

27 February 2023, Monday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

# **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

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# Manila Standard



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## Binay seeking probe on plan to use Masungi

By Macon Ramos-Araneta

SEN. Nancy Binay has sought a Senate investigation into the reported plan of the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) to build and transfer its headquarters--including the New Bilibid Prisons (NBP)--at Masungi Georeserve, an ecotourism and conservation site in Tanay, Rizal.

While the initiatives of the BuCor to have new headquarters and housing for its personnel are reasonable, Binay stressed that it is important to weigh the possible consequences of building its new headquarters in the said area as it may affect the country's environment and tourism industry.

The Masungi Georeserve is a conservation area and a rustic rock garden tucked in the rainforests of Rizal.

In 2019, it has received international recognition for its sustainable tourism practices at the Annual World Tourism Organization Awards.

Binay said scientists from the National Museum of the Philippines previously noted that developing the relocation site will have expensive consequences for the environment.

In her proposed Resolution No. 495, Binay cited the need for a thorough study on the BuCor plan.



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Not sure what good "tree-hugging" brings to the environment. But I would love to know DENR's actions and voice on the Masungi Georeserve, Philippines being tagged as the No. 1 ocean plastic polluter, mining in Sibuyan island, etc. Where is the DENR secretary?  
**@gretchenho**



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



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**ALL TOGETHER NOW** — Tourists take the time to exercise while on the spider web-style viewing platform at the Masungi Geo-Reserve in Baras, Rizal, on Sunday, Feb. 26, 2023. Masungi is a conservation area and rustic rock garden tucked in the rainforests of Rizal. Senator Nancy Binay has asked the Senate to conduct a probe into the reported plan of the Bureau of Corrections to build a facility at the geo-reserve. (Arnold Quizon)





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**Tourists visit Masungi Georeserve in Baras, Rizal yesterday. The Masungi Georeserve Foundation recently raised alarm after 20 Bureau of Corrections personnel went to the area with orders to conduct an inspection and security threat assessment. The Senate committee on tourism is set to investigate the BuCor's plan to build its headquarters in the reserve.**

MICHAEL VARCAS



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NEWS IN A FLASH P10.00

**TOURISTS** try a spider web-style viewing platform during a visit to the Masungi Georeserve in Baras, Rizal yesterday. The Masungi Georeserve is a conservation area and a rustic rock garden tucked in the rainforests of Rizal. Sen. Nancy Binay has sought an investigation on the reported plan of the Bureau of Corrections to build a facility at the Masungi Georeserve that she said may affect the environment and tourism in the country. (Arnold Quizon)



## Paglilipat ng BuCor sa Masungi Georeserve, pinaimbestigahan

NAGHAIN ng resolusyon si Senador Nancy Binay na naglalayong palimbestigahan ang napaulit na plano ng Bureau of Corrections na magtayo ng baong headquarters sa loob Masungi Georeserve sa Rizal.

Inaatasan ng Senate Resolution No. 495 ang Senate committee on tourism na kanyang pinamumunuan upang imbestigahan ang plano ng BuCor.

"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," ayon kay Binay sa resolusyon.

"While the initiatives of the Bucor to have a new headquarters and housing for its personnel is reasonable, it is important to weigh the possible consequences of building its headquarters in an Ecotourism site like the Masungi Georeserve, which may affect the environment and tourism in the country," dagdag ng senador.

Binanggit ni Binay sa resolusyon ang pahayag ni Ann Dumaiang, co-founder ng Masungi Georeserve na nagsasabing nakapaloob ang relokasyon ng BuCor sa maselang limestone formation at kasama sa konserbasyon nan isinasagawa ng Masungi Geopark Project sa pagitan ng Masungi Georeserve Foundation at Department of Environment and Natural Resources, sa pamamagitan ng balido at binding memorandum of agreement na nilagdaan ni dating DENR Secretary Gina Lopez noong 2017.

Sinabi pa ni Binay ang posisyon ng siyentipiko mula sa National Museum of the Philippines na nagsasabing kapag ginalaw at ginawang relocation site ang lugar, magkakaroon ng matinding epekto sa kapaligiran.

Noong nakarang linggo, sinabi ni BuCor officer-in-charge Gregorio Catapang Jr. na nakatakda silang magtayo ng bagong headquarter sa lupain sa Tanay, Rizal na sinasabing nasasakupan ng Masungi Georeserve.

