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DENR

IN THE NEWS
Strategic Communication and Initiative Service
DENR chief to Manila Bay biz owners: Install sewer treatment plants

ENVIRONMENT Secretary Roy A. Cimatu said business establishments along Manila Bay are still required to put their own sewerage treatment plants (STPs) to prevent the discharge of untreated wastewater that contributes to water pollution.

Meeting with several guests, that include Sen. Cynthia Villar, chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources; Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) Chairman Danilo S. Lim; and Engr. Lito Abuyan, the New Zealand-based chemical engineer who designed the STP, before the ceremonial "Turn-On" event along Roxas Boulevard on Sunday, Cimatu reiterated the need for business establishments to comply with the order, or face the consequence.

One of the highlights of the first anniversary celebration of the Battle for Manila Bay, the Duterte administration's ambitious P4.7-billion, seven-year Manila Bay rehabilitation program, the commissioning of the STP expects to treat an average of 500,000 liters of water from three major esteros along Roxas Boulevard that drain to Manila Bay.

He said the DENR has already issued cease-and-desist orders to many business establishments during the past year for failing effluent standards for "Class SB" (Coastal and Marine Waters).

Class SB is the designated water quality for recreational Water Class 1, or areas regularly used by the public for bathing, swimming, skin diving and fishery, while Water Class 3, or spawning areas for bangus and similar species.

Cimatu said while Metro Manila households are already covered by the private water concessionaires of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS), business establishments need to invest in such facility in compliance with existing policies, particularly Republic Act 9275, or the Philippine Clean Water Act.

He said even the Philippine Navy will soon construct its own STP.

"Households, they are not required to put up STP. But business establishments along Manila Bay are required to put up their water treatment facilities."—Cimatu

soon construct its own STP.

"The Philippine Navy will have its own STP. I've already asked them to put up an STP," Cimatu told a group of fellow government officials during the STP Turn-On ceremony near the Manila Yacht Club on Sunday.

"Households, they are not required to put up STP. But business establishments along Manila Bay are required to put up their water treatment facilities," he insisted.

The DENR chief reported that coliform level in Manila Bay has greatly improved, but added that much needs to be done to achieve the desired water quality to make the waters of the historic bay "swimmable" as mandated by a decade-old Supreme Court continuing mandamus.

Citing data from the Environment Management Bureau, Cimatu earlier said the fecal coliform count at the Padre Faura outfall is now down to 920,000 most probable number per 100 milliliter (mpn/100ml) from its pre-rehab record of 7.21 million mpn/100ml.

Meanwhile, from 35 million mpn/100ml recorded before the rehabilitation began, Cimatu said the coliform level at the Raja Soliman/Remedios drainage outfall across Aristocrat Restaurant went down to 11 million mpn/100ml.

On the other hand, the coliform level at the Manila Yacht Club outfall is now 54 million mpn/100ml, from a high of 110 million mpn/100ml.

The desired standard fecal coliform level in Manila Bay is 100 mpn/100ml based on its classification as Class SB coastal and marine water... —Jonathan L. Mayupa
As the Department of Environment and Natural Resources marks the first year of Manila Bay Rehabilitation Program with bragging about lower coliform levels in Manila city bayside, former Anakpawis Party-list Rep. Ariel Casilao urged Congress to pass House Bill 257 Declaring Manila Bay as “Reclamation-Free” Zone as serious measure for genuine rehabilitation.

“DENR’s claim is so narrow that it could only cite positive indicators on the bay within the city of Manila, when legally it involves a coastline of 190 kilometers and near 200,000 hectares, from Bataan province in the north to Cavite in the South and they did so cited (sic) on their very own Manila Bay Rehabilitation Program,” the former lawmaker said in a press statement.

Also, DENR Secretary Roy Cimatu cited that the fecal coliform at the Padre Faura outfall in Manila is down to 920,000 most probable number per 100 milliliters (MPN/100mL), which was the lowest among with at Rajah Sulayman/Rometados drainage and at the Manila Yacht Club outfall, but is far away from its supposed level at 100 MPN/100mL to fall under the Class SB for coastal and marine water, as set by the Environmental Management Bureau.

At the same time, the urban poor group Kalipunan ng Damayang Matatag (KADAMAY)-Metro Manila on Tuesday condemned Cimatu’s “anti-poor” remarks on massive evictions of urban poor near Manila Bay.

Maristel Garcia, KADAMAY Metro Manila spokesperson, questioned the degrading remarks of Cimatu against the poor and for blaming them as the core reason of the problem.
MANILA BAY REHAB STARTING TO BEAR FRUIT
As Taal simmers down, DENR steps in to manage trash from evacuees

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA
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Taking advantage of Taal's relative calmness over the past few days, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is stepping into the picture to help address the garbage problem in over 400 evacuation centers in Batangas, Laguna and Cavite.

