

18 June 2023 Sunday



DENR

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Malls and the value proposition of strategic partnerships

As was crucially seen during the recent health crisis, the malls of today are more than congregation centers for recreation, dining and/or shopping. Thanks to their strategic locations, and their serving as walk-in magnets for the community; they've stepped up, and become focal points for community service, for disseminating pertinent information, and acting as crucibles for communication and activations.

I've observed how SM Supermalls is one of the mall operators who has taken this new role to heart, fully understanding the important role they can play by partnering with government organizations and local government units (LGU's) in jump-starting initiatives of social impact and betterment. They recognize how there are multiple touch points when creating effective synergy and collaboration – that it doesn't all have to follow one formula.

Recently, the SM Mall of Asia hosted the 2023 Sibol Lokal event, in partnership with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and their improved Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP). DSWD Secretary Rex Gatchalian was present for a memorandum of agreement signing between the DSWD, SM Supermalls and the SM Foundation. Sibol Lokal is a regional promotional and marketing initiative that aims to showcase and advocate SLP products and services, to boost DSWD employ-

ees' and the general public's interest in patronizing the SLP output, and to encourage the growth of MSME's (micro, small and medium-scale enterprises).

Through the memorandum of agreement, steps are being taken to expedite the implementation process, to rationalize cost parameters, and provide new training and capacity-building activities, for SLP's poor, vulnerable, and marginalized household and communities. There's a five-year incubation period – broken down to Punla, Usbong, Sibol, Yabong, and Ani phases. And SM Supermalls commits to expand its SM Government Services Express, starting with 21 locations. This is the latest chapter in the partnership forged between SM Supermalls and the DSWD.

Then, there was a memorandum

of agreement signed by the Department of Agriculture (DA), SM Supermalls and the SM Foundation. Fostered on the belief that urban

gardening should be promoted in the name of food security, alternative livelihoods, and nutrition; there are now rooftop urban gardens at SM North EDSA, SM City Fairview, SM City Sta. Mesa, and SM City East Ortigas – with additional gardens to spring up at 21 more malls.

For SM Supermalls, it connects directly to the SM Sunday Market that it's been promoting in over 30



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PHILIP CU UNJIENG



AT THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, SM Supermalls and SM Foundation 'Urban Gardening' launch.



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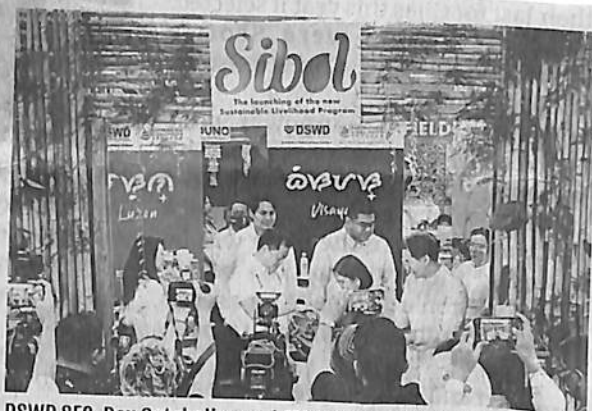
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shops, while SM Foundation ties it in with edible garden training under their Kabalikat Sa Kabuhayan Farmer's Training Program. Juana Manahan-Yupangco of Mesa ni Misis, which promotes plant-based diets using locally grown produce, was a guest speaker at the event. Speaking on the benefits of urban gardening and how it can be an activity shared with the children, she mentioned that backyard "gulay" is healthier and more nutrient-rich as it's just been made "pitas;" and by involving the children, they get to appreciate veggies at an earlier age. And that's all on top of how they're actually easy to grow, and saves money.

On June 8, the Mall of Asia held their regular coastal clean-up event, and this was done with the participation of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), with DENR Secretary Toni Yulo-Loyzaga in attendance during the very early morning hour. Earlier that week, SM Supermalls was on the panel presented by Sec. Loyzaga at the Central Office of the DENR, as part of World Environment Day, and DENR's Environment for Life initiative.

