

30 December 2022, Friday



DENR

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DENR cites gains in environmental protection amid pandemic

By CORY MARTINEZ

SIGNIFICANT achievements in protected area management, cave management, and wildlife conservation have been recorded even amid the pandemic.

This was disclosed by Natividad Bernardino, director of the Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), as she declared that these achievements are "a testament that the importance of conserving wildlife and their natural habitats are now prioritized by communities and policymakers."

"While we are treading into the post-pandemic era, the BMB - together with DENR field offices - continues to be at the forefront of protecting, conserving, and sustainably managing the country's flora and fauna," Bernardino said.

In 2022, the BMB made substantial progress in terms of protected area management with the establishment of seven more protected areas (PAs) under the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS), which brings to 248 the total number of PAs in the country with an aggregate area of 7.78 million hectares.

All seven PAs were legislated, and each was covered by a Republic Act (RA). These are Mt. Arayat Protected Landscape (RA 11684), Mt. Pulag Protected Landscape (RA 11685), Naga-Kabasalan Protected

Landscape (RA 11686), Tirad Pass Protected Landscape Act (RA 11687), Banao Protected Landscape (RA 11688), Tugbo Natural Biotic Area (RA 11806), and Sicogon Island Wildlife Sanctuary (RA 11933).

In terms of cave management, the BMB has so far identified 3,432 caves, of which 292 are within PAs.

Meanwhile, intensified wildlife protection efforts and the sustainable management of ecosystems brought 12 species to improved conservation status.

The Asian giant softshell turtle (*Pelochelys cantorii*) has moved from "endangered" to "other threatened" species, while four more species - the Negros horned tree frog (*Platymantis negrosensis*), Cordilleras cloud frog/Mt. Data Forest frog (*Platymantis subterrestris*), Mindanao bleeding-heart (*Gallicolumba crinigera*), and Luzon water redstart (*Rhyacornis bicolor*) - were moved from "endangered" to "vulnerable" species.

Wildlife Rescue Centers (WRC) also play a crucial role in wildlife protection, as these provide temporary shelter for mistreated and rescued wild animals.

As the "center of the center of marine biodiversity," the BMB - together with DENR field offices - continues to work on the establishment of the Verde Island Passage (VIP) under the NIPAS.



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DENR hoping to deploy biotech solutions to fight climate change

THE DEPARTMENT of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said it will explore biotechnology solutions in addressing climate change.

“Biotechnology is one of the tools that we can use to boost economic growth, create jobs, develop healthcare solutions, improve agri-food systems, and rehabilitate and protect our environment and natural resources,” Environment Undersecretary Jonas R. Leones said in a statement.

The DENR said biotech advances will also help the department arrive at “scientifically informed” decisions.

Separately, Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual said developments in the field will also help the government produce clean energy and reducing environmental footprints.

“Biotechnology’s breakthrough products and technologies feature multifaceted benefits. Aside from creating vaccines that combat debilitating diseases, biotechnology can produce clean energy, reduce our environmental footprint, and make industrial manufacturing processes safer, cleaner, and more efficient,” Mr. Pascual added. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**



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Govt completes 16 resiliency road maps for climate-vulnerable provinces, cities

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA
@jonlmayuga

THE government has completed the resilience road maps for 16 vulnerable areas, which will serve as a guide in managing disaster risks and climate vulnerabilities in the Philippines.

The road maps and their corresponding investment portfolios for risk resilience (IPRR) are for 12 climate-vulnerable provinces and four major urban cities.

The road maps were recently turned over to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Center under the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) last December 19 in Quezon City.

Developed under the Risk Resiliency Program (RRP) of the Cabinet Cluster on Climate Change Adaptation, Mitigation, and Disaster Risk Reduction, each road map with IPRR contains recommended actions to manage the risks and vulnerabilities in the climate-vulnerable areas in the

form of specific resilience measures. Key findings and relevant experiences were also presented by the study teams that conducted the risk assessments in the climate-vulnerable areas, during the turnover ceremony.

"These planning documents will definitely help inform both local and national investment programming, resulting in more efficient and climate-responsive programs that make better use of our limited resources," DENR Undersecretary for Finance, Information Systems, and Climate Change Analiza Rebueltateh said in a news statement.

The road maps were developed for the provinces of Siquijor, Eastern Samar, Northern Samar, North Cotabato, Maguindanao, Sulu, Lanao del Sur, Apayao, Kalinga, Ifugao, Mountain Province, Catanduanes, as well as the urban centers of Metro Manila, Metro Cebu, Metro Iloilo, and Metro Davao.

The initiative is implemented by the Neda-PPP Center and the DENR under the project "Strengthening Public-Private Partnerships in the Philippines" with support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB)

and the Government of the United Kingdom, through its Urban Climate Change Resilience Trust Fund.

