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Point of view

Building back biodiversity

By SELVA RAMACHANDRAN

This year's International Day for Biodiversity is a strong call for all of us to walk the talk when it comes to protecting our biodiversity areas. Its theme, "From Agreement to Action: Build Back Biodiversity," holds meaning as it prompts us to rejuvenate our passion, commitment and hope for the future generation with the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework at COP 15.



While there have been significant biodiversity-related interventions when we launched the 2030 Agenda and development partners have publicly committed their resources for nature and climate, we still have quite a long way to go.

At the brink of what is considered a Planetary Emergency, the cost of inaction in the face of a deteriorating planet is severe. The world is on track to breach a critical warming threshold in the next five years.

The Philippines is known as one of the world's 18 megadiverse countries. It is home to two-thirds of the Earth's biodiversity, and between 70 percent and 80 percent of the world's plant and animal species. The country also ranks fifth in the number of plant species, and maintains 5 percent of the world's flora.

The Philippines has over 50,000 plant species, including over 3,000 endemic species. Moreover, it has over 100,000 animal species, including over 500 endemic species. The country's over 7,000 islands is home to a variety of rainforests, mangrove forests, coral reefs and other ecosystems.

The Philippines' biodiversity is a valuable resource that provides many benefits to the country and the world. Biodiversity provides food, water, medicine and other resources. It also helps to regulate the climate and protect our people against natural disasters.

However, only 37.47 percent of the country's Key Biodiversity Areas are protected by law. Given the DENR Biodiversity Management Bureau's roadmap, protection coverage of terrestrial areas needs to increase from what is currently 4.54 million hectares to 5.55 million hectares. On coastal areas, there is a need to increase protection from 3.14 million hectares to 35.03 million hectares.

These numbers can only be achieved through our collaborative action. Together, we can build the resilience of our treasured ecosystems, local governments and communities.

To support the Department of Natural Resources, UNDP and other development partners have committed to move and mobilize action to achieve the Philippines' biodiversity targets outlined in the Philippines' Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (PBSAP). The support of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through UNDP has been pivotal contributions to natural resources management and biodiversity conservation through the engagement with local communities.

Not only that, soon, with support from the GEF, we will be supporting the Biodiversity Management Bureau with the updating of their PBSAP and drafting of their 7th National Report.

The government's commitment and evident partnership-building work has enabled the broadened and improved biodiversity management interventions through the biodiversity corridor approach, improved capacities of local government units (LGUs), empowerment of civil society organizations (CSOs), increased biodiversity financing, wealth creation through fair and equitable access and benefit sharing mechanisms and development of innovative local nature-based solutions for climate.

Recognizing nature-based solutions to improve biodiversity management and the participation of different stakeholders are critical to ensuring that biodiversity targets are met. For this, we will need the strong support of the private sector, whose existing and potential contributions to biodiversity cannot be underestimated. There is an urgent need for the government and development partners to work with the private sector in establishing the business case for biodiversity management interventions and in ensuring that green and climate considerations are integrated in business models, both during project development and implementation stages.



Designation of Panaon Island as protected seascape pressed

AN international advocacy organization is urging Congress to pass a bill declaring Panaon Island as a protected seascape under the Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System Act or RA 11038.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resource (DENR) recently endorsed the designation to the House Committee on Natural

Resources chaired by Rep. Elpidio Barzaga Jr.

The Panaon Island, situated in the southern tip of Southern Leyte, has up to 60 percent of very good coral cover, way above the national average of only 20 percent.

The proposed seascape, if enacted, will be called Panaon Island Protected Seascape (PIPS).

It has an area of about 61,204 hect-

ares or 612.04 sq. km covering the municipalities of Liloan, San Francisco, Pintuyan, and San Ricardo.

On May 15, the House Committee on Natural Resources provisionally approved the consolidated bill for the proposed Panaon Island seascape pending the submission of a minor revision to the technical description from the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority. The

mapping authority committed to submitting this by next week.

"We call for the urgency of the measure as we race against time in achieving the targets and more importantly, in preserving the integrity of the natural life support system that our coral reefs, mangroves, seagrasses, and wetlands provide. The destruction of these invaluable havens for the people and

wildlife persists and will get worse if we will continue to lay back and take our own sweet time taking action," said Atty. Liza Osorio, Oceana Acting Vice President.

As a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Philippines is committed to supporting the initiatives to ensure that at least 30 percent of the global ocean, especially areas of particu-

lar importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed by 2030.

Relatedly, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and Sustainable Use the Oceans, Seas and Marine Resources, the Philippines set the goal of conserving at least 10 percent of its coastal and marine waters in 2020.