During her years at the Manila Observatory and as president of our National Resilience Council, Secretary Loyzaga has long championed environmental action and sustainability, and was happy to count SM Supermalls among the committed supporters to this advocacy. Solar panels, building structures with an eye to disaster mitigation given how we're so prone to flooding and calamities, solid waste management, and water conservation - there



DSWD SEC. Rex Gatchalian and SM Supermalls President Steven Tan during the launch of the DSWD-SM Supermalls/SM Foundation Sibol Lokal 2023 event.



THE DENR-SM Supermalls Mall of Asia coastal clean-up event, with DENR Sec. Toni Yulo-Loyzaga.

are a myriad of ways that SM Supermalls supports this particular cause.

As we see, SM Supermalls has taken on the challenge of being relevant to its communities in ways that go beyond their being a location of commerce and recreation. It's a continuous and ever-evolving search for partnerships that can enhance this progressive outlook on the role it can play in nation-building and community growth. I'm happy to see other mall operators are also doing their part in creating more synergistic partnerships, and being more connected to development, as spearheaded by our government.



EDITORIAL

Mindset change on waste management

Waste segregation is a task that should start at the household level but is something that majority of Filipinos either find too laborious or never learned to do. That task has mostly fallen on waste pickers (locally known as “*mangangalakal*”), who go around neighborhoods looking for “*diyaryo, bote, garapa*” or go through garbage at the dump sites to find scraps they could sell.

Environment Secretary Ma. Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga’s proposal this week to integrate informal workers into the expanded producer responsibility or EPR system is a recognition of their important role in managing the trash that the country produces on a daily basis and can help improve waste collection as the country shifts to a circular economy. “It’s very important to realize that without this particular sector, the whole collection system would not work,” said Loyzaga. This initiative will need the cooperation of local government units (LGUs) and the social welfare department and should be pursued to complement efforts in reducing waste.

The Philippines produces over one-third of all oceanic plastic waste in the world, mainly due to the lack of access of at least 70 percent of the population to disposal facilities and sanitary landfills. While it has enough laws to address the waste problem, including Republic Act No. 9003 or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000, the Commission on Audit (COA) in its April performance audit report of the government’s waste management program released last month, observed a “steady increase” in solid waste generation in the country through the years. COA projected that annual solid waste production will increase further in the following decades: from 16.63 million metric tons in 2020 to 19.76 million metric tons in 2030, and to 24.50 million metric tons in 2045.

The COA report also said that RA 9003 “may not be seen as progressively achieving its goals” since its implementation two decades ago. Aside from the law’s inconsistent implementation in waste segregation such that mixed wastes have been found in landfills, environmental officials also pointed to the lack of discipline among Filipinos. “We just throw away our waste [anywhere], [there is also no] segregation. It’s a total mindset change for solid waste management,” said Department of Science and Technology Undersecretary for research and development Leah Buedia. This mindset change would entail a massive information and education campaign on sustainable consumption and lifestyle—something that a developing country like the Philippines may find difficult to attain when people’s consumption habits are still largely influenced by developed countries that have more advanced waste disposal facilities.

But it is not altogether impossible since recycling household waste is not an entirely new concept here: old clothes are recycled as rags and leftover food is given to animals or used for composting. These already existing practices can be taken a step further: clothes and other materials can be upcycled, which is already being done by some local brands; and leftovers can be recycled into biogas, animal feed, or fertilizer like what South Korea has been doing since 2005. That country now recycles nearly 100 percent of its food waste with municipalities introducing automated food waste collectors in apartment complexes. These are areas that the Philippine government can look into given the country’s staggeringly high amount of food waste: a 2021 study by the United Nations Environment Programme said households generate some 9.4 million tons of food waste, an irony when there are millions of hungry Filipinos. As of last year, only two LGUs—Marikina and Muntinlupa—have been known to establish a system that processes food waste into other by-products.

