

04 June 2023 Sunday



DENR

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



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Marine spatial planning

ACCORDING to Teh, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) also needs to do marine spatial planning to further boost safeguards that will be integrated into the guidelines.

"Because there are many uncertainties, we are applying the precautionary principle, including the climate lens. This is something we must consider to protect the investment. We need science-based, not merely generic mitigation measures, for all our projects," Teh pointed out.

"We need to map out first how to use our ocean [and inland water resources]. Anyway, the pre-development stage is five years to seven years yet. During that period, we will be able to get the necessary data and complete the marine spatial planning," she explained.

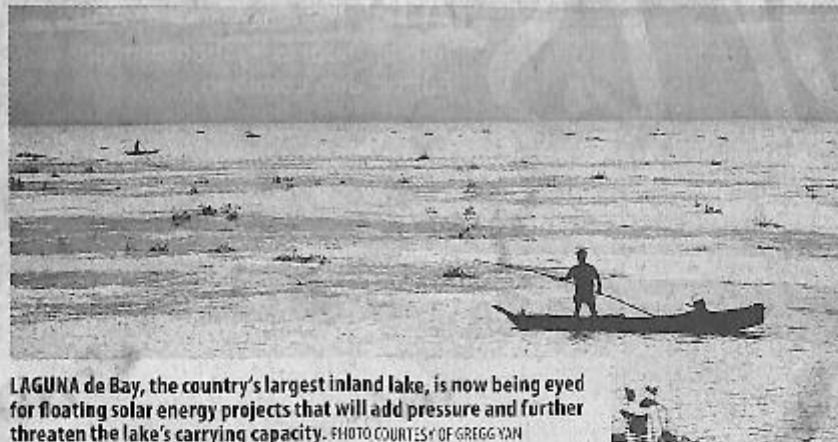
More importantly, Teh said that in implementing the projects, the DENR is also putting in place measures that will protect and conserve biodiversity, such as identifying "no-go zones" like protected areas, which are set aside for conservation.

Alternative source of energy

ENVIRONMENT and climate advocates support the decision of the DENR in stopping the acceptance, processing and approval of BCC applications for RE projects.

Asked to comment, Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) Executive Director Theresa Mundita S. Lim said that with the increasing intensity of climate change impacts, RE has become a very viable alternative as a source of power in order to reduce dependency on fossil fuels.

"Addressing climate change, however, should not only be



LAGUNA de Bay, the country's largest inland lake, is now being eyed for floating solar energy projects that will add pressure and further threaten the lake's carrying capacity. PHOTO COURTESY OF GREGG YAN

through technological and engineering solutions, but must also consider harnessing nature, including biodiversity, as a cost-effective measure for adaptation and mitigation that can achieve a multitude of benefits," Lim, an expert on biodiversity, told the BUSINESSMIRROR via Messenger on May 22.

She said it is for the same reason that when establishing renewable energy infrastructure, one must also ensure that "we leave as little footprint as possible, especially in areas known to be rich in biodiversity."

Environmental impact assessment

LIM added that environmental impact assessments (EIAs) should include biodiversity and ecosystem services as essential elements.

Biological Diversity-focused Strategic Environmental Assessment "is another tool that can be used to guide the planning processes at a seascape/landscape level," she added.

Lim pointed out that the following considerations in selecting the specific location for a project should be included, among others: Is it a habitat for species (flora or fauna) that are limited in range? Is it a migratory species pathway? Is it adjacent, connected to, or within a unique ecosystem that provides vital services, such as water, flood control, food source, aesthetic and cultural value, pharmaceutical potential, etc?

"To respond to these queries, it is important to have baseline information, an inventory and a profile of the biodiversity in the area prior to the development," Lim explained.

These data, in addition to symbiotic relationships and dependency studies, should also be useful to determine ecological capacity thresholds, and, hopefully, allow us to move forward on the development of renewable energy while preserving nature-based solutions, providing a holistic and integrated means to address the climate crisis, she added.



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1ST RUNNER-UP
Pateros National High School
Pateros City



2ND RUNNER-UP
Signal Village National High School
Taguig City



Senator Cynthia A. Villar together with DENR-NCR Regional Director Jacqueline A. Caancar, Judges: renowned artist A.G. Saño and art teacher Teodulo M. Diega Jr., DENR officials and staff, teachers, coaches and student delegates from ten cities of Metro Manila (Taguig, Parañaque, Muntinlupa, Pateros, Las Piñas, Pasay, Makati, Marikina, Valenzuela



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Senator Cynthia A. Villar
Chairperson, Committee on Environment,
Natural Resources and Climate Change

ON-THE-SPOT POSTER MAKING CONTEST WINNERS



CHAMPION
Sto. Niño High School
Paranaque City



*Sustainability Feed the
Global Population*

Villar highlights role of oceans and wetlands in nurturing life

In celebration of May as the month of the Ocean, Sen. Cynthia A. Villar renews her commitment to protect oceans and wetlands and preserve its significant role in nurturing life and supporting livelihoods not only in the country but worldwide.

During the On-the-Spot Poster-Making Contest initiated by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources at the Las Piñas-Parañaque Wetland Park (LPPWP), Villar underscored the importance of "the conservation, protection, and sustainable management of our country's coastal and marine resources."

"It becomes all the more important given that the Philippines is an archipelago endowed with vast coastal and ocean resources, including critical habitats, mangroves, coral reefs, seagrass beds, seascapes, and endangered and vulnerable marine flora and fauna, all of which provide both economic and ecological benefits for the present and future generations," Villar said.