Key officials who witnessed the turnover were DENR Undersecretary for Policy, Planning and International Affairs Jonas Leones; PPP Center Executive Director Cynthia Hernandez and Director Lerma Advincula; ADB's urban climate change resilience specialist Dr. Ramon Abracosa; and Jacques Miel-Soliguin, Climate Change, and Energy Attache of the British Embassy.

Biotech option

BIOLOGICAL technology offers powerful solutions to mitigate the effects of climate change, an official of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said.

As climate change compels expeditious and wise action toward biotechnology, the DENR is committed to building opportunities in biotechnology to help address this global phenomenon and achieve sustainable and inclusive growth for all Filipinos, DENR Undersecretary for Policy, Planning, and International Affairs Jonas R. Leones said in a statement.



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Protection for Kalayaan Group's seas pushed

THE passage of a measure in the House of Representatives that seeks to declare the waters around the Kalayaan Island Group (KIG) and Scarborough Shoal as a marine protected area will be a boon for Filipino fishermen in the area.

The benefits from the enactment of House Bill (HB) 6373 were explained by Palawan Third District Rep. Edward Hagedorn in an interview with *The Manila Times*.

Hagedorn said there will be more fish as long as spawning and breeding sites, which are located within three nautical miles of the Kalayaan and Scarborough Shoal, are safeguarded.

"Former Justice Antonio Carpio's experience in marine science enabled him to assist me in conceptualizing the bill," he said.

Hagedorn said he shares Carpio's

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Protection for Kalayaan Group's seas

advocacy "to maintain and preserve Philippine territorial and maritime sovereignty, particularly in the West Philippine Sea."

Republic Act 7586 or the "National Integrated Protected Areas System (Nipas) Act," as amended by RA 11038, bans the use of fishing gear and practices that destroy "coral reefs, seagrass beds or other marine life" in Kalayaan Group and Scarborough Shoal Marine Protected Area (Kigss-MPA).

Hagedorn said that when he was mayor of Puerto Princesa City, "the first thing I did was to ensure that the entire coral reef system and the adjacent forest were saved."

"Sadly, a significant portion of the coral reef has been destroyed due to cyanide and dynamite fishing, not by outsiders but by our local fisherman," he said.

"Since there is no law, we must first safeguard our resources from within before defending them from outside threats," Hagedorn added.

He said he admired the idealism of certain critics, such as Kabataan party-list Rep. Raoul Manuel, who on December 15 denounced the swarming Chinese warships in the West Philippine Sea.

Manuel "is correct in his assessment of the Philippine Economic Zone, but I'm confident the higher-ups are working on the diplomatic solution,"

Hagedorn said.

HB 6373 seeks to create the Kalayaan Island Group and Scarborough Shoal Protected Area Management Board (Kigss-PAMB) as well as the Kigss Protected Area Management Office (Kigss-PAMO).

The two agencies will have the same composition, powers and functions as defined in Sections 9 and 10 of RA 7586 as amended.

The Palawan Council for Sustainable Development, created by virtue of the Strategic Environmental Plan for Palawan Act, will be a member of the Kigss-PAMB.

The bill tasks the Kigss-PAMB and Kigss-PAMO to come up with a management plan within a year from its effectivity.

The plan must "include specific strategies and programs for the preservation and protection of atolls, reefs and corals within the Kigss-MPA."

The Kigss-PAMB and Kigss-PAMO shall engage the cooperation of other government agencies in the implementation of the management plan.

The Department of Transportation, the Department of Information and Communications Technology, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of the Interior and Local Government will provide assistance in the monitoring of activities within the

Kigss-MPA.

If the bill is passed into law, P10 million will be allocated for its implementation.

Hagedorn said that "with this bill, we hope to get the interest of all the surrounding states to have one common ground and that is to protect [the environment]. Hindi ito about territorial disputes eh (This [bill] is not about territorial disputes); this is about the protection of environment," he said.

Another congressman, Cagayan de Oro Second District Rep. Rufus Rodriguez, previously asked Congress to pass House Bill 2465 which establishes "the archipelagic sea lanes in the Philippine archipelagic waters, prescribing the rights and obligations of foreign ships and aircraft exercising the right of archipelagic sea lane passage."

HB 2465, which Rodriguez has refiled and is currently before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, prevents foreign ships from illegally entering Philippine seas.

He said the bill was passed by the House but was not approved by the Senate.

"No Chinese or any vessel should be allowed in our waters without our approval unless for innocent passage in the designated archipelagic sea lanes," he said.

**REINA C. TOLENTINO
AND MOISES CRUZ**



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REGIONS

SC to mining firm: Get consent of IPs

BAGUIO CITY—The Supreme Court has terminated a 2015 arbitral ruling that exempted Lepanto Mining from securing the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples (IPs) in Mankayan, Benguet, when it applied for the renewal of its mineral production sharing agreement. The Lepanto mine site overlaps with lands covered by an ancestral domain title granted to the Kankanaey community. —STORY BY VINCENT CABREZA

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FPIC REQUIREMENT

SC TO MINE FIRM: GET CONSENT OF BENGUET IPs

By Vincent Cabreza
@InqNational

BAGUIO CITY—The Supreme Court sitting en banc has terminated a 2015 arbitral ruling which exempted gold and copper miner Lepanto Consolidated Mining Co. from securing the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of ancestral domain dwellers in Benguet's Mankayan town when it applied for the 25-year renewal of its mineral production sharing agreement (MPSA) seven years ago.

