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Boracay waters safe for swimmers—DENR

Environment chief notes absence of algal blooms on beach after island rehab

By Nestor P. Burgos Jr.
@nestorburgosINQ

BORACAY ISLAND, AKLAN —These days, visitors to White Beach need only a quick glance at the shoreline to conclude that the water quality in the country's premier tourist destination has improved, according to Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu.

Speaking on the eve of the first anniversary of the six-month closure of Boracay to tourists, Cimatu said the absence of clumps of green algae along the main beach was an indication that the water had become clean and safe for swimming after government efforts to stop the discharge of untreated wastewater into the sea.

Unlike in the past, the high-level of coliform bacteria in recent months has been 40 MPN (most probable number) per 100 milliliters, Cimatu said at a press conference after a meeting of the Boracay Inter-Agency Task Force (BIATF) on Thursday. "And in some months, it was single digit," he added.

The acceptable concentration of coliform bacteria is 100 MPN/100 ml for areas categorized for swimming.

Algal blooms

Cimatu said the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) had compared photographs of the main beach taken last year with the situation on Thursday to show the marked difference in the water quality.

In February 2018, President Duterte said Boracay had turned into a "cesspool" due to uncontrolled development, business owners' violation of



BEACH STROLL Tourists enjoy a stroll on Boracay's White Beach, where clumps of algae have disappeared following the island's closure and cleanup last year. —NESTOR P. BURGOS JR.

environmental laws and congestion. Two months later, on April 26, the island was closed to tourists to allow for a six-month period of rehabilitation.

Summer is when algal blooms are expected in Boracay.

There is still algal bloom in a small area at the northern end of the island, but it is not as thick and viscous as in previous years, a number of residents told the Inquirer.

Many business owners and residents have claimed that algal blooms are seasonal, "natural" and have been occurring even before the island was developed.

But in 2015, then Environment Secretary Ramon Paje noted that algal bloom on Boracay's shores indicated water pollution resulting from "poor waste management, with sewage being dumped into the waters."

In a statement issued on that year, the DENR cited a study by conservation group Global Coral Reef Alliance that "the presence of green algae along Boracay's shoreline during the calm season is a strong indicator

of very high nutrient pollution that they are typically found right around sewage outfalls."

It said the algae "die back in the rough season because waves dilute nutrients to lower levels and wash away the algae, ... [but] the algae become visible again in the next calm season."

Underground pipes

Using high-technology and ground-penetrating radar, Department of Energy personnel detected last year underground pipes along the main beach illegally discharging untreated wastewater suspected as coming from commercial establishments.

The government's rehabilitation efforts also involved the removal of structures encroaching on the 30-meter beach easement.

Cimatu said traffic congestion had been addressed. He said the average time for tourists to travel from Cagban port to their hotels now took only 30 minutes, compared to at least an hour in the past.

He also cited the rebuilt

sidewalks, and said the BIATF would continue to improve the water quality of Bulabog Beach at Boracay's eastern side.

'#LOVEBoracay'

The task force yesterday kicked off its "#LOVEBoracay," a weeklong series of activities promoting sustainable tourism to mark the first anniversary of the closure and rehabilitation. Among the highlights are a food festival, a drone film festival and a sailboat-painting contest.

The Department of Tourism said the activities were an alternative to the "LaBoracay" revelry held during long vacation weekends on the main beach, especially on Labor Day. The revelry drew thousands of tourists and merrymakers, but were largely criticized for causing congestion and garbage buildup on the island.

Tourism Undersecretary Arturo Boncato Jr. said that no big party or event was planned on White Beach this year, and that activities were confined to select establishments. INQ



DoT declares Boracay back in pristine shape

The government's rehabilitation efforts in Boracay are bearing fruit as the island is now back to its pristine condition and businesses are starting to prosper, a year after its doors was closed to tourists, the Department of Tourism said.

"Everything is moving according to plan," said Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat.

Puyat said that the Department of Environment and Natural Resources "has done an excellent job" as the coliform bacteria level in the island's waters is now "under safe standard levels" as compared to its high level of one million coliform bacteria prior to its shutdown.

The Department of Public Works and Highways has also finished the

rehabilitation of the island's main roads, while the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone "is on-track in the construction of the drainage system for the island," said Puyat.

