

02 May 2023 Tuesday



DENR

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REGIONS

Cordillera mining slumps in 2022

The weak global demand for metals and supply chain constraints arising from Russia's invasion of Ukraine affected Cordillera's mining industry, a leading revenue earner for the region that hosts the country's oldest mining firms, as it posted negative growth last year. But mainstreaming the Cordillera's small-scale mining sector will help prop up the industry, according to government economists and mining officials. —STORY BY VINCENT CABREZA **AB**

Cordillera mining slumps in 2022

Neda says weak global demand for metals caused the slowdown but helping small-scale miners will prop up the industry

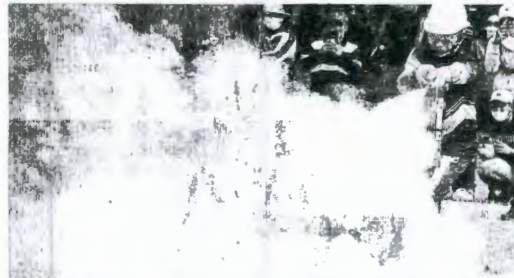
By Vincent Cabreza
@InqNational

BAGUIO CITY—The Cordillera mining industry performed poorly in 2022, making it more imperative to bring into the mainstream economy the black market operation of the region's small-scale mining sector, government officials said.

The country's oldest mining firms, including the century-old Benguet Corp., continue to operate their legacy mines in Benguet province but mining and quarrying slowed down with a 0.4-percent contraction (or negative growth) in last year's gross regional domestic product, which measured the value of goods and services produced by the region in 2022, according to the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda).

The agriculture sector fared worse as it contracted by 2.1 percent, according to Villafe Albuyog, Cordillera director of the Philippine Statistics Authority, who presented the region's economic performance on April 27.

The mining industry slowed down despite the region's 8.7-percent economic rebound last year has been attributed to "weak global demand" for metals at that time, as well as "supply chain constraints" arising from what is now the 15-month invasion of Ukraine by Russia, said Freda Toyoken, the economic development specialist of Neda in the Cordillera.



FIRE STOPPERS Cordillera mines are among the industries allowed to continue operating to keep the economy afloat at the height of the coronavirus pandemic. As restrictions eased, miners from across the country displayed their firefighting skills in a miners' skills competition during the Mine Safety and Environment Conference in Baguio City in November 2022.

—EV ESPERITU

Gold production declined by 1.29 percent (from 2,736 kilograms in 2021 down to 2,701 kg last year), although the downturn was offset by world gold prices which shot up from P1,678 per troy ounce in 2021 to P1,801 last year, said Fay Apil, Cordillera director of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB).

Robust metals prices toward the end of 2022 raised the value of the Cordillera's metallic mineral production by four percent from P13.6 billion in 2021 to P14.148 billion last year, she said.

Copper and silver also declined last year. Silver production dropped by 34 percent, just as world prices slid by 14.52 percent, Apil said, while a 5-percent drop in world copper prices

occurred just as the region's mines suffered a slight decrease in regional production.

Move to legalize

The sector's performance does not reflect the production of small-scale mines in the Cordillera. But efforts to make pocket mining legal in the region were a good step toward improving the performance of the Cordillera metals sector in the near future, Toyoken said.

Legally, small-scale mines are required to sell gold only to the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), which adds to the country's gold reserves, but pocket miners have been transacting on the black market because most of them are still unlicensed.

"The current initiative of the BSP to return the sale of gold from small-scale mining operations to the formal sector and to ensure fair pricing [is anticipated to generate] a better estimate of mineral production in the region," said Toyoken.

Apil said the target of legitimizing all Cordillera small-scale miners has taken a step closer with the approval of 13 Minahang Bayan (people's mines) in the provinces of Apayao (6), Benguet (4), Abra (1), Kalinga (1) and Mountain Province (1).

