

04 February 2023, Saturday



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DENR looks into Sibuyan illegal mining protest

Tension grips Sibuyan Island over nickel mining.

BY JING VILLAMENTE

Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Toni Yulo-Loyzaga on Friday said they "will take a good look" at the opposition of a group of Sibuyan Island residents to nickel mining in that part of Romblon province.

The group had put up a human barricade to prevent trucks carrying nickel ore from exiting a pier being constructed by the Altai Philippines Mining Corporation. Police, however, dispersed the protesters.

Yulo-Loyzaga said the DENR is engaging with different stakeholders – including those in the mining sector and communities – to balance the need for minerals with environmental, social and economic considerations.

She stressed that the agency is adapting a "mitigation hierarchy" framework, comprising a sequence of steps to avoid the impacts of mining and, where avoidance is not possible, to reduce the effects of extraction activities.

The approach also includes rehabilitation of sites no longer used by a project, before offsetting residual impacts.

"[This approach] will definitely entail the consideration of the environment enhancement program that each of the mining companies need to undertake, the progressive rehabilitation program that they are going to propose, and the short-term mine planning model that they are mandated to put into consideration," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

The secretary added that revitalizing the mining sector – even though the industry only accounts for less than one percent of the country's gross domestic product – is a priority of the Marcos administration.

"Geographically and socially, [things are] different. So these complexities need to be addressed in whatever approach that we will take moving forward," she said.

Violation

The Alyansa Tigil Mina is supporting residents opposed to the operations of APMC, claiming the mining firm does not have the necessary permits to operate.

ATM also claimed that the extraction of minerals is also driving deforestation and the climate crisis, threatens water sources and displaces people.

ATM said that it is not "a fair call" for the DENR secretary to listen to all sides when a mining operation is clearly violating environmental and local government laws.

The anti-mining protesters have demanded to see APMC's barangay clearance, municipal business permit, foreshore lease contract with the DENR, and port authority permit.

"Affected communities have been waiting for DENR Secretary Yulo-Loyzaga to listen to their side, and unfortunately, the Mines and Geosciences Bureau has failed to properly enforce environmental laws," Jaybee Garganera, the ATM National Coordinator, said.

In 2011, the DENR canceled the APMC permit to explore Sibuyan Island.



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Senate to probe mining in Romblon

BY BELLA CARIASO

BY BELLA CARIASO

CAGAYAN DE ORO: Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri on Friday said that the Senate is ready to investigate the nickel mining project in Romblon amid calls for Congress to look into the alleged violations of the Altai Philippines Mining Company (APMC).

In an ambush interview, Zubiri added that Congress will also impose more taxes on mining companies to increase the country's revenue from industry.

"If there is a resolution filed, we can do that [in the investigation]. They can approach senators and the senator can file a resolution and the Committee on Senate environment and natural resources can hear that. It is up to the committee to hear that. We are open to any environmental degradation claims that need to be investigated," Zubiri said.

The Roman Catholic Diocese

of Romblon has warned of "tragic consequences" if the nickel mining project in the province continues.

Bishop Narciso Villaver Abellana visited Sibuyan Island residents who have been protesting the large-scale project, which the local clergy opposes.

Zubiri added that he is for sustainable mining amid efforts of the Marcos administration to revive the industry.

"I believe that there should be sustainable mining. You know the world today, we use batteries all over the world and the Philippines is one of the richest sources of

nickel which is used for batteries. We just need to make sure that we mine responsibly and increase the taxation so that it can go back to the communities," Zubiri added.

According to Zubiri, there are several measures that are now pending in Congress seeking to increase the taxes on mining firms.

"There are several measures right now being heard in the Senate and in Congress on the increase in the amount of taxes being collected from the mining companies, that actually comes from the House of Representatives, all tax measures emanates from the House so we are awaiting for these tax measures to come to the Senate," Zubiri said.

Zubiri added that the concerned local government unit should get a portion of the funds earned from the mining companies.

"I've been always pushing that the money should not only go to the national government, to the national treasury, there should be a proportion of the funds that will

go back to the local communities, for environmental rehabilitation, as well as livelihood and skills training," he added.

Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said that the DENR will continue its consultation on the government's move to revitalize the mining industry after residents of Sibuyan Island have opposed the operation of APMC in the area.

In a press conference, Yulo-Loyzaga also defended the decision of the Marcos administration to allow the operation of the mining companies, saying the country needs minerals.

"We need minerals, you all know that. How we balance really depends on our understanding of the complexities that we faced. We cannot just choose one approach. We need to be sensitive to everything that is going on so on the Sibuyan, we need to take a good look at that," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

Residents of Sibuyan Island in Romblon have been forming a

human barricade to block the entry of trucks with ore.

"We are here to listen until we get to be satisfied that we have heard all the stakeholders. These complexities need to be addressed in whatever approach," she added.

According to Yulo-Loyzaga, the DENR is implementing a mitigation hierarchy to minimize the impact of mining operations in the environment.

"When you can avoid it, you must. If you can reduce it, you must. If you need to rehabilitate, you must and if you cannot fully rehabilitate, you must be engaged in some form of compensatory action," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

She said that the mining companies will be tasked to undertake an environment enhancement program.

"We are looking at the SDMP (Social Development and Management Program) in particular to see how they may be part of a general resilience and risk management objective for the communities and

ecosystems that are going to be destroyed but the Environment Potential Enhancement Program also needs to be reviewed. There will be a very careful look at climate related risk, and other multiple hazards that are occurring in the area," she explained.

Yulo-Loyzaga said that the DENR will also establish a multisectoral advisory council for each bureaus.

"That will be launched very soon and for the MGB (Mines and Geosciences Bureau), we have engaged both from the pro- and anti-mining sectors as well as the science and business community," Yulo-Loyzaga noted.

She also reiterated the need to review the Philippine Mining Act of 1995 and the Small-Scale Mining Act.

"We also need to review the Clean Water, Clear Air, Solid Waste, Climate Change and Disaster Risk and Management Acts. We can no longer think that these are not interrelated. They all intersect with each other," Yulo-Loyzaga said.



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FIGHT FOR ENVIRONMENT An antimining protester is being pulled by an antiriot policeman on Friday as hauling trucks of a mining firm forced their way through a barricade set up by groups opposing mining operations on Sibuyan Island in Romblon province. —PHOTO COURTESY OF ALYANSA TIGIL MINA

2 hurt as cops, antimining protesters clash in Sibuyan

Commotion erupts as policemen break up barricade set up to stop trucks from hauling nickel ore out of the island in Romblon

By **Madonna T. Virola**
@mvirolaINQ

CALAPAN CITY—Two protesters were injured as antimining residents continued to barricade the port of a mining firm in the town of San Fernando on Sibuyan Island, Romblon province, on Friday.

According to the antimining group Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM), about 20 protesters tried to stop three hauling trucks of Altai Philippines Mining Corp. (APMC) that were carrying nickel ore from leaving the port at around 9 a.m.

The protesters formed a human wall, but the trucks forced their way through the barricade, prompting 30 policemen in full antiriot gear to intervene and disperse the residents.

In a video posted on Friday by ATM on its social media pages, two policemen were seen dragging away a protester who tried to get in the way of one of the trucks, while the other protesters were shoved by the policemen to the roadside.

Before the commotion, some of the residents and policemen figured in a verbal confrontation, with the protesters

complaining that they were being "harassed" by the cops. Uniformed personnel from the provincial police office also had a confrontation with the protesters on Thursday but no one was hurt in that incident.

Call for suspension

Police authorities in the province could not be reached for comment on Friday. But on Thursday, Police Capt. Richard Obsid, information officer of the Romblon police, asserted that the cops were deployed there to prevent violence during the protest.

Since last week, residents on the island have been opposing what they claim to be an "illegal" mineral exploration by APMC in Sibuyan.

Elizabeth Ibañez, coordinator of environmental group Sibuyanons Against Mining, said they have asked the local government of San Fernando, one of the three towns on the island where the company is based and has built its port, and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to suspend APMC's mining activities.

