

DATE : 14 MAR 2019

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DENR

IN THE NEWS

Strategic Communication and Initiative Service



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UPLAND BLAZE

FIRE DESTROYS REFORESTATION SITE IN ZAMBALES

Firefighters could only watch helplessly from the foot of the Zambales Mountains as fire on Tuesday night ravaged a forest area and destroyed thousands of trees that had been planted in the government's National Greening Program (NGP), authorities here said.

The site of the blaze straddles the towns of Mangatarem and Aguilar in Pangasinan province.

Firefighters tried to go to the site but there was no access road. The fire was at the top of the mountain, said fire officer Alexander Beltran, Mangatarem fire chief.

The NGP, a massive reforestation project launched by the government in May 2011, aimed to plant 1.5 billion seedlings in 1.5 million hectares of public land from 2011 to 2016.

As of 8 a.m. on Wednesday, smoke could still be seen billowing from the area.

—GABRIEL CARDINOZA AND JOANNA ROSE AGLIBOT INQ



Reclamation sa Alaminos isinumbong kay Duterte, DENR, DILG

PUMALAG ang mahigit 100 residente ng Brgy Lucap, Alaminos City, Pangasinan matapos umanong tabunan ng lupa ang kanilang dalampasigan at tayuan ng mga commercial establishment ng ilang maimpluwensiyang opisyal sa kanilang lugar.

Nagsampa ng reklamo laban kay Alaminos City Mayor Arthur Celeste ang may 138 mangingisda sa naturang lungsod sa tanggapan nina Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Sec. Roy Cimatu at Department of Inte-

rior and Local Government (DILG) Usec. Martin Diño.

Labis umanong naapektuhan ng reklamasyon ang kanilang kabuhayan dahil hindi na makadalong sa dalampasigan ang kanilang mga bangka para maghatid ng mga turista sa Hundred Islands.

Ang bagong restaurant umanong itinayo doon ay pag-aari ni Brian Celeste, anak ng kanilang mayor. Gayundin ang isa pang cafe na itinayo ay pag-aari naman umano ni Bani Mayor Gwen Yamamoto.

"Bakit inapakan ni Mayor Celeste ang aming mga karapatan,

pinalayas nila ang mga tindera at bangka sa dalampasigan, tinabunan, para lamang sa kapakanan ng pamilya Celeste at mga alipores nila?" ang galit na sigaw ng taumbayan na isa-isang lumagda sa mga demanda.

Wala umanong aksyon sa reklamo ang kanilang barangay chairman na si Raul Bacay, at CENRO o City Environment and Natural Resources Office.

Tinangka namang hingan ng reaksiyon ang mga inaakusahang opisyal subalit hindi makontak ang mga ito. **(Armida Rico)**

'People are thirsty for truth' about water crisis roots—Poe

BY BUTCH FERNANDEZ [@butchfBM](#)
& JONATHAN L. MAYUGA [@jonlmayuga](#)

THE Senate Committee on Public Services, flexing oversight powers covering State-granted franchises, will open an inquiry on Tuesday amid a “gripping water supply crisis” affecting Metro Manila and Rizal Province, summoning officials of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS).

Chaired by Sen. Grace Poe, the committee also sent out invitations to get testimonies from officers of private concessionaires Manila Water—supplying Rizal province and parts of Metro Manila’s East Zone—and Maynilad, which supplies the Metropolis’s West Zone.

The Senate hearing is expected to assess the impact of “the water crisis gripping the country, which particularly affects parts of Metro Manila and Rizal province, and several farming communities in the provinces.”

Poe said on Wednesday, “We will call for the hearing as part of the committee’s oversight functions over the country’s utilities,” as she voiced concern that “what we are seeing now is not normal and something that our households and farmers do not deserve.”

Poe added: “*Ipapatawag natin ang hearing na ito dahil ang sambayanang walang tubig, walang mainom, walang paligo ay uhaw na uhaw sa katotohanan* [We will call this hearing because the people who have no water to drink or shower with are thirsty for the truth].”

The senator said officials of concerned agencies, heads of water concessionaires, regulators and other concerned stakeholders are expected “to discuss the crisis and come up with solutions to ease the impact of the supply shortage.”

Poe stressed the importance of having such officials at the hearing “so that together, we can come up with immediate short- and long-term solutions to avert the current water crisis.”

She also cited “need to hear the current mitigating measures planned by the agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture, given the importance of our agricultural sector to the economy.”

Poe had earlier voiced serious concern over the looming water crisis that is expected to be aggravated by the impact of El Niño.

At the same time, Senator Poe stressed the need to “rationalize the economic as well as administrative regulation” of water utilities through an independent, quasi-judicial body.

What caused water shortage?

THE unusually huge demand for



“We will call for the hearing as part of the committee’s oversight functions over the country’s utilities. What we are seeing now is not normal and something that our households and farmers do not deserve.”—Poe

water because of El Niño and the limited allocation for Manila Water Co. Inc. are behind the current supply shortage being experienced by water consumers within its concession area, Manila Water Co. Inc. had explained earlier.

The weak El Niño has a double-bladed effect—increasing the demand for water by consumers and depriving dams of much-needed rainwater, the company said. River systems that drain to dams also dry up faster.

Manila Water COO Geodino Carpio, explaining over CNN Philippines the current predicament of Manila Water’s customers, said the company has had to experience “supply shortage” by an average of 140 million litres per Day (MLD) per day since 2016.

Manila Water’s allocation from Angat is 1,600 MLD while the demand of its consumers over the years said Carpio, has been increasing over the years and it has peaked to 1,740 MLD. This means a supply shortage of 140 MLD.

Also, he said the installed aqueduct from Angat to Ipo Dam, and Ipo Dam to La Mesa Dam has limitations, which means there’s a need to enlarge its capacity because even if the National Water Resource Board (NWRB) were to allow Manila Water to draw down

a higher water allocation, the limited capacity of the aqueduct will constrict the flow of supply.

Hopefully, Carpio said, by September next year, with ongoing projects to boost water supply distribution, there will be more water from Angat, preventing supply shortage.

“By September next year, there will be more water from Angat, if the NWRB allows it,” he added.

Nonrevenue water

ACCORDING to Carpio, Manila Water was able to cope with the supply shortage from Angat by reducing its Nonrevenue Water.

“In 1997, our system loss was about 63 percent. It means for every 100 liters we get, 63 liters are lost. *Mas malaki ang tapon* [The volume of wastage is bigger]. Today, we have 10 to 12 percent NRW. Worldwide, the acceptable standard is 20 to 25 percent. We are better than world-class standards in terms of controlling system losses,” he said.

However, he said the company can only save water from NRW by so much. “We can only save water so much. Any more than 12 percent.... The more our water saving increases, it means the cost also increases,” he said in mixed Filipino and English.

“We are overly producing more than 1,600 MLD. Sometime in February, we were averaging 1,740 MLD per day production. But we are receiving 1,600 MLD per day. There are also peaks. During Saturdays, for example, in Montalban, many households are doing laundry, hence, the consumption is high. During Pacquiao fights, during breaks, the water consumption goes up,” he quipped.

SEE “WATER CRISIS,” A8



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Water crisis. . .

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"The reality is, if we are getting 1,600 MLD from Angat and the demand is 1,740, that means, we are getting water from La Mesa. This means La Mesa water level will go down. This has been happening since 2016. But we are lucky [that] from July to October, La Mesa gets filled up. During summer, it will start peaking. June, July, it rises again and then returns to normal level," he explained.

According to Carpio, the bigger the demand, the more the water at La Mesa Dam is depleted.

"It happened in December 2018. [We were never able to return to normal] and it peaked now. So far, we are hoping for water in La Mesa to recover by the onset of the rainy season," he said.

According to Carpio, Manila Water is currently boosting supply from Laguna de Bay, and is stepping up deep well projects to get water from other sources, while waiting for the Kaliwa Dam Project.

