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16 JAN 2016
Sunday

DENR

IN THE NEWS

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Climate-change programs at P12.4-B budget

ENVIRONMENT Secretary Ramon J.P. Paje said a total of P12.4 billion, more than half of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources's (DENR) total budget this year, has been earmarked for 19 specific climate-change programs to strengthen the country's resiliency against natural calamities.

The amount represents 57 percent of the DENR's total budget of P21.8 billion this year, which is P1 billion lower compared to the DENR's budget last year, Paje said.

The National Greening Program (NGP), President Aquino's flagship reforestation program, got the bulk of the budget, with a total of P8 billion, he said.

While this year's budget for NGP is P800 million higher compared to last year's P7.2 billion, the DENR

originally proposed a P10.19-billion budget for the program.

The lower budget for the NGP was a result of the realignment by Congress for other priority programs of the DENR, Paje said.

"Hindi na ako nagreklamo dahil mahalaga naman talaga iyong project for coral rehabilitation at solid-waste management," he said.

Other climate-change programs are also aimed at strengthening the country's forestry sector: For protected-area development and



PAJE: "Hindi na ako nagreklamo dahil mahalaga naman talaga iyong project for coral rehabilitation at solid-waste management."

management, P1.063 billion has been earmarked; for forest protection, P473.6 million; and reforestation of major river basins under the Integrated Natural Resources and Environmental Management Project, P451.4 million.

The DENR has also earmarked a total of P443.7 million for air-quality improvement; unified mapping project, with a P398-million budget; national geohazards assessment, P397 million; and clean-water program, P194 million.

Meanwhile, for ecological solid-waste management regulation, a total of P88.2 million has been allotted this year. For Manila Bay rehabilitation, P80 million; wildlife

BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

19 JAN 2016

DATE

PAGE

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

P-2

Climate change programs at P 12.4 B - budget

protection and conservation, P72.2 million; and hazardous-waste management, P41.7 million.

Paje boasted of the NGP accomplishment, which exceeded its target for the fifth straight year in 2015. He also expressed confidence of achieving the program's overall target of covering 1.5 million hectares before the end of the year, its last year of implementation.

The DENR will be conducting a strategic planning starting this week for the implementation of the NGP.

In an earlier interview, Director Ricardo Calderon of the Forest Management Bureau (FMB) said the strategic planning will be conducted together with the DENR's regional directors and Provincial Environment and Natural Resource Officers (Penros) to make the necessary adjustment in the implementation of the program because of this year's lower budget.

Paje noted that the successful implementation of the NGP over the past five years has reversed the trend of deforestation in the Philippines, citing the Global For-

est Resources Assessment report of the Food and Agriculture Organization which ranked the Philippines as fifth worldwide in terms of most forest gain from 2010 to 2015, at an average annual rate of 240,000 hectares.

Before the implementation of the NGP, Paje said the country is losing 100,000 hectares of forest annually.

A total of 636,710 jobs were generated through the NGP's cash-for-work component, benefiting the DENR's Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) partners.

Paje said the massive reforestation program is key to achieving the country's goal of reducing its carbon emission by 70 percent under a business-as-usual scenario from 2020 to 2030.

The "conditional commitment" was expressed in the country's intended nationally determined contribution (INDC), which was submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change by the Climate Change Commission on October 31, 2015.

With the country's economy steadily growing, Paje said there is

a need to continue expanding the country's forest cover to enhance our carbon-absorption capacity, as well.

He said an increase in the GDP means that the country's carbon emission increases, as well.

"Pag nag-increase ang GDP, ibig sabihin tumaas ang carbon footprint kasi nagtayo ng power plant for energy," he said.

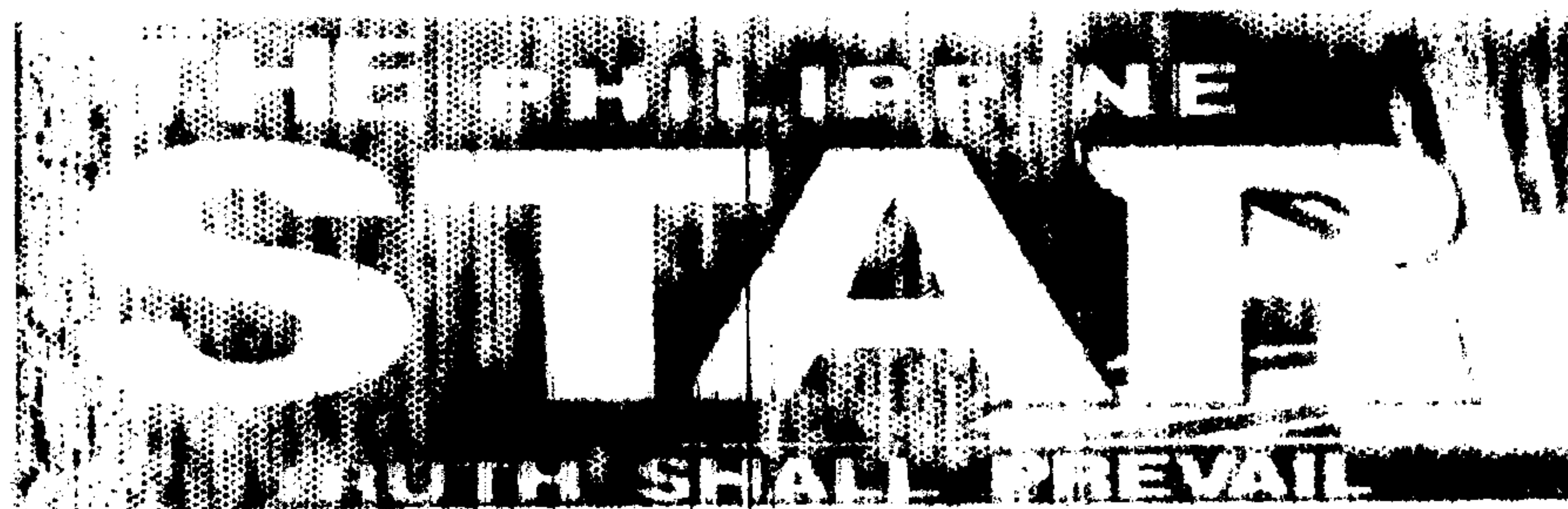
This, he said, is the reason President Aquino signed Executive Order 193, expanding the coverage of the NGP.

