

26 February 2023, Sunday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

# **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE**



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## Wawa reforestation on its way

BY JING VILLAMENTE

The reforestation of a 1,800-hectare area within the Upper Marikina River Basin Protected Landscape is now on its way after the Department of Environment and Natural Resources recently signed a memorandum of understanding with Prime Infra-led WawaJVCo Inc.

WawaJVCo is the developer and operator of the Wawa Bulk Water Supply Project in Rizal province, designed to deliver a reliable water supply of at least 518 million liters per day to Manila Water and the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System.

The MoU integrates water security, watershed protection, and forest carbon and biodiversity management in the area that covers 1,800 hectares.

Under the MoU, DENR and WawaJVCo will “design, develop, and establish Afforestation, Reforestation, and Revegetation programs” within the UMRBPL. The programs intend to generate carbon units, based on internationally accepted voluntary carbon standards, that will enable investments in sustainable social and environmental projects for the communities where WawaJVCo and Prime Infra operate.

The MoU also affirms the commitment of WawaJVCo to exert best practices in stakeholder consultations with and involvement of the local community and indigenous peoples.

The MoU between DENR and Prime Infra-led WawaJVCo Inc. integrates water security, watershed protection, and forest carbon and biodiversity management in a 1,800-hectare area within the Upper Marikina River Basin.

DENR Secretary Antonia Lozaga and Enrique K. Razon Jr., Prime Infra and WawaJVCo chairman, signed the MoU on 20 February, with WawaJVCo president Melvin John Tan and DENR Undersecretary for Policy, Planning and International Affairs Jonas Leones as witnesses.

Also present during the ceremonial signing were Independent Director Cesar Buenaventura and chief regulatory officer Donato Almeda of Manila Water, WawaJVCo’s customer; DENR Undersecretary for Field Operations–Luzon, Visayas and Environment Juan Miguel Cuna; and Prime Infra president and CEO Guillaume Lucci and chief regulatory officer Vince Dizon.

“We’re very glad for this new effort on the part of the public and private sectors to address the complexities we are facing in terms of risks for the country. The private sector is among the leading engines of growth for the country, and we would like very much to continue exploring this type of multi-stakeholder partnerships to move the agenda of the department forward,” Lozaga said.

“We’re very grateful that some of our work in terms of keeping our forests whole and generating new forests will be part of the work of this group as well. We hope this will be the first of many other endeavors together,” the Secretary added.

Razon Jr., on the other hand, said the MoU for environmental stewardship between the government and private sectors reflects the commitment of both parties to develop and implement science-based strategies for sustainable development.

“We thank the DENR for making it possible for us to contribute to environmental protection and biodiversity management,” he added.





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# Climate change to affect food security – group

BY BELLA CARIASO

**A**N environmental group warned on Saturday that the country's food security will be affected by climate change after the Gross Domestic Climate Risk of Assessor Cross Dependency Initiative identified 17 provinces vulnerable to rising sea level caused by global warming.

"Based on the report, areas like Pampanga, Zambales, Tarlac, Nueva Ecija — basically areas in Central Luzon — are basically vulnerable to climate change, as this region is prone to flooding and it is usually hit by typhoons," Aksyon Klima ng Pilipinas Interim Secretariat member John Leo Algo said in a radio interview.

"Whenever Central Luzon is af-

ected by a typhoon, the damage to the agriculture sector is big, and it directly affects short-term and even long-term food security in the country," Algo added.

Besides Central Luzon, other areas expected to be affected by climate change include Occidental Mindoro, Oriental Mindoro, Pangasinan, Ilocos Sur, Eastern Samar, Northern Samar, Cagayan,

Surigao del Sur, Sulu, Leyte, Samar and Southern Leyte.

Algo noted that Eastern Visayas was severely affected by Super Typhoon "Yolanda" in November 2013.

"In November this year marks the 10th anniversary of the landfall of Super Typhoon Yolanda in the country. Because of this, Filipinos became aware of the severity of the effects of climate change," he added, noting the country is now among the most vulnerable to the impact of climate change.

"We are among those most at risk countries because of the crisis on climate brought by the pollution being emitted by rich countries in the West, particularly countries in Europe and the United States. The emission of fossil fuels is causing extreme

weather," he said.

