

# No need for sugar imports, millers say

SUGAR millers disputed the need for imports of the sweetener, citing improved domestic production and ample inventories.

Jesus L. Barrera, executive director of the Philippine Sugar Millers' Association, Inc. (PSMA), said in a statement on Tuesday: "Our increased production has filled our warehouses, so there is no need to import at this time."

The Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) has said it is studying allowing sugar imports during the milling off-season to safeguard against shortages.

According to the SRA, raw sugar production had reached 1.92 million metric tons (MT) as of May 12, exceeding the 1.799 million MT from last year.

Refined sugar output rose to 687,823 MT from 624,389 MT in the previous milling season.

The regulator had projected raw sugar production of 1.85 million MT, with a possible 10-15% decline depending on the severity of El Niño.

"Even with sugar milling already closed for the season, we are confident that our current sugar inventories will

last beyond the start of the next crop year, which is estimated to be Oct. 1, 2024," he added.

The national sugar inventory rose 26% for raw sugar to 531,838 MT, with refined sugar up 35% at 572,398 MT.

"Part of the inventory is the 135,675 tons of imported refined sugar that were brought in last year that remains unwithdrawn and unused," the PSMA said.

Withdrawals or demand for domestic raw sugar and domestic refined sugar have decreased 4.23% and

7.20%, respectively, while withdrawals of imported refined sugar have risen 16%.

"We will continue monitoring the impact of El Niño on the supply levels in the upcoming 2024-2025 harvest," Mr. Barrera said.

The SRA has said that El Niño has greatly damaged the cane crop for the October 2024 season.

Batangas, Southern Negros, and Mindanao have reported extensive sugarcane damage due to the dry conditions. — **Adrian H. Halili**



## PHL hotel bookings up 54% in Q1 — Trip.com

By Justine Irish D. Tabile Reporter

SHANGHAI — Hotel bookings in the Philippines rose 54% in the first quarter, driven by impulse travel, Singapore-based travel booking service Trip.com Group said.

"We have witnessed a significant increase in hotel bookings in the Philippines compared to last year, and that is a strong sign that more is to come," Trip.com Managing Director and Vice-President for International Markets Boon Sian Chai said at a signing ceremony on Tuesday.

In the first quarter, Trip.com reported that hotel bookings in the Philippines through its travel site grew 54%.

The Philippines actually lagged the more than 100% growth in hotel bookings in Southeast Asia overall, though Trip.com said the country performed well in 2023, dampening the first-quarter result due to base effects.

Last year, volume and gross merchandise value of hotel bookings, as well as flight bookings in the Philippines, rose in the triple digits compared with 2022.

Trip.com Assistant Vice-President for International Market Yi Ru said that impulse travel influenced the Philippine numbers.

"The Philippine market is very unique. Filipinos are very enthusiastic about social media, so impulse buying is working super well in the Philippines," she said.

She said that younger Filipinos are more receptive to impulse purchases, which is why Trip.com is looking at releasing a new feature on the platform.

"We will be launching our pre-sale campaigns, and we will have this function on Trip.com platforms very soon," she added.

The feature will allow customers to buy a travel package at an earlier date and decide when they want to travel and book at a later date.



## Red, yellow alerts raised over Luzon grid — NGCP

RED and yellow alerts were raised on Tuesday over the Luzon grid, with a yellow alert also declared for the Visayas grid, as the operating margins remained insufficient to meet the grids' energy requirements, the National Grid Corp. of the Philippines (NGCP) said.

In an advisory, the NGCP said that the Luzon grid was on red alert between 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. and 9 p.m.

It was also placed under yellow alert between 12 noon and 2 p.m., 5 p.m. and 8 p.m., and 9 p.m. and 12 midnight.

The grid operator said that the available capacity was 13,277 megawatts (MW) while peak demand was 12,869 MW.

Yellow alerts are issued when the supply available to the grid falls below a designated safety threshold. If the supply-demand balance deteriorates further, a red alert is declared.

A total of 18 power plants are on forced outage while 10 are run-

ning derated, making 3,963.3 MW unavailable to the grid.

Meanwhile, the Visayas grid was on yellow alert between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Tuesday.

The grid's peak demand was 2,527 MW, against available capacity of 2,885 MW.

During the period, a total of 21 power plants were on forced outage, with four at limited capacity. A total of 587.1 MW were unavailable to the grid.