In an earlier statement, Ibañez said APMC alleged that

the company had not obtained the necessary permits and documents for its mineral exploration.

Cleared

Sibuyan Island, which is known for its rich biodiversity and near pristine environment, is composed of the towns of Cajiocan, Magdiwang and San Fernando.

On Sunday, the San Fernando municipal government said APMC had permits and documents that were issued by the national government.

According to the San Fernando public information of-

fice, Mayor Nanette Tansingo and Vice Mayor Domingo Marin validated the mining firm's papers after a recent meeting with officials of the regional DENR in Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan).

APMC also asserted that its operation was cleared by the DENR and other concerned government agencies.

"We assure the public that APMC's operations shall remain in accordance with prevailing laws, rules and regulations," the company said in a statement sent to the Inquirer on Monday. **INQ**



Human barricade nilatag sa Sibuyan Island, 2 sugatan

DALAWA ang sugatan nang subukan ng mga residente ng Sibuyan Island sa Romblon na harangin ang mga mining truck sa pagpasok sa pribadong daungan.

Makikita sa ibinahaging video sa Twitter ng Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM) ang pagharang ng mga residente sa mga truck bilang protesta sa operasyon ng Altai Philippines Mining Corporation (APMC) pero itinutulak silang palayo ng mga pulis.

Tatlong truck na may kargang nickel ores ang nakalusot sa ikinasang human barricade ng mga residente nitong Pebrero 3.

Pinapalagan ng mga residente ang operasyon ng nickel mining sa lugar dahil sisirain nito ang tinaguriang 'Galapagos of Asia.'

Ayon kay Donato Royo, opisyal ng barangay

sa lugar, sinikap nilang harangin ang pagpasok ng mga truck pero hindi sapat ang kanilang dami kaya naitulak sila ng mga pulis.

Kumbinsido rin ang environmentalist na si Rodne Galicia na may sawatan sa pagitan ng mining firm, pulisya at mga local politician kaya napa-sok ang kanilang lugar.

Iginiit ni Royo na tutol sila sa paghuhukay ng nickel sa kanilang lugar dahil wawasakin nito ang kapaligiran kabilang ang Mt. Guiting Guiting Natural Park at iba pang pinagkukunan nila ng kabuhayan.

Dagdag niya, tama at lehitimo ang ginawa nilang barikada dahil ilegal ang nasabing operasyon bunsod ng kawalan ng permit sa local level.

(Issa Santiago)



Barikada ng anti-mining sa Sibuyan binuwag ng pulisya: 2 sugatan



SUGATAN ang dalawa katao sa ginawang dispersal sa human barricade na binubuo ng mga residente ng San Fernando, Sibuyan island, Romblon upang pigilan ang mining operations sa naturang bayan Biyernes ng umaga.

Ayon sa environmental group Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM), gumawa ng barikada ang mga residente dahil sa di-umano'y iligal na mining operations ng Altai Philippines Mining Company na hindi makapagpakita sa mga nagprotesta ng kaukulang legal na mga dokumento para

makapag-operate.

“Two were hurt after Sibuyanon defenders try to block mining trucks in entering the private port. Three trucks with nickel ores passed through the barricade today,” saad ng ATM sa isang Facebook post.

“Three trucks with nickel ores passed through the barricade today”, sinabi pa ng grupo.

Magdalawang linggo nang nagbarikada ang mga residente sa lugar ng mining, sa Sitio Bato, Barangay Span pero wala pang tugon ang Department of Envi-

ronment and Natural Resources (DENR) sa pangyayari.

Sinabi ni San Fernando Mayor Nanette Tangsingco na walang permit ng local government ang pagmimina sa lugar, pero wala itong ginawang hakbang para pigilan ang paghakat ng nickle ores ng Altai na gumawa rin ng sariiling pier sa lugar kungsaan nakahimpil ang barko na hahakot ng ores patungo sa ibang bansa.

Ang Altai Mining Philippine ay pag-aari ng Gatchalians.



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Manila Bay is 'alive and well'; reclamation poses a big threat

By CHARIE MAE F. ABARCA

Manila Bay is not dead. While marine resources of Manila Bay are "at risk" and threatened by reclamation projects, the Pam-bansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mama-malakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) stressed that a significant number

of fishermen primarily from Cavite, Metro Manila, Bulacan, and Bataan still depend on its fishing grounds.

In a statement, Pamalakaya said "Manila Bay is alive and well," refuting claims of local government units (LGUs) that the body of water is already considered "dead" due to pollution.

"Contrary to the claims of local

officials, Manila Bay still has diverse marine resources," said Pamalakaya in Filipino. It cited a report published by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), stating that "there are coral covers discovered in the southern part of Manila Bay, specifically in the province of Cavite."

Pamalakaya, however, warned of the impending effects of massive

and ongoing reclamation projects in the bay. Currently, there are at least 30 reclamation projects in the body of water, 21 of which already have an environmental compliance certificate according to the group.

**Revocation
of environmental permits**
In October 2022, the fisherfolk

group, together with other progressive groups in the country, urged DENR to revoke and scrap the environmental compliance certificates for Manila Bay reclamation projects.

Through this "science-backed" opposition, Pamalakaya highlighted that these projects not only threaten the livelihood of small-scale fishermen, but also bring harm to the fragile marine ecosystem of the bay.

Instead of pushing for reclamation, Pamalakaya urged LGUs to support Filipino fishers in promoting and seeking "genuine" rehabilitation such as, but not limited to, coastal restoration and reforestation of mangroves.



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'Manila Bay still rich in marine resources'

Manila Bay is still abundant in marine resources, fisherfolk group Pamabansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mambalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) said yesterday, following reports that some local government units were discouraging small fishers from fishing in Manila Bay by saying that it is already a "dead" body of water.

"Contrary to the claims of local officials, Manila Bay is still diverse with marine resources. In fact, a significant fishing population from Cavite, Metro Manila, Bulacan and Bataan rely on its fishing grounds," Pamalakaya national chairperson Fernando Hicap said in a statement.

The fisherfolk group cited a report from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)'s Ecosystems Research and Development Bureau showing that coral reefs still thrive in Cavite. The report said that 72 percent of coral reefs in the bay are found in the province.

Pamalakaya, however, said the bay's resources are threatened by massive reclamation projects. Based on the group's record, there are at least 30 pending and ongoing reclamation projects in Manila, of which 21 have been issued environmental compliance certificates by the DENR.

Among the projects that have environmental permits are the 420-hectare Bacoor Reclamation project, the 2,500-hectare Bulacan Aerotropolis project, a 360-hectare reclamation project in Pasay, a 650-hectare reclamation project in Navotas and the 419-hectare Horizon Manila project.

"We have sought help from the DENR under its current secretary, Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, but to no avail," Hicap said.

He called on local governments to demand that the government stop "destructive" reclamation activities and "promote genuine rehabilitation."

- Elizabeth Marcelo, Danessa Rivera



Zubiri urges DENR chief to push for REs

CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY: Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri on Friday urged Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyza to ensure the establishment of more renewable energies (REs) to lessen the country's dependence on coal.

During his speech at the second day of the multistakeholder forum here, Zubiri added that former Energy secretary Alfonso Cusi failed to implement the country's program on REs.

"We are trying to push for the renewable energy portfolio standards. Under the renewable portfolio standard, most major power producers, particularly coal and gas power plants, were supposed to be getting renewable energy as part of their portfolio. There was a delay in its implementation during the time of former secretary Cusi," Zubiri said.

Zubiri expressed confidence that Energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla will hasten the implementation of the renewable energy power projects.

"There are many pending renewable energy power projects due to the lack of push from the previous administration, that is why I am happy Secretary Popo Lotilla is there. Secretary Lotilla sees the problem of lack of power and REs as the best way to of

course fill up that gap because it is expensive to put up a coal power plant. Coal is very expensive but solar is still affordable; we can put up wind sources," Zubiri noted.

