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**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# Ombudsman asked to file cases vs DA, NFA officials 'involved in rice anomalies'

**BY JEFFREY DAMICOG**

Mar 9, 2025 03:47 PM

The Office of the Ombudsman (OMB) was asked on Sunday, March 9, to file cases before the Sandiganbayan against former and current officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the National Food Authority (NFA) reportedly involved in alleged anomalies in the rice industry.

"The Ombudsman must resolve these cases without delay," said Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) president and chairman Rosendo So in a statement.



"If no one is prosecuted before the Sandiganbayan, then those involved in such anomalies will not be deterred," So warned.

With this, So also urged Ombudsman Samuel R. Martires to make public all the former and current officials of the DA and NFA that the OMB is investigating.

"We strongly urge Ombudsman Martires to unveil the identities of the Department of Agriculture officials, including those at the graft-ridden NFA, both past and present, who have been involved in graft and corruption at the agency, in the interest of public transparency," So said.

So recounted that the OMB suspended 139 NFA officials and employees including former administrator Roederico Bioco over allegations of being involved in the irregular sale of 75,000 bags of rice in the agency warehouses to private traders without undergoing the required public bidding.

Citing a complaint letter submitted to the Office of the President in February 2024, So said NFA Assistant Administrator for Operations Lemuel Pagayunan alleged that Bioco and other NFA officials sold 75,000 bags of rice valued P93.75 million to G4 Rice Mill San Miguel Corp. and NBK San Pedro Rice Mill without the approval of the NFA Council.

So also said that Pagayunan alleged that Bioco and NFA Region 4 Regional Manager Alwin Uy directly engaged with commercial rice traders without allowing other bidders to participate.

Pagayunan also claimed that Bioco sold the rice supply due to being "deteriorating or aging stocks" even though the rice was reportedly still fit for consumption, So added.

So asked the OMB an update on this case since the anti-graft agency has already lifted the preventive suspension against 100 NFA officials and employees.

"So we are inquiring with the Ombudsman about the progress of this case since it involves public interest," said So.

Apart from this case, the SINAG official also sought from the OMB updates on other cases under investigation.

"We want to know what has happened with these other cases," So said.

He recalled that there was another administrator being investigated for purchasing rice but subsequently authorized rice imports.

<https://mb.com.ph/2025/3/9/ombudsman-asked-to-file-cases-vs-da-nfa-officials-involved-in-rice-anomalies>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Government steps up drive vs agricultural smuggling, cartels

**Christine Boton** - The Philippine Star

March 9, 2025 | 12:00am

MANILA, Philippines — The Marcos administration is intensifying its crackdown on illegal trade activities in the agriculture sector, targeting large-scale smugglers, hoarders, profiteers and cartel operators who disrupt supply chains and threaten the livelihood of Filipino farmers and fisherfolk.

On Wednesday, the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Council held its inaugural meeting at Malacañang to enforce the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act or Republic Act 12022 enacted last October.

The law imposes stiffer penalties, including longer prison sentences and heavier fines, on those found engaged in agricultural smuggling, hoarding, profiteering and cartel activities.

Chaired by Special Assistant to the President for Investment and Economic Affairs Frederick Go, the meeting formalized the establishment of teams tasked with enforcing the new law.

“With both the law and the implementation team now fully established, we are poised to aggressively target economic saboteurs, especially in the vital sectors of agriculture and fisheries. This will empower us to protect our local farmers, fisherfolk and consumers, ensuring a better quality of life for our people,” Go said.

The council convened officials from key government agencies, including the Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Finance (DOF), Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Philippine National Police (PNP).

During the meeting, specialized working groups were formed, such as an enforcement group comprising personnel from the PNP, DOF, National Bureau of Investigation and Philippine Coast Guard.

Discussions centered on the creation of a Daily Price Index (DPI) to monitor agricultural prices.

The DA’s Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service will manage the DPI, while the DOF and the Department of Trade and Industry will oversee the National Single Window for cargo clearance to curb the flow of illegal imports.

The council also established an executive committee authorized to convene at any time to issue Letters of Authority to the Enforcement Group, based on intelligence information or evidence, ensuring swift action against violators.

“Together, we are sending a strong message that those who undermine our agricultural sectors will face swift and decisive action,” Go said, underscoring the administration’s commitment to stabilizing the agricultural sector.

The council is set to meet quarterly, with special sessions convened as needed to sustain efforts against agricultural economic sabotage and protect the country’s food supply chain.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/03/09/2426960/government-steps-drive-vs-agricultural-smuggling-cartels>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Romualdez backs Iloilo fishermen vs commercial fishing intrusion

The Philippine Star

March 9, 2025 | 12:00am



Fishermen do their regular routine of catching fish along the beach in Lingayen, Pangasinan on January 8, 2024.

STAR / Cesar Ramirez

MANILA, Philippines — Speaker Martin Romualdez assured fisherfolk in Iloilo of his full support in their efforts to protect their primary livelihood, which is at risk due to the encroachment of commercial fishing operations.

Romualdez met with fisherfolk leaders and representatives from Sicogon Island in Carles town, Iloilo and surrounding areas after attending the groundbreaking ceremony for the P388-million Submarine Cable Interconnection project, aimed at providing reliable electricity to over 13,000 households.

