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IN THE NEWS

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'BIGYANG-PAHINGA SA EARTH HOUR'

'Pinas, pinakalantad sa panganib ng climate change—DENR

**Nina Ellalyn de Vera
at Mary Ann Santiago**

Sa Pilipinas mababakas ang matinding banta ng climate change, dahil tumataas ng mahigit 14 millimeters kada taon ang karagatang nakapaligid sa bansa, o limang beses na mas mataas kaysa global average.

Ayon kay Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Ramon Paje, batay sa satellite data mula 2002 hanggang 2014, tumaas ang dagat malapit sa Pilipinas ng mahigit 14 millimeters kada taon. Masyadong mataas ito kumpara sa karaniwang global sea rise na nasa three millimetres lang bawat taon.

Pinakamalaki ang panganib na nakaamba sa mga komunidad na nasa dalampasigan dahil na rin sa banta ng mapaminsalang storm surge, tulad ng nanalasa sa Tacloban City, Leyte, sa kasagsagan ng pananalasa ng bagyong 'Yolanda' noong Nobyembre 8, 2013.

"There is increased urgency to act on climate change, and while Earth Hour is symbolic, we must go beyond one hour each year," sabi ni Paje.

Muling makikiisa ang Pilipinas sa Earth Hour sa Sabado, Marso 19, kaya naman hinimok ni Manila Archbishop Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle ang publiko na makibahagi sa Earth Hour, o sa isang oras na switch off ng lahat ng de-kuryenteng appliances at ilaw, na magsisimula sa ganap na 8:30 ng gabi.

"Patayin po natin ang lahat ng ating appliances at mga gamit na gumagamit ng electricity. Ito po ay para makapagpahinga ang atin pong mundo," panawagan ni Tagle sa panayam ng Radyo Veritas. "At sabi nga po ni Pope Francis, kailangan natin ng Ecological Justice, kailangan ding maramdaman ng ating kalikasan ang ating mabuting pakikitungo, bigyan po natin siya ng kaunting pahinga."

Taong 2007 nang unang isagawa ang Earth Hour sa Sydney, Australia, at nang sumunod na taon ay Pilipinas ang naging unang bansa sa Asia na nakilahok sa nasabing programa.

Dahil milyun-milyong Pinoy ang nakilahok sa mga sumunod na Earth Hour, nakamit ng Pilipinas ang titulong "Earth Hour Hero Country" mula 2009 hanggang 2013.

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CEMEX partners with DENR-MGB in geohazard education program

THE government's program to educate the people on geohazards to improve community disaster preparedness is getting support from the private sector such as global building materials company CEMEX.

Through CEMEX Philippines Foundation, CEMEX is taking part in the priority program of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources - Mines and Geosciences Bureau (DENR-MGB).

CEMEX Philippines Foundation Board Trustee Paul Vincent Arcenas and MGB Regional Director Loreto Alburo recently signed a memorandum of agreement to implement the construction, operation, and management of the Information and Training Center for Geohazards, Environment, and Climate Change in Kinatarkan Island, Cebu.

The said partnership between CEMEX and MGB will help lessen the impact of geohazards on people and the environment through Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) initiatives to educate local officials and residents about geohazard mapping, environmental protection, and climate change.



CEMEX Philippines Foundation (CPF) inked a partnership with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources - Mines and Geosciences Bureau (DENR-MGB) to support the environmental agency in the construction of the Information and Training Center in Kinatarkan Island.

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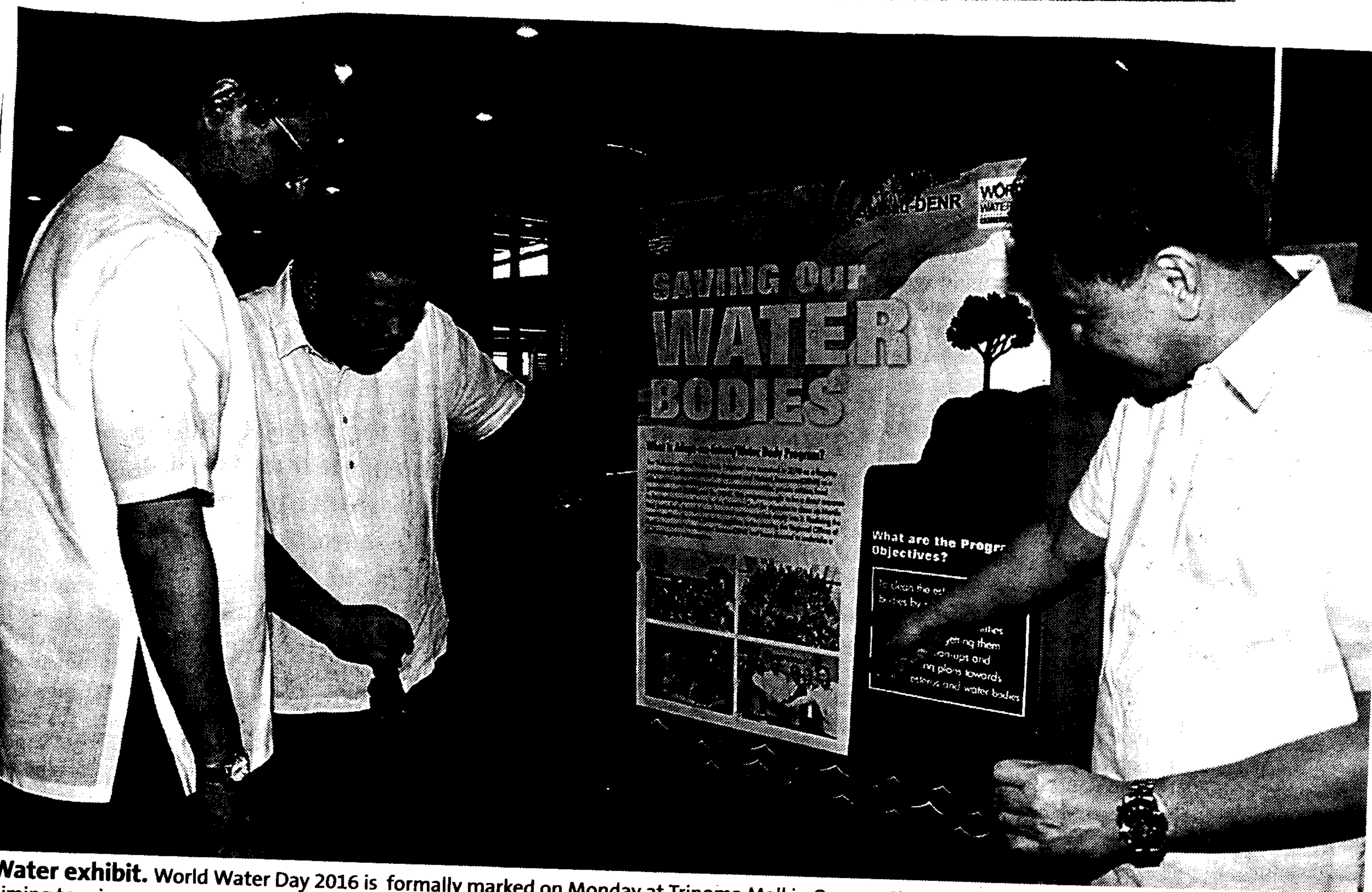
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DEFINING THE NEWS