Ayon kay Catapang, hindi pagtatayuan ng New Bilbid Prison ang 270 ektaryang lupain doon.

Ipinalabas ng ahensya ang pahayag matapos manawagan ang Masungi Georeserve na makialam si President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla, at Environment Secretary Ma. Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga matapos magsagawa ng ocular inspection ang BuCor bilang relocation site ng NBP sa lugar.

"The Georeserve said that the BuCor personnel bore a title for over 270 hectares in the name of the BuCor, while the remaining 30 hectares were under the DENR," ayon sa resolusyon.

Ayon kay Catapang, "BuCor is the registered owner of the property, and it has all the right to conduct any activity in the area, including the questioned ocular inspection."

Aniya, pag-aari ng BuCor ang ari-arian alinsunod sa transfer certificate issued noong September 2006 sa ilalim ng Presidential Proclamation 1158.

ERNIE REYES



EDITORIAL

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## Cautious look at reclamation

FROM their perch in the Senate building in Pasay City, the senators looking in the direction of Seaside Boulevard and Jose Diokno Avenue cannot help but notice the ongoing feverish reclamation of that part of Manila Bay reportedly by Chinese construction firms.

The Senate building itself, along with the nearby GSIS building, big hotels and convention centers in the vicinity stand on land reclaimed from the sea. Since the first reclamation project in Manila Bay in the 1960s to construct the Cultural Center of the Philippines, we have witnessed the development of thousands of hectares of new land both in Metro Manila and Metro Cebu, and many never bothered to question the practice.

Only when catastrophic natural disasters such as the series of huge earthquakes in Turkiye and Syria happen do Filipinos and government officials raise the alarm on present construction practices.

**'Many people are still unaware of the 2004 study by the Japan International Cooperation Agency which said Metro Manila was overdue for a magnitude 7.2 earthquake, or the "Big One."**

Lately, professor Kelvin Rodolfo, a Filipino expert in geology and environmental science, sounded the alarm against business investments in reclamation projects in Manila Bay, citing uncommon risks such as land subsidence, storm surges and tsunamis, and of course, earthquakes. Rodolfo is a professor at the University of Illinois in Chicago and was awarded the Gawad Bayani ng Kalikasan in 2022.

The geologist recently reviewed the proposed P34-billion Manila Waterfront City Reclamation project, a joint venture agreement that involves the reclamation and development of 318 hectares of foreshore and offshore areas of Manila Bay.

"Despite the clear dangers from land subsidence, storm surges, tsunamis and liquefaction during earthquakes, Manila Bay reclamation is proceeding rapidly," Rodolfo said. He stressed that land subsidence, or the lowering of the surface closer to sea level, delayed runoff from rains and worsened flooding and tidal occurrences.

Construction companies whose desire for profit overshadows safety concerns are reminded by the geologist that increased pressure from the weight of new buildings in reclaimed areas could also speed up the compression of the surface, resulting in subsidence.

In other words, buildings constructed on natural ground have better chances of survival than those standing on reclaimed land, in cases of strong earthquakes.

This is because during temblors, the shaking of the ground tends to break the contact between grains of filler materials so buildings on top of sediments could sink or topple over. This is less likely to occur in buildings standing on original solid ground.

Many people are still unaware of the 2004 study by the Japan International Cooperation Agency which said Metro Manila was overdue for a magnitude 7.2 earthquake, or the "Big One."

This warning should prompt the government to take a more cautious look at the ongoing Manila Bay reclamation project and those still to come.





## Beware of toxin in some plastic cutlery, kitchen utensils—watchdog

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

[@jonmayuga](#)

**A** LOCAL toxics watchdog on Sunday raised concern over the detection of bromine in some black plastic cutlery and kitchen utensils being sold in Metro Manila.

According to the group EcoWaste Coalition, the items may contain bromine, a component of toxic brominated flame retardant (BFR) chemicals linked to a number of adverse health effects such as interference with the

body's normal hormone functions, a test buy conducted by the group revealed.

In test buys conducted from February 19 to 21, the EcoWaste Coalition collected 45 assorted cutlery and kitchen utensils sold in retail stores in Caloocan, Manila and Quezon Cities. Items made of black plastic were chosen as other studies have found BFRs in such products.

Among the items purchased and checked for bromine content using an X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) analyzer

were black plastic ladles, skimmers, spaghetti servers, spatulas, turners, spoons and others.