In a briefing on Monday, Energy Undersecretary Rowena Cristina L. Guevara said that red alerts may continue until next week if the power plants that experienced forced outage or derated capacities fail to resume operations.

The Department of Energy is expecting 4,000 MW of energy projects to come online this year, including 2,000 MW from conventional plants and 2,000 MW from renewables. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

## Crop damage from Aghon at P11 million so far, DA says

AGRICULTURAL damage caused by Typhoon Aghon (international name: Ewinar) was initially estimated at P11.83 million, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

"In the coming days, we can expect that to increase... Bicol Region and Eastern Visayas have not yet reported," Agriculture Assistant Secretary and Spokesman Arnel V. de Mesa told reporters on Tuesday.

The typhoon made initial landfall over Quezon province, according to the government weather service, known as PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration).

PAGASA said that Aghon, currently on a track to the northeast in the Philippine Sea, is set to exit the Philippine Area of Responsibility by 5 p.m. on Wednesday.

The DA reported crop losses by volume at 487 metric tons (MT), affecting 432

farmers across 239 hectares of farmland.

The DA had estimated that 199,268 hectares would be affected by the typhoon, based on the standing crop as of May 15.

The DA said that rice accounted for 90% of the crop damage, valued at P10.66 million. Some 430 MT of rice was lost to the typhoon across 232 hectares.

He said that about 99% of the dry-season rice crop had been harvested at the time of the typhoon, with most of the affected crop being early plantings for the wet season.

"Most of what is planted now is in preparation for the wet season. It is in the early stages of crop development," he said.

High-value crop (HVC) damage amounted to P1.15 million, with lost volume at 57 MT. Only Marinduque had reported HVC damage as of May 28. — **Adrian H. Halili**

## LANDBANK loans from RCEF top P2.5 billion at end of April

LANDBANK of the Philippines (LANDBANK) said that it released loans worth P2.5 billion as of April 30 to rice farmers and cooperatives, with the loans backed by the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

In a statement, LANDBANK said the loans were part of RCEF's Expanded Rice Credit Assistance program.

The bank said that loans were issued to 15,400 individual rice farmers and 270 cooperatives with more than 21,300 members.

Loans were used to fund palay (unmilled rice) production, milling and trading, re-lending, and acquisition of farm machinery.

"Under the program, 98% of LANDBANK's direct borrowers are individual rice farmers," it said.

The bulk of the borrowers were from the rice producing provinces of Cagayan, Nueva Vizcaya, and Quirino.

Loads were also disbursed to farmers from Capiz, Leyte, Agusan del Sur, Bukidnon, North Cotabato, and Zamboanga del Sur.

LANDBANK President and Chief Executive Officer Lynette V. Ortiz said that the bank's loans help "support to the agriculture sector (which) is crucial in ensuring food security."

"We are committed to providing continued financial assistance to our rice farmers to help them sustain their operations and improve productivity, especially in the face of challenges including El Niño," Ms. Ortiz added.

The government allocates 10% of RCEF funding towards credit assistance to rice farmers.

RCEF is a component of the Rice Tarification Law of 2019, which liberalized rice imports but required importers to pay a 35% tariff on their shipments. The tariffs generated in turn provide funding worth P10 billion a year to RCEF. — **Adrian H. Halili**

## Palace signs 'Eddie Garcia' law protecting entertainment workers

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. has signed into law a bill protecting workers in the movie and television industries, setting standards for wages, contracts, and work hours.

Republic Act 11996 — the so-called "Eddie Garcia law," named after the actor who died following an on-set accident in 2019 sets the minimum wage of television or film workers at not less than the applicable minimum wage in the region where they are hired.

Wages are to be paid on time, as agreed upon in the contract, directly to the workers, it said.

The law requires employers to give workers or contractors a copy of their contracts, which should spell out the number of work hours, job position and description, period of employment, and details of compensation in a language understood by both parties.

Entertainment workers must receive wage-related benefits, social

security and government-mandated benefits and insurance, according to the law, which also requires overtime pay.

"No agreement or employment contract shall discriminate against a worker who has contracts or projects with other production outfits unless exclusivity is specified in the contract, nor shall any person perform any act involving preference based on race, color, descent, national or

ethnic origin, or religion, which has the purpose or effect of nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise on an equal footing of any human right or fundamental freedom," according to the law.