It must be emphasized that solutions to the country’s waste problem are not entirely up to the waste pickers or the government—of course, it has the task to ensure that laws are implemented properly. Individuals, while contributing to the livelihood of waste pickers or demanding more accountability from the government, must also do their part in creating a more sustainable environment. Japan, which produces a lot of plastic waste—mostly from food packaging and disposable items like plastic umbrellas and chopsticks—has put in place a detailed sorting and waste collection system that is taught in school and practiced at home. It is common to see four to five bins for different types of waste: combustible, plastic, cardboard, glass, cans. Collection points and recycling bins are accessible at supermarkets, drugstores, shops, etc. and the habit of sorting waste has been deeply ingrained into their psyche.

The country’s mounting waste problem requires every Filipino to do even simple tasks like disposing of garbage properly and not throwing them anywhere or the practice of sorting, reusing, and recycling. It goes back to our values of being “*masinop*” (frugal) and “*malinis*” (clean), and applying these in how we manage our waste. It’s all a matter of mindset.



Mondelez PHL launches plastic recycling plant in Parañaque

By RIZAL RAOUL S. REYES

IN celebration of its 60th year in the country, Mondelez Philippines recently inaugurated a plastic recycling facility in partnership with its home city of Parañaque.

Aleli Arcilla, managing director of Mondelez Philippines, said the facility will use a technology from Green Antz Builders and will use recycled plastic collected from Parañaque to create ecobricks for construction purposes.

Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) will support the management and operations of the facility, which is one of the ways the company is supporting the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) law.

Green Antz is a circular economy and innovation group. It develops and deploys disruptive solutions to reduce the amount of waste generated, discarded and existing.

The ecobricks that will be produced are similar to traditional hollow blocks, but perform better with the use of less cement and less water.

Breaking ground in September 2022, Arcilla said the plastic recycling facility aims to help reduce the amount of plastic that ends up in landfills and waterways.

By shredding and mixing the plastic into cement to make ecobricks, it will help contribute to creating a circular economy for

plastics, where it is not viewed as waste, but as a valuable resource for other purposes.

Besides using plastics, the facility will also provide livelihood to the community members hired to make the ecobricks.

Sustainability

ACCORDING to a survey among consumers on snacking trends, 66 percent of respondents look for snacks that work to minimize their environmental impact, especially Gen Z and millennials.

As a global snacking leader, Mondelez takes this insight to heart in strengthening its sustainability actions.

Under "Sustainable Snacking," it aims to grow its business by making its snacks in the right way, with a positive impact for people and the planet.

Meanwhile, Sonia Mendoza, chairman of Mother Earth Foundation, said materials recovery facilities, such as a plastic recycling facility, can help manage waste pollution.

She said it should also help in reducing waste. "It should not send its plastic waste to cement kilns."

"MRFs, in the true concept of Republic Act 9003 [Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000], does not adhere to quick-fix solutions that harm the public health and the environment," Mendoza said.



THE Quezon City government, Greenpeace Philippines and Impact Hub Manila signed a memorandum of agreement for the implementation of "Kuha sa Tingi," a "sari-sari" store-based refill initiative, in the city. Leading the signing ceremony are Greenpeace Campaigner Marian Ledesma, Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte and Impact Hub Manila Founder and CEO Ces Rondario. ALBERT LOZADA, GREENPEACE

QC leads the fight vs plastic through 'sari-sari' store refill hubs

SARI-SARI (variety) stores in Quezon City will soon be helping solve the country's plastic problem with the launching of refill hubs.

The local government of Quezon City, Greenpeace Philippines and Impact Hub Manila launched "Kuha sa Tingi" to establish community-based refill hubs in sari-sari stores to help address plastic pollution. The event was held ahead of the celebration of World Refill Day on June 16, Greenpeace Philippines said in a news release.

Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte, Greenpeace Philippines Zero Waste Campaigner Marian Ledesma and Impact Hub Manila Founder and CEO Ces Rondario signed a memorandum of understanding for the pilot roll-out of the project in selected "Tindahan ni Ate Joy" stores.

