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DENR

NEWS ALERTS

NEWS CLIPPINGS

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



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EDITORIAL

Water resource development

The country observes Holy Week as the heat index soars and water supply becomes intermittent in large swathes of Metro Manila. The situation could persist as meteorologists warn of a possible strong El Niño phenomenon this year that could lead to a prolonged dry spell.

In 2019 as a mild El Niño reduced water levels in Angat, Ipo and La Mesa dams, the main sources of water supply for Metro Manila, the region experienced a water crisis particularly in the eastern concession area where development of the Cardona water treatment plant had been delayed. Supply was inadequate and water turbidity required increased treatment before distribution to customers.

A belated approval by the National Water Resources Board or NWRB of the rehabilitation and construction of deep wells, combined with the reduction of water pressure in many areas and ramped-up work on the Cardona treatment plant provided relief until the rainy season arrived and replenished the reservoirs.

As the crisis ended, the two water concessionaires stressed the urgency of developing new water sources for the National Capital Region to avoid a repeat of water shortages. This was before the COVID-19 pandemic. Four years later, the NCR is still waiting

for new water sources to come onstream.

The concessionaires have pointed out that while their customers have increased exponentially in the country's most densely populated region since water distribution was privatized, no new major source of fresh water has been developed.

Laguna de Bay and Marikina River are now being tapped to a limited extent to augment the water sources for the NCR. Water from these sources, however, tends to require more treatment because of siltation and pollution compared to water from the dams.

In the current dry season, the NWRB has approved an increased water allocation of 50 cubic meters per second from the previous 48 for the two water concessionaires – lower than the 52 cubic meters requested.

Since 1979, the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System has been trying to get the Laiban dam project off the ground for Metro Manila and neighboring service areas. Both the Laiban and Kaliwa dam projects, however, have faced issues involving environmental and social concerns. The Marcos administration will have to confront these issues, or else find new water sources and develop them ASAP, if it wants to ensure water security.



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Avoiding a water crisis

First of two parts

IN March 2019, I was tapped to be one of the key presenters for the National Water Summit (NWS) spearheaded by the National Water Resources Board (NWRB).



MOVING FORWARD
WILLIAM D. DAR

the Philippines is blessed with a high annual rainfall of 2,400 millimeter and that 80 percent of freshwater use in the country is for agriculture.

The conduct of the NWS was very timely as another El Niño or dry spell episode was hitting the country in the summer of 2019, and Metro Manila was swamped by a water crisis with residents in the area experiencing water shortages. My presentation was a result of a cluster group whose discussions were focused on agriculture and the economy.

However, there are 30 government agencies with mandates related to water, and many have overlapping and conflicting functions. So, there is a need to create by legislation a department mandated to manage, conserve and develop the country's water resources.

The three recommendations I presented during the NWS were primarily aimed at avoiding another water crisis in the future:

I can even say that even if the country experiences an El Niño episode, we can still have enough water for agriculture, residential and commercial/industrial use if we undertake measures to rejuvenate our water resources during the rainy season, and store rainwater.

- Create the Department of Water Management (DWM) and the Water Regulatory Commission.

Citing an Asian Development Bank study, the NWS backgrounder paper stated "that the cause of the water problem is inappropriate management practices rather than physical scarcity of water." I believe this still applies today even if more than four years have passed since the 2019 NWS.

- Undertake large-scale rainwater harvesting and development of irrigation systems.

- Rehabilitate 18 major river basins including watershed areas of existing irrigation systems managed by the National Irrigation Administration (NIA).

What I fear most if a water crisis happens, or if this year's El Niño episode is worse, is our agriculture production will drop and thousands of farmers will incur losses from crop failures. Remember that agriculture accounts for 80 percent of freshwater use in the Philippines.

After the summit, there was a lot of hope that the measures and solutions identified to avoid a future water crisis would be put in place gradually.