Minahang Bayan are designated mining zones for artisanal and small-scale miners. However, only one pocket mining organization in the region has secured a mining contract, while another has acquired a provisional contract pending the submission of an environmental compliance certificate for their mine area.

According to the National Coalition of Small-Scale Miners in the Philippines, over 500,000 pocket miners operate throughout the country.

The government's long-term plan is to develop downstream mineral processing industries and make use of minerals that are otherwise exported as raw ore to other countries, Apil said.

She said MGB is looking forward to developing nickel and copper manufacturing in Palawan and Surigao, and the projected revival of steel smelting facilities for copper and iron in Leyte. **mq**



Forest fires a big problem in Benguet

LA TRINIDAD, Benguet: More than 872 hectares of forest lands, grasslands and watershed reservations in different parts of the province have been damaged by 52 incidents of nonstructural fires during the first quarter of this year.

Benguet provincial fire marshal Jessie Annasiw said that the affected areas this year are three times larger compared to the 251 hectares recorded in the same period last year.

He disclosed that among the identified causes of the nonstructural fire incidents that transpired in the different forest lands and watershed reservations in the province include open flame from farmlands or agricultural land clearing operations, popularly known as slash-and-burn farming, children playing with matchsticks and lighters, and open flame from rubbish or bonfires.

Annasiw added that numerous newly planted tree seedlings in the various burned forest lands and

watershed reservations were destroyed during these fire incidents.

Annasiw, however, expressed his gratitude to the various firefighters from the different parts of the province for their support to the Benguet provincial fire station in containing the fire incidents over the past several months.

He pointed out that people engaged in the slash-and-burn-type of farming should take all necessary precautions to prevent the fire from their farms from getting out of control and torching nearby tree stands. These incidents will surely affect the efforts to preserve and protect the environment.

Annasiw urged the public to put premium on the efforts to allow the newly planted trees to grow so that the present generation will be able to pass on to the future generations a good state of the environment for them to enjoy the fruits of a well-protected environment.

DEXTER SEE



DENR Cagayan Valley vows to sustain forest mgmt's

project gains, activities

TO sustain the gains and best practices in forest management, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in the Cagayan Valley Region will integrate and mainstream the agency's Forestland Management Project (FMP) into its regular operation programs.

This was announced by DENR Cagayan Valley Regional Executive Director Gwen-

dolyn Bambalan following the FMP closing event on April 20 in Solano, Nueva Vizcaya.

"The 10-year forestland management project in the provinces of Nueva Vizcaya and Quirino is not actually closing, instead, this is the start of the integration of the best practices and milestones we accomplished from the project," Bambalan said in a statement.

From April 18 to 20, the DENR Cagayan

Valley Region held an event to tackle the different measures and policy recommendations to sustain the different FMP activities in the regular operation of the department were discussed.

Bambalan reiterated the actions taken during the previous sustainability action planning workshop discussed with the provincial environment and natural resources officers and provincial project management offices (PPMOs) chartering the direction for the project's sustainability for the first five years.

"We could not treasure what we could not measure. We have to account for the different accomplishments gained from the project," she pointed out.

During the event, officials from the Central Project Management Office witnessed the of-

ficial turnover of the completed construction of 37 agroforestry support facilities and 20,291 hectares of reforestation projects to the local government units (LGUs).

The municipalities of Kayapa, Dupax Del Sur, Dupax del Norte, Ambaguio, Bambang, and Kasibu received their respective Certificate of Sub-Project Turnover and Acceptance with the corresponding memorandum of agreement for the projects.

In his message, Assistant Regional Director for Technical Services Marcos Dacanay congratulated the members of the 35 Peoples Organizations for their support.

"Continue developing your respective areas for your own good, for your families, and for the next generations to come," Dacanay said.

Jonathan L. Mayuga



Much to do about logging

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ORLY?

**ORLANDO
MERCADO**

El Niño phenomenon this month. We are already feeling the extreme temperature rise with little to no rainfall. Maynilad started supply interruption in their service areas to conserve the limited stored resource in the Angat-Ipo system. **►MercadoA6**

Pagasa warned that rain in the coming months will not be enough to replenish the dams. Climate change is making it worse.

