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DENR

IN THE NEWS

The Manila Times

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Water for a better future



UN WATER

WORLD WATER DAY

22 MARCH 2016 - WATER AND JOBS

BY YAGGY USON,
SPECIAL FEATURE WRITER

EACH year, different organizations celebrate World Water Day to highlight water preservation and sustenance. The United Nations' theme for this year—"Water and Jobs," focuses on how these two interrelated factors can help improve the stability of planet Earth.

Mother Earth faces a great challenge from all the consequences of human wrongdoings—bringing out the need to preserve Mother Nature.

Good results will surely come from the cooperation of all stakeholders for this yearly campaign.

The World Water Organization wants a change—that people working for the safety of water be finally heard and respected.

Key to a better future

Jeric T. Sevilla Jr., Manila Water Company's officer-in-charge, told The Manila Times that the main goal for celebrating the World Water Day is to emphasize the importance of preserving water for everyone.

"We celebrate World Water Day annually to continuously instill awareness

and appreciation in the general public the importance of water as a precious resource and the need for effective used water management—something that the public has taken for granted," Sevilla said.

Also, being part of the economy's growth, Sevilla stressed the importance of

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Water for a better future

water in the nation's stability not only for today's generation but also for the future.

"Water resources are heavily impacted with these challenges," Sevilla said. "It is important that we ensure the sustainability and security of our water supply for this generation and the next."

He lamented that people nowadays fail to give importance to taking care of nature, which has a huge impact on the environment.

"It is imperative that we protect our water resources, especially during these times, when we face great environmental challenges as a result of climate change," he said.

Sevilla said even the little things people do to save water matters a lot.

"Water is a vital engine that fuels the economy and growth of a nation," he said. "Residences, commercial and industrial establishments require the use of water in their operations, whether directly or indirectly. Everyone needs to do his share in

protecting our water resources through the wise and responsible use of water. Every drop of water saved, every leak repaired means more water inside our homes and more water which we can bring to areas that remain unserved."

Sevilla said the extensive help of stakeholders—the organizations or groups involved in water conservation—goes a long, long way.

"The water industry needs a lot of professionals in the operations and management, distribution, and rehabilitation of water infrastructure," he said. "It is therefore important that this resource be protected. The provision of water and used water services in a locality has a domino impact on the lives of people within the community, as it brings forth both home industries and commerce that generate employment for many."

Little steps count

The UN-Water estimated that almost half of the world's workers are in the

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Water for a better future

water industry and other related jobs.

Manila Water has taken a few steps to provide more job opportunities for Filipinos and at the same time create a stronger bond within the water industry. One of these is local employment.

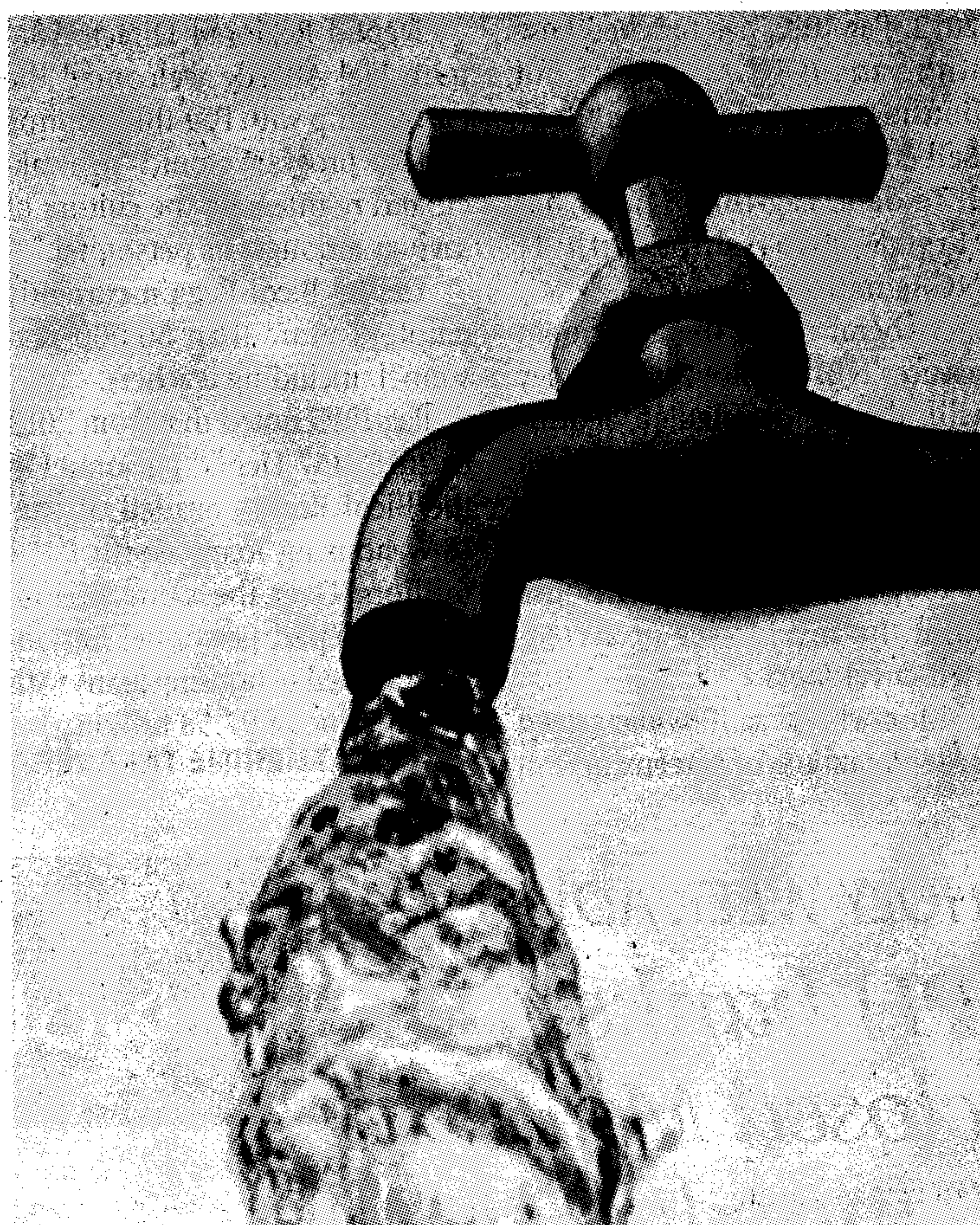
"Manila Water offers employment opportunities by way of our Cadetship Training Program for fresh graduates and Management Development Program from various disciplines," Sevilla said. "Our Vendor Management Program provides opportunities for service providers, contractors, and suppliers for them to be essential parts of the Manila Water supply chain, particularly in the construction of both water and used water infrastructure. Manila Water's Kabuhayan Para Sa Barangay employs cooperatives in the fabrication and manufacture of materials, such as short pipes, board-ups, and meter set assemblies, which are commonly used in the water industry."

The Manila Water OIC said this shows how every

decent job in the water industry helps in the promotion of full sustainability and growth of the nation.

"Our Watershed Man-

guardians and stewards of our forests and watershed areas and provides opportunities for socio-civic groups to partner



agement Program harnesses the skills of indigenous communities to be

with us in advocating environmental protection," Sevilla concluded.

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Use water efficiently, public urged

AMID a strong El Nino phenomenon, Environment Secretary Ramon Paje called on the public to be more climate-conscious and use water efficiently during Holy Week and the rest of the summer season.

Paje said the public should be reminded that the prevailing heat nowadays means longer and hotter dry months, which will be aggravated by the El Nino if we do not take concrete personal steps to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration has formally declared the start of summer.

"Let us also not forget that while we are enjoying the scenery and the time with our loved ones, there are those who are losing a lot of their livelihood because of the heat and dry spell," Paje said.

According to the Department of Agriculture, it is always the farmers who bear the brunt of drying effects of El Niño, with agricultural losses have reached more than P5 billion, covering over 200,000 hectares of farmland.

The country's water supplies are also under close watch as reservoirs begin to dry up and rivers carrying less water.

Joel dela Torre

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Region pushes for stronger water management policies

By TARA YAP

ILOILO CITY – Local governments and the private sector in Western Visayas region must have stronger water and wastewater management policies.

This was the call made by Atty. Jonathan Bulos, Regional Director of the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in Western Visayas (DENR-6), for this year's World Water Day celebration.

First and foremost, the EMB-DENR is pushing for realization of a suggestion made by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for the forming of stricter water management policies by local government units (LGUs).

Former DENR Secretary Elisea Gozun, who also serves as team leader of

USAID's Be Secure Climate Resiliency Team, discussed the matter during the recent "Water Audits: A Tool Towards Water Efficiency" training for the city and province of Iloilo conducted by the USAID's Water Security for Resilient Economic Growth and Stability Project (Be Secure Project).

Gozun noted that LGUs must look at undertaking long-term shifts in policies. She pointed out that many LGUs only address impending water shortages for the summer season, which is predicted to be worsened this year by the El Niño climate phenomenon.

One of the key policy changes being suggested by the USAID is obliging residential developers, schools, government buildings, shopping malls, hospitals, and other establishments to establish rainwater catchment facilities.

For its part, EMB-6 is reminding

LGUs and the private sector that among the general conditions of issuance or renewal of the Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) is the installation of cisterns, which is a type of artificial reservoir.

Bulos also said that planting trees must be continued as this activity helps replenish groundwater. The Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB), another attached agency of DENR-6, earlier warned that too much extraction of groundwater from coastal areas can deplete fresh water sources as salt water may seep through the ground.

For wastewater management, EMB-6 is strongly reminding LGUs and the private sector to reuse wastewater, especially for flushing toilets.

According to Bulos, establishments that recycle wastewater will pay less for the issuance of their Discharge Permit from EMB-6.

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MGB sets deadline for ISO 14001 compliance

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

AN official of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) on Monday reminded mining companies the mandatory requirement to secure International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 14001 certification for their operations.

Director Leo Jasareno of the DENR's Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) said the requirement is mandated under DENR Administrative Order (DAO) 2015-07 signed by Environment Secretary Ramon J.P. Paje early last year upon the recommendation of the MGB and the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB).

"The deadline is for mining contractors to comply by April this year," Jasareno told the BUSINESSMIRROR in an interview.

He was reacting to a policy pronouncement made by Zambales Gov. Hermogenes Ebdane Jr. requiring all mining companies operating in the province to conform with ISO 14001 and OHSAS 18001.

"We are already requiring mining companies to secure ISO certification. In fact, the DENR and the MGB have also secured ISO 14001 certification," Jasareno said.

ISO 14001 sets out the criteria for an Environmental Management System (EMS). It maps out a framework, which a company or organization can follow to minimize how their operations negatively affect the environment; comply with applicable laws, regulations and other environment-oriented requirements; and continually improve in the above.

As for OHSAS 18001, or the Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems-Requirements, Jasareno said that as long as an order has legal basis, mining companies should comply. Jasareno is confident mining companies oper-

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A broader look at today's business

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MGB sets deadline for ISO
14001 compliance

ating in Zambales will abide by the new requirement.

OHSAS 18001 is an internationally applied British Standard for occupational health and safety-management systems. It provides a framework that helps to identify and control health and safety risks; reduce the potential for accidents; aid legal compliance; and improve overall performance.

Ebdane made the policy pronouncement, after residents of Candelaria and Santa Cruz, Zambales, renewed the call to stop large-scale mining operation in their area, believing that their irresponsible mining practice of nickel mines is to blame for the massive flooding and the contamination of water bodies, including coastal areas, that severely affect the people.

The DENR had earlier suspended all nickel mines operating in the province for violation of environmental and mining laws. Three of the mining companies were allowed to resume operation last year. These are the Benguet Corp. Nickel Mines, Inc. (BNMI), Zambales Diversified Metals Corp. (ZDMC) And Lnl Archipelago Minerals Inc. (Lami). The operation of Eramen Minerals Inc. (EMI) remained suspended, Jasareno said.

The four companies were slapped with a suspension order in July 2014 due to "unsystematic mining or stripping method," which has affected water bodies in Santa Cruz, including the town's coastal waters. Several fishponds were also damaged by mudflow as a result of the mining operations.

The MGB eventually issued a temporary lifting order (TLO) that allowed the mining companies to resume operation under certain conditions, which include payment of fines for violation of mining and environmental laws, conduct of remediation measures to rehabilitate affected water bod-

ies, including fish ponds, and construction of a mine road.

According to Jasareno, DAO 2015-07 institutionalizes an environmental-management system that ensures the adherence of local mining operations to international standards, particularly the ISO 14001 certification, as a measure of responsible mining in the country.

As mandated under Executive Order (EO) 79, it will also guarantee the compliance of mining contractors with applicable mining and environmental laws, regulations and requirements in mining operations, while gearing toward growth.

