

FILIPINO BALITA

SATURDAY, MAY, 03, 2008

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Govt, IRRI in pact for rice self-sufficiency

(Source: THE MANILA TIMES)

By Ira Karen Apanay Reporter

The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) on Friday signed an agreement with the Department of Agriculture to cooperate in making the Philippines self-sufficient in domestic rice production. "This medium-term plan aims to sustain the record highs in palay (unhusked rice) harvests as a way to boost the incomes of our farmers and make our country 98-percent self-sufficient in our staple food by 2010," Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap said.

President Gloria Arroyo witnessed the signing of the agreement between Yap and IRRI President Robert Zeigler at the headquarters of the international grains agency in Laguna province, south of Manila. The agreement has a five-year period, and subject to the renewal or pre-termination by either party.

The President allayed fears of a rice-supply shortage in the country as some of the world's biggest exporters of the staple had tightened their hold on exports and planned to form a rice price-fixing cartel. Thailand along with Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Burma unveiled last week plans of establishing the Organization of Rice-Exporting Countries (OREC).

Zeigler said IRRI would "join forces with the Department of Agriculture and the Philippine Rice Research Institute [PhilRice] to ramp up Philippine rice production."

The country's rice self-sufficiency rate today is 90 percent. The government earlier announced fresh investments of P43 billion over two years to attain rice self-sufficiency by 2010 or 2011.

Yap said the collaboration with IRRI would cover the country's four million hectares of rice farms.

The agreement specifically covers the following major items: accelerated delivery of crop management technologies; massive development and propagation of high-yielding rice seeds; intensified research and development to enable farmers to produce more yet trim production costs; long-term programs to develop new and better rice varieties; and long-term programs to train the next generation of agriculture scientists and farm extension workers.

Yap said the rice master plan will focus on 44 provinces with large irrigated and rainfed areas, and another five provinces with the largest rainfed lowland areas.

Under the agreement, he added, the Agriculture department and IRRI agreed that the transfer of biological materials, including breeding materials, will be done in compliance with biosafety and bio-prospecting laws.

Both parties also agreed that the outcome of joint research activities will be released to the public, and will be available and accessible to farmers and other end-users.

At IRRI, Mrs. Arroyo checked out a field exhibit showcasing new technologies and palay lines developed by the institute that are tolerant of submergence, heat, salinity, diseases and pests; and varieties rich in micronutrients.

Zeigler briefed the President on new technologies jointly developed by IRRI and PhilRice on maximizing the use of fertilizers to further raise palay yields.

No shortage on rice imports

At the general assembly of the Federation of Philippine Industries, Inc. on the same day in Makati City, Mrs. Arroyo said the country will have enough supply of rice because Thailand and Vietnam already concluded contracts covering the supply of 1.2 million metric tons.

The President made the statement after reports came out that Thailand would not join the Philippines' rice tender on May 5 because the Thai government did not endorse private exporters.

The National Food Authority (NFA), the government's rice importing agency, will hold a fifth tender on Monday for the supply and delivery of 675,000 metric tons of rice.

Yap belittled Thailand's refusal to join the bidding, saying the NFA almost closed the 10-percent supply gap in the country's rice supply, and that the scheduled tender is intended to secure the country's buffer stock from September to December this year.

"I don't know what the Thais' action means, but I think it would be better if they join the bidding. We're not at a critical level but we will still look at the volume and prices during May 5's tender," he said.

Yap added that farmers have started their harvests and the government estimates that the total harvest for the lean months would reach seven million metric tons, enough volume to add to the NFA's stocks. **With Angelo S. Samonte And Jayson Cruz Luna** (Full story: <http://www.manilatimes.net>)

Arroyo joins Garcia in taking on Meralco

(Source: Manila Standard Today)

By Joyce Pangco Pañares

PRESIDENT Arroyo has urged business groups to join forces with the government in a "tough legal fight" against the Manila Electric Co. to stop the Lopez-controlled group from charging its system losses to consumers and to bring down its distribution charges.