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



Water exhibit. World Water Day 2016 is formally marked on Monday at Trinoma Mall in Quezon City with Manila Water and Manila Water Foundation aiming to raise awareness on the significance of water and water-related issues in day-to-day lives. Attending the exhibit on water to mark the event are (from left): Sevillo David, executive director of National Water Resources Board; Zoilo Andin, MWSS deputy administrator for finance; and Ferdinand dela Cruz, COO of Manila Water. **MANNY PALMERO**

BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

Ecotourism eyed to boost conservation program in Northern Sierra Madre Park

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

VARIOUS stakeholders in the province of Isabela are eyeing to promote ecotourism to boost conservation effort in the Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park (NSMNP), the country's largest protected area.

"We have started to train people in surrounding communities; training them to become tourist guides," Mina Labuguen, protected area superintendent of the NSMNP, told the BUSINESSMIRROR in an interview.

Labuguen said the NSMNP, which covers a total area of close to 360,000 hectares, including buffer zones, has a very big potential as an ecotourism destination.

Aside from its vast forest, ideal for trekking and nature tripping, NSMNP also boasts of having long white-sand beaches fronting the Eastern Seaboard.

"We have very long white-sand beaches ideal for swimming," she added. The beaches, she said, are mostly part of, or covered by, the NSMNP.

Labuguen said local government units (LGUs), led by the provincial government of Isabela, are working together to protect the NSMNP and conserve the wildlife that thrive within, including some of the most unique but critically endangered species, such as the Philippine eagle and the Philippine crocodile.

"Ecotourism, of course, will be extra income for our communities," she said.

Labuguen added that many of the people in surrounding communities are now benefiting from various government programs, such as the National Greening Program (NGP).

Aside from their income in planting trees and protecting NGP sites as partner of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), she said the people have started to harvest fruits from the trees they planted.

"We are now looking at ecotourism because it will mean extra income for our communities. If they have extra income, they will no longer see the trees as easy source of cash," Labuguen said.

The DENR official said communities in the NSMNP are now protective of the forest resources, realizing the value of having a healthy forest ecosystem, especially because of extreme weather.

DENR Forest Management Bureau Director Ricardo Calderon said last year that P20 million has been allocated for forest protection in the province of Isabela. This year another P20 million will be released, he said.

Once an illegal-logging hot spot, the NSMNP and the province of Isabela, along with the entire Cagayan Valley region, have been declared last year by the Regional Development Council as free of illegal-logging activities, Labuguen said.



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New Semirara coal field operational by year-end

Consunji-led Semirara Mining and Power Corp. will start production at its new coal field in Semirara Island by year-end after securing an environmental clearance, its top official said.

In a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange, the coal miner said it was granted an environment compliance certificate (ECC) by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Environmental Management Bureau (DENR-EMB) dated Feb. 12, 2016.

The ECC covers the total project area of 3,825.25 hectares within coal operating contract (COC) No. 5. This includes the Panian and Narra existing coal mines and the proposed Molave coal project at Brgy. Semirara, Caluya, Antique.

Work has started at the Molave expansion project, which includes the over burden removal of 80 million cubic meters before production, Semirara chairman Isidro Consunji said in a text message to **The STAR**.

"(We) expect production by year-end," he said.

With the expansion plus existing open pit mine in the island, Semirara expects a total 12 million metric tons (MT) of coal production annually.

In a separate disclosure, Semirara said it also received yesterday a copy of the certificate of registration issued by the Board of Investments dated Feb. 24, 2016 for the Molave mine.

The certificate means the company has been duly registered as new producer of coal on a non-pioneer status under the Omnibus Investments Code of 1987 for its Molave mine.

"In the grant thereof, the corporation shall enjoy income tax holiday for four years from January 2017 or actual start of commercial operations, whichever is earlier but in no case earlier than the date of registration," the company said.

"Other incentives with no specific number of years of entitlement may be enjoyed for a maximum period of ten years from the start of commercial operation and/or date of registration," it added.

The Molave mine is located at the west portion of the Panian Pit. Last year, an landslide occurred in Panian Pit, which took the lives of nine coal miners.

Aside from the Panian Pit, Semirara also has existing operations in the Narra Pit, which is located east of Panian Pit.

- Danessa Rivera



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Pangasinan gov nadiin sa buhangin

KASONG paglabag sa Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act ang isinampa ng Ombudsman sa Sandiganbayan laban kay Pangasinan Gov. Amado Espino Jr., at 10 iba pa kaugnay sa umano'y iligal na black-sand mining noong 2011.

Kasama ni Espino sa

kaso sina Rafael Fontelera Baraan, provincial administrator at mga board of directors ng Alexandra Mining and Oil Ventures Inc.

Nagsabwatan umano ang mga akusado upang makapagmina sa Brgy. Sabangan sa Lingayen Gulf,

Pangasinan. Ang naturang kompanya ay hindi rehistrado sa Philippine Contractors Accreditation Board, walang business permit at walang clearance mula sa Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

—Leifbilly Begas

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Pangasinan gov charged over black sand mining

GRAFT charges were filed at the Sandiganbayan yesterday against Pangasinan Governor Amado Espino Jr. and 13 other individuals in connection with illegal black sand mining in the province.

The charges were based on the resolution issued by the Office of the Ombudsman in October last year that recom-

mended criminal charges against Espino and the other respondents, including executives of mining

firms that operated the quarrying site.

