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IS RESPONSIBLE MINING POSSIBLE?

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

WITH Environment Secretary Regina Paz L. Lopez's order to close or suspend operating mines and cancel 75 mining contracts, the debate over the issue of mining in the Philippines is far from over.

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Is Responsible Mining possible?

While initially supporting Lopez on the decision of the closure of 23 operating mines and suspending five others, President Duterte later admitted that Lopez "messed up" on her decisions, which warrant a careful review.

Upon Duterte's instruction, the Mining Industry Coordinating Council (MICC), which Lopez co-chairs along with Finance Secretary Carlos G. Dominguez III, has started the review process. The process would take into account the potential economic impact of closing down large-scale operating mines.

Rep. Robert Ace S. Barbers of the Second District of Surigao del Norte, a member of the MICC, said the review will take at least three months.

Fighting for its life and mining's constituents, mining industry's big players, represented by the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP), vowed to fight Lopez. The people behind COMP said the eventual closure of 28 of the 41 operating mines will have severe impact on the economy. They added Lopez's decision condemns to hunger and poverty 1.2 million people in various parts of the country.

However, Lopez said her decision is final and only the President has the authority to reverse her closure orders.

Marcopper disaster

LOPEZ said her decision aims to protect the country's watersheds against the adverse impact of mining operations.

She said the destruction caused by irresponsible mining threatens the country's source of water, citing the 1996 Marcopper mining disaster in the province of Marinduque.

Lopez said the disaster has led to the death of rivers. The Marcopper tragedy remains one of the largest mining disasters in the country's history.

Reports said a fracture in the drainage tunnel of a large pit containing leftover mine tailings led to a discharge of toxic mine waste into the Makulapnit-Boac river system and caused flash floods in areas along the river.

One village, Barangay Hinapulan, was buried in 6 feet of mud. About 400 families were displaced and 20 other villages had to be abandoned.

Lopez noted that the drinking water was contaminated, while fish and other food in the river vanished.

In terms of toxicity, the Marcopper mining disaster was the worst in the country's history.

The Boac River was declared "biologically dead".

"Until now, there is no fish in the river," Lopez said.

Mines blamed

ANOTHER mining disaster was the leak from Tailings Pond 3 at the Padcal mine operated by Philex Mining Corp. in Tuba and Itogon, Benguet, on August 1, 2012. Over 20 million tons of mine tailings sediment were dumped into the Agno River and Balog Creek. The contamination reached and affected the San Roque Dam.

In terms of volume, it was the country's worst mining disaster.

The government slapped Philex Mining with over P1 billion in fines. After settling the fine, Philex was allowed to resume operation by the DENR in 2014.

Along with 11 other mining operations, Philex's Padcal mine passed the mine audit, even though Lopez said the closure and suspension orders, as well as the cancellation of mining contracts, are preventive measures to protect watersheds.

In Zambales mining's adverse impact to the environment claimed the lives of seven people, according to Lopez. She also blamed the most

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recent flooding that hit Agusan provinces to logging and mining activities.

In Surigao destruction is happening from "ridge to reef", with Lopez showing aerial photos and videos showing the discoloration of rivers and coastal areas in Surigao provinces.

An official Twitter account of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) blamed mining for the disastrous earthquake that left six people dead, a pronouncement that experts said is "untrue" and lacks scientific basis.

Death, destruction

ACCORDING to Lopez, the massive destruction of ecosystems in mining tenements—the massive cutting of trees, blasting of mountains, the digging and hauling to extract mineral ores—are to blame for the siltation of rivers, as well as degradation of coastal environments that affect agricultural and fishery production. People suffer because of these.

Before announcing the cancellation of MPSAs on Valentine's Day—her "gift of love", Lopez defended the order to close large-scale mines.

The DENR chief said mining rakes huge profit at the expense of the environment. Lopez also blames mining for the war in Mindanao.

"You take away their land, you take away their resources, you take away their livelihood," she said. "That is why there is war in Mindanao."

Environment and human-rights groups have been blaming mining for militarization, killings and human-rights abuses in mining areas.

Kalikasan-People's Network for the Environment (Kalikasan-PNE) said many of the extrajudicial killings (EJK) that took place under the Duterte administration involve activists fighting destructive mining companies.

The killings took place from July 1, 2016, to January 20, 2017.

The victims were identified as Gloria Capitan, Makinit Gayoran, Jimmy Saypan, Joselito Pasaporte, Mario Cantaoi and Veronico Lapsay Delamente.

The list excludes EJKs involving antimining advocates, Kalikasan-PNE said.

Arbitrary, lacking due process

AT a news conference on February 3, a day after Lopez announced the closure order, COMP Chairman Art Disini and Vice President for Policy and Legal Ronald Recidoro condemned Lopez's decision.

They said the decision was "arbitrary" and ignored due process. Disini and Recidoro said Lopez set aside the findings and recommendation of the mine audit teams, denied mining companies the right to make the necessary corrective measures or even challenge the findings of the mine audit.

According to Recidoro, many of their members have yet to receive the closure order or the audit reports detailing the violations committed.

"We want to know what led to the DENR chief's decision to issue closure orders. Mining companies want to know their violations," Recidoro told reporters. "If they violated the Clean Water Act, what is the basis? If it's the Clean Air Act, we want to know what corrective measures can be done to address the problem."

Recidoro said some companies are protesting in disbelief that they failed the mine audit, even with representatives of antimining civil-society organizations (CSOs) joining the team that inspected the mines.

Lopez had said some of the findings appeared to ignore the grave violations committed by

mining companies and recommended mere slap-in-the-wrist penalties and fines.

COMP said that most, if not all its members, have acquired ISO 140001 certification, indicating that it passed the highest environmental standards for mining.

According to COMP, Lopez's questionable decision to close the mining operations will directly affect 20,000 employees.

Standing pat on her decision, Lopez promised to help those who stand to lose their jobs by implementing area development that will provide green jobs in mining-affected communities.

She added it is her duty to protect the country's freshwater supply for present and future generation, as mandated by the Philippine Mining Act of 1995, which is also enshrined in the Constitution.

Roots in Surigao

SURIGAO del Sur and Surigao del Norte are among the areas that stand to be affected by Lopez's closure orders.

Richly endowed with metallic minerals, such as copper, gold, chromite, cobalt, nickel and lead zinc, Surigao del Sur and Surigao del Norte are also endowed with nonmetallic minerals, like limestone, coal and feldspar, clay diatomite/bentomite and coarse or fine aggregates.

Along with Dinagat Islands, which used to be part of Surigao but now an independent province,

Surigao del Sur and Surigao del Norte have been besieged by mining for decades.

Ironically, Lopez said mining failed to improve the lives of the people. Surigaonons remained poor despite mining.

"They have been mining in those areas for 77 years. This has to stop," Lopez said. "I want to give Dinagat a rest."

Mining operations on Dinagat Islands and Surigao provinces were among the 23 large-scale mining operations ordered shuttered by Lopez. These are mines being operated by Aamphil Natural Resources Exploration; Kromico Inc.; SinoSteel Philippines H.Y. Mining Corp.; Oriental Synergy Mining Corp.; Wellex Mining Corp.; Libjo Mining Corp.; Oriental Vision Mining Phils. Corp.; Adnama Mining Resources Corp.; Claver Mineral Development Corp.; Platinum Development Corp.; CTP Construction and Mining Corp.; Carrascal Nickel Corp.; Marcventures Mining and Development Corp.; and Hinatuan Mining Corp.

Small-scale mining activities also take place in Surigao municipalities of Barobo, Carmen and San Miguel.

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Mining evolution

MINING and the administration of mining activities in the Philippines date back during the Spanish era; from small-scale artisanal gold mining or gold panning to large-scale, open-pit mining method.

According to the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) of the DENR, the country's mining regulatory agency, the first mining measure was Inspeccion General de Minas, which saw the creation of an office that took charge of the administration and disposition of minerals and mineral lands.

The office, however, was abolished on July 1, 1886. Its functions and personnel were merged with the General Directorate of Civil Administration, according to an article posted on the MGB web site, which narrates the history of the bureau.

Like other areas, mining in Surigao can be traced back to the promulgation of the Commonwealth Constitution reverting the Regalian Doctrine—which particularly asserts that minerals belong to the State and their disposition, administration, exploitation and development shall be done through license, concession or lease.

On November 7, 1936, Commonwealth Act 136 and Commonwealth Act 137 were enacted. The former created the Bureau of Mines, while the latter, otherwise known as the Mining Act of 1936, was actually the first major mining law.

As mining evolved, laws evolved, as well, through the years.

Presidential Decree (PD) 463 (Mineral Resources Decree of 1974) aims to provide for, among others, a modernized system of administration and disposition of mineral lands and to promote and encourage the development and exploration of the mining industry.

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PD 463 was later revised by PD 1385 and PD 1677.

On June 6, 1978, PD 1281 was promulgated revising Commonwealth Act 136 boosting the Bureau of Mines with additional tasks, as well as authority to make it more responsive to the objectives of the government for its minerals sector.

A year after, some sections of PD 1281 were amended by PD 1654 to include renaming the Bureau of Mines as the Bureau of Mines and Geosciences.

The passage of Republic Act 7942, otherwise known as the Philippine Mining Act of 1995, on March 3, 1995, paved the way for the mining liberalization policy in the Philippines.

A Supreme Court decision on February 1, 2005, further galvanized the constitutionality of the Philippine Mining Act of 1995 in a case questioning foreign investment in mining. In particular, the Court noted the Financial and Technical Assistance Agreement the Philippine government signed in 1995 with the Western Mining Corp. of the Philippines.

A separate law applies to small-scale mining: RA 7076, signed on June 27, 1991, provides for the creation of "Minahang Bayan" to be governed by the Provincial Mining Regulatory Board.

Economic potential

THE Philippines has a total land area of 30 million hectares, with over 9 million hectares identified as hav-

ing high mineral potential. Around 811,000 hectares, or 2.7 percent, of the country's total land area are covered by mining tenements. This went down to approximately 740,000 hectares as of January this year.

Two years ago, the MGB reported that exports of minerals, which include copper, gold and nickel, reached close to \$2.8 billion, with Japan, Australia, Canada and China as major destination countries.

Mining employs around 236,000. According to the MGB, it is conservatively assumed that for every job in the mining industry, about four indirect jobs may be generated by the mining industry.

In 2015 taxes paid by the mining industry to national and local governments, including royalties, reached P25.78 billion.

As of August last year, mining companies have committed P13.15 billion through various Social Development Management Programs (SDMP) for host communities that will benefit a total of 767 barangays.

Gross value added, or the industry-wide value of goods and services, at current prices in 2015 is pegged at P80.9 billion.

The country is rich with minerals such as gold, copper and nickel. In 2015 estimated gold produced is P35.33 billion; nickel and nickel products, P54.90 billion; and copper, P18.98 billion.

Losses

THE COMP said that because of inconsistent policy, mining invest-

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ment in the Philippines went down.

It estimated that around \$22 billion, or P1.1 trillion, in potential investment will be lost because of uncertainties in mining regulatory policies, from the time Executive Order 79 was signed by former President Benigno S. Aquino III to the closure or suspension of 28 of the 41 operating mines and cancellation of 75 MPSAs and one FTAA.

According to Lopez, mining contribution to the Philippines is not enough to cover for the economic losses. Last year mining's contribution in terms of GDP, or the total goods and services produced in the Philippines, is a measly 0.9 percent.

Mining-exports receipts are pegged at \$2.8 billion, or only 4.8 percent of total exports, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Mining companies claim that they provide the good life to employees with high-paying salaries and a package of nonfinancial benefits, including housing, health, education for their children, clothing and even rice subsidy, which Recidoro said are a lot better than planting mangroves and bamboo, or serving as ecotourism guides as suggested by the DENR chief.

Green economy 'better'

LOPEZ insists that the Philippines is better off with a "green" economy, where people will benefit and not suffer from mining.

The official said that, com-

pared to mining, ecotourism offers better economic opportunities, in terms of jobs and livelihood.

"Mining is not labor-intensive," Lopez said. "It is capital-intensive."

Lopez said a 2014 government report stated that mining created 235,000 jobs all over the country, while tourism has resulted in 4.7 million jobs.

While admitting that mining provided jobs and livelihood, Lopez argued that, although many benefit from mining, several times more that number suffer.

