Catch landed at fish ports down 4.26% month on month in May

THE catch landed at regional fish ports (RFPs) declined 4.26% month on month by volume in May due to the early onset of the rainy season, according to the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA).

Fish landed at RFPs amounted to 42,814.19 metric tons (MT), down 4.26% from the record set in April of 44,721.05 MT.

"Following the recent passage of Typhoon Betty and widespread rain brought by the southwest monsoon (*habagat*), all PFDA ports delivered a sufficient supply of fishery products to their respective clients," the PFDA said.

The Navotas Fish Port Complex unloaded 19,644.03 MT, down 15.14% from a month earlier, with the fishing season typically slowing down towards the end of May.

Fish landed at Lucena Fish Port Complex fell 4.90% month on month to 2,246.85 MT.

The catch landed at Bulan Fish Port Complex rose 17.14% month on month to 1,334 MT.

Fish volumes at the General Santos Fish Port Complex rose 6.75% month on month to 15,788.37 MT.

Zamboanga Fish Port Complex and Davao Fish Port Complex reported that volumes rose 5.24% and 4.07% month on month respectively to 965.65 MT and 441.40 MT. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

Marcos warns of 'modest' agri gains being upended by El Niño

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. said on Tuesday that the upcoming El Niño dry spell is threatening to upend "modest gains" made in agriculture in recent months.

In a speech at the 125th anniversary of the Department of Agriculture (DA), Mr. Marcos also promised to address the challenges agriculture continues to face, like "decreasing productivity, climate change (and) diminishing natural resources."

The El Niño event, projected to emerge sometime between July and September, is expected to drag down growth in agriculture, which expanded 2.1% in the first quarter, a turnaround from the 0.3% decline posted a year earlier and a 1% contraction in the fourth quarter of 2022.

The last El Niño took place in 2019, causing as much as P8 billion worth of damage to agriculture.

Agriculture accounts for about a 10th of the Philippines' gross domestic product.

Mr. Marcos, in his speech, said the DA must "continue to adopt and utilize the latest technologies and practices" to enhance agricultural productivity and attract foreign investment.

He said climate-mitigation practices and technology can make agriculture sector resilient to future shocks.

"Moving forward, the DA will continue to devise interventions to advance our agri-fishery practices, improve the competitiveness of our agri-fishery products, (and) further boost the income of our farmers and fisherfolk," he said.

Mr. Marcos, who is also Secretary of Agriculture, promised to expand market reach for farmers "by enhancing our physical and our digital infrastructure (and) leveraging private sector investment."

He said the DA should continue to engage in collaborative dialogue with experts, researchers, and rural workers to "solve the root causes of the lingering problems."

The Philippines imports much of its food and farm inputs, making it vulnerable to imported inflation.

In a recent World Bank report, the Philippines ranked first in a group of 16 countries in terms of regressive output subsidies, followed by Mexico, Canada, Japan, and Vietnam.

"We have all heard the issues of food supply, of food prices, of supply chain problems. And these are all of the things that we have to overcome if we are going to be able to say that the DA has achieved its ultimate goal and that we are able to provide to Filipinos all of the food supply," Mr. Marcos said, adding that the industry's contribution to nutrition should be considered in assessing the DA's success.

Mr. Marcos has been urged by opposition legislators to appoint his replacement as Secretary of Agriculture.

In a statement on Tuesday, ACT Teachers Party-list Rep. France L. Castro said the DA needs a full-time Secretary "who truly understands and knows the solutions to the agricultural as well as agrarian problems of the country."

"Unfortunately, the remedies being implemented by the DA under Marcos are mostly band-aid solutions and entail the importation of key agricultural products like rice, sugar, onions, and the like," she said.

"Instead of helping farmers, such measures further mire them deeper into poverty but at the same time make agricultural importers richer," Ms. Castro said. "Unless genuine agrarian reform coupled with full support of the government to farmers is implemented, (alongside the suspension of) land conversion, our agricultural sector will die even if President Marcos stays there up to 2028."

The DA has addressed food inflation by, among other things, organizing subsidized stores allowing farmers to sell directly to consumers.

The Kadiwa stores allow sellers to offer low prices because the government pays for transport costs and other expenses.

Kadiwa stores have been accused of seizing markets from small- and medium-sized traders who had been weakened by the pandemic, with economists saying that any discussion of the program needs to consider the level of public funding it is receiving.

