

Philippines Research Institute sets a master plan for rubber treatment

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The Philippines Department of Agriculture (DA) has approved the allocation of P110 million in additional funds requested by the Philippine Rubber Research Institute (PRRI) intended to treat infected rubber plantations in the province of Basilan in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

The supplemental budget is deemed necessary following the outbreak of Pestalotiopsis disease in more than 800 hectares of plantation in the province, infecting 40-100 per cent of trees.

Pestalotiopsis leaf fall disease can cause the gradual falling of leaves. If left untreated, it will cause the tree to become leafless. Leaf fall or defoliation results in a decrease in the number of canopies in the rubber plant which decreases its latex production.

The Malaysian Rubber Board, in 2020, reported that the disease poses risk, which may result in defoliation of up to 90 per cent and latex yield reduction of up to 50-80 per cent.

Given the degree of infection, PRRI will set out a team of experts to oversee the treatment of the affected plantations. Coordination with the provincial government of Basilan has also been undertaken for the swift execution of control measures.

Under a one-year treatment plan, the rubber trees will undergo mist fogging, drone aerial spraying of fungicide, fertilisation and weed management.

The fungi *Pestalotiopsis* sp. which causes leaf fall disease can co-infect other pathogens and may cross-infect other crops, such as mango and palms which are also massively produced in BARMM.

The disease has already destroyed rubber plantations in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and other rubber-producing Asian countries.