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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

DENR assures due process observed in mining audit

BY MADELAINE B. MIRAFLORES

Despite concerns about the credibility of the government's nationwide audit on mining companies, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) assured that the process as to how the controversial audit was done was "meticulously observed," three days before revealing the said results.

"We assure the industry and the general public that due process was meticulously observed in the mining audit conducted by the agency and that the results would really promote the common good and social justice," the DENR said in a statement.

DENR Secretary Gina Lopez is scheduled to announce on Thursday (February 2) the final report and recommendations of the audit team created to review the compliance of mining firms to environmental laws and regulations.

Since the start, Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP)

has always been concerned with the integrity of DENR's mining audit because of the way it was conducted and the questionable role of anti-mining civil society organizations (CSOs) who have no certified expertise in any field relevant to the audit in the evaluation process.

"The process was clearly rushed, with the audit teams given only one month to inspect over 40 mines and report their findings," COMP Vice President for Legal and Policy Ronald Recidoro said earlier.

"The findings were also inconsistent, with some mines without ISO14001 certifications rated as passed," he added.

It was Lopez who initiated the mining audit, taking a cue from President Rodrigo Duterte, who in his first State of the Nation Address last July ordered a review of all permits granted to mining, logging and other similarly environmentally sensitive activities to ensure compliance with government standards.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

'Big fish' priority of environmental crime task force

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA @jonlmayuga

ELIMINATING large-scale mining companies that are causing massive environmental destruction and making people in affected communities suffer will be the priority of the National Anti-Environmental Crime Task Force (NAECTF).

After the "big fish", the new agency, led by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), will then train its sights on erring small miners.

Environment Undersecretary and concurrent NAECTF Head Arturo T. Valdez said small-scale mining will not be an easy task because of its "on-and-off" type of operations.

"When you stop them [small-scale miners] now, they will be back tomorrow. It is not that we condone their activities; we are against it. But we will get them later," Valdez said, describing small-scale mining as "Kamote mining".

For now, Valdez said, "We will

go after large-scale mining [companies] that operate illegally."

Without elaborating on the details, Valdez said the NAECTF is currently investigating the alleged illegal transport and shipment of mineral ores by a large-scale mining company. In a telephone interview, Valdez said he prefers to go after the big fish first before going after illegal small-scale miners.

The NAECTF, composed of the DENR, departments of the Interior and Local Government, Transportation and Justice, and law-enforcement agencies, conducts surveillance operations on the ground based on information it gets from various sources.

The NAECTF, in coordination with the DOJ, builds up cases before pouncing to catch illegal miners "red handed".

The NAECTF was created to go after large-scale environmental crimes, including mining, logging, quarrying and wildlife trafficking.

Meanwhile, Environment Secretary Regina Paz L. Lopez said she will announce to the public the result of mine audit started in July last year.

Of the 41 operating mines, only 11 passed the initial mine-audit criteria, which include environmental, biodiversity and social aspect of mining as among the considerations. An environmental advocate and known staunch critic of large-scale mining, Lopez had also canceled the environmental compliance certificates (ECCs) of 10 mining projects as part of an ongoing industry-wide ECC audit.

Lopez said the audit was done fairly and that due process was observed in evaluating the findings and recommendations of the audit teams.

Mining's big players under the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP) are unfazed by the crackdown against irresponsible mines, saying almost all of its members have complied with various mining and environmental laws.

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Com4. 'Big Fish' priority of ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME TASK FORCE

the scheduled announcement of the results of the mine audit, COMP issued a statement saying it sees a bright prospect in the steel industry.

The statement quoted COMP Chairman Artemio F. Disini stressing the importance of the country's thrust to revitalize its steel industry. He said no less than the Department of Trade and Industry-Board of Investments's (DTI-BOI) Iron and Steel Road Map from 2015 to 2030 underscores the importance of mining industry's role.

"We see an increased demand for products and services from the metals industry, especially in human-resource capital development [science and technology sectors]; revitalization of the manufacturing industries; and leveling up of annual public spending on infrastructures at 5-percent gross domestic product or greater," Disini said.

The COMP official took part in the Japan Oil, Metal and Gas Corp. seminar on sustainable development of mineral resources in the Philippines held recently.

