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DENR freeze order to impact renewable energy projects

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA @jonlmayuga

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has suspended the acceptance, processing and approval of environmental compliance certificate (ECC) for offshore wind energy and floating solar energy projects pending the approval of a new guideline for these renewable energy (RE) projects.

The "freeze order" signed by DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga has been in effect for four months now.

"It has been reported that the EMB Regional Offices have already been accepting, processing and approving applications for ECC guidelines indicating a well thought, evidence and science-based criteria, parameters and requirements to appropriately assess the impacts of these projects on the coastal and marine environment," read the order dated January 6, 2023, and addressed to the Director of the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) and all EMB Regional Directors.

In her order, Yulo-Loyzaga said the DENR has an ongoing discussion with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for possible technical assistance to help in the crafting of these guidelines "to make sure that all possible impacts can be looked

into and adequately considered in the event that these types of projects are pursued.

Lastly, the offices of the Undersecretary for Policy, Planning and International Affairs, Undersecretary for Finance, Information Systems and Climate Change and Director of the EMB are directed to closely coordinate with the ADB on the requirements of the technical assistance and commence the discussion on the crafting of the guidelines.

Yulo-Loyzaga's order runs contrary to the provision of Section 13 of Republic Act 11234 (Act Establishing the Energy Virtual One-Stop Shop for the Purpose of Streamlining the Permitting Process of Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution Projects). The section provides a time frame for actions by government agencies on applications for RE projects.

The DENR, its attached bureaus (except for the National Water Re-

sources Board or NWRB), offices and agencies at national and local levels and GOCCs, the time frame is 120 calendar days.

DENR Undersecretary for Policy, Planning and International Affairs Jonas R. Leones confirmed to BusinessMirror the order would potentially affect billions-worth of RE projects investments.

Offshore wind energy, he said, is an environmentally-critical project because of the threat to coastal and marine biodiversity in installing such a facility.

In the same breath, floating solar energy has a potential adverse environmental impact on water bodies, because it makes use of huge solar panels that will cover the surface of the water, preventing sunlight from doing its thing to ensure a healthy underwater environment.

He said the DENR is in close coordination with the Department of Energy (DOE) and that Yulo-Loyzaga has been reporting to Malacañang to give the President updates on crafting the said guidelines.

"We don't have a guideline yet for these RE projects. We need a guideline first," says Leones. "We have already formulated the interim guidelines. It is now with the DOE."

In February last year, the Laguna Lake Development Authority issued a memorandum circular outlining the implementing rules and regulations of the "Laguna de Bay RE Resources Utilization of 2022." The MC said an initial pre-determined area of not more than 2,000 hectares in the country's largest inland freshwater body is allocated for RE utilization projects.

A signatory to the Paris Agreement, in 2021, the Philippines committed to reducing 75 percent of its emissions by 2030 and scaling up efforts to adapt to a changing climate, setting itself a very ambitious target for a developing nation with one of the lowest carbon emissions in the world.

Environmentalists have been pressing the government to promote the development of RE in the Philippines and phase out coal in the face of the climate crisis. While its greenhouse gas emission is relatively nil, the Philippines is one of the most climate-vulnerable nations in the world. It receives an average of 20 typhoons a year. The archipelago is also prone to landslides and flash floods. Manila is also still struggling to make communities resilient to natural calamities.

The delay in the acceptance, processing and approval of ECCs for RE projects somehow derails targets of private sector investors as well as the Marcos administration's own thrusts to promote RE.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has been pushing for the development of RE to increase its share in the current energy mix, which is currently dominated by coal.

Under his watch, Executive Order 21 dated April 19, 2023, established the policy and administrative framework for offshore wind development and cited that the Philippine Energy Plan for 2020-2040 targets to increase the RE contribution in the power generation mix from the current share of 22 percent, to 35 RE share by 2030 and 50 percent share by 2040.



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Unsolicited water supply project under study

A PROPOSAL to develop a new water source for Metro Manila and the rest of Luzon is currently being considered by the government, Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) officials said during the weekend.

"A private proponent has submitted an unsolicited proposal to develop more water sources for

the MWSS to extend our water supply to 2050," MWSS deputy administrator Jose Dorado Jr. said in Filipino during a news forum on Saturday.

He did not identify the firm involved but said the proposal involved the Kanan and Agos rivers in Quezon province.

Dorado said the proposal was

already being reviewed by the National Economic and Development Authority.

A National Water Resources Board (NWRB) official said the potential water supply that could be generated from the Kanan River was around 3,000 million liters per day.

NWRB Executive Director Se-

villo David Jr. said the Kanan River was part of the Kaliwa-Kanan-Agos River Basin in Quezon province.

The China-funded Kaliwa Dam, which is also envisioned as an alternative water supply source, is currently being constructed in the area and is expected to be completed by 2026.

