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MANILA BULLETIN:

Look-back 2024: The year that was in the House of Representatives

BY ELLSON QUISMORIO & DEXTER BARRO II

Jan 2, 2025 01:06 PM

AT A GLANCE

- No other institution in the Philippines presents in full view the pulse of politics like the 300-plus strong House of Representatives--and the year 2024 was no different.



The plenary hall of the House of Representatives (Dexter Barro II/MANILA BULLETIN)

No other institution in the Philippines presents in full view the pulse of politics like the 300-plus strong House of Representatives--and the year 2024 was no different.

In this melting pot of various political stances--which is 10 times bigger than the Senate, the other legislative chamber--it is quite intriguing to see how the House members pursued various landmark measures while staying true to their personal beliefs.

Being district and sectoral representatives, the solons were also quite outspoken on different issues of national importance, even if it meant openly criticizing fellow public servants. But

that's what politics is all about--make the case for your side, agree to disagree, and in the end let the people decide.

Economic Cha-cha try

The Speaker Martin Romualdez-led House of Representatives' first mission of 2024 was to pass a Charter change (Cha-cha) measure--an economic Cha-cha measure, to be exact.

The House achieved this on March 20, when then the plenary voted 288-8-2 (yes-no-abstain) to pass on third and final reading the proposed economic Cha-cha, as embodied in Resolution of Both Houses (RBH) No.7. As the phrase implies, the current Cha-cha effort is only concerned with easing the restrictive economic provisions of the 37-year-old Constitution.

RBH No.7 is an exact copy of the Senate's RBH No.6, which proposes amendments to Articles XII, XIV and XVI, focusing on the national patrimony, economy, education and general provisions of the 1987 Constitution.

The year 2024 was arguably the last time in the current Marcos administration that seeking constitutional revision was politically feasible in Congress (House and Senate). By 2025, all of the solons' focus would be placed in mid-term polls; after the that, the latter half of the Marcos administration will have commenced.

To pursue Cha-cha in the final three years of any presidency is viewed as an uphill climb, given its likelihood to be branded as an attempt to extend the term of elected officials. With the Senate's relative indifference to economic Cha-cha, the effort ultimately went nowhere, and the House was left with no choice but to move on.

House takes SMNI to task

Controversial television network Sonshine Media Network International (SMNI)--founded by the equally controversial Pastor Apollo Quiboloy--found itself on the receiving end of franchise revocation efforts in the House in 2024.

HB No. 9710, which sought to repeal Swara Sug Media Corporation (corporate name of SMNI) operating franchise, was also approved on third and final reading by congressmen on March 20. The network's franchise was originally scheduled to expire in 2044.

The revocation of SMNI's franchise was prompted by a series of violations, including spreading fake news, involvement in red-tagging, and committing serious corporate offenses.

Romualdez defended the revocation of SMNI's franchise. He called it a "decisive action" that "underscores our commitment to uphold the integrity of broadcasting standards and the public's trust".

SMNI openly admitted to transitioning from a non-stock, non-profit corporation to a sole corporation under Quiboloy in 2006. Later, in 2023, the controlling stake was transferred to Bro. Marlon Acobo, with both transactions taking place without obtaining congressional approval.

Section 10 of Republic Act (RA) 11422--the law granting SMNI the franchise to operate until 2044--stipulates the requisite congressional approval for such changes, explicitly prohibiting the sale, lease, transfer, or assignment of the franchise without prior congressional consent.

Pantaleon Alvarez's advice to PBBM

Davao del Norte 1st district Rep. Pantaleon Alvarez---known to be a close ally of former president Rodrigo Duterte--grabbed headlines in late March when he told President Marcos to make the ultimate "sacrifice" by turning over the reins of the country to Vice President Sara Duterte.

Alvarez gave this advice to President Marcos on amid the ever-growing tension between the Philippines and China in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

“I will advise the President to reflect and meditate this Holy Week. If Jesus Christ himself made sacrifice for the people, maybe it is his turn to do the same by voluntarily resigning from his position and turn over the functions of the presidency to the duly-elected Vice President in the person of VP Sara Duterte,” he said.

The veteran congressman sees this as a way to somehow de-escalate the tension in the WPS. The Duterte family is known to have good ties with China.

“I respectfully call for our President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to stop making decisions and actions that will further escalate the tensions between the Philippines and China. Realistically speaking, we cannot compete with China in terms of military strength. We have allies and defense treaty with the US but are we 100 percent sure they will come to our defense? I don’t think so,” he said.

Alvarez, who was served as House Speaker during the first two years of former president Duterte's term, called on the Marcos to "reassess its strategies in dealing with the Chinese government in the WPS" following a water cannon attack perpetrated by the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) to a Philippine resupply mission boat navigating towards Ayungin Shoal.

Just days later, during a political rally in Tagum City, Davao del Norte, Alvarez told the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to withdraw its support from the Chief Executive. This was supposedly in response to developments in the West Philippine Sea (WPS) issue.

Most of Alvarez's House colleagues didn't agree with his remarks, with some of them branding the ex-Speaker as pro-China, and risking sedition in the process.

House takes another crack at divorce bill

For the first time in six years, the House of Representatives approved a bill legalizing absolute divorce—perhaps the most divisive legislative measure in recent history.

HB No. 9349, or “An Act Reinstating Absolute Divorce as an Alternative Mode for the Dissolution of Marriage,” was passed on May 22 via slim margin of 131 affirmative votes, 109 negative votes, and 20 abstentions.

The historic measure, principally authored by Albay 1st district Rep. Edcel Lagman, seeks to offer another mode of dissolving dysfunctional marriages through several grounds, such as domestic violence, marital infidelity, and abandonment.

According to Lagman, a member of the minority, the bill is intended to "save the children from the pain, stress, and agony consequent to their parents’ marital clashes or irreconcilable differences".

Anti-divorce lawmakers, however, argue that the bill would “destroy” the spirit of marriage. It was also criticized for being unconstitutional, citing its supposed violation of the provision

which states that marriage is “the foundation of the family and shall be protected by the State”.

The bill is still pending in the Senate.

Enter quad-comm: Mega-panel looks into POGO rabbit hole

Following high-profile raids on several Philippine offshore gambling operations (POGOs) that unraveled links to organized crime, lawmakers from both the House minority and majority urged President Marcos to outright ban such facilities.

This did not fall on deaf ears as the President ordered a ban on POGOs during his third State of the Nation Address (SONA) in July.

Despite the ban, the House continued its investigation into POGOs with one question in mind: who are the masterminds behind it?

The mega-panel in charge of this is the quad-committee (quad-comm), composed of the Committees on Dangerous Drugs, Public Order and Safety, Human Rights, and Public Accounts. It is led by overall chairman Surigao del Norte 2nd district Rep. Robert Ace Barbers.

It held its first ever hearing on Aug. 15, and has since proven to be must-see TV.

