2024 the Philippine Salt Industry Development Act which aims to strengthen and revitalize the salt industry in the Philippines as part of the administration's efforts to promote rural development and increase rural income.

The law stated that appropriate technology and research, and adequate financial, production, marketing and other support services will be provided to salt farmers to revitalize the salt industry, attain increased production, achieve salt-sufficiency and become a next exporter of salt.

A Philippine Salt Industry Development Roadmap will be formulated and established to ensure the attainment of the objectives of the law, which are aligned with the objectives and continued implementation of RA 8172.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/04/regions/noveleta-revives-salt-making-industry/1944543>

Davao Prison gets into aquaculture

By Franco Jose C. Baroña

May 4, 2024

THE Davao Prison and Penal Farm (DPPF) has ventured into aquaculture to generate additional income for the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) and as a supplementary source of food supply for persons deprived of liberty (PDLs).

BuCor Director General Gregorio Pio Catapang Jr. said chief inspector Edgardo Mendoza Jr., DPPF acting superintendent, oversaw the recent launching of the project with the release of 5,600 tilapia fry at a pond located behind the superintendent's quarter.

He said the project area was supposed to be located at Mactan Area under the leased land covered by the Joint Venture Agreement of BuCor with Tagum Agricultural Development Company Inc. (Tadeco).

However, Catapang pointed out that due to recent weather changes in the Davao Region, including massive flooding caused by water and a subsequent high heat index, it would not be possible to continue the project in the area.

Upon the suggestion of Mendoza, it was decided that the pond inside the DPPF compound be utilized.

They sought the assistance of the owner of a local fish farm who served as a consultant to ensure the success of the project, Catapang said.

He said free training on the latest technology in fish culture has been scheduled on May 17 for the work and livelihood personnel and interested DPPF employees.

Catapang, who laid down the Aquaculture for the Operating Prisons and Penal Farms (OPPFs) program, said the technology being employed for the DPPF project is suitable for backyard farming and yields at least 500 kilos of fish per harvest on a two square meter area using a minimal amount of water.

Maximizing the utility of land acquired by penal colonies to generate more opportunities for the bureau's development is one of the key areas of priority that has been identified by Catapang.

He said this can help assure food security and sustainability for PDLs as well as those living near OPPFs nationwide.

The DPPF currently earns at least P22 million per month for the lease of its land to Tadeco, a company engaged in the production of Cavendish bananas.

Catapang said that of the total 8,445.13 hectares of land owned by DPPF, more than 5,000 were leased to Tadeco.

The plantation yields an average of 5,000 boxes of bananas per hectare per year which are exported to Japan, Korea, Middle East, Hong Kong, China, Russia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore.

Catapang said BuCor is guaranteed a share from the annual production while PDLs earn from packaging the produce.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/04/regions/davao-prison-gets-into-aquaculture/1944631>

Ordinance promoting bamboo industry in NVizcaya okayed

By Leander C. Domingo

May 4, 2024

VILLAVERDE, Nueva Vizcaya: The local government unit (LGU) here joined the "Bamboo-tiful Nueva Vizcaya" campaign with the enactment of an ordinance to institutionalize the implementation of bamboo development.

Mayor Ronelie Valtoribio said the municipal ordinance, titled "An Ordinance Institutionalizing the implementation of Bamboo Development Project of Villaverde and Providing Funds Thereof," was enacted during the town council's 55th regular session.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) in Nueva Vizcaya said the ordinance is the ninth LGU-led initiative in Nueva Vizcaya to promote the Bamboo Industry Development Program (BIDP).

BIDP is being pushed by the DTI in Region 2 to engage the LGUs as key players in implementing the Cagayan Valley Bamboo Industry Development Program.

Valtoribio said her office has already approved the ordinance passed by the Sangguniang Bayan headed by Vice Mayor Marlon John Acosta.

She said the LGU here is aware of the project's benefits in helping the town develop a competitive and sustainable economy.

"With this, we are also intensifying environmental protection and providing equal employment opportunities to raise the standard of living of our constituents in the bamboo industry," she said.

According to the mayor, there will be more interrelated activities under this ordinance which will soon roll out after the organization of the LGU's Bamboo Development Task Force.

Valtoribio said these activities will include the preparation of a bamboo development plan, the establishment of nurseries and plantations, and the formation of partnerships and linkages with government agencies, academe, nongovernmental organizations, and other private sectors.

"There will also be other undertakings of the LGU that will support bamboo-related businesses and other stakeholders involved in the bamboo development value chain," she said.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/04/regions/ordinance-promoting-bamboo-industry-in-nvizcaya-okayed/1944628>

Lending to agri seen improving

By Niña Myka Pauline Arceo

May 4, 2024

BANKS anticipate favorable lending conditions for agricultural borrowers in the next 12 months, a survey by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) showed.

