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21 MAY 2024 [08:00 am]

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By: Vincent Cabreza

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Information and Knowledge Management Division

DAILY TRIBUNE

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In a win for the electric vehicle industry, the wait for tax breaks on e-motorcycles is nearly over. It is one signature away.

This comes as the National Economic Development Authority greenlighted the expansion of Executive Order 12, series of 2023.

It means the executive order, which grants tax breaks to EVs, will now include e-motorcycles, effectively removing tariffs on imported models.

During NEDA's 16th Board Meeting last Wednesday, the agency said that its Board deliberated to approve the proposal of the Committee on Tariff and Related Matters to expand EO12's coverage until 2028, which also removes the tariff for e-motorcycles, e-bicycles, and nickel metal hydride accumulators.

The approved version of the revised EO12 is now in the hands of NEDA chairman and President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., for final approval and publication.

"Executive Order 12 is designed to stimulate the electric vehicle (EV) market in the country, support the transition to emerging technologies, reduce our transport system's reliance on fossil fuels, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions attributed to road transport," NEDA Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said.

E-motorcycles' zero emissions are one of their most emphasized traits, as the transportation sector alone is responsible for emitting 35.42 million tons of carbon dioxide in 2022, which contributes to climate change, data from Statista showed.

"By encouraging consumers to adopt EVs, we are promoting a cleaner, more resilient, and more environmentally friendly transportation alternative," he added.

Since EO12 took effect in February 2023, EV industry leaders have been campaigning for the inclusion of e-motorcycles under the executive issuance, questioning its intent and demanding its inclusion once the review takes place.

Two of them -- think tank Stratbase ADR Institute and advocacy network CitizenWatch Philippines -- have been actively campaigning for tax breaks for e-motorcycles since 2023, noting their benefits to the country, environment, and economy once integrated into the country's traffic.

The Electric Kick Scooter (EKS) of the Philippines, the Electric Vehicle Association of the Philippines (EVAP), and other government agencies have also backed the removal of tariffs for e-motorcycles, as evident from their respective positions sent to the Tariff Commission after its public hearing in March.

Under EO12's initial version, only e-motorcycles are still subject to a 30 percent import tax, while other types of EVs got reduced or removed from tariff rates. According to the Statista Research Department, motorcyclists will account for approximately 7.81 million registered vehicles in the country in 2022, making them the most popular vehicle type among motorists.

The Department of Energy also wants to increase the country's EV fleet by 50 percent, or an additional 2.4 million units, in hopes of making the green transportation sector help cut down the country's 35.42 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions in 2022, which contributes to climate change, data from Statista showed.

EO12 was enacted to complement the Electric Vehicle Industry Development Act (EVIDA) to create an industry for EVs in the country and help reduce carbon emissions, in compliance with the Philippines' commitment to the Paris Agreement. It modifies the tariff rates for EVs to help mainstream their use among Filipinos

ECO BUSINESS

Why do environmentalists oppose genetically modified 'golden rice'?

A court in the Philippines has sided with green campaigners and banned a genetically modified (GMO) rice variety that the government hoped would help fight vitamin A deficiency - the leading cause of childhood blindness in poorer countries.

Three years ago, the rice-dependent nation became the first to approve commercial cultivation of so-called Golden Rice, which unlike conventional rice varieties produces beta-carotene in the grain. The body uses beta-carotene to make vitamin A.

But the government approval was challenged by small-scale farmers and environmentalists, and an appeals court ruled on April 17 to revoke the rice variety's biosafety permit, meaning it can no longer be cultivated commercially.

The ruling - which was based on a writ of nature, essentially the constitutional right to a healthy environment - could increase resistance to Golden Rice in Bangladesh, where anti-GMO activists are protesting plans by the government to grant approval to the variety's use.

Here's what you need to know:

What is Golden Rice?

In a move aimed at fighting child malnutrition, the Philippine Agriculture Ministry approved in 2021 the commercial propagation of the GMO variety and started distributing seeds to farmers in some parts of the Southeast Asian country.

Due to its content of beta-carotene, a yellow-orange plant pigment, Golden Rice can double the vitamin A intake of children in the poorest 40 per cent of the country's population and other low-income nations, according to the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), an agricultural research body based in the Philippines.

