

Import lib viewed as threat to sugar farmers' survival

SUGAR farmers said on Tuesday that the proposed liberalization of sugar imports poses a threat to thousands of marginal sugarcane farmers.

In a statement, Manuel R. Lamata, president of the United Sugar Producers Federation of the Philippines, said the industry is "totally against" the proposal put forward by Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno to liberalize sugar imports, which he said favors "a few industrial users."

"He wants to further enrich these industrial users even knowing that this move will kill the (livelihood of) more than five million Filipinos who are

dependent on the sugar industry," he said.

Mr. Diokno said last week that he is studying allowing manufacturers of sweetened beverages to directly import their sugar as a "reasonable compromise" following plans to raise taxes on sugary drinks.

The Department of Finance said it hopes to impose a P12 excise tax on sweetened beverages under the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion Law that does not recognize exceptions based on the type of sweetener used.

"Diokno should also think of the consumers or the general public who will also be affected

as these industrial users will surely pass on the additional taxes to their consumers," Mr. Lamata said.

He asked President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., who is also the Secretary of Agriculture, to reject the tax plan, which he said was prepared without benefit of consultation with the sugar industry.

"We are calling for his intervention on this matter," Mr. Lamata said.

The Sugar Regulatory Administration controls sugar imports and determines the volume required based on its assessment of the supply and demand situation.

National Federation of Sugarcane Planters President Enrique D. Rojas said in a text message that liberalization will "wreak havoc on the long-established government regulations over the sugar industry."

Mr. Rojas added that it will "destabilize" livelihoods.

"We strongly oppose direct sugar imports by manufacturers of sweetened beverages because it will destroy the livelihood of thousands of marginal sugarcane farmers, will not result in lower prices of sweetened beverages, and will simply further enrich these companies," he said. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

USTR hopes to lock down labor, agri, regulatory provisions in July round of IPEF negotiations

THE United States Trade Representative (USTR) said it hopes to lock down provisions of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) trade deal dealing with labor, agriculture, and regulatory best practices.

Deputy USTR Sarah Bianchi said a roundtable session on Tuesday that the Philippines is especially engaged in the labor provisions of the IPEF.

The IPEF's fourth negotiating round will take place in Busan between July 9 and 15. The previous negotiating round took place in Singapore on May 8-15.

"This is kind of the point in the negotiations where it's time to close some text. So, it's a really important round coming up for us. I think just all getting on the same page about what we need to do to deliver by the end of the year," Ms. Bianchi said.

According to Ms. Bianchi, the labor side of the talks include "some really ambitious and exciting texts for workers. We have found the Philippines to be really engaged on that text and supportive. We look forward to spending the next few rounds really working with Philippines and others to hopefully make some real progress in that space."

"A lot of the early rounds are exchanges of ideas and people giving feedback. Now, it's kind of where the rubber meets the road. It really is about landing some text that can kind of get us momentum going into the end of the year," she added.

The IPEF, launched by US President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. in

May last year, seeks to enhance US economic engagement in the Indo-Pacific region. The other IPEF participants are Australia, Brunei, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The economic framework has four pillars: trade; supply chains; clean energy, decarbonization, and infrastructure; and tax and anti-corruption measures.

Ms. Bianchi said the IPEF could benefit the Philippines in terms of sustainable agriculture, environment, and climate initiatives.

"The IPEF really gets to a lot of those... we can have more sustainable agriculture, arrangements and agreements. We can do more things together on the environment and climate," Ms. Bianchi said.

"When you think about trade, in this day and age, sometimes these kinds of barriers, whether it's how customs work together and things that may seem a little technical. If you can have some standards that make it easier to do business, it can actually be very meaningful. So I think that the Philippines will be a big beneficiary of IPEF," she added.

Ms. Bianchi reiterated that a critical minerals agreement (CMA) between the Philippines and the US is not expected soon.

"I would say there isn't anything on the table right now in terms of doing something like we did in Japan. But the partnership between the US and the Philippines is very strong," Ms. Bianchi said. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

Carnival Cruise Line to set up training center on STI campus

CARNIVAL Cruise Line, a unit of Carnival Corp. & plc., said it has entered into a Philippine crewing agreement with United Philippine Lines (UPL), with the collaboration to result in the establishment of a facility within the Pasay-EDSA campus of STI Education Services Group, Inc.