This reminds me of my advocacy against logging in 1990 when I engaged Sen. Sonny Alvarez, who was the then-chairman of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Ecology, in a televised debate. As the author of a selective log ban bill, he insisted that it was more sustainable — but what could be sustained when the resource is almost gone?

My mantra then was "Walang gubat, walang tubig." I argued for a total commercial log ban in an effort to stop the annihilation of our remaining forests and watersheds. Back in the 1990s, the Philippines was already on the brink of ecological disaster — droughts and water shortages were common. When the rains came, they were in the form of massive floods. Fast-forward 30 years, my question remains unanswered — must we continue to live in a cycle of long droughts and devastating floods?

At that time, only eight out of 73 provinces had enough forest cover left — also known as "closed forests." That is equivalent to less than a million hectares. Due to incessant logging operations nationwide, we experienced massive deforestation in a short period of time. Poor people suffered the repercussions while rich families behind the logging industry lived lavishly. I argued that while LGUs had control in issuing permits to loggers, the after-effects of deforestation such as flooding cannot be halted by political boundaries — excess water from deforested mountains will always cascade to the lowlands.

Selective log ban is akin to cutting short the hair of those who still have hair, and telling the bald they cannot have a haircut.

I am not against industrial tree farming. It is okay to grow trees and harvest them for various uses. The bill I authored aimed to arrest natural, old-growth forest destruction and give Mother Nature ample time (25 years) to regenerate its forests. Reforestation efforts can only do so much, and its cost far outweighs the government's profits from the logging industry.

We eventually won the support of the Senate, including Senator Alvarez, in 1991 — the same year as the Ormoc tragedy happened. However, it has always been difficult to pass pro-people and pro-environment laws when Congress is full of legislators with vested interests. Our bill was gutted and set aside, much to our dismay.

Some bills, though not exclusive to addressing logging, were able to make it nonetheless.

For example, in 1992, the National Integrated Protected Areas System (Nipas) Act was passed to protect identified nature reserves, natural parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and natural biotic areas against exploitation. The Strategic Environmental Plan for Palawan Act was also enacted to ensure the province's sustainable development while protecting and enhancing its natural resources and endangered environment. The Expanded Nipas Act was signed into law in 2018, adding more protected areas in the country.

The executive branch under different administrations also addressed the unabated logging issue.

President Ramos used the Community-Based Forest Management Agreement to achieve "sustainable forestry and social justice." Meanwhile, President Aquino 3rd took a more aggressive stance by issuing a moratorium on logging and creating an anti-illegal logging task force all the while pursuing a National Greening Program. President Duterte continued the implementation of the Expanded National Greening Program and also ordered the study of a total log ban due to massive forest denudation.

While it is unfortunate that the ban has not been fully implemented, at least there is gradual progress as reflected by the 2.2 million hectares of closed forest in 2020. However, I cannot help but wonder that if the total log ban had been enacted — by now we could have been reaping the fruits of allowing our forests to breathe and recover. We might have been spared the devastating effects of floods and landslides. We might have had enough water supply to tide our communities and agriculture sector over from prolonged droughts.

Perhaps President Bongbong Marcos could take up this challenge more aggressively. Since he is already keen on creating the Department of Water Management to promote water security, he may also want to look into the preservation of our virgin forests, especially those in watersheds.

As a nation that sits in the Western Pacific Basin, we are vulnerable to extreme typhoons due to climate change. We have to make smart decisions when it comes to our forestry policies and operations. We have to exploit the opportunity to catch rainwater for our use in times of scarcity, as well as prevent floods and landslides from destroying us.

This El Niño will not be the last one we will see, but hopefully, it is the last that will catch us unprepared.



