

*STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE*

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# **DENR**

## **IN THE NEWS**

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## EDC wants gov't to support geothermal

By Daxim L. Lucas  
@daxINQ

Energy Development Corp. (EDC) has urged the Duterte administration to support more geothermal projects and veer away from coal-fuel power plants, arguing that geothermal was a clean, renewable energy source whose supply was also affordable and stable.

In a statement, EDC president and COO Richard Tantoco said the country could not depend on coal plants for stable prices because, contrary to perception,

coal was no longer a cheap power plant fuel.

"Indonesian coal [cost] \$44 a metric ton in February and just a couple of weeks ago it reached \$110 [per metric ton]," he said. "So, what does that mean for the Filipino consumers going out to the future?"

Tantoco explained that there was a risk associated with relying heavily on a single fuel source because if that fuel source encounters supply shortages or sharp price increases, consumers would suffer higher electricity rates.

"Even if it [coal] stabilizes into 80 [dollars per metric ton], it doesn't mean 'cheap' energy is there to stay," he added. "That's why we're pushing very hard for geothermal to happen, because if you make it happen, it provides stable base load and clean energy."

Tantoco said that EDC's focus on developing geothermal and other renewable energy sources reflected the company's recognition of the need to lessen the buildup in the atmosphere of more carbon dioxide and other

house gases that have been linked for global warming and climate change.

Use of geothermal power, which is an indigenous energy source, also helped the government save on foreign exchange that otherwise would pay for imported fuel sources like coal, he pointed out.

Studies have tagged the power-generation industry, especially carbon-intensive coal-fired power plants, as one of the main reasons behind adverse weather patterns associated with climate

change, including floods, droughts as well as more destructive and more frequent typhoons, similar in magnitude to Super typhoon Yolanda, said the company that is controlled by the Lopez family.

In explaining support for coal, government officials earlier explained that the country contributed a minimal amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

But Tantoco pointed out that, for a country that is most vulnerable to climate change-related

disasters, that small amount has huge impact on Filipinos, especially indigent ones.

The EDC official cited a 10-year study conducted by a European group showing the Philippines suffered 320 weather loss-related events over a 10 year period.

"The Philippines is the single, most vulnerable nation on earth; it recorded 320 events in 10 years compared to just 220 for Bangladesh and Thailand. So we are the most vulnerable," Tantoco noted. INQ



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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

# EDC encourages gov't to aid geothermal dev't

By DANESSA RIVERA

Lopez-led Energy Development Corp. (EDC) is encouraging government to support the development of more geothermal projects—a clean and steady-priced power supply source—as it says the country cannot just rely on coal-fired power plants.

A staunch supporter of clean energy adoption, EDC said geothermal is not only a clean and renewable energy source but its cost and supply are stable.

EDC president and COO Richard Tantoco said the country cannot depend on coal-fired power plants for stable prices since coal is no longer a cheap fuel and is volatile in

terms of pricing.

"Indonesian coal was \$44 a metric ton in February and just a couple of weeks ago it reached \$110 (per metric ton)," he said.

Tantoco highlighted the risk in relying heavily on a single fuel source, saying consumer will bear the burden if that fuel source encounters supply shortages or sharp price increases.

"Even if (coal) stabilizes to \$80 (per metric ton) it doesn't mean 'cheap' energy is there to stay. That's why we're pushing very hard for geothermal to happen; because if you make it happen, it provides stable,

base load, and clean energy," he said.

The use of geothermal, an indigenous energy source, also helps the government save on foreign exchange that otherwise would pay for imported fuel sources like coal, the EDC head said.

As the country's largest geothermal energy producer, the company continues to focus on developing geothermal and other renewable energy sources.

This reflects the company's recognition of the need to lessen the build-up in the atmosphere of more carbon

dioxide and other greenhouse gases that are blamed for global warming and climate change, Tantoco said.

Earlier, the National Geothermal Association of the Philippines (NGAP)—which EDC is a member of—pushed for incentives for small-scale geothermal projects to allow the power source to compete with conventional fuel such as coal.

Incentives could be in the form of a feed-in tariff (FIT) rate. Currently, the FIT scheme provides a 25-year fixed rate for developers building solar, wind, hydropower, biomass and ocean technology.

## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

# EDC seeks more gov't backing of geothermal

ENERGY Development Corp. (EDC) has asked the government to back the development of more geothermal projects as the Lopez-led company described the energy source as not only clean and renewable but also offers stable cost and supply.

"Indonesian coal was \$44 a metric ton in February and just a couple of weeks ago it reached \$110 [per metric ton]. So, what does that mean for the Filipino consumers, going out to the future?" said Richard B. Tantoco,

EDC president and chief operating officer, in a statement on Wednesday.

Coal was no longer a cheap resource to fuel a power plant, calling its price "erratic" and undependable for stable power prices. He also warned of the risk in relying heavily on one fuel source as consumers will suffer during times of shortages or sharp price rises.

Mr. Tantoco said even if coal prices stabilize at \$80 per metric ton, the result would not be cheap energy for the long haul.

"That's why we're pushing very hard for geothermal to happen; because if you make it happen, it provides stable, base load, and clean energy," he said.

He said EDC's focus on developing geothermal and other renewable energy sources reflects its "recognition of the need to lessen the buildup in the atmosphere of more carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that are blamed for global warming and climate change."

The indigenous energy source can also help the government

foreign exchange, which had to pay for imported fuel such as coal.

EDC said studies have pinpointed the power generation industry, specifically carbon-heavy coal-fired power plants, as among the reasons for unusual weather patterns linked to climate change, including flood, drought, as well as more destructive and more frequent typhoons.

Mr. Tantoco also criticized government claims that the country contributes a minimal amount

of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. He said for a country that is most vulnerable to climate change-related disasters, "that small amount has huge impacts on Filipinos, especially indigent ones."

He cited a 10-year study conducted by a European group that showed the country suffered 320 weather loss-related events over a 10-year span.

"The Philippines is the single, most vulnerable nation on earth, it recorded 320 events in 10 years compared to just 220 for Bangla-

desh and Thailand. So we are the most vulnerable," Mr. Tantoco said.

"Every single ton of carbon we throw out to the atmosphere is detrimental ... It's not the people who trade in the stock exchange who are going to get affected, it's the poorest of the poor. So we have to work hand in hand to decarbonize the energy sector," he added.