The 2022 Countryside Bank Survey (CBS) revealed that respondents in the banking sector foresee positive lending conditions for agricultural borrowers. They expect improvements in both loan volumes and loan quality, which should contribute to increased profitability.

On average, survey participants anticipate single-digit percentage growth in agricultural loan volumes.

Rural banks (RBs) project around 9-percent growth, while government-owned banks (GBs), expect an increase of over 5 percent.

Conversely, universal and commercial banks (UKBs) appear to focus more on lending to thrift banks (TBs) and rural and cooperative banks (RCBs) subsidiaries.

UKBs anticipate a less than 4-percent increase in agricultural loan volumes, while TBs predict nearly a 9-percent growth in this area.

The BSP cited that banking institutions often struggle to lend to the agricultural sector due to several inherent risks, including exposure to natural disasters, uncertainty surrounding harvests and farmers' income, as well as aging agricultural producers.

The central bank said that the pandemic has exacerbated these risks by impacting farmers' health and livelihoods, undermining borrowers' ability to repay loans.

"Banks consider it essential to implement measures that reduce information asymmetry when extending credit to the agricultural sector, thereby supporting confidence in extending loans to this sector," the BSP said.

The central bank, meanwhile, reported that the share of agriculture loans and services rose to 18.1 percent in 2022 from 17.6 percent in the previous year.

"The increase was mainly observed in rural and cooperative banks," the BSP said.

"It reflects an expansion in loan products related to various agricultural needs, such as seeds, fertilizer, working capital, and farm equipment, sustainable projects, digitalization of farming activities, and agri-tourism activities," it added.

The 2022 CBS Report is a joint effort by the Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Credit Policy Council (DA-ACPC) and the central bank. The report examines lending trends and policy implications related to agricultural financing using branch-level data.

It assesses banking units' agricultural lending activities in 2022 compared to 2021, covering aspects like loan demand, borrower profiles, interest rates, repayment patterns, profitability, risk management, challenges and future strategies.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/04/business/top-business/lending-to-agri-seen-improving/1944576>

DA sees rice production recovery

By Janine Alexis Miguel

May 4, 2024

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said that rice production may recover in the following months as El Niño is seen to weaken, predicting lower rice prices driven by cheaper rice in the international market.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said on Friday that the impacts of the dry phenomenon were really felt in the farming sector, as palay (unmilled rice) production for the first quarter of 2024 went down by 1.96 percent to 4.68 million metric tons (MT) compared to the same period last year.

"El Niño really had its effect. The rain [season] is upcoming, and I hope there will be no strong typhoons. If there will be no strong typhoons then I think we could recover," Tiu Laurel said on the sidelines of Horticulture and Urban Agriculture Summit 2024.



AGRICULTURE Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel. Photo from Department of Agriculture

"But of course, La Niña is also approaching, I hope it will not be strong then we should be OK," the agriculture chief added.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed that the current palay output was down by almost 2 percent from 4.77 million MT posted in the same period of 2023.

The latest figure also did not meet the PSA's previous estimate for palay production, or higher by 0.8 percent from last year's output.

During the period, the majority of the output came from irrigated areas, comprising 3.59 million MT of palay or 76.8 percent of the total production.

Rain-fed areas, meanwhile, produced 23.18 percent of the total or 1.08 million MT of palay.

Tiu Laurel also said that the department predicts lower rice prices in the second half driven by cheaper prices of the staple in the international market.

Last week, he said that rice prices in the international market was at \$590 per ton but went up to \$630 per ton this week.

"On average, I think prices should be slightly lower by next month, but our prediction by the second half, prices will go down, hopefully, in the international market," he said.

If the world prices of the commodity went down, the agriculture chief said that "definitely local prices will go down also."

As of May 2, prices of local well-milled rice ranged from P48 to P50 per kilo while imported well-milled rice were priced from P51 to P54 per kilo.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/04/business/top-business/da-sees-rice-production-recovery/1944573>

REMATE:

Labeling ng local, imported rice sa merkado sinisilip ng DA

May 3, 2024 09:20



MANILA, Philippines- Binabalak ng Department of Agriculture (DA) na maglagay ng label sa local at imported na bigas upang maiwasang magkahalo ang rice varieties.

Sa isang panayam, sinabi ni Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa na ang paglalagay ng label sa bigas sa retail markets “provides the needed information to consumers who want locally-produced or imported rice varieties.”

“That’s very important. We also plan to check on mislabeling activities on the ground,” wika ng opisyal.

“Definitely, may mga ganyang posibleng mislabeling. Paghaluhin, kung mas mura iyong isang klase ng bigas tapos ihahalo doon sa mas mahal tapos ibebenta nang mas mahal,” dagdag ni De Mesa.