The summit was not just convened out of the blue as its preparation dated back to March 2017 after the NWRB executed an agreement with a research team from the University of the Philippines Los Baños-Office of the Vice Chancellor Research and Extension tasked to undertake the following: gather all water-related baseline data; analyze the data; identify gaps and issues; and recommend short-term, medium-term and long-term strategies.

I definitely support large-scale solutions to make sure water is always available for farming like building of irrigation dams and systems, and opening up to private investments or public-private partnerships the development of more large-scale irrigation systems in the Philippines.

Eventually, more government entities got involved in the initiative like the National Economic and Development Authority, Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Soils and Water Management, Department of Public Works and Highways and the Department of the Interior and Local Government. The late Rep. Rodol Batocabe also got involved in the initiative.

The good news is NIA is now led by former Piddig mayor Eduardo Guillen, who led a model convergence effort in his locality that put farmers on the growth path.

What should not be overlooked, however, are doable and sustainable low-tech solutions that can be scaled up nationwide, such as aquifer recharging and rainwater harvesting. An elementary student can easily understand rainwater harvesting and so should bureaucrats.



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However, the Covid-19 pandemic emerged in late 2019 and forced the Philippines to undertake restrictive measures from March 2020. With that scenario, water-related issues took the back burner although there were more than a dozen measures filed at the House of Representatives seeking to establish the DWM or a similar department-level entity.

Now that the pandemic is over, I believe the government should act urgently to avoid a future water crisis. The El Niño episode this summer should also remind us that we should be more proactive in dealing with dry spells.

The government will get a lot of ideas by revisiting the solutions discussed during the 2019 NWS as these are still applicable today. Also, many of the solutions identified were not yet implemented like the creation of the DWM.

The main issues

In my presentation for the NWS, I cited that

There is also a need to develop water infrastructure and systems to ensure the delivery of potable water to the urban and population centers. The lack of those, however, was echoed in an Ateneo de Manila paper by Rosalina Palanca-Tan titled "Global Water Shortages: A Philippines Case Study."

"This water shortage is the result of rapid population growth and poor governance that led to failure to put up the necessary water supply infrastructure and systems to meet the growing demand for water of a rapidly increasing population," the paper stated.

"In the Philippines, 9 million out of 101 million Filipinos still suffer from unimproved, unsafe and unsustainable water sources. Inadequate and intermittent water supply afflicts not only rural areas and low-income urban cities, but also even the foremost urban center, Metro Manila," it added.

"So, in the next installment of this column-series, I will discuss more of the solutions needed to avoid another water crisis.



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Boost for Camarines Norte mining

BIZ BUZZ



Mining activities in Camarines Norte received a boost recently after the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' (DENR) Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) declared Galeo Equipment Corp. the co-permittee and co-contractor of Mt. Labo Exploration and Development Corp.

The decision recognized and gave importance to an ordinance enacted by Camarines Norte's provincial board, which mandated that, in case there are joint venture partners in mining projects within the province, the partners should be deemed co-permittees to ensure accountability for the implementation of mining laws and ensure responsible mining within the province.

The decision of the MGB's panel of arbitrators recognized the duties and responsibilities of local governments in the management and regulation of small- and large-scale mining within the various local government units (LGUs) in the province.

Of course, Camarines Norte is known for its mineral deposits of gold, silver, iron, zinc and bull quartz and its nonmetallic minerals that include sand, limestone, clay and kaolin.

"This has energized the province to craft more legislation and institute measures that will encourage the growth of responsible mining activities in Camarines Norte," said

2nd district board member and environment committee chair **Gerardo Quiñones**. "Just as we currently have a Tourism Code, I would like to champion the creation of a Mining Code to serve as framework for all mining-related activities."

"We are delighted with the decision as Galeo has a good track record in partnership with the LGUs and other stakeholders in Camarines Norte," said Labo council member **Rey Kenneth Oning**.

