

State of calamity may last one year

by PAOLO ROMERO
Philstar.com

MANILA – Price controls may remain until 2010 and government is expected to have a firmer hand in rebuilding areas ravaged by “Ondoy” and “Pepeng” as Malacañang considers extending its declaration of a nationwide state of calamity for at least one year.

This was revealed by deputy presidential spokesman Anthony Golez who stressed that the plan is aimed at allowing the government and the public to immediately respond to weather disturbances that have become increasingly deadly and destructive in the last few years.

Budget Secretary Rolando Andaya Jr. stressed that purchase of equipment or hiring of services for relief and rehabilitation would still be subject to bidding but governed by “special conditions” to ensure swifter results. He did not elaborate.

In a news briefing, Golez said damage caused by both Ondoy and Pepeng reached P8.4 billion as of on October 5 and the figure is expected to increase in the coming days as the full extent of the destruction unfolds.

“Normally, by law if I’m not mistaken, the state of calamity is effective I think one year from the time, one or two years, from the time it has been declared so that’s the time frame,” Golez said.

He said there was no need for a formal lifting of the declaration as such would “self-terminate” anyway when normalcy returns.

Officials said the declaration would help authorities effective-

ly implement price controls as well as allow local government units to easily access their respective calamity funds, which represent five percent of their respective budgets.

Pres. Arroyo declared Metro Manila and nearby provinces under a state of calamity in the wake of Ondoy’s devastation on Sept. 26.

She later made the coverage of her declaration nationwide to speed up relief and reha-

bilitation efforts and as Pepeng threatened to wreak more havoc. She said the order was meant to keep prices of basic goods under control as well as maintain peace and order.

It was the first time that a nationwide declaration of a state of calamity was made to help the country brace for a disaster.

Officials explained that while Metro Manila, Rizal, Laguna, and Cavite were the hardest hit

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SUBMERGED. Buildings are seen under in floodwaters caused by after Typhoon Parma in Nabua township, Camarines Sur, Sunday, Oct. 4. Landslides buried two families in the Philippines as they sheltered in their homes from Asia’s latest deadly typhoon, which killed at least 16 people and left more than a dozen villages flooded Sunday. AP Photo by Nelson Salting

Typhoons force RP to import rice

MANILA – President Arroyo has ordered agriculture officials to import rice amid an expected supply crunch next year following devastating typhoons that battered the farm sector, her spokesman said on October 4.

Typhoon Pepeng, which hit Luzon Saturday, leaving at least 15 dead, swamped large swathes of farm land just a week after tropical storm “Ondoy” dumped the heaviest rainfall in more than four decades on Manila.

Ondoy, international name Ketsana, left 293 dead and affected over three million people.

The typhoons have caused extensive damage to the farm sector and Arroyo has ordered free seedlings for farmers, her spokesman Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said.

“Secondly, President Arroyo is anticipating food shortages (and) she has ordered the Department of Agriculture to import (rice) at the earliest possible time,” Remonde said.

Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap said initial damage to the farm sector wrought by the two typhoons stood at 5.5 billion pesos (117 million

dollars). The figure was expected to rise once a full assessment of the damage comes in.

Yap said there were enough stocks of rice for the whole year, but the impact on the supply could be felt by the first half of next year.

“We don’t see a supply problem for 2009, because that is provided for in our buffer stock,” Yap said over local radio. “Our issue now is dry crops for 2010.”

The Philippines relies heavily on imports to feed its rapidly growing population of 92 million.

In 2008, the country was forced to buy some 2.3 million tons of rice despite record world prices. This year, it has so far imported 1.7 million tons from Vietnam.

Ketsana however has not spared rice producer Vietnam, where it killed 162 people and flooded large areas in the countryside.

Arroyo also ordered Yap to immediately extend assistance to farmers displaced by Ondoy and Pepeng to help them recover and ensure the country’s food supply in the coming months. (Philstar.com)

Villar wary about an extended state of...

PAGE A9 ◀ called expressed alarm about the planned extension of the state of calamity status.

According to them, it may create more problems for the country such as job losses and supply shortage. Other business groups even fear that it may lead to a state of emergency and the exercise of police powers.

“It is understandable that we have to prioritize the needs of the flood victims but we have to take into account the repercussions of our actions to other sectors. In this case, if the business sector will be affected, it will have a chain reaction if our economy will slow down because of it,” added Villar.

According to Villar, “It is also important to put a semblance of normalcy to the people’s lives as soon as possible. Even the flood victims need to go back to their

homes, to their jobs and move on eventually. They cannot rely on people’s charity for long, we have to make them self-reliant again.”

Regarding the feared food shortage due to the extensive damage wrought by typhoons Ondoy and Pepeng in agricultural crops and infrastructure, Villar said all possible efforts should be exerted to avert its possibility.

Damage from Ondoy alone reached over P5.5 billion, while Pepeng hit many rice-producing areas in northern Luzon and create damage of nearly a billion already based on estimates. Based on estimates from the Department of Agriculture: 22,669 metric tons of palay, valued at P403.2 million, when Pepeng wrought havoc to 35,494 hectares of rice-growing

farmlands in Isabela and Cagayan Valley, and the Cordillera region.

“The production of our farmers is really badly affected since most of their crops and infrastructure were damaged. The effect of this in food supply may not be felt in the last few months of the year and the agriculture department has made assurances about that. But the negative effects will likely manifest early next year,” cited Villar.

According to Villar, “At this early, the concerned government departments and agencies should already put in place mechanisms to ensure the stable supply of food until next year. At the same time, help should be extended to farmers who suffered losses due to the typhoons.” (Office of Sen. Manny Villar press release)

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