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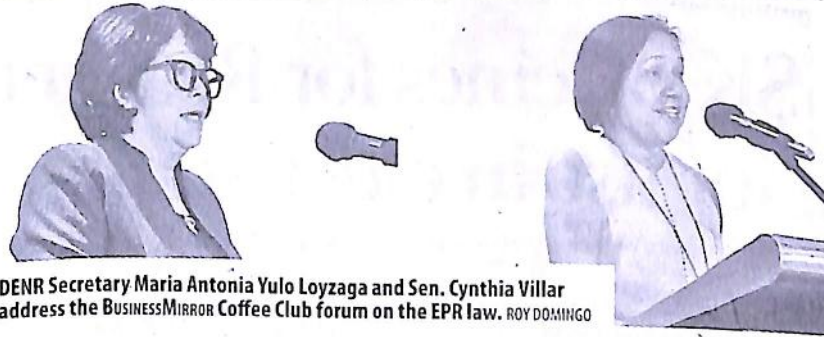


DENR

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo Loyzaga and Sen. Cynthia Villar address the BUSINESSMIRROR Coffee Club forum on the EPR law. ROY DOMINGO

EPR Act implementor, author push timely compliance with law

By BUTCH FERNANDEZ

BOTH the author and the main implementor of a 2022 law mandating large enterprises to take responsibility for the proper and effective recovery, recycling and disposal of plastic packaging used for their products—after these are sold and used by consumers—agree that the law is a work in progress, but ensuring strict compliance is crucial given the environmental crisis facing the country.

Sen. Cynthia Villar, author of Republic Act 11898, or the Extended Producer Responsibility Act of 2022, also stressed the need to encourage micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) “to participate as well” even though only large enterprises are mandated to comply with the law enacted in July 2022. “In my view, the cooperation of MSMEs is crucial for the EPR compliance of obliged large enterprises (OEs), as MSMEs often service as conduits for the distribution of products from large enterprises to the consuming public,” Villar said in her speech at the BUSINESSMIRROR Coffee Club Forum at Bellevue Manila in Alabang.

The Coffee Club returned to its face-to-face format for the first time since the pandemic, but with option for virtual participation as it was livestreamed on BM’s Facebook.

Speaking after Villar, Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo Gonzaga of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources thanked Villar for trusting the DENR to be the

Main implementor of the landmark law, but added that its success hinges on a “whole-of-society, whole-of-government approach,” adding that this is a job that

requires “all hands on deck.”

The DENR issued the implementing rules and regulations for RA 11898 in January this year, and the so-called “obliged enterprises” have until the end of this year to meet the first milestone of a phased compliance, show proof they have recovered a minimum of 20 percent of the plastic packaging waste they distributed in 2022.

This target, as detailed by Villar in her speech, “rises to 40 percent in 2024, 50 percent in 2025, 60 percent in 2026, 70 percent in 2027 and 80 percent in 2028 and every year after.”

It is important, stressed Villar, that the DENR’s Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) educates the public on the benefits of the EPR.

Both Villar and Yulo Gonzaga urged the media to help bring up the number of obliged enterprises who have registered under the EPR law. The number currently stands only at 642, just a fraction of the estimated 4,000 enterprises that must be covered.

It was during Villar’s stint as chair of the Senate Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change in the 18th Congress that she authored the EPR Act of 2022. The goal, she told attendees at BM’s Coffee Club on Friday, “is to cut down on non-environmentally friendly packaging, boost recycling and promote effective waste recovery to mitigate environmental pollution.”

At the time she pushed enactment of the law, the country was facing alarming levels of marine pollution from plastic waste and a dismal failure to properly enforce the two-decade old solid waste disposal act.



Govt, food and beverage firms say all must be on same page on EPR

BY ANDREA E. SAN JUAN

GOVERNMENT and food and beverage company officials in the country underscored the importance of having a "unified" understanding among all sectors in complying with the requirements under the Extended Producers Responsibility (EPR) Act.

"We all know the deliverables under the EPR law, but the key here should be a clear understanding, a unified understanding by all sectors because if we interpret the law differently, then we cannot reach our objectives," Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Undersecretary Jonas R. Leones said at the forum, "The EPR Law: What Goes Around, Comes Around" on Friday organized by the BusinessMirror.

The DENR official stressed that the challenge lies in making all sectors in the country aware of the deliverables under the law, particularly what will be the support and resources given by the private sector.

For instance, he said, while there are only 642 that have registered thus far, out of the 4,000 enterprises obliged to practice EPR, Leones said "We cannot blame those who have not registered, maybe they do not know the requirements of the law."

Through another government agency's lens, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) said it is important to raise awareness of the local government units (LGUs) on the system and processes and how to "go about the partnership with the EPR law implementation."

"The DILG is committed to partner closely with the DENR as well as partner-business organizations in localizing this law as well as raising the awareness of LGUs and probably this will help out

LGU in probably improving their solid waste management plan, especially on plastics," DILG Bureau of Local Government Supervision Director Debie T. Torres said at the same forum.

