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Wednesday

DENR

IN THE NEWS

BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

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Invasive species 'serious threat' to food security

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

AN official of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) on Wednesday warned hobbyists against releasing into the wild their imported pets, which may eventually threaten other native species.

Director Theresa Mundita Lim of the DENR's Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) issued the warning in light of the continuing knife fish infestation in Laguna de Bay, the country's largest freshwater lake.

Lim said imported pets, such as ornamental or aquarium fish, crabs, turtles, spiders, lizards, rodents and snakes, are potential invasive alien species, and should be safely kept in tanks or cages by hobbyists.

She added that the Wildlife Conservation and Protection Act prohibits the introduction of invasive alien species into the wild because of their potential adverse impact to the natural ecosystems.

Lim warned that imported pets can easily survive and adapt to new environments and may eventually dominate other native species threatening the country's rich biodiversity.

She said the BMB issues import permits for exotic animals as pets, but warned against unreported breeding or introduction into the wild.

These exotic wildlife are often smuggled into the country because the BMB is very strict in issuing import permits. According to Lim, the BMB makes sure that the pets are not invasive and can be easily controlled. She said the DENR-BMB studies reports of the behavior of pets, particularly feeding habit and reproduction to determine their potential danger, before issuing permits.

The proliferation of invasive alien species, she said, may affect the country's food-production

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Invasive species 'serious threat' to food security

“That is the problem with invasive alien species, you get fewer choice for food.”—Lim

capacity, as well, citing its potential impact in forests and water bodies, such as lakes and rivers.

She cited the effect of the dreaded janitor fish and knife fish which have invaded the Laguna de Bay. The 90,000-hectare lake supplies 70 per cent of Metro Manila's fish requirement. Fishermen, who go out to fish in the lake, complain that instead of native fishes with high commercial value, they end up catching janitor or knife fish.

Both the janitor fish and knife fish are considered a serious threat to the lake's biodiversity as they compete with other native fish for food, prey on smaller fishes and feed on eggs while reproducing faster than any other species. Another aquarium pet, the Chinese soft-shell turtles have been reported to infest the lake and other inland waters, including fish ponds in Central Luzon.

Introduced in the Philippines as an aquarium fish to naturally clean aquariums, the janitor fish once became a major headache to small fishermen after they started to proliferate in the Laguna de Bay. After the janitor fish, the Laguna de Bay is now threatened by the dreaded knife fish, an ornamental species,

which has the appearance of the famed arowana.

The Laguna Lake Development Authority and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) of the Department of Agriculture (DA) are planning to address the knife fish infestation in the lake by electrocuting its eggs in fish pens.

Fish-pen operators and other stakeholders will be consulted about the implementation of the plan as electrocuting the eggs of the knife fish may also kill eggs of other fish species present in the target areas.

“We are appealing to pet lovers to be very cautious. Accidentally or intentionally releasing their pets into the wild pose serious threat to our biodiversity,” Lim added.

The official said these pets may compete with other native species for food or become predators of other species. Invasive alien species, she said, easily reproduce, thus, by sheer number, can cause ecosystem imbalance.

“The problem is when these invasive alien species have completely replaced other native species. Every species have an important ecological function, and once they are replaced by these invasive alien species, getting rid of them will require deeper

study,” said Lim, citing the case of the tilapia, which is now more famous than the native *galunggong* because it is cheaper and can be bought in the market all year-round.

Tilapia was introduced in the Philippines as early as the 1950s for aquaculture production. The Mozambique tilapia (*Oreochromis mossambicus*), which came from Thailand, has dark color and smaller in size than the Nile tilapia, which was introduced in the 1970s. Today, being a major source of protein, tilapia is still being promoted for aquaculture, and the DA-BFAR is introducing these fish in inland waters to boost fish supply.

However, because of the tilapia's proliferation in rivers and other water bodies, many native fish have become extinct. “We now have fewer fish to choose from. *Puro tilapia na lang*,” she said.

“That is the problem with invasive alien species, you get fewer choice for food,” she added.

Lim said that because of reports of the invasion of the janitor fish and lately, the knife fish in the Laguna de Bay and its impact to the livelihood of small fishermen, the BMB is now very cautious in issuing import permits for all other exotic pets.

She said pet lovers should also secure a permit from the BMB before breeding. “They should let us know if they are into breeding, so that we can monitor these potential invasive alien species,” Lim said.