Two counts of graft were filed against Espino, Provincial Administrator Rafael Baraan, and Provincial Housing and Home-site Regulation officer Alvin Biga.

Similar cases were filed against private defendants Cesar Detera, Edwin Alcazar, Lolita Bolayog, Denise Ann Sia Kho, Annlyn Detera, Cynthia Detera-Camara, Glenn Subia and Emiliano Buenavista, all members of the board of directors of the Alexandra Mining and Oil Ventures Inc.

Also charged were Michael Ramirez, Gina Alcazer and Avery Pujol, directors of Xypher Builders Inc.

Prosecutors recommended that bail bonds for all defendants be set at P30,000 per count.

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Supreme Court asked to stop Davao Sasa Port project auction

By Carmelito Q. Francisco

Correspondent

DAVAO CITY — Opposition to the Sasa Port modernization has been brought to the legal front with a petition to stop the P18.99-billion public-private partnership (PPP) project filed before the Supreme Court yesterday.

The 26-page petition for a writ of continuing mandamus and Writ of Kalikasan with Temporary Environmental Protection Order cites the project's lack of an environment permit, community consultation and local government consent.

The petitioners are composed of one incumbent and three former Davao City councilors, a representative of a non-government organization for the urban poor as well as a group of owners of resorts on the neighboring Island Garden City of Samal.

The respondents to the case are Transportation and Communications Secretary Joseph Emilio A. Abaya, the Department of Transportation and Communications (DoTC), its Pre-Qualification Bids and Awards Committee and the Philippine Ports Authority.

Represented by lawyer Herminio Harry L. Roque, Jr., the petitioners cited urgency given the scheduled March 28

Davao Sasa Port, S1/5

bid submission for the project, the first seaport lined up for PPP, the infrastructure flagship of the government of President Benigno S.C. Aquino III that has seen 12 contracts cumulatively worth some P217.4 billion so far awarded since 2010.

"While the Court of Appeals has concurrent jurisdiction over a petition for a writ of kalikasan and continuing mandamus, petitioners respectfully submit that the proper court with which to file and to decide this petition is the honorable Supreme Court given the prayer for a temporary environmental protection order which, to all intents and purposes, is a restraining order applied for to halt what is otherwise a national government infrastructure project on environmental grounds," the petition read.

"The urgency of the application for a temporary environmental protection order is made more manifest by the fact that bid submission is scheduled on 28 March 2016 and the award of the project shall be made thereafter."

The project, whose proposed cost has ballooned fivefold from P3.5 billion initially, has also taken on a political dimension as one of the petitioners — former Davao City councilor Peter T. Laviña — said the legal action is intended "to stop the administration from making the project its milking cow for the elections."

— **with Marifi S. Jara**

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Fight vs coal plant takes Lenten twist

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Fight vs Coal plant

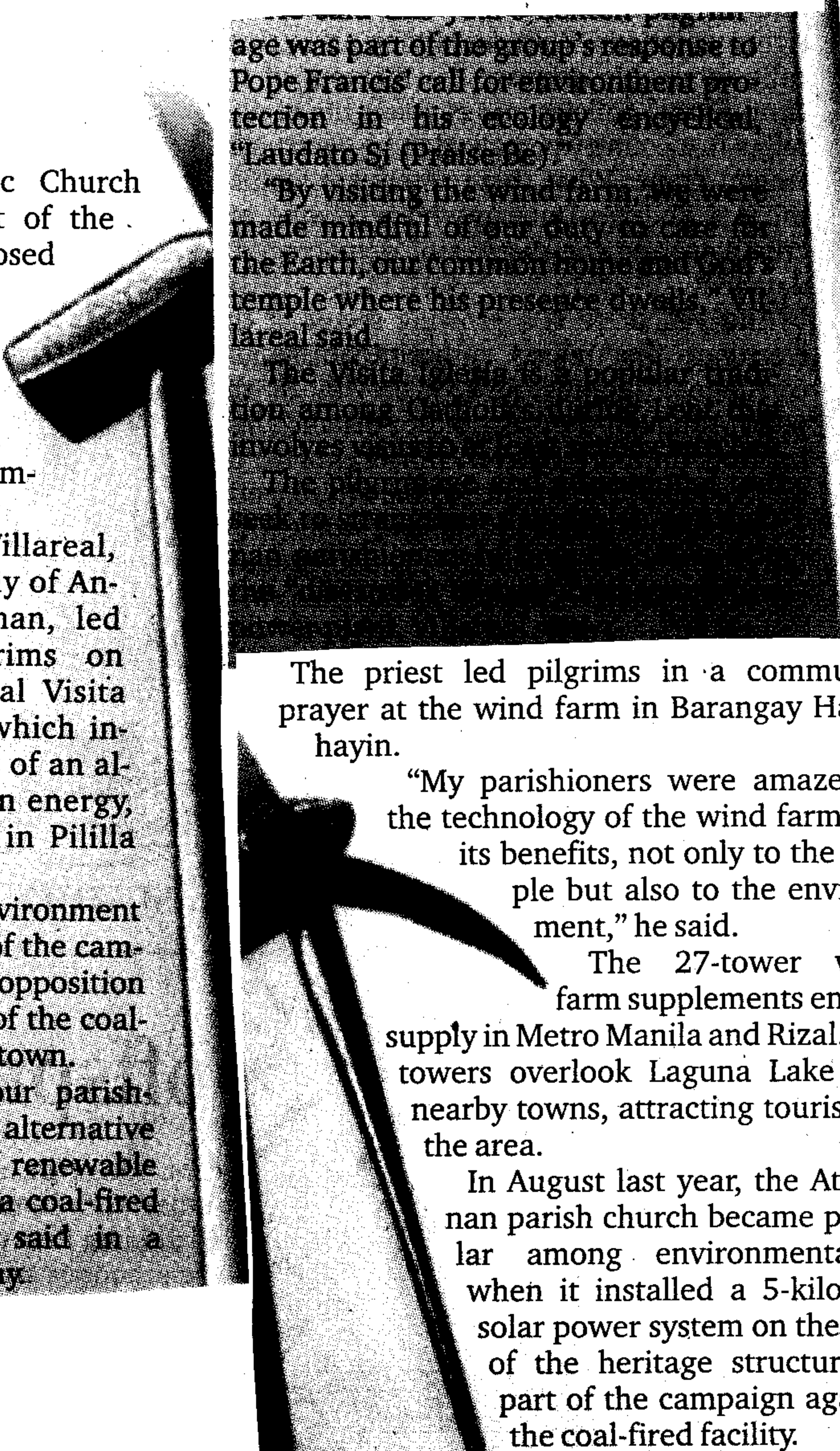
By Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
Inquirer Southern Luzon

LUCENA CITY—Catholic Church leaders at the forefront of the fight to stop the proposed 1,200-megawatt coal-fired power plant in Atimonan town, Quezon province, continued their campaign through a Lenten pilgrimage.