Environment Undersecretary for Solid Waste Management and Local Government Units Concerns Benny D. Antiporda said members of Task Force Basura composed of field personnel from various DENR Regional Offices, together with the DENR Central Office, will conduct an information drive on proper solid-waste management.

"You can expect us from the DENR that we will act on it as early as now, rather than be taken aback by the mountains of garbage that will be produced because of this calamity in Taal Volcano," Antiporda said.

Antiporda has also appealed to the public to avoid donating single-use plastic cups, plates and utensils to evacuees, as these "environmentally unfriendly" items could create another problem.

"Plastic forks, spoons, cups, plates and coffee stirrers may be convenient, but they are wreaking havoc on the environment," Antiporda pointed out.

He lamented that "calamity and the displacement of individuals make proper waste management the last and least among the priorities of the people."

However, Antiporda assured that the DENR is willing to help affected local government units (LGUs) in dealing with garbage resulting from Taal Volcano's activity.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) said Taal Volcano remains under Alert Level 3, and reminded the public that sudden steam-driven, and even weak, phreatomagmatic explosions, volcanic earthquakes, ashfall and burial volcanic gas expulsions can still occur and threaten areas within Taal Volcano Island and nearby lakeshores.

Phivolcs has recommended to prohibit human activities on Taal Volcano Island, as well as areas near Taal Lake, and communities west of the island within a 7-kilometer radius from the main crater; must be strictly prohibited.

As such, Phivolcs advised LGUs to assess areas outside the 7-kilometer radius for damages and road accessibility, and to strengthen preparedness, contingency and communication measures in case of renewed unrest.

"People are also advised to observe precautions due to ground displacement across fissures, frequent ashfall and minor earthquakes. Communities beside active river channels, particularly where ash from the main eruption phase has been thickly deposited, should increase vigilance when there is heavy and prolonged rainfall since the ash can be washed away and form lahars along the channels," Phivolcs said in its latest Volcano Bulletin issued at 8 a.m. on January 28.

The air space above Taal remains dangerous, and Phivolcs advised civil aviation authorities to put in place necessary measures as explosions and wind-remobilized ash may pose hazards to aircrafts.
DENR to help LGUs clear Taal Volcano eruption garbage

By Joel dela Torre

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) vowed to help affected local government units (LGUs) in dealing with garbage problems resulting from the Taal Volcano eruption.

Undersecretary for Solid Waste Management and Local Government Units Concerns Benny Antiporda said the DENR has mobilized all its regional offices to assist in the management of solid waste on orders of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Roy Cimatu.

An information drive on proper garbage handling has also been launched in evacuation centers in Batangas, Cavite and Laguna provinces in anticipation of the mountains of garbage piling up in areas where the “bakwits” are staying.

Although the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) has lowered the alert level from 4 to 3, thousands are still in evacuation centers sending only some other members of the family to return and check their residences.

“Secretary Cimatu gave instruction that we come up with a joint operation by all DENR regional offices in the country to assist all those affected by the Taal Volcano eruption,” Antiporda said.

The joint operation, which will be participated in by concerned personnel from the DENR central office in Quezon City, will be called “Task Force Basura.”

Meanwhile, Antiporda appealed to the public to avoid donating single-use plastic cups, plates and utensils to evacuees as these “environmentally unfriendly” items could create another problem.

“Plastic forks, spoons, cups, plates, and coffee stirrers may be convenient, but they are wreaking havoc in the environment,” Antiporda pointed out.

He added: “Calamity and the displacement of individuals make proper waste management the last and least among the priorities of the people.”
Malacañang has assured people displaced by Taal Volcano's continuing unrest that the government is ready to allot funds for their needs.

"The President always thinks of the safety of our countrymen. If necessary, he will allocate funds for them," presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said at a press briefing yesterday.

"The President's directive is always to secure their safety. So necessarily, all the appropriate agencies will respond to the directive," he added.

Panelo said local governments are already providing assistance to the evacuees.
Funds ready
From Page 1

Red Cross eyes rehab

With Phivolcs lowering Taal Volcano's alert status to Level 3, the Philippine Red Cross (PRC) is set to shift its operation in the area to rehabilitation.

Sen. Richard Gordon, PRC chairman, after a discussion with Batangas Gov. Hermilando Mandanas over the weekend, instructed PRC chapter administrator Ronald Generoso to conduct further discussion with the governor.

Mandanas disclosed that they are planning to put up tents where evacuees can stay until they can move back to their homes.

"We can provide family tents to each family where they can sleep with privacy," he said. "But we will also set up halls which will serve as their dining areas, separate tents for socialization activities, place of worship and other group activities," he assured the governor.

Gordon also disclosed that national societies that committed to provide funding for the rehabilitation phase, which includes rebuilding damaged houses, schools and other buildings; providing livelihood and distributing cash grants.

