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MGB to erase exploration permit backlog by June 30

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

MINING firms with pending applications for exploration permit will know between today and June 30 if they can proceed with their projects or not, consistent with the "zero backlog" campaign of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB).

 264

Number of exploration-permit applications under MGB's evaluation

MGB Director Leo L. Jasareno said the agency has stepped up the evaluation of all applications for exploration permit, so when the next administration steps in, the MGB would get to start with a clean slate.

The MGB, an attached bureau of the

Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), is the country's mining-regulatory body.

Jasareno, on January 21, issued a memorandum directing the Mining Tenements Management Division of the MGB, in coordination with the MGB regional offices, to go for zero backlog.

This means that the applications for exploration permits should have been approved or denied by June 30.

There are 264 pending exploration-permit applications undergoing evaluation by the MGB. On January 18, 2011, Environment Secretary Ramon J. P. Paje issued DENR Memorandum Order 2011-01, which suspended the acceptance of all types of mining applications.

The order was lifted on February 21, 2013, with the implementation of DENR Administrative Order 2013-11, which prescribed the procedural guidelines in the filing and processing of exploration-permit applications, pursu-

ant to Executive Order (EO) 79.

Once an exploration permit is granted, mining companies are allowed to explore specific areas with potential mineral reserves that they intend to extract through a contract with the government.

There are close to 50 operating mines in the Philippines, more than half of which are nickel mines.

Mining investment over the past three years had gone down, after President Aquino issued EO 79, which seeks to institutionalize reform in the minerals-development sector and increase the government's share in mining profit.

EO 79 also designated mining "no-go zones," which prohibits mining activities in agricultural areas, tourism areas, protected areas or areas identified for conservation, including key biodiversity area, such as national park, natural park, bird sanctuaries, marine protected area, protected landscapes and seascapes.

Mr. Aquino's mining policy also prohibits mining in areas previ-

ously covered by the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program, or land with previously issued certificates of land-ownership awards.

The declaration of mining no-go zones, in effect, made 84 percent of the country's 30-million-hectare total land area off limits to mining activities.

Despite its potential to boost economic growth, the mining sector's contribution to the country's GDP remains less than 1 percent.

The Joint Foreign Chambers (JFC) included mining on the list of seven sectors that are expected to drive growth in the inflow of foreign direct investments into the country.

The JFC noted in its Arangkada blueprint that the Philippines has an estimated \$1.4 trillion in mineral reserves, especially gold, copper, nickel, aluminum and chromite. The country is fifth in the world in terms of overall mineral reserves, covering an estimated 9 million hectares, although less than 2 percent received mining permits.

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'BAKAWAN' PRESERVATION - Officials and staff of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in Region 13 (DENR 13) lead the planting of mangrove propagules along the coastlines and vacant mountain ranges of the Caraga region. DENR-13 aims to plant more than 54 million of the seedlings of various tree species in Northeastern Mindanao this year. (Mike U. Crismundo)

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Illegal logging returns to Sierra Madre

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By Delfin T. Mallari Jr., *Inquirer Southern Luzon*

LUCENA CITY—Illegal logging has returned to Sierra Madre, and environmentalists seeking to preserve what is left of the mountain range are pointing to poverty as its main propeller.

"We're sad that poor mountain dwellers, some of them tribal people, are forced to join the rape of the mountain due to extreme poverty," Zander Bautista, assistant executive director of Save Sierra Madre Network Alliance (SSMNA), said in a phone interview.

SSMNA is a multisectoral network of indigenous peoples' groups, nongovernment organizations, religious and other individuals working for the conservation and protection of the Sierra Madre. It also wants to help the tribal people in opposing government dam projects in General Nakar town that may impact on the Sierra Madre's biodiversity.

According to Conservation International, the Sierra Madre contains the largest remaining tract of old-growth tropical rainforest in the Philippines. It spans Luzon's northeastern coast from Cagayan province in the north to Quezon province in the south.

The longest mountain range in the country, also known as the "backbone" of Luzon, contains 1.4 million hectares of forest, representing 40 percent of the Philippines' forest cover, it said.

For three days last month, Bautista led an SSMNA team in monitoring activities in a section of the Sierra Madre covered by General Nakar.

Bautista took photos of several piles of illegally cut lumber in the mountain trails, rivers and a makeshift shack. He also encountered illegal loggers in the act of processing trees toppled by chainsaws.