Sumang-ayon naman si Federation of Free Farmers Cooperatives national manager Raul Montemayor sa DA official, at binanggit na halos magkatulad ang itsura ng ilang imported rice sa local produce at maaaring mapahalo ang mga ito.

Binanggit din niya na bagama’t karaniwang pinaghahalo ng ilang traders ang bigas “to satisfy the requirements of their market,” ilang]traders ang nagre-“re-bag” ng imported rice at ibinebenta ito bilang local rice para sa mas malaking kita.

Hanggang nitong Huwebes, nagkakahalaga ang imported regular milled rice ng P48 kada kilo hanggang P51/kg; at well-milled rice ranges mula P51/kg hanggang P54/kg.

Samantala, ang presyo ng local regular milled rice ay P50/kg habang ang well-milled rice ay P48/kg hanggang P55/kg. RNT/SA

<https://remate.ph/labeling-ng-local-imported-rice-sa-merkado-sinisilip-ng-da/>

REMATE:

Solon: El Niño nakasasakit na sa ekonomiya; nat'l state of calamity ideklara

May 4, 2024 09:56



MANILA, Philippines- Dapat magdeklara ang pamahalaan ng Pilipinas ng national state of calamity upang ibsan ang epekto ng El Niño phenomenon sa ekonomiya.

Iminungkahi ito ni Senator Francis Tolentino kasunod ng Social Weather Stations poll kung saan lumabas na 14.2 porsyento ng pamilyang Pilipino ang nakaranas ng involuntary hunger sa unang quarter ng kasalukuyang taon.

“Yung declaration of a state of calamity should not be localized... This should be really national in scope to trigger the application of [Republic Act 7581] or the Price Act, which would result in the freezing of prices of basic commodities, especially during this El Niño season,” giit ni Tolentino sa isang virtual interview.

Sa gitna ng matinding init sa buong bansa, inirekomenda rin ni Tolentino ang cloud-seeding, na aniya ay mainam gawin kasabay ng umiiral na Balikatan exercises.

Dapat din umanong maging aktibo ng Department of Trade and Industry at ng Department of Agriculture sa pagtugon sa epekto ng El Niño, at binanggit na dapat ipatupad ng gobyerno ang ilang interbensyon.

“Di naman natin pwedeng kontrolin ang El Niño... Siguro proactive ang ating Department of Agriculture at DTI. Baka mabawas-bawasan itong effects ng El Niño. Ilang linggo pa ito sana wag na lumagpas ng May,” wika ng senador.

Hanggang nitong May 2, makikita sa datos ng gobyerno na nagdulot ang El Niño phenomenon ng P5.9 bilyong pinsala sa agrikultura.

Pinakaapektado ang palay sa P3.1 bilyong pinsala, sinundan ng mais sa P1.76 bilyon, at high-value crops sa P958 milyon.

Kabilang naman sa tatlong pinakaapektadong rehiyon ang Mimaropa, Cordillera Administrative Region, at Western Visayas. RNT/SA

<https://remate.ph/solon-el-nino-nakasakit-na-sa-ekonomiya-natl-state-of-calamity-ideklara/>

REMATE:

DA: Mga lugar lang sa ilalim ng state of calamity saklaw ng price freeze

May 4, 2024 16:48



(c) Remate News Central File Photo

MANILA, Philippines- Sinabi ng Department of Agriculture (DA) nitong Biyernes na ang price freeze ng bigas at iba pang pangunahing biling ay dapat ipatupad lamang sa mga lugar na labis na apektado ng El Niño phenomenon.

“Kung idadamay iyong buong bansa na hindi naman apektado ng El Niño, baka magkaroon ng problema doon sa ibang area,” giit ni DA Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa sa Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon briefing.

“Makikita natin mostly western section ng ating bansa ang naapektuhan at kanya-kanya iyong mga apektadong lugar na ito ay nagkaroon na ng declaration ng states of emergencies,” wika ng opisyal. Sa kasalukuyan, 131 local government units (LGUs) ang nagdeklara ng state of calamity sa buong bansa, base sa Task Force El Niño.

Nananatili ang Mimaropa region na pinakaapektado sa P1.71 bilyong halaga ng agricultural damage, sinundan ng Western Visayas sa P1.5 bilyon; Cordillera Administrative Region, P768 milyon; at Cagayan Valley, P562 milyon.

Nauna nang iniulat ng DA ang halos P5.90 bilyong halaga ng agricultural damage dahil sa El Nino, kung saan pinakasapul ang rice production, na nakapagtala ng halos P3.14 bilyong halaga ng pinsala. RNT/SA

<https://remate.ph/da-mga-lugar-lang-sa-ilalim-ng-state-of-calamity-saklaw-ng-price-freeze/>