

21 September 2022, Wednesday



DENR

NEWS ALERTS

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



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Guns seized from Masungi Georeserve 'invaders'

Police have confiscated the firearms of a group of men accused of invading the Masungi conservation site in Tanay, Rizal.

Calabarzon police director Brig. Gen. Jose Melencio Nartatez Jr. said yesterday operatives of the regional civil security unit seized 12 shotguns and three .38 caliber revolvers from the armed men who were later found to be security guards from the Sinagtala Security Agency.

The security guards reportedly camped along the Marikina-Infanta Highway in Barangay Cuyumbay.

Nartatez has vowed to restore normalcy in the Masungi Georeserve.

Lt. Col. Eunice de Guzman, spokesperson for the Calabarzon police, said the security agency may be held administratively liable if investigation shows that there were lapses.

She clarified that there were only six security guards in the area when the inspection was conducted, contrary to a social media post of the Masungi Georeserve administration that up to 30 armed men have been camping out in the area since last week.

De Guzman said no arrest was made as the men were confirmed to be security guards and their guns were licensed.

However, in a post on Facebook yesterday, the Masungi Georeserve administration said the "invaders" are still on Km. 48 of Marcos Highway, which is part of the protected area.

"We appeal to President Bongbong Marcos, Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Toni Yulo-Loyzaga, Department of the Interior and Local Governments Secretary Benhur Abalos and Philippine National Police chief Gen. Rodolfo Azurin Jr. to look into the matter," it said.

The management of the conservation site called for the arrest and prosecution of the armed men for trespassing, forcible entry, illegal possession of firearms and violations of the National Integrated Protected Areas System Law. — **Emmanuel Tupas, Ed Amoroso**



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NEWS

Masungi protectors seek Palace help

The Masungi Georeserve Foundation has asked Malacañang to intervene in the ongoing controversy at the protected area after more than 30 armed men set up camp in its vicinity in an apparent bid to take over parts of the georeserve in Rizal province. Both the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Philippine National Police have yet to act on the reported intrusion. —STORY

BY DEMPSEY REYES

A5

MASUNGI FOUNDATION SEEKS PALACE INTERVENTION

By Dempsey Reyes
@dempseyreyesINQ

The Masungi Georeserve Foundation has asked Malacañang to intervene in the ongoing controversy at the protected area amid what they called were “dismissive” responses from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Philippine National Police.

Over the weekend, more than 30 armed men reportedly belonging to Sinagtala Security Agency Services encamped along Kilometer 48 of the Marikina-Infanta Highway near the protected area.

Ann Dumaliang, a trustee and cofounder of the Masungi foundation, said the road was within the conservation area.

Dumaliang said that portion of the road was between the Kaliwa Watershed and the Marikina Watershed, both of which are part of the protected and reforested area being conserved by the foundation under a 2017 agreement with the government.

The armed men, whose firearms were seized by the police, had allegedly intended to take over huge portions of land inside the conservation area.

In an interview with the Inquirer, Dumaliang complained that no arrests were made by the police despite the confiscation of around 15 firearms from the



OASIS The Masungi Georeserve Foundation is keeping watch over this vast protected area in Rizal province. —PHOTO COURTESY OF MASUNGI GEORESERVE FOUNDATION

armed men who as of Tuesday “remain encamped” on Km. 48.

“There are many things that can be done by the government. All of the criminal cases that can be filed against these people, they should exhaust all possible remedies and explore all of them because there are so many ways,” she said, reiterating that arrests should be made by authorities.

She also lamented how the provincial police in Rizal downplayed the incident, only describing the presence of armed men as a “land dispute.”

This prompted her and the rest of the foundation to appoint a project manager mainly tasked to oversee the situation at the protected area.

“This is what will stop all of these from happening and this will allow us to move forward,”

Dumaliang stressed. “The idea has always been to establish a system so that we can restore the watershed and other critical areas in record time.”

The project manager would also help the foundation “resolve the persistent challenges in conserving Masungi landscape in a sustainable manner,” she added.

She also maintained that the presence of armed men, just over a kilometer away from the area, was an “attempt to occupy lands through the use of threat and intimidation.”

The presence of these men, Dumaliang stressed, was already a violation of the National Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 1992. The law imposed penalties and gave “more teeth” to the enforcement of environmental laws. INQ



Masungi seeks BBM help on land-grabbing attempt

BY VICTOR REYES

MASUNGI Georeserve yesterday asked President Marcos Jr. and other government officials to cause the arrest of security guards who remain encamped at the vicinity of the protected area, allegedly planning to take over portions of the government property.

"At this moment, they remain encamped on Km 48," said Masungi in a statement posted on its Facebook page, referring to the security guards from Sinagtala security agency.

On Monday afternoon, Masungi reported that policemen from the Calabarzon regional police office seized unlicensed firearms from the security guards, but no one was arrested.

"For reasons still unknown, the invaders were not arrested for ille-

gal possession of firearms, for possessing and brandishing unlicensed firearms," Masungi said.

It appealed to President Marcos Jr, Environment Secretary Toni Yulo-Loyzaga, Interior Secretary Benjamin Abalos Jr. and PNP chief Gen. Rodolfo Azurin Jr "to look closely into this matter and help us through the following reliefs."

"Immediate arrest, prosecution, and removal of the invaders for trespassing, forcible entry, illegal possession of firearms, and violations of the NIPAS (National Integrated Protected Areas Systems) law. Let us be clear: This is not a land dispute but a typical professional squatting and land grabbing operation on no less than government property," Masungi said on the first relief that should be taken.

It said the DENR must also

"assign a competent, trustworthy, and passionate project manager from its end to help us resolve the persistent challenges in conserving the Masungi landscape in a sustainable manner."

On the last and third relief, Masungi said: "We acknowledge the DENR's statement echoing our stance that a survey plan, whether signed by a DENR official or not, is not a proof of land ownership. However, the DENR must also crack down on possible anomalous acts, prosecute those responsible, and cancel these spurious instruments."

Sinagtala personnel have claimed they have a survey plan under the name of one Beatriz Sonquipal that was reportedly signed by the DENR regional office in the early 2000s.

"There should be a thorough

and independent investigation of why a survey plan was signed by a DENR Regional Director in the first place even if the land was already titled to the Republic," it said.

Masungi said this was not an isolated case, noting that it has uncovered similar survey instruments that are used to sell protected areas and forest lands.

"We have observed that many of these instruments have been issued in direct contravention of standing presidential proclamations and department orders," it said.

"Unfortunately, these survey plans are being used to imply ownership and illegally occupy and trade lands. In this particular case, the land grabber's signature – not that of the real owner which is the Republic – appears in a box reserved for the landowner," Masungi also said.



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needing to monitor everyone, accused kidnapping of 43 of its workers.

Masungi 'invaders' yield 15 guns

BY PAULA ANTOLIN
@tribunephil_paula

Fifteen firearms were seized by elements of the Police Regional Office, 4-A from personnel of the Sinagtala Security Agency on Monday following complaints they have encamped at the Masungi conservation area in Tanay, Rizal.

Acting 4-A regional director P/Brig. Gen. Jose Melencio Nartatez confirmed the confiscation of the security guards' firearms in a social media post of the regional police office.

"PRO 4-A will restore the sense of normalcy in Masungi Georeserve," Nartatez said after the operation of Regional Civil Security Unit 4-A to secure 12 shotguns and three cal. 38 revolvers from the guards detailed at Sitio Pinagtarangkahan in Cuyumbay, Tanay.