"We constructed a plant to draw water from Laguna de Bay until the Kaliwa Water Source is constructed. But that will be energized to produce 100 MLD a day and another 50 MLD sometime in August. But really, we are catching up. Kaliwa Dam is delayed and [MWSS Administrator] Reynaldo Velasco has put it back on track. We saw it coming," he said.



Angat Dam an alarming threat

COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDOÑEZ

Overdependence on Angat Dam poses a very serious threat with disastrous consequences, especially for Metro Manila residents. We must give priority attention to the chaos that is certain to erupt if a calamity cuts us off from Angat Dam.

We are experiencing today a water shortage in Metro Manila. On March 11, water expert Dondi Alikpala stated: "Five to six years ago, the study to develop Kaliwa Dam as a new water source for Mega Manila had been completed. The project was to be funded by PPP, and several competent firms had expressed serious interest in investing. In 2016, the PPP plans were scrapped in favor of funding the project with Chinese loans for Chinese construction firms. The project has yet to start. And here we are today."

On March 12, MWSS chief regulator Patrick Ty wrote: "Manila Water has been warning that there will be a looming water shortage if we do not have a new water source soon. Due to the increase in population, Manila Water's requirement is now 1,750 million liters per

day (MLD). Their allocation of 1600 MLD given 22 years ago in 1997 is not enough now. So they used their reserve water, which is the La Mesa Dam. Since it hasn't been raining, their reserve is not getting replenished. This is the reason we have a shortage in the Manila Water side. We need a new water source, and we need it soon."

In an earlier speech by AG-BIAG party list Rep. Michelle Antonio, she pointed out the following:

- There is only one major water source for Metro Manila: the Angat Dam. This provides 97 percent of Metro Manila's water supply.

- The Angat Dam management allocates the water supply shared by domestic and industrial users, irrigation of about 31,000 hectares of farm land and power supply generation to feed the Luzon grid, which takes care of more than 20 transmission lines in Luzon.

- In 2020, Angat Dam will not be able to meet the needs of more than 15 million Mega Manila inhabitants.

If the 50-year-old ticking time bomb of Angat Dam collapses, it will be a total disaster. Since Angat Dam sits along the West Valley Fault, this fault can move anytime and trigger a 7.2-magnitude earthquake.

A commissioned study reveals there will then be 30,000 deaths, P201 billion in damages, and 10- to 30-meter high floodwaters ravaging 20 towns in Bulacan, three towns in Pampanga and three cities in Metro Manila. This is in addition to the severe water shortage in Metro Manila, which will result in chaos.

What should be done? There is a saying: "If there is something worth doing, it is worth doing badly." The point is that even if the response is not an ideal one, we must move quickly. If time is of the essence, the late former Health Secretary Juan Flavio Velasco used to say: "Just doh it."

There are alternatives to Angat Dam. These are the Kaliwa Dam in Quezon and the Laiban Dam in Rizal. Together, they can produce more than the 2,000 MLDs provided by Angat. Kaliwa can be done first, followed at the appropriate time by Laiban.

There are difficult political, legal, settlement and environmental issues at stake. That is why construction is seriously delayed.

This is where President Duterte's strong political will and creativity should come in. Boracay and Manila Bay had problems. The President solved these problems, while others did not.

We are now suffering from the effects of El Niño. This would

not have been as bad if a key recommendation of the 2017 seven water presumpits had been given to the President, and most likely addressed by him. This was to improve our low 4 percent water harvesting rate, compared to India's 60 percent in some areas. No presidential intervention, not much water harvested.

The private sector Movement for Water Security will highlight the Angat Dam issue during the National Water Summit on March 21. They look forward to taking action to support the President's strong political will on the matter and other key issues the summit will identify. We can overcome our water crisis only if the President himself leads a united public-private team effort to achieve water security for our people, especially the poor. INQ



The author is Agriwatch chair, former Secretary of Presidential Programs and Projects and former undersecretary of Agriculture and Trade and Industry. Contact him via agriwatch_phil@yahoo.com



WORKER FOR CLEAN WATER

Preserving public health paramount for Davao-based expat-environmentalist

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BY HENRYLITO D. TACIO | Contributor

‘OUT of 100 million-plus Filipinos, about 9 million rely on unimproved, unsafe and unsustainable water sources, [while] 19 million lack access to improved sanitation...”

This very alarming situation is culled from the web site *water.org*, which explained: “Families without a safe water source in or near their homes often spend significant time and energy collecting water. Those without a sanitary toilet facility face a number of unattractive choices—including venturing out at night, or suffering the embarrassment of asking to use the toilet of a neighbor.”

If that’s not disconcerting, here’s another scenario: According to the National Sewerage and Septage Management Program (NSSMP), Filipinos who have toilets “do not have septic tanks; many...have open bottoms. Most [of them] are not regularly dislodged, and the septage removed is not treated and disposed of properly.”

The result: Health problems, or even death. Without access to improved sanitation, children and their families are at much greater risk of contracting waterborne diseases, which kill 55 people each day, the NSSMP deplored.

“Proper sanitation has always been the most effective tool to pre-

serve public health,” pointed out Sean Ligtvoet, a Dutch national who works as project officer at the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) Regional Office in Davao City. “That’s why I feel privileged to be able to improve the sanitary status in areas where it’s most needed.”

Ligtvoet is referring to the Profitable Sanitation Facility (PSF) project, a collaborative effort of the regional DOST office and the HELP (Hydrology for the Environment, Life and Policy)-Davao Network, composed of volunteer organizations and individuals based in Davao City.

Preventing environmental pollution

PSF is an undertaking where the urban poor of Davao City can go to a clean toilet and shower, as well as get top-quality drinking water provided by the Davao City Water District (DCWD). The wastewater is treated by an integrated Helophyte-filer system to prevent environmental pollution.

More importantly, the community where the PSF is located can

earn an income by taking care of the facility. But that’s going ahead of the story.

According to Ligtvoet, PSFs are currently being implemented under the Public Sanitation and Hygiene Upgrading Program (PUSHUP), a joint venture between the regional DOST office and the DCWD.

“It’s a public comfort room with five toilets, designed for a capacity of 200 users a day,” Ligtvoet explained. “The wastewater goes to a septic tank below the facility. After staying there for four to five days, the wastewater is pumped up and discharged on a 12-square-meter helophyte-filter system.”

The effluent—liquid waste or sewage—from the filter system is discharged to the nearest surface body of water, since the parameters conform with B-class effluent standards stated in the Administrative Order issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources on water-quality guidelines and general effluents. The water for flushing and cleaning comes from the DCWD.

The method the PSF uses is called vertical helophyte-filter system (VHFS), which is derived from the vertical flow-constructed wetlands. “This is well known in the Netherlands, where the government endorses the technology to any establishment [unattached] to the communal sewerage system,” Ligtvoet said.

“The VHFS is a low-cost and nature-based wastewater-treatment system, which uses a sand filter [with multiple layers of filter substrate] and reed plants [called helophytes] to treat grey and black wastewater,” the



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Dutch national further explained. "The system is very low-priced to install, needs relatively less maintenance, has no consumables and is easy to understand. In fact, all of the needed components are available in the Philippines."

The VHFS reportedly passes the standards set by the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) of the environmental department. "It lasts for at least 20 to 25 years," he said.

Community involvement

THE first project started in October 2017. "As of now we have implemented three units, and the fourth one will be constructed in March for a Badjao village in barangay 76-A," he explained.

Through a memorandum of agreement or memorandum of understanding, the barangay is responsible for maintenance and operation of the facility. To use such, the users pay a small fee.

From the income, the barangay pays for the utilities, while a small salary is designated for the person maintaining and cleaning the facility. "It's the barangay itself which decides what time it opens, but [ideally], from 5 a.m. until 11 p.m.," Ligtvoet elaborated.

The Dutch environmentalist said that PSFs are constructed in barangays that have problems with proper sanitation. "But the DCWD targets those areas where they receive complaints from barangays or other government agencies," he informed.