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DENR OKs cutting of 57 trees in Legazpi City

LEGAZPI CITY-The Department of Public Works and Highways Bicol regional office yesterday said that the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources approved the cutting of 57 trees of different species in this city.

The cutting of the trees was to give way for the road widening of the national highway in Bgy. Rawis, the site of the regional offices of the national government agencies in Bicol.

DPWH spokesperson Lucy Castañeda said that the

PENRO sent an endorsement letter stating the reasons for the necessity to cut the 57 assorted trees; mostly Agoho trees.

Castañeda said they need to cut the trees for a planned four-lane road expansion of the Rawis national highway section, a national program of the DPWH, which target completion is before the end of the Aquino administration.

Engineer Virgilio Perdigon, an environmentalist, said the trees on the national highway in Bgy. Rawis were planted by village officials during the Marcos administration.

Sonny Sales

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DENR retains only 1 CENRO in revamp

By MAMER BAÑEZ

BALER, Aurora -- The Department of Environment and Natural Resources has retained only one Community Environment and Natural Resources Officer (CENRO) in Aurora during a top-level revamp in the region recently.

Jimmy Aberin, who was assigned in the area since January 2014, remains as Dingalan-Baler CENRO.

DENR Region 3 Director Francisco Milla Jr. identified those relieved as Cyril Coliflores, Aurora OIC-PENRO; Casiguran (Aurora) CENRO Alfredo Collado; Camiling (Tarlac) CENRO Joselito Blanco and Tarlac Division Chief Nicanor Claudio.

Coliflores, who was assigned in Aurora in mid-2014, has been reassigned to Milla's office in San Fernando, Pampanga.

Blanco, a former CENRO in Dingalan, Aurora, and in Cabanatuan City, will replace Coliflores while his Camiling post will be assumed by Collado.

The Casiguran post of Collado will be taken over by Claudio.

DENR insiders said Coliflores' relief was a result of his poor performance.

In the case of Collado, Milla said the former has stayed in Casiguran for over seven years so he needs to get a fresh assignment.

The streamlining and deployment process is needed for "more aggressive, honest and effective delivery of services to the public" based on personnel expertise and experience and to prepare them for higher position.

Milla hinted that movement of DENR personnel was only stopped by the election ban.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

QC shuts down 3 public markets

By JANVIC MATEO

The Quezon City government has ordered the closure of three public markets in Balintawak for failure to comply with the requirements imposed by the local government.

Ordered closed were the Cloverleaf Market, MC Market and Riverview Market II, city market administrator Noel Soliven said.

Soliven said these markets have no sanitary and building permits from city hall.

He said the markets had been operating without a sewage treatment facility, consumer welfare desk, discharge permit from the Laguna Lake Development Authority and environmental certificate from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

The city government has repeatedly issued notices to the owners of the markets, but no compliance has been made.

"Lack of compliance puts at risk not only the consumers but also the neighboring areas, which are affected by the markets' discharge of wastes to the waterways," Soliven said.

He cited issues on the safety of the structures, hygiene and sanitary conditions of the markets.

The owners of the markets were given 48 hours to stop operations or face further sanctions.

City officials said the markets may be allowed to reopen upon compliance with the necessary permits.

Some 300 vendors will be affected by the closure order.

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Circular sets rules for firms handling Environmentally Critical Projects

THE DEPARTMENT of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has set the first submission date of environmental compliance reports for companies handling Environmentally Critical Projects (ECPs).

The DENR's Memorandum Circular No. 2016-001, dated Jan. 18, sets the submission of two Compliance Monitoring Reports (CMRs), the first in July, to cover the first and second quarters, and the second in January of the following year, to cover the third and fourth quarters.

Among the procedures indicated in the circular is registration for a CMR online account at the Web site of the DENR's Environmental Management Bureau (www.emb.gov.ph).

The circular's transitory provision states: "The submission of second CMR (January

2016) covering compliance during the second semester (July to December) of the year 2015 shall be done through both the online system as well as filing hard copies with the EMB Central Office."

"Non-submission or submission of falsified CMRs shall be dealt with severely in accordance with the penal provisions of Presidential Decree No. 1586 and the implementing rules and regulations thereof," the circular also said.

The 1978 PD carries with it penalties of suspension or cancellation of the Environmental Compliance Certificates (ECC), plus an amount not exceeding P50,000.