Meanwhile, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) cited the challenges in implementing the law on the side of manufacturers and consumers.

For one, DTI-Consumer Protection Group (CPG) Undersecretary Ruth B. Castelo said for the manufacturers, "It's first finding the alternative on what material are they going to use; that is an issue that we have been discussing in the National Solid Waste Management Commission in declaring plastic straws and plastic coffee stirrers as non-environmentally acceptable products."

According to Castelo, industries question what alternative solutions they can provide. In the same way, she said, "I'm sure that the manufacturers find it difficult to find alternatives for plastic."

For consumers, the challenge to DTI is making everyone understand. "Number one, why we have the EPR law, why we need to be sustainable consumers, why we need to preserve the planet... These are all connected ideas that we need people to understand."

Castelo stressed that the DTI, being an advocate of the EPR law and as an agency that advocates for sustainable consumption and production, cannot do it alone.

Food manufacturers

MEANWHILE, businesses engaged in food also raised the challenges they are experiencing in complying with the law.

For US-based multinational snacks company Mondelez International, Corporate and Government Affairs Lead Caitlin Nina Punzalan said, "...the challenge

is really...starting from the beginning, is to find out what is our output because it's not a straightforward matter, it involves cross-functional research, understanding how much do we really produce, what is the weight of what we produce."

Punzalan said these are the factors to consider as the company needs to make sure it complies with the EPR law. But, the Mondelez official stressed, they are slowly overcoming this challenge with the help of experts.

"We really target a certain number. It was a challenge at the beginning. But we are fortunate that we have expert partners in helping us. Because we are a snacks company, we know how to make cheese, make chocolates, but we don't know how to account for all of our waste yet," Punzalan said.

For major food and beverage firm Nestlé Philippines, Head of Corporate Affairs Jose Uy said the most difficult part is the packaging material.

"While we have solutions for now as an interim action to address EPR and plastic neutrality...it's actually coming up with the right packaging that is food grade, food safe, and the material can accommodate recycle and post-consumer recycled content which is very critical, because we want to cut the use of virgin plastics and hopefully used packaging can be recycled and used again in developing new packaging," Uy said.

In coming up with packaging material solutions, Uy said, "That is technology work underway." Moving forward, he said, "We are very open and committed to work with the international community, researchers, and other companies and government sectors to ensure that we develop that packaging material to address this circularity and issue on sustainability."



Holcim vows speedy decarbonization

BUILDING solutions provider Holcim Philippines Inc. pledged to further accelerate initiatives that advance decarbonization and circularity in the construction industry as it joined the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in celebrating World Environment Day and Philippine Environment Month in June.

Holcim Philippines was among the seven companies that presented its environmental stewardship programs during the agency's World Environment Day celebration.

Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga called for greater collaboration, among concerned stakeholders to protect nature and promised a rigorous science-based approach in the DENR's push for programs and policies to safeguard nature and combat the environmental challenges faced by the country.

Holcim Philippines President and Chief Executive Officer Horia Adrian pledged to support the transition to sustainable construction to better build progress in the Philippines.

He noted the construction industry's key role in sustainable development, given its significant environmental footprint. He shared the company's efforts to improve efficiency of operations, introduce new building solutions with lower carbon

footprint, recycle materials to lessen the consumption of virgin materials and help communities manage waste.

"Building more with less, building new from old and building more efficient buildings with greener materials and smarter designs. This is our commitment on the World Environmental Day to decarbonize the construction industry in the Philippines," Adrian said. "It is great to see the commitment across both the public and private sectors to embed circularity into the new ways of construction. Nature is life, and together we can make a positive impact on preserving its beauty for future generations."

Exploration and impact

Adrian also discussed the Holcim Group's marine waste collection and research vessel Circular Explorer, which will be operated in partnership with the DENR along with One Earth One Ocean and the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute. The solar-powered vessel will support the rehabilitation of Manila Bay and support awareness building on the power of circularity in decoupling growth and development from the consumption of virgin raw materials.

Holcim Philippines launched this year

two new products for building durable and strong structures with less impact on the climate compared with ordinary Portland cement (OPC). Its flagship product for general construction Excel ECOPlanet was rebranded given its 30 percent lower carbon footprint than OPC. Also introduced in June was limestone cement Optimo used for vertical construction projects and which has a 10 percent lower carbon footprint than OPC.

The company is also advancing circularity by embedding more recycled materials into the cement products as well as increasing the amount of alternative fuels used in operations. In the first quarter, Holcim Philippines recycled 290,000 tons of materials and supported more than 40 local governments in keeping their communities clean led by its waste management unit Geocycle.

Holcim Philippines received the 2018 Water Wise Award from the National Water Resources Board for successfully reducing freshwater withdrawals by 64 percent in operations. It has invested in closed-loop systems to raise water use efficiency and rainwater harvesting facilities to reach its target to be water-positive or cut freshwater withdrawals to zero and provide water to the community by 2030.