Based on the XRF screening results, samples of big and small reusable black plastic spoons had 27,170 and 2,225 parts per million (ppm) of bromine, respectively, while a small soup ladle had 1,758 ppm. A disposable black plastic spoon contained 139 ppm of bromine.

Also, 10 black plastic kitchen utensils were found to contain 119 to 864 ppm of bromine, in-

cluding a slotted turner (with 864 ppm), ladle (482 ppm), and a soup ladle (236 ppm).

In most cases, bromine was detected along with antimony (a component of antimony trioxide which is a common flame retardant synergist) as well as lead (a heavy metal additive or a contaminant).

"The detection of bromine in some cutlery and kitchen utensils being sold locally is a red flag," Aileen Lucero, National Coordinator, EcoWaste Coalition said in a statement.



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# Daily Tribune

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THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources has turned over two trash traps to Barangay Lapasan and Barangay Buntod in Cagayan de Oro City recently to address the problem of garbage flowing into rivers and seas. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF DENR



## *Regional Updates*

### **Brooke's Point fisherfolk say mining operations killing their livelihood**

THE LIVELIHOOD of at least 100 families, mostly fisherfolk, in the town of Brooke's Point in Palawan have been affected by mining operations, according to a community leader.

"The fishermen who depend on the sea lost their jobs. They were banned by the mining company in the area where a causeway was built as they said they have applied for it," Job Z. Lagrada, a resident

and community leader from Brooke's Point, said in Filipino via Messenger call.

He also said that floodwater triggered by rains from a low-pressure area in January came with laterite that drenched the homes and livelihood of the residents. Laterite is a reddish soil of aluminum ore, which he claimed came from the mining operations.

"It was added up to the water of the people and gradually became muddier. This will start to weaken the income of the community, especially the fishermen in the upcoming years," said Mr. Lagrada.

On Friday, Brooke's Point local government officials and residents called on the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to issue a cease-and-desist order against Ipilil Nickel Corp. (INC), citing that it does not have a renewed mayor's permit.

Mr. Lagrada also said that the mining firm did not conduct a public consultation for the "extended application" of its expired mineral production-sharing agreement (MPSA).

INC, in a statement on Thursday, said the DENR has clarified that their MPSA did not expire and was instead amended to comply with Republic Act No. 7942 or the Philippine Mining Act of 1995.

The company also claimed that they have already "submitted the necessary documents and complied with all laws and regulations" for the mayor's permit renewal.

Leon Dulce, campaign support and linkages coordinator of Legal Rights and Natural Resources, said via e-mail that "mining projects should be conscious of how they can affect all resource-dependent communities not only in their direct impact areas but also along the watershed where the impacts can flow."

"These include indigenous peoples, small farmers and fisherfolk, and other residents, other economic activities such as agriculture and tourism, and the public authorities that represent these stakeholders," he said. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**



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# Expired permit puts Palawan mine in trouble

By Jane Bautista  
and Jordeene B. Lagare  
@Team\_Inquirer

Residents and the local government of Brooke's Point in Palawan province are urging the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to issue a cease-and-desist order against Iplan Nickel Mining Corp. (INC) for continuing to operate without a mayor's permit.

The pushback from the community comes two weeks after the people of Sibuyan Island protested the operations of Altai Philippines Mining Corp., which resulted in an order from the DENR to conduct an investigation of the company's alleged violations.

In a press briefing on Friday, Brooke's Point Mayor Cesareo Benedito Jr. lamented how the mining firm ignored his order and continued to operate.

"[In the] first week of January, we sent an order telling them to stop and reminding them that they need to renew their permit," Benedito said. "Until now, they have submitted requirements, but many are still missing for their renewal."

On Feb. 18, residents staged a protest and barricaded the mine purportedly because residents "could not accept that the



**NO TO MINING** Environmental activists protest in front of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources headquarters in Quezon City to oppose the continued mining operations on Sibuyan Island in Romblon. —GRIG C. MONTEGRANDE

firm is disregarding the power of our mayor."

Job Lagrada, a farmer and town resident, said they have seen "how irresponsible" the mining company was and that it could not control the laterite coming from the mountain.

### 'Not socially accepted'

Laterite is a rock and soil type rich in iron and aluminum that develop under weathering, usually during high temperatures and heavy rainfall.

"The barricade was done to show that mining is not socially accepted in Brooke's Point. This is the result of the reaction of the people during the previous

typhoon [that caused] severe flooding," said Lagrada, who is leading the demonstrators barricading in the area.

