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MANILA BULLETIN:

DA confirms hack on its attached agency; says hacker gained no sensitive data

BY JEL SANTOS

Jun 13, 2024 05:34 PM



The Department of Agriculture (DA) on Thursday, June 13, confirmed that the website of its attached agency, Agricultural Credit Policy Council (ACPC), was hacked on June 9.

Earlier, the Manila Bulletin reported that the hacking group Ph1ns gained unauthorized access to the ACPC's internal systems. This group was also responsible for various hack attacks on government agencies, notably the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and the Philippine National Police (PNP).

Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa, the spokesperson of the DA, said the ACPC assured them that no sensitive information was obtained by the hacking group.

“Inasura kami ng ACPC na lahat ng mga kliyente at ng mga data nila remains secured. Nangyari ‘yung unauthorized access noong June 9 (The ACPC assured us that all clients and their data remain secured. The unauthorized access occurred on June 9),” he said during a phone interview.

“Walang sensitive information [na nakuha]. Na-secure naman. Secured lahat ng information (No sensitive information was taken. Everything has been secured. All information is secure),” the spokesperson stressed.

Necessary measures, according to De Mesa, were taken to protect the ACPC system and fix the security standard protocol after the breach.

“So wala namang data na na-compromise (So no data was compromised),” he added.

The DA has directed its Information and Communications Technology Service (ICTS) to support the department's agencies in protecting their websites from potential hacking attempts.

“Una, binigyan ng instruction ‘yung ICTS na tulungan ‘yung mga agency within the Department na ma-protektahan laban sa mga hacker (First, instructions were given to the ICTS to help the agencies within the Department protect themselves against hackers),” said De Mesa.

The DA has 16 regional offices; nine bureaus; eight attached agencies; nine attached corporations; and nine foreign agriculture service corporations.

The ACPC was established in 1986 under Executive Order 113 to aid the DA by coordinating all credit policies and programs aligned with the DA’s priority initiatives.

Its responsibilities included reviewing and evaluating the economic viability of all current and proposed agricultural credit programs, regardless of their funding sources.

As such, the ACPC was tasked with implementing measures to increase its funding base and introducing mechanisms for liquidity, interest stabilization, and risk coverage for its financing programs.

In 1987, through Executive Order 116, the ACPC became an attached agency of the agriculture department.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/6/13/da-confirms-hack-on-its-attached-agency-claims-hacker-gained-no-sensitive-data>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Marcos appoints new set of government officials

BY BETHEENA UNITE

Jun 13, 2024 01:13 PM

President Marcos has appointed a new set of government officials in various agencies.



President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. (Photo courtesy of Malacañang)

The Presidential Communications Office (PCO) announced on Thursday, June 13, that Raymond Balatbat was tapped to be the country's ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with concurrent jurisdiction over Yemen.

Balatbat's nomination for the position was first reported on June 9.

Marcos also designated Paolo Teston as assistant secretary of the Department of Health (DOH) and Avenilo Aventura Jr. as executive director of the Philippine Heart Center.

The President also appointed Raymond Anthony Dilag as commissioner at the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG).

He also named Anthony Castelo as vice chairman, chief operating officer and Board of Directors member of the Bataan Shipyard and Engineering Co. Inc. under the PCGG.

Francisco Rivera was also appointed as the chairman of the Games and Amusement Board (GAB) under the Office of the President (OP), Jesus Leonardo Auxilio as executive director

of the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency's (NICA) National Maritime Aerial Reconnaissance and Surveillance Center, and Kaye Tinga as president and chief executive officer of the Board of Trustees of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP).

Other appointments were made in various agencies and offices such as the Department of Justice (DOJ)-Board of Pardons and Parole, Bureau of Immigration (BI), Department of Information and Communications Technology-National Privacy Commission (DICT-NPC), Department of Labor and Employment's (DOLE) National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC) and National Wages and Productivity Commission (NWPC).

More appointees were at the Philippine Commission on Women of the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Civil Aeronautics Board of the Department of Transportation (DOTr), Philippine Creative Industries Development Council, Career Executive Service Board, Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), Department of Agriculture (DA), Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO), Department of Budget and Management (DBM), and CCP.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/6/13/marcos-appoints-new-set-of-government-officials-1>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Solon tells rice tariff cut critics: 'Give the government options'

BY ELLSON QUISMORIO

Jun 13, 2024 12:47 PM

AT A GLANCE

- Camarines Sur 2nd district Rep. LRay Villafuerte has challenged those opposing the Palace-ordered 20 percent tariff rate reduction on rice imports to put forward better options in the bid to reduce retail prices of rice.



Camarines Sur 2nd district Rep. LRay Villafuerte (Facebook)

Camarines Sur 2nd district Rep. LRay Villafuerte has challenged those opposing the Palace-ordered 20 percent tariff rate reduction on rice imports to put forward better options in the bid to reduce retail prices of rice.

Villafuerte noted that the advocacy groups that intend to take legal action to block the proposed tariff reduction from the current 35 percent to just 15 percent, “seem to forget that our farmers themselves will benefit from lower rice prices because they, too, are heavy consumers of this food staple”.

President Marcos is expected to release an executive order (EO) soon regarding the tariff cut, which is seen as part of the administration's effort to pull down rice prices to at least P29 per kilo.

Villafuerte says the groups planning to block the proposed EO should not just oppose the proposal, "but must present a doable and immediate option to slash market prices of rice without having to reduce import tariffs".

"I understand that these groups are objecting to the planned EO on fears that any rate cut would make smaller the earmarked RCEF funds for the rice subsector, but they actually have no reason to worry about because future collections from import tariffs are not expected to fall below the annual outlay of P10 billion for RCEF," he said.

RCEF stands for Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund.

Villafuerte said that on top of the RCEF budget, President Marcos has committed to raise public spending on intervention programs to raise palay (unhusked rice) productivity and lift farmers from poverty.

In fact, the Department of Agriculture (DA) is proposing to more than double its annual budget to over P500 billion for 2025—of which P294 billion will be set aside for the palay subsector.

"And I am inclined to support in the Congress that proposed budget hike," said the Bicolano.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/6/13/solon-tells-rice-tariff-cut-critics-give-the-government-options>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Parada ng Kalayaan draws 30,000 crowd at Quirino Grandstand

BY RICHIELYN CANLAS

Jun 13, 2024 08:35 AM

The Manila Police District (MPD) estimated that over 30,000 people were at the Quirino Grandstand in Manila on Wednesday, June 12, to witness "Parada ng Kalayaan 2024," the highlight of this year's Independence Day.





President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos, and their sons Ilocos Norte First District Representative Sandro Marcos, Vinny Marcos, and Simon Marcos attended the Parada ng Kalayaan 2024 during the 126th Independence Day celebration at Burnham Green, Quirino Grandstand, Manila on Wednesday June 12, 2024. The parade featured 21 floats representing different government agencies and various Philippine towns involved in the Philippine Revolution. One of the highlights of the parade is the "Inang Bayan" float, designed by artist Diego Imao. (Photos from Noel B. Pabalate/MANILA BULLETIN)

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., along with First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos and their sons, Ilocos Norte First District Representative Sandro Marcos, Vinny Marcos, and Simon Marcos, attended the event. Also present were Manila City Mayor Honey Lacuna-Pangan and delegates from the local and national governments.

According to the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP), the parade featured 22 beautifully decorated floats from different provinces and national government agencies, showcasing the rich history of the Philippines.

The various floats depicted 11 significant events representing the country's struggle for freedom from colonial rule: the Cry of Candon, Ilocos Sur; the Tres de Abril Revolt, Cebu; the Battle of Alapan, first unfurling of the Philippine flag and Proclamation of Independence; establishment of the Comite Central Filipino; Cinco de Noviembre Revolt and establishment of the Negros Republic; the Cry of Santa Barbara and the establishment of the Federal State of the Visayas, Iloilo; first flag hoisting in Mindanao; the siege of Fort Pilar, Zamboanga; the lowering of the Spanish Flag in Jolo, Sulu; end of the Siege of Baler; and the establishment of the Malolos Congress and the first Philippine Republic.