Zubiri added that renewable energy should be pushed all over the country.

"We have to push that all over the country, the whole eastern seaboard, Davao Oriental all the way up to Isabela, Cagayan province, from Eastern Samar, all the way up to Bicol Region, we can put up wind facilities there. We have to harness the power of the wind. So that is not very difficult," he added.

Zubiri noted that in 2022, the electricity rates in Mindanao increased to P16 per kilowatt hour from P9 per kilowatt hour.

"We need to bring down our cost because right now, the coal power plant is giving us P16 per kilo here in Mindanao for our consumers, and it's hurtful. Last year, we were only paying P9 per kilowatt hour, not to mention it is already expensive and damaging to our climate. We should already do away with these fossil fuels and just go with renewable energy for the next six years under the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.," he added.

BELLA CARIASO



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DoLE interns for DENR reforestation

THE Department of Labor and Employment (DoLE) in Region 2 (Cagayan Valley) has engaged a total of 14 beneficiaries under its Government Internship Program (GIP) on bamboo plantations' maintenance and protection activities within the provinces of Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino and Cagayan.

DoLE Region 2 Director Joel Gonzales said that activities like geotagging, foot patrolling, replanting, ring weeding, soil cultivation and brushing contribute to the bamboo's growth and high survival rate while supporting the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' (DENR) National Greening Program.

DENR Region 2 Executive Director Gwendolyn Bambalan recently met with DoLE key officials, asking for support to sustain the aforementioned Environment department's reforestation program's activities.

She noted that through the government internship program, the community members-beneficiaries are given the opportunity to earn a living while augmenting the government's massive planting activities that address climate change.

"We in our department ensure to provide an improved labor and employment system as evident in our collaboration with other government agencies," she said.

Engaging Tupad

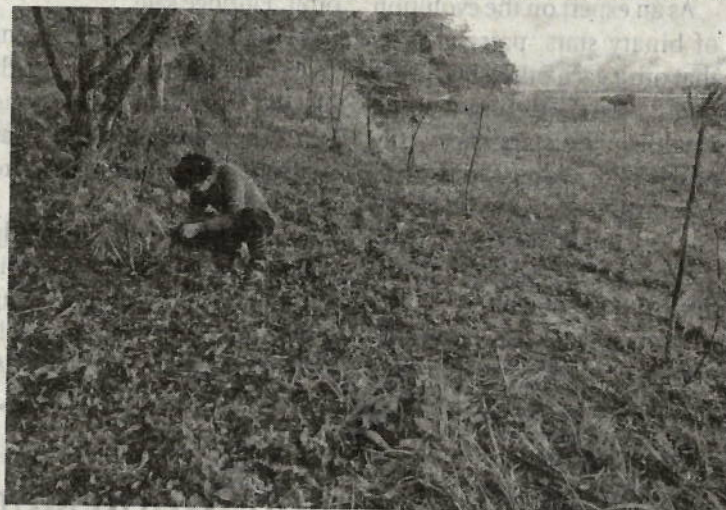
The engagement of 205 Tulong

Panghanapbuhay Sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (Tupad) in 2020, which was a partnership between DoLE and DENR, resulted in improved riverbank stabilization and the latter's solid waste management programs.

After Super Typhoon "Ulysses" hit the region that same year, 120 workers planted bamboo along the easement area of the Cagayan River, while 50 conducted cleanup and clearing operations within the Regional Government Center (RGC) in Tuguegarao City. Another five beneficiaries cleaned along the RGC premises in 2022.

During the meeting, Gonzales approved the 90-day renewal of the 14 GIP beneficiaries and the 60-day engagement of the 35 Tupad workers for a massive cleanup within the RGC, which included maintenance and protection activities in clonal nurseries, and at the Mechanized and Modernized Forest Nursery in Lannig village in Solana town, Cagayan province.

A memorandum of agreement between and among the DoLE, DENR and the Department of Trade and Industry, which was forged in October 2022, is also set for renewal on Feb. 14, 2023. It provides for the intervention on bamboo reforestation sustainability; promotes the bamboo business industry; and extends financial assistance for the engagement of GIP and Tupad beneficiaries. **LEANDER C. DOMINGO**



Community members earn a living while supporting the government's tree-planting activities. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



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ASFs worth P70M turned over to Region 2 LGUs

DUPAX DEL NORTE, Nueva Vizcaya: The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in Region 2 (Cagayan Valley) turned over P70 million worth of completed agroforestry support facilities (ASF) to the local government units (LGUs) and people's organizations (POs) of Nueva Vizcaya and Quirino.

During the turnover ceremony on January 30 to 31, a tripartite memorandum of agreement was signed among the DENR, LGUs and POs, defining their responsibilities in sustaining the infrastructure projects.

DENR Region 2 Executive Director Gwendolyn Bambalan said the turnover aims to strengthen the agency's forest conservation activities and improve the local

communities' socioeconomic condition.

Three Nueva Vizcaya facilities were funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) through the Environment department's Forestland Management Project, a watershed management intervention that addresses climate change.

These include the concreting of 3.151-kilometer access road sections 1 and 2, the construction of 13 linear meters flat slab bridge in Barangay Parai and the construction of 7.97 kilometers Molave, Keon and Guijo pathway in Barangay Bitnong.

The two ASFs in Quirino were turned over to Diffun LGU and Don Mariano Perez Farmers Consumers Cooperative (DMPFCC) — the concreting of access road

phase 2 and construction of the irrigation pipeline system.

Carolyn Annang-Tumamao, DENR Region 2 information officer, said DENR officials awarded the certificate of sub-project turnover and acceptance to the following recipients: Parai Upland Greeners Association Inc. and Bitnong Guijo Greeners Association Inc. in Dupax del Norte, and the DMPFCC together with the concerned municipal and *barangay* (village) LGUs.

Engaging communities

These projects would integrate the conservation and development interventions within the 24 sub-watershed areas involving 147 POs.

Bambalan said they "support

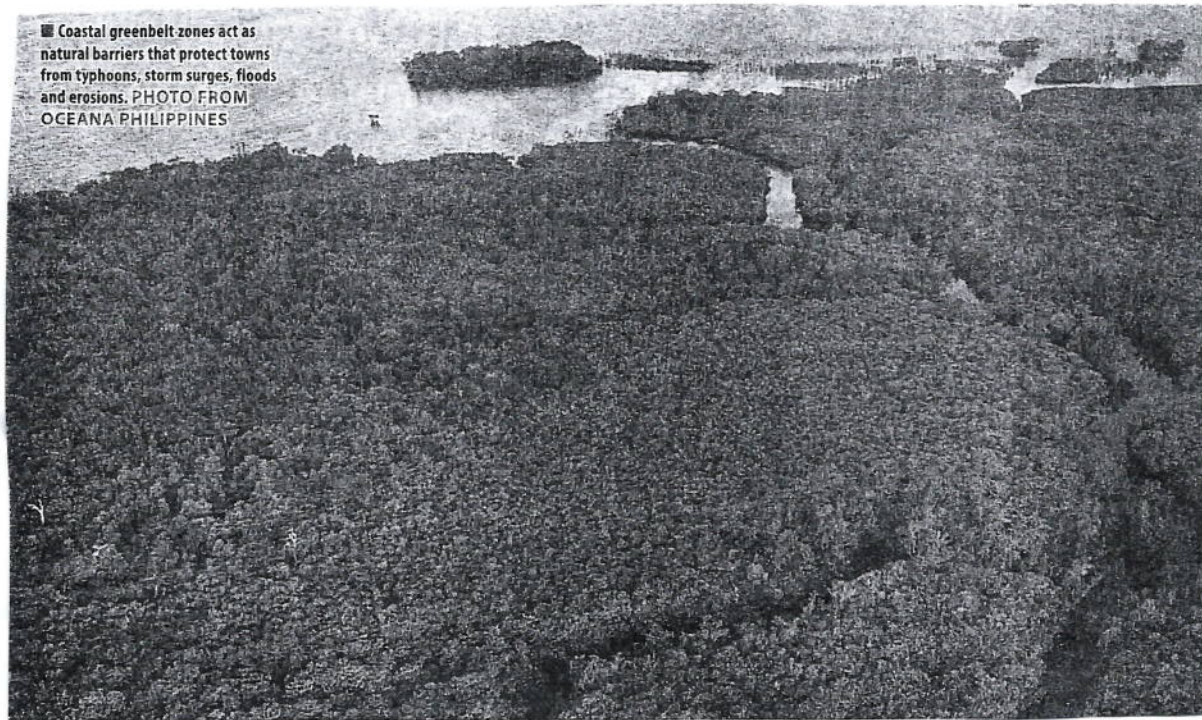
social and economic advancement at the local level while we engage with the local communities ... to protect and conserve our remaining natural resources to address climate change crises."

