

Prices increasing for 152 Christmas-feast items

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said prices rose for 152 items typically consumed during the Christmas feast, known in the Philippines as the Noche Buena, with cheese products leading the increase.

Assistant Trade Secretary for Consumer Protection Group Amanda F. Nograles said the majority of stock keeping units (SKUs) saw their prices raised by 1-5%.

Some 83 SKUs posted 1-5% increases, while 37 items became 6-10% more costly. The prices of 32 items were raised over 10%.

The DTI posts a price guide in the runup to the holidays, with this year's edition listing 240 SKUs.

Prices were left unchanged for 34 SKUs, while 21 items recorded a decrease in price.

"It will be difficult to establish a trend because SKUs which had an increase and decrease are seen across all the 12 categories of the price guide," Ms. Nograles said at a briefing on Tuesday.

"But the largest increase was seen in cheese products... other

products that increased include sandwich spread, ham, fruit cocktail, queso de bola (Edam-style cheese), and mayonnaise," she added.

Ms. Nograles said that the price increases were mainly due to the higher price of raw and packaging materials, as well as increasing power and distribution costs.

Prices were left unchanged for Virginia Brick Ham and Pear Shaped Ham, which had suggested prices of P198 per 500 grams and P345 per kilogram, respectively.

"In the Noche Buena Price Guide 2023, we would like to emphasize that our consumers are given the option for their noche buena meals," Ms. Nograles said.

"Unlike the previous years, the DTI took a more proactive role this year by actively engaging all manufacturers of noche buena items and asking them to participate in the price guide," she added.

Earlier this month, the DTI asked manufacturers and retailers of prime commodities to hold

off price increases until the end of the year.

"Currently, 63 requests for price adjustments have been filed with the DTI, but we are currently in talks with them and most of them have committed to not raise their prices until Dec. 31," Ms. Nograles said.

Separately, Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual said the department is currently studying the state of competition in consumer products.

"I want to study to what extent competition in the consumer products market is happening in the Philippines," he added.

He said that the study will determine whether an amendment to the Price Act is necessary and possibly determine the future of the suggested retail price (SRP) system.

"We want to pursue this study to explore whether the SRP does not promote competition (and to address) the notion that the government is interfering in the workings of the free market," Mr. Pascual said. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**



TRADE SECRETARY Alfredo E. Pascual and Assistant Trade Secretary for Consumer Protection Amanda F. Nograles show to the media the price guide for noche buena items at a briefing in Makati City on Tuesday.

Meralco baseload bid attracts interest from power providers with 3,000 MW in capacity



PHILIPPINE STAR/KJ ROSALES

MANILA Electric Co. (Meralco) said a pre-bid conference to solicit offers for 1,800 megawatts (MW) of baseload capacity has attracted interested parties which can provide a potential 3,000 MW.

"There were more than 3,000 megawatts (on offer from participants). There were, I think, three San Miguel plants, one GNPD (GN-Power Dinginin Ltd. Co.). There was also a solar company," Jose Ronald V. Valles, Meralco first vice-pres-

ident and head of the company's regulatory management office, told reporters late Monday.

Other participants were First-Gen Corp. subsidiary First NatGas Power, and SP New Energy Corp.

The San Miguel Power Global Holdings units represented at the conference were Mariveles Power Generation Corp., Excellent Energy Resources, Inc., and Masinloc Power Partners Co. Ltd. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

GOCC regulator seeks power to levy sanctions via charter amendments

By Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson
Reporter

THE Governance Commission for GOCCs (GCG) said it will propose amendments to its charter next year which would give it the power to sanction the companies it oversees.

"We were created under Republic Act No. 10149 but there's something missing in our charter. We don't have coercive power; our powers are mostly advisory," GCG Chairman Marius P. Corpus told reporters on Monday.

"If there are GOCCs (government-owned and -controlled corporations) that are underperforming and refusing to comply with our regulations, we don't have any disciplinary authority," he added.

Mr. Corpus said the amendments will give the GCG power to sanction GOCCs or their officials.

"We also intend to upgrade the positions in the GCG. Our staff is often pirated by other GOCCs. We are constrained as a regular National Government agency; compared to GOCCs, their benefits are better," he added.

Mr. Corpus said the draft proposal will likely be submitted next year. "It might be too late to get an amendment now from the (current Congress). We'll go through the process, and if it isn't finished,

we can have it refiled at the next Congress," he added.

Earlier this year, the GCG proposed to be given the power to consolidate, rationalize, and integrate GOCCs into National Government agencies.

Meanwhile, Mr. Corpus said that the GCG is still studying the proposed merger of Land Bank of the Philippines (LANDBANK) and the Development Bank of the Philippines.

"It's a big endeavor, very complicated. We tried to consult with the other National Government agencies. They all gave their comments, but considering the enormity of the endeavor, I said let's be careful on this. They are asking for a timeline but if we give a timeline, that's not advisable, (better) to be cautious and prudent about it," he said.

Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno has said that the merger is expected to be completed by the first half of 2024.

"There are pros and cons. There are favorable comments and justifications, but there are also possible problems that may arise if the merger goes through. We are actually (organizing) technical working groups with other agencies concerned," he added.

The merger, which would leave LANDBANK as the surviving entity, will create the sole authorized government depository bank.

Q3 chicken production rises; cattle falls

CHICKEN production rose, while that of cattle declined during the third quarter, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

In a report, the PSA said that chicken output rose 2.3% year on year to 464.97 thousand metric tons (MT) liveweight.

Central Luzon was the top producer at 151.97 thousand MT, followed by Calabarzon (77.21 thousand MT), Northern Mindanao (40.77 thousand MT), the Western Visayas (32.84 thousand MT), and the Central Visayas (29.71 thousand MT).