She vowed to transform mining areas into ecotourism sites, with the promise of infusing National Greening Program (NGP) funds and using mining companies' funds for SDMP to boost jobs and livelihood anchored on the protection and conservation of the environment and natural resources.

She said that within 18 months, she can get the people out of poverty, with those employed getting as much as P7,000 to P10,000 a month from various ecotourism activities.

Fragile environment

THE DENR chief said the Philippines is highly vulnerable to climate change, and irresponsible mining is making the already fragile environment more fragile and prone to disasters.

Lopez has the habit of showing aerial photos and videos of rivers and lakes—showing the beauty of the areas before mining, and the

horrifying picture during and after mining activities, particularly in Surigao provinces.

Mining severely affected Surigao's forests, rivers and coastal areas, Lopez said, and the destruction will not stop unless mining activities stop.

A known critic of the open-pit mining method, Lopez said 95 percent of mining companies practice open-pit mining—which, mining experts say, is the fastest, safest and most efficient way of extracting mineral ores. Open-pit mining causes massive destruction of forest ecosystems—as forests are shaved, mountains flattened, and the digging and hauling continue, until huge bowl-like holes are formed.

Citing the potential damage of the Tampakan Copper-Gold Project which Lopez stiffly opposes, she said forests, watersheds and highly productive agricultural areas the size of 700 football fields will be devastated once proponents of potentially the biggest gold-mining project begin commercial operation.

"That area is the food basket of Mindanao," Lopez said. "There are rivers and farms in those areas."

Lopez said miners explode dynamites to tear down mountains or in digging holes to fast-track the extraction of mineral ores.

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Mining, earthquakes

SURIGAO is prone to floods, landslides and other geological hazards, such as earthquakes.

While mining may actually trigger earthquakes, experts say that irresponsible mining may exacerbate the effects of geological hazards, such as flooding and landslides.

Renato Solidum of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) said mining does not trigger earthquakes.

"Mining has no relation to the earthquake in Surigao," the Phivolcs director said. "It did not trigger the earthquake."

Asked if there is a possibility that mining may worsen earthquakes, Solidum said: "No. *Hindi ganun 'yun dapat tignan.*"

"Remember that fault movement cannot be triggered by mining activity. But fault movement can cause ground shaking and ground shaking can cause either landslide and other hazards. I think the question that you need to look at would be how mining activity can exacerbate the hazards that can happen during earthquake events. *Kung rain 'yan, madali lang.* Loose slopes can be eroded by rain. Sediments can go to the river and it goes down to the sea," he said.

He said even the blasting of dynamites or other explosive devices during mining cannot trigger earthquakes.

"It can cause shaking but the shaking is localized," Solidum explained.

A geologist at the Land Survey Management Division of the MGB, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told the BUSINESSMIRROR that earthquakes are either related to tectonic or volcanic activity.

"Activities related to mining, like blasting, are limited to ground shaking over a small area, not wide areas, where the impact will be great," the source explained.

Mining exacerbates geohazards

THE person familiar with the matter said surface activities may cause destabilization of ground surface. This, the source said, can exacerbate geohazards like landslides.

However, the source said that most of the time, such as in large-scale mines, engineering intervention prevents landslides from happening.

"In large-scale mining, in some cases, if mining activity is not carried out, landslides can happen," the geologist said.

Engineering intervention in mining includes slope stability, so as not to disrupt the operation.

The source said MGB has monitoring teams that undertake environmentally social activities related to mining, to make sure that mining companies are compliant.

Threat to biodiversity

THE master planners of the 18 major river basins commissioned by the River Basin Control Office (RBCO), a unit under the DENR, also identified mining among the major threats to Philippine rivers.

Theresa Mundita S. Lim of the DENR's Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) said that, while rehabilitation is possible, the extensive damage of open-pit mining leads to irreversible biodiversity loss, considering the Philippines is rich in endemism, particularly site-endemic species of animal and plant wildlife.

"When you cut trees and haul soil, you kill forests, which are home to threatened species," Lim said.

Even the nutrients in soil taken out in the extraction of mineral ores, she said, are important to the growth of plant species that thrive in a particular area.

The DENR chief has included biodiversity consideration in the recent mine audit, leading to the cancellation of environmental compliance certificates (ECCs) and closure or suspension of mines, because of the threat of causing biodiversity loss.

Responsible mining

LOPEZ clarifies she is not anti-mining and not against the mining industry, per se.

"I am only against irresponsible mining," she said.

Experts agree that irresponsible mining may cause irreversible damage to the environment.

While Lopez ordered the closure of 23 and suspended five others, 12 large-scale operating mines passed the mine audit. On that account, based on the strict mine audit criteria, which include environmental, social and biodiversity consideration, those that passed the audit qualify Lopez's standard as "responsible miners".

Antimining groups under the Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM), however, said responsible mining is not possible at this time.

"First, there is no legal definition that can set parameters on how responsible mining can be done, much less how this can be measured whether in terms of compliance or best practice," ATM National Coordinator Jaybee Garganera said.

Garganera said responsible mining can only be operationalized if mining is done in the context of other laws that are enforceable. He cited these as the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) Local Government Code, National Integrated Protected Areas System Act and the Afma.

Garganera added that mining cannot rely solely on the implementation of the mining law.

"If there is land conflict between mining law and other laws, responsible mining is difficult, unless these conflicts are resolved."

Garganera also pointed out that responsible mining framework is a multistage process, based on the COMP model.

"What COMP is not saying is that the model has not been completed in a single mine site. Steps 1 to 4 were done in Australia, [while] steps 5 to 8 were done in Africa. Steps 9 to 12 were done in Canada."

He said not one mine has proven the hypothesis of their responsible mining model.

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"Responsible mining was a fallback position of the mining industry after it failed to defend the concept of sustainable mining," Garganera said. "Global environmental groups shot down this concept."

He said responsible mining is only possible if there is a clear national industrialization plan. This plan, he said, should be able to tell us what minerals we need to industrialize, how much of these minerals we need to fuel our industrialization and when do we need these minerals.

"After we have clear answers to these, only then do we talk 'where' do we get these minerals, or where we will allow mining?," Garganera said. "This is not only responsible mining; this is also rational mining."

Cost-benefit analysis

LOPEZ said the DENR is doing cost-benefit analysis of mining operations using total economic value (TEV) as model.

This way, Lopez said, ecosystems services will be fully accounted in weighing the cost as against

the benefit of mining in a particular area.

The TEV teams from Palawan State University, Bicol University and Mindoro State College of Agriculture and Technology, who are experts in various disciplines, came up with the conclusion that the benefits of mining are minimal.

In the Bicol study, which focused on the operation of the Perlite mining in Legazpi City, Lopez said that after 40 years of mining, the poverty rate remains high at 45 percent. The poverty rate in the two barangays where there is ongoing mining is higher at 58 percent.

Legazpi City generates from mining an annual revenue of P22,000, which includes the P20,000 real property tax and around 2,000 from special education fund.

Out of 12,000 households, only 18 people are employed by the mining company, she said.

Total benefits in terms of employment, social development program, taxes and multiplier effect of the SDMP reached only P22.7 million. The costs, which include agricultural resources, coastal and marine resources, forest resources, health impact, tourism, soil erosion and "option value", reached P169 million.

In Palawan, which focused on the operation of Citinickel mine in Barangay San Isidro, Narra town, total benefits in terms of employment, SDMP, IP royalties and taxes reached P151 million. But because of the effect of mining, the costs exceeded the benefits because of the dwindling fish catch, damaged coral reef and health costs, Lopez said.

In Oriental Mindoro, which focused on the operation of a nickel mining company in Naujan town, total projected benefit is pegged at P4.7 billion, as against the relevant costs totaling P5.3 billion.

COMP's Recidoro, in previous discussions with the BUSINESS-MIRROR, questioned the TEV modality, saying the benefits provided by mining companies, such as free education, free health care, roads and bridges built, school buildings and health-care facilities, are not measured or taken into consideration in the cost-benefit analysis.

"How would you account for the the benefit of mining, which helped children graduate or complete college degrees? How can you account for the livelihood projects or the trees that were planted by mining companies during progressive mine rehabilitation?" he stressed.

Environmental groups, including the ATM, Kalikasan-PNE, Save Sierra Madre Movement Inc., the Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) and their networks of community-based groups and people's organizations, are opposed to mining.

Indigenous peoples

NOT all are excited about the impending closure of mining operations. Indigenous peoples' tribes that benefit from mining want mining in their ancestral lands.

In Surigao mining stakeholders are up in arms for the impending closure of mining operations.

Six tribal chiefs from three towns in Surigao del Sur expressed support behind mining and even filed opposition to the interim appointment of Lopez before the Commission on Appointments.

In a letter dated February 17, 2017, Datu Engwan Ala and Datu Ryan Huniog of Carrascal, Datu Benjamin Adjawon, Datu Escobal Angeles and Datu Felipe Antad of Cantilan, and Datu Benjamin Tindogan of Madrigao said mining provided jobs and livelihood to the people.

The tribes are from the towns of Carrascal, Cantilan and Madrigao.

They fear that those who would lose their source of income from mining may be tempted to go back to a life of crime, or worse, even join insurgents and criminal organizations or syndicates involved in kidnapping, illegal drugs, or illegal logging.

Arguably, the debate over mining, whether responsible mining is possible, or whether the costs outweigh the benefit, is for the long haul.

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'Lopez jeopardizing confirmation by CA'

By JESS DIAZ

A key leader of the Commission on Appointments warned Environment Secretary Regina Lopez yesterday that she is jeopardizing her CA confirmation by making a baseless claim that congressmen were being offered P50 million each to junk her.

"She's making things difficult for herself. As it is, there are valid mining-related issues she has to explain. She made the situation worse," Isabela Rep. Rodolfo Albano III, who is CA majority leader, said.

But Lopez remains hopeful that she will be confirmed by

March 1 despite the alleged bribe offer. "I continue to hope that they will vote according to the highest principles of truth, service and the common good and wish them well," Lopez said.

For his part, Albano said Lopez should prove her accusation. "Otherwise, she is merely engaging in innuendo and intrigue. I was inclined to support her until this irresponsible and unfounded statement from her," he said.

There are 12 congressmen sitting in the CA, the body empowered by the Constitution to approve or reject Cabinet appointments. The head of the

House-CA contingent is San Juan Rep. Ronaldo Zamora, whose family owns Nickel Asia Corp., one of the largest mining companies in the country.

The mining industry, through the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines, has filed an opposition to the confirmation of Lopez, who has ordered the closure of 23 mines, suspension of five and the cancellation of 75 mine production-sharing agreements for allegedly destroying mountains and watersheds and polluting rivers.

Albano said there were others opposing Lopez's confirmation.

The Zamoras operate nickel

mines in the Caraga region (Surigao-Agusan provinces) and Palawan. It is not clear if they are affected by Lopez's orders.

In an interview on Tuesday, Lopez told reporters: "I was told every congressman was offered P50 million if they voted against me. Well, people talk. Let the dice fall where it may. I don't know what's going to happen, so I might as well do what I have to do. Politics is so messy. I know it might affect my confirmation because I know that mining funds political campaigns."

But she said there was no evidence to implicate any congressman "in the slightest

way" and that "it's just talk."

"I met some congressmen and know of others, and my experience has been good – in fact, very good," Lopez said.

Lopez earlier said she was not afraid not to be confirmed by the CA, which has already bypassed her a few times. Duterte could always reappoint her if she is bypassed. She could no longer be reappointed if the CA rejects her.

However, the appointments body is not known to reject Cabinet appointments, since a rejection reflects negatively on the President. Lopez is apparently banking on Duterte's support.

The CA committee on environment and natural resources chaired by Sen. Manny Pacquiao is scheduled to tackle Lopez's appointment on March 1.

No jobs lost

Lopez clarified as of now, no mining operations have been formally stopped since companies can still appeal to the Office of the President.

"There are also no jobs that have been lost because mining is seasonal, and as of now, operations are at a standstill because of the rains so there are no jobs to lose," Lopez said. – With Louise Maureen Simeon, Mary Grace Padin

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'NOT NEWS'

P50-M OFFER TO DUMP ME JUST GOSSIP, SAYS GINA

By Jaymee T. Gamil
@jaymeegamilINQ

It was just "tsismis" (gossip)—not accusations, not news.

