

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

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DENR

IN THE NEWS

Duterte Cabinet picks run into resistance

BY ANGELA LOPEZ DE LEON

SEVERAL environment groups yesterday expressed concern over the pronouncement of Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte that he is open to giving the environment portfolio to a member of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

Aside from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Department of Agrarian Reform, Department of Labor and Employment, and Department of Social Welfare and Development were also offered by the incoming president to the CPP.

CPP founder Jose Maria Sison has said the group would consider the offer and

make recommendations that may include non-CPP members.

Angelina Galang, president of the Green Convergence for Safe Food, Healthy Economy and Sustainable Environment, asked why Duterte would appoint to his Cabinet "people who have been enemies of the state, constantly trying to destabilize the government."

"Have they shown goodwill? Are they now laying down their arms?" Galang said.

"As an environmentalist, I think the DENR should be free of any ideology," she added.

The Green Convergence, in its website, said it is a coalition of networks, organiza-

tions and individuals "working for a development paradigm that addresses the need for social and economic upliftment, and preserving life-supporting water, air and land for generations to come."

Von Hernandez, former executive director of Greenpeace Southeast Asia and a recipient of the 2003 Goldman Environmental Prize, said Duterte should clearly his basis for offering these partial Cabinet posts to the CPP.

Hernandez said Duterte must ensure people with proven experience and of caliber and integrity would be appointed.

See DUTERTE > P

18 MAY 2016

Malaya Business Insight

www.malaya.com.ph

DATE
B1 + B6

PAGE
✓

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

* DUTERTE CABINET PICKS

PAGE 2/2

• FROM PAGE B1 •

DUTERTE

these top government posts and not simply because it is being made in pursuit of peace.

"Hidden agendas must be discarded," he said.

"It would be tragic if environmental protection or social welfare were bartered away for political accommodation without due regard for competence, proficiency or expertise," he added.

Sonia Mendoza, president of EcoWaste Coalition and chairman of Mother Earth Foundation, said Duterte should appoint in the DENR post "a person of integrity and probity, who will serve as the country's number one champion for zero waste, chemical safety and environmental protection regardless of her/his ideological or party affiliation."

The leftist group Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan) welcomed Duterte's offer of government posts to the CPP.

Bayan said this move signals positive development for jump-starting the peace process.

The group also suggested the appointment of peace negotiators, who are acceptable to the National Democratic Front of the Philippines, to boost chances of progress in the peace talks.

"A just and lasting peace entails serious economic and political reforms that address

the roots of the armed conflict," Bayan said.

The leftist Kilusang Mayo Uno said it welcomes the appointment of "anyone who is genuinely pro-worker, nationalist, and progressive" to the labor post.

"We hope that the appointee would back workers' demands for a national minimum wage in the amount of P750 per day, for an end to contractualization, for respect for workers' right to unionize and strike, and for the upholding of workplace safety and health standards," it also said.

DUTERTE READIES FOR PEACE TALKS

Groundwork is being laid for a resumption of peace talks between the government and the communist group, a Duterte aide said in Davao City.

The National Democratic Front, the CPP's political wing, is preparing to discuss a framework for dialogue and has already dispatched an advanced delegation to Davao City, where Duterte has been mayor for 22 years.

Jesus Dureza, a former congressman and aide to Duterte, said, "We are still preparing the new government's peace roadmap."

Dureza will be Duterte's adviser on peace talks when he takes office on June 30.

Manuel Quinob, a peace advocate who has been involved in earlier negotiations, told Reuters talks were scheduled with Agcaoili.

Efforts to end the leftist insurgency stalled in 2011 when the government refused to free political prisoners.

Political analysts say chances of progress in restarting dialogue are helped by Duterte winning the presidency as he has good relations with the political left.

Duterte has promised to guarantee the safety of Sison and former Catholic priest Luis Jalandoni if they return to the Philippines. The two senior rebel leaders live in exile in the Netherlands and have sought asylum there.

Sison, who was Duterte's political science professor when he was at university, was freed by late President Corazon Aquino in 1986 and fled to Europe.

In an interview with CNN Philippines on Monday, Sison said he was "very proud" of Duterte and welcomed his moves to seek rapprochement.

Experts say one bone of contention could be Duterte's support for releasing hundreds of political prisoners.

The military and police, which have long been opposed to the communists, declined to comment on any such amnesty.

— With Reuters

The Manila Times

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

Duterte urged to nationalize mining

BAGUIO CITY: Environmentalists and indigenous people in Northern Luzon are pushing presumptive President Rodrigo Duterte to nationalize the mining industry "that prioritizes people over profit."

Amianan Salakniban (Defend The North), through spokesperson Igorot leader Fernando Mangili, said Duterte could also work for the junking of the Philippine Mining Act of 1995 that severely affected the environment and the people for over two decades.

Indigenous peoples in the North believe that, "Land is Life... Nobody can own what can outlive us," hence, "it is our responsibility to the future generations that they can still breathe the same fresh air we breathe today."

"Mr. President," Mangili said, "the Filipino people believed that you will be the change that this country needs, please prove us right."

They are appealing to Duterte to make good his promise to address mining and environmental issues.

Duterte earlier said that he will only allow mining if environmental laws are strictly complied with. He said he believes that the government is not getting a fair share from mining revenues.

Amianan Salakniban claimed that for decades, communities in the regions of Ilocos, Cagayan Valley and Cordillera have been suffering from the ill effects of large-scale mining, citing inland open pit mining operations which have caused erosion, landslides, subsidence and the destruction of watershed areas, residential and agricultural lands.

Mangili said that along the coastal areas of Ilocos and Cagayan Valley, magnetite mining has caused massive shoreline retreat and flooding, and made communities near the sea vulnerable to sea surges, citing findings by high-tech sensory analysis by US experts who believe that "NL coastal communities with magnetite mining operations were observed to be subsiding annually and will be underwater in 30-70 years."

Pollution

Large-scale mining in Benguet has polluted the Agno River, affecting the lowlands of Quirino and Cervantes in Ilocos Sur. It has also caused the drying and siltation of rivers and streams, rendering hundred of hectares of farmlands useless.

The biodiversity of affected

areas is in grave danger, Mangili added, noting that species of fish, plants and corals are affected, and the source of livelihood for millions of farmers and fisherfolk is at stake.

Mining communities in Kasi-bu, Nueva Vizcaya have also lost their sources of potable water because of ground disturbance caused by blasting operations of foreign large-scale mining companies, he said.

In the village of Runruno, people reported that springs that provide clean water for the whole community disappeared when FCF Minerals conducted drilling explorations.

Oceana Gold Philippines Inc., (OGPI) is also being blamed for massive destruction to the environment that affected the people of Barangay Didipio, as its mine tailings have been polluting the adjacent river systems affecting several villages surrounding the mining site, Mangili said.

Water sources for irrigation have dried, or have been contaminated with high levels of toxic chemicals like in Cordon, Isabela, where irrigation systems were ruined when an illegal mining company covered the rivers with excavation debris. **THOM F. PICAÑA**

THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
SINCE 1900

MANILA BULLETIN

THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

18 MAY 2016

DATE

UPPER HALF

PAGE

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Duterte pursuing peace talks with Reds

By ELLALYN B. DE VERA and REUTERS

Incoming president Rodrigo Duterte's plan to pursue peace talks with Marxist guerrillas is one of the key factors that he is offering government roles to the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), including its exiled founder.

Duterte's peace offer would include a

ministerial post to Jose Maria Sison, the CPP figurehead who lives in exile in The Netherlands and was once listed by the United States as a "person supporting terrorism."

But in a television interview, Sison ruled himself out of serving in Duterte's Cabinet, but said the CPP would seriously consider his offer. Sison said he felt proud to see Duterte win.

►6

Duterte pursuing peace... ◀1

"No, I don't want any position for myself, but you know there are many people who are very competent," he told CNN Philippines.

Earlier, Duterte had told a news conference in Davao: "I offer my hand in peace to Sison and to others and we can talk."

The mayor and self-styled sheriff of Davao City said it was time to put an end to hostilities with the CPP and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), which has been embroiled in decades of on-off fighting with government troops in the south and east of the country that has killed 40,000 people.

Pantawid program

At the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), which Duterte said may be offered to the CPP, incumbent Secretary Corazon Soliman was preparing the department's transition report.

"We, at the DSWD, are now preparing our transition report. We want to make sure that the aspirations of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) and other programs and

services of the Department, especially the positive changes in the lives of the partner-beneficiaries, their continued empowerment, and the significant strides along health and education will be protected," she said.

The Pantawid Pamilya program of the Aquino government will be enhanced under the Duterte administration. The plan was included in the eight-point economic agenda of the new administration which was unveiled earlier.