The guards failed to present the licenses for the firearms during the inspection ordered by Nartatez in reaction to the complaint of the Masungi Georeserve Foundation that armed men had encamped at the roadside of the Marikina-Infanta Highway.

No arrests

No arrests were made during the retrieval of the guns.

P/Lt. Col. Eunice de Guzman said they have verified that the firearms were licensed except that the guards at the time failed to show them to the RCSU 4-A inspection unit.

"That's why the guns were

confiscated because they couldn't show the docs. RCSU issued a violation ticket for the 15 guns," she told *Daily Tribune*.

On Monday, Philippine National Police chief Gen. Rodolfo Azurin said he ordered police forces to check on the contested property in coordination with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources as the contested property is in a "protected area."

Police 4-A office chief vows to bring normalcy at the protected area in Tanay, Rizal.

A first police patrol in the area proved negative in sighting the armed guards, but a second inspection unit was able to confirm that Sinagtala's personnel in the area had been armed as reported by Masungi Georeserve Foundation project director Ann Dumaliang.

No isolated case

Dumaliang on Sunday claimed that armed men had encamped in the area holding a survey document purported to have been issued by the DENR years back. She earlier referred to the members of the group as "invaders."

"This is not an isolated case or incident. We have uncovered many similar survey instruments being used to sell our protected areas and forest lands," she said, accusing the group

of trying to landgrab.

"We have observed that many of these instruments have been issued in direct contravention of standing presidential proclamations and department orders," Dumaliang added.

She said that the foundation, which the government has engaged to stop encroachment on protected areas, will remain vigilant to stop the further despoliation of the "abused forest lands."

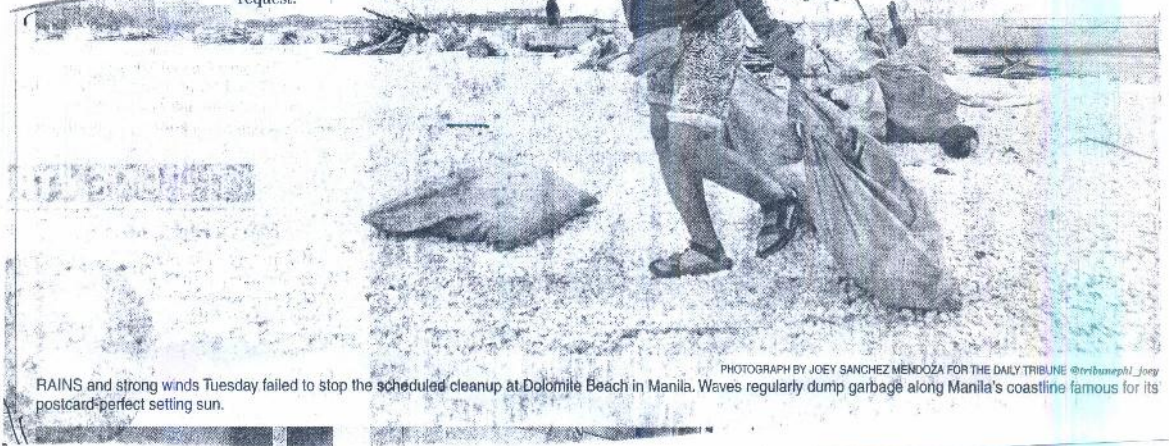
MoA review

Meanwhile, DENR Undersecretary Jonas Leones clarified that a land survey document, like the one which the group that hired Sinagtala purportedly had, cannot serve as a legal basis to claim lands.

"Our information is that there were several attempts to make use of these surveys in the area. But our regional office has rejected them several times because DENR has not yet recognized them," Leones said.

While the DENR acknowledged the assistance of the Masungi Georeserve Foundation in protecting the conservation site, Leones said that the memorandum of agreement between them should be reviewed and revised.

"That is not the issue here as the land is protected area and government property, and must be protected with or without our presence," Dumaliang said in reaction to the statement of the DENR official about the MoA review.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOEY SANCHEZ MENDOZA FOR THE DAILY TRIBUNE @tribunephil_joey
RAINS and strong winds Tuesday failed to stop the scheduled cleanup at Dolomite Beach in Manila. Waves regularly dump garbage along Manila's coastline famous for its postcard-perfect setting sun.



Masungi needs national government's help

BARELY three weeks after my visit to Masungi Georeserve, the foundation had to deal with hostilities from an armed group which claims they have legal rights to occupy the land. Last Sunday, September 18, we saw footage and photos of about 30 armed people occupying the side of the Maharlika-Infanta Highway in the outskirts of the Masungi Georeserve. Before I continue with the story, this area is legally protected from invaders, loggers and landgrabbers by a multitude of laws and agreements.

Presidential Proclamation 1636 enacted by President Ferdinand E. Marcos Sr. in 1977 declares this part which sits on 46,310 hectares of Rizal, as well as specific parts of Bulacan, Laguna and Quezon, a national park, wildlife sanctuary and game free reserve.

Presidential Proclamation 573 from 1969 declares the area as part of the Kaliwa Watershed Forest Reserve. The ecosystem and natural assets of this area must remain protected as they ecologically serve the needs of Antipolo City, Baras, General Nakar, Rodriguez, San Mateo and Tanay.

The Nipas Law of 1991, or Republic Act 7586, defines the management, scope and coverage of the National Integrated Protected Areas System, of which Masungi is a part. Under Section 20, squatting, mineral locating and occupying any land, as well as constructing any structure or fence and conducting any business enterprise, is prohibited.

In 2017, the Masungi Georeserve Foundation and the national government through



URBANISTA

**DAPHNE
OSEÑA PAEZ**

the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, then headed by then Environment Secretary Gina Lopez, entered an agreement for the expansion of the reforestation project. Under this landmark agreement called the Masungi Geopark Project, 3,000 hectares of degraded land was to be restored and reforested by the funds generated from the low-impact ecotourism experiences offered at the Masungi site.

I have been through both the Discovery Trail and Legacy Trail and it was an unforgettable learning experience for me and my children. They saw the degradation of the forest, largely from illegal loggers and poachers. But they also saw a lot of hope in the new native trees they planted themselves. The success of the Masungi Geopark Project has given the group a lot of attention globally — from National Geographic to Vanity Fair to the United Nations. There are collaborations with private sector groups and international agencies. My visit last week was to celebrate the Environmental Champions sponsored by the embassy of Canada in the Philippines.

Masungi has become the darling of reforestation success stories, to be emulated and celebrated in similar environmental crisis areas around the world. Despite all

the high profile attention and support, Masungi continues to be threatened literally and figuratively. Last Sunday's altercation between the armed "invaders" and the young foundation trustees felt like a Netflix crime series unfolding with a cliff-hanging he-said-she-said episode.

The Masungi Foundation said there were more than 30 armed people on site on September 18. On September 19, the Rizal Provincial Office issued a rather lackadaisical statement that said there were only six security guards from Sinagtala Security Service Inc. The press statement said Sinagtala Security were "posted in the said area through the instruction of Biatriz Sonquival (claimant) and the main issue is the land conflict between Masungi and the alleged claimant." (Rizal PPO PIO Facebook Page, Sept. 19, 2022)

A press statement from Masungi, dated September 20, said the "provincial police seemed to downplay the incident and frame it as a common 'land dispute.'" However, at around 2 p.m. on September 19, another police unit found and confiscated several unlicensed firearms inside the camp of the invaders. This was witnessed by our team members and cannot be denied or covered up. For reasons still unknown, the invaders were not arrested for illegal possession of firearms for possessing and brandishing unlicensed firearms. At this moment, they remain encamped on Km 48."

