



Gov't addressing high food prices

MANILA – The government has readied immediate and medium-term solutions to help tame the increase in prices of food items, Malacañang said

Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque gave the assurance, as prices of agricultural products and other food items remain high despite the implementation of a price freeze on basic necessities amid the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic.

He also issued the statement after Agriculture Secretary William Dar warned unscrupulous traders who are jacking up prices of agricultural commodities and other basic goods in public markets at the start of the year.

To prevent higher market prices, Roque said the DA would allow more pork imports to raise supply,

Roque said.

“Sa lalong mabilis na panahon, nag-aangkat po ang ating Department of Agriculture ng baboy galing po sa Visayas at Mindanao at iba pang mga ASF (African swine fever)-free areas ng Luzon (In soonest time possible, the Department of Agriculture is importing hogs from Visayas and Mindanao, and other ASF-free areas in Luzon),” he said.

Roque said the government would also prevent and control the spread of ASF in the country through the “Bantay ASF sa Barangay” program or BaBaY.

He added that there would also be massive repopulation of hogs in ASF-free areas in the country.

Roque said the government would also ramp up the implementation of SRPs (suggested retail prices) on fruits and vegetables.

He said vegetable and food production would also be intensified.

The government, Roque said, would also expand the “Kadiwa ni Ani at Kita,” a government project that aims to establish a direct link between consumers

and the farmers and fisherfolk.

“Tapos magpapadala pa po ang mga rehiyon nang mas maraming gulay at prutas sa Metro Manila, sa NCR. I-expand po natin ang urban agriculture, ‘yung Gulayan sa Paaralan at Barangay. Nagdi-distribute na rin po nang mas maraming mga seeds at planting materials ‘no (Other regions would also bring more vegetables and fruits to Metro Manila. We will also expand the urban agriculture. We are also distributing more seeds and planting materials),” Roque said.

Roque said medium-term solutions include the expansion of aquaculture and the conduct of joint fishing of commercial and municipal fisherfolk.

PH imposes travel restrictions to six more countries positive for new COVID-19 variant

By Jerome Carlo R. Paunan

CALOOCAN CITY, (PIA) -- In light of the new COVID-19 variant, starting today until Jan. 15, travelers from Portugal, India, Finland, Norway, Jordan, and Brazil, or those with travel history to these countries 14 days prior to their arrival, will be subject to travel restrictions and/or quarantine and testing protocols upon arrival in the Philippines.

“Ang mga banyagang pasahero na manggagaling sa anim na bansang ito, or nagpunta sa mga nasabing bansa ng labing-apat na araw bago dumating sa Pilipinas, ay p i n a g b a b a w a l a n g makapasok sa Pilipinas,” said Presidential Spokesperson Secretary Harry Roque Jr in a press briefing in Malacañang.

The Palace official said that Filipinos are exempt from the travel restriction as they will be allowed entry to the country even if they came from or have been to the said countries within 14 days before their arrival. However, returning Filipinos will have to comply with the 14-day absolute facility-based quarantine, even with a negative RT-PCR test result.

With the expected surge in COVID-19 cases because of the Christmas and New Year celebrations, and with the possible entry of the new

variant, the Palace spokesman said that it was necessary to impose such restriction. “Yung temporary travel ban ay hindi naman po masyadong matagal po, January 15, at ito po ay para mabigyan naman pagkakataon makapaghanda tayo kung magkaroon nga ng surge ng kaso,” said Secretary Roque.

“Pero ang mabuting balita naman at salamat sa Panginoon, so far, hindi pa naman natin nakikita yung surge na galing po ng Pasko at Bagong Taon. Pero pinaghahandaan po natin yan. Kaya nga nagkaroon tayo ng temporary travel ban hanggang January 15,” Sec. Roque said.

Roque added that foreign passengers who will arrive before January 8, 12:01 AM, Manila time, from the said countries or who have travelled to the same countries within 14 days, will be allowed

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National Policy Against Covid-19 chief implementer and vaccine czar Sec. Carlito Galvez Jr.

Jr.

MANILA – The government targets to inoculate about 50 to 70 million individuals this year, National Policy Against Covid-19 chief implementer and vaccine czar Secretary Carlito Galvez Jr. said on Wednesday.

"The massive nationwide vaccination program is anchored on the Philippine national vaccine roadmap. Its goal is to achieve the full recovery of our economy and the lives of our Filipino people," Galvez said during a Laging Handa public briefing.