Macli-ing Dulag and the struggle of the indigenous peoples



Dennis Gorecho

KUWENTONG PEYUPS

HOW can you own that which will outlive you?" is the most often quoted famous line of Kalinga martyr Macli-ing Dulag in relation to issues affecting the indigenous peoples.

It was in the mid-1990s when I joined three Cordillera Day celebrations in honor of Macli-ing held annually every April 24, two in Benguet (Itogon and Mankayan) and another in Sagada, Mountain Province.

It was in the evening of April 24, 1980 when soldiers fired at two houses in the village of Bugnay, Tinglayan, Kalinga that caused the death of Macli-ing from multiple gunshots.

He is one of the leaders of the Kalinga tribes opposing the World Bank-funded 1,010-megawatt Chico River Basin Hydroelectric Dam Project of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

Despite the lack of a formal education, Macli-ing knew that the project would eventually displace thousands of his people from their ancestral lands and destroy millions worth of fruits, vegetables, and grains.

Government forces killed Macli-ing in an attempt to silence him, but his murder was a catalyst that united the peoples of the Cordillera in opposition against the dam.

One of his famous quote on the people's reverence for the land, affirming their right to stay, states: "You ask if we own the land and mock us saying, 'Where is your title?' When we ask the meaning of your words, you answer with taunting arrogance, 'Where are the documents to prove that you own the land?' Titles? Documents? Proof of ownership. Such arrogance to speak of owning the land when we instead are owned by it. How can you own that which will outlive you? Only the race owns the land because the race lives forever."

IPs have a claim of ownership, not only upon the ancestral domain, but also on the resources found in them. It acknowledges that the ancestral domain and the resources located therein constitute as the IPs' basis for their cultural integrity.

"The indigenous peoples' struggles for their rights have long been enduring. Their struggle for the recognition of their rights to land and self-determination is rooted in their effort for cultural and human survival. We should honor the struggle of our people. This decision is the least we can do to correct a historical injustice," Leonen said.

In the case of Isagani Cruz vs Secretary of Environment (GR 135385 December 6, 2000), former SC Chief Justice Reynato Puno said: "If the evolution of the Filipino people into a democratic society is to truly proceed democratically, it is this Court's duty to acknowledge the presence of indigenous and customary laws in the country and affirm their co-existence with the land laws in our national legal system."

Former Senator Juan Flavio, one of the law's authors, noted that the survival of the IPs depends on securing or acquiring land rights; asserting their rights to it; and depending on it. Otherwise, IPs shall cease to exist as distinct peoples.

Flavio added that the IPs are the offsprings and heirs of the peoples who have first inhabited and cared for the land long before any central government was established.



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BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business



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My former University of the Philippines law professor and now Supreme Court Associate Justice Marvic Leonen cited Macli-ing's words in his concurring opinion in *Samavs People* (GR224469, January 5, 2021) that Iraya-Mangyans should be acquitted of the crime charged for violating the Revised Forestry Code after they cut down a dita tree without a license or permit issued by the proper authority.

The Iraya-Mangyans invoked their Indigenous Peoples (IP) right to harvest dita tree logs, which constitute a part of their right to cultural integrity, ancestral domain, and ancestral lands. They insist that the felled dita tree was planted in their ancestral domain, over which the Iraya-Mangyan exercise communal dominion.

The IP Rights Act (IPRA), or Republic Law 8371, recognizes that

The Cordillera People's Alliance (CPA) said in its website that "more than just a gathering, Cordillera Day is a political statement on present realities by the militant Cordillera peoples' movement. It carries with it the historical advances of the mass movement for self determination and national democracy. It is the affirmation of principles and struggles for defense of the ancestral domain and for self determination and pursues what the Cordillera martyrs and heroes have fought for."

Macli-ing Dulag and all our other martyrs did not die in vain. CPA added: "The struggle for the peoples' aspirations for social justice, genuine development and peace, freedom and democracy are still far from over."

