

Minimum-wage earners selected for P20 subsidized-rice program

AN INITIAL 120,000 minimum-wage earners were selected as beneficiaries of the P20-per-kilo rice program, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

The first batch of beneficiaries was taken from a list compiled by the Department of Labor and Employment. They are employed by companies that have expressed interest in participating in the program and will be eligible to buy up to 10 kilos of subsidized rice per month, Agriculture spokesman Arnel V. de Mesa told reporters.

The distribution of rice for minimum-wage earners has yet to be determined, though the DA is considering deliveries to the beneficiaries' workplaces, he said.

Food Terminal, Inc. has a P500-million budget for the logistics costs of the rice distribution, he added.

Agriculture Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. met on Tuesday with Labor Secretary Bienvenido E. Laguesma to discuss the rice program's expansion to minimum-wage earners.

"For now, participation is limited to workers from companies that have expressed interest in the pilot program," Mr. Tiu Laurel said in a statement on Tuesday.

Mr. De Mesa said the DA is still working on a mechanism to prevent duplication of beneficiaries, because some minimum-wage workers could also be eligible under other categories, such as solo parents.

The P20-per-kilo rice program, supplied from the reserves of the National Food Authority, is currently only available to indigents, senior citizens, solo parents, and persons with disabilities. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

Meralco sees new DoE leadership advancing nuclear development

MANILA Electric Co. (Meralco) is confident that the government's nuclear energy ambitions will advance under the new interim Energy Secretary Sharon S. Garin, who had formerly overseen nuclear energy policy for the department.

"I think with her at the helm, we can be on top of our nuclear agenda," Ronnie L. Aperoch, Meralco executive vice-president and chief operating officer, told reporters on the sidelines of the company's annual stockholders' meeting.

Ms. Garin, who was appointed office in charge of the Department of Energy (DoE), headed its nuclear energy division in her former position as Undersecretary.

Former Secretary Raphael P.M. Lotilla was transferred to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources after President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. revamped his cabinet last week.

"(Ms. Garin) is on top of the nuclear energy agenda. Although we have not dis-



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cussed it yet, we think that it will be at the top of her agenda. And then with the opening of the next Congress, we hope that nuclear will be the priority," Mr. Aperoch said.

The DoE expects to start feeding nuclear energy into the grid by 2032. For now, it is occupied with complying with international nuclear safety standards.

Meralco is hopeful that the bill seeking to establish an independent nuclear energy regulator will obtain Senate approval when Congress returns in June.

Under the Philippine nuclear energy roadmap, the government has set a target of 1,200 megawatts (MW) of nuclear capacity by 2032, scaling up to 2,400 MW by 2040 and 4,800 MW by 2050.

By 2025, the nuclear legal and regulatory framework are expected to be in place.

Meralco's controlling stakeholder, Beacon Electric Asset Holdings, Inc., is partly owned by PLDT Inc.

Hastings Holdings, Inc., a unit of PLDT Beneficial Trust Fund subsidiary MediaQuest Holdings, Inc., has an interest in *BusinessWorld* through the Philippine Star Group, which it controls. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

Rice tariffs up 12.5% in 2024; 2025 funding for RCEF in doubt

RICE IMPORTS in 2024 amounted to 4.8 million metric tons (MMT), generating tariffs of P34.23 billion, up 12.57%, the Department of Agriculture said.

Agriculture spokesman Arnel V. de Mesa told *BusinessWorld* that tariff collections were strong in the first quarter of 2024, hitting P11.66 billion, up 53.23%.

Subsequent quarterly collections were P11.85 billion in the second quarter of 2024, P4.18 billion in the third quarter of 2024, and P6.52 billion in the fourth quarter of 2024.

Collections weakened year on year in the latter half of 2024,

with an 80.93% decline posted in the third quarter and a 33.50% fall in the fourth quarter.

Import volumes were tracking lower in the first quarter of 2025, for which data were available only until March 13. Imports to that date totaled 641,000 MT, well behind the year-earlier pace, when first quarter import volumes totaled nearly 1.2 MMT.

Raul Q. Montemayor, national manager of Federation of Free Farmers, said he doubted whether tariff collections this year will raise the P30 billion required by law to support the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement

Fund (RCEF), due to the decline in rice imports.

