57,000 transport workers set to access P20/kg rice

TRANSPORT WORKERS will be eligible to purchase subsidized government rice at P20 per kilogram (kg) starting Sept. 16 (Tuesday), the Department of Agriculture said.

It said the expected number of beneficiaries is about 57,000, with the initial distribution sites identified as follows: The Bureau of Animal Industry in Quezon City for 17,633 beneficiaries; the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority in Navotas City for 1,001 beneficiaries; Barangay Pandan, Angeles City, Pampanga for 9,961 beneficiaries; Food Terminal, Inc. in Cebu City for 24,742 beneficiaries; and Tagum City, Davao del Norte for 3,650 beneficiaries.

The departments of Transportation and Interior and Local Government and the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board are assisting with the distribution.

Future distribution areas will include the Bureau of Animal Industry and Agricultural Development Center in Quezon City, the Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Division (AMAD) office in Cebu, the Food Terminal, Inc. warehouse in Angeles, and the AMAD office in Tagum.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said in a statement: "This is more than a food program. It's a promise being fulfilled — a fight against hunger that meets people where they are."

The program was initially rolled out for senior citizens, solo parents, persons with disabilities, and indigent households. It has since been expanded to minimum-wage earners, farmers, and fisherfolk. Set to join at a later date are public school teachers, non-teaching education department staff, and Walang Gutom program beneficiaries of the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

Mr. Laurel said that President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. plans to expanding the market to 15 million households by 2026 and to continue expanding until the end of his term in 2028. — **Andre Christopher H. Alampay**

India to help PHL keep processed meat prices low

THE PHILIPPINES is seeking to further develop India as a source of buffalo meat to keep processed meat prices low, and as an alternative supplier of rice, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said.

Assistant Secretary and Special Assistant for Export Development Philip C. Young said India's importance as a trading partner lies in the affordability of its buffalo meat, which "allows food processors and canners to keep prices competitive."

Speaking to reporters at the 2025 Agri-Food Summit, Mr. Young said the Philippines is also looking to develop India as a source of rice and a provider of farming know-how.

Last year, India lifted a ban on exporting non-basmati white rice, which it had imposed to shore up its own domestic supply. The lifting of the ban paves the way for it to reliably supply the Philippines, the world's largest importer of the staple grain.

Mr. Young said India could also provide agricultural expertise to the Philippines, in light of the devolution of the DA's extension services to local governments.

"Due to the devolution, the DA does not have extension workers. Our farmers and stakeholders need extension workers to assist them," Mr. Young said.

He added that local government units need help in implementing the Sagip Saka Law, which is designed to develop agribusiness, and other such measures.

Mr. Young said that while the trading relationship develops, "at the same time we're building our capability and capacity."

Agricultural extension services are a key component of Sagip Saka, which also involves the supply of production inputs, equipment, facilities, and infrastructure for production and post-production. — **Andre Christopher H. Alampay**

FREEPIK

India not concerned about PHL rice import freeze

AN INDIAN official said he was not concerned about the Philippines' temporary ban on rice imports, saying that each country is entitled to impose measures to serve its own interests.

Sudhanshu, secretary at the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry, said "Every country is supposed to take care of their national food security. Accordingly, the policy decisions are taken because every country must look to its own people, protect its own industry. So, by imposing the temporary ban, I don't think it is (of concern)."

The Philippines imposed a 60-day rice import ban starting September to provide relief to farmers, who have had to deal with low prices for their grain offered by traders. Traders had been using cheap imports as leverage to offer low farmgate prices for palay (unmilled rice).

Mr. Sudhanshu said at an appearance at the 2025 Agri-Food Summit in Manila that at any rate, many types of goods have potential to be developed to grow Philippine-Indian trade despite restrictions on certain products from time to time.

India itself imposed an export ban on non-basmati white rice, which it only lifted in September 2024 after a recovery in its domestic inventory.

