

PEZA calls for agro-industrial, aquamarine ecozones on gov't land

THE Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) said 12 million hectares of government land needs to be tapped for agro-industrial and aquamarine economic zones (ecozones), to address the looming food crisis.

PEZA Director-General Charito B. Plaza said in a statement on Thursday that "For years, we have been hearing of plans for production and food sufficiency, yet we continue to be an import and consumption-dependent economy, despite the millions of hectares of idle land."

"Our focus (must be) to utilize responsibly our very fertile land and rich natural resources towards self-reliance (and a) self-sustaining and resource-generating economy," Ms. Plaza added.

Ms. Plaza said President-elect Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.'s decision to take control of the Department of Agriculture (DA) has opened up an opportunity for PEZA

to explore the expansion of production via the ecozone route, with corresponding incentives to locators.

"PEZA will contribute in our own way... by transforming public land into viable agro-industrial and aquamarine (production centers to achieve) food security," she added.

On May 31, the PEZA signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to create more ecozones in the countryside. The ecozone development program will be piloted in the Caraga region.

"Under the MoU, PEZA and DENR have agreed to pursue the establishment of special ecozones in potential areas within the jurisdiction of the DENR that are suitable for development as agro-industrial, agro-forestry, mineral processing, and eco-tourism (zones).

We hope to truly implement these partnerships in the coming years under the administration of President-elect Marcos," Ms. Plaza said.

"We aim to restore the once major industry of wood and bring order to the utilization of the raw minerals processed into many other products in Caraga, which has (major) timberland and mining land," she added.

PEZA and DENR identified seven sites in the region viable for ecozone development. Four of the proposed economic zones will be in Agusan del Norte, while one site each has been nominated for Agusan del Sur, Surigao del Norte, and Surigao del Sur.

"Once proclaimed, these will be in addition to the 23 operating agro-industrial ecozones in PEZA, four of which are located in Luzon, five in Visayas, and 13 in Mindanao," PEZA said. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochoa**

No decision on BNPP; gov't evaluating modular reactors

THE Climate Change Commission (CCC) said studies are still ongoing to determine the fate of the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP), in compliance with the executive order (EO) that gave the go-signal for tapping nuclear power.

"We are aware that based on the EO, studies still have to be undertaken. That's why we are also engaging our experts here, along with other national agencies" to ensure the appropriate policy that accords with scientific opinion, CCC Policy Research and Development Division Chief Jerome E. Ilagan said during the Second Virtual Philippine Life Insurance Summit on Thursday.

President Rodrigo R. Duterte signed EO No. 164 in February, authorizing the exploration of nuclear power as a possible addition to the energy mix.

In 2020, the Philippines' power mix consisted of 57% coal-fired, 21% renewable energy (RE), 19% natural gas, and 2% oil.

Michael O. Sinocruz, the Department of Energy's (DoE) Energy Policy and Planning Bureau officer-in-charge and director, said EO No. 164 has also triggered studies on the development of small modular reactors with capacity of about 50 megawatts.

Mr. Sinocruz said that compared to other sources of energy, nuclear energy is among the cheapest options, but will require significant spending to ensure safety.

"If you are going to compare nuclear with other energy sources, nuclear is the cheapest, but because of the additional safety measures (to be undertaken) due to Fukushima, the capital cost increased slightly, so now they

are at roughly the same level with coal in terms of cost," he said.

He added that when all costs are considered for nuclear, coal remains cheaper and its disadvantages can be mitigated by more efficient low-emission technology, which promise lower carbon dioxide emissions.

The DoE will implement the National Renewable Energy Program (NREP) 2020-2040 within the year. NREP sets a target of 35% renewable energy in the generation mix by 2030, driving this further to 50% by 2040.

About \$153 billion in investment is needed, with \$94.3 billion going to the construction of RE power plants and \$510 million needed for renewable energy pre-development activities.

Mr. Sinocruz said that there were also currently talks with

the Star Scientific Ltd., of Australia and Tokyo-based Hydrogen Technology, Inc. to introduce hydrogen as an alternative energy source.

Mr. Ilagan said the Philippine pledge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 as part of the Paris Agreement on Climate change should not serve as a deterrent to seeking out other energy sources, adding that the country needs to get "creative."