Environment Secretary Gina Lopez on Wednesday cleared the air on a controversial statement she made to the Rotary Club of Makati on Tuesday while she averred to moves to block her confirmation by the congressional Commission on Appointments.

During her speech at the gathering, which was attended by around 50 members of the club and covered by various media outfits, Lopez said: "I was told every congressman was offered P50 million if they voted against me. Well, people talk. Let the dice fall where it may."

In a video she posted on her Facebook page on Wednesday, Lopez explained she wasn't making accusations but was just repeating what she heard from the grapevine.

"I have heard—you know how people talk—that there was a kitty where every congressman was offered P50 million if they voted against me. That's just what I heard. It's tsismis, there's no evidence, there's no anything. And I said that casually. It's not a news bit," Lopez said.

"It's just tsismis, and they turned tsismis into a headline," Lopez said, reacting to the reports of her statement. INQ

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Gina: Solons bribed P50m to vote vs me

By Christine F. Herrera, Maricel V. Cruz
and John Paolo Bencito

THE House contingent to the powerful Commission on Appointments rebuffed Environment Secretary Regina Lopez, who was seeking an audience with the lawmakers ahead of her confirmation hearing, after she accused them of accepting bribes of P50 million each to vote against her.

San Juan Rep. Ronaldo Zamora, chairman of the House contingent to the bicameral body, said he canceled the courtesy call Lopez requested on Monday and decided to just see her during the CA hearing next Wednesday.

"I have canceled Gina's courtesy call on our contingent on Monday, and will just meet her in open sessions on Wednesday at her confirmation hearings," Zamora told the **Manila Standard**.

Members of the powerful panel were aghast at the charges Lopez made in a speech to the Makati Rotary Club last Tuesday when she lashed at her critics and claimed to have received infor-

mation that CA members were promised P50 million each if they blocked her confirmation.

"My confirmation is on March 1. Let the [sword] fall where it may. I don't care. I was told that every congressman was offered P50 million if they voted against me. I don't know. I heard there's a kitty out there. I don't know. That's people talking," Lopez told the businessmen.

"To my detractors, stop it already, I mean if you're gonna fight, at least fight clean. These are below the belt attacks. For example, *Inquirer* puts headlines, which are not even true. **Manila Standard** puts

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things, which are not even true. Play the game well. If you think that what I'm doing is not right, at least tell the truth," Lopez said in a video she posted on her Facebook page.

Isabela Rep. Rodolfo Albano III was incensed by Lopez' accusations.

"She heard? She just heard and she took it already as gospel truth? What's her motive for making it public? So that people would think the CA members got bribed when the congressmen vote against her?" Albano asked.

"We definitely would want to know who wanted to bribe the congressmen with P50 million. Who are they? How about the senators? How much did they get?"

"Did they also bother to approach Senator Loren Legarda, a staunch environmentalist, and offered her millions? I would just love to know how Senator Legarda will react to that," he said, adding that Lopez should have foreseen the opposition against her.

"What did she expect? She ran over so many. These aggrieved parties definitely do not want her there at the DENR. [But] at the same time, those who support her advocacies are lobbying hard for her," Albano said.

Albano said Lopez "should stop acting like a prima donna and instead explain why she deserves to be a DENR secretary despite strong opposition against her confirmation by several sectors."

But other congressmen lambasted Lopez for making wild accusations against legislators when she does not even attend congressional hearings on mining-related bills pending at the House.

Surigao del Norte Rep. Robert Ace Barbers said resources persons in congressional hearings in aid of legislation should not just ignore invitations from Congress.

"The committee should reprimand her and send a strongly worded letter to her for ignoring the [invitation] of the committee," Barbers said.

"She should be taught that she cannot ignore the invite; otherwise, the committee should cite her for contempt," Barbers added.

The committee, chaired by Bayan Muna party-list Rep. Carlos Zarate, is considering 11 mining-related bills and invited Lopez to attend, but she declined the invitation without any explanation.

Lopez earlier earned the ire of lawmakers after she snubbed the hearing conducted by the House committee on ecology on the adverse environmental impact of mining.

Lopez this month closed 23 mining companies and suspended five others for alleged violations of environmental laws. She later canceled 75 mining contracts with companies that she accused of damaging watersheds and causing siltation of coastal waters and farmlands.

Deputy Speaker and South Cotabato Rep. Ferdinand Hernandez earlier suggested to the committee, chaired by Nueva Ecija Rep. Estrellita Suansing, that it issue a subpoena to Lopez to compel her attendance.

"Since this is not the first time the DENR secretary did not attend this committee's hearing, there has to be a strongly worded letter from the chairperson to compel the DENR secretary to attend the next hearing and a warning for a subpoena if she fails again to attend it,"

Hernandez said.

Suansing said Lopez, who has been under intense criticism for her decision, has already snubbed three hearings of his panel.

They also vowed to grill Lopez and make her explain her reported "squandering away" of millions in public funds over environment projects that benefited her and her family-owned ABS-CBN Foundation Inc., among other issues raised against her.

These were multimillion projects that spanned several years under the previous administrations at the expense of the government, they said. The projects included the Sab-saban Falls Eco-tourism project in Palawan, the La Mesa Ecopark project in Quezon City and the Pasig River Rehabilitation project.

Lopez herself answered the controversy on her Facebook page and maintained that her department "followed due process every step of the way."

"To the mining companies, you talk about contracts, [but] how about our contract to life? I have every right and it is my duty and obligation to review contracts in light of the common good," she said.

"That is the duty of government: To check which contracts benefit everyone, and then if we see that a contract was made that affects the community, it's our duty and responsibility to help them."

On Wednesday, the Philippine Nickel Industry Association (PNIA) said Lopez was unfit to lead the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Expressing its opposition to her confirmation as DENR secretary, the group said Lopez willfully circumvented due process when she disregarded the findings of a technical review committee to suspend erring mining companies.

"Secretary Lopez's deep-seated bias against mining in general has compromised her ability to lead a government agency. Her personal views about mining have unfairly portrayed the mining industry as the villain and has damaged the reputation of many responsible mining companies in the country in the eyes of the general public," the PNIA said.

The nickel miners said her decision to close mining companies on her own without basis was already enough grounds to disqualify her for a Cabinet post on the grounds of gross misconduct, gave abuse of power and conduct unbecoming of a public officer.

Benguet Corp Nickel Mines Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of Benguet Corp., said Wednesday Lopez has no legal basis in canceling its mining contract in Zambales province.

In a disclosure to the stock exchange, the mining company said that the order failed to identify specific environmental violations of BNMI that would warrant cancellation of its mineral production sharing agreement (MPSA) with the government.

"As in the suspension order, we strongly object to such arbitrary actions being made without observance of due process and without basis in fact and in law," said BNMI president Leopoldo S. Sison III.

DENR's order alleged that BNMI has impaired the function of the watershed in the area.

But Sison said the company's approved MPSA issued in 2005 states that BNMI's contract area is located within the Zambales Chromite Mineral Reservation.

"This specific mineral reservation has been excluded from government declared watersheds as proven by area clearance issued by the DENR prior to the MPSA approval. Our nickel project continues to be operated outside of any known, critical or declared watershed," Sison said. With Anna Leah E. Gonzales

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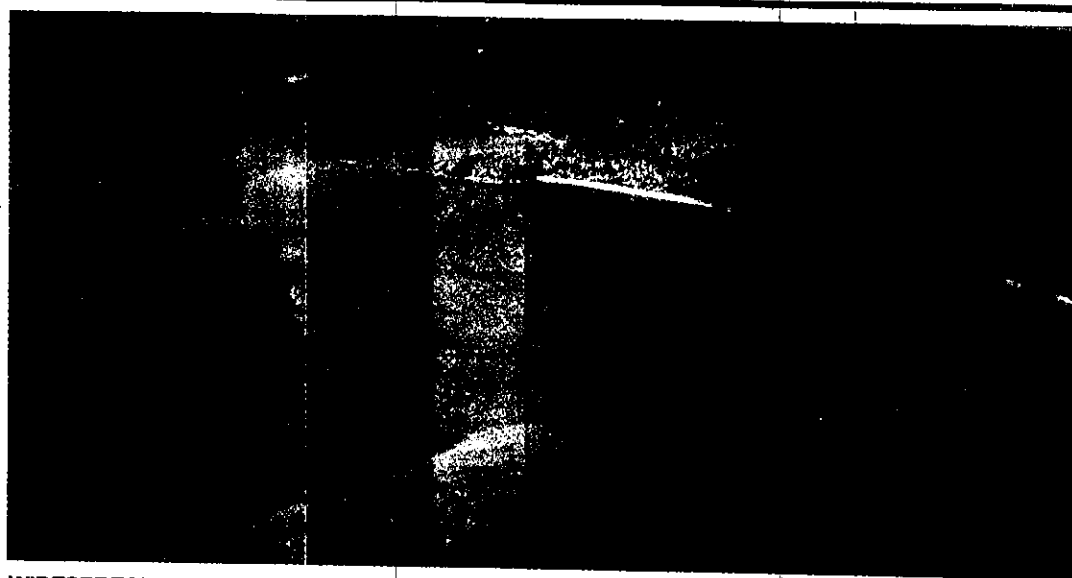
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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



WIDESPREAD siltation problem along the coast where the Hinatuan Mining Company operates in Hinatuan Island, Taganaan town, Surigao del Norte is shown here during an aerial inspection Sunday. The company is one of 14 mining operators ordered closed by Environment Secretary Gina Lopez. (Roel N. Catoto)

Thursday, February 23, 2017

NEDA sees other jobs for displaced miners

BY ANGELA CELIS

THE National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) said that there will be alternative employment for those who will be affected by the order of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to either suspend or close several mining sites in different parts of the country.

Ernesto Pernia, socioeconomic planning secretary, said that there are other job opportunities for those employed by mining companies that were ordered to be suspended or closed.

"(DENR) Sec. Gina Lopez says she has alternative employment for them. There are a lot, there are greening projects, we have a lot of construction projects this year, there will be many job opportunities for these displaced workers," Pernia said.

"Sec. Lopez is into local area development, to make local areas, especially tourist areas, more attractive, and there are a lot of job opportunities there," he added.

Pernia said that the mining and quarrying industry as a whole only has a total of 217,000 workers, which accounts for about 1/2 of one percent of total persons employed. This figure already includes those employed by mining firms that are allowed to operate by the DENR.

"Of course at the family level, it can be devastating," Pernia said when asked about the impact of the job loss.

The NEDA chief said that he does not expect all displaced workers to have jobs immediately, and it could probably take a month for them to be employed.

"We are emphasizing responsible mining. Whatever policy or policy decisions that are made, they should

be data-based and evidence-driven," Pernia said when asked about the government's stand on mining under the Philippine Development Plan.

Meanwhile, Carlos Dominguez III, said that the estimated three-month review of mining operations, to be undertaken by a review team which is a sub-committee of the Mining Industry Coordinating Council (MICC), is reasonable.

The MICC's technical review team met last Monday at the BSP to discuss the composition, scope, and process involved in the review of mining operations, which will be done in consultation with local government units.

Bayani Agabin, finance undersecretary who heads the DOF Legal Services Group, said that the review will start once there is clearance from the MICC and administrative issues are resolved.

"We will do what Usec. Agabin said. I will ask them if the three-month period is enough time to do the review, but that's just an initial estimate. Three months seems to be reasonable," Dominguez said.

Agabin said that the results of the review is only "recommendatory," and is also in compliance with existing laws. The sub-committee will provide the recommendations to the MICC.

"If you will look at Executive Order 79, the MICC is supposed to do, every two years, a multi-stakeholder review. So that is what we are doing, pursuant to what is mandated by law," Agabin said.

The DOF earlier said that the DENR's order to either shut down or suspend the operations of 28 mine sites across the country will cost 17 affected cities and municipalities in 10 provinces over P821 million annually in foregone revenues.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



Si Pangulong Digong ay “psychopathic serial killer” at “No. 1 criminal” sa mga mata ni Sen. Leila de Lima.

Matatawag mo ba ng “psychopathic serial killer” ang isang lider na nagdala ng kapayapaan sa Davao City na noon ay isang no man’s land dahil maraming mga masasamang-loob na nambiktima ng mga mamamayan ay napatay?

Ano ang mas mahalaga sa iyo—ang buhay ng mga magnanakaw, aktyat-bahay, mamamatay-ao, rapists, kidnappers at drug pushers, o yung buhay ng mga mamamayan na sumusunod sa batas?