Lepanto, one of the country's oldest mines, began renewal proceedings as early as 2014 before its MPSA No. 001-90 lapsed on March 2015, and was told that it needed the consent of Mankayan's indigenous peoples (IPs), according to letters exchanged between the mine, and the Cordillera offices of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

The firm operates a mine site that overlaps with Mankayan lands covered by a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title granted to its Kankanaey community.

But Lepanto had argued that the FPIC was not among the "same terms and conditions" for a possible renewal when it granted the firm its first MPSA in 1990.

The consent of indigenous Filipino communities are required by Republic Act No. 7942 (Philippine Mining Act of 1995) and RA 8371 (Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997 or Ipra) which became laws after Lepanto acquired its original MPSA.

Lepanto had asked for arbitration, and an ad hoc arbitration tribunal ruled on Nov. 27, 2015, that the mine did not need to comply with the FPIC precondition which the arbiters had characterized as an "unfavorable future legislation requirement" that would impair the company's "vested rights to renew [its] MPSA."

"rights of indigenous cultural communities to their ancestral lands to ensure their economic, social, and cultural well-being, is a Constitutionally declared policy of the State."

Lepanto had yet to issue a statement on the Supreme Court decision. But MGB Cordillera director Fay Apil said on Wednesday that the company had chosen to continue the renewal process, and had asked her agency for an endorsement to secure the FPIC.

Lepanto also disclosed the court's decision in a Dec. 21 report to the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Although its first MPSA had technically ended in 2015, Lepanto continued to operate on the strength of the arbitral decision, MGB sources said.

Deemed renewed

According to the Supreme Court, the arbitral decision states that the MPSA is "already deemed renewed" because the MGB Cordillera office in 2015 "found Lepanto to have substantially complied with all requirements for the joint renewal of the agreement, save for the new imposition of FPIC and [a] Certification Precondition [to be issued by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples] under the Ipra."

In a separate opinion, Associate Justice Marvic Leonen pointed out that the rights arising from the MPSA ended when the agreement lapsed.

"As pointed out by Chief Justice Alexander Gesmundo during our deliberations, an arbitral award is against public policy if 'its enforcement would be against our State's fundamental tenets of justice and morality or blatantly be injurious to the public or the interests of the society,'" Leonen said.

The Supreme Court sided with the Court of Appeals (CA) in dismissing a "motion to intervene" that was filed by then Benguet Rep. Ronald Cosalan, who challenged the arbitral decision in 2017.



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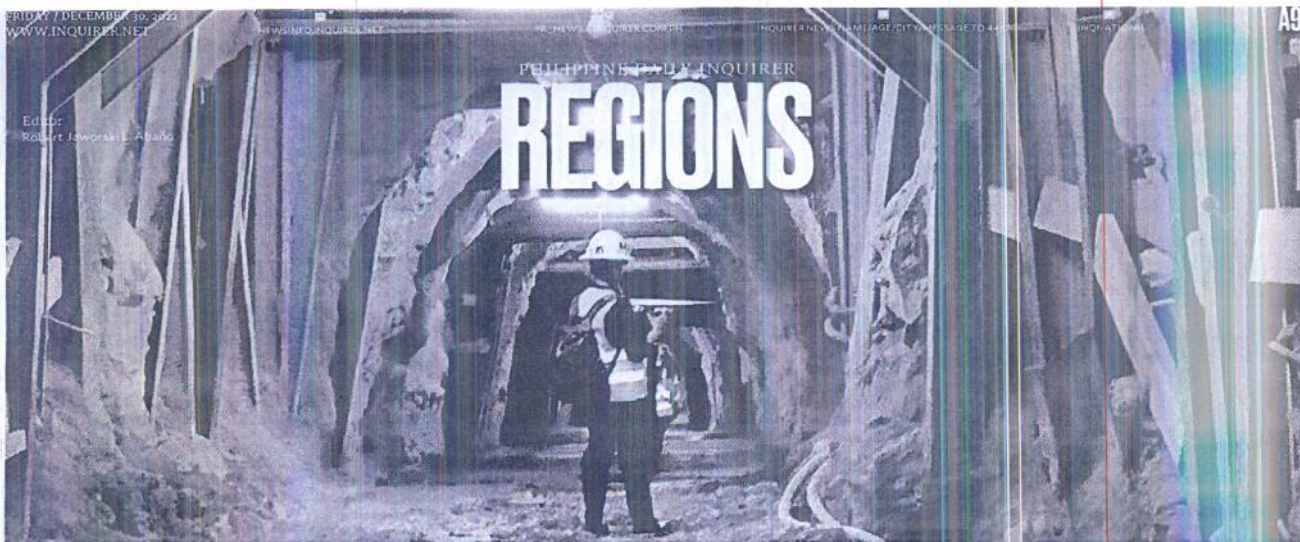
However, in a decision that was promulgated on June 21 and made public only on Dec. 22, the high court said the arbitration tribunal contradicted "a strong and compelling public policy on the protection of the rights of the Mankayan indigenous cultural communities to their ancestral domains" when it excused Lepanto from acquiring the FPIC.

