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MANILA BULLETIN:

‘Aghon’ damage to PH agri hits P11.83M— DA

BY JEL SANTOS

May 28, 2024 02:36 PM



The damage wrought by Typhoon “Aghon” to the country’s agriculture sector reached P11.83 million, the Department of Agriculture (DA) bared on Tuesday, May 28.

The areas affected by the typhoon were Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon (Calabarzon), and Mindoro Occidental, Mindoro Oriental, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan (Mimaropa).

The DA said a total of 432 farmers were affected by the devastation of the typhoon.

“A total of 84 hectares of farmlands were totally damaged, while 155 hectares sustained partial damage that still have a chance for recovery,” the agency reported.

Most of the crops damaged are rice, the agriculture department said.

It noted that losses in production volume are 430 metric tons of rice and 57 metric tons of high-value crops.

The report added that agriculture facilities were damaged.

The DA said it has prepositioned seeds for rice and corn, as well as drugs and biologics for livestock and poultry, in safe storage facilities.

As such, the agency said it is conducting monitoring and field validation to assess the impact on the agriculture and fisheries sectors.

Earlier, state weather bureau Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) reported Aghon is forecasted to exit the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR) between Wednesday afternoon and evening, May 29.

According to the tropical cyclone bulletin released by PAGASA on Monday, May 27, the typhoon will continue its northeastward trajectory across the Philippine Sea before leaving the PAR.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/28/aghon-damage-to-ph-agri-hits-p11-83-m-da>

MANILA BULLETIN:

NFA wants more drying facilities to boost buffer stock

BY GABRIELL CHRISTEL GALANG

May 28, 2024 02:07 PM

Aside from the higher buying price of palay, the National Food Authority (NFA) wants to increase the number of drying facilities to improve the country's buffer stock of rice.

NFA Director Larry Lacson explained that they are closely coordinating with the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) on various programs that would help maintain ample rice stock.

"Our challenge [when it comes to drying facilities] is that we're low on quantity. At the moment, we are fixing bids in order to construct additional infrastructure, and we're hoping next year, we'll build more," Lacson said.

Since imposing a higher buying price on palay, the NFA's rice buffer stock has tripled its amount within May.

"Because of the flexible pricing fee, we acquired 2.8 million bags of palay, and 126,000 metric tons [MT] of milled rice. Our target for the year is 300,000 MT for milled, so before we implemented the increased buying price, we had 45,000 MT," he said.

Asked about the expected onset of La Niña, Lacson believes that there will not be any inefficiency in stock level, and it is enough for the rainy season.

"At the same time, we have given some supplies to the Department of Social Welfare and Development [DSWD] for prepositioning. We also provided rice to some local government units [LGUs]. We also see ample rice stock in the private sector and household," he added.

The local well-milled rice in public markets range from P48 to P55 per kilo, while local regular milled rice are around P45 to P53 per kg.

Subsequently, a kilo of imported well-milled has an average of P53 to P58, whereas imported regular milled per kilo is at around P49 to P51.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/28/nfa-wants-more-drying-facilities-to-boost-buffer-stock>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Marcos mobilizes gov't agencies for 'Aghon' relief efforts

BY JOSEPH PEDRAJAS

May 28, 2024 09:51 AM

President Marcos has ordered the mobilization of various government agencies in response to the aftermath of Typhoon "Aghon" that has reportedly killed five and affected about 10,000 families in the southern part of Luzon.

Before departing Manila for Brunei for a state visit on Tuesday, May 28, Marcos reported the actions taken by the government to help and ensure the safety of the victims.

He said the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) already provided P1.35 million worth of assistance to the victims, with P607.9 million more that is available for release if necessary.



Noel Pabalate/MANILA BULLETIN

Marcos said the government also prepared a total of 841 search and rescue teams from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP); as well as 456 transportation assets and 436 emergency telecommunications equipment.

According to the President, the DSWD, the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Department of Health (DOH) were also ordered to extend help to those affected by the typhoon.

The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and the Department of Transportation (DOTr), meanwhile, are already prepared to help in repairing damaged infrastructures.

“Patuloy naman ang ating gagawin at hindi natin titigilan ito siyempre hanggang matapos ang ating pagtulong sa mga nasalanta, sa mga naging biktima dito sa ating mga area na tinamaan ng Aghon (We will continue our efforts and won't stop until we'll have extended assistance to the victims),” Marcos said.

So far, he said, the Regions IV, V, VI, VII and VIII were seen to have been hit by “Aghon,” with about 12,043 families or 26,726 affected.

Six cities and municipalities experienced power outages and 13 flooding incidents were reported.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/28/gov-t-agencies-mobilized-to-help-aghon-victims-marcos>

MANILA BULLETIN:

As the new Senate tourism chief, Lapid vows to push agri-tourism growth

BY HANNAH TORREGOZA

May 28, 2024 04:52 PM

Senator Manuel “Lito” Lapid, who now chairs the Senate Committee on Tourism, has vowed to push for the development of agri-tourism in the country.

As a farmer, Lapid said he would promote the growth and promotion of the Philippine agriculture industry through tourism and even encourage the people to support the local tourism industry.

“The promotion of farm tourism will give us good jobs and opportunities for young people to return to farming and have additional income for our tourism, farmers, and local communities,” emphasized Lapid.

Lapid added he is certain that farm tourism would also solve the problem of mass migration to urban centers.

“Farm tourism would contribute to rural development,” said Lapid, who gained the tourism panel after Sen. Maria Lourdes Nancy Binay resigned as chief of the Senate tourism committee.

Lapid noted that agri-tourism is centered on agricultural-based activities to encourage vacationers or tourists to visit and learn about the work of farmers in fields and ranches.

The senator also said he is confident that the development of agritourism would encourage the youth to study agriculture, especially now that the country has aging farmers.

Farm tourism has been institutionalized in the Philippines, with the enactment of Republic Act 10816, also known as the Farm Tourism Development Act of 2016.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/28/as-the-new-senate-tourism-chief-lapid-vows-to-push-agri-tourism-growth>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Philippines, Brunei ink 4 deals during Marcos' state visit

BY BETHEENA UNITE

May 28, 2024 03:15 PM

JERUDONG, Brunei— The Philippines and Brunei forged four deals on tourism, security, maritime, and agriculture during President Marcos' state visit here.



President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. is welcomed by Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah as he begins his two-day state visit in Brunei on May 28, 2024. (Betheena Unite)

President Marcos and Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah witnessed the signing of at least three memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and one letter of intent (LOI) during the two leaders' bilateral meeting on Tuesday, May 28.

The three MOUs signed were efforts on boosting tourism cooperation between the Philippines and Brunei Darussalam; on Mutual Recognition of Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) certificates; and on maritime cooperation.

The LOI, on the other hand, is intended to renew a memorandum of understanding on food security and agricultural cooperation.

Tourism deal

The tourism pact, which was signed between the Department of Tourism (DOT) and the Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism (MPRT) of Brunei Darussalam, aims to generate cooperative tourism projects and increase tourist arrivals between the two countries.

It also aims to support niche tourism development, particularly in the area of Islamic tourism and the promotion of Muslim friendly destinations.

Seafaring

The MOU on STCW certificates allows the national agencies of both countries to recognize the national certificates issued by both focal agencies of the two countries.

It also replaces and updates a prior MOU between the Philippines and Brunei signed in 2001.

Moreover, an MOU on maritime cooperation was also signed between the two sides, which both agreed to further their cooperation on areas including pollution, skills training, research and information sharing.

It is also crucial for maritime nations like the Philippines and Brunei.

Agri pact

The LOI on agriculture underscores the interest of both countries to explore further cooperation and collaboration on the field of agriculture for food security and sustainable agriculture between the two countries.

It was executed between the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Agriculture and Agrifood Department (AAD) of the Ministry of Agriculture of Brunei Darussalam.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/28/philippine-brunei-ink-4-deals-during-marcos-state-visit>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Recto favors tariff reduction on rice imports

BY XANDER DAVE CEBALLOS

May 28, 2024 03:11 PM

Reducing the tariff on imported rice to 17.5 percent would be more favorable to the consumers and farmers, Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto said.

On the sidelines of the Philippine Economic Briefing on Monday, May 27, Recto said that there should be a balance between the two parties when considering the affordability of the staple food.

"You have to strike a balance between the farmers and the consumers. It's better to have a fair share, 17.5 [percent]. Could be 20 percent, right?" he told reporters.

"But I leave that to the Secretary of Agriculture. First, to discuss with his constituencies, right? It needs to have a hearing. But there are about three million farmers and 115 million consumers, or 112 million, so a good balance should be," he added.

Asked whether the lower tariff proposal on rice should be implemented until the end of this year, Recto said that he would want to see first its effectivity and from there should be decided if it can be extended.

"As much as possible, not only up to the end of the year. But, possible, the EO [executive order] will be only up to the end of the year. And then, let's take a look, and then, if we need to extend it, then we can extend it, right? But what's important is to reduce the prices of rice," he stated.

The Marcos administration last year implemented EO 50, maintaining the tariff rate for rice at 35 percent within and exceeding the minimum access volume (MAV) quota until the end of this year.

However, Recto said that the government would want to further reduce the tariff of the commodity for rice prices to go down by 20 percent in September.

"We expect rice prices to go down by 20 percent in September. This would entail an increase in production and reduction in tariffs," the finance chief said during the panel in the same forum.

"I think we have a game plan in place as far as that is concerned. That is something we can have a grip on and we expect it to go down between July to September," he added.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/28/recto-favors-tariff-reduction-on-rice-imports>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Ombudsman suspends 69 officials allegedly involved in controversial Chocolate Hills resort

BY CZARINA NICOLE ONG KI

May 28, 2024 06:20 PM

The Office of the Ombudsman has ordered the six-month preventive suspension of 69 officials from the provincial and municipal governments of Bohol, including its Governor Erico Aristotle C. Aumentado, due to their involvement in the controversial resort found in Chocolate Hills this year.

Other officials suspended came from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Department of Agriculture (DA), Office of Civil Defense, Department of Science and Technology (DOST), Philippine National Police (PNP), as well as several barangay officials.

The order, dated May 22, ordered the suspension of these officials:

1. Erico Aristotle C. Aumentado - Governor
2. Restituto Q. Suarez III - Municipality of Sagbayan Mayor
3. Atty. Antonino M. Jumawid - Municipality of Batuan Mayor
4. Elizabeth M. Pace - Municipality of Catigbian Mayor
5. Eugenio E. Ibarra - Municipality of Clarion Mayor
6. Norman Palacio - Municipality of Bilar Mayor
7. Manuel G. Jayectin - Municipality of Bilar Mayor
8. Simplicio C. Maestrado, Jr. - Municipality of Sierra Bulloens Mayor
9. Michael Doria - Municipality of Valencia Mayor
10. Maria Katrina Lim - Municipality of Valencia Mayor
11. Calixto Garcia - Municipality of Valencia Mayor
12. Dionisio Neil Balite - Municipality of Valencia Mayor
13. Ranulfo Q. Malignat - Municipality of Bihar Vice Mayor
14. Conchita T. Delos Reyes - Municipality of Carmen Mayor

15. Ricardo Francisco A. Toribio - Municipality of Carmen Mayor
16. Ma. Victoria V. Aberra - Regional Director, DENR - EMB
17. Eugene G. Cabrera - Regional Director, Civil Defense, Region 7
18. Joel A. Elumba - Regional Director, Department of Agriculture, Region 7
19. Marlou L. Salazar - Regional Director, Office of the Civil Defense, Region 7
20. Edilberto L. Paradela - Regional Director, Department of Science and Technology
21. P/BGen. Valeriano T. De Leon - Regional Director, Philippine National Police, Region 7
22. Jesus F. Zamora, Jr. - Regional Director, Department of Science and Technology
23. Angel C. Enriquez - Regional Executive Director, Department of Agriculture, Region 7
24. Paquito D. Melicor, Jr. - DENR Regional Executive Director/Chairman, PAMB
25. Salvador D. Diputado - Regional Executive Director, Department of Agriculture, Region 7
26. Alan R. Dinoy - Building Official, Municipality of Sagbayan
27. Maximo G. Lomosbog - Zoning Administrator, Municipality of Sagbayan
28. Lorna L. Fernandez - PAMB Secretariat/Assistant Protected Area Superintendent
29. Laurentino A. Bautista - Officer-in-Charge, DENR CENRO/Protected Area Superintendent
30. Ariel N. Rica - Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Officer
31. Atty. John Titus J. Vistal - Provincial Planning and Development Office
32. Perfecto Bambe - Tourism Officer, Municipality of Bihar
33. Quern C. Aparicio - Barangay Captain, La Victoria, Carmen
34. Gregorio Digamon - Barangay Captain, Nueva Vida, Carmen
35. Eulogio L. Aparri - Barangay Captain, Canmaya Centro, Sagbayan
36. Erlinda A. Nacua - Barangay Captain, Katipunan, Sagbayan
37. Ricardo R. Basco - Barangay Captain, San Antonio, Sagbayan
38. Asuncion B. Ybanez - Barangay Captain, Poblacion, Sagbayan
39. Floriana J. Decierdo - Barangay Captain, Sabgayan Sur, Sagbayan
40. Erwin G. Capa - Barangay Captain, Kagawasan, Sagbayan