Jasareno said the order covers all existing contracts that are in the

operating period; mineral agreement (MA) and financial or technical assistance agreement (FTAA) holders engaged in metallic-mining operations should secure the ISO 14001 certification by April this year, Jasareno said.

In the case of an MA or FTAA holder filing for a Declaration of Mining Project Feasibility for metallic mineral, the ISO 14001 certification should be secured within one year from receipt of the order approving the said DMPF.

DAO 2015-07 may cause the suspension of the company's environmental compliance certificate (ECC) and nonissuance of ore transport and or mineral export permit.



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Secure ISO certification, DENR urges mining firms

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources yesterday said mining companies and contractors have until the end of April to secure the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 14001 certification or they would not be issued an export permit.

The ISO certification shows that mining operations pass minimum standards set internationally and they have a good environmental management system.

Failure to secure or maintain ISO 14001 certification will lead to suspension of the environmental compliance certificate (ECC) and non-issuance of ore transport or mineral export permit until such time that the certification is secured.

Department Administrative Order 2015-07 "institutionalizes an environmental management system that ensures the adherence of local mining operations to interna-

tional standards."

It will "ensure that appropriate measures are put in place to achieve minimal negative impacts of mining on the environment."

The ISO certification also guarantees the compliance of mining contractors with applicable mining and environmental laws, regulations, and requirements in mining operations while gearing towards growth.

There are 44 metallic mine companies listed under the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) and only four have secured ISO certification namely Oceana Gold, Philex Mining Corp., SR Metals Inc. and Greenstone Resources Corp.

Apex Mining Co. has appealed to extend the deadline as it is still in the application process.

The DENR itself got the ISO certification last January while the MGB received one in 2008.

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Miners urged to secure ISO certification before April 30

By Janine C. Lim

LOCAL MINING companies' operations may be suspended if they fail to meet the April 30 deadline to secure an International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 14001 environmental management certification, the head of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) said on Monday.

"There will be no exemption unless the deadline is extended on meritorious ground to be evaluated by the MGB and EMB (Environmental Management Bureau), like when due to force majeure," Leo J. Jasareno, director of MGB, told reporters.

Last April 30, 2015, the Department of Environment and Natural

Resources issued Administrative Order (AO) No. 2015-07, requiring all metallic mining companies to secure an ISO 14001 environmental management certification within one year from the date of the order. The order covers all holders of valid and existing mineral agreement or financial or technical assistance agreement.

"The extractive nature of mining necessitates a greater degree of standards to ensure that any adverse impact on the environment is properly remediated in accordance to the norms of responsible mining... The requirement for mining contractors to undergo ISO certification will help achieve sustainable growth by the development of an effective environmental management system," the order read.

Mr. Jasareno said the Philippines is the lone country that mandates mining firms to be ISO-certified. In other countries, companies voluntarily apply for such certification.

Of the 40 mining companies, only Apex Mining Company has requested an extension through a letter sent to the MGB last January.

The MGB chief said most companies are currently undergoing the process of securing an ISO 14001 environmental management certification, which usually takes at least a year.

Under the AO, the MGB can suspend a mining company's environmental compliance certificate (ECC) and can withhold the issuance of ore transport and/or mineral export permit, if the miner fails to comply with or

maintain the ISO 14001 certification.

Michael Drake P. Matias, officer-in-charge/chief of the Environmental Impact Assessment and Management Division, said without an ECC, a company cannot conduct exploration activities.

Ore transport or mineral export permits, which are validated by the MGB, allow a firm to transport and export its mineral ores.

Three companies, namely SR Metals, Inc., OceanaGold (Philippines) Inc., and Philex Mining Corp., have already received ISO 14001 certification, prior to the issuance of the AO last year.

Mr. Jasareno said GreenStone Resources Corp. has also recently received its ISO 14001 certification.

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Gov't tightens 'green' control over mines

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) yesterday said that mining companies will not be allowed to transport and export ores if they will not be able to secure the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 14001 certification by April.

The ISO certifies that the mining company observes international standards of keeping environment safe while doing its business.

MGB director Leo Jasareno said the deadline for the ISO processing was mandated

under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources administrative order (DAO) 2015-07 was signed last May.

The AO cited that it "institutionalizes an environmental management system that ensures the adherence of local mining operations to international standards, particularly the ISO 14001 Certification, as a measure of responsible mining in the country.

It will ensure that appropriate measures are put in place to achieve minimal negative impacts of mining on the environment. As mandated under Executive Order No. 79, it will also guarantee the compliance of mining contractors with applicable mining and environmental laws, regulations, and requirements in mining operations while gearing towards growth."

"The requirement is ISO 14001, it is an EMS or environmental management system. It means that a certain system for environment passed international standard... What we want is for all 44 metallic mines (to be ISO certified)," Jasareno explained.

He said that in general, the ISO is becoming a basis of



Mining companies need to present their green certification before they will even be allowed to transport ores much more export them.

international companies to assure that a certain product or company is reliable, transparent, efficient and has a time service.

Currently, out of the 44 metallic mines in the country those who already secured an ISO certification are Ocean Gold, Philex Mining Corp., SR Metals Inc. and Greenstone Resources Corp.

Jasareno also said that it will be a record if all of the Philippines 44 metallic mines will be ISO certified.

MGB also said that processing for ISO certification usually lasts for more than a year which prompted some companies including Apex Mining Co. Inc. to ask for a possible extension of the period before the administrative order becomes effective.

"In the order, there was no extension. We received letter asking for extension but we want them to submit proof that they are already in the process of securing certification for us to evaluate if an extension is feasible," Jasareno added.

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MAY-ARI NG BARGE NA LUMUBOG SA PALAWAN SINUSPINDE

INATASAN ni Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) Director Leo Jasareno ang MGB Region 4-B na isyuhan ng suspension order ang kumpanyang LCT Mark Jason para hindi muna makapaglayag makaraang mabutas ang kanilang barge habang may dalang laterites ores sa Quezon, Palawan - kamakailan.

Ayon kay Jasareno, mananatili ang suspension order hanggang hindi nabibigyan

ng clearance ng mga kaukulang ahensiya ng gobyerno ang kumpanya para maayos na makapaglayag ang barge nito sa karagatan.

"Sinabihan ko na ang MGB Region 4-B na mag-isyu ng suspension order. Kailangang ma-establish muna ang seaworthiness ng barge bago alisin ang na-impose na kautusan," aniya.

Kasabay nito, sinabi ni Jasareno na patuloy ang imbestigasyon ng MGB Region 4-B, sa

pangunguna ni Regional Director Roland de Jesus, sa insidente at inaalam nila kung aksidente o may kapabayaan sa panig ng mga namamahala sa barge ang pagkabutas at paglubog nito sa karagatan ng Palawan.

Magugunitang nabutas ang barge na may pangalang LCT Mark Jason at may dalang 1,120 metriko toneladang laterites ore o raw nickel ore noong Huwebes ng umaga sa may karagatan ng Quezon, Palawan.

Ang ginawa ng mga

tauhan ng barge ay naglagay ng coconut logs at geo-textile para hindi na lumawak ang pagkalat ng mga lumutang na laterites ores at maiwasan ang posibleng pagtagas ng langis.

Idinagdag pa ni De Jesus na nagsagawa na rin ng water sampling ang Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) para alamin ang pinsala sa karagatan ng paglubog ng barge at paghahanda sa posibleng paglabag sa Clean Water Act.

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DEFINING THE NEWS

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Miners protest. Workers from four mining companies operating in Sta. Cruz town, Zambales hold a protest rally in front of the Environment Department's building in Quezon City to push for the reopening of Eramen Minerals Inc., Benguet Nickel Minerals Inc., Zambales Diversifield Metals Corp. and LNL Archipelago Minerals Inc. The miners said economic losses mounted and crime rate rose in Sta. Cruz, as 3,000 displaced workers and families failed to find decent jobs after the government suspended nickel mining operations in the area. See related story on B4.

LINO S.

DENR inaugurates P10-m air quality sensor

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT—A P10-million air sensor that measures real-time air quality was inaugurated here on Monday, providing a means to measure systematically the concentration of pollutants in ambient air and provide a scientific basis for measures to reduce air pollution and protect the community's health.

The Air Quality Monitoring Station was installed here as part of the Ambient Air Monitoring Network Project of the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources for the assessment of air quality in the entire Philippines.

"The world is changing, and we really have to be very vigilant about how climate change is going to affect us," said Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority chairman Roberto Garcia during the launch.

"We are very fortunate here in SBMA to have this facility, for as you know we are very strict as far as our environment is concerned," Garcia said, adding that "we really have to ensure excellent air quality in Subic, considering that we are the number one tourist destination in Central Luzon."

Funded by the DENR, the

AQMS is expected to be a big boost to the Freeport's environmental protection program as it could measure air pollution coming from motor vehicle emissions, as well as factories and construction sites in Subic.

"Once this is connected to the Internet, results of the air quality measurement will be sent to the DENR main office and the SBMA Ecology Center, and will be posted in *airquality-embdenr.gov.ph* site for its real-time measurement," said engineer Zaldy Pagador, Air Quality Management Division chief of the DENR. **PNA**

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**GLOBAL
TOURIST
MAGNET – A
group of
foreign and
local tourists
take snapshots
before entering
the world
renowned
Puerto Princesa
Subterranean
River in
Palawan where
thousands of
tourists are
expected to
flock during the
Holy Week and
the summer
season.
Palawan is
likewise known
for pristine
white sand
beaches, cliffs,
mountains,
virgin forests,
dive sites
and rich
biodiversity.
(Jerry J.
Alcayde)**



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PEF run by people with heads in clouds

MY LETTER ("Data show 'unfavorable score' for PEF 'releases,'" Opinion, 2/17/16) disproving Jayson Ibañez's arguments for the dispersal program of the Philippine Eagle Foundation (PEF) pointed out that we have been losing precious Philippine eagles bred or rehabilitated by the PEF—six so far—in pursuit of a program that has no leg to stand on. Needless to say, the unfortunate shooting and wounding on Feb. 21 of Matatag, one of the eagles Ibañez bragged was safe in the wilds, would not have also happened at all if not for the pea-brained program. Ibañez's silence after his vehement albeit logic-less rejoinder ("In captivity, eagle's potential killed," Opinion, 2/10/16) is an admission that the PEF's releasing of more eagles is in flagrant defiance of reason and common sense.

Ibañez and company are so fixated with the idea that the eagles should be where nature means them to be—even when present-day conditions militate against such option—such that they confuse realities with the wished-for situation and habitually put the cart before the horse. For example, in their appearance before the Senate after the shooting to death of

"Pamana" in August 2015, they informed the senators that eagles are being killed due to poor enforcement of wildlife laws. Yet, earlier they had made 10 eagle releases as if the situation that comes only after consistent and effective implementation of the laws were already in existence. (If these PEF people were scientists researching for a cure for a human disease, they would have no need of guinea pigs because they will test the experimental medicine on their kind.)

But they cannot afford to not wait until there is sufficient and solid evidence that people in the targeted release areas are ready for the birds. They freed eagles, as a result of which some people ended up treating the precious national symbols as though these were ordinary birds. Which ironically set back the PEF's own efforts to save the Philippine eagle from extinction.

It's high time that the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and concerned government authorities, and perhaps even former president Fidel Ramos under whose watch efforts to conserve the Philippine eagle started, stepped in. It does not serve best our national bird or its survival that giddy heads have full rein of the Philippine eagle conservation program, otherwise the eagles will just continue to incur needless casualties. The first agenda should be to make the present PEF leadership account for their harebrained and damaging dispersal program.

—ESTANISLAO C. ALBANO JR.,
casigayan@yahoo.com



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Albay, kabilang sa 20 bagong biosphere reserves ng UNESCO

Idinagdag ng cultural body ng United Nations ang lalawigan ng Albay sa listahan ng 20 bagong protected biosphere nature reserves, kasama ang tig-dalawang lugar sa Canada at Portugal.

Kilala bilang United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Eco Parks, iginawad ang status sa dalawang araw na pagpupulong sa Lima, na nagtapos nitong Sabado, itinaas ang kabuuang bilang ng biosphere reserves sa 669 sa 120 bansa.

Ang biosphere reserves ay mga lugar para sa pag-aaral sa sustainable development sa pangangalaga ng biodiversity at sustainable use ng mga likas na yaman.

Binanggit ng UNESCO ang

high conservation value ng Albay na may kapansin-pansing 182 terrestrial plant species, 12 species ng mangrove, 40 species ng seaweed o macro-algae, at 10 species ng sea grass. Lima sa 7 species ng marine turtles ng mundo ay matatagpuan rin sa Albay.

Kahilera na ngayon ng Albay ang dalawa pang biosphere reserves sa Pilipinas: Puerto Galera (idineklara noong 1977) at Palawan (idineklara noong 1990).