In his report, Disini pointed out that the Philippines ranks fifth next to Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia in terms of steel production.

He enumerated key strategies to revive the steel industry:

strengthen national policy instruments to develop the minerals and steel industries in the country; revitalize the existing assets of National Steel Corp. (NSC) in Iligan City; implement the integration of the NSC facility to consider use of indigenous materials; and foster research and investments in downstream processing and value-adding industries.

In August 2016 Suarez City Mayor Celso Regencia signed Executive Order 17, Series of 2016, or "An order reconstituting the National Steel Corp. Working Group on the 25th of July 2016, that essentially set forth to address the clamor of Iliganons for the reopening, rehabilitation, operation and integration of the plant."

Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) Assistant Director Danilo U. Uykieng laid down the policy direction of the government for the minerals industry during the same forum. Uykieng said the gov-

ernment will focus on key areas to ensure a long-term and stable policy environment.

The five areas are minerals and metal-led industrialization initiatives; streamlining of application and procedures; MGB-led inter-agency coordination of regulatory agencies in mining projects; strong community relations programs; and final land-use options of mineral lands.

According to Uykieng, value-adding activities for downstream processing of mineral resources are a must.

"This shall be accomplished by ensuring continued supply of materials and commodities, revisiting regulatory and compliance policies, and conduct inventory and exploration studies of the various mineral resources," he added.

The DENR exec also stressed the need to simplify and rationalize documentary requirements, systems and signatories, and processing time and cost.

“When you stop them [small-scale miners] now, they will be back tomorrow. It is not that we condone their activities; we are against it. But we will get them later.”—VALDEZ

Semirara Mining clarifies alleged suspension by DENR

CONSUNJI-LED integrated energy company Semirara Mining and Power Corporation (SMPC) said on Monday that it has not been suspended by Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), contrary to information appearing on social media.

In a statement, the company told the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE) that it "continues to operate and has not been suspended and neither has it been issued any suspension order nor is there any ongoing mining audit or re-audit."

"We reiterate that the DENR Environmental Audit conducted in August 2016 cleared the company as compliant with its Environmental Compliance Certificate disclosed to the Exchange on September 19, 2016," SMPC said.

The company has also reiterated that its operation is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Energy (DOE).

It noted that the DOE issued on August 26, 2016 the results of its technical audit confirming that SMPC's operation does not discharge toxic materials to the mangroves, the sulfur content of coal is below 1 percent, no seaweed farm has been affected and the dumping of overburden materials do not affect nearby communities.

"This was disclosed to PSE on September 22, 2016," the company said.

SMPC is the only power producer in the Philippines that generates its own fuel. It produces over 800-megawatts (MW) of baseload power for the Luzon grid.

Meanwhile, SMPC said it is setting aside around P320 million for its host community projects this year.

It said the spending is in line with its 5Es program which

aims to reduce poverty and facilitate development in its host community using a sustained, holistic approach.

SMPC's 5Es program includes initiatives that address (1) Education and Training, (2) Environmental Stewardship, (3) Employment and Livelihood, (4) Electrification and Basic Infrastructure, and (5) Emergency Preparedness.

"We expect our CSR spending to grow by around 75% compared to last year's P186 million because we are building more community infrastructure and livelihood facilities," SMPC President and COO Victor A. Consunji said in a separate statement.

Majority of the planned expenditure or about P200 million will be used to construct community and livelihood facilities such as evacuation centers, community park, sea port, river walk and sports facilities.

Another P65 million will be spent on environmental stewardship projects, which include the establishment of a Semirara Biodiversity Center and progressive inland and mangrove area reforestation. The rest of the CSR budget will be used to fund community nutrition initiatives in Calaca, Batangas.

"We are closely working with the Department of Energy and the host communities to ensure that our CSR efforts are aligned with the national and local government's priorities. We want to implement projects that best respond to their needs," Consunji added.

In 2015, the 5Es program of SMPC became a finalist under the CSR category of the prestigious Platts Global Energy Awards, touted as "the Oscars of the energy industry."

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

LINKAGES

MINING SEEN PLAYING KEY ROLE IN STEEL INDUSTRY REVIVAL

By Ronnel W. Domingo
@ronwdomingoINQ

As regulators make ready the results of an audit of all operating mines in the country, the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP) said the industry was important for the country's thrust to revitalize the steel sector.