The Supreme Court decision, penned by Associate Justice Henri Jean Paul Inting, stresses that protecting the

Cosalan, in an interview on Wednesday, said he had a stake in the case being a member of Benguet's indigenous community and as one of the authors of the Ipra.

Earlier in 2016, the DENR and the MGB also sued and won a favorable ruling from a Makati Regional Trial Court (RTC) which "vacated" the arbitral decision, but the CA reversed the RTC decision also in 2018.

However, the high court agreed with the RTC decision that also described consent from IPs as public policy. INQ



UNDERGROUND TOUR A group of visitors tours a mining tunnel of Lepanto Consolidated Mining Co., one of the country's top gold producers, in Mankayan, Benguet, in this 2018 photo. Lepanto, which started operations in the 1930s, is among the Philippines' pioneer mines. —ev esparru



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House to work double time to boost economy

With the country's economy picking up speed, Speaker Martin Romualdez said yes-

terday the House of Representatives will work double-time next year to ensure that

whatever economic gains are achieved would translate to better living conditions for

Filipino families. "We, in the House of Representatives, welcome the

good news from our finance secretary that the worst is over for the Philippines and better years are expected," Romualdez said.

"This definitely inspires us to work double-time when we resume session next year, pushing us to legislate more laws needed to further boost the economy and improve the living condition of our people," he added.

The Speaker was referring to the statement released Wednesday by Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno where he projected faster economic growth for the Philippines in 2023.

Despite a looming global recession, Diokno said the Philippines is still expected to have one of the highest growth rates among six Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member economies next year.

"Many institutions and experts have predicted a global recession in 2023, and consequently, downgraded Philippine gross domestic product (GDP) outlook to less than 6 percent," Diokno said.

"But an average GDP growth of 6.5 percent is nothing to be sneezed at; it is still one of the highest, if not the highest, growth rates among ASEAN+6 economies," he pointed out.

Diokno cited nine reasons for his optimistic projections for the economy's growth in 2023, four of which were the direct result of acts of Congress, namely: the early approval of the 2023 national budget, early adoption of the first-ever Medium-Term Fiscal Framework (MTFF) for 2023-2028; a more favorable economic environment that removed barriers to foreign investments, and a strong commitment to expand the "Build, Build, Build" program with enhanced private sector participation.

Romualdez extended his gratitude to his fellow members of the House of Representatives for acting swiftly on vital legislative measures, which Diokno cited among the major reasons for optimism in the country's strong economic performance.

It could be recalled that last Aug. 1, 2022, the House adopted Concurrent Resolution No. 2, supporting President Marcos' 2023-2028 MTFF.

The House approved its version of the 2023 national budget on Sept. 28 and ratified the bicameral conference committee report on Dec. 5.

Signed by President Marcos last Dec. 16, Romualdez noted that it was the only budget in recent memory to have been signed in mid-December.

Amendments to the Retail Trade Liberalization Act, Foreign Investments Act and Public Services Act during the 18th Congress shepherded the passage of its enactment into laws by Romualdez who served as the House majority leader.

Diokno also cited the swift approval of the Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028, the strong international credit profile of the country, a stable and resilient banking system, adequate buffers against external headwinds; a young, tech-savvy, mostly English-

speaking labor force, among the factors that bode well for the growth prospects of the economy in 2023.

To help sustain such a growth trajectory, Romualdez had vowed to pass the remaining 12 priority measures of the Chief Executive when Congress resumes session on Jan. 23, 2023.

Romualdez was referring to the 12 priority measures that the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) adopted as its Common Legislative Agenda (CLA): 1. Enactment of an Enabling Law for the Natural Gas Industry, 2. Amendments to the Electric Power Industry Reform Act (EPIRA), 3. Unified System of Separation, Retirement and Pension, 4. E-Governance Act and E-Government Act, 5. National Land Use Act, 6. National Defense Act, 7. National Government Rightsizing Program, 8. Budget Modernization Bill, 9. Department of Water Resources, 10. Establishing the Negros Island Region, 11. Magna Carta for Filipino Seafarers, 12. and Establishment of Regional Specialty Hospitals.

Before the House adjourned for the Christmas break, Romualdez pointed out that it had fulfilled its commitment to pass pro-people measures, including the Maharlika Investment Fund (MIF), the P5.268-trillion national budget for 2023, and 20 other priority bills of the Marcos administration, 19 of which were included in the CLA.

