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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Congress realigns P26 B in 2016 budget

By JESS DIAZ

Congress has realigned a total of P26.4 billion in the P3.002-trillion national budget for this year.

The realignments are reflected in the voluminous budget, which the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) started posting on its website yesterday.

The changes are increases and decreases Congress introduced in the appropriations for agencies and special purpose funds.

The biggest realignment is P7.442 billion, which was added to the funding for the planned salary increase of government personnel this year. The augmentation brought the total to P58 billion.

An additional P6.042 billion was given to the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), increasing its budget to P384.387 billion.

More than 100 state universities and colleges received P2.744 billion more, bringing their funding to P47.415 billion.

Other huge realignments are P1.203 billion for the Department of Agriculture (DA), P597 million for the Department of Health (DOH), P1.667 billion for the Department of National Defense, P1.839 billion for the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and P591 million for the Department of the Interior and Local Government.

Since lawmakers are prohibited by the Constitution from increasing the total annual budget proposed by the President, they made a zero-sum balancing of realignments, meaning whatever was gained by one agency, appropriation or fund was lost by another, and the net effect on the outlay is zero.

In some cases, while realignments were made in a particular agency, some appropriations were also slashed. In the case of the DA, P1.203 billion was realigned but there were reductions amounting to P637.9 billion, or a net change of P564.8 million.

For the DOH, there is a net reduction of P760.6 million, bringing down its budget to P123.5 billion. Some P1.358 billion was cut, of which P597 million was realigned.

For the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, there is a net cut of P1 billion. A total of P2.087 billion was taken away, of which P1.087 billion was returned and realigned.

Funding for the National Economic and Development Authority was decreased by P1.2 billion to P5.638 billion.

Budget watchdog Social Watch said many of the changes Congress introduced in the 2016 budget are pork barrel funds of lawmakers and the President.

According to Social Watch, the pork barrel funds lawmakers allegedly inserted in Aquino's budget proposal, known as the National Expenditure Program (NEP), include the following:

- P326 million for farm-to-market road projects under the DA (P7.377 billion from P7.051 billion in NEP);

- P987.930 million for assistance to indigent patients under the DOH-Office of the Secretary (P2.783 billion from P1.795 billion in NEP);

- P2.54 billion for government internship program and Tulong Pangkabuhayan sa Ating Disadvantaged Workers Project under the Department of Labor and Employment-Office of the Secretary (P3.267 billion from P727.3 million in NEP);

- P403 million for training-for-work under the DOLE-Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (P2.206 billion from P2.203 billion in NEP);

- P1.248 billion for local infrastructure under the DPWH-Office of the Secretary (P19.813 billion from P18.566 billion in NEP);

- P5.382 billion for protective services under the DSWD-Office of Secretary (P6.698 billion from P1.315 billion in NEP);

- P144 Million for Tulong Dunong Program under the Commission on Higher Education (P1.130 billion from P986.231 million in NEP);

- P662.538 million for financial assistance to local government units under the Local Government Support Fund in the Allocation to Local Government Units (P862.538 million from P200 million in NEP).

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

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Baguio temperature higher, but cold enough for holiday tourists

By Gobleth Moulic
Inquirer Northern Luzon

BAGUIO CITY—The summer capital has not been getting its “brrr” nights as the year ends, but these are still bonfire-worthy nights for tourists.

Temperature dropped to 13.3 degrees Celsius on New Year’s Eve from 13.6 degrees C on Wednesday.

These are not the coldest days for Baguio residents, even when the temperature on Tuesday dropped to 12.8 degrees C, the coldest in December.

Baguio was even warmer on Dec. 24 because that day’s lowest temperature was 14.8 degrees C. Temperatures increased to 15.4 degrees C on Dec. 25, frustrating residents who were expecting to enjoy the nippy weather.

Visitors who are not used to the mountain city’s holiday cold did not notice the difference. Many turned up wrapped in shawls and wearing jackets on Session Road in downtown Baguio even when temperature soared to 26.4 degrees C at noon of Dec. 25.

The year 2015 is an El Niño year, which may explain the warmer Baguio days and nights, said Jasper Pelayo, weather observer of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) in Baguio.