"We see an increased demand for products and services from the metals industry especially in human resource capital development (science and technology sectors), revitalization of the manufacturing industries; and leveling up of annual public spending on infrastructures at 5-percent gross domestic product or greater," COMP chair Artemio Disini said in a statement.

Disini said that, in fact, the mining industry figured in the Department of Trade and Industry-Board of Investments Iron and Steel Road Map from 2015 to 2030.

The COMP chief noted that

the Philippines ranked fifth next to Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia in terms of steel production.

According to Disini, the following key strategies were needed to be pursued to revive the steel industry: Strengthen national policy instruments to develop the minerals and steel industries in the country; revitalize the existing assets of National Steel Corp. in Iligan City; implement the integration of the NSC facility to consider use of indigenous materials; and foster research and investments in downstream processing and value-adding industries.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources is expected to announce on Feb. 2 what will happen to 30 mining companies that failed the initial audit conducted last year when Regina Lopez became environment secretary.

Lopez ordered an immediate review of the operations of all 41 metallic mines in the country, "to look into the

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MINING SEEN PLAYING KEY ROLE IN STEEL INDUSTRY REVIVAL

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adequacy and efficiency of environmental

protection measures taken by the mining companies; determine gaps in those measures and identify the appropriate penalties for violations of mining and environmental

laws." Initial results showed that only 11 mining companies "passed" the audit and 30 firms were either ordered suspended or recommended for suspension for failing to meet environmental safety standards. INQ

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Mining firms see luster in local steel industry

Mining stakeholders have a rosy outlook for local steel industry this year as the government seeks to revitalize the sector to sustain economic growth.

"We see an increased demand for products and services from the metals industry especially in human resource capital development (science and technology sectors), revitalization of the manufacturing industries, and leveling up of annual public spending on infrastructures," said Artemio Disini, chairman of the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines.

Disini cited the need to strengthen the country's national policy to develop the mineral and steel industries.

He said the existing assets of

BY LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON
the mothballed National Steel Corp. (NSC) would be revitalized.

Disini urged the government to foster research and investments in downstream processing and value-adding industries.

The Department of Trade and Industry earlier said the local steel industry was a critical component in achieving inclusive economic growth and sustainable development.

The Philippines currently ranks fifth in terms of steel production. Other top producing nations are Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Meanwhile, Mines and Geo-

sciences Bureau (MGB) assistant director Danilo Uykieng said the government would focus on key areas to ensure a long-term and stable policy environment.

These include minerals and metal-led industrialization initiatives, streamlining of application and procedures, MGB-led inter-agency coordination of regulatory agencies in mining projects, strong community relations programs, and final use options of mineral lands.

"This shall be accomplished by ensuring continued supply of materials and commodities, revisiting regulatory and compliance policies, and conduct of inventory and exploration studies of the various mineral resources," he said.

Mining lobby stresses need to revitalize steel industry

BY JAMES GALVEZ

THE country's big mining lobby on Monday stressed the mineral development sector's crucial role in the Duterte administration's thrust to revitalize the country's steel industry.

Artemio Disini, chairperson of the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines, said mining industry figures in the Department of Trade and Industry-Board of Investments Iron and Steel Road Map from 2015 to 2030 show that "there is an increased demand for products and services from the metals industry especially in human resource capital development (science and technology sectors), revitalization of the manufacturing industries; and leveling up of annual public spending on infrastructures at five percent Gross Domestic Product or greater."

In his report before participants at the recently held Japan Oil, Metal and Gas Corporation (JOGMEC) seminar on sustainable development of mineral resources in the Philippines, Disini pointed out that the Philippines ranks 5th next to Vietnam, Thailand,

Indonesia and Malaysia in terms of steel production.

This as he enumerated key strategies to revive the steel industry, among them: strengthening national policy instruments to develop the minerals and steel industries in the country; revitalizing the existing assets of the National Steel Corporation in Iligan City; implementing the integration of the NSC facility to consider use of indigenous materials; and fostering research and investments in downstream processing and value-adding industries.

In August 2016, Suarez City Mayor Celso Regencia signed Executive Order 17 series of 2016, "An order reconstituting the National Steel Corporation Working Group on the 25th of July 2016; to address the clamor of Iliganons for the reopening, rehabilitation, operation and

integration of the plant."

Meanwhile, Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) assistant director Danilo Uykieng said during the same forum that the government will focus on key areas to ensure a long-term and stable policy for the steel industry in the country.

These five areas are minerals and metal-led industrialization initiatives; streamlining of application and procedures; MGB-led inter-agency coordination of regulatory agencies in mining projects; strong community relations programs; and final land use options of mineral lands.

Uykieng also said that value-adding activities for downstream processing of mineral resources is a must.

"This shall be accomplished by ensuring continued supply of materials and commodities, revisiting regulatory and compliance policies, and conducting inventory and exploration studies of the various mineral resources," he added.

The DENR exec also stressed the need to simplify and rationalize documentary requirements, systems and signatories, and processing time and cost.

Uykieng assured that the MGB will closely coordinate with the Environmental Management Bureau, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, local government units and other relevant line agencies in approving mining projects.

"The government [will] also work hand in hand with community relations practitioners in achieving government's and the industry's common objectives on responsible mining and community development. Host communities should be engaged every step of the way towards responsible mining," Uykieng said.

This thrust is in line with DENR's commitment to consult with the local government units, the communities and other stakeholders the final land use options of mineral lands.

"The utilization of these God-given mineral resources should only be allowed when the proposed mining operation is technically feasible, environmentally compliant, socially acceptable and financially viable. [When] any of these imperatives is absent, it is not time to mine," Uykieng said.

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Semirara says Calaca project expansion on

By Alena Mae S. Flores

SEMIRARA Mining and Power Corp. is confident of starting the construction of a 700-megawatt coal plant in Calaca, Batangas within the year.

"Yes, I believe that President [Duterte] will push infra," Semirara Mining chairman Isidro Consunji said.

Consunji said the project had received an environmental compliance certificate and was approval of a power supply agreement and "right of way transmission line."

Semirara Mining, a unit of DMCI Holdings Inc. and Meralco PowerGen Corp., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Manila Electric Co., have formed a joint venture to build the power plant. The project company for the coal power plant is St. Raphael

Power Generation Corp.

Consunji earlier said Semirara Mining and Meralco PowerGen would equally take a 40-percent equity stake in the project. He said Marubeni Corp. of Japan could take a 20 percent interest.

"Meralco will buy the output," Consunji said. Meralco, the country's biggest power distributor, has a pending application with the Energy Regulatory Commission to purchase of up to 400 MW of electrical output from the St. Rafael power plant.

The proposed power plant is the second phase of the planned

expansion of the Calaca coal-fired plant facility.

Semirara Mining's board approved the second phase of the expansion in 2014 consisting two units of 350 MW each, using pulverized coal technology.

The existing Calaca facility consists of two 300-MW generating units designed to utilize local coal from Semirara.

DMCI bought the Calaca plant from the government in July 2009 with a bid of \$361.7 million.

The company pursued the first phase expansion of the 300-MW capacity, which started full commercial operations last year.

The project received an indirect endorsement from President Rodrigo Duterte, who said the Philippines would continue to use coal for power generation as long as the plants use new technologies to minimize emissions.

"But for as long as the most viable fuel is coal and cheapest so that the power can also be delivered the energy to the people at a much lower price, then we'll have no other alternative except to upgrade the technology to its fullest—to limit," Duterte said during a visit to Sarangani for the groundbreaking of the coal plant of Alsons Consolidated Resources Corp.

"At this time, whoever is the president of the Philippines would always contend with coal. There's so much coal still that can be utilized by civilization for the next 50 to 70 years. And to be worrying about pollution, well, we just have to come to terms with it that in our time, in our generation, it is really what it is. There is nothing you can do about it," Duterte said.

The president said the use of coal for power continued to face challenges.

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No fish pen demolition exemption – DENR

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) yesterday warned the public against individuals who extort money in exchange for supposed exemption from the dismantling of illegal fish pens in Laguna de Bay.

Arturo Valdez, DENR undersecretary and head of the National Anti-Environmental Crime Task Force, said the

DENR does not give any exemption to fish pen owners or operators.

"No one is untouchable as everyone has to go to enable the lake to have a breathing spell to rejuvenate," Valdez said.

He urged the public to report incidents of extortion to the DENR hotlines: #DENR, #3367, 0917-868-DENR, 0917-

885-DENR or through aksyonkalikasan@denr.gov.ph and web@denr.gov.ph.

The DENR, together with the Laguna Lake Development Authority, National Bureau of Investigation, Philippine Army and the Philippine Coast Guard started removing fish pens and other illegal structures in the lake last week.

– Rhodina Villanueva

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Postscript

By FEDERICO D. PASCUAL Jr.



• Another killer lurks: Air pollution

I'M TYPING this column through teary eyes. No, the tears are not because our Maxine Medina failed to win the slippery Miss Universe 2016 crown, but I suspect because of pollution in the air.

Aside from watery eyes, I have been sneezing and coughing intermittently. I manage to keep writing only by sheer force of habit – and deadline pressure – in the same manner that I'm able to claw my way through chaotic traffic mainly by reflex honed over the years.

Re my sneezing, coughing, runny nose, and teary eyes, it so happens that the owners of the giant mall beside us in Quezon City are busy constructing another concrete structure just 60 meters from our low-rise condo unit.

We're trapped. The din and dust of the construction is so overwhelming, and there is simply nothing that we the mall's neighbors can do about it. The fine dust is on top of the residual brownish blanket of dirty air perpetually hanging over the metropolis.

(Have you noticed that Filipinos who had spent some time in, say, the US of A, come home to Manila – and start coughing within one week?)

On air pollution, btw, the Rotary Club of Makati operates an air quality monitoring system in Metro Manila as a public service. It has so far four stations whose readings are available 24/7 through its Internet website *airtoday.ph* or *Android app*.

The stations are at EDSA-Muñoz and the Lung Center, both in Quezon City; at UST-España in Manila; and on Ayala Avenue in Makati.

Air quality in the four sites show a consistent pattern. Lung Center-QC shows better readings while UST-España has the worst. EDSA-Muñoz has the second poorest air quality, and Makati places third.

Project initiator Eddie Yap, Makati Rotary president RY2015-2016, told us that air readings last New Year's eve spiked to hazardous levels in UST-España and reached very poor levels at EDSA-Munoz and on Ayala Avenue-Makati.

The UST-España site showed the dirtiest air with readings spiking to 264 micrograms per cubic meter air ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) for particulate matter (PM_{10}) and 212 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ for fine particulate matter ($\text{PM}_{2.5}$). Yap said these readings are 428 percent and 748 percent over standards for safe air set by the World Health Organization.

He said that air quality reverted to average only after 10 hours in UST-España, eight hours on Ayala Avenue-Makati, seven hours at EDSA-Munoz and six hours in the Lung Center.

The monitoring system employs advanced Germany-made outdoor type all weather instruments that measure both $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} . Readings are taken continuously day and night and wirelessly transmitted to a server where the data are analyzed and shared with the public through health advisories through the Internet and smartphones.

That is just monitoring. Data collected are wasted unless used. What is the government doing to improve the air quality?

* * *

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

BETTER WAY TO SPEND QC'S GARBAGE BUDGET

At first blush, it looks good: "Gina set on Payatas landfill closure" (Metro, 1/21/17). But a leader of a people's organization alerted us a week ago that he saw a billboard outside Payatas announcing that a waste-to-energy (WTE) plant (read: incinerator) will soon rise inside Payatas.

At a recent meeting of environmentalists with Environment Secretary Gina Lopez on the ill effects of WTE operations, especially the fly and bottom ash from burnt waste which would give us even greater problems, she said, "I won't sign that then." We hope she will honor her word.

However, it is not correct for Secretary Lopez to tell the Quezon City government to look for other dumps because the people there and their environment will suffer, too. Moreover, from north to south of our country is a watershed that any landfill would only pollute and destroy as is happening now. Our country, which consists of several islands, is surrounded by bodies of water.

Republic Act No. 9003 (Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000) mandates waste prevention at best—or reduction at least. Excess resources must be segregated at the source (households, establishments). Biodegradable wastes must be composted (ideally at the source, or in a barangay materials recovery facility or ecology center, as we prefer to call it); nonbiodegradable wastes must be reused, recycled, sold. Toxic, hazardous wastes (broken glass, spent batteries, light bulbs, electronic wastes, etc.) must be ecologically managed with special treatment by the city or municipal government. Infectious,

hospital wastes must be taken care of by the hospitals and not given to the regular collection.

The law is a bit lax, however, by providing for "residual waste"—which is only what should go to the landfill as the law also provides for. Strictly speaking, residual waste or "latak" can be treated/recycled with special technology that is much cheaper and safer than WTE technology. Hence, there would be no need for landfills, much less WTE.

We urge the Quezon City government to seriously, sincerely consider options for a progressive, sustainably prosperous city based on ecological premises. Here's one: In 2012, selected women leaders from the city's barangays wrote Mayor Herbert Bautista about their vision of Payatas as a bamboo forest—to mitigate global warming, protect the environment, and help improve people's lives and the economy.

The garbage budget could be more creatively spent for a win-win outcome for the city government, the waste management contractors, and other business entities (the biggest ones are now in Quezon City) and for the whole Quezon City population, especially the poor. Bautista has intelligent and hardworking people in his environmental protection and waste management group and in his other departments, who—together with many of us equally intelligent, hardworking, concerned, and well-meaning citizens—can help him in transforming Quezon City into the most ecological city in the country.

JOEY C. PAPA and ANNETTE V. PAPA
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Quezon City dads support Bicycle Act bill in House

THE Quezon City Council has passed a resolution supporting the enactment of House Bill 2276 or the draft Bicycle Act of 2016.

City Resolution SP-6929-S-2016, authored by Councilor Alan Benedict S. Reyes, expressed support to the draft law authored by Marikina Rep. Lord Allan Jay O. Velasco.

The bill bats for the establishment of

bike-friendly communities and the promotion of bicycles as an alternative mode of transportation throughout the country.

The bill is akin to a Quezon City ordinance which directs the city's 142 barangays to install bike racks in barangay halls or in any other convenient place that can be utilized as bike parking areas.

Under City Council Resolution SP-6760, bicycles are recognized for being very useful to the human society, "both in cultural and industrial realms."

Reyes, the main proponent of the resolution, noted there is a move in QC to establish a bicycle sharing system or community bicycle program which is implemented in

some cities around the world.

The Quezon City government, led by Mayor Herbert M. Bautista, supports moves to protect the environment by providing measures such as creation of bike lanes to encourage residents to ride bicycles instead of motorized vehicles that cause air pollution.

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Extra

BM Reports

Investing in rivers can help PHL bag 'First World' status

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

@jonmayuga

Part Two

ACCORDING to the Philippines Water Supply and Sanitation Sector, Assessment Strategy and Road Map of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Philippines has a total mean supply of 226,430 million cubic meters (m³) a year.

The report, released in January 2013, based the computation on National Water Resources Board (NWRB) estimates of the total available groundwater supply of 20,200 million m³ a year and based on an 80-percent probability for surface water.

The ADB report also said that agricultural use accounts for 83 percent to 85 percent of the country's ground and surface water, with the remainder being shared by the industrial, commercial and

domestic sectors.

It warned that growing population in urban areas, water pollution, inefficient use of water, denudation of forest cover in watersheds and saltwater intrusion caused by extraction of groundwater in the metropolitan area of Cebu, Davao City and certain areas of Metro Manila are a major problem.

A study by the NWRB and Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) warned as early as the 1990s that water deficit would take place in 17 major river basins until the year 2025.

The study was based on socioeconomic projections, water-demand projection, regional water-demand projection and water demand and groundwater potential in selected nine major urban areas. The study covered Metro Manila, Metro Cebu, Davao City, Baguio City, Angeles City, Bacolod City,

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Iloilo City, Cagayan de Oro City and Zamboanga City. Surface-water development measures in other areas are needed to sustain growth and development, the study said.

According to the study, demand for water will reach 85,400 million m³ by 2025, as the country's population posts at an annual growth rate of 1.6 percent.

Poor management

WHILE nature blessed the Philippines with abundant water supply, access to freshwater where and when needed the most remains a big challenge because of poor water management.

During the wet seasons, rivers and lakes overflow and cause massive floods because of excessive rainfall. During the dry season, water becomes scarce and hard to find, as rivers and lakes go dry.

Experts said these water could be stored by constructing small dams or water-impounding facilities in

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Investing in Rivers can help PH Bay 'First World' status

upland areas to prevent flooding in low-lying areas while having water to use during the dry season.

Managing the country's freshwater resource rests in the hands of multiple government agencies with different mandates and functions.

These agencies are the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-River Basin Control Office (DENR-RBCO), Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System, National Water Resources Board, Local Water Utilities Administration, National Irrigation Administration, Bureau and Soil and Water Management, National Power Corp., Laguna Lake Development Authority, Manila Bay Coordinating Office and Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission. These agencies have overlapping mandates and jurisdiction over water.

Good use

IN most cases, proper management spells life and abundance, while mismanagement leads to, in worse cases, destruction and death.

With properly managed rivers, the huge volume of water could ensure adequate supply for irrigation and other beneficial uses.

Environment Secretary Regina Paz L. Lopez said rivers and watersheds can be nursed back to health by preventing destructive human activities. She cited as example the La Mesa Watershed, where water from Angat Dam is treated for tap water.

Lopez had earlier ordered the cancellation of the environmental compliance certificate (ECC) of a housing development project within the La Mesa Watershed.

She said the decision is based on the belief that protecting the country's critical watersheds is for the good of the majority of the people who stand to be affected once the source of water is contaminated.

"We cannot have an economy based on suffering," she said.

Polluted, silted

MANY of the country's rivers are polluted and silted.

The DENR's Environmental Man-

agement Bureau (EMB) said rivers in Metro Manila and highly populated areas with big concentration of people have poor water quality.

Rivers in Metro Manila are no longer productive as they used to be 50 years ago because of decades of abuse, documents from the DENR-EMB said.

Aside from killing fishes, pollution has made many of the country's rivers unsafe—even for bathing.

DENR-RBCO Deputy Executive Director Donna M. Gordove said water pollution in rivers, even outside Metro Manila, are worse in highly populated areas.

She attributed this to poor solid-waste management, the indiscriminate dumping of waste in estuaries and lack of proper sewage-treatment facility.

"Sometimes, people dump their wastes right in the river for [their selfish] convenience," Gordove said. "Studies prove that water in rivers are polluted in areas where there is high concentration of people."

To be concluded

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Itogon gains P16m for high school

TUBA, Benguet—Philex Mining Corp. is providing its host town of Itogon a total of P16 million to build an agricultural secondary school.

This would help the municipality pursue and support the national government's program on basic education, as the company and other parties concerned signed the agreement and broke ground to seal the deal.

Philex Mining CEO and president Eulalio Austin Jr., Itogon Mayor Victorio Palangdan, and Beatriz Torno, OIC-Regional Director of the Department of Education in Baguio City, joined other company executives and public officials in the groundbreaking ceremonies after they signed the memorandum of agreement in Sitio Ayosip, Barangay Poblacion.

Torno said the DepEd-Cordillera Administrative Region "cannot thank Phi-

lex Mining enough for the legacy that it would be leaving—its generosity in supporting projects on education."

"We have many partners—partners in words, but partners in deed, I see it in Philex," she stressed.

Manuel Agcaoili, SVP at Philex Mining and resident manager of its Padcal operations in Benguet, said the two-story building at Itogon Agricultural National High School, will have 10 classrooms and two faculty rooms to accommodate senior high-schoolers (Grades 11 and 12) who would enroll by June. He added that building a teachers' quarters will follow soon.

Torno said DepEd-CAR will be talking with the Benguet State University, in the provincial capital of La Trinidad, to agree in providing the academic support, especially its expertise on agricultural studies, for the IANHS.

"We need the agricultural sector to prosper," she added, stressing the need to enhance livelihood programs in the region.

Austin said the granting of funds for the IANHS is part of Philex Mining's commitment to a humanized responsible mining which translates to community development by building schools and roads, adhering to labor standards, protecting the environment, and promoting the welfare of stakeholders.

He added that the IANHS may also "fall under the standards" being spearheaded by Secretary Regina Lopez of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, for mining companies to "focus on the impacted communities" in implementing projects under the Social Development and Management Program. **Dexter A. See**