Rice, *galunggong* prices rise, meat down in early November

PRICES of rice and *galunggong* (round scad) rose in early November, as pork and chicken prices declined slightly, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

During the period the PSA calls the first phase of November (Nov. 1-5), the national average retail price of well-milled rice rose to P47.55 per kilo, against P47.37 during the second phase of October (Oct. 15-17) and P47.30 a month earlier. The year-earlier price had been P55.11 per kilo.

The highest average retail price of well-milled rice in the first phase of November was recorded in the Central Visayas at P53.46 per kilo, against the P52.30 reported in the second phase of October.

The lowest retail price of well-milled rice in early November was reported in the Cagayan Valley at P39.88 per kilo, which rose from the P39.48 recorded in the second phase of October.

Galunggong prices rose to P241.71 per kilo in the first phase of November from P237.77 and P233.90 recorded in the second and first phases of October, respectively. A year earlier, the price for the staple fish had been P214.73 per kilo.

Retail prices of fresh pork (in bone-in form) averaged P315.63 per kilo, down from P320.98 and P323.58 in the second and first phases of October. Compared to a year earlier, pork prices rose from P299.93 per kilo previously.

The retail price of dressed chicken averaged P208.69 per kilo, against P210.03 and P211.14 in the second and first phases of October. Prices remained elevated compared to the year-earlier level of P202.71 per kilo. — **Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**

Hydropower developers seek higher tariff for run-of-river

HYDROPOWER developers are seeking a higher, more "reasonable" tariff for run-of-river (RoR) hydropower projects to attract further investment, an industry official said.

On the sidelines of the Third Philippine Hydro Summit on Tuesday, Gertrude V. Roque, president of PhilHydro Association, Inc., said that increasing the tariff would attract more developers.

"The reality is that we're not just producing water or power, but we are also taking care of the watershed and the infrastructure that we contribute to the countryside," Ms. Roque said.

Hydropower facilities generate electricity from the natural flow of moving water. The types of such projects active in the Philippines are impounding hydro, run-of-river hydro, and pumped storage hydro, which qualify for subsidized rates under the government's feed-in tariff (FIT) program.

Launched in 2011, FIT offers fixed payments per kilowatt hour to developers. This is also a uniform charge billed to all on-grid electricity consumers to support the development and promotion of renewable energy.

Since the installation target for RoR under FIT is about to be fully subscribed, the Department of Energy (DoE) has set a new target of 100 megawatts (MW) this year.

During the previous FIT rounds, the rate for RoR ranged from P5.90 per kilowatt-hour (kWh) to P6.0804 per kWh, depending on the scheduled completion date of each project.

Once the quota is taken up fully, RoR will adopt the incentive structure of the green energy auction, another program to encourage renewable energy development.

PhilHydro proposed the use of "actual average capacity factor" as the basis for setting the tariff. This sets the rate based on how much electricity a power plant actually generates over a period of time, compared to how much it could generate if it ran at full power continuously.

"Actual and historical capacity factors of operational plants best represent the true conditions and challenges of operating RoR hydro," the group said in a position paper.

PhilHydro is also asking for run-of-river hydro to be shielded from contingency costs, citing "constant exposure to weather, climate change and natural disasters."

As of October, the government has awarded 404 hydropower project service contracts with a potential capacity of more than 14,000 MW.

According to a speech by Energy Secretary Sharon S. Garin delivered by Ruby B. de Guzman, director of the Renewable Energy Management Bureau, hydropower's role in the system is to provide firming capacity and deliver power reserves crucial to keep the grid stable.

"Hydropower is more than just a part of our energy mix — it is a National Imperative that underpins a successful energy transition and is crucial to achieving our renewable energy targets of 35% by 2030 and 50% by 2040," Ms. Garin said.

The DoE is partnering with foreign partners and technical experts to map potential large-scale hydropower sites across the Philippines, supporting the goal of boosting hydro capacity, she said.

"The energy transition is not a distant goal — it is the reality we are living today. And for the Philippines, water is not just life; it is power, resilience, and opportunity," she added. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

BSP says cash withdrawal cap was agreed to after consultation with banks

THE Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said its P500,000 cap on cash withdrawals to make large kickbacks from infrastructure projects more traceable was arrived at following due study and consultation with the banking industry.

"It wasn't a knee-jerk reaction," BSP Deputy Governor Zeno Ronald R. Abenoja told *BusinessWorld* on the sidelines of a Senate hearing on Thursday. "It was well-considered. We looked at other countries' experiences. So, it was carefully thought out… and we did consult the banks, the feedback that the banks were getting from their clients and among themselves."