"It may still be fairly early to tell whether we are now realizing the benefits of prices saved vs. investment spent," agroforestry researcher Ayn G. Torres told *BusinessWorld* earlier. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

Construction industry sentiment positive over next 12 months — survey

PHILIPPINE construction executives had positive views of the industry's outlook over the next 12 months, due to the strength of the economy, according to a survey conducted by construction management software company Procore Technologies.

The survey findings were released in a report, "How We Build Now: Technology Trends Shaping and Shifting Construction – Southeast Asia 2023," which found that 95% of construction executives in the Philippines cited the "fast-moving economy and continuation of the current administration's modernization efforts."

According to the report, 80% of Philippine respondents are expecting an increase in the number of projects over the next 12 months, while 83% see projects of higher value.

The report said the most-cited challenges by the construction industry executives were increasing raw material and equipment costs (46%); securing competitive bids and tenders at sustainable margins (35%); dealing with trade contractors, contracts, and payments (35%); staff management (32%); and increasing productivity to manage project volume (32%).

Procore commissioned independent research company YouGov to conduct the survey online between Jan. 31 and Feb. 22. The respondents were 876 construction industry executives from Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

"Industry confidence is resilient in the face of challenging market conditions, and expectations for growth are stronger in 2023," YouGov Associate Director of Research Fumin Rianto said at a media briefing in Makati City on Tuesday.

Overall, the survey found that 88% of executives in the three countries expressed confidence in market conditions ahead, lower than the 94% posted a year earlier due to weakening confidence in Malaysia.

"Driving this optimism was expectations for the increase in both the number (73%) and value of projects (71%) over the same period," Procore said in a statement.

Procore found that 39% of Southeast Asian respondents are rethinking their contracting models to protect margins, while 37% are considering new payment methods, such as early payments at lower margins.

"A focus on risk management has become more important, especially in light of persistent challenges such as the increased cost of raw materials and equipment (44%) and winning competitive bids and tenders at a sustainable margin (32%)," Procore said. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

Batangas declared free of bird flu after Dec. outbreak

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has declared Batangas as free from type H5N1 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), or bird flu.

The all-clear was issued via a memorandum circular signed by Senior Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban on June 16.

The province had one confirmed HPAI outbreak detected in Barangay Sabang, Ibaan on Dec. 14 following RT-PCR testing, affecting chickens and ducks.

According to the DA, the Batangas government and Ibaan municipality worked with DA Regional Field Office IV-A and the Bureau of Animal Industry to depopulate, clean, and disinfect the affected area, while conducting surveillance around nearby farms.

"Continued disease monitoring and surveillance in the 1-km and 7-km surveillance zones surrounding the affected farms yielded negative test results for influenza type A virus," the DA said.

According to the guidelines of the World Organization for Animal Heath, a country or zone may be declared AI-free 28 days after the completion of depopulation, disinfection of the last affected establishment, and no signs of infection observed after surveillance.

According to the DA, more than 90 days have elapsed since the end of the cleaning and disinfection stage with negative results on all tests. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

Trade dep't considering development of 'green' aviation fuel from biomass

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said the Philippines could develop a sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) industry by tapping its biomass resources.

Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual said he discussed the country's SAF potential in talks with aerospace companies at the Paris Air Show on June 19.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) defines SAF as liquid fuel that reduces carbon emissions by up to 80%.

The Paris Air Show was conducted for the first time after four years. The DTI did not reveal which companies Mr. Pascual met with, saying only that discussions with them are ongoing.

To the air show participants, he also touted reforms that have made the Philippines more investment-friendly, such as the amendments to the Public Service Act, Foreign Investment Act, and Retail Trade Liberalization Act; the passage of the Electric Vehicle Industry Development Act; and Executive Order No. 18, which created a green lane for expedited processing of strategic investments.

The DTI's participation at the air show was part of an investment roadshow due to run until July 6. The roadshow seeks to promote the Philippines as a "viable investment destination" for companies from France, the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

ERC says 48 power distributors applying for rate adjustments

THE Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) is currently evaluating applications from 48 distribution utilities (DUs) for automatic cost adjustments and true-up mechanisms for the 2020-2022 period.