He noted that they did not see the mining workers as enemies since some of them are community members and their neighbors as well.

"What we are against is irresponsible mining that continues to operate and ignores the orders from the local government," Lagrada said.

But the company, through its parent firm Global Ferronickel Holdings Inc. (FNI), said "we are awaiting the renewal of our mayor's permit as we have already submitted the neces-

sary documents and complied with all laws and regulations," according to INC resident manager Alex Arabis.

### MPSA still in force

The FNI quoted the Mines and Geosciences Bureau's (MGB) Feb. 21 letter in saying the mineral production sharing agreement (MPSA) covering the mine remains in force until April 10, 2025, and the MGB wrote a clarificatory letter to Brooke's Point Vice Mayor Mary Jean Feliciano that INC still holds the exclusive mining right to the area spanning 2,835 hectares, with 260 hectares already partially declared as a mining area.

"To resolve the issue on the effective date of the MPSA, the DENR has issued the order dated December 21, 2021, confirming that the effective date of the same MPSA shall be reckoned from the date of the execution of the amended MPSA," it said.

A total of 3,739 indigenous people (IPs) from Barangays Arimbungos and Calasaguen voted in favor of INC while in Barangay Calasaguen, 100 percent of the eligible voters backed the company.

"This led the IPs from Barangays Barong-Barong, Iplan, Mambalot and Maasin to concede in favor of INC," it added. **INQ**



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REMATE OPINION

## ANG INYONG LINGKOD

NI DR. HILDA C. ONG

**MISMONG** si President Ferdinand "BBM" Marcos, Jr. na ang nagsabi na mahalaga ang ginagawang pangangalaga ng pamahalaan at non-governmental organizations sa nalalabing natural forests ng bansa.

Ang mga trahedyang du-

lot ng mala-delubiyong bagyo ay nagbibigay ng diin sa pangangailangan na isaayos ang mga nasirang kagubatan malapit sa mga baybayin at makagawa ng mga tamang proyekto na hindi na tablan ng mga malalakas na weather disturbances.

Ang massive tree-plan-

## PROTEKSYON NG KAGUBATAN, MAHALAGA SA KAUNLARAN

ting activity sa ilalim ng pamamahala ng gobyerno sa kanyang National Greening Program (NGP) ay maaaring ipatupad sa coastal areas. Ang mabisang paraan upang protektahan ang mga siyudad mula sa nagngangalit na storm surge, ay sa pamamagitan ng mangrove reforestation sa ilalim ng NGP.

Mula sa tinatayang mahigit 30 million hectares na kagubatan sa pagdating ni Ferdinand Magellan noong taong

1521 ay nasa 6.8 million hectares na lamang ito noong taong 2011 ayon sa datos ng NAMRIA o ng National Mapping and Resource Information Authority.

Pero sa pinakahuling tala ay umakyat ito sa 7.2 million hectares o pagtaas ng 5.6% dulot ng reforestation program at pagpapatupad ng anti-illegal logging laws.

Ayon pa kay Pangulong BBM, sa kasalukuyan ay puwedeng i-monetize ang forest cover, mayroon itong peso o dollar value na malaki ang maitutulong sa pagpapaulad ng ekonomiya ng bansa.

Ang tinutukoy ng Pangulo ay ang malaking pondong inilalaan ng mga funding agencies para sa proteksyon ng kagubatan katulad ng carbon sink program ng UNEP o United Nations Environmental Program.

Base sa direktiba ni Pangulong BBM, may inihandang strategic plans and programs for the forestry sector ang DENR o ang Depart-

ment of Environment and Natural Resources.

Bahagi nito ay ang pagkakaroon ng isang real-time, single-point access forestry investment program na magbibigay ng mga tamang impormasyon at serbisyo ukol sa forestry investment sa tinatayang 15 million hectares na forestlands ng bansa.

Nakaugnay din ang portal sa mga financial and credit facilities of partner financial institutions katulad ng DBP o Development Bank of the Philippines na suportado ang mga agro-forestry plantation program, at maging sa Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation para sa proteksyon ng mga pananim.

Kung nais ninyo malaman ang TAMANG IMPORMASYON, TAMANG SERBISYO ni AGARANG SERBISYO LADY, i-search sa YOUTUBE CHANNEL, "HILDA ONG" at sa Facebook Fanpage "TV RADIO HILDA ONG". Huwag kalimutan i-click ang salitang "SUBSCRIBE", "LIKE" at "SHARE".



