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DENR

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Multipartite monitoring strengthened to mitigate disaster risks in mining

By **MELODY M. AGUIBA**

The government is strengthening the grassroots-based Multipartite Monitoring Team (MMT) to eliminate disaster risks faced in mining sites arising from climate change and in compliance with the Philippine Mining Act.

The Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) and the Mines and Geosciences Bureau are leading the establishment of new guidelines on MMT's continual improvement. This will be part of enforcing compliance of mining companies to their commitments to protect the environment and ensure benefits to host communities.

The same improved guidelines should apply in related extractive industries particularly energy and power.

EMB, an attached agency of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), is set to hold the National Multipartite Monitoring Team (MMT) convention on April 12-13, 2016 for the guidelines improvement setting.

The project aims to fulfill an earlier DENR order harmonizing implementation of the Philippine Environmental Impact Statement System (PEIS) with the Philippine Mining Act (PMA). DENR Administrative Order (AO) 2015-02 was issued on March 12, 2015.

The new guidelines aim to strengthen participation of the community-- indigenous people (IP), non government organizations--in improving mines' social responsibility projects, thereby reducing disaster risks in light of recent highly destructive climate change-related disasters.

Implementation of best practices in running MMTs will be replicated in environmentally critical areas.

For the power and energy sector, the guidelines improvement is focused on carbon sequestration and how communities can actively participate in monitoring tree planting commitments of companies.

AO 2015-02 mandates harmonized implementation of the PEIS (Presidential Decree 1586) and the PMA (Republic Act 7942).

The MMT is a multi-sectoral team composed of representatives from the MGB and DENR regional offices, the mining company, a non-government organization, the host community, and indigenous peoples, if any.

AO 2015-02 specifically targets environmentally critical mining projects' compliance to laws.

The guidelines to be formulated by the MMT will be used as basis for a joint financial audit by EMB and MGB of the use of the Mine Rehabilitation Fund and Environmental Trust Fund of mining projects.

Use of other mandated funds for mining projects will likewise be more strictly monitored. These are the Contingent Liability and Rehabilitation Fund, a fund to compensate damages for any adverse effect of mining, and the fund for Social Development and Management Program, a commitment for social development in mining host communities.

There is also a provision for the monitoring of a mining project's Final Mine Rehabilitation and Decommissioning Plan.

MMTs are tasked under DAO 2003-30 and 2010-21 to submit monitoring and validation reports on a quarterly and semi-annual basis. MMTs are mandated to receive complaints and recommend measures to address these.

The Regional Office 3 of MGB and the EMB Regional earlier conducted a workshop on the formulation of Manual of Operations (MOO) of MMTs of mining companies and industrial sand and gravel permittees. Sixty representatives of mining companies from Bulacan, Bataan, and Pampanga, including their MMTs attended the workshop.

DENR is enhancing communities' capability in monitoring mining projects' commitments through workshops-orientations on environmental laws including Philippine Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Hazardous Waste Act, Solid Waste Management Act of 2000.

AO 2015-02 requires all mining projects to submit Self-Monitoring Reports or SMRs to concerned EMB and MGB regional offices quarterly.

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BEST EFFORTS Volunteers try to control the blaze that has been raging on Mt. Apo in Davao province since March 26. (See story in *Across the Nation*, Page A8.)

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



VOLUNTEERS continue to create more fire lines on Mt. Apo on Thursday.

ORLANDO B. DINOY/INQUIRER MINDANAO

New tack on Apo: Fight fire with fire

DIGOS CITY—Authorities trying to put out a fire still raging on Mt. Apo have decided to fight fire with fire.

Harry Camoro, spokesman of the Incident Manage-

He said while this is being done, two Philippine Air Force helicopters continued to douse other areas with water and ice to cool them down and prevent them from spreading.

He said at least 200 volunteers (4 feet) in some areas, was necessary because volunteers could not possibly keep up the fight forever.

Mt. Apo are inside the fire lines and not in areas that the IMT had been trying to protect.

Joselin Marcus Fragada, di-

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Elections add to drought disaster

Ban on giving aid during poll season offers excuse for gov't inaction

KORONADAL CITY—A ban on local government officials distributing aid during a calamity that coincides with an election period is being drawn into the spotlight following the bloody dismantling of a road blockade in Kidapawan City that farmers set up to demand food to tide them over as El Niño continues to destroy crops and bring farming communities to the brink of starvation.

The ban, which authors of the Omnibus Election Code designed to prevent elected officials from using government resources for their campaign, is emerging as the biggest reason that local government units could use to wiggle themselves out of the blame game that is now playing around the hardships that millions of farmers and their families are now suffering as a result of El Niño.

