

22 July 2023 Saturday



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THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
SINCE 1800
MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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EDITORIAL

CARTOO

JUL 22 1972

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17 Cabinet members tapped as CORDS

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has approved the designation of 17 Cabinet Officers for Regional Development and Security (CORDS) for the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) to further intensify the administration's fight against insurgency.

The newly designated CORDS are:

- NCR - Department of Migrant Workers Secretary Maria Susana Ople
- CAR - Department of Transportation Secretary Jaime Bautista
- Region 1 - Department of Agrarian Reform Secretary Conrado Estrella III
- Region 2 - Department of Trade and Industry Secretary Alfredo Pascual
- Region 3 - Department of Social Welfare and Development Secretary Rexlon Gatchalian

- Region 4-A - Department of Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla
- Region 4-B - Department of Information and Communications Technology Secretary Ivan John Uy
- Region 5 - Department of Labor and Employment Secretary Bienvenido Laguesma
- Region 6 - Department of Energy Secretary Raphael Perpetuo Lotilla
- Region 7 - Department of Tourism Secretary Maria Esperanza Cristina Frasco
- Region 8 - Department of the Interior and Local Government Secretary Benhur DC Abalos Jr.
- Region 9 - Department of Public Works and Highways Secretary Manuel Bonoan
- Region 10 - Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development Secretary Jose Rizalino Acuzar

- Region 11 - Presidential Assistant for Eastern Mindanao Secretary Leo Tereso Magno
 - Region 12 - Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga
 - Caraga - National Commission on Indigenous Peoples Secretary Allen Capuyan
 - BARMM - Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation, and Unity Secretary Carlito Galvez
- The Cabinet officers were designated "to lead the Joint Regional Task Forces (JRTF)-ELCAC to oversee the peace and development efforts in every region of the country," said Director Mario Jose Chico, directorate for strategic communications of NTF-ELCAC. (Martin Sadongdong)



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NEED TO CORRECT 'ERRONEOUS DA'

BAGUIO FOREST CLASSIFICATION HAMPERS TITLING OF RESIDENTIAL LANDS

By Vincent Cabreza
@InqNational

BAGUIO CITY—The 2013 reclassification of Baguio residential zones into forest lands has been preventing many households from perfecting their land titles, allegedly due to erroneous data, the city council was informed on Monday.

But Elias Aonan, acting deputy officer of the city planning, development and sustainability office, assured the city council that digital technology combined with GIS (Geographic Information System) and extensive ground validation should correct these errors once it updates the summer capital's 2016 Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP).

Families of the city's Balacbac community near Mt. Santo Tomas first raised the anomaly at a citizens' forum during the city council's July 10 session. Before 2016, their area was classified for both residential and forest use.

Lawyer Roman Taguiling, who represented the Balacbac residents at the council session, said many households in the area have titles but the restrictive forest use classification could prohibit them from securing permits required for their livelihood and other transactions.

Other Balacbac settlers currently securing titles through Baguio's townsite sales mechanism or the national government's free patent program found their applications blocked because of the 2016 CLUP, Taguiling said.

The 57-square-kilometer Baguio is the country's remaining townsite reservation, where all lands are alienable and disposable and may be purchased through a laborious townsite sales application (TSA) process. Land transactions will not be cleared by the city and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) if they are within forest lands. TSAs are approved by a joint task force manned by Baguio and DENR employees.

Google Maps

Aonan acknowledged that the current CLUP, which was accomplished in 2013 but adopted officially in 2016 through Ordinance No. 62, bore no technical descriptions for zones identified for forest use. He said the CLUP forest land use map at the time was "based on Google Maps."

Satellite images of Baguio that showed abundant trees were designated for forest use in 2013. Aonan replied when pressed by Councilor Betty Lourdes Tabanda. However,

Balacbac residents said many of their homes lie beneath pine tree canopies and might not have been spotted through Google Maps.