"Being sustainable and eco-friendly doesn't have to be expensive. Our partnership with Greenpeace and Impact Hub only proves that shifting to zero waste and limiting our plastic generation is inclusive, affordable and accessible to all, including those from socioeconomic sectors and urban areas," Belmonte said.

Initially, refill stations will be installed in 30 sari-sari stores across the city, where consumers can bring their reusable containers to refill basic commodities, such as liquid detergent, fabric conditioner and dishwashing liquid.

Designed based on insights from communities and small store owners, the project aims to provide people with alternatives to sachets and other kinds of plastic packaging, though affordable and simple reuse and refill systems that build on past sustainable practices.

"Tingi" culture is inherently Filipino, defined by practical and sustainable practices like refilling reusable containers and purchasing only what one needs. The project seeks to reclaim that culture by bringing back small-volume retail into its

original zero-waste model.

The fact that Filipinos were already buying 'tingi' decades before corporations manufactured and marketed sachets shows that sachet packaging is not a necessity and can be easily replaced with alternatives.

Studies show that over 164 million sachets are being used every day in the Philippines.

According to the United Nations, around 36 percent of all plastic used globally goes into packaging, while around a third of all plastic packaging leaks into the environment.

A recent report by the University of Portsmouth in the United Kingdom shows that reuse systems could cut plastic pollution by 30 percent by 2040.

"Accessible reuse and refill systems are at the heart of 'Kuha sa Tingi.' We want to give consumers simple, affordable and convenient access to zero waste alternatives for their daily needs," Ledesma said.

Rondario said, "The model gives both savings to consumers and higher profit to our partner sari-sari stores."

She added, "We recognize that a significant portion of consumer goods consumption comes in small volume, or tingi transactions. This affordability solution allows many to enjoy high-quality products at a price they can budget for. A consequence of this, unfortunately, is the significant environmental impact of single use plastic waste."

"Not only should companies reduce plastic production and phase out single-use plastics, but they also have to invest resources to transition to and adopt reuse and refill systems in their operations," Ledesma said.

Besides the "Kuha sa Tingi" project, the city government has initiated various strategies to address the challenges of the plastic waste crisis, such as banning single-use plastics and plastic bag ordinances, and the Vote to Tote project.



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Gov't moves to revitalize rubber industry

By DANESSA RIVERA

The Philippine Rubber Research Institute (PRRI) is formulating strategies and forging collaborations to tackle Pestalotiopsis Leaf Fall Disease (PLFD) while simultaneously enhancing the rubber industry in the country.

The PRRI said it would develop an action plan aimed at increasing rubber production and enhancing the livelihood of smallholder farmers.

"By implementing strategic initiatives, PRRI seeks to promote sustainable practices,

foster innovation, and drive the growth of the rubber industry in the Philippines," it said.

In a recent quarterly meeting, PRRI director Cheryl Eusala stressed the importance of controlling the spread of PLFD as this poses a significant threat to the rubber industry.

She urged other local government units (LGUs) in Region IX "to create an executive order" aimed at banning the movement of rubber planting materials to contain the spread of the disease and protect rubber plantations from further

damage.

The PRRI said it fully supports Zamboanga Sibugay's recent executive order, which temporarily bans the movement of rubber plant parts and planting materials within the province.

Zamboanga's rubber industry is seriously threatened by PLFD, putting the rubber plantation of the province at risk.

When infected planting materials are moved, the disease may spread rapidly, threatening the industry as a whole.

The PRRI also aims to forge partnerships with the Depart-

ment of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and Department of Science and Technology (DOST) regarding the processing of rubberwoods into furniture.

"By working together, these organizations will explore opportunities for the utilization of senile rubber trees, thereby contributing to sustainable practices in the industry," it said.

Meanwhile, Zamboanga City Special Economic Zone Authority and Freeport chairman Raul Regondola urged the PRRI to conduct an assess-

ment and pest surveillance in the ecozone area, specifically profiling Lapacan which is recognized as the largest supplier of rubber to CTK Asia Rubber Corp.