Anong ginawang krimen ng Presidente para tawagin siyang “No. 1 killer?”

Ang mga ulat na krimen na diumano’y gi-

nawa ni Mano Digong ay sabi-sabi lamang; hindi pa siya nasampahan ng anumang kaso sa korte.

Sino ang pumupukol ng paratang kundi isang tao na inuusig na ng kanyang nakaraan dahil diumano’y pagbigay proteksiyon niya sa mga convicted drug lords sa New Bilibid Prisons sa Muntinlupa at pagtanggap niya ng campaign funds sa mga ito?

Hayaan na natin ang paratang na siya’y nakipagtalik sa isang preso sa “Munti”—kautana-unahang justice secretary na gumawa niyan—at sa kanyang drayber dahil iyan ay mga personal na bagay at wala tayong pakialam.

Ngayon, mag-usap tayo ng masinsinan.

Sino ang pipiliin mo, ang isang lider na

nagliliigpit ng mga masasamang loob o yung nagpoprotekta ng sindikato ng ilegal na droga?

□□□

Bakit bubuksan ng Senado ang imbestigasyon sa mga alegasyon ng retiradong pulis na si Arthur Lascanas tungkol kay Pangulong Digong samantalang sinabi niya noong 2016 na walang Davao Death Squad o DDS?

Pawang kasinungalingan lang daw ang mga paratang na maraming pinapatay na mga kriminal ang noon ay Davao City Mayor Digong Duterte?

Kung nagsinungaling si Lascanas noon ay walang dudang magsisinungaling pa rin siya sa susunod na hearing ng Senado.

□□□

Nagtabas ng litrato

Sinira ng mining ang Marinduque

ang INQUIRER ng mga diumano’y mga lider ng katutubo sa Surigao del Sur na apektado sa utos ni Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Gina Lopez na isara ang mga minahan sa mga watershed areas.

Nilalakad ng mga lider (daw) ng katutubo na huwag ma-confirm si Gina Lopez sa Commission on Appointments.

Ipupusta ko ang lahat ng aking pera na mga huwad o fake ang mga nagsasabing sila’y mga katutubo. Sila’y binayaran lamang ng mga mining companies.

Sa litrato, ang kaniyang katutubong kasuotan ay mga bago at sila’y hindi bilad sa araw kundi mga nagsa-sunblock na mga taga lowland.

Dalawa pa nga sa kanila ay may sunglasses na nakasabit sa kanilang

ulo.

Ang mga tunay na katutubo ay hindi nagsusuot ng mga sunglasses.

□□□

Sa mga galit kay Gina Lopez dahil sa kanyang kampanya laban sa irresponsible mining o pagpapatayo ng minahan sa mga watersheds, tingnan ninyo ang nangyari sa probinsiyang Marinduque.

Matagal nang nagsara ang Marcopper, isang Canadian mining company, pero iniwan nito ang Marinduque na naghihirap.

Ang mga bata ay hindi na puwedeng lumanog o maligo sa mga ilog at ang mga mangingisda ay malayo sa dalampasigan ang kanilang pangangisda dahil sa mga dumi o mine tailings na iniwan ng Marcopper.

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Dominguez backs 3-month timeframe for mining review

A THREE-MONTH window for reviewing the closure and suspension orders on mining operations seems reasonable, given how complicated the task is for the technical working group (TWG) created under the Mining Industry Coordinating Council (MICC), Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez 3rd said.

"We will do what Agabin said. You look at three months," he told reporters late Tuesday on the sidelines of the Asian Development

Bank 50th Anniversary Reception.

Finance Undersecretary Bayani Agabin, a member of the MICC-TWG, earlier announced a three-month timeframe for the TWG review.

"I will ask them, that's just an initial estimate. Three months seems to be reasonable. You have to read all the mining contracts, you have to see what they did," he said.

The MICC issued Resolution 6 after the

Department of Environment and Natural Resources ordered to shut down 23 mining sites and suspended five others.

The Bureau of Local Government Finance (BLGF) noted in a report that the closure and suspension of 28 mining operations across the country will cost 17 affected cities and municipalities in 10 provinces over P821 million in yearly foregone revenues.

➤ Mining B2

MINING FROM B1

Dominguez backs 3-month

Of the amount, collections of the affected local governments amount to P340 million, comprising P53.54 million in real property taxes (RPTs), P263.13 million from business tax, fees, charges and other local charges, and P23.29 million from provincial revenues.

The share of local governments from mining taxes collected by the national government accounts for P481.17 million.

Local governments directly collect from mining firms operating in their municipalities and cities real property taxes (RPTs), local business tax, mayor's permit fee, regulatory and administrative fees and occupation fees.

Local governments get a 70 percent share from property taxes imposed by cities, while 15 percent goes to percent

to the barangay directly affected and 15 percent to component barangays.

From the property tax collected by the province, it gets a 35 percent share while 40 percent goes to the municipality and 25 percent to the barangays where the mining site is located.

The Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (CoMP) estimated that almost P70 billion in gross production value and close to P20 billion in taxes would be lost if the DENR decision pushes through. About 67,000 jobs are also at risk, it said.

Last year, local governments hosting mining projects received P233.8 million or 40-percent of the P585 million in mining taxes collected from December 2011 to the fourth quarter of 2014.

MAYVELIN U. CARABALLO

PEOPLES Tonight

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PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NE

BARBERS: REPRIMAND

By RYAN
PONCE
PACACO

SURIGAO del Norte Rep. Robert Ace Barbers urged the House committee on environment to reprimand Environment Sec. Gina Lopez for snubbing anew the body's invitation for her to appear in yesterday's hearing on mining-related bills.

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LOPEZ

BARBERS...

From Page 1

Barbers, House committee on dangerous drugs chair, said resource persons in congressional hearings in aid of legislation should not just ignore conveniently invitations from Congress.

"The committee should reprimand her and send a strongly worded letter to her for ignoring the invite of the committee. She should be taught that she cannot ignore the invite; otherwise, the committee should cite her for contempt," said Barbers.

Lopez has ordered the closure of 23 firms, suspension of five others and cancellation of the mining contracts of 75 companies which are reportedly damaging watersheds and causing siltation of coastal waters and farmlands.

The House committee on environment and natural resources chaired by Bayan Muna party-list Rep. Carlos Zarate is deliberating on 11 bills on mining.

It sent an invitation to Lopez who declined without any explanation.

Buhay party-list Rep. Lito Atienza said he would push for the restoration of the Question Hour in Congress.

"We miss Cabinet members attending congressional hearings. They do not attend committee hearings anymore," Atienza said.

Atienza lamented the fact that Cabinet members send "third-rate, third level officials" to Congress as resource

persons on matters of national importance.

"Clerks probably even, who cannot answer simple questions. So we will require, we will push for it, for the question hour to be revived. Question hour means Cabinet members will have to attend session and answer question from the congressmen," Atienza said.

Atienza added he would actively advocate for the revival of the Question Hour in Congress as this will improve the performances of the different departments.

Earlier, the chairperson of the House committee on ecology hit Lopez for her seeming pattern of snubbing congressional invitations when her presence is very crucial and vital to the hearings that were held before.

Nueva Ecija Rep. Estrellita Suansing, the panel chairman, hit Lopez after she failed to attend the committee's recent motu proprio investigation on the adverse environmental impacts of mining operations in the country.

Deputy Speaker and South Cotabato Rep. Ferdinand Hernandez moved that Suansing send a strongly worded letter to Lopez and compel her to attend the next hearing, with a warning for a subpoena if she fails to show up again.

"Since this is not the first time the DENR secretary did not attend this committee's hearing, there has to be a strongly worded letter from the chairperson to compel the DENR secretary to attend

the next hearing and a warning for a subpoena if she fails again to attend it," said Hernandez.

The House committee on ecology has moved to send another invitation compelling her to attend the next hearing on March 1, 2017.

The committee members were displeased by Lopez's absence during last week's hearing and her failure to send a representative.

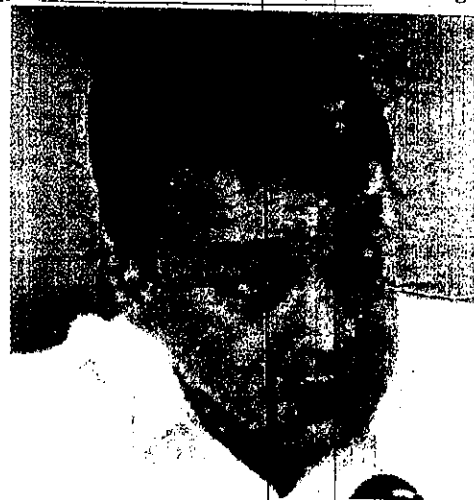
Suansing said there had been three hearings of the committee wherein the secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) did not honor the panel's invitation.

She said these were about the proposed Plastic Products Regulation Act,

Mandatory Environment Insurance Coverage, and lately the motu proprio investigation into the adverse impacts of mining operations in the country.

Suansing said the funding from the Mandatory Environment Insurance Coverage will go to the DENR.

"DENR, this serves as your warning, iniin snub ninyo kami. A lot of meetings were set for you. We are even passing laws here for your benefit. You've been ignoring this committee. This will serve as your warning. Don't send somebody who cannot answer questions here. Respect the House of Representatives, most especially this committee," said Suansing.



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LOPEZ AGAIN SNUBS HOUSE

STORY ON PAGE 3

By Ryan Ponce
Pacpaco

FOR snubbing a House invitation anew, Environment Sec. Gina Lopez earned the ire of lawmakers, claiming this is tantamount to disrespecting the House of Representatives.

Lopez did not show up again during Wednesday hearing of the House committee on environment on mining-related bills in the wake of her decision to close and suspend mining firms and cancelling the mining contracts.

Surigao del Norte Rep. Robert Ace Barbers, who chairs the House Committee on Dangerous Drugs, said resource persons in congressional hearings in aid of legislation should not just ignore conveniently the invitations from Congress.

"The committee should reprimand her and send a strongly worded letter to her for ignoring the invite of the committee," said Barbers.

"She should be taught that she cannot ignore the invite; otherwise, the committee should cite her for contempt," said Barbers.

Lopez was behind the closure of 23 firms and suspension of five others while the mining contracts of 75 companies have been cancelled for reportedly causing damage to watersheds and siltation of coastal waters and farmlands.

The House committee on environment and nat-

ural resources chaired by Bayan Muna party-list Rep. Carlos Zarate is deliberating on 11 bills on mining.

It sent an invitation to Lopez but the latter declined the invite without any explanation.

Buhay party-list Rep. Lito Atienza, said he would push for the restoration of the Question Hour in Congress.

"We miss Cabinet members attending congressional hearings. They do not attend committee hearings anymore," Atienza said.

Atienza lamented the fact that Cabinet members send "third-rate, third level officials" to Congress as resource persons to matters of national importance.

"Clerks probably even, who cannot answer simple questions," Atienza lamented.

"So we will require, we will push for it, for the question hour to be revived. Question hour means Cabinet members will have to attend session and answer question from the congressmen," Atienza said.

Atienza said he would actively advocate for the revival of the Question Hour in Congress as this will improve the performances of the different departments.

Earlier, the chairperson of the House committee on ecology hit Lopez for her seeming pattern of snubbing congressional invitations when her presence is very crucial and vital to the hearings that were held before.

This was the statement of Nueva Ecija Rep. Estrellita Suansing, the panel chairman, after Lopez, who is under fire over her order to close and suspend mining firms, did not attend the committee's recent motu proprio investigation on the adverse environmental impacts of mining operations in the country.

Deputy Speaker and South Cotabato Rep. Ferdinand Hernandez moved that Suansing send a strongly worded letter to Lopez and compel her to attend the next hearing, with a warning for a subpoena if she fails to show up again.

"Since this is not the first time the DENR Secretary did not attend this committee's hearing, there has to be a strongly worded letter from the chairperson to compel the DENR Secretary to attend the next hearing and a warning for a subpoena if she fails again to attend it," said Hernandez.

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TO THE
POINT
EMIL P.
JURADO

Dump Lopez

THIRTY-ONE years ago, the People Power revolution happened. The Reform the Armed Forces Movement broke away from the Marcos government. They stayed first at Camp Aquino and later on at Camp Crame. Then-PC/INP Chief Fidel Ramos joined Defense Secretary Juan Ponce Enrile and Col. Gregorio Honasan.