FRANCIS EARL CUETO



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Japan's plan to dump radioactive waste in PH hit

An activist fisherfolk group decried Japan's plan to dump radioactive wastewater into the Pacific Ocean, saying that it could affect the 13 million-hectare Benham Rise and the local fishing industry. Ronnel Arambulo, Pamalakaya spokesperson, said the dumping of radioactive water could contaminate the ocean and lead to a wide-scale calamity for the fisherfolk communities. "Countless fishers' livelihood in the country would surely be jeopardized due to the release of hazardous chemicals into this vast body of water," he said during a forum in Quezon City on Saturday. —JANE BAUTISTA



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Editorial

El Niño, polluted Laguna Lake could form a perfect storm

SINCE 2010, the 900-square-kilometer Laguna Lake has been supplying Metro Manila with 300 million liters of potable water every day. The water from the lake, however, is far from pristine, tainted for years by untreated sewage, industrial waste, overfishing and siltation.

The Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) gave the lake a ranking of "C-" for water quality and "F" for fisheries, on a scale of A to F, with F being the worst.

The problem of poor water quality looms even darker following a forecast of a serious El Niño episode that could begin as early as September and last until the first quarter of next year.

The Manila Water and Sewerage Services (MWSS) highlighted the problem during a forum last Saturday. The agency's officials said blooms of blue-green algae or "lumot" could clog up the filtration system of the two water treatment plants put up by MWSS concessionaire Maynilad at the lake. Blue algae proliferate when temperatures rise and the flow of water slows, conditions brought about by an El Niño event.

If the treatment plants' filters jam up, Maynilad will once again be forced to schedule water interruptions in large swaths of western Metro Manila.

The LLDA has warned that the algae buildup can also cause fish kills. That's another serious concern since 80 percent of Metro Manila's bangus and tilapia supply comes from the lake.

There is also the issue of turbidity, the result of decades of silt buildup in the lake. Siltation has made the lake 2 meters shallower so that a strong gust of wind is enough to stir up sediments in the lake bed, making the water murky.

Turbid water is more difficult to treat, according to Maynilad.

A new form of pollutant could further complicate Laguna Lake's woes. A study in 2021 revealed that microplastics — minute particles of plastic waste — have contaminated the lake. The microplastics found in the lake are mostly polypropylene fibers, used in making clothing, bags and even medical masks. The microplastics come from the plastic waste dumped into the streams and other waterways that drain into Laguna Lake.

Ruffy Biazon, the mayor of Muntinlupa, the city that shares Laguna Lake with Rizal and Laguna provinces, is calling for stronger action to protect the lake as a water source.

The MWSS said it is bringing in experts from Singapore to take a look at the water treatment in Putatan, Rizal, and determine if it needs an upgrade.

Maynilad said it had installed ultrasonic equipment in its plants to control algae infestation and dredged the area around the intake pipes.

These are, however, disjointed attempts when what is needed is a long-term strategy to rehabilitate Laguna Lake.

There have been numerous plans in the past. One was the Laguna Lake Development and Rehabilitation Project, a P609-billion project proposed by a private consortium and endorsed by the LLDA.

The project covers, among other things, the dredging of 800 million cubic meters of silt and mud.

The project, unfortunately, seems to have vanished into a black hole of bureaucracy.

An extensive paper written in 2005 that lays out a framework for the sustainability of Laguna Lake may be worth looking into. The paper takes a bigger view of the problem, saying that the government's "legalistic approach" to urbanization failed to contain "the unplanned and unregulated urban expansion as a means of preserving" Laguna Lake's water quality.

It concluded that while Metro Manila's urban sprawl "contributed to the deterioration of the lake's environmental quality, "no framework has been developed to manage" the problem.

Among the paper's recommendations is that the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) and the LLDA be merged into one agency that will have "both the power to regulate surface waters directly used by Metro Manila and regulate the areas outside of Metro Manila in order to ensure that whatever expansion outside of Metro Manila's boundaries will not further deteriorate the lake."

That makes sense today since any impact the coming El Niño will have on Laguna Lake will definitely be felt by Metro Manila.



Marcos urges Pinoys to conserve water, energy

By HELEN FLORES

President Marcos urged Filipinos to be frugal in using water and electricity, citing the country's tight energy supply and the expected severe dry spell due to El Niño until early 2024.

In his vlog posted on YouTube on Saturday, Marcos noted that the Philippines' power demand far exceeds supply.

He added that the 35 percent reduction in rainfall expected in some parts of the country due to El Niño could affect the supply of dams, including their allocations for irrigation and hydropower production.

"As we increase our supply (of power), let's combine this with energy saving measures. Not just on the use of air conditioners and electric fans, there are appliances or electronics that we can reduce the use of to help with this goal as we have been doing during Earth Hour," the President said partly in Filipino.

"It's noticeable that the temperature is higher compared to the previous summer season... the El Niño alert has been raised and expected from June to August, maybe until the first quarter of next year," Marcos said.

Marcos earlier ordered local government units (LGUs) to launch a campaign to increase public awareness on water and energy conservation as part of the measures to mitigate the effects of a dry spell.