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## 20 hektarya sa Solsona-Apayao nilalamon ng forest fire

TINATAYANG nasa 20 hektarya sa kabundukan ng Solsona-Apayao ang patuloy na nilalamon ng 'forest fire' na nagsimula noong Sabado ng gabi.

Ayon kay Solsona Vice Mayor Joseph de Lara, hanggang sa kasalukuyan ay patuloy na inaapula ang sunog sa nasabing kabundukan.

Kasama si Ilocos Norte Police Provincial Office (INPPO) provincial director Gen. Julius Suriven, nagtungo sa lugar si De Lara para alamin ang lawak ng pinsala ng sunog.

Nagsagawa na rin ng emergency meeting sina Norte Gov. Matthew Marcos Manotoc, INPPO at Philippine Army (PA) para matugunan ang problema.

Kumukuha na rin ang mga awtoridad ng tubig sa dam ng Pidding at Paoay Lake bilang aerial response para buhusan ang nasusunog na kabundukan.

Kabilang sa mga rumesponde sa nasusunog na kabundukan ang mga kagawad ng pamatay sunog ng Dingras, Banna, Marcos, Nueva Era, Bacarra, Laoag City, Batac City at Ilocos Norte Water District (INWD). (Allan Bergonia)



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# GLOBAL STUDY LISTS PH PROVINCES AT MOST RISK OF CLIMATE DAMAGE

By **Krixia Subingsubing**  
@krixiasINQ

Several Philippine provinces, majority of them in northern Luzon, are at most risk of damage from extreme weather to their buildings and other property developments in about two decades, according to a new report on climate risk.

According to the 2023 Gross Domestic Climate Risk ranking by the Sydney-based climate-change research firm The Cross Dependency Initiative

(XDI), Pangasinan, Pampanga, Nueva Ecija, Cagayan and Tarlac are the five most at-risk provinces based on their aggregated damage ratio (ADR)—or the total amount of damage to their built environment because of climate-induced disasters such as flooding and rising sea levels.

XDI defines the damage ratio as an indicator of the province's annual average loss from extreme weather damage to property.

Metro Manila, Bulacan, Isabela, Davao del Sur and Leyte

round up the rest of the 10 most at-risk provinces.

Together they join the 600 most vulnerable provinces out of the 2,639 jurisdictions worldwide covered by the report.

### China tops list

The study said that 80 percent of the top 50 most at-risk states and provinces are in China, the United States and India.

The ranking also showed that most of the states and provinces at highest risk of climate disaster are economically

important to their countries and to global trade.

Nine Chinese provinces, including Jiangsu, Shandong and Hebei, that account for more than half of the country's economy take up the top nine spots that are most likely to suffer trillions of dollars in damage by 2050, as natural disasters become more extreme and frequent.

The coastal US state of Florida ranked 10th in the world.

But XDI's report is also the latest among several studies that have shown the Philippines'

vulnerability to climate change.

Just last year, the Philippines topped 193 countries around the world in terms of disaster risk from extreme weather and other climate-induced events.

The report is based on global climate models, combined with local weather and environmental data and engineering archetypes which are used to calculate the damage to the built environment from eight different extreme weather hazards.

It aims to capture the risk of extreme weather and climate

change on infrastructure in cities, provinces and countries around the world using consistent and comparable metrics.

Climate risk at an ecosystem level was analyzed to see the impacts of climate-related failures in power, water and transport infrastructure.

XDI said the countries on the list need to acknowledge their physical risks, take immediate and effective measures to adapt, and take climate risks into consideration when making investment decisions. INQ



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Govt should consider  
amending land reform  
law for rice sufficiency,  
food security



**BUSINESS TALK**  
WILLIAM S. CJ





**R**ice for many Filipinos is the holy grain that cannot be missed out for most of their meals and the most important staple food at least for Filipinos. It is not surprising that it is the major crop of the Philippines and it became a political commodity. However, the much-coveted desire of the country to be self-sufficient is still elusive at the present time.

Rice as a major agricultural crop in the Philippines contributes to 14 percent of the country's gross domestic product, and by some estimates, there are 3.65 million rice farmers. Still significant millions of labors are dependent on the rice.