The circular was published in the newspapers yesterday and takes effect five days after publication.

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Only 10% of LGUs in UN disaster drive

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By Jerry E. Esplanada
and Leila B. Salaverria

ONLY about 10 percent, or some 170 out of over 1,700 cities, towns and provinces in the Philippines have so far joined the United Nations campaign on "Making Cities Resilient to Disaster," noted the outgoing head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), who urged other local government units to sign up for the global drive.

Margareta Wahlstrom said almost 3,000 cities and communities worldwide have joined the

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PLUS POINTS Outgoing head for the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction Margareta Wahlstrom addresses the media in Malacañang.

program since its launch in May 2010, as the UNISDR initiative has pushed local governments to give more attention to disaster risk reduction (DRR) and develop partnerships with key stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector.

"Local governments are important but communities and people are even more important. So I think this can't really happen unless communities are fully mobilized," the UN official said in a Palace press briefing yesterday.

The Geneva-based agency said more than 120 nations, including the Philippines, have enacted laws to establish policy and legal frameworks on reducing and managing disaster risks.

Proactive

In 2010, the Philippines—one of the most disaster-prone countries in Asia—was cited for passing the National Disaster Risk Reduction Act, described as a "proactive approach to disaster risk governance."

The country was also among the 86 countries that "set up formal national coordinating bodies for DRR, which create a common language, vision and understanding of the responsibility for the program nationally," said Wahlstrom, who is also UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's special representative for disaster risk reduction.

Among the initiatives and "striking paradigm shifts" in DRR that the Philippines had initiated are risk information and early warning systems. Manila has also been "developing more sophisticated methods of gauging the impact of typhoons following "Haiyan," the international name of Super-typhoon "Yolanda" that ravaged Eastern Visayas in November 2013," Wahlstrom added.

The country's National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), oversees the government's DRRM efforts.

Driven advocates

In a related development, the UNISDR named Sen. Loren Legarda as Global Champion for Resilience, for being a "driven advocate" of disaster risk reduction policies in the Philippines and Asia, implementing new laws to adapt to climate change and working tirelessly to build sustainable development in Asia.

Wahlstrom expressed hope that senator "will inspire many more governments, parliamentarians, mayors and citizens to follow her path ... achieve resilience."

In formally receiving her appointment on Tuesday, Legarda said that reducing the country's risk from disasters and addressing the effects of climate change should be mainstream activities and part of the regular features of daily life.

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Only 18% of LGUs in US Disaster Office

statement, the senator said the Philippines and the world needs to work double time to improve resilience even with the people's increased awareness of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation issues.

Action is needed following different nations' commitment to the Sendai DRR framework, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Climate Agreement, Legarda said, adding that "these commitments are laudable but we need to move forward fast by turning these commitments into action—understanding disaster

and climate risks to provide suitable solutions, promoting inclusive and sustainable growth, and limiting global carbon emissions, among other urgent actions."

National priority

The senator, who said she would pursue the creation of a department of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, said resilience should become a national priority and "not just a special provision in our general appropriations act."

She added: "It will be the heart and soul at the core of

every budgetary process, and at the core of governance."

Wahlstrom noted that the 2016 Philippine budget was the first ever mainstream national budget that has disaster risk reduction features, which show how far the Philippines had come.

The UN official said the general perception was that the issue was government's responsibility alone, even as she expressed hope that the Philippines would continue to work toward mobilizing various sectors to address climate change.

"Governments can't do it

without engagement by every part of society," she said, adding that more social groups could be tapped to help out.

The UN official was herself cited Monday for her "outstanding service in upscaling resilient, safe and green communities and for the successful passage of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030)" during a March 2015 international conference in Japan.

Wahlstrom was cited by Climate Change Commission Vice Chair Emmanuel de Guzman and Commissioner Heherson Alvarez.

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As climate change threatens coffee, a cocoa boom is born

NEW YORK / JINOTEGA, NICARAGUA - Brimming with shade trees and bounded by the Tuma river, the lower climes of Roger Castellon's farm in Nicaragua's mountainous Jinotega department were long ideal for growing coffee.

But with temperatures on the rise, the veteran coffee farmer is shifting his lower-lying land to a crop that, although new for him, enjoys a rich legacy in the region: Cocoa.

