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29 MAR 2016

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Tuesday

DENR

IN THE NEWS

The Standard

DEFINING THE NEWS

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

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Stop open burning, DENR tells villagers around Apo

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources is urging communities around Mt. Apo to help prevent exacerbating fire woes in this mountain by avoiding open burning as much as possible.

DENR's Forest Protection Section chief Raul Briz said fire from open burning can spread to upper portions of Mt. Apo, worsening problems already created by the blaze there at present.

"Prevention is still the best defense against future fires," he said.

He noted spread of fire from open burning is very possible due to wind and dry conditions in the area, he noted.

"Fire there will be difficult to control once it spreads," he said.

During the weekend, reports surfaced about fire razing the up-

per part of Mt. Apo.

Briz said DENR already deployed personnel concerned to monitor the fire.

The fire already razed some 100 hectares of grassland in Mt. Apo, he said, citing initial feedback relayed to him Monday by a community environment and natural resources officer having jurisdiction over a village at the foot of Mt. Apo.

It takes hours of walking to reach Mt. Apo's upper portion so manually bringing water there to put out the ongoing fire is a difficult and almost impossible task, he noted.

DENR has no water bombers for aerial firefighting.

According to Briz, the ongoing fire in Mt. Apo might be due to disposal there of either charred wood used in cooking or cigarettes smoked in the area.

"There's no natural fire in the Philippines," he said.

Fire due to lightning strikes is unlikely as rain quenches sparks on the ground, he noted.

"Mountain fires nationwide are 99.9 percent man-made," he said.

Authorities identified Mt. Apo as the Philippines' highest peak with an elevation of 3,143.6 meters above sea level.

Mt. Apo is the main attraction of Mt. Apo Natural Park which straddles parts of regions XI and XII.

RA 9237 (Mt. Apo Protected Area Act of 2003) established Apo as a protected area under category of a natural park to secure its protection and conservation.

The law also established Mt. Apo peripheral area as buffer zones.

All activities including open burning are banned inside Apo except in the multi-use area where some activities are permitted, noted Briz.

Mt. Apo Natural Park's total buffer zone covers about 9,000 hectares, DENR also said.

Open burning is likewise banned there and in forestlands outside such zone, Briz continued.

He noted DENR approval is still needed for open burning in titled private pasture land outside the buffer zone. **PNA**

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

MGB to spend P900M for geologic, groundwater maps

THE government will spend around P900 million to produce the country's geologic quadrangle and groundwater maps in the next two years, an important factor in mining, exploration, construction and urban-planning undertakings.

Director Leo Jasareno of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources's (DENR) Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) said the agency will produce new 1:50,000 scale geologic quadrangle and groundwater maps, which is one of the agency's core functions.

According to Jasareno, about P400 million of the P1.03-billion budget of the MGB this year will be used for works related to the geologic quadrangle and groundwater maps. Next year, of its proposed P1.3-billion budget, around P500 million will also be spent for these projects. Jasareno said they intend to complete these by the end of 2017.

The MGB, Jasareno added, started producing geologic quadrangle maps in the 1980s. The project was stopped in 2007 to give way for the production of the more important geohazard maps. "We are now resuming our work on geologic quadrangle maps," he said, adding that the MGB has only accomplished 20 percent of the task when they shifted focus

“This is important because it will identify rocks and soil conditions in the map. This is useful for mining exploration, construction and urban planning.”—JASARENO

to producing geohazard maps.

"Now that we have completed our geohazard maps, we will focus on the geologic map. This is important because it will identify rocks and soil conditions in the map. This is useful for mining exploration, construction and urban planning," Jasareno said.

Since 2005, the MGB has not published geological quadrangle maps.

The MGB targets to complete within the year the map for Region 3 (Central Luzon), Jasareno said.

Jasareno added that the MGB is simultaneously working to produce groundwater maps, which will identify locations or areas with groundwater supply.

The groundwater maps, he said, will be produced upon the request of the National Water Resources Board (NWRB).

"The map will be important to

the NWRB for permitting purposes," Jasareno added. The groundwater map will identify the volume of groundwater available in a particular area, he said.

He said there will also be water testing to know whether the groundwater in a particular area is still fresh or already contaminated with saltwater.

The MGB's Lands Geologic Survey Division (LGSD) said geological quadrangle maps have many practical applications. These include applications for vulnerability assessment, solid waste disposal site selection, land-use planning, said Lilian Rollan, chief of the LGSD.

Last month, the LGSD conducted a workshop to standardize procedures for geologic quadrangle mapping.

It aims to standardize methods and outputs for geologic quadrangle mapping, and encompassed a series of comprehen-

sive lecture about basic mapping techniques, standardization of methodology for mapping, Philippine Stratigraphy, unified map format and other related topics.

Danilo Uykieng, MGB assistant director, said the geologic quadrangle-mapping activity should be treated as an opportunity to gather all the necessary interrelated data that are relevant to the various facets of MGB, such as mining, geohazard, geologic and environmental.

Former MGB geologists who gave lectures at the workshop, include Rolando Peña of the consulting geologist of Geoscience Foundation Inc., Arnulfo Cabantog, consulting geologist of Apex Mines Co. Inc., and Mario Aurelio, director of the University of the Philippines-National Institute of Geological Sciences.

The MGB geologists from the central and regional offices will be deployed to Region 3, the project's target area for 2016,

to finish the 1:50,000 scale geologic mapping of 64 quadrangles in the region. The geologic map output will be Geograph Information System-based.

The MGB also produces geohazard maps, which are intended to identify areas that are prone to various geologic hazards, such as flood and landslides, to aid decision-makers in reducing risks of disasters. **Jonathan L. Mayuga**

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Camping climbers blamed for Apo fire

PAGE 2A/3A

By Williamor A. Magbanua, Orlando Dinoy and Eldie S. Aguirre
Inquirer Mindanao

KIDAPAWAN CITY—Volunteer firefighters built a 200-meter-long buffer line to contain the forest fire in the southwestern side of Mt. Apo, the country's highest mountain and prime peak of mountain trekkers, in North Cotabato province.

But the fire was creeping in Apo's northwestern side in Davao del Sur province, prompting authorities to concentrate their efforts in Sta. Cruz town and stop its spread toward Davao City's Calinan District.

The Bureau of Fire Protection has yet to determine the cause of the fire, which has been raging in the majestic mountain shared by North Cotabato and Davao del Sur since Saturday afternoon. Apo, with an area of 54,974 hectares of land, was declared a natural park in 2004.

