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**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Philippines, New Zealand hold talks on visiting forces

Michael Punongbayan - The Philippine Star

January 30, 2025 | 12:00am



Defense Undersecretary Pablo Lorenzo and Director Kathleen Pearce, the Head of International Branch of the Ministry of Defense of New Zealand, together with the members of their respective delegations

New Zealand Embassy / Released

MANILA, Philippines — Efforts to fortify the military alliance between the Philippines and New Zealand are now underway following the conduct of the first round of formal negotiations on the proposed Status of Visiting Forces Agreement (SOVFA) between the two countries last week.

The Department of National Defense (DND) said negotiations held on Jan. 23 in Manila saw top defense and diplomatic officials of both nations coming together to discuss the deal.

Once approved, the SOVFA will reinforce the 2017 Memorandum of Arrangement between the DND and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) with the Ministry of Defense (MoD) of New Zealand.

The DND said such an agreement “will enable both countries’ armed forces to elevate their cooperative activities and conduct exercises in each other’s territories, deepening overall defense and military cooperation.”

“The conclusion of this agreement will be a significant milestone for the overall bilateral relationship between the Philippines and New Zealand, as the two countries will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties in 2026,” the DND added.

Last week’s first round of talks were led by DND Undersecretary Pablo Lorenzo and MoD Director Kathleen Pearce representing the Philippine and New Zealand delegations, respectively.

Delegates from New Zealand included New Zealand Ambassador Catherine McIntosh, Deputy Head of Mission Stacey Kwant and an analyst from the MoD. Other members of the New Zealand delegation joined virtually.

The Philippine delegation was composed of Department of Justice Undersecretaries Raul Vasquez and Dennis Arvin Chan, Presidential Commission on Visiting Forces Undersecretary Antonio Habulan Jr., Department of Foreign Affairs Assistant Secretaries Aileen Mendiola-Rau and Patrick Chuasoto, and DND Assistant Secretary Erik Lawrence Dy.

The DND said the first round of negotiations marked an important step in strengthening bilateral defense ties between the Philippines and New Zealand.

New Zealand participated in one of last year's Multilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity in the West Philippine Sea alongside the Philippine and United States navies.

On the sidelines of the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting held in Laos last November, Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro Jr. met with New Zealand Defense Minister Judith Collins KC to discuss shared security concerns and avenues for collaboration during a bilateral meeting.

Meanwhile, New Zealand has reaffirmed its commitment to Mindanao through its International Development Cooperation Program, emphasizing the shared goal of fostering long-term stability and prosperity in the region.

Ambassador McIntosh recently visited Mindanao focusing on education, innovation and sustainable development.

She was accompanied by New Zealand international development cooperation manager Dyan Mabunga Rodriguez.

The New Zealand embassy in Manila said the visit was an opportunity to promote the Manaaki New Zealand Scholarship Program and deepen bilateral ties.

McIntosh paid a courtesy visit to the Mindanao Development Authority in Davao City and met with Secretary Leo Tereso Abellera Magno to explore collaborative opportunities in innovation, agriculture and education – key sectors vital to Mindanao's progress.

Magno expressed his gratitude for New Zealand's sustained support and highlighted the growing international interest in Mindanao due to its improving peace and stability.

### **Optimistic on US ties**

The DND expressed optimism yesterday that the defense alliance between the Philippines and the United States will continue to flourish under the new administration of President Donald Trump.

Immediately following Trump's election, the DND said President Marcos is looking forward to working closely with the new administration, and that the strong and lasting alliance "will continue to uphold our shared vision of prosperity and security in the region."

The DND, in a statement yesterday, said it shares the same optimism amid the reforms that the Trump administration is now pursuing.

“While the review of US assistance is being conducted, the DND and AFP continue to pursue the development of our defense capabilities in accordance with our identified needs and priorities,” it noted.

“We remain steadfast in our commitment to perform our mandate to defend our sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction,” the DND said.

In a recent interview on Battlegrounds with former US national security adviser and retired Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, Teodoro said “the partnership between allies (Philippines and US) that the President has personally spearheaded has been vital.”

“My expectation is that the momentum that is existing at present (will) be continued because we are not only strengthening a relationship but evolving a new ecosystem of security, not only bilaterally but also multilaterally with other countries with shared values like Japan, like Australia,” he added.

During a consultation between Teodoro and Philippine Ambassador to the United States Jose Manuel Romualdez, the latter also said he saw a continuing strong alliance with the US.

“We are confident that US military assistance will continue, including major economic programs. The 90-day suspension is temporary,” he said. – **Pia Lee-Brago**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/01/30/2417886/philippines-new-zealand-hold-talks-visiting-forces>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Raw tobacco exports continue slide

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

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 02:12 AM January 30, 2025

Philippine exports of unmanufactured tobacco totaled \$94.59 million in 2024, down by 6.5 percent from \$101.13 million a year ago, due to various factors affecting cultivation, according to the National Tobacco Administration (NTA).