"We're also happy to note that more than 160 establishments have already complied with the 25+5 easement recovery," she said.

Puyat also noted that they "have maintained the carrying capacity of 19,215 tourists at any given time" since Boracay was reopened last October.

"More importantly, business is booming," said the Tourism chief. "We've accredited more than 300 accommodation establishments already. Our accreditation process is

still on-going for those that are still non-compliant," she said.

Based on the latest Boracay bulletin, 339 accommodation establishments with a total of 12,083 rooms are now accredited to operate in Boracay as of April 8.

"All efforts are on track to Phase 3 of the rehabilitation as we continue to make Boracay as a model of sustainable tourism," said Puyat. Previously, the Tourism chief said that they are expecting to complete the rehabilitation of Boracay by December of this year.

The world-famous island was closed down to tourists last April 26, 2018 as ordered by President Duterte to fix its environmental problems. **(Analou de Vera)**



ANGAT DAM WATER LEVEL CONTINUES TO DROP, SEEN TO BREACH THE 180-METER MARK

By Jhesset O. Enano
@JhessetEnanoINQ

Residents in Metro Manila should make a conscious effort to conserve water as the level of Angat Dam, which supplies water for majority of the metro, continues to dip in the absence of rainfall.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) on Friday said the dam's water level is expected to breach the 180-meter low-water mark by Sunday.

Data from Pagasa pegged the dam's water level at 180.73 m on Friday morning, lower than the previous day's mark at 181.15 m. Its normal water level is at 212 m.

Pagasa hydrologist Jayson Bausa said that based on historic data, the water level in the reservoir drops from January to June due to the lack of rainfall.

170 meters by end of May

"Since the demand for water also increased a bit, the daily reduction in the dam also in-

creased," he said in an interview.

The National Water Resources Board (NWRB) said that at the rate of decline of Angat Dam's water level, it may hit 170 meters by the end of May.

But the NWRB assured the public that despite the low levels, service for irrigation and households would remain uninterrupted.

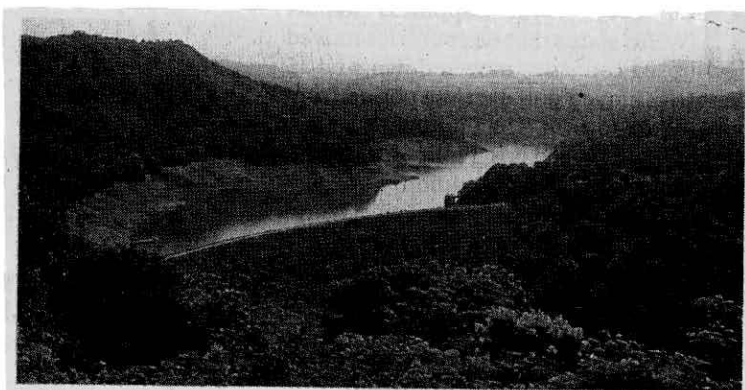
However, the dam's supply for irrigation has been reduced to 10 cubic meters per second from 35 cubic meters per second.

Located in Norzagaray, Bulacan province, the Angat Dam supplies around 90 percent of water to Metro Manila through the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System.

Conserve water

Bausa said the downward trend would continue until the rainy season begins.

"So the public must really conserve water because we still have two months ahead before the rainy season begins," he said. INQ



DOWNWARD TREND The water level of Angat Dam continues to decline in the absence of rainfall.



Environment groups weigh in vs Canada garbage

By RHODINA VILLANUEVA

Despite the assurance given by Canadian Ambassador John Holmes regarding his country's commitment to address the garbage dumping case, more environmental groups demanded the immediate return of the illegal garbage shipments to Canada as ordered by President Duterte last Tuesday.

"Canada should act swiftly to retrieve their garbage from our country. No more promises. It has ignored us for six long years. We do not deserve such disrespect, much less the damage wrought by their garbage on our environment and affected communities," Joey Papa, Bangon Kalikasan Movement president, said before the weekend.

For Consumer Rights to Safe Food president Rene Pineda, the "period of making vague promises and statements is already over."

"We expect Prime Minister (Justin) Trudeau to order without any precondition the speedy reshipment of the reeking garbage to Canada where it belongs. Any scheme to get the garbage processed, buried or burned in the Philippines will be totally unacceptable," Pineda said.

