

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

News and Information Bureau

**MALACAÑANG PRESS BRIEFING
HOSTED BY PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
(PCO) ASSISTANT SECRETARY DALE DE VERA
WITH DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE SECRETARY FRANCISCO TIU-LAUREL
AND DEPARTMENT OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY SECRETARY MARIA CRISTINA ROQUE
JANUARY 16, 2025 [2:47 P.M. – 3:24 P.M.]**

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Magandang hapon, Malacañang Press Corps, welcome sa ating press briefing ngayong araw, January 16.

Dahil sa taas ng presyo ng bigas, inirekomenda ng National Price Coordinating Council sa Department of Agriculture na magdeklara ng food security emergency. Ang rekomendasyon ng food security emergency ay para payagan ang National Food Authority na ilabas ang kanilang buffer stocks sa mga warehouse at patatagin ang presyo ng bigas bilang suporta sa ating mga magsasaka. Inaasahan din na ang paglabas ng buffer stock ay makakatulong sa papalapit na anihan sa Pebrero.

Para ipaliwanag ang food security emergency sa bigas at ang epekto nito, kasama natin ngayon sina Department of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu-Laurel at Department of Trade and Industry Secretary Maria Cristina Roque.

Good afternoon, Secretary Laurel and Secretary Roque. May we ask Secretary Roque first for your opening statement?

DTI SEC. ROQUE: Good afternoon, MPC reporters. We are here today to clarify and to verify also the information that are out now in the news and, also, we are here to answer the questions that you may want to ask us regarding the bigas and other details that you want to know from our department. Good afternoon.

DA SEC. TIU-LAUREL: Good afternoon again to the MPC family also and maybe I'll start with a statement siguro 'no just to clarify some possible questions.

So, under the amended RTL, the NPCC shall declare a food security emergency on rice based on the following conditions existing: One, supply shortage or extraordinary increase in price. During the last NPCC meeting, the DA presented data that show that even with the tariff cuts and the world prices of rice is going down, the retail prices have not gone down significantly. Thus, the trend level of prices is extraordinary.

The NPCC recognizes this condition in principle and agreed to recommend to the secretary of the DA the declaration of food security emergency on rice. However, as the NPCC is recommendatory in nature, it

would still be with the DA secretary to make a declaration. As for the effects of the declaration, number one, when declared by the secretary, the NFA may sell its existing NFA rice buffer stocks in areas where there are extraordinary increase in rice prices. NFA may sell its stocks to GOCCs also, DSWD, OCD, LGUs and the Kadiwa program.

This would allow NFA to free its warehouses also to be able to buy more palay in the next harvest season. The declaration of a food security emergency is a last resort or option for the DA. The DA secretary have weighed other significant actions to lower the price of rice such as the incoming NSRP for rice, the labeling rules na binabago natin, coordination with importers, retailers and wholesalers; we coordinated with Metro Manila mayors this morning, and coordination, of course, with other government agencies such as DTI, the police, the military, PCC and among others.

Thank you.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you. Secretary Roque, you want to add, ma'am?

DTI SEC. ROQUE: Yes. The NPCC approves the release of NFA rice buffer stock through Kadiwa centers. The Department of Trade and Industry announced today, January 16, 2025, that the National Price Coordinating Council has approved the resolution that will allow the DA to sell its NFA rice buffer stock through Kadiwa centers, local government units, partners and other government agencies. This move is in response to the extraordinary price increase of rice observed since 2023 which continue to persist. The said resolution is being finalized and will be rooted to the member-agency.

The DTI assures the public that it is committed to stabilizing rice prices and ensuring the accessibility of affordable rice for all Filipinos. The DTI will continue to work closely with the DA and other concerned agencies to implement measures that will address the current rice situation. So, the Department of Trade and Industry will monitor and will also enforce the price of rice in coordination with the price set by the Department of Agriculture.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you, Secretary Roque and Secretary Laurel. We're now opening the floor to questions. First question, Anna Bacho, GMA News.

ANNA BACHO/GMA NEWS: Good afternoon, secretaries. Tanong ko lang po kung nakausap na po natin si President Marcos regarding this? Ano pong reaction niya and what was his directives po?

DA SEC. TIU-LAUREL: Well, as of the moment, we're still waiting for the formal transmittal of the recommendation to the DA. Once I received it, then of course, I will consult also our President for his comments. But as of the moment—this is live happening ngayon eh so wala pang consultation tungkol doon.

