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IN THE NEWS

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Firefighters race to save 2 other natural parks

By Jigger Jerusalem, Orlando Dinoy
and Edwin Fernandez
Inquirer Mindanao

CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY—As authorities in central and southern Mindanao are engrossed in snuffing out a persistent fire on Mt. Apo, their counterparts in the northern part are racing to save two other natural parks, Mt. Kitanglad and Mt. Kalatungan.

At least five fires have broken out in within and around the protected area of Mt. Kitanglad in Bukidnon province since April 2, razing a total of 851.5 hectares of natural forest and grassland. The burnt areas also covered sites of the the National Greening Program (NGP) of the government.

The Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park has a total land area of 47,270 ha, of which 31,236 ha have been declared a protected area. It straddles the towns of Talakag, Libona, Manolo Fortich, Sumilao, Impasugong and Lantapan, and Malaybalay City in Bukidnon.

Officials said the fire was spreading toward Libona town and was endangering the safety of at least 23 families living in Sitio Alawon in Barangay Sil-ipun.

On the other hand, the fire on Mt. Kalatungan, also in Bukidnon, has so far damaged 143.85 ha of natural forest and grassland.

No 'fire out' yet

Maria Theresa Allen, Bukidnon provincial environment and natural resources officer (Penro), said that while the fires in the two mountains had already been contained by newly established fire lines, a "fire out" could not yet be declared as more efforts were needed to fully quell these.

Allen said the volume of destroyed flora and fauna had yet to be determined, but most likely, she said, some of the endemic trees were burned down, too.

In a meeting held on Tuesday, environment and local officials led by Gov. Jose Ma. Zubiri appealed for more volunteers to finally put out the fires. At least P35 million was also needed to counter the grass fires and to rehabilitate the mountains.

Zubiri has pledged P5 million from the provincial government's fund for the purchase of firefighting equipment and honorarium for the volunteers. Bukidnon, he said, had a surplus fund of almost P1 billion from last year's budget.

Volunteers

The Office of the Civil Defense in Northern Mindanao held a separate briefing on Wednesday, reporting that over 100 volunteers had been involved in

Rain after cloud-seeding
did little to douse
fire on Mt. Apo

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setting up the fire lines.

"We have to stop the fires as soon as possible. The life of the province depends on these mountains. We will do everything within our powers and capacities to solve this. We will not allow any forest fires in our province," Zubiri said, adding that this was the first time in 43 years that a fire affected any protected area in the province.

Cloud-seeding on Apo

In Digos City in Davao del Sur province, cloud-seeding operations failed to douse the fire on Mt. Apo, which had been raging since Black Saturday.

Though it rained on Tuesday, embers continued to burn the next day, according to Harry Camoro, spokesperson of the Incident Management Team on the Mt. Apo fire.

"It did little," he said, referring to the cloud-seeding activities that started on Sunday.

Some 50 medicinal red tea trees (*Leptospermum flavescens* Sm.), locally known as "tinikaran," have been burned on the Apo side of Sta. Cruz town, also in Davao del Sur, Camoro said.

"The area is highly combustible and there's a possibility that a new fire could develop," said Rye Glenn Trinidad, president of the Mindanao Mountaineering Federation, as he narrated how dry the mountain had become due to the drought.

Camoro said more firefighting equipment had arrived and that volunteers were using water sprayers to quell the burning embers.

Mt. Matutum closed

In Koronadal City, the South Cotabato Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) and the local government of Tupi, South Cotabato province, announced the closure of Mt. Matutum from mountaineering and other tourism-related activities.

Mt. Matutum, a stratovolcano that stands 2,286 meters above sea level (masl), has also been a favorite mountaineering and tourist destination in Mindanao.

Emil Sumagaysay, Tupi municipal disaster risk reduction and management council action officer, said the decision to shut the mountain was reached after two forest fires occurred on its slope.

On March 27, a fire of unclear origin broke out in Barangay Kablon, about 305 masl on the southern side of Mt. Matutum. It damaged about 5 ha of grassland but was immediately subdued, Sumagaysay said.

Another fire occurred on the other side of the mountain on March 30, damaging about a hectare of grasslands. Campers were seen in the area before the blaze.

"To ensure that a massive fire like the one going on in Mt. Apo is prevented, the PAMB decided to shut down the mountain," Sumagaysay said.

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Grass, forest fires in Mt. Matutum now under control

GENERAL SANTOS CITY—The provincial government of South Cotabato declared as under control the grass and forest fires within the protected areas in Mount Matutum and the crater-lake Holon.

Milagros Lorca, head of the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRRMO), said the bush fires in portions of Mount Matutum in Polomolok and Tupi towns and in Lake Holon in T'boli have been contained as of Wednesday morning through the efforts of local volunteers.

She said the municipal government of T'boli reported that the fires in two sites near Lake Holon have been totally extinguished at around 9 p.m. on Tuesday.

In Polomolok, she said the grass and forest fires in parts of Barangay Kinilis were declared as contained as of 5 a.m. on Wednesday.

"The situation in both sites is now under control and clearing operations are presently ongoing to prevent possible breakouts in the coming days," Lorca said.

The fires in Mount Matutum in the on three weeks already destroyed more than 100 hectares of grass and forest areas in Barangay Kinilis in Polomolok and Barangay Kablon in Tupi.

The first major fire in the area started on March 23 in Purok 7 in Kinilis and destroyed around 10 hectares of grasslands.

Another fire broke out in another portion of Kinilis on April 2 that spread to around 90 hectares of grass and forest areas.

Separate fires also erupted in Purok Datal Bong of Sitio Glandang and Sitio Datal Ngisi in Barangay Kablon, Tupi and destroyed around 5 hectares of forest areas.

In T'boli, two major fires also broke out near the main outlet of Lake Holon and a portion of its trail in Sitio Kutong Busaw in Barangay Salacafe, destroying around 10 hectares. Trekking activities to the two sites, which are all declared protected areas, have been temporarily suspended as a result of the bush fires.

Lorca said the provincial government assisted the operations by providing the logistical needs of the volunteers, among them knapsack sprayers, shovels and chain saws.

She said they are also monitoring the situation in various sites of Mount Matutum and Lake Holon through the barangay disaster-action teams. *PNA*

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Patches of grass fire rage in twin mountains of Bukidnon

By MIKE U. CRISMUNDO

BUTUAN CITY – The provincial government of Bukidnon has released P5 million for the immediate purchase of fire-fighting equipment to help in the battle against grass fires which continue to rage in the twin mountains of Mount Kitanglad and Mount Kalatungan.

Provincial government officials said the new fire-fighting equipment, such as shovels, digging pipe bars, masks, flashlights, handheld radios, among others, would be purchased and

distributed to fire-fighting teams from the government, volunteer groups, and highland villagers to help contain the packets of fire that have hit the slopes of the two mountains.

The areas where firefighters would need to focus their efforts on are in Barangays Nacalo and Capela in Libona town and Sangayo in Malaybalay City.

There were also patches of forest fire observed in the northern part of the park, specifically in sitio Mangasa of Dalwangan village and Barangay Imbayao, both in Malaybalay City. But these were contained on Monday and Tuesday by Kitanglad Guard Volun-

teers and Tribal Guards by establishing fire breaks.

And while the fire in these areas have been placed under control, fire fighters chose not to declare a total fire out.

Last Thursday night, grass fires occurred in the hinterlands of the towns in Libona, Sumilao, Impasugong, Imbayao, Lantapan, in the outskirts of Malaybalay City, and in Mount Magantol and Mount Nakalo, which are within the Mount Kitanglad and Mount Kalatungan natural parks.

Since the start of the grass and forest fires, young trees of various species

within the 52-hectares National Greening Program (NGP) project were damaged, as well as those located in 10 of the 72-hectare natural generation forest.

The regional office of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in Northern Mindanao has already mobilized all available personnel of the four community environment and natural resources offices (CENROs) and provincial environment and natural resources office (PENRO) in Bukidnon for the rehabilitation of the NGP project in these damaged areas.

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Exec pushes science-based mangrove reforestation

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

AN official of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) on Wednesday underscored the need for integrated pest management (IPM) and science-based approach to mangrove reforestation.