Dupax del Norte Mayor Timothy Joseph Cayton acknowledged that the projects can improve their reforestation program, committing additional funding support to be implemented in his municipality. Diffun Mayor May Calaunan also ensured commitment to the DENR and JICA's development projects.

JICA senior representative Soichiro Ide encouraged the local communities that running the projects can have benefits "if you are there to maintain the forests and ensure the availability of social services." **LEANDER C. DOMINGO**



'Greenbelt zone' gains ground



■ Coastal greenbelt zones act as natural barriers that protect towns from typhoons, storm surges, floods and erosions. PHOTO FROM OCEANA PHILIPPINES

BY BELLA CARIASO

A PROPOSED legislation pushing for the establishment of a national "greenbelt" program to shield fishers and coastal communities from storm surges, and the worsening impact of climate change is gaining ground in both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Senators Cynthia Villar, Lorna Regina "Loren" Legarda, Ana Theresia "Risa" Hontiveros and Maria Lourdes "Nancy" Binay have filed separate bills in the upper

house pushing for the creation of the National Coastal Green Program.

Cagayan de Oro City Rep. Rufus Rodriguez and Bukidnon Rep. Jose

Manuel Alba also filed counterpart measures at the lower chamber.

Hontiveros said Senate Bill 591 aims to come up with a strategic program to rationalize the development of mangroves and beach forests for coastal protection, and is anchored on a comprehensive policy framework that addresses the fragmented approach in the past.

The proposed legislation shall provide appropriate agencies and government instrumentalities with the mandates, funding and general guiding principles for

implementing a science-based and cost-effective program.

The House Committee on Climate Change, chaired by Bohol Rep. Edgar Chatto, has concluded its marathon technical working group meetings to tackle the proposed coastal greenbelt bills.

During the meetings attended by concerned national government agencies, the academe and nongovernment organizations, emphasis was given to the urgency and importance of protecting the country's threatened coastal greenbelts.

Protecting the coastlines

The Davao Regional Development Council and the Provincial Government of Negros Occidental backed the declaration of a network of coastal greenbelt zones.

Oceana Philippines Vice President Gloria Estenzo-Ramos supported the development and implementation of a national program for coastal greenbelt zones.

"We live in an archipelago with one of the longest coastlines that are also the pathways of typhoons and storm

surges, yet the government favored the so-called development projects in exchange for coastal defense provided by mangroves and beach forest areas which had been decimated as a result of reclamation and dump-and-fill projects," Ramos said.

She noted that thriving mangrove forest areas serve not only as refuge and habitat for fishes, aquatic animals and plants, but also as natural barriers to protect coastal towns and rural folk from powerful typhoons, storm surges, erosion and floods that inflict huge damage to property and lives.



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NEDA approves six big-ticket projects worth over P100b

By Vince Lopez

SOCIOECONOMIC Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan on Friday said the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) board has approved six big-ticket projects, including the proposal to raise funding for

the rehabilitation of Metro Rail Transit Line 3 (MRT-3).

The six projects were on top of the seven that were earlier approved by the NEDA board, chaired by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

On Thursday, Malacañang announced *Next page*

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that the first public-private partnership (PPP) project approved by the NEDA board was the proposed construction of a P6-billion cancer center at the University of the Philippines (UP)-Philippine General Hospital (PGH) in Manila.

On top of the UP-PGH cancer center project, the proposed increase in the cost of the MRT-3 Rehabilitation Project by P7.6 billion from P21.9 billion to P29.6 billion also secured the NEDA board's approval, Balisacan said in a Palace press briefing Friday.

Balisacan said the NEDA Board approved the DOTR's request for changes in scope, project cost increase, implementation period extension, additional loan and second loan reallocation of the MRT-3 rehabilitation project.

"This project involves upgrading MRT-3 to its original, as designed, state, with provision for capacity expansion in the future. All subsystems will be restored, renewed or upgraded, including the tracks, signaling system, power supply system, overhead catenary system and communication system, as well as maintenance in a station equipment," he said.

"The project will also involve integrating other MRT-3 related projects such as the common station, the Dalian

trains, and the transition to a four-car train configuration. This rehabilitation project aims to enhance the safety and level of service of the MRT-3 and to promote its use to help alleviate the worsening traffic congestion in Metro Manila," he added.

Balisacan said the NEDA board also approved the utilization of Japan International Cooperation Agency's (JICA) P2.12-billion loan balance for the Communications, Navigation and Surveillance for Air Traffic Management (CNS/ATM).

The NEDA board, Balisacan said, also confirmed the Investment Coordination Committee's approval of the Department of Transportation's P17-billion New Dumaguete Airport Development

Project, P13 billion of which will be funded through Official Development Assistance (ODA) from the Korean government.

"Under this project, a new airport facility in Bacong, Negros Oriental will be developed with domestic and international standards for operational safety and efficiency. This project will replace the existing Dumaguete-Sibulan Airport due to physical and operational constraints involving the latter," Balisacan said, noting that the project will be implemented within seven years.

He said the new Dumaguete airport will enhance the province's tourism and

trade potential, economic activities and standard of living.

NEDA also approved the Department of Agriculture's (DA) P6.6-billion Mindanao Inclusive Agriculture Development Project (MIADP), which aims to increase agricultural productivity, resiliency and access to markets and services of organized farmers and fishers groups in selected areas, Balisacan said.

He said around P5.3 billion of the estimated total cost of the MIADP will be financed through the ODA from the World Bank, while the remaining P863.461 million will be shouldered by the DA and the local government units (LGUs).

He said the MIADP covers selected ancestral domains in Zamboanga Peninsula, Northern Mindanao, Davao Region, Soccsksargen, Caraga and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

"The project will be pivotal in reducing poverty, unemployment and food insecurity among indigenous peoples. It will improve the economic situation of the indigenous people in Mindanao and further strengthen the capacity of LGUs to implement support programs that address weak market linkages and poor infrastructure in geographically isolated ancestral domains," he said.

Balisacan said the NEDA board also



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over P100 b.

gave its approval to the Department of Public Works and Highways' (DPWH) first phase of the Integrated Flood Resilience and Adaptation Project.

He said the project aims to mitigate flood damage, reduce flood risk and improve climate resilience in the country's three major river basins, including Abra, Ranao and Tagum Libuganon in Mindanao.

The project, with an estimated cost of P20 billion, is to be financed through an ODA loan from the Asian Development Bank.

Balisacan said the NEDA board also approved the DOTR's request for changes in scope, an increase in cost, and the extension of the implementation period for the Davao Public Transport Modernization Project.

The project, he said, involves delivering a "modern, high priority" bus system for Davao City, wherein interconnected bus services will be prioritized along 29 routes.

"Implementation period for this project is extended from 2023 to 2029," Balisacan said.

Balisacan said the approval of the "high-impact" projects will play an important factor in attaining the Marcos government's economic development agenda.

"These projects are expected to significantly contribute to achieving our social and economic transformation goal in the medium term," he said.



Inutil na mga opisyal!