Algo lauded the government's efforts to make rich countries accountable to the effect of climate change while underscoring the need to educate ordinary people of the perils the planet is facing.

"We always emphasize education because we believe education is the foundation on which we build the road to sustainable development for the Filipino people," he said.

In 2022, the Philippines had the highest disaster risk among 193 countries, according to another study, scoring high in exposure, vulnerability, susceptibility, lack of coping capacities and lack of adaptive capacities.

A 2020 UN study also found the Philippines among the hardest hit by natural disasters in recent years.



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# Needed: National decarbonization plan

BY MARIA ROMERO  
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At the 4th Philippine Environment Summit held in Tagaytay City this week, First Philippine Holdings Corp. chair and CEO Federico Lopez pointed out that the country, despite accounting for only 0.4 percent of global emissions, is vulnerable to climate change.

As such, the government needs to adopt a data-backed decarbonization master plan.

"We need a comprehensive, integrated, and well-studied national decarbonization and adaptation plan of our own, backed by constant feedback from what science is telling us," Lopez said, adding that the country has no decarbonization plan to date.

Lopez explained that crafting a decarbonization plan to solve climate change covers several facets, including agriculture and energy.

"Decarbonizing and scaling up a green electricity grid over the next three decades is probably the greatest energy transition in the history of mankind," he added.

The Asian Development Bank had previously pressed the government to ramp up investments in decarbonization, particularly in energy sources to lower power costs in the long run.

Dr. Prinyantha Wijayatunga, Chief of the Energy Sector Group of ADB, said prioritizing decarbonization – through reduction of carbon dioxide using low-carbon or clean and renewable energy sources, easing energy intensity, digitalization, and decentralization – is the way forward. A shift away from traditional areas of investment and toward these four aspects can help increase the country's GDP by lowering energy costs, among others, the ADB official added.





## Poll: 8 in 10 Pinoys prefer environment-friendly products

By JANVIC MATEO

Eight in every 10 Filipinos prefer brands that have environment-friendly products and operations, a recent poll conducted by Pulse Asia showed.

Results of the Nov. 27 to Dec. 1 survey commissioned by Stratbase ADR Institute were released during a forum on sustainable and strategic waste management co-organized with the Philippine Business for Environmental Stewardship (PBEST) last Thursday.

The poll showed that 83 percent of the respondents said they prefer to patronize products and services "of brands or

enterprises that (they) believe have environment-friendly operations and products."

Only five percent said no, while the remaining 12 percent were evenly divided among those who do not care how the product is made and those who are not aware if the products or services they use are good or bad for the environment.

Preference for brands with environment-friendly products and operations was highest among those in the Visayas at 89 percent, followed by those in Mindanao at 88 percent, Metro Manila at 85 percent and the rest of Luzon at 77 percent.

Among socio-economic classes, it was highest among those in class E at 85 percent, followed by those in class D at 83 percent and class ABC at 81 percent.

Lack of awareness on how the products they use are made was highest among class ABC at 13 percent, followed by those in class E at nine percent and class D at five percent.

"The message is clear: a sizable majority of Filipinos will support enterprises that have environment-friendly operations and products," said Pulse Asia president Ronald Holmes, who presented the survey results during the forum.

Meanwhile, Stratbase president Dindo Manhit said addressing the waste problem in the country entails a whole-of-society approach.

"While the government plays a key role through the formulation and implementation of policies, industry players are also expected to equally contribute through their investments and programs that enable circular business models," he said.

"As a problem that drastically affects the future of all, everyone, including the public must act jointly... Discipline, especially on the part of consumers, in proper waste disposal, or simply by not littering will already drastically reduce the tonnage of garbage in our waterways," he added.



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## NCR, 19 probinsya delikado sa climate change

Dalawampung lugar sa Pilipinas ang tinukoy na nanganganib sa epekto ng climate change kung saan nanguna ang Pangasinan sa listahan, batay sa inilabas na 2023 Gross Domestic Climate Risk ranking.

Nabatid na isinagawa ang naturang pag-aaral sa mahigit 2,600 teritoryo sa buong mundo ng XDI na isang independent specialist.