Msgr. Emmanuel Villareal, parish priest of Our Lady of Angels Church in Atimonan, led more than 500 pilgrims on March 11 in the annual Visita Iglesia (church visit), which included a tour to the site of an alternative source of clean energy, the 54-MW wind farm in Pililla town in Rizal province.

Villareal said the environment education tour was part of the campaign to help strengthen opposition against the construction of the coal-fired power plant in their town.

"We want to show our parishioners that there is an alternative source of abundant and renewable clean energy aside from a coal-fired power plant," Villareal said in a phone interview on Sunday.

age was part of the group's response to Pope Francis' call for environment protection in his ecology encyclical "Laudato Si' (Praise Be)." 

"By visiting the wind farm, we were made mindful of our duty as caretakers for the Earth, our common home and God's temple where his presence dwells," Villareal said.

The Visita Iglesia is a popular tradition among Catholics during Lent. It involves visiting seven churches in a town.

The pilgrimage was part of the campaign to help strengthen opposition against the construction of the coal-fired power plant in their town.

The priest led pilgrims in a community prayer at the wind farm in Barangay Halayhayin.

"My parishioners were amazed at the technology of the wind farm and its benefits, not only to the people but also to the environment," he said.

The 27-tower wind farm supplements energy supply in Metro Manila and Rizal. The towers overlook Laguna Lake and nearby towns, attracting tourists to the area.

In August last year, the Atimonan parish church became popular among environmentalists when it installed a 5-kilowatt solar power system on the roof of the heritage structure as part of the campaign against the coal-fired facility.

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Fight vs coal plant

The diocese of Lucena and environmentalist groups are spearheading the "No to Coal" campaign against the proposed coal-fired power plant by Meralco Power-Gen Corp. (MGen) on an 80-hectare land in Barangay Villa Ibaba.

The Atimonan government approved the project and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources is conducting an environmental compliance



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Indigo trade getting rid of the blues

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By Tina Arceo-Dumlao

THE UNASSUMING plant that grows wild in farms all over the country does not look like much, but there was a time when the *indigofera tinctoria* was among the most prized in the world.

Indeed, indigo—a dye derived from fermenting the leaves—was one of the Philippines' first major export products, carried on galleons for sale to Europeans who desired the wide range of blue tones to naturally color their fabrics.

Indigo, one of the colors of the rainbow, in between blue and violet, was preferred not just for its color, but also its excellent resistance to fading or running.

The emergence of cheaper and more readily available synthetic dyes, unfortunately, practically killed the indigo trade in the Philippines, with the tradition kept alive mainly in indigenous communities that continue to use the natural dye for their weaves.

The indigo trade, however, is showing signs of new life, thanks to the efforts of the Non-Timber Forest Products Exchange Program Philippines, which started working on the Indigo Project as part of efforts to promote the use of non-timber forest products—such as indigo—to give alternative livelihood to forest dwellers such as indigenous peoples while protecting the little that remains of the country's forests.

The Indigo Project works with indigenous populations in upland and rural communities in the Philippines and Indonesia, including members of Mangyan Alangan, Mangyan Hanunoo and Mangyan Iraya of Mindoro; Higaonon of Bukidnon, Palaw'anon and Tagbanua of Palawan, T'boli of South Cotabato, Maguindanao weavers and those of Negros.



TRIBAL artisans and city-based designers put a modern touch to natural dye, fabric.

"We need to reduce pressure on the forest," NTFP EP executive director Ruth Canlas tells the INQUIRER.

One way to help reduce the demand for timber is to show the huge profit potential of indigo.

Canlas says these forest areas and their fringes usually have a lot of wild indigo, but the people do not see their value because they are like grass, not knowing that within lies a treasure, with powdered indigo selling for a minimum of P3,000 a kilo.

The processing of indigo involves soaking the indigo leaves in water for 48 hours. To "awaken" the dye, lye is added. Sediments that settle at the bottom of the container become indigo cake, which when dried becomes indigo powder. It is a simple process that has remained practi-

cally unchanged since the days of the galleon trade and does not require a lot of capital.

The yield is 10 percent, meaning for every kilo of leaves, a farmer can get 100 grams of indigo powder. The technology best-suited for indigo powder production and indigo dye application on abaca, cotton and piña was provided by the Philippine Textile Research Institute, an attached agency of the Department of Science and Technology.

Funding came from the European Union and Dutch organization Hivos, partners of NTFP-EP Philippines in the Sustainable Consumption and Production of Handwoven Textile Project where indigo is also a part of.

Canlas says that what is good about indigo is that it can be planted all over the

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country and even aids in boosting the fertility of the soil because it is an excellent nitrogen fixing agent. But it does prefer warm and dry areas such as Abra, where the indigenous Tingguian communities have long used it in their traditional weaves.

To help boost production, Globe Telecom lent its support to NTFP-EP with the construction of natural indigo dye powdering facilities, with the first ones set up in Occidental Mindoro, Oriental Mindoro, Zamboanga, Palawan and Aklan.

The indigo is sold mainly to the CustomMade Crafts Center, which aims to produce world-class materials made of natural dye and fiber that can in turn be promoted not only locally but to the international market as well. It does this in part by bringing together tribal artisans with

city-bred designers to make culture-bound crafts up to date, instead of being patronized only during formal occasions with a Filipiniana theme.

The timing is auspicious because of the growing demand for the natural blue color in the fashion world, which is turning toward fabric with cultural as well as aesthetic and environmental value.

Canlas says the group approached several companies and institutions, which all turned them down, before it found a committed partner in Globe Telecom, with which it forged a relationship starting 2012.

Fernando C. Esguerra Jr., director of Globe Corporate Social Responsibility, says the proposal came at the right time because Globe had just crafted a strategy where its corporate social responsibility must have a direct and profound impact on the communities it works with.