This is where Masungi is while I write this article. Yesterday, I met with Masungi's



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president Ben Dumaliang and his daughter Billie. I expected to see a distraught and desperate pair as they asked for help to get the attention of President Bongbong Marcos, DENR Secretary Toni Loyzaga and Interior Secretary Benhur Abalos. But instead I was greeted by a gracious father and daughter who were prepared with documents, had urgency in their eyes, but were also used to dealing with these threats and abuses which used to be worse before.

The Dumaliangs and Masungi Foundation trustees are hopeful that the lowest hanging fruit — the lack of enforcement of existing laws, most of which President Marcos Jr's father enacted himself — would be immediately addressed once any of them pay a visit to the site. The work is far from over. More varieties of native trees need to be planted and cared for. In Masungi, the model reforestation project, reforestation does not stop with a tree-planting event. Their forest rangers, biologists, tour guides, and volunteers continue guarding the baby trees.

Ben told me the Benguet pine trees in the Legacy Trail were planted by the former first lady Imelda Marcos. Before the reforestation project, the pine trees kept being illegally cut and faced near extinction on site. But since the Geopark Project of 2017, the rare Benguet pine trees have had a chance to propagate seedlings. Perhaps it is time the next generation of Marcoses visit Masungi to see one of the celebrated legacies of their mother and father.



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Masungi Georeserve, ibabalik sa normal - PGen. Nartatez

IPINANGAKO ng Police Regional Office 4A (Pro 4A) na ibabalik nila ang pagiging normal sa Masungi Georeserve, sa Tanay, Rizal.

"Pro 4A will restore the sense of normalcy in Masungi Georeserve," pahayag ni PGen Jose Melencio C. Nartatez, Jr., Acting Regional Director ng Police Regional Office 4A.

Ayon kay Nartatez, bilang tugon ito sa pagkaka-kumpiska ng labinlimang (15) baril mula sa isang security agency na iniulat na nananatili sa protektadong lugar sa Tanay, Rizal.

Base sa mga ulat, nakumpiska ng Regional Civil Security Unit 4A ang labindalawang shotgun at

tatlong cal. 38 pistola mula sa mga security guard na nakadetalye sa Sinagtala Security Agency sa Sitio Pinagtarangkahan, Cuyumbay, Tanay, Rizal, nang hindi makapagpakita ng lisensya habang nag-iinspeksyon.

Isinagawa ang operasyon alinsunod sa direktiba ni ARD Nartatez na puntahan ang lugar kung saan nakita ang mga armadong kalalakihan noong Setyembre 18.

Sa report, isasailalim sa law-enforcement operations ang naturang lugar dahil sa magkasalungat na pag-aangkin ng ari-arian at ang naiulat na presensya ng mga armadong grupo.

(Ernie dela Cruz)



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THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
SINCE 1900
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THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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VOL. 597 NO. 21 • WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2022 • THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS SINCE 1900 IN METRO MANILA P20.00

Marcos: PH without US is unimaginable

Liberalized economy, fiscal incentives dangled to woo American investors

By ARGYLL CYRUS B. GEDUCOS

NEW YORK — President Marcos cannot visualize the Philippines' future without the United States as its partner in politics and economy.

Marcos stressed this at the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), where he was invited and given the opportunity to ring the closing bell on Sept. 19 (New York time).

In a short exchange with NYSE vice chairman John Tut- ▶ 11



PBBM AT NYSE — President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. (fourth from right) bangs the gavel after ringing the closing bell at the New York Stock Exchange on Sept. 19, 2022 in New York. From left are Speaker Martin Romualdez, Trade and Industry Secretary Alfredo Pascual, and First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos, and Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno (second from right, partly hidden).

Marcos: PH without US is unimaginable

the, the President said the US is a vital player in his vision of the Philippines moving forward.

"It is very clear to me in my vision for the way that the country will move forward that I cannot see the Philippines in the future without having the United States as partner," he said. "Although I was referring to the geopolitics of it, and I was referring to the political situation in the region and around the world, that certainly does continue to apply in our exchanges on the economic front."

Marcos noted the role of the US in the Philippines and in the lives of Filipinos.

"It is something that I can see as becoming stronger and becoming more robust as we work together toward the new ... toward exploiting properly the new global economy," he said.

President Marcos said many of the Philippines' early economic drivers were American corporations. The strongest corporate benefactors to the government and the Philippine society came from the US.

"Now, of course, this has evolved as time has gone on, but the strength of this relationship continues," he said. "We envision further strengthening of these relationships."

Marcos said the political, economic, and diplomatic ties arising from the Philippines' partnership with other countries are essential to economic and political stability.

"In this highly unstable economic, political, geopolitical, diplomatic environment, this is something that is central to our thinking when it comes to economic planning for the Philippines," he said.

According to Marcos, the Philippines has adjusted to how it does business at the behest of its friends in the US and American businesses already in the Philippines.

"I think that will give us great opportunities in the future and

for both our countries, for private corporations, for government-to-government agreements and arrangements," he said. "It is something that we feel can actually be achieved. So the United States has always been central to that."

President Marcos' stand regarding the US is completely different from that of his predecessor, former President Rodrigo Duterte, who focused on building stronger ties with China and Russia under his independent foreign policy.

Invest in PH

In his speech before ringing the closing bell, President Marcos shared with US business leaders how the Philippines is ramping up efforts to open the economy and accelerate post-pandemic recovery.

"Bouncing back from the pandemic, the Philippine economy has seen robust growth since last year and has returned to its path toward upper-middle-income country status, achievable within the next few years," said Marcos, the first Philippine president to ring NYSE's closing bell after then President Benigno Aquino III did the same gesture eight years ago.

Marcos said the country increased the scope for mutually beneficial investments that would mean more jobs and better quality of life.

"For investors, doing business in the Philippines is an opportunity to reap the benefits of a vibrant economy," he said.

Marcos cited laws that further liberalize the economy, such as lowering corporate income tax rates and rationalizing fiscal incentives.

He added that the country had reduced the minimum paid-up capital requirements for foreign retailers and startups bringing in advanced technology and allowed full foreign ownership of companies providing public services.

Incentives

According to the President, this wide range of fiscal and non-fiscal incentives makes the Philippines a key investment destination. He assured them that the Philippines is committed to maintaining sound macroeconomic fundamentals.

"In the near-term, our top pri-

orities are protecting the purchasing power of families by managing inflation, reducing the scarring effects of the pandemic, and ensuring sound macroeconomic fundamentals," he said.

Marcos likewise said that his administration is keen on implementing policies that enhance food security, reduce energy, transport, and logistics costs, strengthen social protection, and enhance the quality of education and skills of workers.

"As we pursue our short-term agenda, we build the foundations for a stronger, more inclusive future," he said.

"Our medium-term agenda includes reducing the poverty rate to single digits by 2028 and undergoing an industrial transformation through which science, technology, innovation, and sustainability will drive our industries," he added.

President Marcos said despite "external headwinds," the Philippine economy's resilience, reinforced by sound policies and decisive leadership, "makes us confident about the future."

House Speaker Martin Romualdez, Marcos' cousin, also made a solid investment pitch before US business leaders.