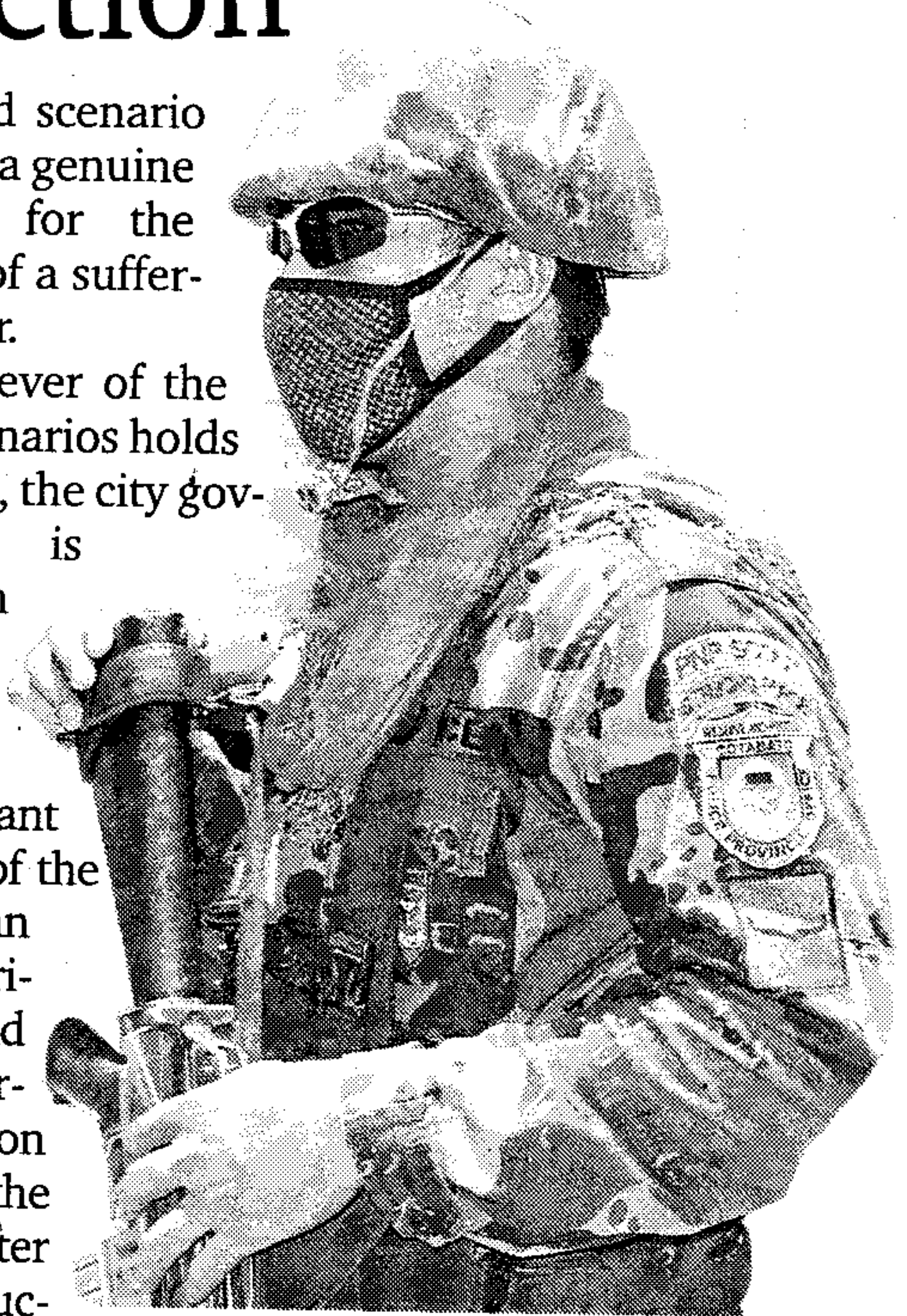
The tragedy that looms as a result of the drought, however, could also offer an excuse for politicians to defy the ban and make their presence felt and seen in efforts to ease the suffering of drought-hit communities.

A third scenario could be a genuine concern for the welfare of a suffering sector.

Whichever of the three scenarios holds true here, the city government is bent on defying the ban.

"We do not want a repeat of the Kidapawan City experience," said Cyrus Urbano, action officer of the City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (CDRRMC).

Urbano said the city government has yet to get an exemption from the ban from the Commission on Elections (Comelec), but it



A FULLY ARMED policeman stands guard near Spottswood Methodist Center in Kidapawan City where farmers demanding food sought shelter after their blockade was dismantled violently, killing at least two protesters.

WILLIAMOR MAGBANUA/
INQUIRER MINDANAO

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Elections add to drought disaster

could no longer wait for it before food is distributed to more than 3,500 farming families suffering from the drought in the city.

"We are taking a risk [for defying the ban]," Urbano said. All 27 villages of the city would get food packs, he said.

According to the election code, local governments should let the Department of Social Welfare and Development, with supervision from the Commission on Audit, distribute relief goods during calamities that coincide with an election period.

"No candidate or his or her spouse or member of his family within the second civil degree of affinity or consanguinity shall

participate, directly or indirectly, in the distribution of any relief or other goods to victims of the calamity or disaster," the Omnibus Election Code said.

Urbano said the city government had long asked for an exemption but the Comelec has not acted on the request.

"We have been asking for exemption as our people are getting hungry. We will no longer wait for our farmers to go to the streets and demand food," he said.

"We can no longer wait, we do not want the Kidapawan experience to happen here. We can no longer wait for the Comelec certification we sought since January. We must act now before our people die of hunger," Urbano said.

Last week, at least 6,000 El Niño-hit farmers set up a blockade on portion of a major highway in Kidapawan City demanding rice from the provincial government of North Cotabato.

The blockade prevented vehicles from passing through the highway and lasted for at least two days before police moved in and dismantled the barricade in an operation that turned bloody, killing at least two farmers and wounding 100 protesters and policemen.

South Cotabato Gov. Daisy Avance Fuentes said provincial officials

also sought exemption from the Comelec to bring aid directly to some 9,000 drought-hit farmers.

Fuentes said while the provincial government has sufficient funds for the aid, distribution could not start without Comelec approval.

The provincial government has declared a state of calamity. "Our farmers' situation is alarming," Fuentes said.

Danilo Supe, South Cotabato provincial administrator, said the process of acquiring an exemption from the ban "is a very tedious and long process that could take us until after the elections to complete." *Edwin Fernandez, Inquirer Mindanao*

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FPI seeks passage of climate-change mitigation bills

BY JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ

THE Federation of Philippine Industries (FPI) has recently asked the House of Representatives to pass measures mitigating the effect of climate change.

In a letter to the House Committee on Energy, the FPI, as a signatory to the 2015 Manila Declaration on Climate Change, asked the lower chamber to make climate change-related bills as priority.

FPI president, Jess Arranza, also said measures to mitigate climate change should be aligned with national priorities, circumstances and capabilities, which should be based on co-benefit measures such as forestation.

Arranza also lamented the recent call of former US Vice President Al Gore during his visit to the Philippines for "people power" action versus Philippine coal power-plant projects.

"This is not only misplaced but reflects a complete lack of understanding of local conditions," Arranza said.

He said the FPI has been urging its members to adopt friendly climate-change mitigation methods, such as robust reforestation, traffic decongestion to prevent carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, and a rational evaluation of the Philippine

policy on renewable energies.

According to Arranza, the Philippines only accounts for 1.37 percent of the world's population and only contributes 0.24 percent of the global CO₂ emissions annually, which is significantly lower than the other countries such as the United States (17 percent), Germany (8.9 percent), China (6.7 percent), and even neighboring Thailand (4.5 percent).

The Philippines, he said, already has a high installed power-generation capacity from renewable sources at 32 percent, driven primarily by geothermal and hydro resources, which is even higher than far more developed economies such as Germany (24 percent) and the United States (12.2 percent).

Moreover, Arranza said the Philippines has only 23 coal-fired power plants, which incidentally are the backbone of the country's generating sector as the aggregate power produced by these plants constitutes 35 percent of the country's total power generated at about 6,000 megawatts.

"Coal-power plants are base-load power plants that provide stable and dependable power that addresses the requirements of manufacturers and producers on a 24 x 7 basis," he said.

