

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

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IN THE NEWS

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

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DPWH pushes Sagada project through; pine trees, heritage church to be felled

Despite lack of environmental clearance, road-widening project gets going

By **Edgar Allan M. Sembrano**
Contributor

DESPITE opposition from local heritage advocates, the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) pushed through with its controversial road-

widening project in Sagada, Mountain Province.

The INQUIRER first reported the issue last January after conservationists cried foul over the project, which would affect a number of age-old pine and *alnus* trees and the American-

era mission compound of the Episcopalian church.

Sagada resident Celia Peñaflor of the Agowan local heritage group told the INQUIRER the DPWH did not have a permit yet to cut trees from the Department of Environment and Natural Re-

sources (DENR), but would push through with the project.

She added the project had no environmental impact assessment and environmental compliance certificate.

The DPWH also does not

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have the free prior and informed consent (FPIC) from the local indigenous people's group, she added.

Peñaflor said that as a result of the second assembly on March 18 between the DPWH and the opposing groups—Episcopal Church Women (ECW), Saint Mary the Virgin Church Vestry and other concerned citizens—there was an agreement to put all activities on hold until the requirements were met.

However, the activities continued after the agreement was made although these are “on hold” after ECW intervened.

Peñaflor warned the road-widening project threatened to destroy Sagada's reputation as a “walking town.”

She said the project would not really address the traffic concerns of Sagada.

Cave Congress

The Philippine Speleological

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DPWH pushes Sagada...

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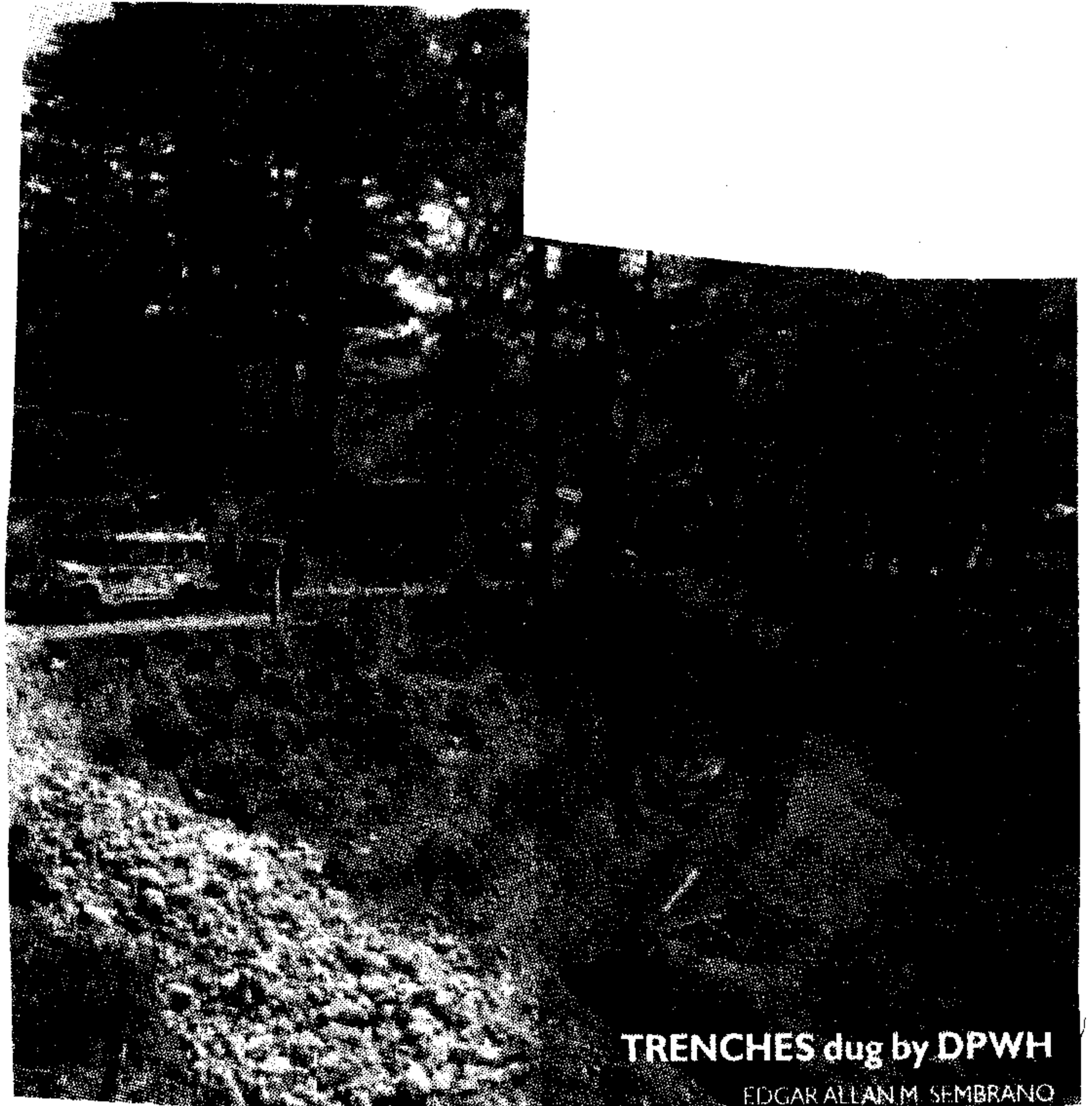
NUMBER 16 of 18 trees that will be cut