41. James P. Diolan - Barangay Captain, Behind the Clouds, Batuan
42. Ian A. Bernadez - Barangay Captain, Sta. Cruz, Batuan
43. Francisco A. Loy-A, Jr. - Barangay Captain, Cabcnitan, Batuan
44. Dennis L. Remedio - Barangay Captain, Campagao, Bilar
45. Perfecto M. Buro - Barangay Captain, Villaflor, Carmen
46. Nilfa D. Pamat - Barangay Captain, Ubojan, Sagbayan
47. Enrico S. Celades - Barangay Captain, Canmaya Diot, Sagbayan
48. Isabelo S. Candole - Barangay Captain, Libertad Norte, Sagbayan
49. Liza B. Tandura - Barangay Captain, San Ramon, Sagbayan
50. Arnel D. Polinar - Barangay Captain, San Vicente Norte, Sabgayan
51. Victor B. Ramos - Barangay Captain, San Isidro, Sagbayan
52. Emmanuel L. Jumawid - Barangay Captain, Poblacion Vieja, Batuan
53. Maria Fe F. Jala - Barangay Captain, Janlud, Batuan
54. Flaviano C. Pacatang - Barangay Captain, Garcia, Batuan
55. Timoteo B. Quimpan - Barangay Captain, Bugang Sur, Bilar
56. Serapion Organiza - Barangay Captain, Cambigsi, Bilar
57. Adelo Mangayaay - Barangay Captain, Zamora, Bilar
58. Christopher Andales - Barangay Captain, Kabagsakan, Sagbayan
59. Rolando Pataca - Barangay Captain, Rizal, Batuan
60. Gerardo Salces - Barangay Captain, Cantigdas, Batuan
61. Crisologo Balag - Barangay Captain, Cansumbol, Bilar
62. Rosendo B. Bantugan, Jr. - Barangay Captain, Daghoy, Bilar
63. Rosalino Polinar, Jr. - Barangay Captain, Cabog, Clarin
64. Cecilia G. Tesio - Barangay Kagawad, Cabog, Clarin
65. Belito S. Gallogo - Barangay Kagawad, Montevideo, Carmen
66. Teresita Y. Pahamutang - Barangay Kagawad, Libertad Sur, Sagbayan
67. Tito O. Ancog - Barangay Kagawad, Barangay Bugang Norte, Bilar

68. Teresita C. Bayron - Barangay Kagawad, Barangay Roxas, Bilar

69. Gilbert C. Gonzales - Regional Director, DENR, Region 7, PAMB Chairman

Their six-month preventive suspension comes without pay, except when the delay in the disposition of the Ombudsman's case is "due to their fault, negligence, or petition, in which case the period of delay shall not be counted in computing the period of preventive suspension."

"In accordance with Section 27(1) of Republic Act 6770, this Order is immediately executory. Notwithstanding any motion, appeal, or petition that may be filed by respondents seeking relief from this Order, unless otherwise ordered by this Office or any court of competent jurisdiction, the implementation of this Order shall not be interrupted within the period prescribed," the Ombudsman order read.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/28/ombudsman-suspends-69-officials-over-chocolate-hills-resort>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Romualdez pats Marcos' back for securing Brunei deals

BY ELLSON QUISMORIO

May 28, 2024 10:42 PM

AT A GLANCE

- House Speaker Martin Romualdez has hailed President Marcos for securing key agreements between the Philippines and Brunei during the latter's state visit to Bandar Seri Begawan.



President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. (left), House Speaker Martin Romualdez (Speaker's office)

House Speaker Martin Romualdez has hailed President Marcos for securing key agreements between the Philippines and Brunei during the latter's state visit to Bandar Seri Begawan.

Signed on Tuesday, May 28 between the Philippines and Brunei were three memorandum of understanding (MOUs) on tourism cooperation, on Mutual Recognition of Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) certificates; and on maritime cooperation.

A letter of intent (LOI) was also forged to renew an MOU on food security and agricultural cooperation.

“President Marcos, Jr. deserves our commendation for this significant diplomatic achievement. These agreements signify a promising future for our bilateral relations, fostering deeper cooperation and understanding between our countries,” Romualdez said on Tuesday.

“The Filipino people will undoubtedly benefit from these initiatives through enhanced tourism, improved maritime standards, and strengthened agricultural practices that would spur job creation and generate income opportunities,” he added.

As the Philippines and Brunei celebrate the 40th anniversary of their diplomatic relations, Romualdez said he looks forward to seeing the continued growth and success of this enduring partnership.

“The House of Representatives fully supports these initiatives. We remain committed to helping the administration of President Marcos, Jr. and to ensure as well that these agreements would re-energize the partnership and unlock potential opportunities for both nations,” reckoned the Speaker.

The MOU on tourism cooperation seeks to enhance tourism projects and increase tourist arrivals between the two countries. This agreement supports niche tourism development, particularly Islamic tourism, and the promotion of Muslim-friendly destinations.

"This initiative will not only boost our tourism industry but also promote cultural exchange and understanding," said Romualdez, who accompanied Marcos to the two-day trip.

Romualdez said the MOU on STCW is crucial for the safety and efficiency of our maritime workforce, ensuring that our seafarers meet international standards.

The MOU on maritime cooperation was also signed. It gives focus on areas such as pollution control, skills training, research, and information sharing.

Romualdez said the LOI to renew the MOU on food security and agricultural cooperation, executed between the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Agriculture and Agrifood Department (AAD) of Brunei, is seen to bolster the Philippines' agricultural sector, ensure food security, and promote sustainable agricultural practices.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/28/romualdez-pats-marcos-back-for-securing-brunei-deals>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Aghon exits PAR, leaves 6 dead

[Romina Cabrera](#) - The Philippine Star

May 29, 2024 | 12:00am



In this handout photo taken on May 26, 2024 and released on May 27, 2024 by the Philippine Coast Guard, children are evacuated from a flooded area by coast guard personnel in Lucena, Quezon Province, amid heavy rain brought by Typhoon Aghon.

Handout / Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) / AFP

MANILA, Philippines — Typhoon Aghon is forecast to leave the Philippine area of responsibility (PAR) by this afternoon and is no longer affecting any part of the country.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said Aghon was monitored 535 kilometers east of Basco, Batanes as of 5 p.m. yesterday. It was carrying maximum sustained winds of 130 km per hour near the center and gustiness of up to 160 kph as it moved northeastward at 30 kph.

PAGASA said Aghon may undergo a short period of intensification but will enter a period of weakening by today. An earlier weakening is not ruled out as it interacts with the mid-latitude environment and undergoes post-tropical transition.

Aghon is unlikely to directly bring a significant amount of rainfall within the next three days.

However, the southwesterly windflow will bring moderate to heavy rains over Western Visayas and the western section of Luzon in the next three days.

The wind flow that is partially influenced by Aghon will also bring occasional gusty conditions over Batanes, Cagayan, Isabela, Ilocos Region, Central Luzon, Metro Manila, CALABARZON, MIMAROPA, Bicol Region, and Aklan and Antique.

The windflow is bringing scattered rainshowers over Ilocos Region, Zambales, Bataan, Occidental Mindoro, Palawan, Western Visayas and Zamboanga Peninsula.

Meanwhile, the frontal system is bringing scattered rains over Batanes, Babuyan Islands and Apayao, while localized thunderstorms may affect Metro Manila and the rest of the country.

PAGASA warned of possible flash floods or landslides during heavy rains.

Despite the rains, the heat index again breached the extreme danger levels in Guiuan, Eastern Samar for the second day in a row.

The heat index reached a sweltering 54 degrees Celsius on Monday, a day after it recorded the highest heat index of 55 degrees Celsius for the year on Sunday.

3 more dead

Three more fatalities have been reported in Quezon province due to the onslaught of Aghon.

According to records gathered by the Quezon Provincial Police Office, two people died in Lucena City – one due to drowning and another after being struck by a fallen tree.

Meanwhile, in the town of Mauban, a 56-year-old café-restaurant caretaker drowned after being trapped by rising flood waters in Barangay Santol.

Also in Mauban, a woman sustained head injuries when she slipped and fell while evacuating her home in Barangay Sadsaran during the typhoon.

In total, six deaths have now been reported in Quezon, including the previously reported fatalities of two individuals struck by fallen trees in Lucena and San Antonio town and an infant who drowned in Pagbilao.

Meanwhile, the local government of Lucena has distributed initial aid to residents in various barangays in the city that were affected by Aghon.

A state of calamity was previously declared in the city during a special session of the Sangguniang Panlungsod.

Marcos vows aid

Before embarking on a two-day state visit to Brunei Darussalam and working visit to Singapore, President Marcos ordered on Tuesday concerned agencies to ensure the immediate recovery and continued assistance to the victims of Typhoon Aghon.

The President directed the Departments of Social Welfare and Development, Agriculture and Health to ensure that all forms of assistance and medical support are extended to Aghon-hit areas.

He also instructed the Department of Public Works and Highways and the Department of Transportation to swiftly deploy personnel for the immediate repair of affected infrastructure and transportation facilities.

Aghon – the first tropical cyclone to hit the country this year – lashed parts of the Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol region, Central and Western and Eastern Visayas, leaving three airports and 29 seaports non-operational, the President said.

Six cities and towns had power outages, and there were 13 flooding incidents and three rain-induced landslides, he added.

“That’s why I continue to task the DSWD, the DA, DOH, to provide assistance to all the victims of Typhoon Aghon. And because the next one is (recovery) – that’s why the DPWH and then the DOTr must be next to the first responder so that the damaged infrastructure can be repaired immediately,” the President said.

Marcos said the DSWD has provided P1.35 million worth of assistance to Aghon-affected residents while a P607.9-million fund is on standby.

Telco services

Leading telecoms firm Globe Telecom said it quickly responded to restore service in parts of Luzon affected by Aghon.

Per Globe's monitoring, outages affected 12 provinces in Southern Luzon, Bicol and Mimaropa.

As of Monday afternoon, call, text and data services have been fully restored in majority of the affected areas, among them Albay, Batangas, Camarines Norte, Cavite, Marinduque, Masbate, Palawan and Romblon.

Restoration is nearly complete in Camarines Sur, Laguna and Quezon, and underway in Mindoro.

Globe added it is also ready to deploy Libreng Tawag and Libreng Charging stations in storm-hit areas as soon as it is safe to do so.

Cancelled flights

The Manila International Airport Authority announced on Tuesday the cancellation of four domestic flights due to unfavorable weather at destinations.