Ibinatay umano ang report sa projections ng pinsala na maaaring sanhi ng mga epekto ng climate change katulad ng baha, pagkasunog ng kagubatan at tumataas na antas ng sea level.

Bukod sa Pangasi-

nan, kasama pa sa 20 lugar sa Pilipinas na nanganganib umano sa epekto ng climate change ay ang sumusunod: Pampanga, Nueva Ecija, Cagayan, Tarlac, Metro Manila o National Capital Region (NCR), Bulacan, Isabela, Davao del Sur, Leyte, Ilocos Sur, Batangas, Cebu, Oriental Mindoro, Quezon, Laguna, Zambales, Negros Occidental, South Cotabato at Misamis Oriental.

Binanggit pa sa report na pinaka-'most exposed' umano sa climate change ang mga sentro ng kalakalan, manufacturing at iba pang aktibidad na may kinalaman sa ekonomiya ng isang bansa.



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GEORESERVE PROTECTION

**BINAY URGES SENATE INQUIRY INTO BUCOR PLAN ON MASUNGI**

**By Marlon Ramos**  
@MRamosINQ

Sen. Nancy Binay has sought the intervention of the Senate to look into the plan of the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) to develop a 270-hectare portion of Masungi Georeserve in Rizal province for its new headquarters.

"The Masungi Georeserve is a symbol of sustainable development and at the forefront of

efforts to conserve, restore and improve the environment in the face of climate change, which must be protected by the government and private sector at all cost," Binay said as she filed Senate Resolution No. 495 on Feb. 21.

Binay, chair of the Senate tourism committee, filed the resolution after the Masungi Georeserve Foundation Inc. (MGFI), the private caretaker of the protected area that covers four vil-

lages in the town of Tanay, Rizal opposed the BuCor's plan.

**Possible consequences**

BuCor acting Director General Gregorio Catapang Jr. earlier said that besides relocating its offices, the bureau would also construct housing units for its personnel in the area.

Binay said while the BuCor's reason for developing the area was "reasonable, it is important

to weigh the possible consequences of building its headquarters in an ecotourism site like the Masungi Georeserve."

She said the plan "may affect the environment and tourism in the country."

"Scientists from the National Museum of the Philippines had previously noted that developing the relocation site will have expensive consequences for the environment," the senator noted. INQ



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EU Law Tests NMIA (editorial)

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# EU law tests NMIA

The European Union will soon seek accountability from the New Manila International Airport consortium that has as major partners Asian conglomerate San Miguel Corp. and Dutch infrastructure firm Boskalis Westminster NV which has the backing of export credit agency Atradius Dutch State Business.

A new EU legislation on corporate accountability, the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, will make it mandatory for companies operating in the EU to respect human rights and to protect the environment.

Since the massive P740-billion project involves an EU company, the investments of which were guaranteed by a member state, the project would have to submit to the law.

Under the directive, companies would be required to undertake human rights and environmental due diligence.

Companies could also be held accountable in European courts for the damage they cause through their projects.

By the end of last year, Boskalis's dredging vessels had completed more than one-third of the material dredging needed to build the huge sand bank of the Bulacan airport.

The NMIA is the biggest project that Boskalis has ever undertaken. Its contract, in turn, is insured by the Dutch state through export credit agency Atradius DSB, which issued its largest ever insurance policy of 1.5 billion euro or P877 billion.

International rights watchdog Global Witness said Boskalis initially exerted efforts to be transparent about the project.

In December 2021, Boskalis responded to concerns raised by several Dutch and Filipino non-government organizations on the project's detrimental impacts.

It, however, deferred talks on many of the issues raised against it and said that it will discuss the concerns once SMC had completed its second impact assessment. Boskalis later refused to meet with the Filipino NGOs, stating that its discussions were intended for groups operating in a Dutch environment.

Boskalis CEO Peter Berdowski then extolled the project's "socially responsible manner" and its "eye for the local community and the preservation of biodiversity."

Boskalis, when it received the project award in 2020, however, admitted to not meeting international standards, notably the International Finance Corp. Performance Standards on Environmental and Social Sustainability and the Equator Principles, for the venture.