Society recently held its 16th National Cave Congress in Sagada with the theme "Kweba-Kultura-Kalikasan (Cave-Culture-Environment)," the first time it included the cultural aspect of caves on its yearly event.

Speakers from the Archaeological Studies Program of the University of the Philippines, Cultural Heritage Studies program of the University of Santo Tomas Graduate School, and the local indigenous people's representative talked about caves as repository of tangible and intangible heritage.



INFLUX of tourists now becoming a problem in terms of traffic, waste management and water shortage



TRENCHES dug by DPWH

EDGAR ALLAN M. SEMBRANO

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Break free from dirty energy

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA @jonlmayuga

WITH President Aquino ending his six-year administration by the end of June, environmental and climate-justice advocates are hopeful that the next administration will give a closer look at the country's energy policy of shifting from fossil fuel-based to more environment-friendly renewable-energy (RE) sources.

Faced with the challenge of sustaining economic growth, the next administration is also faced with an even tougher challenge of fulfilling an ambitious target to reduce the country's carbon emission by 70 percent by 2030, a promise made under the country's Intended Nationally Determined Contribution that was submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in the Paris conference in December 2015.

On April 22, highlighting the country's celebration of Earth Day, Environment Secretary Ramon J.P. Paje signed the Paris Agreement in New York in behalf of President Aquino, affirming the country's commitment to reduce its carbon footprint to help limit global temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius, or at least to 1.5°C, at best, in the next 14 years.

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 The number of existing coal-fired power plants in the country, and 27 more are in the pipeline

While plausible, environmental and climate-justice advocates seriously doubt that such carbon emission-reduction target is achievable, considering the current procoal-energy policy. They are pinning their hopes on the next administration for the country to break free from coal and shift to RE.

Arguably, they said coal may be cheap and quick to put up, but the cost to people's health and environment makes it the most expensive source of energy, far worse than the cost of putting up RE plants, such as hydropower, geothermal and, perhaps, the most cheapest and supply abundant, solar plants.

Piglas Pilipinas

ON May 4 a nationwide campaign against coal kicked off in Batangas City. About 10,000 marchers echoed calls against coal and the shift to clean RE. They called out the country's next leaders to take the lead for a more environment-friendly development paths, starting with sourcing clean energy and scrapping fossil fuels.

The event, organized by Piglas Pilipinas, a coalition against coal, was part of the global Break Free from Fossil Fuels 2016 campaign to keep coal, oil and gas in the ground.

