

Marcos orders advance fertilizer, seed stockpiling

By **Chloe Mari A. Hufana**
Reporter

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. ordered the Department of Agriculture (DA) to procure fertilizer, seed and other inputs and pre-position them to minimize distribution delays.

Speaking at the 2026 National Confederation of Irrigators Associations general assembly in Quezon City on Tuesday, Mr. Marcos said he instructed Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. to front-load procurement of farm supplies ahead of planting.

Mr. Marcos warned that last-minute procurement — particularly of imported supplies — could result in months of shipping and inland transport delays before goods reach farms.

“I told them to buy early so that when planting season comes, everything is already there,” Mr. Marcos said.

The government is seeking to raise farm productivity and stabilize food supply amid persistent price pressures and weather disruptions.

Stockpiling and pre-positioning, he added, would allow the government to distribute assistance more efficiently and cushion farmers from price spikes or delivery lags.

The administration is seeking to modernize agriculture, including the operations of the National Irrigation Administration. Proposed measures include of a command center capable of real-time telemetry and satellite-fed weather monitoring.

Former Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar said the strategy is sound risk management.

“This is a very good strategy of DA procuring the needed inputs way ahead for better and on time distribution of the same,” he said via Viber.

Mr. Dar added that early procurement would not necessarily fuel food inflation. With timely input assistance and proper ag-

ricultural practices, productivity could rise, potentially boosting farmer incomes and stabilizing supply.

However, other analysts highlighted structural issues in the food value chain.

Jayson H. Cainglet, executive director of the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura, pointed to the persistent gap between farm-gate and retail prices, and argued that inflationary pressures stem largely from distribution mark-ups and intermediary costs.

“There is a disconnect between production/farmgate price and retail prices,” he said via Viber. “Farmers are always blamed for food inflation or price

pressures when the real drivers are distribution markups, weak price transmission, and high intermediary margins.”

“Front loading as a concept is a positive development as farm input distribution has always been late and in other instances, substandard — thereby impacting yield and productivity.”

Mr. Cainglet supports early distribution but proposed alternative mechanisms, such as vouchers, allowing farmers to purchase supplies directly from dealers based on their specific needs.

Former Agriculture Undersecretary Fermin D. Adriano cautioned that centralized pro-

urement assumes an efficient bureaucracy capable of competitive pricing and accurate demand forecasting.

“This is under the assumption that the bureaucracy is efficient; that it can buy stocks at a competitive price; that they know the demand for inputs by the rice farmers for each province; the time farmers need them; with the DA capable of properly stocking them,” he said via Viber.

He advocated direct cash assistance instead of centralized input procurement, arguing that cash transfers would reduce logistical risks and corruption while allowing farmers to choose inputs tailored to their operations.

Nuclear power licensing process released by DoE

THE Department of Energy (DoE) announced the proposed permit approval flowchart for nuclear power developers, which it said streamlined key stages by allowing some approvals to take place in parallel instead of sequentially.

Two of the stages — business registration and the environmental clearance certificate (ECC) — are common to most projects, while the nuclear and energy-related approvals cover the siting plan, licensing and provisional permitting by the Philippine Atomic Energy Regulatory Authority (PhilAtom); and energy industry-specific approvals and licenses like testing and commissioning approvals, the DoE said.

The Philippines is hoping to integrate nuclear power into the national power mix by 2032.

In a statement on Tuesday, the DoE said the regulatory pathway for new nuclear projects, which covers seven major phases, requiring sequential and parallel approvals.

The end-to-end licensing framework incorporated the results of a focus group discussion led by the Nuclear Energy Program Inter-Agency Committee (NEP-IAC), which took in input from the private sector and academia.

“We must ensure that every nuclear power plant project in our country meets the rig-

orous standards required for its safe and secure operation, in adherence to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) requirements,” NEP-IAC Secretariat Head and DoE Director Patrick T. Aquino said.

The government hopes to present the NEP-IAC-validated flowchart to prospective nuclear power project proponents seeking to invest in the Philippines, alongside key policies and investment incentives.

Energy Secretary Sharon S. Garin said the government hopes to begin accepting nuclear power plant license applications by this year to stay on track for the 2032 target.

“By finalizing this harmonized licensing roadmap, we are sending a clear signal that the Philippines is preparing for nuclear energy with discipline and foresight,” Ms. Garin said.

“Our commitment is straightforward: strong safety oversight, predictable processes, and transparent public engagement, so that when proponents are ready to invest, government is ready to evaluate, regulate, and deliver our 2032 target responsibly,” she added.

