



## Seaweed industry eyed for expansion

THE DEPARTMENT of Agriculture (DA) said on Sunday that it is planning to increase investment in the seaweed industry to boost its export potential.

“We still have unutilized area of 85,000 hectares. Until we reach that, we shouldn’t stop. If possible, we should accelerate the industry’s expansion,” Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said in a statement.

He said that the DA has allocated P1 billion for the industry, for investment in large tissue culture laboratories, dryers, warehouses and technician training.

The Philippines produced 1.63 million metric tons of seaweed in 2023, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority, up 5.3%.

Mr. Laurel added that the seaweed industry of Indonesia produces five times the output of the Philippines.

“In 1990, the Philippines accounted for 80% of the world’s seaweed requirement while Indonesia only produced 10%. That has since changed. Indonesia produces five times more than the Philippines,” the DA said.

Mr. Laurel said the industry has noted the lack of seed material as an obstacle to further growth.

Industry groups have also called for support in the form of seed material, implements, lines, floaters, and counterweights.

He said logistics issues also need to be resolved, including building more ports to take raw materials to processing plants, as well as the high cost of power.

Most seaweed farms are in Mindanao, while processing facilities are located in Cebu and Manila. — **Adrian H. Halili**

# NIA sees higher yields with switch to new crop calendar

By **Adrian H. Halili**  
Reporter

THE NATIONAL Irrigation Administration (NIA) said rice production is expected to benefit from its proposed new dry season crop calendar.

“We have the funding for a small pilot project,” NIA Administrator Eduardo G. Guillen told *BusinessWorld* on the sidelines of a forum last week.

NIA has said that it is planning its irrigation programs around two dry-season crop periods — one from October to January and the other from February to May.

“We looked at the rainfall data and when the typhoons hit. What we wanted was to place the cropping period during the dry season where not a lot of typhoons should take place,” Mr. Guillen added.

“So by June or July, we should be done with both the cropping seasons,” he said.

NIA said the shift will minimize the impact of typhoons on standing crops during the wetter parts of the year.

“Our (main) target here is to increase rice yields... so it’s not all about the weather but also about the effort of government agencies to deliver

farming inputs to producers on time,” he added.

The use of high-yielding hybrid seed could potentially increase yields in NIA-irrigated sites to 8 million metric tons (MT) of palay (unmilled rice), according to NIA.

Production is expected to hit 20 million MT of palay this year, according to the target set by the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Mr. Guillen noted that the prompt delivery of inputs to farmers will help keep NIA’s projections on track.

“*Andaming pera na binibigay natin sa (Department of Agriculture) para sa kanilang farm inputs, hindi ba tayo na sasayangin na minsan dumarating’yung inputs sa (farmers) kung kelan dina nila kailangan,* (With all the funding

available, it’s a waste not to deliver inputs to the farmers when they don’t need them,” he added.

Mr. Guillen has said that NIA has accelerated the timetables for irrigation projects in the pipeline.

Up to P40 billion has been allocated for new irrigation projects, which could potentially irrigate 40 thousand hectares.

As of 2023, the NIA has completed 68% of its national irrigation development commitments, servicing an estimated 2.11 million hectares, with 1.1 million hectares still to be irrigated.

“NIA is at 60 years, and we have only irrigated (68%). We need better ways to fast track these projects,” he added.

NIA last year signed a memorandum of agreement with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to repurpose surplus irrigation water for power production, bulk water supply, aquaculture, recreation, and tourism.

The DENR offered the water rights of an initial 135 NIA sites for public-private partnerships. An additional 112 were added last week.

Environment Undersecretary Carlos Primo C. David has said that more than 60 private water firms have expressed interest in investing in the initial 135 sites.



PHILIPPINE STAR/MIKHAEL VARGAS

## France eases Olympics river restrictions

PARIS — The French government will ease restrictions on grain transport on the river Seine during this year’s Olympics in response to industry concerns about disruption at harvest time in the European Union’s (EU) biggest grain producing country.

The Seine is a major route to transport crops to the northern port of Rouen, France’s biggest grain export terminal. Industry association Intercereales estimates around 1 million metric tons of grain take the route in the peak harvest period from mid-July to mid-August that this year coincides with the Paris Olympic games.

The closure of the Seine to traffic in the capital before the July 26 opening ceremony, which will take place along the river, will last six and a half days, com-

pared with previous plans for just over a week, Agriculture Minister Marc Fesneau said on Thursday.

