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## Palace okays govt-to-govt purchase of rice imports

THE Philippines will seek new ways to buy rice amid tightening world supply after its latest tender for the grain failed, Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap said yesterday.

He said the government had authorized "alternative modes of procurement" in dealing with foreign government suppliers of the staple food.

President Arroyo had ordered the National Food Authority, the state-run grain importer, to import rice without having to go with the bidding process," Yap said, adding she had also allowed government-to-government negotiations for rice imports.

The NFA's tender for 675,000 tons failed on Monday because "foreign suppliers would only want to supply rice in such a way that it will not drive up prices of rice," Yap said.

He said suppliers did not want to negotiate under an open public tender "because it tends to shore up prices," adding Manila could negotiate directly with a foreign rice supplier instead of using a tender.

The Philippines, one of the world's largest rice importers, has

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# Inflation spikes to 8.3%; oil spurts to near \$121



Inflation trigger. Residents line up to buy cheap rice in Commonwealth, Quezon City.

MIKE DE JUAN

■ The April figure brought the average inflation rate for the first four months of the year to 6.2%

**SURGING** food and energy prices in the Philippines pushed the inflation rate in April to 8.3 percent, the highest level in three years, the government said yesterday.

The National Statistics Office said "all the commodity groups at the national level continued to record higher annual price increases," with the food sector alone incurring a 12-percent inflation rate.

Meanwhile, oil futures rose to an all-time high near \$121 a barrel in Asia on Tuesday, fueled by worries about threats to supply and a weakening of the US dollar.

Surging oil and other commodity prices have been contributing to rising inflation worldwide.

The Philippines' April inflation was the highest recorded since May 2005, when inflation hit 8.5 percent, the NSO said in a statement.

April's rate far exceeded central bank forecasts of between 6.4 and 7.0 percent and economists' previous estimates of about 6.8 percent.

The April figure brought the average inflation for the first four months of 2008 to 6.2 percent, far above the central bank's full-year target range of between 3.0 and 5.0 percent.

Rice, the national staple, saw a 24.6-percent price rise in April with corn, other cereals and dairy products also incurring double-digit rates.

"For rice alone, 11 out of 17 regions [in the Philippines] posted double-digit month-on-month inflation rates, with the highest coming from Central Visayas at 18.6 percent," Acting Economic Planning Secretary Augusto Santos said.

"Historically, this is the highest nationwide increase in rice prices since the 11.5-percent uptick from December 1998 to January 1999."

Excluding selected food and energy items, core inflation rose to 5.9 percent in April compared with 4.8 percent in March.

The Philippines, one of the world's largest rice importers, has been hit hard by the worldwide rise in the price of rice. AFP and AP with Roderick T. dela Cruz

## 6 generals promoted as AFP chief retires

AT least six senior officers will be promoted when Armed Forces Chief Hermogenes Esperon Jr. retires on May 12.

Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. said President Arroyo had already approved the appointment of the six officers on the recommendation of the Board of Generals.

Army chief Lt. Gen. Alexander Yano will replace Esperon, whose term was extended for three months days before his mandatory retirement at age 56 on Feb. 9.

Lt. Gen. Cardozo Luna, commander of the Eastern Mindanao Command, will be appointed Armed Forces chief of staff, replacing Lt. Gen. Antonio Romero, who is set to go on leave on May 8 before retiring on June 25.

Maj. Gen. Armando Cunanan, commander of the 8th Infantry Division, will take over the Eastern Mindanao Command.

Northern Luzon chief Lt.

Gen. Rodrigo Maclang will assume the third highest position in the Armed Forces as deputy chief of staff.

Maclang will replace Lt. Gen. Pedro Ike Insierto, who will become commander of the Central Command.

Maj. Gen. Isagani Cachuela, commander of the Army's Light Armor Division, will take over the Northern Luzon Command.

Lt. Gen. Victor Ibrado, who heads the Central Command, will head the Army, replacing Yano.

Luna, Maclang and Ibrado were on the Board of Generals' shortlist for Yano's successor.

But Mrs. Arroyo picked Ibrado to lead the 80,000-strong Army.

Teodoro, who is tipped to retain his post after the impending Cabinet revamp, said he expected the new military leaders to carry out and enhance the programs that their predecessors put in place.

Florante S. Solmerin



April 2000 to April 2008

## Archbishop Cruz defends gay queens

By Arlie Calalo

THE gay community crossed swords with Catholic bishops yesterday as more clerics supported Manila Archbishop Gaudencio Rosales' call to bar homosexuals from parading as women in the Santacruzán, a traditional procession held in honor of the Virgin Mary.

the Virgin Mary," said Danton Remoto, leader of Ang Ladlad, a gay rights group.

"Gay men are deep believers too. We should not be prevented from expressing our love for the Virgin Mary."

On Monday, Rosales criticized parishes for allowing gay cross-dressers to take part in the procession.

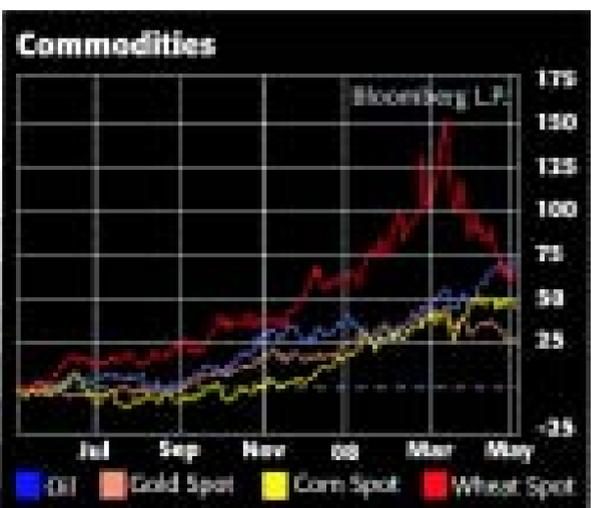
"It is very disgusting that we see gays as the center of attrac-

tion in the Santacruzán, which is supposed to be religious and nature," the archbishop said.

His views drew support from Pampanga Archbishop Paciano Aniceto, Antipolo Bishop Gabriel Reyes, Manila Auxiliary Bishop Bernardino Cortez, and Calocan Bishop Deogracias Iñiguez.

But Dagupan-Lingayen Archbishop Oscar Cruz disagreed,

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## Conti loses in PCGG power struggle

By Florante S. Solmerin

IN an unexpected twist, the Palace yesterday replaced the head of the legal affairs department of the Presidential Commission on Good Government and appointed a former classmate and buddy of the agency's chairman, Camilo Sabio.

Palace, which had wanted Commissioner Nicasio Conti to return to the commission as head of the legal department.

But at a press conference yesterday, Sabio announced the appointment of Jaime Bautista to that post.

Earlier, Sabio accused Conti of being behind a complaint filed against him before the Presiden-

tial Anti-Graft Commission and said he could no longer work with the commissioner.

But he refused to comment on Conti's departure and denied he was behind lobbying efforts to remove him at yesterday's press briefing.

Bautista used to be the country's ambassador to Moscow.

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NICASIO CONTI