Esguerra says Globe is determined to help the so-called "bottom of the pyramid," thus was looking for institutions such as NTFP-EP.

In providing sustainable livelihood and financial services to underserved communities, Globe hopes to offer viable economic opportunities and open up new possibilities for prosperity.

Through its My Fair Share Program, Globe supports social enterprises with IT tools, capacity building support and market access. Through these resources and opportunities, they are able to not just sustain their businesses, but also scale them to heights that may not have been previously possible.

The partners hope that the collaboration under the Indigo Project will bring about a renaissance so that the Philippines can reclaim its previous position as a major exporter of the versatile and noble indigo.

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INDIGO TRADE
GETTING RID OF D/BLUES

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LGUs told climate change funds now P2B

DAVAO CITY—The government now has up to P2 billion in funds that communities suffering from El Niño could use to cope with the disastrous effects of the weather phenomenon associated with climate change, according to the head of a government agency that oversees projects to soften the impact of climate change.

Emmanuel de Guzman, head of the Climate Change Commission (CCC), said local governments should also start preparing “risk- and science-based” approaches in dealing with climate change and warned that bigger disasters as a result of climate change were yet to happen.

De Guzman also told the INQUIRER that local governments exposed to climate change risks could access the People’s Survival Fund (PSF), which has now grown to P2 billion since it was created in 2013. The PSF, De Guzman said, will receive an annual allocation of P1 billion as provided for by the Climate Change Act and its amending law, Republic Act No. 10174.

In a statement, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said

many Mindanao provinces were bearing the brunt of El Niño, with at least 17,000 hectares of rice and corn farms destroyed in the provinces of Maguindanao, North Cotabato and South Cotabato.

Central Mindanao, which includes the two Cotabato provinces, already suffered P639 million in crop losses, according to the DA.

Crop destruction in Southern Mindanao, the DA said, has already hit P358 million.

“Failure to prepare for and implement programs on climate

change adaptation and mitigation projects and disaster risk reduction and management programs may lead to more devastating disasters in the country,” De Guzman said.

In a bid for stronger cooperation among communities at risk, the CCC rolled out the Communities for Resilience (Core) project to be implemented in 18 major river basins in the country.

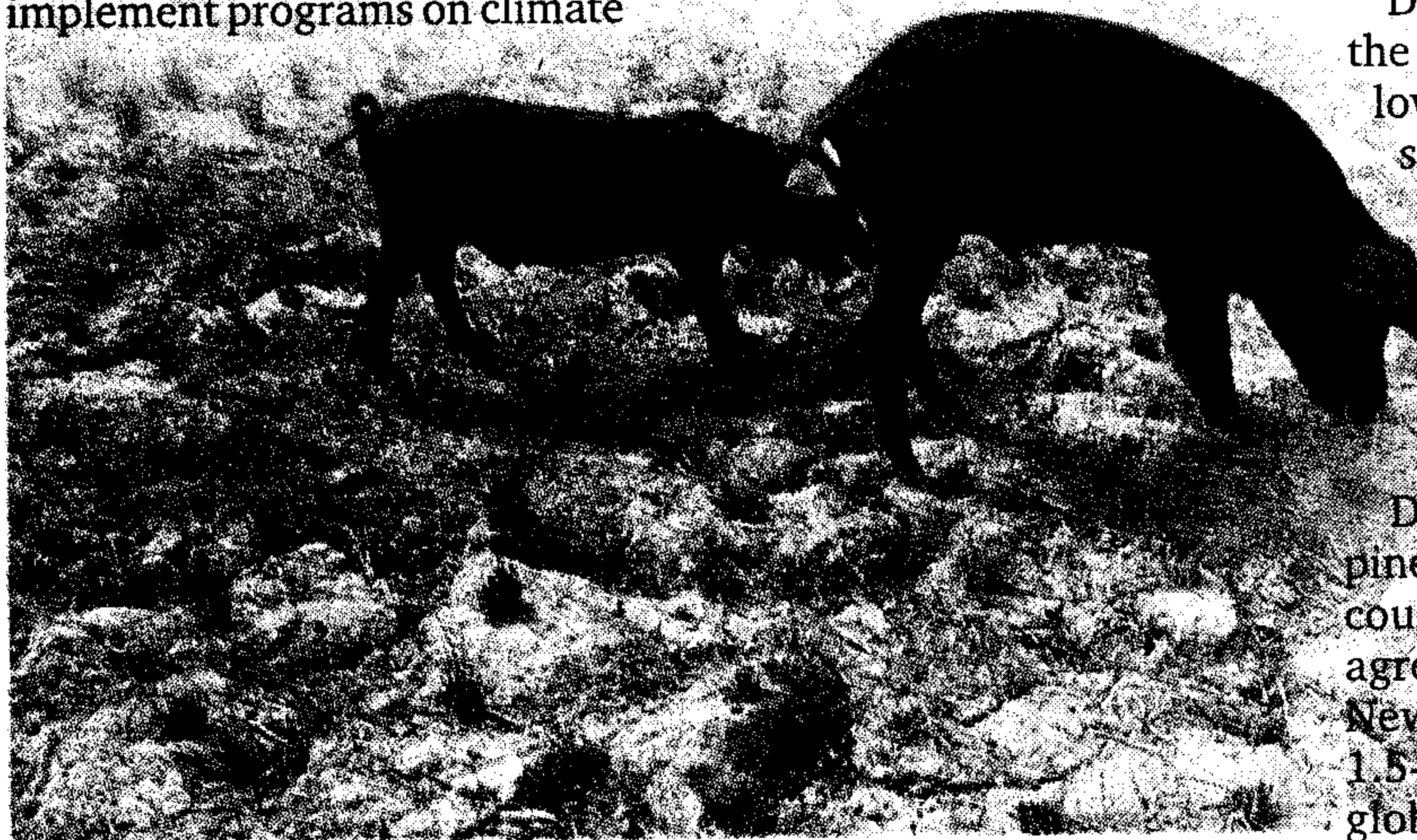
These are the Mindanao River, Tagum-Libuganon, Davao,

Buayan-Malungon, Tagoloan, Cagayan de Oro, Agusan and Ranao (Agus) river basins in Mindanao; Ilog-Hilabangan, Panay and Jalaur river basins in the Visayas; and Pasig-Laguna, Pampanga, Agno, Abra, Cagayan, Bicol and Apayao-Abulug river basins in Luzon.