Director Henry A. Adornado of DENR's Environmental Research and Development Bureau (ERDB) said, while many are planting mangroves as part of massive mangrove reforestation initiated by the private sector and non-governmental organizations, many of those planted will eventually go to waste if it were not done properly.

The DENR's research and development arm is open to partnerships to share its expertise with businesses and other players in mangrove reforestation.

The ERDB recently completed the P1-billion Mangrove and Beach Forest Development Project, where its experts applied their know-how in sustainable mangrove reforestation, including IPM, Adornado told the BUSINESS-MIRROR in an earlier interview.

Adornado said the ERDB applied science-based techniques in implementing the project, which aims to strengthen the country's natural defense against calamities, such as storm surges, tsunamis and sea-level rise.

The project was implemented by the DENR after the onslaught of Supertyphoon Yolanda (international code name Haiyan), which devastated the Central Philippines in November 2013.

The storm surge swept away thousands of homes in coastal areas, which have become defenseless because of the absence of mangrove forests.

According to the ERDB, the IPM principle involves the use

of science-based techniques that will ensure that most, if not all, seedlings planted will survive and grow.

Cynthia C. Marquez, ERDB's senior science research specialist on forest tree insect pest and diseases said there are basic prerequisites for a sustainable mangrove planting which starts with the selection of quality planting materials.

Marcelina V. Pachon, another ERDB researcher, said that although there are numerous ways to control pests, preventing infestation lies in proper mangrove planting.

"Before undertaking any mangrove planting, it is important to gather baseline information on the area to be planted," she said.

DENR has released guidelines which provide information on baselining protocols, which Adornado said will be made available and accessible to the public.

According to Adornado, farmers should choose the right species of mangroves.

Selection of species that suits the area where it will be planted, he said, is very important.

Adornado said 46 of the 70 known species of mangroves can be found in the Philippines, including *bakawan babae* and *bakawan lalaki*, which are the most preferred species because they germinate easily.

However, the ERDB experts warned that these species are highly vulnerable to pests, like barnacles.

Barnacles are crustaceans considered to be the most destructive pests that infest mangroves.

Barnacles, when in groups, could crown mangrove stems, causing growth stunting and, eventually, death.

"There are specific species of mangroves that can be recommended for planting, depending on soil type and salinity of water," Adornado said.

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Red Cross sends search, rescue team to Mt. Apo

BY CLAUDETH MOCON-CIRIACO

Correspondent

THE Philippine Red Cross (PRC) Davao City Chapter, in coordination with local authorities, has mobilized a search-and-rescue team to help in the firefighting efforts on Mount Apo in Davao.

The PRC sent a 13-strong firefighting team that coordinated with the local government and other volunteer teams to help build fire lines to help prevent further the spread of the fire.

The team also set up a first-aid station and provided immediate health services to other responders in the area and local residents who needed immediate medical assistance.

"Aside from our Davao City Chapter, our chapter in Davao del Sur and the North Cotabato-Kidapawan Subchapter also provided assistance by putting up first-aid stations and coordinating with the local government and other agencies in responding to the situation," PRC Chairman Richard J. Gordon said.

Gordon added that the local PRC chapters in the affected areas are currently coordinating with local government agencies on how the PRC can assist in providing water for the firefighters and volunteers working to suppress the fire, as well as other needed assistance.

Mount Apo, which was declared a natural park in 2004, is the highest peak in the country, with an elevation of 2,954-meters above sea level. The fire in Mount Apo started on March 26 in the Kidapawan City trail and has now ravaged several hectares of forest and grassland.

Meanwhile, a grassfire or bushfire also broke out on Mount Magantol, part of the Mount Kitanglad Range Natural Park in Bukidnon on Saturday.

Recent reports indicate that the fire is spreading, particularly on Mount Nakalu in Barangay Sil-ipun in the town of Libona.

Authorities say that the areas where the fire happened have no communities nearby, so there are no affected families and no evacuation was needed.

Some reports say that the ongoing drought in some areas in Mindanao caused by El Niño have caused the bushfire in Bukidnon and have further exacerbated the fire in Mount Apo.

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Albay newest biosphere reserve in PH

By Mar S. Arguelles
Legazpi City

BLESSED by natural features and rich resources in land and water, Albay province has earned another global distinction as a biosphere reserve, joining more than 600 areas in 120 countries around the world.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) recently recognized Albay as one of 20 new biosphere reserves in the world, or "places for learning about sustainable development aiming to reconcile the conservation of biodiversity with sustainable use of natural resources."

Ecological marker

Gov. Joey Salceda said every Albayano should be proud of this recognition. "We welcome it as an ecological marker of excellence and a challenge to our community," he said.

Albay is known for a variety of terrestrial core zones, such as the Mayon Volcano National Park, Mt. Masaraga Watershed Forest Reserve, Mt. Malinao-Tiwi Geothermal Reservation and the Pocdol mountain range in Manito town.

It is also home to various endem-

ic species of animals and plants, and fish sanctuaries.

According to records from the provincial government, Albay's forests nurture 280 species of animals, 91 of which are endemic. These include four endemic mammals (brown deer and flying fox), 12 species of birds (cockatoo and eagle-owl), 13 endemic frog species, 17 species of amphibians and 30 species of reptiles.

Endangered species

Its marine and coastal environment hosts 272 species—158 species of gastropods (snails and slugs), 15 bivalves (clams, mussels and oysters), 12 crustaceans, 13 echinoderms (starfish, sea cucumber and sea urchins), a sea slug, 26 corals, five turtles and 42 species of fish.

At least 182 species of plants, 46 of which are endemic, are found in the province. However,

10 of these are on the "red list" of endangered species and seven classified as vulnerable.

In marine and coastal ecosystems thrive 12 species of mangrove, 40 species of seaweeds and 10 species of seagrasses.

Salceda said the province's terrestrial buffer zones had been increased from 35,000 hectares to over 62,000 ha.

Long-term protection

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources' proposed biosphere reserve in Albay would cover 381,526.65 ha of terrestrial and marine ecosystems that would be protected in the long term.

Philip Bartilet, an environmental advocate, reminded local officials to follow the "no mining" ordinance signed by Salceda during his first term as governor, saying any mining exploration would waste the province's effort in protecting its natural environment.

Albay is the third biosphere reserve in the country, following the declarations of Puerto Galera in Oriental Mindoro province in 1977 and of Palawan province in 1990.

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120-kg sea turtle rescued in La Union

By ERWIN G. BELEO

LUNA, La Union – An endangered 120-kilogram olive ridley sea turtle was released back to the sea on April 1, 2016 after it was caught along the pebble ground of Barangay Barrientos, Luna town in La Union.

Tito Gorospe, municipal environment management coordination (EMC), said the turtle was caught by Bernardo Ayala, 57, who was looking for pebbles in the area at around 4:50 a.m. He saw the turtle crawling along the rough ground.

Gorospe said the sea creature has a length of 40 inches and 35 inches in width.

Virgilio Enriquez of the Coastal Underwater Research Action Movement in San Fernando City, La Union, said the sea turtle is estimated to be more than 25 years old.

Ayala, who was aware of the campaign for the preservation of endangered species, immediately reported to Luna Mayor Victor Marvin Marron for the proper care of the turtle.

Volunteers from the Philippine Coast Guard, Philippine National Police, representatives of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, municipal employees, and



BACK TO SEA – Volunteers carry an Olive Ridley for release back at sea in Barangay Barrientos, Luna, La Union, after it was caught by a concerned citizen on April 1, 2016. (ERWIN G. BELEO)

residents joined in releasing the turtle back to the sea. Proper documentation was made before it was released to the sea.

It was learned that the turtle was weak because it was pregnant and was looking for sandy ground to lay

its eggs.

Olive ridley sea turtles (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), also known as the Pacific ridley sea turtle, are medium-sized species of sea turtle found in warm and tropical waters, primarily in the Pacific and Indian oceans.

