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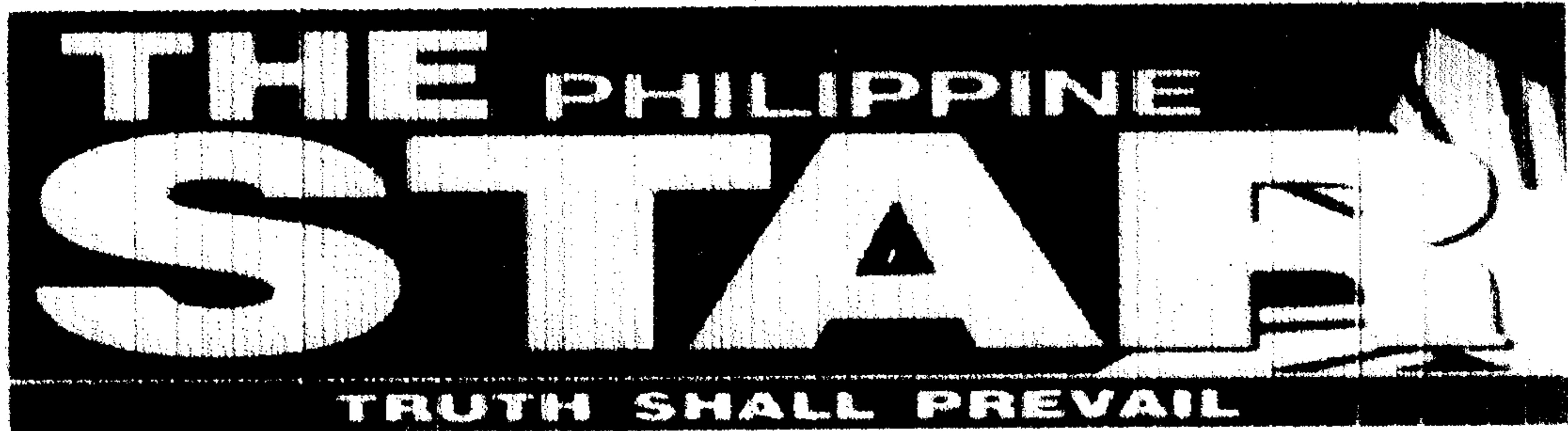
16 APR 2016

**DAY**

Sunday

# **DENR**

## **IN THE NEWS**



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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

# Fire on Mt. Apo under control

DAVAO CITY – A forest fire on Mt. Apo is not yet out but has been placed under control, an official said yesterday.

Joselin Marcus Fragada, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)-Region 11 director, said clearing operations are underway to put out the fire.

"Volunteers have to dig the ground deeper and ensure that there is no more fire underneath," Fragada said.

He said the declaration that the fire has been put out

would come from the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP).

The fire, which started on the portion of the mountain facing Kidapawan City in North Cotabato on March 26, spread to the area facing Davao City.

Fragada said they would put up a permanent fire line – a gap in vegetation or other combustible materials that will act as a barrier to slow down or stop the fire from spreading – and create a regional group of responders in case another fire breaks out on

the mountain.

"So far the estimated damage covers 113 hectares of grasslands. We are still validating the fire's impact on the forest where the extent of damage is minor. We are hopeful that it remains that way," he said.

Fragada said a heavy downpour over the area helped control the fire.

The DENR's Protected Areas Management Board earlier declared Mt. Apo off-limits to trekkers for five years. – Edith Regalado

# Abante

UNA SA BALITA

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## PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

Doon sa mga mountaineers or campers, maging responsable naman tayo sa ating kilos at galaw. Ang nangyaring sunog sa Mt. Apo sa Southern Davao ay nagsimula sa Kidapawan City trails at ang dahilan nito ay ang mga campers na umakyat sa bundok. Maaaring nag-iwan ng siga o upos ng sigarilyo ang mga campers kaya ayun lumaganap ang apoy. Naging sanhi nang pagkasira ng 350 hectares na kagubatan at mga damuhan sa kabundukan. Ngayon ay nanganganib na lumawak ang sunog sa nalalabing 7,000 hectares na kagubatan. Kung saan doon naninirahan ang ating mga agila. Na itinuring na nawawala na ang kanyang lahi.