According to the World Bank, nearly 17 per cent of Filipino children aged between 6 months and 5 years suffer from vitamin A deficiency, which is linked to numerous health problems besides childhood blindness including decreased growth rates and ability to fight infection.

The IRRI and the government's rice research arm, the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice), led the nation's push for Golden Rice, which takes its name from the colour caused by the beta-carotene - also found in carrots and other orange fruit and vegetables.

Which other countries grow Golden Rice?

Research to develop Golden Rice started in the 1980s as part of a Rockefeller Foundation initiative involving scientists from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology and the University of Freiburg.

In the early 2000s, its creators donated a version of the GMO variety to poorer countries including the Philippines, Indonesia, and Bangladesh, where regulatory approval has lagged amid strong opposition from environmental groups.

In Bangladesh, vitamin A deficiency affects one in five children aged 6 months to 5 years old and about a quarter of pregnant women, and rice scientists in the country say the GMO variety provides a cost-effective option for families that cannot afford beta carotene-rich foods.

“Let us not take away the opportunity (to reduce vitamin A deficiency) that we failed to provide thus far,” said Uttam Deb, an agricultural economist and an associate professor at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff in the United States.

Golden Rice has also secured food safety approvals in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, and Deb said research showed it “is unlikely to negatively affect human health, the environment, and the agricultural ecosystem”.

Who opposes Golden Rice?

In 2022, Filipino farmers who support organic agriculture and environmentalists filed a Supreme Court petition against the government over Golden Rice, which they said posed “dangers of irreversible damage or risks to the environment, (rice) biodiversity ... and human health”.

The complaint was led by Masipag, a network of farmers and agroecology advocates, and environmental group Greenpeace Southeast Asia.

The petitioners said the government had approved the biosafety permit of the crops without conducting proper impact and risk assessments. They also argued that introducing GMO crops could cause farmers to lose organic farming certificates.

Golden Rice proponents have said previously that the rice variety would not impact organic agriculture through cross-pollination.

Asked to comment, PhilRice said only that it was still reviewing the implications of the April court ruling.

GULF NEWS

[\\$200b economic damage from extreme weather: Report](#)

A recent report highlights that extreme weather events are inflicting widespread devastation on the global economy, resulting in significant losses estimated at \$200 billion annually.

This includes disruptions to flights, property damage, loss of life, and interruptions to economic activity, underscoring the profound impact of such events.

This assessment, conducted by Zurich-based reinsurance company Swiss Re in its latest report titled “Changing climates: the heat is (still) on,” identifies floods, tropical cyclones, winter storms (in the Northern Hemisphere), severe thunderstorms, and record forest fires as the primary culprits behind these economic losses.

Countries ranked

The report ranked 36 countries based on the vulnerability of their economies to the intensifying climate crisis.

It highlights the Philippines and the US as among the most economically exposed nations, facing annual economic losses equivalent to 3 per cent (\$12 billion) and 0.38 per cent (\$97 billion) of their GDP, respectively.

Intensification

Moreover, both countries are expected to experience further intensification of weather hazards in the future, signaling a potential increase in climate-related economic losses in the years to come.

The top countries most exposed to these weather perils also include Thailand, Austria, China, India, Australia, Switzerland, and Japan.

These countries face significant financial risks from hazard intensification, the report stated, particularly due to the lag in establishing loss mitigation and adaptation measures compared to the rate of economic growth.

The report underscores the urgency of taking adaptation measures to mitigate the impacts of climate change and foster insurability. More importantly, it highlights the need for greater investment in building resilient infrastructure.

2023: Hottest year on record

Jérôme Jean Haegeli, Swiss Re's Group Chief Economist, emphasises the importance of risk reduction through adaptation, particularly in light of the hottest year on record in 2023, marked by a global average temperature 1.45°C higher than pre-industrial levels.

“Climate change is leading to more severe weather events, resulting in increasing impact on economies. Therefore, it becomes even more crucial to take adaptation measures,” said Haegeli, who argued that “insurability” greatly improves by reducing risk through adaptation.

Coping

To cope with the impacts and uncertainties of climate change, countries are racing to reduce their vulnerability. Despite the increasing recognition of the need for climate adaptation, progress remains slow, especially in low-income countries historically most affected by climate change.