"I instructed the DILG to launch a campaign in LGUs to mitigate the impact of El Niño such as saving water at home, in car washes, in watering golf courses and refilling swimming pools," he said in his vlog.

The administration is considering all technologies to ensure energy security and improve the country's energy mix, the Chief Executive said.

"We continue to increase energy production by opening more renewable energy sources," he said.

Marcos also cited his signing of an agreement renewing the service contract for the Malampaya gas field until 2039. The Malampaya gas field off Palawan supplies about 2,000 megawatts to Luzon.

Malampaya is the country's only indigenous commercial source of natural gas, which will be commercially depleted by 2027 as projected by the Department of Energy (DOE).

On Friday, the President inaugurated a 160-megawatt wind farm in his home province, Ilocos Norte. It is projected to power over 123,000 homes.

The Pagudpud Wind, funded by Ayala-led ACEN Corp., is the third wind energy development in Ilocos Norte along with NorthWind Bangui Bay Project in Bangui and North Luzon Renewables in Pagudpud.

The Marcos administration is setting a target for a higher share of renewable energy in the power generation mix of 35 percent by 2030 and 50 percent by 2040.



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PBBM: Conserve water, energy amid El Niño impacts

By BETHEENA UNITE

President Marcos asked the public to contribute, in any way they can, in the conservation of energy and water amid the looming power and water supply crisis in the country.

Marcos talked about the impacts El Niño and climate change pose to the

lives of Filipinos, health, manufacturing, and agriculture in his vlog.

These prompted him to call on Filipinos to conserve both energy and water during the dry season.

"Kasabay ng pagpaparami ng supply ay samahan na rin natin ng pagtitipid, hindi man sa mga aircon o electric fan, may ilan ▶ 4

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tayong mga appliance o electronics na maaari naman nating bawasan ang paggamit para makatulong sa layunin gaya na lamang ng ginagawa natin noong nakaraang Earth Hour (Along with the efforts to increase supply, let's also save, perhaps not in using aircon or electric fan, but in other appliances or electronics which we can reduce the consumption of in order to contribute to the objective like what we do during Earth Hour)," Marcos said in his vlog on Saturday.

The President also appealed to the local government units to help mitigate the impact of El Niño by saving water at home, at carwash establishments, golf courses, and in refilling swimming pools.

These efforts, he said, are expected to contribute to the government's effort to maintain the country's supply.

In his vlog, Marcos discussed the various effects of El Niño in the country such as the rising heat index in the country, which has reached 49 degrees Celsius as of May 20.

Due to this, he said, power consumption and demand are higher than the country's supply.

"Ang lahat ay lumaki ang konsumo para maging mas maginhawa naman sa init na ito. Kasama diyan ang problema ng mga nasisirang electric plant kung kaya't ang energy requirement natin ay hindi talaga tumutugma sa supply na meron tayo (In order to get relief from the heat, consumptions are increasing, including the damaged electric plant that's why our energy requirement does not match with the supply that we have)," Marcos explained.

The President further said that the water supply in the country is also at risk due to El Niño.

He said while water demand increased, the country's water supply was not increasing. He linked this to the 35 percent decreased rainfall during the season.

He assured the public that the government is working on projects that will mitigate these climate change impacts.



Maynilad expects water

demand rising

By DANESSA RIVERA

West zone concessionaire Maynilad Water Services Inc. expects to sustain higher billed water volumes this year on higher water demand due to warmer temperature and as economic activity continues to pick up.

In an interview with **The STAR**, Maynilad president Ramoncito Fernandez said the company's first quarter numbers were "relatively good."

"It depends on a lot of factors, but that's the objective, to continue with the trend," he said.

In the first quarter, Maynilad saw billed water go up three percent to 127.6 MCM from 124 MCM as demand from semi-business, commercial and industrial customers continued to increase.

Higher billed volume, along with the 14 percent increase in average tariff, helped push revenues up by 18 percent to P6.22 billion from P5.29 billion.

Last year, Maynilad saw billed volume inch up by one percent to 527 MCM from P519.6 MCM due to higher commercial and industrial demand.

Fernandez said the higher billed volumes was largely due to warmer temperatures and economic growth.

"It currently depends on the heat. In the past two months, the heat index went up. The demand correspondingly goes up when the heat index is up," he said.

"Of course, consumption, economic growth, and we hope that the economy

will grow further as government has projected. We're very hopeful the targets of government will be achieved," the Maynilad official said. The country's economic managers are targeting the Philippine economy to grow by six to seven this year.

With the forecasted increase in water demand and the looming El Niño phenomenon, Maynilad is urging customers to conserve water.

"We have also been reminding our customers to do responsible use of water. I hope that they will help in the conservation of water," Fernandez said.

Maynilad said it would accelerate its supply augmentation projects amid the threat of El Niño, which could yield around 163 million liters per day (MLD) of additional water supply from alternate sources.