Cavite Green Coalition coordinator Ochie Tolentino said: "Our patience has already run out. Canada now has to assume full responsibility for its wastes that have been languishing in our land since 2013. Please re-import your rubbish so we can move on."

The same sentiment was aired by Green Convergence for Safe Food, Healthy Environment and Sustainable Economy executive director Tessa Oliva, who said the garbage's continued pres-

ence in the country is an "affront to the rule of law and to our environmental rights."

"Prime Minister Trudeau has no other option but to take back their garbage to put this long standing irritant between Canada and the Philippines to rest. It's the only decent, moral and legal thing to do to bring this mess behind us," said Sonia Mendoza, chair, Mother Earth Foundation.

EcoWaste Coalition national coordinator Aileen Lucero said her group hopes that the clamor for Canada to get their trash out of the Philippines "will not again fall on deaf ears."

"We remain optimistic that our long struggle for environmental justice will soon draw to a close so we can focus on preventing the hideous dumping of wastes

and toxics into our country from happening again," she added.

Next week, environmental advocates will gather to push for Canada's immediate compliance with the ultimatum issued by Duterte for the long overdue re-export of the overstaying Canadian garbage to its origin

in line with its obligations under the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal.

The garbage placed in 103 container vans were unlawfully shipped to Manila from 2013 to 2014.



More groups want Canada to take back waste from PH

By **Tonette Orejas**
@ttorejasINQ

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—Five groups have joined the clamor for Canada to take back heaps of trash misdeclared as plastic scraps that were illegally shipped to Manila from 2013 to 2014.

Their demand came on the heels of a legal opinion finding Canada in violation of the Basel Convention and an ultimatum declared by President Duterte on Tuesday.

No more promises

“Canada should act swiftly to retrieve their garbage from our country. No more promises. It has ignored us for six long years. We do not deserve such disrespect, much less the damage wrought by their garbage on our environment and affected communities,” Bangon Kalikasan Movement president, Joey Papa, said in a statement released by the lead campaign-

er EcoWaste Coalition.

Rene Pineda, president of Consumer Rights to Safe Food, said Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau should order the speedy reshipment “without any precondition.”

Ochie Tolentino of the Cavite Green Coalition said the group’s patience has “already run out.”

Tessa Oliva, executive director of Green Convergence for Safe Food, Healthy Environment and Sustainable Economy, said the “overstaying garbage” was an “affront to the rule of law and to our environmental rights.”

Trudeau, she said, must heed Mr. Duterte’s warning “without delay.”

Long-standing irritant

Sonia Mendoza, chair of Mother Earth Foundation, said Trudeau has to put the “long-standing irritant” between the two countries to rest.

“It’s the only decent, moral and legal thing to do to bring

this mess behind us,” she said.

They issued comments even as Canadian Ambassador John Holmes assured his country’s commitment to address the garbage dumping issue.

Holmes said: “Our prime minister (Trudeau) committed and has recommitted to resolving this issue, including taking the waste back to Canada.”

Presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo called Holmes’ assurance “quick but vague.”

103 containers of waste

EcoWaste’s Aileen Lucero said Holmes’ statement failed to placate civil society groups demanding the return of 103 freight containers that were unlawfully shipped to Manila from 2013 to 2014.

At least 26 freight containers were emptied in a private landfill in Capas, Tarlac.

“We hope that the clamor for Canada to get their trash out of the Philippines will not again fall on deaf ears. We re-

main optimistic that our long struggle for environmental justice will soon draw to a close, so we can focus on preventing the hideous dumping of wastes and toxics into our country from happening again,” Lucero said.

Difficult

The Pacific Center for Environment Law and Litigation said Canada violated the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal.

Tarlac Gov. Susan Yap said she wanted the garbage, estimated to be 100 tons, thrown in the Kalangitan landfill of the Metro Clark Waste Management Corp. (MCWMC) in Capas in July 2015 to be retrieved and sent back to Canada.

But MCWMC president, Rufo Colayco, said retrieving the garbage was difficult to do since these had been mixed in cells that had already been sealed and buried. INQ



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EDITORIAL

'War' with Canada

If only it had shipped boxes of Tim Hortons' donuts, or cases of maple syrup, or even just Justin Trudeau himself, Canada would not now be the object of the Filipino people's ire.

