

RCEF needs to be extended, given set percentage of tariffs, DA says

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it supports an extension of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), with an adjusted budget allocation per year.

"Definitely, I think it should be extended. But there should be adjustments so we can adapt to the times," Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. told reporters.

Mr. Laurel added that the DA is finalizing its proposal on adjustments to the funding allocated to RCEF.

"Only P10 billion goes into RCEF. It should be increased. We also have to invest more on post-harvest facilities and mechanization," he said.

He added that some funds may also be allocated for fertilizer distribution to farmers to increase their yields.

"Right now, about 12% to 15% of our rice production is wasted because there are no post-harvest facilities... Reducing waste means more income for farmers," Mr. Laurel said.

The RCEF is intended to modernize the rice industry and is funded by import tariffs generated as a result of Republic Act 11203, or the Rice Tariffication Law.

The fund supports the supply of machinery, seed, and fertilizer, among others, to farmers. Some P10 billion worth of rice tariffs finance support RCEF. The tariff allocations are set to expire in June.

He said that the allocation for RCEF should vary with the amount of tariffs collected.

The Philippines collected P30 billion in rice tariffs in 2023, according to the Bureau of Customs.

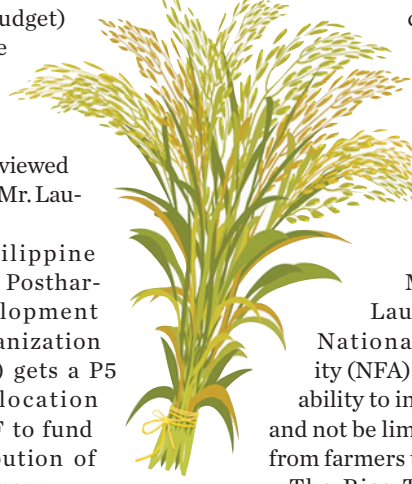
"Every year the collection is different, so it should be a percent-

age. (The budget) needs to be raised... If possible, it should be reviewed every year," Mr. Laurel said.

The Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech) gets a P5 billion allocation from RCEF to fund the distribution of farm machinery.

The Philippine Rice Research Institute handles the distribution of certified inbred seed to farmers.

Senator Cynthia A. Villar proposed an extension of RCEF for another six years, with an in-



creased budget of P20 billion per year. Likewise, Nueva Ecija Rep. Rosanna V. Vergara also filed a bill seeking an RCEF extension.

Meanwhile, Mr. Laurel said that the National Food Authority (NFA) needs to regain its ability to influence rice prices and not be limited to buying rice from farmers to build reserves.

The Rice Tariffication Law stripped the NFA of its power to import; instead, private traders were allowed to bring in rice with no restrictions, but have to pay a 35% tariff on grain sourced from Southeast Asia. — **Adrian H. Halili**

Energy regulator 'confident' in resumption of normal reserve market operations soon

THE Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) is confident that the suspended reserve market will soon resume normal commercial operations.

"There have been hiccups in the implementation of the reserve market, but we are confident that with the required information to be submitted to the ERC, we can resume normal operations soon," ERC Chairperson Monalisa C. Dimalanta said during Tuesday's *BusinessWorld* and Project KALIKHASan forum on Achieving Balance in the Philippine Energy System.

Last month, the ERC ordered the suspension of billing and settlement in the reserve market.

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insights

The suspension covers the March billing period, which will be lifted when the commission finalizes its evaluation of the price determination methods used by the Independent Electricity Market Operator of the Philippines (IEMOP), which will likely come in May.

The ERC had directed IEMOP and the Philippine Electricity Market Corp. to submit audit results of the software by April 15 "to identify and address" is-

sues and immediately resume the market's normal operations.

"Once that's complete and we have no more requirements for them to submit, we can finalize the evaluation of the program," Ms. Dimalanta said.

She said ERC has set a meeting with the Department of Energy next week.

"We're all aligned that we need the reserve market to be operating, so I'm really confident that we'll find a way, if there are some misalignments, to align the policy and the software and the regulation," Ms. Dimalanta said.

"Because we really need to make it work to support the RE (renewable energy) ambitions

of the country. So that's where the confidence is coming from because we have a shared vision," she added.

Meanwhile, Ms. Dimalanta said the ERC is hoping to complete the fourth regulatory reset of the National Grid Corp. of the Philippines by the middle of the year.

The completion of the fifth regulatory reset is targeted by the end of 2024.

"In the same manner, we will complete the reset for the distribution sector. Not all at the same time because we have 141 distribution utilities, but for the bigger ones, starting this year we'll start completing them," Ms. Dimalanta said. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

PSA hikes 1st quarter palay output estimate

PRODUCTION of palay or unmilled rice, is expected to come in at 4.82 million metric tons (MT) during the first quarter, based estimates of the standing crop as of March 1, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.

PSA's projection, if borne out, would represent a 0.3% increase from the initial 4.8 million MT estimate issued on Jan. 1 and an 0.8% year from actual output a year earlier.

The PSA said that the estimated harvest area for the first quarter declined 0.1% year on year to 1.17 million hectares.