"Based on what we call the carbon budget, we still have space to emit (greenhouse gases)," he added. "But in the solidarity with the world, and since we also suffer when greenhouse gases go up, we commit to lowering future emissions; but we ask: give us support in terms of technology, capacity, and finance." — **Tobias Jared Tomas**

BSP studying 3 key market infra technologies

THE Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) is exploring three new technologies that will be crucial to the development of new financial market infrastructure (FMI), making the Philippines one of the more open jurisdictions in the region to new financial tools, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said.

The ADB said the BSP is currently developing proofs of concept for artificial intelligence, open API (application programming interface), and cloud com-

puting, three of the six technologies it identified as instrumental to the FMI of the future.

The other three tools for the development of new FMI are distributed ledger technology (DLT), big data analytics, and cybersecurity.

The ADB said that according to a survey it conducted, five central banks in the ASEAN + 3 region have explored a single new technology; three have explored two; six have explored three; and two have explored four.

"Twenty of the 25 Cross-Border Settlement Infrastructure Forum (CSIF) member institutions responded to the survey in 2021.

Sixteen of the 20 institutions stated that they have explored at least one of the six new technologies" ADB Financial Sector Specialist Byung Wook Ahn said in a webinar on Thursday.

"All central banks and central securities deposi-

tories (CSDs) in this region... really need to consider those emerging technologies. Regardless, if they only focus on one path or many, this is

really the fact. The more important thing (is that) I realized, many of our CSIF members are already developing a proof of concept or already in the production level," ADB advisor Satoru Yamadera said in the webinar. — **Ana Olivia A. Tirona**

FULL STORY



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World Bank approves \$178-million loan to support PHL efforts to curb malnutrition

THE World Bank has approved a \$178.1-million loan to the Philippines to support efforts to curb malnutrition, which has worsened due to the rising costs of food.

The program, the Philippines Multisectoral Nutrition Project, will provide nutrition support and health services to help reduce growth stunting in infants and young children, in 235 municipalities with high incidences of poverty and malnutrition.

"The persistence of high levels of childhood undernutrition in the Philippines, exacerbated by the pandemic, could lead to a significant increase in inequality of opportunities in the country," Ndiame Diop, World Bank country director for Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, said. "Where healthy children can do well in school and look forward to a prosperous future, stunted children tend to be sickly, learn less, more likely to drop out of school and their economic productivity as adults can be clipped by more than 10% in their lifetime."

"Hence, improving the nutritional status of children is key to the country's goals of boosting human capital while strengthen-

ing the country's economic recovery and prospects for long-term growth."

Households in the selected local government units with pregnant women and children under two years of age will be eligible for regular feeding for the young, growth monitoring, nutrient supplements for children aged between 6 to 23 months, iron-folic acid supplements for pregnant women, diet support, and treatment for malnutrition.

The project will also help change habits in households deemed crucial in improving health and nutrition in women and children, including hand washing with soap, better sanitation and access to drinking water, early child care and development and activities, and promoting access to the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), a conditional cash transfer targeted at the poor.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development's 4Ps program grants eligible families cash aid if they keep children in school and submit to health checks.

These health and nutrition interventions are focused on the first 1,000 days of children's lives, a critical period in their development.

Agricultural trade deficit widens 40.3%

THE DEFICIT in agricultural goods trade widened 40.3% year on year to \$2.55 billion in the first quarter, according to preliminary data from the Philippine Statistics Authority.

The fourth quarter 2021 deficit was \$2.36 billion.

Agricultural imports grew 33.4% year on year to \$4.50 billion. Exports tallied \$1.95 billion, up 25.3%.

Total trade in agricultural goods — the sum of exports and imports — grew 30.8% from a year earlier to \$6.45 billion.

Cereals were the top first-quarter import at \$3.93 billion, or 87.4% of the total.

Agricultural imports from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) amounted to \$1.52 billion or 17.5% of all goods imported. For the first quarter, Indonesia remained the top source of agricultural products with \$401.91 million.

The top commodities imported from ASEAN were animal or vegetable fats and oils and their cleavage products; prepared edible fats; animal or vegetable waxes (\$410.15 million), miscellaneous edible preparations (\$362.64 million) and cereals (\$329.07 million).

Meanwhile, the value of agricultural exports tallied \$1.949 billion, accounting for 10% of all exports.

The top export was animal or vegetable fats and oils and their cleavage products; prepared edible fats; animal or vegetable waxes amounting to \$623.32 million, or 32% of all exports.

Agricultural exports to ASEAN amounted to \$261.69 million, or 7.5% of all exports to the region. Malaysia was the top destination, accounting for \$111.84 million, or 42.7%.