However, Soliman asked how this is consistent should DSWD be under a communist party member.

"It is on record that the Communist Party of the Philippines has not been supportive of the Pantawid program," she noted.

Currently, some 4.4 million households are included in the Pantawid Pamilya nationwide.

Crushing crime

Nicknamed "The Punisher" for his measures to tackle crime, Duterte also said he would beg Congress to re-introduce a death penalty that was

repealed in 2006.

Crime is endemic in the Philippines and Duterte's promise of a war that would wipe out gangs and drugs within six months struck a chord with Filipino voters.

In a comment that spiraled into one of his trademark tirades, Duterte reiterated his priority was crushing crime, although not at the expense of economic reform.

"Stop messing with me because I have this sacred promise to save the next generation from the evil of drugs. That is my priority," he said.

"We will work simultaneously with the economic managers of this country."

DENR

Aside from the DSWD, Duterte has also said the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) may be headed by the CPP once he assumes office on June 30.

According to Von Hernandez, leading environmental activist and Goldman Environmental Prize recipient, "it would be good to understand better the incoming President's basis for allocating these particular Cabinet positions to the CPP."

"While the offer is apparently being

THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
SINCE 1900

MANILA BULLETIN

THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

18 MAY 2016

DATE

UPPER HALF

PAGE

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

p. 2 Duterte promising peace talks with Reds

made in pursuit of peace, the incoming President must ensure that people with proven experience, and of high caliber and integrity are appointed to these critical posts. Hidden agendas must be discarded," Hernandez said.

"It would be tragic if environmental protection or social welfare were bartered away for political accommodation without due regard for competence, proficiency or expertise," he added.

Meanwhile, Sonia Mendoza, president of the EcoWaste Coalition and chairman of Mother Earth Foundation said that for the DENR post, "we expect President Duterte to appoint a person of integrity and probity who will serve as the country's number one champion for zero waste, chemical safety and environmental protection regardless of her/his ideological or party affiliation."

Free of ideology

For Dr. Angelina Galang, educator and environmentalist, the DENR should be free of any ideology.

"As a Filipino, I question why Duterte would put in his Cabinet people who have been enemies of the state, constantly trying to destabilize the government. Have they shown goodwill? Are they now laying down their

arms?" she asked.

Release political prisoners

Meanwhile in Butuan City, Karapatan, a human rights group, urged Duterte to release some 543 prisoners who are languishing in various detention centers.

The group claimed that about 18 of those inmates are peace consultants of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) whose protection under the Philippine government-ND-FP agreement on safety and immunity guarantees have been violated.

Karapatan said that there are 88 ailing and 48 elderly among the political prisoners, mostly peasants fighting for their land.

The human rights group said that more often than not, those persons were charged with criminal offenses.

The group also appealed to Duterte to address the displacement of thousands of peasants and indigenous peoples caused by the ongoing conflict between government troops and armed rebels in Mindanao.

The group is hopeful that the land of promise will become the land of fulfillment. (With a report from Mike U. Crismundo)

Daily Tribune

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOR

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

18 MAY 2016

DATE
Page 1 Story
PAGE

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

Davao friends, allies dominate Duterte Cabinet

More names emerged yesterday of the likely Cabinet members of presumptive President Rodrigo Duterte with the common denominator of being the Davao City mayor's close friends and allies in his stint as local government chief.

Duterte's aides have said the president-elect is looking to fill top posts with people who have proved their loyalty to him in the past and whom he can trust.

Until his stunning surge in the pre-election polls, Duterte was regarded as a hell-raising outsider without the national political network required to win the presidency.

Duterte named former North Cotabato governor Emmanuel Piñol to head the Department of Agriculture and former Bureau of Immigration chief Andrea Domingo for the Philippines Amusement and Gaming Corp. (Pagcor). Both Piñol and Domingo actively supported Duterte in the election campaign.

Earlier, Duterte announced he has offered lawyers Salvador Medialdea the Executive Secretary post and Salvador Panelo the

position of spokesman and head of the Presidential Communications Group.

Former Chief Executive Officer and President of the Clark Development Corp. (CDC) Arthur Tugade was will become Transportation and Communications Secretary, Carlos Dominguez will become Finance Secretary and the president of Lyceum of the Philippines Peter Laurel will take over as Education chief.

Turn to page 2



Former press secretary Jesus Dureza and former Justice secretary Silvestre Bello were tapped as peace negotiators, former Defense secretary Gilbert Teodoro will reassume his former post and former Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) chairman Perfecto Yasay Jr. was named acting Foreign Affairs Secretary.

Duterte has reserved the top post at the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) or the Department of Justice (DoJ) to his vice presidential running mate Sen. Alan Peter Cayetano after the one year ban on election candidates in assuming a government post.

In an ambush interview, however, Teodoro said he has not accepted the offer as he is yet to consult his family.

Meanwhile, Piñol confirmed he has already accepted the offer to head the DA. Piñol on what qualified him for the post said "I am a farmer." He stressed that he did not apply and he was even surprised it was offered to him.

Piñol disclosed he has two marching orders from Duterte - to make sure that food is available and affordable and stop corruption in the DA.

Piñol said he plans to recommend to Duterte to issue an executive order voiding the separation of the National Irrigation Administration (NIA), National Food Authority (NFA), and Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) as his first act as DA chief.

"These are agencies directly under the DA whose functions are vital to the food security program of President Duterte. There's absolutely no sense separating them from the DA," he added.

Piñol said that another priority will be to make sure that farmers return in top shape after their farms have been unproductive due to drought associated with El Niño.

Piñol said he would want to see the prepositioning of the needs of farmers such as seeds, fertilizers and other farm inputs to start planting and rehabilitating farms.

Piñol said after an El Niño there is bumper harvest, thus there is a need to prepare the NFA to have

enough funds to absorb surplus production.

As promised by Duterte during the campaign that his administration will offer soft loans to farmers, Piñol said he will see to it that there is P1-billion fund as easy access credit fund.

He added that he will work with a system how the credit fund could accessed by farmers from the government rather than going to borrowing money from traders with high interest rates.

Piñol will start going around the country to see the situation in the countryside so that by June 30 he has a report to Duterte and kick start agricultural programs.

Piñol said agricultural programs will also be focused on the 20 poorest provinces which involves mostly the provision of technology, financing and marketing.

Visaya as next AFP head

Considered to take over the post of AFP Chief of Staff is commander of the AFP Southern Luzon Command Lt. Gen. Ricardo Visaya.

A member of the Philippine Military Academy "Matikas" Class of 1983, he is the 28th chief of the Solcom where he commands all Army, Navy and Air Force units in Region 4A (Calabarzon), Region 4-B (except Palawan) and Bicol Region, Guzman said.

Born on Decmbrt 8, 1960 in Bacarra, Ilocos Norte, Visaya is a decorated military officer, being a recipient of four Distinguished Service Stars - the third highest award in the AFP given for imminently meritorious performance of duty in a position of major responsibility; three Gawad sa Kaunlaran awards; 11 Bronze Cross medals; 49 Military Merit medals; 14 Military Commendation medals; Sagisag ng Ulirang Kawal; two Silver Wing medals; 20 Plaques of Recognition and countless letters of appreciation and commendation from different military commanders and various socio-civic organizations, he added.

He was awarded the Cavalier Award for Army operations in 2008, the most-coveted award that a PMA alumnus can obtain.

During his younger days in the military service, Visaya earned his mark as a leader and firmly

Daily Tribune

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOR
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

18 MAY 2016

DATE
Page 1 Story

PAGE

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

Davao friends, allies dominate Duterte Cabinet

P-2

established the foundations of his military career by ably performing key positions in the junior level of command in the Philippine Army, the Solcom spokesman said.

Among these, he said, are: platoon leader and company commander of the Bravo Company, 28th Infantry Battalion, 4th Infantry Division and then commanding officer of the 3rd Intelligence and Security Unit, Intelligence and Security Group.

Visaya also held the position of brigade commander of two prestigious brigades, the 104th Infantry Brigade, 1st Infantry Division that operated in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, Lanao Provinces and Basilan, and the 901st Infantry Brigade, 9th Infantry Division in the Bicol Region.

The Solcom chief was also designated as assistant division commander of the 6th Infantry Division, Philippine Army, in Cotabato and as commander of the 4th Infantry Division, Philippine Army in Cagayan de Oro City covering the areas of Northern Mindanao (Regions X and XIII).

Duterte has called Visaya the "vibrant general." Visaya was also one of the top contenders for the top AFP post last year.

DPWH goes to Villar

Las Pinas Rep. Mark Villar, who had just been re-elected for his third term, has accepted the offer to take the helm at the Department of Public Works and Highway (DPWH).