Fr. Pete Montallana, SSMNA president, said the resurgence of rampant illegal logging not only in northern Quezon but also in Isabela and Aurora provinces and other parts of the Sierra Madre had long been a "mad cycle during elections."

"It's nothing new," Montallana said. "The politician or

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ILLEGAL LOGGING

backers of illegal loggers needed funds to finance the expensive campaign."

Bautista said workers in the illegal logging trade had told him that they were forced to this job out of desperation to feed their families. They also accept jobs offered by financiers in other parts of the Sierra Madre in northern Luzon, he said.

"But they receive only pitiful amounts from illegal logging syndicates," he said, without elaborating.

Bautista said an official in an upland village in the Sierra Madre had talked about being helpless to stop villagers from engaging in the illegal trade.

"They just want to survive," he said, quoting the official.

Most mountain dwellers, particularly members of the Agta tribe, gather rattan, honey and other forest products that they sell to lowlanders.

But Sierra Madre inhabitants are afraid to wander deep into the mountain out of fear of being caught in the crossfire in clashes between government soldiers and communist rebels, who also consider the forest a haven.

Bautista called on all government agencies to attend to the needs of the mountain dwellers. He asked the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to establish guard posts in several exit points of the Sierra Madre to stop the movement of illegally cut logs.

Illegal loggers use the Umiray River, which connects Aurora and Quezon and ends at the mouth of Pacific Ocean in Infanta town in Quezon, to transport logs felled from the Sierra Madre.

The construction of the Umiray Bridge in early 2014, according to Agta members, provided easy access to the mountain and opened another route to the transport of illegal forest resources.

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NatGeo Earth Day run benefits WWF

NATIONAL Geographic Channel (NGC) is holding the Earth Day Run on April 17 at Bonifacio Global City.

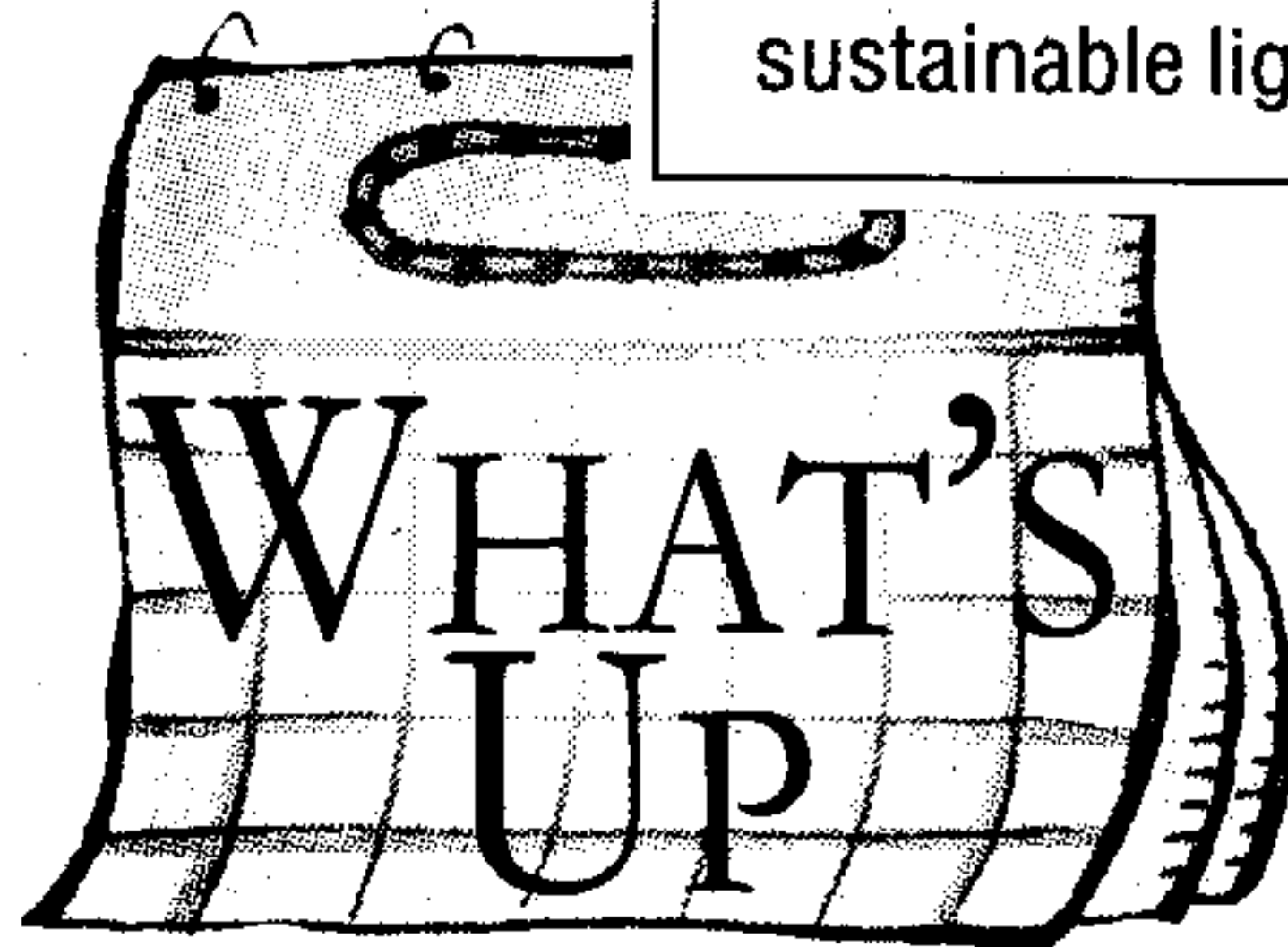
To celebrate its seventh year in the Philippines, the NatGeo Earth Day run will be held simultaneously for the first time in five Asian locations: Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Tai Chung and Manila. Each city's race will be using support from the registration of all participants to help raise money for the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and its projects.