Galvez said the government will carry out a strategic framework of the national vaccine roadmap.

He said safety and efficacy are some of the key considerations of the government in buying Covid-19 vaccines.

Galvez said the World Health Organization (WHO) solidarity vaccine trial is set to begin in the country this month.

"This month, the Philippines and Colombia would take part in WHO solidarity vaccine trial," Galvez said, noting that about 15,000 volunteers will be participating in the trial.

Meanwhile, Galvez said the government is strictly conducting a full evaluation of the vaccine candidates to ensure the procurement of safe and efficient Covid-19 vaccines.

"Ang gobyerno po ay may mga portfolio ng mga vaccines, ibig sabihin po nito marami tayong pagkukunan ng bakuna sa iba-ibang manufacturer. Ito po ay para matiyak na magkakaroon tayo ng sapat na bakuna para sa lahat (The government has the portfolios of the [candidate] vaccines, which means we have many sources from various manufacturers to make sure that we can acquire enough vaccines for all), particularly this year 2021," he said.

Vaccination program

He said the government will strate-

gically prioritize the inoculation of healthcare workers as well as members of vulnerable sectors such as senior citizens.

It will also initially vaccinate essential workers that are vulnerable and those belong to the co-morbid groups, the overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), and the remaining workforce in the country.

Galvez noted that the implementation of the nationwide vaccination program "is not the sole responsibility of the government.

"Batid ng pamahalaan na hindi niya ito makakayang mag-isa. (Knowing that the government cannot do it alone). This is the reason why the whole-of-government and the whole-of-nation approach shall be adopted," he said.

There is a need to maximize manpower, expertise, and processes to ensure coordinated and integrated implementation of the vaccination campaign, he added.

LGUs, private sector's role

On the other hand, Galvez cited the significant role of local government units (LGUs) and the private sector in the Covid-19 vaccination program.

He re-echoed President Rodrigo Duterte's remarks that LGUs will be in charge of identifying and profiling the priority sectors who will initially get Covid-19 jabs.

Galvez said LGUs are tasked to support the national government in the mass rollout of the nationwide vaccination program.

Meanwhile, the private sector, he added, will provide invaluable, technical, and financial support in the procurement of the vaccines as well as the deployment of possible Covid-19 vaccines, particularly in setting up of cold chain logistics.

"In recognition of this, the President recently approved the tripartite agreement between the national government, the LGUs, and the vaccine companies," Galvez said.

Galvez reiterated that the government is serious about providing a safe and efficient Covid-19 vaccine which will be given free

Locally-made anti-dengue drug dev't underway

MANILA – Local researchers are now gearing for the Phase 2 clinical trial for an anti-dengue drug, which could possibly be the first treatment for the disease.

"Wala pa pong accepted medicine for dengue (There is no accepted medicine for dengue yet). This will be the first anti-dengue medicine, if ever. First locally-made drug," Philippine Council for Health Research and Development (PCHRD) executive director Jaime Montoya told the Philippine News Agency (PNA) in a message Thursday.

The project is led by researchers from Pharmalytics Corporation, in partnership with De La Salle Medical and Health Sciences Institute, and funded by the PCHRD, Department of Science and Technology (DOST) Secretary Fortunato de la Peña said.

So far, he said the PCHRD has already allocated PHP4.69 million for the Phase 1 clinical trial conducted at the Genti Medical Center and Hospital in General Trias, Cavite. It ended in 2020.

The Phase 2 clinical trial, which will last for 10 months, will be held at the same hospital and about 600 are expected to participate in the study, he added.

Montoya said Phase 1 clinical trial determined the maximum dose of the drug that could be administered to healthy volunteers without manifesting any serious adverse events nor dose-limiting toxicities.

"Compared to the Phase 1 clinical trial where safety among healthy subjects was evaluated, Phase 2 will focus on testing the drug on a much greater number of volunteers (approximately 600) to test both its safety and efficacy. The volunteers who will be recruited at this stage are dengue patients," Montoya said.

While Phase 1 evaluated signs of adverse events related to dosing, Phase 2 will assess parameters relating to the

drug's effectiveness to mitigate dengue disease severity by lowering the viral load, reducing vascular leakage and stimulating platelet formation, he said.

Montoya said 18 participants were included in the Phase 1 clinical trial. "Initially, 78 were enrolled. Twenty-four were randomized, then 18 were included in the analysis."