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BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business



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Dutch envoy gauges impact of dredging in Manila Bay

DUTCH Ambassador to the Philippines Marielle Garadaets recently held a consultation meeting with Cavite fisherfolk to look into the impacts of dredging activities to people and the environment in Manila Bay.

In particular, the Dutch ambassador is looking into the alleged adverse environmental and social impact of the dredging operation of Boskalis, a Dutch maritime construction firm tapped by local corporations involved in one of the reclamation projects in Manila Bay.

Fisherfolk from various towns in Cavite asserted that the

Boskalis dredging project should be immediately terminated, citing its alleged adverse effects to fishing activities.

They alleged the activities cause the disruption of marine life and are driving away of fish due to noise pollution caused by dredging equipment. The ongoing activities also trigger bigger waves and increased tidal currents in dredging sites.

Moreover, fisherfolk group Pamalakaya said fishing nets are being hauled by dredging equipment along with the sand.

Lastly, the group said the ongoing activities are causing

a drastic decline in fish stocks, blaming it to dredging-related pollution, ecological disruptions, and stressors.

Pamalakaya spokesperson Ronnel Arambulo, who was present in the consultation, told the Dutch envoy to hold the Boskalis accountable for the damages it has inflicted on the livelihood of local fishers, as well as to the marine environment and fisheries resources.

The group reported an 80 percent decline in the average fish catch of fisherfolk since the dredging operations started two years ago. *Jonathan L. Mayuga*



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EDITORIAL

Laguna de Bay's algal bloom

RECENTLY, the country's largest lake Laguna de Bay opened out in news broadcasts and newspapers because of the reported algal bloom, a high-speed increase in algae density in the 2.8-meter deep lagoon.

Algal blooms are natural phenomena, but their frequency, duration and intensity are increased by nutrient pollution.

Good thing the Muntinlupa City Health Office was quick on the draw and assured lakeshore residents the algal bloom in the 900-square-km Laguna de Bay does not pose a threat to public health.

Experts have said exposure to high levels of blue-green algae and their toxins can cause diarrhea, nausea or vomiting; skin, eye or throat irritation; and allergic reactions or breathing difficulties.

Drinking algae-affected water or consuming food (such as fish or shellfish) containing toxins can lead to gastroenteritis, which can induce vomiting, diarrhea, fevers and headaches.

These toxins may also affect the liver or nervous system, according to experts.

Concerns associated with blue-green algae include discolored water, reduced light penetration, taste and odor problems, dissolved oxygen depletions during die-off and toxin production.

Government data showed about 60 percent of the estimated 8.4 million people residing in the Laguna de Bay

“The latest algal bloom suggests authorities should rethink development plans to protect water quality and fish stocks for Metro Manila's 16 million people”

Region discharge their solid and liquid wastes indirectly to the lake through its tributaries.

Shaped like a crow's foot, with two peninsulas jutting out from the northern shore and filling the large volcanic Laguna Caldera, it drains its water to Manila Bay via the Pasig River.

Environmental concerns like water quality problems created by population pressure and industrialization, invasive

species and over-fishing are round the lake, hurting its economic importance to the country.

As population expands in the Bay, it's expected to rely more heavily on the lake for freshwater supply, thus water quality directly affects human populations.

The latest algal bloom suggests authorities should rethink development plans to protect water quality and fish stocks for Metro Manila's 16 million people.

It also supports agriculture, industry and hydro-power generation, and is a welcome getaway for rest and recreation for many Filipinos.

Time was when the lake's importance was placed in peril from problems, including pollution from untreated sewage and industrial waste, over-fishing and the sedimentation and illegal reclamation eroding its capacity.

In recent years the Laguna Lake Development Authority gave the lake an overall ranking of "C-" for water quality and "F" for fisheries (on a scale of A-F, with F being the worst).

Environmental threats have also sparked repeated attempts to clean up the lake and ease the pressure on its overstretched ecosystem so it continues to deliver its benefits to a growing human population.

And now the algal bloom.



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Liberian ship to drain fuel from sunken motor tanker

By MARTIN SADONGDONG

A Liberian-registered dynamic support vessel (DSV) will arrive in the country on May 26 to finally drain the cargo fuel from motor tanker (MT) Princess Empress after it sank 400 meters deep off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro nearly three months ago and sparked a massive oil slick.

Vice Admiral Rolando Lazor Punzalan Jr., PCG deputy commandant for operations, presided over a meeting at the PCG headquarters in Port Area, Manila on Monday, May 22, to coordinate and simplify the Customs, Immigration, Quarantine, and Security (CIQS) formalities for the arrival of DSV Fire Opal.