Peyups is the moniker of University of the Philippines. Atty. Dennis R. Gorecho heads the seafarers' division of the Sapalo Velez Bundang Bulilan law offices. For comments, e-mail info@sapalovelez.com, or call 0917-5025808 or 0908-8665786.



Oil sheen seen from sunken yacht off Tubbataha

By EVELYN MACAIRAN

An oil sheen was reportedly seen coming from the dive yacht *M/Y Dream Keeper* that sank some four nautical miles from the Tubbataha Reefs Marine Park.

Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) spokesman Rear Admiral Armand Balilo yesterday reported that "an oil sheen was seen from the site where the *Dream Keeper* sank. There is only a small oil sheen but just the same, our oil spill response team is already there and we would be able to contain it right away."

Tubbataha Reef has been declared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization as a World Heritage Site in 1993 because of its high density of marine species and pristine coral reef.

Balilo added that the presence of oil sheen is not an indication of an oil spill. He explained that there are instances when the fuel tank remains intact and would not aggravate the situation.

The PCG is still gathering information on the quantity of oil inside the sunken yacht.

They are also considering that the yacht might have diesel oil as the situation has not worsened since the sheen was discovered last Sunday. It was possible that diesel oil dissipates and would not become a problem.

Balilo also said they are continuing their search and rescue operation

for the four still missing persons onboard the *M/Y Dream Keeper* that might have encountered a squall, or sudden violent gust of wind or a localized storm, that caused the yacht to sink.

The PCG is still searching for a dive master, the owner and two passengers, consisting of three Filipinos and one Chinese.

Search and rescue (SAR) operations are still ongoing. The 28 people earlier rescued are on board the PCG's *BRP Melchora Aquino* and are in good condition.

"After our SAR today, the *Melchora Aquino* might return to Puerto Princesa City so those who were rescued could already go home. Their families have also been informed," he said.

Even if *BRP Melchora Aquino* returns to Puerto Princesa City, SAR operations would be continued by other Coast Guard personnel in the area.

He said 10 other yachts and divers in the Tubbataha Reef area stopped their diving expeditions to help in the SAR.

The Coast Guard issued a Notice to Mariners to alert passing ships to be on the lookout for the four missing persons and to immediately inform the PCG.

The *Dream Keeper* left San Remigio, Cebu City at 4 p.m. of April 27 and arrived at Tubbataha Reef at around 10 p.m. of April 29.

On board the yacht were 15 crew,

12 passengers/guests and five dive masters or a total of 32 people. Among those onboard were four Chinese nationals.

The dive yacht reportedly sank in the morning of April 30 and by 6:49 a.m., the PCG Command Center received information from the PCG District Palawan about the mishap.

Gov't to assist

The Department of Tourism (DOT) assured victims of the yacht that sank off the waters of Tubbataha in Palawan last Sunday that their needs would be attended to.

Secretary Christina Garcia-Frasco "immediately instructed the DOT Dive Committee, including the Philippine Commission on Sports Scuba Diving, the attached agency in charge of regulating scuba sports and technical diving in the country, to extend all assistance possible to the survivors of the capsized *M/Y Dream Keeper*," the agency said in a statement yesterday.

The DOT was also "in close coordination" with the Department of National Defense, Armed Forces of the Philippines, Philippine Navy, PCG and private entities in the ongoing SAR operations.

The Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park "is home to a great diversity of marine life," where over 360 species of coral and almost 700 species of fish can be found, according to the DOT.

- With Ghio Ong



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NEWS BRIEFS

Oil sheen spotted near Tubbataha Reef

Contingency measures were being readied after an oil sheen was spotted near Tubbataha Reef, a day after the dive yacht MY Dream Keeper sank in the vicinity of the world-renowned scuba diving site on Sunday, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said. While the presence of the oil sheen was not yet worrying, PCG spokesperson Rear Adm. Armando Balilo said they were closely monitoring the situation and were preparing to respond. "We monitored an oil sheen on the site where the vessel sank. We are closely monitoring and preparing our oil spill response team in case of an oil spill so we will be able to contain it right away," he said in an online press briefing on Monday. --FRANCES MANGOSING