El Niño is the seasonal warm-

ing of the Pacific Ocean which affects weather patterns and brings drought.

The World Meteorological Organization said average temperatures in January to September 2015 were the “hottest on record,” or since 1880.

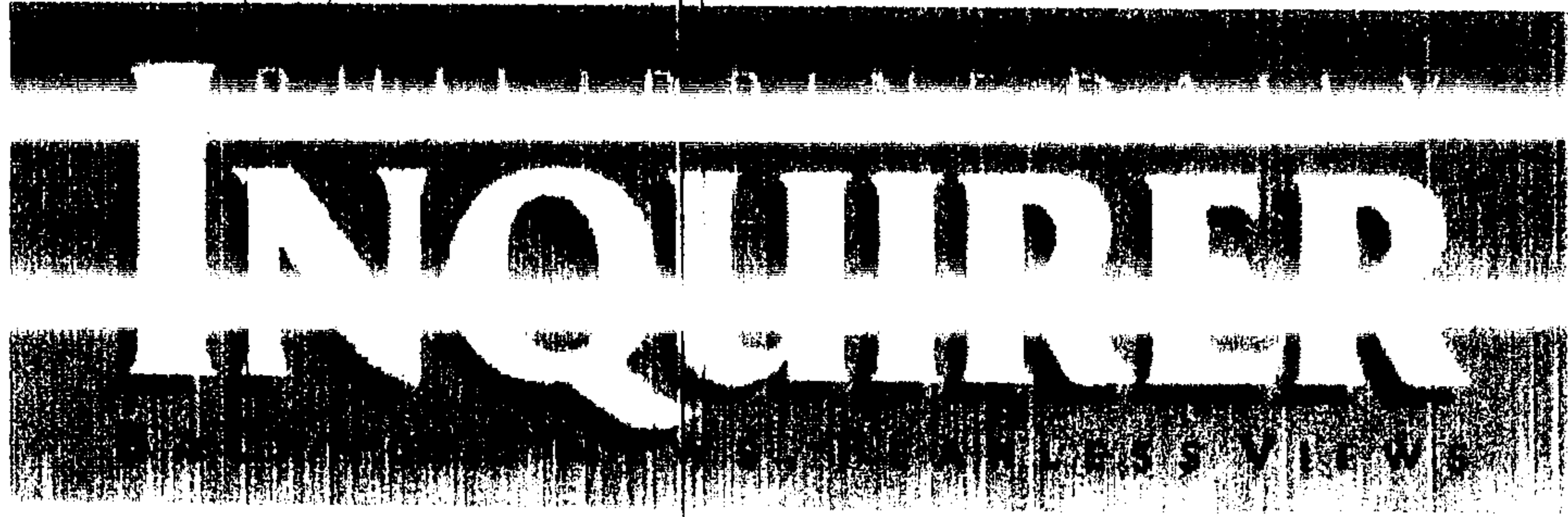
But Christmas 2015 was colder than Christmas 2014. Baguio residents experienced 15.6 degrees C on the night of Dec. 24, 2014. It was a much colder 15 degrees C on Dec. 25, 2014, Pagasa records showed.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration had described 2014 as “the world’s hottest year in 135 years of record-keeping.” Historically, Baguio’s coldest months are January and February.

In 2015, the city recorded its lowest temperature of 9.8 degrees C on Feb. 1.

Baguio’s coldest day in 2014 was Jan. 18 when the mercury dropped to 8.1 degrees C. Pelayo said Pagasa does not expect Baguio to get any chillier than 10 to 12 degrees C this month because El Niño would still affect the country later this year.

Last week, the cold weather prompted the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to issue an advisory urging mountain climbers to protect themselves from extreme cold as they hike to the summit of Mt. Pulag in Benguet.



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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Another trashy holiday

AN ENVIRONMENTAL watchdog deplored how appeals against wanton dumping of holiday trash fell on deaf ears.

Members of EcoWaste Coalition took photos of the massive littering in Manila's main commercial areas after the New Year festivities.

"The ugly sight and stench of mixed 'holitrash' left on street corners and market areas can make one's stomach turn," EcoWaste coordinator Aileen Lucero said.