THE MANILA TIMES



■ From left: DENR Undersecretary Carlos Primo David, Holcim Philippines Chief Sustainability Officer Zoe Sibala, DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, Holcim Philippines CEO Horia Adrian and Holcim Group Circular Explorer Project Manager Christine Bellen. PHOTO FROM HOLCIM PHILIPPINES



Air quality in Albay still safe says DENR

LEGAZPI CITY: The air quality around the restless Mayon Volcano in Albay is safe and in "good" index quality despite the effusive eruption of the volcano, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said during the press briefing here.

Maria Socorro Abu, DENR's Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) regional director, said that the air quality in Albay, specifically around the restive volcano, remains in good quality.

"The air quality in Albay is safe despite the Mayon Volcano eruption. Based on our monitoring, so far, we are at the green level which means the air quality is within standards," Abu said.

She said that the EMB started monitoring the air quality in Albay on June 10.

"We have four monitoring stations located in Tabaco City 13 kilometers from the volcano, Legazpi City at 12.10 kilometers, Guinobatan at 11.5 kilometers, and Ligao City at 16.15 kilometers," Abu said.

Abu added that the particles that come out of Mayon Volcano are lighter and suspended in the atmosphere.

"When the ash comes down, it means it's heavy so we have an ashfall," Abu said.

Although a light ashfall was noted in the province, it has not affected the air quality.

Abu said that the DENR follows the air quality health guide based on Republic Act 8749 or the "Philippine Clean Air Act of 1999," a law providing for a comprehensive air pollution control policy, among others.

Data in monitoring the air quality is determined through color coding scheme; green means good; yellow is fair; orange is unhealthy for sensitive groups; red is very unhealthy; violet is acutely unhealthy; and maroon is emergency.

RHAYDZ BARCIA



CLEANUP DONE BUT FISHING BAN REMAINS IN MINDORO TOWN

COASTAL FOLK AWAIT 'CONCRETE' ACTION ON VERDE PROTECTION

LUCENA CITY—Four months after tanker MT Princess Empress sank off the waters of Oriental Mindoro and spilled toxic fuel oil into the sea, affected residents were still waiting for “concrete” government actions on how to prevent the same from happening again, which placed the Verde Island Passage (VIP) in constant threat from such a disaster, an environmental group said.

Protect VIP, in a statement on Wednesday, said President Marcos promised to resolve the devastating oil spill in Oriental Mindoro in four months but “communities and coastal and marine life continue to suffer damage” and “there are also still no concrete policy or legislative measures put in place to ensure that no such disasters take place in the future.”

On Feb. 28, MT Princess Empress sank while carrying some 800,000 liters of industrial fuel in the waters of Naujan town and caused a massive oil spill that affected coastal areas in Oriental Mindoro and Batangas, both of which are within the VIP corridor, and also those in Antique and Palawan provinces.

Fishing ban

Fisherfolk continued to suffer as the fishing ban ordered by Gov. Humerlito Dolor in Oriental Mindoro’s affected areas, while it had been lifted in other parts of the province, was extended in the hardest-hit town of Pola, the pro-



CALL TO ACTION Members of the environmental group Protect the Verde Island Passage stage a rally in front of the office of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in Quezon City, in this photo taken on June 8, to renew their call for the fragile marine corridor to be declared as a protected area and for the government to provide a lasting solution to families affected by the spill. The protest is held 100 days after the sunken MT Princess Empress spilled toxic oil that hit Oriental Mindoro and nearby areas. —PHOTO COURTESY OF PROTECT VIP

vincial public information officer (PIO) said on Tuesday.

Citing the latest testing of the sample waters in Oriental Mindoro by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, the PIO said the fishing ban in Pola had to stay due to the presence of toxic polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons in its waters. Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons are a class of chemicals that occur naturally in coal, crude oil and gasoline.

The PIO said the fishing ban was lifted in Naujan and Pinamalayan towns. Fishing and water sports were also allowed to re-

sume in the waters from Naujan to Puerto Galera and from Pinamalayan to Bulalacao towns.

On June 17, the Philippine Coast Guard said it had completed siphoning off the remaining oil from the sunken tanker.

Marine corridor

But Protect VIP believed that only by including the VIP in the Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 2018 that its waters and rich marine resources, the lifeblood of thousands of fishing families, could be protected.

The VIP is a 1.14-mil-

lion-hectare marine ecosystem located off the coastlines of Batangas, Romblon, Marinduque, Occidental Mindoro and Oriental Mindoro provinces. It was recognized as the “center of global shorefish biodiversity” due to the high densities of marine resources in the area, based on a 2005 study by American marine scientists Dr. Kent Carpenter and Victor Springer.

Protect VIP lamented that VIP has now become the “epicenter” of fossil gas and liquefied natural gas (LNG) developments in the country, as eight of the 27 proposed new plants and seven of the nine planned LNG terminals in the country are located in Batangas.