With the emphasis on reliable data, the Regional Development Council (RDC) expressed its support for PRRI's profiling activities, enabling PRRI to gather accurate and comprehensive information, leading to informed decision-making and targeted interventions.

While the DENR announced its decision to discon-

tinue the distribution of planting materials, it will conduct an inventory of rubber data and assess PLFD's impact on rubber areas to provide valuable insights into the disease's prevalence and guide future interventions.

Moreover, DENR expressed its commitment to supporting rubber farmers by ensuring fair pricing and facilitating market access for their products to help improve the economic conditions of smallholder rubber farmers and contribute to their overall well-being.



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CLEANUP ONGOING

OIL REMOVAL IN OR. MINDORO COMPLETED

By Dexter Cabalza
[@dexcabalzaINQ](#)

Almost four months after oil tanker MT Princess Empress sank off Oriental Mindoro province and spilled most of its cargo of fuel, the Philippine Coast Guard said on Saturday that the underwater oil spill removal and recovery efforts have been completed.

But the PCG clarified that the entire oil spill containment operation had not been finished as possible new leaks from the vessel's fuel pipes were still being monitored.

PCG spokesperson Rear Adm. Armand Balilo said based on the final inspection conducted on Friday and the information shared to them by the salvage company contracted for the oil removal operations, all the eight tanks of MT Princess Empress were empty. INQ



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Oil removal operations from Princess Empress completed

By MARTIN SADONGDONG

The operation to remove oil from the eight cargo tanks of sunken M/T Princess Empress was finally completed, nearly four months since it sank and triggered a massive oil spill off Oriental Mindoro, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) announced on Saturday, June 17.

Despite this, monitoring is still being conducted due to the risk of a new leak from the vessel's fuel pipes.

Rear Admiral Armando Balilo, PCG spokesperson, said all eight cargo tanks containing approximately 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil when MT Princess Empress sank 400 meters to the bottom of the sea in Naujan town on Feb. 28 are now empty.

"Based on the ROV [remotely operated vehicle] live videos, all eight cargo oil tanks are now empty, and the only remaining observations are oil drips from the cargo piping line," Balilo said on Saturday.

"These pipes are small and the remaining oil is very minimal.

In case there are sudden changes in the condition of the sea that might result in small leaks, we are ready to respond. What's important right now is that the cargo tanks have already been cleared," he added.

The Malayan Towing and Salvage Corp. (MSTC), the salvage company that led the oil removal operations, showed to officials of the PCG—headed by Marine Environmental Protection commander Vice Admiral Robert Patrimonio and Incident Management Team commander Commodore Geronimo Tuvilla—all the eight cargo oil tanks and the ship's operational tank to prove that they no longer have traces of oil during an inspection on Friday.

The PCG officials were accompanied by representatives from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Office of the Civil Defense (OCD), Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), Department of Science and Technology (DOST), and local government of Oriental Mindoro.

Diving support vessel (DSV) Fire Opal, a Liberian-flagged vessel, spearheaded the oil removal operations which started on May 29.

"Following the completion of DSV Fire Opal's operations, MTSC said two of their tugboats will continue to monitor and conduct containment operations for oil that may leak from the fuel pipes of M/T Princess Empress," Balilo noted.

The sinking of M/T Princess Empress affected 42,487 families or 200,244 individuals in 262 barangays in Calabarzon (Region 4-A), Mimaropa (Region 4-B), and Western Visayas (Region 6).

The oil spill that resulted from the incident spread from Oriental Mindoro to Batangas, Palawan, and Antique. It caused agricultural losses amounting to ₱4.9 billion, data from the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) showed.

Meanwhile, ₱693 million worth of assistance was provided to the affected residents.



OVP, DSWD give cash aid to families affected by oil spill

THE Office of the Vice President (OVP) and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) have released a total of P740,000 to families affected by the oil spill in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

The recipients were 37 parents of students from Francisco Tria Memorial School, who received P20,000 in cash assistance on June 14.