Lucero said based on the 2013 report of the Commission on Audit, Metro Manila's local government units spent P4.221 billion for garbage hauling expenses that year.

The top five spenders were Quezon City, P999 million; Manila, P512 million; Makati, P440 million; Caloocan, P421 million, and Pasay, P376 million.

Dona Z. Pazzibugan

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Ecija to host another solar plant in bid for green power

**By Anselmo Roque
and Armand Galang**
Inquirer Central Luzon

SAN JOSE CITY—This city in the agricultural province of Nueva Ecija is harnessing the power of the sun to provide an alternative energy source to its businesses and households.

On Tuesday, local officials and businessmen led groundbreaking rites for the 10-megawatt Sto. Niño Photovoltaic Power Generation Plant on a 17-hectare area in Barangay Sto. Niño III.

The plant, which is set to operate in March, is the fourth alternative power source to rise in Nueva Ecija after biomass plants in this city, in nearby Science City of Muñoz and in Talavera town, which are all fueled by rice husks.

Businessman Mario Salvador, chair of VMARS Solar Energy Corp. (VMSEC), said the Sto. Niño plant would address the shortage of electricity in the province without environmental hazards posed by traditional coal-fired and fossil fuel-dependent plants.

The project was conceptualized for more than five years by a group called Altergreen, a company registered with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) that has been studying the feasibility of tapping different renewable energy sources.

Salvador said his firm, after the construction of the Sto. Niño plant, would develop another 50-MW biomass plant in Nueva Ecija's northern town of Lupao.

"Nueva Ecija is known for being the rice granary of the country and it will soon be known as a major source of renewable energy," he said.

Salvador, a former vice mayor of this city who is in palay trading and milling, called on other businessmen and investors to rally behind the call to help tap renewable sources of energy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

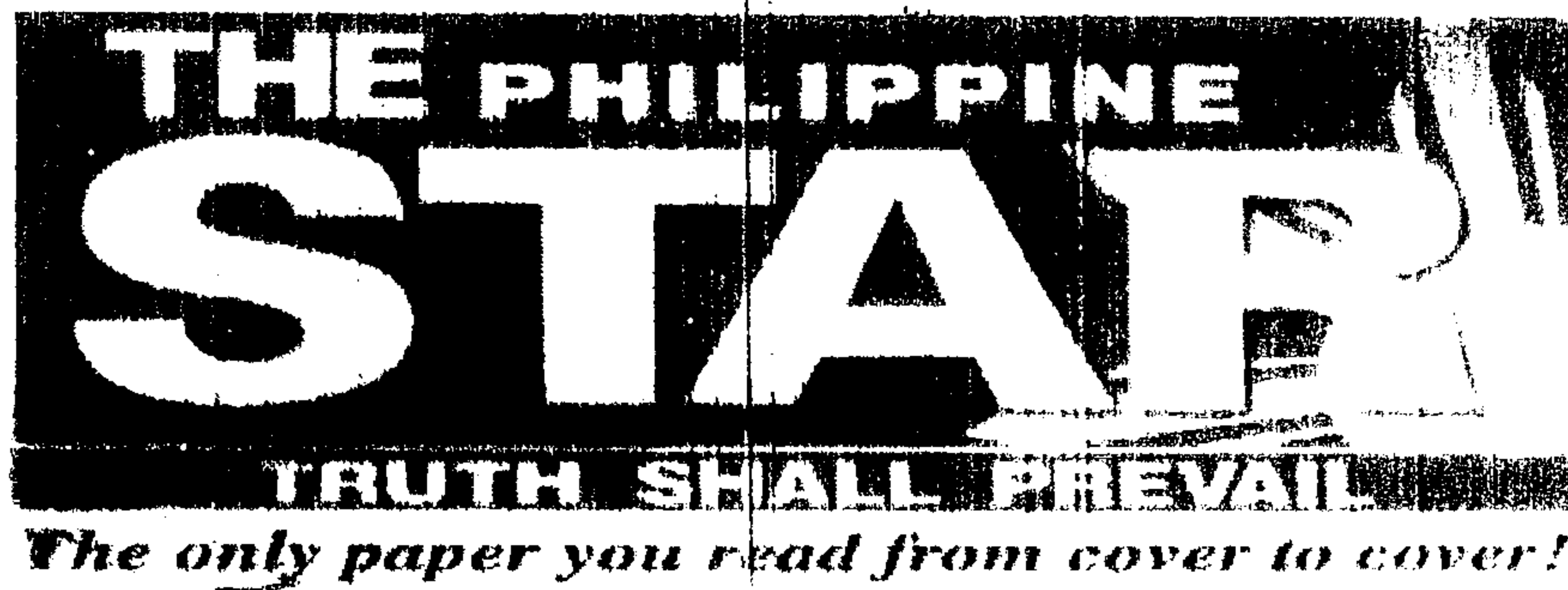
Energy Undersecretary Mario Marasigan, head of the Renewable Energy Management Bureau of the Department of Energy, said the location of the solar power plant here, which is near mountain ranges, also suits wind energy production.