Despite belonging to different political affiliations, the provincial board members of Camarines Norte came together to support responsible mining, setting aside politics to uphold a landmark piece of legislation intended to solidify the LGU partnership with the DENR and promote balanced socioeconomic progress both on the local and national front.

"We all understand that mining, if done in a responsible manner, can bring about much needed economic growth to our province," 2nd district board member **Joseph Stanley Alegre** said.

The resolutions are timely given the intent of the DENR to open up the mining sector purposely to help the national government create more jobs and spur economic activity locally and at the national level.

"The resolution is just the start as we are looking for more effective ways to strengthen the coordination and partnership between the local governments in the province and the DENR and other national government agencies towards the effective and responsible implementation of

the Philippine Mining Act of 1995 and other related laws," Camarines Norte Vice Gov. **Joseph Ascudia** said.

Now the question is ... can this serve as a model for other provinces where local officials are more antagonistic toward mining? Let's see. —**DAXIM L. LUCAS**



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BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business



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ECOTOURISM Asian delegates who participated in the recently concluded International Ecotourism Travel Mart (IETM) gather in a century-old Peruvian Parasol tree at the International School for Sustainable Tourism in Silang, Cavite. A historic assembly and world festival pushing ecotourism to its rightful place in protecting the environment and improving the local people's welfare, IETM brought together delegates and exhibitors showcasing products and services with a strong ecotourism component, green technology and sustainable green practices. IETM was co-presented by the Asian Ecotourism Network and the ISST, the first sustainable tourism school in the Asia-Pacific region. NONIE REYES



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Editorial

New plastics treaty may not be enough

A GLOBAL treaty intended to reduce plastic pollution is moving closer to adoption, but there are growing worries that it may fall short in its noble intentions. Of particular concern to the Philippines and neighboring countries in Southeast Asia is recent data suggesting that the global plastics treaty and other efforts to fight plastic waste may unintentionally turn the region into a dumping ground for plastic waste from other parts of the world, severely handicapping our own efforts to reduce plastic consumption and waste.

To be clear, we are fully supportive of the global plastics treaty, as is our government. Any measures that help to reduce the enormous amount of plastic that is produced and eventually finds its way into the environment as solid waste pollution should be implemented as quickly as they can be, because humanity is quite frankly producing plastic faster than it can get rid of it.

According to a report published by the OECD at the beginning of last month, if no significant actions are taken at either a global or regional level, plastic consumption will triple by 2060 — from an already astonishing 460 million metric tons annually as of 2019, to more than 1,230 million MT. More than 80 percent of that plastic ends up as waste, with all but a very small percentage of that being “mismanaged,” that is, simply discarded to pollute the land and sea.

Among the key provisions of the new global plastics treaty are a global ban on single-use plastic products; a producer-pays plan (known as extended producer responsibility, or EPR) to manage plastic waste; and a tax on new plastic production. These are all measures that have been implemented in various countries and at local government levels, but supporters of a global treaty point out that these small, uncoordinated efforts have clearly not been enough to even slow the growth of plastic consumption and waste, let alone reduce them.

However, even before the new global treaty is implemented, some of its worrisome potential flaws are being highlighted. One concern is over the definition of “single-use plastics,” and the large number of exceptions to that definition that have been necessary to gain support for the treaty from some reluctant parties.

A second uncertainty is how a tax on plastic production would be structured, as the new treaty provides very few details. Again, this was a necessary area of “flexibility” in order to secure support for the treaty, but it is seen as something that might lead to problems later on. For example, there are some proposals to treat the plastic tax much like carbon taxes, which could lead to a trade in “plastic credits.” This might not actually reduce the production of plastics, but simply shift it to different areas and producers.