"The vessel departed Singapore on 19 May 2023 and will arrive in Subic on 26 May 2023," said Rear Admiral Armando Balilo, PCG spokesperson.

DSV Fire Opal was chartered by the Malayan Towage and Salvage Corp. (MSTC), a PCG-accredited maritime solutions provider, and contracted by the Protection and Indemnity (P&I) Insurance Club, Shipowners Protection Mutual, the insurer of MT Princess Empress' operator - RDC Reield Marine Services Inc.

The meeting was attended by representatives from the Bureau of Immigration (BI), Bureau of Customs (BOC), Bureau of Quarantine (BOQ), MT Princess Empress, and MSTC.



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Recycle water, MMDA tells public

The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) yesterday called on the public to conserve water amid the looming threat of the El Niño weather phenomenon.

Water used to wash rice could be used on plants, the MMDA said in an advisory on its Facebook page.

Collecting rainwater and water used to rinse clothes could be considered recycling, according to the MMDA.

Recycling could help mitigate the potential effects of the dry spell brought about by the weather phenomenon, the agency said.

The MMDA earlier urged local government units (LGUs) to submit plans to cope with a possible water shortage before the Metro Manila Council, composed of the metropolis' 17 mayors, convenes before the end of the month.

Acting MMDA Chairman Romando Artes said LGUs could talk with businesses with significant water consumption.

He said the El Niño weather phenomenon could last from July to February next year.

- Ghio Ong



PERSPECTIVE

Mining and justice

BY PHILIP CAMARA

THE should-be very purpose of any organized State is the arena of justice because without it there can be no peace. Without peace, society can eventually unravel.

Therefore, economic justice is a crucial aspect to consider in projects that impact natural watersheds in tropical areas. Natural watersheds are vital to providing biodiversity, water and hydrological balance to tens of thousands of rural families who rely on the clean waters for irrigation, domestic needs and industry. However, these watersheds are systematically removed to make way for mining projects, which generate significant revenue for a few wealthy individuals who own the mining company while depriving the local economy and local values that depend on the watershed.

The importance of watersheds in tropical areas

Natural watersheds are critical to the survival and well-being of rural communities in tropical areas. Watersheds provide numerous ecological services, including water supply, soil and biodiversity conservation, and flood control. Watersheds are also crucial to maintaining biodiversity and supporting fish and wildlife habitats. Tropical areas are particularly susceptible to erosion, flooding and drought, making watersheds a crucial resource for the local economy and ecosystems. In

addition, rural families rely on the clean waters for domestic needs, irrigation and industry, making the watershed a vital aspect of their livelihoods.

Challenges faced by watersheds

The removal of natural watersheds and their associated ecosystems has resulted in the degradation of freshwater resources in several tropical locales. These watersheds have been subjected to mining activities, increased agriculture, deforestation and the construction of large dams. These activities have significantly altered the natural hydrology and ecology of the watersheds, thus depriving rural families of their livelihoods and non-polluted air and water. Furthermore, the destruction of watersheds not only leads to negative environmental impacts but also economic losses for the locals.

The concept of economic justice

Economic justice is the notion that economic benefits and costs should be distributed equitably, taking into account the needs, claims and rights of the various stakeholders involved. Economic justice seeks to ensure that the wealth generated from an economic activity is distributed equitably to all stakeholders. Economic justice also seeks to ensure that the costs incurred by an economic activity are fairly distributed across all stakeholders.

Applying the concept of economic justice to watershed impact projects

Mining projects that impact natural watersheds in tropical areas tend to be owned by a few wealthy individuals. These individuals make large sums of money from the projects, while the local communities are left to bear the costs. In most cases, the rural communities affected by the mining projects do not receive any direct benefit from the projects. As a consequence, the local economy is severely affected, with negative impacts on livelihoods and income levels.

To ensure economic justice in mining projects that impact watersheds in tropical areas, several approaches can be adopted. First, mechanisms can be put in place to ensure that the costs incurred by mining projects are borne by the company and not by the local communities. These costs can include environmental damage, displacement of communities, and negative ecological and social impacts. Second, revenue generated from mining projects can and should be shared between the company and the local communities. This can be achieved through revenue-sharing arrangements, taxes or royalty payments to local associations or flow through the local governments. Third, the rights of the local communities impacted by mining projects should be respected. These rights can include land ownership value preservation,

compensation for loss of livelihoods or property, and access to clean water and air, etc.

In conclusion, economic justice is a crucial aspect that needs to be considered when undertaking mining projects that impact natural watersheds in tropical areas. Most importantly, the removal of watersheds leads to the degradation of freshwater resources, which is a critical resource for rural communities. Also, without a watershed flash floods gravely reduce the value of all properties in the impact area. Billions of values in locally owned and used real estate disappear when an area is declared "flood prone."