Villar, son of incumbent Sen. Cynthia Villar and former Senate President and property developer Manuel "Manny" Villar Jr., became the first to accept the Cabinet position in the incoming Duterte administration.

"Duterte talked to (Rep.) Mark yesterday (in Davao City) and then he announced it (Cabinet position offer) afterwards. Duterte asked for honesty, and to avoid corruption. That was what he told (Rep.) Mark," Sen. Cynthia Villar said in a phone-patched interview with Senate reporters.

The Villar couple, admittedly, rallied behind the candidacy of Duterte even if their political party, the Nacionalista Party (NP) in which former Senator Manny is the current president, did not take a party decision in supporting the mayor's

presidential bid even if his running mate, Sen. Alan Peter Cayetano is a member of their party.

"(NP) did not carry (Duterte) 100 percent, but most of them (NP members), in the end, they went for Duterte. But of course, we gave them a chance to choose. But in the end almost all of them chose Duterte," she said.

Senator Villar further confessed that they chose to be quiet in supporting Duterte's candidacy considering that their party opted to implement a "free-zone" policy in who among the candidates to support.

"But we're very close to him. We have known him for 20 years. They're (Manny Villar and Duterte) close," she said.

The offer from Duterte was readily accepted by the younger, who is just about to enter into his last three-year term at the House of Representatives.

With his position being vacated due to the presidential appointment, Mrs. Villar said they will have to consider the idea of holding a special election to fill in the post or have Rep. Villar as "caretaker congressman."

The senator dismissed impression that Rep. Villar's assumption to the DPWH would come in conflict with their business interests, which is mostly concentrated in real estate.

Besides, she said, they can build their own road that will pass through their properties, if need be and does not need to tap government funds.

She said they did not expect such appointment to their son to come their way.

Long queue of well-wishers, hopefuls
Quezon City Rep. Winston "Winnie" Castelo called on all quarters to be level-headed and steer clear of preconceived judgments on the Duterte Cabinet.

"The resounding mandate people gave Duterte leaves us with no option but to trust and support him," Castelo said in a statement.

"With Duterte we are now taking in a whiff of fresh air and we would do well to give him the benefit of the doubt and let his brand of participatory leadership succeed," Castelo said.

"We operate from the assumption that Duterte taps only the best and the brightest to help him deliver his

commitment to effect lasting peace in the land and it behooves us to get our acts together to make things happen," Castelo said.

According to Duterte, four departments are open to the Left: DoLE, DSWD, DAR, and DENR.

Leftist groups operating in Mindanao openly campaigned for Duterte in the May 9 national elections.

"This move could be the first single step toward lasting peace and harmony among Filipino people splintered by conflicting ideologies and agenda," Castelo said.

Business tycoons, turncoat politicians, celebrities and rebel leaders are descending on the long-neglected Mindanao, hoping to gain favor with the nation's shock new powerbroker.

The remote and dusty city of Davao has suddenly become the country's new seat of power after hometown hero Rodrigo Duterte won last week's presidential election in a landslide.

The mayor has refused to travel to the nation's capital 1,000 kilometers away, forcing VIPs to head to Davao for the time-honored Filipino political ritual of jumping on the bandwagon of the new president.

Movie star-turned-politician ER Ejercito was among the suitors, shifting effortlessly from his campaign support for Jejomar Binay — an early frontrunner in pre-election presidential surveys who finished a distant fourth.

"My loyalty to my party ends where my loyalty to my country begins," said Ejercito, a former governor of Laguna province near Manila.

Speaking to AFP in the lobby of one of Davao's top hotels that has suddenly become fully booked, Ejercito said he hoped to be appointed to head a national tourism agency.

"I have to move forward. I cannot live in darkness. With my experience in local government and tourism, I can help the incoming administration," he said.

Ejercito said he waited nine hours at a private function center which the president-elect had turned into his reception venue.

Ejercito finally secured a 40-minute meeting that began just after midnight on Tuesday, but emerged

without a firm commitment.

Others were more lucky.

Duterte, a known "night owl" spent 21 hours meeting and greeting about 60 individuals and groups of well-wishers from 2 p.m. on May 16 to 11 a.m. Tuesday.

Emerging from the Matina Enclaves clubhouse at 11 a.m. Tuesday to give in to the request of a 60-member delegation from Tawi-Tawi for photo opportunity, Duterte has to beg off from another media ambush interview. Duterte told reporters he would not be able to finish meeting the people some of whom came the day if he gives in to an interview.

The group from Tawi-Tawi was scheduled the previous day but was only accommodated Tuesday morning. One of them, Sahrin Alvarez, who leads the campaign on Federalism in Tawi-Tawi, collapsed probably due to lack of sleep.

There was also the group from Bohol. It was learned that there were only 60 individuals and groups on the guest lists but more came without prior appointments to greet the mayor. But they waited still.

Among the early well-wishers were Japanese Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ishikawa Kazuhide and Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua. Reporters, who covered the occasion after 12 midnight, sighted Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) vice chair for political affairs Ghazali Jaafar.

Former Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) chief Augusto Syjuco Jr., who was able to meet the mayor Tuesday morning, said he was amazed of Duterte's endurance to welcome the guests.

He was even more surprised that it was not just simple shaking hands but Duterte would even talk more.

Duterte was supposed to spend at least 20 minutes but his talk with one visitor would last an hour. There were also photo opportunities.

The other well-wishers were former congressional representatives and winning candidates. Among those sighted were outgoing Cavite Governor Juanito Victor "Jonvic" Remulla and his brother incoming governor Jesus Crispin "Boying" Remulla. **Angie M. Rosales, Charlie V. Manalo**

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

18 MAY 2016

DATE

18

PAGE

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

ACROSS THE COUNTRY

5 nabbed for illegally cutting pine trees

TUGUEGARAO CITY – A village official and four other persons have been arrested over the illegal cutting of pine trees in over six hectares of land in Sitio Baan in Bauko, Mountain Province.

Barangay Balintaugan councilman Carlos Combisen, Ariel Bomogao, Jerry Padingil, Joel Padingil and William Daping were arrested in Barangay Balintaugan on Saturday.

At least five dump trucks were used to haul the illegally cut trees worth P500,000, Senior Superintendent Cornelio Comila, Mountain Province police director, said yesterday.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources said it took three days for government foresters and police operatives to finish hauling the fallen and sawn pine trees.

– Raymund Catindig

18 MAY 2016

Malaya Business Insight

www.malaya.com.ph

DATE

B2

PAGE

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Soldiers swoop down on Bulacan illegal loggers

ARMY soldiers seized 300 board feet of illegally-cut red Lawaan timber on Monday during an anti-illegal logging operation in Doña Remedios Trinidad town in Bulacan.

Lt. Col. Eugenio Julio Osias IV, commander of the Army's 48th Infantry Battalion based in Bulacan, said illegal logging in the area is contributing to heavy flooding.

Soldiers from the battalion swooped down at Sitio Buasao in Barangay Sapang Bulac early Monday morning after receiving information from a concerned

citizen about illegal logging in the area but no one was arrested.

"Sensing the presence of Army personnel, the offenders immediately fled, abandoning the illegally-cut lumbers and conveyances," said 2Lt. Maricris Abobo, the battalion's civil military operations officer.

Also found in the area were six motorcycles and an Isuzu Elf truck.

The confiscated items were turned over to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources officials in the province.

— *Victor Reyes*

18 MAY 2016

DATE
A7
PAGE

The Manila Times

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

ILLEGAL LOGS CONFISCATED IN BULACAN

TROOPS of the Philippine Army's 48th Infantry Guardians Battalion confiscated about 300 board feet of red iawaan wood of assorted cuts, loaded in six motorcycles and an Elf truck in Sitio Buasao, Barangay Sapang Bulac, Doña Remedios Trinidad in Bulacan on Monday. Bravo Company officer, 1st Lieutenant Rex Payot, said they received information from a concerned citizen about the alleged illegal activity and dispatched the team under 2nd Lieutenant Jan Michael Jamelarin to conduct an operation. Upon sensing the presence of army personnel, the suspects immediately fled, abandoning the illegally cut lumbers and their vehicles. The confiscated items were turned over to the Community Environment and Natural Resources (CENRO) in San Rafael, Bulacan.

FREDERICK SILVERIO

118 MAY 2016

DATE

7

PAGE

UPPER-HALF

LOWER-HALF

MAGTANIM NG PUNO PARA SA SUSUNOD NA HENERASYON

KUMPIYANSA ang mga lawmaker na sa darating na 17th Congress ay mabibigyang prayoridad ang pagpapasigla at proteksiyon sa kagubatan sa ating bansa, ayon sa ulat ng Philippine News Agency (PNA).