Local carrier CEBGO announced the cancellations of the following flights: DG 6031/6032 Manila-San Jose-Manila; DG 6113/6114 Manila-Naga-Manila; and DG 6118 Naga-Manila. — **Michelle Zoleta, Helen Flores, Rudy Santos, Rainier Allan Ronda, Mark Ernest Villeza**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/29/2358791/aghon-exits-par-leaves-6-dead>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Bohol Gov. 68 others suspended

[Ric Obedencio](#) - The Philippine Star

May 29, 2024 | 12:00am

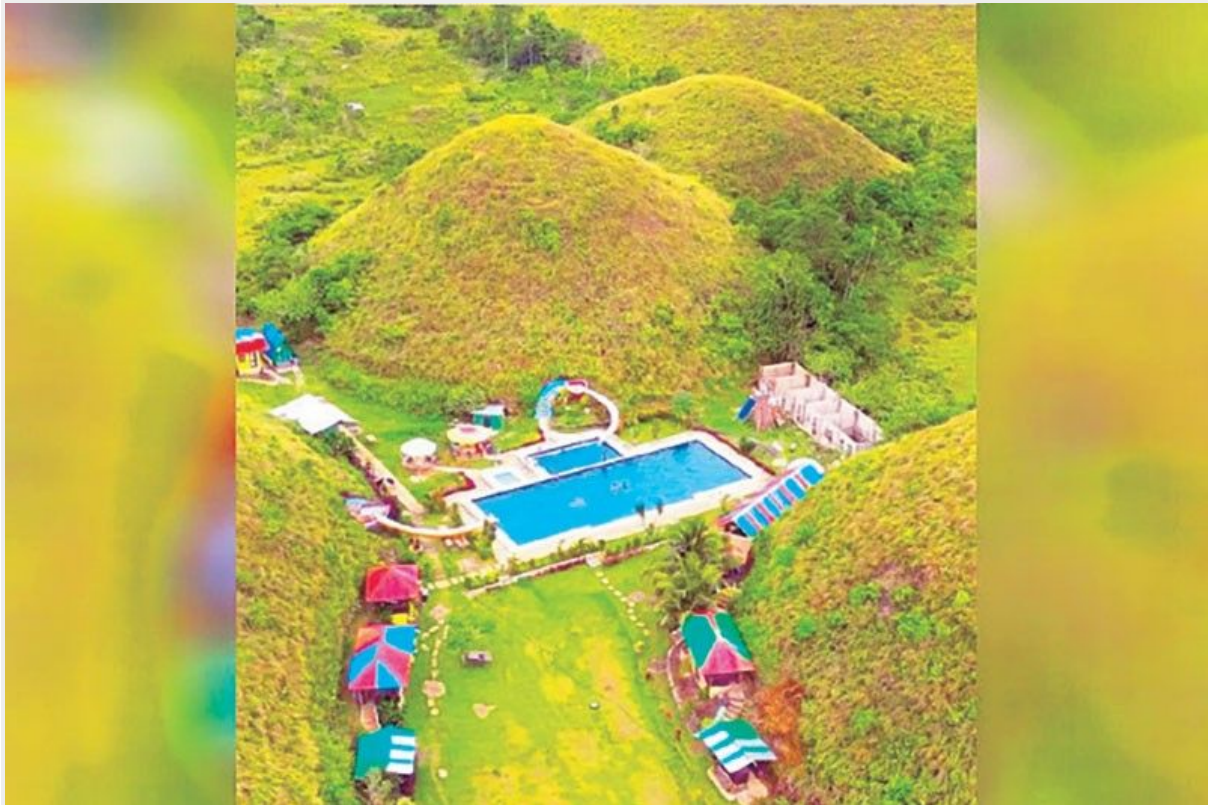


Photo shows Captain's Peak Resort.

STAR / File

Chocolate Hills Resort probe

MANILA, Philippines — The Office of the Ombudsman has preventively suspended Bohol Gov. Aris Aumentado and 68 others including town mayors for six months without pay in connection with the investigation into the controversial construction of Captain's Peak Resort at the foot of Chocolate Hills.

The ombudsman field investigation office (FIO), as complainant, “charges public respondents with grave misconduct, gross neglect of duty and conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service relative to the construction, operation and expansion of Captain's Peak Resort in Canmano, Sagbayan, Bohol, an establishment nestled in the middle of the iconic Chocolate Hills National Monument (CHNM), a declared protected in Bohol.”

The resort has no Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) and Special Use Agreement in Protected Areas (SAPA) issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' Environmental Management Bureau (EMB).

The ombudsman FIO said that the “public respondents acted with manifest partiality, evident bad faith, gross inexcusable negligence and committed gross violations” of the National Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 1992 and the expanded NIPAS Act of 2018.

Preventive suspension may be imposed if the evidence of guilt is strong, and the charge against such officer or employee involves dishonesty, oppression, grave misconduct or neglected in the performance of duty; the charges would warrant removal from the service or the respondent's continued stay in office may prejudice the case filed against him/her as provided under section 24 of republic Act 6770.

In a text message to The STAR, Ombudsman Samuel Martires confirmed that his office issued a preventive suspension order against Aumentado and other local officials in Bohol on May 22.

Martires said that order was signed on his behalf by Special Prosecutor Edilberto Sandoval as he was on official leave at that time.

The ombudsman also said the suspension is “immediately executory,” notwithstanding any motion, appeal or petition that may be filed by the respondents, unless ordered halted by the ombudsman itself or any court of competent jurisdiction.

The office of Interior Secretary Benjamin Abalos Jr. was tasked to implement the suspension order.

Aside from Aumentado, also ordered preventively suspended were chief executives of several towns in Bohol namely: Sagbayan mayor Restituto Suarez III, Batuan mayor Antonino Jumawid, Catigbian mayor Elizabeth Pace, Clarin mayor Eugenio Ibarra, Bilar mayor Norman Palacio, former Bilar mayor Manuel Jayectin, Bilar vice mayor Ranulfo Maligmat, Sierra Bullones mayor Michael Doria, Sierra Bullones vice-mayor Simplico Maestrado Jr., Valencia mayor Dionisio Neil Balite, Carmen mayor Conchita Delos Reyes and former Carmen mayor Ricardo Toribio.

Also ordered suspended were DENR-EMB regional director Ma. Victoria Abrera and DENR Region 7 Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) regional director Gilbert Gonzales.

Likewise ordered suspended were several barangay officials as well as regional officials of the Office of the Civil Defense, Department of Science and Technology and Department of Agriculture.

The Chocolate Hills Natural Monument in Bohol is a legislated protected area.

Bohol Island is also declared a UNESCO Global Geopark, the only tourism area in the country to secure the coveted title.

During an inquiry hearing by the joint Senate environment and local government committees, the Land Registration Authority confirmed that there are already 5,652 titled properties spanning 7,860 hectares at the Chocolate Hills. —

Elizabeth Marcelo

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/29/2358799/bohol-gov-68-others-suspended>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Philippines, Brunei forge pact on maritime cooperation

[Helen Flores](#), [Alexis Romero](#) - The Philippine Star

May 29, 2024 | 12:00am



President Marcos meets with Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah at Istana Nurul Iman in Bandar Seri Begawan yesterday. Marcos is in Brunei for a two-day state visit and will head to Singapore to address the Institute for Strategic Studies Shangri-La Dialogue 2024.

STAR / File

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN – In his first trip to Brunei as head of state, President Marcos yesterday witnessed – along with his host Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah – the signing of a maritime cooperation agreement covering information and research sharing, pollution control and skills training, among others.

The memorandum of understanding on maritime cooperation was one of the four deals whose signing was witnessed by Marcos and Bolkiah. The other MOUs were on tourism, seafarers' training and food security.

It was not clear if the signing of the MOU on maritime cooperation had anything to do with Marcos' pre-departure statement that he would discuss with Bolkiah "ways for further cooperation with Brunei in ensuring the defense of our countries and of our region."

The Philippines is embroiled in a dispute with China over maritime claims in the South China Sea.

The two Southeast Asian countries also forged MOUs on mutual recognition of Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) certificates and on boosting tourism.

Also signed was a letter of intent to renew an MOU on food security and agricultural cooperation.

The two leaders witnessed the signing of the deals at Istana Nurul Iman, the Brunei leader's official residence. It was one of the first events during Marcos' two-day visit here.

"We hope to expand the partnerships that we have begun and we feel that there is much potential that we can examine," Marcos said.

"I think the MOUs that are being signed today that we shall witness, Your Majesty, will be a very good start to once again re-energize, and I think the areas that we have talked about – that we have paid attention to for these MOUs are certainly rich with potential," he added.

The Sultan cited the two countries' stronger people-to-people exchanges and economic ties.

"I'm looking forward to further enhancing our friendship in areas of future interest, which I believe will greatly benefit our countries and people," Bolkiah said.

The Presidential Communications Office (PCO) said the MOU on maritime cooperation is "crucial for maritime nations like the Philippines and Brunei."

The MOU on the recognition of certificates issued under the provisions of the International Convention on STCW for seafarers permits the two countries to recognize the national certificates issued by each other's agencies. It replaces and updates a prior MOU inked by the two countries in 2001.

Tourism

The MOU on tourism cooperation, meanwhile, was signed between the Philippines' Department of Tourism and Brunei's Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism. It seeks to generate cooperative tourism projects, boost tourist

arrivals between the two countries, support niche tourism development, particularly in the area of Islamic tourism, and promote Muslim-friendly destinations.

Tourism Secretary Christina Frasco said the agreement sets the stage for a “dynamic” partnership between the Philippines and Brunei.

She noted that the deal includes collaborations to expand Halal and Muslim-friendly tourism, medical and wellness tourism, meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibition tourism and to increase tourism investments.

“The collaboration is expected to enhance the overall tourist experience, strengthen economic ties and contribute to the sustainable development of the tourism industry in both countries,” Frasco said in a statement.

The Philippines’ Department of Agriculture and Brunei’s Agriculture and Agrifood Department also inked an LOI to pursue further cooperation aimed at achieving food security by increasing the production of agricultural products and further modernizing farming technologies.

The letter is a product of the third Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation between the two countries convened in Manila on Aug. 15 last year.

“It underscores the interest of both the Philippines and Brunei to explore further cooperation and collaboration on the field of agriculture for food security and sustainable agriculture between the two countries,” the PCO said.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/29/2358801/philippines-brunei-forge-pact-maritime-cooperation>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

DOF wants to cut rice tariffs below 35 percent

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

May 29, 2024 | 12:00am



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

STAR / Ernie Penaredondo

To bring down prices

MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Finance (DOF) wants to slash tariffs on rice imports further below 35 percent to pull down retail prices of the staple, which have been putting pressure on the country's inflation print.

Finance Secretary Ralph Recto said further tariff reduction is part of government measures to bring down rice prices by 20 percent in September.

The DOF chief is looking at 17.5 percent or 20 percent from the current 35 percent.

President Marcos, through Executive Order (EO) 50, extended the lower tariff rates of 35 percent on rice until the end of the year.

Without any tariff reduction, the Philippines imposes a tariff rate of 40 percent and 50 percent on rice imports inside the import quota and outside the quota, respectively.

All rice imports from Southeast Asian countries are levied a 35 percent tariff pursuant to the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement.

According to Recto, world rice prices have been on a downward trend, which bodes well for an importing country like the Philippines.

Rice imports account for about 20 percent of the country's total staple supply.

The lower rice prices in the global market coupled with the tariff reduction would result in a more affordable staple that is being sought by the consuming public, the finance chief said.

“(The tariffs should be) lower than 35 (percent),” Recto told reporters late Monday.

The DOF is looking at the power of the President to modify the tariff rates when Congress is not in session.

Recto said the Tariff Commission (TC) is expected to begin reviewing the proposed rice tariff cut soon.

Recto, however, said they are not looking at reducing rice tariffs to zero as it would be detrimental to local rice farmers.

“You have to strike a balance between the farmers and the consumers,” he said, referring to the tariff rates.

Recto expects the Department of Agriculture to conduct its own consultation with its stakeholders regarding the proposed tariff reduction.

The rice tariff adjustment may be done while Congress is not in session so that Marcos can exercise his power of modifying tariff rates on goods through an EO.

The lower rice tariffs may be in effect until the end of the year.

“We want it lower... as much as possible not only up to the end of the year. But (it is) possible (that) the EO will be only up to the end of the year,” Recto said.

“And then, let’s take a look, and then if we need to extend it, then we can extend it, right? But what’s important is to reduce the prices of rice. That is what the Filipino public is asking,” Recto added.

Congress adjourned its session on May 24. The next session opens on July 21.

The tariff adjustment process begins with the TC holding a public hearing regarding a tariff modification petition filed by either a private entity or the government.

The TC will submit its findings to its mother agency the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) for proper endorsement to the Cabinet-level Committee on Tariff and Related Matters (CTRM).

The CTRM will deliberate on the proposed tariff modification and make its recommendation to the NEDA board chaired by the President for final action, including the issuance of an EO.

The average price of well-milled rice in the country softened to P56.42 per kilo in April from the record-high P56.44 per kilo recorded in March, according to the Philippines Statistics Authority (PSA).

Rice inflation softened to 23.9 percent inflation in April from 24.4 percent in March, based on PSA data.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/05/29/2358672/dof-wants-cut-rice-tariffs-below-35-percent>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Millers buck sugar import proposal

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

May 29, 2024 | 12:00am



“The country has an abundant supply of sugar this year. Our increased production has filled our warehouses, so there is no need to import at this time,” Jesus Barrera, executive director of PSMA, said in a statement.

STAR / File

MANILA, Philippines — There is no need for sugar importation since the country has ample stocks of sweetener to tide it over during the off-milling season, according to the Philippine Sugar Millers Association (PSMA).

