

Fisherfolk set to join P20 rice beneficiary list

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said the beneficiary list of P20-per-kilo rice program will be expanded this month to include fisherfolk.

The DA said the rice will start to go on sale at fishports by the end of the month.

"Weekly provincial rollouts will also continue in areas with active NFA (National Food Authority) depots through the end of the year," it said in a statement on Monday.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said the rice program is the DA's "biggest

challenge" that still needs "full support" from the government. The subsidized-rice program currently benefits nearly 400,000 families.

"We have the stocks. We have the budget. What we need now is urgency and unity," he said, refer-

ring to the P10-billion increase in rice program funding under the 2026 national budget.

The program was originally limited to senior citizens, persons with disabilities, solo parents and indigents. It was recently expanded to minimum wage

earners, beneficiaries of the Department of Social Welfare and Development's Walang Gutom program, and farmers and farm workers enrolled in the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**



PEZA sees 20-30 economic zone proclamations as best-case scenario

THE Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) said economic zone (ecozone) proclamations are likely to number 20-30 this year, based on the agency's best-case target.

"We might be able to achieve that. Because if you notice lately, there are a lot of proclamations coming out," PEZA Director General Tereso O. Panga told reporters last week.

"So maybe 20 to 30 proclamations. That is our ambitious target," he added.

The Palawan Mega Ecozone is among the ecozones it is counting for endorsement to PEZA this month.

"They're ready to endorse it to us if not this month, next month. So once they endorse it to us, we will now apply it with the Office of the President for proclamation," he said.

The endorsement will initially cover 4,000 hectares and eventually cover 28,000 hectares, Mr. Panga said.

The Palawan Mega Ecozone is a result of a memorandum

of agreement signed between PEZA and the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) to redevelop portions of the Iwahig Prison and Penal Farm in Puerto Princesa, Palawan.

He also added that BuCor Director General Gregorio Pio P. Catapang, Jr., has announced

plans to develop another BuCor property in Sablayan, Mindoro Occidental, into an ecozone.

"That is far bigger than Palawan. They want to develop it into a township ecozone. I think

that is a total of 200,000 hectares," he said.

He said that the plan is to develop the mega ecozones through public-private partnerships and distribute the property to the private sector to develop their own facilities.

"We will offer the land as our equity and bring in the developers to put in money for all the amenities and facilities," he said.

"It might be a big ecozone, but we are willing to split it into pack-

ets of development. What we are anticipating are probably huge agro-processing companies that will need, other than processing plants, their own plantations," he added.

He also said the pharma ecozone that is set to rise in Luisita, Tarlac, will be developed by Lloyd Laboratories.

"They're now complying with the requirements for presidential proclamation. So that one will be massive too because they have an American

partner to do drug manufacturing," he said.

"We are looking at three months for proclamations, so if we can submit by September, maybe towards the end of December it can be proclaimed," he added.

Meanwhile, he said the PEZA board is set to approve billions worth of investments at the Victoria Industrial Park.

The PEZA board is scheduled to meet in Davao City between Aug. 14 and 16. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

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