The Cabinet Cluster on Climate Change, which is chaired by Paje, has commissioned the Ateneo de Manila University to study the country's carbon footprint per industry.

The study, he said, will allow the country to get a clear estimate of the corresponding increases in carbon emissions by industry, in particular, and the entire country, in general.

"Currently, our carbon footprint is increasing by 1.3 percent annually. The study was partly the basis for the country's INDC submission," he said. **Jonathan L. Mayuga**

10 JAN 2016



The only paper you read from cover to cover!

PAGE

UPD-2016

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

DENR earmarks P12.4 B for climate programs

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has earmarked P12.4 billion for 19 programs on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction this year.

"More than half of the agency's 2016 budget is allotted for programs that aim to further build the resilience of vulnerable communities and natural ecosystems against the devastating impact of climate change," DENR Secretary Ramon Paje said.

The National Greening Pro-

gram (NGP) gets the lion share of the DENR's climate change expenditures at P8 billion.

NGP is a massive forest rehabilitation program under Executive Order 26 issued by President Aquino in February 2011.

The other climate change programs are protected area development and management program, P1.063 billion; forest protection, P473.6 million; restoration of major river basins (Integrated Natural Resources and Environmental Management Project), P398

million; national geo-hazards assessment, P397 million; clean water program, P194 million; ecological solid waste management regulations, P588.2 million; implementation of the area based management plan of Manila Bay, P80 million; wildlife protection and conservation, P72.2 million and hazardous waste management, P41.7 million.

The climate change programs also include ground-water vulnerability assessment, P18 million; establish-

ment of monitoring stations in water constrained cities, P15.2 million; comprehensive water resource assessment in major river basins, P13.6 million; coastal resources mapping, P10.6 million; mapping of low-lying areas vulnerable to sea level rise due to climate change, P9.8 million; land cover mapping, P9.6 million and development of ground-water management plan, P6 million.

Water conservation

Meanwhile, Paje said water

conservation should start this month to address the effects of El Niño.

Paje said that he would discuss the matter with the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) which he chairs, and order a thorough review of water allocation.

"We are confident that if the water level in Angat Dam reached its normal level of 212 meters, the water supply will be enough until the next rainy season. Considering the situation now, we are still hoping that rains will come in by May

or June," he said.

The NWRB increased Metro Manila's water allocation from Angat Dam last month as the water level in the reservoir improved.

The municipal water allocation has been raised to 40 cubic meters per second from 38 cms this month, while the standby allocation for irrigation has been increased to 25 cms from 10 cms.

The NWRB said the amount is still below the normal water allocation of 43 cms for metro water concessionaires.

Daily Tribune

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOR

19 JAN 2016

DATE

PAGE

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Inter-agency meeting held to resolve dam project woes

By Alvin Murcia

The concerns of the Bugkalot Tribe about their share to a dam project could be finally resolve as the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) and other government agencies started to discuss the matter.

An inter-agency meeting led by NIA Administrator Dr. Florencio Padernal was held recently to address the concern of the said tribes.

Padernal in the said meeting reiterated to the representatives of the Department of Finance (DoF), Office of the Presidential Assistant for Food Security and Agricultural Modernization (OPAFSAM), National Water Resources Board (NWRB) and National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) the need to solve the matter quickly.

The meeting started as NIA Legal Services department manager Genever Dionio resonated the gist of the recent dialog with the Bugkalot Tribe.

He gave emphasis on the two major issues raised by the tribesmen, including the tribe's percentage claim on the profit of CalEnergy operations as well as the 10 percent dependable flow.

On the other hand, a four-page document was presented by CMIPP project manager Engr. Alexander Coloma stating the action plans and recommendations collated from the previous meeting with the Bugkalot Tribe.

Dionio reiterated that technical and legal issues are the two major deterrents blocking both parties to attain solid solution toward profit-sharing.

The Bugkalot Tribes are holding their rights with IPRA law at their back while CalEnergy are questioning the constitutionality of certain provisions of the said law.

In the same manner, NWRB Executive Director Seville David Jr. responded that the request of Bugkalot tribe to immediately release the 10 percent dependable flow should take time because there can be a possible structural modification from the existing structure to divert the water flow.

Other issues related to the concerns of the Bugkalot Tribe were also discussed including some implications on water release, existence of endemic fish in the area most specifically "Ludong," and CalEnergy's Corporate Social Responsibility efforts.

A marathon discussion is also set to appreciate all aspects of the issues with the Bugkalots.

Other points that must be included in the next meeting like studying the benefits continuously being given to Bugkalot Tribe, design and modification structure to address the water release, and presenting chronological events of the issue from the start up to the current status.

The inter-agency meeting was a response to the previous dialog last Dec. 9, 2015 between NIA Top Management and Bugkalot Tribe led by Nagtipunan, Quirino Mayor and Bugkalot Chieftain Mr. Rosario Camma.

NIA is firm with its position that the agency can only act as a facilitator between CASECNAN and Bugkalot Tribe in achieving a mutually beneficial agreement and resolution on both parties involved.

Earlier, 15,000 members of the Bugkalot indigenous people (IP) spread in Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino and Aurora have accused the government of perpetrating a 19-year injustice by diverting the water of Casecnan River to boost the supply of Pantabangan Dam in Nueva Ecija.

Camma of Nagtipunan, Quirino, said that CalEnergy Water and Energy Co. Inc. (Cecweci) had violated its own pledge to pay the Bugkalot a royalty for the use of the water of Casecnan.

"We have never been paid," Camma disclosed, even as Administrative Order No. 248 issued by former President Fidel V. Ramos creating a task force to oversee the Casecnan Multi-Purpose Irrigation and Power Project made it clear that it should respond to the 20 issues raised by the Bugkalot, including the payment of a share from the proceeds of the project.

Multibillionaire financier Warren Buffett owns CalEnergy through his holding company, the Des Moines, Iowa-based Berkshire Hathaway.