The group warned that allowing fossil gas facilities in Batangas exposed the VIP to the frequent entry of LNG barges, and the inadvertent oil spills or disposal of shipboard liquid wastes and bilge water.

“This was not the first oil spill in the VIP, and it is unlikely to be the last as long as toxic and dangerous cargo is ferried in these waters,” said Gerry Arances, executive director of the think tank Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development and the co-convenor of Protect VIP.

On July 13 last year, Senators Cynthia Villar and Loren Legarda filed a bill creating the “Verde Island Passage Protected Seascape” but the measure remained pending in the Senate.

—REPORTS FROM DELFIN T. MALLARI JR. AND MADONNA T. VIROLA INQ



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The Manila Times

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On nuclear waste disposal, China tells Japan: Explain!

NUCLEAR fear can be turning out as man's ultimate saving grace. I came across this report in the China-based Global Times that there is a wide protest against the planned dumping by Japan of nuclear radioactive wastewater into the Pacific Ocean. While Filipinos were celebrating Independence Day on June 12, 2023, thousands of South Korean fishermen massed in front of the parliament protesting the plan.

We certainly remember the 9-plus-intensity earthquake that hit Japan on March 11, 2011. The temblor created a 15-meter tsunami that killed 19,500 people and automatically shut down the cooling mechanism of three nuclear reactors of the Fukushima-Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Radioactive leaks contaminated the water of the cooling system, which took all of four days to put back in place. Anyway, Japan had safely stored the contaminated water over the years while placing it under study by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for eventual disposal.

The core of the current controversy over the planned discharge of the wastewater into the sea is a questionable donation by Japan to the IAEA of \$1.10 million. What is that donation for? The Global Times story calls it "political donation" and claims it was given in order to resolve differences of opinion between the IAEA and third country experts conducting



MY SAY

**MAURO GIA
SAMONTE**

a review of the nuclear contaminated water from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant.

It would seem that what the IAEA says on the matter goes. And it strongly appears that the working group in the agency formed to mind the Fukushima nuclear accident is prone to give in to Japan's ultimate plan of dumping the contaminated water in the Pacific Ocean. Naturally, people of the region are aroused.

China has taken the cudgels for South Korea and all those pressing for an inquiry into the reported donation by Japan of the \$1.10 million to the IAEA.

According to the Global Times report, the Chinese foreign ministry urged Tokyo to provide a convincing explanation and the IAEA secretariat to respond to the allegation after South Korea media reports revealed that the Japanese government made the "political donation" to the IAEA concerning the Fukushima nuclear-contaminated water disposal.

The Chinese foreign ministry cited anonymous sources close to the matter who said that "the Japanese government had obtained the draft final assessment report from the IAEA's

Fukushima contaminated water disposal working group in advance and proposed substantive amendments, exerting undue influence on the final report's conclusions."

In other words, as one reader pointed out, dumping radioactive contaminated water into the ocean is evil per se. The Japanese so-called political donation must comprise a bribe in order to declare OK what is not. It's dangerous to human life, it's dangerous to the environment.

Particularly to the Philippines, whose archipelagic structure is immersed in waters that are the very sea in which the Japanese radioactive wastes are to be dumped, the Japanese gambit cannot but amount to a national tragedy for the Filipinos.

I hail from Catanduanes, the remotest spot in the Bicol Region, a solitary area whose main means of livelihood is fishing. As a boy, I would just hop over to the seashore every day at 10 a.m. to throw my line into the waves to catch my viand for lunch. Sure, my descendants could still do the same even after Japan dumps its toxic wastewater there, but what they will catch is not viand as I used to but disease, if not death.

One report has it that in the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident, no death has been recorded; authorities swiftly acted to relocate the residents. But imagine volumes of radioactive wastewater dumped into an ocean whose very nature

makes it capable of spreading its contents within minutes across the earth, think of what catastrophe dumping Japan's nuclear waste would bring to humanity.

Mao Ning, spokesman for the Chinese foreign ministry, told a press briefing that China has been closely following relevant media reports.

"The Japanese government has the responsibility to provide a convincing explanation for the relevant media reports, and the IAEA secretariat should also respond to the matter," Mao said.

Well, all's well that ends well, it seems with the matter. With China expressing a resolve to seriously mind the issue of Japan's wastewater disposal, Pacific residents can rest assured the danger of their contamination with nuclear radioactivity will be addressed adequately. True, the United States is the largest contributor to the budget of the IAEA and as such expectedly enjoys corresponding clout in policymaking. Yet though China's obligation for that budget may fall a little less, what may not be immediately obvious to many is that South Korea, otherwise a staunch ally of the US in the current worldwide political skirmish, is now on the other side of the fence, aligned with the US' main nemesis. And with world masses adopting the Chinese stand on the controversy, how else will it end up resolved than the people's will upheld?