In doing those projects, Ligtvoet had learned some lessons. "Sometimes, it's easy to involve the community and, in some cases, it's not,"

he shared. "The first project in 76-A was a great success as the comfort room is still super clean a year after, and the barangay is actually making a profit out of it to financially support other projects. There is even a television now in the waiting area."

It's a different case in other barangays. "The people there are much poorer, and the water supply has many and long interruptions," according to him. "As a result, the project is a bit of a headache and needs more attention."

Ligtvoet is very much worried with other barangays, which have no PSF. "The primary tool to preserve the public health," he reiterated, "is, and always will be, proper sanitation. Since proper sanitation was established in Europe, less and less children died every year. At that time, *Escherichia coli*-related diseases were most common."

With the situation today, he urged, "Take a closer look at the informal settlements [or squatter areas] in Davao City. You don't need to be an expert to understand that this situation is just waiting for a huge epidemic to break out."

But the situation changed a bit since he came to the Philippines in September 2012. "I've done case studies about flood-risk reduction in Manila, but knew nothing about Davao or the Filipino culture," he admits. "However, I fell in love with the Philippines a few months after my arrival and, since last year, I've been a permanent resident [of this country]."

Better alternatives

LIGTVOET is an engineer and stud-

ied water management at the Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences. "My initial approach was to do something about the flooding," he said. "But after a week, I was sure that the issues regarding improper wastewater management was way more severe."

When he started working in the country in 2012, most Filipinos didn't understand him, and there was less attention for proper wastewater management. "However, after [then-Environment Secretary] Gina Lopez and now, the President himself, it became a hot item, and you see lots of things happening."

"I feel blessed to be part of this greener movement, and I'm proud of the Philippine government [now] that [it finally sees and admits] the growing issues regarding improper wastewater management," he added.

However, Ligtvoet also believes that it's not easy for private entities to comply with the high standards set by EMB. "The private wastewater-treatment consultants and companies are asking way too much money for their systems, which should be way less expensive," he told this author. "The VHFS is a good alternative, because it's very affordable to construct and needs very little maintenance."

He now lives in Davao City with his Filipina wife. "I come from Rotterdam, which is in many ways the exact opposite of Davao City," he expounded. "I like the spatial planning in Rotterdam more, but I'm always inspired by the kindness and hospitality of the Filipinos."

CONTINUED ON E2



CONTINUED FROM E1

On Manila, Ligtvoret intimidated: "I'm actually not such a big fan of Manila, because I get quite intimidated by the amount of people and the traffic. I strongly believe that they should stop investing so much [there] and start decentralizing as soon as possible."

He offered some unsolicited, yet sensible pieces of advice: "Start building an airport somewhere else and move the major port to Batangas. Also, all government agencies should have their national offices outside of this highly urbanized area. Only then can the proper measures be taken to rehabilitate the area."

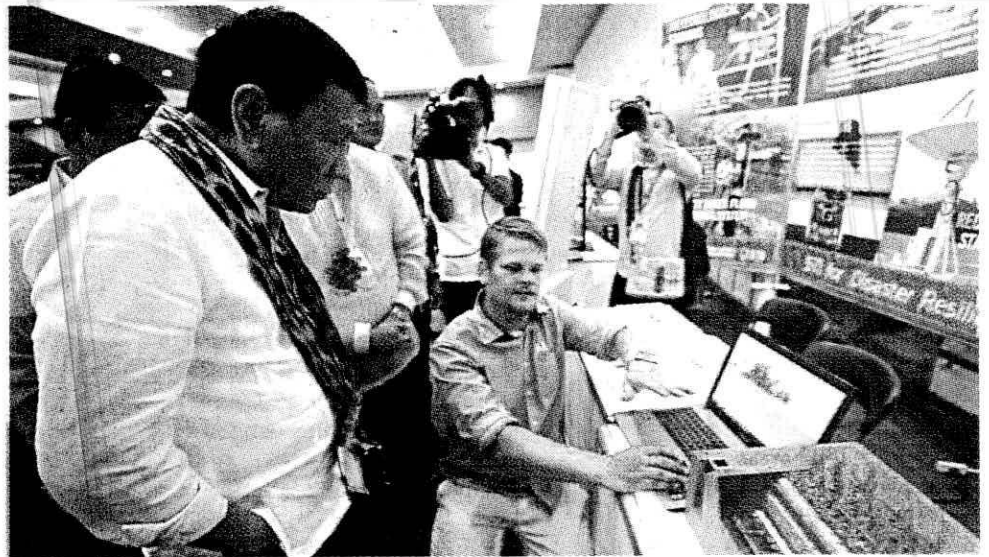
He also said that he'd rather work for P40,000 a month in Davao than be salaried for P400,000 a month in Metro Manila. "In Davao, there is still space and possibilities for a small player to become big, but in Manila, it's already a rat race. I really want things to be done as quickly as possible, and in Davao, it's still quite easy to move around."

Blessed to be in PHL

WHEN asked about food, he replied: "I used to be a cook in an Italian restaurant to finance my studies in the Netherlands. As such, I know more than average about different food and flavors. I'm really fascinated by Filipino cuisine, and when I cooked adobo in the Netherlands, many of my friends kept on insisting that I cook that meal."

"However, my favorite [viands] are Bicol Express and *kinilaw*. No other country makes better barbecue than the Philippines. The right amount of sweet and saltiness really compliments the fine taste of the meat," he related.

Ligtvoet met his beautiful wife Tedz in 2012, when he was in discussion with some findings with another Dutch intern. "Since that time, we have always been together, but had to deal with a long-distance relationship for quite



THE Dutch environmentalist shows President Duterte the scale model of the Profitable Sanitation Facility.

some time. In the end, it all worked out fine."

They were married in February last year. "She works home-based for an American company, where she hires virtual assistants and does very well doing that," the proud husband said.

The Dutch describes his wife as "very sweet and highly intelligent." He added, "She helps me with many cultural misunderstandings, which I encounter during my work in the communities. She has a very Western way of thinking, and that creates a good bridge to understand the differences in mindsets between the Dutch and the Filipinos."

He admitted that he actually never planned to stay long in the Philippines. "But everytime I plan to leave, more great opportunities came my way," he explained.

Ligtvoet considers his boss, DOST Regional Director

Dr. Anthony C. Sales, as "a great leader." According to the expat-environmentalist: "I feel very blessed working for him. He is by far the most intelligent person I know, and gives me lots of space and guidance to improve the technology. I've never felt the urge to leave, and will be happy to work with him for many more years."

Although Dutch by birth, he already considers himself part-Filipino.

"I live more by the day," he shared. "I don't really make future plans, but try to go with the flow as much as possible. This has given me lots of happiness so far, and I did things that I [never thought] was possible a few years ago. Life is one huge learning process, and you should embrace it as it is. Try not to lead it so much, because you never know what tomorrow brings."



TITLE:

KUNG may krisis sa tubig at kuryente, hindi dapat na magpabaya ang pamahalaan.

Katulad ng problema sa suplay at presyo ng bigas na nilalaro ng mga negosyante na pinakialaman na ng pamahalaang Duterte, dapat gano rin ang mangyari sa krisis sa tubig at kuryente.

Sa krisis sa bigas, pinairal na ang Rice Tariffication Law para mabigyan ng luwag ang higit na nakararami na nabibigatan na sa mahal na bigas.

Sa kalaunan, inaasahan na gagaan din ang kalagayan ng mga mag-sasaka dahil magmula sa buwis ng mga inangkat na bigas ang malaking pondo para sa mga programang kanilang ikauunlad.

KRISIS SA TUBIG

Wala pang sinasabi ang mga may hawak sa mga dam na may krisis sa tubig.

Ang Metro Manila ang pinag-uusapan natin.

Sinasabi lang na medyo na nasa kritikal level lamang ang mga depositong tubig sa mga dam ng Angat, La Mesa at Ipo dam.

At dahil sa medyo mababa na ang lebel ng tubig, lalo na sa La Mesa dam na pinagdadanan ng tubig mula sa Angat Dam at Ipo Dam, hindi na masusuplayan ang mga mas matataas na lugar.