Villar, chairperson of the Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Climate Change, said while it is important to meet the needs of the growing population and demand for food and resources, "we should do so without neglecting the health of our oceans, which are a rich source of diverse marine life that sustain millions of people."

"It is a sad reality that our oceans and wetlands are vulnerable. Habitat destruction and climate change have led to a decline in marine bounties and biodiversity. Wetlands, such as the LPPWP, a legislated protected area, are also under threat," Villar said, adding that the proposed reclamation projects near or within the vicinity of LPPWP would result the destruction of the park's ecological function which are beneficial to Filipinos.

She said the reclamation project "will lead to the disruption of migratory bird routes, degradation of buffers against climate change, and an irreversible loss of marine resources and biodiversity."

Villar cited a study conducted by the National Fisheries Development Institute, which reveals that the wetland is part of the hotspot for spawning in the Eastern part of Manila Bay and the volume of fish eggs laid is the highest in that area.

Groups of fisherfolk cited that various types of fish and other seafood can be harvested in that area, which form part of the seafood supply in Southern NCR, consisting of cities of Pasay, Parañaque, Las Piñas, Taguig, Pateros and Muntinlupa, CAMANAVA (Caloocan, Malabon, Navotas, Valenzuela) and Bulacan.

"I am very determined to stop these proposed reclamation projects that threaten the survival of this protected area. We should remember that it is within wetlands like the LPPWP that life in our oceans begins. They are the nursery grounds for many marine species that end up on our plates," Villar said.

Villar also reminded the contest participants to remember their important role in safeguarding the oceans and wetlands. "Together

we can craft a future where our wetlands are respected, and our oceans continue to thrive and sustainably feed the global population," she added.



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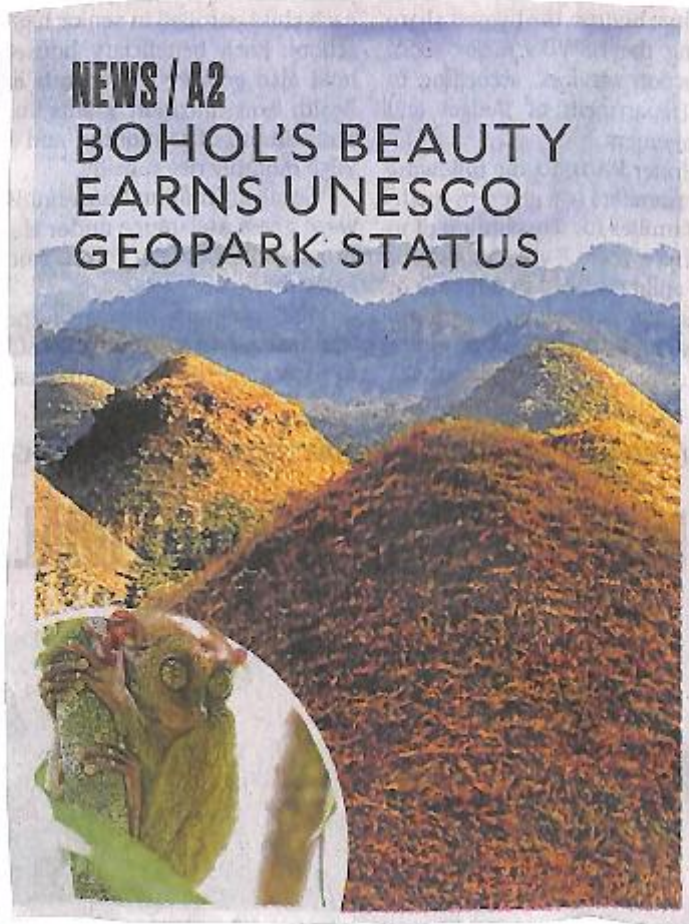
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FURTHER INCENTIVE TO PRESERVE NATURAL SITES, MANAGE WASTE

BOHOL'S BEAUTY MAKES IT FIRST UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARK IN PH

By Leo Udtohan
@leoudtohanINQ

TAGBILARAN CITY—Bohol has been recently hailed by the United Nations as the country's first global geopark—a feat that recognizes the natural landforms and marine resources in the province as among the world's best.

But officials of this island province in Central Visayas say they won't rest on their laurels.

Instead, they want to strengthen programs to preserve Bohol's geological sites which withstood a magnitude 7.2 earthquake that killed at least 222 people, damaged homes and public infrastructure and heritage churches, and displaced more than 80,000 people in the province on Oct. 15, 2013.

"We're doing this not because of the geopark title but for the reason that we want to take care and protect our island," said Jovenia Ganub of the Bohol Provincial Environment Management Office which heads the Bo-

hol island geopark committee.

First on the list, she said, is to lessen and eventually get rid of trash in geological sites and other areas in the province.

Ganub said waste management protocols, such as providing trash bins in strategic areas to encourage proper waste disposal, should be intensified.

Conservation 'bible'

While its geopark invites more tourists, money and jobs to Bohol, this status also increases the volume of waste generated in the province, she said.

According to Ganub, littering has been a serious concern in Bohol's tourist sites.

In 1998, the province enacted the Bohol Environmental Code which provides for the creation of the Bohol Environmental Management Office and the Bohol Tourism Office. Since then, it became the province's "bible" in environment and conservation management.