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Sustainable tourism needs ecosystem accounting

TOURISM, which has been experiencing a comeback after the pandemic, needs environmental management to be sustainable. Real-time, concrete monitoring of sustainability and addressing present and future problems in turn need an awareness and implementation of ecosystem accounting, which constantly measures the conditions of the various biodiverse communities in a location.

Nilo Tamoria, regional executive director of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)-Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon), pointed this out in the recent First Regional Edutourism Congress organized by the Laguna State Polytechnic University (LSPU) and the Commission on Higher Education International Affairs.

He said, "Modern tourism cannot be promoted without considering environmental management, which is its main economic component [of tourism]." He added that "knowing the extent of the natural resources and its value" is key to the sustainability of modern tourism.

This is where ecosystem accounting comes in. The presentation defined it as measuring ecosystem services which are the contributions of ecosystems, or the dynamic complex of plant, animal, and micro-organism communities and their interactions to "the benefits that are used in economic and other human activity. All ecosystem services represent the final output of the ecosystem before interaction with the economy."

Ecosystem services come in the following categories: provisioning, where goods like crops and livestock are provided by the ecosystems; cultural services which pave the way for non-material benefits like recreation and tourism; regulating services or natural processes regulated by the bio-communities like water purification; and support services such as nutrient and water cycling.

Ecosystem accounting then monitors

and measures the carrying capacity of a system to support an activity like planting or tourism. When it comes to ecotourism sites, the carrying capacity measurement is vital because it "refers to the maximum amount of individuals that can be accommodated in an ecotourism site without affecting the state of the environment, the level of satisfaction of the visitors and the sociocultural norms of the local community," as described by one presentation source.

Measuring resources

An ecotourism's carrying capacity is determined by three main factors: the amount of resources available in the ecosystem; the size of the population or the number of users; and the amount of resources a visitor or individual consumes.

Tamoria explained why monitoring and taking care of an ecosystem's carrying capacity is essential: going past it means "...malaki ang impact. [Tourism] will be competing with the use of the ecosystem [against] the other communities."

Managing or doing responsible ecosystem accounting will also help ensure that the positive advantages of tourism will outweigh the negative ones or the risks. On one side, there are benefits like the conservation of natural areas and wildlife; the involvement of the human communities in the rehabilitation of a site; and the economic gains. On the other hand, lack of planning, negligence or even carelessness can lead to the disturbance of animal breeding patterns; destruction of forests, coral areas and beaches; or conflicts over the use of resources.

"Tourism has become the world's largest industry, and the environment is taking center stage in tourism development," Tamoria added, then reiterated, "We cannot enjoy the scenery ... without having environmental management making it long-lasting and sustainable."

CORA LLAMAS



Didipio: green, sustainable mining

BY LEANDER C. DOMINGO

LOCATED some 270 kilometers north-northeast of Manila at an elevation of around 700 meters above sea level is the gold deposit-rich upland village where the Didipio Mine practices green and sustainable mining.

The Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) in Region 2 (Cagayan Valley), headed by Regional Director Mario Ancheta, acknowledged Didipio Mine as one of the front-runners in responsible mining in Nueva Vizcaya.

The Didipio Mine near the border of Nueva Vizcaya and Quirino provinces commenced in June 2011 while open pit mining started in July 2012. The mine shifted to underground mining in 2015.

Benchmark

Marjorie Wong-Idio, Didipio Mine external affairs and communications manager, said the systems and programs maintained by the company got support from its host barangay (village) of Didipio and surrounding communities in said both provinces.

The following company features keep the mine's operation safe and serve as benchmarks to other mining operations in the country: a Water Treatment Plant system, Danum-Ket Biag (Water is Life) program, Tailings Management system, Progressive Rehabilitation activities and Paste Backfill system.

With its P268-million investment in the water treatment system, Didipio Mine has made efforts to recycle water with an average recycling rate of 75 percent and an increase of up to 90 percent.

"Our water treatment plant (WTP), which treats tailings storage facility water discharge, has a treatment capacity of 1,980 cubic meters per hour," said Idio, who is also a chemical engineer by profession. Based on the company's monitoring results affirmed by the MGB in Region 2, the effluent discharges from the WTP meets Class C effluent standards with less

than 50 parts per million of total suspended solids or TSS, exceeding the required Class 'D' effluent standard.

Importance of water

Launched in partnership with the Didipio local government, the "Danum Ket Biag" program of the company focuses on initiatives that will improve the water management of the host barangay.

"One of the pillars of this campaign is to map out the bodies of water or water sources in Barangay Didipio as a preliminary step to identifying projects for collaboration to preserve and protect these water sources," Idio said.

The management of tailings and the structural integrity of the mine's tailings storage facility (TSF) is critical to community safety and environmental protection.