Leo Reynoso, regional director of the DSWD field office in Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan), said the fund release is the third in the partnership between the OVP and DSWD in providing cash assistance to affected residents of the oil spill caused by the sinking of the MT Princess Empress in February.

The tanker carried over 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil, and the spill affected multiple communities in Mindoro, Palawan and nearby areas.

The OVP-Disaster Operations Center also conducted a five-day relief mission in Oriental Mindoro last April, where it distributed 1,616 sacks of rice to 8,241 fisherfolk beneficiaries.

An additional 2,924 sacks of rice were also distributed to Calapan City and the towns of Naujan and Bulalacao on April 25-27, while 5,385 sacks were distributed to fisherfolk in the three municipalities covering 17 villages in the provinces.

OVP relief missions were also conducted in oil-spill localities outside Oriental Mindoro.

RED MENDOZA



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THE EXPONENT OF THE PHILIPPINE PROGRESS SINCE 1899
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Proposed body to tackle looming water crisis OK'd by House panel

By ELLSON QUISMORIO

The House bill creating an inter-agency body that will propose, formulate, draft, and direct the implementation of a comprehensive master plan to address the looming water crisis has hurdled the committee level.

Gaining the approval of the House Committee on Public Works and Highways was House Bill (HB) No. 6345. Bulacan 3rd District Rep. Lorna Silverio is the principal author of the bill.

Under the bill, the proposed inter-agency body will have the power to call on any government body, including private sector agencies, to contribute to solving the crisis.

The approval by the House panel chaired by Surigao del Sur

1st District Rep. Romeo Momo Sr. was done just before the sine die adjournment of Congress.

Also incorporated in HB No. 6345 was HB No. 601, also authored by Silverio. The lady solon said that over the past two decades, the Philippines has experienced various water shortages that have adversely impacted the nation.

"Given the vital importance of water to everyday lives, leaders of the nation should be alarmed and should act today to avert a devastating water shortage. Even with the La Niña season, when there is supposed to be an abundance of water supply, the nation, particularly the National Capital Region (NCR), experiences water shortages that adversely impact on communi-

ties and business operations," she said.

Silverio lamented that the onset of the El Niño phenomenon has worsened the situation, drying up traditional water sources, and limiting its capacity to supply the water needs of a continuously growing metropolis.

"While water rationing is a stop-gap solution, a long-term solution that will assure a sustainable supply of clean, potable water must be put in place urgently," she stressed.

Representatives of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), Department of Budget and Management (DBM), and Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) endorsed the bill's approval during the committee hearing.



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Palawan church leaders call for focus on agriculture, tourism instead of mining

THE Catholic Church on Palawan Island said the local economy should prioritize agriculture and tourism over mining.

In a recent open letter, the church leaders called on authorities to make efforts to protect the country's "last ecological frontier" from further environmental destruction.

"Prohibit the expansion and extension of mining operations and enact a law to prevent the opening of new mines," a portion of the letter read.

"On the other hand, it would be beneficial to prioritize agriculture and tourism programs," it stated.

The letter was signed by Bishop Socrates Mesiona of Puerto

Princesa, Bishop Broderick Pabillo of Taytay and all the clergy of both apostolic vicariates.

According to them, Palawan has a unique ecosystem that deserves conservation efforts.

"We have only one province, and it is imperative that we appreciate and take care of it," they said.

"Let us be the path to unity and reconciliation, as we all share the same goal—for the well-being of the people and for the sake of Palawan," they added.

In making this appeal, the



BISHOP Socrates Mesiona of Puerto Princesa joins protesters at an anti-mining barricade in Brooke's Point, Palawan, on March 7. CBCP NEWS

church leaders also requested that officials implement environmental laws and promote

the importance of protecting the island's remaining forest and biodiversity. CBCP News



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Threats remain, but hopes for saving Philippine eagle are high

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), through its Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB), looked back at the gains in conserving the iconic bird of prey. DENR Assistant Secretary Marcial Amaro Jr., also the concurrent BMB director, admitted that more work needs to be done to ensure the survival of one of the world's largest raptors, the Philippine Eagle.