The parade also featured a procession of the 10 original branches and cabinet departments of the first Philippine Republic: the Department of War and the Navy; the Department of Public Instruction; the Department of Public Works and Communications; the Department of Agriculture, Industry, and Commerce; the Department of the Interior; the Department of Finance; the Department of Foreign Relations; the Supreme Court of Justice; the National Assembly; and the Office of the President of the Philippines.

The highlight of the parade was the "Inang Bayan" float, designed by artist Diego Imao.

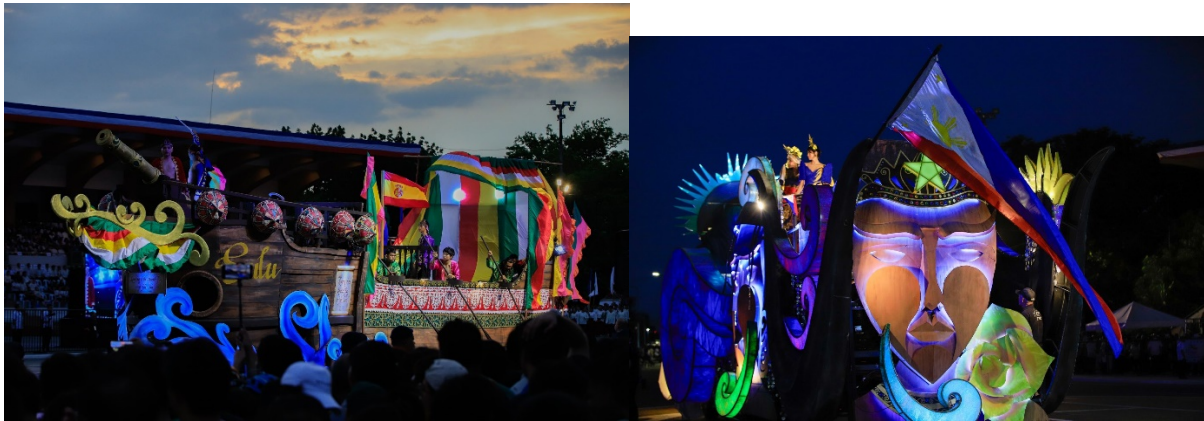
The float represented Inang Bayan herself and her three children: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.

It also depicted the mountains, islands, and other bodies of water in the country and, most importantly, symbolized the flame of revolution for the independence of the Philippines.

A fireworks display followed along with a performance by the Nation's Girl Group, BINI.

Other activities that marked Independence Day included the flag-raising and wreath-laying ceremony led by President Marcos, the Kalayaan Obstacle Course, and Filipino Kusina Warrior Cooking, where participants made their own versions of the Filipino pancit and their best adobo recipes, among others.

The NHCP stated that this year's Independence Day theme is "Kalayaan. Kinabukasan. Kasaysayan," with activities aimed at honoring Filipino heritage anchored in the spirit of freedom and unity.



Photos from Noel B. Pabalate/MANILA BULLETIN

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/6/13/parada-ng-kalayaan-draws-30-000-crowd-at-quirino-grandstand>

MANILA BULLETIN:

OCD: Agriculture damage due to Kanlaon eruption now at P105-B

BY TRIXEE ROSEL

Jun 13, 2024 03:39 PM

The damage caused by the Kanlaon Volcano's eruption to the Philippines' agricultural sector has reached P105 billion, the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) said on Thursday, June 13.

OCD spokesperson Director Edgar Posadas said the damage is equivalent to 3,947.27 metric tons of production.

A total of 1,706 farmers and fisherfolk in Region VI, as well as 1,571 individuals in Region VII, have been affected by the disaster. The crop areas impacted in both regions total 842.33 hectares.

Out of the total area, 625.85 hectares were categorized as having "no chance of recovery" whereas 216.48 hectares were identified as having a "chance to recover" from the inflicted damage.

Meanwhile, affected families were placed at 8,580, equivalent to 29,739 individuals residing in 25 barangays in Regions VI and VII.

Posadas said affected families include those displaced and those not needing transfer or removal from their residence.

The impacted families have been given assistance by the government, totaling P11,346,626 in terms of essential supplies and various commodities.

Mt. Kanlaon experienced a six-minute eruption on June 3, resulting in a 5,000-meter plume. The steam-driven or phreatic explosion took place at the summit vent at 6:51 p.m.

Meanwhile, Posadas stated that the agency remains in a state of "blue alert" to enhance disaster response initiatives in areas affected by the volcanic eruption.

"Ipinahihiwatig nito na ang dagdag na 50 porsiyento ng ating mga manggagawa, kapwa sa virtual at pisikal na anyo, lalo na ang ating mga unipormadong tauhan, ay maaaring i-deploy kaagad kung kinakailangan (This implies that an extra 50 percent of our workforce, both in virtual and physical form, particularly our uniformed personnel, can be promptly deployed if necessary)," he said in a televised media briefing on Thursday.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/6/13/agriculture-damage-due-to-kanlaon-eruption-now-at-p105-b>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Senate open to passing RTL amendments bill, says Romualdez after meeting with Escudero

BY ELLSON QUISMORIO

Jun 13, 2024 03:44 PM

AT A GLANCE

- The Senate is open to passing the House-approved bill that seeks to amend the five-year-old Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), according to House Speaker Martin Romualdez.



(Ellson Quismorio/ MANILA BULLETIN)

The Senate is open to passing the House-approved bill that seeks to amend the five-year-old Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), according to House Speaker Martin Romualdez.

This was one of the main takeaways from the first formal meeting between Romualdez and his Senate counterpart, Senate President Francis "Chiz" Escudero, on Thursday, June 13. The meeting took place at Aguado residence in Malacañang.

Romualdez, in a statement Thursday afternoon, said the proposed amendments to Republic Act (RA) No.11203 was a "key focus of the meeting" and was "identified as a top priority".

It was last May 21 when the Romualdez-led House of Representatives approved House Bill (HB) No.10381, or

the proposed Act seeking to amend the RTL, on third and final reading. The lower chamber has transmitted the measure to the Senate.

A key revision to RTL that's being pursued by House members is the restoration of the National Food Authority's (NFA) power to directly sell relatively cheaper rice to the market. This will pave the way for the return of "NFA rice".

Escudero replaced Senator Juan Miguel Zubiri as Senate President on May 20. Two days later, Congress (House and Senate) adjourned sine die.

The solons won't reconvene in their respective chambers until July 22, the day of President Marcos' third State of the Nation Address (SONA).

Romualdez, Leyte's 1st district representative, said the amendments under HB No.10381 aim to provide quality affordable rice to Filipinos and increase the income of Filipino farmers.

"Amending the [RTL] is a crucial step towards ensuring food security and economic stability for our farmers," underscored the official, also known as "Mr. Rice".

"We are committed to making quality rice affordable for all Filipinos while boosting the livelihoods of our local farmers," he added.

Beyond the RTL issue, Thursday's meeting also allowed the two leaders to review the progress of existing priority legislation and identify next steps to ensure timely approvals.

"The focus remains on the 20 LEDAC (Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council) priority measures targeted for approval by June 2024, with significant advancements already made, including ten measures approved by both Houses, one enacted into law, and several others in various stages of the legislative process," the House leader explained.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/6/13/senate-open-to-passing-rtl-amendments-bill-says-romualdez-after-meeting-with-escudero>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Hungary urged to invest in PH

BY JOSEPH PEDRAJAS

Jun 13, 2024 10:42 PM

Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo on Thursday, June 13, urged Hungary to invest in the Philippines, particularly in the fields of agriculture, information and communications technology (ICT), and digital and water technologies.