ERC Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer Monalisa C. Dimalanta said that the Commission is still evaluating whether more documents will be required from DUs.

"The applications will be evaluated by the ERC to validate the recovery of pass-through costs implemented by the DUs and confirm the true-up of other pass-through charges, if any," the ERC said.

According to an advisory dated May 10, the ERC required all DUs in Luzon to file their over-under recoveries with the deadline set on May 30.

"Failure of Luzon PDUs (private distribution utilities) and EC (electric cooperatives) to file their complete Over and/or Under Recoveries Applications, with the required supporting documents, within the said non-extendable period, shall be a ground for the imposition of administrative sanctions and penalties pursuant to pertinent ERC rules and regulations," it said.

The ERC also noted that all PDUs and ECs which fail to submit required reports and supporting documents will not be allowed to impose any pass-through charges on consumers.

The ERC said that about 20 Luzon DUs have not submitted any applications to date.

These are: Abra Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Albay Electric Cooperative, Inc.; First Bay Power Corp.; First Laguna Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Ibaan Electric Corp.; Ilocos Norte Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Isabela I Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Isabela II Electric Cooperative; Kalinga-Apayao Electric Cooperative, Inc.; and Masbate Electric Cooperative, Inc.;

Nueva Ecija I Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Nueva Vizcaya Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Oriental Mindoro Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Pangasinan I Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Pampanga II Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Quirino Electric Cooperative, Inc.; San Fernando Electric Light & Power Co. Inc.; Ticao Island Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Zambales I Electric Cooperative, Inc.; and Zambales II Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Separately, the ERC said that it has started processing for approval the majority of 36 ancillary services procurement agreements (ASPAs) entered into by the National Grid Corp. of the Philippines (NGCP).

It said that the grid operator issued notices of award for 36 ASPAs on April 18, of which 14 applications have been filed with the ERC and are awaiting hearing. Others have not yet paid filing fees, which are needed for the application to be deemed filed, and must still undergo prefiling review, the ERC said.

"The ERC is committed to facilitate the approval of the ASPAs to ensure that consumers continue to have access to reliable electricity," the ERC said.

In separate filings posted on ERC website, the NGCP is seeking the approval of ERC for the ASPA with Giga Ace 4, Inc.; MORE Power Barge, Inc.; Bac-man Geothermal, Inc.; and First Gen Hydro Power Corp.

According to Republic Act No. 9136 or the Electric Power Industry Reform Act of 2001, Ancillary Services are "services that are necessary to support the transmission of capacity and energy from resources to loads while maintaining reliable operation of the transmission system in accordance with good utility practice and the Grid Code." — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

DTI, MSMED COUNCIL, GO NEGOSYO JOIN FORCES FOR MSME SUMMIT

Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Secretary Alfredo Pascual and Go Negosyo founder Joey Concepcion, Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise Development Council (MSMEDC), respectively, pose for posterity with other members of the Council after their meeting about the MSME Summit slated on July 17.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise Development Council (MSMEDC) and Go Negosyo have joined forces for the holding of the MSME Summit on July 17.

The DTI, led by Secretary Alfredo Pascual, Go Negosyo founder and MSMEDC Vice Chairman Joey Concepcion, and members of the MSMED Council agreed to collaborate during a recent meeting.

As the newly elected MSMEDC Vice Chairperson, Concepcion has committed to finding more ways to address the needs of micro, small, and medium enterprises in the country to enable them to grow.

"The aim of the MSME Summit is to gather as many stakeholders as we can and get their inputs in crafting ways to further address their needs and promote their welfare," said Concepcion, who also serves as Lead for Jobs in the Private-Sector Advisory Council (PSAC).

Concepcion was recently elected Vice Chairperson of the MSMEDC, weeks after he was appointed by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. as a member of the MSMEDC, representing Luzon.

Headed by the DTI Secretary as Chairman, the MSMEDC is an attached office of the DTI mandated to help establish the needed environment and opportunities conducive to the growth and development of the MSME sector.

It will also recommend to the President and Congress all policy matters affecting MSMEs, among others.

The Vice Chairperson will preside over meetings in the absence of the Chairman. The members of the Council are the Secretaries of Departments of Agriculture, Interior and Local Government, Science and Technology, and Tourism; chairman of the Small Business Corporation; three representatives from the MSME sector to represent Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao; a representative from the labor sector; and a representative from the private banking sector.