"Coffee is no longer viable due to climate change," said Castellon, who calls his 420-hectare (1,038-acre) farm Los Nogales.

Soaring temperatures in Central America, linked to climate change, are forcing many farmers like Castellon to replace coffee trees with cocoa - a crop once so essential to the region's economy it was used as currency.

Farmers across the region, known for high-quality arabica beans, are still recovering from a coffee leaf rust disease known as roya, which devastated crops over the past four years.

Now, lower-altitude areas are becoming unsuitable for growing coffee as temperatures heat up. Cocoa thrives in the warmer weather.

Castellon maintains coffee plants on the higher portions of his farm, at about 1,200 meters (3,937 feet). But two years ago he replaced coffee with cocoa on 84 hectares (208 acres) of land at about 700 meters (2,297 feet) in altitude, protected by the shade of fig and banana trees.

He expects to produce his first cocoa crop this April and said planting the cocoa trees cost about a third of what it would have cost to renew coffee plants.

The quiet shift across the region shows up in export data: This crop year, coffee bean exports from six countries in the region excluding Honduras will fall for the third straight year, to 8.14 million 60-kg (132-pound) bags - the lowest level since the 1973/1974 cycle, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Cocoa production and exports have steadily risen. In Nicaragua, cocoa exports totaled 3,839 tons (8.5 million pounds) in 2015, up more than 80 percent from 2014, and in El Salvador, a coalition is working to expand cocoa acreage hundredfold.

Even in Honduras, which has seen a successful recovery from roya, the government is requiring growers to substitute 8 percent of coffee land to cocoa.



Soaring temperatures in Central America, linked to climate change, are forcing many farmers to replace coffee trees with cocoa - a crop once so essential to the region's economy it was used

To be sure, some new cocoa acreage has come from abandonment of other crops, and high-altitude coffee production is strong in many parts of the region. Central America also will not supplant West Africa as the leading supplier of the main ingredient in chocolate anytime soon.

But high cocoa prices are providing an incentive to farmers to switch. The region's cocoa rebirth could ease concerns about supply stability amid growing emerging market demand, weather scares and the potential for civil strife in Ivory Coast and Ghana, which produce 60 percent of world output.

In Nicaragua, the ideal coffee zone is between 700 and 1,700 meters (2,297-5,577 feet) above sea level, but rising temperatures and lower rainfall will shift the range to 1,000 to 1,700 meters (3,281-5,577 feet) by 2050, according to a 2012 study by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture.

Temperatures have increased between 0.5 and 3 degrees Celsius (0.9-5.4 degrees Fahrenheit) in the region in the past century, and temperatures in coffee zones are expected to rise another 2.1 degrees Celsius (3.8 Fahrenheit) by 2050.

Roya has long plagued coffee production, but scientists say

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AS CLIMATE CHANGE THREATENS COFFEE,
A COCOA BOOM IS BORN

warmer weather will cause more harm because the disease thrives in high temperatures.

"Coffee is not for this region anymore - the yields are no good, and it's more investment," said Roberto Mairena, 51, who eight years ago planted 8.4 hectares (21 acres) of cocoa on his 300-500-meter (984-1650 feet) San Miguel farm in La Dalia, in the mountainous Nicaraguan department of Matagalpa.

The devastating impacts of roya forced many affected farmers to reconsider the wisdom of re-investing in coffee. Many decided on cocoa, calculating that rising temperatures would only make coffee in those areas more vulnerable.

"Leaf rust was an effect of climate change," said Ryan Bathrick, the Nicaragua country director for TechnoServe, a U.S. nonprofit organization that helps coffee and cocoa producers with farming techniques and business practices. "There's a lot of optimism around cacao."

In El Salvador, a coalition including USAID and Catholic Relief Services hopes to help plant cocoa on 10,000 hectares (24,711 acres) by 2019, up from 100 hectares (247 acres) when the project began in September 2014. The group is specifically targeting roya-ravaged coffee growers.

The coalition's efforts helped Andres Menjivar, who planted cocoa trees on one-third of his farm's 8.4 hectares (21 acres) this August, after roya wiped out coffee production on his La Libertad, El Salvador farm four years ago.

"Studying history, we always learned about how cocoa was part of the way of life in Central America, but it gradually lost out to other crops," said Menjivar, who expects to cultivate his first cocoa crop in 2018 and is considering planting more.