In a bilateral talk with Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto, he also urged his counterpart to explore investment possibilities on renewable energy, green metals, electric vehicle manufacturing, and smart and high-tech light manufacturing.

In his remarks, Manalo said he also thanked Hungary for its support for the resumption of a free trade agreement (FTA) between the Philippines and the European Union (EU).

The Philippine diplomat said Manila is confident that Hungary's upcoming presidency of the EU council, the Philippine-EU talks on FTA "will gain further momentum."

"We are optimistic that it will also pave the way for a deeper collaboration between the EU, ASEAN and the Philippines in promoting respect for international law and enhancing joint initiatives in the areas of trade, investment, and climate change," Manalo said.

There are also other areas of partnership that Manalo and Szijjarto discussed during their meeting. Manalo cited the education ties between the two countries, considering that "Hungary is also one of our active partners in higher education."

"The Stipendium Hungaricum Programme has been truly beneficial to the Philippines, annually offering 35 scholarships to Filipinos in such vital fields as natural sciences, agriculture, and public health among others," he said.

As of now, 142 students have already completed the program, according to Manalo.

"We also welcome our active cooperation in Science and Technology, with particular focus on Sustainable Agriculture, Info-communication Technology, and Quantum Technology," he said.

"Hungary has a rich history in the field of science and technology, and we hope to tap into that vast wealth of knowledge and expertise," he added.

Szijjarto was in Manila for the 8th iteration of Philippines-Hungary Political Consultations. His latest visit was his third one after flying to the Philippines in 2017 to meet Manalo, who was then an acting Foreign Affairs secretary, and in 2020 to engage with former DFA chief Teodoro Locsin Jr.

"I am confident that we can further strengthen our ties and collaborate for the mutual benefit of our nations," Manalo said.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/6/13/hungary-urged-to-invest-in-ph>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Tariff cuts to bring in more rice imports

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

June 14, 2024 | 12:00am



Workers unload rice at an import terminal in Manila.

STAR / File

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippines' rice imports this year could reach 4.6 million metric tons as a result of the Marcos administration's decision to slash tariffs on the commodity, according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The USDA raised this year's rice import forecast for the Philippines by 500,000 metric tons from the earlier target of 4.1 million MT after the government reduced tariffs to 15 percent from 35 percent previously.

Next year, the Philippines could be importing even more rice – as much as 4.7 million MT – to meet the country's growing demand for the staple, according to the USDA's latest global grain report published yesterday.

If the forecast of the international agency materializes, then the Philippines will be the world's biggest buyer of rice for three straight years from 2023 to 2025.

Last week, Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan announced that the National Economic and Development Authority board, chaired by President Marcos, approved the country's most favored nation tariff schedule for 2024 to 2028.

Included in the new tariff schedule was the reduction in rice tariffs. This, Balisacan explained, was meant to slow down the country's rice inflation as part of the government's efforts to make the staple affordable to the public.

The lower tariffs could decrease prevailing rice prices by as much as P7 per kilogram, based on the estimates of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Former agriculture secretaries, however, said that the reduction in rice tariffs is an "open invitation" for bigger imports annually.

"It is a very clear signal (to the world market) to export (more rice to the Philippines). Good luck with the government's promise that we will not be flooded with imported rice," Leonardo Montemayor, who served as agriculture chief from 2001-2002, said.

"I would not be surprised if our imports (this year) would be more than 4.2 million metric tons," he said.

Emmanuel Piñol, who served as agriculture chief from 2016 to 2019, said prevailing rice prices would remain the same despite the tariff reduction.

"Reducing tariff would encourage importers to bring in more rice, which would be sold at the same price, but which would dampen the planting intentions of Filipino rice farmers," Piñol said in an open letter addressed to Balisacan.

Rice imports have accounted for about 20 percent of the country's annual rice supply since the government deregulated and liberalized the rice trade regime in 2019.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/06/14/2362646/tariff-cuts-bring-more-rice-imports>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Chinese Coast Guard bullying escalates after WPS fishing ban — group

[Alexis Romero](#) - Philstar.com

June 13, 2024 | 10:01am



This photo taken on February 15, 2024 shows Filipino fishermen loading plastic containers with free fuel from the Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) ship BRP Datu Tamblot (background) near the China-controlled Scarborough Shoal, in disputed waters of the South China Sea. The Philippines on February 17 accused Chinese coast guard vessels of "dangerous" manoeuvres for attempting to block a Filipino vessel dropping supplies to fishermen at a reef off the Southeast Asian nation's coast.

AFP / Ted Aljibe

MANILA, Philippines — Fishers' group New Masinloc Fishermen Association (NMFA) said the bullying by the Chinese Coast Guard has intensified after China banned fishing activities in areas in the West Philippine Sea that include the Philippines territory.

NMFA president Leonardo Cuaresma said that Pinoy fishermen are driven away by the CCG and were not allowed near the lagoon in Panatag Shoal.

The Philippines has protested the unilateral ban issued by Beijing, which will start on June 15.

Cuaresma said the number of Chinese ships in Panatag has increased.

“Since the start of the campaign of the government to fight for our sovereignty, even personnel of Philippine Coast Guard, Philippine Navy and Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) are being harassed by the Chinese Coast Guard,” he said, adding the CCG even pointed guns at some Filipino fishermen.

Cuaresma advised fishermen to sail by groups so they could defend themselves in case the CCG would harass them.

China considers almost the entire South China Sea its territorial waters. — **Evelyn Macairan, Bella Cariaso, Jose Rodel Clapano, Pia Lee-Brago**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/06/13/2362561/chinese-coast-guard-bullying-escalates-after-wps-fishing-ban-group>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Philippines seen to remain world's biggest rice importer

By: [Jordeene B. Lagare](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 02:30 AM June 14, 2024

MANILA — The Philippines is expected to increase its rice imports this year and next following the government's move to reduce tariffs by 15 percent until 2028, thus retaining its standing as the leading rice importer in the world.

In a report, the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Foreign Agricultural Service estimated that the country's rice imports would reach 4.6 million metric tons (MT) in 2024.

That would be higher by about 27 percent than the 3.6 million MT of imported rice in 2023.

So far, the country has procured 2.17 million MT of imported rice as of June 6, mostly from Vietnam.

China was the biggest importer in 2021 and 2022, with the Philippines ranking second. The following year, however, the Philippines took over the top spot.

With the USDA's projection, the country will retain the top spot, followed by Indonesia with 3.5 million MT.

The foreign agency also estimated the country's rice imports in 2025 to reach 4.7 million MT, which meant the Philippines would likely retain the top spot for three consecutive years, based on USDA projections. Vietnam would be a distant second with 2.95 million MT.

Increasing rice consumption

Aside from lower tariffs, the upward revision in the USDA's forecast is attributed to an expected increase in rice consumption.

Earlier, the National Economic and Development Authority board led by President Marcos said the tariff for rice imports would be slashed to 15 percent from 35 percent. This was included in the modified Comprehensive Tariff Program covering the years 2024 to 2028 aimed at keeping prices of major food products affordable for consumers.

The President, however, has yet to issue a fiat on the new tariff structure, which also covers other agricultural items such as meat.

The USDA said global rice production would slightly increase this year amid a bigger harvest from India. Worldwide rice stocks were expected to grow, "primarily on increases for the Philippines and Kenya."

"Total imports are estimated higher on increases for the Philippines, Kenya, and Iraq. Exports are up, driven by India, Vietnam, Pakistan, and Thailand," the USDA noted.

<https://business.inquirer.net/463596/ph-set-to-remain-biggest-rice-importer>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Fishers exposed to China rule raise PH flag in WPS

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

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:30 AM June 13, 2024



FLAG OF RESISTANCE A fisherman waves the Philippine flag near a “payao,” or artificial reef close to Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal in the West Philippines Sea to display resistance to Chinese incursions and to show other foreign vessels passing through the area that these waters are part of the country’s exclusive economic zone. —photo from Bigkis

MANILA, Philippines — A group of Filipino fishermen displayed the Philippine flag close to Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal days ahead of the country’s 126th Independence Day and the June 15 implementation of a new China policy authorizing its coast guard to arrest foreign persons and ships that cross what it claims are its borders in the South China Sea.