At tanging ang mga mas mababa lang sa lebel ng tubig ang madadaluyan ng tubig.

Meron ding ibang pinagkukunan ng tubig gaya ng mga deep well at Laguna de Bay pero hindi pa rin sapat para matugunan ang mga pangangailangan ng milyon-milyong mamamayan sa Metro Manila.

MANDALUYONG

Kabilang sa matinding tinatamaan ng krisis sa suplay ng tubig ang lungsod ng Mandaluyong.

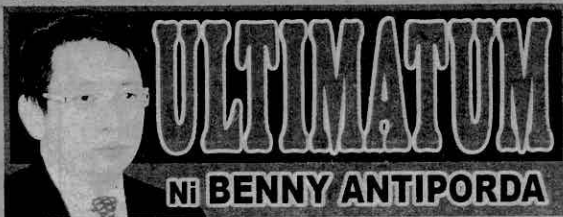
Ilang araw nang walang tubig sa lungsod.

Kaya naman karambola ang mga mamamayan kung saan sila kukuha ng tubig.

Ang masama pa, anak ng tokwa, ang mga nagtitinda ng tubig, doble at triple na ang halaga ng mga nabibiling tubig.

Ang mga bottled water ang nagmahal.

Siyempre pa, nagmahal din ang mga balde at drum at iba pang im-



TUBIG AT KURYENTE DAPAT PAKIALAMAN NG GOBYERNO

bakan ng tubig na pinapakyaw ngayon ng mga may pera.

PAGKILOS NG PAMAHALAAN

May mga pagkilos na ang pamahalaang Mandaluyong upang makontrol ang hindi magandang kalagayan sa tubig.

Una, pinakakalat na ang mga pulis upang tumulong sa mga barangay tanod na kumontrol sa mga taong nag-aagawan ng tubig.

Ikalawa, may kautusan na rin na isara ang lahat ng mga car wash at gamitin ang tubig sa mga mahalagang gamit gaya ng pang-inom, panluto, panligo at paglinis sa sa mga palikuran.

Ang isang mahalagang usapin ay ang overpricing ng mga tubig inumin, panluto at pampaligo.

Dapat na makialam ang pamahalaan at arestuhin ang mga nagsasamantala.

Siyempre pa, mga Bro, dapat tumulong ang pamahalaan sa pagtiyak ng suplay ng tubig sa anomang paraan.

Marami ang pagkukunan ng tubig na pupwedeng pakialaman sa utos ng pamahalaan para matugunan ang suplay.

At may mga paraan na malilinis ang tubig kahit marumi pa, kahit tubig baha pa ang mga ito.

Ang dagat mismo ay pupwedeng tanggalan ng asin pero hindi dapat na kukunin ang tubig sa Manila Bay na sobra ang dumi o polusyon na laman nito.

BROWNOUT, BLACKOUT

Unang nagparamdam ang mga planta ng kuryente ng kakulangan ng suplay ng kuryente sa mga susunod na araw.

Inimbestigahan na ang nakadududa umanong sabay-sabay o sunod-sunod na pagkasira umano ng mga malalaking planta.

Pero may malinaw na posibleng panggagalingan ng kakulangan ng kuryente.

Ang mga dam na nagsisilbing hydro plant o lumilikha ng kuryente mula sa tubig.

Kung kulang nga na-

man ang tubig sa mga ito, tiyak na kukulangin ang kuryente.

Pero iba ang usapan sa mga sadyang slowdown ng mga planta upang magmahal ang kuryente sa mga susunod na araw.

Napatunayan nang walang kaibhan ang mga planta at distributor ng kuryente sa mga switik na negosyante sa tubig at bigas na habang may krisis, imbento o hindi, kikita sila.

Kapag nagkaroon ng sunod-sunod o sabay-sabay na brownout o blackout, nariryan na ang palatandaan na gustong kumita ang mga may negosyo sa kuryente.

AKSYON DIN NG PAMAHALAAN

Dapat na umaktyon din ang pamahalaan kung magaganap ito.

Hindi pupwedeng ang mga mapagsamantalang negosyante ang mamayani kung maisasakripisyo ang kapakanan ng taumbayan.

At tanging ang pamahalaan ang kanilang sandalan kung magaganap ito.

Sa krisis sa dalawang bagay na ito, nakataya ang buhay at maging ang kalagayan ng buong bansa.

Kapag wala o kulang ang tubig, delikado ang kalusugan ng tao kahit saan mula sa tahanan hanggang sa mga ospital at laban sa sunog.

Sa kawalan ng kuryente, delikado ang buhay ng tao sa loob at labas ng mga ospital, ang andar ng ekonomiya sa paghinto ng mga pagawaan at maging ang edukasyon.

Dapat na ngayon pa lang, eh, mahigpit nang magtulongan ang gobyerno at mamamayan laban sa aktuwal na nasabing mga krisis at laban sa mga mapagsamantala.

oOo

Anomang reaksyon o reklamo ay maaaring iparating sa 0922840-3333 o i-email sa banti-porda@yahoo.com.



Water crisis iimbestigahan

PINAIIMBESTIGAHAN ng isang solon sa House committee on good government ang biglang pagkawala ng suplay ng tubig sa maraming lugar sa National Capital Region, Rizal at Cavite.

Inihain ni Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Zarate ang House Resolution 2518 upang matukoy umano kung nagkaroon ng kapabayaan kaya nagkaroon ng kakulangan sa suplay ng tubig.

"Thousands of people were deprived of water service since March 8 and were reduced to waiting for water tankers or opening fire hydrants just to have water," aniya.

Sinabi ni Zarate na ang epekto ng El Nino ay maaaring mabawasan at matagal na umano itong ibinabala ng Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration.

"El Nino phenomenon is predictable and measures can be done to prepare for it, but it seems that the water concessionaires did not do so," aniya.

Sinabi rin umano ng National Water Resources Board at Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System na walang problema sa suplay ng tubig pero ang katotohanan ay walang tumutulong tubig sa maraming bahay.

Sinabi naman ni PBA Rep. Koko Nograles na maaaring nagkaroon ng "mismanagement" na nagesulta sa kakapusan ng suplay.

"The water interruptions are localized within the concession areas of Manila Water. This is simply mismanagement. Manila Water should be truthful to the public instead of blaming Mother Nature for their negli-

gence," ani Nograles.

Sinabi niya na kung nakagawa ng paraan ang Maynilad para maiwasan ang kakulangan ng suplay ay bakit hindi ito nagawa ng Manila Water.

"Maynilad has been

very busy upgrading its system and its network even until now. "If Manila Water cannot serve their concession, perhaps Maynilad should take over," ani Nograles.—*Leifbilly Begas*



PAGASA: 41 provinces likely to have dry spell, 9 to experience drought

By **ELLALYN DE VERA-RUIZ**

Several provinces may experience drought in the next three months as rainfall in the country continues to significantly drop due to the weak El Niño.

El Niño is characterized by unusually warm ocean waters in the tropical Pacific, causing drought in most parts of the Philippines.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said nine provinces may experience drought and 41 provinces may experience dry spell by the ►11

PAGASA: 41 provinces... ◀1

end of March.

Dry spell is described by PAGASA as three consecutive months of below normal (21 to 60 percent reduction from average) rainfall conditions or two consecutive months of way below normal (more than 60 percent reduction from average) rainfall conditions.

The 41 provinces (26 in Luzon, 10 in Visayas and five in Mindanao) that will likely be affected by dry spell are Abra, Benguet, Kalinga, Apayao, Mountain Province, Pangasinan, Cagayan, Bataan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac, Zambales, Metro Manila, Batangas, Cavite, Laguna, Quezon, Marinduque, Oriental Mindoro, Romblon, Albay, Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur, Catanduanes, Masbate, and Sorsogon.

Meanwhile, drought, which is a more severe dry condition, is defined as three consecutive months of way below normal (60 percent reduction from average) or five consecutive months of below normal (21 to 60 percent reduction from average) rainfall condition.