Among the areas affected by the reclassification of residential areas into forest use were settlements at Balacbac; the affluent neighborhood of Outlook Drive; portions of Barangay Irisan, which is Baguio's largest village; Barangay Pinsao Proper; and residences at Camp 7 along Kennon Road.

According to the Department of the Interior and Local Government, 10-year CLUPs are mandated by Republic Act No. 7160 (the 1991 Local Government Code) to help regulate and determine the future development of land resources. Each CLUP illustrates how local governments like Baguio utilize public properties and preserve forest and government reservations through their respective zoning ordinances.

Twin city

The Baguio CLUP would be revised and upgraded by October, utilizing a 3D modeling application that Aonan refers to as the Baguio Digital Twin City.

The summer capital's Twin City project generates 3D representations of Baguio and all its barangays using all land resource data that is acquired scientifically or from methodical interviews and ground research conducted in each village. The digital twin helps experts analyze the geological conditions and the sturdiness of homes and buildings in Baguio. It also picks out illegal structures and danger zones that are inhabited.

According to the 2020 census, 363,151 residents make up Baguio's household population (or 99.12 percent of the total population of 366,358).

A corrected CLUP could be officially adopted by the Baguio government in December, Aonan said.

But the proposed CLUP corrections may end up reducing Baguio's forest cover as depicted in the official land use map, said Councilor Peter Fianza, a former city administrator.

Baguio's current number of residents has already breached the population threshold (about 324,000) for the city's forest cover, according to a 2019 urban carrying capacity report. This means the current forest and green cover of the city are no longer sufficient to serve the current population.

The city currently has 2.5 million trees, including less than 50,000 Benguet pine trees. **INQ**



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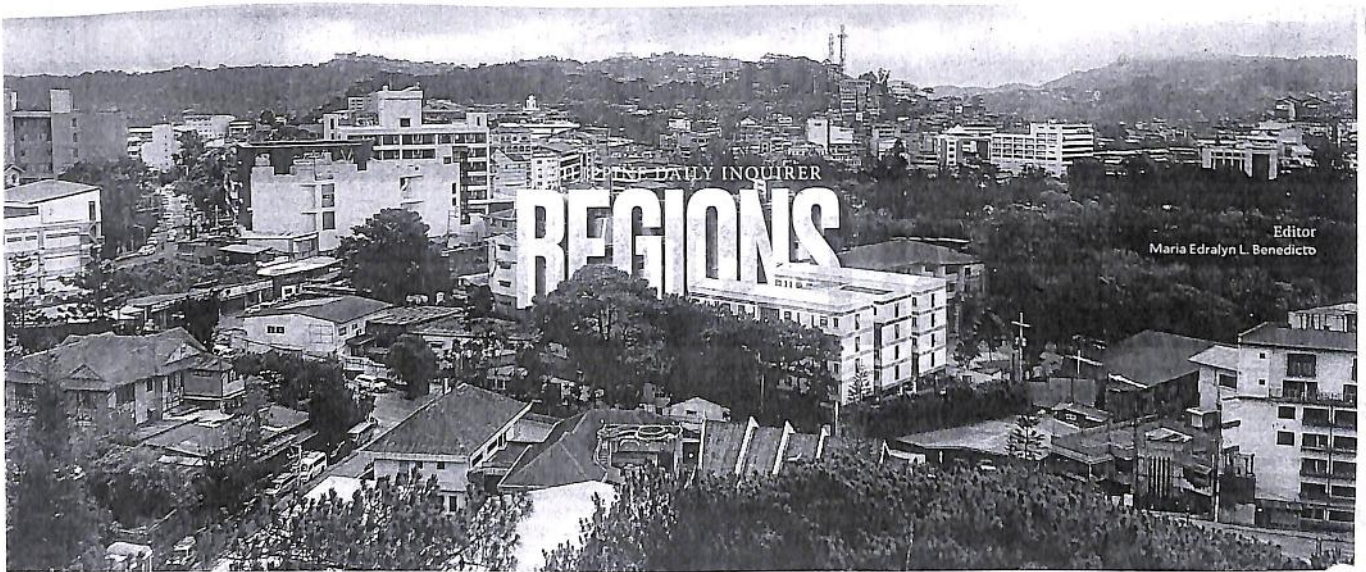
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EMBRACED BY TREES Baguio City may have become overcrowded, but many of its residents continue to breathe fresh air as they live near pockets of pine forests for decades, as shown in this photo taken on May 17. —VINCENT CABREZA



