

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

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Lopez stays as DENR chief to pursue mining tack

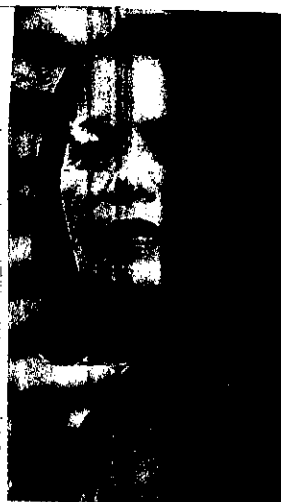
By MADELAINE B. MIRALTA

Gina Lopez said she is still the secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and that her fight against destructive mining operations in

the country will continue.

In a phone interview, Lopez cleared the issue that she has not been reappointed by President Rodrigo Duterte as the DENR chief.

"I talked to Presidential management and this is what



GINA LOPEZ

happened. My paper for reappointment was put together with all the undersecretaries and assistant secretaries I am recommending that's why the President wasn't able to see it and sign everything," Lopez told Business Bulletin.

"My paper was overlooked. So now, they took it and the President was able to sign it," she added.

DENR Assistant Secretary Rommel Abesamis seconded this, saying that there hasn't been any news within the DENR that Lopez wasn't reappointed.

Now that the smoke is clear, Lopez said she will still push for the poverty alleviation programs that she have started, especially now that the DENR will get a higher budget of nearly ₱29 billion next year.

"I do things not for political reasons. The heart and soul of what I do is to provide social justice to the poor," Lopez said.

The Senate on Tuesday night approved the proposed ₱28.67-billion budget of the DENR for 2017, which is 31 percent higher than the agency's ₱21.8-billion allocation for this year.

Bulk of the budget will be used by the agency for its poverty alleviation programs which will prioritize massive reforestation and climate change initiatives.

Lopez said that a bigger budget would help the department fulfill its commitment to social

justice through the implementation of environmental programs, notably the National Greening Program (NGP).

According to Lopez, the budget increase "mirrors the Duterte administration's push for social justice where majority of the Filipino people truly benefit from the country's natural resources."

The environment chief has been eyeing the NGP the government's flagship reforestation program, as a tool to improve the lives of people living in poverty.

NGP is a six-year massive forest rehabilitation program that aimed to cover 1.5 million hectares of degraded forestland with trees by the end of 2016.

But it was extended until 2028 through an executive order issued in November 2015 in a bid to rehabilitate 7.1 million hectares more.

As of November 2016, the NGP has already created more than 3.29 million "green jobs" benefiting individuals hired as workers in producing almost 400 million seedlings.

For 2017, the DENR is also asking Congress to allocate ₱9.4 billion for NGP's implementation.

Out of the nearly ₱29 billion, only ₱3.37 billion was earmarked for DENR's two-line bureaus.

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Gov't bonds eyed to fund closure of 'zombie' mines

BAGUIO CITY—How do we kill "zombie" mine sites? An economist said the Duterte administration could design a government bond dedicated to financing the closure of abandoned mines.

Over 800 mines have not been shut down properly or have been abandoned without proper rehabilitation, but "like zombies, they died but are still moving around trying to eat people," said Patrick Caoile, economics professor of the De La Salle University and a former mining executive.

These are mines whose owners could no longer be found or are "financially unable or unwilling to rehabilitate their sites," Caoile said.

These continue to exert a "malevolent effect on their afterlife," and hound an industry that is facing criticism not only from antimine advocates but also from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Caoile said at the national mine safety and environment symposium held here last week.

He said closing down abandoned mines has become an immediate concern given the impact of climate change. But financing their closure has become a problem for the govern-



Miners competed at the recent Mine Safety and Environment Week in Baguio City to show their skills in reducing risks at work, like putting out fire in their work sites. —EV ESPIRITU

ment, he said, since it was not clear who was responsible for these mine sites.

A "legacy bond," however, could be suited for that purpose, Caoile said. A bond is a debt instrument which government sells to corporations, banks or investors to raise capital for a specific project.