The top commodities exported to ASEAN were animal or vegetable fats and oils and their cleavage products; prepared edible fats; animal or vegetable waxes (\$91 million); tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes (\$85.14 million), and dairy produce, birds' eggs, natural honey, and edible products of animal origin, not elsewhere classified (\$13.61 million).

The Netherlands was the top European export destination with \$328.86 million or 62.3% of all European shipments, while Spain

was the top source of such imports with \$97.48 million, or 23.9% of the total.

In an e-mail interview, University of Asia and the Pacific Senior Economist Cid L. Terosa attributed the agricultural deficit to "rising agricultural commodity prices worldwide due to supply issues spawned by the Russia-Ukraine war, constricted global markets for agricultural exports, and the depreciating peso," he said.

"The widening gap between agricultural exports and imports is indicative of the country's struggle to sell agricultural products abroad and to buy agricultural commodities from other countries given the outbreak of the geopolitical tensions in Europe," Mr. Terosa added.

Mr. Terosa expects the agricultural trade deficit to continue to expand.

"The next quarter won't be different from the first quarter of this year. The agricultural trade deficit will continue to widen since supply issues and supply chain disruptions will cause global prices of agricultural commodities to continue to rise, making agricultural imports more expensive," Mr. Terosa said.

On Wednesday, the peso closed at P54.47, its weakest level since 2005.

Pampanga State Agricultural University Retired Professor Roy S. Kempis said in a text message: "With the rate of import growth outpacing the rate of exports growth, the trade deficit in the second quarter will be even higher."

However, the disruption in agricultural trade may see more of an effort to produce goods domestically, he said.

"We may see a slowing down of agricultural trade as the country tries to produce more of its cereals especially rice and corn for the livestock, poultry and aquaculture... it is possible that countries that supply these two commodities may suspend or reduce their exports to the Philippines to protect themselves from looming food shortages," he added.

In April, Indonesia blocked palm oil exports. This was followed by Indian restrictions on sugar and wheat exports. — **Mariedel Irish U. Catilogo**

Concepcion: Marcos as Agri chief can create resilient PHL food security

Presidential Adviser for Entrepreneurship and Go Negosyo founder Joey Concepcion welcomed President-elect Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.'s decision to head the Department of Agriculture.

"Many of our MSMEs are based in the agriculture sector, and the President-elect has expressed his intention to focus on our country's small entrepreneurs," he said. "This would be a chance to help both our farmers and our MSMEs."

Concepcion said it would be a natural choice for the incoming President as he has always expressed his intention to continue the elder Marcos's projects in the sector. "There are many programs that his father started that I believe can be revived and will redound to benefits for the country's agriculture sector," he said. "Masagana 99, the Food Terminal Inc. and the Kadiwa stores are only but a few of the projects that I believe can be revisited today," he said.

"President-elect Marcos told us at our Kandidatalks series during the campaign season that he felt the pandemic exposed the weaknesses not just of our agriculture sector, but our whole

food supply chain," he said. "With hope, with the reforms he will implement, we will become more resilient and able to withstand future disruptions in our food supply system, such as that we experienced during the lockdowns and now with the Russia-Ukraine crisis," he said.

In a statement, the President-elect expressed his intention to rebuild the value chain of agriculture, and that the agriculture sector, along with food security, will be a priority of his administration.

"Masagana 99 was quite a successful project, and there were several infrastructure projects like the Pantabangan Dam and Magat Dam that really helped Northern Luzon become a productive rice producer. The challenges that many of our agriculture-based MSMEs space is on productivity. I look forward to how our next President can help lift so many out of poverty," he said.

"Our continuing efforts to mentor farmer-entrepreneurs through our programs like the Kapatid Agri Mentor Me Program will dovetail with the President-elect's efforts to help both the MSMEs and the agriculture sector," Concepcion said.

Most HR professionals see automation as key to making hybrid office policy work, study shows

HYBRID workplace policies have become a key tool for retaining talent, and will require a corresponding investment in systems and services that enable such an environment, according to a survey of human resources (HR) practitioners conducted by Sprout Solutions.

The HR services company said in a statement on Thursday that the top items on HR professionals' wish lists are automated HR systems, mental and physical health resources, and company-wide allowances for transportation, electricity, and internet.

"Innovation and technology advantages to improve the employee experience," Sprout Chief Executive Officer Patrick Gentry said in a Thursday statement. "2022 is shaping up to be the year hybrid work becomes the rule rather than the exception, and tech has a huge role to play." — **Alyssa Nicole O. Tan**

FULL STORY



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