Areas (five in Luzon and four in Mindanao) that may be affected by drought by the end of March are Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Occidental Mindoro, Palawan, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga Sibugay, Maguindanao, and Sulu.

Likewise, 22 areas (seven in Luzon, six in Visayas, and nine in Mindanao) may observe dry condition or two consecutive months of below normal (21 percent to 60 percent reduction from average) rainfall conditions. These are Ifugao, Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino, Bulacan, Aurora, Rizal, Guimaras, Negros Oriental, Bohol, Cebu, Siquijor, Southern Leyte, Bukidnon, Camiguin, Lanao del Norte, Misamis Oriental, Compostela Valley, Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur, Basilan, and Lanao del Sur.

April scenario

By end of April, more provinces are expected to experience dry spell and drought conditions.

PAGASA said 42 provinces (21 in Luzon, 14 in Visayas, and seven in Mindanao) may experience dry spell.

These include Ifugao, Cagayan, Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac, Aurora, Batangas, Laguna, Rizal, Quezon, Marinduque, Albay, Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur, Masbate, Sorsogon, Antique, Capiz, Guimaras, Iloilo, Negros Occidental, Negros Oriental, Cebu, Siquijor, Biliran, Eastern Samar, Leyte, Northern Samar, Samar, Southern Leyte, Bukidnon, Camiguin, Lanao del Norte, Misamis Occidental, Misamis Oriental, Dinagat Islands, and Surigao del Norte.

Meanwhile, 17 provinces in Luzon, one in Visayas, and four in Mindanao may experience drought.

These are Abra, Benguet, Kalinga, Apayao, Mountain Province, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan, Zambales, Metro Manila, Cavite, Occidental Mindoro, Oriental Mindoro, Romblon, Palawan, Catanduanes, Aklan, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga Sibugay, Sulu, and Tawi-tawi.

By end of May, 33 areas may experience drought — 21 in Luzon, 10 in Visayas, and 2 in Mindanao.

These are Pangasinan, Bataan, Pampanga, Tarlac, Zambales, Metro Manila, Batangas, Cavite, Laguna, Occidental Mindoro, Oriental Mindoro, Romblon, Palawan, Albay, Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur, Catanduanes, Masbate, Sorsogon, Aklan, Antique, Capiz, Iloilo, Negros Occidental, Biliran, Eastern Samar, Leyte, Northern Samar, Misamis Occidental, and Dinagat Islands.

Water conservation tips

The previous El Niño occurrence in 2015-2016 was among the strongest events alongside the big El Niño episodes in 1972-1973, 1982-1983, and 1997-1998.

The National Water Resources Board (NWRB) gave tips on how to preserve water.

- Turn the faucet off firmly to prevent leakage and install low volume/high pressure nozzles or flow restrictors that help reduce water usage by up to 50 percent.
 - Use water dipper (tabo) and pail instead of the shower, while taking a bath
 - Use a glass of water in brushing your teeth instead of letting the water flow
 - Buy new, water-efficient toilet bowls that consume only 2.6 to 4 liters of water for every flush. Old models use up to 14 liters of water per flush
 - Discard leftover food before washing dishes and use a basin to save water and dishwashing soap
 - Wash all clothes at once and do not allow water in the wash basin to overflow
 - Re-use water from laundry to flush the toilet, clean a car, or water garden plants
 - Use a pail and towel in washing your car instead of a water hose
 - Water plants before sunrise or after sunset to prevent water loss due to vaporization, and collect rainwater with pails and basins, and store it for future use
 - In restaurants and hotels, serve water to guests upon request
 - Eatery owners can use leftover drinking water to water the plants
 - Switch off water valve in buildings that do not operate at night. Turn off the gate valve in the evening, and turn it on again the next day
- Report broken pipelines and illegal water connections



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Closure of trail to Mt. Apo eyed due to El Niño

KIDAPAWAN CITY – The city government here is considering the temporary closure of its trail to Mt. Apo this summer due to the prevailing El Niño phenomenon.

Mayor Joseph Evangelista has tasked the City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council to study possible shut-off of the city's trail to the country's highest peak as the weather condition started to become unfavorable to the forest and its climbers.

The mayor, in a statement, said the

move is aimed at protecting the forest from careless climbers that may trigger grass fire and other destruction during the dry season.

In 2016, a fire hit the forest area around Mt. Apo that lasted for weeks and destroyed vast tracts of flora and fauna area.

The municipal government of Sta. Cruz ordered this week a closure of its trail to Mt. Apo starting April 1, citing also concerns for the safety of climbers. (Ali G. Macabalang)



DAVAO: MONKAYO, COMPOSTELA VALLEY
**DENR orders relocation
of gold ore mills in Compostela Valley**

BALL MILL facilities for gold ore extracted from Mt. Diwalwal in Compostela Valley have been given until this weekend to move out and transfer to a government-designated site as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is set to rehabilitate the Naboc River. Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Officer Chamberlain J. Babiera, in a statement on Monday, said the ball mill operators agreed last month to the issuance of a cease and desist order (CDO) effective March 15. "We will not be stopping their livelihood; we just want them to continue their operation at the Mabatás area," he said, where government agencies can more closely monitor their operations. The operators sought an extension of their stay in Mt. Diwalwal, but the Program Monitoring and Coordination Committee of the National Task Force Diwalwal declined the request, noting that they were already ordered to leave the area more than 15 years ago. — **Carmelito Q. Francisco**

>> See full story on <https://goo.gl/q32V2d>



'Adopt simple mining royalty fee'

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The Department of Finance (DoF) has made a last-minute appeal to the Senate to pass its original proposal for a uniform royalty rate of 5 percent for all mining operations, whether inside or outside mineral reservations, in line with the reform goal of making the tax system simple, more efficient and equitable for all taxpayers.

Finance Assistant Secretary Ma. Teresa Habitan told senators before Congress adjourned in February the DoF proposal would generate an estimated P7.2 billion in the initial year alone.

This was double the P3.7 billion the government will collect from the mining revenue reform bill approved by the House of Representatives in November last year.

"In the House, there was a considerable discussion about how the royalty was going to be calculated and with different methodologies on that. What

finally was approved by the House can be considered a compromise position. The DoF always wanted a simpler manner of computing the royalty," Habitan said at the public hearing conducted by the Senate ways and means committee.

Mining operations inside mineral reservations are located in areas where the government has already made some investments and where there is some certainty on the presence of minerals.

The House version lowers the current 5 percent royalty on large-scale mining inside mineral reservations to 3 percent and imposes a royalty equivalent to 1 to 5 percent of profit margins for large-scale mining outside mineral reservations, and 0.1 percent of gross output for small-scale mining outside or inside mineral

reservations.

Habitan said the DoF prefers a rationalized and single fiscal regime for the mining industry for a simpler, more equitable and more efficient tax collection.

Quoting 2017 data from the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) and the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), Habitan said the government collected P1.1 billion in royalties and 1.9 billion in excise taxes from mining operations.

The royalties were collected only from operations inside mineral reservations.

Most mines in the country operate outside mineral reservations and do not pay royalty,

she said.

The DoF reform proposal for the mining sector as outlined under Senate Bill 1979 filed by Senate President Vicente Sotto III calls for the retention of all existing taxes and fees on the mining industry, and a royalty of 5 percent on gross output paid to the government on all mining operations, regardless of the nature of the

agreement, whether large-scale or small; metallic or non-metallic minerals extraction; or located inside or outside of mineral reservations. According to Habitan, the tax paid by mining contractors at present include the corporate income tax, excise tax, indigenous people's royalty, local business tax and value-added tax.

The DoF wants all these retained under the proposed fiscal regime to level the playing field.

SB 1979 also provides for an additional government share when its basic share is less than 50 percent of the net mining revenue; thin capitalization to avoid mining contractors relying too much on debt for funding; and ring-fencing in which each mining project will be treated as a separate taxable entity.



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FINANCE officials would rather have a simple royalty fee collection system to avoid administrative complexities.