The CCC, in cooperation with the United States Agency for International Development, launched the Core project here to press the Mindanao local governments to start working together for climate resiliency.

De Guzman said that though the Philippines had one of the lowest greenhouse gas emissions globally, it was leading other countries worldwide in efforts to institute climate change policies because “we are the first victims of climate disasters.”

De Guzman said the Philippines would be one of the first countries to sign the Paris agreement in April 2016 in New York that would push for a 1.5-degree-Celsius cap on global warming. *Ma. Cecilia Rodriguez, Inquirer Mindanao*



PIGS roam a rice farm destroyed by the dry spell in North Upi town, Maguindanao province.

JEFFREY MAITEM/INQUIRER MINDANAO

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Manila among high-risk centers

THE City of Manila placed second among the cities in 197 countries that face the highest exposure to adverse impact of climate change, a study of a United Kingdom-based risk consultancy group showed.

Based on the Climate Change Vulnerability Index 2013 posted by Verisk Maplecroft, Manila followed the City of Dhaka in Bangladesh that topped the list of high-risk cities in face of earthquakes, fires and typhoons.

Maplecroft combined the research data on risks posed by tropical storms and cyclones, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, severe storms, extra-tropical cyclones, wild-fires, storm surges, volcanic eruptions and landslides in more than 1,300 cities.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change also cited Manila as well as more than 100 other localities in high-risk tropical and subtropical regions that are most vulnerable and can expect to be battered by tidal surges, stronger typhoons and storms, and hit by deeper droughts.

The Philippine Office of Washington's Climate Institute, on the other hand, stated that climate change would bring ill-health and water rationing to cities such as Manila and Cebu, along with rise in intestinal and mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue fever, Japanese encephalitis and chikungunya fever, as well as other ailments.

These alarming information were presented by Maria Isabel Lanada of the Center for Social Concern and Action of the De La Salle University, who was tapped by the city government of Manila for the disaster preparedness trainings.

Joel Zurbano



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EDITORIAL

A warning on climate change

As icecaps melt and sea levels rise, at least 13.6 million Filipinos in coastal communities may be forced to relocate to higher ground. This is the assessment of Al Gore, who has become a full-fledged environmental activist since ending his term as US vice president.

Gore shone the international spotlight on climate change, brushing aside criticism that his warnings were based on flawed science. His documentary on the problem, "An Inconvenient Truth," earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007. Visiting Manila for the 31st Climate Change Reality Leadership Corps Training, Gore has called for greater action to deal with climate change, including a curb on the use of coal for power generation.

Several advanced economies have been locked in a debate with developing countries on this issue. Coal remains a cheap power source, and advanced economies depended on it as they industrialized. Developing countries, on the other hand, want the affluent ones to do their part in confronting climate change by curbing their gas consumption. Green energy can be expensive. Develop-

ing countries want the same freedom to select their energy mix, which the rich nations exercised on their way to prosperity.

Dealing with environmental problems has always been complicated, with many well meaning actions having unintended negative consequences. In several countries, biofuel production has destroyed the natural habitats of certain species. In the Philippines, the ban on plastic containers has led to greater consumption of paper substitutes, often used in double layers, and paper comes from trees. Industries that use pipes and other materials made from recycled plastic have seen costs rise as recyclable items become scarce.

Despite the complex issues involved, the world has no choice but to confront global warming. The Philippines, which is among the nations most vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters, needs a more aggressive approach to deal with the problem. There are many ways that undoubtedly reduce carbon footprint. Each nation and each individual can contribute to the effort.



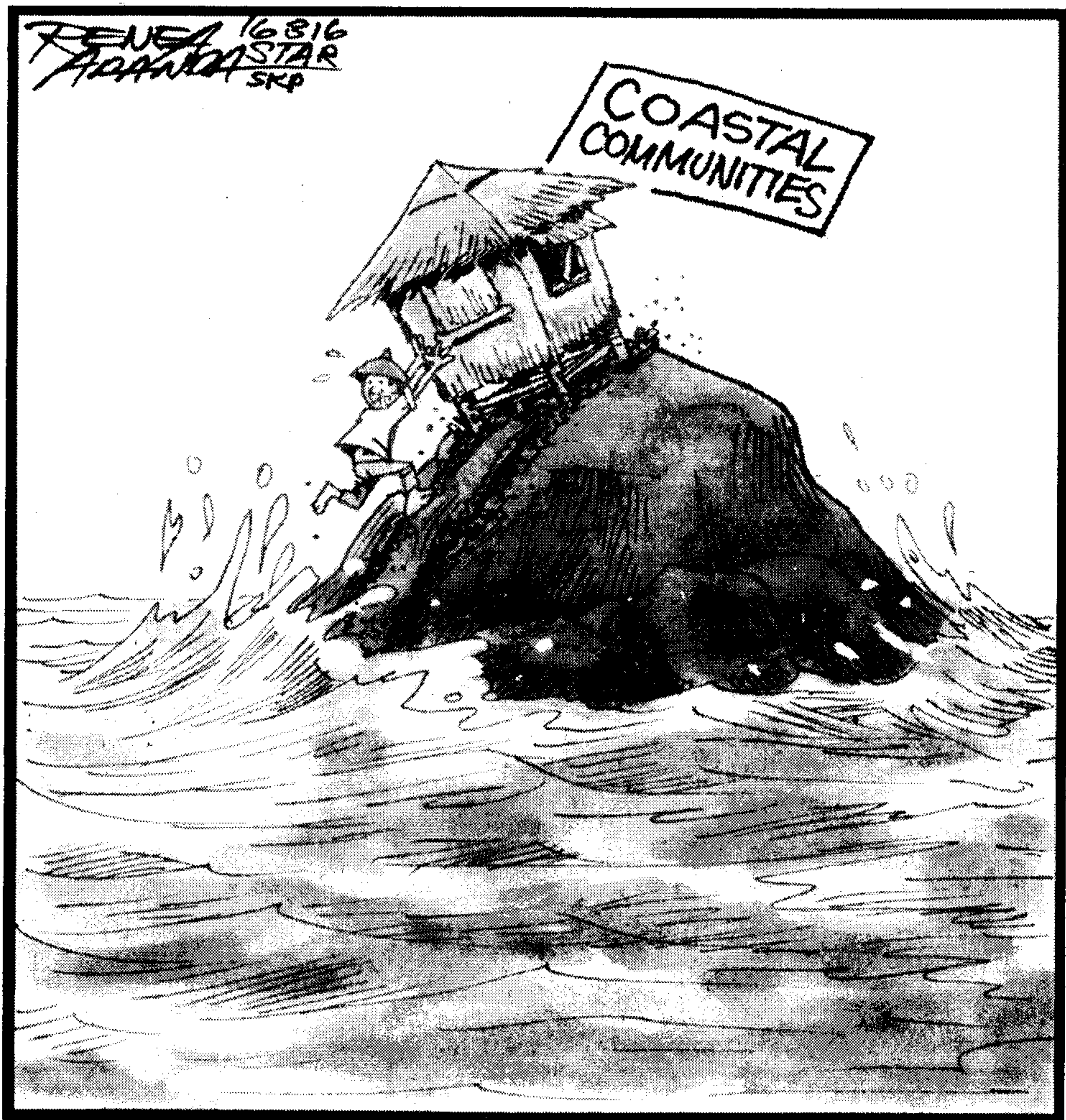
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Gore warns of biblical results of climate change