The local campaign aims to enjoin people in affected communities to make a stand against

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coal-fired power plants, highlighting its adverse impacts on people's health and environment vis-à-vis the threats of climate change, which are considered by scientists as the most serious threat to human existence.

Organizers vowed to launch similar activities in the next few days to rally the people in areas with existing, expanding and approved coal-fired power-plant projects as "a show of force" against coal and other sources of dirty energy.

There are 19 existing coal-fired power plants in the country, and 27 more are in the pipeline. After a law promoting renewables was signed on December 16, 2008, the share of RE in the country's energy mix had decreased by 5 percent. In the next six years, this is expected to further shrink by 5 percent, with its share being eaten up by coal—unless the next administration takes a bold step to reverse the trend, the group's organizers said.

Piglas Pilipinas 2016, which is composed of religious leaders, environmental and climate-justice activists, told the BUSINESSMIRROR on Thursday the successful Batangas City event highlighted the growing opposition against coal-fired power plants, particularly against the proposed 600-megawatt coal plant of JG Summit Holdings in Barangay Pinamucan Ibaba, Batangas City.

Organized by the Archdiocese of Lipa, led by Lipa Archbishop Ramon Arguelles, the event called "Piglas Batangas, Piglas Pilipinas" kicked off a series of anticoal peaceful protest actions in the Philippines and other parts of the world.

Breaking free

IN other areas, similar events were scheduled within 12 days by environmental and climate-justice advocates from six continents as part of Break Free from Fossil Fuels 2016. Mass actions are scheduled until May 15 in other countries, including Indonesia, Nigeria, Brazil, the United States, Germany and Australia.

In Indonesia people will troop to the presidential palace in Jakarta on May 11 to express their resistance to coal projects. Indonesia is one of the world's biggest producers of coal. The Philippines imports 70 percent of its coal from Indonesia. The mobilization hopes to convince Indonesian President Joko Widodo to revise his ambitious 35,000-MW energy plan by moving away from coal and embracing RE.

In South Africa, on May 12, protesters will gather in Emalahleni, one of the most polluted towns in the world, to speak out on the effects of climate change on communities. It will also feature a photo exhibit that shows the poison behind coal mining to people and the environment.

Between May 12 and 15, protesters, including Greenpeace, in the US, will target six key areas of fossil-fuel developments, including Washington, D.C., and Colorado. The event on May 12 is in protest of the Bureau of Land Management plan to auction off public lands in Colorado for fracking. In Washington, D.C., they will demand President Barrack Obama to stop all new offshore drilling in the Arctic, Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico.

On May 14 protesters will gather in Vancouver, Canada, to oppose the proposed Kinder Morgan Transmountain tar sands pipeline, surrounding the Westridge Marine terminal.

In Spain cyclists will take over the city and project large-scale messaging for the shift to RE on public buildings powered by bicycles at Plaça Saint Jaume.

Piglas Batangas

THE fishermen in Batangas City and the organizers of Piglas Pilipinas fear the proposed coal-fired power plant in Barangay Pinamucan Ibaba will aggravate air, water and land pollution.

Coal-affected communities from Quezon and other parts of the country, as well as people's movements and civil-society groups from Metro Manila and other provinces in

Southern Luzon, took part in the event, calling on the next administration to impose a moratorium on coal-fired power plant-development projects, including mines, and phase out the 19 existing coal plants.

"Coal-affected communities from Batangas and other areas joined the call to stop the project. Piglas Pilipinas is a grassroots movement of people in communities [that] are against dirty energy from fossil fuels," Greenpeace Southeast Asia's Angelica Carballo Pago told the BUSINESSMIRROR in a separate interview.

The 20-hectare project site now has a perimeter fence, according to the organizers, but communities are not losing hope that the next administration will cause the cancellation of the project. Pago said the event gathered people in affected communities and shared their sad experiences.