Janice Javellona, officer of the Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (MDRRMC) in Bansalan, Davao del Sur, said it might have been started by climbers who had set up a camp fire.

"The temperature on Saturday was negative 3. According to some of our rescuers, they received information that some climbers lighted a fire in front of their camp," she said.

Kapatagan trail

The fire started in the Kapatagan trail in Davao del Sur and spread to North Cotabato, according to Harry Camoro, action officer of the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

All 120 trekkers who used the Kidapawan trail have been accounted for and have safely returned to their places of origin. "They are all safe. None of them was hurt while going down the peak after the fire broke out," said Joey Recemilla, Kidapawan city tourism officer.

At least 200 volunteers from the towns of Makilala and Magpet and this city were deployed in the base camp in Lake Venado to ensure that the fire would not reach the Kidapawan-Magpet-Makilala (KMM) ecotourism triangle.

"The KMM ecotourism triangle is now safe, but we are still on a tight watch, especially that the fire is still ongoing in the Davao side, and the wind direction keeps on changing," Recemilla said.

Buffer line

He said the volunteers, armed with spades, rakes, bolos and chainsaws, conducted clearing operations and drew a buffer line to stop the fire from spreading to the remaining flora and fauna around the lake, and the 72-hectare reforestation area of Energy Development Corp. (EDC), which oper-

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Corrupting climbers blamed for Apo fire!

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ates the Mount Apo Geothermal Power plant in the North Cotabato side.

The buffer line is about 10 meters wide and at least 200 meters long. Recemilla said the volunteers cleared the peripheries of dried materials and cut some trees to build the fire line.

Local government units provided food and logistics to the volunteers who stayed at the base camp for almost two days since the fire broke out.

North Cotabato Gov. Emmylou Talino-Mendoza called on people responsible for the fire to be brave enough to come forward, as well as those with any information about the incident. "This would be helpful in identifying those who should be held accountable for this abominable act," she said in a statement.

Kidapawan Mayor Joseph Evangelista has recommended the suspension of the Mt. Apo Summer Trek, saying all trails would be closed to climbers this summer to prevent a similar incident from happening.

It will take at least five years to rehabilitate the mountain, Evangelista said.

Summer treks

Bansalan had just opened a trail, which is nearer to the peak of Mt. Apo. But its mayor, Edwin Reyes, ordered the suspension of "Summer Climb 2016" even with the newly opened trail.

Almost 200 hectares of forest land had been lost along with its wildlife, said Alden Batal, the municipal tourism officer.

Edgardo Elera, Digos City tourism officer and acting officer of the Incident Management Team, said the forest fire in Bansalan had been contained as of Monday afternoon.

"We are now concentrating our efforts on the Sta. Cruz (town in Davao del Sur) side to prevent the fire from spreading towards Barangay Tamayong in Calinan, Davao City," Elera said.

Two teams of mountaineers were sent to Sitio Colan and Sitio Baroring in Barangay Sibulan, Sta. Cruz, to determine the extent of the forest fire, said Einstein Gary Taghoy, executive officer of Digos City's Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