The company said the supply augmentation projects include the reactivation of 45 deep wells across the west zone.

It is also looking to commission two modular treatment plants in Cavite, tapping of additional cross-border points with Manila Water, construction of an auxiliary filtration system at Putatan Water Treatment Plant, and production of an initial 50 MLD from its new water treatment plant in Poblacion, Muntinlupa.

The additional supply to be generated from the projects will help improve supply reliability for some 700,000 Maynilad customers in parts of Manila, Parañaque, Pasay, Muntin-

lupa, Las Piñas and Cavite.

Maynilad is the largest private water concessionaire in the Philippines in terms of customer base.

It is the concessionaire of the MWSS for the west zone of the Greater Manila Area, which is composed of the cities of Manila (certain por-

tions), Quezon City (certain portions), Makati (west of South Super Highway), Caloocan, Pasay, Parañaque, Las Piñas, Muntinlupa, Valenzuela, Navotas and Malabon all in Metro Manila; the cities of Cavite, Bacoor and Imus, and the towns of Kawit, Noveleta and Rosario, all in Cavite province.



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Fears of a watered-down plastics treaty

As government negotiators, lobbyists and observers prepare for the second session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution — to be held May 29-June 2 in Paris, France — the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) released its report “Turning off the Tap: How the World Can End Plastic Pollution and Create a Circular Economy.”

The purpose of the report is “to inform decision-makers and stakeholders across the whole value chain of plastics about the necessary action.” While it is possible to cut plastic production significantly with existing technologies and solutions, the report says, governments must come up with policies and legislation that will compel these stakeholders to adopt the practices that will lead to reduced plastic production, consumption and disposal.

Concerns regarding some “solutions” presented in the UNEP report have been raised. The Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) issued a statement on the very same day (May 16) that the report was published, criticizing UNEP for promoting the burning of plastics in cement kilns. Such practice “undermines the primary goal of the global plastic treaty,” which is to put a cap on plastic pollution, GAIA stressed. GAIA fears that the “widespread burning of waste in cement kilns would create a lock-in effect, perversely creating demand for cheap plastic waste for fuel that would defy global efforts towards



RESURGENCE MARIT STINUS- CABUGON

restricting plastic production.”

While the UNEP report recommends the burning of plastic waste in cement kilns, it is not endorsing waste-to-energy incineration. This may look inconsistent considering that the pollution issues raised against both are similar. The report looks at the matter from a more practical perspective: The cement kilns are already here, producing cement. Plastic waste is simply a potential alternative fuel. A waste-to-energy plant, on the other hand, “locks a municipality into needing a long-term, stable flow of plastic feedstock to recuperate the hundreds of millions of dollars in capital costs.”

The authors do acknowledge health and safety risks associated with burning plastic waste in cement kilns: “There are concerns of potential toxic emissions such as furans and dioxins when the conditions in the kilns are not optimal and dose monitoring and quality control are essential.” Laboratory testing facilities would be required.

Such monitoring, quality control and testing in laboratories may be the standard in more advanced economies but seldom in the Global South. Ergo, the risk of plastic-burning cement kilns



Even the majestic Himalayas are not spared from plastics pollution. Zero Waste Himalaya and Integrated Mountain Initiative has since 2018 been organizing an annual Himalayan Cleanup in the Indian Himalayan region while advocating for Zero Waste lifestyles to permanently eliminate the plastic waste problem. For more information, visit www.thehimalayancleanup.in.

PHOTO FROM ZERO WASTE HIMALAYA FB PAGE

emitting toxic smoke is high.

The “Turning off the Tap” report features eight topic sheets on various subjects, including Chemical Recycling and Just Transition. “Plastics-to-plastics chemical recycling offers a promising solution in complement to mechanical recycling,” according to the topic sheet authors. Again, one of the biggest problems with plastic is that it is made from fossil fuels, its production generating greenhouse gases. According to a 2021 Reuters Special Report on chemical recycling, (July 29, 2021) plastics “will be the



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biggest growth market for oil demand over the next decade." Plastic production is seen "to double by 2040." No wonder that "Petrochemical businesses have generally been resistant to the notion of slashing production of plastics, instead preferring a greater focus on waste management and recycling." (Liang Lei for Eco-Business, May 17, 2023.)

"Just transition," another featured subject, in the context of going from the current "plastics economy" toward a circular economy, the authors explain, is about making sure that such transition will be "fair, just and inclusive, ensuring that no one is left behind." The conversation around "just transition" in the context of the Global Plastic Treaty has mainly focused on waste pickers, a large subsector of informal sector workers in the Global South. But they are not the only economically vulnerable sector that stands to be affected by the changes. While everyone will benefit from a cleaner, healthier, plastic-free world, ambulant vendors — such as taho vendors — and small eateries that rely heavily on cheap and single-use plastics and don't have access to water, need help from the government to transition away from single-use plastics.