EDC, the renewable energy unit of First Gen Corp., is the country's biggest producer of geothermal energy. **Victor V. Saulon**

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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

# EDC calls for support on geothermal projects

Energy Development Corp. (EDC) is urging government to support the development of geothermal projects due to its advantages as a renewable and stable energy source.

Richard Tantoco, EDC president and chief rating officer, said the country cannot end on coal-fired power plants for stable prices as its price is "erratic."

Indonesian coal was \$44 a metric ton in January and just a couple of weeks ago it reached \$110 (per metric ton)," Tantoco said. He said relying on a single source of fuel type is risky as this makes the country vulnerable to possible supply shortages and sharp price increases.

Even if it (coal price) stabilizes to 80 dollars per metric ton, that, doesn't mean cheap energy is there to stay. That's why we're finding it very hard for geothermal to happen;

because if you make it happen, it provides stable, base load, and clean energy," Tantoco said.

EDC added the use of geothermal, which is an indigenous energy source, also helps the government save on foreign exchange that otherwise would pay for imported fuel sources like coal.

"We are pushing for geothermal energy because it's stable and clean. We are also developing more solar projects," Tantoco said.

He added that EDC's focus on developing geothermal and other renewable energy sources is part of the company and the Lopez Group's commitment for a decarbonized future.

The company said government should also reconsider its stance on promoting more coal plants since scientific studies tagged the power generation industry as one of the main reasons

behind adverse weather patterns associated with climate change.

EDC said for a country that is most vulnerable to climate change-related disasters, the small amount has a huge impact on Filipinos.

"The Philippines is the single, most vulnerable nation on earth; it recorded 320 events in 10 years compared to just 220 for Bangladesh and Thailand. So we are the most vulnerable. Every single ton of carbon we throw out to the atmosphere is detrimental... It's not the people who trade in the stock exchange who are going to get affected; it's the poorest of the poor. So we have to work hand in hand to de-carbonize the energy sector," Tantoco stressed.

Earlier, EDC also called the government to consider granting feed-in-tariff (FIT) incentive to geothermal projects.

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## Govt should support geothermal dev't - EDC

LOPEZ-LED Energy Development Corporation (EDC), the country's largest geothermal energy producer, is encouraging the government to support the development of more geothermal projects saying that geothermal is not only a clean and renewable energy source but its cost, as well as supply, is stable.

EDC President and COO Richard B. Tantoco explained on Wednesday that the country cannot depend on coal-fired power plants for stable prices because -- contrary to popular perception -- coal is no longer a cheap power plant fuel. "It's price in fact erratic", he said.

"Indonesian coal was US\$44 a metric ton in February and just a couple of weeks ago it reached US\$110 [per metric ton]. So, what does that mean for Filipino consumers, going out to the future?" Tantoco rhetorically asked.

Tantoco said there is a great risk in relying heavily on a single

fuel source, because if there are shortages in the supply of that fuel source or there are sharp price increases, consumers will suffer.

"Even if it [coal] stabilizes into 80 [dollars per metric ton] it doesn't mean 'cheap' energy is here to stay. That's why we're pushing very hard for geothermal to happen; because if you make it happen, it provides stable, base load, and clean energy," he said.

Tantoco said that EDC's focus on developing geothermal and other renewable energy sources reflects the company's recognition of the need to lessen the build-up in the atmosphere of more carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that are blamed for global warming and climate change.

The use of geothermal, which is an indigenous energy source, also helps the government save on foreign exchange that other-

wise could pay for imported fuel sources like coal.

Scientific studies have tagged the power generation industry, especially carbon-intensive coal-fired power plants, as one of the main reasons behind adverse weather patterns associated with climate change, such as floods, droughts, as well as more destructive and more frequent typhoons similar in magnitude to super-typhoon Yolanda.

In explaining its support for coal, government officials earlier explained that the country releases a minimal amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

But Tantoco pointed out that, for a country that is most vulnerable to climate change-related disasters, that small amount has a huge impact on Filipinos, especially on the indigent sector of the population.

The EDC official cited a 10-year study conducted by a European

group which showed the Philippines suffered 320 weather loss-related events over a 10 year period.

"The Philippines is the single, most vulnerable nation on earth; it recorded 320 events in 10 years compared to just 220 for Bangladesh and Thailand. So we are the most vulnerable," Tantoco said.

"Every single ton of carbon we throw out to the atmosphere is detrimental. It's not the people who trade in the stock exchange who are going to get affected; it's the poorest of the poor. So we have to work hand in hand to de-carbonize the energy sector," he said.

He also reaffirmed EDC's willingness to work together with government in developing clean and renewable energy sources that do not aggravate the country's vulnerability to disasters associated with adverse climate change.

**VOLTAIRE PALAÑA**

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# EDC urges gov't to support dev't of geothermal to lessen coal imports

Energy Development Corporation (EDC), a Lopez Group company, is encouraging the government to support the development of more geothermal projects because this energy source is not only a clean and renewable but its cost, as well as supply, is stable.

EDC President and COO Richard B. Tantoco explained the country cannot depend on coal-fired power plants for stable prices since – contrary to popular perception – coal is no longer a cheap power plant fuel. It's price in fact erratic, he noted.

"Indonesian coal was US\$44 a metric ton in February and just a couple of weeks ago it reached US\$110 [per metric ton]. So, what does that mean for the Filipino consumers, going to the future?" Tantoco rhetorically asked.

Tantoco said there is risk on relying heavily on a single fuel source, because if that fuel source encounters supply shortages or sharp price increases, consumers will suffer.

"Even if it [coal] stabilizes into 80 [dollars per metric ton] it doesn't mean 'cheap' energy is there to stay. That's why we're pushing very hard for geothermal to happen because if you make it happen, it provides stable, base load, and clean energy," he pointed out.

He explained that EDC's focus on developing geothermal and other renewable energy sources reflects the company's recognition of the need to

lessen the build-up in the atmosphere of more carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that are blamed for global warming and climate change.

Use of geothermal, which is an indigenous energy source, also helps the government save on foreign exchange that otherwise would pay for imported fuel sources like coal.

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In explaining support for coal, government officials earlier explained that the country contributes a minimal amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

But Tantoco pointed out that, for a country that is most vulnerable to climate change-related disasters, that small amount has huge impacts on Filipinos, especially indigent ones.

The EDC official cited a 10-year study conducted by a European group which showed the Philippines suffered 320 weather loss-related events over a 10-year period.