"Based on standing crop for the period... the yield per hectare of palay may increase to 4.10 MT or 1.0%," it added.

It said that about 677.34 thousand hectares or 57.7% of the 1.17 million hectares planted to rice had been harvested as of Feb. 1, with the resulting palay output at 2.74 million MT.

About 91.2% of the crop yet to be harvested was in the maturing stage, while 8.8% was in the reproductive stage.

The Department of Agriculture has projected that palay production this year would exceed 20 million MT.

Meanwhile, corn output is estimated to rise 4.8% in the first quarter to 2.64 million MT, based on the standing crop as of March 1.

The area planted to corn is estimated to have risen 0.4% to 697.35 thousand hectares, while yields are expected to be flat at 3.79 MT per hectare.

The PSA said that about 59.3% or 413.48 thousand hectares of the standing crop had been harvested, producing about 1.42 million MT of corn.

"Of the total area of 283.86 thousand hectares standing corn yet to be harvested... 5.7% were at the reproductive stage and 94.3% were at the maturing stage," the PSA said. — **Adrian H. Halili**

Calamity funds worth P3 billion released by end of March — DBM

CALAMITY FUNDS worth P3.41 billion have been released as of the end of March to fund relief operations and repairs to infrastructure that had sustained typhoon damage, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) said.

In its National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Fund (NDRRMF) status update, P2.01 billion was disbursed to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), while the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) received P1.4 billion.

The DBM said that P875 million was released to the DSWD to replenish the Quick Response Fund, a stand-by fund to support relief and rehabilitation efforts during calamities.

The DPWH received P408.34 million for infrastructure repairs in the Cagayan Valley, which was hit by Typhoon Egay last year.

The DPWH also received P177.37 million for the rehabilitation and restoration of infrastructure damaged by Typhoon Paeng in 2022. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

ODA to Asia declines 3.7% in 2023 — UN agency

OFFICIAL development assistance (ODA) to Asia and Oceania declined 3.7% last year, forcing recipients to identify priorities for emergency needs and other projects that require immediate funding, the United Nations Global Crisis Response Group (UNGCRG) said.

"At a time when slowing economic growth, rising inflation and other macroeconomic challenges put pressure on aid budgets, dealing with new emergencies is inevitably complex," the UNGCRG said in a report.

ODA is deemed "one of the most stable and predictable sources" of external financing during a crisis, the UNGCRG said.

The report found that ODA to Asia and Oceania dropped to \$2.9 billion in 2022. Countries in Africa were the biggest recipients of ODA at \$3.5 billion, which represented a drop of 4.1% from a year earlier.

Least developed countries received \$2.4 billion worth of ODA. Latin America and the Caribbean received \$2.1 billion.

Around 70 developing countries, including the 24 least developed countries and 15 small island developing states, saw their ODA decline.

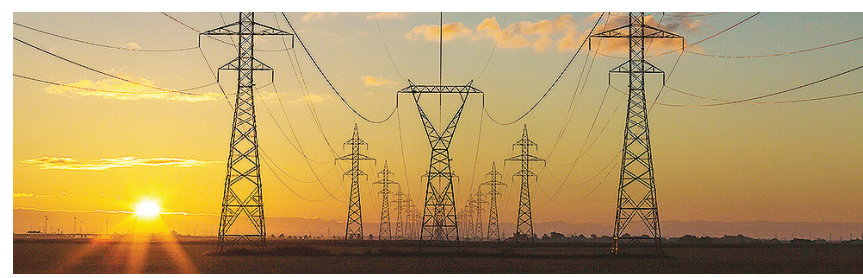
"International crises leave visible marks on the ODA landscape, generating new demands and reshuffling priorities," the UNGCRG added.

Global ODA totaled \$287 billion last year, but remained \$143 billion below the 0.7% of gross national income target, as stated in UN sustainable development

goal 17 or "Partnerships for the goals."

Multilateral lenders and research institutions have projected global growth to slow until next year.

"Inflation, food insecurity, the cost-of-living crisis, supply chain disruptions and tightening financial conditions are among the pressing challenges added to a world recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and facing the threats of climate change and conflicts," the report said. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**



MATTHEW HENRY-UNSPASH

PHL, Singapore exploring energy security, AI tie-ups

THE PHILIPPINES and Singapore are exploring the possibility of more partnerships in energy security, artificial intelligence (AI), and trade this year, the two countries' foreign ministers said on Monday.

In a briefing in Manila, Singapore Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said Singapore businesses are confident in the economic prospects of the Philippines and are keen on building ties in these areas.

"Both our nations are also keen, to strengthen collaboration in future-oriented areas including the green economy, smart sustainable infrastructure, innovation, startups and opportunities, especially for the many young people that the Philippines has," he said.

Mr. Balakrishnan said he had discussed with Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique A. Manalo the establishment of a framework for trading carbon credits.

Companies can use carbon markets to compensate for greenhouse gas emissions caused by their projects by buying

credits from entities that reduce these emissions, according to the United Nations Development Programme.

"This will be a learning journey for both of us as we transit into the economic and energy transformations," he said.