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23 endangered na ibon na-rescue

Dalawampu't tatlong (23) sari-saring ibon na kabilang sa endangered species, ang na-rescue ng pinagsanib na puwersa ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) at National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) sa isang sari-sari store sa Cainta Rizal. Ayon sa mga awtoridad, ang mga ibon ay kinabibilangan ng Blue-Naped Parrot, Umbrella Cockatoo, Indonesia Rainbow Lory, African Grey Parrot, Indian Ring-Necked Parakeet, African Lovebird, Sun Conure at Palawan Hill Myna. Na-rescue ng Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) ng DENR ang nasabing mga ibon sa tindahan ng isang Ferdinand Domingo sa Brgy. San Andres, Cainta.

Sa matiyagang paghanap ng mga tauhan ng BMB, nakita din ang lugar na kinaroroonan ng suspek at sa tulong ng NBI, sinalakay nila ang tindahan nito. (Lhean Angeles)

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Communities, wildlife threatened by mountain fire

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (IP) communities and wildlife, including the endangered Philippine eagle, are under serious threat as grass and forest fires continue to rage in three mountains in Mindanao despite efforts to contain the blaze in the midst of the El Niño-triggered drought.

Calls for manpower and supply assistance have been raised by local government units, involved government agencies such as the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), and non-government groups that are helping in the firefight.

Grass fire in Mt. Matutum was first reported on March 23, the one in Mt. Apo started on March 26, and in Mt. Kitanglad on April 2.

All three mountain systems are home to various IP groups, considered habitats of the Philippine eagle, an endemic specie and the country's national bird, as well as identified by the Philippine Coffee Board, Inc. as the three main coffee sources in Mindanao.

Mt. Matutum, where the B'laans are rooted, is located in South Cotabato province. Mt. Kitanglad in Bukidnon is the ancestral home of the Talaandig and Higaonon. Mt. Apo — home of the Manobos, Bagobos, Ubos, Atas, K'lagans, and Tagacaolo — is the country's tallest mountain at 3,143.6 meters above sea level straddling Davao City and the provinces of Davao del Sur and North Cotabato.

EVACUATION

As of April 5, at least 25 families in an upland village in Polomolok

THIS FEB. 17 photo shows a rescued monkey-eating eagle in Davao.



AFP

town in South Cotabato have evacuated due to the grass and forest fires in Mt. Matutum.

Engineer Jonathan Pabulare, head of the Polomolok Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (MDRRMO), said on Tuesday, residents in portions of Barangay Kinilis were forced to leave their homes as the raging fires continued to spread in the last several days.

Kinilis is one of the areas under the local government's Mt. Matutum Organic Coffee Production Project.

"They decided to evacuate mainly for safety reasons and most of them could no longer stand the thick smoke and haze coming from the fires," he said in a radio interview.

As of Tuesday morning, Mr. Pabulare said the fires already destroyed around 100 hectares that are part of the 14,000-hectare Mt. Matutum Protected Landscape.

He said the situation in Barangay Kinilis remained volatile as the fires have not yet been totally extinguished.

"The fires are continuing as of the moment. They sometimes slow down and then blow up again," he said.

Personnel from the BFP, MDRRMO and the Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Office as well as local volunteers are trying to put out the fires and digging up trenches to serve as fire lines.

In Mt. Apo, firefighting efforts continue while the Davao City-based Philippine Eagle Foundation has launched the #SaveMtApo campaign to raise funds for supporting volunteers who are setting up fire lines, food provision and protective gear for forest guards, and periodic ground and aerial monitoring of the eagles and their habitats.

Military personnel have also been deployed to help on the ground as some volunteers and forest rangers from local communities have been reported to be suffering from fatigue.

LACKING EQUIPMENT

In Mt. Kitanglad, the Office of Civil Defense in Region 10 (OCD-10)

said the forest fires have spread to nearby mountains, including Mt. Mangantol, Mt. Matampay, Mt. Butoc, Mt. Nakalo, and Mt. Undingan.

OCD-10 Regional Director Ana C. Cañeda said lacking firefighting equipment, volunteers face a daunting task in stopping the spread of the forest fires to the rest of the 47,720-hectare Mt. Kitanglad mountain range.

"The volunteers have to climb steep mountains to get to the fire locations. We lacked rope, firefighting equipment and there is not enough volunteers to cover the area," Mr. Cañeda said.

During its assessment meeting on Tuesday afternoon, OCD-10 also received confirmed reports that new fires have broken out at Mt. Kalatungan, the sixth highest mountain in the country.

Gerry Ablon, of the Libon MDRRM Council, said more than 100 persons living in Sitio Alawon, Barangay Sil-ipun are threatened by the spreading fire.

M/Sgt. Abel Idusma of the Philippine Air Force Tactical Operations Group at Lumbia Airport in Cagayan de Oro City said they are waiting for the arrival of two Huey UH-1D helicopters that would be used to ferry firefighters and volunteers up the mountain.

Felix Mirasol, Jr., assistant regional director of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in Region 10, said they needed 47 volunteers to dig 66 kilometers of fire line in the affected areas.

Marifi S. Jara with reports from Froilan Gallardo/MindaNew



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Parola sa artipisyal na isla, pinagana na ng China

BEIJING (Reuters) - Sinimulan na ng China ang pagpapagana sa parola sa isa sa mga artipisyal na isla nito sa South China Sea malapit sa pinaglayagan nitong nakaraang taon ng isang barkong pandigma ng U.S. para hamunin ang pag-aangkin ng China sa teritoryo.

Sinasakop ng China ang halos kabuuan ng tubig sa South China Sea na mayaman sa langis, at dinaraan ng halos \$5 trillion kalakal na sakay ng

barko bawat taon. Ngunit inaangkin din ng Brunei, Malaysia, Pilipinas, Taiwan at Vietnam ang iba't ibang lugar dito.

Nagdaos ng "completion ceremony" ang transport ministry ng China upang markahan ang pagsisimula ng operasyon sa 180 talampakang taas na parola sa Subi Reef, na sinimulang itayo noong Oktubre, iniulat ng state news agency Xinhua nitong Martes ng hapon.

Ang Subi Reef ay isang artipisyal na islang itinayo ng China nitong nakalipas

na taon.

Bago ito ginawang isla sa paghuhukay ng mga Chinese, ang Subi ay nakalubog tuwing high tide. Sa ilalim ng U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, hindi maaaring ibigay ang 12-nautical-mile limits sa paligid ng mga man-made island na itinayo sa isang dating bahura.

Mayroon ding lighthouse projects ang China sa dalawa pang bahura sa lugar - sa Cuarteron Reef at Johnson South Reef.

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P-Noy to welcome Prince Albert of Monaco to Malacañang today

By Nikko Dizon

PRESIDENT Aquino will welcome Prince Albert II of Monaco to Malacañang today, one of the last dignitaries the Chief Executive will receive in his final two and a half months in office.

The visiting monarch's day will start with a wreath laying ceremony at the Rizal Monument at the Rizal Park, after which he will proceed to Malacañang.

Monaco is the second smallest country in the world next to the Vatican City.

According to the official schedule released by the Palace, the two leaders will hold bilateral talks, possibly to be followed by a signing of agreements.

The President and the Prince are also expected to issue a joint statement to be followed by a

luncheon hosted by Mr. Aquino. Prince Albert will then fly to Palawan.

A passionate environmental conservationist and an advocate of climate change research, Prince Albert is expected to visit the Tubbataha Reef National

Parks in Palawan as well as other sites in the province.

The Prince was in the Philippines 17 years ago to represent his father, the late Prince Rainier, who was invited to the country by then President Joseph Ejercito Estrada.

While Malacañang has yet to officially announce the agenda for the two leaders' bilateral talks, it is expected that President Aquino and Prince Albert will discuss marine conservation and other environmental concerns.