Over several public hearings, which captured the interest of millions of viewers, the quad-comm invited a slew of alleged POGO personalities, including Alice Guo, Atty. Harry Roque, Katherine Cassandra Li Ong, and Tony Yang.

In a Nov. 28 hearing, the quad-comm presented a detailed matrix of a “deeply-entrenched transnational criminal syndicate” behind POGOs and the criminal activities behind them. The panel’s findings point to former president Duterte’s presidential adviser Michael Yang and his associate Allan Lim as its alleged leaders.

House seeks justice for EJK victims during Duterte’s drug war

Aside from POGOs, the House quad-comm also investigated in great detail the alleged extrajudicial killings (EJKs) and human rights violations during Duterte’s bloody war on illegal drugs during his presidency.

During the previous Duterte administration, an investigation like in the House of Representatives would not have been possible—after all, Congress has traditionally been in favor of the administration. Suffice it to say that in 2024, the House made a stand for the sake of the families of EJK victims.

The main focus of the lawmakers is to hold Duterte and his close allies accountable for the purported 30,000 deaths during the drug war.

During his sole appearance before the quad-comm on Nov. 13, the former president admitted the existence of a cash reward system for drug war kills. The 79-year-old Duterte even dared the International Criminal Court (ICC) to immediately begin its investigation into his anti-drugs campaign while he was still alive.

At one point, the hearing got so tense that Duterte nearly scuffled with former senator Antonio Trillanes, who was a resource person in the hearing. The former leader also openly

antagonized former senator Leila de Lima, who was incarcerated for drug charges during his Palace tenure.

After 13 grueling hearings, the quad-comm tagged Duterte and his inner circle for mounting a “grand criminal enterprise” where they were alleged to have profited from the illegal drug trade they had publicly vowed to eliminate.

In its progress report which it submitted to plenary on Dec. 18, the quad-comm recommended the filing of appropriate charges against Duterte and his allies Senators Ronald "Bato" dela Rosa and Christopher "Bong" Go.

Barbers tagged the trio as "perpetrators of crimes against humanity under Section 6, Republic Act (RA) No.9851 or the Philippine Act on Crimes Against International Humanitarian Law, Genocide and other Crimes against Humanity".

OVP's proposed 2025 budget gets slashed

Following last year's realignment of confidential funds from the Office of the Vice President (OVP) to other agencies, the House of Representatives took it one step further as they moved to cut the 2025 budget of Vice President Sara Duterte's office from the proposed P2.037 billion to just P733 million.

The staggering decrease was sought after Duterte deliberately skipped the hearings of the House Committee on Appropriations—the panel in charge of overseeing the deliberations on the General Appropriations Bill (GAB) or proposed national budget--and the subsequent plenary debates.

During her sole appearance before the committee on Aug. 27, the Vice President butted heads with House members over the former's refusal to directly answer questions surrounding the OVP's controversial usage of P125 million in confidential funds in an 11-day period in December 2022.

In one instance, Makabayan bloc member and ACT Teachers Party-list Rep. France Castro likened Duterte's evasiveness to that of a “pusit” (squid).

However, Duterte wasn't left to fend for herself in the hearing as she was backed by none other than the former president and incumbent Pampanga 2nd district Rep. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who thumbed down her colleagues' manner of questioning.

SAGIP Party-list Rep. Rodante Marcoleta, a close ally of the Dutertes, questioned the lower chamber for not affording the lady official the traditional parliamentary courtesy.

Probing VP Sara's alleged misuse of confidential funds

Following a scathing privilege speech by Manila 2nd district Rep. Rolando Valeriano, where he criticized Vice President Duterte's confrontational behavior and refusal to cooperate with congressmen during the budget hearing of the OVP, the House Committee on Good Government and Public Accountability launched a thorough probe into Duterte's usage of confidential funds.

The panel, described as a counterpart to the Senate's Blue Ribbon Committee, included the Department of Education (DepEd) in its investigation. The agency was previously led by Duterte herself from June 30, 2022 to July 19, 2024.

Through a number of hearings, lawmakers alleged that both the DepEd and OVP misused their allocation of confidential funds totaling to P612.5 million. Allegations of splurging this money on safe houses and youth leadership summits, handing out cash envelopes to certain officials, and the bewildering disbursement of funds to Duterte's security personnel were among the issues that the panel flagged.

However, none have caught the public's attention as much as the mystery behind "Mary Grace Piattos"--a supposed signatory to a confidential fund receipt. The name trended on social media as netizens pointed out how it is named after a Filipino restaurant chain and a local potato chips brand. The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) has since reported that 1,322 names linked to such receipts have no birth records.

The Vice President only made two appearances before the Manila 3rd district Rep. Joel Chua-chaired good government panel. In her first appearance on Sept. 18, she surprisingly refused to take an oath to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. She returned to face the panel on Nov. 25, but cut her attendance short due to her staff's medical emergency. These missed opportunities meant that the committee did not get the chance to directly ask Duterte about the issues hounding her.

The drama didn't end there though, as the panel's arrest order on Duterte's chief of staff, Zuleika Lopez, led to the Vice President violating protocols to spend the night with her at Batasang Pambansan complex. It was during this episode wherein Vice President Duterte claimed in a press briefing that she contacted an assassin to kill President Marcos, First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos, and Speaker Romualdez—in the event that she was killed.

During the final hearing of the good government panel for 2024, both majority and minority congressmen cited the potential crimes committed by Vice President Duterte and her offices, which include plunder, malversation, falsification, and bribery. The panel, however, has yet to recommend the filing of such charges.

Murang Pagkain Super-committee

On Sept. 25, the House formalized the creation of another multi-panel body, this time to tackle the issue on the high cost of rice and other basic goods.

Dubbed the quinta-committee (quinta-comm), it is tasked to investigate the interdependent issues of smuggling and price manipulation of basic goods and essential commodities, as well as to address hunger and promote food and nutrition security. It is led by overall chairman Albay 2nd district Rep. Joey Salceda.

The five panels that make up the quinta-comm are the Committees on Ways and Means, Trade and Industry, Agriculture and Food, Social Services; and the Special Committee on Food Security.

Nicknaming itself as the Murang Pagkain Super-committee, the quinta-comm in its first hearing on Nov. 26 traced "biggest agricultural price manipulation case" involving rice--the Filipino staple food--to the previous Duterte administration.

"The biggest case of price manipulation in the agricultural sector remains to be the cornering of import permits in 2016-2018," Salceda said. He estimated the total economic loss at P88.6 billion.

The economist-solon noted how private sector control over rice importation and the manipulation of import permits during the period led to a significant spike in rice prices in 2018, with consumers paying up to P8 more per kilo.

He said that the issue only eased after the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) abolished in 2019 the permit system administered by the National Food Authority (NFA). Salceda said it remains to be known who in the private sector were granted rice importation permits by the NFA during the three-year period.

As a preview for 2025, the quinta-comm said it will pivot from tacking costly food items to costly electricity. "So, we will soon convene a Murang Kuryente Super-committee," said Salceda.

This directive came from no less than Speaker Romualdez.