Sa Canada, idinagdag sa listahan ang Tsa Tse area sa Northwest Territories at ang Beaver Hills region ng Alberta.

Napili rin ang Isle of Man ng Britain at ang Isla Cozumel ng Mexico.

Sa Portugal, ang buong isla ng Sao Jorge, ang ikaapat na pinakamalaki sa Azores Archipelago, ay itinalagang reserve bukod sa Tajo River region sa pagitan ng Portugal at Spain.

Ang listahan ng bagong UNESCO biosphere reserves ay kinabibilangan din ng mga lugar sa Algeria, Ghana, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Kazakhstan, Madagascar, Morocco, Peru at Tanzania.

Sa daan-daang lokasyon sa listahan, 16 ay mga lugar na nasasakupan ng mahigit isang bansa. Ang Spain ang may pinakamalaking bilang ng registered reserves.

AFP/Jiji Press

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LGUs to get help with composting facilities

THE GOVERNMENT has allocated P100 million worth of composting facilities for biodegradable waste (CFBW) units to 172 qualified local government units (LGUs) to enhance the country's prospects for organic farming.

"We have been facing serious problems regarding proper management of waste disposal throughout the country," said Bureau of Soils and Water Management (BSWM) director Dr. Silvino Q. Tejada in a statement released by the agency yesterday.

Mr. Tejada cited a report from the National Solid Waste Management Commission (NSWMC) showing that 4,0087.46 tons of waste is generated nationwide per day.

There is a need to set up facilities near markets, trading centers and residential areas that will convert this waste into organic fertilizer/compost for use by farmers and other interested groups, according to Mr. Tejada.

In addition, the statement cited a study from the Food and Agriculture Organization which reported that composting can potentially divert up to 150 kilograms (kg) of food waste per household per year from local collection authorities.

Under the National Organic Agriculture Program (NOAP) implemented by the Agriculture department, the distribution of CFBW capacities LGUs in terms of sorting, collecting and composting their community waste and to lessen the dependence of farmers on commercial fertilizer.

The CFBW can process 1-2 tons of biodegradable collected wastes and can produce 500-kg organic fertilizer/compost in a span of two weeks.

Both CFBWs and Small Scale Composting Facilities (SSCFs) are the two composting facilities being distributed by the BSWM to promote organic agriculture.

The DA implements the NOAP in support to the Organic Agriculture Act of 2010 or Republic Act 10068 which develops and encourages the practice of organic agriculture

"... reaching our targeted increase of 5% of the hectareage devoted to organic farming out of the total agricultural land area is what we have to work for this year," Mr. Tejada added in the statement.

Last month, the BSWM completed delivery of 83 CFBWs worth P49 million nationwide. — **Janina C. Lim**

The Manila Times

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Utilizing geographical data in biodiversity conservation

BY VER ANTHONY ODEVILAS
HARIBON FOUNDATION
GIS SPECIALIST

GEOGRAPHY is crucial in the field of conservation science where most data is spatial and location-based. Thus, it is a discipline that asks what is where and why we should care.

"Where can we find the critically endangered Haring Ibon and what are we doing to protect it?"

"Where do fishers cast their nets and what specific species of fish do they catch?"

"Are there still native trees in the country's urban areas and are people aware of them?"

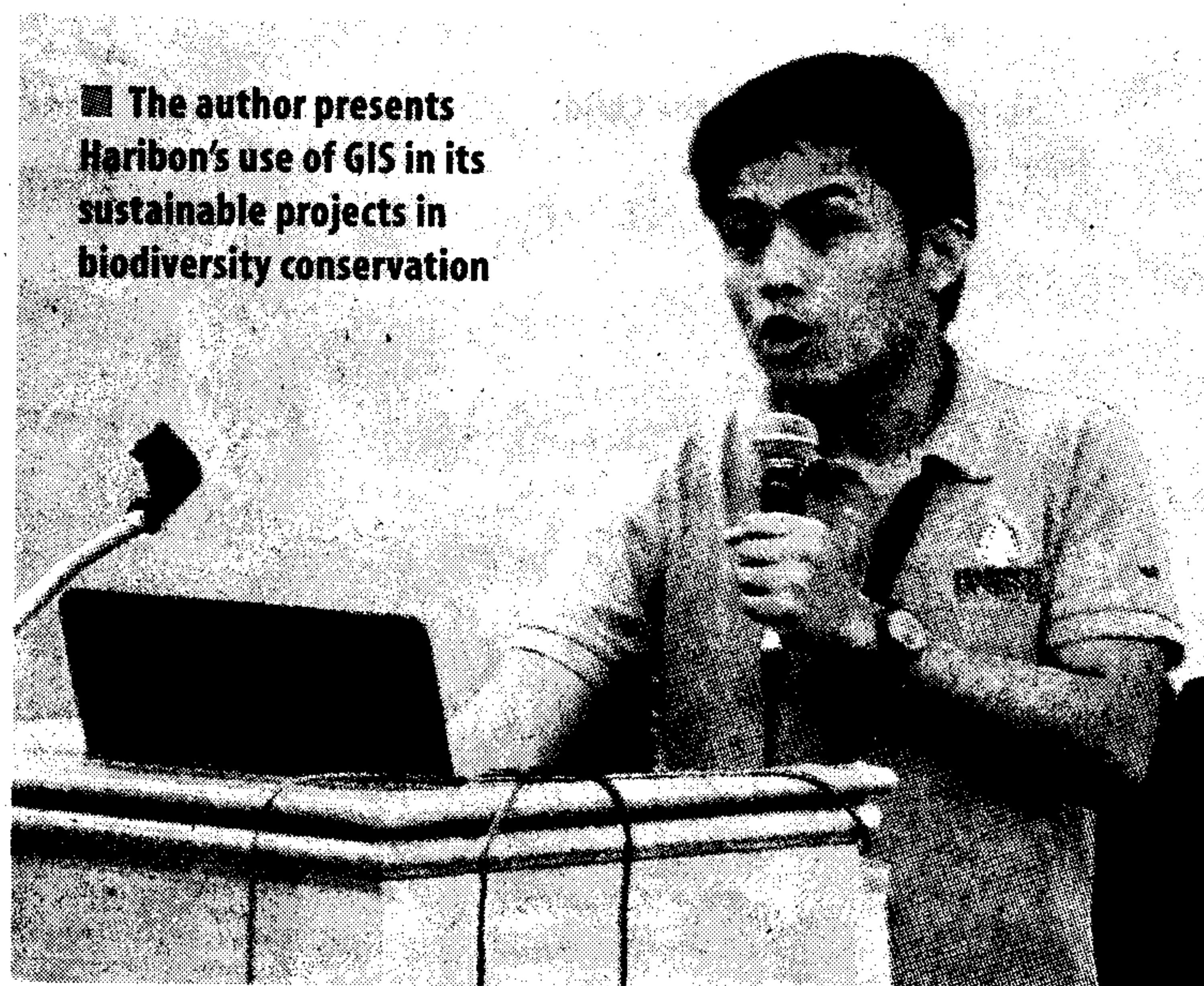
Through the Geographic Information Systems (GIS), these questions can be answered. Utilized by the Haribon Foundation, the system is an organized collection of hardware, software, personnel and methods used to acquire, analyze and display geographical data.

Recently, GIS practitioners from the government and private sectors gathered to share their stories at the 2016 Philippine ESRI User Conference organized by Geodata Philippines at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Ortigas, Pasig City. The author was given the opportunity to present how Haribon leverages GIS in Haribon's biodiversity conservation projects.

One example is the Road to 2020 Movement, Haribon's initiative to restore forests using native trees. Before going to fieldwork, we'll inspect satellite imagery of the vicinity to identify candidate restoration sites and then mark them on the map. This practice reduces the time our foresters will need to spend on ground validation because they will already know exactly where to go.

In Haribon's Tree Trek and Tag, a

■ The author presents Haribon's use of GIS in its sustainable projects in biodiversity conservation



partnership with the Philippine Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation to raise awareness about na-

tive trees among the general public, we can identify and locate native trees in the city through information

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Utilizing geographical data in biodiversity conservation

crowd-sourced from social media. By geotagging or associating location to photos submitted by the public, we are able to map out the native trees in the city.

In Darwin Initiative 19-020, a collaboration with Newcastle University that looks into fish extirpations, we are using GIS software to transform data from interviews with fisherfolks into fishing density maps. Data from thousands of respondents may not make sense even when arranged in tables or graphs, but spatial patterns will be quickly revealed in a visual map.

Aside from biodiversity conservation, GIS is used in a wide range of applications such as in energy and water distribution, disaster risk reduction and management, as well as in building and road construction.

The conference highlighted how GIS is a versatile tool used by different sectors of society in different industries. It's also a powerful system that should be an integral part of an operation so progress have physical evidence and data which can be used for other projects or operations in the area. This technology lets us visualize, question, analyze, and interpret data to strategize our next move.

In Haribon Foundation, we don't stop at just mapping out Haring Ibon sightings or native trees tagging, for example. Technologies like GIS provide a fountain of information that, when analyzed properly, will help stakeholders make better plans and decisions so we can properly manage and ensure greater impact in conserving biodiversity.

THE REPORT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
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Sen. Pimentel questions LRA's turnabout on 'fake' GenSan land titles

A sudden reversal in its position concerning land titles that it had previously declared to be fake has put the Land Registration Authority (LRA) in hot water and has placed it squarely in the sights of a lawmaker.

Senator Aquilino Pimentel III is asking the LRA to explain why it recently issued a resolution allowing transactions on a batch of Original Certificates of Titles (OCTs) that allegedly covers parcels of land adjacent to the General Santos City airport to continue.

In a letter addressed to Eulalio C. Diaz III, LRA administrator, Pimentel, chair of the Senate committee on justice and human rights, warned that the agency's sudden turnabout could be "prejudicial to the LRA's avowed mission to maintain and foster greater public trust and confidence in the Torrens title as a secure, stable and trustworthy record of land ownership and recorded interests."

Pimentel's committee has been conducting a long-running probe into the proliferation of fake land titles in the country, particularly in General Santos City. According to him, some 6,000 fake land titles are reportedly in circulation in this southern Mindanao city alone.

In the hearing held by the committee on October 8, 2014, Ronald Ortile, LRA deputy administrator, testified that the agency's Task Force Titulong Malinis (TFTM) had investigated the OCTs under question as early as 2004 and found them to be "actually spurious titles." Testifying under oath, Ortile described the OCTs as "mere scraps of paper" which, he said,

were produced through the so-called "saksak-bunot" scheme where unscrupulous elements, in connivance with some LRA staff, insert fake land titles among the agency's files to give them a "semblance of validity."

Ortile has been TFTM chief since 2004. Despite the TFTM's findings, which Ortile supported in his testimony, the LRA recently issued a resolution allowing continued transactions on the OCTs under question.

These OCTs cover parcels of land that make up a 700-hectare government-owned property that is being managed by Alsons Development and Investment Corporation (Aldevinco) under an Integrated Forest Management Agreement (IFMA) that was issued to it by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in 1992.

Aldevinco was, in fact, already exercising control over the area as early as 1964 by virtue of a pasture lease agreement (PLA) that was granted to it by the then Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources following the company's purchase of the PLA rights from Tuason Enterprises.