The Bigkis ng Mangingisda Federation, a group of fishermen from Zambales, Pangasinan, Bataan and Palawan provinces, said in a statement that a convoy of more than 20 fishing boats had sailed to Panatag, also called Bajo de Masinloc, or BDM, on June 1.

Panatag, a resource-rich shoal controlled by China for the past 12 years, is about 220 kilometers west of Zambales province, well-within the Philippines' 370-km exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

In its Independence Day statement, Bigkis said they raised and waved the Philippine flag when their boats were about 55 km from Panatag "to show resistance to China's incursions and to defend Philippine sovereign rights" over its EEZ.

Bigkis said some of the fishers went northward to their "payaos," or artificial reefs used to attract and catch fish, while others sailed southwest to their own payaos near the shoal, one of the Filipinos' traditional fishing grounds.

A fisherman on one of the boats in the convoy unfurled a Philippine flag to show foreign vessels, especially Chinese, sailing through the area that the West Philippine Sea (WPS) belongs to the Philippines.

Bigkis president Randy Megu, who led the convoy, said "the Chinese have no right to the Philippines' exclusive economic zone."

Dwindling catch and income

"Before leaving the BDM, we again waved the Philippine flag on our boat and reiterated our demand—a call to action to the Philippine government to promote, protect and defend our rights in the West Philippine Sea," he said.

In a phone interview with the Inquirer on Wednesday, Megu said many of them fear the possible arrest and detention of Filipinos under China's new regulations on illegal border crossing in areas that it claimed in the West Philippines Sea.

He said that the fishermen were also worried that their catch and income would dwindle.

He urged the government to increase maritime patrols by the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and the Philippine Navy to protect Filipino fishermen, especially at Bajo de Masinloc.

“If China will implement their new policy, I think we will postpone our fishing activities in Bajo de Masinloc because it will be a problem if we get arrested by the Chinese coast guard or the Chinese Navy and then they will prosecute us in China. That will be very difficult,” Megu said.

But Henrelito Empoc, spokesperson for Bigkis, said they would still have to fish in the West Philippine Sea despite the threat to arrest trespassers.

“There’s fear among us but we have to continue our fishing because this is our livelihood and this is for our families,” he told the Inquirer in a text message.

Hunger and impoverishment

Bigkis is pressing the government to bring Manila’s maritime dispute with China “to an international legal body for conflict mitigation.”

According to Bigkis, local fishermen and their families are “enduring further hunger and impoverishment” due to Chinese harassment in the West Philippine Sea.

They urged the Philippine government to demand an apology from China, saying that under the United Nations-sanctioned economic, social and cultural rights, Beijing had an “extra territorial obligation to pay for all the accumulated damage to the Philippine marine environment.”

They also called for the full implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and enforcement of the 2016 arbitral ruling “to allow Filipino fishermen to fish freely within the BDM and other parts of the WPS without Chinese interference.”

The 2016 ruling, which invalidated Beijing’s sweeping claims to the South China Sea, declared BDM as a common fishing ground for Filipinos, Chinese and Vietnamese.

The Chinese seized the shoal after a two-month standoff with the Philippine Navy in 2012 and had since then controlled access to the area and prohibited entry to the lagoon, a rich fishing ground and a shelter during storms.

More protection

Bigkis also wanted more protection from the PCG and BFAR and government economic support to affected fishermen in the WPS.

In his Independence Day message, National Security Adviser Eduardo Año said defending Manila's sovereignty over the West Philippine Sea "remains a paramount priority."

"We stand firm in upholding the 2016 Arbitral Award and adhere to a rules-based international order to ensure our maritime entitlements are respected," Año said.

The quest for peace and security, according to him, remains at the forefront of the government's national agenda.

"We work tirelessly to ensure the safety and well-being of every Filipino, countering both internal and external threats to uphold our nation's sovereignty and freedoms," he said.

Commodore Roy Vincent Trinidad, spokesperson for the Philippine Navy, said China was an intruder in the Philippines' EEZ and should leave, instead of demanding that the Philippines ask its permission for any resupply mission it intended to conduct within its own waters.

"In the first place, China does not have any right to be inside the Philippines' exclusive economic zone. They are the ones intruding, so they should not be there; yet, is it not ridiculous for them to demand that the Philippines asks their permission?" he said.

Trinidad confirmed reports of an increased number of People's Liberation Army Navy warships in the West Philippine Sea from June 4 to June 10.

But the Navy spokesperson said the reported increase in the number of ships from China's South Sea Fleet was not yet alarming.

“What will be concerning is they would deploy warships from their other fleets such as the East Sea Fleet or the North Sea Fleet. But so far, this increase in number is still within our acceptable limits,” he said.

Citing open-source references, Trinidad said China's South Sea Fleet could muster a total of 75 to 80 ships and submarines.

“If we factor in their deployment all over the South China Sea and maritime Southeast Asia, we could get a ballpark figure how many warships they can manage to surge into our exclusive economic zone,” he said. —with a report from Melvin Gascon

For comprehensive coverage, in-depth analysis, and the latest updates on the West Philippine Sea issue, [visit our special site here](#). Stay informed with articles, videos, and expert opinions.

<https://www.inquirer.net/406322/fishers-exposed-to-china-rule-raise-ph-flag-in-wps/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Palay farmgate price jumps 30% in May

June 13, 2024 | 8:56 pm



A farmer dries rice grains in Baliuag, Bulacan, Oct. 9, 2023. — PHILIPPINE STAR/KRIZ JOHN ROSALES

THE farmgate price of palay, or unmilled rice, rose 30.2% year on year to an average of P24.81 per kilogram in May, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The PSA reported that all regions recorded year-on-year growth in farmgate prices during the month.

The highest prices in May were posted in the Western Visayas, where palay prices rose 39.7% to P27.76 per kilo.

The lowest farmgate price was recorded in the Eastern Visayas at P19.56 per kilo, up 11.7% year on year.

In April, the National Food Authority Council raised its purchasing price for palay in order for government procurement to remain competitive with prices offered by private traders.

The buying price for dry and clean palay was raised to P23 to P30 per kilo and that for fresh palay to P17 to P23 per kilo, depending on location and how the grain is graded.

On a month-on-month basis, the PSA said that the average farmgate price rose 1% from April.

The PSA said nine regions posted higher farmgate prices month on month, while seven regions posted declines.

Northern Mindanao and Central Visayas reported the highest month-on-month rises to 7.9%. The average farmgate prices in those regions were P26.66 and P27.28 per kilo, respectively.

Ilocos Region saw a 2.9% decline month on month in May. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/06/13/601795/palay-farmgate-price-jumps-30-in-may/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

USDA upgrades rice import forecast for PHL to 4.7 MMT

June 13, 2024 | 8:56 pm



BW FILE PHOTO

THE US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has raised its Philippine rice import forecast by 11.9% to 4.7 million metric tons (MMT), citing rising demand and lowered tariffs.

In its Grains: World Markets and Trade Report, the Philippine import estimate rose from the 4.2 MMT forecast issued in May.

“Total imports are estimated higher on increases for the Philippines, Kenya, and Iraq,” it said.

Rice imports for the Philippines last year amounted to 3.62 MMT, undershooting the USDA forecast of 4.6 million MMT.

The USDA sees domestic rice consumption at 17.4 MMT this year, against the 16.8 MMT estimate for 2023.

The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Board approved a plan to lower tariffs on industrial and farm goods, including the further reduction of rice import tariffs to 15% from 35% until 2028.

The Philippines has imported 2.17 million metric tons (MT) of rice as of June 6, according to the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI), or about half of the USDA's projection for the year.