"They are equipped with handheld radios to provide the IMT base with relevant information which would be the basis for any possible action," Taghoy said.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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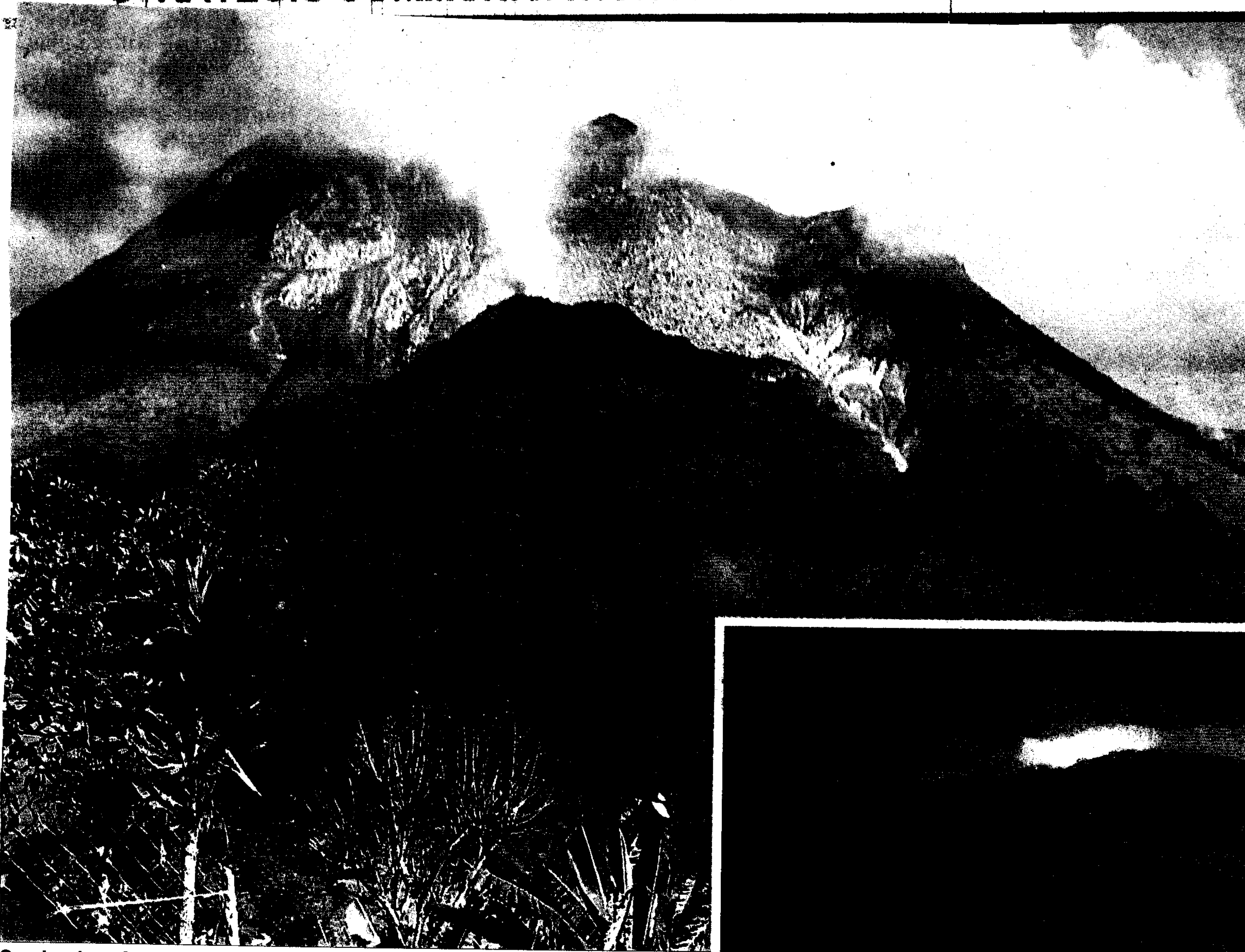
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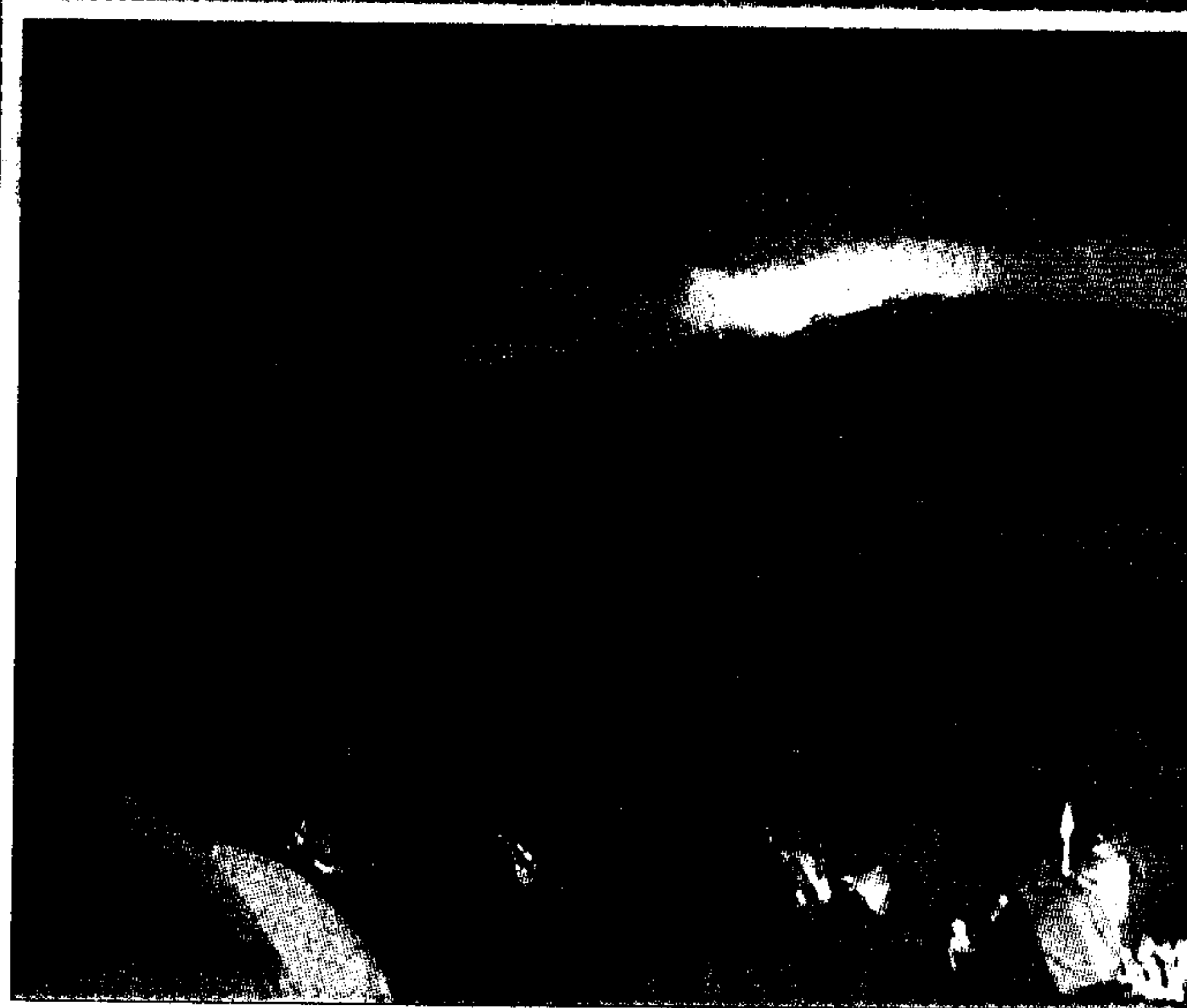
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Smoke rises from Mt. Apo, the country's highest mountain, as seen from the town of Digos, Davao del Sur yesterday. Inset photo taken by Sajid Mamadra from base camp shows the blaze raging near the summit the other night. An estimated 200 hectares of forest have been damaged by the fire while thousands of tourist hikers have been evacuated from the mountain. Story on Page 12. EPA





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Fire on Mt. Apo rages

By EDITH REGALADO

DAVAO CITY – A forest fire continued to rage on Mt. Apo yesterday.

Authorities said the fire, which started at the Kidapawan City trail on Saturday, spread to the side of the mountain facing Sta. Cruz town in Davao del Sur and near Mt. Talomo on the side of Davao City.

Mt. Apo, the country's highest mountain, straddles Davao City, North Cotabato and Davao del Sur.

North Cotabato tourism officer Joey Recimilla said the forest fire was only about two kilometers away from Lake Venado on Sunday.

Recimilla expressed concern that the fire could hit the Kidapawan-Magpet-Makilala eco-triangle.

Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte has ordered members of Davao City's 911 teams, whom he sent to Tacloban at

the height of Super Typhoon Yolanda, to assist the Bureau of Fire Protection personnel in Makilala and Magpet towns in North Cotabato.

"Mt. Apo is not only a tourist spot and an adventure site for taking selfies, but also one of the mountains and volcanoes with forests that help manage the effects of climate change," Duterte said.

"El Niño is undeniably here. We need less talk and more action to protect or enhance nature around us, since our survival depends on it, especially the rural poor," he added.

Sen. Ralph Recto said the lack of forest rangers leaves the country's woodlands prone to poachers. He bewailed the lack of personnel to put out forest fires.

"The lack of forest rangers reached a general alarm a long time ago," Recto said. –
With Janvic Mateo, Marvin Sy

The Manila Times

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Hundreds flee as 2-day fire rages in Mount Apo

BY MOH SAADUDDIN
CORRESPONDENT

KIDAPAWAN CITY: A fire that gutted the forested lands at the peak of Mount Apo here since Saturday forced hundreds of people to flee as citizens and government agencies continue to contain the blaze that entered into its second day on Monday.