Camma said the project was started in 1995 under the build-operate-transfer concept, and was designed to irrigate 50,000 hectares of farms in Central Luzon and generate 140 megawatts of power.

The mayor said the project has not irrigated a single square meter of land cultivated by the Bugkalot in Quirino, Nueva Vizcaya and Aurora, and not a single watt of electricity has benefited anyone of them.

19 JAN 2016

DATE

PAGE

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Metro Manila air will be cleaner in 2016—Paje

ENVIRONMENT Secretary Ramon J.P. Paje said Metro Manila's air quality will continue to improve with the implementation of a policy mandating cleaner motor-vehicle fuel starting this year.

This, as Paje said, the level of total suspended particulates (TSP) has gone down to 101 micrograms per normal cubic meter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{Ncm}$) from July to December last year from the 106 $\mu\text{g}/\text{Ncm}$ during the same period last year.

This even as January to June air pollution last year was recorded to reach 130 $\mu\text{g}/\text{Ncm}$.

Paje said that separate administrative orders issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Department of Energy (DOE) last year prescribed cleaner fuels.

DENR Administrative Order 2015-04 was issued in March 2015, while the DOE issued a parallel circular shortly after.

"We can expect cleaner air in 2016 because starting this year, all gasoline pump stations should be selling Euro-4 fuel," Paje said.

He said the use of Euro-4 gasoline and diesel was prescribed by two separate administrative orders issued by the DENR and the DOE last year and took effect on January 1, 2016.

"Motorists can ask pump stations if they are selling Euro 4. If not, they can refuse and demand for Euro-4 fuel," Paje said.

The orders target the shift from Euro-2 fuel to Euro-4 fuel that will reduce by 500 percent the sulphur being emitted by motor vehicles using both diesel and gasoline.

Around 80 percent of air pollution comes from motor vehicles, while the other 20 percent comes from industries and other sources.

Also starting this year, Paje said that all brand-new motor vehicles will be issued certificate of conformity by the DENR's Environmental Management Bureau (EMB).

"We hope that traffic will improve in Metro Manila because addressing the traffic problem will help reduce air pollution," Paje said.

Meanwhile, EMB Director Juan Miguel Cuna said aside from prescribing cleaner fuel, the DENR will conduct garage visits in Metro Manila and different provinces to check on the compliance of owners of private, as well as public-utility vehicles to its appeal for proper-engine maintenance. *Jonathan L. Mayuga*

The Manila Times

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Paje calls for water conservation

ENVIRONMENT Secretary Ramon Paje stressed the need to conserve water at Angat Dam despite its abundance at present to ensure water availability at the height of the El Niño phenomenon early this year.

"Conservation should start this January even if Angat's water level is high," he said.

He noted that the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) will soon review Angat's water situation and the latest El Niño forecast so government can allocate water from the dam accordingly for the coming months.

Rain-fed Angat supplies water for irrigation, power generation and Metro Manila's needs.

Last year, NWRB reduced allocation of Angat water for Metro Manila and suspended normal supply of irrigation water.

The Philippine Atmospheric,

Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) had warned that El Niño may intensify to a new record level, further prompting government to implement contingency measures.

In late 2015, however, Angat Dam's water situation improved as rainfall from several tropical cyclones increased its reserve.

On Saturday, the dam's water level stood at 213.50 meters, higher than the flood season high water level of 212 meters.

But Paje said that the public should still conserve water because of the possibility that there could be no rain for months.

Pagasa's forecast released this week indicates Angat Dam will likely face water woes in the first semester of the year. The dam's water level will likely dip to 208 meters by February, the weather bureau said.

PNA

Metro water allocation to be reviewed amid El Niño

By ELLALYN B. DE VERA

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) will be reviewing the water allocation for Metro Manila's domestic requirements to effectively conserve water until after the impact of El Niño eases by mid-year.

DENR Secretary Ramon Paje said he will order the National Water Resources Board (NWRB), an attached agency of the DENR, to immediately do a thorough review of water allocation.

Paje, who is also chairman of the NWRB, explained that the Board's protocol is to allot 43-45 cubic meters of water to the water concessionaires Maynilad and Manila Water, once the elevation at Angat Dam in Bulacan reaches 212 meters.

Currently, the water level in Angat Dam is at 213.5 meters, or 1.5 meters above its 212-meter maximum operating level.

But the water allocation for Metro Manila remains at 40 cms, which is three to five meters below its normal share.

"We are confident that with the Angat Dam reaching 212 meters, our water supply will be enough until next rainy season. But at this point, PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration) is telling us that there's still not enough rain in July due to the prevailing El Niño," Paje said.

"We have to make sure that there will be

enough water, especially from May to July," he added.

"We have to start discussing conservation measures with the NWRB Board this month, not during the critical months," he also said.

From January to June, PAGASA said the country could expect two to six tropical cyclones within this period, as compared to six to eight tropical cyclones during a non-El Niño year.

PAGASA noted that during the strong El Niño years 1972, 1982, 1997 and 2009, no tropical cyclone was recorded during the months of January and February.

The current El Niño is expected to end by May but PAGASA pointed out that its impact could be felt up until the second half of the year.

The adverse impact of the continuing El Niño event includes below normal rainfall and warmer than normal temperatures.

PAGASA Administrator Dr. Vicente Malano earlier said the water level at Angat Dam in January 2015 was the same as this year, but last year "Angat Dam's level went down to 168 meters in July-August."

"We are not discounting the possibility that Angat Dam's level could also reach this level by the second half of the year," Malano said.

Lucero said rainfall over the Angat Watershed is expected to be near normal this month, way below normal by February and March, below normal by April, and near normal by May.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICES

In Pantukan, Compostela Valley

MGB greenlights \$2-B King-King gold project

By JAMES A. LOYOLA

The \$2-billion King-King copper-gold mine project in Pantukan, Compostela Valley has been approved by the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB).

Construction and mine development can start after the developer, Nationwide Development Corporation (Nadecor), has complied with certain conditions, said MGB Director Leo Jasareno.

King-King is an open-pit mine that could have an annual output of 138 million pounds of copper, about half a million ounces of silver, and more than 236,000 ounces of gold over a period of 22 years.

potential to generate great value and thousands of jobs for the Philippines," said Nadecor.

