

## LTO to sanction violators on railroad crossing

**CLARK, Pampanga** -- Drivers who fail to stop at railroad crossings will be slapped with stiff sanctions by the Land Transportation Office (LTO).

This follows the directive of the Department of Transportation (DOTr) to the LTO on the strict implementation of Section 42 (d) of Republic Act No. 4136, also known as the "Land Transportation and Traffic Code," which stipulates that a driver shall bring his/her vehicle to a full stop before traversing any railroad crossing.

The DOTr immediately directed the LTO, in coordination with the Philippine National Railways (PNR), to establish an enforcement mechanism on vehicles traversing the operating lines of the PNR.

DOTr Undersecretary for Road Trans-

port and Infrastructure Mark de Leon said that devising an enforcement system would bring swift action to penalize errant drivers and ultimately avoid collision on rail lines.

"Through an enforcement system, violators cannot just get away with their misbehavior. We will be able to determine those who deliberately and habitually disobey our traffic rules on rail lines," de Leon said.

He also cited the need to preserve government property.

"Aside from the safety of the public, we also need to protect our rail infrastructure given the high capital cost of these systems," he said.

PNR earlier sought the assistance of the DOTr to enforce proper sanctions to drivers who deliberately beat approaching trains, causing collisions and bringing damage to

government property and danger to the public.

On Sept. 3, seven people, including a two-year-old child and a female infant, were brought to a hospital after a van collided with a PNR train at the Pari-an crossing in Calamba, Laguna. Based on the incident report, the van traversed the railroad crossing despite the approaching train, and following the collision, rammed into three houses and a parked tricycle.

LTO Assistant Secretary Edgar Galvante assured that the formulation of the enforcement mechanism would help prevent further loss of life on rail tracks.

"We will work closely with the DOTr and PNR on the establishment of preventive measures to ensure the safety of the public, and inculcate discipline among drivers," Galvante said. (PR)

## DA allays fears over swine fever virus in PH

**MANILA** -- The Department of Agriculture (DA) on Wednesday allayed fears over the suspected swine fever virus in the country noting that even if tests conducted in hogs show positive results, measures are in place to keep the animal virus controlled.

Agriculture Secretary William Dar said his agency will release results of confirmatory lab tests on hogs by Friday.

Asked if the threat of the animal disease should be a cause for concern, Dar assured that quarantine and safety measures are in place to prevent the spread of the dreaded animal virus.

"Wala po. (No cause for concern) Even positive, mas lalo kung negative ay okay. Kung positive naman, meron na tayong all over the country naka in place na yong quarantine and

food safety measures (Even if it's positive and all the more if it's negative. If it's positive, we have quarantine and food safety measures in place all over the country)," Dar said in a media interview.

He said DA is also working to ensure that the whole hog industry will not be placed at risk.

"Alam ninyo kung too yong suspetsa (If suspicions are true), this will kill the whole industry. That's why ingat muna tayo (we have to be careful)," Dar said.

Dar said the public should not worry because his agency immediately confiscates slaughtered hogs that do not have veterinarian health certificates and National Meat Inspection Services (NMIS) certificates.

"Wag mabahala ang publiko kasi basta yong proseso na bago katayin

nandiyan ang veterinarian health certificate, pag kinatay mayroon tatak na NMIS certificate (The public should not worry because there is a process wherein before a hog is slaughtered, there will be a veterinarian health certificate, after they are slaughtered there will be an NMIS)," Dar said.

"Kung wala ang mga ito, ikukumpiska namin lahat yan (Without these, we will confiscate them all)," he added.

At present, some areas in the country remain quarantined because of reports of the rising number of hog deaths in their localities.

Concerns on suspected swine fever rose after farmers said their livestock showed loss of appetite, recumbency, vomiting, skin hemorrhage, dark discoloration in the extremities, and sudden death. (PNA)

## Hoarding to blame for low 'palay' prices: DA

**MANILA** -- It is not the implementation of the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) but hoarding to blame for the drop in prices of palay (rice), the Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Wednesday.

Agriculture Secretary William Dar admitted that although the RTL (Republic Act 11203) had "birth pangs", he believed that it will help farmers become more competitive over time and lower inflation rates.

Dar explained that prices have already been dropping because of traders and millers involved in hoarding even before President Rodrigo Duterte signed RTL on Feb. 14, 2019.

"So may nagsasamantala (There are some taking advantage)," Dar said in an economic briefing in Malacañang.

"That's the major direction by which we are looking at. Of course, importation nandiyan na e (is already there), that's part of the law," he added.