Caoile said the government could consider patterning the legacy bond after the "Brady bond," a debt-relief initiative led by the United States government to help bail out developing countries in the late 1980s.

"Basically the idea [for a legacy bond] is risk and reward," Caoile said. Since there is enormous risk with abandoned mines, the reward should complement or match the risk, including the opportunity to reopen and rehabilitate these mines, he said. Reviving abandoned mines is allowed by law, he added.

Some of these mines are located in the Cordillera region, where these operated during the American colonial period.

Fay Apil, Cordillera regional director of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau, said the reopening and rehabilitation of these mines would require extensive studies "because we need to ensure that the tunnels are safe and there are no gases that would harm workers."

The companies that operated the abandoned mines on Kennon Road here, for example, no longer exist, "and the government would need money to close the mines properly," she said. —VINCENT CABREZA/INQ

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NBI operatives apprehend 17 for illegal quarrying in Rizal

Seventeen persons were arrested by operatives of National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) for illegal quarrying in Rodriguez, Rizal province:

NBI-Environmental Crime Division Chief Eric Nuqui identified the arrested suspects as Nomer Santos, Jeffrey Manahan, Rodrigo Alutaya, Jaymark Dangel, Jose Dangel, Eliseo Habla, Mario Blas, Angelito Panganiban Jr., Antonio Dapitan, Wilfredo Asuncion, Eduardo Dapitan, Eddie Tagapan, Rajohn Hermo, Peter Jason Lozada, Romar Cascayan, Roger Tablac and Juan Dapita.

Nuqui said those arrested

were working under Radthien Builders Corp., a firm conducting quarrying and mining in Barangay San Rafael in Rodriguez without an operation agreement.

Nuqui said a cease and desist order was issued by the Mines and Geosciences Bureau against the proprietor of Radthien Builders Co. for stripping activity utilizing heavy equipment or backhoe and dump truck.

However, Radthien continued to operate in the said area, which violates Section 103 of Republic Act 7942 or the Philippine Mining Act of 1995.

On November 23, joint team of the NBI-ENCD and the Department of Environment and Natural

Resources-MGB Regional Office IV-A went to the target area to conduct verification and possible arrest of the illegal miners.

The team conducted an inquiry with the mining firm's operating personnel who disclosed that buyers of extracted materials do not have any ore transport permits from DENR.

No operation agreement was shown to authorities. An estimated amount of P72 million of heavy equipment, tools, vehicles and earth materials were seized during the operation.

The arrested are detained at the NBI.

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DISASTER THREAT

EXPERTS WARN OF ANOTHER 'SENDONG' AMID LOSS OF FOREST COVER

CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY—A repeat of the the 2011 devastation wrought by Tropical Storm "Sendong" in the cities of Cagayan de Oro and Iligan, where floods killed more than 1,000 people, is not farfetched if nothing is done about the vanishing forest cover and siltation of rivers here, environment experts and advocates warned.

"Many areas in the river basin are already barren that, if [we are hit] with several inches of rain, a catastrophe could happen, especially to the people living in downstream communities and along the path of the Cagayan de Oro River," Raoul Geollegue, president of the Watershed Management Coalition (WMC), said during the third International

River Summit here on Thursday.

When Sendong (international name: Washi) hit the region five years ago, the river overflowed, submerging the city and nearby Iligan villages with floodwater as high as 9.14 meters (30 feet), killing people and destroying crops and property. Environmentalists blamed deforestation and siltation for the tragedy.

Experts who spoke at the summit noted with alarm the diminishing forest cover in the upland areas of Northern Mindanao and along the path of major rivers.

Geollegue said the forest cover of the 137,933-hectare river basin that keeps the Cagayan de Oro River alive is now "scanty, inadequate and in bad shape,"

citing a report from the Cagayan de Oro River Basin Management Council (CDORBMC).

Only 24 percent of the basin's forest cover remains, way below the ideal forest cover of at least 40 percent.

"What the river basin needs, is massive reforestation in the denuded spots," he said, as he urged local officials and the community to do their part.