Green Industries

EDITOR: Cora Llamas

SATURDAY July 22, 2023



MGB in Region 2 (Cagayan Valley) highlighted the significant gains on responsible mining projects during the recent forum in Santiago City. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

MGB Region 2 cites gains of mining

BY LEANDER C. DOMINGO

THE Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) in Region 2 (Cagayan Valley) and various mining industry partners have affirmed significant gains in responsible mining projects to socioeconomic growth within the region's mining communities even during the rise of the Covid-19 pandemic.

MGB Region Director Mario Ancheta said at least four mining projects in the Cagayan Valley region continue to operate and contribute not only to the economy of the region but also to the country.

These companies are the Didipio Mine of OceanaGold Philippines Inc. (OGPI) and the London-based FCF Minerals Corp., both in Nueva Vizcaya; the Dinapigue Mining Corp. of Nickel Asia in Isabela; and the JDVC Resources Corp., an offshore mining firm in Cagayan province.

Ancheta acknowledged that these companies "helped local government units and its host communities in hurdling the adverse effects of the pandemic."

As proof and for purposes of transparency, Ancheta said a request has already been made with the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) to provide a categorical report on the revenue contribution of the mining industry in the region.

"The mining firm themselves have clamored for transparency and that we will be reporting the significant contribution of the mining industry in the region during the next mining forum in Region 2 to various stakeholders," Ancheta added.

During a recent forum facilitated by the MGB of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in Region 2,

Willy Winston Fayloga, officer in charge and area supervisor of the Bureau of Internal Revenues (BIR) in Region 2, affirmed that mining companies' infrastructure and livelihood projects have helped the national and local government units in generating taxes through their extraction of minerals.

"The mining industry also generated employment in the Cagayan Valley region which also contributed to the revenue collection of the BIR," he said.

According to the participating mining companies, their respective information, education and communication mandated program funded the recently held forum to showcase their economic gains on responsible mining. They also wanted to disclose strategies in and contribution to community development in their respective areas of operations.

Gold production

Meanwhile, Noel Neil Malimban, regional director of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) North

Luzon, thanked OGPI for selling a sizable chunk of its gold production.

In May 2022, the BSP and OGPI signed an agreement that will offer at least 25 percent of OGPI's annual gold production to the BSP at fair market prices.

Recently, OGPI also offered to sell more gold to BSP in response to BSP Governor Felipe Medalla, who underscored the central bank's commitment to responsible gold sourcing and sound reserve management.

Malimban said the BSP Gold Buying Program (GBP) purchases gold from both small- and large-scale miners operating in the Philippines. The gold holdings form part of the country's gross international reserves which support economic activities and serve as a buffer against potential adverse impact on the economy.

Malimban maintained that the GBP has contributed to the peso stabilization through the accumulation of gross international reserves. The program also boosted economic growth and foreign investor confidence in the country.



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Better mining infra seen to draw in foreign partners

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

The Philippines needs to provide better mining infrastructure to be able to make its minerals sector more attractive to foreign partners, particularly the United States, according to a Hawaii-based foreign policy research institute.

On the sidelines of a briefing under the Foreign Press Centers' International Reporting tour, Pacific Forum senior resident fellow Akhil Ramesh told The STAR that infrastructure is vital in attracting partners in the minerals sector.

"It's about the infrastructure in the case of mining. So a country with established industrial parks or already existing processing ecosystems to mine will be much easier than one that is in its nascent stages," Ramesh said.

"While the Philippines has some, it still need to step up simultaneously," he added.