Firefighters dug ditches of about seven-feet (two metres) deep in their battle to contain the three-day fire, which local leaders viewed as a culpable act.

Region 12's Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR-12) Parks Operations superintendent Edward Ragaza, said they are evaluating the situation with priority to immediately contain the fire.

The blaze started at about 1 p.m. on Saturday in an open field near the mountain's peak facing Davao del Sur that quickly spread to nearby areas.

About 200 trekkers who climbed the mountain for the Holy Week and another 1,000 tourists were safely evacuated.

The fire already gutted about two hundred hectares of grass and forest lands.

Ragaza said strong winds fanned the blaze and could spread more if affected areas are not fully contained.

Philippine Air Force's helicopters were sent in the area on Sunday to examine the affected-areas but no details were provided yet.

Some setbacks to immediately stop the fire were attributed to Mount Apo's height - 3,142 meters above sea level - making it the highest peak in the Philippines.

Towering over the main southern island of Mindanao, Mt. Apo is home to forest reserves and the breeding ground for the country's national bird, the endangered monkey-eating eagle.

Meanwhile, North Cotabato Gov. Emmylou Taliño-Mendoza urged the public to immediately help control the on-going fire and identify the culprits behind the irresponsible act.

"The fire that recently hit and

is currently raging in Mt. Apo Natural Park is reprehensible," Mendoza said in a statement.

She said the fire happened despite enforced policies, rules and regulations on tourism destinations to protect them from hazards, especially amid the Niño phenomenon that had dried up grasses and trees which could be easily gutted by fire.

It was not yet established whether some trekkers were responsible for the incident.

City Tourism Officer Joey Cimilla said numerous reports on the cause of the fire were being validated.

Last January, forested land "Sleeping Lady" mountain range located at the boundaries of Davao del Sur, Maguindanao and North Cotabato was razed by fire twice which was initially blamed on animal hunters.

WITH AFP REPORT

1 story

THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
SINCE 1900

MANILA BULLETIN

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

200 hectares of forest cover already affected by Mt. Apo fire

By MALU CADELINA MANAN,
ELLALYN B. DE VERA, and PNA

KIDAPAWAN CITY – The Mount Apo blaze, which has already destroyed at least 200 hectares of forest cover, was raised to “forest fire” category yesterday, an official of the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) said.

A forest fire is uncontrolled ►4

and will take a long time for fire fighting crew to have control over the situation. This could result in massive destruction of the Mt. Apo forest.

Joey Recemilla, chair of PAMB's eco-tourism committee, said the extent of the damage caused by the blaze, initially categorized as bushfire when it broke out Saturday afternoon, has already been so wide, destroying forests mostly on the towns in Davao del Sur province surrounding Mt. Apo.

According to Harry Camoro, Davao del Sur provincial disaster risk-reduction management officer, the forest fire already damaged more than 200 hectares and may destroy more if no immediate solution will be undertaken.

Camoro said the fire started from the Kapatagan trail in Digos City and spread towards the side of Lake Venado.

Firefighters coming from various fire stations in Davao del Sur have been dispatched to help contain the forest fire that hit Mt. Apo since Saturday noon.

Camoro said there were no reported injuries and nearly all of the 1,000 tourists who were on the mountain were evacuated by noon Sunday.

Davao City is also sending its team from Central 911 to help quell the fire. The trail to Mt. Apo from Davao City area has long been closed to trekkers.

Presidential candidate and Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte on Sunday ordered Central 911 to respond to the Mt. Apo fire.

Duterte called for urgent action to help quell the forest fire that broke out at around 1 p.m. of March 26.

Considered the highest peak in the country with an elevation of 2,954 meters, Mt. Apo is one of the Philippines' favorite tourist destinations and often visited during Holy Week.

Areas under threat

Based on PAMB's monitoring as of Monday, areas in Davao del Sur that are under threat of forest fires include the remaining forest canopy of Sta. Cruz town, all trails going to the peak, the Tamayong area, and camp sites in Sitios Kulan, Godi-Godi, and Tompis.

However, PAMB cannot yet release reports on the extent of damage.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is already coordinating with the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) for the use of their air assets to conduct the assessment of extent of damages.

DENR-Region 11 (Davao Region) Director Joselin Marcus Fragada said the fire was not immediately contained due to the ongoing drought triggered by the El Niño phenomenon.

Fragada immediately instructed Davao del Sur PENRO Ma. Mercedes Dumagan and Parks Operations Superintendent of Mt. Apo Eduardo Ragasa to coordinate with the concerned local government units and agencies to determine the extent and coverage of the fire.

Forest line established

On the Cotabato side, a 10-meter wide “forest line” was established to prevent the fires to “consume” the remaining forests in the so-called Kidapawan-Makilala-Magpet (KMM) eco-triangle, according to Recemilla.

“In a situation where there is no water, we immediately created a tightly spaced road or line, about 10 meters wide, so as not to fuel the fire,” he explained.

Some 2,000 volunteers, coming from towns of Makilala, Magpet, and Kidapawan City, were deployed in Lake Venado and at the Ma-ag Reforestation Area of the Energy Development Corporation (EDC), with their bolos, rake, shovel, and other tools. They cut the small trees and grasses and clean the dried leaves to set up a forest line.

“This is a simple yet effective tool to fight forest fire,” said Recemilla.

As of Monday, Recemilla said the grassfires on the KMM triangle are already “under control.”

“We have technical problems but we were able to resolve them quickly

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200 hectares of forest were already affected by Mt. Apo fire

because of the immediate actions undertaken by our LGU executives," he explained.

Limited access

Prior to the raging forest fire at Mt. Apo, the PAMB already limited trekking during the Holy Week to prevent wildfires.

A resolution was issued last month by the Eco-Tourism Committee of the MANP-PAMB limiting the number of trekkers in specific trails of Mt. Apo during the Holy Week.

During this season, it is believed that fires at Mt. Apo can break out accidentally due to increased human activities such as accumulating trash, indiscriminate throwing of cigarette butts or cooking food.

A similar policy has been adopted by the Eco-Tourism Committee during last year's Holy Week observation.

However this year, MANP-PAMB also took into consideration the ongoing El Niño event that could exacerbate possible forest fires due to dry condition.

This year, only six trails in Mt. Apo were opened to climbers. Authorities set a limit of 1,000 climbers for all trails, with the number of trekkers allowed in specific trails as follows: Sta. Cruz, 300; Digos City, 200; and Bansalan, 100, all in Davao del Sur province, and Makilala, 100; Kidapawan, 200; and Magpet, 100, all in Cotabato province.