"We are all witnesses to nature's fury. Global warming and climate change are now a real threat to humanity. We must do our part and act now to counter the problem of biodiversity loss for the sake of the future generations," diin ng mga lawmaker.

Mayroong iba't ibang environmental measure na ikinokonsidera ng House Committee on Reforestation na, kung sakaling hindi makapasa dahil sa limiting panahon, siguradong ipakikila sa unang araw ng susunod na Kongreso. Ito ay ang sumusunod:

1) House Bill 3556 - "An Act to require every student to plant (ten) trees every year" isinulat nina Reps. Rufus Rodriguez at Maximo Rodriguez; and

2) HB 972 - "An Act requiring all graduating elementary, high school and college students to plant at least ten (10) trees each as a prerequisite for graduation and for other related purposes," nina Reps. Francisco Ashley L. Acedillo at Gary C. Alejano.

"While we recognize the right of the youth to a balanced and healthful ecology, as proclaimed in the 1987 Constitution, there is no reason why they cannot be made to contribute in order to ensure that this would be an actual reality," pahayag nina Magdalo Party-list Reps. Acedillo at Alejano.

Ipinagdiinan din nila na ang HB 972 ay pasok sa Executive Order No. 26, Series of 2011, na inisyu ni Pangulong Benigno S. Aquino III, na layuning hikayatin ang mga estudyante at mga empleyado na magtanim ng 1.5 bilyong puno sa loob ng anim na taon mula 2011 hanggang 2016.

"Even with a survival rate of only 10 percent, this would translate to an additional 525 million trees available for the youth to enjoy, when they assume the mantle of leadership in the future," sambit nina Acedillo at Alejano.

Samantala, ipinaliwanag naman nina Reps. Rufus B. Rodriguez at Maximo B. Rodriguez Jr. na sa kasalukuyan, maraming puno pa rin ang pinutol dahil sa urban at industrial development, illegal lumber trade at large scale mining, at iba pa.

Furthermore, global warming and climate change are environmental phenomena intertwined with the world's decreasing biodiversity. The loss of biodiversity is making climate change more complicated which poses threat on the planet's marine and plant life," dagdag pa ng magkapatid na lawmakers.



PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

18 MAY 2018

DATE

3

PAGE

UPPER-HALF

LOWER-HALF

Tree planting, gagawing obligasyon

Tiniyak ng mga mambabatas na ipupursige nilang maipasa sa 17th Congress ang mga panukalang batas na nakabimbin sa Committee on Reforestation, na nagsusulong ng pagtatanim ng mga punongkahoy.

Ang mga ito ay ang HB 3556 ("An Act to require every student to plant ten trees every year"), inakda nina Reps. Rufus Rodriguez at Maximo Rodriguez; at HB 972 ("An Act requiring all graduating elementary, high school and college students to plant at least ten (10) trees each as a prerequisite for graduation and for other related purposes"), nina Reps. Francisco Ashley L. Acedillo at Gary C. Alejano.

Bert de Guzman



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Now the
No. 1 Daily
Business
Newspaper in
the Philippines

18 MAY 2016

DATE

Page 1 Story

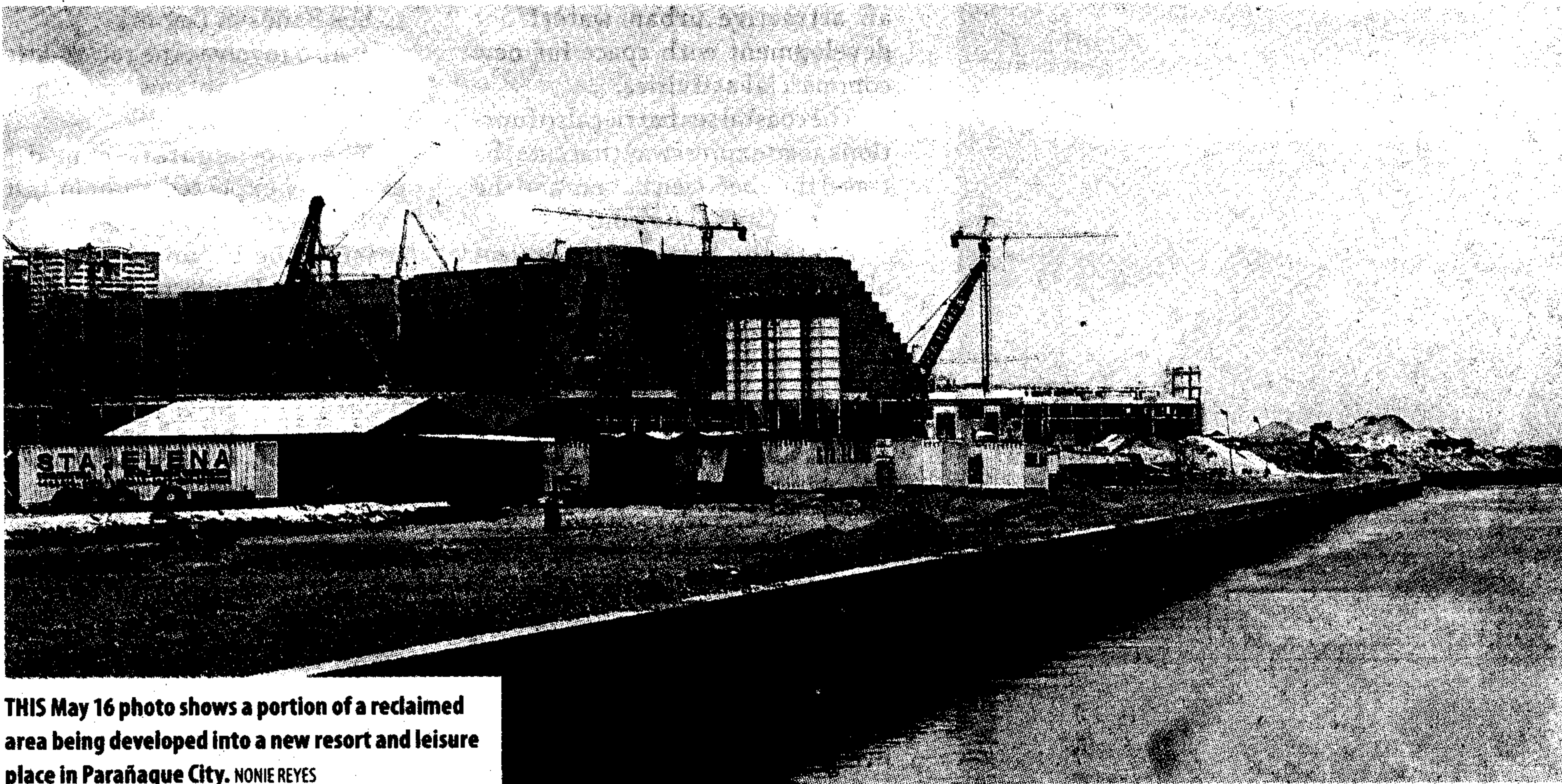
PAGE

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Land-reclamation tack fraught with challenges, opportunities



THIS May 16 photo shows a portion of a reclaimed area being developed into a new resort and leisure place in Parañaque City. NONIE REYES

By VG CABUAG, LENIE LECTURA
& JONATHAN MAYUGA

Twitter: @villygc @llectura @jonlmayuga

Conclusion

LAND reclamation, explained Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA) Assistant General Manager Joselito D. Gonzales, is the process of creating new land from ocean, sea, riverbeds, and the like.

These bodies of water, he explained,

290,000 sq m

The total office spaces coming online in the next three years, according to KMC Research and Consultancy

are all state-owned.

Gonzales added that private companies pursuing to build an establishment or road infrastructure within a state

property need to seek the green light of the PRA and the National Economic and Development Authority Board.

"We are very strict when it comes to issuing permits. We require studies, which should all be complete," Gonzales told the BUSINESSMIRROR. "For as long as we see their project fit and they have complied with other requirements, such as environmental clearance, among others, then we can issue a permit."

CONTINUED ON A2



BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

ISSN 1908-1189
9 770190 811892

Now the
No. 1 Daily
Business
Newspaper in
the Philippines

18 MAY 2016

DATE

Page 1 Story

PAGE

P.2

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Land-reclamation tack fraught with challenges, opportunities

CONTINUED FROM A1

Another government agency that scrutinizes land reclamation projects is Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Center.

According to Andre C. Palacios, the executive director of the PPP Center, what his office does is to study the project carefully and try to mitigate risks to suit private-sector taste, and implement the bidding as soon as possible.