In particular, the ire of President Duterte who, in a seemingly impetuous moment (he was, after all, speaking before an audience in Pampanga on the aftermath of the April 22 earthquake that left 18 people dead and 282 injured), began hurling invectives at Canada and threatening war against that country for shipping more than a hundred containers filled with trash.

His timing was curious, and even inappropriate. His purpose at the Pampanga event, it would seem, was to lend comfort to the survivors of the temblor which, even if it originated in Zambales, caused more deaths and damage to structures in Pampanga and even as far as Metro Manila.

But the headlines that evening and the next day focused not on our countryfolk's suffering in the wake of the earthquake, but on our literally trash-talking President's rants against Canada.

To be sure, the containerloads of hazardous materials—computer parts, hospital waste and even common household detritus like soiled diapers—are cause for offense. The subterfuge employed to slip past Customs' scrutiny and the years of dilly-dallying add to the sore feelings all around.

It is the abrupt resurfacing of the issue, however, the newfound urgency, that seems suspect. After all, the first batches of Canadian trash arrived in mid-2013 or nearly six years ago, declared as recyclable plastic scrap materials and shipped by a private export company, Chronic Plastics, based in Ontario, Canada. In the next few months, 48 more container vans arrived in Manila, with the environment department ordering the Bureau of Customs to send the trash back after the consignee Live Green Enterprise failed to claim the shipment.

In the next few years, the government would file charges of smuggling against Chronic Plastics while the Ombudsman ordered the dismissal of the Customs official who allowed the shipment to enter Philippine shores. Canadian Embassy officials, approached for help to ship back the hazardous materials to their country, said their hands are tied as there is no law penalizing the export of garbage. The seemingly last word on the issue came from Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau, who said he would work to expedite laws punishing exporters of garbage, while a technical working group was convened to study ways of returning the containers to Canada.

Meanwhile, some of the trash have already been buried in a landfill in Tarlac, while the rest of the shipments sit still inside unopened containers now baking under our warm tropical sun.

So now, after years caught in the labyrinth of bureaucratic and diplomatic limbo, why is the Canadian garbage shipment suddenly on the front burners of state concerns? What triggered the President, already loose-lipped at the best of times, to threaten war against a country that had always been a good friend and helpful partner for the last decades, and where, according to a 2016 Canadian census, some 851,000 people of Filipino descent have chosen to live, making up the third largest subgroup of Filipinos overseas?

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, borrowing a term used previously and often by other officials like the presidential spokesperson, perhaps attempting to allay the fears of Canadian officials, downplayed the threat of war by saying that Mr. Duterte was just employing a "figure of speech."

The next day, after raising a ruckus with his "figure of speech," Mr. Duterte left for his fourth visit to China since he had taken office. Perhaps the timing is only incidental, but it should strike observers how the President seemed to be trying to deflect any criticism of his extraordinary friendship with Chinese officials by his rant against Canada. He wants to quell any notions of his being anybody's toady by "showing" how willing he is to stand up to a foreign leader, especially in light of the midterm elections in two weeks.

Filipinos, however, will find it easy to see through the pantomime. They have to grit their teeth while a giant neighbor continues to police the country's seas, despoil outlying islands, threaten hapless Filipino fishermen, harvest giant clams while destroying precious reefs in the world's center of biodiversity—and, throughout, Malacañang's irate gaze is fixed somewhere else.

2



69 containers of Canada trash still in PH – BoC

From a total of 103 containers, the shipments of garbage from Canada that were dumped in two major ports in the country about six years ago have been reduced to 69 containers, Customs' top official said Friday.

It's not because the 34 containers of trash have been shipped back to

its country of origin but have been disposed, Customs Commissioner Rey Leonardo Guerrero said.

Guerrero said majority of the garbage shipments, which contain household waste; including adult diapers; electronic garbage; and non-recyclable plastics, have been staying at the Port of Subic while two containers of trash were at the Manila International Container Port (MICP).

According to the commissioner, charges have been filed against the importer, broker, and other individuals involved in the shipments, which arrived in 2013 and 2014. Their Customs accreditation have also been revoked.