"We are already coordinating with our partner national societies to ensure that, like how we worked in Yolanda, assistance will be distributed evenly to our target population, that the operation will be organized. What I am proposing is to use P2 million of the money that the Spanish Red Cross and the German Red Cross will donate to build houses. The important thing is to remove the pressure of evacuation from the schools so the children can resume their classes," the PRC chairman said.

DENR Undersecretary Benny Antiporda said the department's regional office will assist in the management of solid waste in evacuation centers in Batangas, Cavite and Laguna.

"You can expect from the DENR that we will act on it as early as now, rather than be taken aback by the mountains of garbage that will be produced as a result of this calamity brought by Taal Volcano," he added.

He also appealed to the public to avoid donating single-use plastic cups, plates and utensils to evacuees since these items are environmentally unfriendly and could create another problem.

"Plastic forks, spoons, cups, plates and coffee stirrers may be convenient, but they are wreaking havoc on the environment," Antiporda pointed out.

Albay Rep. Joey Salceda said there is no longer a need for the House of Representatives to approve the P30-billion supplemental budget for the rehabilitation of areas devastated by the eruption of Taal Volcano.

"I don't think there's a need for supplemental fund. No more need for a supplemental budget. We thought the eruption would go full blast that's why we needed P30 billion to rebuild facilities, public infrastructure and livelihood support," he said.

Salceda, chairman of the House committee on ways and means, said the proposal could be converted to a more developmental purpose.

"What we need is a more developmental approach to the impacts of Taal eruption by way of creating south of Manila growth corridor, a re-launch of the Calabarzon," Salceda said. "It will be part of the regular developmental process."

He said the government has enough calamity funds even if the proposed P20 billion was reduced to P16 billion in the General Appropriations Act for this year, because this was augmented by an unused P7 billion in the 2019 budget that was carried over.

"All in all, this year's budget for disasters is P23 billion. — Alexis Romero, Helen Flores, Rhodina Villanueva, Cecille Suerte Felipe, Delon Porcalla, Jose Rodel Clapano
Marami na ang nakasu-500,000 tao ang nakauwi sa kanilang mga tahanan na biktima ng Bulkan Taal na sumabog. Sa kanilang pagtulog, nakakayan na sila sa mga evacuation center na, amin na nilang inihi, puno ng hindi magandang kasagayan.

Kaya magaimutan muli sila sa walang kakaunti, wala kasi kapatlang ang makakalikha sa sustansya tahanan. Kahit pa may mga nasira ng tahanan o tahanan, hindi na lamang ang hindi magandang kasagayan, kahit magsimula muna ang pagbangon, kaya may mangyari na magtayo ng bahay bagaman ang mga magagawa na muna.

Sa permanent na DANGER ZONE, ang hindi na lamang ang hindi magandang kasagayan. Sa pagiging hindi magandang kasagayan, hindi pa rin ang maaring magtayo ng bahay bagaman ang mga magagawa na muna.

Gamit ang salitang "habal-ya" sa kanilang mga pag-aaral, hindi 'yung magtuturado ang mga bahay sa mga nasirang lugar ng bulkan gaya ng mga dinaghang nanunun at lokal. Maaari rin ang pagtulungan ang iba pa, kulong ang mga maging bahay sa sustansya at sa sustansya tahanan.

Kahit pa may mga nasirang tahanan o tahanan, hindi pa rin ang maaring magtayo ng bahay bagaman ang mga magagawa na muna.

Kaya naman, dapat magaling ang mga magagawa na muna ang pagbangon at sa sustansya tahanan. Ang hindi na lamang ang hindi magandang kasagayan, kahit magsimula muna ang pagbangon, kaya may mangyari na magtayo ng bahay bagaman ang mga magagawa na muna.

Sa programang rehabilasyon, maaaring may maaaring ibenta. Namang maliliit ang kriwil ng mga biktima ng Taal.

Ang mga maging bahay na nagtulog sa permanent danger zone, walang kapalit ang nawalan ng kabuhayan, nasiraan ng tahanan o tahanan.

Sa programang rehabilasyon, maaaring may maaaring ibenta. Namang maliliit ang kriwil ng mga biktima ng Taal.

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DUMALO si DENR Usec. Benny Antiporda, chairman ng Solid Waste Management and Local Government Units Concerns, sa pagding ng Senate committee on energy and local government na pinamunuan ni Sen. Francis Tolentino. Pilit na nagsereto si Antiporda sa lahatyang magandang pamamalakad at siling-siling na nilalagay sa programa ng waste-to-energy.

CESAR MORALES
LGU role in solid waste a hurdle in waste-to-energy projects

A BILL outlining the regulatory regime for waste-to-energy facilities is encountering various hurdles because local governments, which are now responsible for managing solid waste, may not have the resources to pursue such projects.

"There are two constraints. From the hearing, I can see that this is a very complicated bill," Senator Sherwin T. Gatchalian, who proposed the bill, told reporters after a Senate hearing on the measure Tuesday.