Furthermore, mining projects tend to be owned by a few wealthy individuals, leading to significant disparities in the distribution of costs and benefits. To ensure economic justice, mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that the costs incurred by mining projects are borne by the company and not by the local communities. The place to articulate this is in the preparation of the Environmental Impact Assessment which is a requirement in the application of the ECC of the project.

Revenue generated from mining projects should also be substantially shared between the company and the local communities at the minimum to compensate for their "losses," while the rights of local people impacted by mining projects need to be respected as enshrined in our constitution and laws.

The author is a trustee of Hari-bon Foundation.



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'Mawar' rapidly intensifies, may become super typhoon 1◀

effect on the Philippines yet, but it continues to enhance the south-westerly wind flow, which causes cloudy weather with scattered rain showers and thunderstorms over Palawan, Occidental Mindoro, and Antique, he added.

Residents in these areas have been warned of the possibility of flash floods or landslides due to moderate to heavy rains in the next 24 hours.

Meanwhile, Badrina said the rest of the country will continue to experience warm and humid weather, but isolated rain showers and thunderstorms will be more frequent in these areas.

The public is advised to exercise caution during severe thunderstorms, as these may also trigger landslides or flash floods, especially in areas that are vulnerable to these hazards.

Typhoon to enter PAR by Friday

As of 3 p.m. Monday, Mawar was approximately 2,275 kilometers east of Mindanao and still outside the Philippine area of responsibility (PAR).

It was moving north northwestward at 15 kph.

Badrina said Mawar may intensify the southwest monsoon or 'habagat' as it enters PAR on May 26, which will bring rains to the western part of the country by weekend.

The weather disturbance will be given the local name "Betty" once inside PAR, he added.

It will be the second tropical cyclone inside the PAR for 2023.

DSWD readies food packs

In preparation for the possibility of a super typhoon entering the country's area of responsibility by the weekend, Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Secretary Rex Gatchalian on Monday directed its field offices to prepare additional family food packs and other relief supplies in areas that may be affected by typhoon Mawar.

The DSWD-Cordillera Administrative Region has pre-positioned 16,355 family food packs in the provinces of Abra (4,401 packs), Kalinga (5,300 packs), and Apayao (6,654) in response to the DSWD chief's directive.

The DSWD-Ilocos Region inspected its regional and satellite warehouses to ensure a sufficient stockpile of family food packs.

DOH's safety list

Meanwhile, the Department of Health (DOH) advised Filipinos to prepare and report any untoward incident that may be triggered by

the cyclone.

In an advisory issued on Monday, the DOH listed safety preparations as Mawar continues to approach PAR.

First on the DOH's list is to understand signs of emergency. Apart from paying close attention to weather updates, the department stressed the need for learning the chain of information communication systems in communities in times of hazards.

"Learn, understand, and follow Early Warning Systems (EWS) in the community," it stressed.

Filipinos were also told to inspect their houses for necessary repairs while cyclone Mawar is not yet directly affecting the archipelago.

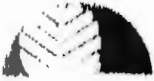
"Prepare your home for flooding, fully charge all your electronic gadgets, [and] keep important documents at a higher level," said DOH.

To avoid injuries and casualties in case flooding occurs, the health department also highlighted the need for creating an evacuation plan.

"Know the locations of multi-storey buildings and pre-arrange with families or friends living in the higher grounds for evacuation in case of flooding. Know the important emergency contact numbers, [and] get everyone in your family a whistle," it furthered.

Last on the DOH's list is to prepare a Go Bag—a kit containing emergency essentials. Essentials, according to DOH, include ready to eat food and water, clothes, first aid kit, sleeping bags, flash lights, batteries, toiletries, cash, as well as Covid-19 protection kit.

"Ensure that the Go Bag is easily accessible to everyone. Should there be an emergency, do not hesitate to contact your local disaster and emergency risk team for assistance," DOH concluded. (With a report from Charie Mae Abarca)



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'Mawar' rapidly intensifies, may become super typhoon

By ELLALYN DE VERA-RUIZ

The tropical cyclone off the Pacific Ocean has strengthened into a typhoon and may further intensify

into a super typhoon, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said on Monday, May 22.

As of 3 p.m. Monday, the typhoon

with the international name Mawar has maximum sustained winds of 140 kph near the center and gusts of up to 170 kph, up from 100 kph maximum sustained winds and gusts of up to 125

kph on Sunday afternoon.
In a public weather forecast, PAGASA weather specialist Obet Badrina said Mawar has a chance of intensifying into a super typhoon with winds of at least 185 kph while still over the ocean.
However, it has no direct ► **5**