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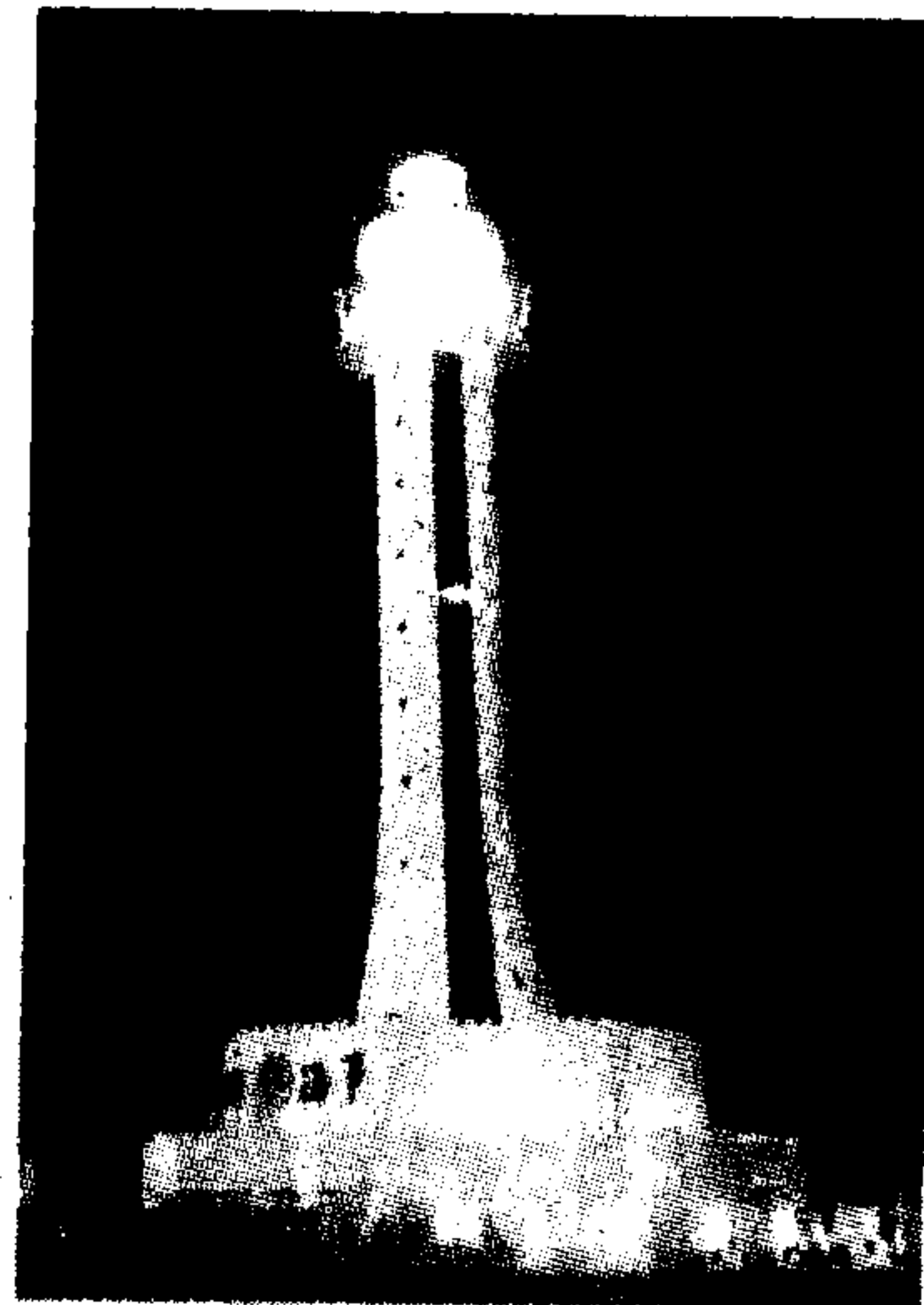
LIGHT HOUSE PAGE 1/4

New China lighthouse up on disputed reef

BEIJING—China has expanded its presence in the contested South China Sea by switching on a lighthouse atop a reconstructed reef also claimed by the Philippines and Vietnam, Chinese state media said.

The 55-meter-high lighthouse on Zamora Reef (international name: Subi Reef) in the Spratly archipelago contains technology to monitor passing ships, the official Xinhua news agency reported late Tuesday.

China claims virtually all of the energy-rich South China Sea, through which about \$5 trillion in ship-borne trade passes every year, despite conflict-



CHINESE LIGHT China opens its lighthouse on Zamora (Subi) Reef on Tuesday.

AP/XINHUA

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LIGHTHOUSE
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COMPLETION CEREMONY Guests clap their hands as China's lighthouse on Zamora (Subi) Reef goes into operation on Tuesday.

AP/XINHUA

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New China lighthouse up on disputed sea reef

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ing claims by Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam, Taiwan and the Philippines.

Beijing has constructed artificial islands in the area in recent months as it asserts its claims.

One of those artificial islands is built on Zamora Reef, which the Chinese call Zhubi Reef. Recent satellite photos have shown China has reclaimed nearly 400 hectares of land on the reef.

The island-building has been condemned by neighbors and the United States, but Beijing insists it is aimed at helping with maritime search and rescue.

Chinese transport officials held a ceremony on Zamora on Tuesday, Xinhua said.

Lights on

Pictures showed men in white shirts beside the towering structure next to a sign reading "Lights-on ceremony."

Construction of the lighthouse began in October, according to Xinhua.

Washington regularly accuses Beijing of militarizing the Spratlys by building runways and deploying unspecified weapons on the artificial islands it has built in the area.

Beijing denies the accusations and says US patrols have ramped up tensions in the region.

Citing an obligation to uphold freedom of navigation, Washington last year sent the USS Lassen to sail past Zamora Reef, a move that angered Beijing.

Second lighthouse

Xinhua reported last year that China would build two 50-meter-tall lighthouses on Calderon (Cuarteron) and Johnson South (Mabini) reefs in the Spratly islands, both also claimed by the Philippines and Vietnam.

Both Manila and Hanoi have protested China's building lighthouses on the two reefs and analysts have said navigation by foreign vessels by the lighthouses would mean recognition of China's sovereignty over the area.

Beijing has rejected the protests, saying any construction on the reefs is within its rights as it has "undisputed

sovereignty" over the Spratlys, which it calls Nansha Islands.

The state-run China Daily newspaper reported in 2014 that Beijing would build five new lighthouses in the South China Sea's Paracels chain, claimed by Vietnam.

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LIGHTHOUSE

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Law of the sea

Before Chinese dredging turned it into an island, Zamora was submerged at high tide. Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 22-kilometer limits cannot be set around man-made islands built on previously submerged reefs.

The Philippines has challenged China's sweeping claims in the South China Sea at the UN Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, angering China, which has said it will not recognize any ruling by the tribunal.

The court has proceeded to hear the case, however, and is expected to hand down a ruling in coming weeks.

China says much of its construction in the South China Sea is designed to fulfill its international obligations of ensuring maritime safety, search and rescue and scientific research.

Asked about the lighthouse, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Lu Kang said China was dedicated to providing public services in the South China Sea to ensure safety and freedom of navigation, which would be helpful for commercial users of the waters.

Xinhua said the lighthouse on Zamora Reef, which emits a white light at night, "can provide efficient navigation services such as positioning reference, route guidance and navigation safety information to ships, which can improve navigation management and emergency response."

The South China Sea is an important maritime area and major fishing ground, it added.

"However, high traffic density, complex navigation condition, severe shortage in aids and response forces have combined to threaten navigation safety and hindered economic and social development in the region," it said. *Reports from AFP and Reuters*

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NGCP, Napocor to reforest watersheds