The river basin sources its headwaters from the upper slopes of Mt. Kalatungan and Mt. Kitanglad and drains to the main stream of the Cagayan de Oro River. Improper cultivation and land use practices across the slopes and foothills of the mountains contributed to the denudation problem, the

CDORBMC report said.

Geollegue said the national government, through the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, must allocate enough funds to reforest the river basin.

Cagayan de Oro City Mayor Oscar Moreno said the tragedy brought about by Sendong tested the city's resilience and resolve to rise from the devastation. He said Cagayan de Oro and its people rose from a difficult situation, "emerging stronger, building back better."

Archbishop Antonio Ledesma, head of the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro, said everybody should work together to engage in disaster mitigation, adaptation and anticipation of calamities. —JIGGER JERUSALEM INQ

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Aetas to benefit from NGP venture

A 240-hectare military reservation area at Fort Magsaysay in Palawan City will be replanted with indigenous trees under a tripartite agreement that will benefit Aetas in the uplands of Nueva Ecija.

Earlier, an agreement was signed by Ecosystems Research and Development Bureau (ERDB) Director Dr. Henry A. Adornado, Judge Virgilio Caballero, and LTC Eugenio Batara (Seventh Infantry Division, Philippine Army).

The partnership has significant ecological enhancement and livelihood benefits to the Aetas. Provision of food security and additional income to the community will be strengthened by intercropping agricultural crops in the NGP (National Greening Program) sites," said Adornado.

(Chito A. Chavez)



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SEIPI bats for natural gas vs coal in power generation

The Semiconductor and Electronics Industries in the Philippines Inc. (SEIPI) is batting for a shift toward natural gas as a main source of power to replace coal, citing its competitive edge in terms of cost and environmental impact.

"One of the major challenges faced by the electronics industry is the high cost of power, which is the second worst in Asia," SEIPI president Dan Lachica said.

He said the high power costs remain among the biggest problems for the country's electronics industry, which produces its top export.

Given the persisting concerns on high power cost, SEIPI wel-

By RICHMOND MERCURIO

comed the recent inauguration of the new natural gas-fired power plants owned by First Gen Corp., which the group said would provide much needed additional generating capacity to the Luzon grid.

The group said natural gas is the best alternative to coal which is currently the cheapest source of power.

Lopez-led First Gen switched on its 414-megawatt (MW) San Gabriel combined-cycle and 97-MW Avion open cycle natural gas-fired power plants in Santa Rita, Batangas on Nov. 11.

"The additional 511 MW from these natural gas power plants is a welcome develop-

ment for our Philippine electronics industry," Lachica said.

For this year, electronics exports are seen returning to record levels should it finish on the higher end of industry growth targets.

SEIPI is targeting a two to five percent jump in electronics exports this year. Hitting a five percent growth, according to Lachica, would place the export value of electronic products to \$30 billion to \$31 billion by year-end, matching the previous record high posted in 2010.

Last year, total outbound shipment of electronics rose 7.9 percent to \$28.92 billion from \$26.79 billion in 2014.

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Transmission biggest hurdle for mine-mouth coal plants

By MYRNA VELASCO

Setting up of transmission facilities to wheel generation output is the major dilemma hobbling development of mine-mouth coal power facilities in the country, according to industry players.

Arnulfo A. Robles, executive director of the Philippine Chamber of Coal Mines, Inc. (Philcoal) noted that given site-specific development nature of mine-mouth plants, setting up of transmission lines has always been a problem because the coal mines are also usually in remote areas.

"The problem on transmission for mine-mouth plants is just being given focused at this time," he stressed, adding that they have yet to see that such shall really be integrated into the Transmission Development Plan (TDP) of the energy sector.

Robles emphasized that beyond the transmission of generated electricity, mine-mouth coal plants have some inherent benefits – such as cutting cost on logistics aside from value-added proposition that the country's lignite coal reserves could be utilized to meet part of its energy requirements.