At least PHP18 million is needed for the 600 participants in Phase 2 clinical trial.

For the Phase 3 clinical trial, the anti-dengue capsule will be registered with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) before it can be distributed in the market.

The DOST is currently preparing the budget for Phase 2 clinical trial, de la Peña said.

De la Peña said once the Phase 3 clinical trial is finished and the drug has the FDA approval, and if the Department of Health (DOH) decides to adopt the technology, would determine if the drug would be given for free.

"There is a need to evaluate the result of the upcoming Phase 2 clinical trial to ensure that the investment for Phase 3 is correct. The adoption of the technology would be dependent on the DOH or the private sector," he said.

The DOST's role, he said, is to fund or support researches that aim to develop technologies that may address the problems in the country using science.

The DOST earlier supported a herbal supplement against dengue, and this was made available to the market in 2019.

The herbal supplement was developed through a loan by Herbanext. (PNA)



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KUTOB NG KAPALARAN

CAPRICORN: (Dis. 22-Ene. 19) Mahalin ang sarili at maaakit mo ang iyong true love. Ikaw lang ang nakakaalam kung ano ang gusto mo. Mag-focus sa gawain dahil malaki ang potensiyal na matamo ang pag-unlad na higit pa sa iyong inaasahan. Lucky numbers at color for the day ang 22, 53, 35, 41, 12 at ivory white.

AQUARIUS: (Ene. 20-Peb. 18) Tanggapin ang legal transgression ng mahal mo. Bigyan siya ng abogado para maipagtanggol siya. Lucky numbers at color for the day ang 15, 26, 52, 36, 41 at honey yellow.

PISCES: (Peb. 19-Mar. 20) Magpasalamat sa masalimuot na karanasan. Dahil ito ang magpapatatag sa iyo. Hanapin ang feel good sa moments. Lucky numbers at color for the day ang 42, 26, 22, 53, 35 at cherry red.

ARIES: (Mar. 21-Abr. 19) Meron kang control sa iyong emotional reactions. Kaya dedma ka lang sa pagre-react ng iba. Lucky numbers at color for the day ang 11, 53, 36, 27, 48 at mango orange.

TAURUS: (Abr. 20-May. 20) Walang masasayang sa mga bagay na pinag-laanan ng panahon at lakas. Basta huwag samahan ng bisyo. Lucky numbers at color for the day ang 55, 25, 32, 41, 11 at satin white.

GEMINI: (May. 21-Hun. 21) Ang iyong well being ay dominant sa universe. Mahalin ang sarili at ang kaligayahang inaasam ay darating sa iyo. Lucky numbers at color for the day ang 12, 45, 32, 23, 52 at cinnamon brown.

CANCER: (Hun. 22-Hul. 22) Ikaw ang meron dahil pumapabor sa'yo ang tadhana. Hanapin ang good feeling na magdadala sa'yo sa iyong destiny. Lucky numbers at color for the day ang 32, 37, 54, 11, 44 at vanilla brown.

LEO: (Hul. 23-Ago. 22) Ang kabuuan ng iyong pagkatao ang kukumpleto para mapadpad sa karanasang kailangan sa buhay. Magpakatatag. Lucky numbers at color for the day ang 54, 47, 31, 33, 11 at cyan blue.

VIRGO: (Ago. 23-Set.23) Ang iyong negative thought ay mangingi-babaw. Paglabanan para makaiwas na ma-ging mapagpatol. Lucky numbers at color for the day ang 11, 23, 33, 41, 51 at emerald green.

LIBRA: (Set. 24-Okt. 23) Matutupad ang panagi-nip. Magbabago ang trend ng buhay mo. Biglang marami ang mapalapit sa'yo. Lucky numbers at color for the day ang 22, 55, 35, 41, 12, at magenta red.

SCORPIO: (Okt. 24-Nob. 22) Yakapin ang masali-muot na karanasan, ito ang tamang panahon para malaman ng lahat ang totoo. Lucky numbers at color for the day ang 35, 53, 15, 42, 23 at chestnut brown.

SAGITTARIUS: (Nob. 23-Dis. 21) Magpa-aura cleasing para maalis ang sumpa ng kabiguan sa pag-ibig. Nakatakda ang masaganang bukas. Lucky numbers at color for the day ang 22, 43, 55, 11, 35 at pine green.