The fishermen, through Iloilo 5th District Rep. Boboy Tupas, raised their concerns about the August 2024 Supreme Court (SC) ruling that allowed commercial fishing vessels to operate within the 15-kilometer municipal waters, an area traditionally reserved for small-scale fishers.

“We understand the situation of our fisherfolk. Your position is correct; I see nothing wrong with it. That’s why I’m confident that we will be granted what we are asking for. I will use all my capabilities (to help you) in your case, you can count on me,” Romualdez told the community.

He also committed to endorsing their concerns to the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) to explore all possible legal options to reverse the SC decision.

“We will talk to our lawyer, the OSG, so we’re sure this will reach the proper authorities. The case is meritorious, and we just need to bring it to the attention of the justices that this is the real concern of the fishermen,” he said in Filipino.

In response to the issue, several bills have been filed in the House of Representatives, including HB 6381, which proposes the establishment of a 10-kilometer buffer zone beyond the 15-kilometer municipal waters to prevent commercial fishing vessels from entering areas exclusively reserved for small fishermen.

During the dialogue, Iloilo fishermen expressed concern that allowing commercial fishing in municipal waters would threaten their livelihoods, potentially leaving them without income to support their families and send their children to school.

They also warned that the presence of large commercial fishing fleets would cause irreparable damage to ecosystems and deplete the marine resources on which they depend.

Highlighting their commitment to sustainability, the fisherfolk pointed out their compliance with the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources' closed fishing season regulations. In January of this year, the Department of Agriculture filed a motion for reconsideration before the Supreme Court, seeking to overturn the controversial decision.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/03/09/2426936/romualdez-backs-iloilo-fishermen-vs-commercial-fishing-intrusion>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Comelec: NFA rice sales to LGUs exempt from election spending ban

By: [Jown Manalo](#) - Reporter / [@jownmanaloINQ](#)  
INQUIRER.net / 03:48 PM March 09, 2025



Comelec headquarters in Intramuros, Manila. INQUIRER FILES

MANILA, Philippines — The Commission on Elections (Comelec) has approved the Department of Agriculture’s (DA) request to exempt the sale of National Food Authority (NFA) rice to local government units (LGUs) from the spending ban for the May 2025 midterm elections.

In a memorandum signed by Comelec Chair George Erwin Garcia and released to reporters on Sunday, the poll body’s law department said that the NFA’s sale of rice to LGUs does not fall under the spending restrictions outlined in Section 261 (v) of the Omnibus Election Code.

The provision prohibits the disbursement of public funds for social welfare and services projects during the election period.

However, Comelec clarified that such projects are defined as government initiatives aimed at assisting disadvantaged or vulnerable sectors of society.

“In other words, these are programs intended to help and improve the life and livelihoods of the residents in the locality,” it said.

“Based on the foregoing definition, it appears that NFA’s selling of rice to LGUs does not fall within the ambit of the prohibition in Section 261 (v),” it added.

The Comelec explained that while the sale of rice is not restricted, LGUs may be subject to the prohibition if they use public funds to purchase rice within 45 days before election day either distribute it as aid to vulnerable sectors or sell it at a subsidized rate.

In such cases, the transaction would be considered a social welfare expenditure, which is generally prohibited unless exempted under Comelec Resolution No. 11060, the poll body added.

Comelec also reminded the NFA and LGUs that under Section 261 (v), issuing or using treasury warrants and similar financial instruments for future payments using public funds is prohibited.

“Being absolutely prohibited from March 28, 2025, to May 11, 2025, no exemption may be given by the Commission to any request covering the issuance, use, or availment of treasury warrants or any device undertaking future delivery of money, goods, or other things of value chargeable against public funds,” the poll body added.

The Comelec previously granted an exemption to 28 programs of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) from the 2025 midterm elections’ spending ban, provided they adhere to three additional conditions for strict compliance.

Among the exempted programs are the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, Ayuda sa Kapos ang Kita Program, and Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation.

Garcia emphasized that the DSWD must strictly follow the three provisions outlined in the memorandum:

- **No candidates or politicians during the distribution of ayuda in whatever nature or form.**
- **Furnish the Comelec of the guidelines committed by the DSWD in its public announcements.**
- **Faithful observance of these guidelines by the DSWD and its personnel and partners.**

<https://www.inquirer.net/431846/comelec-nfa-rice-sales-to-lgus-exempt-from-election-spending-ban/>



**REMATE:**

# Pagsisikap kontra agri smuggling pinagtibay ng Marcos admin

March 9, 2025 14:30



MANILA, Philippines- Pinaigting ng administrasyong Marcos ang paglansag sa illegal trade activities sa agrikultura.

Sa katunayan, isang inaugural meeting ang isinagawa ngayong linggo ng isang body na inatasan na labanan ang agricultural sabotage.

Sa isang kalatas, sinabi ng Department of Agriculture (DA) na nagtipon ang Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage (AAES) Council para sa kauna-unahang pagkakataon nito lamang Marso 5 sa Palasyo ng Malakanyang.