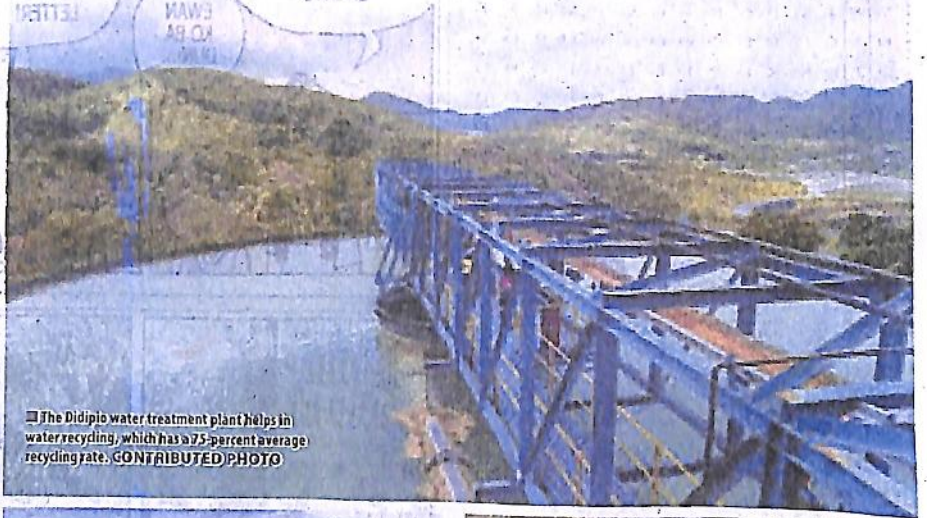
"Our TSF was designed to exceed compliance standards as stipulated in the guideline issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and Australian and International Commission on Large Dams' Guidelines on Tailing Dams," Idio said.

Also affirming the safety and environmental protection of this Didipio Mine structure, Ancheta noted that the company's quality control and assurance of construction criteria and materials is undertaken by an independent engineering specialist with support from operational personnel.

As to its progressive rehabilitation, the Didipio Mine is done through hydros seeding and conventional methods.

Paste backfill systems

To date, Idio noted that a total of 44 hectares has been progressively



The Didipio water treatment plant helps in water recycling, which has a 75-percent average recycling rate. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



The Tailings Storage Facility has a treatment capacity of 1,980 cubic meters per hour



The Paste Backfill Plant produces a monthly 50,000 cubic meters of paste.

rehabilitated out of the 335 hectares of the disturbed area.

The Didipio Mine has also established a Paste Backfill Plant which is the first paste backfill system in the Philippines that produces about a monthly 50,000 cubic meters of paste, which is delivered underground.

Idio also noted that at this rate, the quantity of tailings sent to TSF is reduced by 30 to 40 percent which in effect reduces the footprint of the TSF.

"With this backfill system, the reduced amount of waste for dis-

posal lessens the environmental impact," she added.

Idio also mentioned that with paste backfill, the underground mining method for extracting ore in the mine is LongHole Open Stopping.

Automation and digital transformation are also very important aspects of the operation. "We implement technologies to boost productivity and ensure safety in our underground operations," Idio said, adding that remote and semi-auto bogging eliminates exposure of underground operators to open stopes.



To date, 44 hectares have been rehabilitated



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DPWH to plant 30,000 trees in Pangasinan

LINGAYEN, Pangasinan: Starting in the month of July, the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) second district engineering office here will start planting trees in the areas surrounding the upland village of Mapita in Aguilar town.

Engineer Edita Manuel, district engineer, said the trees that will be planted are replacements of the trees cut down during road construction and widening projects of her office.

"The tree planting aims to replace those trees that have been cut to pave the way for the road construction and widening projects of the DPWH Pangasinan second district engineering office," Manuel said in an interview.

More than 30,000 seedlings and saplings of various tree species will be planted in the area, which is on the Pangasinan side of the Zambales Range.

The area is accessible through the scenic Daang Katutubo, which is connected to the Daang Kalikasan that links Mangatarem, Pangasinan and Santa Cruz, Zambales.

Manuel said that under the tree-cutting permit issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), 50 seedlings must be planted as replacement for each felled tree.

"We are doing this slowly to make sure that the seedlings that we will plant will not be wasted. That's why we are doing this activity this rainy season," Manuel said.

She said her office had also signed a memorandum of agreement with the communities where the trees are to be planted for them to protect and take care of the trees.

"We have a budget for that for three years, just to make sure that all those we planted will survive," Manuel said.

Manuel said specific locations of

the tree planting activities and the tree species to be planted will be determined by the DENR.

Based on existing laws, tree planting activities are undertaken in open, degraded, and denuded forestlands, protected areas and mangroves, ancestral domain lands, and civil and military reservations among others.

As this developed, Manuel said that her office remains committed to its role in implementing innovative engineering solutions and ensuring the successful completion of vital infrastructure projects in its area of responsibility.

Manuel issued the statement after her office was awarded first runner-up as Most Outstanding District Engineering Office during the DPWH's 125th Founding Anniversary last week.