Challenges such as financing, technology, knowledge gaps, and conflicts with other goals hinder adaptation efforts.

The report stated that understanding the real economic costs of climate risks can drive the conversation and spur action towards effective adaptation strategies to safeguard economies and communities from the impacts of climate change.

Knock-on effects

Another report, published in January 2024 by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, also highlighted the effects of climate change on average temperatures.

Temperature has been found to affect income via agricultural yields, the physical and cognitive performance of workers, demand for energy, as well as the incidence of crime, unrest, and conflict.

In September, estimates from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) revealed that the US encountered \$23 billion natural disasters during the initial nine months of 2023, accumulating costs surpassing \$57 billion.

The preceding year (2022) marked America’s third-costliest year for climate disasters – witnessing a total of 18 significant climate-related events that accrued damages totaling \$165 billion and resulted in the loss of 474 lives.

Gaps

“In general, countries with sizeable insurance protection gaps and where the establishment of loss mitigation and adaptation measures lags the rate of economic growth, are most financially at risk from hazard intensification,” Swiss Re’s report states.

This encompasses rapidly-expanding economies such as China, Thailand, India, and the Philippines.

However, developed nations including Austria, Australia, Switzerland, Japan, Poland, and the Czech Republic are also included in the list.

Of these, the Czech Republic and Poland are thought to be at the highest risk of experiencing escalating damages from floods through the middle of the century.

In India, climate change is anticipated to exacerbate health issues, particularly malnutrition and child stunting, according to the World Bank. Child stunting is forecasted to rise by 35 per cent by 2050 compared to a climate-stable scenario, disproportionately impacting the poor.

The escalation in temperatures and sea levels is known to amplify the intensity and devastation caused by hurricanes.

A report from the European Environment Agency points to Europe's worsening flood crisis. The assessment reveals a staggering increase in flood occurrences since 1980. Over 3,500 floods have occurred, with the trend showing an alarming rise.

Floods, hurricanes, forest fires

The report forecasts a five-fold surge in flood damage by 2050, with climate change playing a significant role. The escalation of extreme weather, attributed largely to climate change, is believed to have fueled the unprecedented rainfall witnessed in the UK and mainland Europe.

In North America, Morgan Stanley reports that climate disasters have incurred a staggering cost of \$415 billion from 2016 to 2018, primarily attributed to wildfires and hurricanes. Hurricane Harvey in 2017 inflicted estimated losses of \$125 billion on Texas.

According to climatologist Radley Horton, associate research professor at Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, advancements in science provide more precise spatial information, enabling the identification of assets and operations vulnerable to climate change impacts, such as buildings susceptible to inundation due to rising sea levels.

Adaptation measures

A Nature report from 2019 explored climate change's potential impact on 22 economic sectors under different scenarios.

The research used a modeling framework to forecast the impact of climate change on various US sectors, including human health, infrastructure, and agriculture.

The findings reveal intricate patterns of projected changes, with some sectors facing damages estimated in the hundreds of billions of dollars annually by the century's end under high emissions scenarios. If global temperatures rise 2.8°C by 2100, the study estimated annual costs of \$520 billion to the US economy. A 4.5°C increase would see even higher costs.

The study underscores that no region is exempt from a combination of adverse impacts, and underscores the urgency of emissions reduction and adaptation measures in mitigating economic losses and fostering resilience.

Ways countries cope with climate change:

Mitigation

Implementing measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as transitioning to renewable energy sources, improving energy efficiency, and implementing carbon pricing mechanisms.

Adaptation

Developing strategies to adapt to the impacts of climate change, including building resilient infrastructure, implementing sustainable land-use practices, and creating early warning systems for extreme weather events.

International cooperation

Collaborating with other nations to address climate change through agreements like the Paris Agreement, sharing best practices, and providing support to vulnerable countries.

Sustainability push

Integrating climate considerations into national development plans to promote sustainable economic growth, preserve ecosystems, and protect vulnerable communities.

Public Awareness and Education: Raising awareness about climate change impacts and solutions among the public, promoting sustainable lifestyle choices, and fostering climate literacy to empower individuals and communities to take action.