Current price levels are also sending a signal to producers to transition to cocoa. Coffee futures fell 24 percent in 2015 to around \$1.20 a lb, while cocoa futures have risen for four consecutive years to trade around \$3,000 a tonne, or \$1.36 a lb.

Growing consumer demand for higher-quality products in both markets is also driving the shift, and coffee premiums tend to increase with altitude.

"The lower-altitude coffee does not have the quality level that is now being demanded by the market, so the income these farmers are getting is lower," said Gilberto Amaya of Catholic Relief Services in El Salvador.

But those altitudes are suitable for higher-quality criollo cocoa, which is sought after by craft chocolate makers.

Efforts in the region are focused on promoting quality rather than volume, so while Hershey and Nestle may not be using the beans any time soon, Central America may soon supplement the Dominican Republic and Madagascar as a source of beans for the burgeoning craft chocolate industry. -Reuters



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TAONG 2015 NANG MAMULAT ANG MUNDO SAAKTUWAL AT SERYOSONG BANTA NG CLIMATE CHANGE

KAPAG isinulat ng mga susunod na henerasyon ang kasaysayan ng paulit-ulit na pagkabigo ng sangkatauhan na maisalba ang sistema ng klima ng mundo, magkakaroon ng sarili nitong kabanata ang 2015.

Ang kalikasan, kasama ang mga karaniwang pamilya ng mga bansa, ay nagsanib-pwersa upang gawin itong isang mahalagang taon: halos tiyak nang pinakamainit sa kasaysayan ng planeta, saksi rin ang 2015 sa bibihirang pagkakataon na nagkaisa ang 195 bansa upang mangakong sosolusyunan ang carbon pollution na nagpapainit sa mundo.

Sakali man, ang Paris Agreement noong Disyembre 12 ang makapagsasalba sa atin, o maaari ring sabihin na huli na ito at wala nang magiging epekto kung hindi agarang ipatutupad, ayon sa mga eksperto at aktibista.

"The most compelling thing you can say about Paris is not that it saved the planet, but that it saved the chance of saving the planet," sabi ni Bill McKibben, nagtatag ng grassroots organisation na 350.org at naglunsad ng isang worldwide movement upang itigil na ang operasyon ng mga fossil fuel company.

Sinabi rin ni Robert Stavins, director ng Harvard Environmental Economics Program sa Harvard Kennedy School: "We will only be able to judge whether it is truly a success years, perhaps decades, from now."

Anuman ang maging kahihinatnan ng lahat, sumasang-ayon ang lahat na ang nakaraang taon ay ang "tipping point" sa climate change.

"Paris represented a real sea change in seriousness in coming to grips with the issue," sabi ni Alden Meyer, isang beteranong climate analyst mula sa Union of Concerned Scientists sa Washington na sumubaybay sa proseso ng United Nations sa nakalipas na tatlong dekada.

Ang seryosong pagtalakay sa matinding pandaigdigang banta na ito ay kasunod ng nakamamatay na mga kalamidad at ang lumalaking kumpiyansa sa siyensiya na may magagawa itong paraan upang maibsan ang epekto ng climate change.

Agence France Presse

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The right incentives for a low-carbon future

BERLIN—The climate agreement that world leaders reached in Paris last month has been widely celebrated for establishing the ambitious target of limiting the increase in global temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. But the agreement is just one step, albeit an important one. Policy-makers now must figure out how to achieve this goal—no easy feat, especially given that, contrary to the conventional wisdom, steadily rising costs for conventional energy cannot be counted on to propel the necessary shift toward a low-carbon future.

At first glance, the logic of negative economic incentives seems sound. If, say, driving a gas-guzzling car becomes more expensive, people will presumably be less likely to do it. But the impact of changing fuel prices is partial and delayed. While drivers may purchase a more fuel-efficient car in the long run, they are more likely, in the shorter run, to reduce other kinds of consumption to offset the rise in cost. When it comes to resolving a problem as urgent as climate change, John Maynard Keynes' famous dictum—"In the long run, we are all dead"—clearly applies.

Moreover, even if consumers did respond efficiently, fossil-fuel prices are dictated largely by heavily financialized markets, which tend to be extremely volatile. The sharp decline in oil prices over the last 18 months is a case in point. Not only have oil prices themselves failed to spur a reduction in consumption; they have also undermined incentives to develop alternative energy sources. Investing in, say, solar power may have seemed worthwhile when oil cost \$100 per barrel, but it looked a lot less appealing when the price dropped below \$50.