In 2020, the provincial gov-



BUT THERE'S MORE The province long famous for its tarsier residents and Chocolate Hills definitely has more to offer, and the new Unesco recognition should entice tourists and nature lovers to find out for themselves. —PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNESCO

ernment banned single-use plastics due to an increase in the volume of nonbiodegradable trash in the province.

It also looked into environmental issues, such as easement violations, water quality, sewerage and septage on Panglao Island, considered Bohol's crown jewel in tourism.

Ganub said educating and promoting environmental awareness must be reinforced for residents and tourists to respect

nature and heritage sites.

Beyond tourism

The provincial government appealed to residents and tourists to reduce their waste disposal in places they visit, especially as the province intensifies its campaign to promote sustainable practices now that it has been named as a global geopark by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco).

"We are now known globally and that Unesco title will boost our tourism industry. The end goal here is sustainable development for all stakeholders," Ganub said.

Data from the Bohol Tourism Office showed that 1,581,904 tourists visited the province in 2019. When the COVID-19 pandemic first struck the country in March 2020, this went down to 177,341.

Last year, Bohol recorded 507,324 arrivals as pandemic restrictions were eased. Chinese and South Koreans continue to dominate Bohol's foreign arrivals.

For Gov. Erico Aristode Aumentado, the island's recognition as the Philippines' first global geopark is "more than just about tourism."

"This is a reminder that we should protect the environment as well as our natural and cultural resources. We all have the responsibility to protect our island," he told the Inquirer.

Aumentado lauded the efforts of the provincial gov-

ernment, the current and past administrations, and the ordinary Boholanos, for making the dream of becoming a Unesco global geopark a reality.

"Our province is full of beauty bestowed by the Divine Provider. We must show everyone that we are ready to fight for the betterment of our environment. This is a legacy we can give to the next generations," he said.

Aumentado added: "Bohol's tourism industry is vital to the country's economy, and the Unesco-recognized Bohol Island geopark is the country's undisputed gem. We want to increase community unity so local businesses are well-positioned to promote the geopark and contribute to the impact of visitors' experiences. This is an opportunity for us to strengthen our geoconservation efforts."

Bohol's journey to be among the world's geoparks started in 2013 when a group of researchers from the University of the Philippines' **A4**



title: Bohol's beauty earns UNESCO...

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BOHOL'S BEAUTY MAKES IT FIRST UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARK IN PH

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195 geoparks in 48 countries. "Geoparks serve local communities by combining the conservation of their significant geological heritage with public outreach and a sustainable approach to development," read Unesco's statement posted on its website.

'Green card'

According to Unesco, Boholans have kept alive more than 400 years of rich history and cultural traditions in harmony with its unique geological treasures.

Tourism is growing in the area, which is a prime ecocultural destination, thanks to its white sand beaches, diving spots, magnificent geological formations, rich biodiversity and cultural heritage. Its traditions and culture are proof of how its people adapted to their natural environment," it said.

Unesco said global geoparks are given this designation for a period of four years after which the quality of each geopark is



SEARARITY A very rare geological formation known as the Danajon Double Barrier Reef in Bohol is a major breeding ground and habitat of many different species of fishes, marine mammals, mollusks and seagrasses. —PHOTO COURTESY OF UNESCO

thoroughly reexamined during a revalidation process. As part of the process, the geopark under review prepares a progress report, and a field mission is undertaken by two evaluators to assess its quality.

If, on the basis of the field evaluation report, the Unesco global geopark continues to

fulfill the criteria, the area will remain on the list for a further four-year period or the so-called "green card."

On the other hand, if the area no longer fulfills the criteria, the management body will be informed to take appropriate steps within a two-year period, or the so-called "yellow card."

Should the global geopark fail to fulfill the criteria within two years after receiving a "yellow card," the area will lose its status as a global geopark and given the so-called "red card."

Unique natural attractions

Unesco said global geoparks must also be managed with a holistic concept of protection, education or for people to find relevant information on the sites, and sustainable development.

Bohol's geopark covers 8,808 square kilometers of land surrounded by lush marine protected areas, according to Unesco. It abounds in karstic geo-

sites, such as caves, sinkholes and cone karst.

Among the province's geological sites were the world's iconic cone-shaped Chocolate Hills, Loon Coastal Geomorphic Conservation Park and Coral Garden, Alicia Panoramic Park, Alicia Schist, Baclayan Ancient Marine Terraces, Hinagdanan Cave, Lamanoc Island and Can-umantad Falls.

Unesco also cited Bohol's Danajon Double Barrier Reef, consisting of two sets of large offshore coral reefs that were formed by tidal currents and coral growth, as "one of its kind in Southeast Asia" and one of the six documented double barrier reefs on earth.

'Geological identity'

The province also boasts of its Lamanoc Print in Anda town where archaeological artifacts and burial sites of ancient settlers were reserved; the Rajah Sikatuna Protected Landscape

with its base in Bilar town, considered the largest remaining forest in Bohol; and the Philippine tarsier and Wildlife Sanctuary in Corella town where the world's smallest primates are nurtured.

Bohol's breathtaking landscape is a testament to its geologic history as evidenced from its varied landforms and structural features.

The province, Unesco said, has a "geological identity that has been pieced together over 250 million years, as periods of tectonic turbulence have raised the island from the ocean depths."