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By: Vincent Cabreza

The Cordillera farming industry is seeking climate resilient technology to make geologically challenged farms more adaptable to extreme weather, after this year's El Niño dry spell left P768 million in crop losses and because of an anticipated La Niña which may bring prolonged and harsh rainfall, an agriculture official said.

Lawyer Jennilyn Dawayan, Cordillera director of the Department of Agriculture (DA), said on Monday that the government is looking into specialized greenhouses designed to withstand very strong typhoons, given how extreme rains devastated highland crops in recent years.

The agricultural sector's economic contraction of -1.3 percent (P27.8 billion) in 2023 was partly the result of climate disasters that struck mountain farms, Dawayan pointed out at a press briefing.

The region is also exploring genetically modified varieties as well as hybrid rice grains that are suited for droughts, or grains that could absorb excessive rainwater, said Danilo Daguio, DA Cordillera assistant director.

Maps, research

But Daguio said hybrid grains need to be acceptable to highland farmers. Rice grown by Cordillera farmers is often tied to their culture and rituals.

The DA Cordillera office also uses the latest climate tools, including a map drawn up by Benguet State University detailing towns most vulnerable to droughts and to landslides and flooding during monsoons, as well as weather forecasting models, which the agency shares with agricultural communities.

Farmers like corn producer Marivic Raganit of Paracelis town in Mountain Province and coffee and livestock farmer Dick Evasco of Atok town in Benguet said they conducted their own research, and had learned to blend data on weather patterns with traditional Igorot farming knowledge.

Social media platforms, including YouTube, had also been accessed by farmers so they could adjust their planting schedules or seek out "do-it-yourself" food growing techniques such as bottle gardening, said 27-year-old Ryan Palunan, chair of the Regional Agriculture and Fisheries Council.

Terrain

One of the concerns raised by DA was that some Cordillera farmers were “risk takers” who did not heed government alerts about El Niño, so a more aggressive information campaign would now be undertaken in light of a La Niña forecast.

Dawayan said farmlands in the Cordillera are vulnerable to climate change because of the terrain, since many vegetable and rice gardens were carved from the mountainsides.

Ifugao, for instance, is home to the four-century-old rice terraces, which grow heirloom rice called “tinawon” for household consumption.

As of April 29, the drought damaged or destroyed 40,712.24 metric tons (MT) of rice, corn and high-value crops, like Benguet’s salad vegetables, which had affected 11,671 farmers, according to the DA fact sheet.

Daguio said the biggest losses were recorded in Ifugao (17,811 MT or P311 million in Aginaldo town) and Kalinga (12,196 MT or P263.8 million in the towns of Balbalan, Pinukpuk, Rizal and Tanudan and in Tabuk City).

He said corn (with P638 million in losses) was the biggest casualty among upland commodities, although high-value crops (P1.533 million in losses) were the least affected crops. Damaged rice crops amounted to P127 million.

According to DA, the projected impact on this year’s targeted rice production of 355,774 MT would only be a 1.03-percent (3,653 MT) decline.

But the impact of the drought on the targeted corn production of 171,771 MT had been a 21-percent (36,864 MT) decrease as of April, the agency said.

Makati Mayor Binay joins Pope Francis, other leaders in climate summit

Makati City Mayor Abby Binay discussed climate strategies with Pope Francis and other leaders in view of the head of the Catholic church's call to action against global warming.

Binay said she had the privilege of meeting the Pope during the Mayors and Governors Summit in Vatican City on May 16.

"The audience with the Pope was a crucial moment, allowing us to discuss our climate strategies and challenges in line with his call to action in Laudate Deum," Binay said in a statement over the weekend.

Pope Francis has been very vocal on climate change issues, urging world leaders to do something more concrete to limit polluting emissions.

Binay joined fellow mayors and governors from all over the world at a global roundtable where innovative and scalable solutions for climate resilience were showcased.

This engagement is part of the summit called "From Climate Crisis to Climate Resilience" held at the Casina Pio IV, Vatican City from May 15 to 17.

This summit also brought together scientists, policy makers and faith leaders to understand the scientific and societal challenges of climate change and recommend solutions, according to the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences (PAS).

"We no longer have the luxury of relying just on mitigation of emissions," the PAS said in a statement.

"We need to embark on building climate resilience so that people can bend the emissions curve and bounce back from the climate crisis safer, healthier, wealthier to a sustainable world."