Dapat humingi na ng tulong ang ating gobyerno sa ibang bansa. Dahil hindi kaya na maapula ng kawani ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Interior and Local Government, Bureau of Fire Protection, Philippine Army's Eastern Mindanao Command at local government. Nagsagawa na sila ng pitong composite teams to establish fire lines to keep the fire from spreading. Subalit hindi sapat at patuloy na lumalaganap ang apoy.

Nasa bansa na natin ang U.S. Army bakit hindi tayo humingi ng tulong sa kanila. Puwede naman sigurong mahiram ang kanilang mga choppers. Kailangan natin ang kanilang mga choppers upang magbuhos ng tubig sa nag-aapoy na kagubatan. Ngayon ipakita nila ang ating pangangailangan ng kanilang tulong. Dito makikita kung talagang sinsero sila na tulungang tayo sa oras ng kagipitan. Nakasaad sa pinagkasunduan sa EDCA na tutulungan tayo sa oras ng man-made or natural calamity.

--Nick A. Salvador

Project 4, Quezon City



# BULGAR

## BOSES NG MASA MATA NG BAYAN

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PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

## LET'S GO NA!

[lets.go.na.bulgar.com.ph](http://lets.go.na.bulgar.com.ph)

### Mga punong itinanim ng DENR, mababa ang survival rate!

SINABI ng Commission on Audit (COA) na bagsak ang P7.2 bilyong National Greening Program at land survey project ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). Hindi mumunting pera na naman ng mamamayan ang nalanos sa programa.

Inubos umano ng DENR ang pera sa 10 rehiyon ng bansa nang walang sistema ng implementasyon at pagbabantay.

Itinanim ng ahensiya ng gobyerno ang maling uri ng puno nang wala sa oras sa mga lugar na tiyak na malalanta lamang ang punla.

Kahit pa itinatanggi ng DENR ang ilan sa mga COA finding, tinanggap nito ang alegasyon sa napakababang survival rate ng mga itinanim na puno. Dahil daw ito sa pag-atake ng bagyo at peste.

Natumbok ang problema. Ang mga punong pinili ng DENR na itanim sa nakaraang ilang taon ay exotic, banyaga, hindi likas sa Pilipinas at para bang hinugot lang sa listahan ng magtotoso.

Sadyang walang laban ang hindi katutubong puno tulad ng acacia, mahogany, gmelina, mangga, goma, kape at cacao sa natural na latag ng panahon at kabundukan sa Pilipinas. Kalakalan ang motibo sa pagtanim ng mga punong ito.

Mabilis nga silang lumaki at mamunga pero sobra ang lutong nila para sa bagyo o kaya ay sobrang lambot at masarap nguyain ng peste.

Pagmasdan din na iniwasan ng mga ibon ang punong exotic at bihira silang mamugad sa mga ito.

Ang sabi ng DENR, napakarami raw kasi ng supply ng exotic trees at kulang na kulang ang supply sa mga punong likas sa atin tulad ng narra, kamagong, molave at kamuning. Kaya pala, sa mga commercial nursery at

supplier hinahango ang mga punla ng DENR.

Ayon kay Dr. Perry Ong, biology professor ng University of the Philippines, walang seedling para sa native tree species dahil commercial operator lang ang pinupuntahan nila.

Pero sa laki ng budget ng DENR, "ang kailangan lang nilang sabihin ay hindi kami bibili ng exotic trees para sa National Greening Program," ani Dr. Ong.

Magkakandarapa na ang mga supplier sa paghahanap ng native tree varieties.

Walang tatalo sa mga likas at natural na punong Pinoy. Siguradong tutubo sila at lalago saan man sa Pilipinas.

Matibay at nagsusulong sila ng biodiversity. Hindi sila kaya ng bagyo at peste.

Mabuti pa ang pribadong sektor, alam ang kahalagahan ng punong Pinoy. Mga punong dita ang nakahilera sa Ayala Avenue.

Sa Serendra, mga puno ng antipolo ang mamamasdan. Sa UP Ayala Land Techno-hub, mga punong bitaog ang nakatindig.

Sa Nuvali sa Laguna, may libreng nursery ng mga punong Pinoy para steady ang supply ng native trees.

