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Wednesday

DENR

IN THE NEWS

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

Karagdagang 51 kuweba ang naklasipika ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) ayon sa natatanging kata ngian nito, ito ang nilalaman ng Memorandum Circular No. 2015-08 na nilagdaan ni Secretary Ramon J.P. Paje. Dahil dito, mayroon nang kabuuang 451 klasipikadong kuweba sa buong bansa.

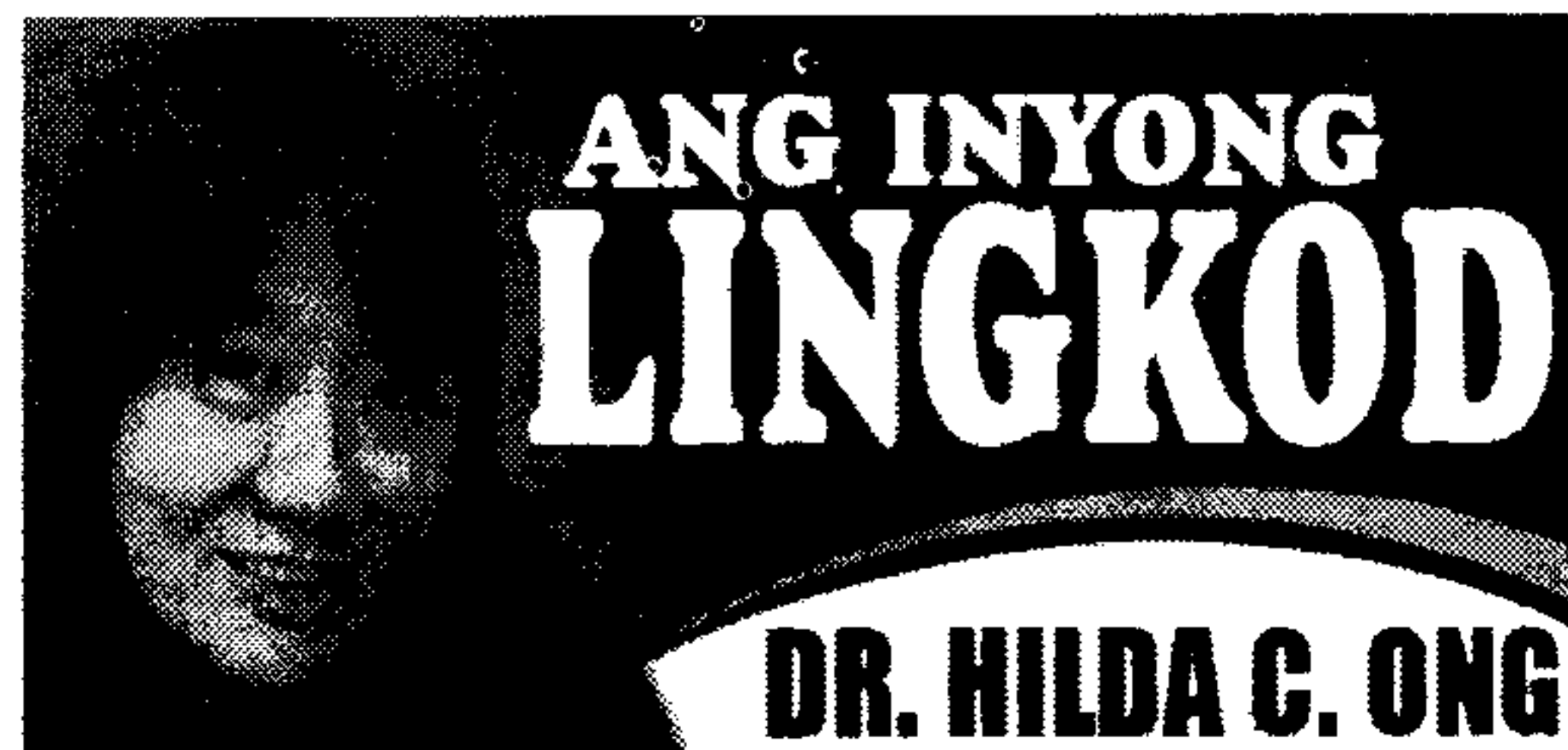
Inatasan ng Republic Act No. 9072, National Caves and Cave Resources Management and Protection Act, ang DENR na magbuo at magpatupad ng mga programa upang mapangalagaan at wastong magamit ang napakaraming kuweba sa buong bansa lalong higit ang taglay nitong yaman kabilang na ang historical value ng mga ito.

Kabilang sa mga inilista bilang Class I o mga kuweba na pwede lamang mapasok upang magsagawa ng mapping, pagkuha ng larawan para sa dokumentasyon, at mga pag-aaral ay ang Nical Cave (Dasol, Pangasinan), Sung Wan at Kaping Caves (Tayabas City, Quezon), at ang Burial Cave (Caraga, Davao Oriental).

Ang mga kuwebang nasa categoryang ito ay hindi pwedeng magamit sa ecotourism activities.

Alam natin na turismo ang isa sa mga nagdadala ng kita sa mga komunidad ngunit batid din natin na pangunahing sanhi din ito ng pagkasira ng isang napakagandang tanawin.