"Complicated in a sense na ang (that) solid waste management is a devolved function to the local government. But... waste-to-energy (involves) high capital expenditure, meaning you need scale, kailangan mo malakihan (You need a big investment)," he added.

Mr. Gatchalian introduced Senate Bill No. 363 in July during the 18th Congress. The proposed legislation seeks to establish a national energy policy and framework for facilities using waste-to-energy (WTE) technologies.

He said reconciling the devolved function of solid waste management and the big investment needed to build a WTE facility is complicated as many local government units (LGU) do not produce enough waste; neither do they have the financial capability to finance a project to generate energy from waste.

Mr. Gatchalian earlier said that the passage of the bill would help solve the country's perennial garbage problem. He had said that the measure will not only encourage the development of new technologies in the treatment and disposal of solid waste, but also support the expansion of bioenergy to attain sustainable energy.

During the hearing, he asked the departments of Energy, Environment and Natural Resources, and Science and Technology to come up with a comprehensive study on waste-to-energy facilities.

"What we want is for these three departments to get together, come up with a preliminary study to look at the capacity, to look at the potential for energy, to look at the environmental concerns as raised by some sectors so that we will have some preliminary idea on how waste to energy can solve our solid waste issues," he said.

He said WTE facilities, which convert non-recyclable waste materials into useable heat, electricity or fuel through a variety of processes, could be the solution as the three Rs — reuse, recycle and reduce — have proven to be a failure.

"Less than 30% of the barangays conduct three Rs, 70% tatafon lang kahit saan (70% throw their garbage anywhere)," he said.

"On top of that, we have 330 open dumpsters. In the law that was passed 20 years ago, bawal na ang open dumpsites (open dumpsites are not allowed), but because of financial and logistical issues, meron pa tayong open dumpsites (we still have them)," he said.

Ahead of the bill's passage, local government units such as Davao City and Puerto Princesa City have embarked on WTE projects.

Tristan Dwight P. Domingo, assistant administrator of Davao City, said the city government is trying to "lobby" the national government for P3 billion to help fund the project.

In 2018, the city secured a 5.013 billion yen, or P2.5 billion, grant from the Japanese government for the development of waste-to-energy facilities in Davao City. The project was meant to be an innovative example of sustainable waste management for other cities to emulate.

"Right now, as part of our commitment before we fully utilize the funds we have to have this final feasibility study," he said in an interview after the Senate hearing.

He said the study, which is now focused on the financial aspect of the project, is scheduled to be completed next month.

"From there, we'll decide whether to push through with the project or not. If the financial side tells us that it is not viable for us, then the grant would be returned to the Japanese government," he said.— Victor V. Saulon
BATAAN LANDFILL OPERATOR CITED FOR ENVIRONMENT, TAX OFFENSES

HERMOSA, BATAAN—The local government on Tuesday issued notices of violations to a company operating a sanitary landfill here for environmental offenses and nonpayment of municipal tax.

Hermosa Mayor Jopet Inton said the Econest Waste Management Corp. had violated the “no segregation, no collection” policy under the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000 (Republic Act No. 9003).

“Econest even accepts garbage from Quezon City when under our agreement only garbage from Hermosa [town] and Bataan [province] should be accepted in its landfill,” Inton told the Inquirer.

He said Econest also violated a contract with the local government when it failed to share a portion of its income from the landfill operation with Hermosa. The company, the mayor said, would not even allow municipal employees to inspect its facility located in Barangay Mambog here.

An Econest officer said the company would review the notices issued against it and would seek help from environmental experts to determine if it committed the violations.

Econest was established on July 6, 2017, under a public-private partnership arrangement with the Hermosa government.

Inton said under the arrangement, the Hermosa government would dump its garbage at the landfill free of charge. “But lately we were being charged already,” he said.

—GREG REFRACCION INQ
MAGKAKAPIT-BISIG ang mga religious leader at civil society organization para ikampanya ang pagkakasang mga bangko sa coal project sa bansa.

Binansagang 'Withdraw from Coal', ilulunsad ang kampanya sa pamamagitan ng press conference ngayon umaga sa isang restawran sa Quezon City Memorial Circle.

Kabilang sa plano ng grupo ay bigyan ng grado ang mga bangko depende sa laki ng pinagamit nilang pondon sa coal project.

Kasama sa mga magaling speaker sina Bishop Gerry Alminaza at Gerry Arances ng Center for Energy, Ecology and Development.

Nais din ng mga obispo sa bansa na kaasupan ni Department Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Roy Cimatu dahil sa lumalalang problema ng polusyon duwot ng sangkaterbang coal-fired power plant sa bansa.

Sa liham na pinapatay kay Cimatu, binanggit ang mga obispo na saan'y bulaan ng kalhim ang kanyang mata at tenga para maramdaman ang bising ng mga tao sa umiling pagkakaroon ng aktibismo.