"The state-of-the-art hub is Carnival and UPL's response to the growing global demand for seafarers as the global cruise industry continues to rebound from the pandemic," Carnival Cruise Line said in a statement.

The training center will be accessible to STI students in the college's hospitality, tourism, culinary, marine transportation and marine engineering programs.

"Our partnership with Carnival is an investment in our country's future. It gives our students more options for a challenging and incredibly rewarding job that allows them to see the world and meet people from a variety of backgrounds," STI Education Services Vice-Chairman Monico V. Jacob said.

"The cruise industry is continuously growing, which means the number of opportunities for those who'd like to work at sea will also continue to increase. STI will strive to offer these opportunities to Filipinos," he added.

Richard Brearley, crew and travel operations vice-president at Carnival Cruise Line, said that the center will put students on track for a fulfilling career in the global cruise industry.

"Because the UPL-Carnival TM Center is equipped with top-of-the-line equipment and well-

trained staff, Filipinos looking to explore the world as shipboard talents can expect an easy and efficient application and training process. We guarantee smooth sailing from the get-go," said Mr. Brearley.

Carnival currently employs 50,000 workers and recruits heavily from the Philippines.

On Monday, the Department of Migrant Workers projected the deployment of Philippine seafarers to hit pre-pandemic levels soon, exceeding 500,000 by year's end. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Reserve power market commercial launch expected by September

THE Department of Energy (DoE) said on Tuesday that it expects to launch commercial operations of the spot market for power reserves by September.

The DoE, in an advisory dated June 26 signed by Energy Secretary Raphael P.M. Lotilla, said that the Independent Electricity Market Operator of the Philippines (IEMOP) has completed preparatory activities required for the commercial launch.

IEMOP operates the Wholesale Electricity Spot Market (WESM). The reserve market will facilitate the trading of ancillary services or power reserves needed to support the transmission system.

The DoE said that in anticipation of the Energy Regulatory Commission's (ERC) approval of the price determination methodology (PDM), it has directed the IEMOP to commence the trial operations program for the reserve market on Monday.

"We informed all generation companies accredited as AS (ancillary service) providers that they are mandated to register in the WESM and participate as well in the trial operations, which we plan to do prior to the target launch of the reserve market by September," IEMOP said in a statement.

The DoE said the trial operations are a non-binding exercise for reserve market participants which seek to "test all market systems for registration, scheduling, dispatch and pricing, metering, cost recovery and settlement."

The results of the trial, however, will have no application to commercial operations in terms of scheduling, dispatch, settlement and cost recovery, the DoE said.

ERC Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer Monalisa C. Dimalanta said that the Commission expects the PDM to be approved next month.

"We just concluded the public hearings, so we are waiting for final submissions of the parties," Ms. Dimalanta said in a Viber message on Tuesday.

The DoE has also directed IEMOP and the system operator to draft the guidelines and procedures for the trials.

"For this purpose, IEMOP is directed to submit weekly reports to the DoE on the results of the trial program," it said.

The DoE also ordered the Philippine Electricity Market Corp. to complete the audit of the software enhancement to the market systems in preparation for the launch of the reserve market. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

PHL single-detached homes rate of ownership by occupants tops 62%

THE percentage of single-detached homes owned by their occupants was 62.1%, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.

The PSA's 2022 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey (APIS) said the rate of owner-occupied houses was three out of every five of the 26.94 million families. The single-detached home market segment is known in the Philippines as a "house and lot."

Some 15.3% of families own houses built on land owned by someone else, and pay no rent with the consent of owner; 9.5% rent the house and lot; and 8.3% occupy the house and lot rent-free with the consent of owner.

The rest occupy houses they own on rent-free land without the consent of owner (2.5%), own houses on lots which they pay rent on (1.9%), or occupy houses

and lots rent-free without consent of the owner (0.3%).

In nine out of 17 regions, the percentage of families who own the house and lot they occupy was higher than the 62.1% national average. In three of these regions, the ownership rate was at least 70%. These are the Cagayan Valley (86.5%), the Cordillera Administrative Region (79.8%), and Central Luzon (76.6%).

Rural families posted a house and lot ownership rate of 65.8%, while the rate for urban families was 58.7%.

In 2022, 90.3% of families were living in single-detached houses. The rest occupied apartments/accessorios/row houses (6.0%), duplexes (2.1%), other multi-unit residential buildings (0.9%), condominiums/condotels (0.5%), and commercial/industrial/agricultural buildings or houses (0.2%).