The majority of the country's rice imports are from Vietnam and Thailand, which account for 72.7% and 15.3% of total imports, respectively.

Vietnam had supplied 1.52 million MT as of May, while shipments from Thailand totaled 319,740.74 MT.

In January, the Philippines and Vietnam signed an agreement giving the Philippines a quota of 1.5 to 2 MMT of rice annually for five years.

Asked to comment, Leonardo A. Lanzona, an economics professor at the Ateneo De Manila, said lowered tariffs will drive up rice imports.

"Imports are already higher even without this new trade policy. The lower tariffs are just accelerating the trend," Mr. Lanzona said in a Messenger chat.

Federation of Free Farmers National Manager Raul Q. Montemayor said that the effects of El Niño on crops may be more severe than estimated, which could also lead to an increase in imports.

"The impact of El Niño on the second quarter crop is higher than estimated, so import requirements will be larger to fill the gap," he said in a Viber message.

Last week, the government weather service, known as PAGASA, announced the end of El Niño, adding that conditions in the tropical Pacific have returned to El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO)-neutral levels.

Weather conditions that are classified as neither El Niño nor La Niña are considered to be ENSO-neutral.

Agricultural production rose 0.05% during the first quarter, weighed down by El Niño, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

"The lowering of tariffs will also make it more profitable for importers to bring in rice even beyond the domestic shortfall, contrary to assurances that this will not happen," Mr. Montemayor added.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Chief Economist Michael L. Ricafort said that preparations for La Niña could also lead to an increase in rice imports during the rest of the year.

"The preemptive measures to increase local supply and better manage inflation and inflation expectations (involve importing more rice)," Mr. Ricafort said in a Viber message.

In its final advisory, PAGASA said that chances of La Niña setting in are 69% between July and September.

The Philippines imports about 20% of its rice requirement each year. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/06/13/601796/usda-upgrades-rice-import-forecast-for-phl-to-4-7-mmt/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Delegation to Thailand studies upgrades to Region II corn, dairy

June 13, 2024 | 8:55 pm



DA.GOV.PH

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said its Cagayan Valley regional office and the Ilagan City government mounted an investment mission to Thailand to seek modernization opportunities for the region's corn and dairy industries.

In a statement on Thursday, the department said that DTI Region II officials and representatives from Ilagan City, the capital of Isabela province, "explored further mechanization and development opportunities for the corn industry.

"The itinerary included visits to private companies and government-operated facilities in Thailand which employ advanced machinery and export-quality corn products," the DTI said.

"This visit aimed to assess the feasibility of integrating Thai technologies into Ilagan City's existing infrastructure," it added.

Ilagan City produces 155.77 million kilograms of corn per season, representing 2.1% of the country's output and 13.9% of Isabela province's.

“With 33% of its land dedicated to agriculture, the city government is actively pursuing initiatives to transform corn production into a sustainable and lucrative enterprise for its residents,” the DTI said.

The delegation visited Thailand’s National Corn and Sorghum Research and Development Center at Kasetsart University.

It also visited the Thai Danish Dairy Farm, operated by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Cooperative Farming Promotion Organization.

The delegation also visited the KU Beef and River Kwai meat and corn processing facilities, to investigate how to increase production in Region II.

“The visit builds on previous initiatives, including DTI Region II’s visit to the Hualam Collective Farm in 2022. This encouraged the DTI to form a technical working group and explore opportunities in export-quality corn silage production in Ilagan City,” the DTI said. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/06/13/601793/delegation-to-thailand-studies-upgrades-to-region-ii-corn-dairy/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

World Bank to support more agriculture projects in PHL

June 14, 2024 | 12:31 am



A carabao is seen on a field in Malvar, Batangas, Feb. 24, 2024. — PHILIPPINE STAR/MIGUEL DE GUZMAN

THE WORLD BANK is seeking to fund more Philippine projects that seek to bolster productivity in the agriculture sector amid rising prices of food.

“The World Bank is very supportive of agriculture and agricultural productivity in the Philippines,” Ndiame Diop, World Bank Country Director for Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand, told *BusinessWorld* on the sidelines of a forum last week.

“For us, agricultural productivity in the medium-to-long term is one of the key ways in which you can reduce food price, a key driver of overall inflation,” he said.

Headline inflation quickened to a six-month high of 3.9% in May amid rising utility and transport prices. It was the fourth straight month of faster annual inflation.

The Philippine central bank has said that the latest inflation data were consistent with its expectations that inflation could quicken through July due to the impact on El Niño on agricultural output.

“We’ve been supporting agriculture for four years, and our support has continued to be strong,” Mr. Diop said.

In November last year, the Department of Agriculture launched three World Bank-funded projects worth a combined \$920 million to make the agriculture and fisheries sector more resilient to climate shocks.

These projects include the Philippine Rural Development Project Scale Up, Mindanao Inclusive Agriculture Development Project, and the Philippine Fisheries and Coastal Resiliency Project.

Mr. Diop said the World Bank is also seeking to fund projects that would plug existing gaps in education and digital infrastructure.

“This year, we do have projects in many areas. Education is one area we are supporting this year,” he said. “We are helping to rebuild schools — we call [the project] Safer School Rebuilding.”

The \$500-million Infrastructure for Safer and Resilient Schools project will address the physical rehabilitation needs and boost the resilience of disaster-affected schools in the Philippines. The project is expected to cover over 3,000 schools around the country.

The Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. From 2021 to 2023, there were 3,484 school facilities affected by disasters nationwide, data from the Department of Education showed.

“We are [also] helping the digital sector by reducing the digital divide in the Philippines, bringing the fiber optic to the lagging regions to help those regions have better internet connectivity,” Mr. Diop said.

Only 33% of Filipino households have access to fixed internet connection, and 70% of the entire population subscribed to an active mobile broadband, according to a separate World Bank study.

For this year, the World Bank is also funding initiatives on sustainable recovery and climate change, Mr. Diop added.

“Almost every year, we’re supporting policy reforms in many areas, but also in sustainable recovery and climate change. So, all of those are projects we are preparing for and developing this year,” he said.

The World Bank was the country’s third-largest source of official development assistance in 2022, accounting for 21.18% or \$6.86 billion of total loans. — **B.M.D.Cruz**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/top-stories/2024/06/14/601786/world-bank-to-support-more-agriculture-projects-in-phl/>

MANILA STANDARD

DTI, Ilagan City explore corn industry development during Thailand mission

By Othel V. Campos

June 13, 2024, 7:50 pm

The Department of Trade and Industry Region 2 teamed up with the Ilagan City government for a two-day business mission to Thailand to explore advancements in mechanization and development for Ilagan's corn industry from May 30 to 31, 2024.

The delegation visited renowned Thai companies and government facilities known their advanced corn processing technology and export-quality products.

Its main goal was to assess the possibility of integrating these technologies into Ilagan's existing infrastructure.

The itinerary included the National Corn and Sorghum R&D Center at Kasetsart University, where the delegation gained valuable knowledge on the latest advancements in maize and sorghum production.

The team also visited the Thai Danish Dairy Farm, a key player in Thailand's dairy industry to gain insights on formulating policies and government interventions to maximize production in Ilagan's dairy sector.

The delegation envisioned Ilagan farmers to replicate the success of Thailand's Hualam Collective Farm-Corn Silage Group that exports an average of 40 to 50 tons to major Asian countries.

Ilagan City, known as the Corn Capital of the Philippines, is a significant contributor to national corn production, generating 15.57 million MT of grains per season.

Seasonal production contributes 2.07 percent to the Philippines' total and 13.92 percent to Isabela's output. With a third of its land dedicated to agriculture, the city actively seeks to make corn production more sustainable and profitable for its residents and farmers.

