

Access roads for upland farms completed in Ifugao province

THE Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) have completed and turned over new access roads in Banaue, Mayoyao, and Lagawe in Ifugao province to support upland farmers.

"The roads are critical to helping upland farmers transport their agroforestry goods easily, find new markets, and for people to access basic services such as hospital care and schools," JICA and the DENR said in a statement.

The roads were funded by a P1.8-billion cooperation project

targeted at building or rehabilitating agroforestry support facilities under the umbrella of the Forestland Management Project (FMP).

Since 2012, the FMP has rehabilitated over 70,000 hectares of forest land across 24 sub-watersheds in Ifugao, Quirino, Nueva Vizcaya, Nueva Ecija and Iloilo provinces.

"JICA and DENR have partnered to save critical watershed systems in the Philippines as a move to address climate change and improve the livelihood of farmers and grassroots com-

munities dependent on forest resources," it added.

According to the DENR, the Philippines has more than 130 watersheds supplying water for irrigation, domestic, and industrial use.

The JICA-DENR partnership also implements conservation efforts at the river basins in Upper Magat and Cagayan, Upper Pampanga, and Jalaur on Panay.

"We join the Philippine government in their self-help efforts to sustainably manage the Philippines' natural resources for the greatest good of the greatest

number of people in the long-term. Conserving vital forest resources such as watersheds is critical to mitigating climate change risks and giving Filipinos opportunities to improve their livelihood through sustainable forestland management," JICA Philippines Chief Representative Sakamoto Takema said.

Mr. Takema said access roads help upland communities implement sustainable community-based forest management activities, protect and maintain a total of nearly twenty thousand hectares of forest in Ifugao. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

Agrarian reform beneficiaries to get aid in accessing markets

THE Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) said it is planning to strengthen the links between agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) and their markets, particularly for those growing rice, corn, coconut, and livestock.

In a statement, the DAR said it also plans to digitize its land database.

"It's about time that we further strengthen market linkage for our ARBs through the value chain so that they will be fairly compensated for their investments in farming," Agrarian Reform Secretary Conrado M. Estrella III said.

Mr. Estrella said that helping the members of ARB organizations sell their harvests directly to the market or institutional buyers will maximize

their earning potential and keep food production sustainable.

The digitalization project will cover the ARB registry, land grants, the status of land being subject to conversion, data mapping, and the profiling of the farmers' crops.

"The improved database will serve as the repository of various information pertaining to agrarian reform program implementation where stakeholders can access official data as a reference," the department said.

It also hopes to offer product development and standards training for agrarian reform communities to make their produce more commercially viable. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

Nearly 1 million people face starvation, UN says

LONDON — Nearly one million people in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen are starving or will face starvation this year in the absence of aid, as the global food crisis worsens, United Nations (UN) agencies warned.

Local conflict and weather extremes remain the primary drivers of acute hunger, aggravated this year by economic instability linked to the ripple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war.

"The severe drought in the Horn of Africa has pushed people to the brink of starvation. Acute food insecurity is rising fast and

spreading across the world. Without a massively scaled up humanitarian response, the situation will likely worsen in the coming months," said the head of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Although global agricultural commodity prices have come off record highs in recent months, local food prices in several countries remain high and risk heading back up if a UN-brokered deal to boost Russian and Ukrainian grain and fertilizer shipments collapses.

Ukraine is the world's fourth largest grain exporter, while Russia ranks third for grain and first for fertilizer exports.

According to the FAO's quarterly "hunger hotspots" report, co-authored by the UN World Food Programme, high prices for food, fuel and fertilizer have forced advanced economies to tighten monetary policy.

This has increased the cost of credit for low-income countries, constraining their imports and forcing them to introduce austerity measures.

"These trends are expected to increase in coming months, with poverty and acute food insecurity rising further, as well as risks of civil unrest driven by increasing socio-economic grievances," said the report. — **Reuters**

India free food program for poor to cost \$10 billion if extended

NEW DELHI — India is likely to extend its free food program for the poor by three to six months, CNBC TV18 reported, a move that could cost the government \$10 billion more and make it challenging for it to meet its fiscal deficit target.

India has spent nearly \$43 billion since April 2020 on its free food program known as 'Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana' where it provides 5 kg of foodgrain to poor families.

A six-month increase could cost the government an additional

800 billion rupees (\$10 billion), according to a government official, who did not want to be named.

A spokesperson for India's finance ministry did not immediately reply to a message seeking comment.