Sen. Francis Pancratius N. Pangilinan had asked the Senate plenary if the regulation was a knee-jerk reaction to revelations that nearly P500 million in cash was withdrawn over two days by contractors linked to the flood control scandal.

Mr. Pangilinan also said he has received complaints from banks, depositors and small businesses about the P500,000 cap.

"A lot of banks, a lot of depositors, (and) small businesses are saying suddenly it's so difficult to transact with the banks because there is a limit of P500,000," he said.

In September, the BSP issued a circular imposing a P500,000 daily limit on cash withdrawals, including the total of multiple transactions.

Clients seeking to withdraw more than P500,000 will have the burden to submit documents proving that the cash withdrawals serve a legitimate business purpose.

Mr. Abenoja also noted that the BSP guidelines mirror the provisions of the Anti-Money Laundering Act (AMLA) and other central bank regulations.

"The guidelines… iterate what is already in the AMLA," he said. "Because under the AMLA, banks are required to do enhanced due diligence. And one form of that is to require or ask for supporting documents to make sure that legitimate transactions underlay their transactions with the banks."

AMLA requires covered persons, including banks, to file suspicious-transaction reports to the Anti-Money Laundering Council within five working days from its occurrence.

Sen. Sherwin T. Gatchalian, who heads the Senate finance committee, said then-Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto sees the measure as a "possible" factor behind the slowing growth in the third quarter.

"Secretary Recto was saying this is possible," Mr. Gatchalian told the plenary. "And also moving forward, it can also create some negative effects."

"The BSP acknowledged this, and they are now reviewing this policy," he added.

Mr. Abenoja said the central bank's Financial Supervision Sector and Office of the General Counsel and Legal Services are handling the review of the regulation.

"It's ongoing," he said. "We don't know yet what will be the final outcome. But the BSP is considering all these inputs." — **Katherine K. Chan**

PHILIPPINE STAR/MIGUEL DE GUZMAN

Regulator finds possible competition law violations in flood control bid rigging

THE Philippine Competition Commission (PCC) said on Tuesday that it found possible violations of the Philippine Competition Act in the course of its investigation into alleged bid rigging in flood control projects in Bulacan.

In a statement on Tuesday, the PCC said it referred, through its Competition Enforcement Office, its initial findings to the Department of Justice (DoJ) on Nov. 14.

In particular, the PCC said that it found possible bid rigging in certain flood control contracts at the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) 1st District Engineering Office of Bulacan.

"Evidence gathered indicates that the contractors agreed to rig and manipulate the bidding process by having predetermined winning and losing bidders," the PCC said.

"On the other hand, several public officers of the DPWH 1st District Engineering Office facilitated and ensured that the bid-rigging arrangement was followed," it added.

The PCC defines bid rigging as collusion by bidders to manipulate the outcome of a public procurement exercise.

"Such conduct undermines competition, deprives the public of fair value, and wastes government resources," it said.

The DoJ is set to "evaluate the referral and recommend either the conduct of further case build-up or proceed to preliminary investigation."

"The PCC will continue to support the process and uphold its mandate to safeguard competitive markets and protect public interest," the competition authority said.

The DPWH tapped the PCC to evaluate to what extent infrastructure bidding is affected by collusion. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Gov't urged to release remaining RCEF money in time for planting

A SENATOR is seeking the release of funds generated from rice import tariffs to support farmers in time for the planting season.

"The P13-billion in Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) funds that have not yet been re-released is worrisome, especially those meant for seed, because planting has already begun," Senator Francis Pancratius N. Pangilinan said in a statement.

He called on the departments of Finance (DoF), Agriculture (DA), and Economy, Planning, and Development (DEPDev) to focus funding on seedlings before the planting window closes.

The Rice Tariffication Law authorizes a certain amount of rice tariffs to be deposited with the RCEF for spending on items to modernize the domestic rice industry.

He added that the delayed disburdenment of funds could cause farmers to miss the planting window, resulting in lower rice yields and lost income for producers.

"The planting season runs from September to February, with peak planting in November to December in the Visayas and Mindanao, and December to January in Luzon," Mr. Pangilinan said.

He said delays in releasing funds have put on hold various programs involving farm mechanization, logistics, rice dryers, and training for 18,000 farmers.

"This is not a technical delay — this is a blow to productivity and food security," he said.