DOST Central Office (Photo courtesy of DOST)

MANILA – The Department of Science and Technology-Philippine Council for Industry, Energy and Emerging Technology Research and Development (DOST-PCIEERD) is allocating almost PHP18 million for three infra development projects (IDPs), three small grants for university projects, and a project of the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice).

In an interview with the Philippine News Agency on Tuesday night, PCIEERD executive director Enrico Paringit said the IDP aims to support the establishment of laboratories, while the chosen university projects fall under the Good Governance through Data Science and Decision Support (GODDESS) framework.

A memorandum of agreement was signed on Tuesday for all the projects, and funding will be released this year, he said.

Each IDP will be funded for PHP5 million while every university project will be provided with less than PHP1 million.

For the IDPs, the approved ones are the SoFFReL (Establishment of a Solid Freeform Fabrication Research) at the Pangasinan State University; CGNIES (Center for Green Nanotechnology Innovations for Environmental Solutions) at the University of Mindanao; and the Father Saturnino Urios University (FSUU) in Butuan City's

project called "decision support for welfare of citizens".

"SoFFReL aims to (explore on) additive manufacturing techniques to support the metal freeform industry. It will take steps to further improve the products of metal industries in Pangasinan, such as blacksmith, metalcraft, nipa, salt, and moringa," Paringit said.

Those steps, he said, include 3-D printing of obsolete machine parts used to process salt, nipa, moringa, sword handle, and souvenirs.

"With modern technology like 3-D printing, they can do whatever design they want, and prototypes can be tested right after printing. Using 3-D printers, the researcher, blacksmith, the machinist can compare outcomes with parts as designed, and automatically make adjustments," he said.

The CGNIES concept, on the other hand, is to develop materials from natural or environmentally neutral sources for various applications that would en-

hance the products using nanotechnology.

"An example from the CGNIES (concept) is using ODeSSEE on Disaster Preparedness of Cagayan Valley Regional Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council; and Iloilo Science and Technology (ISAT) University's "Development of Iloilo Province Employment Portal and Services with Data Analytics".

He said the FSUU's project, though no specific name yet, was classified as an IDP and would analyze senior citizens data such as location, age, condition, to come up with programs to support their needs such as assistance services and maintenance medicines.

"The development of data analytics and information system will be a great help in processing and analyzing available data to maximize policy formulation and implementation, project development and service delivery for the benefit of Butuan City residents," Paringit said, adding that the project proposal is inclined in social empowerment through technology.

Meanwhile, those who will be provided with small grants have applied when the PCIEERD called for proposals that meet the GODDESS criteria.

Paringit said these projects are PhilRice's data analytics on rice production; Isabela State University's

"Optimization of Decision Support System for Effective e-Governance" or

ODESSEE on Disaster Preparedness of Cagayan Valley Regional Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council; and Iloilo Science and Technology (ISAT) University's "Development of Iloilo Province Employment Portal and Services with Data Analytics".

"GODDESS intends to support projects that demonstrate the application of data science in governance, for local government units' or national government's use," he said.

ISAT University's project would enable citizens to access employment opportunities, by making these available online and in real-time, he said.

Paringit noted that Isabela State University's project was approved even before the recent flooding in Cagayan.

"We hope that these initiatives will propel accelerated digital transformation geared towards effective public service. We also expect that the R&D (research and development) capacities built will contribute to strategic benefits and opportunities for industries in regions where IDPs are located," Paringit said. (PNA)

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Go lauds EO keeping 5% tariff on deboned poultry meat until 2022

RETAINED TARIFF. Senator Christopher “Bong” Go listens in one of President Rodrigo Duterte’s previous meetings with members of the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases in Malacañang. Go lauded Duterte for signing Executive Order No. 123 that retained the tariff on mechanically deboned meat of chicken and turkey at 5 percent until December 2022.

MANILA – Senator Christopher “Bong” Go has lauded President Rodrigo Duterte for signing Executive Order (EO) No. 123 modifying the rates of import duty on certain agricultural products under section 1611 of the Republic Act No. 10863, otherwise known as the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act.

The EO will further maintain the reduced tariff rates on mechanically deboned meat (MDM) of chicken and turkey until December 2022 to help curb hunger and prevent prices of said products from going up amid the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

“This is most welcome and I support it. This will have a huge impact on keeping prices low by keeping the tariffs low and preventing any inflationary effect,” Go said in a news release on Monday.

He said the reduction of tariff rates is a big help to the Filipinos particularly the poor after quarantine restrictions forced some companies to stop operations.