Three days later, the strongman President Ferdinand Marcos went on a self-exile with the help of the Americans to Honolulu, Hawaii. That prompted the installation of the housewife of the late Senator Ninoy Aquino as the next president. The rest is history.

So what did the 1986 People Power Revolution achieve for the nation? Poverty and joblessness still stalk the land. The gap between the rich and the poor seems to grow wider. Do we now enjoy the freedoms denied us in the past? Have our lives become better at all?

This is why I have been pessimistic about the subject of celebrations.

The idea is to move on and let not those who would remind us of the dark pages of our history get the better of us.

When President Duterte appointed Gina Lopez as secretary of En-

vironment and Natural Resources, I said to myself, the President is making his biggest mistake.

Lopez used to say that if she had her way she would not have mining at all in Southeast Asia, particularly in the Philippines.

And that's exactly what she did by ordering the closure of 23 mining firms and suspending five more. More recently, she cancelled 75 Mineral Production Sharing Agreements in the pursuit of her "green economy" and eco-tourism.

Does she not realize she is duty-bound to observe due process and the rule of law?

The financial losses to local governments and national economy cannot be underestimated. The exact figure of P821.15 million is even higher than the one estimated earlier at P800 million by the Department of Finance. What is particularly alarming in the DoF financial data was that all three municipalities stand to lose all their operating incomes.

These losses don't include real estate taxes, local business taxes, mayor's permit fees, regulatory and administrative fees and a lot more. The local governments are also entitled to a share—all these alone will amount to P481.17 million.

The Lopez network, ABS-CBN, tried to justify the actions of Lopez, but stopped short when it could no longer gloss over what Lopez did to local governments and the national economy. My gully, some 1.2-million jobs will be lost!

The heiress Lopez patronizes the poor and the jobless

when she argues that mining causes harmful effects on the environment, and that local communities do not receive the economic benefits and fair return for hosting mining concerns.

But she does not care. She can afford to push her advocacy because she was born rich.

Santa Banana, employers have aired their concern that what Lopez—who was once a drug addict committed to DARE Foundation, but escaped and later on became a member of Ananda Marga, an Indian meditation cult—is doing could worsen poverty.

Lopez said she could not care less if she is not confirmed as DENR secretary. Of course. She doesn't need the job.

Now she complains that members of the Commission on Appointments have been offered P50 million apiece so they would not confirm her.

I am sure lawmakers will not take this sitting down. While she did not name names, her allegations cast a cloud over Congress as a whole.

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Dump Lopez

“Appointing her was President Duterte’s biggest mistake.”

The commission should also inquire into her alleged misuse of funds, both private and public, and her conflict of interest. The Lopez-owned

pipeline spanning Batangas to Manila leaked, making a condominium building in Makati uninhabitable.

She is not doing anything about

it, though. I am not surprised.

If the President really wants change, he should make Lopez resign since she seems to be the biggest stumbling block in efforts to solve poverty and joblessness.

Mister President, listen to Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez and other members of the Cabinet, who see Lopez more as a problem than as a solution.

Alleged threats and demolition jobs seem to be the concern of people around the President these days. But while National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon says there are no specific threats, presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella and Communications Secretary Martin Andanar so easily point to attempts to oust President Duterte.

Abella and Andanar now point to destabilization plots against the President by the “Yellowtards” of former President Aquino.

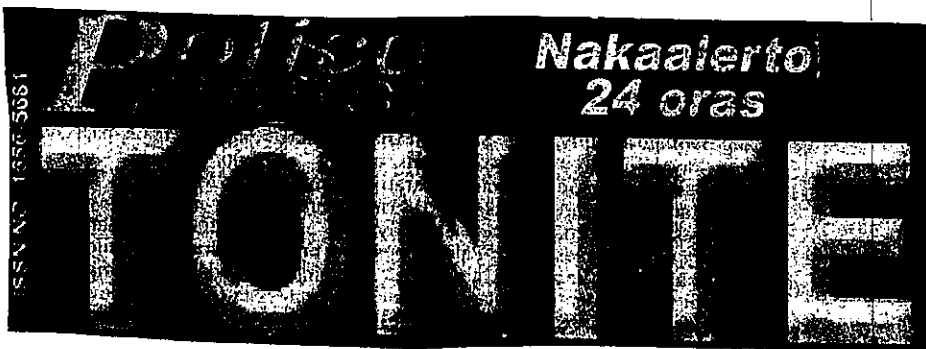
Indeed these two have become the President’s worst enemies.

Every so often, we read contrasting claims of ABS-CBN and GMA-7 on television ratings leadership.

The Lopez-owned network uses Kantar Media while GMA 7 uses Nielsen figures.

I’d rather believe in GMA 7. Nielsen is more widely used and hence more credible.

This is aside from the fact that ABS-CBN is often used to advocate the interests of vested groups.



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DENR Sec. Gina Lopez, isnabera, tse!

NAKAKA-TATLO ka na, ha!

"DENR, this serves as your warning, inii-snub ninyo kami. A lot of meetings were set for you. We are even passing laws here for your benefit. You've been ignoring this committee. This will serve as your warning. Don't send somebody who cannot answer questions here. Respect the House of Representatives, most especially this committee," ito ang patutsada ni House committee on ecology chairperson Rep. Estrellita B. Suansing.

Nagbanta ang mga miyembro ng komite na papadalan ng subpoena si Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Gina Lopez kapag mabigo ulit itong dumalo sa susunod na pagdinig.

Hiniling nina Deputy Speaker at South Cotabato Second District Rep. Ferdinand L. Hernandez kay Suansing na magpadala ng strongly worded letter kay Lopez at pilitin itong dumalo sa susunod na pagdinig, kung hindi, i-subpoena kapag hindi dumalo ulit.

"Since this is not the first time the DENR Secretary did not attend this committee's hearing, there has to be a strongly worded letter from the chairperson to compel the DENR Secretary to attend the next hearing and a warning for a subpoena if she fails again to attend it," sabi ni Hernandez.

May motu proprio investigation ang komite sa salungat na tama sa kalikasan ng mining operations sa bansa. Sumama ang loob ng mga miyembro sa hindi pagsipot ni Lopez at pagkabigong hindi magpadala ng kinatawan.

Ayon kay Rep. Henry S. Oaminal (2nd District, Misamis Occidental) kailangan ang presensya ng DENR Secretary o ng Underscretary na namamahala sa mining operations.

Sinabi pa ni Oaminal na kailangan nilang malaman ang mga paglabag ng mga kompanya sa pagmimina para mag-

bigay linaw na rinse lumabas sa mga pahayagan na may show cause orders, cancellations, and suspensions of mining permits/operations galing sa DENR.

Sumang-ayon si Oaminal sa pahayag nina Hernandez at Rep. Jose L. Atienza (Party-list, Buhay) na mag-aaksaya lamang ng oras kung itutuloy ang pagding para sa mga mambabatas na may hectic schedule.

"I therefore move to postpone this hearing and extend another invitation, a diplomatic invitation, to the DENR Secretary that if and when she will still snub it, that may warrant a subpoena," sabi ni Oaminal.

Ayon naman kay Suansing may tatlong pagdinig ang hindi sinipot ng DENR Secretary, sa kabila ng imbitasyong ipinadala ng komite. Tungkol ito sa: the proposed Plastic Products Regulation Act; Mandatory Environment Insurance Coverage; at ang huli ang motu proprio investigation into the adverse impacts of mining operations in the country. Suansing said the funding from the Mandatory Environment Insurance Coverage will go to the DENR.

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Benguet to sue DENR

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

Listed miner Benguet Corp. and its subsidiary are taking legal action against the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) following a closure order.

Benguet Corp. and Benguet Nickel Mines Inc. (BNMI) were among the 28 firms that were ordered closed by Environment Secretary Gina Lopez earlier this month.

"We see no basis at all for the cancellation order and we will take all the necessary legal actions and exhaust all remedies available to prevent the implementation of the order," the company said in a regulatory filing.

"We are set to file an immediate appeal which shall stay or stop the execution and implementation of the order until the issues are resolved on the merits under the law," it added.

The company noted that the order failed to identify its specific environmental violations that would warrant cancellation of its authority to mine in its patent claim.

"We strongly object to such arbitrary actions being made without observance of due process and without basis in fact and in law," Benguet said.

The company maintained that the order is

unjustifiable as it noted it is ISO certified.

Benguet also claimed it has not abandoned its Antamok mine nor it has withdrawn on its obligation to rehabilitate the area.

For its part, BNMI dismissed allegations it has impaired the function of the watershed in the area following the cancellation of its mineral production sharing agreement (MPSA).

"Our nickel project continues to be operated outside of any known, critical or declared watershed," it said.

BNMI said its contract area is located within the Zambales Chromite Mineral Reservation, which has been excluded from the government declared watersheds as proven by area clearance issued by DENR.

The company also expects to be able to haul the earlier validated stockpiles pursuant to the ore transport permits given by the MGB which directed the removal of the stockpiles for environmental reasons.

"Although the issuance of the permits was delayed, we hope to substantially complete the hauling and shipment of the stockpiles before the start of the rainy season, barring any unforeseen circumstances," BNMI said.

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Benguet says DENR failed to specify mine violations

LISTED mining firm, Benguet Corp. said that it will exhaust all legal remedies against the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' (DENR) order cancelling the mineral production sharing agreement (MPSA) of its subsidiary BenguetCorp. Nickel Mines Inc. (BNMI) after failing to specify the violations that would warrant its cancellation.

In a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange, BNMI said that aside from failing to specify the violations, the order is objectionable since it mentioned that the company's mining operations is located inside a watershed despite the company owning a clearance issued by the DENR that the mineral reservation area is excluded from government declared watersheds.

The company added that it complied with all environmental and social remediation measures

set by the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) except for the provision of constructing a one mine haul road.

"(The one mine haul road) was left but we have now signed a contract with a partner for its construction, the delay caused mostly by right-of-way issues. We therefore see no basis at all for the cancellation order and we will take all the necessary legal actions and exhaust all remedies available to prevent the implementation of the order. We are set to file an immediate appeal which shall stay and/or stop the execution and implementation of the order until the issues are resolved on its merits under the law," BNMI president, Leopoldo Sison III said in the disclosure.

The company added that it expects to be able to haul the earlier validated stockpiles pursuant to the ore transport permits given by the MGB

that directed the removal for environmental reasons and hopes to start hauling and shipping it before the rainy season.

"We are confident that we will be able to surpass this hurdle considering that our mining operation is compliant with environmental standards and our legal rights are well founded," Sison further expressed.

Meanwhile, DENR secretary Regina Lopez said in a statement that the information that there is a promised P50 million for every congressman voting against her confirmation is not based on any evidence.

"This is not based on any evidence whatsoever and should not implicate any congressman in the slightest way. It's just talk. I have met some congressmen and know of others and my experience has been good - in fact, very good. I continue to

hope that they will vote according to the highest principles of truth, service, and the common good - and wish them well," she stated.

"I would also like to add that as of now there are no mining operations that have stopped because the process is they can go on appeal after receiving the notice of suspension or closure. There are no jobs that have been lost because mining is seasonal and as of now, operations are at a standstill because of the rains so there are no jobs to lose. And in the event that a closure order will take place, I am confident that with government's help, we will be able to bring on a much more stable economy," Lopez claimed.

The environment chief also cited that the DENR only want mining firms to follow laws pertaining to the protection of the environment for future generations.

BusinessMirror

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

"IS RESPONSIBLE MINING POSSIBLE?"

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P25.00 NATIONWIDE | 4 SECTIONS 26 PAGES | 7 DAYS A WEEK

THE BROADER LOOK



IS RESPONSIBLE
MINING
POSSIBLE? >>A6-A7

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Lopez urged to lift ECC suspension for coal stockpile

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA [@jonlmayuga](#)

ROCK Energy International Corp.—which operates a coal stockpile in Vitas, Tondo, Manila—is appealing to Environment Secretary Regina Paz L. Lopez to heed its call to lift the suspension of its environmental compliance certificate (ECC).