“The country has an abundant supply of sugar this year. Our increased production has filled our warehouses, so there is no need to import at this time,” Jesus Barrera, executive director of PSMA, said in a statement.

The industry group noted that the country’s current raw sugar and refined sugar stocks as of May 12 expanded by double-digit rates year-on-year.

The country’s raw sugar stocks stood at 531,838 metric tons (MT), up 26.4 percent from last year same period’s 420,866 MT, based on latest Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) report.

Meanwhile, refined sugar inventory rose by 35.5 percent to 572,398 MT from 422,332 MT.

The PSMA noted that some 135,675 MT of refined sugar in the present inventory were imported stocks brought in last year that are yet to be withdrawn and used.

“Even with sugar milling already closed for the season, we are confident that our current sugar inventories will last beyond the end of the crop year on August 31, 2024,” the PSMA said.

“However, we are monitoring closely the impact of El Niño on the timing of the upcoming harvest for next season,” the PSMA added.

The sugar millers pointed out that there has been a huge drop in sugar demand as indicated by slower withdrawals of stocks on an annual basis.

“Withdrawals or demand of domestic raw sugar and local refined sugar have decreased by 4.23 percent and 7.20 percent, respectively, while withdrawals of imported refined sugar have risen by 16 percent,” the PSMA said.

The country’s raw sugar output as of May 12 rose by almost eight percent to 1.921 million MT from 1.78 million MT recorded volume in the same period in 2023

The PSMA issued the statement more than two weeks after the SRA disclosed that it is studying the possibility of allowing sugar imports during the post-milling season to ensure that the country will have sufficient stocks and prevent skyrocketing prices like what happened two years ago.

No less than President Marcos endorsed the recommendation of the Private Sector Advisory Council-Agriculture Sector Group (PSAC-ASG) to allow the importation of sugar during the off-harvest and post-milling seasons.

Marcos backed the sugar importation proposal between 185,000 metric tons and 200,000 MT. The PSAC-ASG argued that the proposed import volume is necessary to build up the country’s sugar buffer stock.

The SRA said the import proposal being endorsed by the President is aimed at ensuring that the country would not have a shortfall in supply, particularly for refined sugar, once all sugar mills stop operating.

Sugar refineries depend on the country’s raw sugar supply to produce refined sugar.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/05/29/2358661/millers-buck-sugar-import-proposal>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Keeping the price of rice reasonable and steady



CROSSROADS TOWARD PHILIPPINE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL

PROGRESS - Gerardo P. Sicat - The Philippine Star

May 29, 2024 | 12:00am

The government decided to propose that the National Food Authority (NFA) be given the right to import rice and to maintain a buffer stock to assure that the price of rice can be kept more stable.

House Bill 10381 which seeks to amend the Rice Tariffication Law which has been approved in the House of Representatives is the instrument to undertake this. The issue is now at the Senate.

The proposal aims to restore to the NFA the power to import rice as an agency under conditions of emergency. The private trader importation of rice under the RTL continues.

NFA's record

By mandate, NFA was to keep the price of rice low and affordable for final consumers.

But at the farm level, NFA bought the palay produce of farmers at a price high enough so that farmers could earn good incomes at harvest time. The procured palay was milled (mostly by private contractors at cost) and kept as part of the rice buffer stock for the nation.

Essentially, this aspect of the domestic operations often led to major losses for NFA, for it bought at high prices from farmers and sold the buffer stock at low prices for domestic market sales.

This is the essence of old-style rice price stabilization. Sustaining this type of operation required a subsidy from the government.

The fact is that domestic rice agriculture has not been able to keep in pace with population growth. Over the decades, the importation of rice had become an essential and important component of NFA operations.

The NFA law gave the agency the authority to determine the total stock of rice needed and to estimate what – year-by-year – the total supply of rice for the nation would be. That sent the signal for the gap in supply, which had to be imported. And NFA could then import the estimated need, as it had the monopoly to make that decision.

Also, NFA had complete control of government interventions on rice pricing. For example, throughout the years 2010 to 2020, Filipinos paid about twice as much for rice than the citizens of Thailand and Vietnam. These countries are very efficient in rice agriculture and are therefore low-cost rice producers. The opportunities for NFA's gains from its international import trading operations are substantial.

Through the years, this was NFA's role in the rice market. Such practice, although it often led to relatively low domestic prices for rice, had suffered from many problems.

Stakeholders on the rice issue were strongly divided on NFA's achievements. Farmers and rice miller groups complained. When rising prices resulted, the complaints came from urban rice consumers. Of course, those few groups that benefited from NFA's operational activities defended the agency.

Serious problems of governance (read: corruption) had been a constant theme of these complaints, however. Many of these arose from the exercise of its monopoly and regulatory powers.

Eventually, during bad times when the demand from price control authorities required consumer subsidies, even the profits from international trading vanished. The result then became a serious fiscal problem because deficits of the agency were charged to the government's fiscal deficits.

NFA has many names

Though I used NFA as the grain price regulator, it had many names in the country's economic history. The agency is a political creation of the government to deal with price stabilization of the country's staple grain.

It is the plan to help assure consumers of rice that they would have a low domestic price.

Further, it is a plan to help farmers also have a fair deal as producers of the nation's main staple. As in the past, the plan to restore its importing and domestic grain operations is essentially the same.

During the Commonwealth and early independence years, it was known as NARIC (National Rice and Corn Corp). When it had to be resuscitated, it was renamed RCA (Rice and Corn Administration). Then it was renamed NGA (National Grains Authority), again, to give it a new rebirth.

Each episode of rebirth under another name was due to the bad fiscal outcomes – budget deficits. Even as the agency was abolished, the political objective of domestic price stabilization still remained. The solution always led to the agency's administrative rebirth in new clothing. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Rice Tariffication Law of 2019

Not too long ago, the government responded to calls for a reform of the market regulations covering rice.

This clearly affected the operations of the NFA.

The RTL defanged the NFA by abolishing its monopoly power to import rice completely. In its place, a new import regime relied on imports by private traders under hefty tariffs of 35 percent.

The rate of tariff reflects the disparity in productive efficiency of Philippine rice agriculture compared to those from which imports are sourced, mainly from countries within ASEAN.

The revenues from tariff were constituted into a fund to supplement the government's domestic program of rice production, a help to farmers.

As long as domestic price stabilization is based on reasonable, not unsustainable, price targets, most economists would agree that the reforms undertaken under the rice tariffication law are sufficient.

Countries that have open markets do not suffer from supply deficiencies in certain goods as long as they can import these since they earn good income on other pursuits.

Tariffication of imports allows for disparities in production efficiency to allow for the protection of domestic interests that are essential to their national survival – in this case, protecting the domestic rice industry to achieve national food security.

In short, as long as the regime of relatively free importation of grain is sustained, perhaps NFA's regaining of the power to import rice during emergency situations is granted.

However, if this power is used to implement an unsustainable domestic price of rice at a low price, all will be lost back to the story of the old NFA.

For archives of previous Crossroads essays, go to: <https://www.philstar.com/authors/1336383/gerardo-p-sicat>. Visit this site for more information, feedback and commentary: <http://econ.upd.edu.ph/gpsicat/>

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/05/29/2358664/keeping-price-rice-reasonable-and-steady>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Brunei public sector to join Concepcion-led Philippines-ASEAN food security alliance

The Philippine Star

May 29, 2024 | 12:00am

MANILA, Philippines — The Brunei private sector will formally join the ASEAN Food Security Alliance (AFSA) with the signing of an MOU between the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (BAC) Philippines and ASEAN BAC Brunei this May 29 in Jerudong, Brunei Darussalam. AFSA aims to strengthen the ASEAN region's food security through strategic partnerships; technology and knowledge exchange of best practices and experiences and expand market access and diversify agricultural enterprises within the ASEAN. Leading the initiative is ASEAN Business Advisory BAC Philippines chair and Go Negosyo founder Joey Concepcion.

This MOU is the result of the initial MOU agreement signed by ASEAN BAC Brunei and ASEAN BAC Philippines last year during the ASEAN Summit in Jakarta which aims to jointly conduct studies and mentorship channels for potential agriculture, agriculture technology, food security and agri-preneurship business models. The new MOU now features a direct partnership between an agricultural company in the Philippines and Brunei. The private sectors of Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos and Thailand have also formally participated in this regional agriculture cooperation.

Brunei's MOU will be signed in time for President Marcos' state visit to the sultanate. Signing for the Philippines is Concepcion and for Brunei is ASEAN BAC Brunei chair Haslina Taib who will be represented by ASEAN BAC Brunei Council member Musa Adnin.

ADVERTISING

“These initiatives harness the strengths of the ASEAN private sector to strengthen food security in the region,” said Concepcion.

The MOU with Brunei will also be signed by former Philippine Agriculture Sec. and now Go Negosyo senior adviser William Dar, ASEAN BAC executive director Gil Gonzales, Yovel East president James Amparo, Bounty Fresh president Tennyson Chen, Brunei Association of Agricultural Farmers president YB

Pengiran Haji Isa Bin Pengiran Haji Aliuddin and Hua Ho Agricultural Farm Rep. Haji Abdul Halim Bin Haji Saim.

As part of the AFSA initiative, Concepcion led Philippine agriculture companies on a visit to Malaysia last April to explore potential partnerships in oil palm, rubber, rice, dairy, poultry, pineapple, durian, banana, coconut and corn.

During the Malaysia visit, the Philippine group was briefed on innovations and best practices of Malaysian agriculture companies in key commodities, including the application of genomics and big data in agriculture. Philippine Ambassador to Malaysia Ma. Angela Ponce pledged her support as the Philippine mission follows through with the initial connections made with the Malaysian private sector.

Concepcion explained that AFSA will create engagements directly between the private sectors of the participating countries.

“Creating this level of private sector partnerships in agriculture has not been done before,” he said.

“This is only the beginning. In the next two years, we will build a roadmap leading to the Philippines chairmanship in 2026,” he added.

Agriculture is poised to be the legacy project of ASEAN BAC Philippines when it assumes the chairmanship in 2026. Its legacy project from its chairmanship in 2017, the ASEAN Mentorship for Entrepreneurs Network (AMEN), has already produced nearly 200 graduates of the MSME mentoring program and established a region-wide network of entrepreneurship mentors.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/05/29/2358662/brunei-public-sector-join-concepcion-led-philippines-asean-food-security-alliance>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Marcos reports: 26,726 locals affected by Typhoon Aghon

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

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 08:26 AM May 28, 2024



President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. speaks to his Cabinet Secretaries before departing for Brunei for a state visit on May 28, 2024. Photo from Jean Mangaluz

Updated on May 28, 2024 at 10:07 a.m.

MANILA, Philippines — President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. broke the typical departure ceremony format on Tuesday and delivered a status report on the current damage that Aghon (international name, Ewiniar) has caused, as well as the government's response.

According to the President, 26,726 persons have been affected by the typhoon, with the government releasing P1.35 million in response and an additional P607.9 million on standby.

Marcos also said that six localities are still experiencing power outages, with three airports and 29 seaports non-operational due to Aghon.

Marcos is set to travel to Brunei for a state visit. Before leaving the country, the President typically addresses his cabinet secretaries in Villamor Airbase, Pasay City.

The President has also ordered the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Health to aid the victims of Typhoon Aghon. He also ordered the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and the Department of Transportation (DOTR) to be on standby.

“Tuluyan kong inatasan ang DSWD, ang DA, DOH, para makapagbigay ng assistance sa lahat ng mga naging biktima ng Typhoon Aghon. And dahil ang kasunod naman talaga lagi diyan ay— kaya naman ang DPWH at saka ang DOTR ang kailangan susunod na diyan sa first responder para maayos na kaagad ang mga nasira na infrastructure,” said Marcos before giving his departure speech in Pasay City.

(I ordered the DSWD, the DA, and the DOH to assist the victims of Typhoon Aghon. And because what always follows is— that is why the DPWH and the DOTR are first responders to fix the damaged infrastructure.)

The President added that 841 search and rescue retrieval teams from the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Philippine Coast Guard and the Bureau of Fire Protection have been deployed.

Marcos said 436 emergency telecommunications equipment are also ready for deployment to ease the distribution of relief goods.

“We will keep you informed habang tumatagal at makita natin ang pagdaan ng Aghon at kung ano ‘yung kailangan gawin doon sa mga naging biktima,” said Marcos.