The Declaration of Mine Project Feasibility (DMPF) was submitted to the Philippine Government in May, 2012.

St. Augustine said the ore delivery and processing rate of the project will be a designed throughput of 100,000 tons per day (tpd) split between 40,000 tpd to an on-off heap leach and 60,000 tpd to a flotation mill with agitated tails leach.

The mining rate will be approximately 178,000 tons per day for the 22-year mine plan. Production from the heap leach process is expected to start one year prior to commencing mill

One of a few mining projects approved under the administration of President Benigno Aquino, the King-King mine is not covered by a local ban on new mineral agreements, which has been in place since 2011 pending the legislation of a new revenue sharing agreement between the government and miners.

Toronto-listed St. Augustine Gold & Copper Ltd also has a stake in the project.

Nationwide Development Corporation (Nadecor) and its joint venture partner St. Augustine Gold and Copper Limited had announced that the results of the preliminary feasibility (PFS) study on the project show that it has

operations.

It added that robust project economics are driven in large part by an initial five-year higher grade operation with a low strip ratio and tidewater proximity.

Average annual production during the first five years of full production (both heap leach and mill in operation) is 270 million pounds of copper (122,487 MT), 360,143 ounces gold (11,202 kg) and 568,958 ounces silver (17,697 kg) with an average gold equivalent total cost of \$454 per ounce.

The estimated initial capital cost is \$2.04 billion including the mine, the mill, on-off leach pad, power plant, port facility and \$240 million in contingency costs.

favorable economic potential.

It is expected to generate an estimated pre-tax net present value of \$2.0 billion. The project also has an estimated pre-tax internal rate of return (IRR) of 24.8 percent.

"The results of this advanced Preliminary Feasibility Study confirm that King-King is an attractive project with robust economics that will bring significant value to our shareholders, our partner and the Philippines," said St. Augustine.

"We are pleased that the millions of dollars and years of intensive technical work that St. Augustine has invested in the PFS have paid off and confirmed that this flagship mining project has the

The Standard

DEFINING THE NEWS

10 JAN 2016

DATE

A-8

PAGE

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

AURORA RESORTS LACK ECCS

By Ferdie G. Domingo

BALER—Nine out of 10 resorts in Aurora province are operating without the required Environmental Compliance Certificates, according to an official of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

The lack of the requisite ECCs is posing a risk to the province's tourism just like the problems now hounding Boracay, said the regional director of the DENR's Environmental Management Bureau, the office in charge of issuing the document.

An ECC is required to be secured from the EMB for any project in the Philippines that poses a potential environmental risk or impact (such as mining, agriculture projects, and construction).

The EMB issues the ECC but only after a thorough and positive review of the project's application. This certificate indicates that the proposed project will not cause a significantly negative impact on the environment.

The ECC contains specific measures and conditions that must be met by the project proponent before and during the operation of the project.

In some cases, conditions are listed to be performed during the project's abandonment phase to lessen identified potential environmental impacts.

An ECC also certifies that the proponent has complied with all the requirements of the Environmental Impact Statement System and has committed to implement its approved environmental management plan.

Cyril Coliflores, DENR provincial environment and natural resources officer, said that save for a few resorts and hotels in this capital town, practically majority of those operating in the province have failed to secure ECCs which provide for mitigating measures and pollution control.

Coliflores said the holding capacities of resorts to accommodate the influx of tourists are going beyond the normal, adding Aurora is threatening to become another Boracay, unable to absorb the tourism boom.

He said the EMB in Central Luzon is in the process of training pollution control officers in the province to arrest the emerging urban blight brought on by tourist migration.

Lormelyn Claudio, EMB regional director, confirmed that Aurora is going the way of Boracay in terms of environmental risks posed by tourism.

Claudio observed that the tourism surge has also triggered the mushrooming of souvenir shops.

She said that the EMB has been conducting seminars among local government units and resort operators in the province to help them cope with the tourism boom.

"In fact, we have embarked on training seminars with resort operators in Barangay Dinadiawan in Dipaculao and in this capital town," she said, adding their office has also coordinated with the environment and natural resources office of the provincial government for the fine-tuning of an ecological profile in the eight municipalities of the province.

She said that what the EMB envisioned was the crafting of a master plan to enable the entire province to cope with the environmental demands of tourism.

Vice Gov. Rommel Rico Teh Angara, presiding officer of the Sangguniang Panlalawigan, said they have already called the attention of the municipal planning officer and the municipal engineer, more specifically in this capital town, to take into consideration the compliance of resort owners and operators with regard to the securing of ECCs.

The Manila Times

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Decades-old trees cut down from Subic forest

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT: Eight dump trucks loaded with more than 100 logs from decades-old trees allegedly cut from ancestral Aeta land to give way to a solar-wind power project have been impounded by forest rangers of the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA), on suspicion that they lacked the necessary documents, a source told *The Manila Times* over the weekend.