Around 20,000 runners are expected to join this year. Available distances are 5K, 10K, 21K and 42K. Online registration is ongoing at www.natgeoearthdayrun.com, while on-site registration for the Manila leg is ongoing until March 31 at G/F, SM Aura Premier, BGC.

NGC's Earth Day Run has consistently helped in promoting sustainable living and supporting environmental advocacy, utilizing the popular platform of running, in its seven years of operation. As a result, participation in the Earth Day Run in the Philippines has increased year on year, allowing NGC to contribute significantly to various environmental causes.

Massive participation in the Earth Day Run throughout the years has made it possible for NGC to plant 36,000 fruit-bearing trees in the Abuan watershed in Isabela, in the Sierra Madre mountains. Not only was the watershed partially reforested, but local farmers were also allowed to care for and harvest these trees for themselves.

In 2014, the Earth Day Run's proceeds went to training fishermen affected by Supertyphoon "Yolanda" on how to make and use fiberglass boats, which can better withstand the weather in the Philippines and allow them to continue with their livelihood. Last year, NGC was able to provide portable solar-powered lighting kits to the Tawbuid Mangyan tribes folk in Mindoro, giving them and Forest Rangers' camps safe and sustainable light sources off the grid.



Hydrate with Contigo water bottles

Bringing your own bottled water not only helps keep you hydrated, but also helps reduce use of disposable bottles. Good water bottles encourage users to keep hydrated, and should be BPA-free, easy to clean and stylish-looking enough to carry around.

Contigo makes bottles that are spill- and leak-proof. It has autoseal technology that allows one-hand operation, autospout features for cleaner sipping, Thermalock vacuum insulation that keeps beverage temperature for

hours and SnapSeal lid system.

Contigo products are distributed by The Neat Inc., and are available at SM Home in North Edsa, SM Aura in Bonifacio Global City, SM Megamall, Mall of Asia and SM Makati; Robinson's Department Store in Ermita, Manila; Galleria in Ortigas and Magnolia in Quezon City; Toy Kingdom outlets in SM North Edsa and SM Megamall; and Banana Peel stores in Alabang Town Center, Starmall San Jose del Monte, Bulacan and TriNoma.

Banana Peel summer sandals

Banana Peel footwear launches new summer collections: Paprika for girls, and Sutton and Cayenne for ladies.

The Paprika flip-flops line for kids comes in six color combinations. These are made with eco-friendly, antislip rubber, and are available in kid sizes 9-14, sold at P530 a pair.

The Sutton collection features thong sandals that pair well with swimwear. These come in vibrant, solid summer colors, and are sold at P550 a pair.

Also available are Cayenne sandals in bright colors that go well with casual wear, sold at P570 a pair.

Visit www.bananapeel.net.

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OF TREES AND FOREST

A floating solution to flooding



By MARY YELLEN

A WORLD Meteorological Organization study provides a worrisome scenario for the Philippines. It reported that water levels around the Philippines are rising almost three times more than the global average of 3.1 centimeters every ten years.