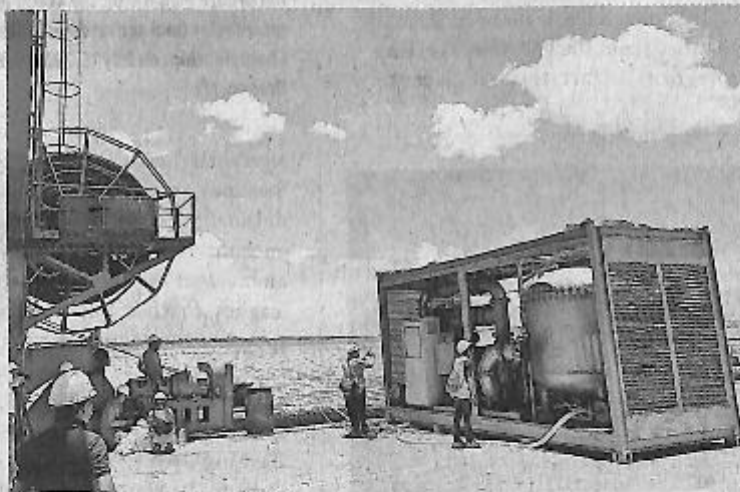
"Bohol's geopark is not only a testament to the earth's very dynamic history preserved in the diverse rocks and geomorphological features in and around the island, but it is also a demonstration of the Boholans' strength and steadfast faith while embracing the uncertainty of geological hazards coming their way," it said. **INQ**



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SHIPBOARD personnel oversee a live demonstration of the ballast water treatment system co-developed by UPD-CS IESM scientist Dr. Benjamin Vallejo Jr. The system is just a fraction of the cost of other commercially available solutions. DR. BENJAMIN VALLEJO JR.

PHL scientist co-invents ballast water treatment system vs invasive species

BY LORENZ S. MARASIGAN

BALLAST water has always been a requirement for ships. It helps trim or balance the vessels. But it also poses potential harm to environments where the water is disposed of.

This is because ballast water often carries invasive animals, plants, microorganisms and other alien species that can devastate local marine biodiversity and coastal ecosystems.

According to the study titled "Science of the Total Environment," the biological impact of such invasive species have cost \$1.1 trillion in damages all over the world in the last 62 years.

The cost of managing the invasions, meanwhile, was projected at \$95.3 billion since 1960.

To mitigate this problem, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) issued a Convention on Ballast Water Management, which imposes regulations on the proper handling and treatment of ballast water.

The Philippines ratified the convention in 2018, requiring it to have a port-based ballast water treatment system.

According to the convention, all ships are expected to treat their ballast water before release by 2024.



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REGIONS

Baguio's 'Eco Walk' returns

After 5 years, environmental program started by local journalists, environment officers and teachers relaunched to teach kids why trees need saving

CITY OF PINES Baguio City has become synonymous to the Denguet pine which thrives despite the intrusion of houses and buildings into the landscape. Residents have been extra protective about Baguio's pine cover and have supported programs like "Eco Walk" which teach children about the importance of protecting trees. —NEIL CLARK ONGCHANGCO



FUN IN THE FOREST Participants in the May 22 revival of Baguio's "Eco Walk" are briefed about pine trees and later joined parlor games like finding the longest pine needle at Busol. —PHOTOS BY JOEL ARTHUR TIBALDO/CONTRIBUTOR



ADVOCACY Artist Joel Arthur Tibaldo, who has revived "Eco Walk," used to join city students hike through the Busol forest in the early 1990s with daughter Inah Felice on his shoulders, and eldest daughter Tam Jewel walking by his side.



WATERSHED CARE Volunteers from the group Partners for Indigenous Knowledge Philippines, including children, plant pine tree saplings at Busol on May 22 to help regenerate



TITLE:

**HOMETOWN
SNAPSHOT**

By **Vincent Cabreza**
@InqNational

BAGUIO CITY—Artist and retired government employee Joel Arthur Tibaldo carried his then 2-year-old daughter, Inah Felice, on his shoulders when he joined grade school pupils wandering through an urban forest called Busol back in the 1990s.

His older daughter, Tam Jewel, was 4 years old and was walking beside him. Tam, now a 32-year-old protocol officer at the United States Embassy in Manila, said she had always been in awe of the huge pine trees towering above them.

Tibaldo brought his children to the first "Eco Walk," an environmental experiment that turned city forests into nature "classrooms" for Baguio's grade school pupils where they learned why Baguio trees need saving.

"I enjoyed being out and about, enjoying nature and its wonders, as well as meeting people and sharing the experience of 'Eco Walk' with them," Tam said.

"My parents, my sister and I visited Busol Watershed many times a year to walk around, draw, play and plant trees. It wasn't just us. There were other kids my age, and we were with local government officials and members of the media," she added.

The records of grade school children who joined Tam, as well as other students who took part in "Eco Walk" across three decades, were lost after the death of the program's longest overseer, journalist Ramon Dacawi, in 2019.

But the program's surviving founders believe those forest hikes helped shape the innate environmental activism of today's Baguio residents.

The community has sprung into action several times in the past whenever Baguio trees were threatened.

Protests

In 2012, the late Baguio Bishop Carlito Cenzon joined students, artists and activists who camped outside a shopping mall to protest its expansion plan that would displace trees.

Seven years later, grade-schoolers, backed by University of the Philippines Baguio students, formed a human chain

around a 1-hectare patch of pine trees to prevent a national government agency from leasing that property to a developer. Pupils from the Baguio Pines Family Learning Center also sent a petition to then President Rodrigo Duterte, asking him to spare the pine tree patch.

The conservation of the city's pine trees began as a crusade with the formation in 1988 of the Baguio Regreening Movement (BRM), which was triggered by the start of water rationing.