(We will keep you informed as time passes and as Aghon passes through about what we will do for the victims.)

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1945612/fwd-bbm-order-to-agencies-for-aghon-response>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Bohol governor, 68 others suspended over Chocolate Hills resort mess

By: [Leo Udtohan](#) - Correspondent / [@leoudtohanINO](#)

[Inquirer Visayas](#) / 07:58 PM May 28, 2024



Bohol Gov. Aris Aumentado (Photo courtesy of the Provincial Government of Bohol)

TAGBILARAN CITY – The Office of the Ombudsman has ordered a six-month preventive suspension against Bohol Gov. Erico Aristotle Aumentado and 68 other public officials over the construction of a [controversial resort at the famous Chocolate Hills](#).

In its order, the anti-graft office said the Captain's Peak Garden and Resort in Barangay Canmano in Sagbayan town was allowed to operate even without the required Environmental Impact Assessment, Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) and Special Use Agreement in Protected Areas (SAPA) from the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

“The respondents acted with manifest partiality, evident bad faith, gross inexcusable negligence and committed gross violations of the National Integrated Protected Area System Act of 1992 (NIPAS Act of 1992) and Expanded National Integrated Protected Area System Act of 2018 (E-NIPAS Act of 2018) when they remained adamant and continuously tolerated the operation and expansion of Captain’s Peak despite its lack of environmental clearances and permits,” it said.

The Ombudsman said the resort was issued with a mayor, business, building and locational permits for the years 2020 to 2024 despite the repeated failure to secure the permits and clearances from the DENR.

The respondents are facing investigation for grave misconduct, gross neglect of duty, and conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service.

Aumentado, 46, said it was his first time to get suspended as a government official since he was elected as representative of Bohol’s second district in 2013 until he became a governor in 2022.

He said he received the orders from the Ombudsman on Tuesday afternoon.

“I did not expect this. But we can’t do anything about it. We have to comply with the order. We will face this. God knows what is inside my heart,” the governor told employees of the Capitol.

Vice Gov. Dionisio Victor Balite served as Bohol governor starting on Tuesday.

Aside from Aumentado, also suspended were Mayors Restituto Suarez III (Sagbayan), Antonino, Jumawid (Batuan), Elizabeth Mandin-Pace (Catigbian), Eugenio Ibarra (Clarin), Norman Palacio (Bilar), Michael Doria (Sierra Bullones), Dionisio Neil Balite (Valencia) and Conchita Toribio-Delos Reyes (Carmen).

Former mayors who were impleaded in the case were former mayors Manuel Jayectin (Bilar), Simplicio Maestrado Jr. (Sierra Bullones), Maria Katrina Lim

(Valencia), Calixto Garcia (Valencia) and Ricardo Toribio (Carmen), and Bilar Vice Mayor Ranulfo Malignat.

Also suspended were Ma. Victoria Abrera, regional director of DENR-Environment Management Bureau; Paquito Melicor; DENR regional executive director; and Gilbert Gonzales, regional director of DENR-Central Visayas; Eugene Cabrera, regional director of the Civil Defense; and Joel Elumba, regional director of Department of Agriculture – Central Visayas as well as some local village captains in Bilar, Carmen, Sagbayan, Batuan, Bilar, Dagohoy, and Clarin.

The Chocolate Hills was recognized as the [country's first Unesco global geopark](#). The hills are composed of 1,776 limestone mounds surrounding the island's interior plains.

In 1997, then president Fidel Ramos, through Presidential Decree (PD) No. 1037, declared the Chocolate Hills as a Natural Monument.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1945853/bohol-governor-68-others-suspended-over-chocolate-hills-resort-mess>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Philippines, Brunei sign deals on maritime, tourism, agri sectors

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

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 03:41 PM May 28, 2024



Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah (L) sits with Philippines' President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. (R) prior to a meeting at Istana Nurul Iman in Bandar Seri Begawan on May 28, 2024. Agence France-Presse

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Brunei — The Philippines on Tuesday signed three deals and a letter of intent during the two-day state visit of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. here to generate more jobs and accelerate economic transformation.

The two countries signed memoranda of agreement on tourism cooperation, on maritime cooperation, and on Mutual Recognition of Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) certificates, according to Communications Secretary Cheloy Velicaria-Garafil.

Garafil said a letter of intent (LOI) to renew memorandum of understanding on food security and agricultural cooperation was also forged.

The MOU on tourism, Garafil said, aims to generate cooperative tourism projects and increase tourist arrivals between the two countries, particularly in the area of Islamic tourism and the promotion of Muslim friendly destinations.

The MOU on STCW certificates, she added, allows the national agencies of the Philippines and Brunei to recognize the national certificates issued by both focal agencies of the two countries.

An MOU on maritime cooperation was also signed between Manila and Brunei to boost cooperation on wide ranging areas including pollution, skills training, research and information sharing.

This deal, according to Garafil, is “crucial for maritime nations” like the Philippines and Brunei.

The LOI on agriculture would allow both countries to explore further cooperation and collaboration on the field of agriculture for food security and sustainable agriculture.

The President, together with First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos arrived here on Tuesday morning for his first state visit in this predominantly Muslim country rich in oil and gas.

In January this year, Marcos also visited Brunei to attend the royal wedding of Bolkiah’s son, Prince Abdul Mateen.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/237827/philippines-brunei-sign-deals-on-maritime-tourism-agri-sectors>

BUSINESS WORLD:

No need for sugar imports, millers say

May 28, 2024 | 8:47 pm



BOC - PUBLIC INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE DIVISION (BOC-PIAD)

SUGAR millers disputed the need for imports of the sweetener, citing improved domestic production and ample inventories.

Jesus L. Barrera, executive director of the Philippine Sugar Millers' Association, Inc. (PSMA), said in a statement on Tuesday: "Our increased production has filled our warehouses, so there is no need to import at this time."

The Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) has said it is studying allowing sugar imports during the milling offseason to safeguard against shortages.

According to the SRA, raw sugar production had reached 1.92 million metric tons (MT) as of May 12, exceeding the 1.799 million MT from last year.

Refined sugar output rose to 687,823 MT from 624,389 MT in the previous milling season.

The regulator had projected raw sugar production of 1.85 million MT, with a possible 10-15% decline depending on the severity of El Niño.

“Even with sugar milling already closed for the season, we are confident that our current sugar inventories will last beyond the start of the next crop year, which is estimated to be Oct. 1, 2024,” he added.

The national sugar inventory rose 26% for raw sugar to 531,838 MT, with refined sugar up 35% at 572,398 MT.

“Part of the inventory is the 135,675 tons of imported refined sugar that were brought in last year that remains unwithdrawn and unused,” the PSMA said.

Withdrawals or demand for domestic raw sugar and domestic refined sugar have decreased 4.23% and 7.20%, respectively, while withdrawals of imported refined sugar have risen 16%.

“We will continue monitoring the impact of El Niño on the supply levels in the upcoming 2024-2025 harvest,” Mr. Barrera said.

The SRA has said that El Niño has greatly damaged the cane crop for the October 2024 season.

Batangas, Southern Negros, and Mindanao have reported extensive sugarcane damage due to the dry conditions. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/28/597991/no-need-for-sugar-imports-millers-say/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

LANDBANK loans from RCEF top P2.5 billion at end of April

May 28, 2024 | 8:44 pm



PHILSTAR

LAND BANK of the Philippines (LANDBANK) said that it released loans worth P2.5 billion as of April 30 to rice farmers and cooperatives, with the loans backed by the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

In a statement, LANDBANK said the loans were part of RCEF's Expanded Rice Credit Assistance program.

The bank said that loans were issued to 15,400 individual rice farmers and 270 cooperatives with more than 21,300 members.

Loans were used to fund palay (unmilled rice) production, milling and trading, re-lending, and acquisition of farm machinery.

"Under the program, 98% of LANDBANK's direct borrowers are individual rice farmers," it said.

The bulk of the borrowers were from the rice producing provinces of Cagayan, Nueva Vizcaya, and Quirino.

Loads were also disbursed to farmers from Capiz, Leyte, Agusan del Sur, Bukidnon, North Cotabato, and Zamboanga del Sur.

LANDBANK President and Chief Executive Officer Lynette V. Ortiz said that the bank's loans help "support to the agriculture sector (which) is crucial in ensuring food security."

"We are committed to providing continued financial assistance to our rice farmers to help them sustain their operations and improve productivity, especially in the face of challenges including El Niño," Ms. Ortiz added.

The government allocates 10% of RCEF funding towards credit assistance to rice farmers.

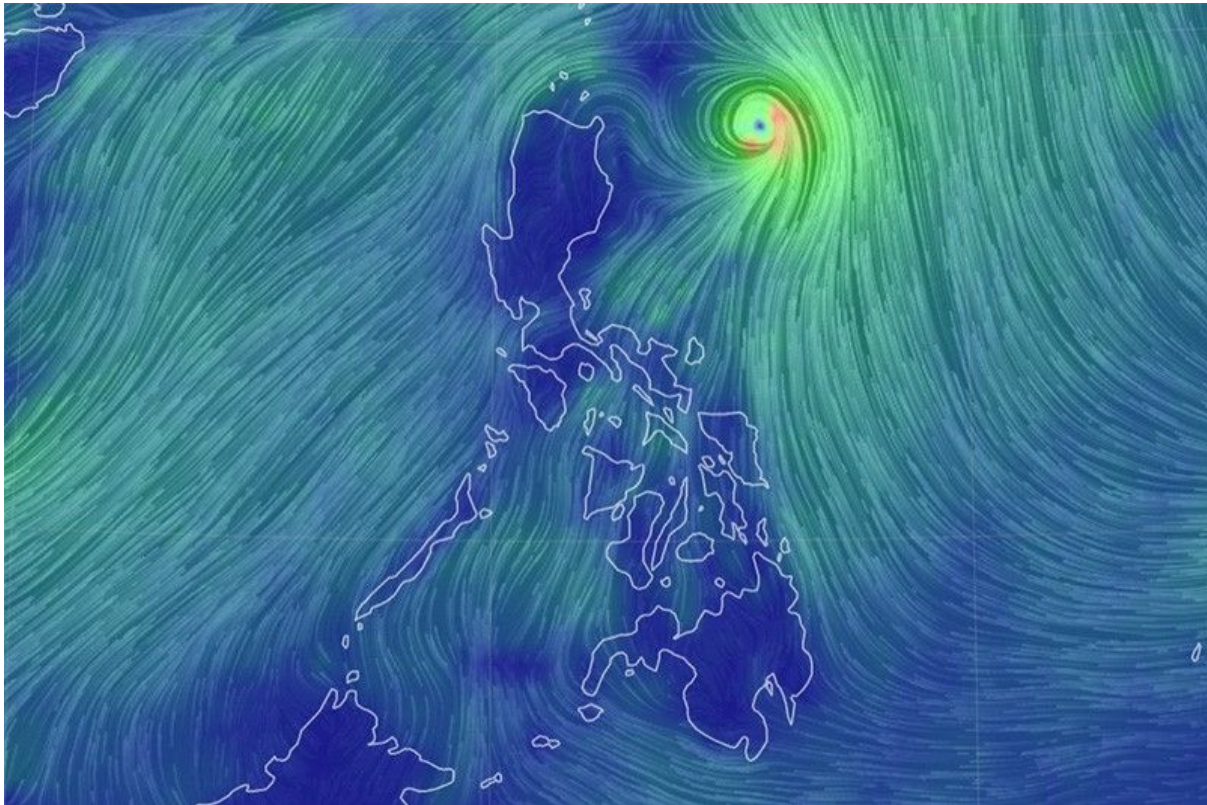
RCEF is a component of the Rice Tariffication Law of 2019, which liberalized rice imports but required importers to pay a 35% tariff on their shipments. The tariffs generated in turn provide funding worth P10 billion a year to RCEF. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/28/597986/landbank-loans-from-rcef-top-p2-5-billion-at-end-of-april/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Crop damage from Aghon at P11 million so far, DA says

May 28, 2024 | 8:46 pm



PHILSTAR FILE PHOTO/EARTH.NULLSCHOOL.NET

AGRICULTURAL damage caused by Typhoon Aghon (international name: Ewiniar) was initially estimated at P11.83 million, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

“In the coming days, we can expect that to increase... Bicol Region and Eastern Visayas have not yet reported,” Agriculture Assistant Secretary and Spokesman Arnel V. de Mesa told reporters on Tuesday.

The typhoon made initial landfall over Quezon province, according to the government weather service, known as PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration).