The five regions accounted for 71.5% of national production for the quarter.

The PSA said that as of Sept. 30, the national chicken inventory rose 1.1% year on year to 202.82 million birds.



PHILIPPINE STAR/WALTER BOLLOZOS

"Population of native/improved chicken (rose) 5%. Meanwhile, broiler chicken and layer chicken stocks reported reductions of 2% and 1%, respectively," it added.

Of the total broiler chicken inventory, native/improved chicken accounted for 43%.

The layer chicken flock comprised 22.3% of all birds.

The average farmgate price in the third quarter was P131.36 per kilogram, down 9.8% from a year earlier.

Separately, the PSA also reported a 1.5% year-on-year decline in cattle production during the quarter, with output at 51.82 thousand MT liveweight.

Production was led by Northern Mindanao, which accounted

for 15.9% of cattle output for the period.

This was followed by the Central Visayas (5.89 thousand MT), Ilocos region (5.02 thousand MT), the Western Visayas (4.41 thousand MT), and Soccksargen (3.7 thousand MT).

"These regions accounted for 52.6% of cattle production in the third quarter of 2023," it added.

The PSA said the cattle herd expanded 0.4% to 2.59 million head during the quarter.

Smallhold farms accounted for 82.3% of the herd, while 14.3% and 3.4% were raised by semi-commercial and commercial farms, respectively.

The average farmgate price of cattle for slaughter was P172.33 per kilogram, down 0.3% from a year earlier. — **Adrian H. Halili**

NIA signs deal for solar-powered irrigation project in Pangasinan

THE National Irrigation Administration (NIA) said it signed a preliminary agreement on a solar farm project with which it intends to power an irrigation network in Pangasinan.

In a statement, the NIA said that it signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with New Canaan Energy Resources Corp. to develop a canal-top solar facility for the Agno River Integrated Irrigation System in Rosales, Pangasinan.

The project will serve about 101 irrigators' associations. The system provides water to 18,162 hectares and 24,298 farmers.

"The MoU aims to pursue the development of a solar farm for utility-sized power generation by utilizing the canal top in an area which has the potential (for feasible) sustainable operations in the Agno River Integrated Irrigation System," the NIA said.

It added that the deal will result in a "full blown study" to determine the project's financial, socio-economic, and technical impacts.

It would also plan out cost-effective ways to develop, con-

struct, and operate the project's power generation component.

"The agency (seeks to harness) solar energy as the most accessible and economically viable renewable energy source to help our farmers," it said.

"The NIA continues to utilize the full potential of its irrigation systems as multipurpose water resources projects for power generation, flood control, domestic water supply, agro-tourism, and aquaculture," it said.

The NIA said last month that irrigation water will no longer be used exclusively for agriculture, and identified potential alternative uses as power production, bulk water supply, aquaculture, recreation, and tourism.

It also said it plans to deploy the majority of its budget to fund the construction of solar-powered irrigation systems.

The NIA has about 183 solar powered irrigation projects in the pipeline for 2024. It is budgeting about P1.72 billion for such works. — **Adrian H. Halili**

DTI signs agreement to commercialize startups

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said it signed an agreement with US accelerator Plug and Play Tech Center to help prepare about 40 tech startups a year to enter commercial operations.

At a signing ceremony on Tuesday, Trade Chief Alfredo E. Pascual said that the memorandum of understanding will help to support local startups focused on key industries.

"In practical terms, we plan to achieve two cycles of acceleration per year, supporting potential pilot and commercialization

efforts of over 40 tech startup companies," Mr. Pascual said.

He said the industries due to receive such support are those likely to aid in the growth of industries considered pillars of the economy, such as the information technology and business process outsourcing (IT-BPO) industry.

"The program will concentrate on strengthening our IT-BPO industry through artificial intelligence adoption (and) empowering manufacturing industries through industry 4.0 technologies," he added.

He said that the program will also support the growth of agritech and financial services. It plans to identify more priority industries.

Plug and Play currently has tieups with over 600 companies and "accelerates" the commercialization of over 2,000 startups annually. It has made over 2,000 investments, including 35 so-called unicorns — startups with over \$1-billion market valuation.

The program will also provide upskilling and knowledge transfer to companies and the public sector, he said.

The DTI also signed another partnership on Tuesday with the Benita & Catalino Yap Foundation (BCYF) to support innovation and entrepreneurship among micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).

Mr. Pascual said the memorandum of agreement signed with BCYF will lead to collaboration in identifying candidates for the BCYF Innovation Awards, as well as provide training and consultancy services in innovation and entrepreneurship to DTI business counselors and MSMEs. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Philippine investment leads arising from US meetings mostly tech

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said investment leads generated during the President's US trip are mostly from technology companies, Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual said.

Mr. Pascual said follow-up on the leads might end up adding to the \$672.3 million worth of investment pledges obtained on the sidelines

of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in San Francisco.

"There are companies that expressed interest, but we have not quantified (the potential investments)," he said at a briefing on Tuesday.

"These are tech companies ... and they have not quantified their investments yet because they are

yet to talk with customers from the Philippines," he added.

Mr. Pascual said the government delegation that visited the US gave rise to meetings with at least 15 US companies, five of which signed preliminary agreements.

On Monday, the Palace said President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. obtained pledges for potential invest-

ments in telecommunications, artificial intelligence-enabled weather forecasting, semiconductors and electronics, pharmaceuticals and healthcare, and renewable energy.

Some \$400 million of the investment pledges will potentially go to telecommunications, and \$250 million to semiconductors. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**