"Thank you for giving an opportunity to the Marcos administration and for considering the President's agenda and vision. We are open to broadening and strengthening the economic partnership with the Philippine government. Let us continue to promote mutually beneficial trade and investment relationships," Romualdez said when he delivered a keynote message at the NYSE economic forum.

"Rest assured that we, in the Philippine House of Representatives, remain committed to enacting laws that would help deepen cooperation with the (US), particularly in the areas of supply chain, health and security, environment and climate change, energy security, and interconnectivity."

Romualdez said Congress has been working very hard with the Chief Executive to introduce reforms and attract more foreign investors. (With a report from Ellison A. Quismorito)



FIGHTER ESCORTS — Two FA-50 fighter jets from the Philippine Air Force (PAF) escorted the Philippine Airlines aircraft, bearing President Ferdinand "Bangbang" Marcos Jr. and his entourage, on its way to New York, United States, where the President is set to address the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on Sept. 20, 2022. The fighter jets escorted the President's plane from the country's eastern front starting over Polilio Island all the way up to 200 nautical miles. (Photo from FB page of PAF Chief Lt. Gen. Connor Anthony Canlas Sr.)



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Hindi talaga mauubos basura Paul's Alarm sa Manila Bay



By Paul Gutierrez

LUMITAW muli ang mga pangit na tanawin sa Manila Bay matapos ang sunud-sunod na sama ng panahon.

Tulad ng dati, inaanod pa rin ang mga basura dito kaya naman puspusan muli ang paglilinis at nagtawag pa nga ng clean up drive para dito.

Matapos itong linisin at pagandahin ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) sa pangunguna siyempre ni dating DENR Usec. Benny Antiporda nakakalungkot na tila unti-unting bumabalik ang dumi dito.

Hindi lamang ito sa panahon ngayon ng tagulan at sama ng panahon, pero napansin na natin noon pa man ang pagiging malamya ng kasalukuyang pamunuan sa paglilinis dito.

Pero ang mas nagiging problema ngayon ay ang palagian na lamang pagdumi ng Manila Bay tuwing may sama ng panahon kung saan dito inaanod ang mga basura.

Isa lamang ang ibig sabihin nito na tuluy-tuloy pa rin ang pagdudumi sa Manila Bay. Ibig sabihin wala ring konkretong ginagawa ngayon ang DENR at maging ang mga lokal na gobyerno na nakapalibot dito para masigurong malinis ang kabuuan nito.

Hanggang ngayon, mula nang maupo ang bagong pamunuan ng DENR, hindi pa tayo nakakita ng konkretong aksyon sa paglilinis ng Pasig River. Tandaan natin na ang mga basurang inaanod sa ilog na ito ay dumidiretso sa Manila Bay. Kaya hanggang hindi nalilinis ang Pasig River hindi rin natin malilinis ang Manila Bay.

At anu-ano naman ang ginagawa ng DENR upang pangunahan ang pagtitiyak na nagiging malinis ito? Wala po tayong nakikita na aksyon o pangunahan man lang sa tulong ng mga lokal na gobyerno na matiyak ang kalinisan nito.

Sa tutuusin lamang po,

tanaw po sa bintana ng National Press Club na katabi lamang ng Pasig River ang mga basurang inaanod dito. Nakakalungkot dahil tila hindi ito lubhang napapahalagahan at hindi nakikita ang potensiyal nito.

Dahil maliban sa basura, kung malilinis mabuti ang Manila Bay ay malaking potensiyal din ito para sa transportasyon at siympre, sa turismo.

Kung mapapakinabangan ito, mas makakatulong ito sa mga mamamayan na makaiwas sa trapiko.

Oo, mayroon tayong mga ferry station pero maliban sa kulang ang mga biyahe nito na kailangan mo pang maghintay ng mahigit 30 minuto kung maiwanan ka ng ferry ay hindi sa mga estratehikong lugar nakalagay ang mga istasyon nito.

Kaya naman hindi ito nagiging popular sa mga mamamayan dahil sa ganitong katangian ng Pasig River na maliban sa madumi ay talaga naman hindi nagiging kaaya-aya sa mga pasahero.

Habang hindi nakikitang problema ang Pasig

River at hindi nagawang mabuti ng DENR ang kaniyang trabaho, hindi po magiging malinis ang Manila Bay. Magsasawa tayo ng mga clean up drive pero mananatiling band-aid solution lamang lagi ito.

Hindi na nga natin mabilang kung nakailang clean up drive na ang Manila Bay pero nananatiling marumi pa rin.

Maraming dahilan na maaari tayong sabihin pero hindi maiaalis na sa huli trabaho pa rin itong DENR na matiyak na gumagana ang mga batas at ahensiya ng gobyerno na nagsisiyuro sa kalinisan hindi lamang ng Manila Bay.

Kailangang palakasin ng DENR ang mga pangmatagalang programa kasama ang mga lokal at ahensiya ng gobyerno na nakapalibot sa Manila Bay kung gusto nitong matiyak na kung hindi managarang malinis ay unti-unting masolusyunan ang polusyon dito.

Kung hindi magawang masiguro ng DENR ang kalinisan sa Manila Bay pa lamang, paano na kaya ang kalagayan ng kalinisan ng buong Pilipinas na nasa mandato nito?



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'HABAGAT' — Clouds hang heavy overhead as Department of Environment and Resources (DENR) workers clear away pieces of wood and garbage washed up on Manila Bay Dolomite Beach due to the southwest monsoon or habagat on Tuesday, Sept. 20, 2022. It has been raining for days due to habagat. (Manny Llanes)



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UNSIGHTLY GARBAGE AT SNOW-WHITE DOLOMITE BEACH. A volunteer lugs away a sack full of garbage that washed up onto the dolomite beach along Roxas Blvd. from scenic Manila Bay. **Norman Cruz**



MGA BASURA, BALIK-DOLOMITE BEACH

LUMUTANG ang samu't saring basura sa Dolomite Beach, Maynila.

Tumambad sa mga namamasyal ang mga plastic, styro, kahoy. Nakatambak din lang sa gilid ng artificial beach ang mga sakong may mga kahoy at iba pang

basura na nakuha rin sa lugar.

Matatandang nitong weekend lamang ay nalinis ang mga volunteer at government agencies para sa International Coastal Cleanup Day. Puspusan ang paglilinis ng mga tauhan ng Metro Manila Development Au-

thority sa lugar. "Ang pinakamabigat dito, yung mga troso. Minsan, may mga puno, kawayan na malalaki. Katulad n'yan, ilang balik na kaming hakot n'yan," ani Ricardo Mallari, isa sa mga naglilinis sa Dolomite Beach.
(Mylene Alfonso)



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Ang sako-sakong basura na nahakot sa Manila
Dolomite Beach sa Roxas Blvd., Maynila. (Jonas Sulit)



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REIMATE OPINION



ANGINYONG LINGKOD

NI DR. HILDA C. ONG

PCG, PCGA AT NWRB NAKIISA SA INTERNATIONAL COASTAL CLEAN UP 2022

UMABOT sa halos isang libong sako ng non-biodegradable waste materials ang nakuha ng mga tauhan ng PCG o Philippine Coast Guard at ng Philippine Coast Guard Auxiliary o PCGA sa kanilang pakikibahagi sa ginanap na International Coastal Clean-up sa Manila Baywalk Dolomite Beach sa lungsod ng

Maynila nitong nagdaang Sabado, September 17 na may temang "Fighting for Trash Free-Seas, Pilipinas!"