Romualdez said the House looks forward to the enactment of the 19 priority bills under the CLA that it has passed on third and final reading.

These include the following: 1. Passive Income and Financial Intermediary Taxation Act or PIFITA (The fourth package under the Comprehensive Tax Reform Program or CTRP), 2. Virology Institute of the Philippines, 3. Agrarian Reform Debts Condonation, 4. Philippine Passport Act, 5. Waste-to-Energy Bill, 6. National Disease Prevention Management Authority or Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 7. Medical Reserve Corps (HEART), 8. Internet Transaction Act / E-Commerce Law, 9. Leyte Ecological Industrial Zone, 10. Eastern Visayas Development Authority (EVDA), 11. Government Financial Institutions Unified Initiatives to Distressed Enterprises for Economic Recovery (GUIDE) bill, 12. Free Legal Assistance for Police and Soldiers, 13. Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Act, 14. Magna Carta of Barangay Health Workers, 15. Real Property Valuation Reform Bill, 16. Apprenticeship Act, and 17. National Citizens Service Training Program (NCSTP).

Two of the 19 measures under the CLA have been signed into law by the President - Republic Act No. 11934 or An Act Requiring Registration of Subscriber Identification Module (SIM), and RA 11935 or An Act Postponing the December 2022 Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections to October 2023.



PH, China to sign sea agreement

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

THE Philippines and China will establish direct communication between their foreign ministries to avoid "miscalculation and miscommunication" in the hotly disputed South China Sea, Manila said Thursday.

The deal will be signed next week during President Ferdinand Marcos' visit to Beijing, where he will meet with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, a foreign ministry official told reporters.

Marcos has insisted he will not let China trample on the Philippines' maritime rights in the sea — in contrast to his predecessor Rodrigo Duterte, who was reluctant to criticize the superpower.

The Philippines last week ordered its military to boost their presence in the contested waters after a report that China had started reclaiming several unoccupied land features around the Spratly Islands. "To avoid miscalculation and miscommunication in the West Philippine Sea, both sides have agreed to sign an agreement establishing ... direct communication between the foreign ministries of both countries at various levels," Foreign Affairs Assistant Secretary Neal Imperial said. Manila refers to the waters immediately west of the Philippines as the West Philippine Sea.

Imperial said the agreement would formalize "procedures" for contact between the two countries when a dispute arose.

In a pre-departure press briefing in Malacañang, Imperial said the state visit will be from January 3 to 5, his first foreign trip for 2023.

Marcos was invited by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

He will be joined by first lady Louise Araneta-Marcos, former president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, House Speaker Martin Romualdez, Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo, Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno, Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual, Tourism Secretary Christina Frasco, Information and Communications Technology Secretary Ivan John Uy, and other members of the Cabinet.

"The Department of Foreign Affairs considers the state visit of great significance," Imperial told reporters.

Despite the Covid situation in China, he said that the Philippine delegation will stay in a "bubble" to minimize the risk of exposure.

"Ang ating ugnayang panlabas sa China ay napakaimportante (Our relations with China is very important), and we have received assurances from our Chinese host that all arrangements are being made to ensure the safety of the President and the delegation during the visit," Imperial said.



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Beijing claims sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea and has ignored an international court ruling that its claims have no legal basis.

The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei have overlapping claims to parts of it.

The surge in Covid-19 cases in China will not stop Marcos Jr. from pushing through with his state visit to Beijing next week, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said Thursday.

"A bubble arrangement has been agreed for the Philippine delegation to minimize the risk of exposure to the virus," he added.

It will be Marcos' first visit to a non-Asean (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) country.

It will also be the second face-to-face meeting between the two heads of state in less than two months.

"With both leaders receiving a fresh mandate in recent elections,

there is an expectation that the state visit will set the tone of bilateral relations between the two countries in the next five to six years," Impe-

rial said.

The state visit, he added, will reaffirm the "cordial and neighborly" relations between Manila and Beijing

as well as "ensure continuity in many facets of the bilateral relationship and chart new areas of engagement."

growing trade and investment ties between the two economies as well as address security issues of mutual concern," the official said.

"It is also expected to build on the WITH AFP



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PH to ink 10 to 14 deals with China during Marcos' state visit

THE Philippines is set to sign 10 to 14 bilateral agreements with China during the state visit of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to Beijing from Jan. 3 to 5, 2023, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said Thursday.

In a Palace press briefing, DFA Assistant Secretary for Asian and Pacific Affairs Nathaniel Imperial said these agreements represent cooperation in a broad range of areas which include trade and investments, agriculture, renewable energy, infrastructure, development cooperation, people-to-people ties and maritime security cooperation.

"There's a very strong expectation that there's great interest from Chinese investors in the Philippine economy, especially in Philippine agriculture and renewable energy and nickel processing," he said.

China imports 70 percent of its nickel ore and concentrates requirements from the Philippines.

Imperial said the Philippines and China are expected to finalize an agreement on durian exportation.