It is not as if we need more bad news given the fact that we are already hit by an average of 20 typhoons annually and that the United Nations (UN) has identified us as the third most at-risk country from climate change.

I am not sure how much urgency there is among government agencies or the general public about the need to address this potentially cataclysmic problem. In particular, we need to seriously come up with climate change adaptation strategies.

Beyond the jargon, what this simply means is that we need to prepare ourselves in order to prevent or minimize the damage climate change can cause.

One strategy that can potentially address our problems with flooding and can become an important climate change adaptation strategy for the country is something

that we have seen in our family travels to The Netherlands.

Actually, it was my son Paolo who looked at the Dutch experience and transformed it into a powerful idea for the Philippines. I am proud to say that he was able to carefully guide the process that made this idea a reality. I am referring to "floating houses" or as Paolo called it, "Vintahanan."

During one of our trips to The Netherlands, we came across houses that are floating in the river. Later on, we would find out that these houses are not just experimental or trivial but they reflect a new strategy in city planning in The Netherlands: "leven met water" or "living with water."

The idea is so brilliant in its simplicity. Do not fight back against rising water instead find ways to work with it. And I think we can trust the Dutch on this because they are widely acknowledged as having the best flood management technologies in the world. Much of it is born out of the fact that two thirds of its area is vulnerable to flooding.

So Paolo had this idea, "Why can't we adopt the same strategy in the Philippines since we basically face the same problem with flooding?"

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p 2 A floating solution . . .

It was brilliant. The idea simply calls for the building of what would amount to an amphibious house that is designed to rise with the water level.

As explained to us by the Dutch construction company Dura Vermeer, "the houses float on hollow platforms made of concrete and timber." All pipes and ducts for water, gas, electricity, and sewage disposal are flexible and keep functioning even when a house rises several meters. Sturdy posts set deep into the ground prevent the houses from drifting away.

The BBC News has reported that the United Kingdom and other countries have started to work with the same idea in their respective countries.

Here in the Philippines, Paolo, who is the president and chief executive officer of Vista Land, has created a floating village project called 'Vintahanan' in Laguna Lake.

Let me quote Paolo here on. "The floating village and the pioneering technology utilized in construction are perfect for an archipelagic country like the Philippines, a country vulnerable to climate change. It is an effective way of mitigating the damaging effects of climate change, particularly massive flooding and rising sea levels."

Vista Land partnered with the Laguna Lake Develop-

ment Authority (LLDA), the Department of Works and Public Highways (DPWH), and Dutch construction company Dura Vermeer to build a prototype that is available for anyone to view or even replicate.

I told Paolo that given the urgency of the climate change issue and the persistent vulnerability of our people to flooding, we need to make this project as our CSR or corporate social responsibility project.

Businesses, especially we at Vista Land, are not just about the bottom line. We are part of efforts towards nation building and should therefore help in providing solutions to social problems.

It makes me proud as a father and as a businessman to see how our company has taken on the challenge to innovate in order to provide new solutions to old problems in the country.

I invite everyone to visit our Vintahanan project located in Laguna Lake, Lakefront, Barangay Sucat, Muntinlupa, and see if you can use the technology in your community.

(For comments/feedbacks email to mbv.secretariat@gmail.com or visit WWW.Manhyvin.com.ph.)