Natuto sa karanasan ang mga Ayala. Sa kanilang lupain, siyam sa bawat 10 punong nangabali at tumumba noong Bagyong Glenda ay mga punong exotic at banyaga.

Kailan pa kaya tayo matututo?



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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

### Fisheries bureau: Increase presence in biodiversity site

THE Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources has cited the need for the Philippine government to increase its presence and jurisdiction over Benham Rise, the country's newest territory rich in marine biodiversity and mineral resources.

Virtually larger than Luzon, Benham Rise is a 13-million hectare under the sea region, off the provinces of Aurora and Isabela. The shallowest part of the region is Benham Bank, with a depth of at least 50 meters.

It was only confirmed by the United Nations as part of Philippine territory on

April 12, 2012.

In order to tap the massive potential for abundant fishery production from Benham Rise, BFAR director Asis Perez said that the government should have an actual presence within the area so as to encourage small and medium-scale fisherfolk to explore the vast yet virtually undiscovered fishing ground.

"Without the government's support, the small and medium-scale fishermen will be afraid to explore the area," said Perez, adding that effective possession, control, and proper utilization of resources

is necessary.

The area is marine biodiversity-rich and is home to high-value fish species such as blue-fin tuna and black and white marlin. The area also teems with round scad or *galunggong*.

Perez cited a three-year fishing survey initiated by BFAR which revealed albacore and big eye tuna as the dominant species of tuna caught in the area.

He noted that longline fishing is an effective strategy which can be implemented within the fishing ground. It uses a long line with baited hooks attached at intervals. **PNA**



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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

### Life and Marikina River

WHENEVER I walk or bike around the Marikina River Park, I instantly reconnect to my childhood and my oneness with nature. However, looking at the once-majestic river, I feel a certain sadness gnawing on my nostalgic spirit.

The river has significantly narrowed over the years due to the erosion of its banks brought about by constant flooding. Situated in a valley, Marikina has always been the funnel of rainwater from higher grounds around it.

This has resulted in the silting of the river, which has become shallow through the years, and the water itself has turned grayish. Households by the river and elsewhere in the city dispose of their garbage into the waterway directly or indirectly.

Moreover, factories by the banks continuously discharge industrial waste into the river, thus elevating toxicity in the water. Once abundant and diverse fish life has diminished, and what remain to thrive are schools of janitor fish.

For the city to be called Marikina, reminiscent of the word "marikit," which means beautiful, is quite contradictory; it is also unfortunate that this beautiful place is associated with flooding and deaths. Marikina River itself has witnessed calamities and tragic loss of lives. In 2009 Tropical Storm "Ondoy" hit Metro Manila and neighboring provinces; the massive destruction was particularly significant in Marikina. A historical marker was erected along the river bank to remind people of the courage that was necessary to live through such unfortunate times.

### HIGH BLOOD

*Antonio A. Manuel*

*WE'D also like to know the concerns of the sixtysomething and above, what makes their blood pressure rise or makes them sit back, content that all's well with their world and with themselves. —Ed.*

\*\*\*

I was a "World War II boy," as I was born at the time of the Japanese Occupation. Young as my friends and I were then, we experienced the hardships and unbearable conditions of the war, but made use of the blessings that nature had to offer.

The aftermath of war left most Filipinos poor. There was a scarcity of jobs and people took any form of employment that came their way. With luck on his side, my uncle was hired by a land owner to cultivate his rice fields, and he asked me to help him out. As his assistant, I tended to the carabaos. I enjoyed the job greatly, as I could play with other "shepherd boys."

After school, my peers and I would drive these powerful beasts to Marikina River to give them a refreshing bath after a hard day's work. I can still remember how clear the water was then. You could see the fish swimming below you as well as the sky's reflection on the surface. The water flowed silently as the tranquil breeze carried it along its direction. From a distance, what a picturesque view it created!

We were thankful for the benefits we got from the river. During the rainy season when production in the shoe industry slows down, people found other ways to augment their income and meet their daily needs. Some took to the fields to farm. Marikeños were able to catch their next meal from the river, as it was teeming with fish, shrimps and crablets then. Banca owners earned extra money by transporting passengers across, while some offered a "river cruise" for a fee. Merchants floated bamboo and other forest products from the mountains of Montalban downstream to Marikina, where farmers bought them to build fences around their houses and trellises for their crops.