These goods, which have not been processed for making cigarettes or other tobacco products, consist mainly of tobacco leaves.

The volume of outbound unmanufactured tobacco shrank by 14.2 percent to 17.8 million kilograms from 20.75 million kg, based on data from the NTA.

In terms of value, unmanufactured tobacco exports had been on a downtrend from 2022 to 2024.

According to the NTA, Indonesia was the leading destination of unmanufactured tobacco exports last year. The commodity is also shipped to the United States, Taiwan and the Dominican Republic.

Universal Leaf Philippines Inc. (ULPI) has retained its standing as the country's top exporter of unmanufactured tobacco since 2019. Last year, ULPI shipped out 14.14 million kg of cargo valued at \$111.97 million.

JTI Asia Manufacturing Inc. was a distant second with 1.9 million kg worth \$3.12 million. Continental Leaf Tobacco Philippines Inc. came third with 747,210 kg (\$3.9 million).

Trans Manila Inc. and PMFTC Inc., meanwhile, shipped \$1.8 million and \$795,761.30 worth of unmanufactured tobacco, respectively.

Meanwhile, the NTA also said exports of manufactured tobacco reached 3.7 million master cases of cigarettes last year as of Oct. 31, 2024. This meant a drop of 30.3 percent.

Shipments of heated tobacco products slumped by 72.2 percent to 10,637 sticks.

Further, unmanufactured tobacco imports amounted to \$115.87 million last year as opposed to the 2023 value of \$229.47 million kg.

The country imported 30.59 million kg of unmanufactured tobacco in 2024, a reduction of 39.9 percent from 50.88 million kg.

Despite this, the NTA is projecting 51.12 million kg of unmanufactured tobacco imports and 22.89 million kg of exports.

Nestor Casela, NTA Deputy Administrator for Operations, said China as the largest tobacco producer worldwide reduced its exports, resulting in the shortage of tobacco supply.

In his presentation during the 2nd International Tobacco Summit, Casela said Philippine-grown tobacco has become globally competitive due to higher prices.

He said various factors affect the tobacco industry, such as the escalating cost of farm inputs and changing market demands.

Other reasons include the unavailability of labor force, climate change and the proliferation of smuggled tobacco following the increase in excise tax.

<https://business.inquirer.net/503852/raw-tobacco-exports-continue-slide>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# **Agri department pushes vaccines for bird flu, swine fever**

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 02:14 AM January 30, 2025

Local authorities are assessing the viability of bird flu drugs from two European countries, hoping to complete its evaluation by the end of first quarter, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said field trials are ongoing for avian influenza vaccines from Hungary and Germany.

De Mesa, also the DA's spokesperson, said results of field trials will be presented to the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) through its Veterinary Technical Advisory Committee upon its completion, which is expected by the end of this quarter.

The vaccines from Hungary and Germany will then be endorsed to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for approval.

Meanwhile, the DA is hoping for "favorable" results from the FDA on African swine fever (ASF) vaccines from Vietnam as controlled vaccination is ongoing.

According to de Mesa, 32,089 doses of AVAC live vaccines from Vietnam have been delivered and administered to eligible farms. Also, 160,000 doses have been shipped by the vaccine supplier.

The DA earlier said it would recommend the approval for commercial use this year of an ASF vaccine coming from Vietnam.

This forms part of the DA's plan to roll out 490,000 doses of ASF vaccines to prevent the further spread of the disease, which has decimated the local swine population and resulted in hundreds of billions of pesos in losses since the country recorded the first outbreak in 2019.



Moreover, the government-backed vaccination has covered 18 farms located in 11 towns across the country. The BAI is currently assessing other farms that are applying for eligibility.

Last year, the DA allowed the inoculation of pigs in ASF-free areas to address low participation in the vaccination drive. Vaccines will be administered to weanling or grower pigs.

The vaccination program had included hogs in barangays with no active ASF cases for at least 40 days and in areas previously tagged as red or pink zones but currently with no active ASF cases.

To date, the active ASF cases are recorded in 11 provinces and eight regions, according to the BAI's bulletin as of Jan. 10. —*Jordeene B. Lagare*

<https://business.inquirer.net/503850/agri-dept-pushes-vaccines-for-bird-flu-swine-fever>

**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# Tobacco exports decline 14.2% in 2024

January 29, 2025 | 8:37 pm



PHILIPPINE STAR/RYAN BALDEMOR

EXPORTS of unmanufactured tobacco declined 14.2% to 17.8 million kilograms in 2024, the National Tobacco Administration (NTA) said.

By value, exports fell 6.5% in 2024 to \$94.59 million.

According to the NTA, the top exporters of unmanufactured tobacco in 2024 are Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc. with 14.14 million kilos worth \$111.97 million and JTI Asia Manufacturing Corp. with 1.89 million kilos valued at \$3.12 million.

Rounding out the top five were Continental Leaf Tobacco (Philippines), Inc. with export volume of 747,210 kilos worth \$3.9 million; Trans Manila, Inc. 636,120 kilos worth \$1.85 million, and PMFTC, Inc., 315,026 kilos worth \$795,761.