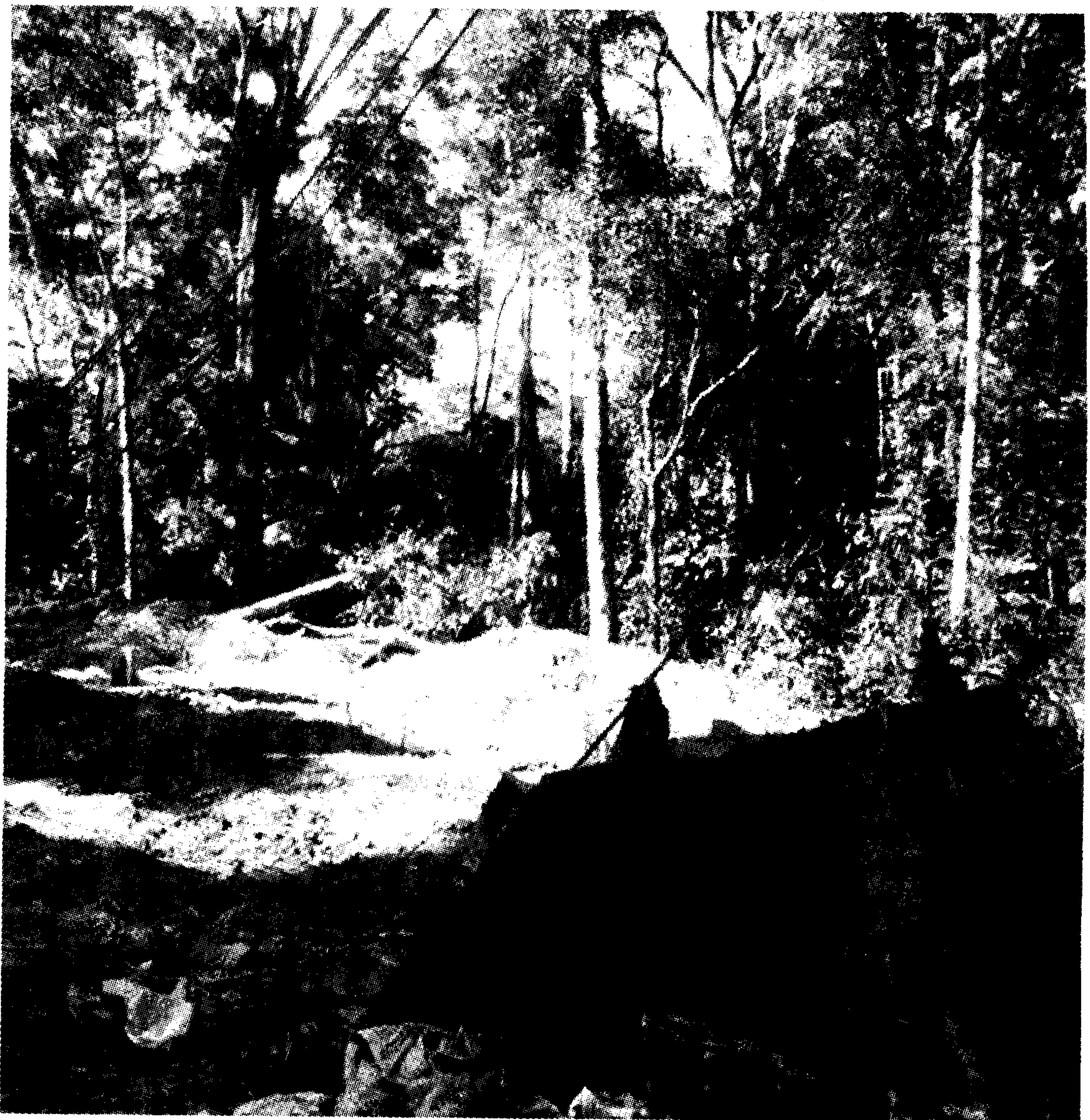
The trucks carrying the logs were brought to the SBMA-LED headquarters but were reportedly released after Olongapo City Environment and Natural Resources Office (CENRO) chief, Marife Castillo, called the attention of SBMA Chairman Roberto Garcia.

Castillo told members of the media that the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) had issued the necessary permits to cut the trees and transport them.

It was not immediately known where the logs would be taken.

An Aeta member of the SBMA Forest Rangers, Ricky Manalansan, said they stopped the trucks and found no permit for the transport of the logs. The trucks were reportedly loaded with Eucalyptus, Cupang and other tree species. A big chunk of Lawaan tree and remnants of other tree species were also found in the clearings adjacent to the access road that reportedly used to be a bike trail to Pastolan Village, the report said.

Based on the DENR assessment, the logs came from trees about 70



■ Part of the area where trees were cut to give way to the installation of transmission line towers for the solar-wind power project inside the Subic forest. SCREEN GRAB FROM \T" _BLANK" SUBICNEWSLINK.COM

to 90 years old, as shown by the rings seen on the trunks.

Republic Act 7227 which created the Subic Bay Freeport Zone classifies Subic forest as a national

park, where a permanent total log ban is imposed.

Aetas living in Pastolan Village and nearby areas have expressed deep concern over the rampant

cutting down of trees on the project site inside the forest, saying the practice has been seriously affecting their livelihood.

PATRICK ROXAS

MANILA BULLETIN

THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

10 JAN 2016

DATE

16
PAGE

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICES

• TEFI to aid in mangrove upkeep

PAGBILAO, Quezon -- The Team Energy Foundation Inc.(TEFI) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Regional Office 4-A have entered into an agreement for the repair and restoration of the 780-meter boardwalk at the Pagbilao Mangrove Experimental Forest (PMEF) in Barangay Palsabangon, this town. Signatories to the agreement were TEFI Officer-in-Charge Toshiro Kume and DENR Region 4-A Director Reynulfo Juan. The pledge is for the improvement of the 145-hectare mangrove forest, considered to have the most diverse species composition in the Philippines, and the second in Southeast Asia. It serves as a demonstration area for mangroves forest enhancement and rehabilitation. Juan expressed appreciation for the TEFI's support in the upgrade and repair of infrastructure in the research facility and for its sharing in the mission of sustaining the health of the ecosystems in the areas where team Energy operates. (Danny J. Estacio)

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

P-1

Saving the endangered 'pawikan'

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

First of two parts

'WE receive reports almost every week [from all over the Philippines]," environmental advocate AA Yaptinchay said of the marine turtles which are held in captivity, trapped, caught in nets, or found dead.

Yaptinchay, founder and director of Marine Wildlife Watch of the Philippines, described the unfortunate plight of the endangered marine turtles, popularly known as *pawikan*, in the country despite an ongoing wildlife-conservation program.

Through social media, the group receives reports about abuses against marine mammals, particularly marine turtles, which it relays to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for appropriate action.

Marine turtles are among the most endangered marine species in the world. All of the seven known marine turtle species are on the list of endangered wildlife, whose trade is prohibited under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

Three of the species are considered critically endangered and another three are endangered under the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The flatback turtle's conservation status is "data deficient," because of lack of data on its population.

Experts say the presence of *pawikan* is a sign of having a healthy marine ecosystem, as these long-distance travelers which swim across oceans to forage tend to stay longer in areas where food is abundant, where they are left alone in peace.

Sea turtles feed on seagrass and algae; controlling the growth of seagrass beds, Director Theresa Mundita Lim of the Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) said.

This increases productivity and enhances the nutritional value of sea grass, an important habitat-forming species, she added.