KUNG ang isang alkalde ay walang magawa para ipagtanggol ang pagkasira ng kalikasan ng kanyang bayan, ang tawag dyan ay **INUTIL!**

Oo! Sinabi mismo ni Mayor Nanette Tansingco sa isang panayam ng media na walang permiso ng kanilang munisipyo at ng barangay ang pagmimina sa kanilang bayan ng San Fernando, Sibuyan island, Romblon. Kung ganun, bakit wala siyang ginagawang hakbang para pigilan ang pagwakwak ng Altai Mining Philippines sa kanilang kabundukan? Aba'y napakalawak ng lugar na kakatayin dito ng Altai, dalawang barangay daw!

Dapat igiit ni Mayora ang kapangyarihan ng local government unit. Dahil ang mamamayan niya ang magdurusa kapag

may trahedyang nangyari dulot ng pagmimina sa kanyang bayan.

Kung walang permiso ng LGU ng San Fernando ang pagsira ng Altai sa kanilang kalikasan, aba'y bakit 'di samahan ni Mayora Tansingco ang kanyang mga residenteng nagmamalasakit sa kanilang bayan, na araw-gabi kahit umuulan ay nagbabarikada sa mining site para mapigilan ang pagkawasak ng napakaganda nilang bayan.

Pero kung dedma lang sa nangyayaring kaguluhan sa pagitan ng mga nagbabarikada at pulisya si Mayora Tansingco na tila nagsisilbi pang spokesman ng mining company, aba'y kadudaduda na yan, mga pare't mare. Magkano?

At nakakabingi rin ang pananahimik ng gobernador ng Romblon na si Otik Riano lalo ng kanilang bosing na si Representative o Congressman "Budoy" Madrona. Sigurado napapanood nila sa social media lalo sa mainstream media ang mga nangyayaring kaguluhan sa bayan ng San Fernando pero 'di manlang sila mamagitan, huwag nilang sabihin na wala ring pahintulot nila ang pagmimina ng Altai sa Sibuyan?

Ang isang mining company ay hindi basta magmimina sa isang lugar ng walang pahintulot ng barangay, mayor at provincial. Dahil bago magbigay ng "go signal" ang Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) ay numero uno nilang nire-require ang mga permit ng LGU lalo't isang protected area ang Sibuyan. Yes!

Sa mga hindi pa nakarating ng Sibuyan, ako kasi ay naikot ko na ang buong isla, napakaraming magagandang ilog dito. Dito nyo matatagpuan ang sikat na Mt. Guiting Guiting at ang natitirang virgin forest sa Pilipinas.

Kapag nagpatuloy ang pagwakwak ng Altai mining sa bundok ng San Fernando, kungsaan matatagpuan ang tanyag na Catingas River at marami pang ilog na dinadaluyan ng malinis at malamig na tubig mula sa kabundukan, at nagkaroon ng malakas na pagbuhos ng ulan, siguradong dadaloy ang putik mula sa minahan patungo sa mga ilog hanggang baybayin paikot ng isla. Magkukulay tae ang mga ilog dito. Peks man!

Ito ang dapat isipin ng mga namumuno sa Sibuyan lalo ng gobernador ng Romblon. Yung Congressman kasi ay wala namang paki yan anuman ang mangyari sa Sibuyan, kasi nasa Tablas island ang kanyang mansion.

Naniniwala ako na si Cong. Madrona ang nagdala ng mining sa Sibuyan. Kasi kung si Otik lang, malabo yan. Hindi kilala ni Otik ang Gatchalians, ang may-ari ng Mining. Si Madrona ang pamilyar sa Gatchalians kasi nakasama niya sa Kongreso ang magkapatid na Gatchalians.

Nitong Biyernes ng umaga, nagkagulo uli sa barikada sa mining. Binuwag ng mga pulis ang barikada para makalabas ang mga truck na puno ng nickel ores patungo sa barge sa kanilang ginawang private pier sa lugar. **Subaybayan!**



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87 pawikan na nahuli sa Quezon, pinakawalan

SARIAYA, Quezon

– Umaabot sa 87 marine turtle hatchlings (olive ridley sea turtle) o pawikan ang pinakawalan sa baybay dagat ng Brgy. Bignay 2, Sariaya, Quezon kahapon.

Ang aktibidad ay dinaluhan ng mga kawani mula sa City Environment and Natural Resources Office (CENRO) Tayabas, Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Office sa pamumuno ni Roda Valenzuela; Municipal Agriculture Office sa pangunguna ni Nelia Oribe; Bantay Dagat, at Barangay Officials ng Bignay 2.

Samantala, patuloy na ipinapaalala ng CENRO Tayabas sa publiko na ayon sa Department Administrative Order No. 2019-09, ang olive ridley ay kasama sa listahan na itinuturing na "endangered" at kailangan protektahan sa ilalim ng Republic Act No. 9147 (Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act of 2001).

Ipinagbabawal sa batas ang paghuli, pagkolekta, pagbebenta at pag-aalaga ng mga pawikan gaya ng olive ridley at iba pang mga "endangered" na hayop. (Tony Sandoval)



Editorial

A new headache for farmers

LAST week, we reported on the probable supply shortages of phosphorus-based fertilizer that Filipino farmers will have to contend with in the next several years. If that were not already an unwelcome additional risk to their business and livelihoods, there is growing concern that supplies of chemical pesticides may soon also be less accessible.

The worry over a potential shortage of pesticides in the near future stems from moves in some countries to ban their production or export, most notably Germany, which is a major manufacturer of pesticides and the base chemicals used to produce them. According to a January 30 report by Deutsche Welle, a draft law being prepared by the German agricultural ministry could be available as soon as the first half of this year. The report said that the specific list of pesticides and chemical compounds to be banned is still to be finalized, but will include common pesticides such as glyphosate, profenofos and cypermethrin. These chemicals are already banned for use within the European Union, but their export is permitted, at least for now.

An export ban presents a huge problem for farmers in developing countries who rely on pesticides to ensure their crops are productive. A tropical climate such as what we enjoy here in the Philippines is great for growing crops, but it is also an excellent environment for all manner of insect pests, fungal and bacterial infections, and invasive weeds. Without the accessibility and liberal use of economical and effective pesticides, most crops in the Philippines would fail, with unimaginably unpleasant consequences for the nation's food supply and the farm sector's economic well-being.

However, chemical pesticides are incredibly harmful for the environment, which is why tighter restrictions on them are being implemented. Recent research shows that, depending on the type of pesticide being manufactured, chemical pesticides derived from petroleum generate between 15 and 27 kilograms of CO₂ (carbon dioxide)-equivalent per kilogram of pesticide during their production.

Pesticides also generate greenhouse gas emissions when they are used; many release volatile organic compounds, which break down into near-surface ozone that acts as a potent greenhouse gas. Some pesticides also stimulate soils' production of nitrous oxide, another type of greenhouse gas. In addition, gaseous fumigant pesticides, such as sulfur fluoride, generate greenhouse gas emissions directly.

What alarms most researchers is that not only do pesticides directly contribute to climate change, the changing climate can intensify pressure from agricultural pests and decrease crop resiliency. To combat these, more pesticides have to be used which, in turn, leads to increased greenhouse gas emissions.

Obviously, moving away from the use of harmful pesticides in favor of more sustainable alternatives should be a priority and done as quickly as possible. Precipitous action such as imposing outright bans on chemical pesticides before those alternatives can be made available, however, may do more harm than good. In Sri Lanka, for example, a well-intentioned but poorly thought-out ban on chemical fertilizers a couple of years ago led to the virtual collapse of that country's agricultural sector. The ensuing economic downturn was a significant contributor to widespread protests against the government, and the eventual ouster of the Rajapaksa regime.

The government should review ongoing agricultural research programs and increase support for those that are aimed at reducing reliance on chemical pesticides and fertilizers. Some of that research into alternatives has already been under way for years, and has produced some promising results, such as more pest-resistant varieties of staple crops. This is a good start, but in order to achieve results that can be put to widespread use before a supply crisis develops, this work must be given a higher priority and expanded. Tapping private sector expertise must be part of the plan as well in order to reduce the government's resource and knowledge gaps.