<https://manilastandard.net/business/314459211/dti-ilagan-city-explore-corn-industry-development-during-thailand-mission.html>

MANILA STANDARD

Inexpensive rice



By Norman Cruz

June 13, 2024, 11:45 pm

Consumers line up to buy rice at a 'Kadiwa' located in the Bureau of Plant Industry in Manila. The rice is being sold for P29 per kilo.

Variable tariff rates

By Dr. Fermin D. Adriano, PhD

June 14, 2024

THE National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Board (composed of various Cabinet secretaries and headed by the President) recently approved the reduction of tariffs on rice imports to 15 percent from 35 percent until 2028. NEDA Secretary Arsenio Balisacan justified the move as a way of taming food inflation, to which rice contributes over 20 percent.

Expectedly, so-called farmers groups — actually lobby groups promoting their parochial sectoral or business interests regardless of their overall impact on the economy — immediately raised a howl of protest. The NEDA approval is still not final until we see the President issuing an executive order to this effect.

Lest those who advocated (including this author) for the tariff reduction be misunderstood and become victims of more disinformation from pamphleteers, our original proposal was a reduction to 10 percent from 35 percent on a temporary basis. This was the position we submitted to the Tariff Commission in a petition sponsored by the Foundation for Economic Freedom (of which this writer is a member) last October.

We were of the predisposition then that the tariff reduction should take effect for a least six months, starting in December when the wet harvest season was over until May or June the following year when a good rice inventory would have been built due to the dry harvest season in March and April, and the entry of imports during that six-month period.

The idea of reducing the tariff to 15 percent and keeping it there until 2028 did not come from us. It is just too risky to do so because

of possible developments in the global rice market. Foremost of this is if the Indian government decides to lift its ban of non-basmati (white rice) exports, which will have the effect of pushing down world rice prices.

An international rice conference was held in India last week, which among others tackled rice trade issues. Also, the final results of the Indian election will be known in the latter part of this month; incumbent Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to secure a coalition to put him in power for a third consecutive term. The victory might lead his government to abandon its protectionist policy of guaranteeing food security in India by banning non-basmati rice exports. With international rice prices soaring, Indian farmers and traders are losing a lot of money by not exporting.

Note that India's decision to ban rice exports is the single biggest reason for a spike in the world rice prices, not the Rice Tariffication Law as the law's detractors claim. If India decides to lift the ban, international rice prices will tumble. Under such a scenario, a 15-percent tariff will not be able to protect our local farmers from the flood of cheap imports.

For the short and medium term, the better policy instrument is for the government to adopt a variable tariff scheme. It involves imposing a higher rate during harvest season (when local supply is bountiful) and a lower one when supply is inadequate during the lean harvest (coinciding with the planting) season. This way, we will be able to protect local farmers from rice imports during harvest season when palay (unmilled rice) prices decline.

Is this feasible? Well, Bangladesh has adopted this system. Its tariffs range from a low of 15.25 to as high as 62.5 percent depending on the palay planting and harvesting seasons and whenever emergency situations arise. There is nothing really new to this proposal because we proffered this idea as early as 1986 when I was part of a team of UP Los Baños professors that wrote the "Agenda for Action for Philippine Agriculture."

Why was it not adopted despite the soundness of the idea? Ask the politicians and the protectionist lobby groups to obtain the answer.

Last June 5, meanwhile, BanKo — the microfinance arm of Bank of the Philippines Island (BPI) — and agri-tech company Agrilever launched the Agri-Negosyo Loan Program, which aims to provide credit to small farmers. Initially, the program is targeting 50,000 rice farmers who belong to farmers' organizations under the irrigators associations of the National Irrigation Administration (NIA).

What makes the program exciting is that a highly reputable private financial institution has decided to extend credit to small farmers, viewed as non-bankable, and plans to upscale it on a nationwide basis. BPI is confident it can lower the risk of lending to small farmers because its partner, Agrilever, will provide up-to-date information on what is happening on the farms of tillers who avail of the credit program.

Using satellite technology accompanied with an appropriate application, Agrilever can detect whether the farms were planted as well as generate information like planting density, adequacy of water supply, and damages and losses from pests, diseases and natural occurrences, etc. Its app can also monitor whether farmers applied the right amount of fertilizer given the status of soil nutrient.

The people behind this project should be commended, including BanKo Chairman Jojo Ocampo, BanKo President Rod Mabiasen, AgriLever Board Chairman Yoav Schwalb, Agrilever Advisory Board Chairman Arthur Yap and NIA Administrator Eduardo Guillen.

While I noted during the launching that the project would not cover the millions of small farmers who would have continued to depend on government credit subsidies, it will be able to respond to the needs of the more organized and entrepreneurial small farmers

because of the ease of obtaining loans and the relatively low monthly interest rate of 2.3 percent. It will bring digital agriculture to new heights, a thrust that the Department of Agriculture has failed to upscale nationwide despite repeated attempts.

Also worth emphasizing is that the project can be further bolstered if Philippine Crop Insurance Corp., whose president, Jovy Bernabe, was present at the launching, adopts a parametric insurance scheme. This is a weather-based insurance scheme wherein farmer subscribers are immediately paid a certain portion of damage caused by bad weather instead of waiting for the results of an appraiser's estimate.

If implemented, it will further lower the risks involved in lending to small farmers and encourage other private financial institutions to extend credit to our cultivators, while opening the door for them to also engage in agricultural crop insurance.

fdadriano88@gmail.com

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/06/14/business/top-business/variable-tariff-rates/1951342>

Bongao police seize 400 sacks of smuggled rice

By Asangan Madale

June 14, 2024

BONGAO, Tawi-Tawi — The Bongao Municipal Police Station (MPS) found 400 sacks of rice believed to be smuggled and abandoned by its owner near the bay area.

The police said they were prompted to check the presence of the unattended sacks of alleged smuggled rice on an information provided by concerned citizen.

Police said no one has claimed ownership of the sacks of rice piled in Barangay Pagasinan, Bongao.

The joint personnel of Bongao MPS, Tawi-Tawi Police Provincial Operations Unit, Provincial Mobile First Company, 5th Regional Mobile Force Company, and First Special Operations Unit-Maritime Group proceeded to the location and took the sacks of alleged smuggled rice worth P508,000.

The police said they received the information on June 11 in Barangay Pagasinan.

The police said the smuggled sacks of rice were brought to Bongao MPS for documentation and then turned over to the Bureau of Customs for proper custody and disposition.

BGen. Prexy Tanggawohn, acting regional director of the Bangsamoro Police Regional Office, lauded the efforts of the

combined law enforcement units for their quick response to a citizen's concern.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/06/14/regions/bongao-police-seize-400-sacks-of-smuggled-rice/1951422>

Lower rice tariff to hike imports by 500K MT

By Jed Macapagal

June 14, 2024



Workers haul sacks of rice to a warehouse. (DA Photo)

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) revised its forecast for the Philippines' rice imports for 2024 and 2025, upward by 500,000 metric tons (MT).

The country will thus remain the world's leading rice buyer for these years.

In a report released by the agency this month, USDA said the country's rice imports for 2024 may hit as much as 4.6 million MT while 2025 rice imports can be as much as 4.7 million MT.

The USDA cites the Philippines' rising consumption with reduced tariffs as the primary reason for the adjusted forecast.

Last May, the USDA estimated for the Philippines to only bring in up to 4.1 million MT of rice for 2024 and 4.2 million MT for 2025.

According to data from the Bureau of Plant Industry, 2.17 million MT of imported rice have arrived in the Philippines as of June 6.

Bulk of the imported rice supply came from Vietnam with 1.59 million MT or 73 percent of the total.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said the expected P6 to P7 per kg drop in retail price of imported rice due to lower tariffs may be experienced by August if these imports start arriving by July.

https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/lower-rice-tariff-to-hike-imports-by-500k-mt/

Farmers get P8.3 billion through RFFA

Reine Juvierre Alberto

June 14, 2024

STATE-RUN Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP) has distributed P8.3 billion in cash assistance to rice farmers as of 2023 under the P12-billion Rice Farmers Financial Assistance (RFFA) program.