"We will not stop there. Mind you, once we solve that, or at least we get the process going in bringing down the price of basic food commodities, we will even look at other basic needs of the people like power or energy cost. We will look at water. We will look at the very basic needs of the people because we are the House of the People," Romualdez said.

VP Sara gets 3 impeachment complaints in a month

Speaking of previews for 2025, the House of Representatives--through the Committee on Justice--could start in earnest the discussions on Vice President Sara Duterte's impeachment case this January.

This, after Duterte--the second highest-ranked official of the land--was slapped with a total of three impeachment complaints in December 2024.

A group composed of civil society figureheads led by former senator Lima filed the first impeachment complaint against Vice President Duterte on Dec. 2.

Just two days later, on Dec. 4, a second impeachment complaint was filed against the lady official this time by members of progressive groups.

A group mostly composed of priests and lawyers then trooped to the House of Representatives to file third complaint on Dec. 19. All three complaints have been endorsed by at least one House member.

Reports said that the impeachment raps have yet to be transmitted to the Office of the Speaker. But once they do, the Speaker will pass the complaints to the Committee on Rules, which will then refer it to the justice panel.

<https://mb.com.ph/2025/1/2/look-back-2024-the-year-that-was-in-the-house-of-representatives>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

‘New law can void SC ruling on municipal waters’

Jasper Emmanuel Arcalas, Bella Cariaso - The Philippine Star

January 3, 2025 | 12:00am

MANILA, Philippines — A new law is needed to overrule a decision of the Supreme Court (SC) allowing commercial fishing vessels to fish in municipal waters, according to former agriculture secretary Leonardo Montemayor.

Montemayor, chairman of the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF), yesterday joined small fisherfolk organizations in opposing the ruling of the high tribunal, which struck down a provision of the Philippine Fisheries Code of 1998 reserving municipal waters for small fishers.

“The law limits fishing within 15 kilometers from the shoreline of municipal waters to small fishermen,” Montemayor said.

He said the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and the Department of Agriculture (DA) failed to appeal the SC decision within the required period.

He said a measure may have to be filed and passed in Congress to correct what he described as a “grave injustice and economic injury” against small fisherfolk.

As a former lawmaker, Montemayor said he co-authored the Fisheries Code or Republic Act 8550, which was amended by RA 10654 in 2015.

Montemayor was DA chief from 2001 to 2002.

Meanwhile, Magsasaka party-list chairman Argel Joseph Cabatbat said the SC decision, once fully implemented, may result in the degradation of the country’s fishery resources.

Cabatbat cited the use of destructive methods like trawl fishing by commercial fishing vessels.

The SC ruling stemmed from a petition filed by Mercidar Fishing Corp., which sought to open municipal waters to commercial fishing vessels.

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2025/01/03/2411436/new-law-can-void-sc-ruling-municipal-waters>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Retail price of pork soars to P430/kilo

Bella Cariaso - The Philippine Star

January 3, 2025 | 12:00am



Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa said the demand for pork is expected to go down starting this month.

STAR / Jesse Bustos

MANILA, Philippines — The retail price of pork reached as high as P430 per kilo due to the impact of African swine fever (ASF) and increase in demand during the holidays, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said yesterday.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa said the demand for pork is expected to go down starting this month.

“The high retail price of pork is still due to the continuous effect of the ASF,” De Mesa said.

Based on the monitoring of the DA in Metro Manila markets, the retail price of pork shoulder ranged between P300 and P400 per kilo. Pork belly is priced between P350 and P430 per kilo.

The Bureau of Animal Industry has reported that cases of ASF have decreased further after outbreaks were recorded in 365 barangays compared to the previous 369 cases.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the DA has procured at least 490,000 doses of ASF vaccine.

Tiu Laurel said additional ASF vaccines would be procured if there will be a clamor from the hog industry.

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2025/01/03/2411458/retail-price-pork-soars-p430kilo>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

EDITORIAL - Social injustice

The Philippine Star

January 3, 2025 | 12:00am



Small-scale rice farmers are groaning from the flood of imports following the drastic cut in tariffs, as part of a so far futile effort of the government to bring down rice prices.

Now it's the turn of small-scale fishers to express alarm over a threat to their livelihood. A coalition of small-scale fishers, farmers, organized labor, religious, students and environmental advocates is asking the Department of Agriculture to appeal a Supreme Court ruling that allowed commercial fishing within 15 kilometers from the country's shores. These municipal waters have long been reserved for marginalized fishing operations using small boats.

On Dec. 19, the Supreme Court upheld a ruling of the Malabon Regional Trial Court, which granted a petition of Mercidar Fishing Corp. to allow commercial fishing in municipal waters. The SC ruled that giving small-scale fishers preferential access to municipal waters was unconstitutional. Up to two million registered municipal fisherfolk and a majority of subsistence fishers are expected to see their livelihoods adversely affected by the SC ruling.

The SC has had its share of controversial decisions. It had previously also ruled that there is no such thing as premature election campaigning in this country, even after certificates of candidacy have already been filed. It also gave free rein to the posting of campaign materials, regardless of size, within private property, citing it as an exercise of freedom of expression. This ruling rendered laughable the designation of common poster display areas by the

Commission on Elections. The Comelec has expressed concern that because of the SC ruling, private entities could sell space in their properties for political advertising in the guise of freedom of expression even during the official campaign period.

The SC, citing laws passed by Congress, also put an end to the constitutional ideal of making the party-list system a tool for marginalized representation. The party list has degenerated into a farce.

Now comes the SC ruling on marginalized fisherfolk. Small-scale fishers have expressed concern that with the ruling, fishing in up to 90 percent of municipal waters will be controlled by commercial fishing enterprises with large vessels. Whether the Department of Agriculture, which has jurisdiction over fisheries, will appeal the SC ruling is uncertain, considering that the family of the DA chief owns one of the largest commercial fishing enterprises in the country.

A spokesperson for the Kaakbay coalition of non-government organizations decried the SC ruling, saying, “The issue here is social justice. The ruling placed the poor and marginalized municipal fishers in a pitiful oppressive situation.”

Small-scale rice farmers have been issuing similar laments. If the government is serious in liberating marginalized workers in the agriculture sector from poverty, it should heed their concerns.

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2025/01/03/2411504/editorial-social-injustice>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Extended RCEF falls short as 'gift' to rice farmers — group

[Dominique Nicole Flores](#) - Philstar.com

January 2, 2025 | 6:09pm



Farmers plant rice seedlings for the first cropping season in Mangatarem, Pangasinan on June 30, 2024.

The Philippine STAR / Cesar Ramirez

MANILA, Philippines — For a farmers' group, extending the Rice Tariffication Law's Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund for six more years and tripling its annual allocation to P30 billion is not considered a "gift."

The Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) described the amended RTL, also known as the recently [signed](#) Republic Act 12078, as a “death sentence” for Filipino rice farmers.