PAGASA said that Aghon, currently on a track to the northeast in the Philippine Sea, is set to exit the Philippine Area of Responsibility by 5 p.m. on Wednesday.

The DA reported crop losses by volume at 487 metric tons (MT), affecting 432 farmers across 239 hectares of farmland.

The DA had estimated that 199,268 hectares would be affected by the typhoon, based on the standing crop as of May 15.

The DA said that rice accounted for 90% of the crop damage, valued at P10.66 million. Some 430 MT of rice was lost to the typhoon across 232 hectares.

He said that about 99% of the dry-season rice crop had been harvested at the time of the typhoon, with most of the affected crop being early plantings for the wet season.

“Most of what is planted now is in preparation for the wet season. It is in the early stages of crop development,” he said.

High-value crop (HVC) damage amounted to P1.15 million, with lost volume at 57 MT. Only Marinduque had reported HVC damage as of May 28. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/28/597987/crop-damage-from-aghon-at-p11-million-so-far-da-says/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

JICA, DA seeking to introduce Japanese tech to Philippine farms

May 28, 2024 | 8:43 pm



PHILSTAR

THE Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) said it has been working with the Agriculture department to introduce Japanese technology that will help vegetable farmers in the Philippines climb the value chain.

In a statement, JICA said the Project for Market-Driven Enhancement of Vegetable Value Chain in the Philippines (MV2C-TCP) involves beneficiaries in the capital region and nearby provinces to improve the vegetable value chain.

“JICA continues to highlight agriculture development as a backbone of Philippine economy in terms of its prospective impact on economic growth, poverty alleviation, job creation, and promotion of healthy living, among others,” Oshima Jiro, JICA Philippines senior representative, was quoted as saying in the statement.

JICA said it has been promoting a “market-oriented approach” to solving agricultural issues in various countries.

“As such, MV2C-TCP remains a relevant and important part of JICA’s assistance portfolio in the Philippines,” Mr. Oshima said.

MV2C-TCP seeks to address bottlenecks in the vegetable value chains of Metro Manila, Quezon and Benguet, JICA said.

The six pilot projects involve the introduction of high-quality seedlings, the supply of a humidified refrigeration and pre-cooling system, and the optimization of greenhouse cultivation.

These initiatives are expected to improve farmers' production techniques, JICA said.

Other initiatives involve the introduction of plastic crates, linking up modern distribution channels, and the promotion of vegetable consumption.

JICA cited price volatility, high distribution costs, post-harvest losses, and poverty among farmers as recurring issues in Philippine agriculture.

“This underscores the urgent need for a more efficient and modernized vegetable value chain that can provide higher income for farmers, many of whom are still under the poverty line, and promote active participation of the private sector and job creation in this important sector,” JICA said.

JICA and the Department of Agriculture (DA) formally began implementing MV2C-TCP last year, targeting municipalities in Benguet and Quezon.

“Moving forward, the project will develop and disseminate broadly inclusive food value chain models comprising various technologies that were verified through the pilot projects,” JICA said. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/28/597984/jica-da-seeking-to-introduce-japanese-tech-to-philippine-farms/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Marcos in Brunei; deals on tourism, maritime and food security signed

May 28, 2024 | 9:16 pm



PHILIPPINE STAR/KRIZ JOHN ROSALES

THE PHILIPPINES and Brunei have signed deals aimed at bolstering cooperation in the areas of tourism, maritime, and food security, the Palace reported Tuesday, as President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. began his two-day state visit in the neighboring Southeast Asian nation.

Mr. Marcos arrived in Brunei Darussalam before noon and later met with Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah Yang Di-Pertuan.

The two leaders immediately sealed the economic partnerships ahead of Mr. Marcos' scheduled departure for a two-day working visit in Singapore, where defense leaders from dozens of nations are gathering.

In a press release, his office said the Philippines and Brunei signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on maritime cooperation to boost information sharing, skills training, and research.

The two countries also signed a letter of intent "to explore further cooperation and collaboration on the field of agriculture for food security and sustainable agriculture."

They also signed an MoU to "generate cooperative tourism projects and increase tourist arrivals between the two countries."

The tourism deal seeks to boost ties in Islamic tourism and the promotion of Muslim friendly destinations.

The two countries also signed an MoU to allow mutual recognition of national certificates.

Mr. Marcos is set to fly to Singapore on May 30 to deliver a keynote address at the 21st Edition of the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, Asia's premier defense summit.

In his departure speech, he said he would articulate the Philippines' "perspectives and outlook on defense and diplomacy" and highlight his country's "commitment to a rules-based international order and constructive multilateralism" amid geopolitical challenges.

Before leaving Manila, Mr. Marcos' government had to deal with China's unilateral fishing ban in the South China Sea, which Beijing claims almost in its entirety including waters that are well within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone.

Early in May, Beijing approved a policy allowing its coast guard to detain foreigners it suspects of violating its exit-entry rules "in the waters under the jurisdiction of China" for up to 30 days — and in some cases for as long as 60 days — without a trial.

Raymond M. Powell, a fellow at the Gordian Knot Center for National Security Innovation at US-based Stanford University, said in an X message: Mr. Marcos should raise concerns over the new China regulation, which will take effect next month, at the security dialogue.

"My visit to Singapore is part of the series of high-level exchanges between the Philippines and Singapore which began at the start of the year," Mr. Marcos said, noting the need to renew ties with Singapore after Lawrence Wong was sworn in on May 15 as its new prime minister.

Mr. Marcos said he will invite Singapore's president and its new prime minister to visit the Philippines "as a testament to our strengthening bonds." — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/the-nation/2024/05/28/598054/marcos-in-brunei-deals-on-tourism-maritime-and-food-security-signed/>

MANILA STANDARD

Marcos orders intensified response, efforts to aid Aghon-hit Filipinos

By Charles Dantes

May 29, 2024, 12:20 am

Typhoon Aghon took the lives of six (6) people, said Edgar Posadas, the spokesperson for the Office of Civil Defense (OCD), on Tuesday.

Based on OCD's report, however, only one of the six fatalities have been verified as of press time.

According to PAGASA's 5 p.m. update on Monday, five provinces remained under Tropical Cyclone Wind Signal No. 1 as Aghon moved northeastward from Luzon.

These are: Quirino, Nueva Vizcaya, Isabela, Aurora, Quezon including Polillo Islands, and Camarines Norte.

At around 4 p.m. the estimated location of the eye of the storm was 155 kms east southeast of Casiguran, Aurora. It packed maximum sustained winds of 140 kms per hour near the center.

The PAGASA report pegged the storm's gustiness up to 170 kms per hour, with central pressure of 965 hPa.

Aghon is generally moving northeastward over the Philippine Sea and will be leaving the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR) by Wednesday afternoon or evening.

In response to the typhoon on Tuesday, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ordered a whole-of-government response to aid recovery efforts following Typhoon Aghon, before departing to visit Brunei Darussalam and Singapore this week.

In his departure speech, the President instructed the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Agriculture (DA), and Department of Health (DOH) to provide comprehensive assistance and medical support to affected areas.

He also gave the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and Department of Transportation (DOTr) the task of rapidly restoring infrastructure and transportation facilities damaged by the storm.

Citing official government data, Mr. Marcos said Calabarzon, Bicol, Western, Central and Eastern Visayas regions were struck, with at least 12,043 families or 26,726 individuals affected. Also, three airports and 29 seaports became non-operational due to the typhoon.

The DSWD has distributed P1.35 million in aid, with P607.9 million on standby.

The Chief Executive also highlighted the preparation of 841 search and rescue teams, 465 transportation assets, and 436 emergency telecommunications units.

“Before the typhoon even arrived, we already placed relief goods near the expected path of the typhoon so they are all ready when it hits,” Mr. Marcos said.

“So, as soon as our forces, our DSWD, our Coast Guard, our search and rescue teams get in, all our assets can enter immediately because we were prepared since the typhoon arrived,” the President added.

Editor’s Note: This is an updated article. Originally posted with the headline “old headline.”

<https://www.manilastandard.net/news/top-stories/314452183/marcos-orders-intensified-response-efforts-to-aid-typhoon-hit-philippines.html>

MANILA STANDARD

PH rejects China's 'illegal' four-month SCS fishing ban

By Rey E. Requejo, Maricel Cruz & Vince Lopez

May 28, 2024, 1:00 am

The Philippines on Monday rejected China's imposition of a unilateral, four-month fishing moratorium in the South China Sea that includes Philippine maritime zones.

The Department of the Foreign Affairs said Beijing's move heightens tension between the Philippines and China.

China's latest fishing ban, which is set to last until Sept. 16, "directly contravenes" the understanding reached by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Chinese President Xi Jinping during their bilateral discussion last year.

Beijing's action came amid China's continued harassment against Filipino troops and fishers in the West Philippines Sea, which includes conducting dangerous maneuvers and firing multiple times water cannon on resupply and humanitarian missions, among others.

The DFA called on China to cease and desist "from the conduct of illegal actions that violates the Philippines' sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction in its maritime zones."

It also urged Beijing to comply with its obligations under international law, particularly the 1982 UNCLOS and the final and binding 2016 arbitral award, as well as adhere to its commitments under the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.

The Foreign Affairs Department reasserted Paragraph 716 of the 2016 arbitral award which already ruled that China's fishing moratorium is against international law.

Meanwhile, leaders of the House of Representatives vowed to create an inter-agency panel to look into the grievances raised by Zambales fisherfolk as well as the possible solutions suggested by stakeholders in the West Philippine Sea.

Senior Deputy Speaker Aurelio Gonzales Jr. said Congress will definitely take note of what transpired in the joint hearing of the House Committees on National Defense and Security and the Special Committee on the West Philippine Sea.

“The budget season is almost here. We have heard those of our fisherfolks. So rest assured that we will form an inter-agency [panel] to have an answer to this request and their feelings,” he said.

Iloilo Rep. Raul Tupas, vice-chairperson of the House Committee on National Defense and Security, said the problems faced by Zambales fishermen from the aggressions of China in Philippine territory may require a multisectoral or inter-agency approach.

“This issue is complex, this problem is complex. So we need the help of many government agencies,” he said.

Zambales Rep. Jefferson Khonghun said the House of Representatives will exercise its oversight functions to validate the grievances of the Zambales fishermen.

The Atin Ito coalition, for its part, said they will launch an “Adopt-a-Payao” campaign in response to the ongoing challenges faced by Filipino fisherfolk in the West Philippine Sea, particularly in Subic, Bataan, and Masinloc.

The initiative aims to provide much-needed assistance to local fishing communities by deploying “payaos” or fish-aggregating devices, to help sustain their livelihoods amid illegal Chinese presence and harassment in the area.

Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement president and Atin Ito co-convenor Edicio Dela Torre said the continuous encroachment of China in the West Philippine Sea has significantly affected the livelihoods of Filipino fishers, hindering their ability to fish freely in their own waters.

“These fishers have fought bravely for our sovereign rights in the West Philippine Sea. Now, it is our turn to stand by them and provide the support they urgently need,” Dela Torre said.

Akbayan President Rafaela David, also an Atin Ito co-convenor, said the “Adopt-a-Payao” campaign seeks to empower Filipino fishing communities and stand in solidarity with them against foreign aggression in the West Philippine Sea.

“Each payao deployed is not just a means of supporting our fishers but also an act of patriotism, a symbol of solidarity for our fellow Filipinos, and a firm stance against China’s unlawful actions in the West Philippine Sea,” David said.

A payao is a traditional fishing device from the Philippines designed to aggregate or lure fish. It typically consists of an anchored floating or submerged structure made of materials such as bamboo, steel, or other available resources.

Editor's Note: This is an updated article. Originally posted with the headline Philippines protests China's unilateral 4-month fishing ban

<https://www.manilastandard.net/news/314451767/philippines-protests-chinas-unilateral-4-month-fishing-ban.html>

MANILA STANDARD

LandBank releases P2.5-b loans to El Niño-affected rice famers

By Othel V. Campos

May 28, 2024, 8:10 pm

State-run Land Bank of the Philippines said it released P2.5 billion in loans through the Expanded Rice Credit Assistance under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (ERCA-RCEF) to farmers as of April 2024 amid the challenges posed by the El Niño phenomenon.

LandBank said that in partnership with the Department of Agriculture (DA), it fully disbursed the P500-million annual allocation under ERCA-RCEF from 2019 to 2023.

The program offers affordable loans with minimal documentation for rice farmers and cooperatives.