Off limits

Following the incident, Mt. Apo has been declared off limits to all trekkers effective immediately due to dangers posed by the ongoing forest fires.

DENR-Forest Management Bureau (DENR-FMB) Director Ricardo Calderon, however, said the cause of the fire remains undetermined.

"The investigation of the incident is ongoing. Our PENRO (Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Officer) and staff are now in Barangay Kapatagan in Mt. Apo," Calderon said in a text message.

However, Calderon confirmed that the fire that broke out last Black Saturday was "aggravated by the (extreme) hot weather condition prevailing in the area."

Camp fire possible culprit

As to the cause of fire, reports said a group of trekkers who used the trails in Sta. Cruz town could have started the blaze after they created a small fire near their camp in Lake Venado just to warm them on Good Friday night.

Though Recemilla refused to confirm such report, he said it could be a possibility. The PAMB will investigate the matter, anyway, he said.

"But right now, what we will do is to immediately put off the fires on Mount Apo. And we need help, we badly need them so as to save the mountain," he said. (With a report from PNA)



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PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

Duterte orders Davao rescue unit to help fight Apo fire

Presidential aspirant Davao City Mayor Rodrigo R. Duterte has directed Central 911, the emergency unit of Davao City, to respond to a reported massive grass fire that hit the country's highest peak and already destroyed more than 100 hectares of forest cover.

Duterte called for urgent action to quell the forest fire that broke out at around 1 p.m. last March

26 in the Kidapawan City side of Mount Apo.

"Davao City's 911 units are always ready to respond if necessary," he said of the Davao City Emergency Response Team that addresses calls needing police assistance and any type of emergency and has gone providing assistance beyond Davao City.

Duterte also called for long term

action on watershed management and forest protection especially in important watersheds like Mount Apo.

"Mount Apo is not only a tourist spot, and adventure for taking selfies, but mountains and volcanoes with forests help manage the effects of climate change and," he said. **(Alexander D. Lopez and PNA)**



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Responsable sa forest fire sa Mt. Apo, papanagutin

DAVAO CITY - Hinihimok ni North Cotabato Gov. Emmylou Taliño-Mendoza ang naging bisita sa Mt. Apo Natural Park (MANP) na responsable sa forest fire sa Mt. Apo na maglakas-loob na lumantad at aminin ang pagkakamali.

"And whoever has any information on the person or persons responsible for this, I urge you to come forward and provide the authorities of such information. This would be helpful in identifying those who should be held accountable for this abominable act," sabi ni Mendoza.

Sa kanyang pahayag kaugnay ng forest fire sa pinakamataas na bundok sa Pilipinas, nilinaw ng gobernador na nagpalabas na ang pamahalaang panglalawigan ng mga polisiya, patakaran, at regulasyon upang mapanatili ang ganda ng MANP.

Dagdag niya, dahil sa umiiral na El Niño phenomenon, hindi kailanman nagkulang ang pamahalaang panglalawigan sa pagpapaalala sa mga Cotabateño at mga turista na maging maingat at responsable sa kanilang mga ginagawa sa parke.

"Thus, cooking and eating in the Asik Asik falls complex have been prohibited. Also, there are monitors and guidelines set for our New Israel zipline facility. And in the Mt. Apo National Park, the City Government of Kidapawan has regulated its climbing season and has issued its climbing rules to be followed," paliwanag ni Mendoza. "Notwithstanding having all these in place, there are just some people who do not care or who could not follow and obey these policies and rules."

Ito ang naging pahayag ng gobernador

matapos maraming netizens ang magalit sa insidente, at sinisi ang kapabayaang mga lokal na pamahalaan sa pagpapahintulot pa rin sa trekking kahit na may El Niño.

Sabado pa nagsimulang magliyab ang tuktok ng Mt. Apo at kumalat na ito sa mahigit 100 hektarya ng bundok.

Kinumpirma kahapon ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)-Region 11 na nakikipag-ugnayan na ang kagawaran sa mga lokal na pamahalaan at sa Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICCs) sa paligid ng Mt. Apo para tuluyang maapula ang apoy at matukoy ang lawak ng pinsala, sa tulong ng Philippine Air Force (PAF), Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), at Office of the Civil Defense.

Alexander D. Lopez

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'Cabinet man, mom get 10 yrs for graft

By Marlon Ramos

A MEMBER of President Aquino's Cabinet has been found guilty of graft and could go to prison, a development that may help blunt criticisms that the administration's anti-corruption campaign is targeting only those who do not be-

long to the ruling party.

"While I don't want to use [his] name, this is proof that justice under the *daang matuwid* (straight path) is non-partisan," Liberal Party (LP) standard-bearer Mar Roxas said, in reference to the President's governance slogan.

Nereus Acosta, presidential

adviser for environmental protection, was sentenced to up to 10 years in prison by the Sandiganbayan yesterday for allocating P5.5 million of his pork barrel to a foundation owned by his family when he was a Bukidnon representative in 2006.

The antigraft court's fourth divi-

CABINET/A11

Cabinet man, mom get 10 years for graft

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sion also found his mother, former Mayor Socorro Acosta of Manolo Fortich town, guilty beyond reasonable doubt of violating Republic Act No. 3019, or the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act.

The Acostas have also been barred perpetually from working in government.

Appeal

Acosta said he and his mother would submit to the rule of law and appeal the decision.

A general manager of the Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA), Acosta is the first former lawmaker convicted of graft in connection with the misuse of the Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF), a pork barrel or public funds for pet projects of lawmakers that the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional in November 2013.

Considered the cash cow of unscrupulous lawmakers, the pork barrel system came to the fore in 2013 when whistleblower Benhur Luy exposed the P10-billion scam allegedly cooked up by businesswoman Janet Lim-Napoles.

A number of former and incumbent lawmakers, including Senators Jinggoy Estrada and Bong Revilla, are detained and are standing trial for pocketing millions of pesos of their PDAF that was channeled to bogus

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Cabinet man, mom get 10 yrs. --

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GUILTY SENTENCE Nereus Acosta, presidential adviser for environmental protection and ex-Bukidnon province representative, was sentenced to up to 10 years in prison by the Sandiganbayan for allocating P5.5 million of his pork barrel to a family-owned foundation.

JOAN BONDOC

foundations set up by Napoles.

A member of the LP, Acosta served as representative of the first congressional district of Bukidnon province for three consecutive terms—from 1998 to 2007.

Mother and son were accompanied by their lawyers when the guilty verdict was read to them by clerk of court Jeoffre Zapata.