The Singapore minister said that he will also be checking up on Singapore businesses operating in the Clark Freeport Zone.

At the briefing, Mr. Manalo said exploring ties in harnessing AI and efforts to mitigate climate change will create more jobs.

"All of these would be in support of President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.'s vision for the Philippines to create more jobs and transform it into an economic powerhouse," he said.

"Singapore remains one of the Philippines' most important trade and investment partners."

In 2022, Philippine imports from Singapore grew 16.83% to \$8.12 billion. Singapore was Manila's 7th largest trading partner that year. — **John Victor D. Ordoñez**

DILG, DoH asked to simplify process for releasing health emergency allowances

THE Department of Budget and Management (DBM) has asked the Health and Local Government departments to fast-track the release of health emergency allowances (HEA), citing a backlog in releases.

"To resolve the bottleneck... maybe a blanket MoA (Memorandum of Agreement) could cover all private organizations and local government units (LGUs)," Budget Secretary Amenah F. Pangandaman said in a statement.

She said the Department of Health (DoH) and Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) could forward such a blanket MoA to hospitals with workers entitled to emergency allowances.

Under the DoH's guidelines on HEA releases, private hospitals and local hospitals need to present an MoA to download their respective allowances. However, due to lack of MoA standardization, fund releases have been delayed.

The DoH has yet to release an updated mapping of HEA claims, which should detail all claims and payments to all health facilities under the Public Health Emergency Benefits and Allowances (PHEBA) program.

The DBM has said it has released P91.283 billion for the PHEBA program since 2021.

However, the DoH still owes private and local hospitals around P27 billion in unpaid claims.

The government has allocated P19.962 billion from HEAs this year, Ms. Pangandaman said. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

Republic of the Philippines
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING COUNCIL

TARGETED FINANCIAL SANCTIONS IN RELATION TO
ANTI-TERRORISM COUNCIL RESOLUTION NO. 54 (2023)

The public, covered institutions as defined under Section 3(c) Republic Act No. 10168, otherwise known as the Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act of 2012 (TFPSA), in relation to Section 3(a) of RA No. 9160 or *The Anti-Money Laundering Act of 2001*, as amended (AMLA), and all relevant government agencies, including the Land Transportation Office, Land Registration Authority, Registry of Deeds, Maritime Industry Authority, and the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines are hereby informed that the Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC), consistent with the Philippines' international obligations to comply with binding terrorism-related resolutions, including United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution No. 1373 pursuant to Article 41 of the United Nations Charter, issued Resolution No. TF-86, Series of 2024, embodying a Sanctions Freeze Order to take effect immediately against the **Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army also known as Bagong Hukbong Bayan (CPP-NPA)** pursuant to the maintaining of their designation as terrorist organizations, associations, or groups of persons by the Anti-Terrorism Council (ATC) by virtue of ATC Resolution No. 54 (2023), and directed the freezing and preserving without delay of the following property or funds, including related accounts, belonging to the abovementioned designated organizations:

- property or funds that are owned or controlled by any of the subjects of designation, and is not limited to those that are directly related or can be tied to a particular terrorist act, plot, or threat;
- property or funds that are wholly or jointly owned or controlled, directly or indirectly, by any of the subjects of designation;
- property or funds derived or generated from funds or other assets owned or controlled, directly or indirectly, by any of the subjects of designation; and
- property or funds of persons and entities acting on behalf or at the direction of any of the subjects of designation;

All the above covered institutions and relevant government agencies are directed to submit to the AMLC a written return, pursuant to, and containing details required under, Rule 16.c of the Implementing Rules and Regulations of the TFPSA.

Any person, whether natural or juridical, including covered persons, private companies, government owned or controlled corporations, and government agencies and instrumentalities who:

- deals directly or indirectly, in any way and by any means, with any property or fund that he knows or has reasonable ground to believe is owned or controlled by any of the organizations designated under ATC Resolution No. 54 (2023), including funds derived or generated from property or funds owned or controlled, directly or indirectly, by such designated organizations; or
- makes available any property or funds, or financial services or other related services to any of the said designated organizations,

shall be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law pursuant to TFPSA.

All covered institutions are mandated to submit a Suspicious Transaction Report of all previous transactions of the designated organizations within five (5) days from effectivity of the Sanctions Freeze Order.

All persons, organizations, associations or groups of persons whose property or funds, including related accounts, are frozen are hereby informed that they may avail of the remedies under Republic Act No. 11479, otherwise known as the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, its Implementing Rules and Regulations, and under the TFPSA and its Implementing Rules and Regulations.

A copy of this Targeted Financial Sanctions in Relation to Anti-Terrorism Council Resolution No. 54 (2023) may be viewed and downloaded from the AMLC website: www.amlc.gov.ph.

For information and compliance.

8 March 2024, Manila.

(ORIGINAL SIGNED)
ELI M. REMOLONA, JR.
Chairman
(Governor, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas)

(ORIGINAL SIGNED)
EMILIO B. AQUINO
Member
(Chairman, Securities and Exchange Commission)

(ORIGINAL SIGNED)
REYNALDO A. REGALADO
Member
(Commissioner, Insurance Commission)