

Typhoon agriculture damage estimate rises to P11.1B

THE ESTIMATE of agricultural damage caused by Typhoon Odette (international name: Rai) has been raised to P11.1 billion, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

The typhoon affected 389,316 farmers and fishermen across 420,465 hectares of agricultural land. The volume of lost production was 252,956 metric tons.

Damage was reported in the Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon), Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, Palawan), Bicol, Western Visayas, Central Visayas, Eastern Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Northern Mindanao, Davao, Soccsksargen (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani,

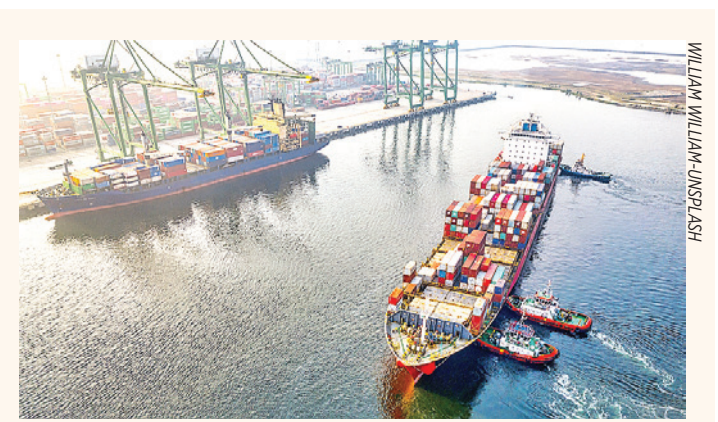
General Santos City) and the Caraga region.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources said it will provide six 20-foot fiberglass boats and two freezers to fisherfolk beneficiaries and associations affected by the storm in Southern Leyte.

On Dec. 28, the Department of Social Welfare and Develop-

ment said more than P154 million worth of humanitarian assistance has been provided to affected families in the Visayas and Mindanao.

The DA also said it will provide P314 million worth of rice seed, P129 million worth of corn seed, and P57 million worth of assorted vegetables to affected farmers. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**



ARTA to simplify port access with unified logistics pass

THE Anti-Red Tape Authority (ARTA) said it will launch this month the Unified Logistics Pass (ULP) to simplify requirements for companies moving goods from the ports and economic zones.

ARTA said in a statement late Wednesday that the ULP will streamline requirements for a unified quick response (QR) code, which will do away with the various pass-through stickers required by economic zones, ports, and local government units.

“(ULP) will facilitate the unhampered movement of trucks for hire that deliver basic goods and necessities across the country through a unified application form,” ARTA said.

The ULP is designed to ease operations for five priority sectors: telecommunications, food and pharmaceuticals, logistics, housing, and energy.

“The launch of the ULP is in line with ARTA’s flagship National Effort for the Harmonization of Efficiency Measures of Interrelated Agencies program, which aims to reduce the time, cost, and requirements or

procedures of government services in five priority sectors by 52% in 52 weeks,” ARTA said.

According to ARTA, signatories to the ULP memorandum of agreement will be the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board, Land Transportation Office, Department of Trade and Industry, Philippine Economic Zone and Authority, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Information and Communications Technology, Philippine Ports Authority, Department of Science and Technology, the Clark Development Corp., and the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority.

Other organizations set to sign the agreement are Asian Terminals, Inc., International Container Terminal Services, Inc., Manila Harbor Center Port Services, Inc., Manila North Harbour Port, Inc., University of the Philippines Public Administration Research and Extension Services-Regulatory Reform Support Program for National Development, and DevConnect Philippines, Inc. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

DoE clears path for RE companies to become eligible for incentives

THE Department of Energy (DoE) said on Thursday that will move to ease the requirements for renewable energy (RE) companies seeking to avail of incentives, including a 10% tax rate, in order to support more sustainable and clean-energy investment.

“We are pleased to issue an amended policy that would address the long-standing concerns of the RE law’s target recipients, including RE developers, fabricators, and manufacturers regarding the law’s incentives,” Energy Secretary Alfonso G. Cusi said in a statement.