Ang TAAES ay nilikha sa ilalim ng Republic Act 12022 o Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, tinintahan upang maging ganap na batas noong Oktubre ng nakaraang taon.

Nagpatupad ang batas ng mas mas mahigpit na multa at mas mahabang sentensya sa bilangguan para sa mga sangkot sa 'agricultural smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, at cartel activities.'

Si Special Assistant to the President for Investment and Economic Affairs Frederick Go ang tumatayong chairman, sa pamamagitan ng inaugural AAES meeting ginawang pormal ang paglikha ng mga mahalagang team na inatasan na magsagawa ng probisyon ng bagong batas.

“With both the law and the implementation team now fully established, we are poised to aggressively target economic saboteurs, especially in the vital sectors of agriculture and fisheries. This will empower us to protect our local farmers, fisherfolk, and consumers, ensuring a better quality of life for our people,” ayon kay Go.

Pinagsama ng konseho ang mga opisyal mula sa ilang mahalagang ahensiya ng pamahalaan kabilang na rito ang DA, Department of Finance (DOF), Department of Justice (DOJ), at Philippine National Police (PNP), bukod sa iba pa.



Layon ng AAES na labanan ang illegal agricultural trade activities na may partikular na pagtuon sa large-scale smugglers, hoarders, profiteers, at cartel operators na nakagagambala sa ‘supply chains, ilagay sa peligro ang kabuhayan ng mga magsasakang Pilipino at mangingisda at papanghinain food security.

Layon naman ng paglansag ng konseho “to restore stability and fairness to the agricultural sector, which has long been plagued by these illegal practices.”

Idagdag pa rito, tinalakay din ng AAES ang paglikha ng Daily Price Index (DPI) para i-monitor ang agricultural prices, kasama ang Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service (AMAS) ng DA na nakatalaga para panatilihin ito.

Sanib-pwersa ang DOF at Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) para pangasiwaan ang ‘full implementation’ ng National Single Window para sa cargo clearance, naglalayon na sugpuin ang daloy ng illegal imports.

“The Council also constituted an Executive Committee that could be convened anytime in order to, among others, issue Letters of Authority—if intelligence information or evidence warrant—to the Enforcement Group to ensure compliance with Republic Act 12022,” ayon sa DA.

“Together, we are sending a strong message that those who undermine our agricultural sectors will face swift and decisive action,” ang winika pa ni Go.

“The council is scheduled to meet quarterly, with special sessions convened as necessary to sustain momentum in addressing agricultural economic sabotage and ensure the protection of the country’s food supply chain,” ayon sa DA. **Kris Jose**

<https://remate.ph/pagsisikap-kontra-agri-smuggling-pinagtibay-ng-marcos-admin/>

**REMATE:**

# Rice for All Program

March 9, 2025 14:00



MANILA, Philippines- Sinimulan nang ibenta ang murang bigas sa ilalim ng 'Rice For All' program, sa Bulacan kung saan sumang-ayon ang mga rice miller at trader mula sa intercity sa Bulacan na magbenta ng mas murang bigas sa mga pampublikong pamilihan sa Metro Manila para matulungan ang publiko na makabili ng mas murang bigas. **Jojo Rabulan**



<https://remate.ph/rice-for-all-program/>

**PILIPINO STAR NGAYON:**

# Taas-presyo ng bilihin binoldyak sa Women's Day rally

**March 8, 2025**

**Kasabay ng mga kilos protesta sa paggunita ng International Women's Day nitong Sabado, Marso 8, nanawagan ang grupo ng kababaihan sa pamahalaan para tugunan ang kanilang mga karaingan para maibsan ang paghihirap.**

**Partikular na tinukoy ni Gabriela Party-list Rep. Arlene Brosas ay panawagan na ibaba ang presyo ng mga pangunahing bilihin na isa sa nagpapahirap sa mga kababaihang Pilipino at nagpapalugmok sa kahirapan ng kanilang pamilya.**

"Today, as we commemorate International Women's Day, we amplify the voices of millions of Filipino women who bear the brunt of this administration's failed economic policies. Ang mga kababaihan ang unang nakakaramdam ng kagutuman kapag hindi sapat ang budget para sa pamilya," ayon kay Brosas.

Sa kabila umano ng ipinagmamalaki ng pamahalaan na nakakabangon na ang ekonomiya ng bansa, patuloy pa rin ang paghihirap ng mga pamilyang Pilipino mula sa nagtataasan na presyo ng bilihin tulad ng bigas na nananatiling nasa P50-P60 ang presyo kada kilo.

"The economic crisis falls heaviest on women's shoulders. Sila ang nagbabalanse ng kakarampot na budget, sila ang nagtitiis ng gutom para may makain ang kanilang mga anak. This International Working Women's Day, we demand genuine economic relief through concrete measures like removing burdensome taxes on basic goods," giit ni Brosas.

Panawagan din nila ang tuluyan nang pag-alis ng 12% value-added tax (VAT) sa kuryente, tubig at iba pang pangunahing serbisyo. (Eralyn Prado)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2025/03/08/taas-presyo-ng-bilihin-binoldyak-sa-womens-day-rally/>