ANNA BACHO/GMA NEWS: Sir, what prompted NPCC to push for this resolution since DA is always saying na enough iyong supply and in September of last year, you mentioned na mas mararamdaman iyong pagbaba ng presyo ng bigas this January?

DA SEC. TIU-LAUREL: Well, oh yes, all of those statements are true 'no. But now we are faced—the DA is faced now with the NFA warehouses full. The NFA warehouses have almost 300,000 tons of rice and the harvest season is coming; and ang problema namin ngayon is we have to start buying rice at kung wala kaming mapaglagyan, mamumroblema kami technically. So, we really have to dispose of these rice, and under the RTL natin we cannot dispose of it unless it's aging. But then, iyong aging, alam ninyo naman may oras iyan – paano namin magagawa iyan. But, we have to technically start really selling or distributing the rice we have dahil importanteng makabili kami sa farmers sa tamang presyo eh 'no, at of course, para ma-rotate din natin iyong mga stocks.

ANNA BACHO/GMA NEWS: Thank you, Secretary.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you. Next question, Eden Santos, NET25

EDEN SANTOS/NET25: Good afternoon po, sir. Mayroon po ba tayong nakikitang dahilan para po magpatupad nitong food security emergency at ano po ba iyong mangyayari kung sakaling maipatupad natin itong resolution na ito? Sagot po ba siya doon sa problema natin na mataas na presyo ng mga bigas?

DA SEC. TIU-LAUREL: Well, definitely iyong 300,000 tons na nasa NFA warehouse ngayon, kapag in-unload sa public iyan, sa consumer iyan, it should help also lower the price of rice in general ano dahil it's additional supply to the market eh. To the laws of supply and demand, it's only but logical na bababa nang kaunti ang bigas.

EDEN SANTOS/NET25: So, ano po iyong mga rason para ma-implement po natin ito at pahintulutan po ng Pangulo?

DA SEC. TIU-LAUREL: As per the law naman, ng RTL, it is really up to the DA secretary to declare such and implement. But, of course, as a cabinet member, I am under the—my boss is the President, so I have to at least tell him that this is what I plan to do.

EDEN SANTOS/NET25: Secretary, nakaka-receive po ba kayo ng mga reports na iyong quality po ng bigas na ibinibenta sa mga Kadiwa ng Pangulo o Kadiwa centers ay medyo hindi daw po maganda?

DA SEC. TIU-LAUREL: Well, yes, there are isolated cases na may rice na may problema but it's very, very minimal. We are talking about five kilos, ten kilos 'no na nakikita and pinadadala namin sa PhilRice iyan to test. And, so far, mayroong mga reports na mayroon sigurong mga—kasi out of one lot na one thousand bags ng bigas, siguro may nabasang ilang sako. Siyempre sa rami noong volume, of course, minor. But if you talk about the whole scheme of things, iyong percentage – at least less than point-something percent eh.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Next question, Cleizl Pardilla, PTV.

CLEIZL PARDILLA/PTV: Sir, good afternoon. How likely will the DA approve the national emergency recommendation and when do you plan to implement it?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Well, as I've mentioned, talagang punung-puno na iyong warehouses ng 'no. And actually a group of Mindoro rice farmers 'no went to the DA two weeks ago saying na, "Punung-puno na iyong warehouse ninyo, paano kayo makakabili sa amin kapag hindi ninyo ano." So, there's also that particular issue that we really have to solve and, kailangan talaga namin ibenta.

CLEIZL PARDILLA/PTV: Sir, kailan po dapat maibenta na?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Hopefully, once we receive the recommendation, we'll finalize the moves 'no. Hopefully, first week of February maano na iyan.

CLEIZL PARDILLA/PTV: Sir, sorry last na lang po. Sir, sabi ninyo sana ma-influence iyong market price – by how much po nito mapapababa iyong prevailing price ng bigas?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Well, mayroon tayong si-net [set] na MSRP 'no. Iyong MSRP na iyon is at 58. It's a multiple attack on the situation 'no – so, mayroon tayong NFA rice, mayroon tayong MSRP starting at 58 pero iyong MSRP na iyon na 58 will be reviewed every two weeks and malamang ibababa natin iyong MSRP na iyon. As of the moment there is a target of bringing it down to MSRP 52, 50 by end of February.