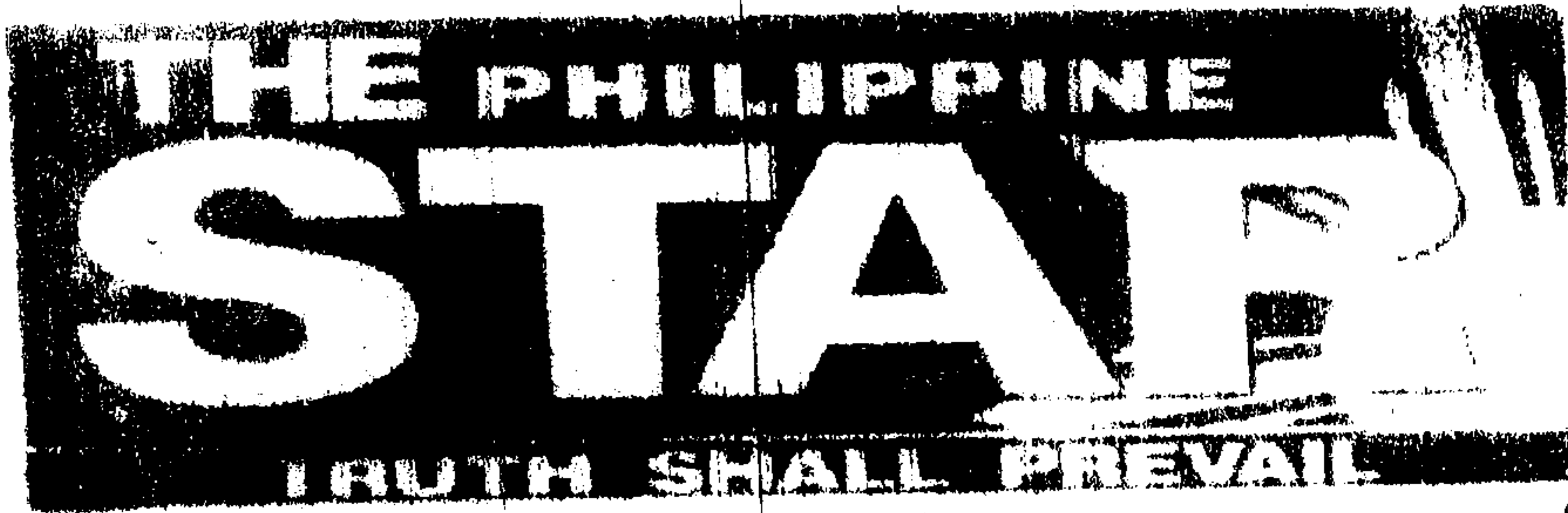
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El Niño likely to push up inflation – DOF

The rise in consumer prices could accelerate this month due to El Niño weather disturbance, the chief economist of the Department of Finance said.

"While the over-all price level appears stable, sector specific measures will have to be carried out," Finance Undersecretary Gil Beltran said in an economic bulletin.

"In this dry season, the agriculture sector is especially vulnerable," he added.

Inflation, as measured by consumer price index (CPI), slowed to

a four-month low 0.9 percent last month from 1.3 percent in January.

It brought the two-month average to 1.1 percent, below the official two to four-percent target for the year.

Broken down, however, Beltran said the CPI showed vegetable prices rising nearly a tenth from year-ago levels after a typhoon hit Northern Luzon last month.

This, in turn, fed into the food sub-index, which accounted for 39 percent of the CPI. Food prices rose an average of 1.5 percent last month.

"In the aftermath of Typhoon Lando, vegetable prices have been rising by more than 10 percent since November last year. The above-average price increase may continue due to the dry spell," Beltran said.

State interventions may thus be needed to mitigate the impact to farmers in North Luzon who accounted for the bulk of food supply in Metro Manila and other regions.

The start of March saw the capital's temperature sizzle to 34.2 degrees Celsius last Monday afternoon.

By PRINZ MAGTULIS

"Innovative approaches to counter the dry spell may be necessary in vegetable-producing areas to dampen inflationary impact of supply tightness," Beltran said.

On the flip side, the Finance official said persistent weak commodity prices, especially of oil, "helped to dampen inflation" during the same month.

The bulk of the country's oil requirements are imported, hence, last year's over 40-percent drop in global crude reflected in lower local pump prices.

Turn to B-9

Beltran said with inflation still below goal, the central bank may keep interest rates at their current levels to support economic growth amid financial volatility.

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas has refrained from tweaking its overnight borrowing and lending rates at four and six percent, respectively, during its first

meeting for the year last Feb. 11.

Low interest rates bode well to bank lending, which in turn, can provide credit to consumers and investors.

"The continued overall price stability will give authorities larger room for maneuver to accommodate external shocks," Beltran said.

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A broader look at today's business

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EL NIÑO HITS ILOCOS In this photo, a fisherman in the Ilocos region uses an improvised fishing gear to catch fish. El Niño has caused fish catch in the northern Philippine province to decline in recent months. LAILA AUSTRIA

HATAW!

D'YARYO NG BAYAN

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Environment friendly technology isusulong

ISUSULONG ng Mapecon Green Charcoal Philippines, Inc. (MGCPPI) ang programang pinaniniwalaan nilang makahihikayat sa publiko na tumulong sa pagpapalaganap ng impormasyon kaugnay sa halaga ng managed environment sa pamamagitan ng thematic program na idinesenyong matugunan ang mga problema sa peste, basura at iba pang problema sa kapaligiran. Naniniwalang ang kompanya na ito ay suportahan ng publiko.