Mrs. Arroyo yesterday expressed impatience over Meralco's slow pace in lowering power rates, saying state-owned National Power Corp. had already lowered its generation charges on the biggest distributors of electricity.

She said the decision was reached in a meeting Thursday night with National Power executives and Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita.

At the meeting, National Power officials said they had already reduced the average billing rate to Meralco to P3.52 per kilowatt-hour for high-load customers in the special economic zones.

"I have also instructed Napocor to charge [for all other areas in Luzon] only P4.11 per kilowatt hour, the same rate it charges Luzon electric cooperatives, instead of the P6 to P10 at which Meralco has been buying from the [Wholesale Electricity Spot Market] at peak hours."

Mrs. Arroyo's statement came as the Government Service Insurance System, which owns 33 percent of Meralco, pressed the company to release documents detailing its electricity purchases. Meralco management yesterday responded by daring GSIS president Winston Garcia to wrest control of the company.

Garcia said that as a representative of a major stockholder, he simply wanted to know why electricity rates were so high. In the wake of Meralco's recent announcement that it would raise electricity rates, Mrs. Arroyo said the government would pursue its case against the power distributor before the Energy Regulatory Commission.

She also asked members of the Federation of Philippine Industries and the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industries to field their best lawyers during the May 6 commission hearing.

"I am wondering out loud why power rates in the Luzon urban beltway should be so high when Luzon is reliant on imported oil for only 1 percent of its

power," Mrs. Arroyo said. "Therefore, there is room for improvement in the rates."

Talking to business leaders, Mrs. Arroyo said: "Please be there with all your legal luminaries because this is going to be a tough legal fight and you will be the beneficiaries, your workers will be the beneficiaries, your consumers will be the beneficiaries, the Filipino people will be the beneficiaries, but you are the ones with the means. to make a good case before the [commission]."

The Trade Department had earlier petitioned the energy commission to bar Meralco from passing its system losses to consumers and to force it to lower its 16-percent return on rate base to 12 percent to bring down power costs.

"We want to prohibit Meralco's system loss from being charged as a separate item," the President said.

"We also want to require Meralco to charge the same as VECO [the country's second largest power distributor], Cebeco, or Davao Light, whose distribution charges, along with all 140 utilities and cooperatives in the country, are all lower than Meralco."

The Trade Department also sought to stop Meralco from buying at the electricity spot market during peak hours, when power is at its most expensive, and to give priority to households and power-intensive industries in the distribution of the charges of the National Transmission Corp. to Meralco. (Full story: <http://www.manilastandardtoday.com>)

Southeast Asia to cooperate over food security

(Source: Philippine Daily Inquirer)

Reuters

NUSA DUA, Indonesia -- Southeast Asia nations meeting in Bali have agreed to cooperate over the rice market, Malaysia's trade minister said on Saturday, as rocketing prices shock a region where the grain is a core part of most meals.

The issue of food security has hijacked the weekend trade meeting of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on the Indonesian resort island.

Malaysian Trade Minister Muhyiddin Yassin told reporters that a statement due to be released on Saturday -- a day earlier than expected -- would include rice.

Asked whether ASEAN members had agreed to cooperate over rice, he said:

"Yes, yes," without elaborating.

Indonesian Trade Minister Mari Pangestu said earlier on Saturday that rice had been a key part of the discussions.

"We are discussing it within the ASEAN context, the rice issue may be the most important one, because rice is the staple for all the members," she told reporters. "So we have discussed it and that in principle will certainly help each other in the context of the ASEAN spirit," she

added.

The group already had a scheme known as the ASEAN emergency rice reserve, which had about 87,000 tons of rice committed and was designed to be used for emergency purposes, she added.

The meeting is also discussing efforts to build momentum for long-delayed world trade talks, as well as freeing up trade in ASEAN, a region with a \$1 trillion combined economy that aims to conclude a free trade zone by 2015.

Asian rice prices have almost trebled this year and prices on the Chicago Board of Trade have risen more than 80 percent. But Asian countries face different issues over rice, with the region home to the world's biggest importer, the Philippines, and the world's top exporter, Thailand.