Carlo Fontanilla, managing director of Rock Energy, wrote a letter to Lopez on January 18 reiterating the company's compliance of the conditions of the ECC issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

In a statement, Fontanilla said the DENR-Environmental Management Bureau-National Capital

Region (EMB-NCR), headed by Director Visminda Osorio, inspected the company's coal facility several times, together with the EMB-Central's Quick Response Team (EQRT) and other multisector groups.

"Both technical teams of EMB-NCR and the EQRT recommended the lifting of the suspension of our ECC. However, to date, our request

is not being acted accordingly by Director Osorio of EMB-NCR," Fontanilla said in his letter to Lopez.

"It is in view of the above that we are appealing to your office for immediate favorable action for the lifting of the suspension of Rock Energy ECC," the Rock Energy official said.

Fontanilla also asked for a meeting with Lopez, preferably at the Vitas Industrial Estate, where their coal storage is located, "to personally appreciate that the temporary coal-storage area is not adverse but is rather an essential part of an efficient logistics supply chain to essential industries in nation-building."

It was the second time Fontanilla sent a letter to Lopez. In his December 15, 2016, letter, the Rock Energy official said the company has fully complied with the specific conditions set forth in the notice of violation issued to them by the DENR-EMB.

Located at Lot 3-G Earnville, Vitas Industrial Estate in Vitas, Tondo, Rock Energy's Mineral Products Storage and Handling Facility had been the subject of complaints by residents of Barangay 105, who claimed coal dusts from the facility have exposed them to serious health risks, such as respiratory diseases.

In response, the DENR suspended the firm's ECC NCR-1405-0199 on June 24, 2015, effectively shutting down the stockyard.

Rock Energy said it has installed various pollution-control systems at the facility—more than what was required by the EMB—and that the inspection teams have recommended their reopening.

Rock Energy, a trading and logistics firm based in the Port Area, is mainly involved in coal and mineral distribution, supplying vital mineral resources to leading manufacturers in the country, such as cement and glass companies.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Fate of mining industry up to Duterte



Val A. Villanueva

BUSINESSWISE

IT looks like President Duterte will have the final say on what to do with what he calls "the mess" created by Environment Secretary-designate Regina Paz L. Lopez.

Duterte says he will ensure due process will be observed this time around, explaining the closure of mines should be weighed in with the loss of jobs and economic disruptions Lopez's closure order will cause.

In trying to untangle such mess, what I believe the government and mining stakeholders should focus on is whether there is truth in her assertion that those she ordered closed are really operating in watersheds and if the mining firms concerned are creating environmental havoc.

Lopez earlier ordered the closure of 23 mines and the termination of 75 mineral production sharing agreements, claiming they are all operating in watershed areas.

She also says mining should be prohibited both in legally decreed and "functional" watersheds. This assertion, I find disturbing. Can she, as Department of Environment and

Natural Resources (DENR) secretary-designate, amend or totally abolish an established jurisprudence? What I know is that mining activities are prohibited by law in watersheds declared as "critical", and that it is beyond Lopez to declare which, because only Duterte as the country's president has that power. The Revised Forestry Code, or Presidential Decree 705, issued in 1975 defines a watershed as "a land area drained by a stream or fixed body of water and its tributaries having a common outlet for surface runoff".

The law also describes a "critical watershed" as "a drainage area of a river system, which supports existing and proposed hydroelectric power, irrigation works or domestic water facilities that need immediate protection or rehabilitation". The DENR's River Basin Control Office has identified 142 critical watersheds

phenomenon has been going on for centuries and cannot be attributed to mining, they said.

Perhaps, this was what Lopez saw from the vantage point of a helicopter when she did an ocular inspection of the affected areas. Based on the visual images she saw, she made that erroneous decision, glossing over the latest scientific findings of her own people in the audit report.

There is no question that the environment should be protected, but a rational DENR secretary should be adept at striking the balance between the need to preserve our ecosystem and the need to harness our natural resources for the benefit of all. For as long as we rely on

across the country.

From where I sit, the law does not say anything about "functional watersheds", and if we go by Lopez's definition, then even Edsa nestles on a watershed.

Now, let's delve into the issue of whether these mining operations pollute the waters. In September 2015 Mines and Geosciences Bureau OIC Regional Director Danilo U. Uykieng supported the earlier findings of local geologists that there is no nickel contamination in the rivers of Zambales.

In a Senate hearing, Uykieng said, upon questioning by Environment Committee Chairman Francis G. Escudero, "...for the record, Your Honor, there is no actual nickel contamination in Zambales. However, there is impact on the sedimentation because of natural erosion..."

Such pronouncement echoes the findings of local geologists, who said earlier that what caused the color of the Zambales rivers to turn reddish-brown was soil erosion, which occurs during heavy rains. They claimed the soil in the mining areas is rich in nickel laterites, which render the area inhabitable by large trees. Trees are a natural deterrent to soil erosion, as they rein in the soil they are planted on. They explained that, even without mining, the soil will cascade downstream and cause the waters to turn reddish-brown. This

products and services related to mining, the government should see to it that access to them should remain unhampered, and that regulatory agencies are on their toes for any signs of abuse.

The Mining Act is pregnant with clauses that control the operations of mining companies. All the government has to do is implement them with vigor, but never constrict mining operations to the detriment of their host communities, which rely on the industry, and the national treasury to which these companies make substantial contributions.

For comments and suggestions, e-mail me at mvala.v@gmail.com.

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WEEKLY ENVIRONMENT WATCH

Limay CFB power plant actual emissions

DENR limits

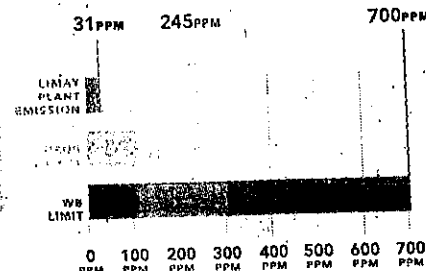
World Bank limits

SAN MIGUEL CONSOLIDATED POWER

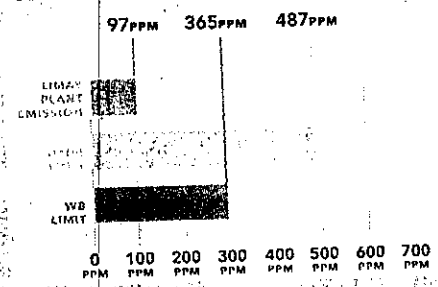
February 13-19, 2017

The Limay CFB power plant undergoes daily emission testing. Average results for the week show its emissions are way below Department of Environment and Natural Resources and World Bank limits.

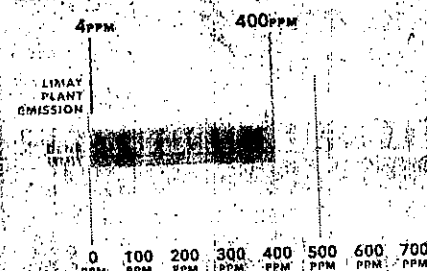
SULFUR OXIDE



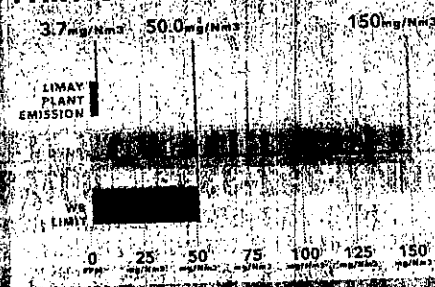
NITROGEN OXIDE



CARBON MONOXIDE



PARTICULATE MATTER (DUST)



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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Baguio eyes Environment Week in June

BAGUIO CITY—The City Council approved on first reading a proposed ordinance institutionalizing the first week of June each year as City Environment Week.

Authored by Councilor Elaine D. Sembrano, the ordinance aims to come up with a regular and local government-sponsored and sanctioned activity "as an avenue for the promotion and information drive of the various policies, programs and projects on health and

sanitation, waste management and environmental protection, including private sector initiatives on these public concerns."

The ordinance would create committee led by the city mayor as chairman and the City General Services Officer as action officer. Committee member would include the City Environment and Parks Management Officer, City Social Welfare and Development Officer, Chairperson of

the City Council Committee of Health and Sanitation, and the President of the Association of Barangay Councils.

Representative from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Science and Technology, Department of Trade and Industry, the academe, duly accredited non-government organizations with programs related to environment protection, and the

Association of Recyclers would also join the committee.

The body would then formulate the program of activities for the weeklong City Environment Week, the requirements and guidelines for public participation, and criteria for the Search for the Most Innovative Indigenous or Locally Developed Waste management practice or technology, among others, Sembrano said. **Dexter A. See**

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THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Cebu mayor: Power plant 'outrageous'

By MARS W. MOSQUEDA JR.

CEBU CITY — Mayor Tomas Osmeña said he is opposed to the construction of a 300-megawatt coal-fired power plant in Barangay Sawang Calero.

"Three hundred megawatt is outrageous. It's too much," he told reporters. He said he is against having a power plant in a densely-populated barangay such as Sawang Calero.

Osmeña made his stand clear even as over a hundred residents from Sawang Calero and four neighboring barangays marched in the city Tuesday to dramatize their support for the project.

The residents believed the plant can provide jobs to residents and ensure a constant supply of electricity.

Joining the rally were residents of Barangays Sawang Calero, Pasil, Suba, San Nicolas Proper, and Pahina San Nicolas. They marched to the area where another plant is located.

Last week, the Cebu City Council officially endorsed the proposed Sawang Calero plant to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and other concerned national agencies.

The council voted 10-5 to endorse the Ludo and Luym Coal Power Plant project.

In April last year, the council rejected the proposal to build the plant citing the risks it could bring to the environment.

The council changed its mind when the project proponent, Ludo Power Corporation, reintroduced its proposal in December.

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Hazards of continued reliance on coal scored

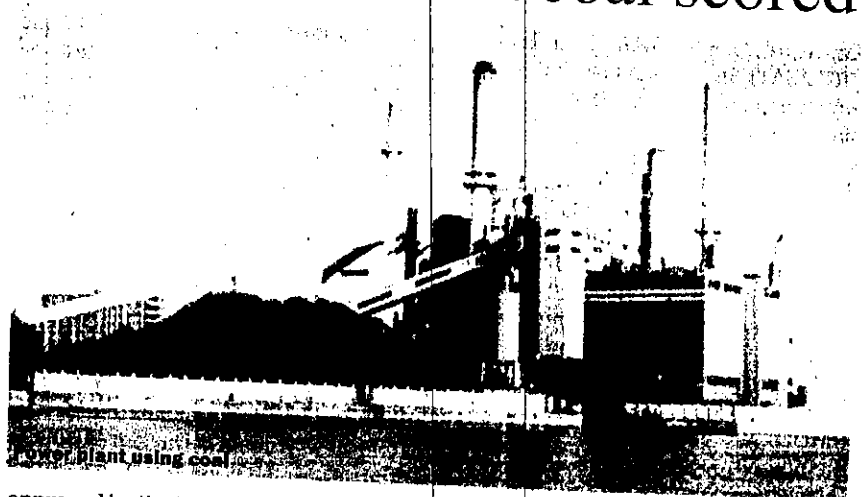
Thousands of Filipinos are in danger of being fatally exposed to serious health hazards due to their exposure to fossil fuels such as coal, and the number may further rise if the Philippines continues with its plan of operating additional coal-fired power plants, a non-government environmental agency warned Friday.

Climate Reality Project Philippines, the local unit of the global CRP initiative launched by Nobel Laureate and former US Vice President Al Gore, maintained that the country's continued dependence on coal as a primary feedstock to its power plants, can lead to serious health risks, and potential fatalities.

CRP cited the results of the study conducted by the Harvard University titled "Coal: A Public Health Crisis". Commissioned by international environmental group Greenpeace Southeast Asia, the study revealed that 960 deaths annually can be directly linked to the ill effects of fossil fuels. The Harvard study said these deaths were caused by respiratory complications, ischemic heart disease, and stroke as major concerns locally.

Greenpeace Southeast Asia even predicted that the number of deaths can go as high as 2,410 yearly, if the Philippines approves more than 20 other coal-fired power plants in the pipeline.

At present, more than one-third of the energy used to generate electricity in the Philippines comes from burning coal. Currently, the country has 17 operational coal plants, with 29 more



approved by the Department of Energy (DOE), set to begin commercial operations by 2020.

The Harvard study evaluated 13 operational coal-fired power plants with a combined installed capacity of 3,799.10 megawatts (MW).