The group argues that while the law aims to reduce rice prices through increased importation, it fails to “directly uplift farmers” and does not prioritize the strengthening of local rice production.

“It is a death sentence for the millions of farmers who toil daily to sustain the country’s food supply,” the group said in a statement on Thursday, January 2.

Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu-Laurel Jr. had hailed the extension and increased funding as a “[Christmas gift](#)” to farmers and their families. However, KMP also dismisses this claim, calling it an “insult” to the many farmers still living in poverty.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, farmers and fisherfolk remain the most impoverished sector in the country, with a poverty incidence of 30% in 2021.

KMP said that extending and increasing the RCEF is only a “smokescreen” concealing the unaddressed problems of Filipino farmers, such as the low palay farmgate prices and lack of affordable agricultural inputs.

What is the rice tariffication law?

The RTL, which was enacted through Republic Act 11203 in 2019, enables rice importers to sell larger volumes of rice in the country by paying tariffs of at least 35%, eliminating the previous cap on imports.

Economic managers have argued that the law will reduce rice prices by increasing the rice supply in the market.

Revenue generated from the tariffs is allocated to the RCEF, which is intended to modernize farm machinery, improve seed production and expand credit assistance to farmers.

With the amended law, the fund hopes to generate and use P30 billion each year for the RCEF.

However, despite the RTL being in effect for several years, rice prices have consistently remained above P50 per kilogram for both local and imported varieties.

“The past five years under RA 11203 and RCEF’s promises of modernization and mechanization did not uplift the local rice industry. RA 12078 will only benefit big traders and machinery suppliers rather than directly uplifting rice farmers,” KMP said.

Lowered tariffs, Kadiwa stores

To reduce rice prices to P29 per kilogram, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. signed Executive Order 62 on June 20, 2024, lowering the rice tariff to 15% until 2028. This move follows his campaign pledge to reduce rice prices to P20 per kilogram.

The DA also implemented the Kadiwa Rice-for-All program in major public markets to sell around P42 per kilogram of imported rice to marginalized groups, hoping to bring down rice prices.

However, this was also met with criticism from civil society groups and industry experts. They contend that it is unsustainable and does not solve the problem of high rice prices.

The amended RTL also provides the DA power to declare a national food security emergency, which then allows the National Food Authority (NFA) to release its buffer stocks of rice.

Tiu-Laurel said the emergency is meant to “hurt” price manipulators of rice and stabilize market prices. However, KMP and other groups have warned that declaring an emergency may only facilitate more rice imports.

“This policy contradicts claims of strengthening the Philippine rice industry, as it undermines local farmers by flooding the market with imported rice, further driving down palay farmgate prices, and perpetuating landlessness and indebtedness,” KMP Chairperson Danilo Ramos said.

Ramos also criticized the Rice-for-All program, saying it is an “empty promise” that puts optics on a pedestal to make it seem as if it has supported farmers and consumers.

What do rice farmers need?

All these measures and programs to curb rice prices and mechanize farming in the country, KMP said, are not effective.

The farmers' group stressed that they need direct subsidies that would allow them to spend less on production costs, such as fertilizer and fuel.

They also urged the government to prioritize providing debt relief to farmers and ensuring their harvests are purchased — and at fair prices.

KMP maintains that the NFA's authority to regulate imported and local rice prices should be reinstated, a power removed under the RTL.

The group argues that with the NFA's role under the revised RTL limited to maintaining buffer stocks, the agency's mandate to support farmers is effectively weakened.

“This not only jeopardizes food security but also sidelines the NFA's critical function of stabilizing rice prices and ensuring a steady market for farmers' produce,” Ramos said.

The House “Murang Pagkain” Super Committee in its inquiry has also criticized the DA and economic agencies for their failure to address issues related to agricultural smuggling and price manipulation.

Rice prices. As of Dec. 30, 2024, the DA's latest report on rice prices in Metro Manila markets shows that local well-milled commercial rice costs up to P52 per kilogram, with only two markets offering it at P40.

Regular milled rice, however, is priced lower, ranging from P38 to P48, with the cheapest price found in only two markets.

Higher-quality rice varieties, both local and imported, can cost between P52 and P63 per kilogram, depending on the grade.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2025/01/02/2411380/extended-rcef-falls-short-gift-rice-farmers-group>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Groups to SC: Protect rights of small fishers

Oceana, civil society groups seek reversal of high court ruling allowing commercial vessels in 15-km municipal fishing grounds

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

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 05:19 AM January 03, 2025



TOILING AT SEA Fishermen from Binmaley town in Pangasinan province, in this photo taken in October 2024, set out for the day’s fishing trip in municipal waters using a small banca hoping to bring enough catch to feed their families. —WILLIE LOMIBAO

Environmental group Oceana, together with fisherfolk and civil society groups, on Thursday filed a petition in the Supreme Court to intervene in the case against a commercial fisher, challenging the constitutionality of preferential access granted to municipal fisherfolk within the 15-kilometer municipal waters.

In a resolution dated Aug. 19, 2024, Oceana said that the Supreme Court’s First Division ruled in favor of Mercidar Fishing Corp., affirming a lower court’s decision that provisions of the Fisheries Code—specifically those imposing a 15-km municipal water boundary prioritizing municipal fisherfolk and regulating commercial fishing activities—were unconstitutional.

The high court upheld the Malabon Regional Trial Court’s (RTC) decision dated Dec. 11, 2023, citing that the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) filed the petition “out of time” and failed to provide “any legal basis,” instead alluding to “policy considerations.”

In a 28-page petition on Thursday, Oceana urged the high court to reverse the resolution, remand the case for trial before the RTC, order Mercidar to implead all indispensable parties, and allow the intervention of citizen suits in the case.

The petitioners included the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice; Mayor Ithamar Espinosa, representing the municipality of Santa Fe, Cebu; Rowel Saldajeno, based in San Jose, Antique, and president of Funda Dalipe Fisherfolks Association and chair of the Municipal Fishery and Aquatic Resources Management Council; and Arnel Boholst, a municipal fisherfolk from Bacacay, Albay, and chair of the Lagonoy Gulf Integrated Fishery and Aquatic Resources Management Council; and the Regional Fisheries Training and Fisherfolk Coordination Division in Tabaco City.

The petitioners argued that all proceedings and orders before the Malabon RTC Branch 170, including the decision dated Dec. 11, 2023, were void for violating due process and lack of jurisdiction due to the respondent's failure to implead indispensable parties.

“Given the unusual breakneck speed of the proceedings before RTC Malabon Branch 170 under Judge Zaldy Docena, the nonjoinder of indispensable parties, and the sheer breadth of the issues involved that affect a large population, allowing intervention serves the ends of justice,” the petitioners said.

“In contrast, disallowing intervention only amplifies the injustices that have already been done in these proceedings,” they added.

Lament



LIVELIHOOD A group of small fishermen checks on their boats at Barangay Bonuan Binloc in Dagupan City in this photo taken last October. Fishermen in coastal towns and cities in

Pangasinan province, many of them using nets and basic gears, rely on the bounty of Lingayen Gulf for their livelihood. —WILLIE LOMIBAO

In Zambales, small fishermen urged the provincial government to protect their right to fish in municipal waters.