Ikinalungkot ni CG rear admiral Robert Patrimonio, commander, Marine Environmental Protection Command, ang mga nakuhang basura na kinabibilangan ng plastic bottles, slippers, cigarette butts,

plastic cups, shampoo at iba't ibang sachet, food and candy wrappers, diapers, at face masks na maaari naman sanang naitapon ng maayos at hindi na napunta pa sa Manila Bay.

Tumulong din ang PCG Auxiliary Executive Squadron, Manila Chinese Action Team, mga tauhan ng Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, Climate Change Commission, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, National Water Resources Board, Manila Water, Maynilad Water at Office of the Vice President. Nagkaroon din ng coastal clean-up sa 13 coastal guard districts, 54 coast guard stations, at 190 coast guard sub-stations sa buong bansa. Isinasagawa ang International Coastal Clean-up tuwing ikatlong Sabado sa buwan ng Setyembre alinsunod sa Pre-sidential Proclamation No. 470.

Layon nito na maitaas ang antas ng kaalaman ng publiko at makuha ang kanilang suporta para sa pagpapanatili ng kalinisan ng mga baybayin, dalampasigan, look o anumang anyong tubig ng bansa.

Ayon sa United Nations Environment Program, isa ang Pilipinas sa "world's worst offenders on marine plastic pollution" kung saan 20% ng kabuuang 2.7 million tons ng basura ay napupunta sa mga karagatan, dagat, look at mga ilog.

Sumabay ang coastal clean-up sa obserbasyon ngayong taon ng Maritime Archipelagic Nation Awareness Month at sa 23rd Maritime Week ayon sa Presidential Proclamation No. 316 at No. 866.



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Marcos: PH without US is unimaginable

Liberalized economy, fiscal incentives dangled to woo American investors

By ARGVLL CYRUS B. GEDUCOS

NEW YORK — President Marcos cannot visualize the Philippines' future without the United States as its partner in politics and economy.

Marcos stressed this at the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), where he was invited and given the opportunity to ring the closing bell on Sept. 19 (New York time).

In a short exchange with NYSE vice chairman John Tut- ▶ 11



PBBM AT NYSE — President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. (fourth from right) bangs the gavel after ringing the closing bell at the New York Stock Exchange on Sept. 19, 2022 in New York. From left are Speaker Martin Romualdez, Trade and Industry Secretary Alfredo Pascual, and First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos, and Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno (second from right, partly hidden).

Marcos: PH without US is unimaginable ◀

tle, the President said the US is a vital player in his vision of the Philippines moving forward.

"It is very clear to me in my vision for the way that the country will move forward that I cannot see the Philippines in the future without having the United States as partner," he said. "Although I was referring to the geopolitics of it, and I was referring to the political situation in the region and around the world, that certainly does continue to apply in our exchanges on the economic front."

Marcos noted the role of the US in the Philippines and in the lives of Filipinos.

"It is something that I can see as becoming stronger and becoming more robust as we work together toward the new ... toward exploiting properly the new global economy," he said.

President Marcos said many of the Philippines' early economic drivers were American corporations. The strongest corporate benefactors to the government and the Philippine society came from the US.

"Now, of course, this has evolved as time has gone on, but the strength of this relationship continues," he said. "We envision further strengthening of these relationships."

Marcos said the political, economic, and diplomatic ties arising from the Philippines' partnership with other countries are essential to economic and political stability.

"In this highly unstable economic, political, geopolitical, diplomatic environment, this is something that is central to our thinking when it comes to economic planning for the Philippines," he said.

According to Marcos, the Philippines has adjusted to how it does business at the behest of its friends in the US and American businesses already in the Philippines.

"I think that will give us great opportunities in the future and

for both our countries, for private corporations, for government-to-government agreements and arrangements," he said. "It is something that we feel can actually be achieved. So the United States has always been central to that."

President Marcos' stand regarding the US is completely different from that of his predecessor, former President Rodrigo Duterte, who focused on building stronger ties with China and Russia under his independent foreign policy.

Invest in PH

In his speech before ringing the closing bell, President Marcos shared with US business leaders how the Philippines is ramping up efforts to open the economy and accelerate post-pandemic recovery.

"Bouncing back from the pandemic, the Philippine economy has seen robust growth since last year and has returned to its path toward upper-middle-income country status, achievable within the next few years," said Marcos, the first Philippine president to ring NYSE's closing bell after then President Benigno Aquino III did the same gesture eight years ago.

Marcos said the country increased the scope for mutually beneficial investments that would mean more jobs and better quality of life.

"For investors, doing business in the Philippines is an opportunity to reap the benefits of a vibrant economy," he said.

Marcos cited laws that further liberalize the economy, such as lowering corporate income tax rates and rationalizing fiscal incentives.

He added that the country had reduced the minimum paid-up capital requirements for foreign retailers and startups bringing in advanced technology and allowed full foreign ownership of companies providing public services.

Incentives

According to the President, this wide range of fiscal and non-fiscal incentives makes the Philippines a key investment destination. He assured them that the Philippines is committed to maintaining sound macroeconomic fundamentals.

"In the near-term, our top pri-

orities are protecting the purchasing power of families by managing inflation, reducing the scarring effects of the pandemic, and ensuring sound macroeconomic fundamentals," he said.

Marcos likewise said that his administration is keen on implementing policies that enhance food security, reduce energy, transport, and logistics costs, strengthen social protection, and enhance the quality of education and skills of workers.

"As we pursue our short-term agenda, we build the foundations for a stronger, more inclusive future," he said.

"Our medium-term agenda includes reducing the poverty rate to single digits by 2028 and undergoing an industrial transformation through which science, technology, innovation, and sustainability will drive our industries," he added.

President Marcos said despite "external headwinds," the Philippine economy's resilience, reinforced by sound policies and decisive leadership, "makes us confident about the future."

House Speaker Martin Romualdez, Marcos' cousin, also made a solid investment pitch before US business leaders.

"Thank you for giving an opportunity to the Marcos administration and for considering the President's agenda and vision. We are open to broadening and strengthening the economic partnership with the Philippine government. Let us continue to promote mutually beneficial trade and investment relationships," Romualdez said when he delivered a keynote message at the NYSE economic forum. "Rest assured that we, in the Philippine House of Representatives, remain committed to enacting laws that would help deepen cooperation with the [US], particularly in the areas of supply chain, health and security, environment and climate change, energy security, and interconnectivity."

Romualdez said Congress has been working very hard with the Chief Executive to introduce reforms and attract more foreign investors. (With a report from Ellson A. Quismorio)



Marcos in talks with US nuclear firm

PRESIDENT Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. on Monday (Tuesday in Manila) met with top executives of US-based NuScale Power, signaling his determination to bring nuclear power to the Philippines.

Marcos, who is in the US for a six-day official visit, held a series of dialogues

with three American-based companies in New York, including NuScale Power, an American energy firm that offers advanced nuclear technology.

Founded in 2007, NuScale aims to provide scalable advanced nuclear technology for the production of electricity, heat and

clean water.

Philippine Ambassador to the US Jose Manuel Romualdez earlier said that the country will look into the possible use of modular nuclear power plants, claimed to be the future of clean energy.

Romualdez said the US had offered

the power plants and that it is being developed "rapidly."