A separate comprehensive study conducted by Greenpeace in 2013 estimates that India suffers 120,000 coal-related deaths annually, while China bears as many as 366,000 casualties per year. Global estimates, meanwhile, set these premature deaths to as much as 5.5 million people.

A similar, devastating pattern is shared by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. Their report reveals that in the last 20 years, the region has been battered by climate change, affecting 2.27 billion people in China, 805 million in India, and 130 million in the country.

CRP Philippines likewise shared that three known health impacts of coal belong to the ten leading causes of death in the Philippines: Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, heart problems, and respiratory diseases.

In places that are near coal storage facilities, the effects of coal pollution can be debilitating. The Happyland community in Tondo, Manila offers a glimpse into the horrors faced by people living next to coal.

Numerous cases of carbon poisoning, diarrhea and fatigue have become common ailments among children and adults. Those who have worked inside the facilities and are now experiencing its effects have looked elsewhere for livelihood.

The CRP Philippines called on the Philippine government to cut down its consumption of fossil fuels in order to avert the potential health risks to its citizens.

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Cavite allays fears on dengue outbreak, red tide

By **ANTHONY GIRON**

TRECE MARTIRES CITY, Cavite -- There is no dengue fever outbreak and red tide warning in the waters off Cavite, the provincial government clarified yesterday.

Provincial Health Office-Education Promotion Officer II and Dengue Coordinator Annabelle R. Dilig confirmed that no outbreak has been reported in the province from January 1 to February 20 this year.

Engineer Rolinio P. Pozas, head of Provincial Government Environment and Natural Resources Office (PG-ENRO) also assured that there is no red tide warning in the coastal areas of the province, namely Bacoor District, Cavite City and the municipalities of Kawit, Noveleta, Rosario, Tanza, Naic, Ternate and Maragondon.

Dengue fever cases

The Region 4-A or Calabarzon (Cavite-Laguna-Batangas-Rizal-Quezon) Health Office earlier reported that Cavite had the most number of dengue fever cases among the provinces in the region in January this year.

Cavite reportedly comprises 33 percent of the total dengue case number on January in the region. The regional health office reported nine dengue deaths and 845 cases in Calabarzon during the month.

The case breakdown is as follows: Cavite, 280; Laguna, 230; Batangas, 182; Rizal, 95 and Quezon, 58.

The Provincial Epidemiology Surveillance Unit (PESU) confirmed that cases of dengue fever in Cavite's cities and municipalities are on the upward trend.

"Although increasing, it is not

alarming," PESU personnel said.

The provincial government declared a province-wide dengue fever outbreak and placed the province under a state of calamity in September 2015.

Water quality tests

Pozas said that the regular water surveillance and examination being conducted by the provincial and local ENRO and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) in the shellfish-growing areas can attest to the "no red tide" claim.

Red tide toxins usually cause paralytic shellfish poisoning and other similar ailments.

"We are constantly monitoring the water quality in the province. there is no red tide in the area," he said.

Bacoor, Naic, Kawit and Ternate are Cavite's top producers of mussels (tahong) and oyster (talaba).

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

DENR urged to cancel permits in Ilocos watersheds

By **FREDDIE G. LAZARO**

CANDON CITY, Ilocos Sur – A day after commending Secretary Regina Lopez for the cancellation of 75 mineral production sharing agreements (MPSA), the Ilocos Network for the Environment (DEFEND Ilocos) asked her to include MPSAs that straddle watersheds supporting Ilocos rivers.

“We urge Sec. Lopez to include in the cancellation order all applications that cover watersheds areas in the region and in other parts of the Cordillera,” said the group.

Sherwin de Vera, regional coordinator of DEFEND Ilocos, explained that the region suffers from dry spells and drought almost annually and “mining operations in watershed areas will increase the suffering of the people, especially the farmers who largely depend on creeks, streams and rivers for irrigation.”

Based on the Mines and Geosciences Bureau, seven companies have applied for permits covering key watershed areas in Ilocos Sur and Ilocos Norte, namely, Cordillera Exploration Company, Inc., Newmont Philippines,

Olpaten Resources Corporation, Diamond Drilling Corporation, Rhenzel Resources Corporation, Benguet Corporation, and Lepanto Consolidated Mining Company.

“The cancellation of MPSAs in Baay-Licuan, Abra and Mankayan, Benguet are commendable since streams and rivers in these locations drain to the Abra River but the surface water system in the region remains under threat because applications and permits of other companies remain active,” said De Vera.

He added that Lopez should support the clamor of environmental groups to repeal the Philippine Mining Act of 1995 and passage of the People's Mining Bill to realize watershed protection against corporate plunder.

Editorial

Salot na illegal loggers, lipulin ng DENR

GRABE na ang pagkapanot ng mga bundok at gubat kaya nararapat nang kumilos ang Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). Hindi lamang ang illegal miners ang kanilang bantayan kundi pati na ang illegal loggers.

Salot ang illegal loggers sapagkat sila ang dahilan kung bakit nagkakaroon ng mga pagguho ng bundok, pagkakalbo ng mga gubat at pagkakaroon ng mga malalaking baha. Dahil wala nang mga punongkahoy sa mga bundok, humihina ang lupa at naguguho sa matinding ulan.

Ang pagbaha sa Cagayan de Oro at iba pang probinsiya sa Northern Mindanao noong nakaraang buwan ay isinisisi sa illegal logging. Nasorpresa ang mga residente sapagkat sa isang iglap ay tumaas ang

tubig at marami ang na-stranded. Huling naranasan ang matinding pagbaha sa Cagayan de Oro noong 2011 nang manalasa ang Bagyong Sendong. Pero sabi ng ilan, mas matindi ang baha ngayon sapagkat napakabilis tumaas ng tubig. Ang talamak na pagputol sa mga kahoy ang dahilan nang pagbaha sa CDO.

Ang Compostela Valley at iba pang lugar sa Davao del Norte at Davao Oriental ay talamak din ang illegal logging. Ayon sa report ang Compostela ang may pinakamataas na bilang ng illegal logging activities sa buong bansa. Kaya marami ang nangangamba na sa mga darating na panahon, magkakaroon ng mga malalaking pagbaha sa lugar sapagkat mapapanot nang tuluyan ang mga bundok. Pawang mga prime-rang klaseng kahoy ang pinuputol ng loggers sapagkat mahal kung ibenta. Mauubos ang mga kahoy dahil sa mga salot na magtotroso at walang ibang kawawa kundi ang mamamayan.

Paigtingin ng DENR ang kampanya laban sa illegal loggers. Pakilusin ng pamahalaan ang Armed Forces of the Philippines para mabantayan ang mga gubat. Mas mapuproteksiyunan ang mga gubat kung may mga sundalo sapagkat walang kalaban-laban ang forest guards sa mga armadong magtotroso. Marami nang pinatay na forest guards kaya dapat lamang paigtingin ng DENR ang pakikipaggiyera sa illegal loggers.



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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

DENR: Preserve Samar's forests for Philippine Eagle

By **RESTITUTO A. CAYUBIT**

TACLOBAN CITY — With sightings of the Philippine Eagle in Samar Island increasing, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' (DENR) Eastern Visayas office has renewed its call for the preservation of Samar's remaining forests.

DENR Regional Director Leonardo Sibbaluca said Wednesday more sightings of the national bird were reported by his men in the Samar Island National Park.

Sibbaluca said his office is soliciting support from private groups or organizations, stakeholders, local government units, and the general public for the protection of Samar forests,

which now serve as the home of the Philippine Eagle.

He said the critically endangered Philippine Eagle (*Pithecophaga jefferyi*), which is a giant forest raptor found only in the Philippines, replaced the maya as the country's national bird in 1995.

The existence of the eagle in Samar was reported in 2014 by a team from the Institute of Biology of the University of the Philippines in Diliman and Philippine Eagle Foundation.

The Philippine Eagle was first spotted in Paranas, Samar, on June 15, 1896 by British naturalist John Whitehead.

Following sightings of the bird in Samar forests in the 1980's and 1997

then, President Joseph Estrada declared the 3,720-hectare Taft Forest in Eastern Samar a Philippine Eagle sanctuary in 1999.

Sibbaluca said the existence of Philippine Eagle and other wildlife in the area depends on the state of the remaining forests in the island.

He said the areas where the Philippine Eagle were observed have been declared government-protected areas to protect the bird from indiscriminate hunting, loss of habitat through cutting of trees and other related interventions.

He the public and other stakeholders need to play a part preserving Samar's forests because the DENR cannot do it alone.

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Indigenous communities eyed to help conserve protected areas

CANDON CITY, Ilocos Sur – A lawmaker wants indigenous communities be tapped to help in conservation efforts for the country's protected areas.

Senator Loren Legarda, head of the Senate committee on climate change, said the indigenous communities have an important role in conserving the country's protected areas and should be utilized by the government.

"Indigenous people's communities have always played an important role in the conservation and preservation of the country's protected areas; they employ age-old traditions in caring for our environment and natural resources; we should tap their knowledge to effectively maintain the integrity of our biodiversity and ecosystems," said Legarda.

As this developed, the senator filed a proposed Senate Bill 1185, the Indigenous People's and Local Communities Conserved Areas Act.

Legarda said there are indigenous communities conserved areas (ICCA), which are areas within ancestral domains including lakes, coastal seas, forests, and watershed imbued with deep spiritual and cultural values for indigenous peoples (IPs).

"This proposed measure acknowledges the significant contribution of conservation areas managed by IPs in

maintaining the country's biodiversity as well as in climate change mitigation. It is about time that the national government give due importance and role to the indigenous communities as partners in the conservation of protected areas found within their ancestral domains," Legarda explained.

Under the bill, concerned government agencies should recognize and promote IP rights to their ancestral domains and the ICCAs including their right to maintain, protect and regulate access and prohibit unauthorized intrusion in such areas.

ICCAs should also be considered in the formulation of development plans and the IPs will have priority in the management of their conservation areas and the preservation, restoration, and maintenance of ecological balance and biodiversity therein, with the full and effective assistance of government agencies.

Moreover, IPs will have a fair and equitable share in the commercial profits of users of well-defined and confirmed ecosystem services provided by ICCAs, in recognition and respect of their right to benefit and share in the profits from the allocation and utilization of natural resources found in their ancestral domains. (Freddie G. Lazaro)

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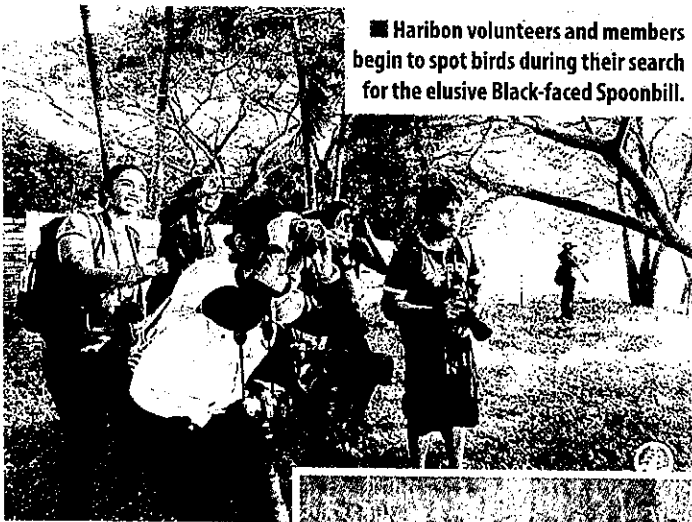
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• **Logging roads
to be converted**

PATIN-AY, Prosperidad, Agusan del Sur - Former logging roads in this province will soon be converted into economic and agricultural highways, it was learned yesterday. This was disclosed in the Philippine Rural Development Project (PRDP) report, which the World Bank's National Project Coordinating Office (WM/NPCO) did not oppose. Under the plan, roads that were formerly used by loggers will be converted into farm-to-market roads, which will be rehabilitated and paved. The plan also includes the start of projects under the Investment in Rural Enterprises and Agricultural and Fisheries Productivity. (Mike U. Crismundo)



■ Haribon volunteers and members begin to spot birds during their search for the elusive Black-faced Spoonbill.

■ A Yellow Bittern spotted during Haribon Foundation's recent bird-watching activity in Pampanga. PHOTOS BY JAMES CONCEPCION/HARIBON FOUNDATION



Haribon leads bird watching in Candaba marshlands

ENVIRONMENTAL group Haribon Foundation recently held its first bird watching activity of the year in the wetlands of Candaba, Pampanga.