Thus it came as a complete surprise for Aldevinco when, in July 2003, it was informed by the DENR's Communities Environment and Natural Resources Office (CENRO) in Region XII that an OCT issued in the name of a certain Pedro Deura Ramos "appeared to embrace" the parcels of land covered by the company's IFMA. This was quickly followed by the discovery of four other titles, all OCTs, issued

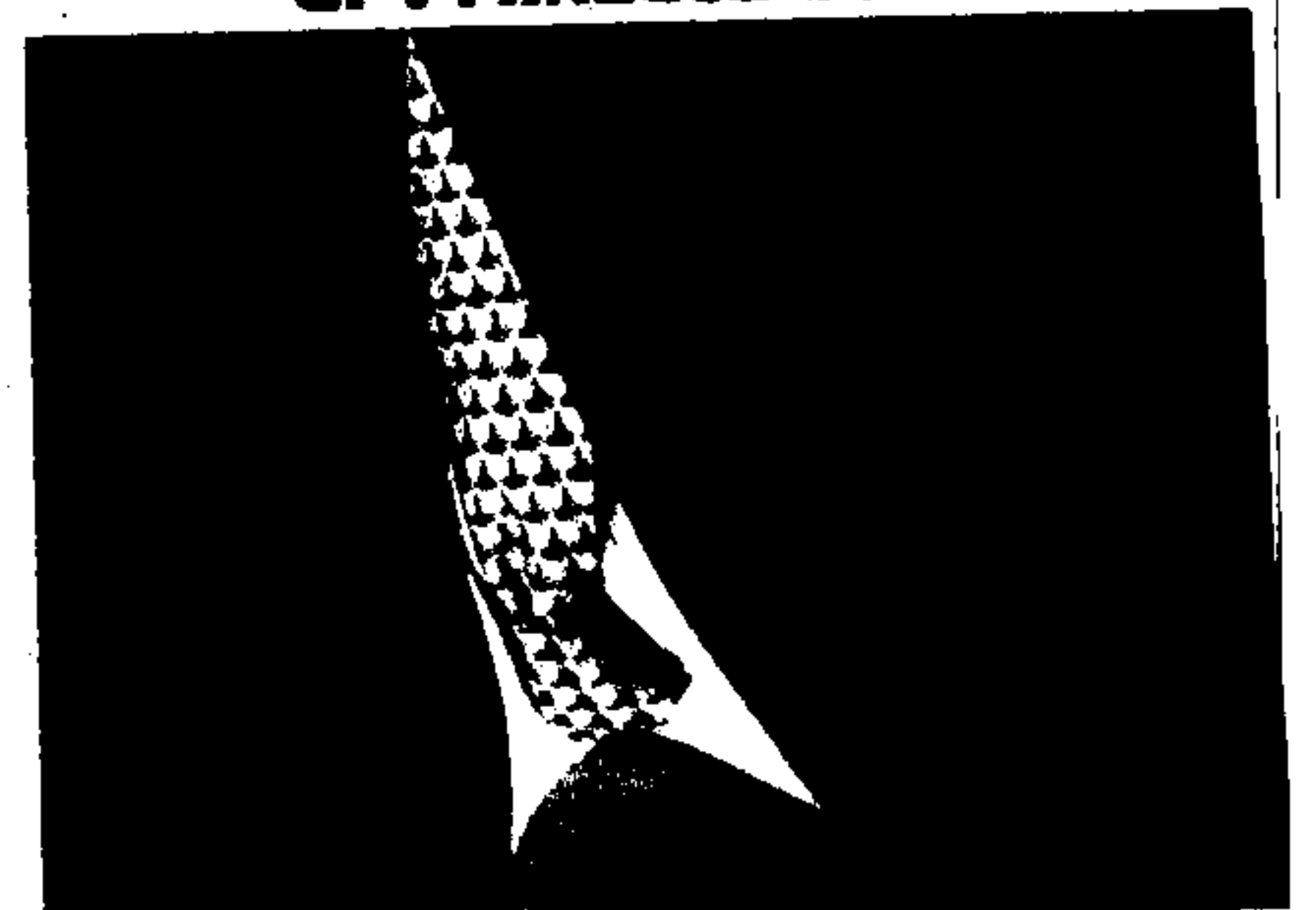
to Excelsa Lauron, Ralderico Confesor, Julita Confesor and Romeo Confesor. The technical descriptions of each of the five OCTs covered the whole IFMA area of the company.

However, inquiries made by Aldevinco with the authorities readily revealed that all five OCTs were fake. For instance, a survey that supposedly covered the leased areas did not appear in the DENR records. Moreover, this survey which was purportedly conducted in February 1950 indicated the runway of the General Santos City Airport as the eastern boundary of one of the lots. Completed only in 1993, the airport did not exist in 1950.

The LRA head office also found no record of the titles presented by the Confesor group, prompting Homer Margate, LRA TFTM investigator, to write in his report dated February 13, 2004 that "there is no doubt that the Original Certificates of Title Nos. P-938 (Pedro de Ramos), P-939 (Excelsa D. Lauron), P-940 (Ralderico S. Confesor), P-941 (Julita D. Confesor) and P-942 (Romeo D. Confesor)...are spurious."

He, thus, recommended "that appropriate action be taken to nullify the titles."

NESTOR ESPENILLA JR.



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Baguio marchers fight for rights of trees

By Vincent Cabreza
and Kimberlie Quitasol
Inquirer Northern Luzon

BAGUIO CITY—Saying “Baguio is not Baguio without pine trees,” students, church leaders, cultural artists and environmental advocates joined a “March for the Trees” on Monday and urged the city’s business sector to help rejuvenate the summer capital’s tree cover.

“We are here to fight for the rights of trees” to exist in the city, said Michael Bengwayan, a key figure in many protest actions against development projects that required the cutting of pine trees.

The promises made during the last Climate Change Summit in Paris made everyone a partner in shielding future generations from the impact of extreme weather, he said.

Land-use conversion

Bengwayan urged developers and private homeowners to allot some of their properties for small forests. “Baguio is a small area, and we have little public space left to grow more trees,” he said.

According to a 2012 invento-

ry by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), “the proclaimed watersheds and forest reservations estimated at 20 percent of the city’s total land area ... continue to be reduced, degraded or converted to other land uses.”

Baguio’s forest cover spans 1,446.81 hectares (25 percent of the city’s 5,700-ha territory), although only 45 percent of these wooded areas are part of the proclaimed watersheds or forest lands. The rest of the trees are located within private properties.

National crusade

To date, the city’s largest forest cluster is the Camp John Hay forest reserve, where two economic zones operate: the Camp John Hay Special Economic Zone and the Baguio City Economic Zone.

Bengwayan said Baguio “prides itself in being called the City of Pines but where are the pine trees?”

“People of Baguio love their trees but they now deal with businessmen who have overdeveloped the city, blind to its consequences for the future gener-

ation,” he said.

He said the “outcry to spare the trees” has become a national crusade because many road projects tend to displace roadside trees.

He said the first national crusade was waged against the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) in 2014 when its contractor girdled 1,829 trees standing in the way of an expanded Manila North Road.

The environmentalists went to court to stop the cutting of 770 trees that were untouched by the project but the DENR eventually issued a special tree-cutting permit that allowed the DPWH to finish the road widening last year.

Parking area plan

“We lost that war but we have not stopped,” Bengwayan said, adding that environmentalists have set their sights on the proposed P11.2-million parking area at a church property in the tourist town of Sagada in Mountain Province.

Former Sagada Vice Mayor Richard Yodong said the project may affect 14 trees. “I

don’t mind the project, but they should spare the trees,” he said in a text message to the INQUIRER.

Robert Pangod, executive assistant to Sagada Mayor Eduardo Latawan, said the project is located at the mission compound of Anglican Church at Sitio Patay in Barangay Poblacion along the Dantay-Sagada national highway.

He said the proposed parking area was an agreement between the church and the DPWH, and was not a local government undertaking.

“We have not received any formal complaint yet regarding [the parking space] but we have seen comments over social media objecting to the project,” he said. The Sagada government urged residents to formalize their complaints against the project, he said.

He said no tree-cutting permit had been issued by the Sagada government or the DENR.

The church is conducting a new round of consultations on March 27 to address the community’s concerns, Yodong said.

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• Rubber trees burned

KIDAPAWAN CITY - More than a hundred rubber trees were razed by a grass fire that was believed to have been sparked by a discarded cigarette lighter in Barangay Pulang Lupa, M'lang, at around 3 p.m., Saturday. The fire, which lasted for at least an hour, was the second such incident in the barangay since Friday when the wild fire burned at least 20 rubber trees. In the second blaze, more than a thousand trees planted on a two-hectare lot inside a forest rehabilitation area in Barangay Amas, this city, were destroyed by grass fire, which lasted three hours. Most of those damaged trees were endangered species, including Lawaan and Molave, according to Jonathan Arquilla, caretaker at the Research Center of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). (Malu Cadelina Manar)

The Manila Times

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

VOLUNTEER DIARIES

Nurturing native tree seedlings

BY MICA GERMAIN R. DE GUZMAN
HARIBON VOLUNTEER



■ Globe Telecom volunteers trek to Haribon's Buhay Punlaan and embark on its native seedling program

EXCITEMENT rushing in our veins, I, along with my team from Globe Telecom, was more than ready for Haribon Foundation's tree nurturing activity. We all agreed to wear the sportiest outfits with matching rubber shoes, and an extra shirt just in case.

Driving farther away from the bustling city, the sceneries became greener and the air got fresher until finally, we arrived at our destination: the Buhay Punlaan.

Only a three-hour drive from Manila, Buhay Punlaan is Haribon's two-hectare nursery of native trees. Located at the Caliraya Watershed in Lumban,

Laguna, it was built as a response to the native tree seedlings shortage in the country.

During the four-minute trek down the slope, the mud began to feel a little bit softer. The smell of lush foliage happily assaulted our senses. After reaching a medium-sized hut, the orientation started with a prayer and lesson on the importance of biodiversity and the ecological services it provides.

We learned that biodiversity is defined as the variability of all living things in nature and how they operate in general. The services they provide contribute to the natural cycles that help make our planet habitable to humans and

contribute to our way of life in many ways such as providing food, water, shelter, pharmaceuticals, and helping mitigate the effects of climate change such as drought, floods and unbearable hot weather. For these reasons alone, if we want to continue benefiting from the wealth of these natural goods and services, the biodiversity that establishes them must be saved and maintained for long-term.

The facilitator, Razel Ripalda, a forester from Haribon, gave us a rundown on how we could bring life to one of earth's important living organism—the trees.

We started with soil bagging and potting wherein we mixed the soil properly by filtering and removing the rocks then blended it with rice hull.

Afterward we placed the mixed soil evenly inside the polyethylene bag then proceeded to collect small wildlings and transplanted them in the bag. Later on, Ripalda guided us to an area wherein there's a line of native wildlings to be planted. Assuming a few years have passed; the group was instructed to prune the seedlings, water, and remove them from their bags so we can plant them on the ground.

To sustain and nurture their growth, the

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Nurturing

seedlings will be maintained and cared for by Haribon's partner communities and People's Organizations (POs) for three years. This is another way of the foundation to ensure its highest survival rate while augmenting the livelihood of the partner communities.

The field activity concluded with an insightful recap and how our groups felt and what we learned. Just a few meters away from the nursery, we reached a native hut called the Caliraya Sunshine Canteen that has a beautiful view of the Caliraya lake. Here, they served our team with traditional Filipino fare. It was a wonderful and relaxing way to end the day's event.

As we walked back up in our respective vans, though feet were slightly sore, we still managed to savor the moment with loud laughter.

Haribon has provided our group with a safe and healthy activity surrounded in a beautiful space that will be the source of healthy native tree seedlings for years to come. This experience will truly be cherished for a lifetime.

Act. Make an Impact. Support Haribon. To join Haribon's Adopt-A-Seedling, Nurture-A-Seedling programs, and Tree Planting Activities, call 421-1209 and/or email act@haribon.org.ph to make a donation today!

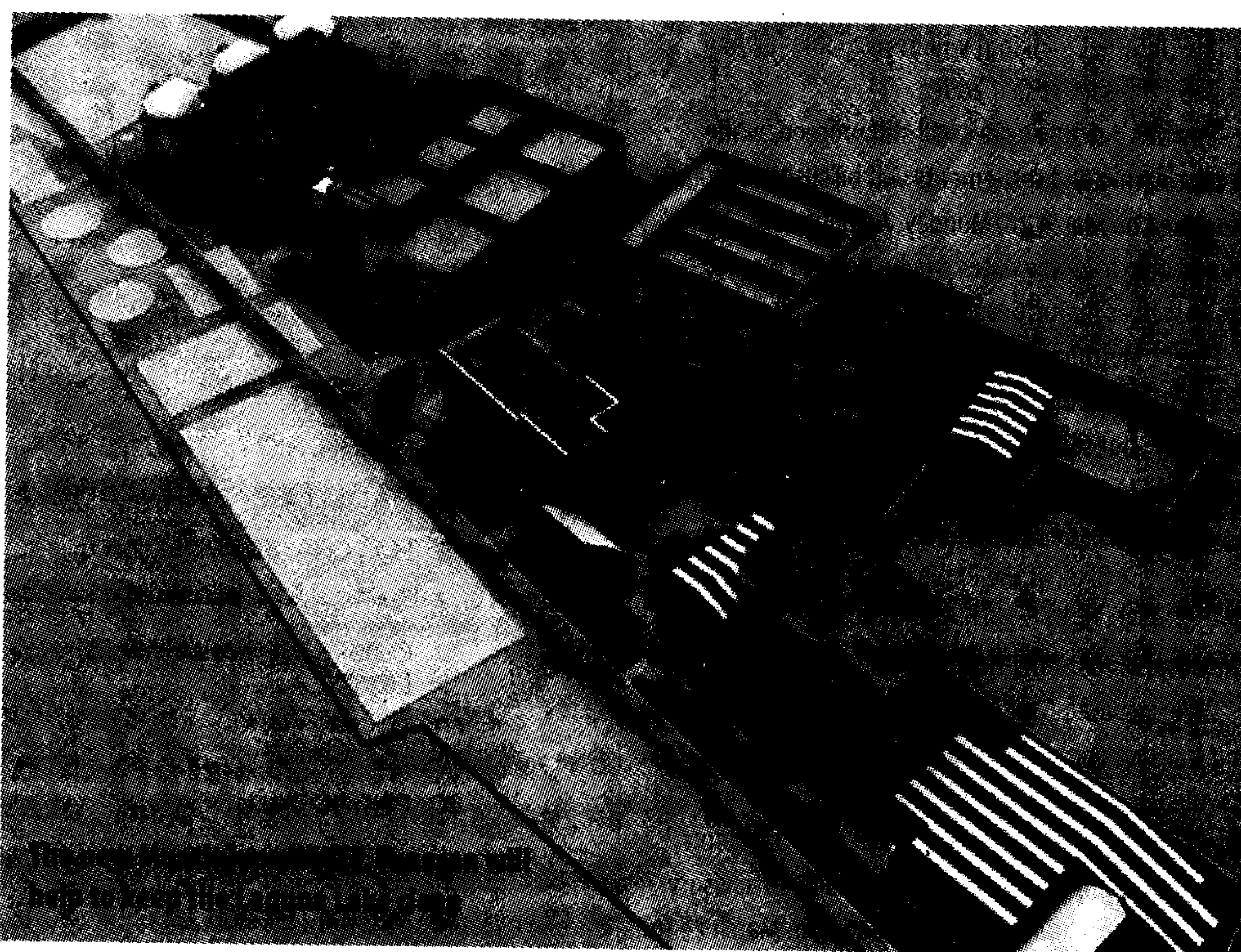
The Manila Times

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

\$15-M plant to keep Laguna Lake clean set to start working this year



A NEW biological wastewater treatment plant that will help keep Laguna Lake clean is set to start working this year.