Ang problema, kapag na-



ANG INYONG
LINGKOD

DR. HILDA C. ONG

451 KUWEBA, NAKLASIPIKA NA NG DENR

sira ang mga kuweba, milyong taon pa ang bibilangin para muli itong magbalik sa kanyang natural na kagandahan.

Kapag Class II naman ang isang kuweba, ibig sabihin nito, mayroong lugar sa kuweba na hindi bukas sa publiko dahil sa taglay nitong kakaibang kondisyon at mataas na kalidad ng ecosystems, medyo limitado rin ang pagbisita rito at may panahong kailangan itong isara sa mga turista para maprotektsiyunang ito.

May 36 na klasipikadong kuweba sa categoryang ito kabilang ang Capilan Bat Cave (Sultan Kudarat), Licup Cave (Samal Island), at Guano Cave (Bangui, Ilocos Norte).

Walong kuweba naman ang isinailalim bilang Class III at ilan sa mga ito ay ang Balite Cave (Samal Island) at Punta Diwata Caves (Carmen City, Agusan del Norte).

Ang mga Class III na kuweba ay bukas sa lahat ng uri ng turista pero kailangang may kasamang guide tour. Ito ay ang mga kuwebang walong matatagpuang threatened species o kaya'y may masisirang mahalagang archaeological, geological, natural history, cultural at historical values.

Buhat sa klasipikasyong inilabas, ang tauhan ng BMB sa mga tanggapan ng DENR ay kagayat na makikipagugnayan sa nakasasakop na

Protected Area Management Board (PAMB), lokal na pamahalaan, o sa may ari ng lupang kinaroroonan ng kuweba, upang masimulan ang paghahanda ng mga plano ukol sa pamamahala at pangangalaga ng mga naturang kuweba.

Nasubukan n'yo na bang mag-caving?

Kung hindi pa, dapat ninyo itong subukan dahil naiiba ang karanasang maging kaisa at mapuntahan ang sinapupunan ng Inang Kalikasan.

Iyon nga lamang kailangang ugaliin ang pagiging isang responsableng turista. Palagi nating isaisip ang kapakanan ng susunod na henerasyon sa atin iwasan ang pagdadala ng mga basura sa anomang pupuntahan, at huwag na huwag nating sisirain ang likas na kagandahang taglay ng mga kuwebang ito.

Ang kagandahan ng mga kuweba ay biyaya ng Diyos sa sangkatauhan kaya dapat natin itong mahalin at pakainngatan.

By **TARA YAP**

“Our overall goal is to contribute to the promotion of ecological integrity and economic sufficiency in the island through the sustainable management and development,” Sampulna said.

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

CTalk

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By CITO BELTRAN

'We will force them'

After trying to find ways and means to arrive at a compromise, hosting a series of "town hall meetings" and consultation with various street leaders and coming up with a Green Bridge - BRT (Bus Rapid Transit system) solution, the homeowners of Barrio Kapitolyo in Pasig City may find their conciliatory efforts to have been nothing but a waste of time and money.



It turns out that the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) has decided to go ahead with the Sta. Monica/Lawton Bridge as they originally planned and designed. When reminded of the very strong and vocal opposition of Barrio Kapitolyo residents to their project "as is," one independent source present at the meeting before Christmas claims that a high ranking DPWH official responded by saying: "*We will force them to accept the project.*"

When asked what about the suggestion that the proposed bridge be turned into a "Green Bridge" strictly for BRT, bikers and pedestrians only, the DPWH official reportedly said that they might consider it at a later time once the bridge is operational. As Heneral Luna put it, that would make us no less than virginal idiots still believing in the promises of a prostitute! I am also reminded of the words of the modern day astrologist Linda Goodman who once said "While they may not all be thieves, they are all liars."

Meanwhile, Barrio Kapitolyo has become such an investment magnet for developers and entrepreneurs in the last two years attracting companies such as Rockwell and DMCI, numerous upmarket restaurants and shops as well as the famous "Unimart" that will soon be opening alongside the intended route of the DPWH Bridge from Hell. So far the property developers have been continuously marketing their projects so one has to wonder if we now have a high stakes game of "chicken" or "stare-down" where the group that blinks loses.

Apparently none of these seems to catch the attention of the project managers who have reportedly bid out consultancy services for the project. The only new angle now being fanned by the DPWH officials is that the project is a necessity in order to have a diversionary route for the traffic on EDSA once the DPWH undertakes rehabilitation work on the Guadalupe Bridge. This is really interesting since nothing was ever said about the Guadalupe Bridge until the 2015 SONA of President Noynoy. Suddenly the DPWH is connecting two projects as if to validate and create a sense of urgency.

The question is, are there dated, documented studies that will hold up under investigation by Congress or the Office of the Ombudsman to prove that the DPWH has long been planning on rehabilitating the Guadalupe Bridge and that the Sta. Monica/Lawton Bridge came about as part of the plan? If so, do the engineers and planners at the DPWH even know what they're doing? How and why would you divert traffic from a six-lane highway into a two-lane bridge and squeeze it through to the Ortigas business district along roads which are already in constant gridlock.