In April, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said it wants the US to consider partnering with the Philippines on the processing of critical minerals, similar to a deal the American govern-

ment recently signed with Japan.

Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual expressed the country's interest in such partnership during his meeting with US Trade Representative (USTR) Ambassador Katherine Tai.

Citing the Critical Minerals Agreement (CMA) between the US and Japan, Pascual enjoined Tai to consider entering into a similar partnership with the Philippines.

"With the Philippines' abundance of critical mineral reserves vis-à-vis the United States' nickel demand for processing into batteries for electric vehicles, it is high time that we seize the opportunities for our countries to work together and address the respective gaps in our supply chains," he said earlier.

Tai noted one of the key aims of the CMA is to build supply chains that are robust, resilient and secure.

Signed last March 28, the CMA between the US and Japan builds on the 2019 US-Japan Trade Agreement and aims to strengthen and diversify critical minerals supply chains, as well as promote the adoption of electric vehicle battery technologies.



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FORUM ON WATER MANAGEMENT: Maynilad CEO Ramoncito Fernandez (5th from left) lauded the Water Resource Management Office of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources 'a valuable ally' of the water sector in furthering its goal of improving water services, in a recent industry forum held in Quezon City. Last April, President Marcos signed Executive Order 22 creating the WRMO to manage the Philippines' water resources and respond to the current environmental challenges through integrated government efforts. Under EO 22, all water-related agencies will be attached to the DENR, among which are the National Water Resources Board, Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System, Local Water Utilities Administration and the network of local water districts, and the Laguna Lake Development Authority. With Fernandez during the panel discussion were (from left) World Bank consultant Karen Jimeno, CitizenWatch Philippines co-convenor Kit Belmonte, FDC Utilities Inc. president and CEO Juan Eugenio Roxas, Aboitiz InfraCapital Inc. head of water business Anna Victoria Lu, Manila Water president and CEO Jose Victor Emmanuel De Dios, MWSS administrator Leonor Cleofas, DENR Undersecretary Carlos Primo David, and Ateneo School of Governance professor Philamer Torio who joined virtually.



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MWSS inutile to address consumer complaints

THE Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) is a regulatory agency responsible for overseeing the water supply and sewerage services in the Metropolitan Manila area. It is a government-owned and -controlled corporation tasked with ensuring the provision of safe and reliable water to the customers of its water concessionaires.

One of the important functions of MWSS is the regulation and oversight of the water and sewerage services provided by the two concessionaires, Manila Water Co. Inc. and Maynilad Water Services Inc. MWSS is presumably tasked to ensure that these companies comply with their concession agreements and meet their obligations to deliver efficient and reliable water and sewerage services to the public. But, do they?

Another important function of the MWSS is customer complaint resolution. The MWSS purportedly handles customer complaints and grievances related to the services provided by the concessionaires. Supposedly, MWSS should be a platform for consumers to voice their concerns and take steps to address and resolve these issues promptly. Believe me, they do not.

In the opening page of their website (mwss.gov.ph) you will be greeted with its Service Pledge: "When you contact us you will be treated with honesty, fairness, sensitivity and dignity. You can expect us to: Be open and transparent. Take time to listen and understand your needs. Communicate with you in a timely manner. Be responsive as reasonably possible to your issues and concerns." However, this is only for their press release and promotional purposes. This is pure baloney.

In real life, the opposite happens. Their employees hide in the cloak of anonymity. It takes forever



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for the officials to reply to you, if they ever do. Most of all, they take the water consumers for granted and treat them miserably.

Bad experience with MWSS

Republic Act 8041, or the "National Water Crisis Act of 1995," includes the unauthorized use of booster pumps and illegal change of pipe size, as among those that are considered unlawful.

The first refers to the use of a booster pump in order to draw water directly from the water main, thereby adversely affecting the withdrawal of water by other nearby registered customers. The second refers to the change in size of the service pipe or replacement of a pipe from tapping to the meter without any approved application.