Just transition means that no one is left behind. Unfortunately, maybe as a sign of things to come, UNEP reportedly decided to limit to one — from five — the number of participants

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Plastic pollution could be slashed 80% by 2040 - UNEP

By PIA LEE-BRAGO

Plastic pollution could be slashed by 80 percent by 2040 if countries and companies use existing technologies to make significant policy shifts and market adjustments, according to a new United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) report.

The report titled "Turning off the Tap: How the world can end plastic pollution and create a circular economy" was released ahead of the second round of negotiations in Paris on a global agreement to beat plastic pollution.

The report also outlines the magnitude and nature of the changes required to end plastic pollution and create a sustainable circular economy that is friendly to humans and the environment.

It is a solutions-focused analysis of concrete practices, market shifts and policies that can inform government thinking and business action.

To slash plastic pollution by 80 percent globally by 2040, the report suggested first eliminating problematic and unnecessary plastics to reduce the size of the problem.

The report proposes a system change achieved by accelerating three key shifts - reuse, recycle, and reorient and diversify - and actions to deal with the legacy of plastic pollution.

Even with the measures above, 100 million metric tons of plastics from single-use and short-lived products will still need to be safely dealt with annually by 2040 - together with a significant legacy of existing plastic pollution, according to the report. This can be addressed by setting and implementing design and safety standards for disposing of non-recyclable plastic waste, and by making manufacturers responsible for products shedding microplastics, among others.

Overall, the report indicated that the shift to a

circular economy would result in \$1.27 trillion in savings, considering costs and recycling revenues.

A further \$3.25 trillion will be saved from avoided externalities such as health, climate, air pollution, marine ecosystem degradation and litigation-related costs.

The UNEP said this shift could also result in a net increase of 700,000 jobs by 2040, mostly in low-income countries, significantly improving the livelihoods of millions of workers in informal settings.

Ban plastic drinking straws

Meanwhile, Sen. Cynthia Villar is pushing for a measure that will impose a ban on using plastic drinking straws in all food and hospitality establishments, restaurants, hotels, inns, fast food centers and eateries, which she said is causing significant harm to diverse species and human health.

Villar has filed Senate Bill 2209, an act mandating all restaurants, hotels, inns, fast food centers, eateries, and similar establishments to prohibit the use of plastic drinking straws and providing penalties for violation.

"Plastic pollution, particularly from single-use items like plastic drinking straws, poses a considerable challenge to our constitutional right to a balanced and healthful ecology," she said.

The chairperson of the Senate committee on environment and natural resources noted that "readily available options such as metal, paper or bamboo straws offer sustainable alternatives to plastic straws."

"Having other choices besides plastic straws makes it both possible and urgent for us to make a change. This switch to greener options is an important move that we can make now to ensure a sustainable future," she said. - With Cecille Suerte Felipe



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UN outlines roadmap to slash global plastic pollution by 80%

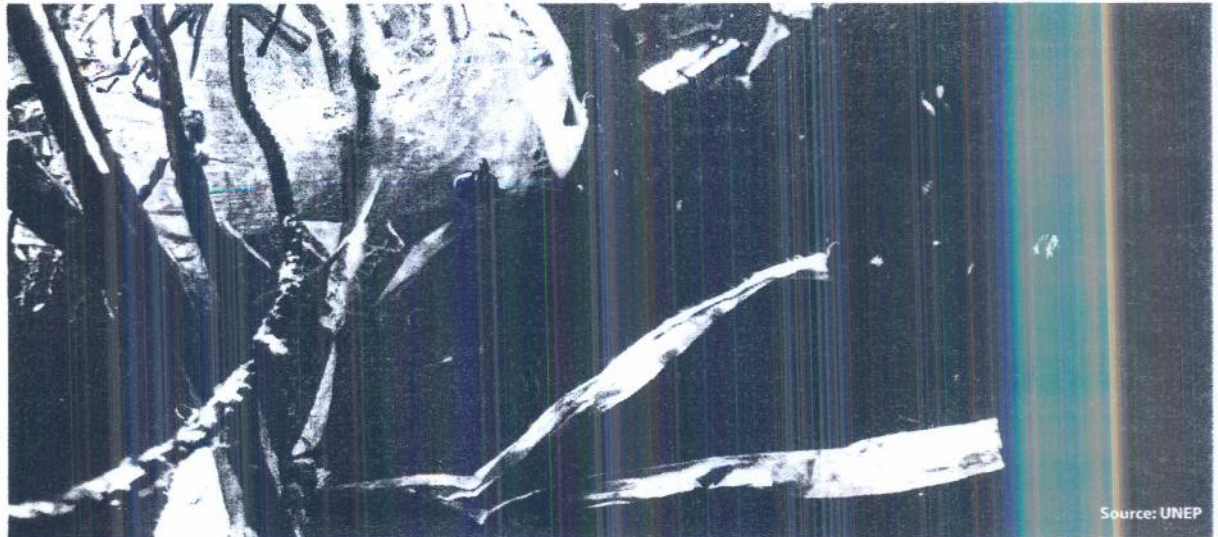
PLASTIC pollution could drop by 80 percent by 2040 if countries and companies make deep policy and market shifts using existing technologies, a new report by UN Environment Program said.