"Right now, we are coordinating with the interagency technical working group for the return of this Canadian trash back to Canada," Guerrero said. **(Betheena Kae Unite)**



WALANG SINASANTO

ni Alex Santos

HINDI maitatangi na namumutiktik ang basura sa Filipinas.

Katunayan, makikita ang mga ito sa estero at sa baybayin ng Manila Bay na kasalukuyang isinasailalim sa rehabilitasyon.

Ganyan din ang kinahinatnan ng Boracay Island na ilang buwang ipinalinis ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte dahil parang naging cesspool na raw ito o tapunan ng basura.

Karaniwan nang nakikita natin sa iba't ibang

lugar sa Maynila ang mga plastik na basura na kinabibilangan ng botelya ng softdrink at mineral water, sachet ng kape at shampoo, supot at mga styro ng pagkain mula sa fast foods at restawran.

Subalit ang nakapagtataka, kahit marami nang basura sa bansa, marami pa ring kompanya ang bumibili ng basura sa ibayong dagat kung saan tone-tonelada pa itong ini-import at hinahayaan naman ng mga dating pamahalaan na madala rito

sa bansa.

Nakalulungkot ngang isipin na habang ipinagmamalaki ng ibang bansa na kaalyado nila tayo, tulad ng South Korea at Canada, ginagawa naman nila tayong tambakan ng basura.

Bukod sa SoKor, mas nauna pa palang nagtapon ng basura sa Filipinas ang Canada.

Higit limang taon nang nasa bansa ang basura mula sa Canada na dumating noon pang 2013 at 2014 kung saan higit 100 freight containers ito na pawang household wastes at banta sa kalusugan ng mamama-

yan.

Idineklara ng kompanyang Chronic Plastics, ang consignee na nasa Valenzuela City, na mga plastik na basura ang laman ng containers.

Gayunman, nang inspeksiyunin ng Bureau of Customs (BOC), natuklasang mga basura at nangangamoy na ang laman nito kaya bumaligtad ang sikmura ng mga taga-BOC nang buksan ang containers sapagkat umalingasaw ang mabahong amoy mula roon.

Mukhang nakalilimutan ng Canada na si Pangulong Duterte ang

nakaupo at hindi ito papayag na kakayan-kayanin na lamang tayo ng naturang bansa.

Kaya ipinag-utos na ng Presidente ang pagbabalik sa Canada ng itinaon nitong mga basura sa atin.

Hindi nga naman tambakan ng imported na basura ang Filipinas kaya ipababalik na niya ito sa Canada.

Kung matatandaan, minsan nang napag-usapan nina Pres. Duterte at Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau ang tungkol sa basura nang minsa'y dumalaw ito sa bansa.

Sa totoo lang, karapatan sana nating tumanggi noon sa basurang iyon lalo't alam naman ng Canada ang batas at isa ito sa mga lumagda sa tratado noong 1992.

Nararapat ding tingnan ang posibleng paglabag sa Republic Act No. 6969 o Toxic Substances and Hazardous Wastes Control Act of 1990 ng dating DENR secretary sa panahon ni dating Pangulong Noynoy Aquino na waring walang ginawang aksiyon para sampahan ng kaso ang mga kompanyang nagpadala ng sandamukal at mapanganib na basura.

Huwag tayong papayag na gawing tambakan ng hazardous wastes ang ating bansa.

Ibalik ang basura sa Canada.

At panagutin ang dapat panagutin!

Nangako noon ang Canadian leader na aaksiyunan ang problema sa basurang umaabot sa mahigit 100 containers.

Hindi nga lang malinaw kung anong aksiyon ang kanyang gagawin.

Noon pang 2017 bumisita sa bansa si Trudeau pero umikot na ang higit isang taon ay wala itong isinasagawang hakbang tungkol sa basura.

Halatang balewala sa kanila ang basura na nagbibigay ng pangamba sa maaaring idulot sa kalusugan ng ating mga kababayan.

Ang hinihintay natin na gagawin ni Trudeau noon pa ay ipag-uutos niya ang agaran pagbabalik ng basura sa kanilang bansa.

Ang masaklap, hindi ganoon ang nangyari.

Walang nakuhang pag-asa sa kanya ang mamamayang Filipino.