WB plan

THE World Bank (WB) announced its plan on Thursday to help developing countries add 30 gigawatts of renewable energy to the world's energy capacity and to mobilize \$25 billion in private financing for clean energy by 2020.

The Climate Change Action Plan, released by the Washington-based lender on Thursday, is designed to help countries meet their Paris COP21 pledges and manage increasing climate impacts.

Under the plan, the WB will quadruple funding for climate-resilient transport, integrate climate into urban planning through the Global Platform for Sustainable Cities, and boost assistance for sustainable forest and fisheries management.

According to the World Bank, climate change threatens to drive 100 million more people into poverty in the next 15 years.

In addition to the World Bank's efforts, the International Finance Corp., a member of the World Bank Group, aims to expand its climate investments from the current \$2.2 billion a year to a goal of \$3.5 billion a year, and lead on leveraging an additional \$13 billion a year in private-sector financing by 2020. *With PNA/Xinhua*

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The Manila Times

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

GREEN ALLIANCE ASKS AQUINO:

Where's P58-B fund for El Niño

BY NELSON BADILLA
REPORTER

PRESIDENT Benigno Aquino 3rd should face the public squarely and explain what happened to the supposed P58-billion government fund allocation to help farmers deal with the impact of a massive dry spell brought by the El Niño phenomenon.

► FundA2

The Manila Times

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Page 2 Where's P58-B fund for El Niño?

The Green Action Philippines on Friday raised this point after hundreds of farmers from North Cotabato province in southern Mindanao staged a protest rally in Kidapawan City on March 30 to April 1 that in the presence of policemen turned violent in the end.

The protesters demanded five sacks of rice from the provincial government for each of them. But they failed to get approval and the rally ended in a bloody dispersal, resulting in the death of three farmers and injuries to more than 100 people, including policemen.

President Aquino has since kept his silence on what critics have referred to as the Kidapawan Massacre.

According to Sanshen Maglinte, Green Action Philippines spokesman, the President last year promised that he would order the release of some P19 billion in calamity funds to mitigate the massive negative effects of El Niño.

Aside from the P19 billion, Maglinte said, about P39 billion more was handed over to the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Fund for 2016.

"The Aquino government has even crafted the Roadmap to Address the Impact of El Niño [RAIN]. What happened to the funds [P19 billion and P39 billion] and to RAIN?" she asked.

Maglinte noted that the Department of Agriculture, Department of Social Welfare and Development and the National Irrigation Administration, can even request an additional budget once the funds allocated to victims of calamities called Quick Response Fund (QRF) has been used up.

On top of the QRF, local government units (LGUs) are allowed to use at least 5 percent of their own fund generated from regular revenues for calamity assistance.

"As the devastation wrought by the extreme drought due to the El Niño phenomenon spreads and heightens across the country, the Aquino government has again been slow to respond. It has also been slow to take decisive action

for the farmers in the face of gross violations of their human rights perpetrated by the local Philippine National Police and under the administration of North Cotabato Gov. Emmylou Taliño-Mendoza," Maglinte said.

Estrella Catarata, executive director of the Philippine Network

of Food Security Programs, a member of Green Action Philippines, said the extreme dry spell that started last year prevented many farmers in many parts of the country from planting and harvesting in May and October in 2015.

The "lean period extended from the usual five to seven months to more than nine months. But assistance from the government has been wanting and slow, and obviously has not reached most of the starving farmers and their families. The pangs of hunger have prompted them to organize, struggle and demand rice and support from the calamity funds of the government," Catarata explained.

The problem with the Aquino Administration, according to Bantay Bigas spokesman Cathy Estavillo, is that "instead of assisting the poorest of its constituents, the farmers and the indigenous peoples, the government has neglected them at the height of their hunger."

Bantay Bigas is also a member of the alliance.

Maglinte said, "If the government only genuinely prepared for El Niño and channeled the funds where they were meant, this tragedy [at Kidapawan] would not have happened. In the longer term, had the government dedicated funds to more productive programs such as developing post-harvest facilities, subsidies, sustainable agriculture programs and appropriate technologies for irrigation instead of the piece-meal Conditional Cash Transfer Program, our farmers would not be as badly hit by calamities."

She added that the President should explain clearly where the P58-billion fund went and for what purposes it was really used.

The Green Action Philippines describes itself as "a broad national alliance of networks and organizations, institutions including [LGUs], church and inter-faith organizations, academe, students, professionals and individuals, producers and consumers with common advocacies leading toward sustainable production and sustainable consumption."

It advocates "organic farming, toxic free and GMO free-food and non-food products, sustainable use and allocation of natural resources, as well as food security, including campaign against large-scale mining, GMO-free Philippine farms and genuine agrarian reform, among others."



Medium Rare

Jullie Y. Daza

Royal visitor

"AN absolute necessity and treasure."

That was how His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco described our Tubbataha Reef even before he could see the UNESCO World Heritage Site in Palawan, where he will be busy photographing and documenting the marine life of our coral reefs and other enchanting sights deep down in the sea. I wish he could include a side trip to Isla Verde not far from Batangas City, where he'd then stand on a promontory and gaze across the aqua-green waters to look for that point which Batangueños proudly refer to as the center of the center of marine biodiversity.

Maybe next time? He was here once before, in 1999, said President Aquino in his welcome toast at a formal luncheon Thursday, though he was not yet the reigning monarch then. Albert, only son of Prince Rainier and Grace Kelly, speaks English like an American, without a French accent, and he liked the music of "Stand by Me" so much (after tea and coffee) that "he was drumming (his fingers) on the table," according to his host.

Monaco is a good friend of the Philippines, even if it's only 1.9 sq km with a population of 35,000 (its citizens are

Monegasques). Despite its size, Monaco has come to our aid in times of calamities, apart from financing programs that help child-victims of abuse and exploitation (his sister, Princess Caroline, was here years ago to raise funds for one such charity), just as it has contributed its share of infrastructures and cultural exchanges. Monte Carlo is famous for its casinos, not all quite like those familiar to James Bond, and car races up and down its boulevards. Did the Prince invite the President to attend one of those races? Said he, "He did say I should 'come and visit'."

After June 30, the President will have all the time in the world to visit as many places in the world as he wants. He has started packing, not that he has any idea how many trucks will be needed, but it's the thought of going home to a somewhat new house on Times Street that he is looking forward to. The renovations have started, in a house that holds a flood of memories – his mother's bedroom, the dining room where family gathered to discuss problems and plans, the living room where the body of his father lay in state – but home is sweet. He will miss only one thing: information available on the instant.