PH's mining industry faces fin'l crisis with tax proposal

By **MADELAINE B. MIRAFLORE**

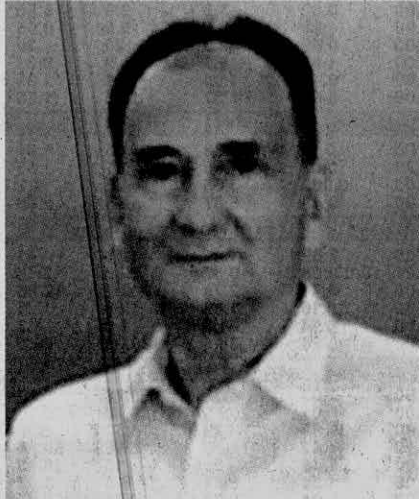
The country's mining sector will be in serious financial trouble once the government imposes a tax regime currently being pushed for by the Department of Finance (DOF), which could lead to the industry's eventual downturn.

Gerard Brimo, chairman of the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP), an organization of some of the country's largest mining operations, said in a roundtable discussion with Business Bulletin that the DOF is "misguided" as to what the reasonable tax regime is that should be applied to mining sector.

The discussion on new fiscal regime in the mining sector has been going on for years. It formally started in 2012 when former President Benigno Aquino 3rd issued Executive Order (EO) 79, wherein no new mineral agreements shall be approved until a legislation rationalizing existing revenue-sharing schemes and mechanisms shall have taken effect.

When the Duterte administration took over, the government wanted to make sure the country will benefit more from the mining sector, especially because the Philippines is one of the most mineralized countries in the world.

As a start, the Senate decided to include in the package one of Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN)



GERARD BRIMO

an increase in the excise tax rate for minerals from 2 percent to 4 percent.

And since this shouldn't be enough for the EO 79 to be lifted, there is now a move to pass an entirely new fiscal regime. Then in November last year, the House of Representatives passed on third and final reading House Bill (HB) 8400, which seeks to "rationalize and institute a single fiscal regime applicable to all mineral agreements."

From the original proposal of the DOF, which imposes a 5 percent royalty on all mining firms in and out of mineral reservations, HB 8400 now only mandate miners outside of mineral reservations to pay to the government

a margin-based royalty on income from mining operations.

But the DOF on Tuesday has made a last-minute appeal to the Senate to pass its original proposal of a uniform royalty rate of 5 percent for all mining operations, whether located inside or outside a mineral reservation.

DOF's proposal is adopted in the Senate Bill (SB) 1979, which is currently being deliberated in the Senate.

Brimo said if this is passed, the government's plan to gain more revenues from the mining sector will no longer become reality.

His statement contradicts what Finance Assistant Secretary Ma. Teresa Habitan told senators that the DOF proposal would haul in an estimated P7.2 billion in incremental revenues to the state coffers in the initial year of its implementation.

This, according to Habitan, is double the projected amount of P3.7 billion that the government will collect from an HB 8400 tax regime.

"If the 5 percent royalty is implemented plus the top-up tax of up to 50 percent for FTAA [Financial and Technical Assistance Agreement] gets retained, then forget about this industry," Brimo said.

"If the government is out to get more revenues, it can't get anything from this industry. We're very small. They need to increase the investments. Enlarge the pie," he added.



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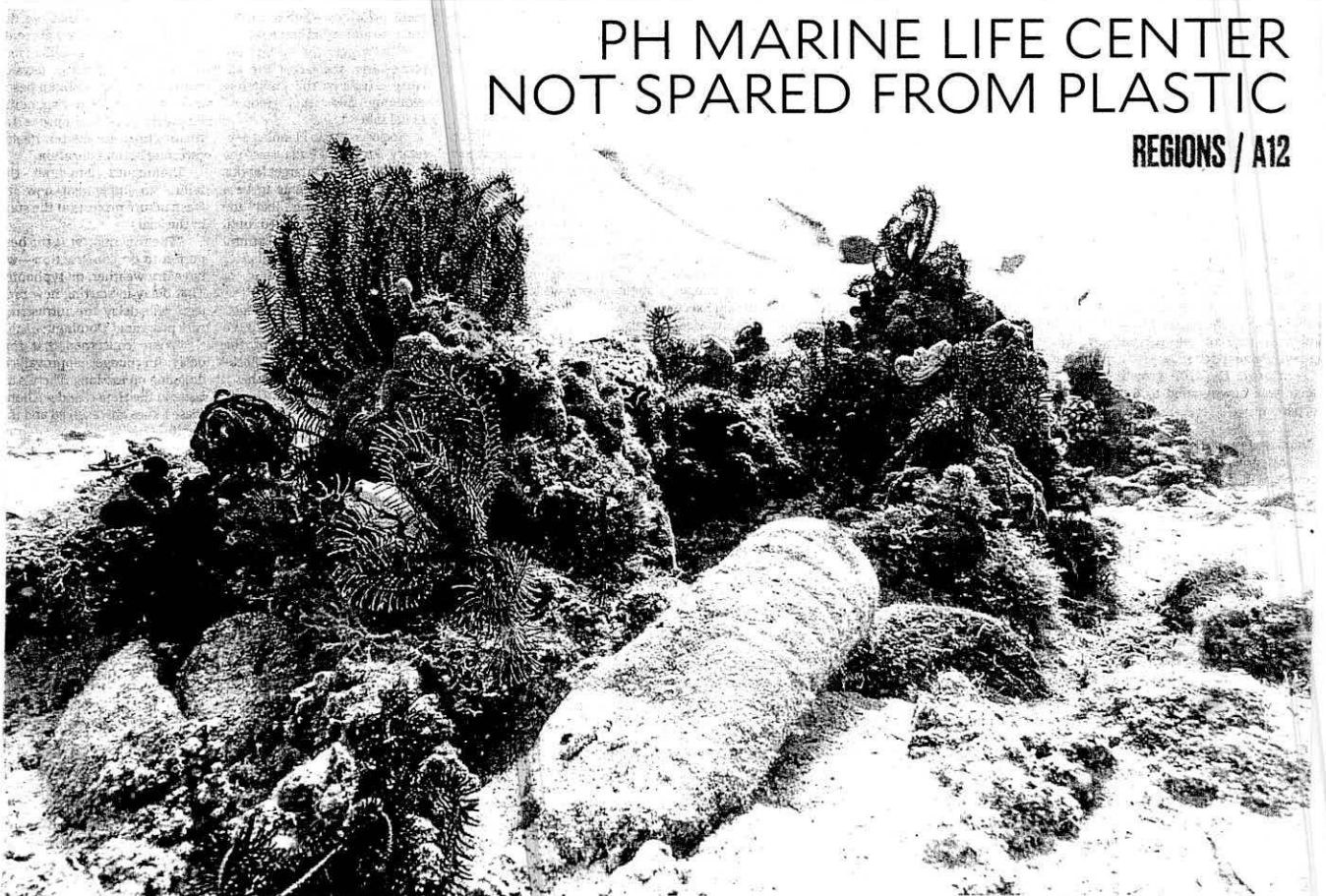
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PH MARINE LIFE CENTER NOT SPARED FROM PLASTIC

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SPOT THE SYNTHETIC A plastic bottle appears to have become part of a coral formation in the Verde Island Passage, considered by scientists the global "center of the center" of marine biodiversity. Filipinos have earned an unenviable reputation as one of the world's top generators of plastic waste. —PHOTO COURTESY OF GREENPEACE SOUTHEAST ASIA-PHILIPPINES



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TRASH AT VERDE ISLAND PASSAGE

PH MARINE LIFE CENTER NOT SPARED FROM PLASTIC

By Maricar Cinco
@maricarcincoINQ

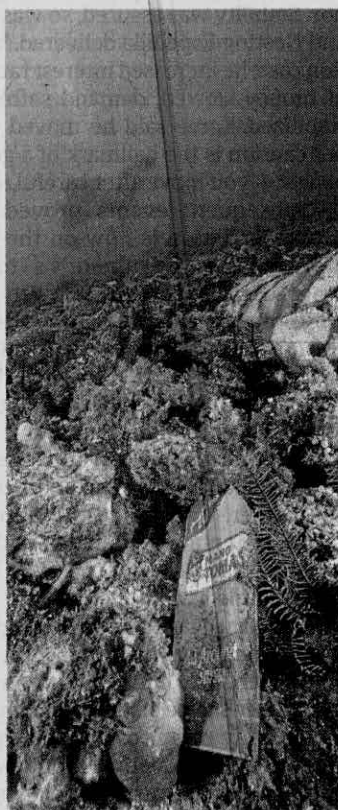
A tiny crab trapped in a discarded milk tea cup, along with a multitude of other food and shampoo packaging stuck in coral reefs, puts a new face to the global campaign against single-use plastics.