Quite frankly someone is lying through their teeth just to get the project off the ground. The other question is why does the DPWH reject the green bridge/ BRT solution when even the DOTC agrees that the Bus Rapid Transit system is what we need in Metro Manila until we get our Mass Transit System sorted out? Is this part of someone's contempt for another's incompetence?

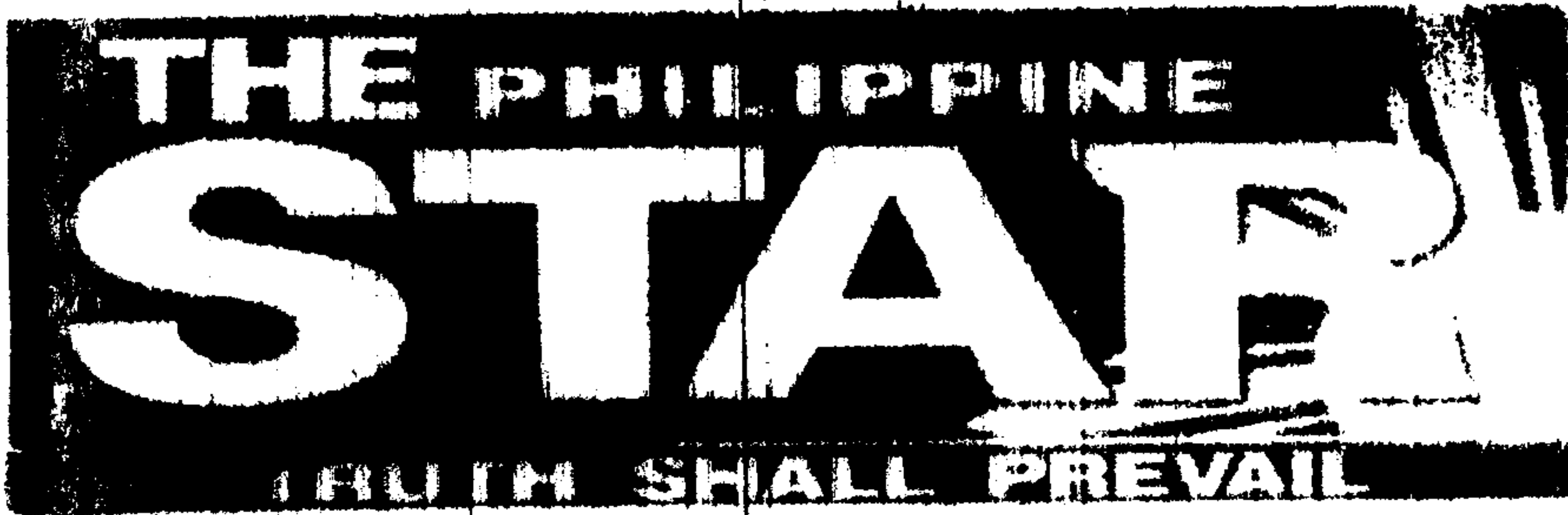
From what I learned, the NEDA Board will be meeting sometime this month to review the proposed EDSA - BGC (Bonifacio Global City) BRT program which is suppose to include or consider the inclusion of a BRT system between the BGC and the Ortigas Business District. Leaders in Barrio Kapitolyo support an integrated BRT/Green Bridge and reject the traditional bridge - elevated roadway proposal of the DPWH.

Hopefully, the more level headed and far-sighted policy makers in the NEDA Board can call in the Cabinet Secretaries of the DOTC and the DPWH to find a happy compromise that makes sense. If not the NEDA should simply freeze the ball until the next administration, because the rush and forceful intent behind it all is beginning to smell of rotting fish.

Ultimately, the DPWH officials may also have to explain to the Office of the Ombudsman why they persist on pushing through with their multi-billion peso project instead of adopting one of two alternatives that would save taxpayers P1 to P2 billion if not more by building a BRT/Green Bridge or following the original suggestion for the bridge to go via Pasig Boulevard and not a "skyway" over Barrio Kapitolyo and Shaw Boulevard. One does not have to steal in order to be charged with graft, stupidity is oftentimes enough.

Under the leadership of Secretary Babes Singson, the DPWH earned applause and recognition for drastically reducing corruption in the department. That has apparently been cause for pride, and that is well deserved. Sadly pride of place should not go to the point of arrogance because that is a mortal sin when expressed or displayed by civil servants. Progress must be beneficial to people, communities, and the environment. Progress must also make sense and follow logic and never be about Force.

* * *



The only paper you read from cover to cover!