Mr. Pangilinan also called for the urgent release of new tariff guidelines, which will index tariff levels using international rice prices as a basis.

"World rice prices are changing in real time. I hope tariff adjustments will also be real time, or near real-time," he added.

Executive Order No. 105 set a 15% tariff on rice once imports resume by January, followed by flexible rice tariff adjustment system to be set by an inter-agency group. — **Adrian H. Halili**

Canada seeking to expand PHL agri role after success of dairy, hog collaboration

By Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel

CANADA is seeking to expand its footprint in Philippine agriculture following the success of some of its collaborations in the Philippine hog and dairy industries, a Canadian government official said.

Diedrah Kelly, executive director of Canada's Indo-Pacific Agriculture and Agri-Food Office, said at a food security forum late Monday that the use of Canadian technology in some Philippine farms has yielded efficiency and productivity gains.

"As a result of this technology, the yield on those cows is about a liter more (of milk) each day than what they had previously," Ms. Kelly said.

"Canadian technology and genetic material are being provided for both pork and dairy," she added.

The technology-sharing supports the Philippines' drive to expand its dairy industry. The Department of Agriculture (DA) said it set a target of 5% of the Philippines' dairy requirements to be serviced by domestic production within the next two or three years.

The Philippines currently imports about 99% of its dairy needs from Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

Canadian Ambassador to the Philippines David Hartman said at the forum that Canada is working more closely with the Philippines to strengthen food security and support sustainable growth through stronger agricultural and trade ties.

"Food security is not just about access to food. It is about continual access to high-quality and safe food, which itself depends on the resilience of our supply chains, the sustainability of our agricultural systems and robust trading relationships," Mr. Hartman said.

Mr. Hartman said Canada is a reliable supplier of agricultural products to the Philippines, exporting meat, grains, seafood and processed foods, while also providing expertise in climate-smart technologies, precision farming and sustainable practices.

Ms. Kelly added that Philippine experts and officials have visited Canada to observe its biosecurity practices to contain African Swine Fever (ASF) and other diseases.

According to the DA data, since ASF was first detected in the Philippines, the hog herd has fallen from 15 million head to around 8 million.

Ms. Kelly also cited the potential of plant-based proteins in addressing stunting in children, particularly the use of ingredients like peas and chickpeas, which are imported by the Philippines primarily for feed production.

"Canada produces a significant amount of peas and chickpeas, which have high levels of protein. They are very cheap, and there is the technology for pea protein extraction that can be used for the fortification of staples like noodles and rice. It is an area that Canada and the Philippines should explore more," she said.

Canadian officials at the forum said collaboration and trade efforts between the two countries reflect the complementary nature of their agricultural industries.

In 2023, Canada was the Philippines' 10th largest supplier of agri-food and seafood products, with imports amounting to around $460 million, according to Canada's Agriculture department.

Top Canadian exports included frozen pork, which accounts for roughly 25% of Philippine pork imports. Canadian wheat and meslin, a mix of grains used in animal feed, also accounted for 9.2% of Philippine imports of such commodities.

The Philippines exports various high-value crops and fish products to Canada. According to the DA, agri-fishery exports to Canada grew from $109 million in 2020 to $148 million in 2024, the strongest performance in five years.

The trade deficit in agri-food and fishery commodities remains around $340 million in Canada's favor, according to 2023 data.

"While Canada does import fruits and vegetables from the Philippines, there is simply space to do more," Ms. Kelly said.

At the forum, Arnel V. de Mesa, agriculture assistant secretary for special concerns and official development assistance (ODA), said the Philippines is looking to boost production and exports of high-value agricultural commodities.

"Rice is an important staple, but to make farmers profitable and bring them out of poverty, we should go beyond rice. The department has recognized the importance of high-value commercial crops," Mr. De Mesa said.

Mr. De Mesa said the DA is focusing on boosting the production of coffee and cacao and is looking to Canada for support.

"Canada has very good innovation and technology that the Philippines can tap. By the end of December, we will be proposing several ODA projects focusing on coffee, cacao, and dairy … We are hoping that Canada and the Philippines can work together to help us bridge all those issues," Mr. De Mesa said.

Mr. De Mesa said Canadian expertise could also be tapped for post-harvest facilities. He noted that post-harvest losses to the mango crop are around 37%, while losses to rice were 17%, much higher than Vietnam's 8%.

Recently, the Canadian Embassy in Manila announced 12 new development projects in the Philippines worth more than P3.2 billion, covering agri-food trade, climate-resilient and adaptive food systems, water and food security, among others.