The report, released ahead of a second round of negotiations in Paris on a global agreement to beat plastic pollution, outlines the magnitude and nature of the changes required to end plastic pollution and create a circular economy.

UNEP is the global champion for the environment with programmes focusing on sustainable development, climate, bi...

"The way we produce, use and dispose of plastics is polluting ecosystems, creating risks for human health and destabilizing the climate," said Inger Andersen, UNEP executive director. "This UNEP report lays out a roadmap to dramatically reduce these risks through adopting a circular approach that keeps plastics out of ecosystems, out of our bodies and in the economy. If we follow this roadmap, including in negotiations on the plastic pollution deal, we can deliver major economic, social and environmental wins."

The report recommended the elimination of problematic and unnecessary plastics to reduce the size of the problem in order to cut pollution by 80 percent globally by 2040. The report calls for three market shifts—reuse, recycle and reorient and



Source: UNEP

diversify products.

The report said promoting reuse options, including refillable bottles, bulk dispensers, deposit-return schemes, and packaging take-back schemes, can reduce 30 per cent of plastic pollution by 2040. To realize its potential, governments must help build a stronger business case for reusables.

It said lowering plastic pollution by an additional 20-percent by 2040 can be achieved if recycling becomes a more stable and profitable venture. Removing fossil fuels subsidies, enforcing design guidelines to enhance recyclability, and other measures would increase the share

of economically recyclable plastics from 21 to 50 percent.

The UNEP report added that careful replacement of products such as plastic wrappers, sachets and takeaway items with products made from alternative materials (such as paper or compostable materials) can deliver an additional 17-percent decrease in plastic pollution.

The report noted that even with these measures 100 million metric tons of plastics from single-use and short-lived products will still need to be safely dealt with annually by 2040—along with a significant legacy of existing plastic pollution. This can

be addressed by setting and implementing design and safety standards for disposing of non-recyclable plastic waste, and by making manufacturers responsible for products shedding micro-plastics

The report said the shift to a circular economy would result in US\$1.27 trillion in savings, considering costs and recycling revenues. A further \$3.25 trillion would be saved from other effects such as health, climate, air pollution, marine ecosystem degradation and litigation-related costs.

The shift could also result in a net increase of 700,000 jobs by 2040, mostly in low-income countries, significantly

improving the livelihoods of millions of workers in informal settings.

The UNEP said investment costs for the systemic change are significant, but below the spending without it: \$65 billion per year as opposed to \$113 billion per year. Much of this can be mobilized by shifting planned investments for new production facilities—no longer needed through reduction in material needs—or a levy on virgin plastic production into the necessary circular infrastructure.

The report said a five-year delay may lead to an increase of 80 million metric tons of plastic pollution by 2040. **UNEP News**



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GO NEGOSYO PILIPINAS

ANGAT LAHAT!
JOEY CONCEPCION

Land consolidation for economies of scale in agriculture

Land has been on my mind lately because it is becoming central to the conversations that I and the KALAP (Kapatid Angat Lahat sa Agri Program) group have been having with people from several sectors. It figured prominently in a conversation we had recently with Sen. Migz Zubiri as we discussed some possible solutions put forward by members of our group on issues that stand between the Philippines and agricultural productivity.



"You had me at agriculture," he told us. The good senator describes himself as an agriculturist by birth, education and profession. Hailing from Bukidnon, he knows all too well how a productive land can bring so many benefits. He saw with his own eyes that corporate farming works.

You need to approach agriculture as a business, and for a business to work, you need a business model to follow. And for farming as an industry to become productive, you need to achieve economies of scale.

This much we have threshed out as we go about finetuning KALAP. This Go Negosyo initiative promotes inclusive growth, sustainability, competitiveness and development by integrating MSMEs, small-holder farmers and fisherfolk into the value chain of big-brother agri companies.

We have already forged formal agreements with the DTI, DA, NCIP, NTA, DENR, PCA and NIA last March, and have had several discussions with them, along with the 15 big agri companies that have agreed to become big-brothers – mentors – to small farmers.

In our discussions, it always comes back to scale. When we talk to other countries it becomes apparent that it is the one crucial component that the Philippines lacks, one that can be traced to the flaws in our land reform program.

The senator describes himself as a total believer in land consolidation, and I agree with him. We can only achieve economies of scale if we consolidate our lands. The agrarian reform law, as it stands now, is preventing farmer-beneficiaries from using their land as collateral for loans. That land, for many, is their only access to capital. And for anyone who has ever tried to farm, you know that you need a lot of money to till the land.