BY PAUL M. ICAMINA

FROM space, the sky is not what it appears to be: not wide open but a very thin, fragile atmosphere.

And yet, says Al Gore, "it's the world's open sewer. If you have gaseous waste, fill up the atmosphere all you want."

And that's the problem: it's a man-made pollution that's thickening the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere which, in turn, drives global warming big time.

Former US Vice President Al Gore is in Manila talking about what he knows best and received the Nobel Prize for: his activist stance against climate change.

Burning fossil fuels is the main



GORE

cause of climate change, although it's part of it. Agriculture is also to blame, ditto for burning forests and crops, fertilizers, landfills, industries, coal plants and coal mining and so on. "All are part of the problem."

The consequences are not in the foreseeable future, it's here and now:

14 of the 15 hottest years on record have occurred since 2000; the hottest year ever measured was in 2015; February 2016 was the 372nd consecutive month with a global temperature above the 20th century average. "A lot of people in this room have

GORE

all felt years that have been hotter than the average," Gore told 700 participants in the Climate Reality Project which he founded and chairs. It has over 9,000 members in 135 countries who in 2015 alone made nearly 2,400 presentations and over 6,500 individual actions related to climate change.

Gore related the "startling" heat index which occurred in Bandar Mahshahr, Iran, that reached 74 degrees Celsius on July 31, 2015. What it means, he said, is that under these conditions, even the healthiest man or woman could not survive for more than a few hours outside because the human body cannot produce enough evaporation from sweat to cool itself. "It's deadly for human life. We are experiencing extremes that should set off alarm bells."

A lot of the extra heat from global warming - 93 percent of it - goes into the ocean. By 2100, the surface waters of the ocean could be nearly 150 percent more acidic, he said, "reaching levels not seen in 20 million years, on a scale beyond our imagination."

Warmer oceans spawn super typhoons like

Yolanda. Before making landfall in the Philippines, its path crossed areas of the Pacific where the ocean temperature was 3 degrees C warmer than normal. Through convection, the warm top layer of the ocean fed the storm with increasing energy and extra moisture from evaporation. "And became the strongest ever typhoon to make landfall," Gore said.

He talked of "rivers" in the atmosphere where warmer air holds more moisture coming from more evaporation driven by global warming. "With more evaporation, wind storm conditions are created, so we get more intense downpours," he said, pointing to record breaking precipitations, like that of Typhoon Ondoy in the Philippines.

In September in 2009, Typhoon Ondoy (International Codename: Ketsana) dumped over a month's worth of rain in just nine hours, bringing extreme flooding to Metro Manila and nearby provinces.

It doesn't get any better on the ground. In the battle with microbes, the balance of power has shifted because climate change has tipped it in favor of infectious diseases, Gore said. It's changing the areas where microbial diseases have become endemic,

expanding range of mosquitoes and ticks and other disease carriers.

In response to the Zika virus, health authorities in South America have advised women not to get pregnant for two years. "It's something new, I've never heard a warning like that before," Gore said, citing Professor Hugh Montgomery saying that "climate change is a medical emergency."

Montgomery, Director of the Institute for Human Health and Performance at the University College London, made the first discovery of a gene related to fitness.

On December 29, 2015, Gore narrated, raising his voice, snow in the North Pole melted in the middle of the winter night. "I'm sorry to raise my voice," he apologized, but the magnitude of changes brought by global warming "is biblical," he said, hinting of Armageddon.

This generation, he said, is responsible for changing things for the better. "It's a simple choice between what is right and what is wrong, and the outcome is assured because of what we are. That's why it's a people's movement because the will to act is itself a renewable resource."

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STAR Introspective

By TONY KATIGBAK

The worsening climate problem

I have written about our deteriorating planet in the past and will continue to do so because the problem is real and it's just getting worse. Just because we don't think about it or talk about it doesn't make it less real. In fact, we're just kidding ourselves if we think we can do nothing and the problem will go away. It's this ignorance and indifference that brought us to where we are in the first place and if we continue on this way, this indifference is what will spell our doom.

As far back as when my daughter was a little girl, people were already talking about the effect we were having on our planet. Back then, in the late 1980s the fear was already there in terms of the longevity of our natural resources and the sustainability of our planet, but the threat was abstract and obscure. It was like talking about running out of snacks from a giant bowl that was still full. We knew that we might run out eventually, but we knew that it would still be a long time before that day arrived.

Well, that day is here. As we continue to grab snacks from the bowl we can already see the bottom and we know that it's only a matter of time before there is nothing left. And the worse part is that we could have prevented this situation if we had just taken action sooner. Instead we chose to ignore the signs and just continue on our way and now we find ourselves in a position of having to be reactionary when we could have practiced prevention instead. Still, while it's a pity we had to get to this point, it's not too late and we should focus now on making a change while we still can.

In line with this, former United States Vice President Al Gore was in the Philippines for a three-day leadership corps training by the Climate Reality Project, of which he is the founder. Climate warriors from all over Asia (roughly 700) gathered in the country for the training and to learn more about solid steps we can all take



to reduce our carbon footprint and begin to make a real difference in our world.