"You, Secretary Cimatu, are blessed with a most valuable position as a steward of creation as head of the DENR. It is a place to not only preserve the beauty of Creation, but also to uphold the dignity of human life," ayon sa liham na may petsang Enero 26, 2020.

"We invite you to open your eyes and ears to the cry of our people, and the cry of our deteriorating Earth," diin pa sa liham.

Ang liham ay pinamado ng 13 obispo sa pangunguna ni Kidapawan Bishop Jose Colin M. Bagufo, chairman, CBCP Episcopal Commission on Social Action, Justice and Peace.

Ayon sa kanila, ang standards on pollution na pinatutupad ng DENR ay hindi sapat para maprotektahan ang mga tao.

Dahil dito, naitala ng World Health Organization ang Pilipinas bilang ikatlo sa may pinakamalaking problema sa aerial pollution.

"It is because of these pitiful measures that coal and other polluting industries are able to spew poison into our atmosphere, further exacerbating our people's vulnerabilities in the context of both man-made and natural disasters," ayon pa sa kanila.

Mayroon 29 coal-fired power plant sa bansa na siyang nagpapasama sa kalidad ng hangin.
Single-use plastic ‘wag i-donate

Umapela dahon ang Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) sa publiko na hawag mag-donate ng single-use plastic cups, plates, at utensils sa evacuees ng Bulkanl Taal.

Sa pamamagitan ng "Task Force Basura," sinabi ni DENR Secretary Roy Cimatu na ang kanyang regional offices sa buong bansa ay inaasahang aayuda sa turns ng solid waste management sa evacuation centers sa Batangas, Cavite, at Laguna.

Sinabi ni Undersecretary for solid waste management Benny Antiporda na "there will be representatives per region that will assist evacuees when it comes to environmental issues, particularly solid waste management."

Umapela niya siya sa publiko na hawag nang mag-donate ng single-use plastic cups, plates at utensils sa evacuees dahil ang mga items na "environmentally unfriendly" items na maaking tumikha ng isa pang problema.

"Plastic forks, spoons, cups, plates, and coffee stirrers may be convenient, but they are wreaking havoc on the environment," paliwanag ni Antiporda.

Ellalyn De Vera-Ruiz
DRAGON BOAT RACE
BALIK NA SA BORACAY

TULUYAN ng imali ng Inter-Agency Task Force ang suspensyon sa dragon boat race sa Boracay. Ayon sa liham ng Boracay Inter-Agency Rehabilitation Management Group General Manager Natividad Bernardino kay Malay Acting Mayor Frolibar Bautista, epektibo ang pagsaalake ng suspensyon.

Dahil dito, masarang mga pagiging aktibidad ang apektibo sa pagiging aktibidad ng mga bakuran sa isla. Kaugnay nito, pinalalahanan ng task force ang lokal na pamahalaan ng Malay, Aklan at ang Philippine Coast Guard na kailangang mahigit na 4 pati na ang Executive Order No. 037 series of 2019 o "Order Setting the Guidelines for Dragon Boat Trainings" sa naturang mga pampalawakang isang hataw ng inaasahang Guidelines na ito sa pagitan ng mga pagiging aktibidad at suspekto na pag-aaral.

Kung maaalala, sbuspinde ni Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Roy Cimatu ang dragon boat activities sa isla kasunod ng katawagang "Order Setting the Guidelines for Dragon Boat Trainings" noong Setyembre 25, 2019, kung saan ipinaganda ng Malay ang pag-aaral ng Executive Order No. 037 series of 2019 o "Order Setting the Guidelines..."
Dragon Boat race, puwede na ulit sumagwan

INALIS na ng Inter-Agency Task Force ang suspensyon sa dragon boat race sa Boracay.
Sa liham na ipinadala ni Boracay Inter-Agency Rehabilitation Management Group General Manager Natividad Bernardino kay Malay Acting Mayor Froilan Bautista, epektibo aged ang pagsasawalang bisa sa nasabing suspensyon.

Nanganghulugan ito na maaaring magagawa ng kahit anong actividad ang apat na grupo na mayroon sa tanyag na isla.

Kaugnay nito, pinalahanan ng task force ang lokal na pamahalaan ng Malay, Aklan at ang Philippine Coast Guard na kailangan mahigpit na ipapatupad ang Executive Order No. 037 series of 2019 o "An Order Setting the Guidelines for Dragon Boat Trainings" sa naturang bayan na siyang may jurisdiksyon sa Boracay.

Kung masahala, situasyon
Three big-time suspected drug pushers were arrested during separate buy-bust operations in a mall in Cavite that also resulted to the confiscation of suspected shabu amounting to P6.8 million.

According to Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) Director General Aaron Aquino, the suspects were identified as Reiner Magbutay III alias Tan, Kevin Mateo and Fatmah Ali Alangadi.

Magbutay and Mateo were arrested around 12 noon on 23 January 2020 in a mall in Molino IV, Bacoor, Cavite, while another buy-bust operation conducted a day after in the same mall led to the arrest of Alangadi.