"So, we are seriously going to look into it. I think President Marcos is quite excited about it. As a matter of fact, I think NuScale, which is a company developing

➤ **TalksA8**

■ TALKS FROM A1

Marcos in talks with US nuclear firm

this technology, is now having a partnership with the local energy company here in the Philippines," Romualdez said in an earlier television interview.

Marcos previously expressed his desire to adopt nuclear energy as part of the country's power mix and the need to build new power plants.

In his State of the Nation Ad-

dress in July, the President said that should the country opt to use nuclear energy under his term, the government will use the guidelines adopted by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"I believe that it is time also to reexamine our strategy towards building nuclear power plants in the Philippines. We will comply, of course, with the International Atomic Energy Agency regulations for nuclear power plants as they have been strengthened after Fukushima," Marcos told lawmakers.

He admitted that while innovations would allow power plants to utilize nuclear energy on a smaller scale, funding could be an issue.

"In the area of nuclear power, there have been new technologies developed that [allow] smaller scale, modular, nuclear plants and other derivations thereof. Once again, PPPs will play a part in support as funding in this period is limited," he added.

Marcos' father, former president Ferdinand E. Marcos Sr., was one of the proponents of nuclear energy.

The Bataan Nuclear Power Plant, the country's first and only nuclear power plant, was unused for fear of accidents.

Marcos also had a dialogue with California-based company WasteFuel which produces renewable fuels through proven technologies.

In a bid to address climate emergency and revolutionize mobility, WasteFuel converts municipal and agricultural waste into low-carbon fuels, renewable natural gas and green methanol.

WasteFuel's first project in development for aviation fuel is in the Philippines, partnering with infrastructure developer Prime Infrastructure and NetJets.

The President also had a meeting with top officials of Boeing.

CATHERINE S. VALENTE



SEC's climate change and sustainable finance initiatives

LAST August 31, I had the honor to speak at an exclusive climate change training for GT Capital Holdings Inc. that was organized by the Institute of Corporate Directors. Other distinguished speakers also attended the training, which covered topics on the importance of environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria on climate change, case studies on the impact of climate change on the Philippines and businesses, and climate risk measurements, among others.

I would like to share what I said in my presentation, which primarily focused on the Securities and Exchange Commission's (SEC) existing and new policies on climate change and sustainable finance.

I read in one article that the Philippines is one of the countries most at risk with climate change. According to the Global Climate Risk Index report by Germanwatch released in 2021, the Philippines was the fourth out of 180 countries most affected by extreme weather from 2000 to 2019. In those 20 years, the group recorded 317 extreme weather events in the Philippines, the highest among the top 10 countries with high scores in the climate risk index. The scores indicate levels of exposure and vulnerabilities of countries to extreme weather events. Data like this just shows you the imperative for all of us to take action.

Focus on sustainable finance has been increasing in the last couple of years. Now, the campaign on promoting sustainable finance plays a huge role in the sense that it serves as a major catalyst toward the transition to a circular econo-



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my, which helps create sustainable investments, reduces the impacts on the environment and achieves sustainable development goals in the Philippines while adhering to international climate and sustainability objectives.

In line with this, the Philippines has committed to achieving universal sustainability targets like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as well as national policies and programs like Ambisyon Natin 2040. The Philippines likewise fostered additional policies and initiatives, such as the Philippine Sustainable Finance Roadmap, to achieve the country's international, regional and local commitments, and strengthen the current initiatives in developing sustainable finance in the Philippines. The roadmap is designed to lay out the strategic action plan of the whole government to promote sustainable finance in the Philippines and to address climate change and other environmental and social risks.

To fully support sustainability initiatives in the Philippines and the Asean region, the SEC has issued rules to promote investments in ESG products and to encourage sustainable business practices by introducing new and innovative investment products and platforms to accelerate the shift to sustainable and inclusive finance. In 2018, the SEC adopted

the Asean Green Bond Standards and provided the rules and procedures for its issuance. In 2019, the SEC also issued the guidelines on the issuance of social and sustainability bonds in line with the Asean Social Bond Standards and Asean Sustainability Bond Standards.

Such adoption of the issuance of Asean-labelled Green, Social and Sustainability (GSS) Bonds mobilized the capital market to finance initiatives for social development and environmental protection. As of July 31, 2022, the country remains one of the leading countries in the region to issue Asean-labelled GSS bonds, next only to Thailand. Of the \$26.40 billion in GSS bonds issued, \$6.77 billion or 26 percent were issued by Philippine companies.

The SEC also aims to take measures through the issuance of draft rules to enhance the disclosures and transparency of sustainability-related products to improve comparability between funds that incorporate ESG into the investment process such as draft rules on sustainable and responsible investment funds to provide disclosures and reporting guidance to investment companies classified as Sustainable and Responsible Investment Funds.

Meanwhile, in 2019, the SEC issued the Sustainability Reporting Guidelines for Publicly-Listed Companies (SR guidelines). Currently, the SEC's Corporate Governance and Finance Department is working on revising the SR guidelines to assess the preparedness of publicly listed companies (PLCs) toward adopting a mandatory ap-

proach to certain disclosures.

In the future, the SEC intends to adopt a mandatory approach to sustainability reporting for PLCs. As I mentioned a while ago, the SEC currently still adopts a "comply or explain" approach to sustainability reporting. This will now be aligned with other Asean jurisdictions, such as Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, where sustainability reporting is mandatory for listed companies. Second, the SEC hopes to introduce the same requirement to all types of corporations and not just PLCs on a "comply or explain" basis. The third one is to finally adopt a mandatory approach to sustainability reporting for all types of corporations.

In addition to that, the SEC adopts international best practices and participates in global development initiatives as a member of international organizations such as the Asean Capital Markets Forum.

I hope this will give the public a good idea of what the commission focuses on to realize its vision of a sustainable future for the coming generations. Rest assured that we at the commission are working hard to enact change that will be good for the environment, the business sector, the general public, our stakeholders, and ultimately, the country.

Kelvin Lester K. Lee is a commissioner of the Securities and Exchange Commission. The views and opinions stated here are his own. You may email your comments and questions to oclee@sec.gov.ph.



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The world is in great peril, UN chief warns

UNITED NATIONS: Warning that the world is in "great peril," the head of the United Nations said leaders meeting in person for the first time in three years must tackle conflicts and climate catastrophes, increasing poverty and

inequality and address divisions among major powers that have gotten worse since Russia invaded Ukraine.

In speeches and remarks leading up to the start of the leaders' meeting Tuesday,

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres cited the "immense" task not only of saving the planet, "which is literally on fire," but of dealing with the persisting Covid-19 pandemic. He

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The world

also pointed to "a lack of access to finance for developing countries to recover — a crisis not seen in a generation" that has seen ground lost for education, health and women's rights.

Guterres will deliver his "state of the world" speech at Tuesday's opening of the annual high-level global gathering. UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said it would be "a sober, substantive and solutions-focused report card" for a world "where geopolitical divides are putting all of us at risk."

"There will be no sugar-coating in his remarks, but he will outline reasons for hope," Dujarric told reporters Monday (Tuesday in Manila).

The 77th General Assembly meeting of world leaders convenes under the shadow of Europe's first major war since World War 2 — the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which has unleashed a global food crisis and opened fissures among major powers in a way not seen since the Cold War.