Joey Marabe, coordinator of fisherfolk group Pamalakaya in Zambales, said some 20,000 registered fisherfolk from 12 coastal towns in the province would be affected if the decision allowing commercial vessels in the fishing grounds of local fishermen would be fully implemented.

“The small fishermen of Zambales, especially those driven by China in the West Philippine Sea, fear the increased influx of commercial fishing vessels in our traditional fisheries,” Marabe told the Inquirer.

Many fishermen in the province who used to venture in Scarborough Shoal, their traditional fishing ground in the West Philippine sea, now rely on municipal waters as they are barred from entering the shoal and after experiencing harassment by the China Coast Guard.

In La Union, George Cacayuran, 54, a fisherman from Agoo town, said that even before the ruling, commercial fishing vessels had been seen in their municipal waters.

According to Cacayuran, who also chairs Timek ken Namnaman Dagiti Babassit ti Mangala ti La Union (Timek), small fishing boats are only allowed 12 km from the shoreline but at least 100 commercial fishing boats are swarming 2 km from the shoreline or within the municipal waters. Timek is a small fisherfolk group with 5,000 members in La Union.

“They will catch and fine us when we cross but they allow the capitalists to compete with the fish we catch. Their catch for one day is equivalent to the catch of 300 small boats that spent 14 hours at sea,” Cacayuran said.

Alarmed

Pamalakaya sounded alarm that roughly 90 percent of every fishing ground of small-scale fishermen in the country would be open for exploitation as the ruling would allow commercial fishers beyond municipal waters and deeper than 12.8 meters.

Ronnel Arambulo, vice chair of Pamalakaya, citing a study of marine scientists, said only 10 percent of municipal waters were less than 12.8 meters deep.

“This only means that only a few area within the municipal waters will be left for small fishermen which has a serious impact not only on livelihood but also on the fish production and food security of each community,” said Arambulo.

He explained that small and large fishing boats could not be alongside each other while at sea because the equipment of municipal fishermen is relatively crude, compared to the modern equipment of commercial fishers.

“Often, commercial vessels use destructive fishing methods such as trawls and superlights. So apart from the impact on livelihood, the entry of commercial vessels into the marine resources of municipal waters will also be harmful,” Arambulo, added.

Pamalakaya urged Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu-Laurel Jr. to help fisherfolk assert their rights to the 15-km municipal waters.

“Small-scale fisherfolk are challenging the Department of Agriculture, as well as the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, to contest the Supreme Court ruling and ensure that the 15-km municipal waters would remain to the fishers,” Arambulo said in an earlier statement. —

WITH A REPORT FROM GILLIAN VILLANUEVA

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2020889/groups-to-sc-protect-rights-of-small-fishers>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Farmer land ownership rate only 21.8%, agriculture census finds

January 2, 2025 | 8:55 pm



Farmers are seen in a rice field in Bustos, Bulacan, Oct. 17, 2023. — PHILIPPINE STAR/KJ ROSALES

THE Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said only 21.8% of the 19.68 million persons engaged in agriculture own or have rights to their farmland.

The 2022 Census of Agriculture and Fisheries (CAF) defines the agricultural population as individuals aged 18 and above that are members of households with at least one person engaged in agriculture.

Out of the total population, 10.13 million or 51.5% are males, while 9.55 million or 48.5% are females.

Some 4.3 million persons told the census that they own their land or have rights to farm it.

The Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) posted the highest rate of farmland ownership or rights with 28.6%.

“This reflects the region’s strong emphasis on land ownership, which aligns with cultural and historical practices,” the PSA said.

Rounding out the list of leading regions were the Cagayan Valley (26.6%), Soccsksargen (25.69%), Central Luzon (25.68%), the Davao Region (25.4%), Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (25.1%), the Central Visayas (23.3%), Northern Mindanao (22.7%), and the Zamboanga Peninsula (22.2%).

Towards the bottom of the table were the Bicol Region (16.8%) Eastern Visayas (17.6%) and Western Visayas (18.2%).

“At the provincial level, Bohol, home to the highest number of farms in 2022, also led in the agricultural population with ownership or secure rights, totaling 191,867 individuals,” the PSA said.

“Isabela ranked second with 153,409 individuals, closely followed by Pangasinan with 149,863 individuals,” it added.

The census revealed that only 1.97 million of the agricultural population held formal title of ownership.

This was highest in Isabela (103,269), Bohol (81,236), and Pangasinan (72,449).

Meanwhile, 1.52 million individuals said they have owner-like possession over agricultural land with the leading provinces listed as Bohol (90,727), Negros Oriental (71,678), and Camarines Sur (50,406).

FISHERIES

In a separate report, PSA said that the number of fishing operators increased to 830,954 in 2022, up 9.3% from 760,297 in 2012.

The census also revealed 7.3% growth in the number of fishing operators to 853,065 from 795,070 10 years prior.

However, the average number of fishing operators dropped to 1.03% in 2022, down 1.8% from 2012.

“This suggests that fishing is becoming more of a household activity with fewer members per household actively engaged as operators, potentially due to diversification or transition of livelihoods or a decrease in younger generations engaged in fishing,” PSA said.

The census recorded 854,587 engaged in capture fishing operations.

“Single proprietorship dominated the industry, accounting for 843,469 operations, or 98.7% of the total. Partnerships made up only 1.3% of fishing operations,” PSA said.

“Institutional involvement, such as corporations, cooperatives, and government agencies, was minimal, collectively contributing only 0.03%,” it added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/01/02/644547/farmer-land-ownership-rate-only-21-8-agriculture-census-finds/>

MANILA STANDARD:

DA launches budget-friendly rice options

By Charles Dantes

January 2, 2025, 11:30 pm

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has announced the launch of affordable rice options under its “Rice for All” program, aiming to provide high-quality but budget-friendly rice to Filipino consumers.

DA Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa revealed on Thursday that the initiative will include Sulit Rice and Nutri Rice, which will be available in Kadiwa ng Pangulo centers, select markets, and train stations.

Sulit Rice, priced at P35 to P36 per kilo, consists of 100% broken rice grains but maintains good quality.

“We tried cooking it in the office, and the quality is satisfactory,” de Mesa said.

Meanwhile, Nutri Rice, priced at P37 to P38 per kilo, offers a healthier alternative. Produced through a single-pass milling process, it retains more fiber, vitamins, and minerals, making it a middle ground between well-milled and brown rice.

Sales of both rice varieties are expected to begin this January, with distribution expanding from Metro Manila to other regions nationwide.

The Food Terminal Incorporated (FTI) will manage the supply, which de Mesa assured is sufficient to meet public demand.

He also highlighted that the department is sourcing rice from both local producers and imports to ensure long-term availability.