The Philippines exported at 3.7 million master cases of cigarettes in 2024, down 27.9%.

Cigar exports dropped 21.6% to 3.84 million pieces, while exports of heated tobacco products fell to 10,637 sticks in 2024.

Among the top exporters of manufactured tobacco are JTI Asia with 32.64 million kilos valued at \$397.51 million, followed by PMFTC with 5.15 million kilos worth \$46.48 million.

Other top exporters were Telengtan Brothers and Sons, Inc. with 3.21 million kilos valued at \$34.92 million, Tann Philippines, Inc. with 2.58 million kilos worth \$15.46 million, and Prudence Development and Management Corp. with 2.42 million kilos worth \$15.58 million.

The NTA said the volume of unmanufactured tobacco imports fell 39.9% to 30.59 million kilos.

The value of unmanufactured tobacco imports declined to \$115.87 million from \$229.47 million a year earlier.

The NTA said more than half of the imported tobacco is used for cigarette and cigar manufacturing, with 39% going on to be exported as cigarettes, and 4% for export as processed leaf. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/01/29/649896/tobacco-exports-decline-14-2-in-2024/>

**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# Bird flu vaccine approval could come by Q2

January 29, 2025 | 8:37 pm



REUTERS

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said a vaccine for Avian Influenza (AI), or bird flu, could be approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) by the second quarter, following the completion of two field trials.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary and Spokesperson Arnel V. de Mesa said the results of the vaccine trials will be presented by the Bureau of Animal Industry's (BAI) Veterinary Technical Advisory Committee to the FDA for approval.

“By the end of this quarter, the two trials for the AI vaccine should be done, and then *mapadala na sa* (will be sent to the) FDA,” Mr. De Mesa told reporters.

He added that the vaccines currently undergoing trials are from Hungary and Germany.

“Hopefully within the second quarter, there will be action (from the FDA),” he said.

The DA is looking to procure 30 million doses of approved vaccine with funding of P300 million.

Some 53 municipalities across nine provinces remain affected by bird flu, the BAI reported on Jan. 24.

— **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/01/29/649895/bird-flu-vaccine-approval-could-come-by-q2/>

## BUSINESS WORLD:

# Wholesale price growth eases to 5-year low in 2024

January 29, 2025 | 8:36 pm



PHILIPPINE STAR/ RUSSELL PALMA

PRICE GROWTH of wholesale goods slowed further to a five-year low of 2.5% in 2024 due to a slowdown in food price growth, the Philippines Statistics Authority (PSA) reported on Tuesday.

The general wholesale price index (GWPI) eased from the 4.9% increase in 2023, the PSA said, citing preliminary data.

The 2024 reading matched the 2020 rate. Last year's growth was also the weakest since the 1.6% reported in 2019.

The PSA said growth in the food index was drastically lower at 3.4% following a 9.2% reading in 2023.

The food index accounts for 36.8% of the wholesale basket of goods.

Other indices posting slower price growth were beverages and tobacco (3.1% in 2024 from 6.6% in 2023), manufactured goods classified chiefly by materials (1.6% from 5%), machinery and transport equipment (0.6% from 1.2%), and miscellaneous manufactured articles (1% from 3.8%).

In December, bulk price growth picked up to 2.7% year on year from 2.3% in November. The December 2023 reading had been 4.3%.

The category posting stronger price growth month on month was chemicals including animal and vegetable oils and fats at 8.7% in December 2024 from 6.6% in November, the PSA said.

In December, GWPI growth in Luzon was 2.8%, against 2.4% in the previous month. The December 2023 reading had been 4.2%. In 2024, Luzon GWPI growth averaged 2.4%, the lowest since the 1.6% posted in 2019.

GWPI growth rates in the Visayas for December slowed to 1.7% from 2% in November. The December reading was the weakest since the 1.4% posted in November 2021 but was down from the 5.7% reading from December 2023.

Bulk price growth in the Visayas grew 4.1% in 2024, the lowest since the 0.4% logged in 2021.

Mindanao GWPI growth in December was 1.1%, up from the 0.7% reading in November but down from the 3.5% posted in December 2023.

Mindanao bulk price growth in 2024 averaged 1.7%, the lowest since the 1.6% recorded in 2020. — **Pierce Oel A. Montalvo**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/01/29/649892/wholesale-price-growth-eases-to-5-year-low-in-2024/>

## BUSINESS WORLD:

# Inflation likely within target until '26

January 30, 2025 | 12:35 am



Fruits are displayed at a market in Quezon City, Dec. 29, 2024. — PHILIPPINE STAR/MIGUEL DE GUZMAN

PRIVATE SECTOR economists expect inflation to remain within the central bank's 2-4% target from this year to 2026, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said.

The BSP's latest survey of external forecasters in its Monetary Policy Report showed that analysts' mean inflation forecast for this year stood at 3.1%, lower than the central bank's 3.3% baseline projection.

