



Lanao market to serve as outlet for Bangsamoro rebels-turned-farmers

A NEW market being built in Lanao del Sur is expected to serve as an outlet for Bangsamoro farmers, who include former rebels, and eases trade access with neighboring Bukidnon in Northern Mindanao.

The P25-million market project, in the town of Amai Manabilang, is funded by the Bangsamoro government's Ministry of Interior and Local Government.

Many of the farmers in the hinterland town are former fighters for the Moro National Liberation Front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, who are now producing potatoes, lettuce and other high-value short-term crops as part of the region's peace transition.

"It is so necessary in invigorating the economy of the municipality, somehow stunted by security issues in decades past," Lanao del Sur Governor Mamintal A. Adiong, Jr. said on Saturday.

Amai Manabilang borders Bukidnon and is also near Butig, hometown of the Maute terror group that triggered the Marawi City siege in 2017.

Hakim Ersad Mansur, a Maranao vegetable dealer, said he and his business partners have long been pressing for a trade hub in the town.

"This market-building project is very important to us," he said on Saturday. On the Bukidnon side, farmer Arnel Seblon Cantomayor said the market, which is expected to be completed in a few months, will also make it easier for them to sell their bell pepper, onion and ginger to the Maranaos, who use these produce in their traditional cuisine.

"Maranao businessmen buy spices and herbs in bulk because Maranaos are known for their heavy use of such in their traditional recipes," Mr. Cantomayor said. — **John M. Unson**

Pandemic reduced competition in market for agri commodities

By **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**
Reporter

THE competitiveness of farm produce has suffered due to the pandemic, with smaller merchants bowing out of the farm-to-table supply chain and leaving the field to entrenched middlemen, analysts said.

A regulatory framework is needed that encourages competition "can reduce the costs associated with negotiating and monitoring transactions by increasing the number of potential trading partners and reducing the bargaining power of dominant firms/middlemen," Ateneo de Manila economics professor Leonardo A. Lanzona said in an e-mail.

According to Mr. Lanzona, many small- and medium-sized retailers "who used to contest the market (with) the dominant firms" shut down during the pandemic.

"It is crucial then for the government to restore and bring back the power of these small merchants and even the farmers themselves to gain access once again to the market," he said.

Mr. Lanzona said that the Department of Agriculture (DA) can provide a centralized database of potential trading partners to reduce the cost of market matching.

Sonny A. Africa, executive director of think tank Ibon Foundation, said in a Viber chat that providing affordable infrastructure and logistics, raising farm incomes, and regulating "profit-seeking private interests" are essential for economic development. "They are bound by currently underdeveloped public infrastructure and logistics systems which increases costs and, eventually, prices," he said.

"Their scale and sophistication is bounded by a domestic market that is far below its potential size because of persistent poverty and severe inequalities in income and wealth — which constrains cost reductions from economies of scale," he added.

John Paolo R. Rivera, an economist at the Asian Institute of Management, said that eliminating middlemen will stabilize prices of commodities.

"[It] will make agricultural produce cheaper because some

unnecessary costs of intermediation will be reduced or eliminated," he said via Viber.

Mr. Africa, however, said that middlemen have a negative reputation because traders have abused their market power over producers.

"Intermediaries will always be an essential part of any supply chain," he said.

He said that the government should have "a more substantial and responsible state intervention" to correct abuses in the supply chain which may also lead to lower prices.

Even though it provides a direct farmer-to-consumer supply chain, Mr. Lanzona said that the DA's KADIWA program has disempowered small retailers.

"The KADIWA stores have appropriated the same markets once dominated by these small retailers," he said.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., concurrently the Secretary of Agriculture, has been expanding the KADIWA store network. To date, the network consists of 308 outlets, pop-up stores, and KADIWA-on-Wheels

routes, according to the DA's Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service.

"Instead of creating the environment that will lead to greater competition, the KADIWA increased the power of dominant firms by quashing the relatively larger merchants that can compete with these larger firms, thus destroying permanently the supply chains that have been in existence before the pandemic," said Mr. Lanzona said.

Mr. Africa dismissed KADIWA as "a public relations gimmick more than anything else" if left with insufficient resources.

He added that the program has only reached 1.2 million households or not "even 5% of the families in the country" and 250,000 farmers and fisherfolk, or about 3% of direct rural producers.

"The hyped subsidies to farmers and fisherfolk may help the handful who are reached but are also mainly public relations exercises because they are far from what the sector needs to substantially increase rural productivity," he said.

French court bans sale of glyphosate-based weedkillers

PARIS — A French court has banned the sale of two weedkillers containing glyphosate produced by Swiss chemical group Syngenta because of a lack of analysis on the chemical's potential harm to some wildlife.

"The decision on Sept. 30, 2020 by French health security agency ANSES to renew the marketing authorization for the chemical product Touchdown Systeme 4 was annulled," according to a ruling by the administrative court of Montpellier in southern France.