The two countries are also going to sign an agreement establishing direct communication between their respective foreign ministries to avoid miscalculation and miscommunication in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

Other deals that are expected to be signed include a memorandum of understanding on digital cooperation; a framework agreement for the three priority bridges crossing Pasig-Marikina River and Manggahan Floodway Bridges Construction Project; an agreement on tourism cooperation; and the renewal of the agreement on the Philippines' participation on the Belt and Road initiative of China.

Imperial likewise said the Philippines is also looking at possible grants from China amounting to 1.5 billion renminbi (RMB).

Great significance

Imperial said the President's state visit to China will be of "great significance" because it will be Marcos' first bilateral visit to a non-Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) country since

assuming the Presidency in July.

He said it will also be the second face-to-face meeting between Marcos and Chinese President Xi Jinping in less than two months.

Marcos and Xi first met in a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the 29th Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders Meeting in Bangkok, Thailand last month.

"With both leaders receiving a fresh mandate in recent elections, there is an expectation that the state visit will set the tone of bilateral relations between the two countries in the next five to six years," Imperial said.

He said the state visit is also set to reaffirm the "cordial and neighborly" relations between Manila and Beijing as well as "ensure continuity in many facets of the bilateral relationship and chart new areas of engagement."

Likewise, he said it is also expected to build on the growing trade and investment ties between the two economies as well as address security issues of mutual concern.

Marcos' official activities, which will begin on Jan. 4, include three important meetings with Chinese leaders namely Li Zhan-shu, chairperson of the standing committee of the National People's Congress; Li Keqiang, Chinese Premier, and Xi.

Xi will host a dinner banquet for the President, the First Lady and Cabinet officials after their meeting. Imperial said a "sizeable" business delegation will be joining the state visit.

Business meetings will be held on Jan. 4 and 5 and a number of business deals are scheduled to be signed and finalized during the trip.

China is the Philippines' largest trading partner, largest source of imports and second largest export destination.

Marcos will be joined by First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos, former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, House Speaker Martin Romualdez, Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo, Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno, Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual, Tourism Secretary Christina Frasco,

Information and Communications Technology Secretary Ivan John Uy and other members of the Cabinet.

WPS
Following concerns over reports of China's new construction and reclamation activities in the disputed South China Sea, Imperial assured that Marcos will raise the issue before Xi and other Chinese leaders.

"In his meetings with the Chinese leaders including President Xi, the President will discuss the full range of our bilateral relations, both the positive aspects of it and the sensitive aspects of our relations, which includes the issue of the WPS and China's activities in the area," he said.

He said Marcos wants a peaceful and stable situation in the West Philippine Sea and will continue to uphold the country's sovereignty and sovereign rights during his meeting with Chinese leaders.

The President has said that the maritime issues do not define the totality of our bilateral relations with China but nevertheless he acknowledges the importance of this issue to our interest and to the Filipino

people. We expect that this issue will be discussed in the President's meetings with Chinese leaders," he added.

Imperial likewise said Marcos may also continue his discussions with Xi on oil and gas cooperation which was briefly discussed during their first meeting in Bangkok.

China, the Philippines and several other littoral states have overlapping claims in the South China Sea.

In a 2016 arbitral ruling, the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled that Beijing's nine-dash line, a demarcation that covers almost 80 percent of the South China Sea, is illegal. China has repeatedly ignored the verdict.

Bubble setup
To ensure the health and safety of the President and his delegation during his China trip, Imperial said China is taking every precaution to ensure that the delegation is not infected and does not bring back to the Philippines the new variants of COVID-19.

"Ang ating ugnayang panlabas sa China ay napakaimportante (Our for-

ign relations with China are very important) and we have received assurances from our Chinese host that all arrangements are being made to ensure the safety of the President and the delegation during the visit," he said.

He said China has agreed to provide a "bubble arrangement" for the Philippine delegation to minimize the risk of exposure to the virus.

"May mga pagbisita talaga na hindi natin puwedeng i-postpone (There are just some visits that we cannot postpone)," he added.

No meeting with Filipino community

Imperial said the President will skip his meeting with the Filipino community in Beijing due to rising Covid-19 infections in the East Asian country.

"There will be no meeting between the President and the Filipino community, unfortunately, because of the situation there. But you know, it's too bad, but we have to follow the Covid protocols there in China so there cannot be any big gatherings which is usually what the President does when he goes overseas," he said.

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Kasunduan para maiwasan sigalot sa West Philippine Sea lalagdaan

INAASAHANG lalagdaan ng Pilipinas at China ang isang deal sa layuning maiwasan ang "miscalculations and miscommunications" kaugnay sa West Philippine Sea (WPS).

Ito ang tiniyak ni DFA Assistant Secretary Nathaniel Imperial sa pre-departure briefing ni Pangulong Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. sa kanyang state sa Beijing mula Enero 3 hanggang 6.