Prioritizing this kind of research and development would help to ensure greater sustainability and productivity in our agriculture sector. The effort would also give the Philippines the chance to establish itself as a world leader in agricultural research, and create new business opportunities.



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EDITORIAL

Reform retirement system

By an overwhelming majority, congressional representatives voted this week to pass a bill lowering the optional retirement age for government employees from 60 to 56 years.

A House press release quoted Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez's optimistic take on the proposed measure: "They (government workers) can opt to quit working, receive their benefits, do other activities, and enjoy life in retirement with their loved ones even before they become senior citizens."

Indeed, this is an attractive option. Who doesn't want to stop working while one is still in relatively good health, and enjoy the company of family and friends, while drawing financial support from a state pension?

And yet, for many senior Filipinos, including the approximately one million Filipinos working in government who would be affected should the measure be signed into law, the reality of retirement actually, to use present day slang, "bites."

This is because, as a 2020 report in this paper points out, an estimated 80 percent of Filipinos nearing retirement age are financially unprepared to bear the cost of post-retirement life. Then Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Gov. (now Finance Secretary) Benjamin Diokno had bad news for those contemplating leaving the workforce. "The harsh reality," he said, "is that eight out of 10 Filipinos aged 60 and above, and in many cases retirees, do not receive sufficient pension to fully cover their living expenses."

Last year, Senior Citizens party list Rep. Rodolfo Ordanes Jr. proposed that beyond making retirement optional for those 56 years and older, the law could also allow employees who reach 65 years (the current compulsory retirement age) to "choose to continue their employment" provided that a senior citizen "qualified under the bona fide occupational qualifications of his job."

Why do many senior citizens wish to continue working beyond retirement age? To begin with, said financial consultant Boom Rizal in a blog post, many seniors are still not entitled to government-mandated retirement benefits since "they're not enrolled in either the Social Security System (SSS) for private sector employees, or the Government Social Insurance System (GSIS) because of their low income." In 2016, only 29 percent of seniors were covered by the SSS or GSIS.

But even if they receive the mandated pension, the amount is still not enough to cover living expenses, including rising medical and health care costs. As of 2021, SSS pensions ranged from P1,200 to a little over P10,000, averaging about P3,600 a month, still inadequate by many measures. No wonder there was a public outcry against the plan (since rescinded) to draw on the funds of the SSS and GSIS to finance the Maharlika Investment Fund. Many argued that it would imperil the already precarious situation of retirees who feared seeing the money set aside for their pension frittered away in an untested instrument.

The country, in fact, ranks the second worst among 44 economies in terms of retirement income system, a deterioration from its previous years' rankings in the Mercer CFA Institute Global Pension Index. Mercer cited the country's system of "having no requirements in terms of communicating with plan members" as the primary cause for its very low scores.

It said unless the government addresses the "major weaknesses and/or omissions" in its retirement system, its efficacy and sustainability will continue to be in doubt and the country will remain among the worst places for retirees.

In passing the bill lowering the optional retirement age for government employees, House members seemed to view the measure as a way of rewarding workers for their many years spent in the workforce. Speaker Romualdez, for one, said retiring early would enhance the life of seniors. "It's surely more fun to live life without work-related stress," he asserted.

But the reality confronting many retirees is far from "fun." For many, the end of employment is proving to be a reason for insecurity, anxiety, dependency, and, indeed, poverty. While retirement will be optional at 56, it can also be a double-edged sword for those who may have no choice but to continue working to provide for themselves and their families in these difficult times of high prices and lack of jobs.

Instead of just lowering the age of optional retirement, which would add untold numbers of early retirees to an already inadequate pension system, our lawmakers and policymakers should also study reforming and improving the pension system to provide adequate benefits to members. It is hoped that this would ensure that the end of employment is not a doorway to disaster, but a real reward for those who had given the best years of their lives to contribute to society.



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Worsening garbage problem

The World Bank last year released a report on its assessment of the solid waste management plans as well as the collection, recycling and disposal conditions of the 17 local government units (LGUs) of Metro Manila to determine the gaps and barriers hindering the effective implementation of RA 9003, in particular the recovery and recycling of plastic wastes.

Based on data from the National Solid Waste Management Commission (NSWMC), Metro Manila generated as much as 9,500 tons per day (tpd) of waste in 2020 and is projected to rise to 10,400 tpd in 2025.

HIDDEN AGENDA



MARY ANN LL. REYES

Waste collection in Metro Manila, the study revealed, is performed through the combined efforts of the barangays and LGUs. As required by RA 9003, collection of segregated waste is performed by the barangays, delivering waste to the materials recovery facilities (MRF) for segregation of recyclables and composting of biodegradables. Meanwhile, LGUs are tasked with the collection of residual waste. However, with the limited resources of barangays and the small number of MRFs, this condition has not been attained in the 17 LGUs in Metro Manila.

The study noted that in practice, the bulk of waste collection in the metropolis is performed by the LGUs together with their contracted private haulers due to the limited resources of the barangays. Of the 17 LGUs, 15 utilized the services of private haulers.

Based on data provided by the Metro Manila Development Authority, the WB study said that 33,000 cubic meters of waste is collected daily from all Metro Manila LGUs. Using the average density of 174 kg/cubic meter, it pointed out that this translates to only about 5,742 tpd or about 60 percent of the projected 9,498 tpd for 2020 and that this collection rate is low compared to Jakarta and Bangkok, which have waste collection rates of 74 percent in 2017 and 81 percent in 2018, respectively.

The WB study observed that non-collection of garbage is expected in areas that are not covered by the barangay collection and not reached by LGU collection trucks, especially in depressed or slum areas where the road networks are narrow. This in turn results in the presence of litter in streets, vacant lots, and waterways during flood events.

The same study pointed out that coordination between LGUs and the barangays is deficient, if not absent, on the aspects of monitoring of collection and waste diversion through MRFs and MRS and this, it said, is manifested by the absence of a unit within the LGUs to monitor barangay MRF and MRS operations.

WB classified the LGUs into four tiers in terms of overall solid waste management. Those belonging to Tier 1 or those with high ratings in the implementation of plastic waste management projects, passage of necessary plastic waste ordinances and diversion facilities, and moderate rating in MRS are Muntinlupa, Paranaque and Pasig.

Those in Tier 2 or those who rank a close second in overall SWM management are Manila, Quezon City, Pasay City, Las Piñas, Makati, Malabon, Mandaluyong and Marikina. Meanwhile, Tier 3 LGUs or those which rank significantly lower compared to Tier 2 in terms of overall SWM management are Navotas, Pateros, Valenzuela, Caloocan and Taguig.

The lone LGU under Tier 4, ranking lowest in overall solid waste management, is the city of San Juan.

Meanwhile, waste disposal in Metro Manila is managed by the MMDA. There are three privately owned facilities accepting waste from the 17 LGUs and these are the Rizal Provincial Sanitary Landfill, New San Mateo Sanitary Landfill and Navotas Sanitary Landfill.

The NSWMC recently announced that Metro Manila was the most waste generating region nationwide, saying that if all the garbage in the Philippines were added up, 25 percent would come from Metro Manila residents.

However, based on a report by the Senate Economic Planning Office (SEPO), only 85 percent of waste in Metro Manila is collected and taken to sanitary landfills. About 15 percent of the estimated 9,212.92 tons of garbage generated by Metro Manila residents end up in canals, estuaries, rivers and, ultimately, into Manila Bay.

Two years ago, the MMDA began desilting Parañaque River and had to remove a garbage island that has formed in the middle of it as part of its flood control measures. Agency officials said it will take about three to four months to fully get rid of the pile of garbage, which is estimated to be 26,000 cubic meters in volume.