"Prices are going up, but there is no problem with the supply because new crops will come soon, probably in July," said a Thai trade ministry official attending the Bali talks, who declined to be identified.

Thailand, which expects to export more than 9 million tons of rice this year, has sought to soothe market concerns as other top rice exporters such as India and Vietnam have spooked major importers by moving to curb exports to ensure domestic supply.

Thai Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej recently revived talk of an "OPEC-style" rice cartel in Southeast Asia involving producers Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia. But analysts have said the idea was unlikely to gain traction.

The ASEAN meeting is also being attended by representatives from Australia, New Zealand, India and the United States. (Full story: <http://www.inquirer.net>)

SEA's 1st biogas plant opens in QC

(Source: The Philippine Star)

By Perseus Echeminada

The first Biogas Emission Reduction Project in Southeast Asia was launched the other day at the Quezon City Controlled Disposal Facility in Barangay Payatas.

Quezon City Mayor Feliciano Belmonte Jr., together with Environment Secretary Lito Atienza, led the inauguration of the biogas plant which will serve as the city's contribution in efforts to reduce global warming.

The plant has been registered with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as the country's first Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) activity.

As a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol, the Philippines is expected to benefit from the CDM system which allows industrialized countries to invest in emission reduction projects in developing countries.

In this case, the CDM project in Quezon City will help partner country Italy meet its commitment under the Kyoto Protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Countries that ratify this protocol commit

themselves to reducing their emissions of carbon dioxide and five other greenhouse gases, or engaging in emissions trading if they maintain or increase emissions of these gases. As host to the facility, the Quezon City government is expected to benefit from the sale of "carbon credits" or greenhouse gas emission reductions, which will be used to fund the city's socio-economic and livelihood programs in the Payatas community.

In February 2007, the city government signed a memorandum of agreement with Pangea Green Energy, an Italian-based company, and its Philippine counterpart, for the development and implementation of the country's first Controlled Disposal Facility Biogas Emission Reduction Project.

The garbage in Payatas have been contained in an enclosed area and the pipes beneath the area will deliver methane gas, produced by the decomposition of the garbage, to the plant which in turn will convert it into electricity.

The project is composed of a plant which extracts, recovers and flares biogas produced in the city-owned waste disposal facility.

Biogas dispatched to the generating set is purified by thermal exchange and allows the production of 200 kilowatt-hours of electronic power.

Once full capacity operation is achieved, the project will avoid the emission of more than 100,000 tons of carbon dioxide per year into the atmosphere. Creating new energy sources while ensuring the safety of the site and its environs, the facility is foreseen to be able to generate as much as 42,000 megawatts of electricity from waste over the biogas plant's 10-year operating life.

On a micro level, the project is expected to significantly improve the ecological conditions of the landfill and the air quality of adjacent areas.-- **With Karla Verzonilla** (Full story: <http://www.philstar.com>)

British peace experts to help restart MILF-GRP talks

(Source: ABS-CBN NEWS)

Agence France-Presse

MANILA - Britain will send experts in peace negotiations to the Philippines to help re-start stalled peace talks between Manila and Muslim separatist guerrillas in the south, diplomats said Saturday. Experts who were involved in the peace talks in Northern Ireland will be consulted over contact between the Philippines government and the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), said British ambassador Peter Beckingham. Beckingham said the experts would not be involved in the actual negotiations but would instead "talk with the government and the MILF and try and get ways in which the peace process can move along in the right direction."

"The MILF and the Philippine

government said they'd welcome someone who could talk about what happened in Northern Ireland and because there are similarities," he added.

The plan which will see three or four experts dispatched to this country in the coming weeks, he said.

Beckingham said Philippine President Gloria Arroyo and then-British prime minister Tony Blair first agreed to the scheme when they met last December. Beckingham said he met with MILF leaders a few weeks ago and they were also in favour of the idea.

The 12,000-strong MILF has been fighting to set up a separate Islamic state in the southern third of the largely-Christian Philippines since 1978.