TACLOBAN CITY — Strong typhoons that hit Eastern Visayas in the recent months have not only resulted in displacing people but also lessened the number of migratory birds which visited the country during their winter sojourn.

Results from the recently conducted Asian Waterbird Census (AWC), which was conducted in seven sites in Eastern Visayas early this month, showed that fewer migratory bird species came to visit the region compared to turnouts in the previous years.

According to Ingelina Lantajo, focal person from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for the conduct of the waterbird count, "The recent typhoons "Tisoy" and "Ursula," which caused some damage to our mangrove areas, may have displaced the migratory birds."

Despite the low turnout, rare migratory birds were sighted in the waterbird count to include a northern pintail duck at Lake Bito. Other species recorded were the great egret, great knot, gray heron, common sandpiper, golden plover and the white-collared kingfisher.

"The presence of these waterbirds is an indication that although some of our mangrove areas may have been damaged by recent natural calamities, there are still healthy wetlands for migratory birds seeking food and shelter away from the colder climate where they originally came from," DENR OIC-Regional Executive Director Tirso Parian Jr. said.

Among the sites where the census was conducted include the Ormoc Bay Wetlands, Lake Bito Inland Wetland in MacArthur town, Carigara Bay Wetlands, and the Tres Marias Islands in Palompon, all in the province of Leyte.

Also included in the census are the Southern Leyte Bird Sanctuary in St. Bernard, the Maqueda Bay Wetlands in the towns of Nafort, Jiaoibong and Paranas in Samar, and at the Guinan Intertidal Flats in Eastern Samar.

Results of the waterbird census will be collated and analyzed while recommendations will be formulated to contribute in local and global conservation activities such as species and site conservation, and research programs and campaign plans to raise awareness of the importance of wetlands presence in communities.

The AWC is an annual event that runs parallel to other international censuses in Africa, Europe and Neotropics under the umbrella of the International Waterbird Census.
Winter sojourn A flock of migratory birds, believed to have come from colder countries, swarm this fishpond in Obando, Bulacan for an abundant meal of fingerlings.
MT. APO TRAILS IN DAVAO DEL SUR
SAFE FOR CLIMBERS AFTER QUAKES

DIGOS CITY—The series of earthquakes that rocked parts of Mindanao last year had not damaged trails in Davao del Sur province leading to Mt. Apo, the country's highest peak.

Local mountaineering groups said a recent assessment showed that the local trails were safe and open to climbers.

An environment official said that unlike the trails in the towns of Magpet, Makilala and Kidapawan City in Cotabato province which had been closed to trekkers, the Davao del Sur trails, such as those in Sta. Cruz and Bansalan towns and Digos City, remained open following the strong earthquakes in October and December.

Mt. Apo, at 2,954 meters (9,692 feet) above sea level, offers panoramic views and adventures to climbers who flock there during the annual summer climb.

Assessment

Jayvee Agas, head of the regional public affairs office of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), said the Cotabato trails had yet to be opened by local governments there due to the danger of landslides.

Rye Glenn Trinidad, vice president of the Mindanao Mountaineering Federation Inc. in Davao del Sur, said his group and the Digos City Active Mountaineers conducted a trail assessment to prepare climbers for a tree planting activity on Mt. Apo from Jan. 30 to Feb. 2.

He said the groups were expecting to draw about 250 climbers to join the event, which was originally scheduled on Nov. 30 to Dec. 2 last year but was postponed following the earthquakes.

According to Trinidad, only 50 climbers a day will be allowed on Mt. Apo's peak when this year's climbing season begins on Feb. 3.

Limited access

Climbers are asked to stay on the summit only until 2 p.m. as the area will be off limits at night, according to the guidelines issued by the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB). The DENR and PAMB have imposed window hours for climbers to prevent forest fires that had destroyed a large part of Mt. Apo's forest in previous years.

Agas also reminded climbers that swimming in Lake Venado was prohibited and they should bring their garbage when they return to their camps.

All climbers, she added, must secure permits from the local government and undergo an orientation before the climb.

Over a thousand residents in four villages at the foot of Mt. Apo in Kidapawan took refuge in the city's evacuation sites after the 6.6-magnitude quake on Oct. 29 left ground fissures near their houses, prompting the government to declare these areas as no-build zones.
Saving native and endemic trees

BY JED MACAPAGAL

As the country’s leader in geothermal power with over 1,400 megawatts (MW) of capacity under its belt, Lopez-led power generation firm Energy Development Corp. (EDC) is pushing its renewable efforts further with its initiatives for the replenishment of streams.

In 2009, the company started BINHI, its flagship environmental program which serves as a nationwide greening and reforestation program of native and endemic trees.

EDC said since its geothermal operations are located in forested areas, there is great reliance on healthy watersheds as trees can help maintain geothermal reservoirs by holding water and releasing them deep into the earth.