"The Philippines is the single, most vulnerable nation on earth; it recorded 320 events in 10 years compared to just

220 for Bangladesh and Thailand. So we are the most vulnerable," Tantoco noted.

"Every single ton of carbon we throw out to the atmosphere is detrimental... It's not the people who trade in the stock exchange who are going to get affected; it's the poorest of the poor. So we have to work hand in hand to de-carbonize the energy sector," Tantoco stressed.

The EDC official shared with ABS-CBN News Channel his thoughts on power supply and climate change after a Philippine Stock Exchange event to mark the firm's 10th anniversary as publicly listed company.

He also reaffirmed EDC's willingness to work hand in hand with government in developing clean and renewable energy sources that do not aggravate the country's vulnerability to disasters associated with adverse climate change.

"We are pushing for geothermal energy because it's stable and clean. We are also developing more solar projects," Tantoco said.

He added that EDC's focus on developing geothermal and other renewable energy sources is part of the company and the Lopez Group's commitment for a decarbonized future.

EDC, the country's largest geothermal energy producer, is the renewable energy arm of First Gen Corporation, the country's leading clean and renewable energy producer.

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## EDC asks govt not to rely on coal plants

By Alena Mae S. Flores

**ENERGY** Development Corp. asked the government to support the development of more geothermal projects.

EDC president and chief operating officer Richard Tantoco said the government should look at geothermal energy to support economic growth.

Tantoco said in a statement the country could not depend on coal-fired power plants for stable prices because coal was no longer a cheap fuel and its pricing became erratic.

He said Indonesian coal climbed from \$44 a metric ton in February to \$110 per ton a few weeks ago.

Tantoco said there was a risk of relying heavily on a single fuel source, given supply shortages or sharp price increases in the market.

"Even if it [coal] stabilizes into 80 [dollars per metric ton], it doesn't mean 'cheap' energy is there to stay. That's why we're pushing very hard for geothermal to happen; because if you make it happen, it provides stable, base load, and clean energy," he said.

Tantoco said EDC's focus on developing geothermal and other renewable energy sources reflected the company's recognition of the need to lessen the build-up in the atmosphere of more carbon dioxide and other



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## MISS U BETS' INTERACTION WITH WHALE SHARKS ENRAGES ENVIRONMENTALISTS

By Victor Silva  
@VicSilvaCDN

Environmentalists have lashed out at organizers of the Miss Universe beauty pageant in the Philippines, calling them "irresponsible" for letting contestants swim with endangered whale sharks.

Intermittent rains over Cebu on Tuesday did not stop bikini-clad Miss Universe candidates from Vietnam, New Zealand, Thailand, China and the Philippines from meeting gentle giants in waters off Oslob town, ahead of January's contest.

Tourists swimming with the creatures are strongly discouraged by environmental groups, which say feeding whale sharks makes them dependent and also leaves them vulnerable to poaching or injuries from boat propellers.

Netizens and environmentalists took to social media their disappointment at the inclusion of the activity in the candidates' itinerary during their visit, saying that the pageant was sup-

posed to be a platform that promotes environmental protection and social awareness.

### Whale sharks

A "plea" has been circulating online asking the Miss Universe organization not to let the candidates swim with the whale sharks in Oslob.

"Miss Universe, please don't be a bitch to the environment," Gabriel Yap wrote on Facebook.

Concerns have been raised in the past regarding the impact of whale shark tourism on the well-being of these creatures.

### Inspection of sites

"We are afraid because with Miss Universe going there, the Philippines is promoting a bad tourism practice," Vince Cinches of Greenpeace Southeast Asia told Agence France-Presse (AFP). "We are telling the world it's OK to do this, aggravating this kind of behavior," he said.

The Philippines is hosting Miss Universe next month and the tourism department said the trip was part of an inspection of

potential competition sites.

### Irresponsible

The whale shark visit was coordinated with the help of the municipality "which promised a well-managed marine interaction experience," Tourism Undersecretary Katherine de Castro said.

Marine Wildlife Watch of the Philippines opposes whale shark tourism in Oslob, but local officials say the practice is a source of livelihood for the community.

"It's irresponsible and unsustainable. It's not even ecotourism. You sacrifice the environment just for a selfie," said the group's director, AA Yaptinchay.

Yaptinchay urged the government to enforce guidelines, including maintaining a 3-meter distance from the whale sharks and prohibiting swimmers from touching them.

De Castro said the decision whether to let Miss Universe candidates swim with the whale

sharks would ultimately be up to pageant organizers.

"We were asked if we had any wildlife to feature. I mentioned the Philippine eagle and whale sharks," De Castro said in a press briefing on Tuesday at Jpark Island Resort and Waterpark in Lapu-Lapu City, the venue of the pageant's swimsuit competition on Jan. 17.

Oslob, a once sleepy town, has become known as a venue for recreation ever since whale sharks started visiting its shores and the local government took advantage of it.

De Castro said that what they did in Oslob was simply an ocular inspection and that only

She said there was a possibility that whale shark watching in Oslob may not be included in the final show, where all 90 candidates would be involved, due to the clamor from various groups against it.

De Castro said the Department of Tourism was deter-

mined to feature both the Philippine eagle and whale shark in the final show.

If not in Oslob, organizers may opt to do it in Donsol, Sorsogon, instead.

De Castro also emphasized that before their visit, there was a series of meetings conducted

### Pleas heard

She said she was given assurance that the town's whale shark encounter was more manageable now than it was before. "So, we pushed through with it. But let me emphasize that we hear your pleas," De Castro said.

Cebu Provincial Tourism Officer Joselito Costas said whale shark tourism had uplifted the economic condition of Oslob residents.

But he said the local government unit must look into a comprehensive visitor management strategy and limit the number of visitors in a day, for example, by setting a higher price. —WITH A



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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

# Seaweed for income, and vs climate change

By RHODINA VILLANUEVA

**The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has started identifying possible sites for seaweed farming, an alternative source of income for coastal communities that can help counter the effects of climate change.**

Environment Secretary Gina Lopez said the department, with the help of other government agencies and concerned parties, is now looking to boost local production of seaweed.

She said the potential sea-

weed farming sites include Calatagan in Batangas, Tambuyong in Quezon, Badian in Cebu, and Caluya Island in Antique, near Semirara Island where the controversial coal mining site and power plant is located.

Lopez said the government would not only help in seaweed propagation, but also in marketing its by-products.

"The seaweed revenues should affect more than one person, while developing an area. We can get the country out of poverty through this project," she added.