The program builds on previous efforts to lower rice prices. By late 2024, prices of “Rice for All” products had already dropped to P40 per kilo. This year, the DA plans to offer even lower prices, between P38 and P39 per kilo, as part of its ongoing initiative to make rice more affordable.

Addressing questions about agricultural production, de Mesa said the DA is targeting a recovery in 2025, aiming for a palay harvest of 20 million metric tons despite challenges posed by the lingering effects of La Niña.

In terms of accessibility, the DA plans to expand the number of Kadiwa ng Pangulo Centers, with a target of 700 operational sites by March and 1,500 by 2028. These centers aim to bring affordable agricultural products closer to Filipino households.

<https://manilastandard.net/news/national/314542757/da-launches-budget-friendly-rice-options.html>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Farmers' groups hit high court decision

By Giselle P. Jordan

January 3, 2025

THE Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) and Magsasaka Partylist (MPL) expressed dismay over the Supreme Court ruling allowing commercial fishing in municipal waters, which allegedly violates provisions in the Philippine Fisheries Code.

The two groups admonished the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), and the Department of Agriculture (DA) for "sleeping on the job" and failing to appeal the court decision.

On Dec. 20, 2024, the Supreme Court First Division upheld a 2023 Malabon Regional Trial Court (RTC) decision on the petition of the Mercidar Fishing Corp. to fish within the 15-kilometer municipal waters, an area reserved for small fisherfolk, except in shallow waters (less than 7 fathoms deep).

In a prior resolution on Aug. 19, 2024, the same division denied a petition by BFAR and DA for certiorari assailing the RTC's decision. Certiorari is a legal remedy used to review another court's decision for grave abuse of discretion.

Leonardo Montemayor, FFF board chairman and MPL first nominee, suggested a bill be filed and passed in Congress to address this "grave injustice and economic injury" to small fisherfolk. Montemayor, who was agriculture secretary in 2001-2002 and a peasant sector representative in the 10th Congress, co-authored Republic Act (RA) 8550, or the Philippine Fisheries Code of 1998, later amended by RA 10654.

"The Fisheries Code clearly limits fishing from the municipal shorelines up to 15 kilometers in favor of municipal fishers. On a case-to-case basis only, a commercial fisher may be allowed

starting at the 10.1-mark upwards, provided he meets the following conditions: water depth of at least 7 fathoms, use of sustainable fishing methods, prior consultation with artisanal fisherfolk and other stakeholders, and no previous violation of Philippine laws," Montemayor said.

MPL Chairman Argel Joseph Cabatbat cautioned the ruling may cause the degradation of local fishery resources, since there have been past reports of commercial fishing vessels using destructive methods like trawl fishing.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/03/business/top-business/farmers-groups-hit-high-court-decision/2029537>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Coffee farmers' income boosted

By Giselle P. Jordan

January 3, 2025

FARMERS can now harvest 600 kilograms of coffee beans every year through the community-based Forest Management Project (FMP), a collaboration between the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency Philippines (JICA Philippines).

The FMP is an 11-year project that covers the Upper Magat and Cagayan River basins, the Pampanga River basin and the Jalaur River basin.

The project consisted of initiating reforestation activities, conducting management capacity development training for people's organizations (POs), establishing livelihood enterprises and constructing bridges, roads and irrigation systems to help local communities in forest conservation and livelihood.

The DENR and JICA worked with 149 POs and local government units (LGUs) in Ifugao, Iloilo, Nueva Ecija, Nueva Vizcaya and Quirino.

On a visit to the municipalities of Janiuay, Lambunao and Calinog in Iloilo, DENR and JICA officials found 13,027 hectares of new tree and agroforestry plantations, and a 16.44-percent increase in vegetative cover through the FMP, based on the 2015-2021 Geo-Spatial Data Analysis.

The establishment of agroforestry support facilities under the FMP has also given communities better access to basic social services like education and health care. For instance, it has reduced travel time from Calinog to Iloilo City and back from three days to less than six hours.

"The FMP has improved my income and enabled me to send my three sons to university," Janiuay resident Jimmy Rapista said, adding that his sons also want to join the forest conservation initiatives.

JICA Philippines noted the project would not be possible without the cooperation of the DENR, LGUs and local communities.

DENR 6 Regional Executive Director Raul Lorilla said, "We need to change individuals to change the society."

The DENR and JICA vowed to continue supporting the communities through the FMP initiative.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/03/business/top-business/coffee-farmers-income-boosted/2029535>

THE MANILA TIMES:

DA to roll out 'sulit, nutri' rice nationwide

By Catherine S. Valente

January 3, 2025

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) on Thursday said it would roll out nationwide two healthier and cheaper rice varieties called "Sulit" and "Nutri" as part of the government's effort to reduce the cost of the staple.

During the Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon briefing, Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said that the Sulit Rice would be priced from P35 to P36 per kilogram (kg), while the Nutri Rice would be sold for P37 to P38 per kg.

De Mesa described the Nutri Rice as between well-milled and brown rice, while the Sulit Rice is 100 percent broken white rice.

He said the new rice varieties, to be available starting January, would be in addition to the P40 per kg price for mixed local and imported well-milled rice currently offered at Kadiwa stores.

"We expect this January to start selling Nutri Rice and Sulit Rice in Kadiwa ng Pangulo Centers, selected markets and train stations," de Mesa said.

He assured the public that there was enough supply of the Sulit Rice and Nutri Rice, which would be sourced from local and imported supplies.

He said that the government planned to further increase the number of Kadiwa ng Pangulo centers to 700 by March.

"We expect that before the end of 2028, the total number of Kadiwa ng Pangulo sites throughout the Philippines will be 1,500," de Mesa said. The Kadiwa ng Pangulo's Rice for All program provides cheaper rice.

The DA also plans to open more Kadiwa kiosks at major public markets nationwide, as well as at Metro Rail Transit (MRT) and Light Rail Transit (LRT) stations.

Kadiwa ng Pangulo kiosks operate in Kamuning Market, Malabon Central Market, New Las Piñas City Public Market, Pasay City Public Market, Guadalupe Market, MRT-North Avenue Station, and LRT-Monumento Station.

Last month, the DA started selling well-milled rice priced at P40 per kilogram in Kadiwa ng Pangulo kiosks in Kamuning Market, Malabon Central Market, New Las Piñas City Public Market and Pasay City Public Market. The Kadiwa kiosks are open Tuesdays to Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The DA brought the Rice-for-All program to public markets in response to "persistently high" retail prices despite reduced tariff rates and declining global rice prices.

Executive Order 62 slashed the import duty on rice to 15 percent until 2028 from 35 percent previously in a bid to augment local supply, manage prices and ease the inflationary pressure of commodities.