As of 2018, the BINHI program has identified and rescued 96 species of prime and endangered Philippine hardwood, apart from raising 175,685 seedlings, distribution and planting of 3,214 hectares with the help of 173 partner organizations and 88 farmers associations.

It also managed to restore local forestlands with over 6.4 million of trees over thousands of hectares to preserve and propagate threatened native tree species and protect biodiversity as well as purify rainwater before being released into natural channels such as streams and groundwater reserves.

Under the BINHI program, EDC works with the academe to provide technical assistance, facilities, and training and capacity-building sessions.

The company recently partnered with the University of San Carlos in Cebu to grow and propagate premium Philippine native tree species such as Narra, Mangkono and Molave. This is the company’s 11th arboretum since 2008.

As part of the agreement, the school will host a permanent designated area for the trees, supported by planting and promotional activities. EDC provided seedlings along with technical assistance for the protection and maintenance of the trees, including labeling and scientific monitoring.

Early last year, the company also adopted the 7.79-hectare Wetland No. 2 in Boracay island to turn it into an eco-tourism park by putting up another arboretum aside from walkway, view deck, visitor information center and other amenities that will be turned over to the government after three years.

The BINHI program has identified and rescued 96 species of prime and endangered Philippine hardwood, apart from raising 175,685 seedlings, distribution and planting of 3,214 hectares with the help of 173 partner organizations and 88 farmers associations.
BINHI is EDC’s flagship environmental program which serves as a nationwide greening and reforestation program of native and endemic trees.

CONT: SAVING NATIVE + ENDIC TRES
Promoting conservation, sustainability

Through the hatchery laboratory, SMPC aims to host the most advanced resource and development center to promote the conservation, sustainability and environmental enhancement by improving marine biodiversity, fishery resources and habitats.

BY JED MACAPAGAL

As a coal mining and coal-fired power plant operator, Semirara Mining and Power Corp. (SMPC) has always been the target of criticisms by environmental groups.

Often overlooked, however, are the company’s efforts to transform Semirara Island into a cradle of giant clams and other high-valued commercial organisms like abalone, spiny lobsters and mud crabs.

With the establishment of SMPC’s Semirara Marine Hatchery Laboratory (SMHL) in 2010, the company aims to host the most advanced resource and development center to promote the conservation, sustainability and environmental enhancement by improving marine biodiversity, fishery resources and habitats.

SMPC focuses on the spawning of giant clams which provide shelter to seaweeds, sea sponges and other marine organisms. Giant clams help clean pollutants and produce food for other marine species.

The giant clams which are also popular for their local name taklobo, likewise serve as an indicator of good water quality in the area despite ongoing coal mining operations. This is because these creatures cannot thrive in a polluted environment.

At present, the lab is spawning at least eight species of giant clams including True Giant Clam; Smooth Giant Clam; Fluted Giant Clam; Boring Giant Clam; Noah’s Giant; Small Giant Clam; Strawberry Giant Clam; and Porcelain Giant Clam.

From the initiative of reseeding 150 giant clams on the island’s coastline in 2006, SMPC expanded the hatchery and has survived 163,267 giant clams to date, of which 80,146 have been reseeded. Meanwhile, 50 giant clams from the hatchery were transferred and spawned along the shoreline of SMPC’s power operations in Calaca town in Batangas province.

In 2015, a team of marine biologists from the Silliman University Angelo King Center for Research and Environmental Management led by National Scientist Angel Alcala, conducted a survey of the whole coastal area of Semirara Island. The results of the study showed contrary to expectations for mining areas, the reefs surveyed had extensive coverage of live hard coral cover and relatively high fish biomass and density.

Likewise, SMPC also formed linkages with other eminent figures in marine biology to further improve SMHL’s efficiency including two other National Scientists Gavino Trono and the late Edgardo Gomez.
The company has been working to transform Samirara Island into a cradle of giant clams and other high-valued commercial organisms like abalone, spiny lobsters and mud crabs.
Reclamation plans bad news for bay’s 200K winged visitors

By Jhesset O. Enano
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Land reclamation projects on Manila Bay threaten to displace as many as 200,000 waterbirds that pass through the country during their migration in winter months, according to the Wild Bird Club of the Philippines (WBCP).

These birds include several endangered and vulnerable species whose fragile populations may be decimated once coastal development projects push through in Metro Manila, Bulacan, and Cavite provinces, and other areas.

“They can really be pushed to extinction,” said Cristina Cinco, WBCP vice president, in an interview on Tuesday. “Similar to a food chain, once you cut one, the others [in the system] will be affected.”

Despite fierce opposition from environmental groups and some government officials, several reclamation projects spanning several cities and provinces are still slated on Manila Bay.

Among the bigger projects is the proposed international airport in Bulacan province, which experts say will destroy hectares of mangroves and worsen flooding in coastal towns.