“Maraming nawalan ng trabaho at kabuhasan. Maraming industriya ang nangangailangan ng tulong para makabangon. Gawin natin ang lahat ng ating makakaya para pagaanin ang pinapasan ng ating mga kababayan (Many have lost jobs and livelihood. Many companies need assistance to recover. Let’s do our best to lessen the burden of our countrymen),” he added.

In 2017, Duterte temporarily reduced the tariff rates on agricultural products from at least 40 percent to 5 percent through EO 23 (s. 2017) as a concession to trading partners for letting the country extend the quota on rice imports to protect Filipino farmers.

Under the earlier EO No. 23, the tariff rates will revert to their original Most Favored Nation (MFN) rates on July 1, 2020, or until such time that a law amending provisions on rice tariffication in Republic Act No. 8178 takes effect, whichever comes first.

Due to the signing of Republic Act No. 11203 in February 2020 which lifts rice import quotas and imposing tariffs, the reduced tariff rates reverted to their original MFN rates.

Duterte, based on the recommendation of the National Economic and Development Authority, once again maintained the reduced tariff rates through EO No. 82 until December 31, 2020, to keep the inflation rate within target.

The recently signed EO No. 123 will again retain the reduced tariff rate at 5 percent on MDM of chicken and turkey until Dec. 31, 2022.

Meanwhile, Go said government must prioritize three important aspects towards recovery -- address hunger; acquire sufficient, safe and effective vaccines for all Filipinos with utmost priority to poor and vulnerable sectors as well as front-liners; and provide more economic opportunities through jobs and other forms of livelihood.

“Tulad nga ng sabi ng Pangulo (As the



President said), no one should be left behind towards recovery,” he added.

Go emphasized that MDM is a major component of low-priced meat products commonly purchased by ordinary Filipinos and keeping this affordable will help address hunger and mitigate poverty.

“Kung mapapanatili natin ang mas mababang taripa sa mga produktong ito, maiwasan ang pagtaas sa presyo ng mga pagkain na madalas binibili ng mga ordinaryong Pilipino (If we can further maintain lower tariff on these products, we can avoid increase on prices of food usually eat by the ordinary Filipinos),” he said.

A November 2020 survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations showed that an estimated 4 million families reported involuntary hunger at least once in the past three months prior to the study. The number, though, is lower than the previous data gathered by SWS in September where some 7.6 million reported involuntary hunger due to the pandemic.

“Ginagawa po namin ang lahat para malampasan ang krisis na ito at makabangon tayo muli bilang isang nagkakaisa at mas matatag na bansa (We are doing our best to survive this crisis and recover against as united and strong nation),” Go said.



DATA MANAGEMENT, PINAKAMAHALAGANG ASPETO NG VACCINE PROGRAM -REMULLA

Sa kaniyang opisyal na pabatid online, tinanong ni Cavite Governor Jonvic Remulla kung mayroon na bang nakapagtanong ukol sa “data management” sa mga plano ukol sa pagbibigay bakuna kontra COVID-19.

Ayon sa kaniya, “Has the question of data management been asked?”

“The most important part of the vaccine program is not the procurement but the data management. The country has a built-in procurement process but it does not have a central data processing system,” saad ni Remulla.

Ipinaliwanag ng gobernador sa kaniyang post na ang pinakamahalagang parte ng vaccination program ng pamahalaan ay ang “data management” nito dahil sa mga sumusunod na aspeto:

a. There will come a time when job applications both here and abroad will rely on an internationally-accepted source of data which will demand integrity more than anything else.

b. Visa applications will demand your vaccine history. If the private sector administers it through their own program, then how

can the government vouch for its accuracy? A simple health record from your HMO, Medical Card or LGU system will not suffice. Information should be as reliable as our passport system where countries can access the database everytime a visitor enters immigration.

c. Where are the back stop programs in case there is a side effect to the vaccine? Do we have assigned specialists? Or do we set up mobile field hospitals around the country?”

Sa huli sinabi ni Remulla na kailangang magtiwala at maghintay ng bawat isa para sa mas detalyado at komprehensibong plano ng pamahalaan sa programang ito.

“Let’s be patient with Secretary Galvez. Let us wait for the details outlined in a comprehensive program rather than subject him to endless hearings where no answers are sufficient. Time is of the essence. The country is desperate. We have to believe in his leadership. I am confident in his competence, integrity and ability to make the right decision for the country.”

“We just have to be patient and believe that we will all get through this.”