These illegal acts were perpetrated by a neighbor, thereby adversely affecting the water supply and pressure to our office. I reported the matter to Maynilad Water Services Inc. (customer.helpdesk@maynilad.com.ph) and to their other communication channels, on June 8, 2023, but to no avail.

On June 16, 2023, as a remedial measure, I elevated the matter to the MWSS Regulatory Office (mwssregulatoryoffice@ro.mwss.gov.ph), Office of Chief Regulator (ocr@ro.mwss.gov.ph), Customer Service Regulation Area (csr@ro.mwss.gov.ph) and to their Customer Service relations officer, Elenita de Leon (enny.deleon@mwss.gov.ph).

On the same day, the Customer Service Regulation Area replied to my email in this wise - "Greetings from the MWSS



■ MWSS Contact Stop Sign

Regulatory Office (RO)! We appreciate your bringing this water service-related concern to our attention. This concern will be endorsed for investigation and appropriate action immediately. We will get back to you with updates with regard to the actions taken to address the concern. Thank you. - CSRA (Note: this is not an automated reply)."

More than a month has passed and, aside from the Customer Service Regulation Area, no one else bothered to reply to my email. To date, the issue still persists, and neither Maynilad nor MWSS have taken concrete actions to resolve it.

Maynilad left it to the customer with an illegal booster pump to desist from using the same. Of course, the inconsiderate customer did not stop using it. Why is that? Maynilad never monitored it. Maynilad did not close the water connection. Maynilad did not remove the illegal booster pump. Maynilad simply told the customer to "stop using it."

MWSS published the name of their customer service relations specialist, a certain Ms. Elenita de Leon, of the policy, planning and public relations department, and her email address (enny.deleon@mwss.gov.ph), where complaints and feedback

could be sent. Yet, this Ms. de Leon is not replying to emails sent to her. How does that sound for a customer service relations specialist?

The Regulatory Office chief regulator, Patrick Lester Ty, spent time in crafting a video message of support for this year's campaign to end violence against women. How is that related to his regulatory work? None. Yet, Ty failed to respond to legitimate consumer concerns.

Meanwhile, the Customer Service Regulation Area signed its email with a mere "CSRA," without even including the name of the person who actually composed that email. Is this a scheme to avoid liability and accountability? How can we trace who actually sent the email?

So, what now?

These officials of the MWSS are there not to protect the interest of the consumers, but that of the concessionaires.

Mr. President, if you really intend to attain a Bagong Pilipinas, you should fire these irresponsible and incompetent MWSS officials.

Email: allinsight.manilatimes@gmail.com

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Albay folk brace anew for Mayon's lahar flow

Phivolcs warns large deposits of pyroclastic materials in slopes facing 2 cities and 3 towns can be released by heavy rains spawned by 'Egay'

By Ma. April Mier-Manjares
@MaAprilMierINQ

LEGAZPI CITY—Families living near the river channels around Mayon Volcano were warned anew of possible lahar flow as Tropical Depression "Egay" was expected to bring heavy rainfall and thunderstorms in the Bicol region and other parts of Luzon.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) on Friday said heavy rainfall may generate "syn-eruption" lahar, or those that are triggered by a primary volcanic activity, along major channels with loose materials emitted by the ongoing effusive eruption of the Mayon Volcano.

In a lahar advisory on Friday, Phivolcs said "the bulk of erodible pyroclastic density current deposits" in Mi-isi, Bonga and Basud channels could be mobilized by heavy rains.

Paul Karson Alanis, resident volcanologist of Phivolcs in Legazpi, said the volcano released about 16 to 17 million cubic meters of materials composed of lava, rocks and volcanic ash as of Thursday.

Alanis said most of these materials were deposited in Mi-

isi gully in Barangay Mi-isi in Daraga town and Bonga gully in Barangay Bonga in Legazpi City.

"[The debris] deposited in the Basud gully in Sto. Domingo was wider, but the lava flow was concentrated in Mi-isi at Bonga gullies," Alanis said in a private message on Friday.