The survey showed an 82.6% likelihood that inflation will settle within target this year and an 83.5% probability for 2026.

"Inflation expectations continue to be well-anchored. Risks are broadly balanced, with headline inflation expected to stay low and manageable over the medium term."

For 2026, economists expect inflation to average 3.2%, also below the BSP's 3.5% forecast.

Headline inflation averaged 3.2% in 2024, well within the target band. January inflation data will be released on Feb. 5.

The survey showed the within-target inflation outlook is mainly driven by easing rice and oil prices.

"Downside risks to the inflation outlook are seen to emanate largely from lower rice prices, amid the implementation of Executive Order (EO) No. 62 and lower oil prices," the BSP said,

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. last June signed EO 62, which slashed rice import tariffs to 15% from 35% until 2028, citing the need to curb rice prices.

Rice inflation has slowed to 0.8% in December from 5.1% in November and 19.6% a year prior. Rice is typically the biggest contributor to overall inflation.

Global crude oil prices are seen to ease further, the BSP said.

“Futures prices have declined due to market expectations of higher US oil production and expectations of weaker global demand as well as the likelihood of global oversupply.”

“This in turn led to a delay in the anticipated increase in oil production by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and other partner countries (OPEC+).”

However, the central bank warned that inflation could breach the 2-4% band if Dubai crude oil prices average above \$90 per barrel from this year to 2026.

The Development Budget Coordination Committee expects Dubai crude oil to range from \$60 to \$80 per barrel from 2025 to 2026.

“These oil price scenarios consider only direct effects and do not incorporate potential second-round effects on transport fares, food prices, and wage increases.”

The surveyed analysts also flagged upside risks to the inflation outlook such as supply disruptions due to geopolitical tensions and adverse weather conditions.

“The potential spike in electricity rates, higher-than-expected wage adjustments, and protectionist US trade policies were also identified as upside risks,” it added.

The BSP also noted the possibility of rising electricity rates in the coming months.

“In July 2023, the Supreme Court nullified the previous cap on Wholesale Electricity Spot Market (WESM) prices for November 2013 and December 2013. Electricity rates could rise due to the potential increase in generation charges being passed on to consumers.”

The central bank earlier warned that the balance of risks to the inflation outlook remain tilted to the upside for this year and the next.

The BSP expects inflation to settle at the midpoint of the 2-4% target until the first half of 2025, before accelerating to the upper end of the target from the second half of 2025 to the first half of 2026.

Inflation will ease closer to the midpoint of the target by the second half of 2026, driven by declining global commodity prices, it added.

## **FURTHER**

Meanwhile, analysts surveyed by the BSP also expect further monetary policy easing for this year.

## **EASING**



“For 2025, the general view is that the BSP will ease its monetary policy stance by a range of 50-100 basis points (bps). Meanwhile, analysts have mixed views on the target reverse repurchase (RRP) rate for 2026,” the BSP said.

Last year, the Monetary Board cut rates by a total of 75 bps, bringing the key rate to 5.75% by end-2024.

“On balance, there is scope for measured monetary policy easing given the within target inflation, manageable underlying price pressures and well-anchored inflation expectations. However, upside risks to inflation warrant close monitoring,” the BSP said.

“A further cut in the policy rate will help reinforce the impact of the prior monetary easing on market interest rates, lending activity, and aggregate demand.”

BSP Governor Eli M. Remolona, Jr. has said there is room to ease further as the current policy rate is still in “restrictive territory.” However, the central bank is likely to deliver further rate reductions in “baby steps.”

#### **‘BELOW**

#### **POTENTIAL’**

Meanwhile, the BSP expects the Philippine economy to “grow below potential” over the near term due to subdued demand. The government is targeting 6-8% for 2025 to 2026.

“The outlook for domestic growth indicates a more subdued pace of economic activity up to 2026,” it said.

The BSP expected economic growth in 2024 to settle slightly below the government’s 6-6.5% target, after a weaker-than-expected third-quarter gross domestic product (GDP) print.

Fourth-quarter and full-year GDP data will be released today (Jan. 30).

“However, GDP growth is seen to modestly improve and settle close to the low end of the targets for 2025 and 2026,” the BSP said.

“The decline in global oil prices, the easing of BSP’s monetary policy, and the reduction in the reserve requirement ratio are seen to support domestic economic activity.”

Domestic demand is also seen to “remain firm but subdued.” — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/top-stories/2025/01/30/649867/inflation-likely-within-target-until-26/>

**MANILA STANDARD:**

## **NFA rice to flood markets for 6 mos.**



*Department of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.  
(Courtesy: Department of Agriculture)*

By Othel V. Campos

January 30, 2025, 12:55 am

Part of food security emergency—DA

The Department of Agriculture will release 150,000 metric tons of National Food Authority rice stocks as part of the food security emergency declaration and bring down high prices of the staple grain.

The NFA said it will distribute around three million 50-kilogram bags over six months in a bid to stabilize rice prices in areas most affected by cost surges.

