

**PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
PRESIDENTIAL NEWS DESK**

**MEDIA INTERVIEW BY PRESIDENT FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR. AT THE
INAUGURATION CEREMONY OF THE BALBALUNGAO SMALL RESERVOIR IRRIGATION
PROJECT (BSRIP)**

[Barangay San Isidro, Lupao, Nueva Ecija| 13 December 2023]

Q: How are we preparing for next year's El Niño na tatama as expected first quarter po ng taon?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Well, marami. We are doing very many things because it's not a simple problem that we have to do. Pretty much every sector of our economy, every sector is going to have to pitch in.

As I said in my remarks when I spoke on stage, 'yung briefing na natanggap namin kahapon ay nakita namin medyo komplikado. Marami tayong gagawin. Kagaya nito, kailangan matiyak natin na mayroon tayong patubig para sa mga magsasaka, number one.

So, we will accelerate the building of this type of dams and flood-control projects that we will also use as irrigation projects. So, this is on the side of the irrigation, number one, because it's all about water. Tubig ang pinag-uusapan dito. Kaya tinitiyak natin nga na 'yung mga magsasaka unang-unang para mayroon tayong food supply na maganda at mapatuloy ang pag-increase ng production natin, ng ating agricultural products.

At the same time, the Department of Agriculture also is now doing, looking into how to improve the yields for our farmers by using new varieties, developing new high breeds, and maybe we can learn some new techniques where we can save water.

Mayroong mga technology na bawas na bawas na 'yung tubig, mga six inches na lang ng tubig pwede nang magtanim ng palay. So, baka bumagay 'yan dito sa Pilipinas. So, these are the kinds of things that we have do.

We have to think about energy because as we all know, when the water levels in our dams go down. The energy becomes a scarce resource and we have to be more efficient in the distribution of whatever power that we generate.

Kailangan maganda ang ating distribution kasi maraming savings 'yan kung maganda ang pag-transmit --- pumupunta talaga doon sa nangangailangan at na walang power at hindi doon sa mga may surplus areas. So, that's why the --- even sa energy we are also accelerating the transmission lines, the putting up of the transmission lines so that we have a better system, a more extensive system for that.

Water is the same thing. We have to be very logical and rational the way we distribute the water, to be able to determine which areas really need the water most. So, 'yun ang uunahin natin and then we go down the line and see kung saan pa dadalhin.

And the hospitals, I mentioned the hospitals also in my remarks. Isa pa 'yun because pag tag-araw, alam naman natin, lalo na 'yung mga may edad na, nahihirapan sa init.

So, we will have to make sure that the hospitals are operating well. Mayroon nga tayong bumabalik. Kaya nga ako naka-mask dahil na-COVID ako. Bumabalik 'yung COVID, tumataas 'yung pneumonia, lahat ng mga ganyan.

So, we have to keep in mind the healthcare system has to be made ready. It's ready so long as they are able to --- they have sufficient power supply and they have sufficient water supply. So, which is exactly the problem that we are facing pagka-El Niño.

So, that is one of the few things and we will embark upon a new informational campaign to make people understand what the situation is, what they can do themselves in each household, in the farms, in industry, what they can do to help us save water, na mag-ingat tayo sa kung ano 'yung tubig na mayroon tayo.

And to try and 'yung mga rainwater dapat ipunin natin para hindi naman masayang lang. Dapat pag nakikita natin na umuulan at nakita natin pumapasok lang 'yung tubig sa dagat, dapat huwag nating pababayaang ganun. We have to always take as much as we can.

So, we have created actually --- I have created under the Office of the President a Task Force El Niño. There already exist one pero babaguhin natin ang structure so that ---because this is I think a more serious and a more extensive effort because we really have to get everybody involved to be able to prepare, to make sure that we can minimize, alleviate, and adapt to climate change. That's what El Niño --- that is [what] El Niño's all about.

Q: Thank you po, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Okay. Thank you.

Q: Good morning, sir. Mark Fetalco from PTV-4. Paano po makakatulong itong proyektong ito sa rice sufficiency ng bansa, lalo't isa po ang palay sa pangunahing inaani po dito?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Well, alam naman natin pagka ang sakahan ang pinag-uusapan, patubig lang 'yun talaga. The biggest determinant of our production levels is irrigation. Like the Mayor was mentioning, baka ngayon, two plantings sila ngayon baka makapag-third planting na sila dahil mayroon na tayong source ng tubig.

So, that will increase the production immediately by 30 percent. So, that's what we are hoping will be the effect of that.

But that is part of the general effort of the DA and of the government to increase our production. It just so happens that that is also what we need to do so that we can secure our rice supply, our food supply.

I think na we will also have some other strategies concerning the financial --- the fiscal rather, the fiscal measures that we can undertake para mabawasan naman ang load sa ating mga kababayan at kahit na kung anong mangyari, we will have to --- we are doing an analysis now of world prices of food to see what would be the appropriate tariff level, what will be the appropriate fiscal measures that we can undertake, at what level do we do this, how much, what percentage, all of these. Pinag-aaralan natin ngayon 'yan and that will also become part of the effort.

The task force is also going to have a data --- we are putting together all the data from DOST, from DENR, from DA, from Department of Energy, all of them. All the departments will put them in --- El Niño database so that the concerned agencies and it's really most of the agencies, the concerned agencies have access to that data so that they can do their modelling.

Kasi lahat naman 'yan gumagawa ng... Ang DA gumagawa ng sariling modelling 'yan. Iyong Energy gumagawa sila ng sarili nilang modelling. But they need to have the raw data if they are going to get the models right.

So, that is part of the organization. We're still working on the structure of the task force. We should have it by next week and we'll be able to show at least what the structure is and what the general plan is.

So, by early next year, we will begin to disseminate this information and let people know what it is that we are doing, what the forecast is going to be, how everyone can help, and what will be our strategies so that we can alleviate the effects of the drought. All right.

Q: Sir, ano po 'yung tulong na maibibigay po ng gobyerno sa mga magsasaka na maapektuhan po ng El Niño?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Well, kasama 'yan. Again, DSWD is there. We will continue to provide AICS, TUPAD, especially for the farmers who have --- na tinamaan, na masira ang kanilang tanim. Siyempre, may support na manggagaling sa gobyerno diyan.

The same thing that we were doing when the prices --- when the inflation was at its height. The same thing that we are doing, 'yung mga hindi na kumikita ay siyempre papasok ang pamahalaan to make sure naman na kahit papaano may hanapbuhay ang ating mga magsasaka.

All right. Maraming salamat. Good morning.

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