The biggest problem with the new plastics treaty, according to some observers, is that it is extremely optimistic in its assumptions about a creation of a “circular economy” to deal with plastic waste, relying heavily on recycling. This, critics say, just simply doesn’t add up, as only about 9 percent of plastic is recycled annually, according to the OECD data, and furthermore, the high cost and energy demand of recycling technology, at least in its current state, means that the percentage cannot be increased by a sufficient amount to make a difference. As a cheaper alternative to developing recycling schemes, large producers and consumers of plastics are increasingly opting to export waste for ersatz “recycling” — usually involving some form of incineration — in developing countries, particularly Southeast Asia. Of the \$4.1 billion invested in “circularity” between 2018 and 2022, according to recent data, more than \$3.5 billion of that went to Asian countries. On the one hand, the investment is welcome for the economic boost it indicates, but on the other hand, it brings with it vast amounts of plastic waste that physically needs to be dealt with.

In our view, the global plastics treaty is a good foundation for further action to fight the plastic menace, but not an end in itself. It should be regarded by our policymakers in that context as they develop laws and regulations to respond to the global agreement’s emerging potential pitfalls.



Norway pitches-in to punctuate PHL's plastic-pollution problem

THE Philippines owns the unenviable rank of being the world's third-largest plastics polluter, with the City of Manila currently facing a growing plastic-waste problem.

With the Pasig River mostly affected by plastic pollution and a growing population using more single-use plastic products, the city is a major contributor to more than 11 million tons of plastic waste that flows into the ocean yearly.

Tackling the gargantuan plastic-waste dilemma, Norwegian organization TV-Aksjonen has launched the "Plastic Smart Cities TV-Aksjonen Project," which calls for social entrepreneurs with scalable solutions across the plastic value chain to pilot in Manila. Supported by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, and World Wide Fund (WWF)-Norway, the project aims to achieve a 30-percent reduction in plastic-waste leakage into the environment by 2024.

In the program, social entrepreneurs will undergo a process of selection divided into three stages:

For the first, WWF aims to generate a database of entrepreneurial solutions that are looking to scale in Manila. They should aim to address plastic pollution and engage local stakeholders, which include businesses, communities and the waste sector, among others. Registration will close on April 10.

In the second phase, registered solutions will be categorized into the following: (1) Closing the tap: Reduction in plastic waste generation; (2) Closing the loop: Segregation, redesign, reusing, recycling, and measures to lengthen the use of plastic items in the operations; and (3) Stopping plastic leakage: Collection, disposal of plastic waste, and measures to prevent plastic waste from ending up in nature.

Last stage of the call is where the shortlisted entrepreneurs pitch in their solutions before a panel of judges for final selection.

The four-year project will fund the scaling of the solutions that will be selected for a maximum of one year starting in May 2023. For more details, interested parties may visit bit.ly/PSCManilaCall. *Rizal Raoul S. Reyes*



French oil-spill expert aids response mission



LAURENT (second from right) attends a briefing in Calapan, Oriental Mindoro. EMBASSY OF FRANCE

FRANCE has financed a French expert's visit to support the Philippines in its ongoing pollution-response efforts related to the sinking of *MT Princess Empress*.

Mikaël Laurent conducted a mission from March 16 to 29 on behalf of Cedre, or the Center for Documentation, Research and Experimentation on Accidental Water Pollution based in Brest, France. He was supported by maritime security advisor Emeric Faure, who works for the Maritime Industry Authority or Marina on behalf of the French government.

Laurent participated in planning meetings with the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, local authorities, as well as private operators—including the French company *Le Floch Depollution*. He joined reconnaissance operations and observed coastal clean-up work areas as well as polluted sites, with a view to identify clean-up techniques adapted to the different substrates, and anticipate the parameters for the closure of affected locales.

The Frenchman advised on selec-

tive collection to limit the quantity of waste generated in clean-up operations. He was involved as an observer and technical advisor during response operations at sea, particularly during the deployment of oil containment booms and the recovery of pollutants.