When school started after the war, my friends and I took the path along the riverbank going to and from school. We enjoyed one another's company on those hikes. We watched birds gliding and flying low over the water looking for a catch. The farmers taught us how to identify the birds based on the sounds they made. We also witnessed how tadpoles grew into frogs. Butterflies and bees were amazing to watch as they flitted from one flower to another in search of nectar and honey. These things we learned from the river ever before we learned them in school.



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*Life and Marikina River*

Those treks to school and back were never tiresome for we played games along the way—tree climbing, target shooting with slingshots, chasing butterflies, spider fighting, skipping stones, and collecting *salagubang* (June bugs) by shaking them off tree branches.

Marikina River was our favorite play area. On weekends, our gang of scruffy boys would go there to play and swim. We jumped into the water from the tree branches that hung low over the river, which was several feet deep then. Swimming across the river was an unofficial “initiation” into the “elite” group of shepherd boys.

Whenever we went to the river with our families, there was a customary picnic on the banks. We’d swim for a few minutes then partake of our simple, home-cooked feast.

In those moments, I felt that life was simple and easy.

\*\*\*

I had lots of happy moments spent in and by the river which I will never forget. I am turning 79 this year, and I have come to face the reality that it’s impossible to bring back its former beauty in the next odd years, given how much we have destroyed it.

Fortunately, efforts are being made to improve its conditions. The city government has led projects and activities for this purpose. Dredging is continually done to deepen the river and increase its water-holding capacity. Coordination with towns and neighboring cities has been initiated on measures to keep the river free of garbage. Tree planting and the cleaning of ditches and tributaries are regularly undertaken with the help of students and civic organizations.

The task of reviving Marikina River’s pristine state may be tedious, but not entirely impossible. This can be easily carried out if everybody is mindful of how one’s actions and choices affect the environment. Given the scope and responsibilities under its administration, the Marikina City government has the capacity to improve the state of the river on a large scale. It can pass laws and strictly enforce them. It can still lead even more aggressive and expansive environment education, restoration, and waste management projects, and assign all sectors at every level to run them.

On a smaller but nonetheless important scale, people can practice mindful and wise consumption—buying only what they need and avoiding overly packaged products, refusing unnecessary additions such as plastic bags, utensils, straws, and lids. All the other materials that come with the things we buy go to the dump, and eventually into the river.

God created nature to provide for us and to show us what unconditional love means. It’s high time we reciprocated that love and became good stewards of the environment so we can preserve it not only for ourselves but also for the generations to come. I’m an old man and all I can wish for younger people is for them to experience the joy and freedom I have found in nature.

*Antonio A. Manuel is a retired teacher at the UP Integrated School and is an active member of Marikina City’s “Above 60 Academy,” a senior citizen program. He plays ground golf with his buddies regularly.*



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### Gov't plans to spend P2B to dredge toxic river

CITY OF MALOLOS—Close to P2 billion has been allotted for the cleanup of one of the world's dirtiest rivers, which runs through two provinces and areas in Metro Manila. Officials have set plans to spend the money on one of the simplest but most controversial methods to rid water systems of trash—dredging.

This year's General Appropriations Act (GAA), which sets the national budget, has allocated P1.9 billion to clean up the Marilao River System (MRS), according to officials of the Bulacan provincial government.

At least P250 million will be spent at the start of the dredging work, according to the provincial government, which says the project has been approved by the National Economic and Development Authority.

Also called the Marilao-Meycauayan-Obando River, MRS originates from upland towns of Rizal province, traverses Caloocan City and flows into Bulacan, through the cities of San Jose del Monte and Meycauayan and the towns of Santa Maria, Marilao and Obando, before it empties into Manila Bay.

#### Dirtiest rivers

In 2008, MRS was named one of the world's 30 dirtiest rivers by a nonprofit environmental group, Blacksmith Institute.

The institute said the river had "high levels of pollution" from wastes dumped by leather tanneries and gold refineries in the area. Wastes from open dumps also settled in the river system. Pollution made the water toxic and contaminated marine life.