The government had earmarked an additional P5-billion budget for Rice-for-All and P29 rice programs, with the latter aimed at making discounted rice available to about 6.9 million low-income households.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/03/news/national/da-to-roll-out-sulit-nutri-rice-nationwide/2029480>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Municipal governments join groups vs ruling favoring big fishers

Joel R. San Juan and Jonathan L. Mayuga
January 3, 2025



Fisherfolk and civil society groups rally outside the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and Department of Agriculture offices to urge them to perform their mandate and defend the social justice provisions of the Philippine Constitution and the Fisheries Code, as amended, giving preferential access to municipal and artisanal fisherfolk in the 15-kilometer municipal water. That particular provision in the code is at the heart of a controversial SC ruling lifting the exclusivity of municipal waters to small fishermen. The latter say that allowing in the commercial fishers will doom them and lead to overfishing.

MUNICIPAL governments have joined fisherfolk, civil society representatives and environmental groups led by the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice and Oceana in asking the Supreme Court to reverse its resolution removing the exclusivity of municipal fishing grounds to small fishers.

In a 28-page petition-in-intervention, the Municipality of Santa Fe together with the other petitioners pleaded with the SC to allow them to intervene in the case of Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), et al v. Mercidar Fishing Corporation as they stand to be adversely affected by the Court's ruling in August 2024.

Meanwhile, Mayor Alfredo M Coro II of the Municipality of Del Carmen in Siargao Islands also asked the national government and the SC to recognize the 15-km municipal waters' preferential rights to municipal fisherfolks and the continued regulation of commercial fishing operations within municipal waters.

In the August 2024 ruling, the High Court's First Division denied the petition filed by the Department of Agriculture-BFAR (DA-BFAR) seeking to set aside the order of the Malabon Regional Trial Court in December 2023 allowing Mercidar to operate within the 15-kilometer municipal waters except shallow waters.

The Court also ruled as unconstitutional several provisions of the Fisheries Code declaring the municipal waters as reserved for artisanal fisherfolk.

The Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) appealed before the SC on behalf of DA-BFAR, but it was denied because it was filed "out of time" and the government failed to provide "any legal basis" and alluded purely to "policy considerations."

"Hurting deeply at how their rights have been taken from them in the darkness of night, recalling that rules of procedure must always serve the ends of justice, the petitioners file this petition before the Supreme Court en banc to protect their constitutional rights to due process and to a balanced and healthful ecology," the petitioners said

The petitioners insist that the proceedings and orders before the Malabon RTC are void for violating due process and for lack of jurisdiction due to the respondent's failure to implead indispensable parties such as the local government, the Fishery and Aquatic Resources Management Council (FARMC) and the municipal fisherfolk.

They noted that Mercidar impleaded only the DA-BFAR in its petition for declaratory relief filed before the Malabon court.

"A judgment rendered without jurisdiction is void. It is not entitled to the respect accorded to a valid judgment, but may be entirely disregarded or declared inoperative by any tribunal in which effect is sought to be given to it," the petition read.

Due to the failure of Mercidar to implead other indispensable parties, the petitioners said the Court should remand the issue to the trial court and order the other parties to be impleaded, including citizens and NGOs.

They noted that commercial fishing operators are often capable of exhausting fisheries resources "beyond their ability to recover."

“Overfishing leads to several dire consequences: the collapse of an overfished stock, ecosystem collapse and the extinction of entire species, and food insecurity,” the petitioners said.

“These matters must be remanded to the court below, with all indispensable parties represented, and where all issues can be fully and adequately threshed out in the light of day,” the petitioners said.

Small fishermen could lose 90% of fishing grounds

An alliance of fisherfolk organizations on Thursday estimated, meanwhile, that small fishermen will lose approximately 90 percent of municipal fishing grounds to commercial fishing should the Supreme Court ruling be fully implemented.

The Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas said commercial fishing vessels, if allowed within the 15-kilometer fishing waters, will eventually outcompete small fishermen and force them to venture farther in open waters to catch enough fish and make fishing sustainable.

The controversial SC First Division ruling, according to Pamalakaya will allow commercial fishers beyond municipal waters and deeper than seven fathoms (12.8 meters). Based on an initial study by a marine scientist, only 10 percent of municipal waters are less than seven fathoms deep.

This means that a tiny portion of municipal fishing grounds will be left for small fishermen to catch fish without competing with commercial fishers whose vessels and boats can huge volume of fish in the waters, Ronnel Arambulo, vice chairman of Pamalakaya said in a statement.

The group insists that small and commercial fishers cannot fish alongside each other in one area because of the backward fishing gear and method of small fishermen compared to the more advanced fishing gear and technology employed by commercial fishers.

Worse, commercial fishers will eventually deploy destructive fishing gear and methods like trawl and superlights when law enforcement units are not looking

Over 2 million registered municipal fisherfolk and a significant number of subsistence fisherfolk nationwide will be affected by the ruling, Pamalakaya said..

Siargao, host of new Ramsar Site

Meanwhile, the involvement of the Municipality of Del Carmen in Siargao Islands in the case bears significance because Del Carmen recently gained international recognition after the Ramsar Convention declared the Del Carmen Mangrove Reserve (DCMR) within the Siargao Island Protected Landscape and Seascape (SIPLAS) as a wetland of international importance or Ramsar Site.

“The local government of Del Carmen together with the Sangguniang Bayan of Del Carmen expresses the sentiments of the local fishers not only of Del Carmen but of all the 2 million small fishers in the Philippines in appealing for consideration of the Supreme Court decision removing the 15-km municipal waters preferential rights to municipal fisherfolks and regulation of commercial fishing operations within the municipal waters,” Del Carmen Mayor Coro said in a statement.

“I still remember the journey we started in Del Carmen in 2010 when the local government started the program of supporting and elevating our small fishers to transition as Professional Fishers with dignity, proper knowledge of managing marine ecosystems, and access to the best public services and establishing social protection programs,” he added.

According to Coro, the small fishers are recognized as among the poorest sectors in the Philippines (and) are continuously being exposed to multiple threats including impacts of climate change, low income without social protection, and limited access to public services due to their remote habitation.

He said the same fisherfolks contribute as well to feeding 65 percent of the Filipinos for their preferred protein source coming from the bounty of the Municipal Waters that have been protected and preserved allowing fish stocks to grow and recover.

Image credits: [Oceana](#)

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/03/municipal-governments-join-groups-vs-ruling-favoring-big-fishers/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Rice import arrivals hit 4.6 million metric tons as of December 26–BPI

Ada Pelonia
January 3, 2025

RICE import arrivals have reached a record-high 4.6 million metric tons (MMT) as of December 26, based on latest government data.

Data from the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) showed that rice shipments from January 1 to December 26 have reached 4.63 MMT.

Based on BPI data, 306,186 metric tons (MT) of rice imports entered the country in late December. The average rice shipment from July to November is around 396,583 MT.

Executive Order (EO) 62, which slashed the rice tariffs to 15 percent from 35 percent, took effect in July.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) recently adjusted upward its rice import projection in 2024 to 4.7 MMT from its initial forecast of 4.5 MMT. This was higher than the 3.606 MMT of rice the Philippines bought in 2023.

“If you look at the estimates, the imports could hit as much as 4.7 MMT [...] That’s a record high if one considers the trend of import arrivals, statistically speaking,” Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said in an earlier interview.