Yet nearly 150 heads of state and government are on the latest speakers' list. That's a sign that despite the fragmented state of the planet, the United Nations remains the key gathering place for presidents, prime ministers, monarchs and ministers to not only deliver their views but to meet privately to discuss the challenges on the global agenda — and hopefully make some progress.

At the top of that agenda for many: Russia's February 24 invasion of Ukraine, which not only threatens the sovereignty of its smaller neighbor but has raised fears of a nuclear catastrophe at Europe's largest nuclear plant in the country's now Russia-occupied southeast.

Leaders in many countries are trying to prevent a wider war and restore peace in Europe. Diplomats, though, aren't expecting any breakthroughs this week.

The loss of important grain and fertilizer exports from Ukraine and Russia has triggered a food crisis, especially in developing countries, and inflation and a rising cost of living in many others. Those issues are high on the agenda.

At a meeting Monday to promote UN goals for 2030 — including ending extreme poverty, ensuring quality education for all children and achieving gender equality — Guterres said the world's many pressing perils make it "tempting to put our long-term development priorities to one side."

But he said some things can't wait — among them education, dignified jobs, full equality for women and girls, comprehensive health care and action to tackle the climate crisis. He called for public and private finance and investment, and above all for peace.

The global gathering, known as the



Dev't of resource-based sectors to fuel economic growth – PCCI

The government should push for the development of resource-based sectors such as mining and pursue agrarian reform as these are seen to help drive economic growth.

During the forum for the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) conducted by the National Economic and Development Authority for the private sector, Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) president George Barcelon said there is a need for the government to focus on key areas and implement programs to bolster economic growth.

He said the government should reinvigorate resource-based sectors such as oil exploration and mining.

"We have one of the biggest resources of minerals that we have not really tapped," he said.

In addition, he said the government should pursue agrarian reform to increase the productivity of the agricultural sector.

"Our productivity in agriculture will not improve if the farmers are limited to one and a half hectares. We need to have agrarian reform," he said.

While the government has focused on attracting foreign investments mainly in services and manufacturing, he said it is about time to encourage firms to invest in agriculture, especially as the country imports food items.

"We import a lot of agricultural products for our needs. So, there is a concern on food dependency. The market is here. Why not invite people who want to invest in the agriculture sector?" he said.

University of the Philippines (UP) School of Economics professor Renato Reside said in a separate webinar the country should further develop the agribusiness sector given risks such as high inflation and climate change.

"We need to develop the agribusiness sector further because of the following looming conditions on the horizon," he said.

By developing agribusiness, he said the country would be able to reduce the inflation risk moving forward.

He said developing agribusiness would lower food prices, alleviate supply constraints and insulate the country against future shocks.

Reside also said there is a need to further develop agribusiness as climate change threatens to damage agricultural production.

To develop agribusiness and improve agricultural production, he said among the ingredients is to improve connectivity to markets, storage and post-harvest facilities, mechanize processes and improve seeds.

He said this would also involve applying research and technology to the production process, climate-proofing the process, improving land use planning and tapping opportunities presented by cooperatives.

In addition, the government can work with UP and other universities to enhance productivity of yields, product quality, and lower unit costs of production.

Reside said improving agricultural productivity would likewise entail strengthening business conditions through ease of doing business and reducing regulatory and legal business risks.

Barcelon said the government should also focus on enhancing education, addressing climate change, as well as improving the health care system.

He said the private sector would be willing to work with the government in programs to promote economic growth.

The NEDA is conducting a forum on the PDP, which serves as the government's overall guide for development for the next six years, to gather inputs from stakeholders.

Following the sessions with the youth and private sector, the NEDA is set to hold a PDP forum with planners on Sept. 23.

– Louella Desiderio



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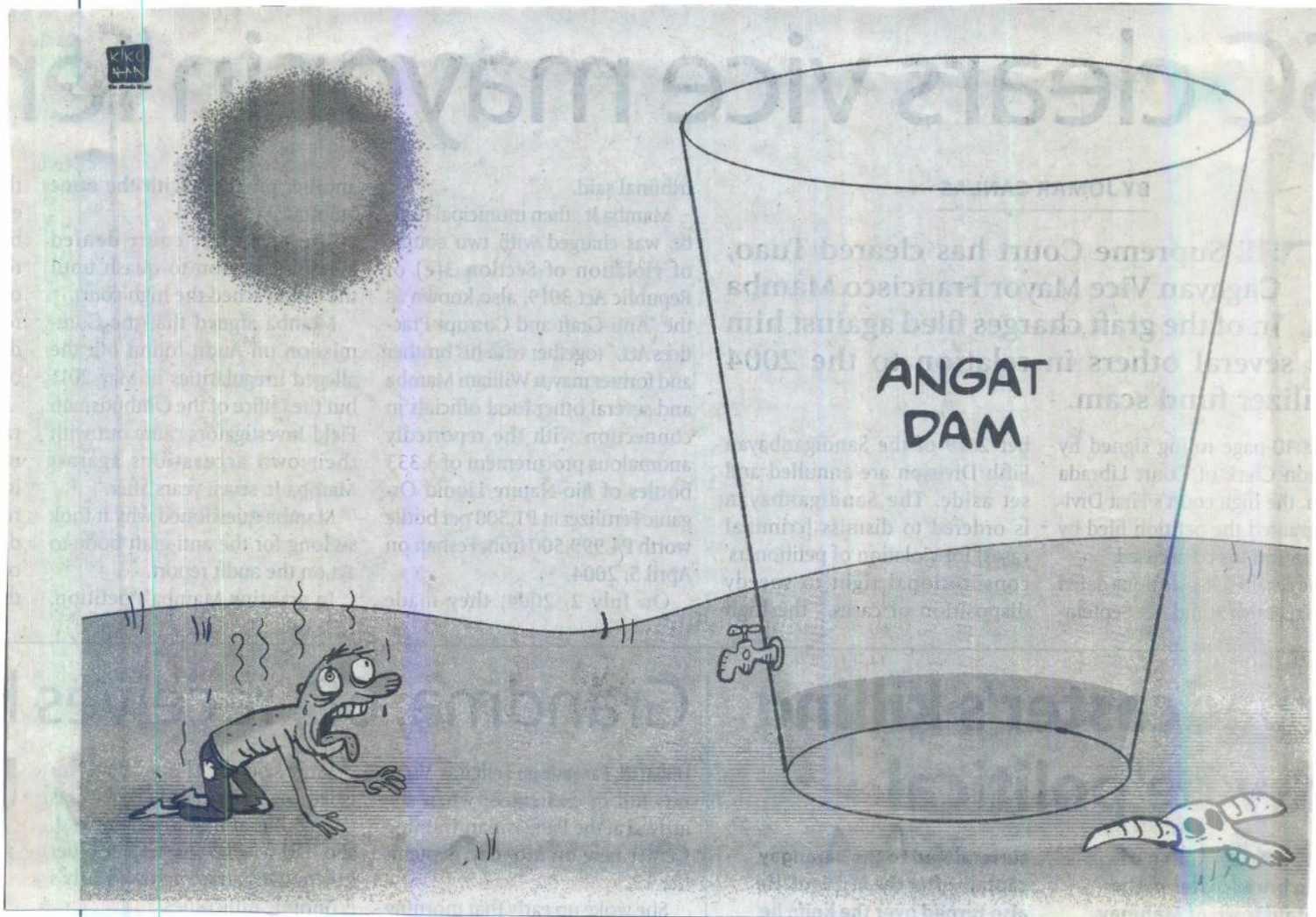
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Partnerships vital for PH water security

GOVERNMENT partnerships with financial institutions and infrastructure providers, as well as financing for small and medium enterprises, should be prioritized to create and promote access to safe water and sanitation in the Philippines, experts said.