Early government efforts to clean the river system have failed.

Former Marilao Mayor Epifanio Guillermo had shut down a battery recycling plant that was dumping waste into the Marilao River. On Wednesday, Guillermo said no accounting had been made on how the government spent international donations given for the river cleanup.

Meycauayan City Mayor Joan Alarilla said her late husband, Mayor Eduardo Alarilla, shut down the city dump and built a sanitary landfill to stop pollution at the Meycauayan River.

#### Causes of pollution

She said small-scale tanneries and jewelry shops were once cited as major polluters of the river system, so the local government imposed stricter rules on waste disposal by these enterprises.

Bulacan Gov. Wilhelmino Sy-Alvarado said dredging would be the first stage in the development of a flood control facility along the river system to help address perennial flooding in the towns of Meycauayan, Marilao and Obando.

He said the government also intended to develop an irrigation system by tapping the Candaba Swamp and to implement a program to revive the Pampanga River to address flooding in Bulacan and Pampanga provinces.

The government will also dredge the Labangan Channel, which catches water discharged by Pampanga, Nueva Ecija and upper Bulacan communities. The channel is part of the Angat River system. *Carmela Reyes-Estropo, Inquirer Central Luzon*



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## Residents alarmed over fish kill in Butuan City

By MIKE U. CRISMUNDO

BUTUAN CITY — Residents are alarmed over the reported fish kill at Taguibo Creek, some 10 kilometers from the city proper.

Some barangay officials said the cause may likely be a company's structure located at the upper part of the creek.

The Butuan City Environment and Natural Resources Office (ENRO) is now conducting an investigation on the reported fish kill observed by residents since early this year.

Meanwhile, the city legislative body on Thursday created a task force spearheaded by the Committee on Health, Sanitation and Environment of the Sannguniang Panglungsod (SP) to investigate the cause of the reported fish kill at Taguibo Creek.

City Councilor Virgilio Neri, Jr., chairperson of the Committee on

Health, Sanitation and Environment of the SP assured of immediate appropriate action on the incident.

Initially, the members of the committee will conduct an on the ground inspection on industrial establishments within the Taguibo area, where the Taguibo watershed is also located.

"Proper waste disposal is very vital in this investigation," Dr. Neri said.

The industrial establishments must show and demonstrate how their waste matters are treated in a way that it will become non-pollutant once released and emptied down the creek.

However, the city legislator said that it is too early to identify the specific establishment that caused the fish kill. He assured that his committee will look for an immediate solution once the results of the investigation are made known.

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

# Request for drought funds unheeded

## ARMM execs lash out at Alcala for inaction on plea for El Niño aid

COTABATO CITY—A ranking official of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) has expressed disgust over the apparent inaction of Agriculture Secretary Proceso Alcala on the regional government's request for funds to alleviate the plight of some 34,000 drought-stricken farmers in the region.

Funds were also the appeal of a senatorial candidate to Malacañang.

In a statement, Senate President Pro Tempore Ralph Recto asked Palace officials to release immediately to the provinces billions of pesos in calamity and so-called Quick Response Funds (QRF) to avert a national crisis caused by the widespread drought.

"The dry spell is real," said Recto. "Now is the time to release the funds. Tomorrow may be too late." Recto said Congress had appropriated the funds and there was no reason for the Executive to

hold on to them.

Laisa Alamia, ARMM executive secretary and head of the regional Humanitarian Emergency Action Response Team, confirmed on Friday that no fund for areas hit by El Niño had been released by the national government.

"Since last year until now, our letter request for funding has not been acted upon despite follow-ups," she said.

Last week, North Cotabato Gov. Emmylou Taliño-Mendoza also said her province, which is also reeling from

the effects of El Niño, had not received any funding from the national government, although she had requested it as early as March.

### Clash

Mendoza and her province were thrown into the spotlight on April 1 when police opened fire at a barricade of drought-hit farmers demanding food aid in Kidapawan City, leading to a clash that killed two protesters and wounded dozens of others, including policemen.

Alamia said she was blaming Alcala for the non-release of the El Niño fund, which could have provided relief to 34,509 tillers



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*Request for drought funds included*

affected by the drought that had damaged over 19,000 hectares of farms in Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Sulu, Basilan and Tawi-Tawi.