Of course, kapag pumasok iyong NFA rice, pumasok sa market... mahirap magsabi eksakto 'no dahil you might quote me on that and use it against me in the future, but three to five pesos is really possible in my opinion lalo na iyong world prices din bumaba na rin ngayon eh.

DALE DE VERA: Next question, Ace Romero, Philippine Star.

ACE ROMERO/PHILIPPINE STAR: Secretary, in relation to the likelihood of you approving that resolution, given the circumstances do you think there's enough justification to come up or to approve such a recommendation or resolution?

DA SEC. LAUREL: The data is very clear when we presented it to the NPCC. Noong tumaas ang presyo ng bigas sa world market then tumaas din iyong local price, then nag-maintain siya hanggang ngayon eh pero nagbaba tayo ng taripa from 35 to 15 percent hindi bumaba iyong mga branded na bigas sa merkado, it maintained at 60 to 64 nakikita natin. So, ibig sabihin sa MSRP 58 natin ngayon ibig sabihin iyong mga 64 na iyon magiging 58 dapat iyon; iyong mga 60 maging 58 – so, technically it should be lower talaga.

ACE ROMERO/PHILIPPINE STAR: So, in principle puwede nating sabihin na may basehan po?

DA SEC. LAUREL: May solid data tayo that shows na justified talaga ito.

ACE ROMERO/PHILIPPINE STAR: Connected po doon. So, do we need that resolution to release the buffer since puwede naman pala ibigay iyong rice sa Kadiwa, Secretary Roque?

DTI SEC. ROQUE: Again?

ACE ROMERO/PHILIPPINE STAR: Kailangan pa ba natin noong actual resolution na iyon to release that buffer since we can process..?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Ako na sasagot noon. Under the RTL Law, hindi namin ma-release iyon to anybody except during emergencies like calamities. So, ang delikado na rin ang rami nating bigas, hindi natin ma-release because of this problem then there's a good chance mabulok iyan. So, kailangan we have to do something.

ACE ROMERO/PHILIPPINE STAR: Last na lang po para sa akin. So, ano po iyong tinitingnan nating reasons bakit po kaya iyong ini-expect nating pagbaba ng price hindi naa-attain despite the interventions, despite the supply?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Well, in my opinion medyo may kaunting profiteering, in my opinion. That's the direct answer to that. Iyong presyo na 62 na iyon dapat as of now dapat 58 iyan pero dapat after two weeks from now dapat 55 iyan dahil pababa ang world market prices eh. Unfortunately, it was set at 58 because the existing stocks natin ng imported rice na five percent broken was imported at that price iyong margin. At saka iyong bili ng rice mills at saka traders ng palay in the last year was average at 27 pesos and as high as 30 – iyong 30 pesos na iyon kung i-compute mo ngayon plus the margins ng retail, 58 iyan eh. Kung binabaan natin masyado iyan ibig sabihin pati iyong local rice mills or local na bumili ng local rice ay malulugi. So, we have to allow a little bit of time for them na signal na sa kanila na "I-flush out ninyo na iyang old stocks ninyo na mas mahal para hindi kayo malugi."

ACE ROMERO/PHILIPPINE STAR: So profiteering, hoarding possible?

DA SEC. LAUREL: No hoarding akong nakikita, it's more of profiteering.

ACE ROMERO/PHILIPPINE STAR: Profiteering, okay.

DALE DE VERA: Next question, Harley Valbuena, DZME.

HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME: Sir, in line with the question of Sir Ace, ano naman po iyong magiging action natin laban po doon sa mga nagpo-profiteer sa prices ng rice?

DA SEC. LAUREL: As of the moment, the DA actually has no power. That's why we have been coordinating with the DTI dahil ang DTI ay may enforcement powers. So, I will turnover the floor to Secretary Roque about enforcement.

DTI SEC. ROQUE: The DTI will of course monitor and enforce the directive of the DA regarding the price. So, from there once...so far, we haven't found anyone yet but if in case mayroon then we will act accordingly.

HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME: Ano po iyong sanction na possible kaharapin noon?

DTI SEC. ROQUE: There are different sanctions 'no, usually we penalize them also with ano...I mean may pera na ano...may money involved na dapat bayaran nila for not following the price monitoring or the price given by the DA.

DA SEC. LAUREL: Mayroon din akong idadagdag. Kanina lang napag-alaman ko through Mayor Zamora and Chairman Artes na ang municipalities and cities also have their NPCCs, that they can also declare na ganito dapat ang presyo, their sanggunian, and they can enforce. Just to add.

HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME: Last question na lang po on my end. Are we considering increasing our rice imports to alleviate po the extraordinary prices of rice?

DA SEC. LAUREL: No. There's no need to increase rice imports. We have just to temper the businessmen to, you know, gawing reasonable iyong presyo nila while still maintaining profitability.

DALE DE VERA: Tuesday Niu, DZBB.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Good afternoon, secretaries. Secretary Laurel, sir, sabi ninyo kanina nakausap—may meeting kayo with the local Metro Manila Council, I understand.

DA SEC. LAUREL: Yes.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: So, papaano po ang naging pagtanggap nila dito sa plano na magbenta rin sa kanila ng NFA rice?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Well, ang initial reaction is very positive and they are quite happy na NFA will be... maglalagay ng Kadiwa para sa mga...; and there was actual recommendation na magdagdag pa kami ng mga mobiles para doon sa mga depressed areas; and mayroon pang suggestion na pati sa munisipyo every 15 and 30th magbebenta. So, yeah these were very positive response.

DALE DE VERA: Sam Medenilla, BusinessMirror.

SAM MEDENILLA/BUSINESSMIRROR: For Sec. Laurel. Sir, na-mention ninyo ho kanina na isa sa reason kung bakit magdi-declare ng food emergency iyong parang overcapacity na noong mga warehouses ng NFA. Bale ano po ba iyong expected natin na ma-harvest na rice sa upcoming harvest season? At saka wala po bang kino-consider iyong government to expand the capacity ng mga NFA warehouse?

DA SEC. LAUREL: The NFA is currently building more warehouses 'no and it's ongoing, and we should see some of the warehouse to be finished this year 'no. As far as the other question, pakiulit na lang.

SAM MEDENILLA/BUSINESSMIRROR: Regarding po doon sa harvest po.

DA SEC. LAUREL: Okay. Iyong sa harvest natin unfortunately last year, mababa iyong harvest natin almost 700,000-plus tons na palay less due to El Niño and La Niña. This year, if ma-restore iyong aming budget

na rice program na nawalan ng almost 1o billion pero last Monday medyo nagawaan na ng paraan ng ating Presidente na mai-restore iyon – I would like to thank the President of course.

We are targeting 20.460 million metric tons – iyon ang target natin if ma-restore iyong budget of 30 billion for the rice program.

SAM MEDENILLA/BUSINESSMIRROR: Sir, follow up lang po. Iyong doon sa expected na mga warehouse na matatapos this year, ilang capacity po iyong madagdag noon doon, kasi 'di ba nga overcapacity na iyong 300,000 metric tons, so ilan po iyong madadagdag kapag natapos iyong mga ongoing na NFA warehouse?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Hopefully, another 50,000 tons.

PCO ASEC. DEVERA: Christian Yosores, Radyo 630.

DA SEC. LAUREL: Just to clarify: Iyong 50,000 metric tons includes iyong mga itinatayo namin ng DA na rice processing systems na may silos. Just for clarification.

CHRISTIAN YOSORES/RADYO 630: Hi, Sec., na-mention po ninyo kanina na obvious na sa data na kailangan na rin nga pong aprubahan iyong recommendation for food security emergency, pero nabanggit din po ninyo na kailangan pa rin po ninyong i-consult kay President. So, may chances pa rin po ito na hindi maaprubahan?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Maybe yes.

CHRISTIAN YOSORES/RADYO 630: And then, sir, na-mention rin ninyo kanina na within the past years, may mga efforts tayo to bring down the prices of the rice, kasama na rin doon iyong inaprubahan recently na Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act. May naging effect na po ba ito sa pagbaba ng presyo ng bigas?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Well, iyong Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act, actually, I don't think has an effect on rice prices. But definitely, it has an effect on the smugglers. Ang balita ko sa industry, talagang takot na takot lahat sa batas na ito. And they should be, 'di ba? But, on lowering of rice price is I don't think—hindi naman iyon iyong main purpose noong batas na iyon eh.

CHRISTIAN YOSORES/RADYO 630: Last na lang, sir. To clarify lang, sir: Kapag inaprubahan na po ng DA, kailangan pa po siyang ipa-approve kay President or hindi na po?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Hindi, by law, no.