The DENR chief noted the strong market potential of seaweed due to its fast-growing characteristics and high market price, making it an important economic activity

to alleviate poverty in rural areas.

"Apart from its economic potential, seaweed is one of the natural and effective carbon sequesters that can be found in the coastal area, and some of its species can grow alongside mangroves," Lopez added.

As such, one of the proposals is to get the fund for the seaweed projects from the Expanded National Greening Program and the People's Survival Fund.

Using seaweed for human production and consumption also helps the marine ecosystem as it reduces the organisms infesting other lives in the sea.

The DENR recently organized a roundtable discussion on seaweed potential for biodiversity-friendly enterprises held at the training center of the Biodiversity Management Bureau in Quezon City.

Among those who attended the meeting were repre-

sentatives from the Seaweed Industry Association of the Philippines, the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute, seaweed farmers from Tambuyog, Quezon, Badian, Cebu, and Negros Oriental, Mabunao Agricultural Forest Livelihood Improvement Program, National Fisheries Research and Development Institute, Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia and the Department of Agriculture.

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# LGUs move to integrate climate policies

By ELIYAH R. DELA TORRE

**L**ocal governments have integrated climate change policies in their protected landscape and eco-town projects in disaster-prone areas in Marikina City and Rizal.

In a multisectoral project together with the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA), the Upper Marikina River Basin Protected Landscape (UMRBPL) will demonstrate climate change integration in agriculture and natural resources management by the respective local government units

(LGUs) to benefit farmers and residents in the towns of Tanay, San Mateo, Rodriguez, Baras, and Antipolo City — all in Rizal province.

This project will allow LGUs to adapt to climate change through proper agricultural and environmental management practices.

"Even if you don't have data, you know climate change has influence in agricultural production. Here we're mainstreaming how we should plan for climate change so that benefits go down to the grassroots," said SEARCA Director Gil Saguiguit Jr.

"Now you can (schedule planting), and you know where to avoid putting certain crops because erosion is rampant

there. It's a whole thing about environmental management and even bigger than climate change," he said.

"We should overlay (with agricultural plans) what is likely to happen in terms of disasters like typhoon," he added.

The new planning tool being pushed by SEARCA involves Adaptation Mitigation and Mitigation Initiative (AMIA), which is currently employed by the Department of Agriculture in its programs.

Among the specific measures piloted by SEARCA's AMIA concept are the bio-charcoal briquetting for Marikina, San Mateo, Rodriguez, Tanay, and Baras, said Asian Development Bank (ADB) climate change specialist Ancha

Srinivasan

Furthermore, it employs species establishment and rehabilitation in Tanay, Rodriguez, and Baras.

Check dams, which is a source of cheap irrigation from naturally regenerated rainfall and aquifer replenishment, are also implemented in Antipolo City and San Mateo.

Hope Santos III, SEARCA program specialist, said another project of SEARCA on AMIA is implemented in similarly climate change-affected Camarines Sur, Davao Oriental, and lower Marikina as also funded by ADB.

Under AMIA, LGUs use toolkits like vulnerability assessments and GIS or Geographic Information System to

determine if a site for agricultural production may be vulnerable to typhoons, landslides, flooding, or tsunami.

They use greenhouse gas inventory and tools to determine polluting carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emission in an area and the capacity of a certain agroforest area to sequester CO<sub>2</sub>.

Benefit-cost analysis tools enable them to know if reforestation planting expense will yield desired profit.

"Our hope is that our LGUs will use and maximize results of this project in updating their Comprehensive Land Use Plan and in preparing local climate change action plan," Saguiguit said.



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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

# Lesson plans to include climate change

**LOS BANOS, Laguna** – Lesson plans incorporating environment and related concepts are being finalized under a joint research program by government institutions and a Southeast Asian center.

The instructional materials integrate concepts of sustainable ecological and organic agriculture, nutrition, and climate change in subjects such as science, mathematics, English, and Edukasyong Pantahanan at Pangkabuhayan (for Grade 4) and Technology and Liveli-

hood Education (for Grade 7).

Near the end of its first year, the ongoing activity is named "Participatory Action Research on School – and Community-based Food and Nutrition Program for Literacy, Poverty Reduction, and Sustainable Development," or the School and Home Gardens Program.

Implementing it are the Department of Education (DepEd)-Laguna, the Los Baños-based Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agri-

culture (SEARCA), University of the Philippine Los Baños (UPLB), five elementary schools and a high school in as many Laguna local government units (LGU).

The elementary schools are in the towns of Alaminos, Cabuyao, Majayjay, Nagcarlan and Pila. The high school is in the Laguna capital town of Sta. Cruz.

The program has been envisioned to improve the nutritional conditions and dietary habits of school chil-

dren through experiential learning activities that instill the importance of agriculture, environmental concerns, and use of locally adapted agricultural technologies.

"Science-based knowledge and simple productive technologies will play major roles in the project, one of which is the introduction of edible landscaping systems in schools," the project proponents said.

In each participating school, an optimal-sized greenhouse

with rainwater collection system was assembled to ensure a sustainable and continuous production of vegetable crops throughout the year.

Preliminary to the preparation of the lesson plans, a series of seminars and workshops was conducted to enable the teachers to better grasp the concepts and principles of sustainable, ecological and organic agriculture, edible landscaping, nutrition, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. – Rudy Fernandez

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# Maynilad climate-change conference draws 170 intl, local industry experts



THE Maynilad Water Supply Operations Conference 2016 gathers water experts from the Philippines and abroad to discuss solutions for the effects of climate change on water supply. Leading the discussion are (from left) Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration weather specialist Joseph Basconcillo; former Climate Change Commission Assistant Secretary Joyceline Goco; and Maynilad's Corporate Quality, Environment, Safety and Health Head Francisco Arellano, entertaining questions from conference participants during a plenary discussion on climate change.

**W**EST ZONE concessionaire Maynilad Water Services Inc. (Maynilad) gathered over 170 local and international water experts in a conference that pushed for collaboration in addressing problems due to The Maynilad Water Supply Operations Conference 2016, held at Maynilad's Balara Head Office in Quezon City, is an annual event that serves as a venue for leaders in the industry to engage in discussions about emerging issues in the water sector. This year's conference focused on the theme "Adapting to the Challenges

of Climate Change through Collaboration and Innovation".

"The effects of climate change on water-supply operations are very real. The only way we can come up with solutions is to work together, tap the latest technologies and adopt innovative solutions to protect the sustainability of our water supply," President and CEO Ramoncito S. Fernandez said.