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Mines bureau lifts CDO vs Berong Nickel

THE GOVERNMENT has lifted the cease and desist order which was slapped on the barge and loading operations and ore exporting activity of nickel miner Berong Nickel Corp. (BNC) when a cargo vessel carrying 1,120 wet metric tons (WMT) of its nickel ore was submerged off the coast of Palawan last month.

The Region IV-B office of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Mines & Geosciences Bureau (DENR-MGB) investigated the incident involving LCT Mark Jayson II and all other vessels including tug boats used in ore shipment on March 17 and concluded that Marc Jayson was "seaworthy and that its partial submergence was an accident."

A DENR-MGB letter signed by regional director Roland de Jesus stated that the cease and desist order on BNC's barge and loading operation in Berong, Quezon in Palawan and the suspension in the processing and issuance of mineral ore export permit had been lifted as of March 23.

BNC, a joint venture between DMCI Mining Corp. and Atlas Consolidated Mining and Development, has so far recovered at least 99.5 percent of the submerged nickel ore. In a statement, DMCI Holdings said BNC had also contained the water discoloration caused by the submerged nickel ore using containment booms, geotextiles and coco logs.

DMCI also said there was no oil spill from the vessel, citing confirmation by the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) in their reports dated March 16 and March 22, respectively.

Jomalia Shipping Corp., the vessel owner, plans to refloat and tow LCT Mark Jason II, pending receipt of the required salvage permit from the Maritime Industry Authority, DMCI said.

In the meantime, BNC has rolled out a skills development program for women and indigenous people in its host communities in Palawan.

The skills development program provides unskilled females and indigenous peoples with high-value employment, DMCI said in a statement.

Under the program, trainees undergo about 150 hours of operations and maintenance training so they can work as hydraulic excavator operators instead of spotters and laborers.

"Hydraulic excavator operators earn double compared to unskilled workers. The additional income will go a long way in addressing the needs of their families," DMCI Mining president Cesar Simbulan said.

To date, 62 locals have completed the program, eight of whom are Tagbanuas and five are women.

The majority have secured jobs at BNC while a few have transferred to other mining companies.

BNC is the only mining company in the Philippines that offers hydraulic operator training to women and indigenous people.

Berong Nickel's mine is under an approved mineral production sharing agreement with the Philippine government through the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. It is located in Barangay Berong, Municipality of Quezon, Palawan. **Doris Dumlao-Abadilla**

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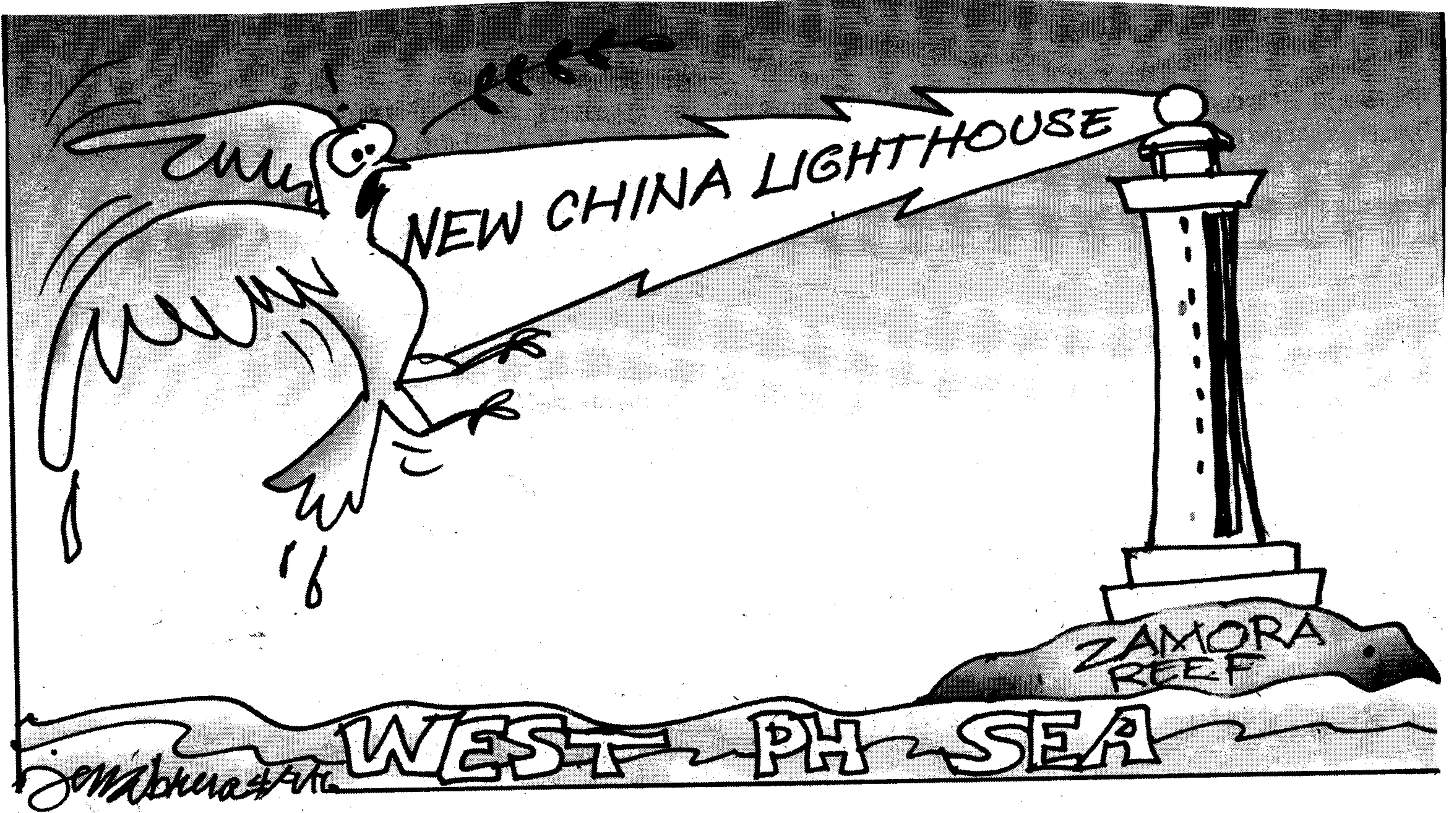
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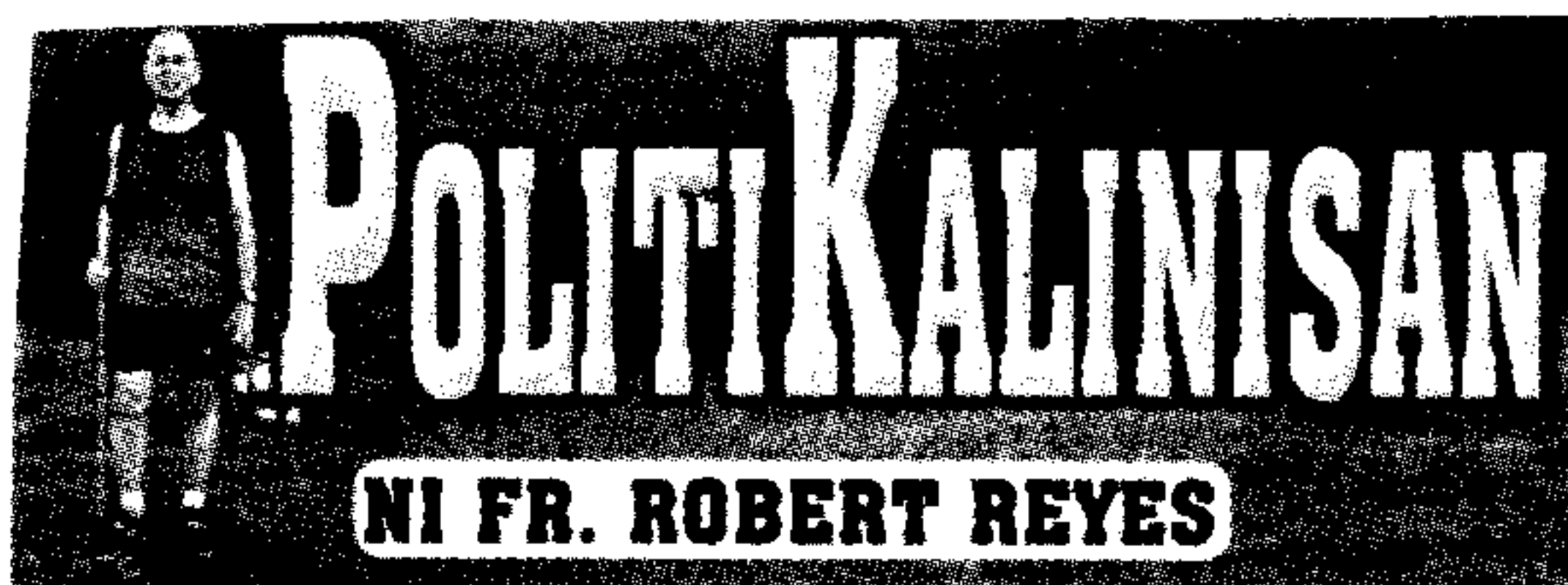
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May kandidato pa bang prayoridad ang kalikasan sa kanyang agenda?