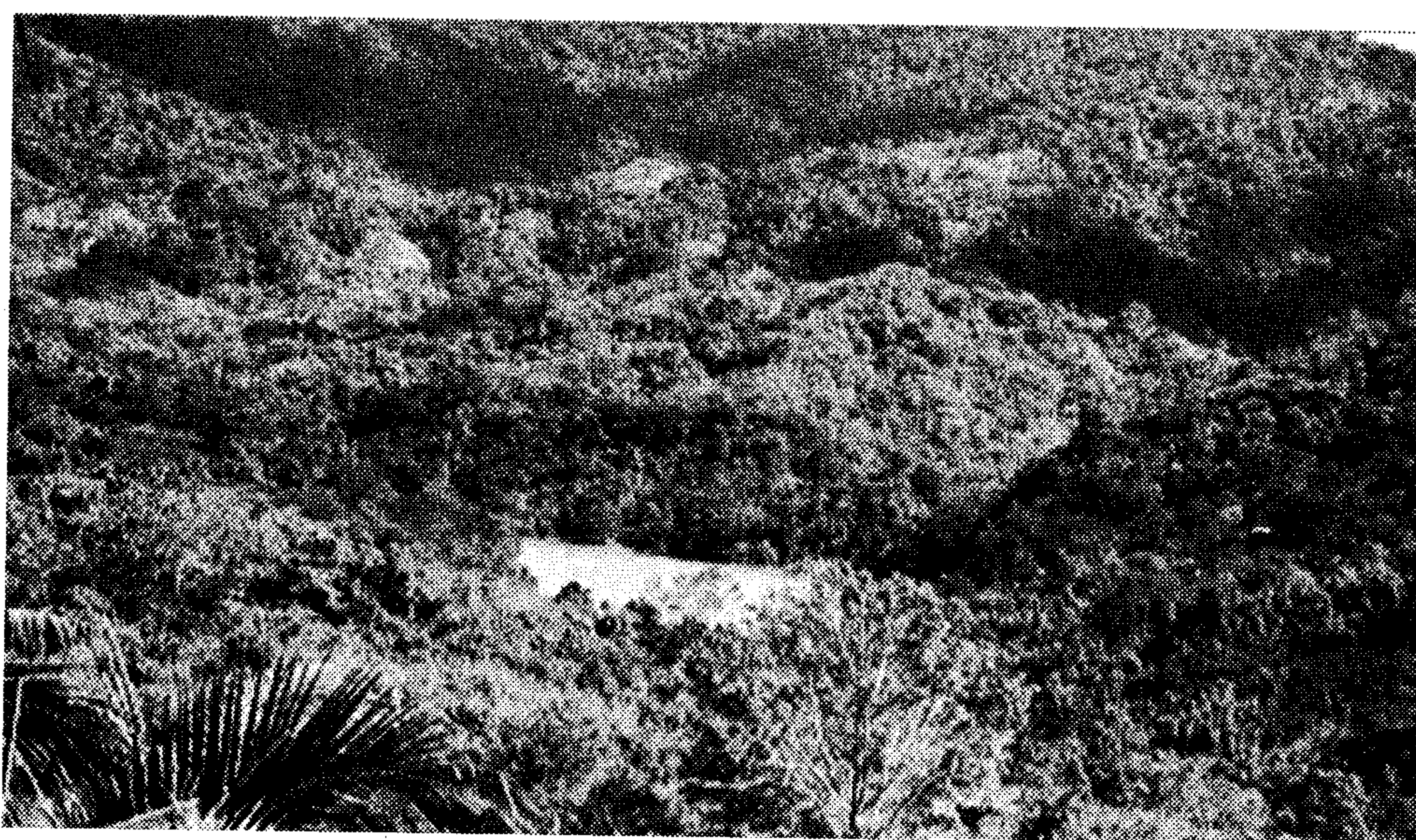
THE National Grid Corporation of the Philippines (NGCP) and the National Power Corp. (NPC) signed an agreement to improve two crucial watersheds in the country by planting a total of 88,750 tree seedlings.

The two firms along with local people organizations pledged to reforest in 50 hectares of the Mak-Ban watershed and 5 hectares of the Angat watershed.

NGCP said the reforestation projects are crucial especially that these are directed at areas traversed by the Lumban EHV-Bay 230 kilovolt and San Jose-Angat 115 kilovolt transmission line projects.

"NGCP's partnership with NPC and the people organizations signifies our thrust to not only provide reliable and adequate power transmission service but at the same time, protect and enhance the environment in areas where we operate. The preservation of these critical areas is our priority as environmental stewards, not only in Norzagaray, Bulacan and Sto. Tomas, Batangas, but throughout the country," the company said.

NGCP is a privately owned corporation in charge of operating, maintaining and developing the country's power grid. It



Angat watershed.

transmits electricity through interconnected system of transmission lines, towers, substations and related assets.

NPC is mandated to provide electricity by lending generators on a subsidized rate to far flung places usually island regions that are not connected to the national grid.

Aside from powering areas not connected to the grid, NPC is also tasked to locate indigenous sources of power as the National Economic and Development Authority recently granted the firm with P38 million budget to conduct feasibility studies for areas with potential for run-of-river hydro plants.

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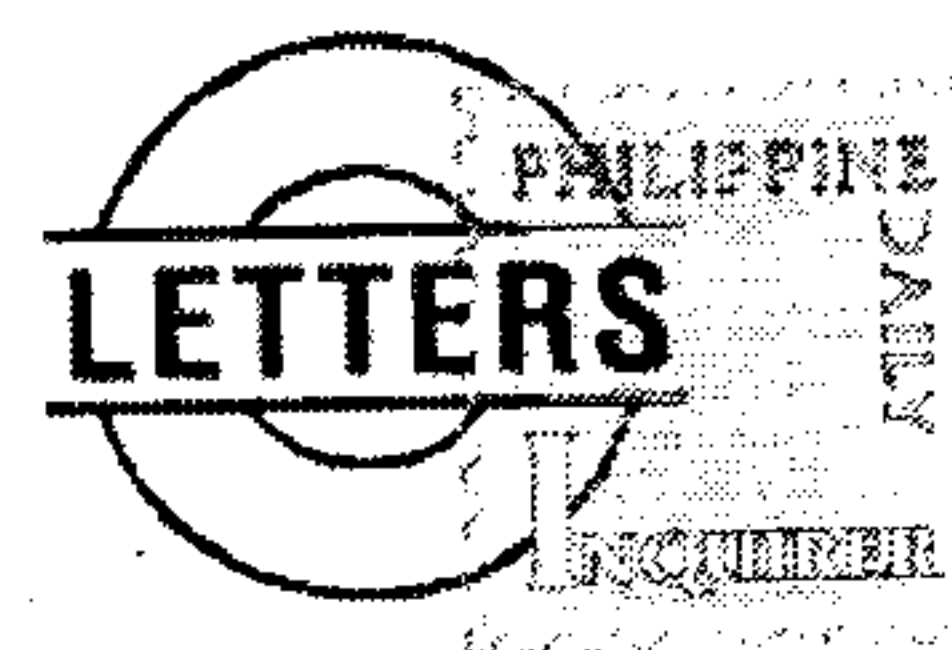
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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Should we take Mayor Duterte seriously on global warming?



PRESIDENTIAL candidate Rodrigo Duterte castigated former US vice president Al Gore and the United Nations on the issue of curbing carbon emissions ("Environmental agenda," Cebu Daily News, 3/27/16). While he had a valid point when he said that at this stage in our economic development, we cannot do away with the energy from coal plants, his criticism of Gore for coming to urge our government to switch to renewable energy when he could not convince his country to reduce its carbon emissions was a bad case of nitpicking. If the Americans do not do their part in checking global warming, should that prevent us from doing ours?

Other than doing what is right when one is faced with a shared problem, there is a more compelling reason for the Philippines to take decisive action on the threat of climate change, of which Duterte seems unaware: The country is classified as extremely vulnerable to global warming. In fact, we are ranked 13 among 186 countries in the Climate Change Vulnerability Index for 2016. With that, we should welcome and be thankful to anyone who contributes to the effort to slow down, if not stop, its seemingly inex-

orable advance. We should be the first to acknowledge that keeping the planet livable for ourselves and for future generations is a gargantuan task that demands the concerted effort of the entire human race, a movement transcending all barriers, least of all petty considerations like who gets to take action first.