Conference participants included local water districts, members of the academe, government agencies and water-service providers from the Netherlands, Kenya, Singapore and the United Kingdom.

Maynilad is the largest private-water concessionaire in the Philippines in terms of customer base. It is the agent and contractor of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System for the West Zone of the Greater Manila Area, composed of the cities of Manila (certain portions), Quezon City (certain portions), Makati (west of South Super Highway), Caloocan, Pasay, Parañaque, Las Piñas, Muntinlupa, Valenzuela, Navotas and Malabon all in Metro Manila; the cities of Cavite, Bacoor and Imus; and the towns of Kawit, Noveleta and Rosario, all in Cavite Province.

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# Upcycling of waste materials into Christmas decors urged

By CHLOE A. CHAVEZ

An environmental group has vigorously campaigned for the "upcycling" of household discards into decorations to reduce the production of waste materials this Holiday season.

EcoWaste Coalition issued the call for the conversion of discarded materials to creative and useful things in event held at the Santo Cristo Elementary School in Quezon City that showcased Yuletide adornments from trash.

"The 'upcycling' of discards is a sensible way of reducing the high volume of waste that is hauled to dumps, especially during Christmastime when crass consumption and disposal are at its peak. It's no secret that our society generates tons of extra waste during the festive weeks of shopping, partying and gift-giving. Also, 'upcycling' will help lower our holiday spending and allow us to save hard-earned money for more essential family and personal needs," said Ochie Tolentino, Zero Waste campaigner of EcoWaste Coalition.

"By recycling, we reduce the environmental costs of our merry making,

including lessening the demand for virgin materials for new products to be manufactured. This will mean fewer trees cut and mountains mined, more energy saved and decreased amounts of pollutants emitted," she added.

In this era of climate change, Tolentino said the public should be mindful of what they consume and throw away saying ecological consumption is a timely response that will help restore simplicity this Holiday season.

To demonstrate the extent of what can be done with "upcycling," student representatives of each grade level from kinder to grade six of the Santo Cristo Elementary School made Christmas lanterns out of recycled materials.

Their teachers, on the other hand, prepared a lantern from consumed paper cups, a Snowman from used papers, and a Christmas tree from candy wrappers.

For its part, the EcoWaste Coalition displayed a range of "upcycled" Christmas ornaments from fabric, glass, metal, paper and plastic recyclables.

Some of the more eye-catching "upcycled" Christmas decorations shown

at the event include a corrugated board Christmas tree covered with used gift wrappers and newspaper comic strips and adorned with decorations made of used buttons, CDs, softdrink crowns and snack packs; ngels fashioned out of fabric conditioner plastic containers with old shirts for costumes and pande sal paper bags for wings; various figures of Santa Claus fashioned out of a corn starch canister, paper and plastic cups, roll-on deodorant and tetra packs; Three Kings with tall softdrink plastic bottles as bodies and printer ink containers as heads; reindeers crafted from toilet paper rolls, wine bottles and native baskets; lanterns made of empty cans painted with lead safe paint; and a variety of Christmas wreaths and other decorations using empty cans of juice, liver spread and canned tuna, egg trays and plastic bottle lids.

"These 'upcycled' items are mere examples. There are countless ways of transforming our discards into functional and, yes, beautiful, things. We can go zero waste or darn close," the EcoWaste Coalition said.

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## Celebrate a low-carbon Christmas with WWF's green holiday tips

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THE World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) estimates that humanity is currently using the resources of 1.6 planets, meaning many of its resources are no longer naturally replenished. With the global population expected to breach nine billion by 2050, we need to learn to minimize our consumption today!

So this Holiday season, let less be more. Celebrate a green or eco-friendly Christmas by recycling decor, opting for energy-efficient lights and heeding these 10 quick tips to help minimize humanity's holiday carbon footprint.

**1. Buy local products and support homemade crafts**—Flown or shipped in from distant locales, it takes more resources for imported goods to reach our homes and offices. Patronizing local products cuts carbon emissions while boosting the local economy. Support native handicrafts, particularly if the raw materials are sustainably-sourced, like twigs, leaves and pine cones.

**2. Bring eco-bags when shopping for gifts**—An estimated one trillion plastic bags are used worldwide each year and most end up in landfills. This means over a million plastic bags are used every second—and most are used only once. Please don't add to the waste by switching to eco-friendly canvas or recycled bags.

**3. Use LED Christmas lights with timers**—Energy-efficient LED

(light-emitting diode) Christmas lights are up to 90 percent more efficient than regular tungsten bulbs. They're far safer and last longer too! Remember to plug them into automated timers to ensure they'll turn themselves off a little after you go to bed, saving power and ensuring that in terms of your carbon footprint, you won't be naughty but nice.

**4. Make your own personalized Christmas cards**—About two billion Christmas cards are wasted every December. Why not craft your own cards from recycled books, magazines or packaging? A little creativity with some crayons, paintbrushes or colored pens can ease out your inner artist!

**5. Use recycled décor**—With some tinkering and a touch of creativity, your old jars, gifts and gizmos can be converted into nifty Christmas decorations. This is not just cheaper—you'll even ensure that each homey gift piece is unique!

**6. Buy only what you'll use**—Hosting this year's Christmas party? Then politely ask your guests to minimize leftovers and get only the food they can consume. Every year, 113 billion tonnes of food is wasted. Buy just the right amount of sturdy plastic cups and bring out a marker to assign cups. Minimize waste and your waistline this Holiday season!

**7. Set that thermostat a bit higher**—Your office doesn't have to be

like the North Pole! When the party's getting too cold, you can increase your air conditioner's thermostat by one degree Celsius. This will leave you feeling comfortable while cutting down the energy bill by as much as 10 percent. The ideal temperature range for homes and offices ranges from 24 to 26 degrees Celsius.

**8. Recycle last year's wrapping paper for this year's gifts**—Printed paper wrappers comprise one of the largest Christmas wastes. Use last year's wrappers for this year's gifts! Old boxes, ribbons and strings can also be repurposed to minimize waste.

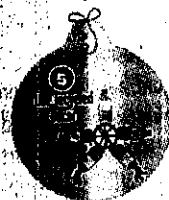
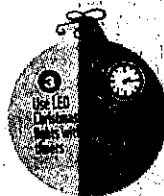
**9. Reuse old props for this year's parties**—Bring out old décor and leftover trimmings for this season's celebrations. In need of refreshing? A little glitter and paint can go a long way. Why not ask your buddies to donate a few things for the party?