"There are other agreements... for example, you know, to avoid miscalculations and miscommunications in the West Philippine Sea, both sides have

agreed to sign an agreement establishing direct communication between the foreign ministries of both countries at various levels and that is expected to be signed by [DFA] Secretary [Enrique] Manalo and his counterpart State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi during the visit," ayon kay Imperial.

Sinabi ni Imperial na gusto ni Marcos ang mapayapa at stable na situwasyon sa WPS at patuloy na igigiit ang soberenya ng bansa sa kanyang pakikipagpuulong sa mga Chinese Leader. **(Juliet de Loza-Cudia)**



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Parents warned vs danger of toys, noisemakers for kids

By JEL E. SANTOS

Children still need adult supervision when playing with "harmless merrymakers" like light-up hand clappers, spinning pens and wands, and the substitute noisemaker "torotot," an environment watchdog stressed.

In a statement, EcoWaste Coalition National Coordinator Aileen Lucero warned that those labeled as harmless alternative merrymakers used during the New Year's Eve revelry "may contain loosely attached parts that can get disconnected and swallowed by a child posing choking, internal burn or chemical hazard."

"Parents and other adults should see to it that such merrymakers are well-made and that kids are informed and supervised on their safe use," she maintained.

In its latest market monitoring, the group found light-up hand clappers, spinning pens, and wands with button cell battery compartments that can be easily broken or opened. The items, which are improperly labeled, have not undergone toy product quality and safety verification by the health authorities, it was disclosed.

"These merrymakers with flashing LED lights are often not sturdily made. A child may drop the toy or open the battery compartment out of curiosity releasing the tiny button cell batteries. A child may put the batteries in the mouth and choke on them, or accidentally insert them on her or his ear and nose," the official explained.

Aside from choking hazards, the button cell batteries also pose internal burn and chemical hazards.

"When it comes into contact with body fluids, the battery generates a

current that produces small amounts of sodium hydroxide, which is lye. If the battery gets stuck somewhere in the body, the lye burns a hole at that spot. Infection usually follows. The result can be serious injury and illness, long-term disability, or even death," according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Unlike firecrackers, Lucero went on, playing with a "torotot" will not blow off a child's fingers or cause eye injuries, but its mouthpiece or whistle can get detached and be swallowed by a child causing choking hazard. Others also have sharp edges that can cause abrasions and cuts.

"Like the light-up merrymakers, most, if not all, of the 'torotot' sold in the market are not authorized by the health authorities and are not duly labeled," she added. "The quality and safety of these toys cannot be assured."



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AC Logistics unit tapped to handle waste in El Nido

SUBSIDIARIES of AC Logistics Holdings Corp. and Ayala Land Hotels and Resorts Corp. (ALHRC) signed an agreement for the transport, handling, and management of hospital and hazardous waste across the latter's resorts in El Nido, Palawan.

In a press release on Thursday, AC Logistics said Integrated Waste Management, Inc. (IWMI), its waste management company, forged the partnership with Ten Knots Phils. Inc., which operates multiple resorts in El Nido.

Through the partnership, IWMI will be in charge of the collection, transport, and proper treatment and disposal of the Ten Knots group's medical and infectious wastes.

IWMI's service under the partnership will include providing documentary evidence on how the generator's hazardous wastes are treated and disposed of. The waste management company specializes in handling hazardous waste and is said to serve 40% of medical establishments in Metro Manila.

"Our team is excited to collaborate with the group's El Nido Resorts and Lio Beach in exploring innovative solutions and practices that protect El Nido's communities and natural environment," IWMI President Cezar Christopher Gregory G. Pacheco, Jr. said.

"Through this partnership, we hope to encourage more organizations to institutionalize proper hazardous waste management and ensure long-term positive impact," Mr. Pacheco added.

"As our businesses grow and the tourism industry recovers, the challenge of managing different types of waste escalates, too," ALHRC President and Chief Executive Officer Javier D. Hernandez said.

"We at Ten Knots are only too glad to work with IWMI in addressing these challenges and meeting our sustainability objectives," he added.

The pandemic has increased the volume of hospital waste like face masks, hazmats, personal protective equipment, vials and syringes, diluents and expired medicines that require proper handling and disposal, according to the firm.

The company said IWMI is at the forefront "in enduring the responsible handling and disposal of hazardous [as it] has been in the business of collecting and treating infectious and hazardous wastes for more than 30 years." — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**



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'Wag ang PAGASA at NDRRMC ang sisihin sa mga pagbaha sa VisMin, politiko ang salarin



IIMBESTIGAHAN daw ng Kongreso ang mga taga-Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) at National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) sa nangyaring malawakang pagbaha at landslides sa Visayas at Mindanao nitong kapaskuhan kungsaan marami ang nasawi.

Sabi ni Misamis Occidental 2nd District Representative Sancho Fernando Oaminal, nagkausap na sila ni Misamis Oriental 1st District Rep. Jason Almonte para pagpaliwanagin ang mga taga PAGASA at NDRRMC kung bakit kulang ang abiso ukol sa naranasang malawakang pagbaha sa maraming bahagi ng Mindanao, dahilan para malagay sa state of calamity ang kanilang probinsiya.