The NFA is also set to procure palay at P23 per kilo in the coming months, with the rice harvest season starting mid-February.

“This monthly release of approximately 30,000 metric tons will alleviate high rice prices and prepare NFA warehouses for the upcoming palay procurement season,” NFA administrator Larry Lacson said.

The emergency declaration includes the sale of NFA rice to LGUs, government agencies and government-owned-and-controlled corporations at P36/kg.

The rice can then be sold to consumers at P38/kg.

Lacson, however, assured the public the NFA would maintain sufficient buffer stocks.

Under the law, the NFA is authorized to maintain a 15-day rice buffer stock, equivalent to 555,000 metric tons, to ensure that the country can meet its national consumption needs.

The DA is awaiting approval from the National Price Coordinating Council to declare the national food security emergency within the week.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the declaration will allow the release of NFA rice stocks to key government agencies and local government units to alleviate the ongoing price pressure on rice.

The DA chief noted there are areas where prices remain high despite global price decreases and the reduction of rice tariffs from 35 percent to 15 percent last year.

“They can book already. Then maybe the delivery is maybe February 7 to 15,” Tiu Laurel said earlier, citing the transmittal of letters from the NFA to select LGUs to identify their intent and volume allocation needed.

*Editor’s Note: This is an updated article. Originally posted with the headline “DA nudges Price Council to declare food security emergency.”*

<https://manilastandard.net/news/314552011/nfa-rice-to-flood-markets-for-6-mos.html>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# **DA aims for food security emergency approval this week**

**By Giselle P. Jordan**  
**January 30, 2025**

AGRICULTURE Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said he aims to secure approval for the declaration of a national food security emergency from the National Price Coordinating Council (NPCC) this week.

The declaration of a national food security emergency would allow the Department of Agriculture (DA) to distribute rice buffer stocks of the National Food Authority (NFA) to government agencies and local government units (LGUs) in an attempt to stabilize rice prices across the country.

The decision to propose a food security emergency came after persistently high prices of rice in various areas of the country despite global price reductions and President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s order to lower rice tariffs from 35 percent to 15 percent last year.

NFA Administrator Larry Lacson said the agency intends to release 150,000 metric tons (MT) or 3 million 50-kilogram bags of rice over six months, setting areas with high rice prices as a priority in the program.

"This monthly release of approximately 30,000 metric tons will alleviate high rice prices and prepare NFA warehouses for the upcoming palay procurement season," Lacson said.

He assured the public that while the agency releases stocks, sufficient buffer stock would still be kept in case of disasters or emergencies.

This upcoming rice harvest season, the NFA is set to procure palay (unmilled rice) at P23 per kilogram to fulfill its rice buffer stock requirement of 555,000 MT or 15 days of national consumption as mandated by the amended Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

The DA assured the public that they are committed to ensuring that rice is available and at affordable prices across the country.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/30/news/national/da-aims-for-food-security-emergency-approval-this-week/2046717>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# **Illicit tobacco trade costing govt P100B every year**

**By Giselle P. Jordan**

**January 30, 2025**

THE illicit tobacco trade is costing the government up to P100 billion per year, a regulator said, not only affecting revenues but also the livelihood of farmers and their families.

"The continuing proliferation of illegal tobacco sales in the local market is causing a decline in government revenue," National Tobacco Administration (NTA) chief Belinda Sanchez said.

"This reduction in funds limits the resources available for essential public services, particularly universal health care. Moreover, proceeds from illegal tobacco sales are often linked to organized crimes, further threatening national security."

Sanchez added that the illicit tobacco trade was also affecting the livelihood of the 2.2 million Filipinos who are dependent on tobacco farming, 430,000 of whom are tobacco farmers, farmworkers and their families.

She called for a multifaceted approach to combat the illicit tobacco trade, including policy changes, intensified enforcement, strengthening regional cooperation and increasing public awareness.

The NTA earlier this week convened government officials and representatives of tobacco companies, traders, farmers' associations and other stakeholders in a summit to discuss avenues for growth and how they can address the issue of illicit tobacco trade.

During the two-day event, resource speakers presented an overview of the local tobacco industry, government initiatives to promote modernization and possibilities to strengthen the presence of local tobacco in the global market. The second day centered on the illicit tobacco trade problem in Southeast Asia and the Philippines, initiatives to address the issue and opportunities to strengthen regional cooperation.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/30/business/top-business/illicit-tobacco-trade-costing-govt-p100b-every-year/2046645>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# DA to import breeder goats, sheep

**By Giselle P. Jordan**  
**January 30, 2025**

AGRICULTURE Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. has approved the importation of breeder goats and sheep to improve the genetic quality of local livestock.

In a statement, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said it will bid out the provision for 1,520 breeder goats — composed of 1,190 Boer does, 175 Boer bucks and 155 Anglo Nubian bucks, which will be distributed to farms in Barili in Cebu and Makilala in North Cotabato.