Conceivably, policymakers could raise taxes to offset such declines. But such hikes sometimes—like now—would have to be huge, and

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Thomas Fricke



adopting erratic policies that mirror the volatility of the market is never a good idea.

Carbon pricing could experience a similar fate. In the European Union, carbon prices have been low for several years, and for now market participants seem to be following the herd in believing that they will remain so. But there is no guarantee that free emissions trading will not function like other financial markets, producing sharp fluctuations in carbon dioxide prices. Should expectations suddenly change, the herd might turn and run in the opposite direction, causing carbon dioxide prices to soar.

Yet another problem with the price-based approach to mitigating climate change is that it fails to account for markets' potential to create perverse incentives. When the cost of conventional energy rises, new suppliers see an opportunity; thus, before June 2014, when oil prices were high, investors poured resources into developing shale oil and gas in the United States. The additional supply, however, ultimately causes prices to fall, reducing the incentive to invest in alternative energy sources or energy efficiency. This is a normal market reaction, but it does not advance the fight against climate change, which would require steadily rising costs.

The final reason negative incentives alone are inadequate to mitigate climate change may be the most irrational: After some years

of rising taxes, the public is staunchly opposed to any policy that may increase energy prices, regardless of whether current prices are high or low. People are so convinced that energy costs are "exploding," despite the recent oil-price collapse, that any new project implying even slightly higher prices—even if overall energy prices are still lower than they were five years ago—is now exceedingly difficult to initiate.

The implication is clear: When policymakers get to work designing strategies for executing the Paris agreement, they should not rely heavily on rising energy costs to advance their objectives. A strategy that assumes that the market will punish those who do not invest in a low-carbon future is not realistic.

A better approach is possible: Directly reward those who do invest in a low-carbon future, whether by enhancing energy efficiency or developing clean energy sources. For example, governments could implement accelerated depreciation schemes for investment in low-carbon businesses; offer subsidies for investment in energy-efficient buildings; and create policies that favor industrial innovation aimed at reducing emissions and boosting competitiveness. All of this would make fossil fuels less attractive to both investors and consumers.

While an approach based on such positive incentives would be costlier than tax hikes in the short run, the long-term benefits can hardly be overstated. At a time of strong resistance to higher energy costs, this may well be among the most effective—not to mention politically savvy—mechanisms for advancing the goals set out in Paris.

Project Syndicate

Thomas Fricke is chief economist of the European Climate Foundation.

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Agency sees strong El Niño sticking around

RECENT TROPICAL CYCLONE activity in the Pacific Ocean has produced strong westerly winds along the equator, which may temporarily slow El Niño's decline, Australia's Bureau of Meteorology said on Tuesday on its Web site. The event is still expected to decay over coming months, with a return to neutral conditions expected in the second quarter, it said.

The current El Niño is rated as one of the three strongest since 1950 and has hampered cocoa crops in Ivory Coast, reduced monsoon rainfall in India and curbed rice production in Thailand. While the weather condition may strengthen temporarily, ocean temperatures in the tropical Pacific have been cooling since November and the bureau said earlier this month that the event has peaked.

"Short-term reintensification of El Niño has happened before," the bureau said. The record 1997-1998 event "saw a restrengthening of El Niño conditions in early 1998, before the event eventually decayed," it said.

Even as El Niño wanes, its effects are being felt. Indonesia's coffee production will probably drop 20% due to El Niño-linked dry weather, according to the median of estimates from six traders and analysts compiled by Bloomberg. Malaysian palm oil output may drop 10% this year, Planta-

tion Industries and Commodities Minister Douglas Uggah Embas said on Tuesday.

"A strong El Niño persists, but ocean temperatures in the tropical Pacific are showing a gradual cooling signal," the Bureau of Meteorology said. The eastern tropical Pacific subsurface has cooled by as much as 3 degrees Celsius since late November and weekly sea-surface temperatures have also cooled, it said.

Farmers, traders and governments are now monitoring for La Niña, a cooling in the equatorial Pacific Ocean that is sometimes thought of as El Niño's opposite. Based on the 26 El Niño events since 1900, about 50% have been followed by a neutral year with 40% by La Niña, Australia's weather bureau said.