"This was our overall performance, not just of the district engineer. All employees really worked together to win the award," Manuel said.

"And I'm thankful to them for their commitment in delivering high-quality performance to address the needs of the public," she added.

The prestigious title of Most Outstanding District Engineering Office in the Philippines was awarded to Pangasinan fourth district engineering office headed by its officer in charge, assistant regional director Mathias Malenab.

The awards were presented by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., DPWH Secretary Manuel Bonoan and Senior Undersecretary Emil Sadain.

The two district offices in Pangasinan were chosen based on their technical performance, planning performance, financial management, procurement management, and resolution rating on stakeholders' complaints.

GABRIEL CARDINOZA



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MWSS honors top planters of trees

THE Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System Corporate Office (MWSS-CO) and the Million Trees Foundation, Inc. (MTFI) honored various institutional, corporate, civic and individual stakeholders of the Annual Million Trees Challenge (AMTC) on June 27 at the MWSS Multi-Purpose Gym.

The event also marked the AMTC pledging session for 2023 commitments.

Now on its seventh year, the AMTC has brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including 30 participating organizations, all united in the goal of protecting and rehabilitating the seven critical watersheds: Angat-Ipo, Kaliwa, La Mesa, Laguna Lake, Umiray, Upper Marikina, and Manila Bay.

MWSS Administrator Leonor Cleofas, in her welcome remarks, cited the relevance of the AMTC

project started in 2017 by her predecessor, former MWSS C/Administrator retired Gen. Reynaldo Velasco who continues to pursue this noble advocacy through the Million Trees Foundation, Inc. (MTFI) where he now serves as chairman emeritus working along with MTFI president and executive director Melandrew Velasco.

"These watersheds are vital, supporting the water supply for Metro Manila and adjoining provinces of Rizal, Bulacan, and parts of Cavite. Despite the COVID pandemic, AMTC has made substantial progress. From 2017 to 2020, the campaign has contributed to the increase of the closed forest cover in these watersheds by 5,734 hectares. Furthermore, from 2017 to 2022, a total of 6,844,490 seedlings were planted, covering an area of 15,622 hectares," Cleofas said.

MISS EARTH GRACES KIDS' BOOTCAMP.

Miss Philippines Earth 2023 Yllana Marie Aduana gamely mingles with school children at the "Punong Puno ng Pag-asa: Arbor Day Bootcamp" held at the Manila Water Laktayan Center in Quezon City, spearheaded by Manila Water Inc. **Manny Palmero**





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ARBOR DAY BOOT CAMP – Miss Philippines Earth 2023 Yllana Marie Aduana graces the 2023 'Punong Puno ng Pag-asa: Arbor Day Bootcamp for Kids' organized by Manila Water and participated in by Quezon City public students at the Lakbayan Center in Quezon City on Friday, June 30, 2023. The event aims to engage the younger generation in taking care of the environment and share the roles of trees in maintaining and protecting watersheds. (Noel B. Pabalate)



FIRST PERSON

ALEX MAGNO

Dammed

Starting today, water allocation for Metro Manila's 15 million people will be reduced by the National Water Allocation Board. The reduction will be from 52 cubic meters per second to just 50. This will mean more areas will be subject to water rationing.



Allocation for irrigation in the surrounding farm areas will likewise be reduced. The cutback is intended to conserve whatever water is left at the Angat Dam, the single fresh water source for Metro Manila and the heavily populated adjacent provinces. Although both concessionaires have invested in treatment plants to use water from Laguna de Bay, the additional water supply is meager.

By end-June, water level at Angat was at 183.25 meters. If there is no significant rainfall over the Angat watershed, the level would fall to the critical operating level of 180 meters in as little as two weeks. Surprisingly, no one seems to be treating this as an emergency requiring a strategic response beyond calling for more prudent water use.

Water from Angat flows to Ipo Dam and then to La Mesa Dam. This is only one system, and one water stream, built during a time when the population of the Capital Region was only 2 million. As the population of Metro Manila and contiguous provinces rises, the water supply will clearly not be enough. With rising prosperity, water demand outpaces even population growth.

The only real relief from this water emergency is the Kaliwa Dam project. But this will take a few more years to complete. Considering how long it took to even begin building the Kaliwa Dam, government should move with a little more urgency in commencing work on the Kanan Dam. There is no time to lose.

Under the present setup, Manila Water owns the La Mesa Dam. Maynilad buys its water from Manila Water under what is called a "cross-portal arrangement." This arrangement, which gives Maynilad 60 percent of the water flow, was suspended by Manila Water last March in the face of declining water supply.

If the available water is divided evenly between the two concessionaires, Maynilad will be at a disadvantage. The West Zone operated by Maynilad supplies more customers even as it has the older water system (including unmapped pipelines built during the prewar period). This older system requires more investment to reduce non-revenue water flowing out of leaks in the system. This is the reason the first owner of Maynilad went bankrupt.