Most economists expect the Indian government to miss its fiscal deficit target of 6.4% of GDP for the 2022/23 year that started on April 1 as it has taken a number of measures to fight inflation that could cost the government over \$20 billion. — **Reuters**

Economists, from SI/1

It has depreciated by 14.71% or P7.50 this year.

"A weaker peso would lead to higher inflation and interest rates — both a drag on economic growth and government spending," Mr. Ricafort said. A weaker peso would also cut foreign borrowings by the government, he added.

BPI Lead Economist Emilio S. Neri, Jr. expects the peso to breach P60 a dollar by the fourth quarter or early next year if the Philippine central bank "continues to hike too gradually."

"At P60, it will give us even less space for 'Build, Build, Build,'" he said in a Viber message. "Expenditures for human capital development such as health and education could remain in the backseat as debt service takes a greater share of the budget pie unless we really see a massive growth in private sector investments."

First Metro and UA&P economist expect consumer spending to pick up after 800,000 new jobs were added in July and as 70% of the population benefits from a weak peso.

"While inflation above 6% may cut into consumer spending, the significant peso depreciation puts more money in the hands of overseas Filipino workers' families, business process outsourcing workers, and [exporters] and their suppliers," they said.

These could offset the negative impact of inflation and help the economy expand by 6.5% in the last quarter, they added.

In July, the DBCC set its inflation assumptions at 2.5-4.5% for next year and 2-4% for 2024.

"In 2023, it will already be lower, but we realize that there are still challenges, especially with respect to external pressures like fuel prices," Ms. Edillon said. "For our part, it's really about addressing food security, especially for the most vulnerable."

Socioeconomic Planning Assistant Secretary Sarah Lynne Daway-Ducanes told the same forum crude oil prices are expected to go down in the latter part of the year, which could help stabilize inflation.

First Metro and UA&P said the government has some legroom for spending since the budget deficit narrowed by 9.1% to P761 billion in the seven months to July.

"The National Government has a leeway of nearly P900 billion from total budgeted deficit for 2022, although we think the administration won't use all that to retain some fiscal space for this and the coming years," they said, citing slower spending growth and a 22.2% growth in taxes.

Headline inflation eased to 6.3% in August from a near four-year high of 6.4% in July, bringing the eight-month average to 4.9%. — **Diego Gabriel C. Robles**

Appropriations, from SI/1

"We do not want to have a reenacted budget because it will cause more harm than good," she added. "Based on our recent experience, it stifles economic activities, denies people needed funds for social programs and enables vast power to the administration to realign the budget."

The government had to operate in the first few days of 2020 using funds from 2019 after the budget bill was delayed.

The government also operated on a reenacted budget in 2019, which economists blamed for slower growth of 5.5% in the second quarter from 6.2% a year earlier.

Ms. Hontiveros said rising food, fuel, feed and fertilizer prices have affected the local farms, transport operations and poor households.

"Consider the possibility of rising hunger as household budgets are squeezed," she said. "The National Economic and Development Authority does not even have a 2022 baseline on hunger incidence and has not set up a monitoring system even in the face of unprecedented national and global food inflation," she added.

"I hope I'm wrong, but there can be surprises in this area that might require a major reconsideration of short-term budget priorities," the senator said.

Ms. Hontiveros also said it is difficult to spot appropriations that could be potential sources of corruption and abuse such as intelligence and confidential funds.

"Does the soliciting office really need it and should it be that large? Such budgets should be thoroughly scrutinized," she said.

"Another challenge is proposing processes that would get things done faster and better such as local collaborations to fill in the backlogs in classrooms, housing, etc."

The biggest challenge will be "ensuring that the national budget is responsive to the needs of the Filipino people," Senator Emmanuel Joel J. Villanueva said in a Viber message.

FULL STORY

Read the full story by scanning the QR code with your smartphone or by typing the link <bit.ly/Budget092622>

Welcome back!



How can we make you feel better?

Now that we're going back to a healthy normal, we'll make your visit to MakatiMed better than ever. Because we know how much better it is to care for you in person, listen to your heartbeat, and to see you again. We'll do everything to make your visit a better experience. So drop by and don't hesitate to consult with our doctors. We look forward to caring for you only with the MakatiMed brand of care that you know.

Visit us today! Learn more at our website www.makatimed.net.ph or call 02-8888-8999 to book an appointment.



MAKATI MEDICAL CENTER
The hospital with a heart.

GET SOCIAL WITH US



Facebook



Twitter