Of the volume that arrived in the country, BPI data said over 3.52 MMT came from Vietnam. Thailand was the second-largest supplier, accounting for 587,465.80 MT.

The Philippines also imported from Pakistan (280,432.48 MT), Myanmar (201,202.75 MT) and India (22,619.10 MT).

The Department of Agriculture (DA) recently said that the Philippines and Pakistan would finalize a deal by June this year, under which the South Asian nation will allocate to the country up to 1 MMT of rice annually “at a competitive price.”

Meanwhile, BPI data noted that the agency approved and issued 9,718 sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances (SPSICs) for the purchase of 9.30 MMT of imported rice.

An SPSIC from the BPI is required before bringing in foreign rice stocks to ensure that an inbound shipment is safe for human and animal consumption.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently adjusted upward its estimate for the country’s imported rice purchases in 2024 to a record-high 5.3 MMT from the previous 5 MMT due to a smaller crop for marketing year (MY) 2024/25.

The international agency also raised its rice imports forecast for the Philippines in 2025 to 5.4 MMT, from its earlier forecast of 5.1 MMT also owing to a smaller crop.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/03/rice-import-arrivals-hit-4-6-million-metric-tons-as-of-december-26-bpi/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

PHL red onion stock good until February

BusinessMirror

January 2, 2025

THE country's red onion stock of more than 30,000 metric tons (MT) could last until early February.

Figures from the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) showed that red onion inventory as of December 13 stood at 33,030 MT, which holds a monthly consumption of 17,000 MT.

Retail prices of red onions in Metro Manila markets saw a slight increase as they ranged between P100 and P160 per kilo based on the latest government price monitoring report from the P80 to P150 per kilo range recorded two weeks ago.

The BPI data showed that the National Capital Region (NCR) held the bulk of red onion stocks at 16,735 MT while Central Luzon trailed with 13,903 MT.

In terms of yellow onions, data from the BPI showed that the inventory of the commodity stood at 2,016 MT. The NCR also had a chunk of the stocks at 974 MT.

Earlier, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. approved the importation of an additional 1,000 MT of yellow onion to ensure sufficient supply, with a caveat that shipments should arrive no later than December 30 to not coincide with the harvest in February.

“It cannot arrive after December 30 kasi tingin ko sapat na iyon dahil magharvest na siguro by February,” Laurel said in an earlier interview.

He approved the purchase of 16,000 MT of imported yellow onions last August owing to a depleted domestic supply. The total imports for the crop settled at 17,000 MT in 2024.

Price monitoring report showed that imported yellow onion prices ranged from P80 to P160 per kilo while local white onions stood at P120 per kilo.

The country has been consistently importing fresh onions since 1996 to be able to meet its annual demand for the commodity as local production remains insufficient, based on historical data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

In December 2023, the government authorized the importation of fresh onions to prevent a repeat of the spike in prices seen in the latter part of 2022, when red onions skyrocketed to as much as P700 per kilo due to a supply shortfall.

The Philippines suffered an onion “crisis” as the state limited the entry of imported stocks and prioritized domestic producers.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/02/phl-red-onion-stock-good-until-february/>

ABANTE TONITE:

DA ibabagsak murang bigas sa P39 per kilo

January 3, 2025

Planong simulan ng Department of Agriculture (DA) ngayong unang buwan ng bagong taon ang pagbebenta ng mas murang bigas sa ilalim ng Rice-for-All Program nito.

Sa Bagong Pilipinas public briefing, sinabi ni DA Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa na mula sa P45 per kilo ng bigas ay naibaba ito ng P42 hanggang P40 nitong Disyembre.

Ngayong Enero ilulunsad na nila ang mas mababang presyo, sa pagitan ng P38 hanggang P39 per kilo.

Ibebenta aniya ito sa mga Kadiwa ng Pangulo center upang magkaroon ng pagpipilian ang publiko.

Samantala, bukod sa pagbebenta ng murang bigas, target din ng DA na paramihin pa ang Kadiwa ng Pangulo centers ng hanggang 1,500 sa buong bansa.

Bukod sa Rice-for-All, ilulunsad din ng DA ngayong taon ang Sulit Rice at Nutri Rice sa mga Kadiwa outlet at mga piling pamilihan gayundin sa mga istasyon ng tren na nagkakahalaga ng P35 hanggang P36 kada kilo sa National Capital Region at kalaunan ay sa buong bansa ipatutupad.

Sinabi ni De Mesa na ang Sulit Rice ay mga durog na bigas pero maganda pa rin ang kalidad para kainin. Habang ang Nutri Rice ay nasa pagitan ng well-milled at brown rice na marami pa ring sustansiya.

“Ito ang tinatawag natin na hundred percent broken na bigas, maganda pa rin ang quality. Ito namang Nutri Rice ay dumaan sa one pass milling at malaki ang nutrients na natira,” dagdag ni de Mesa. (Aileen Taliping)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2025/01/03/da-ibabagsak-murang-bigas-sa-p39-per-kilo/>

PILIPINO STAR NGAYON:

‘Rice-for-All’ ibabagsak presyo sa P38-P39

[Angie dela Cruz](#)

January 3, 2025 | 12:00am

MANILA, Philippines — Ibababa pa ng Department of Agriculture (DA) ang presyo ng bigas na ibinibenta sa “Rice-for-All” Program ngayong buwan.

Ayon kay DA Assistant Secretary and spokesperson Arnel de Mesa, mula sa kasalukuyang P40 kada kilo na bigas sa piling Kadiwa locations sa Metro Manila, gagawin na itong P38 hanggang P39 kada kilo.

“Nagsimula tayo diyan, nagbenta tayo ng P45 per kilo naibaba iyan sa P43.00 at P42.00 at nito nga bago matapos ang taong 2024 ay naibaba pa iyan sa P40.00 per kilo,” pahayag ni De Mesa.

“At ngayong taon na ito, this January ay ilulunsad naman, mas mababa pa ang presyo – between P38.00 to P39.00,[per kilo],” dagdag ng opisyal.

Una nang sinabi ng Presidential Communications Office (PCO) na tumatalab na ang “Rice-for-All” program dahil bumaba na rin ang presyo ng bigas sa merkado.

Bukod sa murang presyo sa well-milled rice target na rin ng DA na magbenta ng ibang variety ng bigas sa murang halaga.

Ayon kay De Mesa ito ay dahil sa ilulunsad na rin ng DA ang “Sulit Rice” at “Nutri Rice” programs sa Metro Manila.

Magbebenta aniya ang DA ng 100% broken” na bigas sa halagang P35 hanggang P36 kada kilo sa ilalim “Sulit Rice” initiative, habang ang healthier brown rice ay nasa P37 hanggang P38 kada kilo sa ilalim ng “Nutri Rice” program.

<https://www.philstar.com/pilipino-star-ngayon/bansa/2025/01/03/2411479/rice-all-ibabagsak-presyo-sa-p38-p39>