At a Senate hearing on the Proposed Extension of and Amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law or Republic Act (RA) No. 11203, DBP Senior Vice President Rallen O. Verdadero reported that the bank has released 1,649,285 cards to rice farmers as of 2023.

Verdadero said that a total of 1.64 million cards and P8.6 billion in RFFA, with a 96.44-percent realization rate, has been distributed to rice farmers in 2022.

For 2021, Verdadero said the DBP released 1.06 million cards and P5.4 billion in cash aid, with a 98.76-percent realization rate.

The DBP, together with the Land Bank of the Philippines, was tapped by the Department of Agriculture (DA) to distribute the cash grants to the farmers.

The DBP has partnered with Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas-licensed cash outlets to expedite the release of funds to farmer beneficiaries.

The RFFA is an unconditional cash transfer program to provide compensation for the projected income loss of rice farmers due to the drop in palay farmgate prices caused by the RTL.

The RFFA also aims to facilitate the access of rice farmers to timely funds for procurement of needed inputs and enhance farmers' opportunity to improve productivity and profitability.

Rice farmers tilling a land area from 500 square meters up to two hectares are eligible for the cash assistance. Each beneficiary will receive P5,000 in cash aid.

The DA aims to fully distribute the P12-billion cash assistance to 2.4 million rice farmers this month after it was delayed due to the barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan elections.

Sen. Cynthia Villar said in the hearing that data from DBP will “form as a basis to extend the RTL” until 2031.

“The RTL ensures that farmers directly benefit from the liberalization of rice trading by providing at least P10 billion a year to the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund [RCEF] up to early 2025,” Villar said.

Under the RTL, tariffs collected from rice imports go to the RCEF. Of the yearly P10-billion RCEF budget, P5 billion is allotted for the free distribution of farm machinery and equipment, P3 billion for free distribution of high-quality inbred certified seeds and P1 billion each for credit support and training of farmers and extension.

Collections in excess of the P10-billion funds go to the RFFA under RA 11598. The law took effect on March 5, 2019.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/06/14/farmers-get-p8-3-billion-through-rffa/>

Rice tariff cuts to boost imports in 2025— USDA report

Ada Pelonia

June 14, 2024

THE reduction in tariffs would boost the Philippines's rice imports next year, according to a report published by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The USDA adjusted upwards its projection for the country's rice imports to 4.7 million metric tons (MMT) in 2025, driven by rising consumption with reduced tariffs. This was a 500,000 metric tons (MT) increase from its earlier projection of 4.2 MMT.

“Imports and global consumption are forecast higher primarily on increases for the Philippines and Kenya,” the latest monthly report on global grains trade read.

“Global stocks are forecast up driven by India and the Philippines more than offsetting decreases for Pakistan and Vietnam,” it added.

The USDA also increased its 2024 rice import projection for the country to 4.6 MMT, up by 500,000 MT following the reduction of import tariffs to 15 percent until 2028.

The USDA projected that Vietnam exports would spike due to “robust demand” from Indonesia and the Philippines.

Meanwhile, Thai rice quotes, the USDA said, increased by \$35 to \$622 per MT with “strong sales” to Indonesia and the Philippines along with a stronger currency. Vietnamese quotes declined \$9 to \$567 per MT, remaining the lowest-priced supplier.

Figures from the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) revealed that the country's imported rice arrivals have reached more than 2.08 MMT as of May 30.

Vietnam remained the country's top source of imported rice, accounting for 1.52 MMT of imports. It was followed by Thailand with 319,740.74 MT.

The National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) Board earlier approved the tariff reduction for rice in its bid to lower the price of the staple.

“This decision aims to lower the price of rice further and make it more affordable,” Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said in a press briefing in Malacañang last week.

The Neda Board's decision extended to maintaining reduced tariff rates on corn, pork, and mechanically deboned meat under executive order (EO) 50 series of 2023.

Farmers and fishers groups said reducing tariffs on key agricultural commodities, such as rice, will bring the country's farm sector to its knees.

They appealed to President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to reconsider his plan to issue an EO that will cut the tariffs on rice and pork until 2028. (<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/06/10/rethink-decision-to-slash-agri-tariffs-govt-told/>)

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/06/14/rice-tariff-cuts-to-boost-imports-in-2025-usda-report/>

Revenue to drop P9.4 billion with rice tariff cuts—economist

Ada Pelonia

June 14, 2024

THE government should expect revenues from rice tariffs to decline by P9.4 billion due to the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) Board's decision to slash tariffs on imports, according to an economist.

“Malaki pa rin po yung matitira kasi hindi naman po all the way down to zero, may iniwan pang 15 percent tariff,” Roehlano Briones, a senior research fellow at the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), said at the hearing of the the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform on Thursday.

Briones also projects retail prices of rice to plunge to about P7.6 per kilogram due to the surge of imports.

“Unfortunately, kailangan bantayan yung palay price kasi ang projection po is P3.56 per kilo ang bagsak [we need to watch the palay price because the projection for this is a drop of P3.56 per kilo],” he said.

The National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) Board earlier approved the tariff reduction for rice in its bid to lower the price of the staple.

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan maintained that the government could still collect substantial import duty for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

“The remaining tariff is still quite substantial; that's still 15 percent. So whatever imports, if those imports are coming in at still elevated high prices, it's still quite a substantial tariff revenue for the RCEF,” Balisacan said in a press briefing in Malacañang last week.

Established under the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) or RA 11203, RCEF is sourced from rice tariffs and used to help improve the competitiveness of farmers after the liberalization of the Philippine rice trade.

Last year, the government collected P29 billion from rice tariffs.

Meanwhile, Briones also noted issues that the government should address if it decides to extend the RCEF.

Among these is the seed provision, since many farmers have yet to be registered under the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA); and the slow delivery of certified seeds in some areas.

Briones sought the conduct of an endline assessment through an independent data collection. This would be in coordination with the data from the Department of Agriculture (DA).

“This must be urgently conducted if we really want independent source of data, an actual survey of RCEF beneficiaries versus non-beneficiaries,” he said.

Food security

Also at Thursday’s hearing of the Committee on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform, Sen. Robinhood Padilla underscored the importance of rice to Filipino families as he highlighted the urgency of strengthening the country’s food security and protection for local farmers.

Padilla pointed out that regardless of life status, rice has been the main food of Filipinos.

“As we emphasized the other day [committee hearing], we know that rice is the main food of Filipinos,” he added, reminding that “regardless of the status in life, “the dining table of a Filipino family is not complete without rice.”

Speaking in Filipino, Padilla pointed out “this is the reason why we have good laws and programs” like Republic Act 11203, the Rice Tariffication Law to “strengthen our food security and also protect those who put food on our tables. But like any law, there is always room for improvement to further enhance its implementation,” he added.

For her part, Senator Imee Marcos asked Agriculture Undersecretary for Policy, Planning and Regulations Asis Perez to look into reports that the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA) has “listed land owners as beneficiaries instead of the actual farm workers.”

Moreover, Marcos remind officials that the RSBSA is a registry of farmers, fisherfolk and farm laborers that identifies the beneficiaries for different agriculture-related programs and services of the government.

Marcos said the report about the mis-identification came from Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) scholars in Bukidnon.

“Clearly, there is a distinction and I am not certain, in terms of policy, who we should help first. In terms of priority, clearly farm workers are clearly poorer and very often the owners of the land are not actually the tillers of the soil,” Marcos noted.

“So, the farmers are asking our help since their names are not actually listed in the RSBSA” the senator said, adding that, “I also encountered the same issue in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija. Farmers are asking to be included in the list and not only the land owners.”