The Philippines and the MILF signed a ceasefire in 2003 to open peace negotiations but the talks have been stalled over the issue of "ancestral domain" where the MILF would exert authority.

In the latest blow to the talks, last month, Malaysia, which had been hosting the negotiations, announced that it was pulling out a team that had been monitoring the ceasefire in the south. (Full story: <http://uw.abs-cbnnews.com>)

No new requirement for US visas – embassy

(Source: The Philippine Star)

The US Embassy denied yesterday reports of additional requirement to Filipinos seeking visa to the United States.

It has been reported that the embassy is allegedly now looking for the filled up application form submitted by Filipino citizens when they secure their passports as a result of the absence of certain security and anti-fraudulent passport features in the new but deficient "machine-readable passports" being issued by the Department of Foreign Affairs.

"That simply isn't true. We have no new requirements. All we require is a valid Republic of the Philippines passport," Rebecca Thompson, First Secretary and Press Attaché of the US Embassy, told **The STAR**.

The certified true copy of the passport application forms contain the visa applicant's thumbprints and specimen signatures which the embassy allegedly wants to access but Thompson said there is no truth to this. (Full story: <http://www.philstar.com>)

Pinoy patients oppose ban on non-related kidney donors

(Source: The Philippine Star)

By Sheila Crisostomo

Filipino transplant patients are opposed to the plan of the Department of Health (DOH) to impose a total ban on locals receiving kidneys from living donors who are not their relatives.

Dr. Reynaldo Lesaca, head of the National Kidney and Transplant Institute's (NKT) Human Organ

Preservation Efforts, said Filipino patients and their families have relayed to him their disappointment about the plan.

"It was brought to my attention that they feel bad about it. They do not want that to happen," Lesaca told **The STAR**. The DOH has announced this plan last Monday after declaring a total ban on foreigners receiving kidney transplants in the Philippines.

DOH Secretary Francisco Duque III maintained that the "drastic change in policy" was in consonance with the orders of President Arroyo, who wanted the country to follow the recommendation of the World Health Organization for the promotion of cadaveric donation.

According to Lesaca, there are patients that do not have a match among relatives so they resort to non-related donors.

"There is one patient who has siblings but they are diabetics. So the only way for him is to get a kidney from a non-related donor. There are other similar cases out there," he noted.

He admitted that a lot of patients are not comfortable getting kidneys from deceased donors.

Lesaca claims that the success rate for living donors is much higher and it is cheaper because less immuno-suppressant medicines are used on the patients.

Immuno suppressants prevent the natural action of the body to fight off foreign organisms inside the body. This is given among transplant patients to enable the body to accept a new organ. (Full story: <http://www.philstar.com>)

Journalists urged to blog, set examples online

(Source: ABS-CBN NEWS)

By CARMELA FONBUENA

[abs-cbnNEWS.com/Newsbreak](http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/Newsbreak)

In the age of YouTube, Multiply and other popular online networking sites, Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) deputy director Luis Teodoro is urging journalists to put up their own blogs to "set examples" online.

"Journalists should consciously go into blogging to set examples," Teodoro told [abs-cbnNEWS.com/Newsbreak](http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/Newsbreak).

Teodoro expressed concerns about the wealth of information made available online. "Many of those who post information online are irresponsible," he said. "Sometimes, it becomes damaging. It disrupts the democratic dialogue."

The YouTube Cebu rectal scandal and Australian Brian Gorrell's allegations in Blogspot are just two of the latest controversies to emerge online that have raised concerns about information made available through the web. The first involves the broadcast of a medical operation against the patient's consent; the latter involves publication of supposedly libelous content.

Teodoro is proposing that "there should be a means of self-regulation" in blogs. "Journalists should be models online," he said. Be it a blog on political opinion or personal lifestyle, "the principles of journalism should apply."

"There should be verification and fairness even if it's an opinion piece. There should be an effort to get the other side no matter how little the space you allot," said Ateneo de Manila University communication professor Chay Hofileña, who agreed with Teodoro that journalists can set examples online.