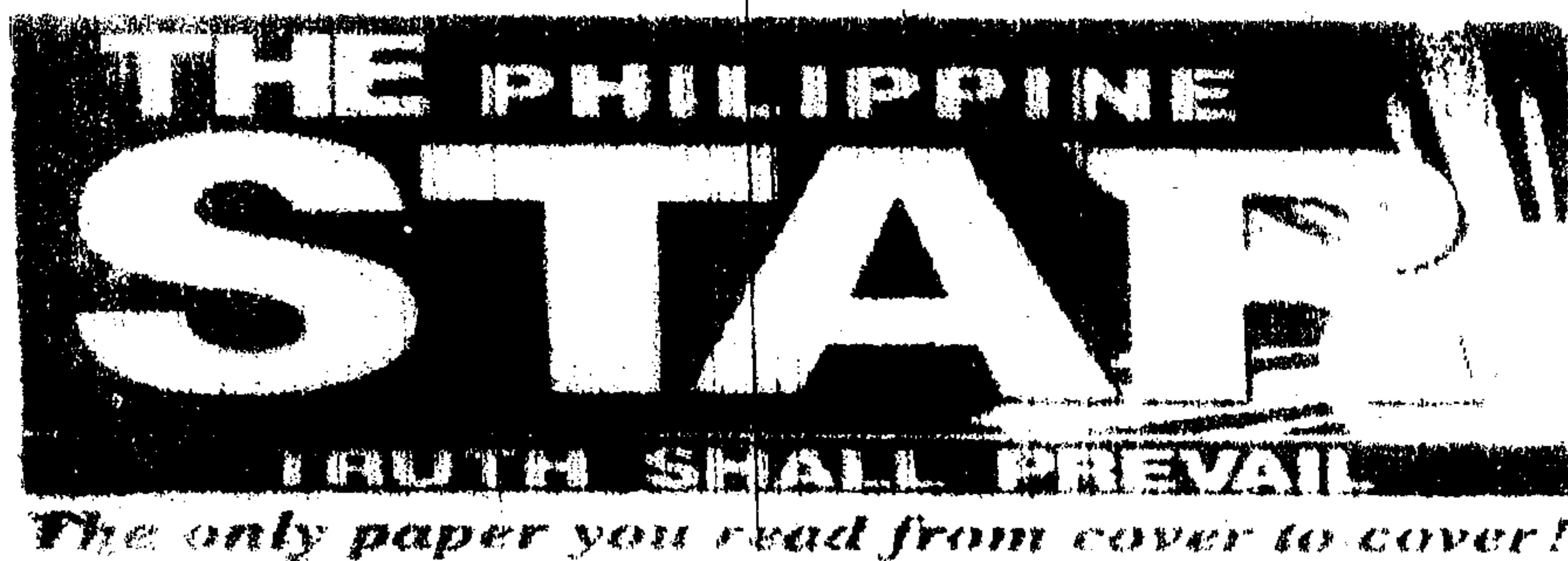
Not Duterte. Stressing that with our near-zero carbon footprint, it is not fair for us to make drastic cuts on our carbon emissions when the United States and other countries with massive carbon footprints are just taking their own sweet time, Duterte dissed Gore for coming to preach the urgency of switching to clean energy even though he had failed to convert his fellow Americans to his climate change agenda.

Duterte also branded the United Nations a hypocrite for asking small nations to comply with their carbon emission-reduction commitments while failing to impose sanctions on the worst environmental culprits. Duterte does not dispute the urgent need to curb carbon emission; he only balks at the suggestion that the country does something about it while nations most responsible for the problem are not lifting a finger. In so do-

ing, he seems to labor under the notion that it is possible to dispense quick justice on environmental offenders in the same manner criminals in Davao City are said to get their comeuppance a lot quicker than their fellows in other parts of the country do.

The instinct of self-preservation and logic demand that the Philippines, as one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change, be at the forefront of the fight against the threat. But then again how and when could we play an active role when we insist that each nation should first contribute to the cure of global warming corresponding to the exact degree of their participation in causing the phenomenon as a precondition to our cooperation in the worldwide movement to stop or slow it down? What if the event that will finally compel the industrialized nations to take Gore and the United Nations seriously is the submersion of, say, the whole island of Mindanao due to rising sea levels brought about by higher temperature of the earth? Shall we wait for that catastrophe to take place before we act?

—ESTANISLAO ALBANO, JR.
casigayan@yahoo.com



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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

El Niño relief efforts 'fairly successful' – NEDA

By CZERIZA VALENCIA

The government has been "fairly successful" in blunting the impact of El Niño phenomenon on domestic food supply and prices but recognizes there are still areas feeling the brunt of the dry spell, this was the assessment of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) said.

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary and NEDA director general Emmanuel Esguerra reported yesterday that as of March, prices and supplies of main food items, particularly rice, are kept in check. He noted rice prices have been declining steadily since October

2015 while prices of vegetables have been on the downtrend since the beginning of the year.

He attributed the present stability in food supply and prices to the provision of production support to farmers, timely importation and the imposition of price freeze in areas that declared a state of calamity.

"While drought usually entails low production leading to high agricultural product prices, inflation data show that prices of food, particularly rice, have been low and stable in the past months," Esguerra said in a briefing at the NEDA central office.

As it is, the government still does not see an immediate need to import more rice for buffer stocking but at the same time, the state is not completely ruling out the need to import more of the staple this year.

Renan Dalisay, administrator of the National Food Authority (NFA), said the country still has sufficient rice supply, thanks to the prepositioning of imports last year and planting in December when the rains came.

The NFA Council approved in September last year the contract for the supply of

750,000 metric tons (MT) of rice from Thailand and Vietnam, arrival which was completed last month. This was meant to beef up government stocks in anticipation of the strengthening El Niño.

"There is still no need for imports right now because the incoming harvests but we are not completely ruling out the need for imports this year. But we need to time this," he said.

The NFA, he said, has standby authority this year

to import 500,000 MT of rice through government-to-government procurement channels if the need is determined.

Esguerra noted a survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations in December 2015 showed the average hunger rate of 13.4 percent for 2015 is the lowest annual average hunger rate since 2004.

Moreover, hunger in Mindanao fell 8.7 percentage from 21.7 percent to 13 percent. This brought the 2015 average Mind-

anao hunger rate to 15.8 percent, the lowest since the 13.3 percent annual average in 2005.

The El Niño task force, however, found out that 23 provinces in Mindanao are parched, having a 60 percent reduction in rainfall. These provinces include Cotabato, Zamboanga and parts of ARMM. Seven provinces have already been placed under a state of calamity: Isabela, Quirino, Bukidnon, Davao del Sur, Cotabato, Maguindanao and Basilan.

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BLACKOUT

KAPAG blackout, nangangahulugan na walang kuryenteng dumadaloy sa kable ng kuryente. Naputol ang supply. Sa ating mga karaniwang tao, ang ibig sabihin niyan ay maaaring hindi tayo nakabayad sa Meralco o may pumutok na kable dahil sa mga 'jumper' na gawi ng mga nagnanakaw ng kuryente.

Ngunit sa malalaking establisimiyento, maaaring may pumutok sa daraanan ng kuryente kung kaya nagkaka-blackout. Kaya sa malalaking establisimiyento katulad ng mga gusali ay mayroon silang mga generator na sa sandaling mawalan ng supply ng kuryente ay may paghuhugutan pa silang ibang source ng kuryente, bukod pa 'yan sa

maintenance team ng gusali na kapag nagkaaberya gawa halimbawa ng isang kasangkapang pangkuryente ay makumpuni agad-agad upang hindi maantala ang pagdaloy ng kuryente.

News blackout namang matatawag kapag may isang pangyayari o importanteng isyu na dapat nailalabas sa media ngunit walang lumalabas, katulad ng korapsiyon sa mga ahen-siya ng pamahalaan na kung nailalabas lamang ay maaaring mapahinto at maparusahan ang mga may kinalaman.

Blackout na ring maituturing kapag hindi dumarating ang tulong o

ayuda ng pamahalaan sa mga komunidad o mamayang narapat na makatanggap sa mga ito.

Blackout din kung walang ginagawa ang pamahalaan sa pagpro-tekta halimbawa sa mga komunidad na nilalansag at blackout din kung may mahahalagang desisyon na may kinalaman sa pambansang pamumuhay ang hindi ikinonsulta sa taumbayan. May mga halimbawa ng kunwari, e pagkokonsulta ngunit moro-moro na lamang.

Blackout din kung hinayaan na lamang na hindi maparusahan ang mga nagkasala sa taumbayan, tulad ng mga dati at kasalukuyang opisyal ng gobyerno na halos na-

man ng lahat nang nag-nakaw sa pamahalaan ngunit hindi naparusahan at kinakalimutan na ng mga awtoridad.

Blackout din sa mga lugar na hindi naaabot ng kamay ng batas, katulad ang ilang kanto sa Cavite at Caloocan na tila ang batas ay isang panaginip lamang. Blackout din sa Zambales dahil napapagtag na ang mga kabundukan doon gawa ng pagmimina at pag-quarry na ginagamit naman ang mismong lupang nahahakot para sa pag-reclaim ng Tsina sa South China Sea.

