

# Over 9 million households set to receive P500 inflation subsidy for two months

MORE THAN nine million poor households will receive P500 each for two months to mitigate the impact of inflation, the Department of Finance said on Tuesday.

The government has allotted P9.3 billion for the cash transfer program for the poor, Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno said at a televised Palace briefing after meeting with President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.

"This is P500 for two months, (totaling) P1,000 for 9.3 million households."

The assistance will be released "in a few days or weeks," he said. The list of beneficiaries will be generated by the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

Mr. Diokno said the government has set aside P26.6 billion overall to subsidize vulnerable members of society during the recent bout of high prices.

The subsidies will come in the form of fertilizer and fuel aid for farmers and fish-

erfolk as well as members of the transport sector.

"We will continue the provision of fuel discounts under the programs for farmers and fisherfolk," he said. "Then, we will extend the targeted cash transfer program for 2023."

Inflation eased to 8.6% in February from 8.7% in January.

The P500 cash assistance for two months marks a cutback from the P1,000

in aid that the government was considering in February.

In a statement, ACT Teachers Party-list Representative Francisca L. Castro said the P1,000 initial floated by the government last month "was already meager."

"Mataas pa din ang inflation rate sa 8.6% at saan aabutin ang P500 sa isang buwan (Inflation is still high at 8.6% and P500 a month will not pay for much)," she said. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**



BW FILE PHOTO

## Cold storage officials cited for contempt after declining to share info with House committee

THE HOUSE agriculture and food committee cited three officials of a cold storage facility in Nueva Ecija in contempt for declining to present inventory records requested by the panel, which is investigating high onion prices.

On Tuesday, 35 legislators voted to cite in contempt Efren P. Zoleta, Jr., Argo Cold Storage trading president and general manager; the company's legal counsel Jan Ryan Cruz; and operations manager John Patrick Sevilla.

Mr. Sevilla had refused to turn over the list of red onion farmers

who used the company's services during the last quarter of 2022, when prices for the commodity spiked.

Argo is based in Palayan City, the provincial capital.

According to House rules, the three officials will be detained in Congress for at least 10 days.

Mr. Sevilla was escorted out of the chamber following the contempt order. The House's sergeant-at-arms was ordered to locate Mr. Zoleta and Mr. Cruz, who were not present at the hearing.

Mr. Sevilla told the committee earlier that Argo was bound by a

confidentiality agreement with its clients.

"According to our lawyers, we can't discuss (or) provide that specific information but we are able to provide (information on) stock movements," Mr. Sevilla told the panel.

"Inventory records are of paramount importance in this investigation because this is where we'll identify if there is hoarding," Marikina Rep. Stella Luz A. Quimbo said at the hearing.

"Confidentiality of business information is not a sufficient reason, and I recommend that

we give them another chance to submit," Ms. Quimbo.

The panel gave Argo Cold Storage one hour to disclose the client list but found submissions by Mr. Sevilla to be inadequate, prompting the contempt vote.

Argo Cold Storage had not replied to a request for comment at the deadline.

In 2019, Argo Cold Storage was among those investigated by the Philippine Competition Commission for alleged involvement in an onion cartel that sought to depress prices. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

## China reopening seen boosting Southeast Asia chip industry

THE reopening of China will boost demand for electronics produced by suppliers in Southeast Asia, Moody's Analytics said.

"While economies such as Vietnam primarily function as low-cost alternatives to China for the assembly of consumer goods, the case of Malaysia, the Philippines, and to a degree, Thailand is different. Exports of semiconductors and other electronic components increasingly make their way into final demand in China, and China's growing consumer economy will accelerate this trend," Moody's Analytics said in a note on Tuesday.

Electronics and semiconductors, which are the Philippines' top export, are expected to grow by 5% this year, according to the Semiconductor and Electronics Industries in the Philippines Foundation, Inc. (SEIPI). SEIPI initially targeted 9% growth but lowered its target amid a looming global recession.

Last year, the value of electronics exports grew 6.88%, below the 10% target.

Moody's Analytics said that Southeast Asia's economies, which feature a mix of manufacturing and commodities-based industries, are "less tied to Chinese domestic demand than emerging heavyweights South Korea and Taiwan."

"These countries' semiconductor and intermedi-

ate electronics exports are more tightly linked to final demand in China, serving as key inputs into consumer and capital goods. But Southeast Asia's growing specialization in semiconductors and other immediate electronic components will bind it tighter to China," it added.

China's reopening is also expected to boost tourism, business travel, and demand for commodities.

"There are a lot of challenges for Southeast Asia, from elevated inflation to higher interest rates and consumer fatigue. But the quadruple-boost from China's reopening — which will support tourism, investment, commodity prices and trade — will power the recovery as inflation gradually recedes," it added.

ING Bank N.V. Manila Senior Economist Nicholas Antonio T. Mapa said in a Viber message that the China reopening will benefit the region in terms of trade and tourism.