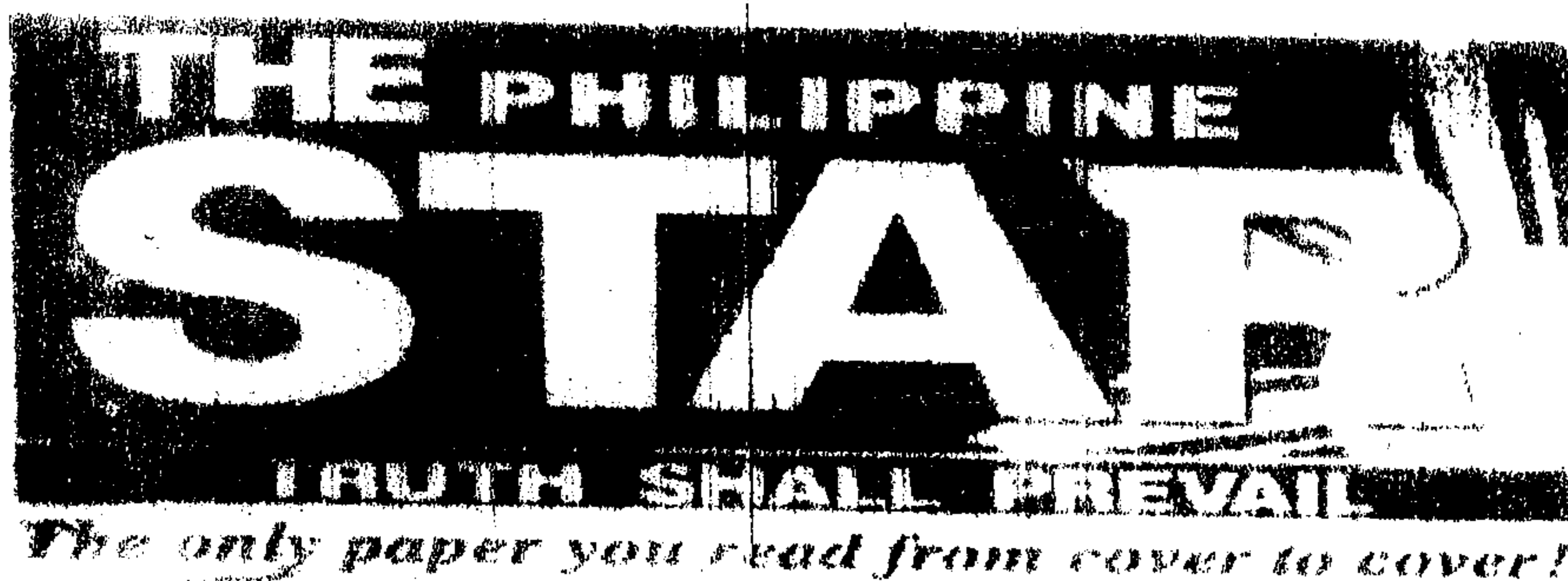
Ing gawing alternative fuel habang ang putik ay maaaring gawing vermicast (organic fertilizer) sa pamamagitan ng patented Green Charcoal technology ng kompanya.

Paliwanag ni Catan, iko-convert ng Green Charcoal technology ang biowaste patungo sa green charcoal sa porma ng pellets, firelogs at briquette at ito ay 'environment friendly'. Ito ay activated carbon na pinoprodukus mula sa coconut shell, coal at iba pang forest wastes gamit nang Toyota Hi-Ace 4-K engine na pinaandar ng 100% green charcoal hydrogen fuel, ang pinakamalinis na fuel, alternatibo sa petroleum fuel na nakasama sa kapaligiran.

Ang programang tinaguriang "Modern Indigenous Proven Solutions" ay nakasaad sa position paper na iprinesenta sa DENR sa nakaraang administrasyon. Ito ang inihayag ni noted inventor Gonzalo Catan, Jr., MGCPPI executive vice president, nagsabing ang programa ay nabuo kasunod ng resulta ng pagsasaliksik kaugnay sa mabilis na pagdami ng populasyon ng waterlilies at putik sa Laguna Lake at Pasig River.

Ayon sa pagsasaliksik, ang mga waterlily ay maaaring gawing alternative fuel habang ang putik ay maaaring gawing vermicast (organic fertilizer) sa pamamagitan ng patented Green Charcoal technology ng kompanya.

Ang activated carbon ay amorphous carbon na isinasalang sa thermal treatment kasama ng oxidizing gases at vapors o mixture ng bath (steam) para mapataas ang 'absorptive properties'. Ang steam activation nito ay umaabot sa 900°C.