Blackout na rin sa natitirang mga isyu na hindi na masasagot sa parating na halalan dahil

blackout na nga. Blackout na rin ang alaala ng mamamayan sa mga totoong nangyaring pasakit sa bansa, ilang dekada lamang ang nakaraan.

Ngunit kahit blackout ay nanatili ang pananampalataya ng mga Pilipino sa kanilang tadhana na mula sa langit. Kahit madilim ang nilalakaran ay banaag mo ang mga mukhang may ngiti kahit sa ilalim ng mapusyaw na sinag ng buwan.

Blackout na rin sa daigdig ni Jose Rizal at mga bayaning nagbuwis ng kani-kanilang buhay para sa kalayaan, maging napakahirap na bansa na sinasaksihan ng

malawakan o milyong kagutuman sa gitna ng karangyaan ng kakarampot na naninirahan sa Pilipinas. Marahil kung gaano katindi ang korapsiyon sa gobyerno ay ganoon din ang tindi ng korapsiyon sa pribado.

Blackout na rin ang kamalayan ng maraming Pilipino na tinatapalan ng mga bulok na kaisipan, katuruan at sistemang sumusupil sa malayang diwa ng katauhan.

Blackout sa bansa ngunit mas blackout ang mga matang hindi nakapapansin sa matagal nang blackout. Ganyan kapag nasanay na ang tao sa blackout.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Phl hosting forum on Asean maritime security

The Philippines is hosting the 8th ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Inter-Sessional Meeting (ISM) on Maritime Security.

The meeting, which started yesterday and ends today, brings together 103 officials from ASEAN member states such as Australia, Canada, Chi-

na, the European Union, India, Japan, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Korea, Russia, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste and the US, as well as ASEAN secretariat officials.

In his keynote address yesterday, Foreign Affairs Undersecretary for Policy Enrique Manalo underscored the Phil-

ippine's commitment to pursue regional efforts to build rules-based maritime security architecture in Asia.

Manalo cited the Philippines' interests as a maritime and archipelagic nation as well as the country's adherence to international law, including the 1982

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

He stressed the Philippines' active support for building an ASEAN community that enhances maritime security and cooperation, as well as adopts internationally accepted maritime conventions and prin-

ciples to promote peace and stability in the region.

The meeting's agenda covers issues on challenges, relevant best practices, legal frameworks, and regional arrangements to deepen ARF cooperation.

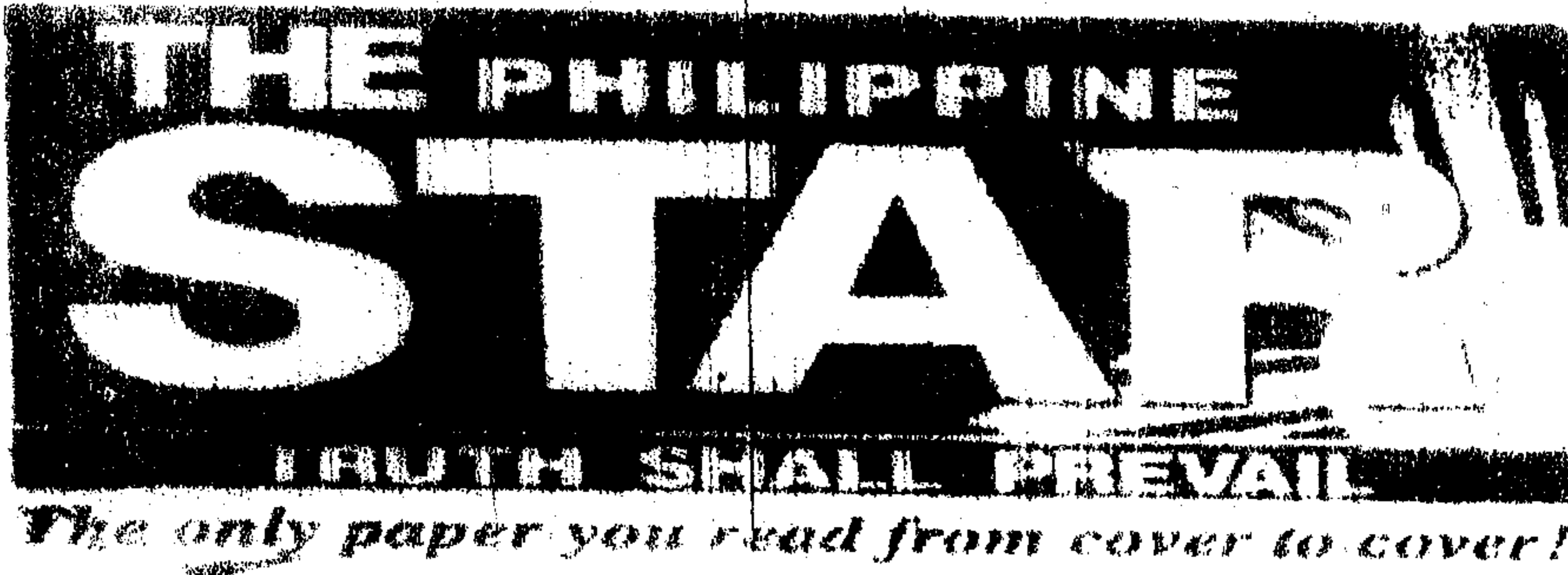
Discussions focus on security

and cooperation, safety of navigation and marine environment and sustainable development.

The meeting is taking a closer look at the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC) Vision 2025 and its maritime security agenda.

— Pia Lee-Brago

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Stronger Iran-Philippine cooperation in science and technology seen

LOS BAÑOS, Laguna – Iran has committed to further strengthen its collaboration with the Philippines in science and technology.

Iran Ambassador Ali Asghar Mohammadi made the commitment when he led a delegation that visited the Department of Science and Technology-Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development (DOST-PCAARRD) based here.

PCAARRD acting executive director Reynaldo Eborá welcomed Mohammadi and the Iranian officials, who also visited research institutions in Los Baños, among them the University of the Philippines at Los Baños (UPLB) and International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in connection with the Philippine-Iran collaboration.

Eborá thanked Iran for its “commitment to a more tangible and beneficial research and development and science and technology collaboration with the Philippines in the future.”

Earlier, in May 2015, the two countries signed the Philippine-Iran memorandum of understanding (MOU) for scientific and technical cooperation in research and training on biotechnology, nanotechnology and nano-biotechnology.

The MOU signing took place during Eborá’s participation in the Ninth National and First International Biotechnology Congress held in Iran under the auspices of the Agricultural Biotechnology Research Institute of Iran (ABRII).

During its recent visit to PCAARRD, the Iranian delegation was briefed by director Leah Buendia on the council’s mandate and its role in agriculture, aquatic, and natural resources R&D; and by deputy ex-

ecutive director Edwin Villar on the council’s S&T programs and R&D collaboration initiatives with ABRII.

PCAARRD is the government agency that formulates policies, plans, and programs for an S&T-based R&D in the various sectors under its concerns.

It coordinates, evaluates, and monitors the R&D activities of the National Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development Network composed of more than a hundred multi- and single-commodity and regional R&D centers, cooperating stations, state colleges and universities, and specialized agencies.