"The land-reclamation component of a PPP project raises unique legal, environmental and social risks," Palacios told the BUSINESS-MIRROR. "The international consulting firms and their local partners—e.g., law firms—acting as government transaction advisors, are required to pay close attention to these risks and to propose mitigation measures."

He listed down examples of reclamation issues as: "Power of agency to undertake reclamation, approvals required, classification of reclaimed land into alienable public land and to patrimonial land that can be transferred to the winning bidder, resettlement of affected families, sufficiency of environmental mitigation measures."

Bullish sectors

PRIVATE firms, especially those in the real-estate sector, generally welcome any bid by the state to expand space, especially in urban areas.

This is so since most of the players in the property sector are bullish about the prospects in the industry, both in the office, com-

mercial and residential spaces.

A huge chunk of the commercial space is being taken by the business-process outsourcing (BPO) companies. Many developers see the BPO sector as a steady stream of revenue even on a medium-term contract.

Megaworld Corp., the property arm of businessman Andrew L. Tan, is one of them.

Megaworld has announced continuing construction of office spaces at an average of 100,000 square meters this year, a tack the firm began two years ago. Before 2014, Megaworld has only been building at an annual average of 50,000 sq m to 75,000 sq m. The company may end the year at supplying 712,000 sqm in office space, the bulk of which is again for the BPO sector.

Skyrocketing prices

KMC Research and Consultancy said office rentals in prime locations, such as Makati City, Bonifacio Global City in Taguig and Ortigas Center, continue to skyrocket on high demand.

Outside of these areas, however, it sees price softening.

In the Alabang market, for instance, rental rate was flat last year and is expected to remain sluggish over the next two years, as there will be new supply of office space of about 194,000 sq m through 2018.

The same is true in Quezon City, mainly in Araneta Center in Cubao, KMC said.

In the bay area, meanwhile, KMC expects vacancy rate to spike in the short to medium term.

"This is due to the impressive

“Eventually, we will look at natural-gas pipeline. We have plans to put up the Batangas-Manila pipeline, so if there is an area that is government-owned and can be used for this project, then we will explore it with the Philippine Reclamation Authority.”—MONSADA

pipeline of office spaces coming online in the next three years close to 290,000 sq m,” a document by the company said. “Rental-rate growth is likely to ease given the demand and supply dynamics in the submarket.”

Residential market

FOR the residential market, 8990 Holdings Inc. President Januario Jesus Gregorio B. Atencio III said that, during the recent debates of candidates for the May 9 elections, only two included housing in their agenda: Vice President Jejomar C. Binay and Rep. Ma. Leonor Robredo of Third District of Camarines Sur. Binay is also the chairman of the Housing Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC).

“The idea of housing as an economic catalyst, as an inclusive society generator, as a social leveler has not been discussed [during the debates],” Atencio said. “Does it mean that if you are

not the chairman of the [HUDCC] that housing means nothing?”

Robredo who is currently leading in the quick count for vice presidency, also mentioned housing as one of the catalyst of growth in the country, according to Atencio.

“Mass housing is the great equalizer because 98 percent of our buyers are nonproperty owners. In a way, this is also like land reform but in a noneconomic or agricultural setting because the result is the same,” he said. “We are able to distribute property to those who at [this] point have no land.”

Atencio declined to disclose if the mass housing developer is eyeing reclaimed land for residential property projects.

Andoni Aboitiz, president of Aboitiz Land Inc., is also bullish on the industry.

“If the new president [would be] able to lift the GDP and translates [the growth into] housing, that’s very good.”



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ISSN 1908-1189
9 770190 811892

Now the
No. 1 Daily
Business
Newspaper in
the Philippines

DATE

Page 1 Story

PAGE

P. 3

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Land reclamation
back fraught with
challenges, opportunities

In between the reclaimed land and the present shoreline are mangrove forests that help develop the ecological value of Manila Bay. The project can be sorted into two subprojects: the City Flood Proofing and the Coastal Sea Barrier and Expressway.

It is currently being reviewed by a technical working group from the DPWH. The administration of President Aquino, however, is regarded to have a general distaste for unsolicited proposals.

Dead deal

ANOTHER project under the current pipeline of national PPP deals is the construction of the Laguna lakeshore expressway dike (LLED), which is as good as dead due to the lack of participation from qualified bidders. Groups interested in the contract were one and the same in their issue on the deal: it is not commercially viable.

Team Trident—composed of Ayala Corp., Aboitiz Equity Ventures Inc., SM Prime Holdings Inc. and Megaworld Corp.—has three key issues on the deal: economic viability, problems with connectivity and the complexity of the deal.

"We looked at the overall economic viability and risks. We took some of those to see if we can get this financed," Aboitiz Equity Ventures First Vice President Roman Anthony V. Azanza said in a March 28 interview. "But we couldn't get to a sufficient level of comfortability with the economic viability and risks and our ability to take it to the banks."

Connectivity to different growth areas in Metro Manila was also an issue for the so-called mega-consortium. "You have to have a guaranteed access to other central business districts," Azanza said. "Connectivity is crucial as it is a 700-hectare development."

The deal's complexity, he added, made it more commercially unviable. "The other one is the complexity of the deal," he said. "Consequently, the technological solutions for this project were so challenging that the cost implications almost doubled than what the government initially had."

Alternative route

THE P122.8-billion LLED project involves the construction of a 47-kilometer flood-control dike—on top of which will be a six-lane expressway—on an offshore alignment 500 meters away from the western shoreline of Laguna Lake. It includes interchanges, bridges, floodgates and pumps from Taguig to Los Baños in Laguna.

It also involves the reclamation of 700 hectares of raw land adjoining the expressway dike.

The thoroughfare-cum-dike project is expected to help mitigate flooding along the western coast of the Laguna Lake, which runs from Taguig to the town of Bay in Laguna. The project is also

expected to serve as an alternative transport route to the congested South Luzon Expressway and enhance the hydrology for the ecosystem of Laguna Lake.

"The government also wants this rolled out in seven years. So, its complexity, less connectivity, and a very tight time frame to roll this project out. So just imagine how the risk-reward balance was clearly not in the favour of the bidders," Azanza said.

MTD Philippines Inc. President Isaac S. David also tagged the bidding process as illegal. In its letter to the public works department, the company said the lack of a presidential proclamation "reserving the reclamation area for purposes of procurement transaction" made the tender illegal.

"Second, the legal personality of the procuring entity is questionable. It has to be the Philippine Reclamation Authority, not the public works agency, nor the Laguna Lake Development Authority," the company said in its letter.

With little time left, the current government will have to pass the deal's tender process to the incoming administration of President-elect Rodrigo R. Duterte.

Prospects: BatMan

ENERGY Secretary Zenaida Y. Monsada said her office would look at the prospects of utilizing a portion of a reclaimed land for the use of natural gas pipeline.

"Eventually, we will look at natural-gas pipeline," Monsada said. "We have plans to put up the Batangas-Manila [BatMan] pipeline, so maybe, if there is an area that is government-owned and can be used for this project, then we will explore it with the PRA."

The BatMan natural-gas project involves the construction of a 121-km transmission pipeline that will transport and supply natural gas to targeted markets along its route from Batangas, Laguna and Cavite and, eventually, to Metro Manila.

The BatMan project, however, faces delay due to technical issues. The Department of Energy (DOE) needs to further review the project design, as well as the prospective off-takers for the gas supply.

With such challenge, the PRA is thankful it has not encountered road right-of-way (ROW) problems in the past.

"Effectively, there is no right-of-way issue to begin with," Gonzales told the BUSINESSMIRROR in a phone interview.

While the Philippines, an archipelago that consists of an estimated 7,641 islands, with a total land area of approximately 300,000 square kilometers (or 3 billion sq m), grappling for more space for economic growth, the incoming administration, hopefully, would not dig itself into troubles but fill more pockets.

Aboitiz Land, a relatively new entrant in the industry, as it mainly focused on development of sparse land areas in Cebu, said the company is looking for partners to expand its existing portfolio of residential space to other parts of the country. Aboitiz Land said it will focus on the mid-range market.

Antiflooding

UNDER the current pipeline of national PPP deals, there are two projects that are currently at different stages.

One is the unsolicited proposal submitted by San Miguel Corp. to the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH).

According to documents from the DPWH, the P338.8-billion Manila Bay Integrated Flood Control Expressway deal will help protect the Manila Bay coastline against flooding from the sea—by means of a city flood barrier and coastal sea barrier—and provide an attractive urban waterfront development with space for new commercial activities.

The coastal sea barrier also functions as an expressway that cuts the travel time between Bataan and the National Capital Region.

Along the barrier, the project also offers reclaimed land for urban and economic development.