Relaunch

Then Bishop Ernesto Salgado, BRM chair, "challenged" members of the Baguio Correspondents and Broadcasters Club (BCBC) to contribute to the environmental campaign, Tibaldo said, which was how "Eco Walk" was conceived.

After a five-year lull, "Eco Walk" was officially relaunched at Busol last month by Tibal-



FILE:

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do, one of the local journalists who helped birth the project.

Tibaldo and foresters of the Baguio Water District welcomed women and children belonging to Partners for Indigenous Knowledge Philippines (PIKP), who were advised ahead of the trip to wear comfortable walking shoes, carry their own water and pack gloves and gear for the tree-planting activity.

PIKP members went through the traditional orientation program, including a parlor game to select the longest pine needle, and attended lectures about the environment.

Tibaldo said the task he inherited from Dacawi brought him full circle to the time he, Dacawi, the late editor Peppot Ilagan, journalist March Fianza and Inquirer correspondent Nathan Alcantara "brainstormed" the "Eco Walk" concept in 1992. The program was enhanced further by then Community Environment and Natural Resources Officer

Guillermo Fianza and teachers Victoria Candelario and Carmelita Simsim, as well as former BCBC presidents.

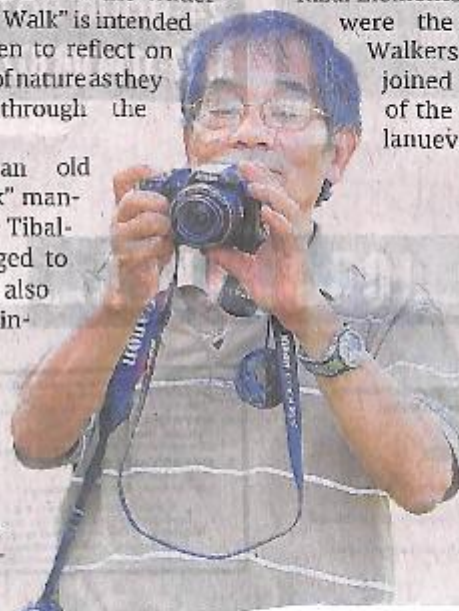
Ilagan used to credit the "walkabout" for the "Eco Walk" philosophy. Like this traditional rite of passage in Australian aboriginal society, where adolescent males live in the wilderness, "Eco Walk" is intended for children to reflect on the value of nature as they journey through the woods.

But an old "Eco Walk" manual that Tibaldo managed to preserve also refers to indigenous forest management systems like the "m u y -

ong and pinugo of Ifugao, the tayan and batangan of Mountain Province and the lapat of Apayao" as the program's inspirations.

Young activists

Alcantara said Dacawi and Ilagan tapped pupils of the Rizal Elementary School, who were the pioneer Eco Walkers. More schools joined with the help of the late Abner Villanueva, who was De-



PIONEER
The late journalist Ramon Dacawi was the longest overseer of "Eco Walk."

—PHOTO
COURTESY
OF BAGUIO
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partment of Environment and Natural Resources Cordillera spokesperson at the time, he recalled.

The "Eco Walk" manual describes Baguio's predicament as "dire."

According to the manual, despite massive reforestation efforts, the forest cover hardly improved simply because the programs could not ensure a high survival rate of the seedlings planted.

"Forest fires, tree poaching and intrusions by illegal occupants have contributed to the denudation of the city's watersheds. It has resulted in a critical water shortage and the warming of a once scenic region of pines that used to enjoy a year round temperate climate," it says.

"Children are the key players because they are most capable of being molded to become lifetime environmentalists. They are chosen because they will be affected the most by the quality of the environment that they will inherit," it adds.

Tam accompanied Dacawi in China when "Eco Walk's" environmental achievements earned it the Global 500 Award by the United Nations Environment Programme in 2002.

She said "Eco Walk" was incorporated into many other projects, as children used to be joined by the city's "Lucky Summer Visitors," who were first time Baguio guests which BCBC selected annually during the Holy Week break.

The program's revival comes at a time when Baguio, Mayor Benjamin Magalong authorized a crackdown on new structures rising within Baguio forestlands, including Busol, for the city's self-preservation.

Busol is a major city watershed that is occupied by settlements, some of which belong to Baguio Ibaloy families.

The city currently has 2.5 million trees, of which only half a million are Benguet pine, based on an inventory ordered by then Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu. The number has since risen by 50,000, according to the City Environment and Parks Management Office.

A 2019 urban carrying capacity report reveals that "the measured forest cover [of Baguio] remains only at 20 percent of the total area of the city which is below the 40 percent standard," and the consultancy group Certeza Infosys asserted that "massive reforestation and protection of forest reservations are urgent measures." INC