He added that the amended department circular which was signed on Dec. 24 covers

the implementation of the tax provisions, particularly the automatic availability of the 10% corporate tax rate and zero-rate value-added tax.

The amendments address Sections 13 E and 18 C of the Renewable Energy Act.

According to Section 13 E, acquiring corporations must have taken over, administered, or operated RE energy facilities that have been in commercial operation for more than seven years to qualify for a 10% corporate tax rate.

RE developers can only avail of the incentives after they obtain an endorsement from the DoE, according to Section 18 C of the RE Act.

BusinessWorld asked for a copy of the amended circular, but the DoE had not released it at the deadline time.

The circular also complies with the RE Act, which provides that savings generated in availing of the reduced corporate income tax rate must be effectively passed on to end-users in the form of lower power rates, the DoE said in a statement.

After the amendment of the circular, the DoE then will evaluate its effectiveness through a review of annual reports submitted by the RE Developers. — **Marielle C. Lucenio**

Duterte signs rice farmer cash assistance bill into law

PRESIDENT Rodrigo R. Duterte has signed into law a bill authorizing direct monetary assistance to rice farmers, who are among the hardest-hit members of the industry as a result of the pandemic.

Republic Act No. 11589 or the Cash Assistance for Filipino

Farmers Act will support rice farmers tilling two hectares or less until 2024.

The law noted “the urgency of intervening for our farmers in light of the current state of declining palay prices and the crippling effects of the coronavirus pandemic.”

For the cash to be distributed, the Department of Agriculture will tap any funds exceeding P10 billion collected from rice import tariffs. The first P10 billion collected is reserved for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

RCEF is a component of Republic Act No. 11203, or the Rice Tariffication Law.

The House of Representatives approved the bill on Sept. 15. It was later adopted by the Senate on Sept. 21. Mr. Duterte signed it into law on Dec. 10. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

Credit card fraud incidents rise as use of digital channels soars



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- Can handle customer by resolving issues and concerns to meet customer satisfaction

CREDIT CARD fraud incidents have risen 21% during the pandemic with the more extensive use of digital payment channels, according to the Credit Card Association of the Philippines (CCAP).

As a result, the card industry is calling for stricter rules governing mobile phone subscriber identity module (SIM) registrations to deter fraud. Legislators are currently considering a bill that would regulate SIM card registrations.

The most common incidents involve what the CCAP calls the “virtual account takeover,” in which perpetrators of the fraud take over and gain access to one-time passwords in order to perform valid transactions.

Separately, the CCAP urged telecommunication firms to implement stricter Know-Your-Customer processes for new prepaid and post-paid users. They specifically noted the need for a more rigorous ID verification process when customers request to change mobile numbers when they declare a lost or stolen mobile unit.

“We respectfully request that this be addressed urgently. Perpetration of a successful unauthorized SIM swap will affect both the telcos’ and the banks’ customers, resulting in financial losses, loss of public trust and confidence, and close scrutiny from the regulators,” CCAP Executive Director Alex G. Ilagan said in letters addressed to Globe Telecom, Inc. and Smart Communications, Inc., the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC), and the House of Representatives.

House Bill 5793 and its counterpart Senate Bill 2395, which requires telco to require registration of SIM cards, both passed third and final reading last month.

“To date, there are no existing laws which protect the consumers from this mode of attack from fraudsters. We believe that the passage and implementation of this law will greatly deter (such) activities... as they will now have accountability from the use of... registered SIM cards,” Mr. Ilagan said.

The group also called on the NTC to devise a formal recourse mechanism for consumers who wish to report numbers that have been used for carrying out financial crime.

“This standardized reporting mechanism is absent in today’s environment which leads (victims to be reluctant) to properly report incidents to their respective banks or telecommunication providers,” Mr. Ilagan said.

The central bank has said that the most common types of fraud incidents related to credit cards include unauthorized or disputed transactions that can be traced to the disclosure of personal information and phishing e-mails, as well as breach of personal account information in the use of the OTP by a person falsely representing a bank employee.