Also for bidding are 4,310 sheep — of which 4,050 are Dorper ewes and 260 Dorper rams for distribution to North Cotabato.

The DA said that while a bidding schedule has not been set, funding for the imports has been secured.

Requirements are as follows:

Goats and sheep should be 6- to 15-months-old.

– For goats, bucks should weigh 35 kilograms (kg) and 30 kg after quarantine.

– As for sheep, rams should weigh 40 kg; and ewes, 35 kg.

– Sheep should be full-blooded and should come from registered farms.

– They should be delivered within 90 days from the issuance of a notice of award from the DA's National Livestock Program.

Anglo Nubian goats are highly valued for their meat and hide production. While they are not heavy milk producers, their milk is also highly regarded.

Boer goats are one of the most in-demand livestock breeds, and are herded primarily for their meat. Breeder goats from the United States are usually valued between \$800 and \$5,000.

Dorper sheep are also known for their meat and rapid growth. They are usually priced at \$500 to \$1,500.

The DA said the importation is part of the agency's initiatives to produce better quality herds and ensure sustainable meat production. Goat and sheep farming may augment farmers' income, create more jobs and help achieve food security, said the agency.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/30/business/top-business/da-to-import-breeder-goats-sheep/2046643>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# Searca chief rallies new agriculturists

**By Leander C. Domingo**  
**January 30, 2025**

THE chief of the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) delivered an impassioned message to over 3,000 newly licensed agriculturists at their oath-taking ceremony at the Philippine International Convention Center on Jan. 20.

Also the 2024 Outstanding Professional of the Year in Agriculture, Searca Director Glenn Gregorio's inspiring remarks during the event hosted by the Professional Regulation Commission were timely as the agriculture sector celebrated a landmark achievement just days later with the Senate's passage of Senate Bill (SB) 2906, or the proposed Philippine Agriculturists Act, on Jan. 27.

The legislation aims to elevate the standards of the agriculture profession and provide long-overdue professional recognition and support to agriculturists nationwide.



Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture Director Glenn Gregorio addresses over 3,000 newly licensed agriculturists at their oath-taking ceremony at the Philippine International Convention Center on Jan. 20, 2025. SEARCA PHOTO

In his speech, Gregorio congratulated the newly licensed agriculturists and acknowledged their hard work and the unwavering support of their families throughout their academic journey.

Emphasizing their role as changemakers, innovators and future leaders in Philippine agriculture, Gregorio referred to them as the "beta generation of agriculturists."

"Today, you are not just licensed professionals; you are trailblazers who hold the potential to transform Philippine agriculture and address pressing challenges like climate change and food insecurity," he remarked.



During the event, Gregorio also introduced Searca's forward-thinking strategy embodied in its 12th Five-Year Development Plan (2025-2030) and outlined three critical actions for transforming agriculture.

First is attracting youth into agriculture by promoting agriculture as a modern, dynamic and rewarding career. Second is revolutionizing the value chain by leveraging digitalization and technology to modernize agricultural processes. And third is ensuring inclusivity by involving marginalized groups, including women, youth and elderly populations, in creating a sustainable and equitable agricultural system.

Gregorio challenged the new agriculturists to rise to the occasion, declaring that "the world needs passionate, innovative and committed agriculturists."

"I challenge you to lead boldly, embrace change and drive innovation fearlessly," he added.

Meanwhile, SB 2906 establishes a regulatory framework to uphold professional standards and improve recognition and remuneration for agriculturists.

"As the agriculture profession in our country celebrates this pivotal moment, Searca reaffirms its commitment to support the next generation of agriculturists to help drive sustainable and inclusive agricultural development," Gregorio said.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/30/business/agribusiness/searca-chief-rallies-new-agriculturists/2046588>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# **P462-M farm road projects set in Isabela**

**By Leander C. Domingo**

**January 30, 2025**

THE Regional Project Advisory Board (RPAB) for Cagayan Valley (Region 2) has approved two Intensified Building-Up of Infrastructure and Logistics for Development projects worth more than P462 million under the Department of Agriculture (DA)-Philippine Rural Development Project office for the region.

The RPAB is chaired by DA Region 2 Executive Director and Project Director Rose Mary Aquino.

Mayrich Soriano of the DA Regional Project Coordination Office for Region 2 said the RPAB reviewed the proposed projects — namely the Rehabilitation of Barangay MH Del Pilar-Barangay Salvacion farm-to-market road (FMR) in Alicia and Rehabilitation of Oscariz-Burgos-Purok ni Bukan-Pabil FMR in Ramon — with an estimated cost of P262.70 million and P199.75 million, respectively. Both projects are located in Isabela.

In his presentation, Alicia Mayor Joel Amos Alejandro emphasized the expected projected benefits of the two subprojects to their municipality, as these have a road influence area of 3,367 hectares benefiting 22,507 constituents. The projects will further support 3,196.13 hectares of existing agricultural areas with aromatic and pigmented rice, and regular rice as priority commodities.