He said the thick lava emitted by the volcano could still be mobilized by the heavy rains.

Phivolcs said potential lahar and sediment-laden streamflows may occur in the river channels in Mi-isi and Binaan in Daraga town; Anoling and Quirangay in Camalig; Maninila, Masarawag and Muladbuca in Guinobatan; Nasisi in Ligao City; Mabinit and Matanag in Legazpi City; and Basud in Sto. Domingo town.

Cedric Daep, chief of the Albay Public Safety and Emergency Management Office, said the old deposits from the 2018 eruption could be a bigger threat if mobilized by heavy rains along the river channels.

"[About] 60 millimeters per hour of rainfall [could trigger] Mayon's lahar but since there are new deposits, it could adjust the threshold," Daep said in a text message on Friday.



INCREASED ACTIVITY
Mayon Volcano continuously generates pyroclastic density currents and lava flow as seen in this photo taken at 5:40 p.m. on July 10 in Daraga, Albay. —PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY DENNIS MIRABUENO

Alanis said there were about 60 million cu. m of volcanic debris emitted by the volcano on Jan. 13, 2018.

On alert

In the 11 a.m. bulletin on Friday, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) said Egay could intensify into a supertyphoon by July 24.

Its center was last seen 900 kilometers east of southeastern Luzon, packing a maximum

sustained winds of 55 km per hour (kph) near the center and gust of up to 70 kph.

Melvin Almojuela, weather forecaster of Pagasa Southern Luzon, said the trough of Egay triggered light to moderate rains in the Bicol region, while localized thunderstorms also affected the province of Albay.

As of Friday, Pagasa has yet to hoist wind signals over any area in the Bicol region.

But the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) Bicol on Friday placed the region under red alert status and activated the emergency operations center for preemptive measures.

Claudio Yucot, director of OCD Bicol, said local officials were advised to evacuate families in high-risk areas, including places prone to flood, landslide and lahar.

At least 20,000 individuals from Mayon's danger zones have been evacuated since June 9, a day after Phivolcs raised alert level 3 over Mayon, which indicated a possible hazardous eruption. They are currently staying in temporary shelters in the towns of Malilipot, Sto. Domingo, Daraga, Camalig and Guinobatan; and the cities of Tabaco and Ligao. INQ



Editorial

Another opportunity for PH climate leadership

THE International Maritime Organization (IMO) recently ratified a new strategy to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, but while the leadership of the 175 member-nation group expressed satisfaction with the plan, the consensus among outside observers and climate-vulnerable nations within the IMO itself was that the result was "disappointing."

That certainly seems to be a fair characterization from our point of view. In recent years, the IMO has been respectably proactive in implementing measures to reduce harmful emissions, such as imposing tough standards on the use of low-sulfur fuels, and promoting the development and use of liquefied natural gas as fuel for ships. When the time came to ramp up action with a comprehensive plan, however, the result was rather noncommittal. The 2023 IMO Greenhouse Gas Strategy merely calls for the industry to "strive for" curbing shipping emissions by up to 30 percent by 2030 and by up to 80 percent by 2040 in order to reach net zero "by or around 2050," depending on "national circumstances," according to the final text of the resolution.

The Philippines went into the IMO negotiations having already publicly declared its support for a hard target of net-zero emissions by 2050, and more ambitious interim targets by 2030 and 2040. It was joined by the Pacific Island nations, the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan and South Korea. Those countries' collective efforts to craft a strategy with firm commitments were stymied, however, by the world's largest shipowner, China, which was backed by India, Indonesia, Brazil and Argentina.

China argued that abating emissions in the shipping industry is difficult, and that it would need more time; this, in spite of the already demonstrated efficacy of other IMO measures such as phased reduction of fuel sulfur content. It does not take a great leap of imagination to guess that China, realizing that its maritime industry would incur huge costs in cleaning up its act, simply used its enormous influence to promote its own economic interests at the expense of nearly everyone else's environmental concerns.