Nothing political

In an interview after the promulgation of the case, the LLDA official said there was nothing political in the ruling issued by the court.

"This is a 15-year-old case.

The trial went on for seven years This has nothing to do with whether you're an LP [member or with] being in the official family of the President," Acosta told reporters.

He was found guilty for one count of graft, but was absolved in three other offenses. His mother was convicted for two of the four counts of graft.

Mother and son were earlier acquitted by the antigraft tribunal's Fifth Division in a related perjury case filed by the Office of the Ombudsman.

Puzzled

Acosta said he was puzzled by the Sandiganbayan's verdict after it dismissed other connected cases.

"While we are grateful for my acquittal in the two graft cases in the Fourth Division and the acquittal of the perjury case in the Fifth Division, we are saddened and perplexed with the decision of this one case connected with the above mentioned cases," he said.

Law violated

In handing down the guilty verdict, the court said Ombudsman prosecutors were able to prove that Acosta broke the law when he assigned a portion of his PDAF as financial assistance to Bukidnon Vegetable Producers Cooperative (BVPC), which Socorro headed as its chair.

The antigraft tribunal also noted that his father, Juan Acosta, and aunt, Ma. Nemia Bornidor, were among those who "formed and organized" the cooperative as shown by its articles of cooperation.

"The court has carefully studied the evidence on record. The court finds that [the] accused ... indeed committed a violation [of the law]... as charged in the information," the court said in a resolution.

It said "no reason or justification was shown why the BVPC was chosen to be the recipient" of the P5.5 million in financial aid from Acosta's pork barrel, which was coursed through the municipal government of Manolo Fortich.

"The court, therefore, holds that the circumstances ... clearly indicate that the accused ... both acted with manifest partiality and evident bad faith; if not with gross inexcusable negligence, in jointly working for the transfer and release to BVPC of the amount," it ruled.

The court added that Socorro had "financial or pecuniary interest, indirect if not direct, in the transaction involving the release [of the fund] through the municipality of Manolo Fortich."

The decision was written by Associate Justice Oscar Herrera and was concurred in by Associate Justices Jose Hernandez and Alex Quiroz. *With a report from Gil Cabacungan*



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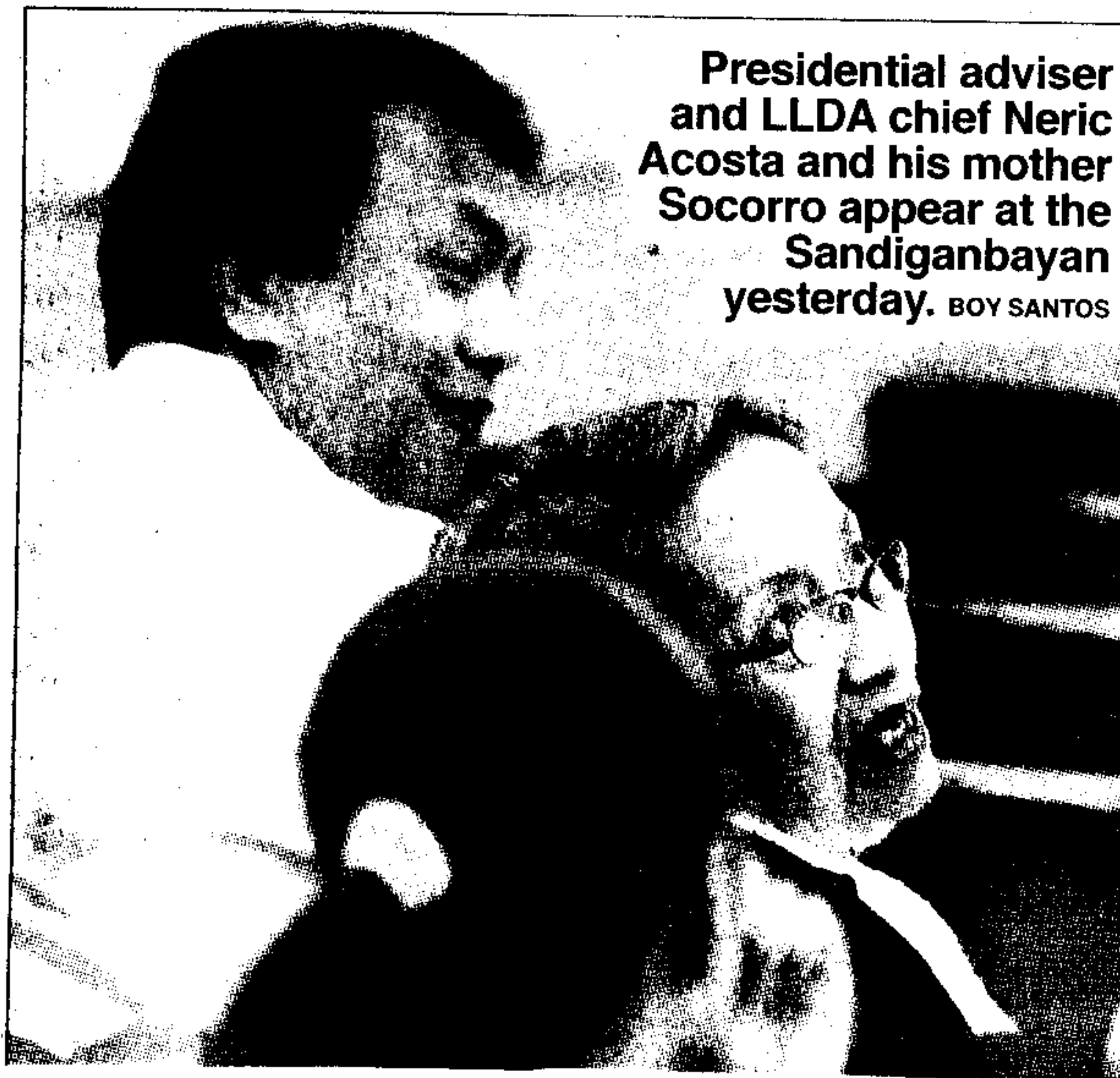
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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

LLDA chief Acosta, mom get 10-20 years over PDAF



Presidential adviser and LLDA chief Neric Acosta and his mother Socorro appear at the Sandiganbayan yesterday. BOY SANTOS



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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

LLDA chief Acosta, mom get 10-20 years over PDAF

Presidential adviser on environmental protection Secretary Neric Acosta was convicted of graft yesterday by the Sandiganbayan for the misuse of his pork barrel funds when he was Bukidnon congressman in 2002.