Ngayong wala pa ring nangyayari sa kabila ng pag-uusap nina Pangulong Duterte at Trudeau noon, napapanahon ang matapang na pahayag ng ating Chief Executive laban sa Canada.

Nararapat lamang na ibalik sa kanila ang mga basura sapagkat nakasaad sa Basel Convention na anumang hazardous wastes na dumating sa bansa ay dapat ibalik sa pinanggalingang nasyon.



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Sea row tackled at Duterte, Xi meet

By Doris Dumlao-Abadilla
@Philbizwatcher

BEIJING—While China has continued to downplay the 2016 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos) ruling favoring the Philippines' territorial rights, tension between the two countries have subsided following the bilateral meeting between their top leaders.

In an interview on Friday, Philippine Ambassador to China Jose Santiago Sta. Romana told reporters that following the latest bilateral meeting between President Duterte and Chinese President Xi Jinping, "there was enough indication that the situation will be addressed and the concerns of the Philippines will be addressed."

In recent weeks, maritime

tension had escalated with the swarming of Chinese militia around Philippine-occupied Pag-asa Island in the Spratlys and the illegal harvesting of giant clams.

Unclos ruling raised

Recalling a "very frank but constructive" discussion between Xi and Duterte, Sta. Romana said the Philippine leader raised the Unclos ruling but noted that China had maintained their position not to recognize this arbitration process.

"It's a card for us in terms of it clarifies our maritime entitlements. Unfortunately, the Chinese are not willing to recognize this. So, it's a challenge. It will take more time," the envoy said.

Nonetheless, Sta. Romana stressed that the two sides had



DISPUTED ISLE With white powdery sands like Boracay, Pagasa Island can very well be the next tourist destination.

—PHOTO BY ERNIE U. SARMIENTO

agreed that their maritime differences "should not be an obstacle to the development of relations and that these differences could be discussed further through diplomatic channels."

In an earlier briefing on Wednesday, Sta. Romana said the Philippines had already requested China in previous meetings to ask its militia to maintain an "appropriate" distance from

Pag-asa Island to avoid "miscalculation" and escalation of tension. But during the bilateral talks, he said there was no specific discussion on such moving away from Pag-asa.

Nonetheless, Sta. Romana noted that fishermen from both sides are able to ply their trades.

"The Chinese side expressed willingness—in the interest of friendship and cooperation—to address the issues we have raised," said Sta. Romana.

"There is no need for them to stay there and the Chinese took note of this because the Philippines is not a threat," he said.

Friendly atmosphere

The atmosphere when the maritime dispute was being discussed was "very friendly and very frank but construc-

tive," he said.

Asked whether the situation could improve in the coming days, the diplomat said: "Even now, atmosphere has already improved with the talks and I think this is a way of easing the tension. As for the actual situation of the ground, we'll have to wait for the actual report."

Sta. Romana said that by clearing the air at the top level, this was expected to set an example to forces on the ground.

"It doesn't mean that the problems are over. The challenges are still here, but I think we have moved a significant step forward," he said.

"We're monitoring this but we certainly hope that the situation will normalize, will remain peaceful and stable, and that things can be worked out." INQ



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Boracay is back, business is booming – Tourism chief

By **ANALOU DE VERA**

The government's rehabilitation efforts in Boracay are bearing fruit as the island is now back to its pristine condition and businesses are starting to prosper – a year after it was closed to tourists, the Department of Tourism

(DOT) said.

"Everything is moving according to plan," said Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat in a text message to reporters.

Puyat said that the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) "has done an excellent job" as the coliform bacteria level in the island's waters is now "under safe standard levels" as compared to its high level of one million coliform bacteria prior to its shutdown.

The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) has also finished the rehabilitation of the island's main roads, while the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone (TIEZA) "is on-track in the construction of the drainage system for the island," said Puyat.

"We're also happy to note that more than 160 establishments have already complied with the 25+5 easement recovery," she said.

Puyat said that they "have maintained the carrying capacity of 19,215 tourists at any given time" since Boracay was reopened last

October.

"More importantly, business is booming," said the tourism chief.

"We've accredited more than 300 accommodation establishments already. Our accreditation process is still on-going for those that are still non-compliant," she said.