The law also requires employers to comply with occupational safety and health standards under the Labor Code and a 2018 law on occupational safety and health standards. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

## JICA, DA seeking to introduce Japanese tech to Philippine farms

THE Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) said it has been working with the Agriculture department to introduce Japanese technology that will help vegetable farmers in the Philippines climb the value chain.

In a statement, JICA said the Project for Market-Driven Enhancement of Vegetable Value Chain in the Philippines (MV2C-TCP) involves beneficiaries in the capital region and nearby provinces to improve the vegetable value chain.

"JICA continues to highlight agriculture development as a backbone of Philippine economy in terms of its prospective impact on economic growth, poverty alleviation, job creation, and promotion of healthy living, among others," Oshima Jiro, JICA Philippines senior representative, was quoted as saying in the statement.

JICA said it has been promoting a "market-oriented approach" to solving agricultural issues in various countries.

"As such, MV2C-TCP remains a relevant and important part of JICA's assistance portfolio in the Philippines," Mr. Oshima said.

MV2C-TCP seeks to address bottlenecks in the vegetable value chains of Metro Manila, Quezon and Benguet, JICA said.

The six pilot projects involve the introduction of high-quality seedlings, the supply of a humidified refrigeration and pre-cooling system, and the optimization of greenhouse cultivation.

These initiatives are expected to improve farmers' production techniques, JICA said.

Other initiatives involve the introduction of plastic crates, linking up modern distribution channels, and the promotion of vegetable consumption.

JICA cited price volatility, high distribution costs, post-harvest losses, and poverty among farmers as recurring issues in Philippine agriculture.

"This underscores the urgent need for a more efficient and modernized vegetable value chain that can provide higher income for farmers, many of whom are still under the poverty line, and promote active participation of the private sector and job creation in this important sector," JICA said. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

## RCEP-enabled imports being monitored for possible impact on domestic producers

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said it is watching out for a possible surge in imports enabled by the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade deal.

"One way to monitor it is the certificate of origin issued by the Bureau of Customs. Because when you get a certificate of origin, that's (an indicator that the exporters) availed of the free trade agreement benefit," Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual told reporters late Monday.

He added that the DTI's Import Surge Monitoring System will watch for possible threats to specific Philippine industries, adding that the steel,

cement, wood, and ceramics industries have shown interest in the monitoring system.

He said Philippine manufacturers are on the lookout for possible cases of dumping.

"The system is ongoing... (we) are continuing (the) process of monitoring import volumes and prices," he added.

The DTI's monitoring system was launched last year as an early warning system to help the Philippines prepare to seek remedies against the sudden and sharp increase in imports.

"We are still in the process of gathering the needed information on how much RCEP has contributed to exports," he said. — **Adrian H. Halili**

## TRO lifting to facilitate completion of NGCP Bataan-Bulacan transmission line

THE National Grid Corp. of the Philippines (NGCP) said it will now seek to complete the Hermosa-San Jose (HSJ) 500-kilovolt (kV) transmission line linking Bataan to Bulacan after the Supreme Court lifted a temporary restraining order (TRO) against the project.

In a statement on Tuesday, the NGCP said that the High Court issued a resolution dated Feb. 28 and promulgated April 8, lifting the TRO issued in July 2023.

"We are happy that the Supreme Court thoroughly studied the case and found no merit in the petitions filed against NGCP. This will enable us to complete the remaining portion of the HSJ which will (facilitate) bulk generation coming in from Bataan," the NGCP said.

The TRO sought to freeze the expropriation of land and construction on a portion of the line owned by Phirst Park Homes, Inc. (PPHI), resulting in a nine-month construction delay.

Upon receipt of the TRO, the NGCP said it halted activity along Towers 170-178 of the line, "stalling the ongoing stringing of the line's remaining circuit."

"The case filed by PPHI and the subsequent court prohibition affected the works remaining for full completion, halting construction works from July 2023 to April 2024," the grid operator said.

The Hermosa-San Jose project currently has a transfer capacity of 2,000 megawatts (MW), a quarter of the full 8,000 MW capacity of Lines 1 and 2 pending the completion of the unfinished portion of the line.

With the lifting of the TRO, the NGCP said it has resumed stringing activities for the affected section of the line and completed Line 1 on May 19, allowing the transmission of 4,000 MW.

Line 2 is expected to be finished in mid-July. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**