In the National Capital Region, about 76.1% of families occupied single-detached houses, 12.9% apartments/accessorios/ row houses, 2.1% duplexes, and the remainder in some other type of housing unit.

Some 93.7% of houses were built with "strong materials," while about 2.3% of the families lived in houses made of concrete/clay tile and cogon/nipa/anahaw materials.

The APIS is a nationwide survey conducted by the PSA, it is intended to provide a snapshot of non-income indicators related to poverty. It also compiles data on the socio-economic profiles of families and other information related to their living conditions.

In the 2022 APIS, the sample consisted of 44,000 households. — **Lourdes O. Pilar**

PHL coconut exporters generate \$6.90M in initial sales from Bangkok trade show

COCONUT exporters booked \$6.90 million worth of initial sales from the five-day THAIFEX-Anuga Asia 2023 trade exhibition in Bangkok in late May, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said.

The DTI said in a statement on Tuesday that nine Philippine coconut exporters participated in the trade show — AG Pacific Nutri-chemicals Corp., Ahya Coco Organic Food Manufacturing Corp., Amazing Foods Corp., Amparitas Food Products Manufacturing, Cocoplus Aquarian Development Corp., Dignity Products & Services, Inc., Pasciolo Agri Ventures, Wellness Care International Corp., and Vegetari Vegetarian Products.

Two industry associations also exhibited at the trade show — the Virgin Co-

conut Oil Producers and Traders Association of the Philippines, Inc. and United Coconut Association of the Philippines, Inc.

Trade Assistant Secretary Glenn G. Peñaranda said the trade show has "served as a gateway to expanding horizons and enhancing the nation's standing as a dependable and premium source of coconut products."

The trade show delegation was organized by the DTI's Export Marketing Bureau and the International Trade Center, in coordination with the Philippine Trade and Investment Center-Bangkok and Philippine Food Processors and Exporters Organization, Inc. The participants exhibited at the Coconut Philippines Pavilion. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**



Ban on poultry imports from Belgium lifted

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it lifted a ban on poultry meat and products from Belgium, after that country was declared free from H5N1 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI).

Senior Agriculture Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban lifted the ban via a memorandum order dated June 23. The order covers shipments of domestic and wild birds and their products, including poultry meat, day-old chicks, eggs and semen.

"Based on the evaluation of the Department of Agriculture, the risk of contamination from importing live poultry, poultry meat, day-old chicks, eggs and semen is negligible," according to the order.

The DA basis for lifting bans relies on official self-declaration reports sent to the World Organization for Animal Health and supporting documents submitted by Belgium's Federal Agency for Safety of the Food Chain.

The ban was imposed on Feb. 8 after the Belgian national laboratory confirmed an HPAI outbreak in Wervik, in the province of West Flanders.

All of the 14 outbreaks have been reported to have ended, according to the order.

"All import transactions of the above commodities shall be in accordance with existing rules and regulations of the Department of Agriculture," according to the order.

Jerome D. Ong, vice-president of the Philippine Association of Meat Processors, Inc. said the order allows the entry of "more safe raw materials" which will "help us ensure uninterrupted supply and stable prices of processed meats."

Jesus C. Cham, president emeritus of the Meat Importers and Traders Association, said any expansion of the list of approved source countries will help improve supply. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

BoC, SKorea aid agency in Customs laboratory partnership

THE Bureau of Customs (BoC) and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) are working to revive the Philippines Customs Laboratory (PCL).

"The re-establishment of the Philippines Customs Laboratory is an opportunity to further enhance border security efforts, increase revenue collection, and foster international cooperation in customs practices," Commissioner Bienvenido Y. Rubio said in a statement on Tuesday.

"This partnership with KOICA will contribute significantly to our vision of a modernized and credible Customs administration," he added.

The Customs Laboratory will help address cases of technical smuggling.

"PCL will serve as an effective deterrent against technical smuggling through the use of scientific and technical expertise, advanced technology, and intelligence-driven strategies," it said.

"This will safeguard national security, protect revenue, and ensure pub-

lic safety. Additionally, it will enhance border security efforts and promote international collaboration, information sharing, and best practices," it added.

The laboratory will also provide chemical analyses of shipped products.

"This analysis helps determine the correct tariff classification and imposeable duties on imports, which is ideal for enhancing the collection performance of the BoC," it added. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsnon**