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**Thursday**

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## **IN THE NEWS**

# The Standard

DEFINING THE NEWS

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**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE**

## Brace for hotter, drier summer, says Pagasa

By Rio N. Araja

*BECAUSE of a strong El Niño phenomenon, the weather bureau has warned of a hotter and drier summer in many parts of Luzon and of a worsening power crisis in Mindanao.*

At a news conference, Pagasa's chief of climate monitoring and prediction Anthony Lucero said a warmer weather is expected to impact in March during the shift of the northeast monsoon (hanging habagat) to southwest monsoon (hanging amihan) than in 2015.

Many provinces in Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao are expected to experience dry condition and a prolonged drought from January until June, Lucero said.

In Metro Manila alone, maximum

temperatures may rise from 35 degrees Celsius to 38.6 degrees Celsius in April and May, while in Tuguegarao City's temperatures could go up to as high as from 39.66 degrees Celsius to 41.5 degrees Celsius.

"Most areas in Luzon are forecast to have above-normal temperature," Lucero said.

According to Lucero, by end of January, 20 percent of the country will experience drought to affect 16 provinces, such as Palawan, Albay, Aklan, Antique, South Cotabato and

North Cotabato, while six provinces will be under dry condition and 15 provinces under dry spell.

In February, Metro Manila will be one of the places to feel dry condition, while 28 provinces and 29 others are forecast to experience dry spell and drought, respectively.

The National Capital Region is also among the 44 places to experience continued dry spell with only Batanes and Quirino under dry spell and 34 provinces under drought.

At least 12 provinces, such as Benguet, Ifugao, Mt. Province, Batanes, Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino, Rizal and Quezon, will have dry spell in April, and 68 provinces, including Metro Manila will feel the scorching heat of drought.

In May, the metro, along with Tarlac, Zambales, Batangas, Cavite, La-

guna, Nueva Ecija and Bataan, is also one of the 34 areas to feel the summer's drought.

"Forty-two percent of the country will experience drought," Lucero said.

In June, 22 percent of the country, such as in Ilocos Norte, La Union, Pangasinan, Bataan, Batangas and Cavite, will still suffer from drought.

The NCR is spared, according to Pagasa.

A dry condition is characterized by two consecutive months of below-normal reduction of rainfall condition of 21 percent to 60 percent, while a dry spell must meet the requirement of having three consecutive months of below-normal reduction of 21 percent to 60 percent.

Drought means a below-normal rainfall reduction of over 60 percent for three consecutive months.



## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICES

# Dire consequences of El Niño expected until mid-2016

By ELLALYN B. DE VERA

The impact of the ongoing strong El Niño phenomenon will likely linger until mid-2016, with 85 percent of provinces expected to suffer from drought by end of April, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA).

The adverse impact of the continuing El Niño event include below normal rainfall and warmer than normal tem-

peratures.

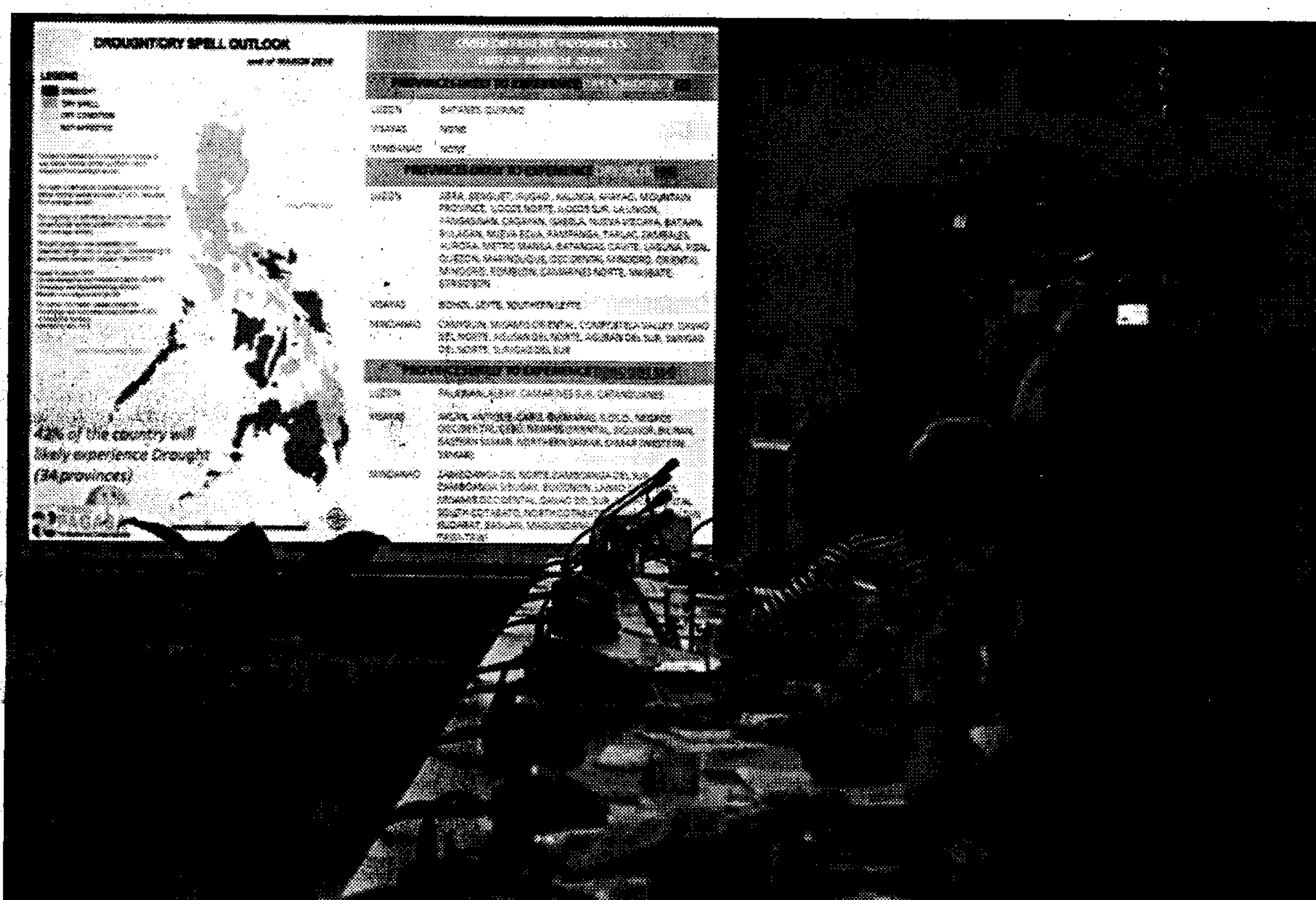
PAGASA-Climate Monitoring and Prediction Section OIC Anthony Lucero said 20 percent of the country's provinces or 16 provinces will experience drought by the end of January, 36 percent or 29 provinces by end of February, 42 percent (34 provinces) by end of March, 85 percent (68 provinces) by end of April, 42 percent (34 provinces) by end of May, and 22 percent (18 provinces) by end of June.

Drought is defined as three con-

secutive months of way below normal (60 percent reduction from average) or five consecutive months of below normal (21 to 60 percent reduction from average) rainfall condition.

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

Lucero noted that during the strong El Niño years 1972, 1982, 1997 and 2009, no tropical cyclone was recorded



**EL NIÑO'S SCOURGE – A Philippine map presented during a press briefing on the ill effects of El Niño at the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration office shows vast areas of the country which is expected to experience droughts and dry spells until the middle of the year. (John Jerome Ganzon)**



## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICES

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*Dire consequences of El Niño expected until mid-2016*

during the months of January and February.

He added that the strong El Niño caused a delay in the country's onset of rainy season, weak monsoon activity, fewer tropical cyclones, above normal air temperature last year.

Last year, only 15 tropical cyclones affected the country, as against the annual average of 19 to 20 tropical cyclones.

The year 2015 was also declared the warmest year by the World Meteorological Organization. However, 2015 was just the fourth warmest year in the Philippines, as 2013 is still the warmest year since 1951.

Lucero said the warmest years in the country are 2013, 1998, 2012, 2015, 2010, 2014, 2006, 2007, 2001 and 1987.

He said the current El Niño is expected to transition to neutral condition during May-June-July period.

But while the El Niño may reach the neutral condition by mid-year, the PAGASA continues to advise the public to conserve water.

PAGASA Deputy Administrator Dr. Flaviana Hilario said, "if we reach the 212-meter maximum flood season high water level of the Angat Dam by the end of the year, it can sustain the water requirements of consumers until the next rainy season."

At present, the level of Angat Dam has reached 214.38 meters, more than two meters above 212-meter level.

"But we still need to closely monitor the dam's water elevations to ensure that there will be enough water during the El Niño," Hilario added.



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## PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS



### EDITORIAL

#### 2 BUWANG TAGTUYOT

SINASABI ng Philippine Atmospheric, Geographical and Astronomical Services Administration na makararanas ang 80% ng bansa ng matinding tagtuyot sa mga buwan ng Marso at Abril.

Maaari pa nga umanong aabot ang tagtuyot sa buwan ng Mayo at mabilis ding maglalaho ang lamig sa Enero at Pebrero dahil sa pagdating ng matinding init ng panahon sanhi ng tag-araw at El Niño.

'Magtipid sa tubig' ang mahigpit na habilin ng PAGASA sa lahat.

Kasama tiyak ang mga dam sa paghihigpit at gaya ng ginagawa ng mga may hawak ng dam, hindi sila nagpapadaloy ng tubig sa mga sakahan.

Ngunit hinahayaan nilang umagos ang mga tubig para sa inumin, pangkalinisan at paglikha ng kuryente.

Kaya naman, para sa mga magsasakang nabubuhay sa tubig-dam, dapat din nilang tipirin ang kanilang produksyon upang hindi masayang ang kanilang mga puhunan at pagod.

Para sa mga tagasentrong lugar gaya ng Metro Manila at iba pang malalaking lungsod at bayan, sa kabila ng pagtitipid, nariryan ang paglalaan ng panlaban sa sunog.

Sa ibang salita, ang pagtitipid ay hindi lang pagsasakripisyo ng mga kapritsong gamit ang tubig kundi may kahalong responsibilidad para sa kapakanan ng nakarami o ng lahat.

Kaya naman, dapat na sumunod ang lahat sa tagubilin ng mga awtoridad ukol sa pagtitipid ng tubig at huwag gumawa ng pang-aabuso rito.

# The Manila Times

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

## Napocor halts Angat dam water release

THE National Power Corp. (Napocor) has temporarily stopped the water spilling operations of Angat dam in Bulacan on Wednesday.

In a statement, Napocor said it stopped the water release effective 9 a.m. Wednesday.

The move was in response to the request of the technical working group (TWG) of the National Water Resources Board (NWRB), which is composed of various government agencies, and the latest advisory of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and

Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa).

The state weather bureau said that despite the possible light to moderate rain showers over the watershed area in the next three days, there will be no significant effect on the water elevation level of Angat dam.

"The Pagasa advisory likewise noted that there will be no tropical cyclones that will affect the country in the coming days," said Napocor.

Napocor said it will be closely monitoring the inflow of water

to the reservoir and the amount of rainfall over the Angat watershed area.

The current water elevation level of Angat dam as of 9 a.m. on Wednesday was 214.31 meters above sea level (masl). The normal high water elevation of Angat dam is 212 masl.

Bulacan Gov. Wilhelmino Sy-Alvarado earlier said they planned to file a class suit against Napocor in connection with the four-day water discharges from Angat dam.

The governor said that the dis-

charge worsened floods in seven towns, particularly in Calumpit and Hagonoy.

The continuous release of water from the dam, he added, affected 250,000 residents.

But Napocor president and CEO Ma. Gladys Cruz Sta. Rita said there was no irregularity in the agency's water spilling operation of Angat dam.

She said they did the right thing and followed all existing procedures and protocol.

**RITCHIE A. HORARIO**



**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE**

## Leaning tree in UPLB a 'yardstick' of typhoon strength

LOS BAÑOS, Laguna – A leaning tree at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) complex here has become a yardstick for the strength of a typhoon passing through this university town.

Over the past decade, the almost century-old dao tree in front of the UPLB Student Union building has survived devastating killer typhoons since it was "condemned to die by chainsaw" because of its condition.

Two typhoons last year, Lando and Nona, wreaked havoc on outlying areas but barely dented the tree that has been declared one of UP's "Heritage Trees."

The tree, about 25 meters tall, scientifically named *Dracontomelon dao*, proved its strength when Typhoon Glenda battered Los Baños in July 2014.

The leaning tree was unscathed while many trees on the sprawling 5,200-hectare complex were either toppled, uprooted or left bald by Glenda's strong winds. Glenda has been decommissioned as a typhoon name by the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) for its destructiveness: 106 people dead, about 250 others injured, and P38.6 billion worth of property destroyed.

The dao has survived other devastating typhoons, among them Milenyo (2006), Frank (2008), Ondoy (2009), Basyang (2010) and Pedring (2011).

Milenyo, which pummeled many parts of Luzon on Sept. 28, 2006, triggered a flash flood and landslide in a barangay on Mt. Makiling, killing 15 mountain dwellers. It also ravaged much of UPLB's foliage.

The university had decided to cut down the tree on June 8, 2005 because it has for years been leaning by 20 degrees.

The tree's butt (basal part) was presumed to be weak owing to disease-causing microorganisms. It was feared that it might eventually collapse, posing danger to life and limb.

But ecologists and nature lovers within and outside UPLB came to the tree's rescue, asserting that the dao was not sickly or about to fall.

"As a plant pathologist, I examined in our laboratory root and soil samples collected around the dao tree and found no disease-causing organisms," attested Romulo Davide, retired UPLB scientist and now professor emeritus.

"Very healthy," said Davide, a former member of the UP Board of Regents and a 2012 Ramon Magsaysay awardee.

The tree, although hallow and leaning, "is not going to fall as alleged," stressed Armando Palijon, UPLB's only urban forest expert, as cited by UPLB landscape architect Susan Aquino-Ong.

Also among the beleaguered tree's "knights in shining armor" that came to its succor was then Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) secretary Elisea Gozun, who decided after several discussions over the dao's fate that "the tree can still be preserved" and that it should be pruned instead of being cut down.

As if to show gratitude to its saviors, the tree survived Milenyo in 2006 and the other catastrophic weather disturbances that subsequently bludgeoned this part of the country.

Then came one of its "crowning glories" in 2008 when it was declared a "Heritage Tree" along with 11 others in the UPLB complex.

The search for Heritage Trees on eight autonomous UP campuses, which culminated in a coffee table book featuring 100 historical trees, was among UPLB's contributions to the state university's centennial celebration in 2008.

In recent times, whenever a strong typhoon hits this 400-year-old "special science and nature city," the question usually asked by residents is: did UPLB's leaning dao tree survive?

The tree, once the inspiration of National Artist Lindy Locsin when he was designing the Student Union building more than half a century ago, still proudly and majestically juts into UPLB's skyline.

– Rudy Fernandez



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# BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

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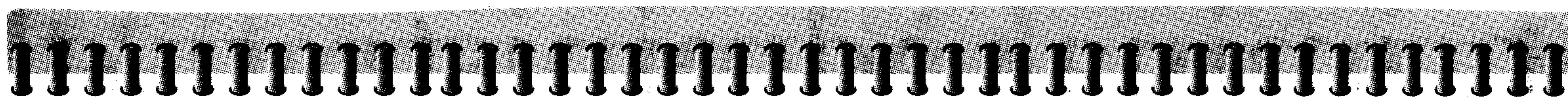
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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



### PHILEX MINING CLINCHES 2015 BELL AWARDS

**P**HILEX Mining Corp. continues to excel in corporate-governance practices, among listed companies, having been one of the top 5 companies in corporate governance at the fourth Annual Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE) Bell Awards, at the Makati Shangri-La Hotel last November 25, 2015.

The PSE continues to recognize corporate governance as one of the pillars of capital-market development. As such, the PSE actively promotes the adoption of world-class corporate-governance standards and best practices by its listed companies and trading participants, and has made this a key thrust in its strategic program.

Philex Mining President and CEO Eulalio B. Austin said one attribute of a responsible mining is adherence to good corporate governance. "[This award, once again, proves that] we are advocates of responsible mining. Because of this, it would motivate other mining companies that, despite the environmental attacks to the mining industry, good corporate governance can be of great help to soften the issue."

For his part, Philex Mining CFO and Corporate Governance Officer Danny Y. Yu said one of the biggest influences came from being a member of the MVP Group of Companies, where he believes is a staunch supporter of corporate governance.



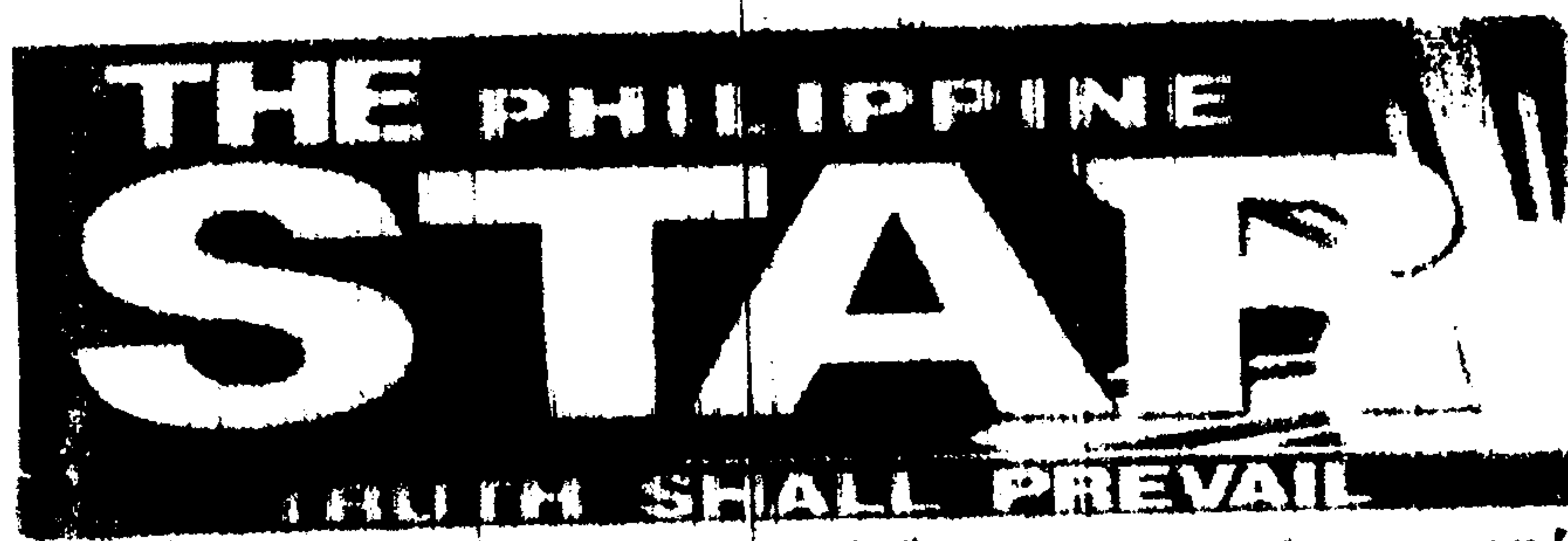
"Being a beacon of the industry, this award may not automatically translate to material benefits, but will go a long way, in terms of our company reputation and shareholder trust. For the industry, we hope this will reawaken an authentic view on mining, and how it works hand in hand, with the government, for national progress," Yu said.

On its fourth year, the PSE Bell Awards continues to respond to the need for better transparency, investor protection and corporate social responsibility, among participants in the Philippine capital market, by recognizing listed

companies and security firms that adhere to outstanding corporate-governance principles and practices.

In photo is Austin (second from right), posing for posterity with Yu. Also in photo are top executives of the MVP Group of Companies, holding their respective company awards, namely, Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. Public Affairs Head Ramon R. Isberto (left), PLDT SVP and CFO Anabelle L. Chua (second from left), Manila Electric Co. FVP and Chief Governance Officer lawyer William S. Pamintuan (center).





The only paper you read from cover to cover!

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

# Farmers, R&D and academic sectors oppose SC ruling on Bt eggplant ban

By RUDY FERNANDEZ

LOS BAÑOS, Laguna – Which is better for keeping out pests: chemical sprays or genetic modification? The agriculture, research, and academic sectors have closed ranks to oppose a Supreme Court (SC) ruling stopping the field-testing of eggplant genetically modified (GM) to be pest-resistant. SC decision permanently banned the field trials of *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) eggplant developed by the University of the Philippines Los Baños-Institute of Plant Breeding (UPLB-IPB) with the support of international and national research and academic institutions.

The high court also declared null and void the Department of Agriculture (DA) Administrative Order No. 08, series of 2002, which provides for the "Rules and Regulations for the Importation and Release into the Environment of Plants and Plant Products Derived from the Use of Modern Technology."

Over the past decade, UPLB-IPB and its partners have been conducting trials at various sites in Luzon and Mindanao on Bt eggplant, which was developed by genetically engineering a gene from the Bt bacterium so that the eggplant can produce a protein that defends itself against the eggplant fruit and stem borer. The FSB is the most destructive pest attacking eggplants in the Philippines and in other Asian countries.

In the intervening years, however, militant anti-GM organism activists swooped down on the GM fields and uprooted the experimental eggplants at the UPLB-IPB farm in Bay (Laguna) and UP Mindanao in Davao City

and the Golden Rice field in Pili, Camarines Sur, that were being grown by the DA, Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) and International Rice Research Institute (IRRI).

In April 2012, a Greenpeace-led group petitioned the SC for a Temporary Environmental Protection Order (TEPO) and writ of *kalikasan* to stop the trials. A writ of *kalikasan* is a legal remedy under Philippine law designed to protect the people's constitutional right to a healthy environment.

The SC, however, did not grant a TEPO.

In May 2013, the Court of Appeals (CA) granted the writ of *kalikasan* and ordered those involved in the research project to permanently stop confined field trials because Bt eggplant allegedly poses risks to human health and the environment.

The case was elevated to the Supreme Court, which subsequently upheld the CA decision.

Emil Javier, a former science minister, former UP president, and former UP Los Baños chancellor, described the decision as "an unfortunate misapplication of the writ of *kalikasan*" and "a letdown for the Philippine science community."

The Asian Farmers Network (ASFARNET)-Philippines headed by Reynaldo Cabanao of Malaybalay City (Bukidnon) has also started mobilizing its ranks for a massive signature drive for a reversal of the SC decision.

The Philippine government-hosted, UPLB-based Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) headed by director Gil Saguiguit Jr. said the ruling held back the advances made by scientific institutions and researchers working on agricultural biotechnology.

"If we stop the experiments, what will happen to us now? Other countries are currently using and experimenting with biotechnology. So with this (SC ruling), our agriculture sector will be left behind again," Saguiguit said.

Javier lamented that the real losers are the poor farmers and the consuming public.

"Our small farmers are deprived of modern means of raising productivity, competitiveness and incomes. They are denied potential sustainable farming technologies that can substantially reduce the need for harmful pesticides to protect their crops. And they are prevented from having access to more climate-resilient crops in the future which can tolerate drought, temporary inundation and



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# THE PHILIPPINE STAR

TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

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Farmers, R & D and Academic sectors oppose SC ruling on  
BT eggplant ban

salt intrusion," he said.

To protect their crops, Javier noted, "farmers resort to chemical pesticides, spraying every other day. The more desperate dip each hanging eggplant fruit into a container full of chemicals."

He said low-income consumers are ultimately penalized with high food prices and excessive pesticide residues in the food they eat.

"All of these because of an unfortunate misapplication of the writ of *kalikasan*," he said.

Cabanao also said that ASFAR-

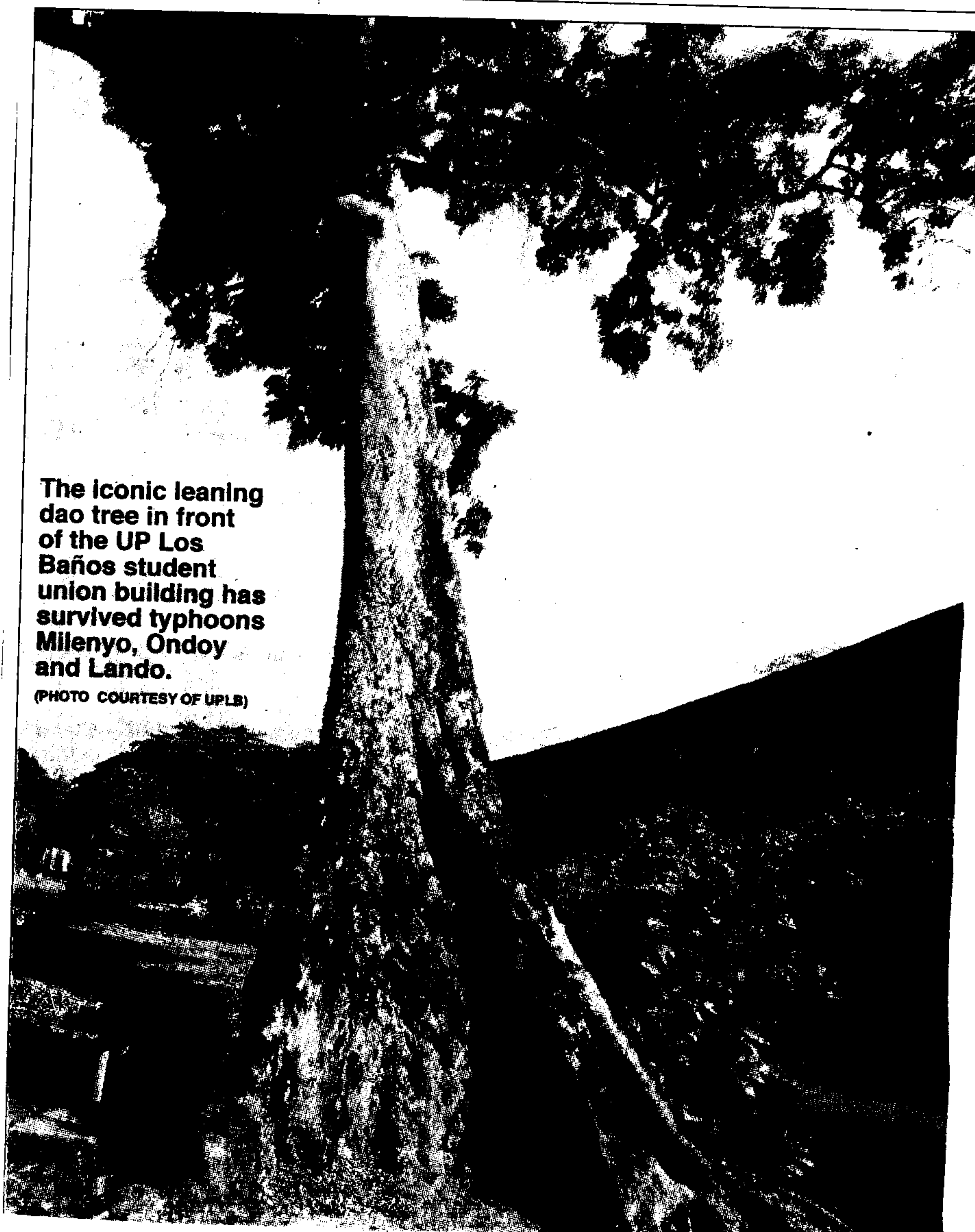
NET-Philippines has started mobilizing its ranks toward the holding of a series of consultations and awareness campaign among its members and farmers regarding the SC ruling.

"We will also hold regional mobilizations and later gather at the SC to show our strong opposition to its ruling," Cabanao told the media on the sidelines of the recent National Agri-Biotechnology Congress at SEARCA on the UPLB campus.

During the meeting, ASFARNET-Philippines unanimously endorsed a resolution expressing disappointment over the SC decision issued last Dec. 8.

The iconic leaning  
dao tree in front  
of the UP Los  
Baños student  
union building has  
survived typhoons  
Milenyo, Ondoy  
and Lando.

(PHOTO COURTESY OF UPLB)





# BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

### Groups to sue Fish and Wildlife Service over monarch protection

WASHINGTON—Environmental and food-safety groups say they will sue Fish and Wildlife Service to force the federal agency to rule on the monarch butterfly designation under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The Center for Biological Diversity, the Center for Food Safety and the Center for Food Safety said that they will file a lawsuit within 60 days, and said they have reviewed documents through the Freedom of Information Act indicating that the Fish and Wildlife Service has not ruled on the issue for at least five years. The lawsuit will argue that the federal agency passed up its chance to determine whether the monarch butterfly deserves to be listed as a "threatened" species at the end of 2015.

"We cannot make them protect the butterfly, but we can make them issue a decision on whether to protect it," said Anna Curry, senior scientist for the Center for Biological Diversity, a conservation advocacy group.

The organization and the Center for Food Safety, along with other groups, submitted a petition on August 2014, to list the monarch butterfly as a threatened species. Its numbers



have plummeted from nearly 1 billion in 1997 to 56.5 million last year, according to studies led by the World Wildlife Fund of Mexico.

Fish and Wildlife Service Spokesman Laury Parramore said the agency does not comment on pending litigation. But she provided an update on the request to name the monarch a threatened species.

"We have not yet established a schedule for addressing each of the backlogged petitions and so do not

have a firm or projected date for a 12-month finding for monarch butterflies," Parramore said. "We hope that, in the meantime, ongoing international conservation efforts to protect and restore monarch habitat will improve the status of the species to the extent that it will not warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act."

Official designation of the monarch as threatened would require Fish and Wildlife to come up with a

recovery plan, make more funds available to help the species recover and require that any federally funded or permitted actions not harm monarchs or their habitat.

Such designations in the past have led to major confrontations over species protection and land use.

#### Monsanto joins group

THE butterfly's winter habitat in Mexican forests and its source of food and reproductive habitat in the United States—primarily the milkweed plant—are under severe pressure.

Creve Coeur-based Monsanto, whose pesticides in farm and other uses have been cited as a reason for the milkweed's decline, announced last September it was joining a consortium that would spend about \$3.3 million to preserve and protect 33,000 acres of monarch habitat along the annual migration route in the central US.

At that time, Monsanto said it had spent about \$4 million to protect the monarch. In November, the US Department of Agriculture announced it was devoting \$4 million to help farmers in 10 states, including Illinois and Missouri, plant and protect milkweed. **TNS**



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# Business World

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

### Malaysia bans bauxite mining for three months amid pollution fears

KUALA LUMPUR — Malaysia on Wednesday announced a three-month ban on bauxite mining in its rural state of Pahang from mid-January amid mounting concern over hazardous dust and pollution.

Demand for bauxite, which is used in aluminium production, is soaring — fueled by heavy demand from China.

“Everything will come to a complete stop on Jan. 15,” Environment Minister Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar told a press conference, adding that current stockpiles would be cleared within the next three months.

He also said new measures would be put in place, such as a better drainage system in the port at Pahang’s capital Kuantan, to prevent bauxite contamination, which has turned the sea red.

The ban would be extended if the industry is unable to mitigate the pollution hazard.

“If it [the industry] is not able to manage the situation in three months, then we will extend the moratorium,” the minister said.

When AFP visited Kuantan recently, red dust swirled around the pits and along the roads on which bauxite-laden trucks rumbled towards Kuantan for shipment to China. Residents complained of a rise in respiratory problems and skin rashes. There are also fears of heavy metals entering the water supply or the food chain.

Bauxite mining took off in Malaysia shortly after Indonesia, a top producer, banned mineral ore exports in January 2014 to encourage the domestic processing of metals. This left major consumers like China short of the commodity.

Malaysia, previously an insignificant producer of bauxite, helped fill the gap with a sharp rise in mining — most of it illegal.

Pahang’s Chief Minister Adnan Yaakob urged residents to stay calm about pollution.

“We are doing everything to assist them,” he told the press conference, adding that authorities were working on a “grand plan” to overcome problems permanently and get a better grip on illegal miners.

Kuantan’s opposition member of parliament Fuziah Salleh hailed the temporary ban.

“The 700,000 people living in Kuantan are exposed to pollution. The rivers, a source of drinking water, are polluted, the air is filled with red dust, and fish in the rivers have died,” she said.

“We must stop the destruction of Mother Nature.”

Mr. Adnan said he was not concerned about a drop in revenue during the ban, saying the moratorium would help push up prices later on.

Malaysian bauxite output more than quadrupled year on year in 2014 to nearly 963,000 metric tons, according to government figures.

— AFP



AFP

IN THIS PICTURE taken Oct. 13, 2015, a truck driver watches as an excavator loads his vehicle at a bauxite storage site in Bukit Goh, Pahang, Malaysia.



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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

### Drought-hit Indian farmers seek more support in federal budget

NEW DELHI — India needs to increase budgetary allocations for irrigation projects and offer higher procurement prices for crops to support farmers hit by two years of drought, farmer associations said on Monday.

Drought in many parts of the country has hit production of rice, cotton and other crops, hurting the popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose party recently lost village council elections in Gujarat, a state he ran for over a decade.

In a pre-budget meeting with Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, farm leaders urged him to implement Mr. Modi's promise of ensuring higher income for farmers.

Mr. Jaitley indicated an increase in allocations in the budget, and said India faced a challenge of raising farm productivity through high-yielding seeds and efficient water utilization.

"There is a need for more investment in agriculture sector," a finance ministry statement said, quoting Mr. Jaitley.

During his victorious 2014 election campaign, Mr. Modi promised to raise public investment in the farm sector to ensure a minimum profit margin of 50% over the cost of production.

Mr. Jaitley, who will present his 2016/17 budget at the end of February, has promised to spend nearly 500 billion rupees (\$7.5 billion) on irrigation projects over a period of five years.

"A bad monsoon and low international commodity prices have aggravated the misery of farmers," Ajay Vir Jakhar, Chairman of the Farmers' Forum India, told reporters after the meeting.

Growth in farm output, which contributes nearly 13% to India's \$2 trillion economy, fell



ARUN JAITLEY

AFP

to 2% in the first half of the current fiscal year from 2.4% a year ago.

Mr. Jakhar said more funds should be allocated to improve weather forecasts for farmers besides a state-funded insurance scheme for all crops.

Farm experts say profit margins for producing major crops have fallen to less than 5% following a collapse of global commodity prices, from around 20%-30% about three years ago.

Last month, the government slashed its economic growth forecast to 7%-7.5% for the fiscal year ending in March 2016, citing lower farm output and weak global demand. That was sharply lower than an 8.1%-8.5% growth estimated last February.

Farm experts also favored the transfer of fertilizer subsidies — estimated at nearly 700 billion rupees a year — directly into farmers' bank accounts to cut down leakages in the system.