NAGBITAW tayo nang mabigat na pahayag noong mga nakaraang araw. Sinabi natin na pawang wala tayong makitang kandidato sa pagka-presidente na pinipili ang kalikasan at kapaligiran bilang kanyang pangunahing agenda o pokus. Dahil dito, maaaring tuluyan nang manganib ang kalikasan at kapaligiran sa mga darating na panahon. Ilang araw na lang at matatapos na ang administrasyong nakilala sa kanilang programang "tuwid na daan." At sa pagtatapos ng administrasyong ito, maraming iiwanang katanungang kailangang sagutin ng susunod na administrasyon.

Anu-ano ang mga katanungang ito? Una, makikita ba ang maliwanag na krimen laban sa kalikasan sa napakaraming punong pinutol sa iba't ibang bahagi ng bansa dahil sa naturang "development projects" na pinangungunahan ng "road expansion" project

ng DPWH sa buong bansa? Pangalawa, kaugnay ng pagpuputol ng mga puno na napakalaki ng papel sa paglinis ng hangin at pagpapanatili ng tubig sa lupa at mabubuting bagay para sa mga tao, hayop at sa mismong kapaligiran? Matagal na nating ipinaglalaman ang "clean air" o ang malinis na hangin sa pamamagitan ng mga programa at pagkilos ng Coalition of Clear Air Advocates o CCAA. Tila iisa ang lumilitaw na dahilan kung bakit pinahihintulutan ang pagpuputol ng mga puno at ang patuloy na paglala ng polusyon sa kapaligiran. Pangatlo, dahil sa lumalaking konsumo ng enerhiya mula kuryente hanggang krudo, tila bukas na bukas ang kasalukuyang administrasyon sa pagbubukas ng maruming uri ng enerhiya na galing sa "coal powered plants." Tila mabagal ang pagsulong ng tinatawag na "malinis na enerhiya" (o clean energy) na hindi kinakailangang magsunog pa ng kung anumang sangkap na nakalalason sa kapaligiran. Pang-apat, dahil sa trapiko sa maraming bahagi ng Maynila at sa pagdami ng pasahero sa LRT/MRT at PUJs, kailan magkakaroon ng malinaw na regulasyon sa rami ng sasakyang bago o luma man ito? Panlima, dahil sa El Niño, dumarami ang mga lugar na namamatay ang mga pananim at hayop at produktong pang-agrikultura. Ano ang dapat gawin ng pamahalaan upang tingnan nang seryoso ang problema ng

BULGAR

BOSES NG MASA MATA NG BAYAN

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May kandidato pa lang proporsiyon ng kalikasan

matinding tagtuyot.

Nakita na natin ang masamang epekto ng mababaw at hindi komprehensibong katugunan sa anumang problemang pangkalikasan tulad ng El Niño sa Kidapawan. Sa tindi ng kanilang kagutuman, nag-rally ang mga magsasakang humihingi ng bigas. Ilang araw nang nagpipiket ang mga magsasaka ngunit, sa halip na mabigyan ng bigas, tinapos ng kapulisan at ng pamahalaang lokal ang rally sa mali at abusadong paraan. Mabilis na naghain ng kaso ang kapulisan laban sa mga magsasaka. Malinaw na kailangan nilang ipagtanggol ang kanilang sarili laban sa anumang reklamong maaaring isampa laban sa kanila.

Ito ang nakababahalang katotohanan: Ang karahasang bunga ng problemang pangkalikasan tulad ng El Niño na sanhi ng lumalalang gutom dahil sa kawalan ng aanihing palay.