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We will force them

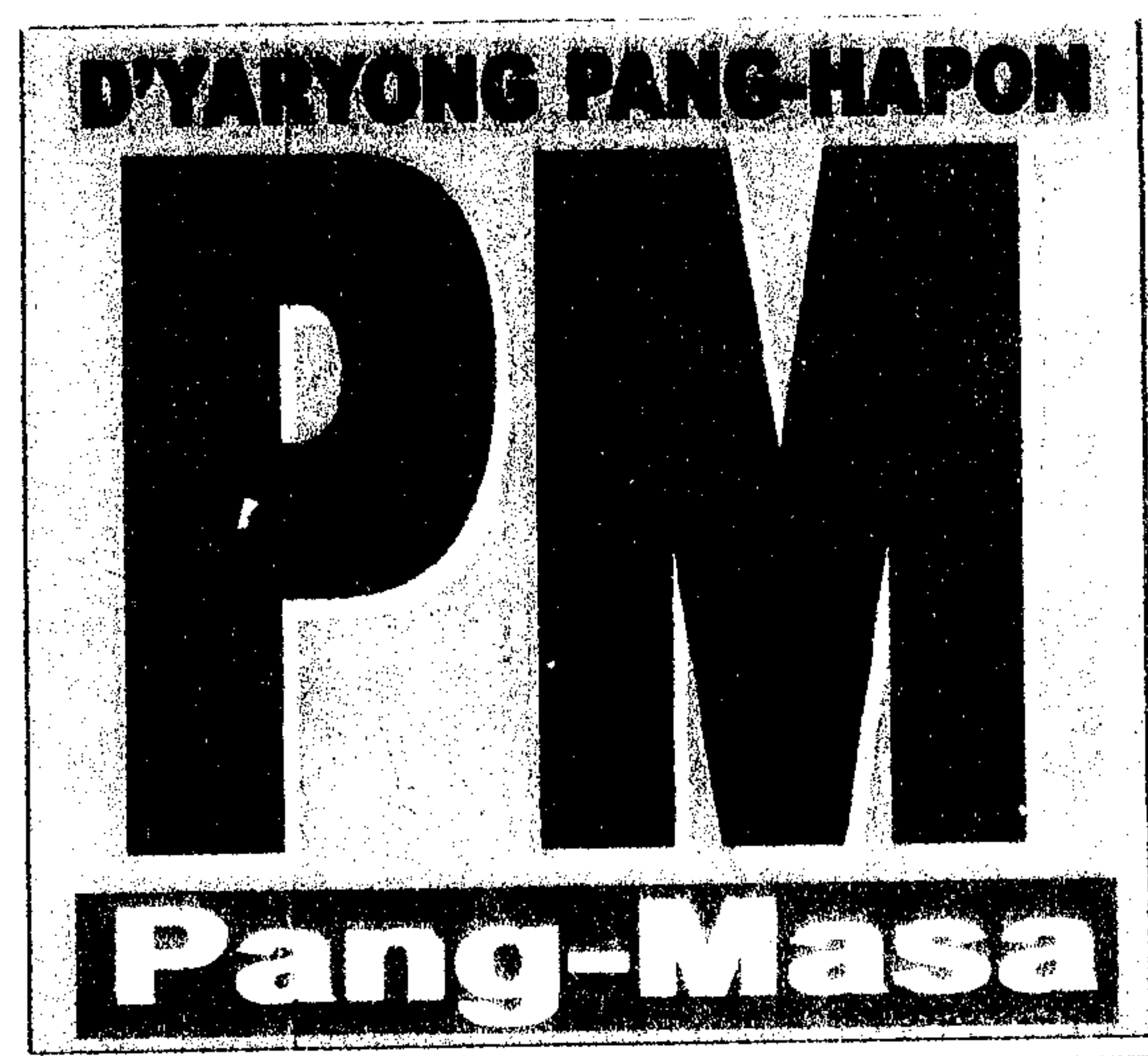
Even after registering dangerous levels of air pollution right after the New Year's fireworks, I found it curious that the Secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources never made his presence felt or issue a statement about the toxic levels or residues in the air. Given how the traditional fireworks almost always results in a man-made haze that has often delayed or diverted flights into Manila, one would think that the DENR would be alongside the efforts of the DOH to tone things down or at least remind people that their revelry could indirectly send people to hospitals or kill them.

With all sincerity I have been wondering whatever happened to Secretary Mon Paje? I know that I travelled a lot in 2015 but I never heard of changes in the DENR leadership, so what gives? I do hope he is fine and I do hope to hear more from the officials of the DENR particularly with growing concerns about air pollution.

* * *

E-mail: utalk2ctalk@gmail.com

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Hangin sa MM nakakaalarma-Tolentino

Sinabi ni independent senatorial aspirant Francis Tolentino na nakakaalarma na ang maruming hangin sa Metro Manila na nalalanghap ng tao tulad ng mga usok bunga ng firecrackers bukod pa sa mga dumi sa hangin mula sa mga polusyon.

Ayon pa kay Tolentino na isang safety advocate na kailangan ng air quality ng Metro Manila para sa kaligtasan ng lahat ng mamamayan dahil sa nakakaalarmang maruming hangin na nalalanghap ng mamamayan.

Noong nakaraang taon, ang air pollutant concentration sa MM ay umabot sa 130 micrograms per normal cubic meter in terms of total suspended particulates (TSP), mula sa 106 $\mu\text{g}/\text{Ncm}$ noong pagtatapos ng 2014.

Ang maximum na safe level ng air pollutant concentration ay nasa 90 $\mu\text{g}/\text{Ncm}$.

Anyang sandaling palarin siya sa senatorial race ay isusulong niya ang batas ukol sa environmental protection at pagbibigay solusyon sa polusyon. -Rudy Andal-



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Bongabon mayor, nagpapasaklolo

BONGABON, Nueva Ecija - Kahit konting pagtingin!