“Several questions were raised on the observance of the rights of Bulacan residents and the protection of the internationally significant wetlands in undertaking the project.”

Boskalis claimed to have commissioned various environmental and social due diligence impact assessments which resulted in an Environmental and Social Management Plan for SMC's compliance which is continuously being monitored.

Atradius DSE said that before issuing the insurance policy, it assessed the airport development's "possible adverse effects" with "extensive environmental and social screening," which included a site visit by officials of the Dutch Ministry of Finance.

"During the visit, they met with several undisclosed stakeholders, NGOs and local community representatives, and concluded that San Miguel was 'on track' to ensure the project met international standards," Global Witness said.

Atradius DSB also told Global Witness that its due diligence included a review of Boskalis's plan to manage the project according to international standards, including Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development guidelines.

Several questions were raised on the observance of the rights of Bulacan residents and the protection of the internationally significant wetlands in undertaking the project.

The EU, through the new law, will require SMC and its foreign partners to come clean regarding the mammoth Bulacan airport project which, it appears, is straying far from the proponents' claim of potentially improving the lives of Filipinos.





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# Carbon contrivances

In previous columns, I provided what I hope was a reasonably easy to understand sketch of the most basic form of a carbon market, the so-called cap-and-trade market. I am not going to take up space to repeat all that, but for those who may have missed it entirely, what this form of a carbon market essentially does is to incentivize reductions in greenhouse gas emissions — because, after all, that is the real point of all this — by quantifying emissions and assigning a monetary value to them. If an emissions producer exceeds a certain amount (measured in metric tons of carbon dioxide or CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent), it pays a tax on the extra; conversely, if it is able to reduce its emissions below the quota, the surplus “carbon credits” can be sold.

Part of what makes the concept of carbon markets a bit complicated, and frankly a bit risky, is the fact that it commoditizes the absence of something. A ton of CO<sub>2</sub>e has value in the form of tax, if the government has implemented a carbon tax, but a carbon credit's value is based on that ton of CO<sub>2</sub>e not existing. That leads to some interesting market creations, things that the Philippines may find financial opportunities in, or that may make a complete mess of any attempt to develop and operate a carbon market here.

First, carbon credits can be created by entrepreneurs by creating new processes or equipment that reduces emissions from an existing source. A company that I have become acquainted with over the past couple of months — and about which I will probably have more to say, once they establish themselves here in the Philippines — is one good example. It has developed an eco-friendly cooking stove to replace the dirtier versions used by people in less-developed areas, where they burn wood, cow dung, coal, peat or some form of gas. By diligently monitoring the use of the replacement stove, the company can then calculate the amount of carbon emissions that have been saved; once that data



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is verified by one of the several carbon registry agencies that have come into existence in the past couple of years, the company now has carbon credits it can trade.

The same “create something out of nothing” principle can be applied to an almost limitless number of ideas. A company that replaces its diesel-powered delivery trucks with electric versions, or even ones equipped with newer, cleaner diesel engines could, if it is willing to do the paperwork, also register its CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions savings as carbon credits. The process would be a bit more complicated for Philippine businesses as there is no certifying entity here, but it is by no means insurmountable, even if the government were to never formulate any carbon laws and regulations.

The government may be more encouraged to do that after a recent development elsewhere in the world, one that will eventually create a supply of carbon credits in a different way. In November 2022, Brazil, Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of Congo signed a pact dubbed the “Rainforest Protection Agreement” to create a “funding mechanism” to help preserve rainforests.

These three countries have more than half of the world's rainforests within their borders, and rainforests are universally acknowledged as the world's most important natural filter for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Although the details of how the proposed funding mechanism might work are necessarily vague, it would entail commoditizing the CO<sub>2</sub> removal capacity of each country's rainforests, in effect instantly creating a substantial, tradeable natural resource that, in market terms at least, is potentially as valuable as coal, oil or mineral ores.

This is a ghostly sort of gold rush the Philippines could take advantage of, although the country has severely handicapped

itself by decades of regarding the Department of Environment and Natural Resources as a way to institutionalize national hatred of forests. Undoing that damage will take decades more, but the effort might be worthwhile given the potential value this amazingly fertile land could generate.