Based on the latest Boracay bulletin, a total of 339 accommodation establishments accounting to 12,083 rooms are now accredited to operate in Boracay as of April 8.

"All efforts are on track to phase three (of the rehabilitation) as we continue to make Boracay as [a] model of sustainable tourism," said Puyat.

Previously, the tourism chief said that they are expecting to complete the rehabilitation of Boracay by December of this year.

The world-famous island was closed to tourist on April 26, 2018 as ordered by President Duterte, to fix its environmental-problems. Six-months later (October 26), Boracay welcomed back its visitors and it now reflects the government's advocacy of responsible and sustainable tourism.



Business booming in Boracay, DOT chief says

By **ROBERTZON RAMIREZ**
and **JENNIFER RENDON**

The tourism industry in Boracay is booming a year after its closure.

As this developed, Chinese establishments have been observed to have sprouted since the island reopened.

According to Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat, her department has accredited over 300 accommodation establishments after

the six-month rehabilitation of Boracay.

"Our accreditation process is still ongoing for those that are still non-compliant," Puyat told **The STAR**.

Boracay was closed to tourists on April 26, 2018 and was reopened on Oct. 26, 2018 after it underwent rehabilitation due to environmental problems.

Puyat said everything was done according to plan, including road repairs and drainage

systems.

"The DENR (Department of Environment and Natural Resources) has done an excellent job in reducing the coliform level from more than a million down to under safe standard levels," she added.

She also emphasized that the 19,215 limit for visitors is being maintained since it was reopened.

Asked for her thoughts about the mushrooming of Chinese business establish-

ments on Boracay after its reopening in October, Puyat replied: "Negative on any foreign or domestic tourists that do not follow the law."

The Chinese businesses are reportedly turning away non-Chinese customers in restaurants, and menus are written in Chinese characters.

There are also allegations that Chinese workers are illegally employed by the establishments.

The Boracay Interagency

Task Force said it will discuss issues surrounding Chinese businesses operating on the island amid complaints and observations by tourists and residents alike.

At a press conference on Thursday at the Paradise Garden Resort in Boracay Island, Interior and Local Government Undersecretary Epimaco Densing III said they will form an ad hoc committee to look into these issues.

The committee will be

composed of the local government of Malay, Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Department of Justice through the Bureau of Immigration, Department of Trade and Industry and the general manager of the management committee of the task force.

"The committee will look into what is true (about) the permits and licenses of these establishments," Densing said.



BORACAY REDUX

Businessmen, workers, tourists look back on the game-changing semester when the globally acclaimed island resort was closed to the world



By MA. STELLA F. ARNALDO | Special to the BUSINESSMIRROR
Photos by Bernard Testa

A YEAR ago on April 26, Boracay Island was closed off to tourists, as the Duterte administration put it under a state of calamity, due to the environmental damage it sustained in several areas.

For six months, the island was like a ghost town, with very few residents remaining, trying to eke any sort of livelihood. Those who

could afford to stay helped out by keeping their establishments open to provide food for the residents and keep their staff employed.



Workers in the resorts, numbering about 30,000, went home to their own provinces or started looking for jobs abroad.

The actual losses from personal and business incomes have yet to be fully quantified, although a recent study by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) estimated economic loss between some P21 billion and P83 billion, while the loss in compensation, possibly ranging from P7 billion to about P28 billion.

The closure has led to a 53-percent fall in tourist arrivals on the island last year to 930,363 from 2 million in 2017, as per data from

the Department of Tourism (DOT).

The island was reopened last October 26, as the first phase of the government's rehabilitation program was completed. As of April 8, 2019, the DOT has accredited 339 establishments with a total of 12,083 rooms.

Improvements made

IN a news conference on Thursday, Environment Secretary Roy A. Cimatu, who chairs the Boracay Inter-Agency Task Force (BIATF), asserted that there have been definite improvements on the island since its closure one year ago. "A

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BORACAY REDUX

CONTINUED FROM A1

year ago, when a tourist arrived at the Cagban jetty port, it would take him one hour to get to his hotel. Now it is just 30 minutes. The road is now clear and it is faster to move through. It is no longer congested and even tourists can now walk along the road [because we made the sidewalks].”

He added that coliform levels have significantly dropped in the waters around the island. “The highest coliform level for the past months was just 40 most probable number (MPN) per 100 milliliter, and there were months that it was only one-digit level.”