Despite its growing economy, the Philippines faces significant challenges in terms of water and sanitation access. The country is rapidly urbanizing, and its growing cities struggle to provide new residents with adequate water and sanitation services.

According to the United States Agency for International Development, about 12 million Filipinos do not have access to safe drinking water, and 80 percent of the population is not connected to wastewater treatment services.

During the "Sustainable Path to Water Security for the Philippines" forum on Tuesday, Rich Thorsten, chief insight officer of Water.org, highlighted how his organization has helped increase access to water supply and sanitation services for underserved communities across the world. The Financial Executives Institute of the Philippines, Management Association of the Philippines, Water.org and Accralaw were behind the event.

Water.org is a nonprofit organization providing aid to developing countries that do not have access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

"This is a global health crisis ... It's estimated that every day, more than 200 million are wasted mostly by women and girls collecting water or finding places to use them every single day. And it's ... making a valuable crisis. It's estimated that over \$300 billion are lost every single year, largely by people living in poverty, who don't have access



■ Rich Thorsten, chief insight officer of Water.org, speaks during the 'Sustainable Path to Water Security for the Philippines' forum on Tuesday, Sept. 20, 2022.

PHOTO BY J. GERARD SEGUIA

to water and sanitation services solutions," Thorsten said.

To help address the crisis, he said Water.org identified gaps and opportunities in various dimensions of water and sanitation. "Principally, it is a financing and funding crisis in the way that we look at it. Globally, it's estimated that roughly \$200 billion is needed in investments every year to meet the Sustainable Development Goals," Thorsten added.

Unfortunately for the Philippines, water adversities will only increase in the face of climate change, which is expected to further exacerbate ecological imbalances as climate variability becomes the new normal. But there will always be a way, according to Thorsten.

By applying a systems approach that strengthens linkages between upstream and downstream stakeholders across all provinces in the Philippines, he said the country will be able to increase access to resilient water supply and sanitation services, improve sustainable management of water resources and strengthen water sector governance.

"[We need to prioritize] downstream partnerships ... [we have] partner-

ships with financial institutions and infrastructure providers ... We worked with many financial institutions in the Philippines and around the world to create and promote access to safe water and sanitation through financing through micro loans, through loans to small and medium enterprises ... And then on the upstream side, we worked with capital providers," Thorsten said.

Collaboration for infrastructure

He also said the key to water security is collaboration with the infrastructure sector who work with utilities and small and medium enterprises.

To date, Water.org has mobilized over \$4 billion in investment capital around the world, including roughly \$250 million in the Philippines toward water and sanitation solutions.

"We've reached 50 million people, most of which has been in the last five years, globally, and of that 6 million people are people that live here in the Philippines. So we're very proud about that. But we also know that there's much more to do to mobilize billions of foreign investment and reach millions of more people with water and sanitation solutions," said Thorsten.

Latest climate projections up to 2050 suggest that the Philippines will become warmer, with increasing temperature and decreasing rainfall during the dry season and more extreme rainfall events during the wet season. The intermittent water supply in parts of the country will only continue to bring serious consequences to the health of the affected people who are still reeling from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. **EIRENE JAIREE GOMEZ**



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Eating without consuming the world

Indeed, we live in a world full of competing interests and disagreements. Yet despite this, there is one underlying, unifying interest that we all share. It is in all our interests to have access to safe, affordable, and nutritious food at all times.

The question is will there be enough food for all in the near future, and will it be produced sustainably? The answer is not so affirmative without immediate action. Despite our common interest, this region is backsliding into greater hunger and malnutrition. According to one recent United Nations report, Asia and the Pacific is so off track, it would need an additional 35 years to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals—in 2065.

Some of the backslidings are obvious. This year, in Asia and the Pacific, we've witnessed droughts and floods, the highest food prices in decades, an armed conflict in Eastern Europe, and a lingering COVID-19 pandemic that continues to threaten health, disrupts supply chains and livelihoods. Together, these have resulted in a crisis of five "Fs"—lack of food, feed, fuel, fertilizer, and finance, and it's predicted there could be reductions in cereal output next year due to fertilizer shortages in some countries in the region.

But even before these crises, successive annual reports of the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) flagship publication, the State of Food Security and Nutrition, were warning the fight against hunger and malnutrition was stalling, and then failing.

In 2021, more than 400 million people in Asia-Pacific were malnourished, most of them in South Asia. In fact, of the billions of people in this region, 40 percent cannot afford a healthy diet. For decades, as the world's population grew, we took our collective eye off the agrifood systems ball. The world was producing enough food, and there was little political appetite to upset the apple cart. Our agrifood systems were (and still are) a complex, interdependent system, of planting, har-

vesting, transporting, processing, marketing, and consuming.

The wake-up call came two years ago with the arrival of a global pandemic. While food production didn't come to a halt, the lockdowns and supply chain disruptions that followed took a serious toll on this interdependent system. For those of us in Asia and the Pacific, the pandemic and fallout were happening in tandem with other huge disrupters such as climate change, natural disasters, hazards, and risks that account for 60 percent of global fatalities and 40 percent of economic losses. And so it became clear, we urgently needed to fix our agrifood systems by transforming them to withstand shocks and disruptions, and also use this as an opportunity to make nutritious foods and healthy diets more accessible and affordable for all.

Last year, the UN Food Systems Summit in New York was the world's first major attempt to move these plans forward. Now it's time to get that transformation underway on the ground in our Asia-Pacific region. In other words, it's time to roll up our sleeves and build a better apple cart. But it will take more than just a few of us to do that. Governments in our region must act through leadership. Asia-Pacific's private sector, among leaders in technology and innovation, must broaden its customer base to provide affordable solutions to the region's smallholders. Civil society, while continuing its important role as watchdog, must work more proactively with policymakers and the private sector. Academia must accelerate its research, while resource partners must make this transformation their top priority because to achieve this massive transformation, our region, in-

deed the world, must literally put its money where its mouth is.

More than 80 percent of the world's smallholders and family farmers live off the land in this region, and their interests and livelihoods must be safeguarded. Social safety nets and reskilling programs to improve employment prospects should form an important part of this transformation. The good news is that, overall, there are plenty, and a variety, of available solutions—policy and evidence-based, regenerative, innovative, and technological. These include strengthening actions to sustainably manage natural resources, enhance forest areas, and restore landscapes.

The Asia-Pacific region benefits from thousands of years of agriculture-based systems and hundreds of generations of traditional knowledge, which could be coupled with a fast-growing entrepreneurial ecosystem. For our part, FAO's mission is to support the 2030 Agenda through helping member nations and partners build more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agrifood systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life, leaving no one behind.

Without doubt, this transformation will require massive public and private investment—and the political will to effect the change. But if we fail to act, even the year 2065 may be too optimistic. This time, all eyes are on the ball, as no one doubts what's at stake. Failing to transform our agrifood systems is not an option—it is imperative for our future and that of our children. *The Jakarta Post/Asia News Network*

Jong-jin Kim is assistant director-general and regional representative for Asia and the Pacific of the FAO.

The Philippine Daily Inquirer is a member of the Asia News Network, an alliance of 22 media titles in the region.

COMMENTARY

JONG-JIN KIM