Alejandro also said that the projects will support the growth of the Alicia Farmer's Association in Barangay Magsaysay, and that the local government unit (LGU) has established a rice processing center to support the price of dried palay (unmilled rice) in the municipality.

Soriano said the projects will contribute to the cost reduction of transactions, facilitate improved access to produce, support and inputs markets, enhance agricultural productivity and improve the profitability of farms.

She said that once issued with a no objection letter, the projects will be the first PRDP-assisted initiative in Alicia that has the biggest rice cultivation area in the region of 3,196.13 hectares.

Also, the projects will enable the C Series Council of Irrigators Association in Barangay San Sebastian to "raise the annual average income of farmers and their production levels."

Meanwhile, Aquino also challenged the proponents to "ensure that there will be enterprise development in the service areas" to which the LGUs responded in the affirmative.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/30/business/agribusiness/p462-m-farm-road-projects-set-in-isabela/2046586>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# **PSABE to hold annual convention**

**By The Manila Times**

**January 30, 2025**

THE Philippine Society of Agricultural and Biosystems Engineers (PSABE) will hold its annual convention on April 20-25 at the Grand Xing Imperial Hotel, Iloilo City, also in time for the celebration of the Philippine Agricultural Engineering Week and the International ABE Conference and Exhibition.

"The weeklong event highlights plenary talks and discussions by local and international speakers on latest trends and developments, new technologies and products systems, best practices and research, development and extension," PSABE said.

"Research and development papers will be presented in the sub-specializations of machinery and power, farm mechanization, renewable energy and automation, information technology and electrification. R&D (research and development) papers will also focus on land and water resources engineering, agro-meteorology, irrigation and drainage. Other papers will cover process engineering, structure and environment engineering, forest engineering, animal and crop structure designs and waste management," it added.

An exhibition of latest agricultural machineries, processing equipment, nano and other cutting-edge technologies will also be an interesting feature of the event. A study tour is also scheduled to visit the modern agricultural technologies located in Iloilo City and neighboring municipalities like smart green houses, precision agriculture and aquaculture. Specifically, the Ephrathah Farms that boasts of a smart greenhouse and a solar-powered facility growing hydroponics vegetables; and the Department of Agriculture-Western Visayas Integrated Agricultural Research Center that houses modern production techniques for high value crops, will be visited by the delegates.

The tour will include a visit to the modern aquaculture production like hatcheries and the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/30/business/agribusiness/psabe-to-hold-annual-convention/2046584>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

## **Alvindia wins agri scientist award in Region 3**

**By Conrad M. Cariño**

**January 30, 2025**

DIONISIO Alvindia, the director of the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech) who has rank of Scientist IV, was awarded the Gawad Saka Outstanding Agricultural Scientist for Central Luzon (Region 3) by the Department of Agriculture (DA) office in that region last Jan. 17.

With that, Alvindia will represent Central Luzon in the 2025 National Gawad Saka Awards, an annual search by the DA for outstanding achievers in the field of agriculture and fisheries.

To recall, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. conferred the 2022 Presidential Lingkod Bayan Award to Alvindia during the awards rites held at Malacañan Palace in March 2023.



Dionisio Alvindia, the director of the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization. PHILMECH PHOTO

The Presidential Lingkod Bayan Award is the most prestigious award for public service and is given to individuals or groups who made exceptional or extraordinary contributions resulting from a performance that had a nationwide impact on public interest, security and patrimony.

Alvindia is the very first Scientist I of PHilMech in 2010. His status as a scientist climbed from Scientist I to Scientist III in 2014, and in 2021, Alvindia was conferred the title Scientist IV — the highest rank ever reached by a PHilMech employee in the scientific career system.

Being born and raised in a farming family, and a graduate of agriculture majoring in crop protection, and plant pathology at Central Luzon State University in 1985, Alvindia grew up with a passion for agriculture and science most specifically in dealing with pests and diseases of crops.

Alvindia formulated a microbial control agent composed of different strains of beneficial bacteria, which aims to provide an effective, sustainable, safe and environment-friendly approach to managing postharvest diseases in various tropical crops. It likewise contains metabolite that serves as a biofertilizer resulting in a phytotonic effect on crops.

With these, he was granted property/copyright by the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines as an inventor and author of scientific and technical books.

Alvindia, while being focused on achieving his scientific career goals, is generous enough to share the opportunities with his colleagues in PHilMech and encourage them to embark on becoming a scientist.

As of today, eight other employees of PHilMech he mentored over the years and encouraged have followed in his scientific career path and officially become scientists themselves.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/30/business/agribusiness/alvindia-wins-agri-scientist-award-in-region-3/2046582>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# **Bicol farmers urged to enroll in RCEF**

**By Philippine News Agency**  
**January 30, 2025**

**LEGAZPI CITY** — The Department of Agriculture office in the Bicol Region (DA-5) is encouraging farmers' cooperatives and associations (FCAs) in the region to apply for accreditation under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) and gain access to additional government benefits.