The Philippine Energy Plan calls for at least 1,200 megawatts (MW) of nuclear capacity by 2032, doubling to 2,400 MW by 2045 and to 4,800 MW by 2050. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

Farmers want DAR to retain power to sign off on agri land transfers

FARMERS' groups said they are seeking the withdrawal of a directive issued by Agrarian Reform Secretary Conrado M. Estrella III removing his department's approval powers for the transfer or sale of certain types of private agricultural land.

In a joint statement on Tuesday, the Mag-sasaka Party-List (MPL) and the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) said the administrative order (AO), dated Jan. 27, could affect an estimated 1.2 million agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) cultivating about 1.8 million hectares.

They said the order removing the requirement for Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) sign-off could undermine decades of social justice gains and facilitate the reconcentration of land ownership.

“It eases the pathway to massive conversions of farmland by real estate and other commercial interests and, in the process, endangers farmers' livelihoods and the nation's food security,” MPL President Argel Joseph T. Cabatbat and FFF Chairman Leonardo Q. Montemayor said in the statement.

The AO removed the requirement for DAR approval for the transfer, sale, or conveyance of privately owned agricultural land not covered by a notice of acquisition as of the June 30, 2014 deadline set by Republic Act No. 9700 or the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program with Extension and Reforms Law.

The policy also applies to land awarded through Emancipation Patents or Certificates

of Land Ownership Awards after completion of the 10-year holding period.

The groups said that while the order restates the rights of farm tenants and workers to security of tenure, preemption, and redemption, it does not provide enough protections.

“DAR must actively shield our agrarian reform beneficiaries from predatory market forces and forcible evictions resulting from expedited land transfers or conversions,” they said.

They also called on DAR to work with the Land Bank of the Philippines to ensure that beneficiaries have access to financing to exercise their rights.

Mr. Estrella did not immediately respond to a Viber message seeking comment. — **Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**

FTI buying onions to stabilize farmgate prices

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said state-run Food Terminal, Inc. (FTI) will begin buying onions this week to help arrest falling farmgate prices as the harvest starts to peak.

In a statement on Tuesday, Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said an FTI team has been dispatched to Nueva Ecija, the leading production area, to obtain cold storage space for onion purchases.

“They've secured space for 50,000 28-kilo bags, and we can expand that if needed,” Mr.

Laurel was quoted as saying in the statement.

Nueva Ecija produces more than half of the country's onion output, with Bongabon accounting for roughly 15% of total production, the DA said.

According to the DA, FTI President Joseph Rudolph C. Lo inspected markets in Nueva Ecija and reported farmgate prices rebounding to as high as P45 per kilo.

“Our goal is to buy at prices that are fair to farmers, at levels that are enough to make

onion farming profitable and sustain their planting intentions,” Mr. Lo was quoted as saying in the statement.

The DA said FTI is also looking at purchasing onions from other major production areas such as Occidental Mindoro, Pangasinan, and provinces in the Cagayan Valley.

The DA said it is also building cold storage facilities to extend the shelf life of vegetables to keep supply and prices stable throughout the year. — **Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**

Clark touted as site of possible AI hub with collaboration from India

THE Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) said it wants to capture any overflow of artificial intelligence (AI) projects from India by establishing a dedicated AI lab in New Clark City.

“We want to explore how we can take advantage of the overflow of BPO (business process outsourcing) in India... We are

putting a framework together on that (and it will involve establishing a hub) in New Clark City,” Information and Communications Technology Secretary Henry Rhoel R. Aguda told reporters on the sidelines of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Editors and Economic Opinion Leaders forum on Tuesday.

The DICT is working on possible partnerships with major Indian BPOs like Infosys and Wipro, which already have Philippine operations, Mr. Aguda said.

“Their DR (disaster recovery) sites are here already, as well as their overflow. These companies have AI initiatives, so maybe they can establish AI hubs in Clark,” he noted.

The target is to create about 50,000 “high value” jobs in the next five years, he said.

Further, Mr. Aguda said collaborations with India are also planned for cybersecurity training, semiconductor workforce development, and mutual recognition of digital certifications. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

Local digitalization deemed critical to achieving upper middle-income status

REGULATORY REFORM centered on digitizing at the local level should be the focus areas in bringing the Philippines to upper middle-income status, officials said.

Speaking at the Makati Business Club's Business-Government Forum on Tuesday, Ernesto V. Perez, director general of the Anti-Red Tape Authority, said innovation at the local government unit (LGU) level is key to improving the ease of doing business and expanding the tax base.