There is also another aspect to the concept that may have some appeal to policymakers here. In a commentary last month, the Heinrich Foundation speculated that the existence of large carbon sinks in the form of forests could lead to a substantial increase in economic power for the “Global South.” Countries with rainforests could actually form a cartel to manage the global carbon market and dictate prices, in much the same way OPEC does with oil; as a matter of fact, the OPEC countries, all of which are prodigious producers of greenhouse gas emissions, would actually be at the mercy of the “carbon cartel” under such a scenario.

Of course, all of this is rather far-fetched at this point, and in a recent conversation, my go-to expert on commodities provided a somewhat discouraging, but quite necessary reminder of how tenuous the broad concept of carbon markets really is. Contrived commodities such as carbon credits — those annoying cryptocurrencies are probably also a good example — only have value if everyone agrees they have value, because they have no intrinsic value as other commodities do.

You can't eat carbon credits; you can't build or manufacture anything with carbon credits; and you can't live in or on them. Any market that depends on a shared assumption — or faith, if you like — has a certain potential for instability that can never be eliminated. It can be controlled, but that requires a high degree of competence and continuous effort, and even then the risk of harmful volatility will never quite go away. That does not mean that the Philippines should not try to establish its own carbon market here; I for one firmly believe that it not only should, it has no choice. But it will require a great deal of work, certainly more than is represented by some flippant two-page bill in Congress, or the minutes of three meetings of some ad-hoc executive branch task force.

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# 11 ways toward a sustainable future

On climate, on conflict, on inequality, on food insecurity, on nuclear weapons – we are closer to the edge than ever.

And yet our collective problem-solving mechanisms do not match the pace or scale of the challenges.

The present forms of multilateral governance, designed in and for a bygone era, are clearly not adequate to today's complex, interconnected and rapidly changing and dangerous world.

The fragmentation of our global response and the fragmentation of our world are feeding off each other.

Halfway to 2030, we are far off track.

We will only make up lost ground by addressing the gaps and challenges that have emerged since 2015 – including gaps in intergovernmental cooperation.

The SDG Summit in September will be the centerpiece of our work this year and must mark significant progress.

Member States must come with a clear commitment to rescue the SDGs – setting out their national vision for transformation, grounded in concrete plans, benchmarks and commitments.

The SDG Summit must make our commitment to leaving no one behind a reality in law and policy.

And it must include measures to ensure international systems relating to finance, trade, debt, and technology work for developing countries – not against them.

I repeat my call on G20 countries to agree on a global SDG Stimulus of at least \$500 billion a year to support



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UNITED NATIONS  
ANTONIO GUTERRES

countries of the Global South, by the SDG Summit.

Our Common Agenda must build on the SDG Summit.

Throughout this year, the Secretariat will issue a series of eleven policy briefs with concrete ideas for consideration by the Member States.

A first brief on the New Agenda for Peace will offer proposals that address all forms and domains of threats, articulating a vision of our work on peace and security for a world in transition and a new era of geopolitical competition.

Two policy briefs on finance will aim to

advance the crucial discussions underway on a fairer and more effective global economy.

A policy brief on our commitment to the needs of future generations will include a proposal for the appointment of an envoy to serve as their global voice. It will suggest content to inform a political declaration defining our duties to the future, and a dedicated intergovernmental forum to share experiences and advance implementation.

A policy brief on improving the international response to complex global shocks will include proposals to convene and coordinate key players quickly in the event of an emergency, with access to the right data, expertise, resources and capacities.

A brief on global digital cooperation will offer ideas on maximizing and sharing the benefits of digital technology while protecting against the harms it can cause.

Linked with this, we will issue a brief on information integrity. Delivering a new social contract means restoring trust in each other and in the facts underpinning our decisions. We need an information ecosystem that is inclusive and safe for all. This brief will further strengthen our focus on how mis- and disinformation are impacting progress on global issues – including the climate crisis.

A brief on the peaceful, secure and sustainable use of outer space, its assets, and its activities will look at harnessing the opportunities offered by space tools for delivering the SDGs and the Paris Agreement, and addressing threats and emerging risks.

Following up on the Transforming Education Summit, we will issue a policy brief on reimagining and accelerating progress on education.