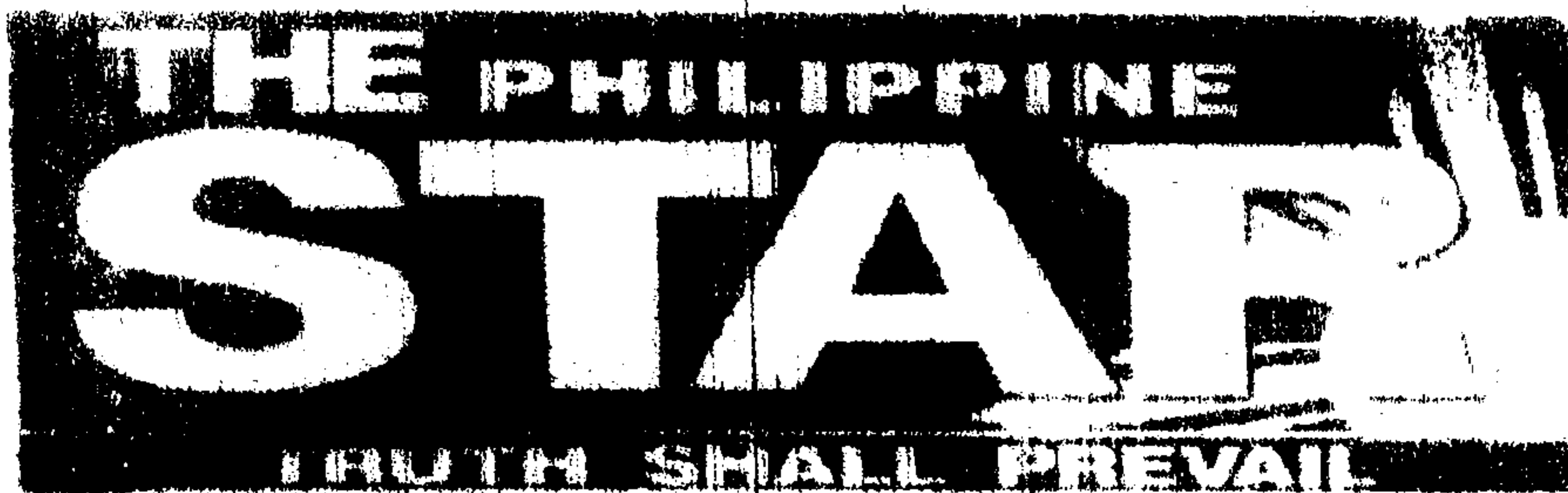
By RUDY FERNANDEZ

PCAARRD also allocates government and external funds for R&D and generates resources to support its programs. Moreover, it promotes active partnerships with international, regional, and national organizations and funding institutions for joint R&D; human resource development and training; technical assistance; and exchange of scientists, technologies, and information.

In a related development, former ABRII director general Behzad Ghareyazi, now with the Iran Ministry of Agriculture, conducted at PCAARRD recently a seminar titled “Biotechnology and Nanotechnology in Iran: Review of a Few Achievements.”

The seminar was attended by more than a hundred participants from PCAARRD, UPLB, IRRI, DOST-Philippine Council for Industry, Energy and Emerging Technology Research and Development, Department of Agriculture-Philippine Carabao Center, and the Philippine government-hosted Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture based in UPLB.

Ghareyazi presented a background of his country’s Islamic Science Revolution, scientific outputs and publications, recent achievements in animal cloning, production of genetically modified and transgenic crop plants, and commercialization of *Bacillus thuringiensis* rice.



The only paper you read from cover to cover!

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Industry threatens nearly half of natural heritage sites

— WWF

PARIS (AFP) – Almost half of all natural World Heritage Sites, including the Great Barrier Reef and Machu Picchu, are threatened by industrial activities such as mining, oil exploration and illegal logging, conservation group WWF warned yesterday.

The 114 threatened sites, virtually half the total listed by UNESCO, provide food, water, shelter and medicine to over 11 million people – more than the population of Portugal, according to a WWF-commissioned report.

The sites are meant to be protected for future generations.

"Despite the obvious benefits of these natural areas, we still haven't managed to decouple economic development from environmental degradation," WWF director general Marco Lambertini said in a foreword.

"Instead, too often, we grant concessions for exploration of oil, gas or minerals, and plan large-scale industrial projects without considering social and environmental risks."

The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) lists

197 "natural" and 32 "mixed" heritage sites in 96 countries around the world, alongside 802 cultural sites.

The 229 natural and mixed sites, nominated by governments of the countries in which they are found, include national parks and nature reserves, forests, coral reefs, islands and coastal areas.

But among the 114 sites highlighted by the WWF, Australia's Great Barrier Reef, the world's biggest coral reef ecosystem, is threatened by both mining and shipping.

In the US, the Grand Canyon Natural Park is threatened by dams or unsustainable water use.

And the 15th-century Inca citadel of Machu Picchu in Peru, named a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1983, is threatened by logging, the WWF said.

The report said oil or gas concessions had been granted in 40 of the sites and mining concessions in 42.

Twenty-eight sites were at risk from dams or unsustainable water use, a further 28 from illegal logging,

two from overfishing, and 20 from construction of roads or railways. Many sites were threatened in more than one category.

Countries are meant to assume responsibility under the World Heritage Convention to protect listed sites within their borders.

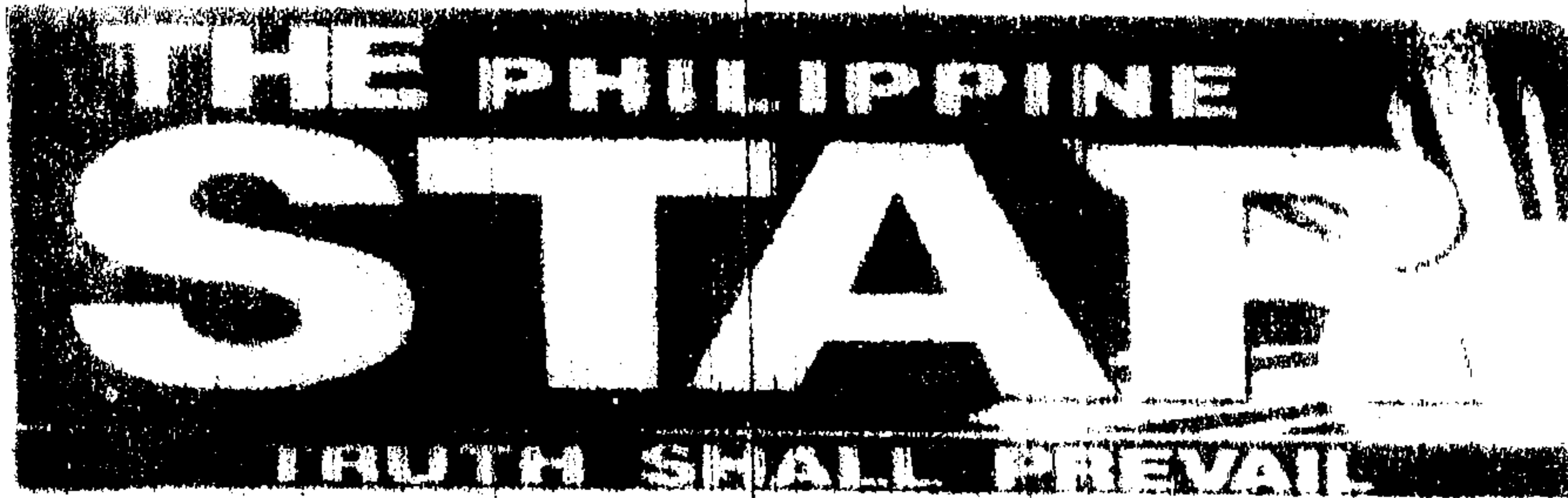
'Not anti-development'

"The World Heritage Committee is clear and definitive that extractive activities should not occur in World Heritage sites," WWF global conservation director Deon Nel told AFP by email.

"It has consistently maintained a position that oil, gas and mineral exploration and exploitation is 'incompatible with World Heritage status.' Despite this, about a third of natural sites have concessions allocated across them."

The WWF urged governments to cancel all such concessions, and also called on companies to refrain from harmful activities in protected areas, and on financial institutions not to fund them.

The report relies in large part on data



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*Page 2 - Industry threatens nearly half of
natural heritage sites - WWF*

from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, which monitors UNESCO's natural heritage sites.

It found that two-thirds of Heritage sites are important for water provision, more than 90 percent provide jobs in tourism and other sectors, and over half provide flood prevention services and store potentially harmful carbon.

"Healthy natural World Heritage sites contribute to poverty reduction, help alleviate food insecurity, combat climate change and restore and promote the sustainable use of ecosystems," said Lambertini.

Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest proportion of heritage sites at risk, followed by South Asia.

"Protecting natural areas and ecosystems is not anti-development," stressed Lambertini.

"It is in the interest of long-term, robust and sustainable development that benefits people and natural systems, including our social stability, economic prosperity, and individual well-being."