“To really develop the economy, we have to prioritize innovation at the local level because this is where businesses start,” he said.

Mr. Perez cited the rollout of the Electronic Business One-Stop Shop (eBOSS), a platform that streamlines and digitalizes business registration and related processes in LGUs.

He said the system encourages voluntary compliance by making it easier for enterprises to register and pay the correct taxes.

Mr. Perez said LGUs that have implemented eBOSS show substantial increases in both revenue collection and business registrations.

“When businessmen know that it is easier for them to register their business, and at the same time they can not engage in business illegally without being caught, then they will voluntarily register their business,” he added.

However, Mr. Perez said adoption remains limited, with only a fraction of the 1,642 LGUs having fully complied with or integrated the system.

He said scaling up implementation would require collaboration with the private sector.

“The problem is huge. We cannot cover the entire country on our own. By partnering with the private sector, we are able to tackle the problem,” he said.

Meanwhile, acting Budget Secretary Rolando U. Toledo said fiscal consolidation and sustained infrastructure spending will be critical to achieving income targets.

“One of the indicators that we are looking at is how we are going to implement our fiscal consolidation strategy,” he said.

Mr. Toledo said the government is monitoring growth trends and the debt-to-GDP ratio as part of its strategy.

He said the government is also seeking to improve investment in infrastructure projects, which he said will boost the economy and employment. — **Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**



Auction announced for contract to upgrade Antique airport runway

THE Department of Transportation (DoTr) said it plans to offer the runway re-paving contract for the airport in Antique province at an indicative price of nearly P100 million.

In a bid notice dated Feb. 21, the DoTr said the runway asphalt overlay contract for Antique Airport, also known as Evelin B. Javier Airport in San Jose de Buenavista, is expected to cost P96.44 million.

The winning bidder will get 120 days to complete the project, the DoTr said, adding that bidders must have completed a project of a similar type in the last 10 years to pre-qualify to bid.

Interested parties have until March 16 to submit proposals.

The auction is restricted to Filipino citizens, sole proprietorships, cooperatives, and partnerships or organizations with at least 60% interest or outstanding capital stock belonging to Filipinos.

The DoTr this week invited potential bidders to redevelop the airports in Naga City, Ormoc, Tacloban, and Kalibo, with the contracts valued at a combined P1.65 billion.

The DoTr's airport upgrade program is focused on improving many provincial airports to accommodate at least narrow-body jets to handle the growing passenger capacities. The capacity to handle Boeing 737 or Airbus A320 aircraft — the most prevalent single-aisle jet models — also suggests upgrades to attract direct international flights. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

Mobile Number Portability Act touted as boosting competition, expanding choice

THE Philippine Competition Commission (PCC) said the Mobile Number Portability (MNP) Act has encouraged more competitive behavior among mobile service providers (MSPs) by expanding consumer choices.

“The assessment shows that the MNP Act has encouraged more competitive behavior among MSPs in attracting and retaining subscribers,” the antitrust regulator said in a statement on Tuesday.

Republic Act No. 11202, or the MNP Act, was signed in 2019. The law enable network subscribers to retain their mobile numbers for free when switching between MSPs.

Citing its competition impact assessment (CIA) study of the law, the PCC said the MNP Act provides sufficient safeguards against the abuses of dominant position by MSPs.

The law also has safeguards against discriminatory practices

due to self-regulation, and the illicit access and use of personal information that may lead to anti-competitive conduct.

To attract users, MSPs developed online channels where subscribers can find information on the benefits of switching to their services, the PCC added.

Citing Telecommunications Connectivity, Inc. (TCI), PCC noted the significant influx of subscribers switching to the third

player (DITO Telecommunity Corp.) during the first 10 months of implementation.

However, this trend declined in the coming months, the PCC noted.

TCI reported that less than 0.1% of registered mobile numbers switched from one MSP to another, during the first three years of implementation.

TCI is a joint venture formed by MSPs — Smart Communica-

tions, Inc., Globe Telecom, Inc., and DITO Telecommunity — to facilitate MNP services.

It serves as a clearing house that manages MNP services. This includes ensuring that subscribers can switch between MSPs without changing their mobile numbers.

However, the PCC noted issues with the law's implementation that could indirectly affect competition.

This includes the low number of porting applications during first three years of MNP implementation, which could reflect subscribers' limited knowledge of the MNP Act.

“If subscribers are unaware of their freedom to switch to another MSP when dissatisfied, they may not realize the full benefits of the bargaining power offered by RA 11202,” PCC said. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**