"The precautionary principle was not respected" due to the lack of a complete evaluation procedure, it said.

A separate but similar decision was taken for Syngenta's Touchdown Foret weedkiller.

Syngenta in an e-mailed response to Reuters called the ruling "disappointing" and said the products had gone through "a rigorous approval process that demonstrated safe use."

The company reserved the right to appeal, it said.

The weedkillers covered by the ruling remained authorized pending the terms of a withdrawal procedure, such as a deadline for using the products, Syngenta added.

Glyphosate, first developed by Bayer's Monsanto unit under the brand Roundup, has been a focus of controversy since a World Health Organization agency concluded in 2015 that it probably causes cancer.

President Emmanuel Macron in 2017 pledged to end glyphosate use in France within three years, but his government later said it would take into account whether other solutions existed.

The EU approval of glyphosate was extended for another year in December. The Montpellier court's decision on Syngenta's products followed a request by environmental association Generation Futures, which said ANSES had failed to take into account the precautionary principle and not obtained a risk assessment on non-target vertebrate and invertebrate animals.

ANSES said in an e-mailed response that it took note of the decision, without commenting further. — **Reuters**

South Korea to cull cattle after outbreak of foot and mouth disease

SEOUL — South Korean authorities have ordered the culling of several hundred cattle and put in place biosecurity measures after confirming cases of foot and mouth disease in farms in a central province, the ministry of agriculture said.

The cases mark the first confirmed outbreak since January 2019, according to media reports.

The current contagion occurred in three farms in Cheongju in North Chungcheong province, south of the capital Seoul, the ministry said.

"Related agencies and local governments are asked to make all-out efforts on preventive measures ... to stop further spread of foot-and-mouth disease," Vice Agriculture Minister Kim In-joong said in a statement.

Foot and mouth disease is highly transmissible and causes lesions and lameness in cattle, sheep, goats and other cloven-hoofed animals, but does not affect humans. — **Reuters**

Government urged to consider inflation impact of new taxes

By **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

THE National Government must consider the inflationary impact of any new taxes, analysts said, noting the heavy tax burden on the middle classes.

John Paolo R. Rivera, an economist at the Asian Institute of Management, said by phone that many "are still recovering in terms of their income generating prospects."

Calling for greater efficiency in collecting existing taxes, he pointed to the need for "being mindful of taxation's impact on those people who are actually driving the economy like the middle classes because (they're the) heavily taxed portion of society," he said.

"It is important for government to ensure that additional taxes do not hit the same group of people every time," Eleanor L. Roque, tax principal of P&A Grant Thornton, said in a Viber message.

Ms. Roque said that the government should also "prioritize bills which improve taxpayer services or make paying taxes easier such as the bill on ease of paying taxes."

Senator Sherwin T. Gatchalian, who chairs the Senate Ways and Means panel, said last month that the proposed Ease of Paying Taxes Act may be given committee approval before year's end. A similar bill seeking to modernize tax administration and improve collection efficiency was approved by the House of Representatives last year.

Mr. Gatchalian also told DZBB radio on Sunday that the Senate is working on a measure allowing faster payment of real property taxes. The proposed Taxpayers' Bill of Rights is currently being deliberated at the Senate, he added.

The senator also pointed to the need to address tax evasion via smuggling.

"Before we talk about increasing taxes, we must first discuss reforms that curb smuggling and easing payment of taxes," he said.

Ms. Roque also called for measures that protect taxpayers from harassment or unnecessary hardship during the assessment or refund process.

The Development Budget Coordination Committee (DBCC) last month said it is pushing for three additional tax reforms to boost revenue, specifically an excise tax on sweetened beverages, the motor vehicle road user's tax, and the mining fiscal regime.

"I agree in principle," House Ways and Means Committee Chairman and Albay Rep. Jose Ma. Clemente S. Salceda said, referring to the proposed excise tax on sweetened beverages.

"I intend to file the administration version as soon as (the Finance department is) ready with it," he said via Viber.

Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno said an excise tax on sweetened beverages is expected to generate P53.7 billion in revenue in its first year of implementation.

Mr. Gatchalian said the tax would help fund health programs.

Ms. Roque added that "it is still a move in the right direction to tax unhealthy products to dissuade people from indulging in them."

Mr. Rivera, however, noted that taxing a product in high demand, especially sweetened beverages, might fuel inflation further.

"(Sweetened beverages are actually) in demand... so it might fuel inflation because people would still buy it," he said.

Mr. Diokno said that a modern vehicle road user's tax will generate P15.8 billion in revenue during its first year and up to P48.6 billion by the third year.

"We will look into the impact on logistics and how to mitigate the price effects, since the highest increases in rates will be for trucks," Mr. Salceda said, noting that motorcycles-for-hire and tricycles could be exempt from the motor vehicle charge.

Mr. Rivera said that a motor vehicle tax can help mitigate the road congestion problem.