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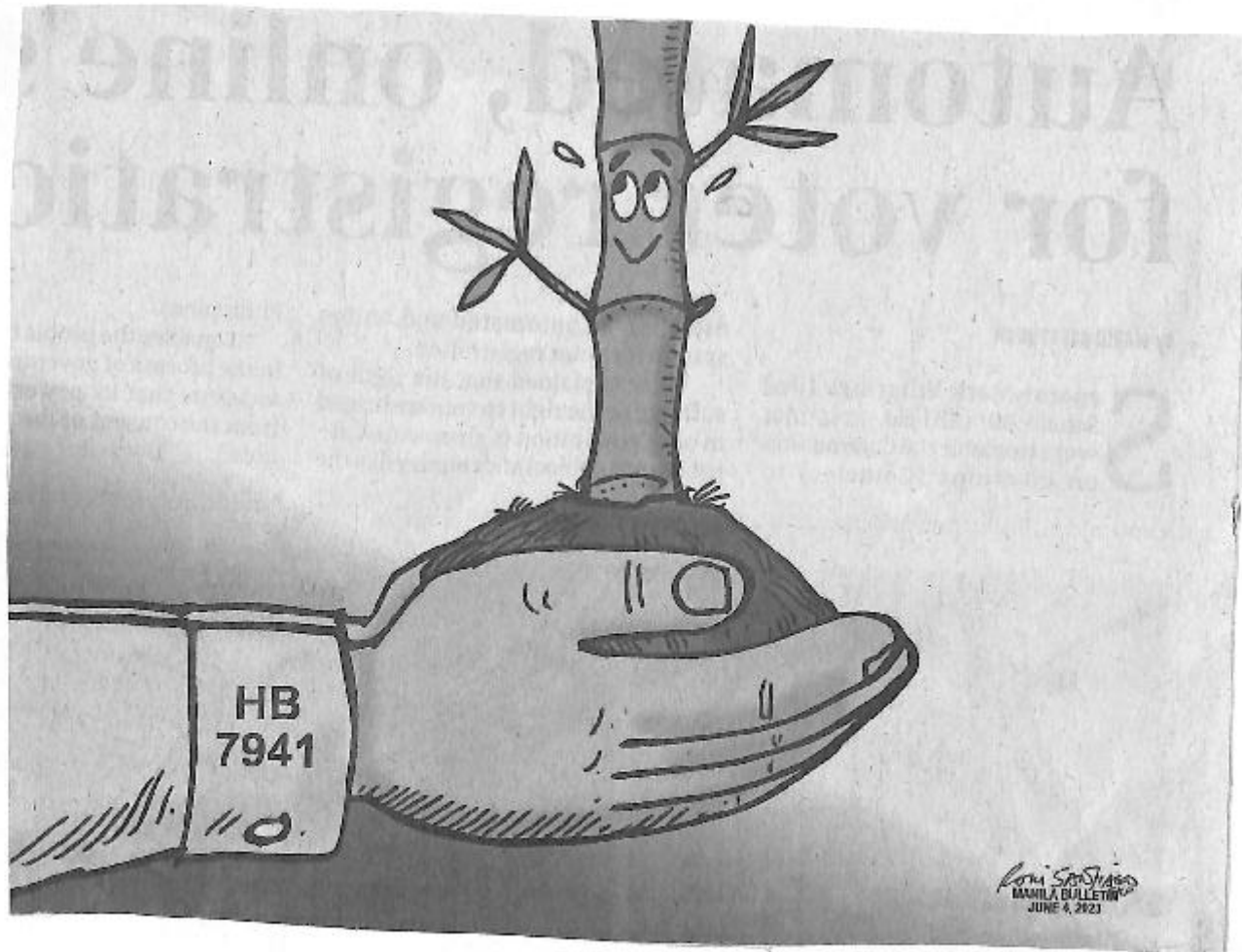
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Roni San Juan
MANILA BULLETIN
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Bamboo may be the boost that our country needs

It would be a great injustice to continue to relegate bamboo as a mere part of the humble bahay kubo and ignore its outstanding qualities for other more important and diverse uses. A top 10 list would be too limiting to list down all of bamboo's uses as it can be used beyond construction, proving its worth in sectors such as food, fabrics, paper, gardening, and more. Most of all, bamboo possesses remarkable environmental qualities, acting as a substantial "carbon sink," and contributing to soil improvement and cleaner air.

With all these beneficial characteristics, why is bamboo still relegated to the backburner and not bannered as a major economic booster? We will not know what bad decisions were made on behalf of bamboo in the past, but this will not be the case moving forward.

The House of Representatives early this week gave its final approval on House Bill (HB) No. 7941, or the "Act Promoting the Development of the Bamboo Industry by Strengthening the Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Council, etc." With an overwhelming number of votes from 282 legislators, the bamboo industry can finally "feel" that it will be given the serious governmental support and utmost attention it needs.

"There is a lot of potential in the local bamboo industry. Currently, we are the fifth largest bamboo exporter in the world," said House Speaker Martin Romualdez shortly after the bill was approved on third and final reading. "With smart planning and malasakit, especially to our bamboo planters, the Philippine bamboo industry could be a behemoth a few years down the road."

According to the bill's explanatory note, the State shall "recognize the strategic importance of the bamboo as a sturdy, versatile, and replenishable material that can be a sustainable source of livelihood and catalyst for agricultural productivity."

The State shall likewise "ensure the integrated

and continuous development of the Philippine bamboo industry through policies and programs that encourage the planting of bamboo, accelerate the development of bamboo-based products and designs, and promote Philippine bamboo products in international markets."

Through the measure, a program for a sustainable utilization, propagation and promotion of bamboo as furniture, food, construction and design material, and other uses shall be established.

The Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Council shall be tasked to create Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Program, which shall include plans of actions and projects for the scientific propagation, development and management, processing, utilization, business development, and commercialization of Philippine bamboo and bamboo products, through the cooperation of all stakeholders of the industry.

The hope for this is to make the local bamboo industry competitive in the local and global markets, and provide employment and enterprise opportunities for Filipinos.

Part of the bill's provision is the creation of the Bamboo Industry Research and Development Center, which will serve as the secretariat of the council.