Led by Haribon wildlife researcher David Quimpo, the bird watching came at one of the best times of the year to spot migratory birds coming from other sites before departing to another location. Particularly, it is the season to search for the endangered Black-faced Spoonbill, along with our other avian visitors.

The bird watching location was a former marshland that was converted into an agricultural area.

At the beginning of the activity, flocks of Philippine and Wandering Whistling Ducks greeted watchers from afar, gathering on one spot in the marshes. Unfortunately, the Black-faced Spoonbill the explorers spent hours searching for was not sighted.

However, more than 30 species of migratory and resident bird species were spotted including the Grey Heron, Great Egret, Intermediate Egret, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Purple Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Yellow Bittern, Wandering Whistling Duck, Philippine Duck, Eastern Marsh Harrier, White Browed Crake, White Breasted Waterhen, Purple Swampphen, Greater Painted Snipe, Whiskered Tern, White-winged Tern, Red Turtle Dove, Zebra Dove, Lesser Coucal, Common Kingfisher, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Barn Swallow, Yellow Vented Bulbul, Pied Bushchat, Golden-bellied Gerygone, Arctic Warbler, Striated Grassbird, Pied Fantail, Long-tailed Shrike, Brown Shrike, Olive-backed Sunbird, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, and Chestnut Munia.

Haribon members and volunteers who participated in the activity remarked that it was a relaxing and enjoyable expedition. Some of the participants already experienced bird watching in Candaba before, while others had just laid eyes on the magnificent

view for the first time.

Towards the end, many of the participants expressed concern about the unsighted Black-faced Spoonbill in the swamp. According to Quimpo, this endangered bird is a rare sight, as this species usually voyages from one location to another during their migratory season, explaining its absence during the activity.

Returning participants Heavenly Garcia and April Enriquez said that they were excited to be back in Candaba after some years. But according to them, it was evident that many of the bird species they sighted some years back were not present during this visit.

"I spotted much more birds when I went here in Candaba for the first time. It's disheartening that avian sightings are rarer these days," lamented Garcia.

Echoing the same sentiment, Enriquez shared, "More bird species were seen before, an even greater number per species."

Probable causes of fewer bird sightings include the area being changed for agricultural purposes, as well as erratic climate patterns. "I was told that this place has been converted which is why we see a lesser number [of birds]. But so far, I am satisfied with the experience because I discovered new species today that I would never see in the city," said Haribon member Princess del Castillo.

Though much has changed in the area, Candaba remains a haven for migratory birds coming from the far north. Haribon's bird watching activities aims to gauge if our lands are still able to provide subsistence for our feathered tourists and if these places still serve as a satisfying home for them. The call is clear: It is high time that we maintain, protect and conserve these homes for our birds.

**JAMES ALDRIN
CONCEPCION/HARIBON
FOUNDATION**

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

ASEAN MINISTERS' WIVES LEAD MANGROVE PLANTING IN BORACAY

The wives of the foreign ministers of Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam, led by Mrs. Marie Cecile Yasay (left), wife of Foreign Affairs Secretary Perfecto Yasay Jr., took part in a mangrove planting activity as part of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations 2017 (Asean 2017) meeting series, on Tuesday, February 21 in Sitio Ligotan, Brgy. Manokmanok, Boracay.

PNA



UN seeks global approach to ocean protection

UNITED NATIONS, New York: The UN Oceans Conference planned for June 2017 aims to create a more coordinated global approach to protecting the world's oceans from rising threats such as acidification, plastic litter, rising sea levels and declining fish stocks.

The tiny country of the Seychelles off the East Coast of Africa is one of 39 UN member states known as small island states, or as Ronald Jean Jumeau, Seychelles' ambassador for climate change and SIDS called them, "large ocean states."

Kids growing up in the Seychelles think of the ocean as their backyard, said Jumeau.

"Our ocean is the first and eternal playground of our children, they don't go to parks they go to the ocean, they go to the beach, they go to the coral reefs, and all that is just collapsing around them," Jumeau told IPS.

Ambassadors and delegations from these 39 countries often speak at UN headquarters in New York steadfastly sounding the alarm about the changes to the world's environment they are witnessing first hand. Jumeau sees these island states as sentinels or guardians of the oceans. He prefers these names to being called the canary in the gold mine because, he said, "the canaries usually end up dead."

Yet while much is known about the threats rising oceans pose to the world's small island states, much less is known about how these large ocean states help defend everyone against the worst impacts of climate change by storing "blue carbon."

"We are not emitting that much carbon dioxide but we are taking

■ A young boy stands near mangroves planted near his home in the village of Entale in Sri Lanka's northwest Puttalam District. IPS PHOTO



everyone else's carbon dioxide into our oceans," says Jumeau.

"There are three billion people around the world that are primarily dependent on marine resources for their survival and so they depend on what the ocean can produce," said Isabella Lövin, Sweden's deputy prime minister.

Despite decades of research, the blue carbon value of oceans and coastal regions is only beginning to be fully appreciated for its importance in the fight against climate change.

"There's proof that mangroves, seas salt marshes and sea grasses absorb more carbon (per acre) than forests, so if you're saying then to people don't cut trees than we should also be saying don't cut the underwater forests," said Jumeau.

This is just one of the reasons why the Seychelles has banned the clearing of mangroves. The temptation to fill in mangrove forests is high, especially for a nation with so little land, but Jumeau said there are many benefits to sustaining them.

Mangroves guard against erosion and protect coral reefs. They

also provide nurseries for fish.

But it's not just coastal forests that take carbon out of the atmosphere. Oceans also absorb carbon, although according to NASA their role is more like inhaling and exhaling.

The Seychelles, whose total ocean territory is 3,000 times larger than its islands, is also thinking about how it can protect the oceans so they can continue to perform this vital function.

The nation plans to designate specific navigation zones within its territories to allow other parts of the ocean a chance to recover from the strains associated with shipping.

The navigation zones will "relieve the pressure on the ocean by strengthening the resilience of the oceans to absorb more carbon dioxide and ocean acidification," said Jumeau. He acknowledged the plan will only work if all countries do the same but said, "you have to start somewhere."

Fortunately, other countries are also beginning to recognize the importance of protecting the world's oceans.

Sweden's Lövin told IPS that the world is going "in the totally

wrong direction," when it comes to achieving the goal of sustainable oceans and life below water.

"If you look at the trends right now, you see more and more overfishing, we are seeing more and more pollution, plastic litter coming into our oceans, and we're also seeing all the stress that the ocean is under due to climate change, acidification of the water, but also the warming and sea level rises and all of this is putting a tremendous, tremendous pressure on our oceans," said Lövin.

Together with Fiji, Sweden is convening a major UN Ocean Conference in June this year.

The conference aims to bring together not only governments but also the private sector and non-governmental organizations to create a more coordinated approach to sustaining oceans. It will look at the key role that oceans play in climate change but also other issues such as the alarming prospect that there will be more plastic in our seas than fish by the year 2050.

Lövin also noted that rich countries need to work together with developing countries to address these issues, because the demand for fish in rich countries has put a strain on the global fish stocks that developing countries rely on.

"Rich countries ... have been over-fishing with industrial methods for decades and now when they European oceans are being emptied more or less we have depleted our resources and then we import and we fish (over long distances in) developing countries' waters," she said. "We need to make sure that fish as a resource is conserved and protected for future generations."

IPS

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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Healthy Laguna de bay

We start today's column with a plea for help by a small fish cage owner in Laguna de Bay who fears that the pronouncements of President Duterte to rehabilitate the country's largest lake has turned into a nightmare.

The President during his inaugural address last year, had instructed then newly-chosen Environment Secretary Gina Lopez to find a solution to the continuing siltation of the lake, a major source of milkfish for residents of Metro Manila and nearby provinces.

Recently, Lopez bared plans to dismantle all the fish pens

BIZ LINKS



REY GAMBOA

in the lake, and transform it into an ecotourism zone. A subsequent notice was issued to fish pen and cage owners to start removing their nets, posts, and all other materials used for their operations, otherwise these would be confiscated during the demolition scheduled later this month.

Our letter sender, who requested anonymity, pretty much represents what other law-abiding small fish pen and cage owners operating in

the lake feel. Here's what he wrote:

Forgotten fishing industry

"I read your column today about mining investors affected by the mining closure. So much attention has been given on the mining that the fishing industry has been forgotten.

"I am an owner of a small fish cage for almost four years now, and the operation has been rough due to various factors like natural calamities, dishonest employees, and the quality of fingerlings that we bought. But I know this is part of the operation, and we'll just hope for a better harvest in the future.

"For three consecutive years, I (suffered) a loss in income, but this season is very optimistic – until it was ordered by the DENR secretary to demolish any structure in the Laguna Lake area.

"As far as I can remember, the President wanted to close those big fishpen (with an area of 15 to 50 hectares) because it's larger to what was prescribed by the law. These big corporations profited for so long.

"But why (does) the crackdown of the fish pens include those small fish cages (with an area of one hectare or less) that have been given permits and are paying yearly dues to the government.

Livelihoods not considered

"I can't understand why they don't consider first the livelihood of workers who rely on their salaries from working in the fish cage, which in my case are two employees.

"They say there will be an alternative source of livelihood, but shouldn't it be done first before any demolition? Did they consider also the effect on the supply and prices if they will proceed with the demolition? Why is it only in Laguna Lake? How about in Batangas and Pangasinan?

"I thought they were promoting SMEs (small and medium enterprises)? We still have stocks in the fish cage, but we are being forced to harvest even if it is still small (nine to 12 pieces per kilo). How can we recover from our investments?

"There were meetings done by the local fish pen and fish cage operators recently, but only the owners of the big fish pens were included in the closed-door meeting. The representatives of small fish cages were asked to stay outside the meeting room.

Fair competition and treatment

"It's very clear that we small owners are being used by the bigger businessmen to get the sympathy of the government while keeping us out of the discussion.

"We just want fair competition and fair treatment. We are here because we want to help while doing small business. Shutting us down is too much of a burden for small entrepreneurs. We just want to recover from our losses, and we need more time for our stocks to grow.

"We just want to air our side. May I please request not to mention my name if ever for security purposes."

Laguna Lake's importance

Many of our fish cage and fish pen owners in the country are small businessmen who have sunk in hard-earned money to have a modest source of income. Laguna Lake, because of its proximity to the huge population of Metro Manila, is a coveted ground for growing fish in cages and pens.

Over the years, as the area of fish growing operations grew to beyond the lake's maximum "safe" carrying capacity of 15,000 hectares (or about 10 to 15 percent of the 90,000 total acreage of the lake), and with the presence of oversized fish pens in clear violation of the law, operational yields dropped to much less profitable levels.

Nonetheless, Laguna Lake's fish pens and fish cages continue to be a major source of cultured fish for millions of Filipinos. It's significance to the local economy, including the jobs created to sustain the fish-growing operations, cannot be taken lightly.

Once again, like in the case of our mining companies that had been unceremoniously shut down, fish cage owners – like our letter-sender – have rights that need to be upheld, especially since they had been given permits by the government and had complied with all the necessary requirements to operate.

But clearly, oversized fish pens that were constructed in clear violation of the law must go. Furthermore, government officials who most probably profited by approving these oversized illegal fish pens should be prosecuted.

Grandiose idea

Our DENR secretary may have grandiose ideas of showcasing a "healthier" Laguna Lake to the world, but this should not be at the expense of rights being trampled on and jobs being lost, even in the name of Mother Earth and the environment.

More importantly, it must not disrupt a system that effectively delivers a cheap source of food for families living in Metro Manila and surrounding provinces.

If the "health" of Laguna de Bay is a problem, let's explore better methods that will ensure the lake's long-term sustainability is achieved while continuing to provide an abundant and relatively cheap source of cultured fish to the communities that rely on it.

No question about it: I'd like to see a Laguna Lake teeming with fish and aquatic life, and with clear and flowing waters; but such a picturesque and romantic vision should not be the be-all and end-all.

Facebook and Twitter

We are actively using two social networking websites to reach out more often and even interact with and engage our readers, friends and colleagues in the various areas of interest that I tackle in my column. Please like us at www.facebook.com and follow us at www.twitter.com/ReyGamboa.

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