Acosta, concurrent general manager of the Laguna Lake Development Authority, was sentenced to a maximum of 10 years in prison after seven years of trial.

The anti-graft court's

Fourth Division chaired by Associate Justice Jose Hernandez found Acosta guilty of releasing P5.5 million in Priority Development Assistance Fund to the Bukidnon Vegetable Producers Cooperative where his mother, former Manolo Fortich mayor Socorro Acosta, was director and cooperator.

Socorro was also convicted of graft and sentenced to a prison term of 12 to 20 years.

The Sandiganbayan or-

dered their perpetual disqualification from holding public office.

Acosta and his mother posted bail of P30,000 and P60,000, respectively.

Court records show that Acosta was charged in three separate graft cases filed by the Office of the Ombudsman in March 2009.

The former lawmaker was acquitted in two cases but was found guilty along with his

mother for their acts of causing undue injury to the government in violation of Republic Act 3019.

Associate Justice Oscar Hernandez Jr. penned the Sandiganbayan decision.

Defense counsels manifested after the promulgation of judgment that they would appeal the ruling all the way to the Supreme Court.

Acosta, in an interview with

reporters, said his conviction had nothing to do with his being a member of the Aquino Cabinet and the ruling Liberal Party (LP).

"This was a 15-year-old case. The trial went on for seven years. This has nothing to do with whether you're an LP, and this has nothing to do with being in the official family of the President," he said.

For his part, LP presidential candidate Manuel Roxas

II said the Sandiganbayan ruling on the graft complaint against Acosta should be respected.

"I do not want to use his name. But the anti-graft court's decision is proof that in the straight path, justice is fair. The fight against corruption favors no one and if a case is filed, the court will render a decision. The evidence will determine if the accused is guilty or not," Roxas said.

- With Alexis Romo

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

Sandiganbayan convicts LLDA chief of graft for PDAF misuse

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ

THE Sandiganbayan Fourth Division on Monday convicted Presidential Adviser for Environmental Protection and Laguna Lake Development Authority General Manager Neric Acosta in connection with the questionable use of his Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) when he was still Bukidnon congressman 15 years ago.

The antigrift court convicted Acosta of one count of graft case, while his mother and former Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon, Mayor Socorro Acosta was convicted of

two counts of graft.

Former Mayor Acosta is code-fendant of his son in connection with the transfer of P5.5 million as cash assistance to the Bukidnon

Vegetable Producers' Cooperative (BVPC), where the former mayor was director and cooperator, on July 2, 2002.

The court said that Acosta gave undue preference to the Bukidnon BVPC, saying that the transfer of public funds from the municipal government of Manolo Fortich to BVPC was traced by state auditors through Postal Bank check 995000.

The court sentenced them to six to 10 years of imprisonment and perpetual disqualification from holding public office.

The young Acosta served three terms as representative of Bukidnon from 1998 to 2007. He ran but lost in the senatorial elections in 2010 under the administration's Liberal Party ticket.

For his part, Acosta said he would file a motion for reconsideration before the Sandiganbayan.

Meanwhile, the antigrift acquitted the younger Acosta in two other graft cases, saying the prosecution failed to prove his guilt beyond reasonable doubt.

Acosta's first graft acquittal involved allegation that he caused undue injury to the municipal government of Talakag, Bukidnon, in 2001, and giving unwarranted privilege to the Bukidnon Integrated Network of Home Industries

Inc. (Binhi), a non-governmental organization (NGO), by depriving the local government of the use of a P2.5-million solar tunnel dryer which was purchased for the municipality but was transferred to the NGO.

The second graft case alleged that Acosta also gave P2.5 million in cash as financial assistance to Binhi from his PDAF using the municipal government of Talakag as a conduit.

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THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
SINCE 1900

MANILA BULLETIN

THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



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CONVICTED -**
Presidential Adviser
on Environmental
Protection and
concurrent General
Manager of the
Laguna Lake
Development
Authority Nereus
'Neric' Acosta can
still muster a smile
while seated beside
his mother Socorro
Acosta, former mayor
of Manolo Fortich,
Bukidnon, as they
appear Monday before
the Sandiganbayan
Fourth Division
which convicted
them of graft for the
anomalous use of
the younger Acosta's
Priority Development
Assistance Fund
(PDAF) and sentenced
them to six to 10 years
in prison. (Candice
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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Bidders snub ₱123-B Laguna

Lakeshore deal

Bidders snubbed the auction for the ₱122.8 Billion Laguna Lakeshore Expressway-Dike Project (LLEDP) yesterday.

Nobody submitted any bids for the project at the 2 p.m. deadline and the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), the implementing agency, "terminated" the procedure.

The project, one of the most lucrative in the Public-Private Partnership list has drawn the country's top property developers. But it was likewise one of the most complex.

LLEDP will provide a high standard highway with a dike to ease traffic flow and mitigate flooding in the western

coastal communities along the Laguna Lake.

The 47-kilometer toll road under the project will run from Taguig in Metro Manila through the towns of Calamba to the Los Baños-Bay boundary in Laguna.

The private partner will finance, design, construct, operate, and maintain a 47-kilometer flood control dike with a six lane expressway toll road on top.

It will also include the construction of interchanges, bridges, floodgates, and pumps, from Taguig to Los Baños.

On top of these, the private proponent will reclaim 700 hectares located west of the expressway-dike and separated from the shoreline by a 100-150-meter channel, in Taguig and

Muntinlupa, offering opportunities for mixed-use projects.

For this reason, the LLEDP has attracted the likes of Team Trident consortium composed of Trident Infrastructure & Development Corp., Ayala Land, Inc., Megaworld Corporation, Aboitiz Equity Ventures, Inc. and SM Prime Holdings, Inc.

However, this group – the biggest among the three pre-qualified bidders which include San Miguel Holdings Corp. and the Alloy Pavi Hanshin LLEDP Consortium of Alloy MTD Capital BHD of Malaysia, Prime Asset Ventures, Inc. of Manuel Villar Jr. and Hanshin Engineering Constructions of Korea – already threatened to pull out of the bidding earlier unless the govern-

ment resolves certain issues.

Team Trident seems concerned about the lack of a guarantee over the "road connectivity" to the C5 and C6 roads for the expressway-dike project which spans a 37-year concession period.

In addition to prospective bidder concerns, a geologist maintained that if a large earthquake on the West Marikina Valley Fault ruptures the planned expressway-dike, Metro Manila can go under in a catastrophic deluge.