The Australian bureau says models indicate neutral and La Niña states are about equally likely for the second half, with a repeat of El Niño the least likely outcome. Indonesia said this month that it forecasts La Niña to occur in October.

Just as El Niño can roil agricultural markets worldwide, so can its counterpart. A large part of the agricultural US tends to dry out during La Niña events, while parts of Australia and Indonesia can be wetter than normal. The previous La Niña began in 2010 and endured into 2012. —

Bloomberg



IN THIS 1998 file photo, corn wilts on a farm in a southern Philippine province during the El Niño phenomenon at the time.

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"In 2013 I also decided to get personally trained by Al Gore and The Climate Reality Project to give volunteer presentations about the science and solutions to the climate crisis. Since then I've given presentations to 45 audiences and 2,000 people in the Bay Area, and have been inspired to meet so many fellow citizens desiring urgent change.

"The Philippines is extremely vulnerable to the climate crisis, and I know your home town of Tacloban was devastated by Haiyan."

The mention of Tacloban and Haiyan — more fearfully remembered as Yolanda — was what hit me like a Pacquiao right cross to the jaw. Being from Tacloban and having lost relatives and friends in that monumental disaster, the ravages of global warming have become a stark reality to me.

The specter is not something in the future but a current and recurring one. But even more horrifying are the prospects for my grandchildren and their children.

I decided that the subject deserved more than superficial attention. Indeed, the speech of Climate Change Commissioner, Secretary Emmanuel de Guzman, at the COP21 closing plenary struck a chord and should do the same to anyone concerned not only about the coming generation but about present day realities:

"For each of the past four years, at this time when we come for annual climate meetings, as our earth spins to another end and another beginning of her voyage around the sun, a powerful typhoon visited the Philippines, carving out an immense swath of devastation, deprivation and death of many of our countrymen, persistently and rudely reminding us of the significance of our role and the urgency of mission in this Conference of the Parties.

"For the Philippines, climate change means sorrowful catalogs of casualty and fatality; the countless voices of the homeless and the grieving — their very tears and screams carried to us by the

AD LIB GREG B. MACABENTA

The effects of global warming are already upon us, and while the principal culprits for greenhouse gases are the major economies like the US and China, developing countries like the Philippines are the most vulnerable, as recent events have shown.

winds and the waves that blew their homes away.

"During moments of great violence and bereavement, 'victim' is an inadequate word to capture the loss and damage visited upon us. Each body count has a name and an age — is workmate or lover, neighbor or friend, son or daughter, father or mother."

Indeed, we all have to face the inconvenient — nay, the fearsome — truth. The effects of global warming are already upon us, and while the principal culprits for greenhouse gases are the major economies like the US and China, developing countries like the Philippines are the most vulnerable, as recent events have shown. Thus, the agreements reached in COP21 could not have come sooner.

For the benefit of those who, like me, paid less attention to COP21 than to the aborted slapping and boxing match between Roxas and Duterte, the following are what the participating countries agreed on:

1 Keep global warming well below 2 degrees Celsius; continue efforts to limit the rise in the temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius;

2 Rich countries must provide \$100 billion from 2020 as a "floor"; amount to be updated by 2025 to aid developing countries and cover the cost of devastation and destruction;

3 Developed countries must continue to take the lead in the reduction of greenhouse

gases; developing nations are encouraged to enhance their efforts and move over time to cuts;

4 Aim for greenhouse gas emissions to peak as soon as possible; from 2050, aim for rapid reductions to achieve a balance between emissions from human activity and the amount that can be captured by "sinks;"

5 Developed countries must provide financial resources to help developing countries; other countries are invited to provide support on a voluntary basis;

6 A review every 5 years; the first world review to be made in 2023; each review will inform countries in updating and enhancing their pledges;

7 Vulnerable countries have won recognition of the need for averting, minimizing, and addressing losses suffered due to climate change

The Climate Reality Project, founded in 2005 by former US Vice-President Al Gore, will strive to ensure that the greenhouse gas reduction pledges made by the participating countries are met by marshalling volunteers worldwide to generate maximum awareness of the disaster about to befall the earth. The sessions in Manila are intended to train volunteers and speakers on the threat of global warming and how it can be mitigated. Gore, as chairman of The Climate Reality Project, will conduct the training, together with renowned scientists, scholars and business and political leaders.