Ito ang madamdaming apela ni Bongabon Mayor Allan Gamilla sa mga opisyal ng Environment Management Bureau (EMB) ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), upang tingnan ng ahensiya ang kalunos-lunos na kalagayan ng kanyang bayan dulot ng matinding paghagupit doon ng malalakas na bagyo noong nakaraang taon.

Ayon kay Gamilla, nawasak ang dike sa Barangay Pesa hanggang sa Barangay Tugatog sa pananalasa ng bagyong 'Kabayan' noong unang bahagi ng Oktubre 2015, at agad siyang lumiham sa EMB para inspeksiyunin ang istruktura.

Matapos na hindi tugunan ng EMB, muling lumiham si Gamilla sa ahensiya upang aktuwal na makita ang kalagayan ng Bongabon at makapagrekomenda ng mga nararapat na hakbangin upang maipatigil ang umano'y illegal quarrying o pagmimina sa bundok na katabi ng bayan.

Paulit-ulit ang naging apela ni Gamilla, aniya, ngunit wala siyang tugon na natatanggap mula sa EMB.

Light A. Nolasco

The Manila Times

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Dredging of Cagayan River to save crops urged

CAUAYAN CITY, Isabela: In a move to save billions of peso-worth of crops in Cagayan Valley resulting from natural calamities like flooding, a Partylist Representative here has called on government leaders to devise a solution by dredging the heavily silted Cagayan River.

Rep. Silvestre Bello 3rd of Una ang Barangay Ating Paunlarin (1BAP) made the call after Isabela Provincial Agriculture Office reported P1.8 billion losses in agriculture primarily on corn and rice as a result of flooding brought about by heavy downpour during the onslaught of typhoon Nona.

He said that corn plants particularly, still on its vegetative stage on the Cagayan River delta, have been destroyed during the recent flooding which also affected low-lying communities.

"With this magnitude of losses in the agriculture sector, the government should prioritize dredging the Cagayan River to address

severe floodings in the region especially in the provinces of Cagayan and Isabela," Bello said.

These provinces become the catch-basin of rain waters from the upstream provinces of Quirino, Nueva Vizcaya and Ifugao and that dredging activities along some parts of the Cagayan River will be the best measure to contain perennial flooding on crops.

Bello said the swelling of Ibulao River in Ifugao and the Magat River in Nueva Vizcaya during heavy downpour also caused the Magat Dam located at the boundary of Alfonso Lista in Ifugao and Ramon in Isabela to reach critical and spilling level flooding agricultural communities.

Meanwhile, the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) conducted a geo-hazard mapping and study which recommended the dredging of the "heavily silted" Cagayan River to avoid further erosions.

LEANDER C. DOMINGO

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Climate-friendly rice growing method yields more

LA UNION farmer Federico Rullamas has a lot to smile about.

His second season crop of high-value organic red rice not only fetched him a very good price in the market, his yield of 170 cavans per hectare also won him the "Highest Yelder for Naturally Grown Organic Rice Farming" award in 2015.

Rullamas used a new method of growing rice called the system of rice intensification (SRI), which involves a simple set of rice management practices that farmers can easily learn in one sea-

son. He also supplemented SRI with composted chicken manure plus home-made organic sprays which he learned from SRI Pilipinas trainer Venancio Garde Jr.

Garde calls his original formulation the "soil nutrient enhancer" but adds that this is no secret and that it can be learned for free via text to SRI Pilipinas Hotline (0939-1178999).

Rullamas learned the new method from training that was jointly sponsored by the local government of Aringay, La Union, and SRI Pilipinas. Through the

efforts of agriculture committee chair Ramsey Mangaoang and the full support of town Mayor Eric Sibuma and Vice Mayor Charlie Juloya, the Aringay Sangguniang Bayan has allotted P300,000 yearly for the conduct of SRI training among Aringay's rice farmers every planting season. More than 100 Aringay farmers graduated from the training last November.

Following the method, Rullamas planted very young 12-day old rice seedlings singly, at a distance of 12 inches (30 cm). He practiced alternate wetting and drying and used

a mechanical weeder to control weeds.

For his efforts, Rullamas was rewarded amply. He got an average of 26 tillers per plant (more than double the typical number) and 41 cavans from his 2,400-square meter field—an impressive yield of about 8.5 tons or 170 cavans per hectare, compared to the national average of about 80 cavans.

Rullamas' growing method is considered very climate-friendly, because it minimizes carbon dioxide emissions by avoiding fossil-based chemical fertilizers and reduces methane emission by dry-

ing the rice field regularly.

SRI is also considered climate-resilient, because the resulting rice plants are also sturdier, deeper-rooted, and therefore less vulnerable to droughts, floods and high winds.

For farmers like 47-year-old Rullamas who are threatened with increasingly more extreme weather events due to climate change, that is a lot of benefit, considering that the method is also less costly than its conventional counterpart.

(For details, contact Mr. Mangaoang at 0920-8788979 or Roberto Verzola, 0917-8117747)

DUE TO EL NIÑO

Drier dry season for first half of year

BY PAUL ICAMINA

JANUARY going to February will still be "100 percent" El Nino weather, dry season will be drier ease towards June then neutral weather by end July.