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Climate (in)justice (2)

Many problems associated with the rapacious exploitation of natural resources have had adverse effects not only on the environment but, more importantly, on marginalized and impoverished peoples. Several studies on climate fragility risks that I have already cited in my previous columns have pointed out that climate change, or extreme weather events like drought and flooding, have shown to be “threat multipliers” (Ruttinger, 2017), as they exacerbate the vulnerabilities of already fragile communities in terms of weak security and inadequate livelihoods. These populations are among the least capable of bouncing back quickly after storms, earthquakes, and other calamities strike. Consequently, because of their lack of capacity to recover after such climate change phenomena, members of these communities are among the first fatalities and for whom massive external humanitarian assistance is required.

Among pastoralists in the African continent that experience long droughts, community members become agitated due to the lack of food and water, making them easy targets for recruitment to cattle rustling gangs and other groups that use violence to earn some money for their families. This also found resonance in the exploratory study I took part in where we asked how climate change phenomena have pushed impoverished communities in some rural areas in the Ligawasan wetlands in the heart of the two Maguindanao provinces to resort to some criminal activities, as I have written before.

The adverse consequences of environmental degradation—deforestation, mining drilling for natural gas, land conversion to monocrop plantations, or any kind of disturbance on the earth’s finite resources—have



KRIS-CROSSING MINDANAO

RUFA CAGOCO-GUIAM

caused the overall warming of our planet, oceans, and seas. All these actions leading to environmental degradation have been made possible largely because of avaricious capitalist interests rationalizing these as part of human development.

Such development has been unkind to already impoverished people. Long dry seasons have made poor families move to places where they have access to water, both for subsistence and for their overall health and well-being. Many of them die due to dehydration, as what happened to more than 40,000 people who died largely to the debilitating effects of a prolonged dry season in Somalia just recently.

Ironically, the victims of the drought in Somalia were not those who caused the rapid desertification of their lands. But the impoverished among them suffered first. The drought’s death toll did not include the owners of capitalist business companies and their government enablers.

This is an example of how climate change can be a source of injustice for the world’s poor, marginalized, and largely excluded populations.

In the devastating Lake Maughan-Mount

Parker tragedy in 1995, a local politician was hauled into court because he and his group were allegedly behind the drilling of the mountain that caused Mount Parker to collapse. The mountain’s collapse inundated Lake Maughan that sat on top of it, causing the flooding of the low-lying communities in three provinces: South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, and Maguindanao, including the city of Cotabato. The majority of those who died were poor and largely marginalized, economically and politically.

After more than 20 years, the victims of such a tragic climate-related incident have not received reparations to pay for the loss of lives of their family members. And it is not clear whether the local politician has indeed been convicted for this case.

Last Oct. 29, 2022, more than 60 people, mainly from the indigenous group, the Teduray, were buried alive near Mount Minandar, in a barangay in Datu Odin Sinsuat municipality in Maguindanao del Norte. This happened after floodwaters and stones carried by the flood submerged their houses at the foot of Mount Minandar in the aftermath of Typhoon “Paeng” (international name: Nalgae) last year. Like Mount Parker, Mount Minandar has been heavily drilled for gravel and deforested over time, not by the indigenous communities, but by businessmen and women who are also local political leaders.

The long-term human exploitation of Mount Minandar’s resources exacerbated the vulnerability of the Teduray, who had largely been socially and politically excluded in their province. Their deaths are the consequences of injustice, via an extreme climate event like flooding.

Comments to rcguiam@gmail.com



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Reforming contract employment in government

Nowadays, the word "labor" has lost most of its unionism sheen. It is being reshaped in history as part of a cordial partnership with management, two sides of a coin whose interests are not necessarily antagonistic, but cannot ignore the reality that one without the other is not possible.