Sa ganang akin, walang kasalanan dito ang mga taga-NDRRMC at PAGASA. Unang-una, kulang sa kagamitan ang mga ahensiyang ito para mabasa ang pabago-bagong lagay ng panahon. Pangalawa, kahit pa mag-abiso ang PAGASA at kahit anong handa ng NDRRMC ay hindi parin nila mapipigilan ang pagragasa ng tubig mula sa mga nakalbong kabundukan at pagguho ng lupa. Pangatlo, hindi nila mapapaalis ang mga tao sa kanilang bahay dahil wala silang mapuntahan lalo't kapaskuhan. Mismo!

Ang dapat imbestigahan ng mga kinatawang ito ng Misamis ay ang mga taga-Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), ang gobernador at ang mga mayor sa kanilang lalawigan dahil ang mga ito ang mga salarin kung bakit naging flashflood at landslide prone na ang kanilang probinsiya na dati-rati ay hindi nakakaranas ng ganitong kalamidad.

Kung bakit ang mga taga-DENR, gobernador at mayor ang dapat sisihin sa mga ganitong kalamidad? Kasi sila ang nagbibigay ng permiso sa talamak na logging, mining at quarry sa kanilang lugar.

Dahil wala nang malalaking puno sa kabundukan, wala nang naghaharang sa pagdaloy ng tubig-ulan pababa sa kapatagan. At dahil nasira narin ang bundok sa mining at quarry, sumasama na

ang lupa sa pagragasa pababa ng tubig-ulan, sanhi ng landslides at flashfloods! Resulta: washout ang kabahayan, kabuhayan at imprastraktura sa kapatagan.

Ang kalamidad na nangyayari ngayon, hindi lang sa Visayas at Mindanao kundi maging sa Luzon, ay gawa rin ng mga opisyal ng gobyerno at mga negosyanteng ganid sa kuwarta.

Karamihan sa mga negosyante ay politiko narin. Sino ba ang may-ari ng malalaking tindahan ng tabla sa inyong lugar? Kung hindi si Mayor ay si Congressman o si Gobernador o kaya'y ang kanilang kamag-anakan. Yes!

Sino ba ang mga may-ari ng mining at quarry sa inyong bayan/lalawigan? Kung hindi si Mayor ay si Cong. si Gob. ang kanilang mga kadugo. Right?

Sa Mindanao, talamak ang illegal logging, mining, quarry. At ang mga nasa likod ay mga politiko. Mismo!

Ang mga opisyal naman ng DENR ay sunud-sunuran lang kung ano ang ididikta sa kanila ng politiko. Dahil political appointee lang ang mga nagpapatakbo sa ahensiyang ito. Tama ba ako Secretary "Toni" Loyzaga?

Kung ang presidente ay maka-kalikasan, ipakulong niya ang mga nasa likod ng illegal logging, mining at quarry kahit pa sumuporta sa kanya ang mga ito noong eleksyon. Dapat!



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AC Logistics, Ten Knots team up for El Nido waste management

By **RICHMOND MERCURIO**

The Ayala Group's AC Logistics Holdings Corp. has forged a partnership with the Ten Knots Group for waste management in El Nido Resorts in Palawan.

AC Logistics subsidiary Integrated Waste Management Inc. (IWMI) and Ten Knots Phils Inc. have signed an agreement for the transport, handling and management of hospital and hazardous waste across the island resorts of El Nido.

Ten Knots is a subsidiary of Ayala Land Hotels and Resorts Corp. that operates multiple resorts in El Nido.

IWMI president Chito Pacheco said the partnership would ensure proper waste management in Ten Knots' hotels and tourism estates.

IWMI will be in charge of collection, transport and proper treatment and disposal of the group's medical and infectious wastes.

Full service includes documentary evidence of how the generator's hazardous wastes are treated and managed.

"Our team is excited to collaborate with the group's El Nido Resorts and Lio Beach in exploring innovative solutions and practices that protect El Nido's

communities and natural environment," Pacheco said.

"Through this partnership, we hope to encourage more organizations to institutionalize proper hazardous waste management and ensure long-term positive impact," he added.

IWMI is one of the leading waste management companies in the country specializing in the handling of hazardous waste that include industrial and hospital waste, among others.

The company, which has been in the business of collecting and treating infectious and hazardous waste, for more than 30 years, serves 40 percent of medical establishments in Metro Manila.

It said the pandemic has resulted in an increase in volume of hospital waste like face masks, hazmats, personal protective equipment, vials, syringes, diluents and expired medicines that requires proper handling and disposal.

"As our businesses grow and the tourism industry recovers, the challenge of managing different types of waste escalates, too. We at Ten Knots are only too glad to work with IWMI in addressing these challenges and meeting our sustainability objective," Ayala Land Hotels and Resorts president and CEO Javier Hernandez said.