"There is one individual who used to experience asthma attack once or twice a month. But because of the coal-fired power plant in their community, the asthma attack became more frequent. It became once or twice in a week," she said. Piglas Pilipinas, she added, wants to show that people in affected communities are demanding to stop the projects, because they are first to suffer from health and environmental problems caused by the operation of coal-fired power plants. There are also testimonies from small fishermen who complain of diminishing fish catch because of water pollution caused by coal.

JG Summit's response

IN response to the BUSINESSMIRROR's inquiry to the protest against its coal project, JG Summit Petrochemical Corp. said in an e-mail statement that it respects Piglas Pilipinas's advocacy and assures its commitment to the people's well-being and to protect the environment.

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Break-free from dirty energy

"We respect the advocacy of Piglas Pilipinas for a cleaner environment for all. As we pursue our plans to participate in providing for the future energy requirements of our country and people, we would like to assure everyone that, over and above full compliance with all existing, relevant laws and regulations, we will work closely with the communities where we operate so that they remain fully informed, confident and assured of our commitment to their overall well-being, as well as to the protection of the environment."

100-percent renewable

CLIMATE-JUSTICE advocate Denise Fontanilla of the Asian Peoples' Movement on Debt and Development said that, while demanding climate justice from developed countries for their historical responsibility, developing countries, like the Philippines, small as it is, should also be responsible for its carbon emission,

no matter how small. "We need to stop emitting greenhouse gases and contribute to solving climate crisis. Unfortunately, we have 19 existing coal plants and 27 more in the pipeline, which is disappointing, considering that even in the Paris climate conference, the Philippines was the head of the so-called Climate Vulnerable Forum, which pushed for tipping the global-warming target below 1.5°C. And we are a signatory to the Paris Agreement," she added.

Fontanilla said under a business-as-usual scenario, even with all the commitments under the Paris climate agreement are done, the world is still on track to at least 3°C of warming, which, she lamented, is "not acceptable."

"Even now that we are just experiencing almost 1°C of warming, the Philippines is already experiencing super typhoons of horrifying intensity and frequency. There are links of how climate change is also making

El Niño worse; what more can we expect? [There would be] more sea-level rise and coral bleaching if it rises to 3°C," Fontanilla added.

She said the next administration should order a moratorium in the implementation of all coal projects in the pipeline, phase out existing coal-fired power plants and start a swift and just shift to 100-percent RE.

A continuing campaign

CHUCK BACLAGON of the group 350.org East Asia, one of the organizers of Piglas Batangas! Piglas Pilipinas event, said the Batangas march aims to escalate the fight against coal by the sheer number of people who marched against the project.

He said there will more "show of force" against coal events in other parts of the country. "This campaign is a national campaign network against fossil fuels."

It will be a continuing fight against coal. Our call is for a moratorium on all proposed, expansion,

sion, new-build coal-fired power plants and call to just transition from coal to renewable," he told the BUSINESSMIRROR.

A just transition from coal to RE, he explained, is needed for the welfare of workers in coal-fired-power plants who may end up losing job. He said it will ensure that no worker will be laid off or lose his or her job without a safety net with the eventual closure of coal-fired power plants.

While shifting to RE, Bacragon underscored the need to sustain the gains of massive reforestation to protect the country's forests.

He said RE should be qualified based on what is most appropriate for a specific area. It must be community-managed and should be put up outside protected areas or away from identified key biodiversity areas to protect the country's rich biodiversity.

Piglas Pilipinas believes it is the end of the road for coal and it's time to break free from dirty energy.



AROUND 10,000 Filipinos march in Batangas City, where the 600-megawatt coal-fired power plant is proposed, to demand to the n to cancel all proposed coal plants nationwide and hasten a transition to renewable energy. The campaign is part of a worldwide m the first in Asia to join "Break Free from Fossil Fuels 2016," a global wave of peaceful actions within 12 days and across six continen Indonesia, Nigeria, Brazil, the United States, Germany and Australia. JIMMY A. DOMINGO/GREENPEACE

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El Niño seen ending in July

By Ronnel W. Domingo

THE EFFECTS of El Niño are expected to let up by July, but the dry conditions and high temperatures are forecast to persist intensely through the remainder of May and in June, according to a United Nations monitoring body.