Dar assured that his agency and the trade department will implement the full force of the law should traders and millers refuse to cooperate.

"Makiusap muna tayo (Let's talk to them first). We know who they are, we have the list, so papasyalan namin, siguro puwede pa magkape muna then alamin natin kung bakti sila naglalabas (perhaps we can have coffee and find out why they are not releasing) then we have to encourage them to really bring out more," Dar said.

"We'll see to it that we will apply the full force of the law and hoarding, if we feel there will be hoarding," he added.

Under the RTL, importers only need to secure a sanitary and phytosanitary import clearance from the Bureau of Plant Industry as proof that the rice they will bring in is safe for consumption.

It imposes a tariff for imported rice, which is 35 percent per ton of rice coming from Association of Southeast Asian (Asean) countries and 50 percent up to as high as 180 percent from non-Asean countries.

The law also creates a PHP10-billion Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) to provide assistance to farmers and finances government's farm moderni-

zation programs.

**Measures in place**  
Dar said government has implemented measures to help affected farmers who are forced to sell their produce as low as PHP7 per kilo since last month.

To date, his agency has implemented the Expanded Survival and Recovery Assistance Program for Rice Farmers (SURE Aid) which is aimed at providing loan assistance for immediate relief to rice farmers affected by the impact of low palay prices.

Under the program, the affected rice farmers tilling one hectare of land and below may avail of PHP15,000 loan via SURE Aid, a zero-interest loan which is payable up to eight years.

Dar said his agency has also been stricter in limiting the importation of rice by ensuring that rice imports comply with the sanitary and phytosanitary measures.

"Titingnan natin (We will see) whether these imported stocks are complying to the sanitary and phytosanitary measures," Dar said.

"Pag nakakita kami ng (When we see) foreign object doon sa bigas, i-hold namin (in

rice, we will put it on hold). That's legal. Kung makakita kami isang bubkok doon sa bigas, i-hold namin until the bukbok is out (If we see bukbok --rice weevils -- in rice, we will put it on hold until the bukbok is out). That's how strict we will be implementing the sanitary and phytosanitary measures," Dar said.

Dar said he has also directed administrators to ensure that warehouses of the National Food Authority (NFA) will be leased to provincial governments instead of the private sector.

"Provincial governments, about 25 have already committed to do business -- palay buying, milling and selling rice. If they don't have the capacity now, they can invest their money through NFA," Dar said.

Moreover, Dar said his agency is working with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in crafting an agreement which will convert the PHP600 monthly rice subsidy into rice distribution.

This way, he said, DSWD will buy the rice from the NFA and provincial governments. (PNA)

## Russia installs first defense envoy in Manila

**MANILA** -- Russia has introduced its first Defense Attaché to the Philippines in over 40 years on Tuesday (Sept. 3), signaling the continued commitment to attaining peace and stability in Asia through enhanced military cooperation with the Philippines.

Russian Ambassador to the Philippines Igor Khovaev introduced Defense Attaché, Col. Dmitry Nikitin to Philippine military officials and the media, saying the event was "quite symbolic and very meaningful."

Philippine Defense Undersecretary Raymundo DV Elefante welcomed the development, saying that he is optimistic about stronger mil-

itary ties between the Philippines and Russia.

"It will be a very long journey but I think with this relationship and cooperation, I think we will go to have a very good opportunity in terms of cooperation and friendship," he said during the reception of the opening of the Russian Military Attaché Office.

Khovaev, meanwhile, highlighted that Russian-Philippines defense cooperation will serve the interest of peace, stability, and sustainable development in the region.

"Because for the first time, the Philippines and Russia decided to open a new channel of communication

between our nations. This decision is in full compliance with the strategic interests of not only the Philippines and Russia but of all regional countries," he said in a speech.

"Because this decision was taken in order to provide, to contribute to strengthening peace and stability in the region," he added.

While Nikitin did not deliver a message, Khovaev said enhanced defense ties are more relevant as terrorism remains a common threat faced by both Russia and the Philippines.

"Simply because it's time for all of us, especially now in the period of in-

creasing global disturbances, to put aside secondary contradictions and differences, and to focus on common struggle against evils and in order to face common challenges of threat. And I strongly believe that the opening of the national defense attaché in Manila will greatly contribute to these joint struggles," Khovaev said.

In May last year, Col. Dennis Pastor was assigned as the Philippines' first Defense Attaché in Moscow.

Earlier reports mentioned that last May 2018, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed an order to send his country's first designated defense attaché to the Philippines, as the 40-year bilateral relations of the two countries have improved since President Rodrigo Duterte assumed office in 2016.