"Farmers are feeling short-changed by the Modi government," said Satnam Singh Behru, president of the Indian Farmers' Association, adding that more than 15,000 farmers had committed suicide in the last year. "Many farmers have lost faith in the government." —

Reuters



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# Business World

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

### Sri Lanka seeks ways to turn El Niño's extra rain pain into gain for farmers

POLONNARUWA — Rice farmer Weerasinghearchilage Darmarathana is used to periodic flooding in his low-lying village of Galella in central Sri Lanka.

The 60-year-old has lived all his life on the flood plains of the country's longest river, the Mahaweli, in Polonnaruwa District, some 250 kilometers northeast of the capital Colombo.

"It used to be maybe twice, three times a year the road would go under, but the last year has been insane," said the paddy farmer. In his recollection, Galella has never been flooded with the same frequency as in the last two months of 2015.

The village was hit six times in less than two months, Mr. Darmarathana said, after unusually heavy rains battered the region in November and December.

Over a million people were marooned in Sri Lanka's Northern, North Central, and Eastern Provinces, and over 400 homes and other buildings were destroyed.

An advisory issued by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in early December attributed the rains to the current El Niño weather phenomenon, likely to be the strongest since 1997-1998.

Extreme rainfall also caused havoc in India late last year, including extensive flooding in the city of Chennai.

"The consensus that strong El Niño conditions has led to abnormal rainfall during the northeast monsoon season in South Asia indicates that El Niño had a part to play in the sequence

of extreme weather events in India," the UNESCAP advisory said.

Excessive El Niño-linked rainfall across southern India and northern Sri Lanka was expected to continue into early 2016, it added.

Sri Lankan authorities said they were prepared. "Historically, El Niño has meant more rains in this region, so we have been making our predictions on those lines," said Lalith Chandrapala, head of the island's Department of Meteorology.

Mr. Chandrapala said the country could be in a position to benefit from the El Niño-induced rains, which began in mid-November on the back of a weak monsoon he assessed to be 75% below average.

"We have been telling agencies like the Department of Agriculture to advise farmers to prepare for rains," he said.

#### CHANGING MIND-SETS

The UNESCAP report also noted that the waters from the current bout of rains could be used for the upcoming planting season.

As the heavy rains struck when there was no harvest, agricultural losses have been negligible.

Pradeep Koddiplili, deputy director at the Disaster Management Centre, said no warnings had yet been issued for potential El Niño-related crop damage, mainly because the rains had coincided with the preparation of fields for planting.

But, disaster risk experts working in rural areas say awareness of changing weather patterns remains low and

could prevent farmers making the most of the unseasonal rains.

Sarath Wickramasinghe, a disaster risk reduction specialist with the Sri Lanka Red Cross who works in North Central Province, said people in the country's dry zone lacked sufficient infrastructure and knowledge to adapt to shifting rains.

"They are traditionally geared for the monsoon, which comes twice a year — even some officials are," he said. "That mind-set needs to be changed."

Farmers must adjust to long dry spells, like that experienced in parts of Sri Lanka between June and October 2015, broken by heavy rains. "Right now the cultivation cycles follow the traditional monsoon," he added.

Mr. Darmarathana has worked according to the monsoon since he started farming in the 1970s.

"I don't know any other timetable," he said. "Someone needs to teach me the new methods, if there are any."

Mr. Wickramasinghe said the approach of traditional farmers needed to evolve "if we are to gain any kind of advantage from the changing rain patterns."

The Red Cross and the UN Development Program have launched a pilot project in Polonnaruwa District to help farmers adapt to uncertain weather and climate conditions.

Targeting 100 families in Nagastenne village, it provides them with assistance including seeds and technical knowledge to develop sustainable agriculture methods, such as water harvesting, and to restore degraded land. — **Reuters**



## STUDY

# Heatwaves, drought may curb global power output



**P**ARIS, France (AFP) - Thousands of power plants worldwide face sharp reductions in electricity output by mid-century due to more frequent heatwaves and drought driven by global warming, according to a study published Monday.

"We need to be concerned as electricity will become more expensive and less reliable in the future due to climate change," co-author Keywan Riahi of the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis in Austria told AFP.

If warming continues unchecked, higher temperatures and water shortages could, by 2050, cut capacity in

hydro-electric plants by nearly four percent, and in thermoelectric plants - powered by fossil fuels, nuclear power or biomass - by 12 percent.

Even if the target embraced at the Paris climate summit in December is met - limiting global temperature rise to less than two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) compared to pre-industrial levels - power capacity would still drop significantly, according to the research.

Hydro- and thermoelectric plants, which together provide 98 percent of the global electricity supply, both depend on water to cool machinery or generate power.

Improvements in efficiency and switching types of fuel, however, would be one way to avoid future shortages of water and power, the study said.

Especially vulnerable regions include the United States, southern South America, southern Africa, central and southern Europe, and southeast Asia.

The study analysed data from nearly four-fifths of the world's hydro-electric plants, and more than a quarter of thermoelectric ones.

"Many of the plants that we couldn't include in our analysis will be vulnerable to climate change as well, but we simply didn't have the information," Riahi said by e-mail.