It will still be El Nino, or what's left of it by the end of June, says Anthony Lucero, head of the Climate Information Monitoring and Prediction Section, Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA). "It will be back to neutral weather by the end of July."

El Nino will remain strong into early 2016 then weaken prior to summer, based on data provided by the International Research Institute for Climate and Society.

While the weather transitions from the Northeast Monsoon to the Southwest Monsoon in April, the rainfall outlook for January to June will be dry conditions in most parts of the country. "Beginning January, it will approach the dry season, and the dry season will be drier," says Lucero.

Slightly warmer than average temperature are expected from April to June. There will be no, perhaps only one, tropical cyclone from January to April and one or two for May and June.

El Nino affects farming as it delays the onset of the rainy season and extends the dry season. The rainy season is "official" when rainfall for five days is 25 mm, with three consecutive days of not less than 1 mm. These must be observed in eight of 10 PAGASA weather stations; in Metro Manila, they must be confirmed in two of three stations.

El Nino weather means less moisture in soil. It may lead to a decline in crop pro-

duction due to delayed rains and increased pests and diseases. It will impact on water, dams and irrigation.

"We are meteorologists and we study how water gets to the atmosphere. Once it touches the ground, it is studied by hydrologists," Lucero says. "We can call it wet, dry, drought and so on, and they are based on rainfall but not on moisture in the soil. We don't study that."

In some places like Eastern Philippines where there's a lot of rainfall, plants grow even if there is 75 percent less rain; in other areas, when rainfall is reduced just by half, crops don't grow.

El Nino occurs over the ocean, in this case east of the Philippines over the Western Pacific, then across to South America or the central and eastern equatorial Pacific. Filipino meteorologists observe the large area above Tahiti for signs of a coming El Nino.

The hot weather, which lasts for eight months to a year, occurs every two to seven years, with the strongest every 10 to 15 years. "You know it's El Nino when there are warmer temperatures .5 degrees C or higher than average," says Analiza S. Solis, PAGASA Senior Weather Specialist. "There are weak winds from the east that can reverse to come from the west. There are fewer clouds over the Philippines and thus less rains."

In neutral years, winds from the east push warm water towards the Western Pacific; clouds formed over the Philippines receive normal amounts of rain. During El Nino years, winds from the east become weak and are unable to push warm water towards the western Pacific. Warm water scatters over the central Pacific. Clouds form away from the Philippines which then gets less rain.

There are fewer tropical cyclones. In 2015, there were 14 typhoons, not your average of 20, and it coincided with an El Nino year. The rainfall is below normal while the air temperature is above normal. The last strong El Nino occurred in 1977-78.

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El Nino weather means less moisture in soil. It may lead to a decline in crop production due to delayed rains and increased pests and diseases. It will impact on water, dams and irrigation.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Angat Dam starts releasing excess water from reservoir, PDRRMO says

MALOLOS CITY, Bulacan —The Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRRMO) has notified eight municipal DRRMOs in Bulacan that the National Power Corp. (Napocor) began discharging waters from the Angat Dam on Tuesday.

The Napocor made the move after the water level reached more than 215 meters, which is 3 meters beyond its spilling level of 212 meters.

Bulacan PDRRMO officer Liz Mungcal, however, said the water release will hardly be felt and will not cause any flooding in the towns.

Mungcal said that according to the "notice on dam discharge warning operation" sent by the Napocor on Monday, Angat Dam will open its spillway at 8 a.m. on Tuesday.

Mungcal said that according to M.T.L. Serra, Flood Operation Manager of Napocor, Gate 2 of the Angat Dam spillway was opened on Tuesday morning at 0.5 meters with an estimated discharge of 70 cubic meters per second.

She said the water discharge is very minimal and will hardly have any effect in the towns of Norzagaray, Angat, Bustos, San Rafael,

Baliwag, Plaridel, Pulilan, Calumpit, Hagonoy and Paombong where the Angat River and the discharge waters will sneak through.

The Napocor notice also stated that the reservoir elevation needs to be lowered in anticipation of expected inflow of heavy rain due to combination of monsoon and easterly winds.

Mungcal also dispelled rumors being circulated by alleged "prophets of doom" that Angat Dam is bound to break and is set to release big volume of water this month to negate it.

The PDRRMO officer said that she and her office has been receiving inquiries from alarmed residents since the last days of December 2015 that officials of Angat Dam and Bustos Dam, which are both undergoing "Phase 1" repairs and strengthening, will release big volume of waters anytime this January.

"This is not true. This is baseless and is just part of an irresponsible hoax to create panic and confusion. We should not believe on it," Mungcal said.

She said that most of the queries came from residents of the coastal

towns of Calumpit and Hagonoy, who spent a "wet Christmas" after being hit by backfloods from Nueva Ecija and Pampanga before Christmas Day and was worsened by the huge water volume released by the Angat and Bustos dams.

The said hoax became more sinister after some groups claimed that the rumors are part of another scheme to discredit the good job being done by the provincial government and the administration of President Aquino, as well.

Some sectors even claimed that rumors began circulating after Angat and Bustos dams released big volume of waters at the height of the backfloods that aggravated the sufferings of the people of Calumpit and Hagonoy.