THE MANILA TIMES

Governor urges Negros LGUs to use solar energy

By: Eugene Adiong

Negros Occidental Gov. Eugenio Jose Lacson has called on all local government leaders in the province to start utilizing solar energy to power the city and municipal halls.

Lacson made the call during the opening program of the Renewable Energy Week at the Ayala Mall Capitol Central in Bacolod City.

"We are encouraging all mayors to solarize their rooftops," said the governor, who added that the Renewable Energy Week is part of the first Provincial Stakeholders Consultative Power Summit.

"We bring together our key people from the national government, our local government officials and our people in business and industry, the academe, as well as our energy consumers, to further engage with each other for energy security and collective greener future," he said.

Lacson said he signed Executive Order 24-09 declaring every third week of May every year as the Provincial Renewable Energy Week in Negros Occidental.

"This is because we recognize the urgent need to address climate change, ensure energy security and promote sustainable development," he said.

"Renewable sources of energy — such as solar, wind, hydro, geothermal and biomass — are environmentally friendly, sustainable and critical in addressing these concerns."

Lacson said he wanted all local chief executives in the province to embrace the renewable energy movement

"It is necessary to create awareness, educate our community and celebrate renewable energy technologies so our people will be encouraged to adopt these in their homes, businesses and communities," Lacson said.

"If they have to do it through an ordinance in their respective LGUs, by all means do it," he said, referring to local government units.

Victorias City Mayor Javier Miguel Benitez, president of the Negros Association of Chief Executives, agreed and said "renewable energy should be the norm in Negros Occidental."

"Renewable energy is cheaper, more reliable and better for our environmental conservation efforts. And local governments play a very important role," Benitez added.

Benitez said that the planned New Government Center of Victorias City will have a canopy type solar-powered roof and rain catchments to collect rain water to be used for watering the plants.

"The building is designed from the ground up to use minimal energy," he said.

Negros Occidental had a locally installed renewable energy capacity of 510.10 megawatts and dependable capacity of 379.9 MW produced by 16 power plants.

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[Commission strengthens partnership with CSOs](#)

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The mechanism, at full capacity, will pave the way for the Commission and the CSOs to have a multilateral working partnership with the shared benefits of knowledge and network resource exchange, strengthening further their relationship.

As part of its regular preparatory process, the CCC conducted WE CAN's 7th Consultation Meeting with CSOs with the main agenda of strengthening the mechanism's terms of reference.

CCC vice chairperson and executive director Robert E.A. Borje cited WE CAN as the pathway for government-to-civil society engagement.

"WE CAN will institutionalize the ways of our engagement, providing a sustainable platform for both civil society and the CCC to work together towards downstream and upstream climate action," said Borje during his keynote speech.

Meanwhile, CCC Commissioner Rachel Anne S. Herrera said, "WE CAN is a detailed mechanism that guides us on how we can work together on various programs and efforts on climate action. It is a platform that will make our partnerships more inclusive, participatory, relevant, and more meaningful."

"The intention is to move away from a top-down approach and instead establish a coordination mechanism that is co-owned by the civil society in order to enable a more in-depth discussion of various climate-related matters," she added.

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"WE CAN is a detailed mechanism that guides us on how we can work together on various programs and efforts on climate action. It is a platform that will make our partnerships more inclusive, participatory, relevant, and more meaningful," Herrera commented.

"The intention is to move away from a top-down approach and instead establish a coordination mechanism that is co-owned by the civil society in order to enable a more in-depth discussion of various climate-related matters," she added.

The CCC remains steadfast in its pursuit of inclusive climate goals, ensuring that all sectors, including the civil society, are engaged in the process of building a climate-resilient and climate-smart Philippines.

By leveraging the grassroots connections, advocacy capabilities, and localized knowledge of CSOs, the CCC hopes to involve a majority of the local communities in the achievement of the country's climate agenda.

For more information on the CCC's climate mainstreaming activities, visit www.climate.gov.ph and www.facebook.com/CCCPhl. (CCC)

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"The mechanism, at full capacity, will pave the way for the Commission and the CSOs to have a multilateral working partnership with the shared benefits of knowledge and network resource exchange, strengthening further their relationship," the CCC said in a news release on Monday.

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