Specifically, the field cooperation enabled a significant improvement in the speed of pumping pollutants onboard the tug *Titan 1*, which was accompanied by *Ladagat*. It was also followed by exchanges at institutional level, in particular with the PCG's Marine Environment Protection Training Institute.

The mission is part of France's long-term support for the protection of the environment and biodiversity in the Philippines, particularly in the maritime field. It was made possible by funding from the French Development Agency (*Agence Française de Développement* or AFD) and Expertise France, in the framework of technical cooperation on disaster-risk management.

The United States, Japan and South Korea have also extended similar technical assistance on the oil spill by fielding their set of experts.



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RDC MIGHT LOSE LICENSE OVER MINDORO OIL SPILL

RDC Reield Marine Services, the company that operates MT Princess Empress that sank off the coast of Oriental Mindoro on February 28, spilling thousands of liters of oil in the area, might have its license canceled, the Maritime Industry Authority

(Marina) said.

"If proven guilty, RDC is facing cancellation or revocation of their certificates of public convenience (CPC) aside from administrative fines and penalties," Marina Enforcement Office Director Ronald Bandelaria said during the

Laging Handa media briefing on Wednesday.

Bandelaria said that a show cause order was issued to the marine surveyor, the shipyard operator and the local classification society to determine their possible involvement in the incident.

"A fact-finding committee was already formed to look into the configuration of the vessel and whether it would qualify as new or not," he added.

It was revealed during a Senate inquiry that MT Princess Empress operated with questionable docu-

ments prior to its sinking.

Bandelaria said appropriate charges against the company have already been filed.

The Marina has also temporarily canceled the CPCs of the two remaining tankers of RDC, pending the result of the ongoing

investigation.

Meanwhile, the Protection and Indemnity Club, insurer of the MT Princess Empress, is assessing the scope of damage of the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro and nearby areas.

CARMELA I. HUELAR



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Point of view

Fast for Mother Earth

By CECILIA GUIDOTE-ALVAREZ

As Christian nations observe the Holy Week, my husband, the late senator and former environment secretary Heherson T. Alvarez, always called for environmental penitence – a Fast for Mother Earth. It is a call for personal sacrifice by cutting individual carbon footprints to minimize the impacts of climate change caused by deforestation and the excessive pollution of our water bodies that now manifest in our rivers. Our oceans are polluted by oil spills and plastic gyre.

Climate change, which upsets the balance and sustainability of the global climate, is primarily caused by the warming of the Earth due to excessive carbon dioxide emissions with the abundant burning of fossil fuels, such as coal and oil and its derivatives, diesel and gasoline.

In 1995, I joined my husband as Senate chair of the environment committee when he presented the Manila Declaration in Bonn, Germany at the first Conference of Parties (COP) for the protection of small island states. He stressed, "We must minimize the use of our vehicles to cut back on fuel, cut back on food consumption, conserve water, take care of our forests and all other dwindling resources as our selfless penitence for the meaningful celebration not only of Lent but of three other significant environmental events preceding Earth Month – International Day of Forests (March 21), World Water Day (March 22) and Earth Hour (March 25)."

Earthsavers DREAMS Ensemble-UNESCO Artist for Peace with the Philippine Center of the International Theater Institute held a comprehensive Techno Arts SDGs ResiliArt Exhibition at the National Library with messages from his colleagues from the Senate.

I must re-echo his call "to fast not only with food and drinks but with consumables like perfume and cosmetics, clothes, shoes, to cut our fossil energy that process and produce them. A gradual withdrawal from our wasteful consumption habits, even on our food consumption, will provide some relief to our beleaguered environment. It builds the message that each individual is made aware of the extreme consequences of climate change – that diminished carbon in the global atmosphere could be our individual spiritual share to diminish death, devastation, disease and deepening poverty and generating health pandemics. Rising greenhouse gas emissions will exacerbate water-related risks over archipelagic Philippines."

three decades ago. Sadly, a penitence that highlights the need to protect the environment seems not to have grown in spiritual dimension as the ruinous impact of climate change is upon us. No continent is spared.