CHRISTIAN YOSORES/RADYO 630: Sa inyo na lang po mag-i-end iyong approval, sir?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Yes.

PCO ASEC. DEVERA: Anne Soberano, Bombo Radyo.

ANNE SOBERANO/BOMBO RADYO: Sir, good afternoon. Sir, I just wasn't to get your reaction lang, kasi kahapon sa Quinta Committee ng House of Representatives, iba-iba iyong reaction ng ating mga Congressman doon sa pagtakda ng P58 na maximum suggested retail price. Sabi nila, hindi daw ito makatotohanan at saan daw po ninyo nakuha iyong base ninyo na P58 po iyong maximum suggested retail price?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Yeah, it is quite unfortunate na wala ako doon kahapon dahil pinatawag ako sa Malacañang. I could have explained it better, I guess, but last night, may nakausap akong mga ilang kongresista at ipinaliwanag ko iyong buong programa. Kasi P58 is just the start eh of a program eh. It will go down and definitely, hindi ako maglalagay ng isang figure without rationale, the right rationale. As I said kanina, ang presyo ngayon ng 5% broken na pinaka-popular na imported rice was purchased at 700 to 720 dollars per metric ton. Tapos ang palay naman na binili ng traders and rice mills na local was from P27 to P30 for the last half of the year, except for last month siguro, mas bumaba ng kaunti.

That represents P58 sa merkado, 'di ba. Kapag ibinaba natin immediately iyan to P55, ibig sabihin malulugi lahat and we do not want a weak local rice system and the importers. But then, it also gives us a signal, "hoy, ito na kami, ito na iyan". After two weeks, ibababa namin iyan, after two weeks, ibababa natin. It gives everybody time to renegotiate with the whole value chain eh, from importers to the suppliers from abroad, farmer to the rice mill, to the trader, to the retailer.

Ang sinasabi natin sa buong industriya, mag-usap-usap kayo, dapat ganito lang, ito ang kita ninyo, huwag sobra, kawawa naman ang consumer natin.

ANNE SOBERANO/BOMBO RADYO: Pero how was the feedback po doon sa mga congressmen na nakausap ninyo, kasi medyo ano sila doon sa P58.

DA SEC. LAUREL: Well, I'm supposed to--they called me again last Wednesday, and I think that would be an ample opportunity to explain it very well. But doon sa mga nakausap ko kagabi, medyo naintindihan nila. I actually also consulted the private sector on this at nagpa-meeting kami with the retailers, importers, with DTI, PCC, BIR and everybody. This decision to peg it at P58 was not a decision that was made arbitrarily. It was made through consultation and everything. But I have to admit, it is at a high price, but then, huwag nating i-shock muna iyong sistema, let's bring it down gradually. Give time to everybody to adjust.

PCO ASEC. DEVERA: Tuesday Niu, DZBB.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Secretary Laurel, sir. Sir, sabi ninyo 300,000 tons iyong kailangang i-dispose from NFA warehouses?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Yes, almost 300,000 tons.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Kapag na-approve na po ba itong reso, lahat noong 300,000 kailangang i-dispose and then papalitan ng panibagong harvest from the farmers?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Yes.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: The same amount, sir, or kailangang?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Hopefully, more, kasi iyong 300,000 na iyon was based on--that's why we need more warehouses and if we have to rent, we will rent. Ang average price nga last year natin ng palay was P27 per kilo eh ang bili natin 'di ba? So, this year, kung ang set ng price namin, hopefully, is at P21 to P23, so we should be able to buy more rice from the farmers. At sa presyo na P21 to P23 ang rice, happy pa rin ang farmers.

PCO ASEC. DEVERA: Pia Gutierrez, ABS-CBN.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sir, since nabanggit ninyo na nananatili pa ring mataas iyong presyo ng bigas despite the reduction in tariffs. Do you see the need or will you recommend returning iyong tariff rates natin to the original 35%?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Well, number one, kanina we were pleasantly—not surprised but happy na nakita namin ni Sec. Roque iyong sa Pasig market, wala ka nang makitang P60, bumaba na, mayroon na silang P40, mayroon pa kaming nakitang P38, which we did not see when we started going around. So, nagri-react na iyong market.