Mungcal said that during that time, Gov. Wilhelmino M. Sy-Alvarado has been calling the attention of the national government, including Executive Secretary Paquito "Jojo" Ochoa Jr., to stop the release of big volume of waters to give the people of Calumpit and Hagonoy towns some "elbow room" to recover from the backfloods that were submerging their villages during that time. **PNA**

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El Niño, sluggish freight demand upset oil market

LONDON - Heating oil prices in the United States are trading as if it was mid-summer rather than winter, as warm weather and sluggish demand from freight companies combine to make heating oil cheaper than gasoline.

Heating oil normally trades at a substantial premium to gasoline in winter and then moves to a discount during the second and third quarters as heating demand fades and the summer driving season ramps up.

But this winter, heating oil is trading at the sort of discount normally only seen between March and July as heating demand fades away and refiners prepare for the summer gasoline campaign.

On Dec. 31, the front-month futures price of heating oil closed at \$1.10 per gallon, a discount of almost 17 cents to the futures price of gasoline.

It was the largest seasonal discount for more than a decade and compares with a normal premium of around 26 cents per gallon at this time of year.

Consumption of distillate fuel oil, used in trucks, trains and ships, and to heat homes and office buildings, is down by more than 450,000 barrels per day, 11 percent, compared with the end of 2014.

Warmer-than-normal weather since October due to El Niño has cut heating demand by around 25 percent according to the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

And freight movements by road, rail, barge and pipeline have been essentially flat for the last 12 months after five

years of strong growth, according to the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics.

Freight is being hit by the shift from coal to gas in power production, the end of the U.S. oil drilling boom, and over-ordering by retailers and wholesalers earlier in the year, which has left them trying to cut excess stocks.

Despite weak demand, the supply of distillate fuel oil is increasing because U.S. refineries are processing crude oil at a seasonal record high to meet strong demand from motorists for gasoline.

Strong gasoline margins are incentivising refiners to produce as much as possible, making excess distillate as an unwanted co-product.

U.S. refiners produced 5.5 million barrels per day of distillate in the four weeks leading up to Christmas, up from 5.25 million in the prior-year period, ac-

cording to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Since the beginning of the oil boom, U.S. refineries have increasingly turned to exports to dispose of excess production of distillate fuel oil.

But with warmer-than-normal weather across most of Europe and northern Asia, it is proving difficult to export more of the surplus.

Distillate stocks are 27 million barrels, 22 percent higher than at the same point last year.

Distillate fuel oil is the most oversupplied part of the fuels market. With the effects of El Niño likely to linger well into the first half of 2016, that overhang looks set to remain for some time.

In contrast, gasoline stocks are more than 7 million barrels, or 3 percent lower than at the end of 2014, and the market looks balanced. -Reuters



Oil tankers stand attached to mooring stations near a refinery in Bayonne, New Jersey. (Reuters Photo)

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Business World

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El Niño easing; growth impact still under watch

SYDNEY — The 2015-16 El Niño weather event, one of the three strongest in the past 50 years, has peaked in recent weeks and will likely return to "ENSO Neutral" by the second quarter of this year, Australia's Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) said on Tuesday.

The El Niño phenomenon is driven by warm surface water in the eastern Pacific Ocean and is associated with extreme droughts, storms and floods.

"ENSO Neutral" periods are marked by ocean temperatures, tropical rainfall patterns and atmospheric winds near the long-term average.

"A number of El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) indicators suggest that the 2015-16 El Niño has peaked in recent weeks," the BOM said in a statement.

"Climate models suggest the 2015-16 El Niño will decline during the coming months, with a return to ENSO neutral likely during the second quarter of 2016."

The agency said that based on data since 1900, some 50% of El Niños have been followed by a neutral year, while 40% have been followed by a La Niña, marked by extensive cooling of the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean.

During the last major El Niño in 1997-98, heavy rains and flooding led to thousands of deaths, loss of crops and extensive damage to infrastructure in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia.

In Indonesia and Malaysia, drought linked to the weather event had hit palm oil production and pushed prices higher.

In November, the World Meteorological Organization said it expected the current El Niño to become one of the strongest on record, warning that the intensity

of the event could be exacerbated by climate change.

While the United Nations' weather agency did not predict when the El Niño would start to subside, it said the weather event normally reaches maximum strength between October and January, then persists through much of the first quarter.

STILL A FACTOR

Earlier reports, however, that the current El Niño episode threatens to be the worst and among the most prolonged in decades had prompted both private analysts and the Philippine government to be cautious in discussing the country's growth prospects.

The Department of Agriculture is looking at an increase in this year's palay and corn output despite the two typhoons that hit the country's farms in December and reports that El Niño full intensity had already been felt in recent weeks.

Edilberto M. De Luna, the department's assistant secretary for field operations, said palay production could hit 20 million metric tons (MT) in 2016, higher than the estimated 18.2-18.5 million MT for 2015.

The target for corn output is at 8.2 million MT in 2016, up from last year's expected 7.3-7.4 million MT, he said in a phone interview.

Palay and corn are the country's staple food and account for half of annual crop output.