Accredited FCAs can benefit from free rice farm mechanization provided by the Philippine Center for Postharvest and Mechanization (PHilMech), inbred rice seeds from the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) and rice credit assistance through the Land Bank of the Philippines.

There are also rice extension services from the Agricultural Training Institute, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, PHilMech and PhilRice.

"To apply for RCEF accreditation, interested FCAs must submit a letter of intent addressed to DA Regional Field Office V Regional Director Rodel Tornilla, along with other documentary requirements," Lovella Guarin, DA-5 spokesman, said in a media release.

The required documents are a valid certificate of registration from a recognized government agency, a profile of the farmers' association with the list of officers and members along with their home and farm addresses, an omnibus sworn statement and an endorsement from either the Municipal Agriculture and Fishery Council or the local government unit.

Shane Matociños, president of the Busay Farmers Association Inc. in Daraga, Albay, said that after their accreditation in RCEF, they were able to request farming equipment.

"We were also involved in the distribution of seeds, fertilizers and machinery such as hand tractors, water-cooled engines, rice reapers and threshers. The requisition process became easier, and the farmers' association had a stronger voice in identifying the primary needs of farming," he said in the same news release.

Matociños said they also secured a loan that supported the hog-fattening business of some farmers.

\ <https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/30/business/agribusiness/bicol-farmers-urged-to-enroll-in-rcef/2046580>

**BUSINESS MIRROR:**

# 2024 fisheries output dips by 5%, lowest in 2 decades

Ada Pelonia  
January 30, 2025

FISHERIES output fell by 5 percent to 4.05 million metric tons (MMT) in 2024, the lowest in two decades, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Preliminary data from the PSA showed that the total volume of fisheries production last year was lower than the 4.26 MMT in 2023.

PSA figures also showed that the 2024 volume was the lowest since the 3.93 MMT recorded in 2004.

The Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (PCAFI) attributed the stunted fisheries production to factors like extreme weather conditions from climate change and overfishing.

“Climate change and overfishing [likely caused the decline],” PCAFI President Danilo Fausto told the BusinessMirror on Wednesday.

PSA data showed that three out of the four subsectors registered contraction last year, with the commercial fisheries subsector being the only one that rose on an annual basis.

The aquaculture subsector, which contributed over half of the total fisheries output, slid by 6.8 percent to 2.22 MMT in 2024 from the 2.38 MMT in the previous year.

The inland municipal fisheries dropped by 4.8 percent to 166,170 metric tons (MT) year-on-year from 174,581 MT. It accounted for 4.1 percent of the total output.

For marine municipal fisheries, the output shrank by 8.8 percent to 802,769 MT in 2024 from 879,961 MT recorded in the previous year. The subsector constituted 19.8 percent of the total fisheries production, based on PSA data.

Commercial fisheries production last year expanded by 4.2 percent to 857,329 MT last year from 822,427 MT in 2023. The subsector's share accounted for 21.2 percent of the total output.

PSA said the species that primarily posted reductions were seaweed, down 10.5 percent to 1.46 MMT; big-eyed scad (*matangbaka*), 20 percent to 96,223 MT; bali sardinella (*tamban*), 8.2 percent to 253,356 MT; and roundscad (*galunggong*) 9.8 percent to 172,417 MT.

Increases were noted in skipjack (*gulyasan*), up 31.2 percent to 277,525 MT; P. Vannamei (*putian*) 32.3 percent to 48,115 MT; frigate tuna (*tulingan*) 8.6 percent to 79,083 MT, and milkfish (*bangus*) 1.6 percent to 361,241 MT.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/30/2024-fisheries-output-dips-by-5-lowest-in-2-decades/>



**ABANTE TONITE:**

# **150,000 tonelada ng NFA rice ibubuhos sa mga palengke**

**January 29, 2025**

Inanunsiyo ng Department of Agriculture (DA) ang nakatakdang paglalabas ng 150,000 metriko tonelada ng mga bigas mula sa imbakan ng National Food Authority (NFA) upang matugunan ang patuloy na taas-presyo nito sa mga palengke.

Sa pahayag ng DA nitong Miyerkoles, Enero 29, isasagawa umano ang distribusyon sa loob ng anim na buwan.

Inaasahan pahuhupain umano nito ang patuloy na pagtaas ng presyo ng bigas sa mga palengke.

“This monthly release of approximately 30,000 metric tons will alleviate high rice prices and prepare NFA warehouses for the upcoming palay procurement season,” ayon kay NFA Administrator Larry Lacson.

Pero, tiniyak naman ni Lacson na sapat pa rin ang suplay ng bigas ng NFA na magagamit kapag nagkaroon ng emergency sa bansa.

Inihayag pa ng NFA na bibili rin ito ng palay sa halagang P23 per kilo sa mga susunod na buwan dahil sa nalalapit na ang anihan na magsisimula kalagitnaan ng Pebrero ngayong taon. (PNA)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2025/01/29/150000-tonelada-ng-nfa-rice-ibubuhos-sa-mga-palengke/>