The Philippine Eagle Week (PEW) is celebrated from June 4 to 10 each year in accordance with Presidential Proclamation 79, series of 1999, to educate the public on the importance and conservation of the country's national bird.

Critically endangered

The Philippine eagle is endemic to the country. Found on the islands of Luzon, Samar, Leyte and Mindanao, the majestic bird has been classified as critically endangered under Department Administrative Order 2019-09, or the Updated National List of Threatened Philippine Fauna and Their Categories, and by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Among its major threats are habitat loss and hunting for food and trophy.

Lately, the Philippine Eagle Foundation (PEF), the DENR's conservation partner in saving the species from extinction, has identified zoonotic disease—an infectious disease that is transmitted between species from animals to humans or vice versa—as a serious threat that could wipe out the bird's populations.

As a preventive measure, the PEF initiated to relocate the breeding pairs of the eagles from the Philippine Eagle Center to a safer location also in Davao City. There, it will be isolated from the human population and away from threats of the bird flu virus from poultry raising and game fowl farming in the area.

Protecting national patrimony

THE Philippine eagle, scientifically called *Pithecophaga jefferyi*, is continually being threatened by hunting and habitat loss, Amaro said.

However, he said in a statement on June 12 that efforts for its conservation have improved with the harmonization of various initiatives.

"By conserving our national patrimony and strengthening our advocacies, we are able to improve and harmonize conservation efforts to put forward strategies and to curb the direct and indirect threats to Philippine eagle populations," Amaro pointed out.

They use relevant conservation actions on habitat restoration, law enforcement, management of captive and wild populations, research and conservation education, he added.

A call to all Filipinos

AMARO explained that this year's PEW theme, "Unity in Action: Achieving success together," is a call to all Filipinos to protect forest habitats to conserve future generations of Philippine eagle and their territories, and allow new generations to thrive and co-exist with other threatened wildlife.

"The habitats conserved locally and protected by communities sig-



THEN an 8-month-old eaglet, Sinabandan was photographed while waiting for its mother to give her food, in the forest of Sibulan, Toril, Mount Apo, in August 2014. PEF FILE PHOTO

nificantly contribute to environmental stability and security of human well-being, in the looming threats of climate change," he said.

A representation of biodiversity

ASKED what is the importance of protecting and conserving the country's national symbols, Executive Director Theresa Mundita S. Lim of the Asean Centre for Biodiversity explained: "What do we mean when we say 'iconic' bird or animal? It's a representation of our biodiversity, of our culture, of our identity as a people."

She added: "For that reason alone, these birds or animals must be protected. But if we are to include other criteria to categorize one species as 'iconic,' such as its being charismatic as well as its ecological importance, then there will be additional reasons to not let them go extinct."

For instance, Lim explained that the Philippine eagle is not just a representation of our national identity, but it is also the largest eagle in the world in terms of wingspan and body length, and its crest, when erect, makes it look very majestic. Thus, it is also considered a charismatic species.

A flagship species

LIM said the bird is also a "flagship" species that can draw attention toward conserving the other animals and the ecosystem that are associated with it.

"The Philippine Eagle is also a keystone species because it is an apex predator and its removal from an ecosystem will result in overpopulation of its prey species, leading to various ecological disturbances," she said.

According to Lim, an international biodiversity expert, other iconic species found in Southeast Asia, which have the same reasons for protection as the Philippine eagle, are the Malayan tiger and some marine species, such as orcas and hammerhead sharks.

"There are also the orangutans, which may not be apex predators, but are icons because they are the only great apes native to Southeast Asia [Indonesia and Malaysia]. They are also very charismatic, and a flagship species for the forests of Borneo and Sumatra," she said.

Still in precarious state

JAYSON IBANEZ, director for Conservation and Research at PEF, told the BUSINESSMIRROR on June 13, that the species remain in precarious condition.

Threats remain, he said, citing

the shooting of Philippine eagle Sinabandan on Mount Tangkulan in San Fernando, Bukidnon, in April.