Yes, siguro ang sagot doon, we are thinking of an idea na baka—mahirap sabihin eh, kasi baka mapintasan na naman, but baka I might recommend the hybrid, a certain type of rice, 15 pa rin, a certain type of rice or quality of rice, iyong 5%, puwedeng i-akyat sa 35, something like that.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Anong klaseng mga rice iyon, sir?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Basically, it's been 5% broken and 25% broken. That's an idea, but --and then there is also clamor nga from the industry na or other organization na ibalik na sa 35. Kapag bumaba na iyong presyo talaga at sumunod lahat, baka puwede nang ibalik. But as of the moment—anyway, may review naman every four months eh, so talagang pag-aaralang mabuti iyan.

PCO ASEC. DEVERA: Ace Romero, Philippine Star.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: Secretary, about the imports, just for background, ilan ba iyong na-import na rice for this year and for 2025, ilan po iyong volume na kailangan?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Iyong sa 2024, if I am not mistaken, it's about 4.75 million, 'di ba. Pero you have to remember, naging ganoon dahil bumili ang NFA at itinago, 300,000. Kung hindi nagawa ng NFA iyon, ibig sabihin, lalabas iyan 4.4 lang, something 'di ba. Ang original estimate ko talaga from the start was

actually 4.3 to 4.5 million ang kailangang i-import. So, ganoon pa rin ang aking tingin for this year, assuming hindi bumili ang NFA ng marami.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: So, for 2025, it will be 4 point five million?

DA SEC. LAUREL: Assuming NFA does not buy rice for buffer stocking. Pero kung this year, naka 400,000 ako, baka bumalik sa 4.7, something like that. Pero baka hindi, kasi kapag ni-release ko iyong 300,000 ito ngayon, although magtatago pa rin ako, so baka bumalik sa 4.5.

DTI SEC. ROQUE: Just to clarify: The violation of the price ceiling is 5,000 to 1 million pesos.

DA SEC. LAUREL: Fine, penalty.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Eden Santos, Net25.

EDEN SANTOS/NET 25: Secretary, sa inyo pong pag-iikot sa mga palengke, mayroon na po ba tayong nakita, napatunayan na talagang intentional iyong pagtataas nila ng presyo ng bigas? Sabi ninyo kanina na profiteering iyong isa sa mga dahilan bakit hindi bumababa at iyong binanggit ninyo pong punishment ay kung sakali pong mapatunayan, iyan po iyong kanilang haharaping parusa, if in case po?

DA SEC. TUI LAUREL JR.: Mayroon talaga sa pag-iikot namin, but we have also to consider na may ibang nagbibenta ng bigas diyan, lalo na sa mga private markets ang taas masyado ng renta nila, 'di ba. Iyong public market kanina, kagaya kay Mayor Vico Sotto, magkano lang P400.00 pesos lang iyong three square meter na store, up to P1,000. oo pesos.

Pero sa public market, may narinig kami, ang PNP pa ang nag-report na may stall doon although mas malaki ng kaunti P80,000 naman ang singil eh. So, I think maybe we'll call on other government agencies kung sinumang in-charge dito na tingnan din itong rentals sa mga public markets kasi it will directly affect the consumers eh, kung masyadong mataas ang rental.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Cleizl Padilla.

CLEIZL PADILLA/ PTV4: Para po kay Secretary Roque. Sabi po kanina na may solid data dito, saan po iyong priority areas na dapat makapag-release po ng NFA, maybe you can site po iyong cities?

DA SEC. TUI LAUREL JR.: Ako na lang siguro, sa amin iyong data. We checked 'no, definitely Metro Manila is the highest sa country sa same imported rice. Kung parehong imported rice, mayroon dito 62, tapos 64, 60, sa iba let's say Iloilo, nasa 58/55 lang siya 'no. So, we're monitoring other cities and sa ngayon we will start only with NCR, but we're getting a lot of data na from all the major cities around the country and susunod-sunod na iyan.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Anne Soberano.

ANNE SOBERANO/BOMBO RADYO: Sir, tuloy po ba iyong January 20 na effectivity po ng MSRP, tuloy po?

DA SEC. TUI LAUREL JR.: Yes, tuloy.

ANNE SOBERANO/BOMBO RADYO: Dito sa Metro Manila?

DA SEC. TUI LAUREL JR.: Yes.

ANNE SOBERANO/BOMBO RADYO: Sir, bukod po doon sa imported rice, puwede din po ba ito, applicable po ba ito sa ibang mga uri ng bigas, iyong MSRP?