I am compelled to keep alive his legacy and pursue his advocacies such as relentlessly and tirelessly making this appeal every year to remind the public of the grave moral responsibility to protect Mother Earth and help mitigate carbon emissions to stop the destruction of our one and only common home, Planet Earth, our womb of life.

Earthsavers reiterate his conviction that "our simple individual sacrifices will drive home the point that the scourge of climate change will need our scientific as much as our spiritual commitment. Then the agony and the death of our forests and oceans can be collectively resurrected to continue life for our children up to the 7th generation."

The leader of the Catholic church, Pope Francis, called the destruction of nature a "sin of modern times" and that acting on climate change is "essential to faith." Serendipitously, abstinence is practiced by our Muslim brethren in the period of Ramadan.

In 2013, the strongest typhoon in Earth's history, Typhoon Yolanda, devastated the country, resulting in more than 8,000 deaths. Super typhoons have grown in intensity, rapidly leaving refugees in tent cities.

Our country finally signed the landmark Paris Agreement on Climate Change that committed the Philippines to reduce its carbon emissions by 70 percent of our usual consumption by 2030.

Governments now realize the primary existential crisis the world faces. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report calls for emergency climate action NOW. Let us pledge not in words, but in action towards a green transition, pushing faster for alternative clean energy.

There is no other alternative pathway. We cannot breach 1.5 degrees Celsius. We suffer Armageddon. Climate justice, loss and damage, decarbonisation, biodiversity with heritage protection have been our battle cry.

Just think, if all the money corrupted were invested to defuse the ecological time bomb of global warming, it would have been possible to prevent climate catastrophes through relevant dynamic application of science, technology and effective cultural communications.



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Fast for Mother Earth

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Our country is ranked third among 67 countries in the world as most vulnerable to climate change in a recent survey done by global corporate giant Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corp. (HSBC). In the HSBC survey, India emerged as the most vulnerable, followed by Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Fast for Mother Earth is an annual program for Holy Week observance during Earth Day month, initiated by the Earthsavers Movement more than

We urgently need the discipline and political will to implement existing laws to combat climate change that will guarantee a safe, clean and healthy world. Hope springs eternal. All of us, regardless of color, creed and social status, must act in concert as global citizens to affirm life. It is heroic to save our ailing Mother Earth.

* * *

Cecilia Guidote-Alvarez is director of Earthsavers DREAMS Ensemble/ UNESCO Artist for Peace and founder of the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA).



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Magnitude 6.2 quake hits Catanduanes

No significant sea level disturbances were monitored when a magnitude 6.2 earthquake struck off the coast of Catanduanes on Tuesday night.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) terminated at around 12:30 a.m. yesterday a tsunami advisory it issued when the quake struck at 8:54 p.m. on Tuesday.

Catanduanes Gov. Joseph Cua said nine families who evacuated in Barangay Biong in Gigmoto after the tsunami warning was issued had returned to their homes.

Cua said no casualty or damage to property has been reported so far.

The epicenter of the quake was located 150 kilometers east of Gigmoto. The quake had a depth of 72 kilometers.

The temblor was felt at Intensity 4, which is classified as moderately strong, in Virac.

It was felt at Intensity 3 in Prieto Diaz and Sorsogon City; San Policarpio, Eastern Samar; Allen, Biri, Bobon, Catarman, Laoang, Lavezares, Rosario, San Jose and San Roque in Northern Samar, and Calbiga and Catbalogan in Samar.

The quake was felt at Intensity 2 in Malinao and Tabaco in Albay, Borongan in Eastern Samar as well as in Babatngon, Dagami, Dulag, Palo, Sta. Fe, Tanauan and Tacloban in Leyte and San Antonio in Northern Samar.

— Romina Cabrera, Cet Dematera