Lim started her career in the DENR and was assigned in Turtle Islands, helping the Task Force Pawikan in the conservation and protection of marine turtles.

The diet and feeding habits of marine turtles, depending on the species, are unique. Some species help enhance coral growth as they feed on algae-engulfing corals.

Others control jellyfish population as they feast on the species. Marine turtles also deposit feces as they travel from the feeding ground to nesting sites, depositing nutrients to tidal flats and seagrass beds.

Declining population

GLOBAL population of marine turtles is sharply decreasing because of various threats, including habitat destruction; hunting and illegal wildlife trade; accidental catching; pollution disease; and lately, climate change.

In the Philippines, which is known to host thousands of nesting sites, sightings of *pawikan* are becoming very rare, except for reports of carcasses having been discovered, or marine turtle shells having been seized from illegal-wildlife traders, suggesting that the population of these endangered marine species in the ocean may be rapidly decreasing, as well.

Reports of declining population of the endangered *pawikan* are backed by the latest inventory of nesting marine turtles and their turtle eggs on Turtle Islands,

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

P-2

Saving the endangered pawikan

7



marine turtle species in the Philippines are on the list of endangered wildlife

the biggest *pawikan* sanctuary in Southeast Asia called Turtle Islands Heritage Protected Area (TIHPA).

TIHPA is a unique protected area jointly managed by Malaysia and the Philippines. Six of the islands are in the Philippines, which compose the Turtle Islands Wildlife Sanctuary (TIWS), three other islands are in Sabah, Malaysia, composing the Turtle Islands Park.

In the Philippines only four of the six islands—Taganak—Lihi-man, Langahan and Baguan—are being monitored. The DENR-BMB stopped monitoring *pawikan* nesting on Buan Island since 1987 on Bakkungan Island monitoring stopped in 2007. Both islands are now thickly inhabited by people who had encroached in the beaches. Bakkungan Island is also besieged by infighting among local tribes, Ramoso said.

DENR records show the number of nesting marine turtles has significantly dropped from a record-high 19,550 in 2012 to 17,593 in 2013. In 2014 the number of nesting female marine turtles continued to drop to only 14,377 heads. As of September 2015, only 11,277 marine turtles came to lay their eggs.

Along with the drop of nesting marine turtles, the annual egg count during the same period also dropped significantly. From the 2 million turtle eggs recorded in 2012, around 1.6 million eggs were recorded in 2013.

In 2014 the egg count continued to drop with just 1.3 million eggs. As of September 2015, the egg count is further down to just slightly over 1 million. Eighty-eight percent of the eggs have hatched and were released into the wild as of September 2015, considered as a very high survival rate, said Milo Ramoso, the DENR-BMB's point person for *pawikan*.

"From this figure, we can say the number of nesting marine turtles is decreasing," Ramoso said. Nevertheless, Ramoso said the report of declining *pawikan* population will have to be validated in the next three to five years, during which the same set of nesting marine turtles are expected to return.

He said egg harvesting in the country, including on Turtle Islands, is no longer allowed since the passage of the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act in 2001. However, some communities on Turtle Island, are persistent in requesting the DENR to allow them to harvest eggs, it being their traditional source of livelihood.

Lim explained that the decrease

in the number of nesting *pawikan* on Turtle Island could be caused by various factors.

It is possible that some of the nesting marine turtles have found other nesting sites nearby. Not all islands are being monitored today, unlike before, when the Pawikan Conservation Project is focused on Turtle Islands. Today, since the program is part of the national wildlife conservation program, the attention is diverted to areas," Lim said partly in Filipino.

Lim added that the declining number of nesting *pawikan* may also be a manifestation of the resurgence of the illegal wildlife trade in Tawi Tawi, underscoring the need to strengthen law enforcement in the area. "There is a need for concerted effort. Although our program has been successful in some aspect, we need to intensify law enforcement, particularly against illegal-wildlife trade," she said partly in Filipino.

Causes of death

NATURAL predation and climate-change effects, such as sea-level rise, storm surge and extreme heat, adversely affect marine-turtle populations, too.

Nests are often destroyed during typhoons that trigger storm surge. While turtle eggs can tolerate rainwater, Ramoso said saltwater causes plasmolysis that destroys the eggs.

Also, when marine turtles accidentally fall as they go to beaches with their backs on the ground, they die because of heat.

"Within two hours, marine turtles may die when they are turned upside down and exposed to the sun," he said partly in Filipino.

Besides natural cause, leading causes of death of marine turtles, such as illegal and destructive fishing methods, are difficult to prevent, as they happen in the open seas.

Fisheries bycatch is also a major cause of death of marine turtles.

Illegal-fishing activities, such as the use of dynamite and cyanide, result in accidental death of marine turtles. Some marine turtles also die of drowning after being trapped in fish nets left by fishermen to catch fish in the open seas.

Similarly, harvesting *pawikan* eggs persists in unmanaged nesting sites, it being a source of food and livelihood of people in coastal areas.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

P-3

Saving the endangered pawikan

Some marine turtles also die because of indigestion, after accidentally ingesting plastics, mistaking them for jellyfish. Globally, however, hunting and illegal-wildlife trade remain as the biggest threats to the survival of the marine turtles. International poaching, Ramoso said, takes place everywhere. In the Philippines the DENR-BMB receives reports of massive poaching of marine turtles in Tawi-Tawi and Palawan. From 2012 to 2015, the PNP-Maritime Police and the Coast Guard have seized

around 200 marine turtles from illegal-wildlife traders. Some of the turtles are alive, but most are already dead. The illegal activities, Ramoso said, are perpetrated by Vietnamese pretending to be Malaysian using Malaysian flags, but investigation would later reveal that the operations are financed by Chinese. He said those arrested were charged with some having been convicted and sent to various jails for their crime.

Increased level of awareness

"THAT is why we are continuously campaigning for the conservation of marine turtles," Lim said.

She said the successful information, education and communication campaign resulted in increased awareness about the plight of the *pawikan*. "Before, cruelty against animals, hunting and harvesting of eggs happen without our knowledge. Now, we learn about them through social media, and they are given action," said she.