Most banks will not likely lend to small farmers because agriculture is often seen as risky. So risky, in fact, that they would rather pay millions in fines than risk billions in what they think is a risky loan. While land is commonly considered as collateral, banks would never touch a CLOA (Certificate of Land Ownership Award, the document given to recipients under the agrarian reform program), given all the restrictions on its sales or disposal. The sad part is, a CLOA is all these small farmers have.

Just put yourself in the farmers' shoes: you own the land and by rights you should be able to sell it or at least be able to use it as collateral for agricultural inputs. On the other hand, we must protect the spirit of why this land was given to farmers: that is, to make it productive. What use would it be if the land does not serve its purpose?

Why can't the land be bought by a returning OFW who wishes to come home and become an agripreneur? Why can't a neighboring farm buy the land and expand so it can increase its productivity? What is preventing cooperatives to aggregate the land so that the farmers – as a group – can achieve scale in the same manner as a big corporation?

The way forward is for farmers to group together: whether by forming strong cooperatives or by integrating into the value chain of a big corporation.

If you fly across the Philippines, you will see a lot of idle land, much of it still contiguous. The natural question would be, how come these lands are not being farmed? How come there are hardly any farms? Why is it that a country like the Philippines, blessed with hectares upon hectares of land, and even thousands of kilometers of coastline, is not assured of food security, nor become an agricultural powerhouse? Why indeed.

From our discussions about the issues of land, several solutions have been proposed in order to achieve economies of scale. The solutions will require a lot of hard work, and I expect many challenges ahead. The work will involve untangling years of bureaucratic red tape, uncovering why one government agency's functions overlap with another's – practically clearing out a garage filled with decades of unresolved issues and forgotten decisions.

In fact, if there is one thing that we can agree on with the progressive groups, it is that the lives of our farmers have barely improved, even after the many earnest attempts to implement land reform and throughout the iterations of land reform over the decades. So you have to ask yourself: where did we go wrong?

Land has always been a painful, contentious issue in the Philippines. Former president Marcos tried to address it with land reform when he was president, doing so with the best intentions to alleviate poverty. I believe he was right in pushing for it, and had he the benefit of hindsight that we have today, he would agree that farmers having only a few hectares of land to farm is not the way forward.

The idea is not to abolish land reform but to update it with what we know now, and what we know is this: we need these lands to become productive, and they can only become productive if production achieves



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scale. We can achieve scale if these lands are consolidated, and they can be consolidated if they can be transferred freely to those who can farm them more efficiently.

There are already proofs of this concept - Lionheart Farms in Palawan and Universal Leaf in Ilocos. In both cases, farmers' lives were vastly improved.

I don't know what prodded me to do it, but I brought up the subject of land reform and our KALAP proposals with President Marcos Jr. during our PSAC meeting last week. He listened patiently. He didn't say yes, but he didn't say no, either, and that is enough for me.





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GOING, GONE? It is feared that this mountain at Barangay San Juan, Ormoc City, Leyte, will be gone soon because of continued quarrying. No signboard announcing the issuance of an environmental compliance certificate has been seen for almost two years to prove that the quarrying is legal. PHOTO BY NESTOR L. ABREMATEA



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Restoring forests holds the key to a sustainable future

PRESERVING the world forests will generate new jobs and mitigate climate change.

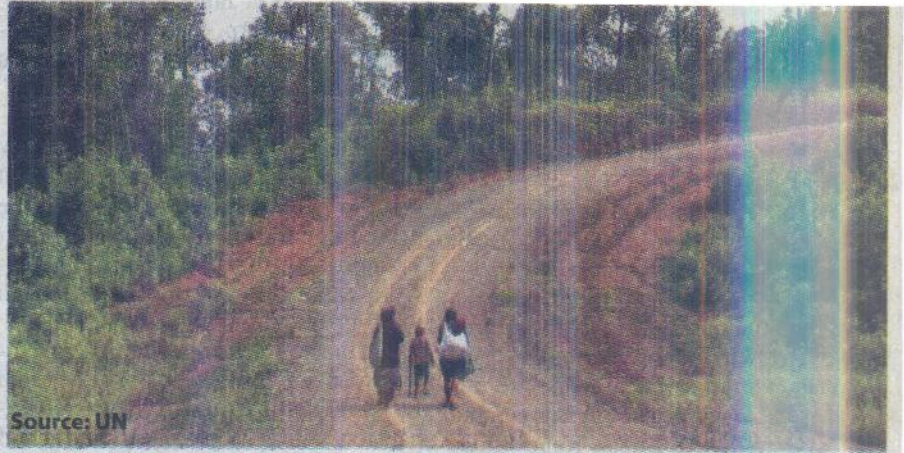
Revitalizing degraded forest is critical for meeting the United Nations target of increasing global forest area by 3 per cent, in time for the 2030 deadline. Doing so would also help countries create new jobs, prevent soil erosion, protect watersheds, mitigate climate change and safeguard biodiversity.

It is estimated that two billion hectares of degraded land worldwide could potentially be restored.