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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Gov't finalizes rules on GMOs

By TED TORRES

The government has approved a stringent set of rules on the propagation and sale of genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

The new rules were in response to the Supreme Court's landmark ruling which called for an overhaul of previous regulations on GMOs.

Last December, the Supreme Court affirmed an earlier

order banning field trials of genetically modified egg plants and the temporary ban on development of GMOs.

The rules are likely to take effect next month.

The overhauled guidelines had been made stringent and transparent as environment safety assessment procedures would be cross checked by five key agencies before the local cultivation of GM crops.

Among these agencies include the Departments of Science and Technology, Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources, Health, and Interior and Local Government.

Biosafety committees will be formed to review applications for field-testing and cultivation.

The DA will be tasked to evaluate applications for field trial, commercial propagation and trans-boundary movement of regulated articles in accordance with the new rules. It will also evaluate the independent reports as well as socio-economic, ethical and cultural considerations.

The DENR will evaluate environmental risks and impacts of regulated articles for field trial, commercial propagation, and direct use of living modified organisms.

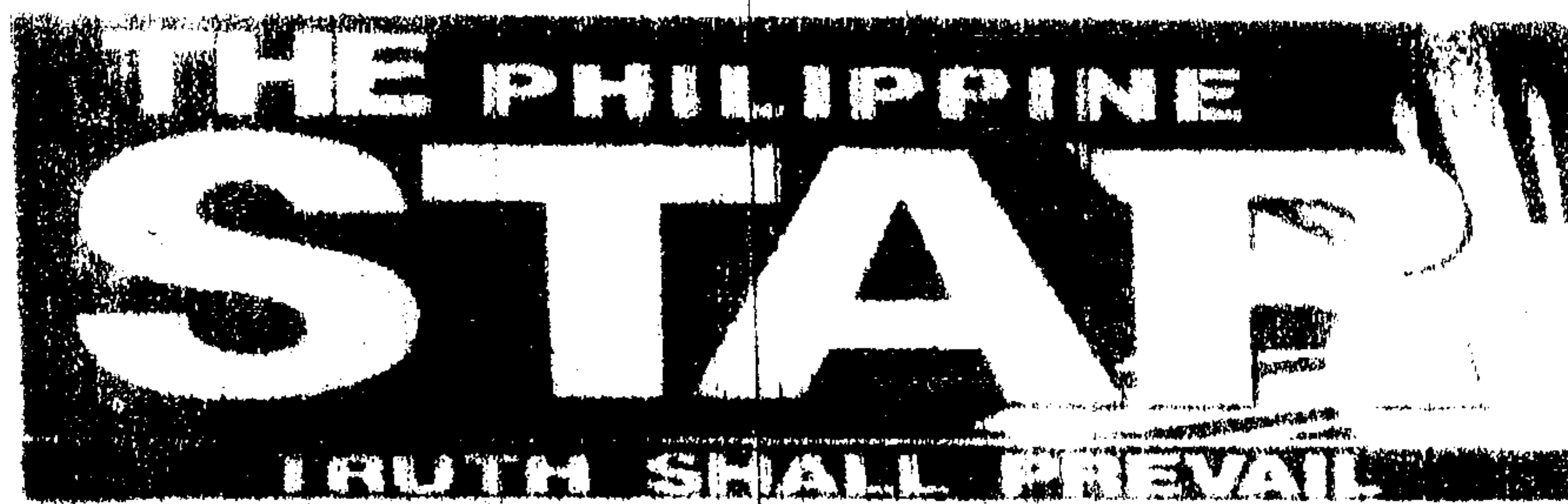
The DOH, meanwhile, will evaluate health impacts of regulated articles for field trial, commercial propagation, and direct use of living modified organisms.

"The DA is now tasked to broaden membership in the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) to accommodate expertise in the evaluation of the potential risks of regulated articles to the environment and human health," Agriculture Undersecretary Dennis Guerrero said.

The Philippines is the first country in the Asian region to allow the propagation and commercialization of GM crops in 2002.

Agriculture officials said the guidelines would strengthen biotechnology's role in the country's agriculture sector and address food security concerns in the immediate future while at the same time ensuring the environment and the health of people, plants, and animals are protected.

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China: We discovered South China Sea

BEIJING – The South China Sea is one of the world's freest and safest shipping lanes, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday, arguing that Beijing's control over the disputed waters was justified because it was the first to "discover" them.