Noong nakaraang Miyerkules, ika-6 ng Abril, nagtungo ang ilang mga taga-Dumaguete

sa pamumuno ng 350 sa tanggapan ng Environmental Management Bureau o EMB sa Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) upang tutulan ang mga ilegal at imoral na gawain ng Energy Development Corporation. Nais pang palawakin ng EDC ang kanilang naturang "operation" upang dagdagan pa ang kanilang produksiyon ng eherhiya. Tinutulan ng mga taga-Dumaguete ang bagong hinihinging Environmental Certification Clearance o ECC.

Napakaganda at napakayaman ng Mt. Talinis na kinikilalang mahalagang "biodiversity" area na merong lawak na 23,565 ektarya.

Makikinig kaya ang EMB? Makikinig kaya si Secretary Ramon Paje? Sana ay makinig kayo at tingnan ninyo ang nangyari sa Kidapawan. Huwag ninyong maliitin ang kaugnayan ng buhay sa kalikasan. Huwag ninyong ipikit ang inyong mga mata sa epekto ng maling polisiya sa kalikasan na nauuwi sa gutom, trahedya at kamatayan. Huwag kayong magbulag-bulagan Secretary Paje at mga kaibigan sa DENR.

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Cayetano slams Palace for belittling El Niño pleas

By Niña Calleja and Dona Z. Pazzibugan

VICE PRESIDENTIAL candidate and Senate Majority Leader Alan Peter Cayetano yesterday criticized Malacañang for downplaying the people's clamor for help amid the enduring El Niño phenomenon that is severely affecting Filipino farmers' livelihood.

During a Senate hearing on the violent dispersal of protesting farmers in Kidapawan City, Cayetano blamed the administration for the delay in the release of adequate funds to mitigate the ill effects of the drought in the province.

Malacañang earlier called the senator's claims as "untrue and unfounded," saying that since the creation of an El Niño Task Force, enough resources were deployed in affected areas.

Cayetano remained firm in his stand and even accused the administration of lying to the public.

"Governor Mendoza, who happens to be a Liberal Party (LP) member, told us herself during the hearing that their local government wrote a letter to the national government to ask for assistance, but nothing came," Cayetano said, referring to North Cotabato Gov. Emmylou Taliño-Mendoza.

"We should end all lies and excuses. We actually have P45 billion worth of funds in the 2016 budget that may be used for projects that will curb the impact of this crisis," he said.

Cayetano said that if the national government had immediately taken action, thousands of farmers would not have staged a protest, and the tragic incident in Kidapawan could have been avoided.

The senator, who is running with Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte, assailed the police's lack of dispersal equipment which could have avoided the violence that killed at least two protesting farmers.

"But the Palace had abandoned the

farmers of Kidapawan. It abandoned North Cotabato," he said.

Cayetano particularly questioned the absence of Agriculture Secretary Proceso Alcala in the hearing on Thursday morning in Davao City.

He said he would have wanted the Cabinet member to explain his statement that the areas where the protesting farmers came from did not suffer much from El Niño.

Nearly all of Mindanao is suffering from drought due to rainfall shortage as the tail-end of an exceptionally strong El Niño coincided with the country's dry season.

The weather bureau reported that 23 of the 27 provinces in Mindanao have received for some months now way below the normal amount of rainfall they usually get, which put them in drought or dry spell status.

While Mindanao is feeling the brunt of the impact of El Niño, 12 other provinces in Luzon and the Visayas are also suffering from drought or dry spell, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa).

The Mindanao provinces in drought as of March are: Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga Sibugay, Bukidnon, Camiguin, Lanao del Norte, Misamis Occidental, Misamis Oriental, Davao del Norte, Davao del Sur, South Cotabato, North Cotabato, Sarangani, Sultan Kudarat, Surigao del Norte, Basilan, Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi.

Palawan in Luzon and Siquijor and Negros Oriental in the Visayas are also in drought.

Pagasa considers a province to be in drought when it receives at least 60 percent less than its normal rainfall—or way below normal rainfall—for at least three consecutive months.

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A broader look at today's business

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Council defers endorsement of \$500-million Cebu City coal-fired power plant

CEBU CITY—The Cebu City council has deferred the approval of a resolution endorsing the proposed 300-megawatt (MW) coal-fired power plant of the Ludo Power Corp. (LPC) in Barangay Sawang Calero, this city.

Cebu City Councilors Noel Wenceslao and Richard Osmeña earlier filed a proposed resolution endorsing the power-plant project.

But the council instead set another public hearing on the \$500-million power-plant project on April 17, after more than a thousand Sawang Calero residents signed a petition opposing the project.

Some of them trooped on Wednesday during the council's regular session at the Cebu City Hall to express their opposition to the project. The residents, wearing black armbands and t-shirts with "No to Coal" print, said they were not consulted about the proposed power plant. But Sawang Calero Barangay Captain Ariel Yburan said three consultative assemblies were conducted for the project, but those who opposed the project did not attend to air their objections.

He said a consultative assembly was held on February 17 for Barangay Sawang Calero and neighboring Barangay Duljo-Fatima, with representatives from the Geoshpere Technologies Inc., the consultant of LPC on the project.

On March 1 he said another meeting was reportedly held with representatives of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources as part of the environmental impact assessment of the project.

The day after, Yburan said the barangay held a general assembly with more than 300 residents to discuss the project. **PNA**

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Groups hold protest, claim gov't action on El Niño impacts a 'colossal flop'

By Pat C. Santos

Members of the Sanlakas Coalition yesterday participated in Kalampag or Kampanya Laban sa Pagkagutom — a campaign to demand from government the political will to take drastic action in addressing the impacts of El Niño and demand justice for the continued neglect of the country's agricultural sector in a prepared statement said.

They alleged that the mitigation efforts of the government's El Niño Task Force to combat the climate-induced water crisis is a "colossal flop." "The bloodshed in Kidapawan could have been avoided if not for the gross negligence and incompetence of the task force that claimed two lives and left hundreds injured last week," they said.

The task force formed in September last year composed of Cabinet-level agencies under the Office of the President led by the Socio-Economic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan, with the departments of Public Works, Agriculture, the National Irrigation Administration and the Presidential Assistant on Food Security and Agricultural Modernization after state weather bureau Pagasa issued a warning in March last year that the El Niño will affect 68 of the 81 provinces by April 2016.

"The much-vaunted El Niño preparations by the Aquino government since last year have been exposed to be P19-billion fiasco by the very blood of our starving farmers. If only they were not too busy campaigning for the administration's bets then they should have monitored that the water crisis was worsening and should have acted upon it promptly," said Leody de Guzman, president of the militant Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino, a founding member of Sanlakas.