Another brief will set out steps towards more systematic participation by young people in decision-making processes at the global level.

Finally, we will consider how to strengthen the capacities of the United Nations for the twenty-first century – and build a UN 2.0.

It is not enough for the UN to have the right agenda. It also needs the expertise to work with Member States to execute that agenda. And like Member States, we need new skills, new expertise, new strategies, and programs.

The policy brief on UN 2.0 will look at how we can strengthen our expertise in data, digital, innovation, foresight, and behavioral science – and build a UN System that can better support Member States in the years to come.



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# Revitalizing rivers of life in Asean

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

**M**ANY of the largest cities in the world were built beside rivers. This is also the case in Southeast Asia, a region that is rich in biological diversity.

Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City prospered because of Saigon; Malaysia's Kuala Lumpur has the Klang River; Indonesia's Jakarta has the Ciliwung; and the Philippines' capital region, Metro Manila, has the Pasig River.

## A life support system

RIVERS are special ecosystems. They are a life support system not only for humans, but for a diverse species of plants and animals as they are natural habitats that provide food and water.

Economically, rivers provide food production, the much-needed boost through irrigation.

In many cases, rivers also provide faster, efficient and relatively safe means of transportation—the reason why Manila, the country's capital city, thrived during the Spanish period.

## Under siege

BUT the rivers are constantly facing threats. The Philippines's Pasig River was once tagged as biologically dead and one of the world's dirtiest rivers.

Lately, rivers are under siege not just by toxic chemical wastes from industries, but also from garbage from various sources, including the dreaded plastic.

Recognizing the socio-economic and ecological importance of rivers, river rehabilitation programs have been launched by governments in the past, with the hope of optimizing the benefits of having a healthy river.

## Asean integrated river management

IN the Asean, a five year regional project, titled Reducing Pollution and Preserving Environmental Flows in East Asian Seas Through the Implementation of Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM), was launched in Manila on February 17.

The project aims to develop practical and innovative ways for various stakeholders—communities, industries and governments—to work together to revitalize Southeast Asia's rivers.

These rivers provide natural

habitats for various plants and animals, food production and water sources for millions of people.

As many rivers pass through densely populated towns and cities, waste and sediment eventually flow out to sea.

According to the Asean Regional Action Plan on Combatting Marine Debris, plastic is estimated to account for 80 percent of all marine debris in the ocean.

Supported by Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the project will establish functional IRBM mechanisms in major river basins of six Asean member states of Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam.

## Integrating knowledge about rivers, seas

"IT will integrate knowledge about the vital connections between rivers and seas. Best practices and pitfalls shall be shared for other rivers to emulate and avoid," Dr. Inthavy Akkharath, chairman of the Asean Working Group on Water Resources Management, explained in a media statement during the project's launching.

"Effective governance will allow us to continue to utilize the water and other ecosystem services that river basins provide despite the threats of extreme events and climate change," said Dr. Carlos Primo David, undersecretary for Integrated Environmental Science and supervising undersecretary of the Philippines's Department of Environment and Natural Resources River Basin Control Office, during the event.

## Rapidly growing water demand

"WATER use among Asean countries is growing rapidly, while water quality and quantity challenges threaten to derail much-needed economic growth," said Dr. Selva Ramachandran, UNDP Resident Representative to the Philippines.

"We're glad to help address the critical issue of freshwater governance in river basins beyond national juris-



RIVER RANGERS in the Philippine province of Cavite, south of Metropolitan Manila, rid a stream of plastic waste. Rivers form natural conduits to the sea, meaning much of the trash that flows through them eventually winds up in the ocean. GREGG YAN, PEMSEA PHOTO

dictions, addressing transboundary issues, such as pollution, watershed management, climate change impacts and disaster risks," she added.

"The project is a testament of Asean's collective and forward-looking action to improving water resources management in our region," said Ekkaphab Phanthavong, deputy secretary-general of Asean for the Asean Socio-Cultural Community.

## Sea-to-source governance

THE Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (Pemsea), the implementing agency of the project, will work closely with the governments and stakeholders in Asean member states to improve source-to-sea governance, as well as build the capacity to plan and strengthen river basin management mechanisms.