Such transformation has been shaped by laws since the '70s that spell out the basic rights of workers, from wages to perks, all of which guarantee some form of dignity in living. Any decent human resource manager or consultant will always recommend that companies best stick to the basics of the law to keep peace in the workplace.

BIZLINKS



REY GAMBOA

Of course, this doesn't always translate to a harmonious relationship, especially when one or the other party attempts to breach some fine lines that needs the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) to step in as arbiter. Big cases have been fewer, but there are those that occasionally do end up in court.

In recent years, the biggest issue has been one of contractual labor, where workers do not have security of tenure. While the law generally respects the free will of a worker who agrees to provide a service for a fixed amount of time, such agreements tend to be lopsided in favor of the employer or contractor.

During the previous administration, a number of big companies that engaged in "endo" were forced to terminate such illegal contracts. Endo refers to employment agreements that skirt laws mandating employers to hire full-time workers who rendered more than six months of service.

While the furor on this has died down, the practice persists, especially in small companies. A business' ability to secure long-term tenure of workers is most often associated with profitability, and if business conditions are not stable, illegal

contracting is resorted to.

Such unfair contracting terms are stuff that DOLE often chooses to ignore, especially if workers don't complain. Often, workers choose to keep silent, recognizing that not to do so could lead to their employer's untimely closure of business. Often, the recourse is to wait until business conditions improve and stabilize.

Politics of contract work

Such an attitude, however, is not what keeps 600,000 contract workers of the Philippine government uncomplaining, sometimes for a lifetime. Under contract of service (COS), job order (JO) terms, and third party contract terms, workers in government carry on doing the jobs of full-time employees without the benefits of tenure and social protection.

Despite data showing that government contract workers are often not covered by the national health insurance program managed by the PhilHealth or are being asked to enroll as voluntary, self-paying members, they opt to stay on, reflective of the strong patronage system of politics in the country.

Many government contract workers get their COSs or JOs on the strength of an incumbent politician's discretion, which could be just for a minimum of three years or a maximum of nine years. But even when the politician loses his term of office after an election, some degree of clout remains whereby the contracted government employee is guaranteed another job. Then, there's the hope that the politician gets re-elected another time.

Perhaps the biggest perk a government worker can look forward to is the possibility of getting consultancies on government projects without fear of being censured for double (or even triple) compensation. Often, these more than compensate for the absence of tenure and other benefits of permanent employment.

Hence, you see civil servants who clock in at 8 in the morning, then leave their desks to return at 5 in the afternoon to clock out. Here, such contractual government employees do not provide the service that they were hired to do.

This explains why there are over 170,000 vacancies in government that have remained unserved despite relaxed rules on hiring for government positions. Even if many of these contractual employees are eligible for civil service under civil service eligibility requirements, they are just plainly not interested.

For the government, COSs and JOs are seen as a way to bring down expenditures. Often constrained by the local government code in the allocation for budgets for personnel services, COSs



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and JOs allow local governments to fudge hiring under the more general description of "projects."

The Civil Service Commission (CSC) is also complicit in allowing the perpetuation of contractual work to such a degree that this has become ridiculously laughable when compared to employment laws that the DOLE has had to enforce when dealing with the private sector.

Correcting the system

Unraveling the seeming injustice that hogs government service will not be easy, especially when the practice seems to be accepted by those who are regarded as being short-changed. If no one complains, who can say that justice needs to be served.

The Senate has been trying to correct the system, which has developed over the last three decades, but the absence of an in-depth study on the impact of growing contractual work in the government has not provided a basis for future action.

The bureaucracy has over 1.75 million people under direct employment terms, which currently makes up about three-fourths of the state machinery if you consider the 600,000 contract workers.

Are the savings that the national and local governments say they accrue by maintaining contract workers enough to compensate for the poor service that many Filipinos often complain of? Without good data, it will be hard to push for the right legislation that would put some order in what our government is currently undergoing. Definitely, it will be difficult to hope for a well-oiled government machinery that delivers the kind of dedicated service we yearn for for the country.

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