**10. Observe proper cleanup after partying**—Before staging your next party, ensure there are enough bins and trash bags that are clearly marked with the right labels for proper disposal. Try forming a 'green team' and announce to everyone that this is an Earth-friendly Christmas party where their love for the planet will be appreciated.

Remember, everyone has a duty to the environment. These 10 quick tips can lessen your impact on the planet. **WWF PHILIPPINES**



### YOUR 10 GREEN HOLIDAY TIPS





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Coral in Guimaras. (Photo courtesy of [roamingcouple.com](http://roamingcouple.com))

## DENR identifies 70 hectares of undisturbed coral reefs in Guimaras

ILOILO CITY (PNA) – Guimaras province boasts of 70 hectares of undisturbed coral reefs, according to the top official of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in Western Visayas.

Regional Director Jim Sampulna during Monday's presentation of accomplishments of the office, said that a team will be created to protect the coral reefs. "We will endeavor to protect them," he said.

What is good, he said, was that the coral reefs are within the established protected areas in the province.

Dr. Vilma Limates of the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office said the coral reefs are within the Taklong Island National Marine Reserve, particularly at Barangay Lapaz in Nueva Valencia.

She explained that the 1,143-hectare marine reserve is divided into two zones – the strict protection zone that is open only for research activities and the multiple-use zone that caters to traditional fishing and eco-tourism activities.

Coral reefs, while they serve as haven for fishes, can also be a big boost to the tourism industry.



THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS  
SINCE 1900  
**MANILA BULLETIN**  
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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## Enforcement plan for PH's largest marine protected area strengthened

The enforcement plan for the country's largest marine protected area (MPA), Tañon Strait, underwent a fresh review, a move that will further protect the channel from commercial, illegal, and destructive fishing operations.

A statement showed that concerned government agencies, local government units (LGUs), and fishing industry stakeholders, including civil society organizations (CSOs), recently

gathered to review and strengthen an enforcement plan for Tañon Strait.

Located between Cebu and Negros, Tañon Strait is one of the country's major fishing grounds with an area of 5,182 square kilometers, which is more than three times the area of the Tubbataha National Park, in Palawan.

It was declared as a protected seascape in 1988 but despite the declaration, illegal fishing operations still continue.

The "Tañon Strait Protected Seascape (TSPS) Enforcement Summit" was recently held and attended by more than 120 participants who reviewed and identified

gaps to strengthen the Tañon Strait enforcement plan and forge their respective commitments to strongly implement the plan in the next several years.

"Efforts to protect Tañon Strait should be sustained," said Department of Environment and Natural Resources Region (DENR) 7 Director Emma Melana.

Director Allan Poquita, of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) Region 7, said that the bureau will provide full support to the TSPS area office.

BFAR's support includes a donation of two patrol boats to the TSPS protected area office to help in the monitoring and apprehension of commercial and illegal fishing operators in Tañon Strait.

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**KEY ECOSYSTEM** Healthy seagrass meadows support economically important fishes and invertebrates. (Inset photo) A sparse meadow of the seagrass species *Halophila ovalis* next to a reef in Canlangi, Tubigon, Bohol. PHOTOS: HARIBON FOUNDATION

## Haribon Foundation working to conserve PH seagrasses

THE Haribon Foundation is working to conserve a critical but often overlooked part of the marine ecosystem, the Philippines' seagrass meadows, through the Strengthening the Marine Protected Areas (MPA) to Protect the Marine Key Biodiversity Areas in the Philippines (MKBA) Project in Lanuza Bay, Surigao del Sur.

Seagrasses are flowering plants that are adapted to seawater, much like mangroves. The only difference is that they live fully submerged in seawater and are exposed to direct sunlight only during low tides. They come from three families, Hydrocharitaceae, Zosteraceae and Cymodoceaceae. Globally, there are more than 67 species of seagrasses.

The Philippines has 18 seagrass species spread across the entire country. Some of the more extensive seagrass beds are found in Caluya in Antique; Northern Palawan; the Polillo Islands in Quezon; Hinatuan and Cortes in Surigao del Sur; and Cateel Bay in Davao Oriental. They can live as deep as 15 meters (or 50 feet) like those found on the coast of Baler, Aurora and Polillo Island.

covered to allow construction of industrial and tourism infrastructure. Seagrass beds can also be destroyed by improper mangrove reforestation and restoration.

Without proper guidance and information, mangrove reforestation projects encroach on seagrass beds. The planted mangrove seedlings may either die from space and nutrient competition or kill or reduce the seagrass beds. Haribon stressed that if mangrove reforestation projects are seen doing this, they should be reported to the nearest office of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), or local government unit.

In addition to large fauna like the dugong and sea turtles that graze on seagrass beds, they also provide a habitat for other species such as ghost pipefish, frogfish, nudibranches, seamounts, and stargazers.

Haribon's MBA-MKBA project aims to assist local government units in properly managing seagrass meadows, and is supported by the Global Environment Facility of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Biodiversity Management Bureau of

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## US body awards PH recycling project



**READY FOR REUSE** A collector of used fishing nets has them weighed before they are shipped away to be turned into carpet fiber, under a program known as Net-Works, designed to clear coastal areas of discarded fishing nets as well as provide fishing communities another source of income. PHOTO: INTERFACE INC.

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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

**I**NTERFACE, a Georgia-based manufacturer of modular carpet tiles and flooring, was one of several winners of the 2016 Secretary of State's Award for Corporate Excellence (ACE) in Sustainable Oceans Management for its work to decrease marine pollution in coastal areas of the Philippines while improving local communities, the US Embassy in Manila announced over the weekend.

Interface launched Net-Works, a project to remove discarded nets from oceans to prevent marine life from getting caught in them. Net-Works encourages the recycling of these nets by providing payment to participants in the local community. The recycled nets provided by the program are sent to an Interface supplier, which uses the nylon found in the nets to produce 100-percent recycled carpet yarn. As of 2015, the program has operated in 26 communities and directly benefited more than 4,000 people.

The Net-Works project, which was started in 2012, is currently being carried out in communities in the Bantayan Islands, Danao Bank, and in Northern Iloilo.