Cinco said this development was also expected to adversely impact thousands of waterbirds that stop over on Manila Bay to feed and roost on its coastlines, mudflats, and mangroves.

16 waterbird species

At least 16 waterbird species congregate on the bay during midwinter months, according to the WBCP, and at least 12 of the species, including the endangered Far Eastern curlew (Numenius madagascariensis), vulnerable Chinese egret (Egretta eulophotes) and near threatened bar-tailed godwit (Limosa lapponica), are considered of international importance because of their decreasing population.

In its most recent Asian Waterbird Census earlier this month, the WBCP observed a record number of black-faced spoonbills (Platalea minor). The bird is listed as endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

A total of 24 spoonbills were seen feeding and resting along the tidal flats and mangrove areas in Barangay Talipot in Bulakan, Bulacan—just “in the backyard” of the proposed international airport, Cinco said.

Before its last sighting in 2019 in Sasmuan, Pampanga province, the rare bird had not been seen for over a century on Manila Bay.

Impact on fish stocks

Environmentalists have also expressed concern over the effect of reclamation projects on fish stocks in Manila Bay.

Though the bay is heavily polluted, many municipal fishermen still rely on it for their livelihood, with sardines as their main catch.

“Birds are the No. 1 bioindicator, meaning if you have birds present, you have clean water, clean air and basic food,” Cinco said. “What is good for the birds are good for the people ... Why ruin a perfectly good environment?”

The Philippines is part of the flight path of some 50 million birds that take the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, which stretches from Russia and Alaska at the northern end, to Australia and New Zealand at the southern end.

The Philippines is a stopover for at least 13.5 million migratory birds, feeding before continuing their long-haul flights over 22 countries.

VULNERABLE Environmentalists have warned against coastal development projects that could disrupt the habitat and food source of migratory birds passing over Manila Bay, like this flock spotted off Freedom Island in Parañaque City in April last year.—JOAN BONDOC
National Housing Authority booked a return trip to the semis with a thrilling 77-74 win over the Philippine International Trading Corporation last week in the 8th UNTV Cup at the Paco Arena in Manila.

Antonio Lusteta once again shone brightest for the Benneth Palad mentored NHA Builders by firing 18 points apart posting three rebounds and a steal.

NHA's win in the annual tournament for public servants assured itself of the No. 3 seed-

ing no matter what happens in its last match in the quarterfinal round against the Department of Agriculture Food Masters on Sunday also at the Paco Arena.

The win likewise arranged for themselves a semis date with the No. 2 Department of Environment and Natural Resources Warriors.

The fourth and last semifinalist will be known on Sunday as the Food Masters made the race for the last semis berth doubly exciting with a surprising 71-68 victory over the two-time champions Judiciary Magis.

The Poch Juinio mentored Food Masters played minus several key players due to previous commitments but they still managed to prevail thanks to the 23-point performance of Sherwin Silva.

Agriculture's victory forged a three-way tie for second to fourth places with PITC and Judiciary all with similar 6-5 records.

The fourth semifinalist will face top seed and defending champion Armed Forces of the Philippines in the other semi-pairing also a best-of-three affair.
All set for Takbo Para sa Kalikasan

A SERIES of fun runs is slated at the CCP Complex ground in Pasay City that not only promotes wellness but also raise awareness of protecting the environment.

This is the mission of Takbo Para sa Kalikasan 2020, a four-race event organized by the Green Media Events Company.

According to Green Media Events managing director Jenny Lumba, this year’s Takbo Para sa Kalikasan is comprised of fun runs representing the four elements — Fire Run on May 31, Water Run on July 19, Air Run on Sept. 20 and Earth Run on Nov. 22.

“This is our own little way of helping promote a clean environment and keep it safe from any undesirable factors,” said Lumba during the 52nd “Usapang Sports” by the Tabloids Organization in Philippine Sports (TOPS) at the National Press Club in Intramuros, Manila.

To kick-off the Kalikasan fun runs, Green Media Events will also support the staging of the Pride Run for the LGBT community on Feb. 16 at the CCP Complex in Pasay City.

“Tuloy-tuloy na po ito kaya ina-anyayahan namin hindi lang ang mga regular running enthusiasts kundi pati na ang mga kaibigan natin sa ating kalikasan,” added Lumba in the weekly public service program supported by the Philippine Sports Commission, National Press Club, PAGCOR, and Community Basketball Association.

Fritz Labastida, who accompanied Lumba in the weekly sports forum, urged everybody to participate in the 3K, 5K, 10K and 16K events not only to keep themselves physically fit but also to meet new friends who share the same advocacy.

Labastida also urged participants to bring their own reusable water container and avoid the use of plastic or paper cups during the fun run as their way of helping the environment.

“Huwag po kayo mag-atubiling tumapating para na rin maatlaking malakas ang pangangatawan pati na ang kalusugan,” said Labastida, who also earned moniker “Barefoot Diva” in the running community.