There are several mine-mouth power facilities that had been cast on blueprint by the Philippine National Oil Company-Exploration Corporation (PNOC-EC) and the Semirara Mining and Power Corporation – but have been hurdled

on development phases due to cost and connection facility concerns.

"For mine-mouth, basically we're trying to remove the transport cost, because if the plant is separate from the mine site, there's handling that will add up to the cost of coal ... and that basically reduces the cost for coal which is fuel for the power plant," Robles explained.

The coal chamber executive specified that in the PNOC-EC mine-mouth projects, what transpired were actually "problems on their financial study... and second had been on social acceptability."

Basically, he noted that in all mine-mouth power projects, financial viability and social issues are the major stumbling blocks – then such shall eventually be factored in into the end-cost of electricity that will be passed on to the consumers.

Former PNOC-EC President Rufino B. Bomasang noted that "only through a mine-mouth power plant that you are able to develop existing low-rank lignites."

Lignite is often referred to as "lowest rank coal" mainly due to their relatively low heat content.

Bomasang reiterated that coal mining in the Philippines will only turn out viable if there are power plants sited proximate to it that will utilize the output. "Otherwise, if you do not put up these mine-mouth power plants, these available resources will never be developed," he said.

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DOF approves P180M for climate change projects in Mindanao

THE Department of Finance (DOF) announced that a total of P180-million has been approved for release to fund climate change adaptation projects in Mindanao.

In a statement on Friday, the DOF said the People's Survival Fund Board (PSF)—the country's national climate fund dedicated to finance climate change adaptation initiatives of local governments and communities—has approved a total of P120 million for two climate adaptation projects in Mindanao.

The Board also approved a P60 million grant for funding a facility to support local governments in developing projects that are scientific and focused on risk reduction to meet PSF requirements.

The PSF funding will support the projects of the Lanao, Surigao Del Sur and Del Carmen, Surigao del Norte local governments

climate change adaptation plans.

Lanao, a fourth class municipality, is proposing a total of P47.5 million for their climate adaptation projects. Of this amount, P39.1 million is proposed for funding under PSF with P8.4 million as local government unit (LGU) counterpart.

Del Carmen, a fifth class municipality, is proposing a total of P95.6 million. Of this amount, P80.7 million is for funding under PSF and P14.9 million as LGU and state college counterpart.

The key approaches to be taken for these projects include integrating natural resource protection and climate-resilient livelihood; protecting watershed, river, and mangroves; providing technical assistance to vulnerable farmers and fisherfolk, and mechanisms to reduce vector-borne diseases affecting agricultural

dependent households; promoting community education on weather forecasting and climate variability to support decision making for agro-fishery practices; and building a regional center for research and extension.

Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez 3rd, PSF Board chair, said the government is taking concrete steps to finance its own adaptation initiatives.

"This is being undertaken even as the Philippines accounts for an insignificant share of the world's carbon emissions but is nonetheless one of the developing countries most vulnerable to climate change," he said.

Dominguez said proof of this is the allocation of funds from the national budget to ensure that local governments are able to establish or enhance their capacities

to adapt to the multiple effects of climate change.

"Both the LGUs of Lanao and Del Carmen are located in vulnerable areas where poverty may further worsen if no adaptation measures are undertaken," he added.

Secretary and Vice Chairperson Emmanuel de Guzman of the Climate Change Commission (CCC) stressed that the PSF Board is ensuring that proposed projects for funding are reviewed by technical agencies and the CCC's panel of experts.

"We are also ensuring that the process for LGUs to access the fund is made easier with the adoption of new guidelines for the submission and evaluation of proposals," he said.

De Guzman said the CCC is committed to support the capacity building of LGUs to develop their local climate change action plans or LCCAPs and to access the PSF for recommended climate change adaptation and mitigation measures in their projects.

► **Mindanao B2**

■ RETAIL FROM B1

DOF approves

"Less than 10 percent of the country's LGUs have such plans," he said.

National Treasurer Roberto Tan said, "The Board intends to launch calls for proposals this November-December and another one in the second quarter of 2017. On top of

that, we have relaxed the requirements and simplified the way that submissions are made."