The Secretary of State has awarded the ACE each year since 1999 in order to recognize US companies representing American values in their business practices worldwide. Each of these companies is contributing to the growth and sustainable development of the local economies in which they work. In 2016, the four ACE categories include Inclusive Hiring Practices, Small or Medium Enterprise, Sustainable Oceans Management and Transparent Operations.

Interface and the other winners will be presented with the award

at the annual ACE ceremony January 5, 2017, at 10:30 am Eastern Standard Time at the US State Department. The event will be globally streamed online at <http://video.state.gov/live/>.

Additional winners include:

Award for Corporate Excellence in Inclusive Hiring Practices: General Electric (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia) and McDonald's Deutschland (Berlin, Germany)

General Electric promotes inclusive hiring practices within Saudi Arabia by creating the country's first all-women business services center, which now employs more than 1,000 Saudi and non-Saudi women, servicing a fifth of the company's worldwide service needs.

McDonald's Deutschland has led by example to support refugees in integrating into Germany's society and workforce. In the last year alone, McDonald's Deutschland has employed more than 900 refugees across the country.

• Award for Corporate Excellence in Small or Medium Enterprise: Andela (Lagos, Nigeria)

Andela has employed new techniques to create a cutting-edge training program that equips students to become elite software developers regardless of background. Andela pays its trainees above-market wages and provides

accommodation, meals, health-care, a computer and detailed instructions. Two hundred twenty former trainees are now employed as software developers, including 50 who are working with large international companies.

Award for Corporate Excellence in Sustainable Oceans Management: Bureo Inc. (Santiago, Chile) and Interface (Manila, Philippines)

Bureo designs and manufactures a unique line of sunglasses, skateboards and other sustainable prod-

ucts for the action sports industry, sourced from recycled fishing nets. They have launched a fishing net collection and recycling program, Net Positiva, to help tackle ocean plastic pollution. Through the program, Bureo has partnered directly with fishing communities across Chile and has recycled more than 55 tons of fishing nets.

• Award for Corporate Excellence in Transparent Operations: Sociedad Minera Cerro Verde S.A.A. (Lima, Peru) Sociedad Minera Cerro Verde

S.A.A. is a mining company that puts transparency and stakeholder engagement at the core of their business model. Cerro Verde completed a \$5.6 billion expansion in 2015, within budget and on schedule because of its policy of proactive and transparent consultation with local communities, and local municipal, regional and national governments. The expansion included a \$1 billion investment in public water infrastructure that supplies not only the additional

capacity required by the mine, but also potable water to 99 percent of residents and 100 percent of wastewater treatment to Peru's second largest city of Arequipa.

The Department of State is committed to working with companies to further responsible business practices worldwide and to recognize their efforts to improve lives at home and abroad. For more information, please visit: <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/ace>.

**US STATE DEPARTMENT**

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## Bugkalot, Ilongot IPs

### want Casecnan row resolved

By Ferdie G. Domingo

BALER, Aurora—Indigenous peoples of the Bugkalot and Ilongot tribes living at the boundaries of Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino and this province have asked President Rodrigo Duterte to resolve their decades-old problem concerning alleged environmental violations committed by the American operator of the giant

Casecnan Multipurpose Irrigation and Power Project.

In a letter to the President, Bugkalot/Ilongot Confederation director Rocky Valderama Jr. sought Duterte's intervention on the supposed violations and injustices committed by the California Energy Casecnan Water and Energy Company Inc. Officials of the company could not be reached for comment as of presstime.

Valderama accused the firm of depriving them of their share in the revenue of the Casecnan power plant, and violating their rights to their ancestral domain while taking in billions of pesos through their operations. The revenue share was one of the 20 demands raised by the IPs before the project could start construction in 1995.

Then-President Fidel Ramos authorized the CMIPP to build the facility, provided these demands were met and a task force created to monitor their implementation, Valderama added.

"President Duterte, you are the only hope of the Bugkalots and Ilongots. Help us resolve this matter," Valderama wrote.

One of CECWECI's glaring environmental violations, he

said, was the drying up of the Casecnan River after its huge volume of water was diverted, leaving only a trickle to proceed downstream.

Valderama said the firm violated its agreement with the National Irrigation Administration before the dam was constructed that it would only utilize 1.6 percent of the 49 billion cubic meters of water in the river.

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

## NEWS

# Palawan gov charged for water deal

By Vince F. Nonato  
@VinceNonatoINQ

Palawan Gov. Jose Alvarez was charged before the Office of the Ombudsman on Wednesday over alleged irregularities in the Cagayan de Oro Water District (COWD) with the private water supplier, to which he is connected.

Private complainant Michelle Fox of San Vicente, Palawan, filed two complaints that accused the COWD board of making accommodations in favor of water provider Rio Verde Water Consortium Inc. (RVWCI).

One of the allegedly "onerous" accommodations supposedly allowed RVWCI to change the parametric formula and allow it to overcharge water con-

sumers by as much as P1.46 per cubic meter.

"The anomalous transaction and activities have greatly prejudiced and damaged the resident of Cagayan de Oro as well as the general public. Public funds and interests have also been irregularly used and utilized," Fox said in her complaint.

She sued Alvarez as an incorporator of RVWCI, the contractor that treats water from the Bubunauan River and delivers it to the COWD. Also named respondents were four other RVWCI executives: Fiorella Azura, Bienvenido Santos, Roberto Lozada and Chona Alvarez.

Public respondents belonging to the COWD were: vice chair Federico Gapuz, secretary Raymundo Java, treasurer Sarah

Borja, assistant secretary/treasurer Sandy Bass Jr. and board chair Francisco Mendez.

They were accused of violating the Government Procurement Reform Act, the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act, the Government Auditing Code of the Philippines, and Commission on Audit Circular 85-55A on irregular expenditures and two other COA resolutions, as well as grave misconduct and gross neglect of duty.

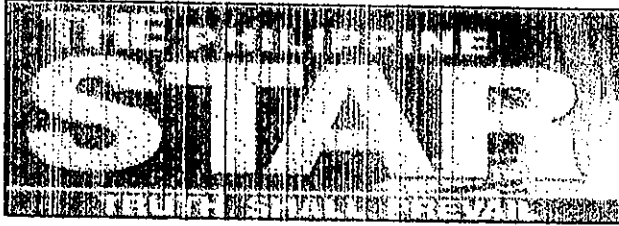
Fox's complaint simply lifted entire segments of the COA Report No. 2013-002, or the "Report on the results of the audit on alleged graft and corrupt practices of the Board of Directors together with the contractor, Rio Verde Water Consortium Inc. of the Cagayan de Oro Water District, Cagayan de Oro City, and the then-

LWUA [Local Water Utilities Administration] Administrator."