"We do not know what's keeping Secretary Alcala from attending to the needs of drought-stricken farmers in the ARMM," said Baintan Adil-Ampatuan, ARMM Planning and Development Office chief.

"We do not need to wait for the provinces to declare a state of calamity in their localities before downloading the funds," said Recto in his statement.

"A national crisis is just around the corner," said the

senatorial candidate.

He said the dry spell, plus drought in funds, was a "perfect formula for more Kidapawans," referring to the bloodshed in the city.

### Billions for calamities

Recto said under the national budget, the government had P38.9 billion for disaster funds. But because P18.9 billion of the funds had been earmarked for Super typhoon "Yolanda" reconstruction, only about P19 billion could be used for other calamities, like the El Niño, which is still very significant.

The disaster funds were different from the QRF, he said, adding that the Department of Agriculture had P500 million in QRF at its disposal. **Charlie C. Senase, Inquirer Mindanao**

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## El Niño causes thirst in Palawan

**P**UERTO PRINCESA CITY, Palawan (PNA) — “It’s getting worst; our water production is no longer stable,” was how Puerto Princesa City Water District General Manager Antonio Jesus Romasanta described the El Niño phenomenon’s effect on the water supply in this city.

Last Wednesday, Romasanta revealed that on a daily basis, his office gets about 57 requests for water support, and most of these come from hotels, water refilling stations, car washes, laundry shops, and other big establishments here.

“Out of this number, we can only approve the requests of 18 establishments. They request two trucks, but we only give one truck of water each because there are others that need water, too,” he said.

The long dry spell takes its toll not only on the water supply but also

the power supply, said Romasanta.

Rotational brown-outs are experienced in the city, he said and their pumping stations depend so much on the power being supplied by the Palawan Electric Cooperative (PALECO).

Although there are generator sets to use, the water district still needs to be started for five minutes before operation resumes and get the pressure back on.

This condition in power supply is the reason that the rotational water distribution among barangays in the city is severely affected.



**DEHYDRATED DAM BOULDERS** — These boulders, which used to be submerged in water, now appear like a rock avalanche as the dry spell has depleted water in this portion of the Magad Dam reservoir in Isabela. (Ceasar M. Perante)



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# Davao region under state of calamity due to El Niño

By EDITH REGALADO

DAVAO CITY – A state of calamity has been declared in several areas in the Davao region due to the dry spell.

The municipal councils of Kapalong and Sto. Tomas and Panabo City in Davao del Norte; Mati City and Tarragona, Lupon and San Isidro towns in Davao Oriental; Montevista in Compostela Valley, as well as Hagonoy in Davao del Sur recently passed resolutions declaring a state of calamity in their respective areas.

In Davao City, where many farmlands have not been irrigated for several months, the city government is also mulling the declaration of a state of calamity.

The drought has resulted in millions of pesos in damage to agriculture, officials said.

Remelyn Recoter, Department of Agriculture regional director, said the Bureau of Soils and Water Management would conduct cloud-seeding operations for at least one hour per day in the affected areas.

## Iloilo

In Iloilo, the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council unanimously approved a resolution on Thursday recommending the declaration of a state of calamity in the province due to El Niño.

A state of calamity was earlier declared in the towns of Santa Barbara, Dueñas, Calinog and

Estancia. A state of water crisis was also declared in Iloilo City.

With the declaration of the state of calamity, the province can use 20 percent of its calamity funds as well as 30 percent of quick response funds to mitigate the effects of the dry spell particularly on farmers.

Ildelfonso Toledo, head of the provincial agriculture office, said 81,592 metric tons of rice had so far been damaged and 32,800 hectares of farmlands had been affected by El Niño.

## Magat Dam

Meanwhile, the water level in Magat Dam continues to drop due to extreme heat and lack of rain.

Wilfredo Gloria, operations manager of the National Irrigation Administration-Magat River Integrated Irrigations System, said the dam's water level yesterday was at 170.19 meters.

Gloria said the water level should not be less than 180 meters for it to be able to irrigate at least 80,000 hectares of farmlands in Isabela and parts of Quirino and Cagayan.