Already, DPWH has moved the bid submission deadline a number of times since last year. This month, the agency moved it again from March 14, 2016 to March 28, 2016 "to make the necessary modifications to the contract to address certain foreseen risks."

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

DMCI unit reduces stake in Subic water utility

By Doris Dumlao-Abadilla

THE PROPERTY arm of DMCI Holdings has reduced its interest in Subic Water and Sewerage Co (Subic Water) to allow the local government to take part in the enterprise, a pioneer in water and wastewater services investment under a public-private partnership (PPP) model.

Conglomerate DMCI Holdings told the Philippine Stock Exchange on Monday that its subsidiary DMCI Project Developers Inc. (DMCI Homes) had sold a 10-percent stake in Subic Water to the City of Olongapo for about P210.6 million.

DMCI Homes was left with a 30-percent interest in Subic Water's outstanding capital stock after the

sale, the disclosure said.

Asked about the rationale for this transaction, DMCI group said: "The Olongapo City LGU (local government unit) wanted representation in Subic Water because their constituents accounted for the majority of the company's customers."

As the single biggest shareholder of Subic Water, DMCI Homes was in the best position to give the LGU such representation.

"We believe the new ownership structure will result in better collaboration among the stakeholders, ultimately benefiting the water consumers in Olongapo City and Subic Bay Freeport," DMCI said.

Subic Water was formed in 1997 to address what was then an impending water crisis in Olongapo City, brought

about by the growing commercial water requirements of the booming Subic Bay Freeport Zone.

It has the exclusive right and privilege to operate, maintain, and improve the water and sewerage systems of Olongapo City and Subic Bay Freeport under a 30-year franchise term.

This company is a pioneer in PPP projects dealing with water in Southeast Asia.

Other stakeholders in Subic Water are Sembcorp Industries Ltd., (Sembcorp) a Singaporean water utility specialist; Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA), which administers Subic Bay Freeport, and Maynilad Water Services Inc. (Maynilad), the country's largest water concessionaire in terms of customer base.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

French winemakers raise funds for Aboitiz Foundation's ongoing #BetterWorld for Pawikan drive

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EIGHTEEN French winemakers, together with international wine merchant Barriere Freres, fine wine distributor AWC Philippines and luxury hotel Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila, took a stand to save the country's *pawikan* from extinction by making a generous donation of P340,000 to the "#BetterWorld for the Pawikan" campaign of the Aboitiz Foundation, the corporate social responsibility arm of the Aboitiz Group.

The donation came from the proceeds of the Bordeaux Rendezvous luxury wine-charity auction held on February 29 at the La Veranda at Sofitel. Bordeaux Rendezvous is an annual wine-tasting series held in key cities around the world. The donation was officially turned over to representatives of the Aboitiz

Foundation at a ceremony on March 17 at Sofitel.

"We are honored to receive the firm support of our friends from the wine industry in our campaign to save our local *pawikan*. This amount will go a long way in the protection and conservation of the shoreline habitat of these *pawikan* today and tomorrow," said Sonny Carpio, Aboitiz Foundation EVP and chief operating officer.

The #BetterWorld for the Pawikan donation drive is an Aboitiz Foundation-led marine turtle-conservation program supporting the Aboitiz Cleanergy Park, one of the last few remaining nesting grounds of the critically endangered hawksbill sea turtle. Located in Matina Aplaya, Davao City, this 8-hectare sanctuary is also home to 66 species of flora and fauna that thrive in the area.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

Greenhouse-gas inventory guide for local governments out

DAVAO CITY—Local governments would soon have their manual on conducting greenhouse-gas (GHG) inventory, official version of it having been turned over to the Climate Change Commission (CCC).

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) handed here this month the official version of the manual to the CCC, a Philippine Information Agency (PIA) dispatch said recently.

Divina Chingcuangco, chief of party of the USAID B-Leaders Project, said the manual would help local government draft

their local climate-change action plans.

Chingcuangco turned over the manual on March 10 to Secretary Emmanuel M. de Guzman and Commissioner Noel Antonio Gaerlan, who represented the CCC, during simple rites at the Xavier Hall of the Ateneo de Davao University.

Copies of the manual are expected to be distributed to local government units (LGUs) soon.

The Community-Level GHG Inventory for Local Government Units in the Philippines: User's Manual would serve as a step-by-step guide for LGUs "in gathering,

managing and quantifying data and information about the level of greenhouse-gas emissions within their respective jurisdictions," the PIA dispatch said.

It said the manual "walks LGUs through the process of computing GHG emissions and removals from carbon sinks, such as forests. It also contains guidelines on categories of data from the agricultural sector."

The manual comes with a GHG Inventory Qualification Excel spreadsheet, which can be used as a template for reporting GHG inventories, it added.

On the same occasion, the PIA dispatch

quoted de Guzman as telling news reporters that "a total of 160 LGUs nationwide have complied so far with their respective local climate-change action plans."

He said some of these areas already showed "best practices in resilience following a calamity."

"The communities in Camotes Island had warning system that was functional during Super typhoon Yolanda and they were able to plant mangroves along their shorelines, consequently indicating zero casualty during Yolanda," de Guzman said. *Manuel T. Cayon*

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PWC backs UN program for water, sanitation

Pure Water Corporation (PWC) commits to adhere to the sixth of the series of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG6) of the United Nations' (UN) to ensure access to water and sanitation for all, and improve national economy and mitigate climate change in commemoration of the World Water Day.

"We can be part of the solution that could combat global water and sanitation crisis," Dexter Tiu, chief executive of PWC said.

Access to clean water and sanitation, a basic necessity for everyone, has been an ongoing issue for the marginalized community especially in developing countries like the Philippines.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for Water Supply has noted a progress in total population served with improved water supply which amounted to 93,446,584 or 93

percent of Filipinos in 2015, a percentage nearing to the fulfillment of SDG6 if supported collectively by the local business community.

"Water plays a vital role in our homes, communities and in generating income for the Philippine economy. Water is a sustainable and renewable source that can help disaster risk reduction and climate resilience," said Tiu.

The United Nations celebrates this year's World Water Day with the theme Water and Jobs', which highlights the importance of better water to provide better jobs to the 1.5 million unrecognized employees in water-related sectors.

PWC contributes to SDG6 through providing clean and sustainable water supply to water districts and directly to consumers through its subsidiary, Tubig Pilipinas Group, Inc. (TPGI), a bulk water and distribution utility company that provides potable, safe and reliable water across major cities and towns in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.