"Remains to be seen however to what extent we will see China reopen and recover. China recently set a disappointingly low growth aspiration showing that even government officials remain guarded in their estimation on how quickly China's economy can get back up to speed," he added. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsos**

## Data on creative industry's economic impact deemed inadequate

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said it cannot accurately measure the creative industry's contribution to the economy because of inadequate data.

"Robust industry studies in many creative sub-sectors must be conducted. We also need to address the deficiencies in statistical data on the actual contribution of the creative industries to employment, trade, and the economy at large," Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual said in a keynote speech at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Philippine Creative Industries Summit in Pasay City on Tuesday.

Mr. Pascual added: "To allow us to measure the creative industries' economic contributions accurately, we will continue working with the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) and the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines (IPOPHL) to establish a well-defined and reliable statistical system through the Creative Industries Satellite Account," Mr. Pascual said.

"We are on track with our work on industry studies and roadmaps for the creative sub-sectors of architecture and landscapes, e-sports, fashion and textile, furniture and fixtures, gifts, decors, housewares, graphic design, and jewelry," Mr. Pascual added.

The creative industries are expected to receive more support after the signing of Republic



FAIZUR REHMAN-UNSPLASH

Act No. 11900 or the Philippine Creative Industries Development Act (PCIDA), which lapsed into law in July 2022.

The law seeks to address challenges hampering creative industries such as high costs, the fragmented education system, piracy, underdeveloped branding and infrastructure, and skills mismatches.

PCIDA provides for the drafting of a Philippine Creative Industries Development Plan, which seeks to address the industry's infrastructure, research and

development, innovation, digitalization, financing, investment, and education needs.

"The creative economy is a priority industry for the DTI, where we expect to create more and better jobs, (raise) incomes, and contribute to the country's inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development," Mr. Pascual said.

"But even beyond services, with all economic sectors now strongly linked with each other due to digital technologies, we will usher creativity not only in

services but also in agriculture, manufacturing, and other industries, as creativity is a crucial component of driving industrial innovation," he added.

Last year, the DTI said that the Philippines is aiming to become the top creative economy in Southeast Asia by 2030. The revenue generated by the creative industries dropped 90% in 2020 as a result of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, with freelancers losing an estimated P268 million worth of income. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**



## Nearly 40% of PHL households report Tagalog as main language

SOME 39.9% of households use Tagalog as their spoken language at home, the Philippine Statistics Authority said on Monday.

According to the 2020 Census of Population and Housing, households totaled 26.39 million in 2020, of which 10.52 million households reported Tagalog to be the language primarily spoken at home.

Households speaking Bisaya or Binisaya numbered 4.21 million or 16% of the total household while Hiligaynon or Ilonggo households numbered 1.93 million (7.3%).

The other top languages or dialects were Ilocano at 1.86 million households (7.1%); Cebuano 1.72 million (6.5%); Bicol/Bicol 1.03 million (3.9%); Waray 698,745

households (2.6%); Kapampangan 639,687 households (2.4%); Maguindanao 365,032 (1.4%) and Pangasinan/Pangalato 334,759 (1.3%).

The "other" category numbered 2.95 million households (11.2%), while 117,335 households (0.4%) did not say what language was primarily used at home. — **Abigail Marie P. Yraola**

## Italian transport companies pitched on investing in PHL

THE Department of Transportation (DoTr) invited Italian businesses to invest in Philippine transport projects, including airports and railways.

In a statement on Tuesday, Secretary Jaime J. Bautista made the pitch for big-ticket infrastructure projects to a visiting Italian trade mission.

"A lot of airport, railway, seaport, and road infrastructure projects have been initiated and we are on track to complete them within the coming years," Mr. Bautista said in a statement.

He told the delegation that the government's transport projects will be favorable to investors.

The Italian trade mission consisted of representatives from 20 companies.

It was organized by the DoTr and the Embassy of Italy. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**



PHILIPPINE STAR/MICHAEL VARGAS

## DA exceeds gender-related spending floor, registers 2.7M women in agriculture

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Tuesday that it exceeded the legally-mandated spending minimum for gender-related programs in 2022.

"Last year, we exceeded the mandated percentage as we allocated 17% or P11 billion out of the P59.8-B budget. For this year, we increased our GAD (Gender and Development) budget by P6.2B — comprising P17.2B out of our total allocation of P87.07B," DA Senior Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban said in a statement.

The DA said it tallied 2.66 million women in agriculture as of March, citing growth in voluntary registration.

The DA said the female farmers, farmworkers, and fisherfolk accounted for 42.9% of the 6.212 million farmers contained in the department's database of workers, known as the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture.

Farmers in the database are eligible for government aid to the agriculture industry, in the form of machinery, inputs and cash aid.

The March tally compares with 1.987 million women in the registry in October 2021.

The DA seeks to allot at least 5% of its budget to GAD initiatives in compliance with Republic Act No. 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women. — **Sheldene Joy Talavera**