He added that, "Not only does the El Niño bring severe droughts to the countryside but we are also looking at imminent food crisis specially that Mindanao is the

country's food basket. To downplay the farmers' pleas will likely have dire consequences on our food security on top of the already devastating effects on their lives and livelihoods."

De Guzman cited that Mindanao provinces produce 25 percent of the country's rice production, more than half of our corn production, 81 percent of our bananas, and 75 percent of the total coffee output and has contributed 59 percent to overall coconut yield among others.

"Concretely, we urge the Aquino administration to declare all 68 provinces affected be placed under a state of calamity and expedite the release the much needed calamity and the standby quick response funds to counter the fast-spreading water and looming food crisis."

So far, the government has declared only four provinces, including North Cotabato and the city of Zamboanga to be under a state of calamity.

At their program, the activists banged the pots and pans in front of the agriculture department's head office along the Elliptical road in Quezon City to symbolize their clamor for food security and justice for the Mindanaon farmers.

Among the organizations that participated in the protest were Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino (BMP), Partido Lakas ng Masa and Kongreso ng Maralitang Lungsod. Protests were also simultaneously held in the cities of Calamba, Cebu, Tacloban, Bacolod, Pagadian, Ozamis and Davao.

The groups' leaders also took turns lambasting Secretary Proceso Alcala for his recent statements in a televised interview where he claimed that the farmers' conditions in North Cotabato are not as bad as it seems.

"If so, then we challenge Alcala to live on poisonous wild yam even for a week, like the desperate farmers there are eating and repeat his statement on live television," dared Oyette Zacate, national officer of Sanlakas.



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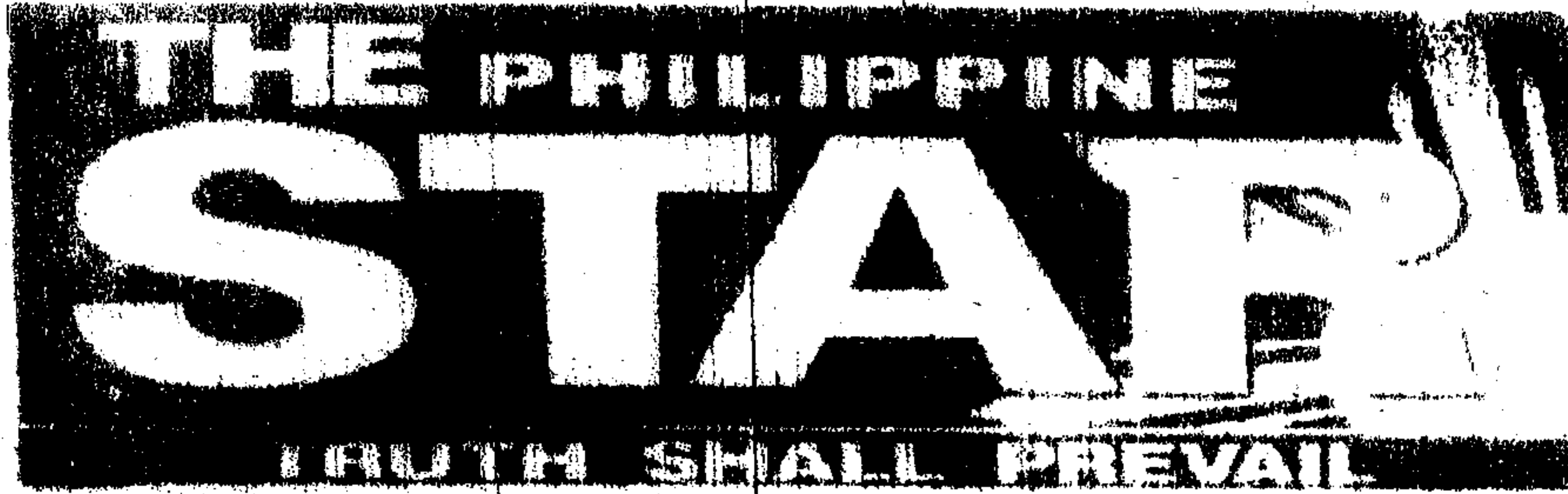
Mula sa pinanana-bikang mga beach, kasama na ang nasa El Nido na kilala sa malakristal nitong tubig, white sand at mga kagubatan. Nariyan din ang Puerto Prinse-sa, Coron at ang dinarayong Tubbataha Reef.

Hindi na mabilang ang mga nag-enjoy sa pag-i-island-hopping, scuba diving at snorkeling sa maliliit o malalaking lagoon nito, mountain climbing sa Mt. Tapyas sa Coron at ang uulit-ulitin mong underground river experience. Marami ring

mapagpipilian para sa iba pang outdoor activities, nature at parks tour, museums at kahit pa food trip ang gusto ninyo.

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Para mas ma-enjoy ang inyong Palawan trip, maging updated sa travel packages papunta rito. Makakabuti rin kung magiging maagap sa pagpapareserve ng tickets. Alamin din ang iba't ibang group discounts na pwedeng i-avail. Higit sa lahat, alalahanin na laging maging ligtas sa inyong adventure.



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PSU to plant mangroves in coastal barangays

DAGUPAN CITY – The Pangasinan State University (PSU)-Lingayen campus will undertake mangrove planting on April 27 to advocate environmental preservation and protection to the community it serves.

Armando Junio, campus executive director of PSU-Lingayen, said the initiative is part of the university's mandate to adhere to its extension function in empowering the community to care for the environ-

ment, report from the Philippine Information Agency (Pangasinan) based here said.

Some 7,000 mangrove seedlings will be planted by local government officials, PSU employees and students as well as scholars of the provincial government in the coastal areas when the tide is low, Junio said.

Tapped as potential partners of the extension activity are the coastal barangays

of Capandanan in Lingayen and Naguilayan in Binmaley that were identified by the Provincial Agriculture Office and the Lingayen Agriculture Office.

PSU has requested the provincial government to include the activity in Pistay Dayat (Sea Festival) to draw more participants in making Pangasinan cleaner and greener.

— Eva Visperas

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CEBU ECO WARRIORS – Soaring mid-day temperatures fail to stop these locals from installing nets to prevent garbage from destroying a mangrove area near the South Road properties in Cebu City yesterday. (Juan Carlo de Vela)

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Stringent measures vs forest fires in Western Visayas implemented

ILOILO CITY (PNA) – The intense heat and forest fires triggered by the El Niño phenomenon has affected some 107,000 seedlings, saplings and trees in Western Visayas, losing them to forest fires.