The Agricultural Market Information System (Amis), which is administered by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, said in its latest monthly report on the global market that in Southeast Asia, dry conditions would be accompanied by above-average temperatures that, in turn, would increase the impact of the dryness.

Even then, the Amis warned about the increasing odds of a transition to La Niña conditions by November.

"[Climate] model projections put the chance of that occurring at about 60 percent, which is double the long-term average probability of La Niña in that month," Amis said.

In areas where El Niño brings below-average rainfall and increased temperatures such as the Philippines, La Niña is often responsible for above-average rainfall and cooler temperatures.

As for global rice production, Amis kept the forecast volume for 2016 at 495 million tons, the same as in the previous month's projec-

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El Niño seen . . .

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tion.

This means that the production out-

look maintained a modest 1-percent recovery from the reduced output in 2015 when the estimated worldwide output was 490 million tons.

"El Niño continues to impact the rice crop in parts of Southeast Asia, most notably in Thailand where conditions remain poor as harvest progresses," Amis said, adding that production was also expected to decrease in southern Vietnam and the Philippines.

"In the Philippines, the dry season crop conditions are favorable in the north but mixed in the south due to insufficient water, intense heat and pest outbreaks," the agency said.

Based on the latest FAO Food Price Index, global food prices have been increasing marginally for the third month in a row.

Still, the FAO observed prices of rice declining marginally, with the forecast output for the entire year being stable, at least for now.

Last week, Economic Planning Secretary Emmanuel Esguerra said that with the El Niño phenomenon likely to last until July, appropriate timing of rice importation remained critical to avoid supply disruptions that could result in unstable rice prices.

THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
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Yolanda-hit Cebu towns most affected by El Niño

By MARS W. MOSQUEDA JR.

BOGO CITY, Cebu – Still trying to recover from the onslaught of super typhoon Yolanda, the northern towns of Cebu have posted the highest cost of damages brought about by the prolonged El Niño phenomenon.

According to data released by the Cebu Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office (PDRRMO), the towns in Cebu's fourth district – Bogo, Daanbantayan, Medellin, San Remegio, Tabuelan, Tabogon, Sta. Fe, Madridejos, and Bantayan – reported initial damage totaling ₱47.4 million on farms and livestock due to the extreme dry weather condition.

The same towns in the fourth district of Cebu suffered the worst damage when Yolanda struck Cebu and Leyte in 2013.

PDRRMO Chief Baltazar Tribunalo

released the latest data based on the assessment of their El Niño monitoring team.

The towns in the fourth district were followed by the towns in the fifth district – Borbon, Carmen, Catmon, Compostela, Danao, Liloan, Sogod, Pilar, Poro, San Francisco, and Tudela – which reported combined initial damage amounting to ₱36.2 million.

In line with this, Tribunalo guaranteed that they will prioritize the districts that suffered the most when it comes to giving of assistance.

The PDRRMO has already allocated ₱9 million in financial assistance but the fund has not been distributed yet.

The prolonged dry season brought about by the El Niño phenomenon has already claimed the lives of seven people and destroyed about ₱227.1 million worth of farms and livestock in the province of Cebu.

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Green jobs law gets DoJ backing

By Rey E. Requejo

THE Department of Justice has supported the enactment of the Philippine Green Jobs Act, which was recently signed into law by President Aquino.

In a two-page legal opinion, Undersecretary Zabedin Azis said it has found no constitutional or legal objection to the green jobs law or Republic Act No. 10771, which consolidated Senate Bill No. 3092 and House Bill No. 6100.

"Now is the time to plant and nurture the seed of environmentalism in every Filipino by creating green goods and services towards the transformation of our consolidated enrolled bill into law," the opinion stated.