Sinabandan is one of the well-studied and faithfully monitored Philippine eagles.

"Despite that, she was shot and airgun pellets were found inside its body," Ibanez said. Sinabandan is undergoing rehabilitation at PEC.

"Shooting is still rampant in the wild and it is even more alarming because we can lose our eagles to shooting and hunting even if we have substantial forest left," he pointed out.

He said between shooting and deforestation, "mortality rates due to trapping is more dangerous because we could lose our eagles" despite their substantial habitats.

Empty-forest syndrome

ACCORDING to Ibanez, if hunting in the wild will not be stopped, the Philippines will eventually end up having a forest without wild animals.

"Science calls this empty-forest syndrome," he warned.

While crediting government and private sector efforts to expand the country's forest, he cautioned that something must be done to stop the illegal wildlife trade, and the hunting for meat and trophy that has been going on for decades.

"If we don't do something about trapping and hunting, the population might suffer that fate," he said.

Extinct in Leyte?

ACCORDING to Ibanez, they fear that the Philippine eagle is now extinct in Leyte mainly due to hunting.

"For instance, Philippine eagles in Leyte might have been lost already. [There is] no more sightings since [Super] Typhoon Yolanda [international code Haiyan occurred in November 2013]," he said.

According to Ibanez, there were individual bird sightings in Leyte before "Yolanda."

"That is the danger if you have low population numbers, then came Yolanda, which gave the coup de grace, or the last blow to the population," he said.

Positive signs

DESPITE the gloomy forecast for the eagle, its protectors and saviors see positive signs of more awareness and the public desire to help.

"This is the best way to do conservation, by increasing public awareness. That's the value of the Philippine Eagle Week. This

is the time for action. We have a very small window of opportunity to reverse the extinction crisis," Ibanez explained.

He added that the same message was behind the "Agilaya" campaign of the PEF during the week-long celebration.

Freedom for the eagles

IBANEZ explained that as Filipinos understand and value human freedom, the Philippine eagle week is also a reminder of the need for the same freedom to live in the wild; freedom against persecution.

"In the same way we aspire freedom from harassment, suffering, deprivation, this is the same essential freedom that is needed for our national symbol," he said.

Unfortunately, despite the laws that prohibit hunting animals in the wild, the problem persists and hunters are becoming more bold and creative.

The only way to stop hunting is to impose a total gun ban in the wild, reiterating the PEF's earlier call and appeal to concerned government agencies, including local government units (LGUs) and the Philippine National Police (PNP).

"There's no concrete action yet. Again we were trying to touch base with the PNP, and there's initial coordination, but there's no strong [indication] to make it happen," he said.

"We have the policies in place. It is a matter of enforcing them faithfully. It calls for a concerted action not only from authorities but for citizens reporting incidents of shooting, and local governments enforcing the ban against illegally acquired firearms," Ibanez explained.

Hunting is reversible

ON a positive note, he said that more of the iconic eagles are being discovered and the captors are becoming the protectors.

"The hunting culture can be reversed through community-based incentives, education programs and also cultural empowerment, especially of Indigenous peoples [IPs]," Ibanez noted.

He said what is needed is the right mix of incentives and disincentives.

"Law enforcement is one element but positive reinforcement like livelihood support, even non-material benefits—giving [the protectors] prestige, honor, recognition—are also needed," he pointed out.

"We need an innovative mix of material and nonmaterial incentives," he added.

Still in danger zones

ACCORDING to Ibanez, many of the country's wildlife are still in danger zones.

"We might be improving our forest conditions. The DENR's indicator is the expansion of our forest. We might be doing that by ignoring or being complacent about local hunting. We might have added forest but they [are] empty forests," he said.

According to Ibanez, investment should be made in preventing hunting if we are to protect and conserve our precious wild animals.

"Unlike shooting and hunting, which we can address within our lifetime so long as we engage the right formula, it will take two to three lifetimes before we can bring back the forests to their original state," he warned.