India is seeking inroads into the rice market of the Philippines, the world's largest rice importer. It had previously been disadvantaged by favorable tariffs enjoyed by Southeast Asian rice producers, though the tariffs have since been equalized for exporters outside ASEAN, leveling the playing field.

Tarun Bajaj, director of the Basmati Export Development Foundation, said India has the potential to export many commodities to the Philippines because of the variety of its soils and climates, as well as its scale.

"All seasons are there; all soil types are there. So that's why we have the huge production base. That base gives us an advantage to export our produce to the world, not only to the Philippines," he said, noting that India's global agricultural exports amount to $51 billion.

Mr. Bajaj said India will wait out the rice import ban and explore other areas of cooperation for the time being.

"We can help increase productivity and their production. We also learn some good things from Philippines for India; that mutual technological development cooperation is what we are always willing to do it because we are two friendly nations," Mr. Bajaj said.

Mr. Sudhanshu said India is willing to learn the peculiarities of the Philippine market to grow its exports here.

"The exporter always tries to understand the ecosystem in the importing country, and the importer basically tells their requirement what kind of product they require, what kind of customization. Such kinds of business-to-business interaction help in increasing the trade," Mr. Sudhanshu said.

India imports $46 billion worth of commodities, including processed foods from the Philippines.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. paid a state visit to India in August. — **Andre Christopher H. Alampay**

Fair incomes, safety nets, career progression urged for PHL workers

THE GOVERNMENT needs to ensure that gig workers receive fair and transparent earnings to unlock the full potential of the gig economy, market research company Ipsos said.

"The Philippine gig economy provides workers with a flexible and empowering source of income, presenting a dynamic avenue for economic growth," Ipsos Strategy3 Principal Christine P. Dugay said at a briefing.

She said the government and gig platforms need to support such workers by ensuring fair and transparent earnings, investing in data systems, protecting workers, and offering skills development and career progression.

"(Workers) have to be provided breakdowns of earnings, bonuses, and deductions," she added.

"There is really a need to standardize what we would call gig work principles," she said, including defining base pay for gig workers.

"The government has to actually work with the gig platforms because they should see the pay structure ... The government has to understand how they are defining base rates and what would be considered base pay," she added.

She said that gig platforms can help by providing a detailed breakdown of earnings, bonuses, and deductions and adopting standardized definitions for base pay, search rates, and incentive schemes.

The Ipsos Gig Life PH study found that 64% of gig workers are actively planning for retirement, while 58% value access to healthcare.

"Given their preferences, we recommend there should actually be an improvement of social protection and retirement security for gig workers," she said.

"We also are recommending that the government create benefits schemes. Gig workers want to be in control of their social protection; this is why you should allow them flexible app-based enrollments and contributions to enhance their social security," she added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

AI essential for competitiveness — AIM

BUSINESSES need to embrace artificial intelligence (AI) to remain competitive and provide more value to their customers, the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) said.

On the sidelines of an AI Advantage Workshop, Christopher P. Monterola, head of AIM's Aboitiz School of Innovation, Technology, and Entrepreneurship, said AI must be allowed to enhance returns in sales and marketing, process improvement, or innovation.

"There are many dimensions that result from that return. But I guess the most important component will be agility, given limited information, that you will be able to make the best possible decision for whatever you'd like to do," he told *BusinessWorld* on Friday.

"If you do not embrace AI, then you will have a problem with your competitors and the market itself," he added. "It really brings value to the customer, assuming that businesses know how to use it."

He said that almost all industries today require AI adoption, noting however that mom-and-pop stores may not require it now for the time being.

"It's a must for almost all businesses right now, I would say. But of course, again, it goes back to Return on Investment. If your goal is not to scale up and simply to sustain what you're earning, then the risk there is that there will be a competitor that is more efficient than you," he said.

"*Sari-sari* stores don't need automation. But if your goal is scaling up, making your product more competitive globally, then the only way to go is to use data science and AI and work with competent partners who understand the risk," he added.

However, he said AI adoption remains a challenge, especially for smaller businesses, as it is capital intensive . — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**