The sustainable management of the world's forests took center stage last week at the UN Forum on Forests at the UN Headquarters in New York.

Forests cover 31 per cent of the Earth's land area, contain over 80 per cent of the world's terrestrial biodiversity and store more carbon than the entire atmosphere.

"Forests are one of Earth's most valuable ecosystems," said Li Junhua, Under Secretary-General for UN Economic and Social Affairs, at the opening session of the forum. "They also form a vital social and safety net



Source: UN

from some communities that rely on forests for food and income."

More than 1.6 billion people depend on forests for subsistence, livelihood, employment and income. Some two billion people, roughly one third of the world's population—and two thirds of households in Africa—still depend on wood fuel for cooking and heating.

Woodlands play a critical role in tackling poverty, providing decent work, and promoting gender equality, all

essential for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Lachezara Stoeva, resident of the UN Economic and Social Council, told the forum

Forests and trees provide clean air and water and sustain people regardless of where they live. Zoonotic diseases account for 75 per cent of all emerging infectious diseases, and they usually occur when natural landscapes, such as forests are cleared. Restoring forests and planting trees are an essential part of

an integrated "one health" approach for people, species and the planet.

"Forests offer solutions," Forum chair Zéphyrin Maniratanga said, encouraging greater engagement of forest communities in all related processes in climate action in fighting against desertification, land degradation and climate change.

Deforestation

One of the main causes of deforestation in Bolivia, for one, is the expansion of mechanized agriculture. Every year, the world continues to lose 10 million hectares of forests, an area roughly the size of the Republic of Korea. The world's forests are at risk from illegal or unsustainable logging, forest fires, pollution, disease, pests, fragmentation, and the impacts of climate change, including severe storms and other weather events.

In the reforestation site of Merea, Chad, children are planting acacia seedlings for the future. In the past 50 years, Lake Chad Basin shrank from 25,000 square kilometers to 2,000 square kms. **UN news**



Aparri sizzles at 49°C heat index

The heat index in Aparri, Cagayan reached 49 degrees Celsius on Saturday as hot temperatures continue to affect the country, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said yesterday.

State weather forecasters said the highest heat index in Aparri was recorded at 2 p.m.

"Dangerous levels" of heat indexes were also felt in Dipolog, Zamboanga del Norte; Iba, Zambales; Juban, Sorsogon, and Tuguegarao, Cagayan with 43 degrees Celsius as well as in Baler, Aurora and Laoag, Ilocos Norte with 42 degrees Celsius.

The highest heat index from March 1 to May 20 was recorded in Legazpi City, Albay on May 12 with 50 degrees Celsius.

Other areas with highest heat index were Aparri, Cagayan on May 20; Butuan, Agusan del Norte on May 12, and Guiuan, Eastern Samar on April 16 with 49 degrees Celsius.

Heat indexes from 42 to 51 degrees Celsius are classified as "danger" heat index, the weather bureau said.

Among the effects of "danger" heat index on the body are heat cramps and exhaustion and possible heat stroke with continued exposure.

Meanwhile, the water level in Angat Dam further dropped to 191.79 meters yesterday morning.

The figure was 0.17 meters lower than the previous day's elevation of 191.96 meters and 7.29 meters above its rule curve elevation of 184.50 or the required level for the dam to be able to function.

Angat supplies more than 90 percent of Metro Manila's potable water needs and irrigates 25,000 hectares of farmlands in Bulacan and Pampanga.

PAGASA also reported a slight decrease in the water level in La Mesa Dam in Quezon City from 76.68 to 76.65 meters.

- Bella Cariaso



Cyclone outside PAR can develop into super typhoon - Pagasa

By BELLA CARIASO

There is a possibility that the tropical cyclone outside the Philippine area of responsibility (PAR) will develop into a super typhoon once it enters the country, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said yesterday.

In a radio interview, PAGASA weather specialist Beni Estareja said that the weather disturbance with international name Tropical Storm Mawar was located 2,520 kilometers east of Northeastern Mindanao.

"We are not discounting the possibility that it will develop into either typhoon or super typhoon once it enters PAR," Estareja said.

He said that Storm Mawar has maximum sustained winds of 85 kilometers per hour and gustiness of up to 105 kph.

"It continues to gain strength as it has now 85 kilometers per hour of sustained winds and is slowly moving north northwest at 10 kilometers per hour. It is expected to enter PAR later this week, possibly Friday or Saturday," he added.

It will be called Betty once it enters PAR, Estareja added.

"Based on our landfall scenario, at present there is a low chance but it will go near extreme Northern Luzon. It can also enhance the *habagat* or southwest monsoon. Its radius could reach 100 kilometers, but the edge of the tropical cyclone is far," he said.

Estareja said that rains are expected next week in many areas, especially the western side of the country because of enhanced southwest monsoon.

"The public may ask why there are still typhoons despite the expected El Niño. Strong typhoons are still possible," he explained.

According to Estareja, there is no chance for the tropical cyclone to dissipate.