"Traffic especially in urban areas is driven by the flow of and volume of vehicles and one way to curb this is through taxation," he said.

The DBCC is also seeking approval of a new mining fiscal regime, which is set for discussion at the House Ways and Means panel this week. The proposed regime for the mining sector is expected to yield P12.4 billion in 2025, P12.9 billion in 2026, P13.4 billion in 2027, and P13.9 billion in 2028.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Chief Economist Michael L. Ricafort said that tax and other fiscal reform measures, alongside faster economic growth would help ease the Philippines' debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratio "to below the international threshold of 60% in the coming years and would help maintain or support the country's relatively favorable credit ratings of 1-3 notches above the minimum investment grade rating."

The Bureau of the Treasury puts the debt-to-GDP ratio at 61% as of the first quarter, higher than the 60.4% ratio at the end of 2021. The 60% threshold is the rule-of-thumb ceiling on debt levels considered manageable by developing countries.

"New taxes and higher tax rates need to be fair, equitable, and progressive, especially targeted to those that can afford them or those from the higher income brackets or at least prevent adding to the burden of the poor, the most vulnerable sectors, and/or those hit hard by the pandemic," Mr. Ricafort said.

Proton Therapy: How it works and helps cancer patients

Among the most common treatments for cancer patients, radiation therapy or radiotherapy uses ionizing radiation, typically x-rays, to damage the DNA of cancer cells. When radiated, these cancer cells would gradually be killed. But conventional X-ray radiotherapy has side effects. Proton therapy, another type of radiotherapy, is said to be less damaging, which makes this treatment especially beneficial for certain patients.

While not really a new development in radiation oncology, proton therapy machines have been getting better in the past few years, according to Dr. Lee Kuo Ann, a senior consultant and radiation oncologist at Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital in Singapore.

X-rays have to traverse normal tissues from the skin to reach the tumor. After passing through the tumor, X-rays continue on till they exit the body on the other side, causing radiation injury to normal tissues on both sides of the tumor.

"Proton therapy is like playing basketball or golf. By shooting the proton particle at the correct direction and speed, it will land in the tumor and stop there, with no radiation coming out the other side. So we reduce radiation injury to the normal tissues on the way in and especially on the way out," Dr. Lee explained.

"So that's the main attraction to proton therapy. It effectively reduces the radiation exposure to the patient maybe by about a third. And that's expected to reduce side effects both in the short term as well as in the long run," he added.

Arguably, almost any patient undergoing radiotherapy can receive a proton therapy treatment as well, according to Dr. Lee. But the benefits would differ from one patient to another. "Some patients will expect to see more benefit than others," he said.

Dr. Lee considered that children and young adults generally, can benefit more from proton therapy, as many of the side effects such as radiation-induced malignancy could appear late or years after.

Proton therapy can also be helpful for patients with large tumors, said Dr. Lee. Treating large tumors with radiotherapy would involve large radiation fields, thus side effects could be worse. Whereas, with proton therapy, even it reduces exposure of normal tissues to radiation,



Dr. Lee Kuo Ann

patients with large tumors can expect less side effects.

The treatment could also help patients with a tumor located within sensitive organs like the liver. Dr. Lee shared that for patients with large liver tumors, it is hard to deliver a large dose of x-rays without unacceptable injury to the organ. "But with proton therapy, we are now able to give that same dose of radiation safely," he said.

Dr. Lee also said that proton therapy could potentially be beneficial to patients who already went through radiation. "If we give a second round of radiation, the injury to the tissues would exceed what is safe. With proton therapy, we might be able to reduce radiation exposure to nearby tissues," he said.

"Having said that, proton therapy for re-radiation cases still has to be very carefully done, and not everyone is a candidate," Dr. Lee also noted. "Because if the recurrence is located in a critical organ, you have to deliver the high dose to the tumor at the critical organ. And no matter what radiation technique you're using, including proton therapy, there will be a high dose to that organ and hence will still be risky and dangerous."

Mount Elizabeth now has a newly available Proton Therapy Centre added to its array of machines for cancer treatments.

"This is the newest state-of-the-art compact proton radiotherapy machine, and it will be installed at Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital," Dr. Lee said. "The cases that we'll be allowed to treat will be dictated and guided by the Singapore Ministry of Health rules, which are actually online."

"We are quite excited to be able to firstly, have all the tools at our disposal. Previously, with the highest-end x-ray radiotherapy machines, and now our newest addition of a proton therapy machine," he added.

Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital's Proton Therapy Centre has started operations this month.

For inquiries, please contact our patient assistance center located at G/F-B, Marco Polo Hotel, Meralco Avenue and Sapphire Street, Ortigas Center, Pasig City 1600; e-mail manila.ph@ihhhealthcare.com. or call 0917-526-7576. Follow us at facebook.com/MountElizabethHospitalsSGPhilippinesOffice.



Mount Elizabeth Proton Therapy Center