In a recent regional conference, regional director Jim O. Sampulna of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in Western Visayas instructed all the provincial and community ENR officers to be vigilant in monitoring the reforestation projects, especially the National Greening Program (NGP) sites.

"You must activate enough manpower on the ground to immediately suppress fire incidents. Create roving teams during this El Niño season to alert CENR offices and coordinate with the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP)," Sampulna said.

Aside from Aklan, where a grass fire damaged 11.53 hectares of alienable and disposable land area in barangays Tigbawan and Alas-as in Madalag town, the provinces of Antique, Capiz and Iloilo likewise reported similar incidents.

NGP sites in Belison and Culasi towns in Antique province reported a total of 13 forest fire incidents due to cigarette butts which affected 620.26 hectares.

Capiz reported kaingin or slash and burn farming as the primary culprit that caused two forest fires, damaging 8.50 hectares.

Iloilo City had four forest fire incidents, which affected 56.50 hectares.

PENROs and CENROs have also implemented proactive measures such as putting up of signages on NGP sites with a warning that the area is fire-prone; deployment of personnel on site to conduct foot patrol; use of hand-held radios for better coordination and communication and installing look-out towers to easily monitor the plantation site, to name a few.

NGP sites which were affected by forest fires shall be replanted after the El Niño season which is still affecting vast areas of the region.

"We can tap our state colleges and universities to provide us the needed seedlings," said Sampulna.

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• River rehab run

CEBU CITY – RC Goldline is holding a marathon aimed at raising funds to help address river pollution in the city. The half marathon on April 24, which will adopt the theme "Get Connected", is one of the activities slated ahead of Cebu Business Month (CBM). This is the second time RC Goldline is organizing the run. CBM 2016 overall chairman and owner of the RC Goldline Sales Corporation Christian Paro-an said during a press briefing at Bayfront Hotel Cebu on Thursday that the proceeds of the marathon will benefit the Run for the Rivers program of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. The half marathon will help fund the cleanup of the Guadalupe River in Guadalupe, Butuanon River in Mandaue City, Bacayan River and Calamba River. (Roy Vincent Alison, Christopher Mahilum)

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Relieved Cotabato police chief's 'judgment call' led to violent dispersal

By ALI G. MACABALANG and MALU CADELINA MANAR

KIDAPAWAN CITY – Relieved North Cotabato police director Senior Supt. Alexander Tagum has admitted having allowed the violent dispersal of

the protesters as a matter of “judgment call” upon seeing one of his men being pinned down by one of the protesters.

Philippine National Police ►2

(PNP) Chief Ricardo Marquez had already ordered the relief of Tagum pending the result of separate investigations on the violent incident that left at least three protesters dead and more than 100 others, including cops, injured. Also relieved was Supt. John Calinga as Kidapawan police director. Supt. Jose Briones, provincial police operations chief will sit as North Cotabato (also known as Cotabato) police officer-in-charge in concurrent capacity, while Supt. Noel Kinazo, provincial police office deputy chief for administration will replace Calinga.

The ongoing Senate probe on the violent dispersal, which was snubbed for the second time by Cabinet members of the Aquino administration, has prompted Malacañang to promise opening its records on the use of public funds intended to mitigate the El Niño phenomenon. Some senators warned of a repeat of the incident if the government fails to adopt a sound agricultural policy that truly addresses the needs of farmers.

Senate Majority Leader Alan Peter Cayetano, meanwhile, pressed the PNP to immediately release all illegally detained “hungry and angry” farmers in drought-hit Kidapawan. He also slammed the Aquino administration for failing to disburse ₱45 billion embedded in the 2016 ₱3-trillion national budget for projects that would curb the negative impact of the El Niño phenomenon.

For her part, Sen. Loren Legarda said the government must utilize available funds to mitigate and adapt to El Niño.

Sen. Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. warned that the Kidapawan tragedy may happen again unless the government adopts a sound agricultural policy that will truly address the needs of the farmers.

Snubbed again

Cabinet members of the Aquino administration snubbed for the second time yesterday a two-day Senate committee hearing on the Kidapawan tragedy despite Malacañang's pronouncement that summoned officials will not be restricted from attending the inquiry. Ironically, the second Senate public hearing elicited testimonies that there are ample government funds to buy rice that could have been distributed

to farmers-demonstrators who were instead given deadly bullets.

The second snub came after only newly designated National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) Director-General Emmanuel Esguerra appeared before a public hearing yesterday by the Senate finance committee chaired by Sen. Legarda, concurrent chairwoman of the Senate Climate Change Committee.

Esguerra testified that the NEDA, designated by President Aquino in mid-2015 to head the “El Nino” Task Force, found out that there is no indication that there is food shortage in Region 12, including Kidapawan city.

The five Cabinet members who were invited but opted to send instead their subordinates to testify before the Laggard committee were Department of Agriculture (DA) Process Alcala, Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Secretary Corazon Silliman, Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Semen Sarmiento, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Ramon Paje and Department of Budget and Management (DBM) Secretary Florencio Abad. They also failed to attend the first day of hearing.

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Relieved Cotabato police chiefs

Farmers' wives appeal

Meanwhile, the wives of farmers arrested during the rally dispersal here last week have sought help from Cotabato Governor

Lola Mendoza to release their husbands from prison.

Elenita Mangga, 45, wife of Ruben who was among the more than 70 people charged with direct assault, said her husband was just deceived by some of their leaders in the barangay into believing that they will receive at least three sacks of rice from the governor and that the distribution will happen in Kidapawan City.

Chary Mae Maglahos, 22, wife of Marcelo, 35, said two residents from Kitao-tao, a town in Bukidnon, arrived in their barangay and asked villagers who are 15 years old and above to list their names so they could get bags of rice from the provincial government.

Chary Mae told her husband to join the group because they wanted to eat rice.

"At first, my husband didn't want to go there but I told him that we needed the rice so he joined the group. I didn't expect he would be among those arrested," said Chary Mae in her native dialect.

Aside from Ruben Mangga and Marcelino Maglahos, also arrested and charged with direct assault were John Nixel Cesar, Majovie Buguat, Lolita Porras, Erlinda Badol, Ederlyn Daelto, Erly Badol, Elmer Badol, and Rex Insek, all residents of Barangay Binoongan, Arakan.

Elenita and Chary Mae said they have not visited their husbands since last week because they don't have money to pay for their fare. (With reports from Mario Casayuran, Genalyn D. Kabling, and Madel S.Namit)