“LandBank’s support to the agriculture sector is crucial to ensuring food security in the country. We are committed to providing continued financial assistance to our rice farmers to help them sustain their operations and improve productivity, especially in the face of challenges including the El Niño phenomenon,” said LandBank president and chief executive Lynette Ortiz.

The P2.5-billion loans benefitted over 15,400 individual rice farmers and 270 cooperatives, impacting more than 21,300 beneficiaries, the lender said.

It said the loans supported various aspects of rice production including milling, trading, re-lending and acquiring farm machinery. About 98 percent of LandBank’s direct borrowers under this program are individual rice farmers.

<https://www.manilastandard.net/business/314452451/landbank-releases-p2-5-b-loans-to-el-nino-affected-rice-famers.html>

MANILA STANDARD

Villar pushes dev't of livestock, dairy, poultry industries

By Macon Ramos-Araneta

May 28, 2024, 10:40 pm

SENATOR Cynthia Villar pushes the development of the livestock, poultry and dairy industry in a bid to ensure national food sufficiency, .

“These industries account for more than a quarter of agricultural output in 2023,” said Villar, chairperson ng Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food.

About 29.8 percent of Filipino protein consumption come from pork and chicken.

Villar also warned of protein deficiency and malnutrition if Filipinos are no longer capable of buying these products due to high cost.

“The hog sector in the country is still struggling against the African Swine Fever (ASF) outbreak since 2019 and needs to bounce back to support small hog raisers and commercial farms,” Villar said.

The ASF was blamed for the P100-billion losses in the agriculture sector.

The senator also said the hog sector in the country was still struggling against the ASF outbreak since 2019. It needs to bounce back to support small hog raisers and commercial farms.

He also cited the need for the poultry sector to have sustainable inputs like feeds and medicines against pests and diseases for a more efficient production system.

“Imported milk in the country accounts for 99 percent of supply which makes milk unavailable and unaffordable to our growing population,” said the senator.

She further stated that milk production is struggling and needs a boost to be able to meet address local demand, especially on the milk feeding programs in schools and the growing population.

The poultry sector also needs sustainable inputs such as feeds, medicines against pest and diseases and more efficient production systems.

For the longest time, the LPD (livestock, poultry, and dairy) sector has been left to be run by the private sector, now with this Act, the government will actively support and participate in the development of the sector.

Villar hopes the Livestock, Poultry and Dairy Industries will be competitive once Senate Bill No. 2558 or “An Act Strengthening the Livestock, Poultry and Dairy Development and Competitiveness, Rationalizing the Organization and Functions of Relevant Government Agencies, Creating an Competitiveness Enhancement is passed into law.

One of the salient features of this law is the creation of the Livestock, Poultry and Dairy Competitiveness Enhancement Fund from tariff collected on imported LPD products which shall consist of P7.8billion annually for the next 10 years. This fund is over and above the regular funding under the National Livestock program of the DA in the General Appropriations Act.

<https://www.manilastandard.net/news/314452608/villar-pushes-devt-of-livestock-dairy-poultry-industries.html>

Marcos assures govt aid to victims of Aghon

By Kristina Maralit

May 29, 2024

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Tuesday assured continued government assistance for the victims of Typhoon Aghon.

The Chief Executive gave the guarantee prior to his departure for his state visit to Brunei, which will be followed by a working visit to Singapore.

"I have ordered the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health to give assistance to all victims of Typhoon Aghon," he said.

"At present, Regions 4 (Calabarzon), 5 (Bicol), 6 (Western Visayas), 7 (Central Visayas) and 8 (Eastern Visayas) were hit, and 12,043 families, 26,726 persons were affected, while three airports and 29 seaports became nonoperational due to the typhoon," he added.



President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. gives an update on the government response to Typhoon 'Aghon' at the Villamor Airbase in Pasay City, on May 28, 2024, before his departure to Brunei for a 2-day state visit. The President will then visit Singapore to address the Institute for Strategic Studies Shangri-La Dialogue 2024. PHOTOS BY MIKE ALQUINTO

Marcos further noted that the Department of Public Works and Highways and the Department of Transportation are now in the thick of repairing damaged infrastructures.

This has paved the way for the DSWD to expand its relief efforts in affected areas.

"Our government forces, the DSWD, Coast Guard, search and rescue, all assets will be able to assist as they have been ready since the entry of the typhoon," the President said.

"We will continue to work and will not stop until we are able to help out all those affected, to all the victims affected by Aghon," he added.

A total of P607.9 million in recovery assistance are also ready for distribution, he said.

The government has readied 841 search and rescue retrieval teams from the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Philippine Coast Guard and Bureau of Fire Protection, while additional 465 transportation assets will be deployed in addition to 436 emergency telecommunications equipment to be used for relief efforts.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/29/regions/marcos-assures-govt-aid-to-victims-of-aghon/1948911>

Finance chief eyes rice tariff reduction

By Niña Myka Pauline Arceo and Janine Alexis Miguel

May 29, 2024

RICE tariffs could be further lowered to address rising prices of the staple and help ease inflation, Finance Secretary Ralph Recto said.

"You have to strike a balance between the farmers and the consumers," he told reporters on Monday at the sidelines of the Philippine Economic Briefing.

"It's better if it favors both sides ... [it] could be 20 percent."

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in December approved an extension of lower tariffs on rice, pork and corn to the end of this year as the country continues to grapple with inflation.

The most favored nation rate for rice currently stands at 35 percent.

Recto said that Marcos could issue a new executive order while Congress is on a break or decide on another extension of the existing directive.

"But I leave that to the Secretary of Agriculture. He should first discuss it with his constituencies, right? There needs to be a hearing for that," he added.

The Finance chief also reiterated his view that rice inflation — primary driver of the ongoing rise in consumer price growth — would decline moving forward given increased output and lower tariffs.

Inflation, earlier expected to top 4.0 percent in the second quarter, was a lower-than-expected 3.8 percent in April. Data for May will be released next week.

Asked to comment, Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. chief economist Michael Ricafort said that lowering tariffs would make rice imports cheaper and, hence, help ease overall inflation.

He warned, however, that it would also "lower farmgate prices for palay (unmilled rice) farmers due to greater competition from cheaper rice imports."

Agriculture Department officials were not immediately available for comment. The Federation of Free Farmers (FFF), however, said the move would make the country more dependent on rice imports.

"If the tariff is brought down further, there is no assurance that rice prices will go down proportionately, because experience shows that the importers, middlemen and retailers just pocket the savings," FFF national manager Raul Montemayor said.

Rice imports are already being underdeclared in value, he claimed, and lower tariffs will allow importers to again "get away with it."

"[As] our experience with RTL (Rice Tariffication Law) has shown, allowing cheaper imports does not bring down prices for consumers, penalizes farmers and benefits only the people in between," Montemayor continued.

He also said that lower tariffs would mean money for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund established under the RTL.

"This will further discourage our farmers from expanding their production and make the country even more dependent on imports," Montemayor said.

The FFF urged the government to focus on addressing issues related to middlemen "and not give them more incentives such as lower tariffs so that they can make even more money."

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/29/business/top-business/finance-chief-eyes-rice-tariff-reduction/1948891>

Sugar millers nix imports, cite surplus in production

By Janine Alexis Miguel

May 29, 2024

THE Philippine Sugar Millers' Association Inc. (PSMA) sees no need to import sugar, as the country is experiencing a surplus in the production of the commodity that can last until the end of the crop year.

"The country has an abundant supply of sugar this year. Our increased production has filled our warehouses, so there is no need to import at this time," Jesus Barrera, PSMA executive director, said in a statement on Tuesday.

Barrera made the statement following the announcement by the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) that it was planning to import raw sugar for buffer stocking and to prevent supply shortages and price spikes.

SRA said the volume of sugar to be imported could range from 185,000 metric tons (MT) to 200,000 MT, as endorsed by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

Citing government data, raw sugar production reached 1.921 million MT as of May 12, higher than last year's same-period output of 1.799 million MT. Likewise, refined sugar production went up to 687,823 MT from the previous crop year's 624,389 MT.

In comparison to last year's stock levels, inventory of raw and refined sugar increased by 26 percent and 35 percent, respectively, and totaled 1.15 million MT in raw equivalent.

The PSMA, meanwhile, said that included in the total inventory was imported refined sugar with an equivalent volume of 135,675 MT purchased last year and unused.

"Even with sugar milling already closed for the season, we are confident that our current sugar inventories will last beyond the start of the next crop year, which is estimated to be on October 1, 2024," Barrera said.

"However, we will continue monitoring the impact of El Nino on the supply levels in the upcoming 2024-2025 harvest," he added.

The SRA earlier said it identified a trigger point on stock levels that would be the basis of the activation of its importation plan.

For its part, PSMA said that sugar demand fell this season, with withdrawals of domestic raw sugar decreasing by 4.23 percent and local refined sugar by 7.20 percent. Meanwhile, withdrawals of imported refined sugar rose by 16 percent.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/29/business/top-business/sugar-millers-nix-imports-cite-surplus-in-production/1948888>

LandBank loans to farmers hit P2.5B

By Janine Alexis Miguel

May 29, 2024

STATE-RUN Land Bank of the Philippines (LandBank) has released P2.5 billion in loans to rice farmers and cooperatives as part of its effort to boost domestic production of the staple.

In a statement on Tuesday, LandBank President and Chief Executive Officer Lynette Ortiz said that they remain aggressive in extending financial support to rice farmers and cooperatives amid the impact of the El Niño weather phenomenon.

Under the Expanded Rice Credit Assistance of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (ERCA-RCEF), the loans from LandBank benefitted over 15,400 individual rice farmers and 270 cooperatives with more than 21,300 member-beneficiaries as of April 30, 2024.

Ortiz said that LandBank's support to the agriculture sector plays an important role in ensuring the country's food security.

"We are committed to providing continued financial assistance to our rice farmers to help them sustain their operations and improve productivity, especially in the face of challenges including the El Niño phenomenon," she said.

Under the ERCA-RCEF program, implemented in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, P500 million is allocated annually from 2019 to 2023. LandBank, meanwhile, ensures that loans are accessible to farmers and cooperatives through affordable interest rates and lesser documentary requirements.

LandBank said that 98 percent of their direct borrowers are individual rice farmers. Also, individuals and groups who acquired

loans use them to support palay (unmilled rice) production, milling and trading, re-lending, and purchase of farm machinery.

Most of the farmers who availed the loans were from the rice-producing provinces of Cagayan Valley, with 4,945 borrowers from Cagayan, Nueva Vizcaya, and Quirino. Loans released for this region alone totaled P612.4 million, according to LandBank.

Central Luzon followed with 2,243 borrowers with a corresponding amount of P840.3 million in total loans.

The state-run bank also extended loans to rice farmers in the provinces of Capiz, Leyte, Agusan del Sur, Bukidnon, North Cotabato, and Zamboanga del Sur.

LandBank has a presence in all 82 provinces in the Philippines and provides accessible financing to drive the agriculture sector's productivity and competitiveness.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/29/business/top-business/landbank-loans-to-farmers-hit-p25b/1948885>

DOF backs tariff cut on rice

By **Angela Celis**

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May 29, 2024

Finance Secretary Ralph Recto is in favor of lowering the tariff rate for rice imports.

Recto told reporters that the rate could be reduced from the current 35 percent, to support the expected reduction in rice prices by September.

“You have to strike a balance between the farmers and the consumers... 17.5 percent, could be 20 percent, right?” Recto said.

“I leave that to the Secretary of Agriculture, to discuss with his constituencies. A hearing is needed for that. But there are about three million farmers and 115 million consumers, or 112 million, so there should be a good balance,” he added.

Recto said while it is assumed that the lower rice tariffs would be implemented until the end of this year, it could still be extended based on its impact.

“We want it lower, right? As much as possible, not only up to the end of the year. But, possible, the executive order will be only up to the end of the year,” Recto said.

“And then, let’s take a look. If we need to extend it, then we can extend it, right? But what’s important is to reduce the prices of rice. That’s what our countrymen are asking for,” he added.

Recto said during the Philippine Economic Briefing last Monday that rice prices are expected to go down by 20 percent by September.

This would entail an increase in production and a reduction in tariffs, the finance chief said.

https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/dof-backs-tariff-cut-on-rice/

Who imposes a fishing ban?

By Malaya Business Insight

May 29, 2024

THE sea and its bounty is for the whole of mankind to share. That has been the unwritten rule since time immemorial, and it went unchallenged for hundreds of years in all villages and areas encircling any vast sea, in our part of the globe, the South China Sea. Until states and kingdoms were invented, along with social systems, sovereignty and the concomitant territorial boundaries. This led to the proclamation of rules and procedures between rulers and their subjects, and among neighboring royalties.