The Manila Times

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

Upscale Subic residents slam excavations

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT: Alleged illegal construction and excavation work being undertaken by an American resident in one of the upscale villages here has caused uproar among his neighbors expressing concern for their safety.

Brian Lance Giles, who was given a 50-year lease on a 740-square-meter area by the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA) for P3.7 million through Cebu Tranquila Realty, Inc. (CTRI), represented by his wife Anna Belen Giles, has started construction and excavation works on a steep slope between Alpha and Beta Streets in Binictican.

SBMA chairman Roberto Garcia said Giles is facing penalties from the agency's Ecology Department, including possible cancellation of his contract.

Homeowners in the upscale

village said the earth works have not only resulted in the cutting of trees and stripping of vegetation, but also put at risk nearby houses in the area.

Telecommunications company executive Eric Alberto, whose house is closest to the Giles, earlier wrote to Garcia, saying he and other neighbors are deeply disturbed and concerned about their safety "due to the monstrosity of the construction work in the area leveled by back hoes and bulldozers."

"We do not understand why and how SBMA opened up a program to lease such spaces which were beautiful natural forest cover," Alberto said in his letter.

Other neighbors of Giles include Jorge Araneta of the Araneta Group and apparently reelected Sen. Richard Gordon.

Garcia said Giles also exceeded the scope of his permit, that the supposedly 740-sqm. area already expanded to an area over 2,000-sqm.

Mrs. Giles has reportedly admitted to the danger posed by the construction in their lot, but argued in a letter to Garcia that "any delay could cause irreparable harm should the rainy season start and we cannot be more clear in our position to not to stop our work to level the site for proper drainage.

Meanwhile, Olongapo City Environment & Natural Resources Officer (CENRO) Marife Castillo said there is clearly a violation of the Forestry Code, among others, and added that she will cause the filing of appropriate criminal cases against Giles and others concerned.

PATRICK ROXAS

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

P.1
18 MAY 2016

DATE

15

PAGE

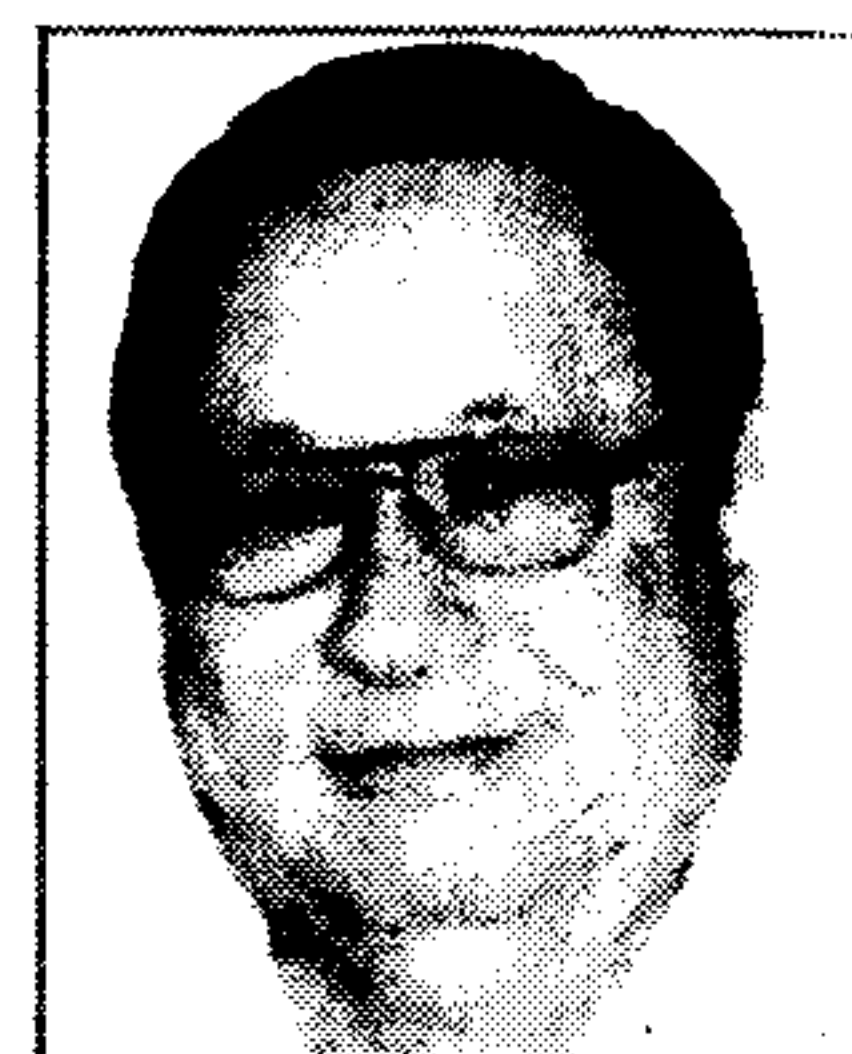
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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Introspective

By **TONY KATIGBAK**



Half of Phl still under dry spell

May 9 has finally come and gone. And what an exciting past six months it has been. Indeed, election mania has dominated the news, social media, and most discussions for the past few weeks (months even), and it looks like it has finally come to a close (or at least coming to a close very soon). According to the Commission on Elections (Comelec), we had clean and honest elections and that it's only a matter of time before our new leaders take their place in the government with a brand new president at the helm.

I know that there is still much controversy surrounding the vice presidential elections, but it will also only be a matter of time before that is resolved as well. At the end of the day, the will of the people must be followed and whomever the majority elected will be the one left standing in the end. The only way we can ensure our country's continued success and prosperity is to support our new leaders. As they say – sour grapes won't get us anywhere. It's time we get on board.

Personally, I can't help but feel relieved that elections are over. It felt like we were all waiting for May 9 before we could plot out the rest of our year. At least now we can go back to focusing on other matters without the elections forever looming in the back of our minds.

Which brings me to what I feel is becoming more and more important by the day. I've written in previous columns my views on climate change and the more the days pass the more I know that this is going to have to become a global priority very soon. The temperatures just keep on rising, both here and in other parts of the world, and it's only a matter of time before we all begin to see the consequences of this temperature increase manifesting in every day life.

In fact, most of us can see the consequences already. The days are just so unbelievably hot. And just when we think it can't get any hotter – it does. And the heat is more than just the regular summer heat we are used to; it is a debilitating heat that makes people lethargic, dizzy, and even sick. Heat stroke incidences are up and I know so many who have regular headaches, bloody noses, and upset stomachs. These aren't just random occurrences.

In addition to the pounding heat, the Philippines is still suffering from a terrible dry spell. Roughly 37 provinces – almost half of the country – is still experiencing drought that could last until the end of the month despite El Niño finally weakening. The weather bureau shared that the dry spell will continue and that several areas in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao would have to continue to tough it out in the drought.

I wrote in a previous piece that this lack of water was a serious concern for

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

P2

18 MAY 2016

DATE

15
PAGE

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Half of PHL still under dry spell

the country. It is something we should all be worried about. At the end of the day, water is the most important commodity there is. As they say, people can still live without food (though they shouldn't have to). Water however is paramount and having no water can have dire consequences. Our crops and the agricultural sector are already suffering and there are so many in the provinces whose lives are affected daily due to the dry spell.

We all saw what the lack of water has done to the livelihood and food supply of those in the provincial regions. It became so bad that farmers protested in a bloody dispute and there is still no immediate remedy to their plight, as the drought will weaken in stages and not all at once. Some provinces will start to see relief in June while others will not see rainfall or respite until July.

However, though we all wish for rain, we also have to be wary and watchful. The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said that despite the need for water in several provinces, after El Niño, a strengthened La Niña phenomenon could be following in the later half of the year. This means, more rains and more typhoons could be coming to the Philippines.

And while more rain is a good thing in the short run, in the long run it can be something that we will have to worry about as well as this means increased strength typhoons could also happen quite regularly. Based on the early reports from the bureau, anywhere up to 12 typhoons could enter the Philippines from May to October. As early as now, this is something the country should be preparing for. While we want rain to help our crops, we also have to be prepared for emergency situations brought about by typhoons and floods.

I am glad that President elect Rody Duterte is including farming and agriculture in his immediate leadership goals. While peace and order and eradicating crime remain his top priority it is also good that he is looking at the sectors that provide life and livelihood to so many Filipinos. I still remember a time when we were the envy of our neighbors due to our rich natural resources and expertise on rice production and exportation. These days we have to resort to importing rice to meet our needs. It's very sad indeed and it's time to change.

As the rest of the summer days go by, we should all be careful and mindful. We should not waste natural resources, ration water whenever possible, and do our part to reduce our carbon footprint. In the end, no matter what programs the government implements, if we don't help and do our share, it won't make a difference.