Perez said he would look into the matter. With Butch Fernandez

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/06/14/revenue-to-drop-p9-4-billion-with-rice-tariff-cuts-economist/>

PSA reports higher palay farmgate prices

Ada Pelonia

June 14, 2024



Farmers harvesting palay in Barangay Hubangon, Mahinog, Camuigin

THE average farmgate price of unmilled rice rose 30.2 percent year-on-year in May 2024, according to the latest data released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Data from the PSA indicate that the farmgate price of palay reached P24.81 per kilo in May, from P19.06 per kilo a year ago.

“Farmgate prices refer to the prices received by farmers for the sale of their produce at the first point of sale net of the total marketing cost paid by the farmers,” the PSA said.

“These prices are determined at the farmgate or first point of sale transactions and are also known as ‘producer prices.’”

On a monthly basis, the average farmgate price of palay in May increased from P24.51 per kilo recorded in April.

PSA data showed that the highest increase was recorded in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), where the average prices registered a year-on-year growth of 43.6 percent.

The average palay farmgate in price in BARMM reached P26.40 per kilo in May 2024, higher than the previous year's P18.39 per kilo.

The slowest year-on-year increase in farmgate prices was recorded in Eastern Visayas at 11.7 percent. The average palay price went up to P19.56 per kilo in May 2024 from P17.51 per kilo in the same period last year.

On a month-on-month basis, the highest increase in May tied in Northern Mindanao and Central Visayas at 7.9 percent.

The highest average palay farmgate price in Western Visayas reached P27.76 per kilo in May, higher than the previous year's P19.87 per kilo.

This was followed by Central Visayas where farmgate prices averaged P27.28 a kilo; Ilocos Region, P27.17; Northern Mindanao, P26.66; BARMM, P26.40; Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), P26.09; Central Luzon, P25.87; and Cagayan Valley, P25.57.

The lowest average palay farmgate price was registered in Eastern Visayas where it reached P19.56 per kilo; Caraga, P22.06; Bicol Region, P22.65; Calabarzon, P22.84; Soccsksargen, P23.39, Mimaropa, P24.28, and Davao Region, P24.50.

The PSA said the monthly data on the farmgate prices of palay are obtained from the results of the Farm Price Survey for Palay conducted on the last five days of the reference month.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/06/14/psa-reports-higher-palay-farmgate-prices/>

The implications of stopping the cultivation of Golden Rice and Bt Eggplant on agriculture, nutrition, and health

Ma Cristina B. Sison

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AS a registered nutritionist-dietitian, I feel compelled to comment on the Court of Appeals' ruling on Golden Rice and Bt Eggplant, highlighting the critical link between agriculture, nutrition, and health. Food production is the starting point of the food system, because it will determine food availability and accessibility. Agriculture therefore, plays a crucial role in ensuring that the population is well-nourished and healthy.

Over the past two decades, the malnutrition status of Filipinos has not changed significantly. A report by the DOST's Food and Nutrition Research Institute (FNRI) in 2021 showed that although prevalence of stunting was reduced from 33.4 percent in 2015 to 29.6 percent in 2018-2019, this reduction is still not enough to meet the UN SDG 2 Zero Hunger in 2030.

Promoting healthy diets should be as straightforward as Pinggang Pinoy and the Nutritional Guidelines for Filipinos. However, many factors come into play to increase our vegetable intake and meet micronutrient requirements such as vitamin A. Households with limited purchasing capacity are at a higher risk of micronutrient deficiencies such as vitamin A deficiency (VAD), iron deficiency anemia, and zinc deficiency, which are all associated with stunting.

Vegetables such as carrots and squash are rich sources of vitamin A, but they are not as accessible to consumers as rice. From a supply point of view, vegetables contribute less than 1.0 percent of the daily per capita calorie supply. A study on the Philippine Food Balance Sheet (Gibson, 2012) showed that in terms of availability, our food supply lacks iron, zinc, and vitamin A. As supply is low, vegetable consumption is also low in all age groups and does not meet the WHO recommended intake of 400g per day. Per capita consumption of vegetables among Filipino households was at 123g per day in 2015, with a slight increase of 127g per day in 2018-2019, while fruit intake decreased from 37g per day (2015) to 34g per day (2018-19).

Cost emerges as the primary deterrent to consumption, as fruits and vegetables are expensive. In the Philippines, the Cost of Recommended Diet (CoRD) is P70 per serving per day. For daily wage earners with a family of five, for example, earning P500 per day, recommended diets based on local dietary guidelines and the cost of food would be unattainable. With a limited budget, households will spend more on rice, and eggs as protein source, and only 19 percent for vegetables.

Rice provides more than half of the total calories of our diet across income levels. A pregnant and lactating woman will consume more than 300g of rice per day, while children aged 3-5 years old will consume about 150g of rice per day. With food crises due to inflation and price increase, purchases may be limited to rice for the poorest households, and may be the only food that can provide the daily caloric needs of an individual.

The great potential of Golden Rice is that it can increase vitamin A intakes at no extra cost by substituting white rice with Golden Rice. Studies have shown that one cup of cooked Golden Rice can provide 30 percent to 50 percent of the estimated average requirement (EAR) for vitamin A for at-risk groups. This is equivalent to 12 cups of cooked kangkong. With the absence of other foods such as fruits and vegetables, Golden Rice will be able to provide the micronutrients per capita at all times.

The court's cease and desist order means that farmers will spend more on inputs by using more pesticides to prevent pest infestation and get a good yield of eggplants. On the other hand, farmers will lose tons of Golden Rice that have already been planted, and seeds wasted with the cancellation of its biosafety permit. Since this permit was granted to Golden Rice in 2021, hundreds of hectares of farmlands have been planted and tons are expected to be harvested. These are healthier rice that could have been consumed by people who could have benefited from the calories and micronutrients that will be discarded with Golden Rice. This decision, and its implications, comes at a time when prevalence of undernutrition in the form of stunting and micronutrient deficiencies such as VAD still pose significant health challenges.

While it is idealistic to transform the food system to allow better access and increase availability of vegetables rich in vitamin A, the need for nutrition intervention is urgent if we are to attain the SDGs in 2030. Many of us still remain food insecure and are malnourished. For every delay, indecision, or wrong decision in policy, program, or intervention, and for every disservice, we lower the chances of our people from achieving a healthy diet.

Eventually, all these policies will have an impact on food and nutrition security, and the court's decision may pave the direction of food system transformation. Whether this transformation is for the best or not remains to be seen.

Ma Cristina B. Sison, RND, MSc, is the president of Philippine Stakeholders for Nutrition and Dietetics, Inc.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/06/14/the-implications-of-stopping-the-cultivation-of-golden-rice-and-bt-eggplant-on-agriculture-nutrition-and-health/>

REMATE:

P105M agri damage naitala sa pagputok ng Kanlaon

June 13, 2024 19:04



MANILA, Philippines – Umabot na sa mahigit P104 milyon ang halaga ng pinsala sa agrikultura dahil sa pagsabog ng Bulkang Kanlaon.

Iniulat ng National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) nitong Huwebes, Hunyo 13, na ang halaga ng pinsala sa Region 6 at 7 ay katumbas ng 3,947.27 metric tons ng produksyon.

Nasa 1,706 naman ang bilang ng mga apektadong mangingisda at magsasaka, 135 mula sa Region 6 at 1,571 sa Region 7. Apektado rin ang 842.33 ektarya ng taniman sa nasabing mga rehiyon.

Sa nasabing bilang, 625.85 hectares ang tinukoy na wala nang tsansa na makarekober habang 216.48 ektarya ang may tsansa pa na makarekober mula sa tinamong pinsala.

Samantala, nasa 8,580 ang bilang ng mga apektadong pamilya sa pagputok ng bulkan o 29,739 indibidwal mula sa 25 barangay sa Regions 6 at 7.

Namahagi na ng ayuda ang pamahalaan sa mga apektadong pamilya na nagkakahalaga ng P11,346,626. ***RNT/JGC***

<https://remate.ph/p105m-agri-damage-naitala-sa-pagputok-ng-kanlaon/>