China has come under fire from the United States and its allies in recent months over its land reclamation activities in the South China Sea, through which \$5 trillion in ship-borne trade passes annually.

The US Navy has carried out freedom of navigation exercises, sailing near disputed islands to underscore its rights to operate in the seas.

Those patrols, and reports that China is deploying advanced missiles, fighters and radar equipment on islands there, have led Washington and Beijing to trade accusations of militarizing the region.

The freedom of navigation does not equal the "freedom to run amok," Wang told his yearly news conference on the sidelines of China's annual parliament meeting.

"In fact, based on the joint efforts of China and other regional countries, the South China Sea is currently one of the safest and freest shipping lanes in the world," Wang said.

"China was the earliest to explore, name, develop and administer various South China Sea islands. Our ancestors worked diligently here for generations," Wang said.

"History will prove who is the visitor and who is the genuine host," he said, adding that China would "consider inviting" foreign journalists to islands under its control when the conditions are right.

China was neither the earliest country to deploy weapons to the South China Sea nor the country with the most weapons there, Wang added, without saying which country was.

Beijing claims almost all of the South China Sea, but Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam have overlapping claims.

US Defense Secretary Ash Carter has warned of "specific consequences" if China takes "aggressive" action in the region.

He has said the US military was increasing deployments to the Asia-Pacific region and would spend \$425 million through 2020 to pay for more exercises and training with countries in the region that were unnerved by China's actions.

– Reuters

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REUTERS

A FIREFIGHTER tries to put out a fire on land intended for a palm oil plantation in the village of Tanjung Palas, Dumai, Riau province, Sumatra, Indonesia in this photo taken on March 5.

Indonesian province declares emergency as forest fires flare

JAKARTA — Indonesia's western province of Riau has declared a state of emergency over forest and land fires blazing on the island of Sumatra, a government official said on Tuesday.

The fires, which send choking smog over Southeast Asia every year, raged uncontrollably across several provinces last year, costing an estimated \$16 billion, and pushed average daily greenhouse gas emissions above those of the United States.

"The governor has declared an emergency now, to be able to prevent a repeat of the haze that occurred in 2015," said provincial government spokesman Darusman, adding that life in the province continued to be normal.

About 500 military and police personnel and a water-bombing helicopter have been deployed to help fight the fires but

the haze had not yet reached urban areas, he said.

The fires are often set by plantation companies and smallholders to clear land and were particularly bad in 2015 because of a prolonged dry season caused by the El Niño weather pattern.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo has urged authorities to contain so-called hotspots, where fires start and spread to their surroundings.

This year, Mr. Widodo set up an agency to restore around 2 million hectares of carbon-rich peatlands, which typically produce more smog than forest fires.

But, past efforts by Indonesia and neighboring countries to prevent the fires, or put them out once started, have shown little success. Last year's fires ended only when the rainy season arrived to douse them. — *Reuters*

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Bongbong wants 4Ps widened

By Jeannette I. Andrade

VICE presidential candidate Sen. Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. vowed to broaden the government's Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) by covering more poor families and providing the beneficiaries the skills and capacity to improve their lives.

In a statement, Marcos said the 4Ps, which is the government's direct intervention for poor families, should cater to more qualified households.

Under the program, conditional cash grants are given to the poorest of the poor through the Department of Social Welfare and Development to improve the health, nutrition and the education of children.

"The 4Ps program is a package intervention of the government to help the poor. It should reach out to

more qualified families," he said.

Marcos said that if he wins the vice presidential race, "aside from expanding the coverage of 4Ps, we can implement other programs like 'cash for work,' 'cash for reforestation,' 'cash for community service.'"

He pointed out that beneficiaries of the 4Ps should be given employment packages that would complement the program by teaching them new skills.

Complementing the 4Ps

Capacitating the 4Ps beneficiaries, he said, would enable them to find a new sense of purpose and eventually stand on their own.

"The 4Ps should be expanded but we also have to complement it by teaching them new skills to enable them to improve their lives more, find better jobs so that eventually they

need not depend on it," Marcos said.

He stressed that the government should focus on helping poor families who try every possible means to survive.

The vice presidential candidate added that "more programs should be implemented to help those who languish in extreme poverty."

Environmental regulations

Marcos also sought over the strict regulation on the construction of resorts and other buildings in tourist hubs to preserve ecological balance.

In a statement, Marcos said that taking a tough stance in enforcing environmental regulations will protect the natural beauty of tourist spots and ensure a steady livelihood for residents engaged in tourism-related businesses.