In the eyes of ING Bank Manila, prolonged dry weather adds to the uncertainty over the outcome of the May national elections and persistent weakness in global trade that now weigh on prospects for the Philippine economy.

El Niño,
from SI/1

ING Bank Manila now expects the country's gross domestic product to expand 6% — well below government's 7%-8% target — this year and in 2017.

"The economy faces challenges thrust upon us by El Niño, weak global trade, including slower China growth, leadership uncertainty," ING Bank Senior Economist Jose Mario I. Cuyegkeng said in a report released yesterday that particularly said "[a]griculture [output] is expected to contract by almost 1% this year."

Budget Secretary Florencio Abad, however, said weak global trade and El Niño have already been factored into state plans.

"Weak global trade has been with us for some time. At the same time, much of our growth is still driven by domestic drivers," Mr. Abad said in a text message.

"The El Niño has also been anticipated and planned for. Based on the way the weather has been behaving, it seems to be moderating. — *Reuters with R. D. Mariano and V. V. Saulo*

El Niño, SI/4

Gold extends gains on global stock rout

SINGAPORE - Gold added to an overnight surge in prices on Tuesday, as escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and a global stock market rout triggered safe-haven bids for the metal.

Spot gold rose 0.1 percent to \$1,075.70 an ounce. On Monday, the metal had jumped as much as 2.2 percent to a four-week high of \$1,083.30, before ending the day up 1.3 percent.

Saudi Arabia widened its rift with Iran on Monday, saying it would end air traffic and trade links with the Islamic republic and demanding that Tehran must "act like a normal country" before it would restore severed diplomatic relations.

Saudi Arabia executed Shi'ite Muslim cleric Nimr al-Nimr on Saturday, provoking protests among Shi'ites across the region. Iranian protesters stormed the Saudi embassy in Tehran, setting fires and causing damage, prompting Riyadh to cut ties and inflaming an already heated rivalry.

Also supporting gold was the tumble in global equities. A 7 percent slide in Chinese shares on Monday sparked by weak economic data rekindled worries over global growth on the first day of trading in 2016, and sent European and U.S. stocks diving.

Bullion, often seen as a alternative investment during times of geopolitical and financial uncertainties, benefited from the risk-averse sentiment along with the Japanese yen and U.S. bonds.

Gold prices, however, gave up some gains as oil prices turned negative after earlier climbing on Saudi Arabia-Iran tensions.

Safe-haven rallies tend to be short-lived and gold could see the focus shift back to U.S. monetary policy soon.

Gold slid 10 percent last year on fears higher U.S. rates would lower demand for the non-interest-paying asset.

San Francisco Federal Reserve President John Williams said Monday he is unfazed by the weak economic data out of China that has spooked Wall Street, and sees three to five U.S. interest rate hikes this year as reasonable given the strength of the U.S. economy.

Hedge funds and money managers boosted their net short position in COMEX gold to a fresh record in the week to Dec. 29, U.S. government data showed on Monday. -Reuters



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Desisyon ng Sandigan sa Marcos ill-gotten wealth panalo ng sambayanan

ITINUTURING ng Malakan-yang na magandang regalo para sa pagbubukas ng taon ang naging desisyon ng Sandiganbayan na utusan ang pamilya Marcos at ang pamilya ng umano'y crony nito na si Alfonso Lim na ibalik ang lahat ng kanilang ari-arian na pag-aari ng pamahalaan matapos ang 28 taon na paghihintay ng gobyerno.

Ayon kay Press Secretary Sonny Coloma Jr. isang malaking pagkapanalo na daig pa ang tumama sa lotto ang naging desisyon ng Sandiganbayan Second Division na ibalik ng pamilya Marcos at Lim ang natitirang assets na nakarehistro kay Alfonso Lim Sr. na tinatayang aabot sa halagang P378 million para sa taong 2006.

Kabilang na rito ang mga ari-arian sa Tagaytay City (P206.6 million), Batangas (P96.8 million) at Angono, Rizal (P74.5 million).

"The judgment rendered by the Sandiganbayan is a significant win for the Filipino-people in the long-term effort to recover assets that had been illegally acquired during the dictatorship

by known cronies of then President Ferdinand Marcos," ayon kay Sec. Coloma.

Ipinaubaya naman ng Malakanyang sa Philippine Commission on Good Government ang pag-implementa ng naging desisyon ng Sandiganbayan sa oras na maisapinal na ito.

Napaulat, na nagpalabas ang anti-graft court ng 35-pahinang desisyon noong Disyembre 14, 2015, na inuutusan ang pamilya Marcos at Lim na ibalik ang nakulimbat nilang ari-arian sa illegal na paraan.

Taong 1987, nang maghain ng kasong sibil ang PCGG laban sa pamilya ni dating Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos at sa crony nito.

Pinanigan ng Sandiganbayan ang Civil Case Number 0030 na isinampa ng PCGG noong 1987, isang taon matapos na mapatalsik sa bansa si dating Pangulong Marcos.

Sinasabing ang mga orihinal na defendant sa kaso ay sina Alfonso Lim Sr, Alfonso Lim Jr, Marcos-time Environment Minister Teodoro Peña, Ferdinand Marcos at dating First Lady Imelda Marcos at ilang korporasyon. **KRIS JOSE**