The Justice department stressed that the new law is consistent with sections 16 and 18, Article II of the Constitution, which respectively uphold the right to balanced and healthful ecology and right of workers.

It said the new law also strengthens the earlier Climate Change Act and the government's National Climate Change Action Plan by "making explicit the State policy for jobs and employment creation as an integral pillar of measures to prevent and reduce the adverse impacts of climate change and to maximize whatever potential benefits climate change may bring."

"The government must take an active role in preventing further environmental degradation and disasters brought about by climate change and accordingly must formulate major policy reforms to address the most pressing environmental issues, like overpopulation, pollution, global warming, rain forest destruction, overflowing landfills, etc.," the legal opinion stressed.

"The creation of green jobs, the establishment of a green economy and the development of green technologies will greatly help in the protection and conservation of our environment and natural resources and in the process, insure that development meets the needs of the present populace without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs," it said.



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DoJ supports creation of green jobs By Hector Lawas

THE Department of Justice sees no legal infirmity in the Philippine Green Jobs Act, which was recently signed into law by President Benigno Aquino III.

In a two-page legal opinion, the DoJ said it sees no Constitutional or legal objection to Republic Act No. 10771, which consolidated Senate Bill No. 3092 and House Bill No. 6100.

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ing further environmental degradation and disasters brought about by climate change and accordingly must formulate major policy reforms to address the most pressing environmental issues, like overpopulation, pollution, global warming, rain forest destruction, overflowing landfills, etc.," the DoJ pointed out.

"The creation of green jobs, the establishment of a green economy and the development of green technologies will greatly help in the protection and conservation of our environment and natural resources and in the process, insure that development meets the needs of the present populace without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs," it added.

R.A. 10771 defines "green jobs" as employment that contributes to preserving or restoring the quality of the environment, be it in the agriculture, industry or services sector.

In promoting creation of environmental jobs, the law grants special tax deductions and duty-free importation of capital equipment for companies that will help create a "green economy" for the country.

It covers industries that hire professionals including solar PV system designers and installers, engineers and technicians of turbines; energy- and resource-efficiency consultants; sanitation and waste management experts; biodiversity and ecology fieldworkers; forest guards; river clean-up crew; organic farmers and recycling plant workers, among others.

The new incentives will be in addition to fiscal and non-fiscal incentives already granted or provided for under existing laws, orders, issuances and regulations of the government.

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Protect tuna nursery, deep-sea corals in Benham Rise—group

THE Philippines must come up with a plan to protect the spawning grounds of the Pacific bluefin tuna and deep sea corals in Benham Rise, a non-governmental organization (NGO) said on Sunday.

Oceana Philippines said conservation needs to be balanced with fisheries and minerals exploration in Benham Rise, which covers the country's newest territory.

"Before we exploit our marine resources, we should explore and find out what is there to lose," Oceana Philippines Campaign Manager Danny Ocampo said in a statement.

Marianne Pan-Saniano, marine scientist of Oceana Philippines, said Benham Bank is blanketed with coral assemblages, sponges and algae. Organisms in what is known as the mesophotic zone, found at depths of up to 150 meters, can tolerate low light penetration. The underwater plateau serves as a refuge and nursery for many economically important fish.

Benham Bank, the shallowest portion of the unexplored seamount, is

one of the traditional fishing grounds of coastal dwellers on the north-eastern coast of Luzon, according to Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR). However, BFAR noted that the area is also "a hot spot for poachers, especially longliners from neighboring countries."

The government's National Payao Program in Benham Bank from 2013 to 2015, along with a tuna fisheries assessment last year, are part of government efforts to exercise control over Benham Rise, the BFAR said.

Payao is the local term for fish aggregating devices made of palm fronds and other materials that attract schools of fish. Albacore tuna were the dominant species in 2015, while bigeye tuna were more bountiful in 2013, according to the BFAR.