Maynilad is clearly in a challenged position. It is forced to ration water in parts of its concession area. In order to earn enough to invest in modernizing its pipelines, it must sell more water. But there is not enough water to sell.

Maynilad's challenged position translates into misery for many of its customers. This cannot be sustainable unless there is more water for the concessions to sell. More water requires building new dams.

There are no ifs and buts about this situation. New water must be supplied the system for the concessions to be sustainable – and the urban center habitable. New water can only come from new dams.

Either we hurry building those dams or Metro Manila and environs, accounting for a major share of GDP, will be damned.

Love

The power of a slogan lies in brevity. That is already a problem for our tourism campaign effort because the country has such a long name.

A few days ago, the Department of Tourism launched a new slogan for the tourism campaign: **Love the Philippines**. That is probably as short as it could possibly be – unless we take out the name of the country.

The slogan was arrived at using extensive market studies. Those studies showed that what strikes foreign tourists the most when they visit is the warmth of the people. Visitors are welcomed with genuine love. That is the main selling point.

The launch of the new marketing tagline was met with some criticism, however.

Rep. Joey Salceda complained that the video accompanying the new slogan's introduction did not include Mayon Volcano. That reflects a bit of parochialism that misses the point of the new tagline. At any rate, the tourism campaign will be a continuing one and eventually every nook and cranny of our beautiful archipelago will be projected.

Besides, this temperamental volcano has its way of constantly advertising itself to the world, as we see from coverage of recent volcanic activity. Mayon is one of those disaster zones that actually attracts tourists.

I like the new slogan, actually. It puts the cultural/emotional experience at the center of its marketing pitch. Tourism, after all, should be about something more than splendid beaches and other natural curiosities. It must also be about the people who inhabit these natural wonders.

The new slogan reintroduces the country. That is the first reason the tagline was changed to begin with. We are inviting the world to experience our culture. This is something more than some socially abstracted experience at the beach. It centers on a human emotion and not just some detached visual.

As a social scientist, I have faith in the outcomes of focus-group discussions. This slogan is also a call on our own people to hold the country in higher regard.

Obviously, a slogan alone will not bring in the tourists. Tourism is a priority program in our economic strategy. We are targeting bringing in 12 million tourists a year by 2028.

We must prove ourselves to be not only a welcoming but also a capable host.





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'Typhoons may trigger lahar from Mayon'

With three to four tropical cyclones forecast to enter the country this month, Albay Rep. Joey Salceda has raised fears that heavy rain may trigger lahar flow around Mayon Volcano.

"Heavy rainfall may exacerbate risks in Mayon, and will force us to evacuate communities near lahar channels in addition to those already in danger zones," Salceda said.

He said average rainfall in Albay in July is at 155.2 millimeters compared to 112.53 mm in the rest of the year.

"Around 38 percent more rain, and if the PAGASA projection takes place, we could see more. That compounds the risks Mayon poses," Salceda said.

He said there may be no need to evacuate residents near lahar channels if they are outside the six to eight-kilometer danger zones.

"What we are looking at is extended evacuation for those in danger zones and intermittent evacuation for those in lahar channels during heavy rain. We will really need help," Salceda said.

He said lahar deposited on the slopes of Mayon during the 2018 eruption cascaded in 2020 due to rains spawned by Typhoon Rolly.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) said lava flow from Mayon reached 2,230 meters and 1,300 meters along Mi-isi and Bonga gullies, respectively, in the past 24 hours.

Phivolcs said seven dome-collapse pyroclastic density currents that lasted for two to three minutes, 284 rockfall events, two volcanic earthquakes, plumes that rose up to 2,500 meters and sulfur dioxide emissions that averaged 595 tons were also recorded.

With Mayon's unrest expected to last for a few months, the Albay Public Safety and Emergency Management Office (APSEMO) said potential donors should coordinate with the provincial government before handing out food and non-food items.

APSEMO officer-in-charge Eugene Escobar said donations should be in response to the actual needs of the evacuees to avoid flooding of similar relief goods.

Escobar said so-called "donor fatigue" should be avoided as it may result in a shortage of food and non-food needs of the evacuees.

He said donations continue to pour in for Mayon evacuees from government and private groups.

Phreatic bursts recorded in Taal

Meanwhile, in Taal Volcano, Phivolcs said two phreatic bursts were recorded in the past 24 hours.

The bursts were relatively small in size and produced plumes that rose 250 meters and 200 meters, respectively.

Phivolcs said the phreatic bursts were steam and gas-driven and did not generate ashfall.

Nine volcanic earthquakes, including five tremors that lasted for two minutes, were recorded.

Sulfur dioxide flux of 7.49 tons per day with plumes that rose up to 2,400 meters were monitored.

Taal Volcano remains under Alert Level 1.

Phivolcs said this means steam-driven explosions, volcanic earthquakes, minor ashfall and lethal accumulations or expulsions of volcanic gas may occur. - Sheila Crisostomo, Romina Cabrera, Cet Dematera