In the present world, the same sovereign power system holds, and rules are made by whoever has effective control over an area. As presidential legal adviser Juan Ponce Enrile once said, a territory is yours only if you can defend it. The country which holds political power over a geographical area makes the rules, and always trumpets the need for all the world to observe a rules-based behavior.

'... the very acceptable issue of a fishing moratorium in answer to environmental concerns has metamorphosed into a geopolitical problem.'

We take the current fishing ban or moratorium imposed by China in certain parts of the South China Sea, parts of which are of course being disputed by the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia and Taiwan.

An annual moratorium on fishing in these seas is acceptable among countries by any standards. Overfishing has been recognized as a serious problem in Europe as it is in Asia and the Americas. The waters of the oceans and sea have to be given time to rejuvenate. Overfishing is so insidious that if left unchecked, it will threaten the survival of much of marine life and ultimately, the livelihood of thousands of fishermen in the world, including the Philippines.

It cannot be gainsaid that catching too many fish at once, making the breeding population too depleted to recover, is the exact formula for maritime perdition.

In the case of the Philippines, overfishing has been verified as the principal cause of the dwindling population of whale sharks and other species.

The Philippine government imposes a fishing moratorium in the Visayan Sea every year to counter the severe decline in fish population attributed to the persistent issue of overfishing. The three-month ban on fishing is usually from November to February. The

Visayan Sea is a major fishing ground for sardines, mackerel and herring in the Philippines. The sea covers an area roughly 10,000 sq km with 22 municipalities along its coastlines.

The government supports the idea of a fishing moratorium on environmental grounds. However, the fishing ban this time is being imposed by the Chinese government, and it includes areas claimed by the Philippines.

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) is therefore correct in filing a diplomatic protest over China's unilateral imposition of a four-month-long fishing moratorium in parts of the South China Sea, saying the move violates international laws and raises tension in the disputed waters.

Just like in the Visayan Sea, it should be the government of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. which should be imposing a fishing ban, if it is convinced that such a ban is warranted.

The DFA said China's unilateral imposition of the fishing moratorium also raises tensions in the West Philippine Sea, and directly contravenes the understanding between President Marcos Jr. and Chinese President Xi Jinping to manage differences through diplomacy and dialogue and to de-escalate the situation at sea.

The DFA has filed over 150 diplomatic protests against China over its aggressive actions at sea under the administration of President Marcos. Last year, the DFA lodged 66 diplomatic protests against Beijing, 20 of which have been filed since January.

Thus, the very acceptable issue of a fishing moratorium in answer to environmental concerns has metamorphosed into a geopolitical problem. With China not expected to budge, the DFA may well count its latest diplomatic protest a number added to the list.

https://malaya.com.ph/news_opinion/who-imposes-a-fishing-ban/

Rising coffee consumption: A path to reclaiming coffee export powerhouse status

BusinessMirror Editorial

May 29, 2024

Coffee is one of the world's most popular beverages. According to the International Coffee Organization, consumption of coffee is increasing even in countries where tea is the beverage of choice. In a report published by ICO in April 2023, it noted that China and Japan were among the countries in Asia and the Pacific that recorded increases in coffee consumption in 2022.

The Philippines is one of the countries in Asia and the Pacific that has seen an exponential rise in coffee drinking. In a statement it released in 2017, the Philippine Coffee Board Inc. noted that consumption was equivalent to only 75,000 metric tons (MT) of beans in 2002. This rose to 170,000 MT in 2017, or more than double the volume recorded 15 years ago.

The jump in demand for coffee necessitated the purchase of beans from other countries, such as Vietnam, where the Philippines has been sourcing a chunk of its bean requirements. For years, farmers from Vietnam and other countries benefited from the steady rise in demand for coffee in the Philippines. And this went on for decades, even though coffee is one of the commodities that can be grown in the Philippines.

Foreign farmers are earning some P7 billion from coffee that the Philippines imports annually. In the last two decades, overseas farmers and traders may have earned some P140 billion from the country's purchases of imported beans. While the importation brought in revenues to the government's coffers in the form of tariffs, these resources were not invested in the development of the coffee sector.

Unfortunately, the challenges posed by the climate crisis are now making it more difficult for the world's traditional sources of coffee to keep up with rising demand. In a Bloomberg report published on May 23, Volcafe said it sees an "unprecedented" fourth year of deficits for robusta beans used in instant coffee as

top producer Vietnam continues to face dry weather. The company, considered one of the world's top coffee traders, noted that poor rainfall in Vietnam has caused "irreversible damage" to coffee blossoms, while lower fertilizer use and the expansion of durian trees at the expense of coffee acreage have also affected output.

Because of the shortage, robusta rallied this year, with futures traded in London surging to a fresh intraday high above \$4,300 in late April, according to the Bloomberg report. In a report it published last year, ICO said the average price of robusta hit a 25-year high of 135.47 US cents per pound in December. Countries like the Philippines would have to step up their production if they intend to reduce their reliance on expensive imports and join the ranks of coffee exporters.

Reclaiming the country's previous status as a coffee exporter may be a tall order, but this is not an impossible dream. (See, "*Nescafe program raised coffee output of PHL farmers,*" in *the BusinessMirror*, May 27, 2024). It would do well for the government to buckle down and collaborate with the private sector if it is serious about achieving its goal of turning the Philippines into an export powerhouse by 2028. Commodities, such as coffee, offer opportunities that will allow the Marcos administration to realize its dream of wiping out the country's huge agricultural trade deficit in four years.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/29/rising-coffee-consumption-a-path-to-reclaiming-coffee-export-powerhouse-status/>

MEATING STANDARDS

May 29, 2024



Department of Agriculture Undersecretary DV Savellano, along with the DA's Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service (AMAS), inspected various meat products at a supermarket in Muñoz, Quezon City, on Tuesday, May 28, 2024.

The inspection aimed to assure the public that there is a sufficient, safe, and affordable supply of meat products in the market.

NONOY LACZA

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/29/meating-standards/>

ABANTE TONITE

Ratipikasyon sa Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, pag-asa ng magsasakang Pinoy

May 29, 2024

Nagkakaisang nagpasalamat ang mga magsasakang Pilipino matapos ratipikan ng Kongreso at Senado ang Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act noong Miyerkules, Mayo 22.

Sinabi ni AGAP Party-list Rep. Nicanor Briones, na siyang may akda sa Anti- Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, na lagda na lang ni Pangulong Ferdinand ‘Bongbong’ Marcos, Jr. ang hinihintay at magiging ganap na itong batas.

Umaasa na matatapos na ang paghihirap ng mga magsasakang Pilipino at consumers sanhi ng cartel, smuggling at iba pang katiwalian.

Layunin ng bagong batas na ipawalang-bisa ang Republic Act No. 10845, o ang “Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act,” at magpataw ng matinding parusa para sa smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, at pagbuo ng mga kartel ng mga produktong pang-agrikultura at pangisdaan.

Mapapangalagaan ng bagong batas ang estado mula sa mga economic saboteurs at mapoprotektahan ang kabuhayan ng mga magsasakang Pilipino.

“Ito ang sinabi natin na kahit anong gawing batas, ayuda, pondo ibigay sa magsasaka walang mangyayari kung patuloy na pagsasamatalahan ng smugglers, hoarders, cartel at profitters,” ani Briones.

“At sa ating bill isinasaad ang pagkakaroon ng National Council under the office of the President na kasama sa council ang pitong sector ng magsasaka, may enforcement group na NBI, PNP at Coast Guard. May special prosecutors, at lifetime imprisonment ang parusa, 3x ang multa at nonbailable ito. Pwede rin mag-file ng kaso ang private citizen. Merong rewards sa tipster o whistle blower mula P1M hanggang P20M o 20% whichever is higher.” dagdag ng mambabatas.

Binigyan diin pa nito na hindi maaaring isama ang Bureau of Customs (BOC) dahil walang saysay ang batas na ito tulad sa Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act, dahil may mga probisyon ito na pabor sa mga smuggler, hoarder, profiteer, at cartel kung saan ang customs ang nangunguna sa nasabing batas.

Walang saysay aniya ang utos ni PBBM na habulin at panagutin ang mga sangkot sa smuggling ng agricultural products sa bansa kung nariyan pa rin sa council ng bagong batas ang BOC, at walang nasasampolan na sampahan ng kaso.(Mina Navarro)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2024/05/29/ratipikasyon-sa-anti-agricultural-economic-sabotage-act-pag-asa-ng-magsasakang-pinoy/>

REMATE:

Presyo ng bigas bababa ng 20 porsiyento sa Setyembre – Finance chief

May 28, 2024 07:39



MANILA — Inaasahang bababa ng 20 porsiyento ang presyo ng bigas sa Pilipinas sa Setyembre, sinabi ni Finance Secretary Ralph Recto nitong Lunes.

“Inaasahan naming bababa ng 20 porsiyento ang presyo ng bigas sa Setyembre. This would entail an increase in production and reduction in tariffs,” anang Finance chief sa Philippine Economic Briefing sa Pasay.

Samantala, sinabi ni Socioeconomic Secretary Arsenio Balisacan na inaasahang bababa ang presyo ng staple grain sa mga susunod na buwan alinsunod sa global trend.

“Ang mga presyo sa mundo ay inaasahang bababa sa Setyembre sa taong ito kaya inaasahan namin na ang inflationary pressure sa bigas ay magsisimulang bumaba sa pagtatapos ng taon,” sabi niya, na binanggit na ang supply mula sa pandaigdigang merkado ay inaasahang bababa dahil sa paghupa ng El Niño phenomenon.

Sa unang bahagi ng buwang ito, sinabi ng Department of Agriculture ng Estados Unidos na ang Pilipinas — isang bansang may malawak na palayan — ay muling namumurong maging nangungunang importer ng bigas sa mundo sa 2025.

Inaasahang mag-aangkat ang Pilipinas ng humigit-kumulang 4.2 milyong metriko tonelada (MT) ng bigas sa susunod na taon, na higit sa kalahati ng 1.5 milyong MT na nakatakdang i-import ng Indonesia, ang pinakamalaking ekonomiya ng Southeast Asia, ipinakita ng data mula sa USDA. *RNT*

<https://remate.ph/presyo-ng-bigas-bababa-ng-20-porsyento-sa-setyembre-finance-chief/>

REMATE:

Imbak na bigas ng Pinas titriplehin ng NFA

May 28, 2024 08:57



MANILA, Philippines – Iniulat ng National Food Authority (NFA) na patataasin nila at gagawing triple ang dami ng rice buffer stock sa pamamagitan ng bagong pricing scheme.

Sa isang panayam, sinabi ni NFA officer-in-charge Administrator Larry Lacson na ang mga bodega ng NFA ay nakakuha ng 2.8 milyong sako ng palay na may mas mataas na buying price range na nasa P17 hanggang P23 kada kilo ng sariwa o basang palay; at P23 hanggang P30/kg ng malinis at tuyong palay.

“Naging 126,000 MT (metric ton) of milled rice equivalent ang stocks natin. So more than triple ito doon sa dati nating stocks equivalent sa 45,000 MT ng milled rice,” ani Lacson.

Aniya, patuloy pa rin ang pagbili ng palay para masiguro ang 300,000 MT ng rice buffer stock target.

Samantala, sinabi ni Lacson na may sapat na stock ng bigas para sa nagbabantang La Niña phenomenon.

Binanggit ni Lacson ang naunang supply na ibinigay sa Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) at Office of the Civil Defense (OCD), gayundin ang pagkakaroon ng bigas sa pribadong sektor at mga kabahayan.

“Tingin ko hindi tayo dapat kabahan. Unang-una, mayroon kaming stocks na na-triple. So pag kailangan pa ng DSWD, OCD, makakapagbigay po tayo,” aniya pa.

Nakikipag-ugnayan din ang NFA sa Department of Agriculture (DA), Philippine Center for Post-harvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech), pribadong sektor, at mga non-profit na organisasyon, bukod sa iba pa, para makakuha ng mga drying facility para sa ang tag-araw na panahon ng ani.

Hinikayat din ni Lacson ang mga kooperatiba ng mga magsasaka na makakuha ng kontrata sa NFA para sa mga drying facility. *Santi Celario*

<https://remate.ph/imbak-na-bigas-ng-pinas-titriplehin-ng-nfa/>