The approval of this bill in the House should also prod the Senate to fasttrack the approval of their consolidated version of the bill. In fact, bamboo industry stakeholders have already appealed to the President to certify this bill as "urgent" and a "priority."

It is quite concerning that it is only now that our government is institutionalizing its support, assistance, and incentives to the bamboo industry, its workers and advocates. Nevertheless, it is a welcome move as it's better late than never. Who knows? Bamboo may become the "miracle" needed to push our economy up as these times call for a more sustainable, resilient, and versatile material.



UN aims to deliver draft plastics treaty by year's end

By BENJAMIN LEGENDRE

PARIS, France (AFP) – The world should see the first draft of a highly anticipated and much needed international treaty to combat plastic pollution by the end of November, 175 nations gathered in Paris decided Monday after five days of gruelling talks.

The assembly's negotiating committee called for the preparation of the "zero-draft" of a "legally binding instrument" ahead of a third round of talks in Nairobi, with the aim of finalizing the treaty in 2024.

The decision emerged from an eleventh-hour meeting led by France and Brazil and was adopted by the full plenary at UNESCO's Paris headquarters.

"Are there are no more interventions on this point?" asked Peru's Gustavo Meza-Cuadra Velasquez, chair of the forum's Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee.

"It is so decided," he continued,

as he brought down the gavel.

The breakthrough came after considerable "nit-picking" and "delaying tactics" by some countries, said France's minister for ecological transition, Christophe Bechu.

Frustrations bubbled up during the first two days of the talks, which were devoted entirely to a debate over procedural rules, as large plastics producer nations – including fossil fuel supplier Saudi Arabia, as well as China and India – resisted the idea the deal could be decided by a vote rather than by consensus.

On current trends, "by 2050 there will be more plastic waste than fish in the oceans," Mexican negotiator Camila Zepeda told AFP. "We can't get hung up on procedural rules."

Concern over the impact of plastics on the environment and human wellbeing has surged in recent years along with a crescendo of research documenting its omnipresence and persistence.

In nature, microplastics have been found in ice near the North

Pole and inside fish navigating the oceans' deepest, darkest recesses.

The equivalent of a garbage truck's worth of plastic refuse is dumped into the ocean every minute.

Plastic debris is estimated to kill more than a million seabirds and 100,000 marine mammals each year, according to the United Nations Environment Program.

Filter-feeding blue whales consume up to 10 million pieces of microplastic every day.

In humans, microscopic bits of plastic have been detected in blood, breast milk and placentas.

Green groups participating in the talks as observers had mixed reactions.

Eirik Lindebjerg, global plastics policy manager for WWF, hailed what he called "tangible progress."

Beyond recycling

"A large majority of the countries have expressed a need for binding specific obligations to end plastic pollution," he told AFP.

Others expressed concern about what is to come.

"It is clear from this week's negotiations that oil-producing countries and the fossil fuel industry will do everything in their power to weaken the treaty and delay the process," said Angelica Carballo Pago, global plastics media lead for Greenpeace USA.

"There is still a huge amount of work ahead of us."

Beside its impact on the environment, plastic also drives global warming, accounting for more than three percent of global emissions in 2019, according to the

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

On current trends, annual production of fossil-fuel-based plastics will nearly triple by 2060 to 1.2 billion tons, while waste will exceed one billion tons.

With less than 10 percent recycled and more than a fifth dumped or burned illegally, environmental groups are pushing for the treaty to go beyond recycling.

"The world needs urgently an international plastic treaty, one that regulates production, one that addresses pollution from its very source," said Li Shuo of Greenpeace.



MANILA BULLETIN file photo



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PADDLING THROUGH PLASTIC WASTE A fisherman paddles his boat through garbage, mostly plastic bottles, as he makes his way out of the Bulungan Fish Port along Manila Bay in Parañaque City on Saturday, June 3, 2023. The World Environment Day on June 5 carries the theme #BeatPlasticPollution. PHOTO BY MIKE ALQUINTO



Pangasinan gov: Don't overprice sand, gravel

BY GABRIEL L. CARDINOZA

LINGAYEN, Pangasinan: Gov. Ramon Guico 3rd warned businessmen that the provincial government would use all legal means to punish them if they were caught selling overpriced aggregates in the province.

"I'm warning them now. We'll find all legal means to punish them," Guico told reporters in an ambush interview here on Friday.

Guico said he had been receiving complaints that prices of aggregates, such as sand and gravel, had increased "exponentially" after the provincial government began collecting higher extraction and other fees from quarry operators last March.

"You know, some entrepreneurs are using this new policy to double, triple or exponentially increase their profits [in selling sand and gravel]. They charge more than P1,000 for every cubic meter, and they are saying that the province was the one that raised the price," said Guico.

"We increased the fees, but its total effect should only be from

P50 to P100 [increase] per cubic meter," he added.

Mineral extraction fees in the province increased from P16 to P50 per cubic meter after the Sangguniang Panlalawigan passed an ordinance last year that amended the province's Revenue Code.

The ordinance also imposed administrative fees ranging from P50 to P250 per cubic meter, depending on the volume of minerals loaded on the truck.

In addition, road maintenance fees ranging from P100 to P300 per cubic meter per truckload were collected, also depending on the volume of minerals being hauled.

Guico said consumers should be aware that the price increase in the sand and gravel that they buy should only be from P60 to P100

for every cubic meter.