Laguna Lake is an important alternative drinking water source for the Philippines, especially in Metro Manila.

The Philippine unit of India's wastewater treatment expert Wabag will do the project worth around \$15 million for Maynilad Water Services, the water distributor of state-owned Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System for the West Zone of Metro Manila.

Funded by the World Bank, the project entails the construction of the wastewater treatment plant at Tunasan town in Muntinlupa City, south of Metro Manila.

Wabag said the new plant would employ the proven activated sludge

process for biological treatment.

But it said the project is unique in the sense that the plant would handle wastewater flowing into Laguna Lake.

Under the contract, Wabag will operate and maintain the plant for a period of one year.

Before the Tunasan project, the firm finished three water treatment projects in the Philippines—in Bagbag, Tatalon, and Doña Imelda—and is currently working on two bigger projects in Illugin and Putatan.

"Wabag, within a few years of its existence in the Philippines, has carved a niche in water and wastewater treatment market, and repeat orders from the existing clients go to prove that Wabag is a trusted partner in Philippines in the water treatment space," said Wabag Philippines Director Coleridge Shelley. **MARICOR ZAPATA**

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Incomplete accounting

THE Industrial Revolution is said to be the most important shift in human history; without it, we will not have all the things we now enjoy—from our clothing, smartphones, and even our food. The idea behind the Industrial Revolution was to satisfy human consumption through production. As we all know, production uses massive amounts of energy—energy that mainly comes from heat applied to water that produces steam.

Of all the technologies we have developed over time, the steam engine technology is, by far, the most outdated one! The impact of the Industrial Revolution is even felt in economics, as countries' economies are measured by GDP. Investopedia defines

GDP, or gross domestic product, as "the total dollar value of all goods and services produced over a specific time period—you can think of it as the size of the economy." This idea is the brainchild of Simon Kuznets in 1937 and intended to capture all economic production by individuals, companies, and the government in a single measure, which should rise in good times and fall in bad.

In 1959, economist Moses Abramovitz was one of the first to question whether GDP accurately measures a society's overall wellbeing. But even after that warning, the use of GDP as an economic measure became popular after Arthur Okun, staff economist for US President John F. Kennedy's Council of Economic Advisers, coined Okun's Law, which holds that for every three-point rise in GDP, unemployment will fall 1 percentage point. Since then, GDP has become the accepted measure of economic size, and countries started formulating policies designed to spur industrial production.

We are driven by numbers to measure our profits without any regard for our most important asset: Earth. In our profession, accountancy, we have accounting techniques, mathematical models and statistical formulas to measure profits and future cash flows; among others. These numbers guide our economic decisions as to what is profitable and what is not.

YOUNG BLOOD

*Christopher Allan
Ray D. Pilpa*

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the twentysomething and below.—Ed.

We rely on energy to pursue our endless hunger for production and profits. To reach our desirable productivity and profit, we use more energy. So what is the cost of producing energy? If you thought of the environment, then you're right.

We are heavily reliant on coal, oil and natural gas which, when burned to heat up water, emits tons of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere that traps the heat in our planet, thus accelerating climate change. On top of that, we dump our wastes in the rivers and oceans. We destroy ecosystems to achieve productivity and improve our lives. We have been taking them for granted ever since we learned to exploit their blessings for our benefits. Yes, our lives are better, and the technological advances are unprecedented. But are these sustainable in the long run? No.

To address these problems, the United Nations organized climate talks in Paris last December. COP21's objective was to create sustainable development by letting countries pledge their formulated policies in curbing carbon emissions by 2030 in order to maintain the temperature 2 degrees higher than preindustrial levels by the end of the century. The good thing is that every country wants to participate and make its pledge, but the problem is that we are still looking at the wrong numbers on economic development.

Our Earth had undergone climate change before and will inevitably survive another such change. The premise that we are saving our planet is a wrong perspective. What we need to realize is that it is not the Earth that needs saving from the effects of climate change but us humans. Also, to think that we need to curb our greed is wishful thinking. What we need to do is adjust our measurements to reflect the reality we are facing now so our decisions, driven by greed and numbers, will be environmentally and morally sound.

We can start by factoring in the losses in our environment in measuring profits and productivity. Imagine putting environmental losses in China's GDP; what will be the effect? What about the United States? Think about the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran, Kuwait): They all have high levels of GDP, but what about the environmental losses they have caused?

Our current accounting and economic models do not take environmental losses into consideration. Imagine putting up a production facility that can generate future cash flows and a positive return of investment (ROI). Then after factoring in the environmental costs, the ROI turns negative; will that be a viable investment? What about a coal-fired power plant? Can you see how this will affect our economic decisions?

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Incomplete accounting

There is a concept called environmental accounting to help us with this. Environmental accounting is a field that identifies resource use and measures, and communicates the costs of a company's or a nation's economic impact on the environment. Costs include those needed to clean up contaminated sites, environmental fines, penalties and taxes, purchase of pollution prevention technologies, and waste management costs. I agree that the losses in our environment can be very difficult to measure effectively, but there are policies that can help us do that. For starters, let's look at America's and China's cap and trade policy on carbon emissions; entities can now trade allowable carbon emissions to avoid penalties. The penalties are so high that they create incentives for a market for the carbon emissions trade, and this can be a start in measuring the environmental costs of conducting business.

Leonardo DiCaprio has said: "Climate change is real, it is happening right now. It is the most urgent threat facing our entire species, and we need to work collectively together and stop procrastinating." Our academic scholars, statesmen, businessmen and other stakeholders need to notice that our current economic measurements lack information on environmental costs. To me, this is just incomplete accounting.

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BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

editorial

Yes, the PHL is green

WANTING to always keep an open mind and learn from others, it is good to invite self-proclaimed experts to the Philippines. We might learn something that is beneficial.

Recently, former US Vice President and losing presidential candidate Al Gore came to talk about global warming and climate change. He spoke of the need for the Philippines to reduce, if not eliminate, as quickly as possible, our use of coal-fired power plants for electricity generation. We agree that our getting nearly 50 percent of our electricity from coal is not the best situation, and we need to move away from coal.

Some people have equated the global warming and climate-change concept as almost a religion, and there is good reason to say that. Although on virtually constant tour of giving speeches around the globe, Gore refuses to entertain any questions from his audiences for several years. You might have noticed that is very similar to a parish priest who also does not answer questions after delivering a homily.

There is good reason that Gore does not answer questions, because he might be asked about his previous statements. For example, in 2007 as Gore accepted the Nobel Peace Prize for his campaigning on climate change, he said, "The North Polar ice cap is falling off a cliff. It could be completely gone in summer in as little as seven years. Seven years from now."

The year 2014 came and went, and the polar ice cap is still there. We will give Gore the benefit of the doubt, since he did say "could" and not "would."

However, what is the factual reality of the Philippines and its energy use? Renewable energy (RE) is defined as "energy from a source that is not depleted when used, such as wind or solar power." We should include nuclear power in that definition but "greenies" usually hate nuclear power, as it meets all their criteria, but without the tree-hugging.

The facts are that the Philippines has a higher percentage of its total power generation (29.6 percent) from RE sources than Germany, China, Ireland, Russia, Mexico, France, India, Australia, the US, Japan, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea. Overall, the Philippines is not doing too bad. We rank 81st out of 150 countries.

But we are also told that a critical problem is a nation's "carbon footprint," the amount of carbon dioxide and other carbon compounds emitted due to the consumption of fossil fuels by a particular person." Here, too, the Philippines has a lower per-person "carbon footprint" than Vietnam, Indonesia, Mexico, Iraq, Thailand, Switzerland, Hong Kong, China, Malaysia, the UK, the US, Australia and Japan, among 120 countries producing more carbon than Philippines.

In fact, the average Filipino has a smaller carbon footprint than Gore, who lives in a 20-room house using an average of 22,619 kilowatts per hour of electricity a month, more than twice the electricity that an average American family uses in an entire year.

We can hardly wait for Gore's speech to the other industrialized nations that are not as clean and green as the Philippines.

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LOPEZES SUPPORT AL GORE FORUM – Former US Vice President and global climate activist Al Gore (center) poses for a photo with Oscar M. Lopez (right), chairman emeritus of the OML Center for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management Foundation, Inc. (OML Center), and Federico R. Lopez, OML Center chairman, during dinner held in Manila in honor of Gore. Oscar and son Federico participated in the Climate Reality Leadership Training that Gore's non-profit Climate Reality Project (CRP) conducted recently in Manila. Gore, who is CRP founder and chairman, travels around the world in his campaign for global support to solve the climate crisis. The OML Center participated in the three-day CRP training by organizing a breakout session, titled 'Ten Acts to Take for a Climate-Resilient ASEAN.' The OML Center was named after the elder Lopez in honor of his own life-long advocacy to protect the environment. The OML Center was established as a non-stock foundation with an endowment from First Philippine Holdings Corporation, the holding company of First Gen Corporation, which is the country's leading clean and renewable energy company.

Pacific countries lead charge in climate deal

MAJURO, Marshall Islands—Battered by massive cyclones, El Niño-fueled drought and swollen king tides, fragile Pacific island nations vulnerable to climate change are leading the charge in implementing the landmark Paris climate deal.

The Marshall Islands is the latest Pacific nation after Fiji and Palau to adopt the historic deal which was agreed by 195 nations in December with the aim of curbing carbon emissions and limiting global warming.

Scientists warn the low-lying island nations risk being swamped as sea levels rise, losing coastline, arable land and facing more extreme weather events.

Marshall Islands President Hilda Heine said this vulnerability ex-

plained why the first three nations to confirm their Paris commitments were all from the Pacific.

"By becoming one of the first countries to ratify the Paris agreement, we have shown our determination to continue to lead this fight from the front," she said after parliament ratified the Paris accord Friday.

The accord sets a target of limiting global warming to "well below" 2.0 degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) compared to pre-industrial levels.

World leaders will gather in New York on April 22 to formally sign the deal in an important statement of intent.

However, ratification goes a step further, involving lawmakers agreeing on action plans that will take concrete steps to address the problem.

The Pacific nations, among the strongest advocates for meaningful action in Paris, have been swift to ratify in the hope of setting an example for bigger nations.

"[It] puts us closer to the goal we all set for (the) nation and ourselves to ensure that our children inherit a habitable, hospitable planet," Palau President Tommy Remengesau said when parliament voted to ratify last month.

The Marshalls' ratification comes

as the nation of about 55,000 people faces a severe drought that prompted Heine, elected in January, to declare a state of disaster last month.

With almost no rainfall in the capital Majuro for months, tap water is rationed to four-hour blocks three days a week, when residents scramble to fill storage tanks and bottles.

The government has sent portable desalination units to remote communities as forecasters predict the drought may not ease until the second half of the year.

The Marshalls' latest climate crisis follows extreme weather in recent years, including ferocious storms, and in 2014 the highest king tides recorded in three decades, which forced 1,000 to flee their homes and left more than US\$2.0 million worth of damage. **AFP**

Business World

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PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

Earth Hour's relevance lost in city of blackouts

By Albert F. Arcilla and
Karel B. Mellanes

ZAMBOANGA CITY — For a city that experiences regular blackouts for several years now, the meaning of the International Earth Hour observance last Saturday was rather lost to many of its residents.

"I find it weird," said Prof. Ali T. Yacub, Al-Hj, a leader of a group of Muslim professionals in the city, told *BusinessWorld*.