Personally, I don't think the news of this training and this environmental summit is getting as much traction as it deserves. We are instead focusing so much on the candidates and the election and the whole circus that comes with it. While I understand that this is also important, it seems like looking at the small picture when the big picture is crumbling right before us.

According to the Long-Term Climate Risk Index of the thinktank Germanwatch, the Philippines ranks fifth as the most affected country in terms of weather events from 1994 to 2013 with roughly 1.13 deaths per 100,000 people as well as losses to the GDP in the same period. The country experienced the most number of extreme weather events with a total of at least 328. Looking at it that way it's almost cold and sanitized. To see the suffering of so many reduced to statistics makes me feel exceptionally sad. While other countries around the world see only the numbers, we in the Philippines have lived them.

After all, who can forget the devastation of the extreme weather events that have ravaged the country in the past? From Milenyo to Ondoy to the most recent Super Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan). We have had our share of horror from Mother Nature and it's only just a preview of how bad things can become. Even those who are suspicious and dubious of climate change can't deny that things have steadily become worse in the last five years alone. The world is getting hotter and the natural calamities are getting worse. We have just been lucky that since Yolanda we have not yet had to endure another storm of similar magnitude. But, that's not to say it won't happen again. After all, after Yolanda hit, researchers have claimed that if we don't change, it's only a matter of time before storms like Yolanda are the norm.

We have definitely come to the point where we can no longer ignore the effects climate change is having on our



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The worsening climate problem

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planet. Last weekend, Gore went to Tacloban as part of his new documentary on climate change. Along with Senator Loren Legarda and Tacloban Mayor Alfred Romualdez, Gore went to the different recovering barangays and visited with several families who were displaced when the super typhoon hit. He also went to the cemetery where thousands were buried in a mass burial site.

I honestly don't know what else will motivate us to act. We have all seen, with our own eyes, the horrors climate change can unleash and yet we're still dragging our feet. Globally, countries have made the commitment to trying to limit global warming to just two degrees Celsius. This is an important decision that can help make a difference in the world if we can achieve it. But in order to do that, we all have to help reach our goals.

Here in the Philippines it really has become time to focus on renewable energy. That is how we can do our part. We need to stop relying on carbon based fuels for the majority of our energy and focus on renewable energy sources like solar and wind. So much of it is available to us – solar energy in particular – it seems a waste not to harness this energy source and continue using dirty carbon based fuels. With alternatives at our disposal there is no excuse for us not to be using clean energy. Granted it will take a big investment on our part to get the infrastructure into place, but the investment will be worth it in the long run.

At the end of the day, I think we need to recognize that we only have one world. We need to do our part in taking care of it. If we do, it will take care of us. If we don't... well, we've seen what can happen. As we head into the elections it's important for us to take a closer look at the environmental platforms of the possible candidates. We need to choose a leader who we know will be a good steward not just of the Philippines, but of the world too.

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‘Climate change must be an election issue’

By ALEXIS ROMERO

Climate change is an election issue and the next president should help address climate change and provide leadership that would enable the country to support efforts to limit global warming, an official of an environment advocacy group said.

Mario Molina, director of The Climate Reality Project Leadership Corps, said political will and knowledge are needed to come up with policies on climate change, which he believes is the most important issue confronting the country.

“Listen to the people and take action on climate as soon as you get in,” Molina said in an interview last Monday when asked for his message to the next president.

“If the intention to address climate change is there, if there is enough leadership in this country, if the Philippine leadership has understanding and knowledge

of the issue, then the policies can follow. What is needed is the political will to make those decisions and to make those choices,” he added.

Molina said his group is not in the position to recommend specific policies to the Philippine government, but he believes that climate change and disaster resilience are election issues.

“The Philippines is the most vulnerable country in the world to climate change, so to not address it as an election issue would be a big mistake,” he added.

Molina also noted that the direction that the Philippine leadership takes on climate would be very important, as this would determine if the country would be able to meet its intended nationally determined contribution (INDC).

— With Helen Flores

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Planet not winning battle against climate change

SYDNEY (PNA/Xinhua) – Australia's chief scientist has warned the planet is losing the battle against climate change after February set a "completely unprecedented" record for the hottest month since global records began.

Australia's chief scientist Alan Finkel told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC's) Q&A program late Monday that it was probably too early to suggest there was a climate emergency, but "there is genuine reason for concern."

Earlier Monday a NASA climate report revealed temperatures were the warmest in more than a cen-

tury of record keeping, while the levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide have risen to unprecedented levels following the largest annual increase in 50-years of record keeping last year.

"For all the effort we are putting into trying to avoid increases of emission, we are losing," Finkel told the audience.

"What we are doing with solar, wind, changing practices, behavioral practices and things like that, we're not winning the battle."

The absolute hottest month in the world was July 2015, however July and August tend to be four degrees Celsius hotter than January and February due to the Northern Hemisphere's large land mass cooling the planet during the northern winter.

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Earth Hour rekindles SM's climate change advocacy

ALL 56 SM malls around the country, plus seven in China, will be turning their lights off at exactly 8:30 PM on March 19 in observation of Earth Hour. This is the 8th year that SM has supported the world's largest public campaign for the environment. The Philippines was one of the top 10 countries with the highest number of participants in 2015.

This year's theme, "Shine a Light on Climate Action", reiterates Earth Hour's goals of not only getting public support for climate change mitigation and adaptation but also getting individuals and groups to do their share beyond the one-hour symbolic switching off of lights.

"We invite the public to visit the nearest SM mall in their respective areas on March 19 and be part of this global movement," said Liza Silerio, Director of SM Cares Program on Environment and Sustainability. "We want to help in spreading the effects of climate change and creating awareness on what we can do to help our planet. We hope that through our different programs, we can convince more people to stand against climate change, and commit to do something in every way we can."

Supporting Earth Hour is just one of SM Supermalls' strategies for environment conservation. "Risk planning against calamities has been part of SM's business strategies for decades. Natural disasters will happen, and we all have to be prepared not just for our business but also for the communities we serve" SM Prime Holdings President Hans T. Sy said.

For many years now, SM has been taking sustainability initiatives that include water recycling facilities, rainwater catchment tanks, and LED lighting systems. Regular Trash to Cash activities are also conducted wherein the public can exchange specified recyclable or reusable trash for cash. In 2014, SM North EDSA installed the country's first and biggest commercial solar rooftop at 1.5MW. Soon, more SM malls around the country will have solar panels on its rooftops.