"Ethics should show in your blogs," Teodoro said.

Hofileña stressed that journalists should be very careful because the "the standard for a news reporter is higher." She said journalists should come up with more substantial articles online.

Tricky Situation

Many journalists in the Philippines have joined the blogosphere. Major media agencies have also encouraged some of their prominent journalists to blog by including their sites in the company web sites.

International media organizations like Time and Washington Post have encouraged their journalists to blog, too. One of the most prolific bloggers in the local media industry is Jove Francisco of television network ABC-5. A Malacañang reporter, his blog provides readers insider information about the country's most influential office.

"It's just tricky in the part where you add your opinions," Francisco admitted. "In my case, I note in my blog if an entry is an opinion or news."

Francisco said he is exercising "self-regulation. "I know that I don't have an editor or a producer in my blog."

TV reporters, particularly, will especially benefit from blogging, Francisco added. "TV reports usually don't have replays. If it's published in the blog, students can use it as reference materials. You can put the other details in your blog," he said. Prime time TV news programs are about 90 minutes long. (Full story: <http://uw.abs-cbnnews.com>)

Sport

Air21 turns back importless Alaska

(Source: Manila Standard Today)

By Peter Atencio

AIR21 Express struggled in the stretch, but still found a way to fend off an importless Alaska squad, 86-79, last night in the Smart-Philippine Basketball Association Fiesta Conference at the Araneta Coliseum.

When the going got tough, the Express went to sparkplug Wynne Arboleda in the endgame to push them out of harm's way. Arboleda scored eight of his 21 points in the last minute and 30 seconds for an 83-74 lead, enough cushion for Air21 to secure its third win in six games in a tie for fifth spot with Magnolia. The Aces dropped to 2-4, tying the

Welcoat Dragons at ninth place.

"It's not easy to go up against a team that's without an import because there's always a chance that they would step up and there's always a chance that we would be complacent. There were times that we were complacent, that's why they made a run. Thank God we were able to make a run also in the end," said Air21 coach Bo Perasol.

The Aces played without import Randy Holcomb, who was suspended for a game after he was slapped a flagrant foul against Richard Alvarez during the Aces' game against Red Bull last April 19.

Still, the Aces made life a little difficult for the Express, threatening to within three, 73-76, on a layup by Jeffrey Cariaso, with 5:26 remaining.

But the Express fought back quickly, with Ranidel de Ocampo leading a 10-0 run to finally finish off the Aces in the final 3:34.

Air21 import Steven Thomas led the Express with 25 points, 17 rebounds and six assists.

Reynel Hugnatan, who led the Aces with 17 points and 10 rebounds, split his charities in the final 4:02 to keep Alaska to within 73-77. (Full story: <http://www.manilastandardtoday.com>)

It's showtime for Gabe, other PBL standouts

(Source: The Philippine Star)

Fil-Am Gabe Norwood, the exciting forward of Hapee Toothpaste, looms as the biggest threat to the title-retention bid of slam-dunk champion Rey Guevarra of

Bacchus Energy Drink when the PBL Lipovitan Amino Sports Cup holds its 2008 Showcase today at The Arena in San Juan.

With his lean frame, height and speed, Norwood can soar, glide and slam the ball with authority as shown in some of his games – small wonder he owns several highlight moves in the league.

The 6-foot-5 Norwood, however, won't discuss the stuff he's going to perform, saying it's a top secret.

But he assured Hapee team manager Bernard Yang that he will come up with a big show.

"He did not tell me exactly what he will do during the contest, but surely, he will entertain the PBL fans," said Yang. "He's the kind of player who loves to see everybody smiling and that's what he wants to do tomorrow."

Guevarra surprised everybody last year when as a rookie he pulled the rug from under the big guns to win the biggest plum in the three-event spectacle.

"Well, it's going to be a big challenge for both Gabe and Rey. I'm sure, Gabe will do everything to win the event," said commissioner Chino Trinidad.

Harbour Centre's Jason Castro, Norwood's chief rival in the MVP derby, guns for his third straight title in the slalom contest against an equally stellar cast that include teammate Boyet Bautista.