“Combating financial crime is a shared responsibility among all concerned industries, as well as the government; thus, we are asking for help in this continuous fight against these progressive fraudsters,” he said. — **Luz Wendy T. Noble**

SSS members reporting more fraud

THE Social Security System (SSS) said on Thursday that it has taken note of an increase in fraud incidents being reported by its members.

“We are deeply concerned with the increasing number of fraud victims who are mostly our members,” SSS President and Chief Executive Officer Aurora C. Ignacio said in a statement.

“That’s why we constantly remind (members) not to patronize these individuals.”

Ms. Ignacio said members should avoid sharing their social security number, My.SSS login credentials and other personal data with people who claim to be SSS employees.

“These will be compromised and used in illegal activities,” she said.

The SSS is also warning the public against joining Facebook groups that offer online transac-

tion help for a fee, noting that the groups are illegal and could be mining personal data.

The SSS said its services are mostly free, charging a fee only for Unified Multi-purpose ID card replacement.

“We also reiterate that SSS shall not be held accountable for any transactions once the member is found to have connived with the fixer,” Ms. Ignacio said.

“This act is considered a violation of (Republic Act) No. 11032 or the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act of 2018 as well as RA 11199 or the Social Security Act of 2018. Hence, we strongly advise our members to coordinate with legitimate SSS branch personnel only.”

The private-sector pension fund’s mobile application processed over 35 million transac-

tions and queries in the first eight months of last year.

The number of online transactions with the SSS increased while manual transactions declined in 2020 as more members used digital platforms during the lockdowns.

The SSS said it is working with the police in taking down social media accounts and posts connected to fraud.

“Sending your complaints will provide notable information which will help the authorities to track them,” Ms. Ignacio said.

The SSS, along with the Government Service Insurance System, has been ramping up digitalization initiatives to deliver services during the public health crisis, the Finance department said.

“Both institutions have also put in place information technology tools to keep their systems safe from data breaches and other forms of cyberattacks and threats,” the department said on Wednesday. — **Jenina P. Ibañez**

Agroforestry project worth P18M turned over to Nueva Vizcaya

A P18-MILLION agroforestry support facility was turned over to around 2,600 beneficiaries in Nueva Vizcaya by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Established in cooperation with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the facilities are part of the ₱9.24-million Forestland Management Project, which covers 71,300 hectares of forest area in Nueva Vizcaya, and eventually in Iloilo, Ifugao, Quirino, and Nueva Ecija.

The facilities include an irrigation pipeline system, pathways and a hanging bridge, to give residents access to basic services and markets, support reforestation work, and benefit people’s organizations and indigenous communities in the watershed areas, JICA said.

“Aside from protecting the watersheds and ensuring that water supply sources are resil-

ient, the project also aims to support job creation in communities by building their capacity on sustainable forest management and enterprise development,” JICA Chief Representative Eigo Azukizawa said.

“The pandemic and climate change problems are making all of us rethink the way we manage natural resources and ensure that they are sustainable for the enjoyment of future generations,” he added.

JICA also announced a project with the Department of Agriculture to address food security and raise farmer income by improving the supply chain for vegetables.

The Project for Market-Driven Enhancement of Vegetable Value Chain in the Philippines is a five-year initiative to be established in production areas for highland and lowland vegetables.

One of the project’s expected outcomes is a vegetable value

chain roadmap to benefit selected regions.

“The pandemic and recently, natural disasters, serve as wake-up calls to look for opportunities to improve food security and the food value chain network,” JICA Senior Representative Ayumu Ohshima said. “We’ve seen how food inaccessibility not only led to hunger in vulnerable groups but also affected the income of farmers whose produce was not able to reach more markets.”

“JICA believes this is a timely cooperation as we map the roles of every stakeholder in the agriculture sector and firm up solutions to tackle food security and identify opportunities to support small-scale farmers,” added Mr. Ohshima.

The program will also involve training of Filipinos based in Japan on farm technology and administration. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**