"If you do the math, we only raised P34 per cubic meter. Then we added P250 for big trucks for road maintenance and another P250 for administrative fees. So, all in all, that's P34 x 20 cubic meters for big trucks, and that's P680 plus P250 administrative fee plus P250 road maintenance fee, it's P1,180, right? Divided by 20, that's P59. So, in 1 cubic meter of sand and gravel, only P59 should be added," Guico said.

Under the ordinance, 40 percent of the taxes collected will go to the barangay where the resources were extracted, 30 percent will go to the town or city, and 30 percent to the province.

Guico said that so far, the total effect of the new fees on the mineral tax collections of the province was "very significant."

From January 1 to May 31 this year, the provincial government collected more than P28.5 million in taxes and fees from quarry operations, according to a report of the Provincial Treasurer's Office. The collection almost doubled the P15.52 million collected from January 1 to December 31 last year.

Guico earlier warned quarry

operators that "if they did not want to pay the new taxes and fees being imposed on quarrying activities and they kept on complaining, they could leave the province and quarry somewhere else."

But despite complaints about the new fees, Guico said the number of applicants for sand and gravel permit extraction in the province had doubled this year compared to last year.

Under the Philippine Mining Act of 1995, the governor, through the provincial mining regulatory board, issues permits for sand and gravel extractions for an area of five hectares and below.

For areas over 5 hectares, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) issues a permit to the operator.

"So, if there is a problem, why are there more applicants now? It just means that the playing field is fair," Guico said.

He said that a task force he earlier organized continued to inspect rivers and other quarry areas in the province to check their permits.

"We will soon use an app (application) that could monitor all rivers and trucks hauling aggregates," Guico said.



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Climate costs mount for poorer nations already troubled by debt

By ANTONY SQUAZZIN, RONJOY MAZUMDAR & PRINESHA NAIDOO

PAKISTANI Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif warned world leaders at the COP27 climate talks last November that developing nations risk falling into a “financial debt trap” if they’re forced to turn to the markets to cover the mounting costs of climate change. Six months on, with rates and temperatures rising, his prediction looks prescient. So far this year cyclones have battered Southeast Africa, floods have killed hundreds in Rwanda, Congo and Uganda and the worst drought in four decades parched crops in the Horn of Africa. Record temperatures are currently being recorded across Southeast Asia, Cyclone Mocha has just ripped through Bangladesh and Myanmar and agricultural regions have dried up in Argentina.



SUGAR cane farmer Sabelo Shabangu walks along a dirt track damaged by heavy rains not knowing how he will get his crop to the mill. GUILLEM SACTOR/BLONDBERG



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Those events often become humanitarian crises; they're also expensive and getting more so. The average cost of capital for a select group of 58 climate-vulnerable countries is 10.5 percent according to report published in April by the Boston University Global Development Policy Center. That compares to a sovereign bond yield of 4.3 percent over the past decade for a Bloomberg Barclays emerging markets index.

Many borrowed heavily when interest rates were much lower, meaning they are often already struggling to payback debt when a natural disaster strikes. The shift in borrowing costs has also been transferred to small businesses such as farmers, exacerbating the problem for governments.

One such farmer is Thobani Lubisi. In February he was just beginning preparations for the annual harvest on Dwaleni Farm, a cooperative in eastern South Africa, when heavy raindrops began pounding his neat rows of sugarcane plants. Over two days almost half a year's worth of rain gushed onto the fields, waterlogging crops and turning the dirt tracks used to deliver the harvest to the nearest mill to sludge. The nearby Mlumati River burst its banks, completely submerging the farm's pump house.

In the weeks that followed, as work began to repair the damage from the worst flood locals had ever seen, Thobani and his colleagues were forced to face up to a new reality. The damaged harvest had blown a hole in household budgets and the repair work quickly drained savings. Ordinarily the farmers, who were uninsured, could tap the local agricultural bank, but the surge in global interest rates means loans now come with crippling monthly payments.

Lubisi, 43, whose father was one of the first Black farmers to start growing sugarcane in the area 40 years ago, has managed to keep going for now, but he is one of the lucky ones. Some in the region have sold their plots. Others are renting

out their fields because they can't afford the repairs.

"You work the whole year for zero because there will be no income," said Lubisi, holding an umbrella to shield himself from the sun in an interview earlier this month as a four-foot Nile monitor lizard slithered into the Mlumati, now a languid stream just a few feet across. "This kind of damage for me looks like it's a first."

Lubisi's story is one that's being increasingly repeated across the developing world. Munich Re calculated the losses from global natural disasters in 2022 at \$270 billion and estimates that roughly 55 percent of that total wasn't insured. Weather-related natural disasters are already being influenced by climate change, and this influence is likely to grow stronger as temperatures rise.

Alvario Lario, president of the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development, said he's seen farmers driven out of business due to extreme weather in Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Kenya and Indonesia. "The depth or the intensity of these shocks is very clearly much more acute than what it was five or 10 years ago. That's the reality," he said.

Almost 3,500 miles north east of Dwaleni Farm is an archipelago that faces a similar financing problem on a national scale. The Maldives, a nation of 1,200 islands that are rapidly sinking into the sea, is spending 30 percent of its annual budget on seawalls, land reclamation and desalination plants. The country's borrowing costs have surged since it sold a \$500 million bond in early 2021, with the yield on the notes due in 2026 now trading at close to 19 percent.

To meet its coastal adaptation needs the Maldives would need to spend \$8.8 billion, about four times its national budget, according to Aminath Shauna, the nation's Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Technology. Already 64 percent of its islands