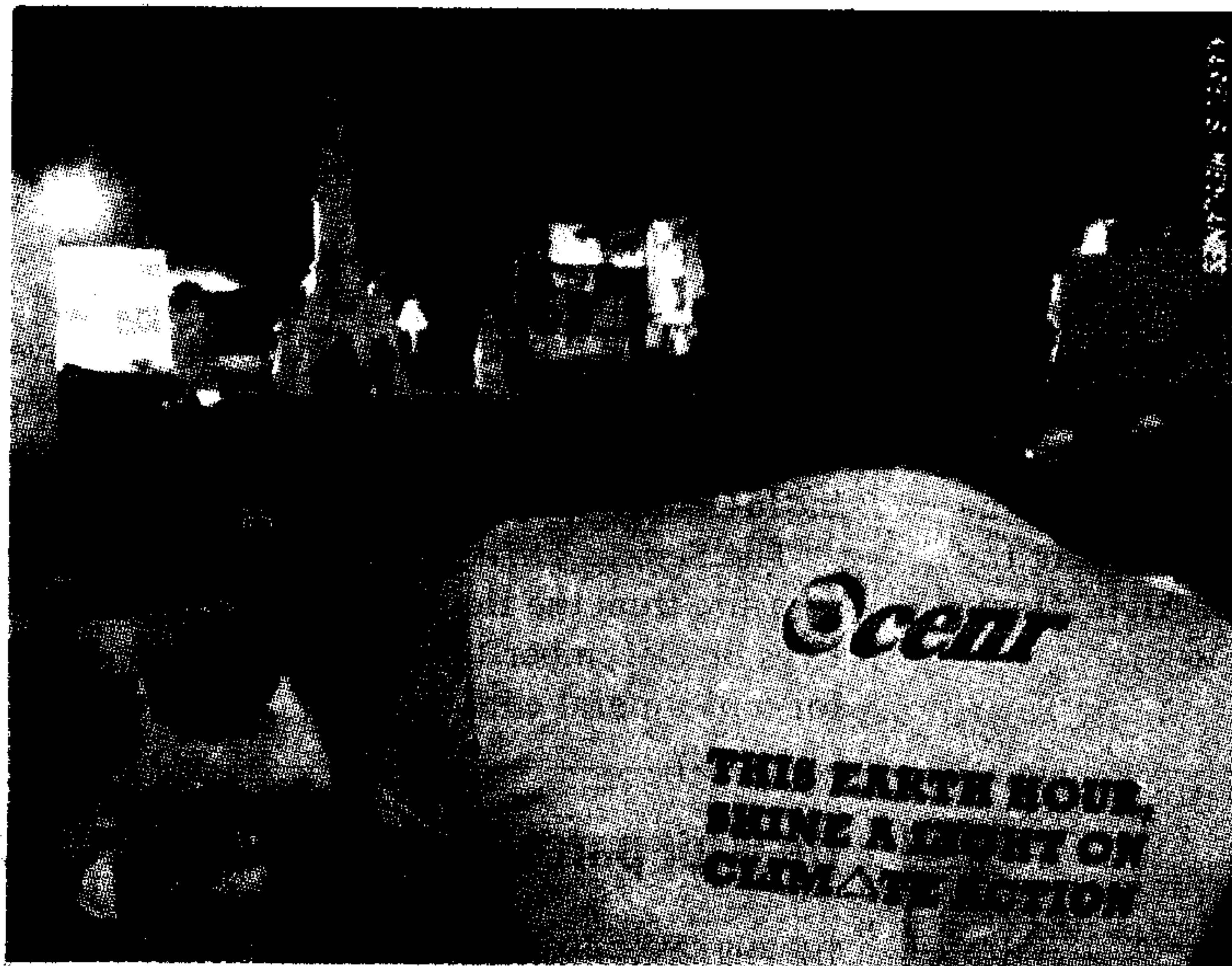
"Why do we have to turn off our lights for an hour when we experience brownouts for several hours daily?" echoed William Harvey S. Roldan, a freelance layout artist.

The city government here, in partnership with the Office of the City Environment and Natural Resource and other environmentalist groups, led the observance of the annual Earth Hour on Saturday night with a program entitled Earth Hour Jam.

The event was intended to show solidarity with the rest of the country and the world by urging the entire city to switch off the power supply in the entire city for 60 minutes.

Some of the business establishments in the downtown area snubbed the call by operating their generator sets and carried on with business as usual.

"Now tell me the relevance of that 60 minute power shutdown," wrote Nuhman Aljani, a national government employee,



AN EMPLOYEE of the Zamboanga Office of the City Environment and Natural Resources joins the Earth Hour program wearing a shirt that announces this year's theme for the annual event.

on his social media account. "Zamboanga City has been observing not earth hour but earth hours all year round."

For Ismael I. Musa, the Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative to the city council, also went to social media to air his annoyance. "Why [do we] still need to observe Earth Hour since we are now experiencing power interruption. It should be human hour by spending for those tarpaulin cost and incidental cost to [our] Internally Displaced Persons and other needy."

COMMITMENT TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Those who supported Earth Hour acknowledged the negative sentiments from locals but at the same

time stressed the global relevance of participating in the activity.

Engr. Reynaldo S. Gonzales, the City Environment and Natural Resources officer, said that by switching off lights for an hour and not using a generator leaves a strong message.

"It is a commitment to the environment, which we are trying to show, and a commitment to a low-carbon lifestyle," Mr. Gonzales told *BusinessWorld*.

"We call for behavioral change, if possible. Let us go back to the old age, before, we do not have televisions and vehicles and we were okay with that... let us not underestimate our power," he added.

Mary Queen D. Signar, a housewife who came to show

support to the Earth Hour with her three-year old kid, said turning off of lights for just an hour is "a little sacrifice from our part to show our concern to the deteriorating environment, the climate change."

"[Although] we are always experiencing many hours of brownouts in the city, what is one hour with no lights? At least by that one hour we help decrease the emissions of carbons which is the major contributions to the climate change," she told *BusinessWorld*.

Abdurajak M. Amsang, a member of the Amores Interfaith, a group of different religious groups in the city, said the Earth Hour was an opportunity to emphasize the value of conserving energy and call on the city government to adopt solar or other renewable energy sources.

An environmentalist, pastor, and biking enthusiast, Arturo A. Veladiez, pushed for a "green lifestyle".

"To prevent the dire effect of climate change, biking is one way of mitigating the impact," said Mr. Veladiez, whose cycling group also participated in last year's Earth Hour event.

"From more than 400 bikers joining last year, this year we have roughly 500 bikers joining the calls," he said.

Earth Hour is a worldwide grassroots movement initiated by the World Wide Fund for Nature. This worldwide lights-off event was started in Sydney, Australia in 2007 to show the city's support to climate change action.

Protecting the rights of every Juan

CONSUMERLINE



By **CHING M. ALANO**

Celebrating World Consumer Rights Day last March 15 (which really ought to be observed every day), a watchdog for consumer safety and environmental health urged the candidates for the May 9 polls to come up with a Consumer Protection Agenda that would address the essential needs of every Juan.

Aileen Lucero, coordinator, EcoWaste Coalition, a member of the Green Thumb

Coalition, stresses, "We expect those running for public elective positions to instigate measures that will advance the eight basic rights of consumers, especially the deprived and the poor." As articulated by the global consumer movement, these rights include: the right to the satisfaction of basic needs, the right to safety, the right to be informed, the right to choose, the right to be heard, the right to redress, the right to consumer education, and the right to a healthy environment.

As we're all entitled to a healthy environment, those aspiring for public office should ensure the citizens' right to clean air, safe water, renewable energy sources, and waste-free, toxic-free ecosystems.

Lucero adds, "We also hope that those running for Congressional or Senate seats will support amendments to strengthen the Consumer Act of the Philippines, as well as file other bills to localize the United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection (UNGCP). Stronger consumer protection laws will prevent market abuse, ensure fair play and justice, and safeguard the public health and the environment."

A most welcome move is the adoption by the UN General Assembly last December 2015 of the revised UNGCP, which acknowledged "access to essential goods and services, and the protection of vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers as new consumer legitimate needs."

Consumers International notes, "Adequate consumer protection can directly support the achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals relating to ending hunger and improving nutrition by supporting access to safe, affordable and healthy diets; to health and well-being by protecting consumers from unsafe products that cause illness or injury and expanding access to effective pharmaceuticals."

Footnotes to Earth Day

Where on earth were you during Earth Hour, 8:30-9:30 p.m., last Saturday, March 19?

Well, I was out, feeling the earth move under my feet. Earth Hour, of course, is a worldwide movement organized by the World Wide Fund for Nature where electric power is shut off for an hour (sometimes, we shut up, too) to highlight the need to address the problem of climate change.

On that bright note, Banana Peel, one of country's



It's time for Earth Hour: Banana Peel continues its partnership with WWF-Philippines through its exclusive Earth Hour collection featuring glow-in-the-dark straps and vibrant animal prints.

leading flip-flops brand, puts its best foot forward by making a stand on issues and creating a positive change in the community. To underscore the need to reduce our carbon footprint, Banana Peel has come up with products that are environment-friendly, using only safe materials.

Banana Peel actively supports and engages in projects on sustainable development. Working with WWF-Philippines since 2013, it has created WWF flip flops collections to support projects on marine life preservation, and forest and wildlife conservation.

This year, Banana Peel continues its partnership with WWF-Philippines through its exclusive Earth Hour collection featuring glow-in-the-dark straps and vibrant animal prints.

"Banana Peel is privileged to be given the opportunity to support WWF," asserts Paul Ng, CEO of The Neat Inc., Banana Peel. "As the product becomes available in our stores, we are able to educate and encourage consumers to choose earth beyond Earth Hour. We would like to be part of the movement that inspires more generations to be stewards of the earth."

Banana Peel encourages everyone to be down-to-earth and do his/her share in saving Planet Earth from extinction. Its Earth Hour flip flops collection aims to help provide solar lamps to light up the remote and off-grid town of Monreal, Masbate. These solar lamps will provide the families of Monreal with clean and sustainable source of electricity, to replace the costly and hazardous use of kerosene. Now, that's a brilliant idea!

Banana Peel's 2016 Earth Hour collection comes in six designs for women and five designs for men, at P420/pair for the women's collection and P440/pair for the men's collection. For information, visit www.bananapeel.net; follow Banana Peel on Facebook Banana Peel Flip Flops and on Instagram bananapeelofcl.

But of course, it's about time we went beyond Earth Hour and protected the environment 24/7.

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PROLONGED DRY SPELL

South Cotabato placed under state of calamity

By Edwin Fernandez
Inquirer Mindanao

KORONADAL CITY—South Cotabato officials on Monday placed the entire province under a state of calamity as the prolonged dry spell continued to devastate farms and livestock.

The provincial board approved the recommendation of Gov. Daisy Fuentes after Friday's emergency meeting of the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (PDRPMC) here.

Agriculture officials reported during the meeting that the drought had destroyed more than 11,000 hectares of land planted to rice, corn and high-value crops.

Damage to crops alone has already reached P285 million, the governor said. The figure could still increase as validation of field reports was continuing, according to the provincial agriculture office.

With the immediate declaration of a state of calamity, the provincial government can use its disaster funds to assist affect-

ed farming families, whose number has risen to 9,300.

Tantangan, another town in South Cotabato, has been declared under a state of calamity as crop and livestock damage has risen due to the lingering dry spell. It was the third to do so the past two weeks after T'boli and Surallah.

The municipal council approved the resolution following the recommendations from the local disaster management office.

In Davao del Sur, the provincial board earlier declared a

state of calamity after losses due to the extreme weather condition had been confirmed to have hit more than P700 million.

The provincial agriculture office said the figure was only the total from 12 towns, including the rice-producing areas of Matanao, Bansalan and Magsaysay.

At least 28,000 farmers in the three towns have suffered from the drought, said Nally Bangoy, provincial agriculturist. **With a report from Orlando Dinoy,**
Inquirer Mindanao



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Nothing wrong with coal plants – Duterte

By HELEN FLORES

CEBU CITY – Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte hit developed countries for bullying poor nations into lowering their carbon emissions, when they are the major culprits in global warming.

Duterte, standard-bearer of the PDP-Laban, said he sees nothing wrong with the government's plan to put up new coal-fired power plants to boost power supply in the country.

"You open the Philippines for all power players, I guarantee you the electricity will become cheaper," Duterte said during the second presidential debate at the University of the Philippines Cebu here on Sunday.

The mayor was responding to a question by STAR editor-in-chief Ana Marie Pamintuan on the Philippines' commitment to the UN to cut its carbon emissions by 70 percent by 2030.

The government last year approved the construction of 25 new coal-fired power plants, according to Sen. Loren Legarda.

President Aquino said in January that building more coal-fired power plants is necessary to meet the nation's growing energy needs.