DA SEC. TUI LAUREL JR.: Sa local rice we don't want to impose that as of the moment, because kailangan sa akin mas importante kumita ang farmer natin eh, kasi iyong planting intention mawawala eh. I think naman, kapag na-temper itong imported ay susunod din naman iyong local ng kaunti 'di ba. Kasi for me, importation of rice is a privilege, it's not a right to—I think, we should temper iyong profitability ng sektor na iyon eh.

Pero sa lokal naman, pinaghirapan iyan na i-plant, nangutang, nagprenda ng bahay, lupa. So, I think iwan muna natin sila to conduct their business as usual.

ANNE SOBERANO/BOMBO RADYO: Sec., anong asahan natin, since ma-implement na po iyong P58 pesos na maximum SRP, mag-i-stable na po iyong presyo ng bigas sa Metro Manila?

DA SEC. TUI LAUREL JR.: Well, theoretically, yes. Of course sometimes mayroon pa rin iyong mga pasaway, but I think with the whole-of-government approach to address this problem and even iyong mga—I call on the netizens and iyong mga consumers to report, mayroon kaming lalabas na bago — *#bantay presyo* 'no, piktyuran ninyo, ipadala ninyo doon sa hashtag na iyon, so that naka-react kami. We need everybody eyes and ears on this, thank you.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Sam Medenilla, Business Mirror.

SAM MEDENILLA, BUSINESS MIRROR: Sir, iyong na-mention ninyo na hindi pa sure kung magdi-declare ng state of food emergency, ano po iyong parang possible scenario in case na hindi po makapag-declare noon, ano pong mangyari doon sa 300,000 metric tons na rice?

DA SEC. TUI LAUREL JR.: Well, kung hindi ma-declare iyon, basically we have to wait for it to age. Then mayroon naman, ang aged rice naman puwedeng ibenta, kaya lang aging depends on when we will mill it 'di ba. So, we have to fast track milling and—may delay lahat iyong programa iyon ang problema. And problema namin, iyon na nga harvest season na eh, 'di ba, kung wala kaming mabili sa farmer, matengga iyong pera ng gobyerno then kawawa naman iyong farmer.

SAM MEDENILLA, BUSINESS MIRROR: Follow up lang, sir. Iyong 300,000 kailan po expected iyon maging aged na to the point na puwede ninyo nang ibenta kahit walang state of emergency?

DA SEC. TUI LAUREL JR.: As I mentioned, it only starts aging as rice when we mill it. So sa ngayon, honestly, out of the 300, 000 maybe—don't quote me, but rough estimate is maybe 50,000 lang na-mill eh. Pero ngayon may order na kami sa NFA na i-mill na lahat iyan. So, sa ngayon ang estimate na nakita ko kanina, we can release 25 to 30 thousand tons of rice per month.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Before we wrap our briefing, to our secretaries, do you have any closing statement or last statement before we end?

DTI SEC. ROQUE: The DTI has already, the DTI main 'no, has already deployed or we've already spoken to all DTI offices in all the regions all over the country to standby and to be ready for the prices that will be given by the DA, so that we can now monitor and we can enforce those that don't follow the price mandated by the Department of Agriculture.

So, they are very aware of this already. The Department of Trade is really monitoring other prices 'no, basic goods and prime commodities, so we will include the rice prices based on what the Department of Trade has set.

DA SEC. TUI LAUREL JR.: Sa DA naman, we will be coming out also with the revised labeling requirements para takal-takal natin para iyong consumers ay hindi mabola at hindi ma-influence by the term premium, special, pero pare-pareho naman sila lahat at iyong mga brands na pare-pareho naman silang lahat.

So, that should give our consumer also a better basis of buying the rice by the actual look, smell and feel of the rice that iyong pagluto hindi nai-influence ng mga brand or statements of na mas maganda ito sa isa, pero hindi naman, so doon tayo papunta,

Then once the labeling is implemented properly then we will be implementing naman MSRP per type of rice. Doon na papasok iyong gusto ng kongreso na iyong 25% broken baka maging 45 iyan, iyong ganitong 5% broken maging mas—so, mas ma-educate lahat mas mabuti. And magkakaroon ng standard sa market na mas madaling ma-monitor nating lahat, iyong lang, thank you.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: At dito na nagtatapos ang ating press briefing ngayong araw. Maraming salamat, Secretary Roque and Secretary Tiu-Laurel. Maraming salamat Malacañang Press Corps.

##