For three days, environmental group Greenpeace Southeast Asia-Philippines documented the marine ecosystem as it studied plastic pollution in the Philippines.

Footage compiled into a "heartbreaking" video showed that even the Verde Island Passage (VIP), which scientists have declared the world's "center of the center of marine shore fish biodiversity," was not spared.

Greenpeace's first underwater documentation happened on March 7 to 9, with its iconic campaign and research ship, Rainbow Warrior, anchored near Maricaban Island in the popular diving site of Anilao in Mabini, Batangas.

The VIP is a 1.14-million hectare strait within the Mindoro-Calavite-Tablas triangle and shared by the provinces of Batangas, Marinduque, Romblon, and Occidental and Oriental Mindoro.



STUCK Among the pieces of garbage found stuck in clumps of coral at Verde Island Passage are plastic sachets of seasoning and condiments. —PHOTO COURTESY OF GREENPEACE SOUTHEAST ASIA-PHILIPPINES

Discarded sachets

The Philippines is at the apex of the Coral Triangle, a marine area and global priority for conservation.

Greenpeace campaigner Abigail Aguilar said a diver and a photographer filmed the ocean at varying depths, the deepest point at 25 meters. They took shots of a wrasse swimming by an empty toothpaste sachet and coffee, food seasoning and other branded food packaging trapped inside corals.

"While it's really beautiful [down there], the state of the [plastic debris] shows they've been there for a long time," Aguilar said in a telephone interview on Wednesday.

Greenpeace took note of the brand packaging, which Aguilar said ran "consistently" with those found during a 2017 "brand audit" of 55,000 pieces of plastic waste collected near Freedom Island in Metro Manila and the 1,500 pieces collected from Lahug River in Cebu province early this month.

A 2015 study by the Uni-

versity of Georgia said the Philippines ranked third, after China and Indonesia, with the highest amount of plastic waste produced, although Aguilar said the Philippines was a mere a recipient of plastic products from multinational companies.

Batangas Gov. Hermilando Mandanas on Wednesday said the local government appreciated Greenpeace's efforts, as it vowed to join calls to preserve the VIP.

Pressure

"The documentation shows that even the pristine VIP [is not spared] from plastic pollution. All the more we need to call out these companies to change their business models," Aguilar said.

She reiterated the group's call on corporations to reduce and eventually phase out plastic packaging and explore alternatives to their consumer products.

"We believe [these companies] have the resources and capacity to make their products sustainable. Pressure is the keyword," she said. INQ



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CRAB IN A CUP The impact of plastic pollution on marine life is evident in the waters of Verde Island Passage, as shown by a crab struggling to get out of a plastic cup carried by the current to this strait separating Batangas and Mindoro provinces. —PHOTO COURTESY OF GREENPEACE SOUTHEAST ASIA-PHILIPPINES



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



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SCURRYING FOR SURVIVAL—
Olive Ridley sea turtles scurry toward shoreline moments after they were released at the Subic Bay Freeport Zone by ecology officials. Eleven of the turtles had died after they were hatched but 38 others reached the sea. (Jonas Reyes)



'CLEAR VIOLATION'

GROUP BUCKS WASTE-TO-ENERGY PROJECT IN QC

By **Daxim L. Lucas**
@daxINQ

An environmental group opposed to garbage incineration is urging the Quezon City government to cancel a planned waste-to-energy facility that will be set up with a consortium of local and foreign firms, calling the project "a clear violation" of existing environmental laws.

In a statement, No Burn Pilipinas (NBP) denounced the Quezon City local government, outgoing Mayor Herbert Bautista and a group composed of Metro Pacific Investments Corp. (MPIC), Covanta Energy and the Macquarie Group for pushing the project despite opposition from residents and civil society organizations.

"We ask the office of Mayor Bautista to respond to NBP's position paper submitted in January 2019 before including the proposal in their council agenda," the group said, adding that the city council has been meaning to pass an ordinance since last month allowing the Office of the Mayor to proceed with the public-private deal and declaring MPIC the sole and original proponent.

Sponsored by Councilors Franz Pumaren, Donato Matias, Elizabeth Delarmente and Godofredo Liban, the project will process and convert up to 3,000 metric tons of municipal solid waste a day into 42 megawatts of renewable energy over a concession period of 35 years.

NBP said the Quezon City government was pursuing the project over the objections of local residents, waste-pickers and environmental groups concerned about potential health and environmental hazards.

"The proposed incinerator will use fire grates to ensure waste combustion, which will cause emissions of toxic and hazardous cancer-causing pollutants like dioxins and furans—a clear violation of the Clean Air Act and Ecological Solid Waste Management Act," the group said.

The group added that construction of waste incinerators would also require 3,000 metric tons of waste a day, which means collecting, hauling and supplying the incinerator more than the amount of waste Quezon City produces daily.

"This creates an endless demand for waste, therefore leaving us in gridlock in addressing the problems of solid waste management," NBP said.

In seeking the scrapping of the project, NBP said Mayor Bautista should carefully study the cost-benefit analysis of the waste-to-energy facility and to go beyond "surface-level convenience" in planning for better solid waste management approaches. INQ



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Govt eases restrictions on agri free patents

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BY BERNADETTE D. NICOLAS

🐦 @BNicolasBM

FARMERS holding agricultural free patents may now sell their land or use it as collateral after President Duterte signed a measure that removed Commonwealth-era restrictions on lands covered by the Public Land Act.

The President signed the Agricultural Free Patent Reform Act, or Republic Act 11231, on February 22. Under RA 11231, agricultural public lands alienated or disposed in favor of qualified public land applicants shall not be subject to restrictions imposed on the registration, acquisition, encumbrance, transfer and conveyance of land covered by free patents under the Public Land Act.

"Agricultural free patent shall... not be subject to any restriction on

encumbrance or alienation," read a portion of the newly signed law, a copy of which was obtained by the BUSINESSMIRROR.

The law shall also have a retroactive effect. Any restriction regarding acquisitions, encumbrances, conveyances, transfers or dispositions imposed on agricultural free patents issued under Section 44 of Commonwealth Act 141, as amended, before the effectivity of RA 11231 are lifted.

The Foundation for Economic Freedom (FEF) welcomed the pas-

sage of the law, saying this will benefit more than 2.5 million agricultural patent landowners and spur agricultural lending.

"It will facilitate transactions in the rural land market that will lead to the highest and best use of agricultural land," FEF said in a post on its official Facebook page.