Countries like the Philippines, whose "national circumstances" oblige them to not be that shortsighted, however, realize that environmental concerns are economic interests. At a minimum, reducing GHG emissions and improving sustainability in the maritime or any sector works toward reducing the costs of climate-related impacts. And if sustainability strategies are done right, they provide a broad spectrum of new growth opportunities.

The Philippines need not give up its leadership in reducing the environmental impact of the shipping sector simply because others' selfish interests are preventing a broader and more effective consensus. The 2023 IMO GHG Strategy does not, after all, prohibit its signatories from exceeding the agreement's modest targets, so that is what the Philippines should seek to do.

The first step is for the government to impose rational emissions standards on the domestic shipping industry, including port facilities and related infrastructure. Some of this is already being done. As just one example, leading port operator International Container Terminal Service Inc. recently announced an ambitious plan to pursue decarbonization across its world-spanning operations, including a complete inventory of all its emissions — direct, indirect from electricity use and indirect from other activities such as truck transportation — by 2025, and firm GHG reduction targets for the first two (Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions) by the end of this year.

Another idea the government might consider is requiring foreign vessels operating in Philippine waters to be compliant with Philippine emissions standards. This could be enforced through the imposition of an emissions surcharge or carbon tax on arriving imports based on the emissions profile of the vessel carrying them, unless that ship has been certified by the appropriate agency here as being emissions-compliant. That would obviously be a somewhat complicated program to create and administer, but even an announcement on the part of the government that it is working on it would likely encourage some shipping operators to give the matter of emissions reduction more serious thought. This would be particularly true if the surcharge was reflected in higher costs for consignees here in the Philippines, who would then naturally put pressure on the shipping industry to comply.



PBBM adds cyber attacks and climate change on list of 'natl security threats'

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. urged the National Security Council (NSC) and the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) on Friday to continue to protect the country against "national security threats," which now include cyber attacks and climate change.

During the joint anniversary celebration of the NSC and the NICA at the Philippine International Convention Center (PICC), Marcos added cyber attacks and climate change to the list of threats the country faces, which includes issues on territorial integrity and sovereignty, terrorism, and local communist insurgency.

Also worrisome, he said, are "global developments and shifts," which can affect the country.

Left unchecked, these threats, the President said, cause public disorder and even chaos.

He urged NSC and NICA to continue addressing the said security concerns to ensure the country's economic and social transformation.

"We know that you are the silent guardians who protect us against all manner of national threats, the steadfast vanguards who keep our enemies at bay, and the faithful watchers ensuring that we do not veer to disorder and to chaos," Marcos said.

Established by virtue of Executive Order No. 330 on July 1, 1950, the NSC is the principal advisory body on the proper coordination and integration of plans and policies affecting national security.

Meanwhile, NICA, which was created on July 1, 1949 through Executive Order No. 235, is the central coordinating agency in charge of integrating government activities related to national intelligence.

Samuel P. Medenilla



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Greenland melted recently, says study that raises future sea level threat

By ISSAM AHMED

WASHINGTON, United States - A mile-thick ice sheet in Greenland vanished around 416,000 years ago during a period of moderate natural warming, driving global sea rise to levels that would spell catastrophe for coastal regions today, a study said Thursday.