Several local government units (LGUs) have, in fact, adopted their own *pawikan* conservation program and coordinate with the DENR in maintaining either hatcheries or protecting nesting grounds of the marine animal.

She said the DENR has existing partnership with 21 LGUs for the conservation of *pawikan*.

'One in a thousand'

A *PAWIKAN* in the ocean can be considered one in a thousand, because of the species's high mortality rate. While marine turtles live up to a hundred years old, experts believe only one in every 1,000 hatchlings actually grow and reach reproductive age.

The presence of marine turtles indicates a healthy marine ecosystem, as these long-distance travelers, which swim across the vast oceans most of their lives in search of food, mate and nesting ground. They tend to stay longer where food is abundant, and where they are left alone in peace to forage and find a suitable nesting ground to lay their eggs. Experts say a female *pawikan* needs to reach at least 30 years to become sexually mature to be able to reproduce. While a female marine turtle can lay from 100 to 300 eggs, not all eggs are hatched.

In their natural habitat, hatchlings need to struggle by crawling their way up to the surface of the beach from their deep nests to the surface and, instinctively, to the shorelines. Along the way to their natural habitats, most of the hatchlings end up as prey to bigger animals, while others simply die of stress.

Young *pawikan*, even upon reaching the shorelines, often end up dead in their first year, with only a handful finally growing up to become juveniles, the age where they are ready to explore the vast ocean and face more serious threats.

Important nesting grounds

ACCORDING to the DENR, five of the seven known marine turtle species can be found in the Philippines, with four of the species actually finding beaches the perfect nesting place. They are the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*); hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), olive ridley turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) and loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*). Of the five, the green, hawksbill and olive ridley turtles are widely distributed throughout the country. Nests of green turtles are concentrated in Mindanao, particularly on Turtle Islands Wildlife Sanctuary, Bancuan Island in Mapun and other islands in the province of Tawi-Tawi, and Panikian Island in Zamboanga del Sur.

Nests of olive ridley turtles, meanwhile, can be found in the provinces of Zambales, Bataan and Batangas.

Hawksbill turtle's nests can be found on Romblon Island, Magsaysay in Misamis Oriental and the Davao Gulf. The DENR recorded the first documentation of a nesting leatherback turtle in 2013 in Barangay Rawis, Legazpi City, Albay, in the Bicol region. Foraging, mating and nesting in the country's territorial waters and beaches take place all year-round, depending on the species, Lim said.

Generally, individual nesters climb up the beach four to five times to complete their nesting in a season. Nesting season occurs once a year, but it is followed after three to five years, making it difficult to monitor and conduct a count of the number of nesting in various parts of the country, Lim said.

10 JAN 2016

BusinessMirror

DATE

PAGE

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

A broader look at today's business

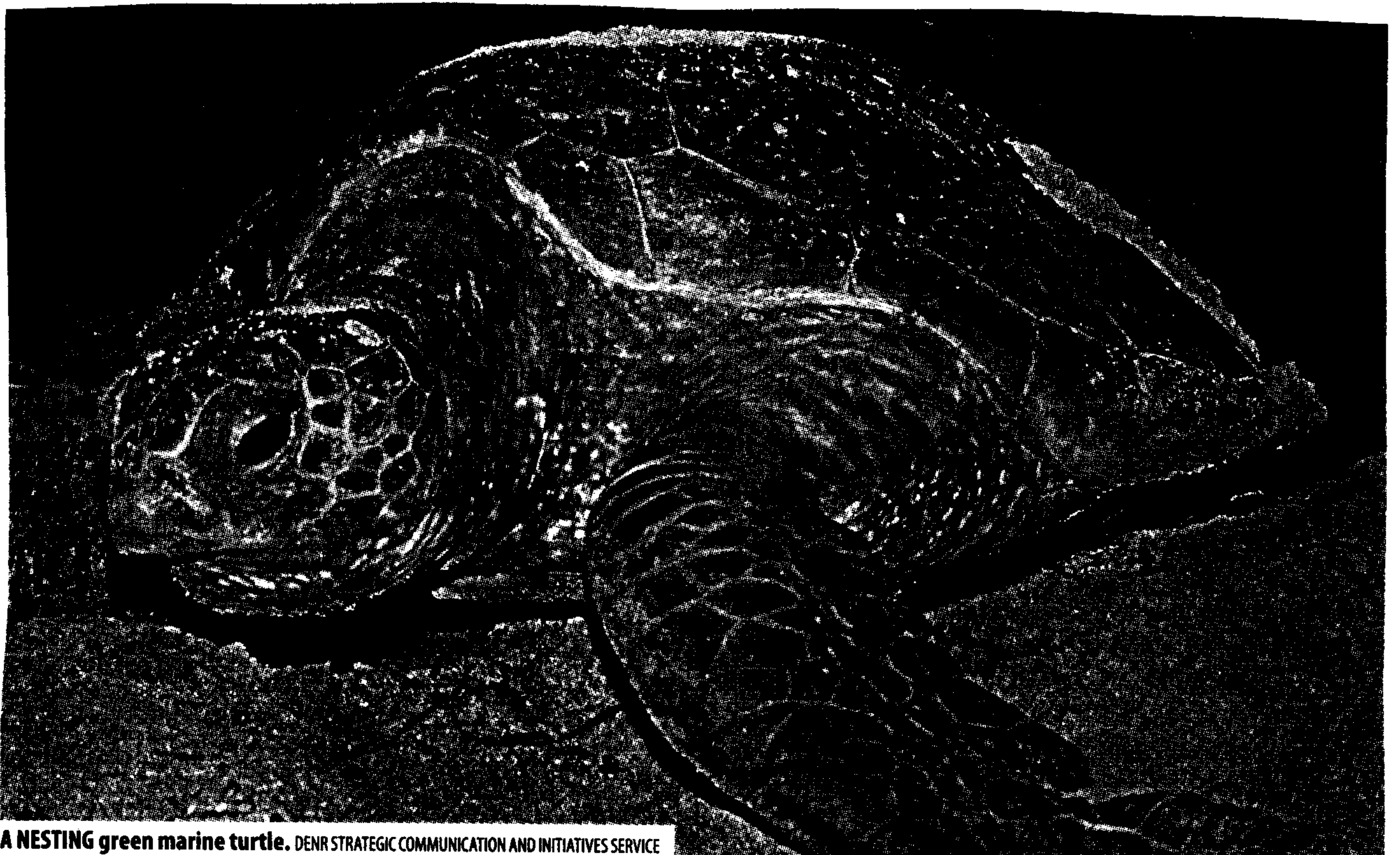
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

P-4

Saving the endangered pawikan

As part of the *pawikan*-conservation effort, the DENR monitors hatcheries maintained and operated by its various partners, including LGUs, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations (POs). Small hatcheries run by LGUs, POs and NGOs, in partnership with the DENR, include those which can be found in Luzon, particularly in the province of La Union, Naic and Ternate in Cavite; Zambales, Morong and Mariveles in Bataan; Abra de Ilog in Mindoro; Lian and Calatagan in Batangas; and Dajican in Mati, Davao Oriental.