Marasigan, who attended the groundbreaking rites for the solar power plant, said a facility that will study and measure wind velocity in the eastern part of the province has been put up in Pantabangan town. It will determine the potentials of Nueva Ecija for wind-generated electricity.

"Our country's commitment to the recent Conference of Parties (this year's United Nations-sponsored climate change conference) in France is to reduce our greenhouse gas emission by 70 percent. Your efforts here in tapping renewable energy for power generation are certainly helping our government in subscribing to that commitment," he said.

In March, the country's first power plant that runs on rice husks (locally called *ipa*) started operating here.

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

First Person

By ALEX MAGNO

Challenges

The world greets 2016 with a bit of trepidation. The challenges are large and the solutions seem to defy our collective imagination.

Two main issues hold the world's attention as we hoped to kick out the old and welcome the new: climate change and terrorism.

In the shadow of brutal terrorist attacks, a global conference was successfully concluded in Paris last month. The parties to that conference agreed to exert all efforts to keep global warming to under two degrees over the average temperature that prevailed prior to the onset of the Industrial Revolution.

Beyond the two-degree threshold, sea levels will rise unmanageably. The world's major coastal cities will be submerged. A few island nations will be lost to the sea. The global icecaps will recede inexorably. Extreme weather conditions will ruin agriculture. Human survival will be on the line.

All these will begin happening during our lifetime. It is an environmental apocalypse that can be averted only by the concerted action of all of humanity.

The covenant signed in Paris accepts several premises that were debated for too long while the planet began to boil. The most important of those premises is that global warming is the consequence of human activity – particularly the massive production of carbon gases.

The way we chose to live since the Industrial Revolution is now deemed unsustainable.

The industrial age has been characterized by massive consumption of fossil fuels, comprehensive urbanization, high-energy consumption per capita and reckless pollution. Carbon dioxide levels have risen even in the oceans, threatening sea life with extinction.

For a while, we imagined that the seas were the final source of food for the increasing number of humans inhabiting the planet. That is no longer true. As fertile floodplains are threatened by rising sea levels, the oceans are also losing their capacity to support life.

We cannot think of evacuating the planet in the event it becomes inhospitable to life. We have nowhere to go to and no means to rescue humanity.

There is no other course to take but to hold back rising global temperatures, or reverse warming if that is at all possible. To do that, we will have to hold back humanity's carbon footprint. That requires no less than a comprehensive revolution in the way life is lived and communities are imagined.



Come to think of it, this tired and retiring administration never issued a fully developed policy statement on our nation's strategy for combating climate change. We ought to demand such a policy statement from all those seeking to lead the nation in the future.

The global agenda for turning back climate change involves building an agenda for every nation, every community and every individual. This requires an unprecedented effort that should dwarf every other concern.

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PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

Loren: Don't take soil for granted

SENATOR Loren Legarda has raised the need for "collective action" on sustainable land use and protection of soil, a nearly forgotten resource, to halt and reverse land degradation.

She noted that some 33 percent of global soils are already degraded through urbanization. Soil erosion, nutrient depletion, salinity, aridification and contamination are additional threats.

Legarda, chairperson of the Senate Committee on Climate Change, deplored that in the Philippines, around 33 million hectares or 45 percent of arable lands are affected by soil degradation making them unsustainable and less productive.