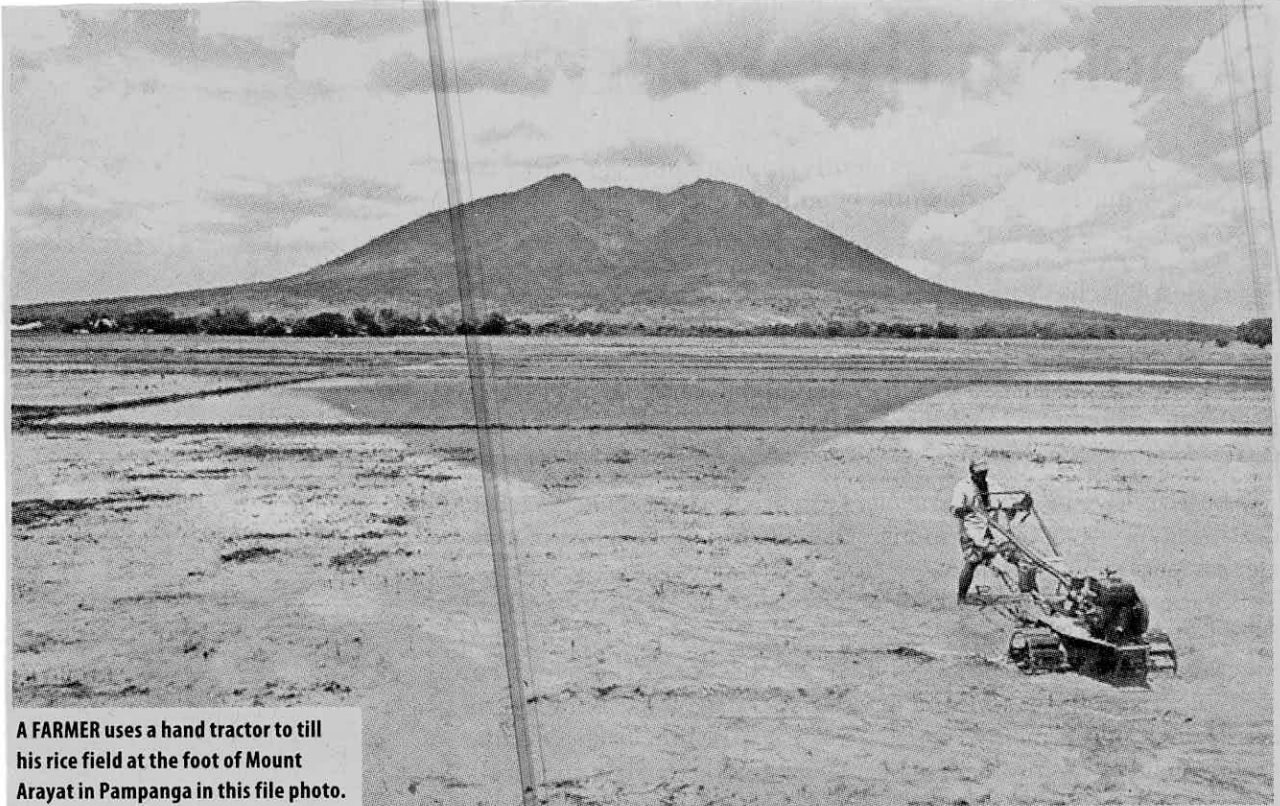
FEF said the restrictions prohibit land owners from selling and mortgaging their land within the first five years of the patent grants and gives original landowners the option to buy back the property within five years from the date of sale.

"The latter restriction has made agricultural patents unbankable inasmuch as banks do not want to hold a property for five years before its disposition," read the statement FEF issued after the ratification of the bicameral report on the measure.

Johnson Melo, director of Rural Bankers Associations of the Philippines, also said in the same statement that lifting the restrictions on agricultural free patents will also improve access to credit



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A FARMER uses a hand tractor to till his rice field at the foot of Mount Arayat in Pampanga in this file photo.

of farmers, as well as micro, small and medium enterprises.

“It will empower millions of free patent holders who, prior to this, could not freely use their land as

capital asset due to the restrictions,” the statement read.

A study by FEF published in 2016 estimated that agricultural land/asset covered by the five-year

restriction amounts to at least P387 billion. This amount may even reach trillions of pesos if patents prior to 1980 are included, according to the study.



PHL engages in intl efforts to strengthen environmental protection

NAIROBI—The Philippines underlined its commitment to protect the environment at the first substantive session of the Ad-Hoc Open-Ended Working Group with the theme: “Toward the Global Pact for Environment [GPE]” at the United Nations office in Nairobi.

Head of the Philippine Delegation and Ambassador to Kenya Uriel Norman R. Garibay reiterated the country’s position that there already exists an integrative framework for bringing the global

community’s work on the environment. He was referring to the 2030 Agenda on the Sustainable Development Goals, which bring together the social, economic and environmental spheres to support human development in a sustainable manner.

The ambassador underlined that the main concern is the delivery of commitments, anchored on the principle of “Common, but Differentiated Responsibilities.”

He also thanked UN Secretary-General António Guterres for his

report on the “Gaps in International Environmental Law and Environment-Related Instruments.”

Garibay nevertheless assured that the Philippines would meet the constructive engagement in the GPE process as he stated that the process cannot be rushed, and that the same should be transparent and consultative.

He also emphasized that the engagement of the Philippines in the process is with the understanding that there will be no renegotiations of already agreed principles

and commitments, no disruption or distraction from the continuing implementation of existing international environment agreements, and no dilution or backtracking of existing internationally commitments on the protection of environment.

The other members of the Philippine delegation to the session included Minister Leila C. Lora-Santos of the Philippine Mission to the UN in New York and May Ofrasio of the Philippine Embassy in Nairobi.



AMBASSADOR to Kenya Uriel Norman R. Garibay underscored the Philippines’s commitment to the environment. ENB.IISD.ORG



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Boracay: 'The best beach in the world'

CALM, warm waters, gently sloping sand. Very relaxing. Possibly the most beautiful beach in Asia." That's how Boracay was described in the TripAdvisor's 2019 Travelers' Choice Awards, which cited 24 others in its Asia's Best Beaches category. Surprisingly, Boracay only bagged the ninth spot among the region's top 25 beaches. The Radhanagar Beach of Havelock Island in India topped the list, while Yapak Beach, the second-largest beach in Boracay and named after the prevalent white puka seashells, was listed last at 25th.

The TripAdvisor's 2019 Travelers' Choice Awards ranks beaches, destinations, attractions, among others, based on millions of traveler reviews and opinions.

Boracay received over 6,000 reviews with 62 percent excellent rave reviews and 24 percent very good rating, with most of the comments acknowledging the successful rehabilitation of the island. For example, TripAdvisor reviewer mariasusnaf2018 said: "Boracay still has it! After the six months rehab the Boracay White Beach is cleaner and clear. It has maintained its popularity among tourists and locals. It's really lovely during sunsets. The burst of colors is awesome. I saw garbage bins, which were absent before."

"The best beach in the world. Experience the new, renovated and clean White Beach of Boracay. It is excellent for watersports and I can swim here the whole day. Be careful with the sun and always use your sunblock with high factor. Food are excellent everywhere you go," said jguzon from Oslo, Norway.

President Duterte ordered the six-month closure of the 10-square-kilometer island paradise starting April last year because it was turning into a "cesspool." Boracay's intensive rehabilitation managed to rid the beach of pollution and fix its unregulated sewage system. It reopened its beaches to tourists on October 26, 2018. Since then, sustainable tourism has been the battle cry of the Department of Tourism in promoting the country's destination and in rallying tourism stakeholders to do their part in balancing development and conservation.

Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo Puyat earlier described Boracay's closure as a "blessing in disguise." She said: "The challenging act of closing down Boracay, a flagship destination and the country's top sun-and-beach destination, has evidently become a blessing in disguise for secondary tourism spots to have a share of the limelight and attention they truly deserve." She added that Palawan's Nacpan Beach and Las Cabanas Beach were voted as the 13th and 22nd best beaches in the TripAdvisor's 2019 Travelers' Choice Awards.

The tourism chief said: "We take it that this TripAdvisor citation of Boracay and El Nido is indicative of the positive reactions to the reforms and new policies being implemented in an effort to inculcate a culture of sustainable tourism. This bodes well with our campaign of highlighting the people's genuine testaments and reactions to our destinations."

The recent naming of Boracay and Palawan beaches among Asia's best in the TripAdvisor 2019 Travelers' Choice Award gives us reason to rejoice. However, it pays to remember that we are just talking about a small segment of a global travel and tourism industry that's estimated at about \$8 trillion in 2016. The big challenge for us is to work for the inclusion of our attractions, destinations, hotels, airlines and restaurants in the top 25 of their respective categories.