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PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

DATE

3

PAGE

UPPER-HALF

LOWER-HALF

Gobyerno, hinimok paghandaan ang La Niña phenomenon

Hinimok ni Senator Loren Legarda ang gobyerno na paghandaan ang La Niña weather phenomenon na inaasahang magdudulot ng malalakas na ulan at malawakang pagbaha sa mga susunod na buwan.

Aniya, kailangan ng mga local government unit (LGU) ang epektibong climate-resilient and disaster risk reduction (DRR) program dahil hindi normal ang dagliang paglakas ng ulan sa panahon ng La Niña.

"We have to be ready for the impacts of La Niña even as we continue to help drought-affected communities recover from the effects of El Niño. Agencies of government, both national and local levels, must work together to help communities projected to be hit by the La Niña adapt to the phenomenon," sabi ng environmentalist senator.

Naunang inerekomenda ng Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) na magsagawa ng pagmamatyag sa La Niña sa mga susunod na buwan matapos humina ang El Niño phenomenon.

Ayon kay Legarda, nakasalalay sa LGU ang pagtukoy sa mga lugar na delikado, lugar na paglilipatan, kahandaan sa paglabas ng bababala, at higit sa lahat mga programang ipatutupad sakaling maging mahaba ang paninirahan sa mga evacuation center.

"Empowered and equipped with the necessary mandate, knowledge, skills and tools, LGUs should develop their own DRR and climate change adaption (CCA) plan of action within their jurisdiction to prevent the loss of life and minimize the damage to property brought about by extreme weather conditions, such as the expected La Niña," ani Legarda.

"Desilting and dredging of rivers, canals and drainage systems should already be underway to reduce or prevent flooding. Meanwhile, communities in landslide prone areas should already have been relocated not only due to the impending La Niña, but also because such areas should not be inhabited in the first place," dagdag niya.

Leonel Abasola

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

P.1

18 MAY 2016

DATE

14

PAGE

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

EDITORIAL

After the drought, the floods

Weather experts have issued several warnings: after the severe El Niño that has induced a prolonged drought, the nation must brace for unusually heavy rainfall that may be spawned by a looming La Niña.

The approaching weather phenomenon is not expected during the usual monsoon season that starts in mid-June or early July, but in the third quarter of the year until the early months of 2017, the weather experts said. This means a prolonged period of heavy rainfall and the likelihood of severe flooding.

The nation has seen such a prolonged period in recent years. Typhoons Milenyo in 2006 and Ondoy in 2009 spawned torrential floods that took months to subside in certain areas particularly around the natural floodplain surrounding Laguna de Bay. The floodplain continues to be degraded by indiscriminate reclamation and the continuing expansion of fish pens, many of them owned by local politicians, making worse flooding inevitable. The incoming government must prepare for the disastrous consequences even as the use of Laguna de Bay for commercial fishing must

be rationalized.

Typhoons carry the accompanying threat of powerful storm surges. Super Typhoon Yolanda struck in November 2013, triggering cataclysmic storm surges that flattened Tacloban City and many other areas of Leyte and Samar. Even while the affected areas have not yet fully recovered from the devastation, they must brace for the next typhoons, like the rest of the country.

Disaster preparedness should have vastly improved after Yolanda. Apart from boosting rescue and relief capability, the government must prepare for further crop destruction. El Niño-induced drought has devastated farmlands; heavy flooding after the drought will aggravate the loss of crops and livelihoods.

In parts of the Visayas and Mindanao including the Davao provinces, vast tracts of coconut plantations have not yet fully recovered from the previous years' typhoons and destructive flooding. The incoming administration, still busy with the transition, must heed the experts' warnings and ensure preparedness for disaster.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

P2

18 MAY 2016

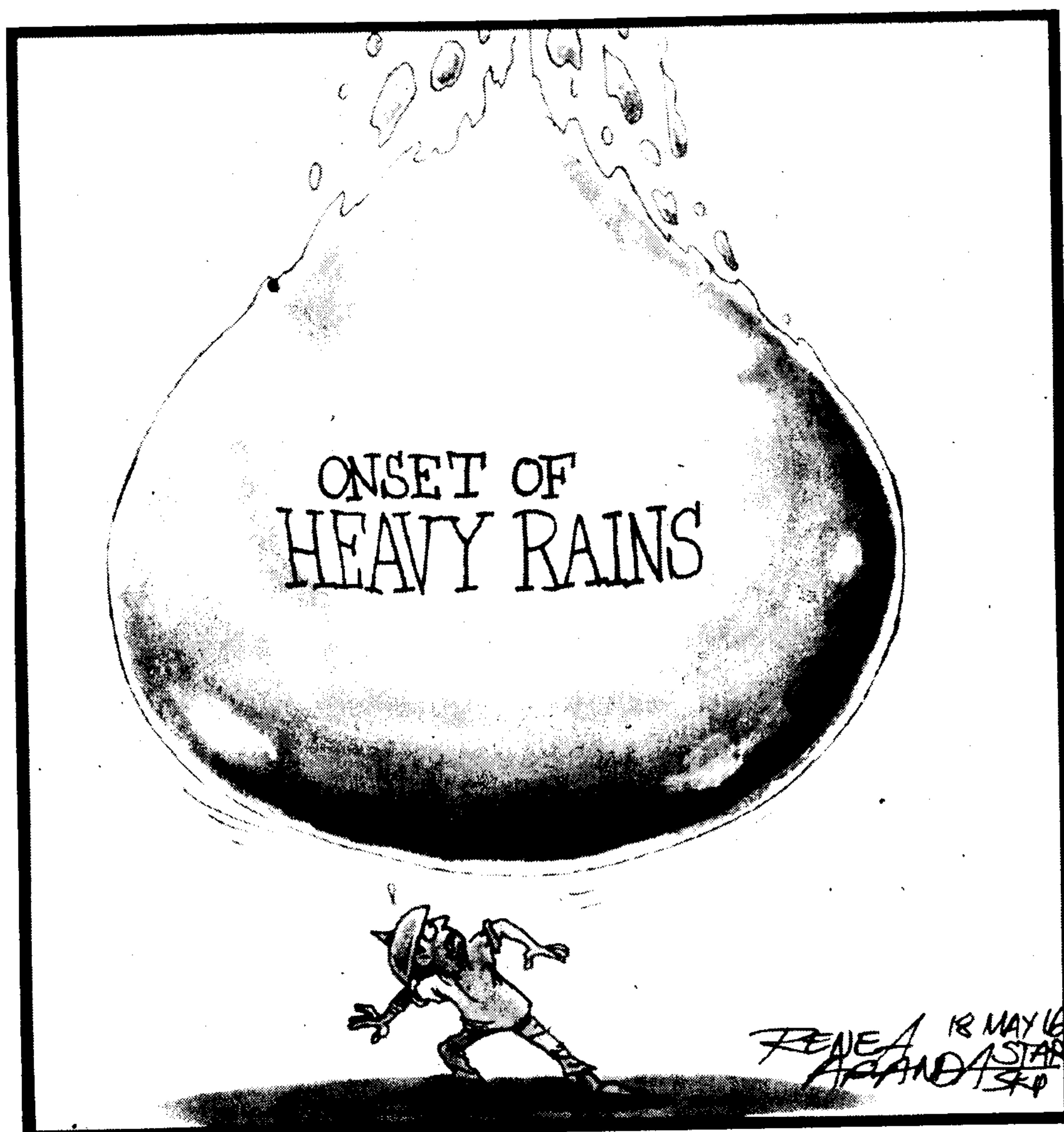
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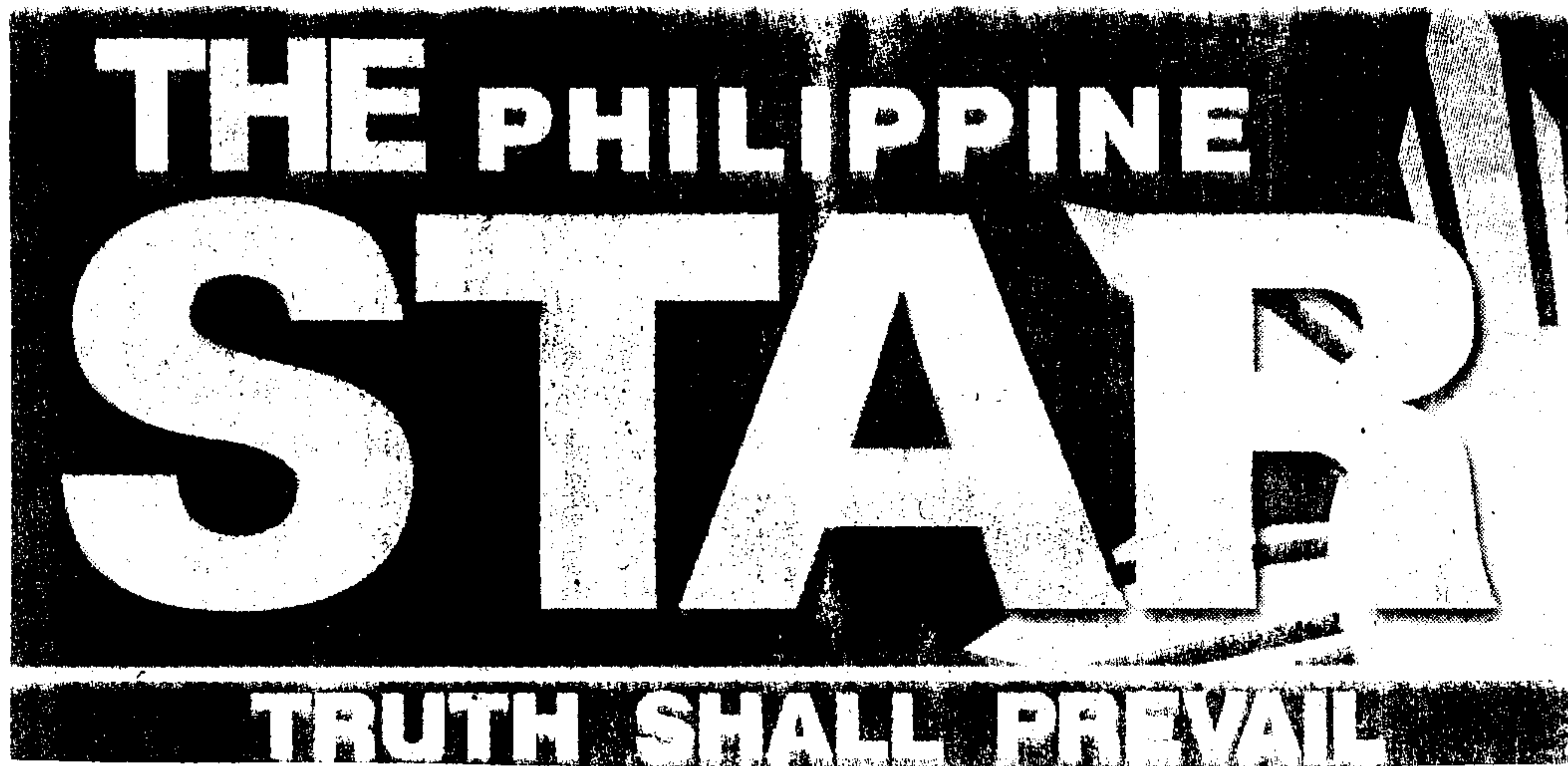
4
PAGE