If the World Bank study were to be used as a gauge, the Paranaque LGU belonged to Tier 1 and therefore has an effective SWM in place. However, residents have begun to think that this will no longer be true soon especially with former mayor Edwin Olivarez no longer leading the city.

Residents observed that uncollected trash have piled up in several city streets and alleys. And this they said may be due to the fact that the Parañaque LGU changed its contracted private garbage hauler.

Just last Dec. 27, Edwin's brother Eric, who now sits as mayor, signed a P414.8 million contract with a new hauler, Metrowaste Solid Waste Management Corp. The mayor terminated the contract with Leonel Waste Management Corp., which had been collecting trash in the city for nine years and without any complaint from the residents and barangay officials.

The allegedly hasty deal entered into by the younger Olivarez with Metrowaste and the numerous complaints from concerned residents prompted the City Council to conduct a public hearing last Jan. 24.

Councilor Christopher Aguilar was reported as saying that



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Angel Alcalá, National Scientist

The passing of Dr. Angel Alcalá, noted marine scientist saddens not only his friends, students, and colleagues but the Filipino people and the nation. He is a rarity even among the best of our best scientists.

For friends and colleagues like myself who had known him over the years, he represents the kind of leaders we need today. After his passing a few days ago, several accounts and accolades said about him noted his outstanding accomplishments as a marine scientist – his scholarly research and his academic accomplishments, even his early beginnings as a son of a fisherman in a poor coastal community in Negros, there was no mention of his qualities as a human being except that it was his early experiences with nature that had developed in him



PAGBABAGO
FLORANGEL ROSARIO BRAID

the lifelong passion of working on the preservation of the fisheries resources.

Angel was a man of great humility, unassuming, soft-spoken and friendly, reaching out to many who needed his help, a man of great integrity and faith. Despite the fact that he had been bestowed with almost every national and international recognition one could think of, (except the Nobel prize which he certainly deserves if he waited a little longer), he had remained humble, grounded, and thoughtful of needs of others, especially the marginalized.

I had the privilege of having worked with him at the CAP College's Distance Learning project which started in 1980 during the

time of former Education Secretary Anding Roces. Dr. Alcalá took over as chair after his stint as chair of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). The project has been a modest but effective model of how college education in the country can be delivered through distance education. It offers a Bachelor of Arts, a Bachelor of Science, and a Bachelor in Business Administration. It offers as well a Ladderized Interface Between Technical-Vocational Education and Higher Education where one can obtain a Bachelor of Science in Information Technology. Among the notables on the board were the late Dr. Edith Tiempo, National Artist.

In the light of the country's deep concern over the continuing deterioration of our biodiversity, especially our marine resources, Dr. Alcalá's exceptional performance in arresting further destruction of environment is indeed commendable. His work was primarily aimed at helping local fishing communities provide better yields as well as raising people's awareness of the advantages of protecting the coral reefs. He has worked as consultant to the UN Environment Program, the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank.

One of his remarkable achievements was the

restoration and preservation of areas with large predatory fish populations in a marine sanctuary in APO called Sumilon Reserve Marine Resources. He also worked on the conservation of coral reefs and the protection of giant clams.

For all these, he was named ASEAN biodiversity hero in 2017 and awarded the Guggenheim fellowship for natural sciences, the Field Museum Founders Council Award of Merit, the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1992, and National Scientist in 1999.

These are among his lifetime accomplishments: about 160 scientific papers and books; 50 new species of animals; ensured conservation programs were put in place in the country; set up artificial coral reefs; headed the Institute of Marine Biology at UP; was deputy executive director of the Philippine Council for Aquatic and Marine Research and Development.

Dr. Alcalá obtained both his master's and doctorate degrees from Stanford University.

We deeply condole with his family, his wife Naomi Lusoc, and six children and the hundreds of thousands of environment warriors in the country. Farewell Angel, you will be deeply missed.

My email, Florangel.braid@gmail.com



Point of view

Food security in the highlands of Kalinga

By DANIEL JASON M. MACHES

If there's one crucial thing that we can learn about this onion fiasco or the unprecedented price hike for almost every food we buy, that is self-sufficiency. In other words, we need to learn how to produce our own food. We can no longer fully rely on what is being sold in the market or the foods produced by big corporations. It's all about going back to the basics, drawing inspiration and lessons from our subsistent ancestors.

Early this month, I and a few members of the SlowFood community for Mountain Province visited Pasil, a remote municipality in Kalinga. We wanted to see the power couple Lam-en Gonnay and Rowena Gonnay who started SlowFood Pasil, the first of its kind in the Philippines. Personally, I am intrigued at how they were able to start a burgeoning community that is now known even abroad for championing organic agriculture, cultural preservation and modeling a healthy and self-sufficient lifestyle.

Truly, Mr. and Ms. Gonnay are inspiring change agents who have taken a grassroots approach to tackle global problems. While many are complaining and whining about societal injustices, they mobilized themselves into taking small steps forward and eventually, inspired many others to follow suit. Thus, SlowFood Pasil was born, a platform that brought the unique Pasil culture not only to the national spotlight but also internationally. For years now, the couple has been showcasing the indigenous way of preparing delicacies in Turin, Italy and how the Pasil inhabitants have lived in harmony with their rich environment since time immemorial.

At the local level, they created model farms to ensure that organic agriculture remains the norm, sharing with their fellows that there is no need to adopt chemical-based approaches to boost productivity; that maintaining their indigenous practices is enough not only to ensure cultural integrity but also overall food security.

After all, Pasil is a self-sustaining community, as it has always been. Everything is there. From rich hunting grounds and natural fish sources such as rivers and brooks, to well-irrigated rice paddies and a thriving culture, Pasil exemplifies what it takes to sustain food security.

The home of the Gonnay family showcases that same model. There, we saw how they put up structures using locally-available materials such as bamboo and how they prepare their foods deliciously without additives or seasonings. They also have gardens with organic vegetables surrounded by various fruit trees. Literally, every basic necessity is there, just outside their humble home. There is no need for them to shop in malls or order from Shopee or Lazada to bring food to the table.

Essentially, their very lifestyle translates to self-sufficiency and food security. By being self-sufficient, they need not worry about soaring market prices.

So, when I asked Ms. Gonnay if she was bothered by the onion price hike, she obviously said no. And it dawned on me – why should they be when, in the first place, they have been surviving and thriving as a family and community with what is already there, what is in their backyards and organic rice paddies and farms.

One thing I also realized during our conversations is that cultural integrity is core to their sustainable mindset. Just like other practicing indigenous peoples (IPs) throughout the world, the Gonnay couple believes that the land is sacred and thus must be protected and preserved for both present and future generations.

This proves the fact that even before terms like organic farming, sustainability and environmental preservation emerged, the IPs have been practicing them for centuries – until the arrival of conquistadors who then introduced a Western lifestyle based on materialism.

So for the people of Pasil, it's all about rediscovering and strengthening their cultural integrity to ensure sustainability not only of social values but also of the environment and their livelihoods. But like in many other indigenous communities worldwide, modernity is eroding such integrity. Thus, the Gonnay couple has tasked themselves to initiate projects and activities to revitalize and preserve their heritage whilst being food secure.

And yes, their impact transcends Pasil.

Interestingly, while many outsiders have characterized remote inhabitants as backward or uneducated, the proud IPs of Pasil and many other communities prove otherwise. With models created by the likes of the Gonnays, more and more organizations and institutions are looking back to the IPs and realizing their invaluable contributions to addressing global issues, particularly climate change. Even the United Nations recognize IPs as the hope of the world, citing that by guarding what is left of the planet's natural ecosystems, they keep greenhouse gas emissions at bay and protect biodiversity.

As an IP myself, I take inspiration from our culture and values in advocating food security through sustainable approaches. I am thankful to Matt Dave Maches, Rose Dagupen, and Sharmaine Chocowen for having braved the perilous road with me to reach Pasil and listening to the stories and sharing of the Gonnay couple. I also express my utmost gratitude to Chit Juan of EchoStore and the Philippine Coffee Board for connecting me to them and to many other passionate individuals echoing the same cause.