Dr. Rodolfo Undan, who was formerly the president of the Central Luzon State University (CLSU) and now a full-time rice farmer, believes that the Philippines has the natural land and water resources, the climate, the manpower, adequate germplasm materials and the technological capabilities to be self-sufficient and consequently, attain the much-desired food security in this staple crop. Self-sufficiency in this context means enough food for the population plus a buffer stock for three months period. Food security means a stable self-sufficiency, no need to import but instead export good quality rice to needy countries.

However, Dr. Undan explained that for rice, there are priority limiting factors that need to be addressed to meet the target: irrigation water, energy, postharvest facilities, pricing, and laws/policy formulation and implementation conducive to high productivity. There is also a need to view the problem holistically by looking at the entire supply chain as well as apply the farm level proven scientific methods of farming for increasing yields. Some misguided policies and laws, the lack of good planning and the agricultural bureaucracy make it difficult for the rice grain sector to flourish. These are actually decades of systemic problems that continue to persist.

Dr. Undan suggests that the government must consider the welfare of all of the stakeholders but slightly favoring the producers - the farmers. He said that the leaders in government should promulgate laws that are advantageous to rice farmers and farmers in general. It should also help set a minimum farm gate price of palay on wet basis at ₱20/kg for ordinary variety and ₱21/kg for good eating quality variety, which he describes would inspire the farmers to be highly productive not only for palay production but also in other food needs.

The Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry shares the same

sentiments with Dr. Undan. In fact, one of the advocacies that we are putting forward is the amendment of the agrarian reform law to expand land coverage and allow farmers to own up to 25 hectares of land to make it suitable for efficient farming. With this size, farmers can put in and utilize proper irrigation and highly mechanized farming technologies including the much-needed post-harvest facilities that lead to better opportunities and benefits - in-

*Specifically, we should consider easing the rules in land consolidation and ownership to create opportunities for better agricultural productivity by farming larger tracts of land and providing farmers with the right support.*

creased productivity and income, access to credit and in the long run reduction of poverty incidence among farmer-beneficiaries.

We have elevated this recommendation to House Speaker Martin Romualdez as part of our 48th Philippine Business Conference resolutions and we hope Congress will consider and look into it.

Certainly, the weak agriculture system in the country is driven by the low productivity of farmers and despite the implementation of the comprehensive land reform law and various support services, we continue to lag behind our neighbors in ASEAN in terms of development. Specifically, we should consider easing the rules in land consolidation and ownership to create opportunities for better agricultural productivity by farming larger tracts of land and providing farmers with the right support. And just like the rice industry of the Philippines, it could be a major game-changer sector that will lead us toward full socio-economic recovery and progress.

*(Dr. William S. Co is the chairman of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) and director of the Agriculture and Fishery Committee).*



## GSIS urged: Let retired gov't officials, workers pay voluntary contributions

BY ASHZEL HACHERO

SENATE Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel III yesterday urged the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) to allow elected officials and their staff who have retired to continue remitting voluntary contributions equivalent to 15 years so that they can qualify for its pension program.

"I appeal for our local officials and their staff who have served nine years in government but cannot qualify for the pension program due to the 15-year minimum service requirement under Republic Act 8291," Pimentel said in a statement.

"I am saddened to learn that there are so many elected officials and public servants holding temporary and co-terminus status on the national and local levels who would retire without a retirement fund and pension only because they have not met the 15-year minimum service requirement," he added.

This as he noted the glaring disparity between the term limit of elected officials and the 15-year minimum requirement of the GSIS pension program that, he added, seems to disregard the service rendered by elected officials and their staff.

Section 13-A of RA 8291 states that a member who retires from

the service shall be entitled to retirement benefits provided he or she has rendered at least 15 years of service.

But Pimentel said that particular provision of RA 8291 is unfair for government employees and elected officials who do not meet the minimum number of years.

The 1987 Constitution provides that local officials such as councilors, mayors, vice-mayors, governors, vice-governors, and congressmen can only be elected for three consecutive terms or a total of nine years.

Meanwhile, senators are elected nationwide by qualified voters to a six-year term and can serve for not more than two consecutive terms or a total of 12 years.

The President and the Vice President on the other hand have a term of six years with no provision for reelection.

"At the grassroots level, it is the local chief executives and members of the council who oversee and address the welfare and interests of our citizens. Without their contribution, development and local commerce will not progress. I think we can at least give them this consideration to compensate for this critical role," the opposition senator said.

He said some of these officials even leave high-paying jobs in the private sector to run for public office.