The riverside opening ceremony will be first time the public has free access to an Olympics inauguration and is a major security challenge for the authorities, who expect some 300,000 people to attend.

The government this week scrapped plans to force booksellers along the Seine to remove their stalls for the ceremony in response to their opposition.

Speaking alongside representatives of Intercereales, Mr. Fesneau also announced that river locks will be closed at midnight, rather than the usual 8 p.m. during the games.

That will allow grain barges to advance along the river and

make up for day-time restrictions when the Seine will be used for swimming competitions.

River docks will also be made available for grain barges to wait during navigation closures in Paris, Mr. Fesneau said.

The authorities will assess the financial impact on the grain sector from the river restrictions, he added.

The farming sector has become an urgent issue for the government after nationwide protests in the last month voiced anger at low income, environmental regulation and cheap imports.

France is supporting calls from the grain sector to be included in emergency measures to limit EU imports from Ukraine. — **Reuters**

## Indian farmers suspend march to Delhi as gov’t talks continue

AMBALA, India — Indian farmers demanding higher prices for their crops said they had paused their protest march to New Delhi on Friday until their unions hold another round of talks with government ministers on Sunday.

Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda, who met farmers’ representatives late Thursday along with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and Deputy Interior Minister Nityanand Rai, told reporters the talks were “positive,” adding: “We believe we will all find a solution together peacefully.”

Movement leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal also said the farmers would hold off their march for now. “When the meetings have started, if we move forward (towards Delhi) then how will meetings happen?” Mr. Dallewal said, adding that the protest “will continue peacefully.”

Thousands of farmers had embarked on the “Delhi Chaloo,” or “Let’s go to Delhi” march earlier this week to press the government to set a minimum price for their produce, but they were

stopped by security forces about 200 kms away from the capital, triggering clashes.

Union leaders said a 63-year-old farmer, who was among those camped at the site, died of a heart attack early Friday.

A state police officer said they had received information about a farmer’s death and are looking into it.

The protests erupted a few months before India is due to hold national elections in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seeking a third term. Farmers are an influential voting bloc.

The farmers remained camped on the border between Punjab and Haryana states on Friday. Security forces have used concrete and metal barricades, as well as drones carrying tear gas canisters, to stop them for advancing.

The protest comes two years after Mr. Modi’s government, following a similar protest movement, repealed some farm laws and promised to find ways to ensure support prices for all produce. — **Reuters**

## Gov’t pressed to create more tech jobs via training tie-ups with private sector

By **John Victor D. Ordoñez**  
Reporter

THE GOVERNMENT should seek more private-sector partnerships to offer training in advanced software in order to expand the available jobs in tech, industry representatives said.

“Retaining top tech talent is a challenge, as competition grows not only domestically but also internationally,” Jay Pegarido, country manager at tech firm Sansan Global Development Center, Inc., told *BusinessWorld* in an e-mail.

“The government and private sector should collaborate to increase access to quality education and targeted training in key areas of technology and entrepreneurship.”

The partnerships should include investments in upgrading the digi-

tal and educational infrastructure, and supporting the development of software and artificial intelligence, he said.

In a study released in May 2023, online job portal JobStreet said technology-based work remains in high demand among jobseekers in the Philippines and other countries in Southeast Asia, despite layoffs by tech companies.

It said that 81% of tech talent in Asia receive multiple job offers a year, making them a sought-after talent group.

Mr. Pegarido cited the need for the government to map out clear career progression paths and develop mentorship programs to upskill the workforce.

The government should also focus on enhancing science, technology and engineering and mathematics education programs, he added.

The Philippines ranked 84<sup>th</sup> out of 134 economies in the 2023 Global Talent Competitiveness Index compiled by Institut Européen d’Administration des Affaires in collaboration with the Descartes Insitute for the Future and Human Capital Leadership Institute.

This was the country’s lowest ranking since the index started in 2013. It is touted as a measures how well countries can attract and retain talent.

“Investing in STEM education and ensuring that educational curricula are up to date with the latest technological advancements can produce graduates who are ready to meet the demands of the global tech market,” Mr. Pegarido said.

“Companies are finding it increasingly difficult to scout new tech talent, with many firms reporting a lack of software developers and similar roles.”

## Better OFW awareness urged for health, social programs

THE GOVERNMENT should improve the health literacy and awareness of social security protections for overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) said.

“The government must strengthen its migration policies to promote health and social security systems literacy among Filipino migrant domestic workers (MDWs),” it said in a policy note, “Promoting health and social security systems literacy among Filipino migrant domestic workers.”