"The Board also acknowledges that LGUs will need all the support they can get to ensure that their projects will incorporate an adaptation aspect. That is why the Board approved an initial P60 million for the most vulnerable LGUs to support their readiness and help them

prepare projects that will meet the PSF criteria. If there is more demand, we can revisit this figure," Tan added.

The PSF Board is composed of six government sector representatives and three NGO representatives.

The government representatives are the secretaries/heads of the Department of Finance; National Economic and Development Au-

thority; Department of Budget and Management; Department of Interior and Local Government; Philippine Commission on Women, and CCC.

The current sectoral representatives of the Board are Renato Constantino, Professor Rex Cruz and Peter Perfecto, representing the NGO, academe and private sectors, respectively.

MAYVELIN U. CARABALLO



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EDC, DENR, USAID INK PACT FOR FOREST, BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION:

The Energy Development Corp., Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and the United States Agency for International Development recently forged an agreement for the enhanced protection of the country's biodiversity. The agreement among the three entities creates a partnership, called the Global Development Alliance (GDA), to apply the LAWIN Forest and Biodiversity Protection System in selected EDC forest sites. LAWIN is an innovation that was jointly developed by DENR and USAID to address threats to the country's biodiversity. Jeremy Gustafson (2nd from left), director of USAID's Environment Office, links hand with EDC president and COO Richard Tantoco (center) and DENR Undersecretary Jonas Leones (fourth from left), after signing the agreement. Witnessing the event are Dr. Efrain Laureano (left), chief of party of the B+WISER Program; and Mayumi Quintos-Natividad, assistant director of the DENR's Forest Management Bureau.

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CONSERVATION BREEDING

28TH PHILIPPINE EAGLE HATCHED IN CAPTIVITY IN DAVAO CENTER

DAVAO CITY—The Philippine Eagle Foundation (PEF) on Friday announced that it successfully hatched another eagle in captivity.

The still unnamed eaglet is now three weeks old, having broken out of its shell on Nov. 4.

The PEF said the eagle, the 28th hatched in captivity, measures 4 to 5 inches tall and weighs 488.3 grams.

"In the midst of continued mortality and persecution in the wild, this hatching success underscores the importance of conservation breeding as way of securing this species' gene pool," Dennis Salvador, PEF executive director, said in a statement.

Salvador said the eaglet became the third "successfully hatched offspring" of eagles MVP (male) and Go Phoenix (fe-

male) after Sinag and Chick 27.

MVP and Go Phoenix were adopted eagles of Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. and Edisy Trading, respectively.

"The chick showed no signs of deformities. It is active and in fact, has a big appetite," said Colin Santander, PEF animal keeper.

The Philippine Eagle is considered an endangered species because of its rapidly declining population.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature classifies the species as "critically endangered."

In July 1995, then President Fidel Ramos declared the Philippine Eagle the national bird.

A pair of Philippine Eagles needs 7,000 to 13,000 hectares of rain forest to survive. How-



NEWEST CHICK The latest eagle hatched in captivity is now three weeks old and about 5 inches long. —PHILIPPINE EAGLE FOUNDATION

ever, deforestation continues to pose a serious threat to their population.

Only about 400 pairs of eagles are left in the wild.

The PEF, which depends heavily on donations for its projects, has been at the forefront of the campaign to save the eagles. —JOSELLER R. BADILLA INQ



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Search for Truth

By ERNESTO P. MACEDA, Jr.

Sound and fury

On the heels of the recent firecracker factory explosion in Sta. Maria Bulacan comes the announcement of President Rodrigo Duterte that he is considering a nationwide ban. Once again, the Davao City success story is to be the model for an entire nation: Christmas time is solemn time without noise from firecrackers.



Extreme measures. Last Thursday, Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III directed the wholesale closure of all firecracker establishments in Bulacan, with a matching work stoppage order. In the Senate, Senator Sherwin Gatchalian has filed SB 1140, the proposed Firecrackers Prohibition Act which is essentially an absolute ban. At the DOH, an executive order (EO) is being prepared to further regulate the industry, to disallow the use of fireworks, pyrotechnics and firecrackers by the general public, limiting the same to trained professionals.