"We view this project as a natural extension of Pemsea's work on integrated coastal management—as rivers are natural conduits to our coasts and open seas," explained Pemsea Executive Director Aimee Gonzales.

"We are excited to institutionalize the use of the integrated river basin management approach; produce state of the river basin reports, which will be the first of its kind in the region; test innovative solutions in select pilot sites within the identified river basins; while mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion from the design, planning and all the way to implementation at the regional, national and river basin level," Gonzales pointed out.

## Project objectives

GONZALES told the BUSINESSMIRROR in an interview via Messenger that the project's objectives is to

improve governance and management responsiveness and capacities in integrated water resources management, reduce nutrient pollution loading, protect environmental flows and alleviate climate vulnerability through the promotion of integrated river basin management in priority river basins in six Asean countries.

Through the project, the proponents aim to conduct baseline assessments, such as biophysical profiles, socio-economic demographic forecasts, governance and management arrangements, pollutant loadings and sources to develop State of River Basin reports.

"We will also conduct pilot IRBM projects to improve governance and management, do feasibility studies, business plan, financing and improve interagency and multisector coordination," she said.

Ultimately, she said the project's objective is to enhance policies and economic incentives, develop IRBM strategy and action plan, knowledge management and enabling capacities on water quality, monitoring, reporting, develop IRBM practitioners, document and share good players, and South-South learning exchange.

## Key result areas

THE proponents also identified key result areas that include state of river basin reports, integrated river basin management plans, potential blended financing and investments on integrated solid waste management facilities in pilot sites within river basins, and integrated information management systems, including water quality river monitoring systems in river basins.

The project also hopes to create a network of IRBM learning centers and



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**SILT and fertilizer from mountains and lowland farms turn rivers brown. Tons of mud, gravel and silt are then discharged in river deltas to choke off light-dependent marine habitats like coral reefs and seagrass beds.** GREGG YAN, PEMSEA PHOTO

trained IRBM practitioners in six Asean member states.

Six river basins have been identified as pilot sites. They are: Cambodia: Kampong Bay River Basin and pilot site Kampot City; Indonesia: Ciliung River Basin and Depok City; Lao PDR: Nam Tha River Basin and Sedone City; Philippines: Imus Ylang Ylang River and General Trias; and Vietnam: Vu Gia-Thu Bon River Basin and pilot areas in Da Nang and Quang Nam.

### Commitments and momentum

ACCORDING to Gonzales, the identification of the river basins as project sites were based on commitments and momentum of both the national and local governments to utilize, build capacities and talents, including funds and investments.

Another is to operate learning sites to develop IRBM capacities through hands-on application and demonstration of best practices, technologies and professional skills, while promoting government-business community through participatory process with gender equality and social inclusion.

"The project sites were identified during project preparation stage," she said, adding that the criteria to select the river basins were discussed with Asean member states.

"Questions like: Is the site priority [river basin] for government?; Is the receiving coastal and sea area a priority coastal and marine area?; Is there adequate information and knowledge on the site?; and Are there previous or ongoing programs covering governance and management?" she said.

### Good news for biodiversity

SOUGHT to comment, Executive

Director Theresa Mundita Lim of Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) warmly welcomed the Asean Integrated River Basin Management Project.

"The project, being focused on addressing marine pollution and improving water quality, will indeed contribute immensely to protecting biodiversity in our inland waters and oceans," she told the BUSINESSMIRROR via Messenger on February 20.

According to Lim, a biodiversity expert and staunch advocate of mainstreaming biodiversity, the project complements the work that the ACB is undertaking with the Asean member states, on marine protected areas and on transboundary conservation of marine species and biological resources, based on ecological interconnectivity.

"It is paving the way for our future partnerships with Pemsea and with other intergovernmental and civil society organizations to achieve a truly integrated, cross-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach to protecting our water systems in the Asean region," Lim said.

According to Lim, ensuring clean water supply and food security in our regional seas will require better scientific and technical understanding and appreciation of the biodiversity, including plants, animals, microorganisms, genetic materials, and ecosystems, in different bodies of water found in the Asean, including their value as indicators of and nature-based solutions for poor water quality.

"Partnerships among relevant regional organizations will be essential toward a successful integrated river basin management in the Asean," she pointed out.