The said COA report flagged various provisions allegedly inserted by RVWCI in the December 2004 bulk water supply agreement. State auditors deemed these provisions "onerous" compared to the original terms in the "model contract" for the project.

Besides the tweak to the formula that purportedly allowed overcharging, the report cited how RVWCI modified the bases on the frequency of water price adjustment.

The project also allegedly became costlier by P47.96 million, after the COWD board agreed to RVWCI's proposal to change the original take-off point of the delivery to a location that is lower in elevation. INQ



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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

### Vice govs push Earth-friendly solar lighting

The country's most far-flung areas will soon get night light after the League of Vice Governors of the Philippines (LVGP) forged a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with My Shelter Foundation's Liter of Light program for the provision of affordable, sustainable solar light to people with limited or no access to electricity.

Under the MOA, which was facilitated by LVGP publicist Jo Kristine Revil (Masbate), the provinces through the vice governors, Sangguniang Panlalawigan, private sector and civil soci-

ety groups will endeavor to provide inexpensive lighting to remote barangays across the archipelago.

Founded by Filipino social entrepreneur Illac Diaz, the project has installed more than 350,000 bottle lights in more than 15 countries and taught green skills to empower grass-roots groups.

A recipient of the 2015 Zayed Future Energy Prize and the 2014-2015 World Habitat Award, its open source technology has been recognized by the United Nations and adopted for use in some UN refugee camps.

# PEOPLES Tonight

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## PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

### Quezon exec offers facilities for seized 'hot' forest products

By GEMI FORMARAN

**BATANGAS City** - To address the problem of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) regarding its lack of depository areas for confiscated illegal forest products, an environment official of the provincial government of Quezon offered available facilities for the said purpose.

Manuel "Gene" Beloso, who heads the Quezon Provincial Government-Environment and Natural Resources Office (PG-ENRO), said it would be a big help to the DENR if illegally-cut logs, sawn fitches and lumber that were seized by the agency in Quezon will be deposited at the available facilities owned by the provincial government.

In his motion filed during the quarterly meeting of the Regional Multi-sectoral Forest Protection Committee (RMFPC), Beloso asked the body to allow the use of their facilities like the Provincial Engineering Office compound for the safekeeping of apprehended illegal forest products.

But Beloso clarified that he was referring only to forest products seized by the environment task force of the provincial government.

Aside from DENR personnel, the police, the military and other law enforcement agencies, everybody knows that we, in the provincial government

of Quezon, through our task force, have also been apprehending 'hot' forest products. But since the DENR lacks depository facilities, it would be practical to allow us to take custody of these products," said Beloso.

After the motion was approved by the committee, Beloso also asked the DENR, through Assistant Regional Director for Management Services Arturo Fadriguela, that those confiscated products that have been forfeited by the DENR in favor of the government and those being abandoned by their owners during the actual apprehensions be eventually donated to the provincial government.

He also clarified that the confiscated contraband will be reported first to the DENR-Quezon for scaling and proper documentation before they are finally kept in the provincial government facilities.

Beloso said Quezon Gov. David Suarez, who has been joining with the DENR's anti-illegal logging drive is very much willing to offer available facilities for the said purpose.

Beloso's move was triggered by the recent statement of Lt. Rosgen Caranza of the Phil. Navy station based in Bgy. Abiawin, Infanta, Quezon, where million pesos worth of forest products and conveyances seized by the Real CENRO under forester Millet Panaligan and the Navy, have been deposited and impounded, making them uncomfortable.



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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

NEW ROUND OF VIOLENCE

### 3 FARMERS IN TAGUM WOUNDED IN LATEST ATTACK IN DISPUTED LAND

TAGUM CITY—Mayor Allan Rellon has warned local police officials that heads would roll if they failed to help farmers who had complained of attacks from security guards reportedly employed by an agricultural firm here.

Rellon also threatened to disarm the guards involved in the shooting of protesting farmers in Barangay Madaum here as tension over a disputed farmland flared anew.

On Wednesday, three more farmers, who belong to a group of agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs), were wounded after they were shot by guards allegedly employed by Lapanday Foods Corp. to man the firm's banana plantation. The latest incident came two days after guards shot a group of 50 farmers on its way to harvest bananas on Monday, leaving 7 wounded.

Lapanday, in an earlier statement, denied its involvement in Monday's attack. The company, on Wednesday, had still to issue a statement on the latest incident.

Antonio Tuyak, spokesperson of Madaum Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Association (Marbai), said at least 20 armed guards, who they suspected to be from the Lapanday, maneuvered around the contested land and shot five farmers working in the field early Wednesday.

The farmers described their attackers as a mix of men wearing security guard uniforms and street clothes.



Farmers belonging to a group of agrarian reform beneficiaries are confronted by armed guards of an agricultural firm in the village of Madaum in Tagum City. —PHOTO COURTESY OF KILAB MULTIMEDIA

Marbai and Lapanday are embroiled in a 145-hectare land dispute after ARBs in the area accused the company of landgrabbing.

"I would relieve any police officer who would refuse to respond to the farmers' plea," Rellon said, after farmers complained of the slow response of the Tagum City police during Monday's incident.

"If they would not act on your pleas for assistance, I would ask even [President Duterte] for help," Rellon told the farmers and their supporters who were manning a barricade in the plantation on Wednesday.

Elaiza Mendoza, city interior and local government offi-

cer, said the Tagum police sent an investigation team to look into incidents of violence in the area.

The farmers set up a barricade last week after their demands to end a contract growing program with the company remain unresolved.

Local officials summoned representatives of protesting farmers and of Lapanday to a consultation on Wednesday to address the standoff but no one came.

Tuyak said they could not attend the dialogue because it was scheduled to be held in San Isidro village, which is far from where the farmers are encamped.

"We wanted the dialog to be

held here so that every farmer can hear what we are discussing," Tuyak said. "I don't understand why the mayor wanted to have the talks held somewhere else."

"If we leave, the guards might come back and seize our position," he added.

Earlier, Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Zarate said he would seek a congressional investigation into the violence in Madaum.

"We will file a resolution in Congress, not only to condemn but also to investigate the reasons behind this dastardly acts against our poor agrarian reform beneficiaries," Zarate said. —FRINSTON LIM AND KARLOS MANLUPIG, INQ