"We have not recorded any rainfall within the Magat watershed since April 1. The dam's water inflow is now 29.25 cubic meters per second... our tributary rivers also dropped below the normal level," he said.

– With Jennifer Rendon, Victor Martin

Farmers plant rice in Bayombong, Nueva Ecija yesterday. VICTOR MARTIN





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**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE**

## PH, vulnerable countries to lose \$400B due to climate change

**By Gabrielle Binaday**

THE Philippines and other vulnerable countries in the world are expected to lose about \$400 billion if stronger measures are not implemented to mitigate the destructive effects of climate change, a top official of the Vulnerable 20 (V20) group said Friday.

Finance Secretary Cesar Purisima who chairs the V20 group said the initial annual loss of \$45 billion since 2010 is expected to escalate to \$400 billion in the next 20 years.

"If we do not push for

stronger measures to arrest dangers, the estimated \$45 billion annual loss of GDP potential since 2010 is expected to increase to close \$400 billion in the next 20 years," Purisima said in his opening remarks during the V20 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial Dialogue held in Washington, DC.

Purisima said the possible losses could account for at least 2.5 percent of the GDP of the vulnerable countries.

Purisima cited a possible sea level rise that will partially or completely submerge the island nations of Kiribati, Maldives and Tuvalu, displacing at least

500,000 people.

He said the inundation of approximately 17 percent of land areas and the displacement of about 18 million people by 2050 in the case of Bangladesh is likely.

The V20 group was founded in October 2015 in Lima, Peru composed by Finance Ministers of countries that are so-called the most vulnerable to climate change.

The V20 Group in its 2<sup>nd</sup> ministerial meet also welcomed 23 new members that will plan and coordinate to lessen and mitigate the effects of climate change.



THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS  
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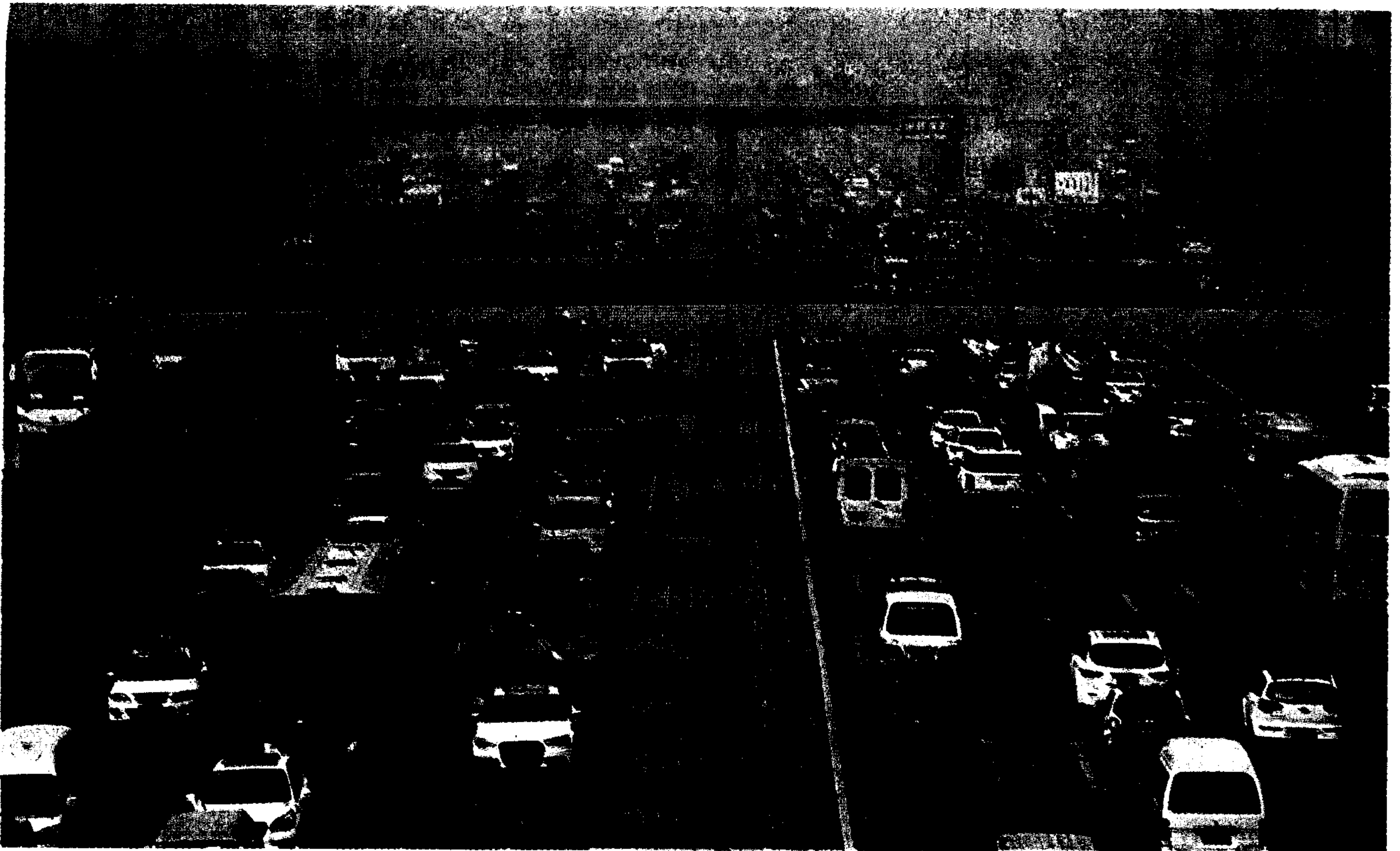
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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