Duterte called the UN a hypocrite for failing to impose sanctions on developed nations, which he said are the biggest emitters of carbon dioxide.

"They should finance our hydropower and solar energies. They cannot impose sanctions against the violators, we only contribute so very little (carbon dioxide)," he said referring to the UN.

Duterte criticized environmentalist and former US vice president Al Gore, who recently visited the country for a three-day climate workshop, for calling on the Philippine government to go on renewable energies.

"Why can't he (Gore) stop his country (from producing greenhouse gases)? We need energy to develop, we are just a developing nation," Duterte said.

Meanwhile, Liberal Party standard-bearer Mar Roxas and independent presidential aspirant Sen. Grace Poe said they are open to the amendment of the 14-year-old Electric Power Industry Reform Act (EPIRA) to address the skyrocketing power rates. – With Rhodina Villanueva, Alexis Romero

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Pres'l bets dismay environment groups

ENVIRONMENTAL groups that converged in Cebu yesterday for the second leg of the PiliPinas Presidential Debates 2016 expressed disappointment at the candidates' lack of any clear positions and plans regarding urgent environmental issues challenging the country.

More than 2,000 environmentalists, farmers, scientists, representatives from the academe and the church, and members of local and national groups from all over the Philippines had come to Cebu to press candidates for clearer positions on environmental issues in their governance platforms.

"From what we've seen so far, the Presidential candidates need a more thorough understanding of environmental issues that have to be quickly addressed, as these greatly affect other developmental problems such as poverty, health and food security. They make vulnerable sectors even more vulnerable the longer they are left unchecked," said Na-

derev "Yeb" Saño, Executive Director of Greenpeace Southeast Asia.

"The presidential aspirants make sweeping statements about environmental challenges such as climate change and disaster response, agriculture and farmers' plights, or energy and development, but either they are merely pandering to popular demands with no clear plans, or are doing the opposite of what they supposedly espouse in their campaign speeches," added Ruth Ylanan, representative of the Urban Poor Alliance (UP ALL).

The groups point up as examples: Mar Roxas stating that the country needs to shift to clean, renewable energy but their current administration facilitated the entry of 25 new coal-fired power plants and is himself propagating the myth that solar energy is expensive; Rodrigo Duterte acknowledging that the Philippines is at the forefront of climate impacts but going against any bid for the Philippines to phase out coal; Grace

Poe pushing for benefits for farmers and agriculture but having no clear position on protecting organic farmers and ensuring safe food; Jejomar Binay not discussing any position or plans regarding any of the environmental issues that were supposed to be discussed at all.

Led by the Sugboanong Nagpakabana sa Kalikupan (Concerned Cebuanos for the Environment), which includes Greenpeace Philippines, the group is part of the bigger Green Thumb Coalition "Pwersang 10 Million Boto" that aims to influence candidates' debates and public discussions around key environmental concerns.

The coalition earlier sent letters to the Presidential candidates asking about their platforms around issues such as biodiversity, natural resource management, climate justice, mining, energy transformation, sustainable agriculture and fisheries, wastes, and other environmental challenges.

Catherine Ruiz, of Kaa-bag sa Sugbo and Philip-

pine Miserior Partnership pointed out that "most of our natural resources are now in the hands of corporations raping the environment, and we are looking at elections this year to start correcting this problem. We cannot afford to have a leader that only looks at the bottomline of raking in more money towards their own pockets in preparation for the next elections."

The groups were hoping for more comprehensive discussions and more substantive reactions to their concerns during the Cebu leg of the debates.

"Cebu has continually pushed for and led the national discourse on environment issues. It would have been great if we finally got to hear concrete plans for our only home discussed in detail here, and not just motherhood statements. Let's hope the third and last leg of the debates yields better results," said Sister Virgie Ligaray, RVM, of the Association of Women Religious of Cebu.

Jun I. Legaspi

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Pacific nations lead the way toward climate accord

MAJURO, Marshall Islands—Battered by massive cyclones, El Niño-fueled drought and swollen king tides, fragile Pacific island nations vulnerable to climate change are leading the charge in implementing the landmark Paris climate deal.

The Marshall Islands is the latest Pacific nation after Fiji and Palau to adopt the historic deal which was agreed by 195 nations in December with the aim of curbing carbon emissions and limiting global warming.

Scientists warn the low-lying island nations risk being swamped as sea levels rise, losing coastline, arable land and facing more extreme weather events.

Marshall Islands President Hilda Heine said this vulnerability explained why the first three nations to confirm their Paris commitments were all from the Pacific.

“By becoming one of the first countries to ratify the Paris agreement, we have shown our

determination to continue to lead this fight from the front,” she said after parliament ratified the Paris accord on Friday.

The accord sets a target of limiting global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) compared to pre-industrial levels.

World leaders will gather in New York on April 22 to formally sign the deal in an important statement of intent. Also, lawmakers will be asked to work out action plans that will lay out

concrete steps to address the problem.

The Pacific nations, among the strongest advocates for meaningful action in Paris, have been swift to ratify in the hope of setting an example for bigger nations.

It puts “us closer to the goal we all set for (the) nation and ourselves to ensure that our children inherit a habitable, hospitable planet,” Palau President Tommy Remengesau said.

AFP

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Vulnerable Pacific nations lead the way on Paris climate pact

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have shown our determination to continue to lead this fight from the front," she said after parliament ratified the Paris accord Friday.

The accord sets a target of limiting global warming to "well below" 2.0 degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) compared to pre-industrial levels.

World leaders will gather in New York on April 22 to formally sign the deal in an important statement of intent.

However, ratification goes a step further, involving lawmakers agreeing on action plans that will take concrete steps to address the problem.

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"(It) puts us closer to the goal we all set for (the) nation and ourselves to ensure that our children inherit a habitable, hospitable planet," Palau President Tommy

Remengesau said when parliament voted to ratify last month.

The Marshalls' ratification comes as the nation of about 55,000 people faces a severe drought that prompted Heine, elected in January, to declare a state of disaster last month.

With almost no rainfall in the capital Majuro for months, tap water is rationed to four-hour blocks three days a week, when residents scramble to fill storage tanks and bottles.

The government has sent portable desalination units to remote communities as forecasters predict the drought may not ease until the second half of the year.

The Marshalls' latest climate crisis follows extreme weather in recent years, including ferocious storms, and in 2014 the highest king tides recorded in three decades, which forced 1,000 to flee their homes and left more than US\$2.0 million worth of damage. **AFP**

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Thai move to regulate lead in paints hailed

THE environment-advocate group EcoWaste Coalition has lauded the Thailand government for issuing a mandatory regulation on enamel paints to protect children and the ASEAN region against lead exposure.

Sonia Mendoza, the group's president, hailed Thai authorities' taking action and commend the civil society campaign led by the Ecological Recovery and Alert-Thailand (EARTH) for their dynamic advocacy.

Effective January 2017, all enamel paints used for construction and decorative purposes which are manufactured or sold in Thailand must contain no more than 0.01 percent (or 100 parts per million) lead, mercury and cadmium in dry weight.

In addition, all enamel paints will be required to show a warning label about potential dangers from the product, for example, "contains toxic substance" or "keep away from children."

"Our steadfast multi-stakeholder effort in the Philippines to regulate lead in paints could have possibly encouraged Thailand to switch from voluntary to mandatory regulation," Mendoza noted.

The group disclosed that the Thai Department of Foreign Trade in February 2015 issued a statement alerting Thai manufacturers that "the Philippines values public health and safety" and that Thai paint manufacturers "should continuously improve the quality of their products" because Thailand exports as much as 616 million baht in paint products and varnishes to the Philippines each year.

It would also be recalled that Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Ramon Paje signed DENR A.O. 2013-24 which provides for a 90 ppm limit for lead in paint and establishes a phase out period for leaded architectural, decorative and household paints by January 2017, and leaded industrial paints by January 2019.

"We hope other ASEAN countries will decisively act and follow suit to ensure that paints produced, traded, sold and used in the region are safe from toxic lead, which can cause serious harm, especially to young children," Mendoza added.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "lead is a cumulative toxicant that has harmful effects on multiple body systems" and that "there is no known level of lead exposure that is considered safe," especially for the unborn babies and young children.

Out of the 10 member states and two observer states of the ASEAN, only three – Philippines, Singapore and Thailand – have regulations controlling lead in paints, particularly oil-based decorative paints.

Cory Martinez

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Scream of the crop

THIS early, almost everybody has tried to dissect the 2016 presidential election, how close the contest would be among the top four candidates and all that.

Well and good, except that the guys down here had yet to hear the “bright analysis” on what the elections would mean to the 8 million or so families without enough food to eat each day in this country that considered itself agricultural.

That number was the estimate on “food poor” families here, based on a recent survey on “self-rated poverty” done by another publication.

Business organizations like the Philippine Association of Feed Millers Inc., or Pafmi, had warned us about an “impending” food crisis coming from spikes in food prices.

Alongside the dire forecast, the guys down here could still expect the continuous bombardment of news and updates, even in social media, about the supposed “danger” of so-called GM (genetically modified) crops, i.e. food.

From our end, all the screams from the anti-GM crops groups seemed to be connected to the move of the Aquino (Part II) administration to form new guidelines on GM crops.

The guidelines would have this unbearably long title: “Rules and Regulations for the Research and Development, Handling and Use, Transboundary Movement, Release into the Environment, and Management of Plant and Plant Products Derived from the Use of Modern Biotechnology.”

Still, the guidelines could be the only logical response of the administration to the Supreme Court ruling in December that cancelled the 14-year-old rules on GM crops.

The reason went like this: If the old rules were wrong, then the administration should correct them.

The rules were laid down in Administrative Order 8-2002, allowing the importation of GM crops such as soybeans which are used for making animal feeds.

By scrapping the 14-year old rules, the Supreme Court thus also imposed an outright ban on the importation of GM crops.

The ban would be enforced until after the Aquino (Part II) administration would have come up with new rules.

Overseeing the formulation of rules for the past three months was the National Committee on Biosafety of the Philippines, or NCBP.

With the recent spate of attacks against GM crops, the NCBP also came under fire from some supposedly environmentalist groups.

For instance, they assailed the NCBP for its supposed abject unforgivable failure to provide “advanced” copies of the draft guidelines in all the public hearings.

Never mind that the “draft” could be easily downloaded from the NCBP website or those of the other departments involved with the new guidelines.

To those groups, the Aquino (Part II) administration was simply railroading the new rules supposedly with evil design.

Let us say it was true: Even just this

BREAKTIME

*Conrado R.
Banal III*



once, at least before our leader, Benigno Simeon, ends his term in a few months, his boys really wanted to do their jobs. What on earth could be wrong with that?

Even environmentalist groups believed the administration wanted to come up with the rules asap, to avoid the certain disruption in the importation of GMO crops.

Chief among those crops was soybean meal, which this country has been using to make animal feeds, importing every year some 2 million tons of it.

One media report said that, because our stocks of soybean meal would soon run out, the administration wanted to hurry up the new rules, only to serve the interest of the importers.

It should follow that the small-time guys raising hogs and chickens and tilapia would not benefit from a steady supply of feeds—was that it?

There—the overused line that the government always took the side of business—and not the small chicken raiser or even the consumers!

It did not matter that the importation would mean cheap GM crops for lower priced animal feeds for the use of small time poultry raisers to benefit the con-

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sumers. But what could we make of the claims that all GM crops were so bad they actually came from the devil.

In short, it was as if humans would be the next to die!

The anti-GM-crop campaign forgot to include in its media blitz obligatory scientific studies to support the claims.

Not too long ago, an international scientific publication retracted an article written by one French professor, Gilles Eric Seralini, an anti-biotechnology advocate.

He came out with a study, supposedly showing that GM corn caused tumor among laboratory mice.

Other scientists questioned his methodology, since he used certain species of rats that were known to be prone to developing tumor—with or without the GM corn.

He also prohibited media from checking his "findings" with other scientists prior to his holding the press conference to announce the study to the world.

Other scientists viewed such a demand simply as a shameless PR stunt.

Also, British journalist and environmentalist Mark Lynas reportedly made a 180-degree turn, from being an avid anti-GM crop campaigner for two decades, to a pro-GM crop campaigner.

These were his exact words: "Most of the anti-GMO case is mythology, and does not stand up to scientific scrutiny."

In 2013, Lynas admitted GM crops could be one of the technological options that could benefit the environment.

In the Philippines, the Institute of Plant Breeding in UP Los Baños has been con-

ducting field trials on the so-called Bt eggplant, which could produce the protein to fight fruit and stem borer, which in turn was the most destructive eggplant pest.

Scientists described the variety as "pro-people" and "pro-environment," as it could increase the yield of the farmers, thus improving their incomes.

Huh, and the new rules would not help farmers, because the Aquino (Part II) administration was trying to finish them as soon as possible?