Also going for a repeat in the annual festivity, which starts at 1 p.m. is Patrick Cabahug of Toyota Otis.

The hotshot from Cebu will defend his title in the Three-Point Shootout against

the likes of Noosa Shoes' Noy Javier, Hapee's Reed Juntilla, and Harbour's deadly duo of Jeff Chan and Jonathan Fernandez.

As an appetizer, the celebrities, starring Bayani Bayani, Jay Manalo, Ariel Rivera, Jhong Hilario and comedian Djords Javier, battle GNC in the Burlington Celebrity and Corporate Cup at 12:20 p.m.

Clashing in the other game of the event sponsored by Burlington, Coca-Cola, Rider, Aquabest, Raymundo Trophies, ACCEL and V-Go Energy Drink, are Asialink and Creative Stuff at 10 a.m. Aside from the Celebrities and GNC, also taking part in the tournament sponsored by Burlington, Coca Cola, Rider, Aquabest, Raymundo Trophies, ACCEL and V-Go Energy Drink, are PGA Cars, Gerry's Grill, Asialink, AFFI, Popoy's Grill, Burlington, Exposure, Pharex, Accel, Hapee Toothpaste, Toyota Otis, Creative Stuff, Solar and members of the PBL Press Corps.

Out to spoil the Norwood-Guevarra showdown are Elmer Espiritu and Ian Saladaga of Pharex, Gilbert Malabanan and Dylan Ababou of Harbour, Lawrence Bonus of Burger King, Andrian Celada of Noosa Shoes and Mike Dizon of Baccus. Aside from Bautista, the 5-foot-8 Castro is likely to face stiff competition from Pharex's Ronnie Bughao and Sean Co, Hapee's Earn Saguindel, Burger King's Marcy Arellano, Bacchus' Robert Labagala, Leomer Losentes of San Mig Coffee, Japs Cuan and Ronald Bucao of Toyota Otis. (Full story: <http://www.philstar.com>)

The Daily Bread

2008 May 3 Sat: 1 Cor 15: 1-8/ Ps 19: 2-3. 4-5/ Jn 14: 6-14

Today's Gospel

Last Supper discourse

John 14:6-14

Jesus said to [Thomas], "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you know Me, then you will also know My Father. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him." Philip said to Him, "Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us." Jesus said to Him, "Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know Me, Philip? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?' Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own. The Father who dwells in Me is doing His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me, or else, believe because of the works themselves. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in Me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father. And whatever you ask in My name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything of Me in My name, I will do it."

We want to have our daily living be a reflection of God in Jesus. It's not enough to have a general idea of the spirit of Jesus' life; we have to contemplate the details of that life. To know Jesus' blessed humanity better and to love Him more, we read the Bible. But we can't read it as though it's just another book. In the

sacred books our heavenly Father comes lovingly to meet us and talk with us. There we find a lasting font of spiritual life. We can't truthfully say that those who knew Jesus in real life were more fortunate than we. Some of those who knew Him crucified Him, and many in His time who didn't know Him very well believed in Him.

Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Jesus, said St. Jerome. Our bearing and conversation should be such that, on seeing or hearing us, people will say, "This person thinks about the life of Christ!"

When the Christian believer asks what God is like, as the Apostle Philip did in today's Gospel (Jn 14:8), the answer is to look at the life and acts of Jesus. Jesus, as the early Fathers of the Church called Him, is the "great sacrament," who signifies who God is and what God does. That's the deep significance of what Jesus says when He tells the Apostles that if they had known Him they would also have known the Father (v. 9).

Today's Gospel isn't the only time that Jesus made valuable promises to answer prayers of petition. He'd said in His Sermon on the Mount that if we ask it shall be given us, if we seek we shall find, if we knock the door will be opened to us (Mt 5:7f).

Later, He repeated His promise, saying that if two or more of us agree about anything for which we're to pray, it shall be granted (Mt 18:19). And at yet another time He said that whatever we ask for in prayer with faith, we will receive (Mt 21:22).