So, what does it take to be self-sufficient? We learn from the Gonnay couple. And yes, there are many more like them whom we can emulate and draw inspiration from.

* * *

Mr. Maches is a travel blogger and organic farmer who currently works as social media coordinator for Naturland in the Philippines. In 2021, he founded the Barlig Rainforest Coffee Project to pilot coffee production while preserving the rainforest and its biodiversity.



tons of garbage will continue piling up in the city's main roads because the daily garbage collection and disposal of Metrowaste is insufficient, ineffective and unsatisfactory, even as he quoted Edgardo Palmiano, MMDA action officer in Parañaque, as saying that the average trips made by Metrowaste was only 43 per day compared to Leonel's 109 trips.

Palmiano also confirmed that the daily average garbage collection of Leonel last year was 2,581 cubic meters while Metrowaste's garbage collection is only 1,328 cubic meters.

For whole of last year, the numbers of trips made by Leonel was 39,731. Metrowaste, meanwhile made only 765 trips from Jan. 1 to 18 this year.

According to Palmiano, Metrowaste's daily average volume of solid waste disposed at the MMDA-designate sanitary landfills is only 1,512.14 metric tons from Jan. 1 to 18, while Leonel's daily average disposal is 2,581.40 daily during the comparable period last year.

During the public hearing, several residents also revealed that Metrowaste's garbage haulers were asking money every time they collect the trash.

Barangay officials, meanwhile revealed that the garbage collectors and staff of Metrowaste were not in proper uniform nor were they wearing any personal protective equipment when collecting the trash, violating the requirements in the contract with the LGU.

In the hearing, Aguilar expressed concern that the uncollected garbage problem in the city would remain especially since Metrowaste only has 24 trucks, consisting of 20 small trucks with compactor and only four large trucks which are not enough to meet the city's requirement.

It was revealed that Leonel has 54 compactors of which 40 are medium sized and 14 large size trucks with compactor, according to the Aguilar, who represents the Association of Barangay Captains (ABC) in the council.

While garbage collection is just one aspect of the entire solid waste management ecosystem, an effective and efficient collection system both by the barangays through their MRFs and the LGUs through their private hauling contractors is crucial to helping solve this ever present and worsening solid waste disposal problem.

These private contractors should not only be fully equipped and manned by sufficient trucks and enough personnel but these contractors should also take their very expensive and lucrative contracts seriously and with a really good understanding of their role in solving not only the garbage problem but also other related problems such as pollution, flooding, health concerns of residents, to name a few.

These contractors should also inculcate in the minds of their personnel, the ones bringing the trash from the households to the trucks, the need to ensure that only segregated garbage is collected. Otherwise, more unsegregated solid waste will have to be hauled and brought to the landfills.

For comments, e-mail at mareyes@philstarmedia.com



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What happened to onion industry road map?

COMMENTARY

REX L. NAVARRO

In recent weeks, the skyrocketing prices of onions have been hogging the news and which, until this writing, have remained high. Explaining the issue, the Department of Agriculture (DA) says that there are many layers of traders which are pushing up the prices of local onions. Senators investigating the surge in onion prices blame a cartel that controls the supply. No less than President Marcos Jr. said that he will meet all stakeholders in the onion industry to discuss the issue of high onion prices. On this, former DA Undersecretary Fermin Adriano says that "there are structural, institutional and cultural reasons why there is a substantial difference between farmgate and retail prices."

As a stopgap measure, the DA approved the importation of 21,060 metric tons of onions to fill a supply gap and arrest the spike in prices. Along with this, the department also declared that it would enable farmers to sell their produce directly to the market, eliminating the many layers of traders. Despite these efforts, along with the harvest season and entry of imported onions, retail prices of onions still remain high.

Amidst the foregoing and unknown to many, there is an Onion Industry Roadmap (2021-2025) which is part of the high value crops subsector road map developed by the DA. The road map outlines how the Philippines can address three major challenges: achieving self-sufficiency in the commodity while lifting farmers from poverty; the advent of the Asean Economic Community (AEC); and adapting to climate change.

The road map envisions "a modern, competitive, and profitable onion industry providing high quality, safe, affordable, and sustainable

supply of onion to meet increasing domestic and export demand" and a mission to "ensure the production of and access to high quality, safe, and affordable onion throughout the year."

To pursue these, the road map aims to: (1) increase production of yellow onion and shallots by 10 percent per year; (2) ensure food safety and enhance off-season production, seed systems, and storage facilities; (3) improve post-production and logistics facilities, strengthen marketing linkage and support services, and minimize production cost and postharvest losses; (4) strengthen analytical service laboratories, enhance pest and disease forecasting capability; (5) develop improved varieties, crop protection systems, and decision-support tools, and improve processing and value adding systems; and (6) organize the production sector and protect onion growers from losses due to disasters, pests, diseases, and other climate impacts.

According to the road map, for the Philippines to achieve onion self-sufficiency, it needs to increase production from 229,539 metric tons to 279,270 metric tons in five years by increasing area planted and yields. It will require promoting improved technology through the judicious use of inputs, farm mechanization, and shift to bigger and higher yielding varieties pursued through farm clustering. Growers will be encouraged to expand their cropped areas, supplemented with new

areas, especially those with a different harvest period to support year-round supply. Likewise, irrigation facilities will be expanded to help increase potential areas for onion.

The road map targets the strengthening and federation of small producers organizations for group procurement, marketing, an efficient delivery of support services. Trading activities will be streamlined by eliminating unnecessary layers for exports and minimizing marketing cost. To implement these, the road map identifies strategic investment in: (1) capacitating producers and their organizations; (2) production support services such as seed support systems, machineries and equipment; irrigation, rain shelters, input subsidies; (3) postharvest support (e.g. hangers and cold storage); (4) common infrastructure; and (5) strengthening regulatory services and research and development.

Philippine agriculture is not wanting in road maps. In fact, the onion road map is one of 19 road maps developed by the DA involving teams of experts from the industry and academe. A rice industry road map has also been mapped out and on a macro scale, there is also the National Agriculture and Fishery Modernization and Industrialization Plan.

Unless implemented, these plans will suffer the "Mona Lisa syndrome"—they just lie there and they die there.

Dr. Rex L. Navarro is a member of the Coalition for Agriculture Modernization in the Philippines. He was associate professor and former director of the institute (now college) of development communication, University of the Philippines Los Baños.



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



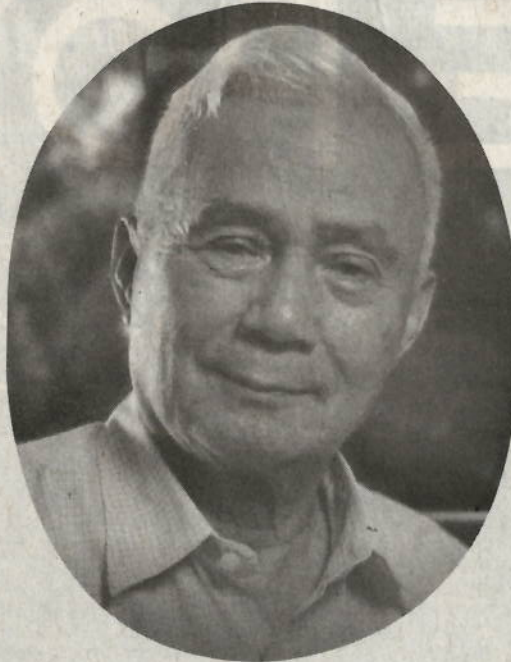
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02-04-23

Obituary



Dr. Angel C. Alcala

CEU Independent Director

has passed away last February 1, 2023
at the age of 93.

His remains lie in state at the Siliman University
Church, Dumaguete City.

Interment will be on 10 February 2023 at the
Dumaguete Memorial Park.

He left behind a rich legacy in the fields of
science and education which is immensely valued
and will be earnestly nurtured.