With its wealth of marine resources, there is a need to craft a management framework for Benham Rise, said Jay Batongbacal, director of University of the Philippines's Institute for Maritime Affairs and Law of the Sea. The area includes the extended continental

shelf, the Philippines's newest territory recognized by the United Nations's Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in 2012.

The highly prized Pacific Bluefin are known to swim to the US and Mexico, but come back to spawn in the western Pacific, including Benham Rise, according to fisheries expert Jose Ingles of WWF-Philippines.

Ingles said there is a huge potential for ecosystems preservation in Benham Bank to protect commercially valuable fish species, noting that bigeye tuna is already overfished. "This can be our contribution to the global economy."

The Biodiversity Management Bureau had announced plans to organize a workshop on management strategies for the sustainable use of resources in Benham Rise, as there is a need for complete baseline assessment of the region.

One of the options being considered is to propose the declaration of Benham Rise as a marine-managed area, with Benham Bank as the core zone with protected status, and the rest as exploration areas.



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Climate change shaping future of Phl companies

By ESTELA DE LA PAZ

A new way of doing business is now in the offing with businesses recognizing climate change adaptation as an integral part of planning and operations.

Much has been said and written about climate change, its dire effects and how it is affecting our daily lives. However, adapting to this "new normal" is still the challenge as there is a dearth of information on climate change adaptation. Thus, it seems the missing link is in the translation of the science of adaptation into more practical uses for business and everyday living.

At the Oscar M. Lopez (OML) Center, continuous work is being done not only to come up with science-based solutions on climate change adaptation but to also bridge the gap between sciences and how this can help businesses and people in their daily lives.

"If successful adaptation is to happen, we will need mechanisms and institutions that help catalyze action, knowledge exchange, and collaboration among players amidst a changing planet. No one has all the answers and we need to help each other as we make our way through the

fog of climate change. The OML Center is just one such foundation that can help bridge the many gaps that may exist," Federico R. Lopez, chairman of OML Center said during the break-out sessions of the Climate Reality Project held in Manila recently.

The OML Center was formed in 2012 by the various subsidiaries of First Philippine Holdings in honor of the patriarch of the Lopez Group, Oscar M. Lopez for his keen interest in preserving and protecting the environment.

He is a staunch believer that "environmentalism in business" can work.

This philosophy is being applied primarily in its power generation business through its subsidiary First Gen Corp. First Gen's power plants are spread across the country and have been using mainly clean and renewable energy fuels such as natural gas, geothermal, hydro, wind and recently, solar energy. One of its subsidiaries is the world's largest integrated geothermal company,



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*climate change shaping future
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Energy Development Corp. (EDC).

Given the changing weather patterns, frequency of super typhoons, and other similar catastrophic weather-related incidents, the role of the OML Center and the search for science-based solutions to climate change adaptation is now essential not only for the general public but even for businesses as well.

"As a businessman, I found it essential to engage with the scientific community so we can jointly make sense of what's going on, demystify it, and make the lessons more accessible to the general public so that policies as well as everyday decisions and actions are guided properly," Lopez said.

According to Marianne Quebral, executive director of the OML Center, one of the studies the OML Center recently funded is a study establishing a common reference to calculate the losses and damages incurred due to climate change. An example would be how agricultural losses due to flooding or drought will be calculated. Having a recognized common framework will

be helpful for business planning and insurance purposes. To date, there is no specific or common reference to calculate such losses. Each area usually has its own system for calculating the cost of the damages brought about by typhoons or extreme weather patterns.

This led to the OML Center funding the Asia Pacific Network for Global Change Research (APN) research study called "Assessing the linkages between climate change adaptation (CCA), disaster risk reduction (DRR), and Loss and Damage (L&D):" This study highlights the state of loss and damage assessment system in the Philippines - its process, players, and gaps. It will propose a loss and damage framework for the Philippines and provide recommendations for the improvement of the system once the study is completed.

Aside from this, the OML Center has given grants to various school institutions and has partnered with government agencies such as the Department of Science and Technology (DOST),