Ramoso said there are also hatcheries in Miatum, Sarangani province, and Punta Dumalag in Davao City. From January 2011 to October 2015, a total of 153,907 *pawikan* hatchlings were released into the wild from the hatcheries, Ramoso said. "The hatchlings are recovered eggs that were transferred to hatcheries," he said, adding that the hatchlings would not have survived because the nests are not safe from natural predators, including destructive human activities. *To be concluded*



A NESTING green marine turtle. DENR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Asean confab on biodiversity set

A BIG biodiversity event in Southeast Asia will be held from February 15 to 19 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the staging of the Asean Conference on Biodiversity (ACB2016), a premier international conference on the conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity in Southeast Asia.

The event is organized by the Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), in cooperation with the Royal Thai government, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Thailand, through the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning. With the theme "Biodiversity for Sustainable Development," ACB2016 is expected to draw some 500 delegates from Asean national governments; private-sector companies; international, regional and national institutions; non-governmental organizations; academic, science and research community; students; media; and ACB partner-countries and organizations.

ACB Executive Director Atty. Roberto V. Oliva said the conference will report the progress and gaps of the Asean region in meeting the 2020 global biodiversity targets, known as Aichi Targets; showcase innovative policies, good practices and experiences in meeting such targets in the Asean region; and provide a platform for Asean governments and relevant stakeholders to discuss and recommend ways forward to meet the Aichi Targets.

"We hope to provide an opportunity for biodiversity stakeholders to enhance partnerships and form new alliances; discuss ways and means to financially sustain biodiversity conservation in the Asean region through the Asean Biodiversity Fund; and engage more sectors, particularly the business community, in biodiversity conservation and advocacy," Oliva added.

Explaining the reason for holding the conference, Oliva said Southeast Asia is home to four of the world's 34 biodiversity hot spots which are characterized both by exceptional levels of plant and animal endemism and by serious levels of habitat loss. "Land conversion, forest fires, shifting cultivation, large-scale mining, wildlife hunting and trading, population growth and poverty, climate change, and lack of appropriate conservation-management policies all contribute to habitat destruction and the consequent loss of biological diversity. Biodiversity loss could trigger enormous effects on health and wealth. The conference will give stakeholders an opportunity to unify conservation efforts from all fronts," Oliva explained.

ACB2016 will be conducted through plenary and breakout sessions, panel discussions and presentations to facilitate exchange among participants. There will be parallel events, exhibits and fun events. Clarissa Arida, ACB director for Programme Development and Implementation, said the conference would feature plenary presentations on issues to be taken up at the forthcoming 13th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP13) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to be held in Mexico in December 2016.

She added these would cover thematic area discussions on access and benefit-sharing (ABS), the Nagoya Protocol on ABS, climate change and biodiversity, health and biodiversity and other key biodiversity concerns. The conference will also highlight Asean member-states' progress in updating and implementing their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans and progress in achieving the CBD Strategic Plan.

She added that the conference would also highlight the developments in advancing the Asean biodiversity agenda within the context of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, the Asean Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025 and the newly adopted global mandate on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Dr. Sheila Vergara, ACB director for Biodiversity Information Management, said a major highlight of ACB2016 is the soft launch of the Second Edition of the Asean Biodiversity Outlook (ABO2). ABO is the flagship publication of ACB, showcasing developments on biodiversity conservation in the Asean region. She added that ABO2 would provide a midterm report on the progress of Asean member-states on the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

Oliva announced that the conference would have a Business and Biodiversity Forum, with representatives of private corporations in Asia discussing the link between business and biodiversity. There will be presentations on good practices on business engagement on biodiversity conservation through the CBD Global Partnership for Business and Biodiversity.

19 JAN 2016

DATE

A-4
PAGE

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Security was high, but so was trash

OVER a thousand Army soldiers were assigned to guard the routes of the huge Black Nazarene procession in Manila in addition to about 5,000 policemen, firemen and contracted security guards, according to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

The NDRRMC, which monitored the situation, said the Armed Forces of the Philippines deployed 1,002 personnel to provide security, medical and logistical services for the procession.

Four security agencies were also tapped to provide 407 personnel and 16 M35 trucks. The Bureau of Fire Protection deployed 232 personnel in strategic areas, along with fire trucks.

Earlier, the Philippine National Police said they were deploying 4,000 personnel to secure the procession.

Despite the huge security mobilization, police and Army officers denied there were security threats to the annual celebration of the Feast of the Black Nazarene, among the largest Catholic processions in the world.

The NDRRMC, in its report, noted that the annual tradition, in which the image of the Black Nazarene is paraded from Quirino Grandstand to Quiapo Church, is joined by millions of devotees increasing at an annual rate of 15 to 20 percent.

A tumultuous event, stampedes and deaths have marred past Black Nazarene processions.

But even before this year's procession was halfway through, environmental group EcoWaste Coalition expressed its dismay over the trash that dotted Manila's streets Saturday morning.

In a statement, EcoWaste coordinator Aileen Lucero said the litter was composed of cigarette butts, Styrofoam food containers, and plastic bags and bottles that they saw in Rizal Park which was "deeply deplorable," since the park has both no-smoking and no-littering policies. *Jaymee T. Gamil and Annelle Tayao-Juego*

19 JAN 2016

DATE

PAGE

A-12

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