The tragic Sta Maria explosion has reignited the debate on whether to continue the regulation of the firecracker industry or to make the policy decision to ban the trade outright. This is an age old issue which was first addressed 50 years ago via a pre-martial law, 1966 EO of President Ferdinand Marcos that mandated an absolute ban. The latest issuance on the matter is a 1992 statute, Republic Act (RA) 7183 which is the landmark law that regulates the sale, manufacture, distribution and use of the same.

Prohibition vs. regulation. The argument against a ban has always been the likelihood of a retreat into smuggling or further unregulated, underground manufacture and proliferation. This was precisely the legislative intent of Congress when it enacted RA 7183 (by a unanimous vote in the Senate).

RA 7183 entrusts to the Philippine National Police the power: (1) to determine what constitutes prohibited firecrackers and pyrotechnic devices; (2) to license the sale, manufacture and distribution of what is non-prohibited; (3) to permit the importation of chemical and explosive ingredients; (4) to require monthly reporting from licensees; and (5) to issue implementing rules and regulations.

In addition to these statutory safeguards, there are also the independent regulatory bodies such as the Philippine Pyrotechnics Manufacture and Dealers Association and the Bulacan Pyrotechnics Regulation Board that impose voluntary controls on their members. As a final safety measure, local government units enforce area concentrated regulations, the premier example being Davao's own 2002 city ordinance.

are opportunities to hurl the litany of arguments against the beleaguered industry and the ineffective PNP.

Health. The most compelling argument mounted is health and safety. Exhibit A would be the recent deaths and injuries from the Bulacan blasts. But the finding in the Sta. Maria explosion is that the same was caused by the owners' violation of the law's rigid safety standards. With respect to injuries caused by the use of private firecrackers, the No. 1 culprit has been the piccolo. The piccolo, like the super lolo and goodbye Philippines, is a prohibited firecracker. And, finally, there is the "deviant" case of the no casualty zones - localities around the country where, despite the availability of firecrackers, virtually no one seems to get injured. Foremost among these locales are Quirino and Southern Leyte.

Environment. Another usual suspect is the pollutants released into the air by firecrackers' deadly smoke. True, on New Year's eve the city streets convert into combat zones with vision often impaired by the abundance of residual firecracker smoke. But this is actually nothing compared to the diesel engine pollutants from our vehicles. In fact, the clean air act does not even refer to firecrackers as points of origin. That honor belongs to industries, vehicles and stationary sources.

We are in agreement with the proposition that it is timely to revisit our policy on firecrackers. In fact, any time is a good time and we need not wait for tragedies to jolt us into vigilance. But let's take the effort to approach this sensibly - emotional responses do not always prove to be the best answer.

The use of firecrackers to celebrate the New Year and other important events is ingrained in our culture. From our Chinese descendants to the practices of our Rizal era forebears as immortalized in the *Noli Me Tangere*, this phenomenon is one that has not been easy to just eliminate, EJK style. During Martial Law when the EO 52 ban was strictly enforced, not even the threat of arrest could silence intrepid souls who would continue to defiantly get their fireworks fix on New Year's Eve.

Middle ground. Absolute bans are not a panacea. The policy is in place and there is legislation, regulatory issuances, self-regulatory controls and local safeguards to make the firecracker business, which is a legitimate trade, a continuing viable industry. Outright prohibition will lead to an "explosion" of smuggled firecrackers and an underground, unregulated black market of even more dangerous products. This has been the experience in neighboring countries and the experience even during our own Martial Law days.

What is needed is more alert enforcement of the regulations in place. Surely, we cannot afford to keep absorbing all these self inflicted deaths and injuries in Bulacan and wherever private firecrackers are exploded. Sec. Bello's closed factories will only reopen upon proof of compliance with safety standards. This is a good first step. A complementary solution would be to adopt the trend in neighboring ASEAN countries where private firecrackers are a thing of the past and community en-