The Philippine Statistics Authority reported that OFWs between April

and September 2022 numbered about 1.96 million.

The study, written by Jocelyn O. Celero, Melissa R. Garabiles, and Evangeline O. Katigbak-Montoya, said more systems are needed to improve the awareness of migrant workers of these social programs.

“Philippine migration-related agencies lack effective mechanisms for sharing and updating information on health and social security programs and services for OFWs,” it added.

“It is crucial to enhance the health and social security systems literacy of Filipino MDWs by boosting government efforts to reach Filipinos work-

ing abroad and enable their wider participation in these programs,” it added.

PIDS also called for greater collaboration between the government and stakeholders to develop adequate tools to measure literacy.

“Survey tools must be accurate, updated, and relevant to the target population to ensure a robust understanding of health and social security systems among Filipino MDWs,” it added.

PIDS also cited the need to strengthen migration-related and gender-responsive policies and programs. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsos**

## Newport World Resorts begins 2024 with multiple wins

Further cementing its status as the country’s most multifaceted integrated resort that delivers epic experiences, Newport World Resorts heads into the year with an impressive array of local and international industry awards, citations, and recognitions. In January alone, Newport World Resorts earned two accolades at the 2024 Asian Management Excellence Awards, three trophies at the 59<sup>th</sup> Anvil Awards, three recognitions at the 20<sup>th</sup> Philippine Quill Awards, and a prestigious title at the 42<sup>nd</sup> Agora Awards.

Proudly representing the Philippine integrated resort industry on a global platform, Newport World Resorts stood out as the sole local hospitality and leisure company at the inaugural Asian Management Excellence Awards presented by the Asian Business Review. The event celebrates exceptional accomplishments by business leaders, innovators, and companies across 50 countries.

Newport World Resorts was feted for its impactful workplace initiatives with the award for Philippines Employee Engagement of the Year - Hospitality & Leisure. President and CEO Kingson Sian was also named Executive of the Year for the Hospitality & Leisure category during the prestigious awarding ceremony held on January 23 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Beyond elevating the integrated resort industry, Newport World Resorts also made waves for its commitment to sustainability. Newport World Resorts earned recognition as Advocacy Marketing Company of the Year for commitment to sustainability | LOVE Earth (ILE) by the Agora Awards. ILE is Newport World Resorts’ fully integrated sustainability initiative that harmonizes the programs of its hotels, entertainment, retail, dining, and leisure facilities to advocate for the planet’s preservation and responsible tourism. Presented by the Philippine Marketers Association, the Agora Awards honors outstanding individuals and organizations that utilize exceptional marketing practices to contribute to the growth and development of the industry in the country.

In the realm of communications excellence, Newport World Resorts bagged multiple awards from the IABC Philippine Quill Awards and PRSP Anvil Awards.

The International Alliance for Business Communicators (IABC) confers the Philippine Quill Awards to businesses that

emply the best strategic communication campaigns, programs, and tools to help uplift communication standards across various industries and institutions.

Newport World Resorts has shone brightly in this arena, with its rebranding and sustainability campaigns earning Awards of Excellence at the 20<sup>th</sup> Philippine Quill Awards - “Rebranding, Rebuilding, and Reinventing the Epic World of Newport World Resorts” and “Newport World Resorts’ I Love Earth: Integrated Sustainability Program from the Heart.”

In addition, the innovative flagship employee focus and needs-based engagement program, “Kamustahan with KS 2.0” has earned the distinguished Award of Merit. The program has created an open channel for communication between Sian and small groups of employees, encouraging them to ask questions, voice concerns, and offer valuable suggestions through a series of casual, sit-down discussions.

The prestigious Anvil Awards, presented by the Public Relations Society of the Philippines has long been regarded as the Oscars of the Philippine Public Relations industry. Taking home three trophies was a feat worth celebrating for Newport World Resorts - Silver Anvil awards for its corporate branding campaign “uNWRapped: Newport World Resorts’ corporate spokesperson revealed,” mall exhibit campaign “Newport World Resorts Mall-seum: Where leisure transforms to enriching cultural experiences for the mall-going public,” and employee engagement campaign “Thrillfest 2023: Winning as one Newport World Resorts.”

Surrounded by success, innovation, and growth - Newport World Resorts welcomed the year with a series of accomplishments, in turn, marking an excellent start for its milestone 15<sup>th</sup> year in the industry. The story of Newport World Resorts continues to unfold since pioneering the Philippine integrated resort scene, an epic journey that began a decade and a half ago.

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