Gore's climate change evangelism became front page news when his documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth," was released worldwide, won two Academy awards and garnered for him the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, along with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. But Gore's environmental advocacy goes back to his years as a member of the US Congress and as a State Senator in Tennessee, throughout his two-term vice-presidency and well into his post-White House years.

Unfortunately, my travel schedule will not permit me to participate in the March training session. But I have committed to help the cause, to spread the word about it and, hopefully, motivate concerned individuals to become active volunteers.

This is, therefore, an appeal to those who care for our country, for Mother Earth, and for our future generations to be part of The Climate Reality Project. To quote my friend Wei Tai's e-mail:

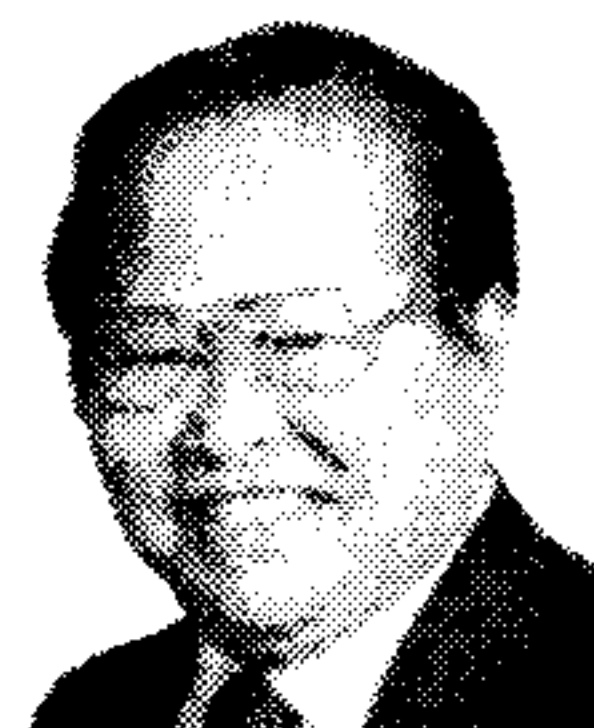
"I would super appreciate it if you could get any strong Filipino community and business leaders you know, particularly from Tacloban and Manila, to attend this training by Al Gore. The Philippines is a country at great risk to climate change, with rising sea levels, ocean acidification, and stronger typhoons. But it is also blessed by sunshine and could move to solar energy as a solution. Pope Francis called on all people of the world last year to act with urgency when he issued his Encyclical on Climate Change."

We can be assured that the youth will be represented in the training sessions. There already exists a Philippine arm of The Climate Reality Project led by Rodne Galicha. For years, young Filipinos have been actively involved in the campaign against global warming, with some of them attending past international UN conferences.

And in the campaign dubbed, Road to Paris — the effort to generate support for COP21 — the Filipino youth issued a statement describing climate change as a social justice and a human rights issue.

Global warming is all that and more. It is a grave threat that confronts us today and not (to paraphrase the movie) the day after tomorrow. ■

GREG B. MACABENTA is an advertising and communications man shuttling between San Francisco and Manila and providing unique insights on issues from both perspectives.
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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICES

'YES sa Luntiang Pasko' attains pro-environment goal in Rizal

By NEL B. ANDRADE

ANTIPOLO CITY, Rizal — The provincial government's pro-environment advocacies continue to enjoy the support of residents and local officials, especially during the last holiday season with Governor Rebecca "Nini" Ynares' "Rizaleño, YES sa Luntiang Pasko" project.

"YES," which refers to the Ynares Eco System or YES to Green Program, is translated into different projects for the province, including last holiday season's contest that enjoined local government units (LGUs) and the villages to use recyclable garbage materials as Christmas decorations.

The contest was done in support of the Capitol's Solid Waste Management Program and Barangay Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) Program in connection with the YES to Green Program initiated by the

lady governor.

Garbage trucks, known as "YES On Wheels," and patrol motorcycles were given as prizes in the contest.

Winners of the dump trucks were

the towns of Tanay, Pililla, San Mateo, Teresa, Jalajala and Rodriguez for winning in the Recycled Christmas Tree and Town Hall Façade Recycled Christmas Décor Contests.

Patrol motorcycles, meanwhile were awarded to the barangays for their compliance in solid waste management program of the provincial government.