"We often take soil for granted without realizing the importance of this non-renewable resource. Without healthy soils, there would be no life because it is the foundation for food, animal feed, fuel and medicine. Hence, we need to develop and adopt good farming practices essential for mitigating soil degradation," she said.

Legarda had already filed Senate

Bill No. 337, the Soil and Water Conservation Act, which aims to promote soil and water conservation technologies and approaches for sustainable land management.

She warned that the current land degradation is likely to contribute to widespread and severe poverty in the rural areas. In 2010, the Bureau of Soils and Water Management (BSWM) under the Department of Agriculture (DA) had estimated that 13 million hectares of arable land in the Philippines are either moderately or severely eroded because of massive deforestation and adoption of unsustainable land management practices in the upland areas.

Legarda said that this condition is further compounded by the unabated use of urea in modern farming, which has led to actual soil degradation. "The degradation of soil in our farmlands will eventually lead to lower agricultural output despite the application of modern farming practices. This will affect not only the livelihood of our farmers but also our food supply," she added.

Bernadette E. Tamayo

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The Standard

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3 Makati barangays remain in danger from pipeline leak

FIVE years since the leakage of an old pipeline, Makati City government officials admitted that residents of three barangays near the West Tower condominium are still in danger.

This was learned after the city government re-imposed a city ordinance prohibiting fireworks in the area of Barangays Bangkal, San Isidro and Pio del Pilar to ensure the safety of residents during the celebration of New year.

Mayor Romulo Peña Jr. said that although most of the fuel leak had been pumped out, remaining traces of the fumes still pose danger on residents and the general public as these may be ignited by fireworks or firecrackers.

"Since 2010, several remediation measures have been done by the First Philippine Industrial Corp. in collaboration with the city government and its consultant. However, the area has not been totally cleared of gas fumes, so we could not risk lifting the ban at this time," he said.

The mayor asked residents and visitors in the three barangays to refrain from lighting firecrackers and fireworks, and instead participate in the New Year's Eve Countdown at the University of Makati held on Dec. 31.

The fireworks ban ordinance imposes a fine of P5,000 or imprisonment of six months for violators. In the case of corporations or partnership ventures, the officers will be held liable for violations.

Dr. Carlo Arcilla, director of the National Institute of Geological Sciences—College of Science in University of the Philippines, had warned that returning residents of the condominium in Barangay Bangkal remain in danger of contracting lung cancer due to benzene contamination and the polluted ground water caused by the leakage in 2010.

Joel E. Zurbano



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2016 holidays declared

President Aquino has signed Proclamation No. 1105 declaring the holidays this year.

Because of this, the public can look forward to six long weekends.

These are New Year's Day, Friday, January 1; Chinese New Year, February 8, Monday; Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, March 24 and 25; National Heroes' Day, last Monday of August or August 29 this year; October 31 and November 1, All Saints' Day, a Monday and Tuesday, and Rizal Day, December 30, a Friday.

Based on Proclamation No. 1105, regular holidays are New

Year's Day, January 1; Maundy Thursday, March 24; Good Friday, March 25; Araw ng Kagitingan, April 9, Saturday; Labor Day, May 1, Sunday; Independence Day, June 12, Sunday; National Heroes Day, August 29, Monday; Bonifacio Day, November 30, Wednesday; Christmas Day, December 25, Sunday; and Rizal Day, December 30, Friday.

Special non-working days are Chinese New Year, February 8, Monday; 30th anniversary of the EDSA People Power Revolution, February 25, Thursday; Black Saturday, March 26; Ninoy Aquino Day, August 21, Sunday; and All

Saints' Day, November 1.

Additional special (non-working) days are January 2, Saturday; October 31, Monday; Christmas Eve, December 24, Saturday; and New Year's Eve, December 31, Saturday.

The proclamations declaring national holidays for the observance of Eid'l Fitr and Eid'l Adha will be issued after the approximate dates of the Islamic holidays have been determined in accordance with the Islamic calendar (Hijra) or the lunar calendar, or upon Islamic astronomical calculations, whichever is possible or convenient.

(Madel S. Namit)