**VEHICLE AIR POLLUTION IN CHINA (EPA) –** Vehicles travel through a main thoroughfare during a smoggy day in Beijing city, China, April 13, 2016. The Chinese Ministry of Environmental Protection received about 15,000 public complaints about pollution in 2015. The air pollution tip-offs became the top 78.3 percent of all complaints received through the ministry's hotline and 68 percent through the WeChat, according to the media reports.



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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

### Carter visits warship in disputed waters

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US DEFENSE Secretary Ashton Carter said he would visit a warship close to flashpoint waters of the South China Sea on Friday, as Beijing reacted defiantly to an American military build-up in the area.

"Later today, I will visit the aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis, sailing in the South China Sea, after some of its

sailors and Marines participated with you in Balikpapan," Carter said in Manila, referring to annual war games with the Philippines that ended Friday.

Carter's trip to the warship is the latest move by the United States to show it is committed to maintaining security in the hotly contested waters, where China has built artificial islands on islets and reefs close to the Philippines.

China claims nearly all of the stra-

tegically vital sea, even waters close to its Southeast Asian neighbors, and has in recent years built the islands in an effort to assert what it insists are its sovereign rights.

The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also have overlapping claims to parts of the sea, which is home to some of the world's most important shipping lanes and is believed to sit atop vast oil reserves. **Next page**

China has constructed the islands on reefs in the Spratlys archipelago, which are close to the Philippines and Malaysia, as well as airstrips capable of accommodating military aircraft.

China in 2012 also took control of a rich fishing shoal just 220 kilometers from the main Filipino landmass. The shoal is 650 kilometers from China's nearest major landmass.

Carter announced on Thursday that the US had launched joint naval patrols with the Philippines in the South China Sea, as he spoke of growing concern about China's "land reclamation" and "militarization" of the region.

He also said the US would deploy hundreds of troops, as well as five warplanes, to the Philippines.

China reacted defiantly to the announcement, with its defense ministry warning the military would protect the nation's territory.

"US-Philippine joint patrols in the South China Sea promote regional militarization and undermine regional peace and stability," said a Chinese defense ministry statement released late Thursday.

"The Chinese military will pay very close attention to related developments, and firmly safeguard China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests."

On Friday, Carter emphasized the US would back up the Philippines and other al-

lies in the region.

"At a time of change in this dynamic region, and democratic transitions in the Philippines and the United States, we will continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder," Carter said at the closing ceremony for the war games, which involved about 9,000 soldiers.

"We will continue to stand up for our safety and freedoms, for those of our friends and allies, and for the values, principles, and rules-based order that has benefited so many for so long."

Carter also highlighted the presence of soldiers from Australia and Japan for the Balikpapan war games this year, emphasizing that the two key regional players had also expressed concerns over China's expansion in the South China Sea. **With AFP**