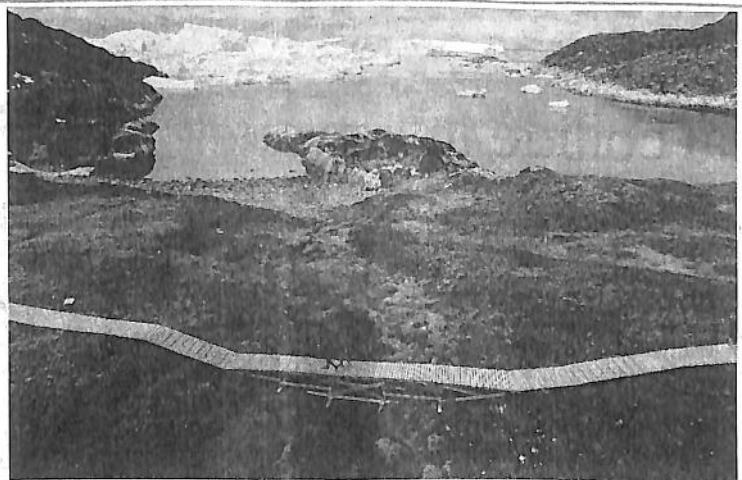
The results overturn a long-held view that the world's largest island was an impregnable fortress of ice over the past 2.5 million years, and instead show it will be far more vulnerable to human-caused climate change than previously thought.

"If we want to understand the future, we need to understand the past," University of Vermont scientist Paul Bierman, who co-led the paper published in *Science*, told AFP.

The research relied on an ice core extracted 4,560 feet (1,390 meters) under the surface of Northwest Greenland by scientists at Camp Century, a secretive US military base that operated in the 1960s.

This 12-foot long tube of soil and rock was lost in a freezer only to be rediscovered in 2017.

Scientists were stunned to learn it contained not just sediment but leaves



MOST OF GREENLAND was ice-free and green 416,000 years ago, according to a study. (AFP)

and moss - irrefutable evidence of an ice-free landscape, perhaps covered by an ancient forest that woolly mammoths would have roamed.

A green Greenland

Though researchers were deprived for decades of access to the precious sample, Bierman said in some ways it was "providential," as the cutting-edge techniques used to date the core are very recent.

Key among these is "luminescence

dating," which allowed scientists to determine the last time that sediment buried beneath the Earth's surface was exposed to light.

"As sediment is buried beneath the surface, background radiation from soil fills in the little holes or imperfections in minerals like quartz or feldspar, and builds up what we call a luminescence signal over time," co-author Drew Christ told AFP.

In a dark room, scientists took interior strips of the ice core and exposed

them to blue-green or infrared light, releasing trapped electrons that form a kind of ancient clock that shows the last time they were exposed to sunlight, which erases the luminescence signal.

"And the only way to do that at Camp Century is to remove a mile of ice," said Tammy Rittenour, a co-author of the study at Utah State University. "Plus, to have plants, you have to have light."

Luminescence dating provided the end point of the ice-free period, with the start point coming from another technique.

Inside the quartz from the Camp Century core, rare forms - called isotopes - of the elements beryllium and aluminum build up when the ground is exposed to the sky and cosmic rays.

Looking at the ratio of the normal forms of these elements to the rare isotopes, the scientists could derive a window for how long the rocks were at the surface versus how long they were buried.

They found the sediment was exposed for less than 14,000 years, meaning this was how long the area was ice-free.

Coastal cities imperiled

The Camp Century core was taken only 800 miles from the North Pole, with the study showing the entire region would have been covered in vegetation.

This took place in a time of natural

warming called an interglacial period, when temperatures were similar to today, around 1.8-2.7 degrees Fahrenheit (1-1.5C) warmer than the pre-industrial era.

The team's modeling showed that the ice sheet melting would have caused between five and 20 feet of sea level rise at that time.

This suggests that every coastal region of the world, home to many global population centers, are at risk of submersion in the coming centuries.

Joseph MacGregor, a climate scientist at NASA who was not involved in the study, noted that the interglacial period that warmed Greenland during this period lasted tens of thousands of years, much longer than what humans have induced so far.

But even so, "we've far surpassed the magnitude of the greenhouse gas forcing back then," he said.

Atmospheric levels of heat-trapping carbon dioxide are currently 420 parts per million (ppm) against 280 ppm during Greenland's ice-free period, and this will remain in the skies for thousands of years.

"We're doing a giant experiment on Earth's atmosphere, and we don't know the results of that experiment," said Bierman. "I don't take that as 'Oh my god the sky is falling,' I take that as we've got to get it together."