Even the World Health Organization did not close the door on GM crops, declaring in its website that "GM foods available in the international market have passed safety assessments and are not likely to present risks to human health.

"No effects on human health have been shown as a result of the consumption of such foods by the general population in countries where they have been approved."

One estimate put at more than 2,000 the number of studies documenting that biotechnology did not pose unusual threat to human health.

Still, doubts continued to arise, perhaps fueled by all sorts of media outbursts of those screaming environmentalist groups.

The new rules being formulated by the NBCEP contained provisions for continuous studies—i.e. scientific research and experiments—on GM crops.

The commission could not simply shut down everything that had anything to do with GM products, just because of the noise from certain environmentalists groups.

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PH fishers narrate Chinese hostility

By Gabriel Cardinoza
Inquirer Northern Luzon

LINGAYEN, Pangasinan—A group of fishermen, who returned home to the fishing village of Cato in Infanta town on Monday, told village officials that they were struck with bottles hurled by Chinese coast guards who had chased them away from the Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal.

Charlito Maniago, Cato village chief, said the fishermen, who were in two boats, were pelted by the crew of a Chinese Coast Guard vessel, after they were warned to stay away from the disputed shoal.

Maniago said he was not informed when the confrontation took place at sea, although it

could have been on the same day the fishermen from neighboring Zambales province were shooed away from the shoal on March 5.

"They just told me that they retaliated by throwing stones at the Chinese coast guards," Maniago told the INQUIRER by telephone.

The fisherman sailed with rocks, which they used to weigh down the fishing lines, once they reached Scarborough Shoal, also known as Panatag Shoal and Bajo de Masinloc.

The shoal, which is about 260 kilometers from Infanta, serves as a mid-sea refuge for fishing boats during stormy weather. It used to be a free zone for local fishermen until the Chinese began patrolling the West Philippine Sea.

Government officials have remained tight-lipped regarding the latest incidents that could heighten tensions between the Philippines and China in the disputed South China Sea.

Cmdr. Armand Balilo, spokesperson of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), said his office had not received reports about the alleged standoff between Chinese coast guards and Filipino fishermen in Zambales or in Pangasinan.

"I know nothing about it. When it comes to issues in the West Philippine Sea, PCG is not authorized to speak about these," Balilo told the INQUIRER on Monday.

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) has jurisdiction over the complaints of fishermen against the Chinese coast guards patrolling the shoal, he said.

Assistant Secretary Charles Jose, DFA spokesperson, said his office was still verifying the report. "We're awaiting official

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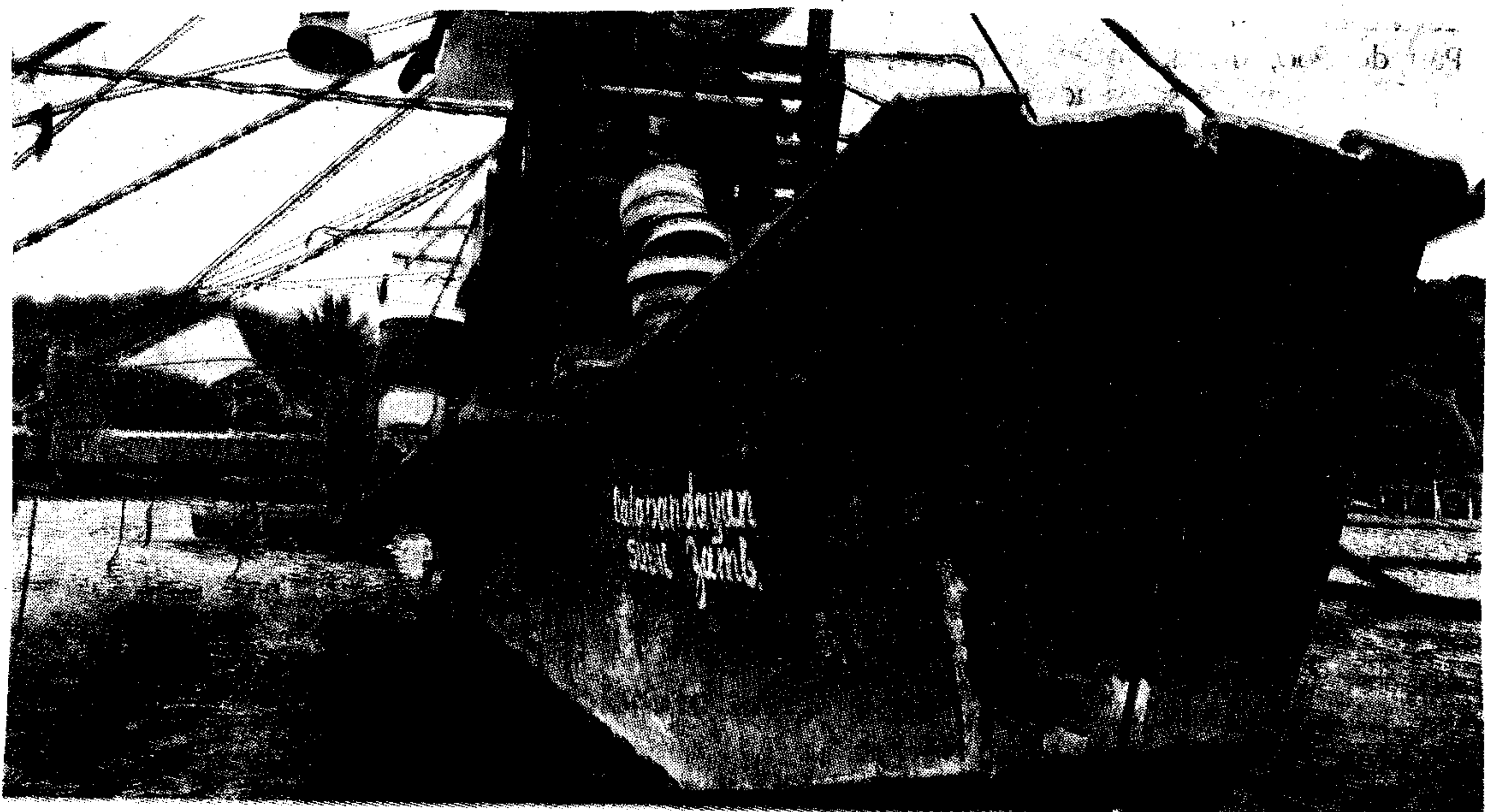
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DAMAGED A hole is seen on the hull of the fishing boat, F/B Bubhoy, which was reportedly rammed by a rubber boat of the Chinese Coast Guard on March 5 when Filipino fishermen ventured near disputed Scarborough Shoal in the West Philippine Sea.

ALLAN MACATUNO/INQUIRER CENTRAL LUZON

report from our concerned agencies on the incident," he said in a text message.

Maniago said only one of two fishing boats had returned to his village. The other one, he said, was already on its way home. Each vessel carried 10 fishermen.

Fishermen catch fish around the "payao" (artificial reefs) scattered some 10 nautical miles (18.52 kilometers) from the Panatag Shoal during day time. They sail to the shoal at night.

Jowe Legaspi, Cato council member and a fishing boat operator, said he almost deployed a group of fishermen to the shoal two weeks ago. But he said he

was informed by his cousin Christopher de Vera, who had returned from the shoal, that the Chinese coast guards had also driven his boat away.

"They almost had no catch. They did not recover their expenses of about P40,000," Legaspi said.

Legaspi was one of the 16 Infanta fishermen who asked the United Nations in September last year to compel China and its state agents to respect the rights of Filipino fishermen over their traditional fishing grounds in the Panatag Shoal.

Fishermen have been returning to the shoal despite the risk of be-

ing harassed by Chinese coast guard because the area is "really a rich fishing ground," he said.

In January 2014, Chinese vessels fired water cannons at a group of Infanta fishermen and other fishing boats while these were anchored at the shoal to avoid huge waves whipped up by strong winds at that time.

On two occasions in April last year, 80 fishermen in 15 boats from Pangasinan, Zambales and Bataan provinces were driven away from the shoal by water cannons fired from a Chinese vessel guarding the area. *With a report from Allan Macatuno, Inquirer Central Luzon*



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EDITORIAL

A threat in the neighborhood

Indonesia is reportedly studying the possibility of seeking international arbitration. This was after a Chinese coastguard vessel prevented Jakarta from impounding over the weekend a fishing boat that was caught in the Natuna Sea – the waters surrounding Indonesia's Riau province. Indonesia detained the eight Chinese crewmembers.

It was not the first such incident. In 2010 and 2013, Chinese vessels also demanded the release of Chinese fishermen and a trawler apprehended by Indonesia in the Natuna Sea. The incident over the weekend comes on the heels of reports that 11 Filipino fishermen were shooed away from Panatag Shoal off Zambales by the Chinese.

In 2012, the Philippine Navy apprehended eight Chinese fishing vessels around Panatag. One of the vessels was found with a cargo of illegally collected corals, giant clams and live sharks. Chinese maritime surveillance ships, however, prevented the Philippine Navy from arresting the fishermen.

The incident contributed to the decision of the Philippines to ask

the United Nations-backed arbitral tribunal in The Hague to define the country's maritime entitlements under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. A decision is expected within the year. Recent reports said Vietnam, Japan and now Indonesia are studying a similar approach to settle its maritime disputes with China.

This is what happens when Beijing's response to its neighbors' protests against its expansive maritime territorial claims is met with even more aggressive moves in disputed waters.

Beijing is painting its activities as part of efforts to protect the environment, marine resources and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. But this is belied by numerous incidents in which Chinese maritime vessels, almost always armed, deprive marginalized fishermen of their livelihood, in waters that are a long way from China's 200-mile exclusive economic zone as defined under UNCLOS. Beijing should not wonder why its avowed peaceful rise rings hollow, especially among several nations in its own backyard.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Editorial: A threat in the neighborhood



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MWSS' Angat project gets P5.7-B ADB loan

By Ben O. de Vera

MANILA-BASED multilateral lender Asian Development Bank (ADB) will lend to the Philippines \$123.3 million (about P5.7 billion) for a project aimed at modernizing Metro Manila's water supply system.

The loan approved by the ADB will be used by state-run Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System

(MWSS) to build a new tunnel at the Angat transmission system in order to "(reduce) the risk of shortages as demand for water rises in tandem with the city's booming population."

"The Angat transmission system provides more than 95 percent of Manila's water but its existing tunnels are up to 75 years old and in poor condition, leaving the metropolitan area highly vulnerable to

serious supply disruptions. This assistance will allow the MWSS to build a fourth tunnel, clearing the way for it to upgrade and modernize its other existing tunnels and aqueducts to maximize and strengthen supplies," said Paul van Klaveren, senior urban development specialist at the ADB's Southeast Asia department.

"In the interim, there is an urgent need to rehabilitate the Angat system to avert a

potential supply breakdown, and the MWSS has been carrying out improvements including the construction of a new aqueduct. The benefits of this aqueduct can only be fully achieved if a new tunnel is built to provide it with raw water," according to the ADB.

The soon-to-be-built additional tunnel will be more than six-kilometer long, with an internal span of around four me-

ters, the ADB said.

"A key element will be the structural measures to limit the impact of earthquakes and other hazards, as well as environmental degradation. Capacity building support will also be provided to improve the skills of MWSS staff so they can meet their management responsibilities for securing raw water supplies for the concessionaires," the ADB said.

Groups alarmed at reef bleaching

SYDNEY—Environmental groups Monday urged greater action on climate change after the government sounded the alarm over severe coral bleaching in the pristine northern reaches of Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

The government said Sunday that corals had turned white and gray in parts of the World Heritage-listed marine park, with the bleaching "severe" in the northern areas.

Environmental group WWF said large sections of coral near Lizard Island were drained of all color and fighting for survival.

"The reef can recover but we must speed up the shift to clean, renewable energy and we must build reef resilience by reducing runoff pollution from farms and land clearing," said WWF spokesperson Richard Leck.

Bleaching occurs when abnormal environmental conditions, such as warmer sea temperatures, cause corals to expel tiny photosynthetic algae, draining them of their color.

Corals can recover if the water temperature drops and the algae are able to recolonize them.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority said recent underwater surveys had detected "substantial levels of coral mortality" in the remote far north areas, blaming prolonged higher than average sea surface temperatures.

As a result, it has raised its response to level three -- the highest level in its response plan and indicating "severe regional bleaching".

"The pictures we're seeing coming out of the northern Great Barrier Reef are devastating," said Greenpeace Australia Pacific's Shani Tager.

"The Queensland and federal governments must see this as a red alert and act accordingly."

She called on the government to reconsider coal mining, saying the burning of the fuel was "driving climate change, warming our waters and bleaching the life and color out of our reef".

Scientists had feared that the current El Niño weather phenomenon—when the trade winds over the tropical Pacific start to weaken—and sea surface temperatures rise—would affect the reef. **AFP**