"As of April 2025, total imports amounted to 1.5 MMT, and tariff collections were only P6.2 billion," he said via Viber.

The Bureau of Plant Industry reported that rice imports as of May 22 totaled 1.7 MMT. The year-earlier total for the first five months had been 2.15 MMT.

Mr. De Mesa, speaking at a briefing on Wednesday, said the government expects favorable weather conditions this year, reducing demand for imports.

RCEF is a component of the Rice Tariffication Law of 2019.

The initial P10 billion worth of annual funding to modernize the rice industry was increased to P30 billion by an amendment in 2024.

"We were informed today that when the amendment was enacted in December 2024, all excess tariff collections in 2023 and 2024 that were unused reverted to the national treasury," Mr. Montemayor said, citing communications with government officials.

"A new special account will be set up from scratch for tariff collections starting 2025."

He noted that for 2025, only P10 billion was so far appropriated by Congress for the RCEF,

with the balance of P20 billion to be sourced from unprogrammed funds.

Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura Executive Director Jayson H. Cainglet said rice import duties in 2024 could have totaled P50 billion if the rice import tariff had not been reduced to 15% in July 2024.

The government lowered tariffs on rice imports from 35% originally and applied the new rate to grain from any source market. The original 35% rate had applied to rice from Southeast Asia. The 15% rate is subject to review every four months.

"Rice farmers urgently need cash because of declining palay farmgate prices this harvest, which were as low as P11-15 per kilo," Mr. Cainglet said.

"Farmers have already started their preparations for the next planting season."

Of the P30-billion allocation for RCEF, P6 billion is earmarked for rice seed, P9 billion for farm mechanization, and P15 billion for extension and training programs, financial assistance, credit, soil improvement, solar-powered irrigation systems, and water impounding projects. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

Sip to support: SM joins Generation HOPE to build classrooms

SM Supermalls is proud to partner with HOPE and the Department of Education for Generation HOPE — a collaborative campaign that transforms everyday consumer purchases into tangible support for Filipino students by helping build classrooms across the country.

Launched on May 26, 2025, at Samsung Hall in SM Aura, the initiative brings together a coalition of brands, including SM Supermalls, BDO, Aivee, Carmen's Best, Grab, Penshoppe, and Sunnies, united in a shared goal: to bridge the country's classroom gap.

In addition to SM Foundation's long-standing efforts — having built 110 school buildings with 374 classrooms — SM Supermalls is further extending its commitment to education by supporting Generation HOPE's Build a Classroom Project, which aims to construct 10 new public school classrooms, funded in part through the sale of specially branded SM Bottled Water. Every purchase directly contributes to the classroom fund — empowering customers to be part of a nationwide solution.

"At SM, we believe that investing in education is investing in the future," said Steven Tan, President of SM Supermalls. "Through this partnership, we hope to empower the next generation of Filipino students by creating safe, inclusive spaces where they can learn, grow, and thrive."

"We are grateful to our partners for joining us in turning everyday actions — like buying bottled water — into lasting change," said Nanette Medved-Po, Founder of HOPE.

"Generation Hope is a



Nanette Medved-Po and Steven Tan assemble puzzle pieces at the Generation HOPE launch, symbolizing SM's support in building classrooms for Filipino students.



Steven Tan reflects on a lesson from the late Henry Sy, Sr.: 'The greatest equalizer is really in education. That's why we push education so much,' underscoring SM's deep commitment to educational advocacy.



DepEd Secretary Sonny Angara and HOPE Founder Nanette Medved-Po join representatives from seven brand partners in a united show of support to build classrooms and uplift Filipino education.



DepEd Secretary Sonny Angara delivers his closing remarks at the Generation HOPE launch event, reaffirming the government's commitment to partnerships that uplift public education and build brighter futures for Filipino learners.

reflection of our commitment to make quality education accessible to all," said Department of Education Secretary Sonny Angara.

This partnership aligns with SM Cares' advocacy for children and youth empowerment, and invites every Filipino to make a difference, one bottle at a time.

Every bottle makes a difference — by choosing SM Bottled Water, customers directly contribute to building much-needed classrooms for Filipino students

across the country. Start making an impact today by picking up a bottle at any SM mall and be part of the movement to empower education, one sip at a time.