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE





18 MAY 2016

DATE

14
PAGE

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Benham Rise: Phl's 'new territory'

By RUDY FERNANDEZ

LOS BAÑOS, Laguna – The Philippines has gained a "new territory" through the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)'s ruling on the 13 million-hectare Benham Rise.

Situated about 250 kilometers east of Dinapigue, Isabela, the region also known as Benham Plateau has untapped natural resources and is said to be wider than Luzon, Samar and Leyte combined.

Until 2012, this seismically active underwater region and extinct volcanic ridge had not been included as part of the archipelago, despite the Philippines being the only country within 200 nautical miles of the plateau.

Historical data sourced from Wikipedia show that the plateau is named after American admiral and geologist Andrew Benham. It was first mapped

in 1933, long before it was to be acknowledged as part of the Philippine continental shelf.

Eventually, on April 8, 2001, in compliance with the requirements of UNCLOS, the Philippines lodged a partial territorial claim on the vast, largely unexplored territory with the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (UNCLOS).

In April 2009, the Philippines went further by lodging a full territorial claim that Benham Rise was part of its continental shelf and territory.

The Philippine claim was embodied in Republic Act No. 9522 or the Archipelagic Baselines Law.

The UN, through UNCLOS, finally recognized and officially approved the Philippine claim on the territory on April 12, 2012.

The awarding of Benham Rise to the Philippines brought

to 43 million hectares the total land area of the country – from 30 million hectares.

Benham Rise has been part of ancient Filipino culture. Ancient Catanduanes (Bicol region, to Benham's south) people fished and roamed the area long before colonial times, Wikipedia noted.

In recent years, several scientific surveys have been conducted on Benham Rise.

The Philippine government has also been exploring the possibility of mapping new gas fields on the ridge.

Aside from the expansion of territory, the Philippines will also benefit from mineral and gas deposits in the region.

Initial research findings have shown that there are massive mineral and gas deposits in the plateau. Furthermore, solidified methane was found during mapping operations. Hence, the

region is believed to have vast oil deposits.

Sen. Juan Edgardo Angara has said the underwater region in the Philippine Sea "is a good alternative for the Malampaya gas fields."

Two years ago, a government-funded exploration and survey were conducted at Benham Bank, the plateau's shallowest part about 50 meters deep, on the research vessel of the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR).

The program, billed "Exploration, Mapping and Assessment of Deep Water Areas," was funded by the Los Baños-based Department of Science and Technology-Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development (DOST-PCAARRD). It was headed by Cesar Villanoy

with Carlos Primo David and Hildie Maria Nacorda as project leaders.

The program is being implemented by the University of the Philippines Diliman-Marine Science Institute, UPD-National Institute of Geological Sciences and UPLB-School of Environmental Science and Management.

A collaboration among UP Diliman, UPLB and DA-BFAR, the program was backstopped by scientists, researchers and seasoned dive specialists from UP Mindanao, UP Baguio, Xavier University and Ateneo de Manila University and from the local diving industry.

The pioneering research project initiated the assessment of the benthic marine biological features and resources of the Benham Bank seamount, contributing to efforts to document deep-water biodiversity in the

Philippines.

"Knowledge about these features and resources may also be linked to the productivity of Benham Rise region, where fishing activities have been known to occur even before the claim," Villanoy and Ma. Adela Corpuz said in a joint report.

Results of the survey, it added, include identification of four species of Halimeda and genera of associated epiphytic algae and corals.

"These data and other related scientific information will contribute to the knowledge/status of Philippine deep sea biodiversity resource planning and management," Villanoy and Corpuz said.

The exploration of Benham Rise is one of the many researches and development initiatives on aquatic concerns supported by DOST-PCAARRD.

The Standard

DEFINING THE NEWS

18 MAY 2016

DATE

A4

PAGE

UPPER HALF

LOWER HALF

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



Protect us from lead. Children and their parents join the Ecowaste Coalition in demanding for lead-safe school supplies to prevent exposure to lead, which can cause intellectual disabilities and other ailments. **MANNY PALMERO**

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

25 Chinese fishermen detained for poaching

BY VICTOR REYES

PERSONNEL of the Philippine Coast Guard and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources apprehended 25 Chinese fishermen for poaching between Babuyan Island and Batanes on Monday.

The Chinese were aboard two fishing vessels flying inverted Philippine flags.

The law enforcers were on seaborne patrol when they saw the fishing vessels – Shen Lian Cheng 719 with 12 crewmembers and Shen Lian Chen 720 with 13 crewmembers – at around 3 p.m. After inspection, Coast Guard and BFAR established that the vessels are registered in China. Also, the crewmembers of the two vessels failed to show an authorization to sail in Philippine waters.

The vessels were then es-

corted by Coast Guard and BFAR personnel aboard MCS 3010 and MM Patrol Boat 3049 to Basco, Batanes.

“We suspected they are not Filipino vessels because they were flying an inverted Philippine flag with the red field on top,” said BFAR director Asis Perez.

An inverted Philippine flag means the country is in a state of war.

During the initial search, Perez said they were able to see fishing paraphernalia. However, he said they were yet to open the vessels’ cargo hold, saying they need interpreters before proceeding with the investigation.

“We brought them to Basco and we are waiting for the DFA (Department of Foreign Affairs) and Chinese embassy consulate to help us with the interpretation because we have to understand why they are here and

why are they using Philippine flags while inside our waters,” he said.

In Beijing, China’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said he had no information and needed to further understand the situation.

A Philippine court fined nine Chinese fishermen \$102,000 each in late 2014 after they were caught with hundreds of sea turtles in the disputed Half Moon Shoal in the Spratly islands of the South China Sea.

At the time, China protested against the arrests and refused to recognize their trial.

Last week, Coast Guard and BFAR personnel also arrested 18 Vietnamese fishermen aboard three fishing vessels off Sta. Ana town in Cagayan. The fishermen were charged with violation of the fisheries code. --

With Ashzel Hachero and Reuters