He noted that one year ago, photos would show algae formation on the main white beach. “It was very green...[despite the summer season], there is no algae up to now.”

In many speaking engagements here and travel fairs abroad, Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo Puyat has held up Boracay Island as a model for sustainable tourism. “This is the Boracay we fell in love with 30 years ago,” she has said.

Cleaner beach and waters

AND for most parts, perhaps the island’s rehabilitation was indeed helpful in preventing it from becoming an even larger environmental disaster that generations after us would no longer be able to enjoy.

“The rehabilitation led by DENR [Department of Environment and Natural Resources] was great,” averred Peter Tay, owner of the multiawarded Boracay Adventures Travels and Tours. “A cleaner Boracay and the road widening with sidewalk gave tourists a walking space. The water condition, according to reports, especially in Bulabog, tremendously improved.”

Nonetheless, he still feels the six-month total closure of the island was unnecessary. “It could have been done in phases, like what is going on now. After six months of closure, it was opened last October 26; they [government agencies] are still working in phases. The sudden closure changed many lives; some are no longer around, while some are still trying to recover from their losses of income from the closure.”

In his case, Tay said, he estimated losses from the closure of his business for six months at about P1 million per month. “I tried teaching in Bohol and setting up another office in Manila, but nothing compares to being in Boracay since I called it home, and have friends around. We are blessed! Things are moving well for our company with good reviews and always striving to provide good services, so we are slowly recovering from our losses. As of now, bookings are coming in since many are looking forward to see the ‘New Boracay.’”

Maintain the changes

RESORT owner Edd Fuentes recalled he was initially bothered by the closure of the island, and the subsequent challenges in reopening his three properties. He used to tell his friends that he wanted to sell his resorts. “It just seemed that every day, there were new requirements asked of us when we were going around and processing our applications for government permits and accreditations,” he said.

He also observed that there are still resorts, which are violating the 25+5 easement ordinance for the main beachfront, and some have been operating without permits. “They have guests! Whereas we had to go through the eye of the needle just to reopen our properties,” he stressed.

While he will still sell his properties on the island, Fuentes said, he will probably just retain one and put a few rooms and a restaurant. He underscored he wasn’t selling because of the closure experience, but rather to rid himself of the stress of running many properties. Also, he noted that government authorities are gradually addressing many of his concerns. “They have been going house to house and checking permits of all the establishments, which is a good thing.”

Fuentes said, “If the government can retain the changes it has put in place, then the closure would have been worth it.” He noted that business has been “very good” since his properties reopened last year. “During the closure, we were able to think about our operations and simplify them. So we were able to streamline our work force. Now we have better profitability because our sales have increased, while our overhead has been reduced. We are happy that business has been booming.”

Opening a can of worms

TOURISM Congress of the Philippines President Jose C. Clemente III said the closure and rehabilitation of Boracay has had positive and negative impacts. “We have to admit that the beach looks great and it looks ‘refreshed’ compared to before. Ordinances to preserve the island’s sustainability have been implemented, and people are now more conscious about the environment. In that sense, the rehabilitation helped Boracay.”

But he noted, “the rehabilitation also opened a whole new can of worms as far as who was at fault for the island’s degradation and has created an atmosphere of finger-pointing and division among some of the stakeholders.”



BORACAY REDUX

On Wednesday, the Ombudsman dismissed Malay, Aklan Mayor Ciceron Cawaling from office, taking him to task for the environmental degradation of Boracay, which falls under his municipality.

However, island residents and tourism industry observers noted that the environmental degradation of Boracay did not start just during Cawaling's term of office, and involved other local government officials, as well as officials of the DENR. The DENR has yet to make public who among its employees and officials have been charged similarly with neglect of their duties to protect Boracay's environment.

Clemente also said reports reaching him from island stake-

holders indicate "the work on the roads and other infrastructure has been slow; so that also needs to be addressed. So, whether the closure was worth it or not will be a discussion that will be debated on for a long time."

Proliferation of 'illegal' alien workers

TAY, for his part, called for more regulation in the establishment of businesses on the island. "Anybody and everybody can just come to the island to set up a business. Chinese and Koreans will partner with Filipinos to set up businesses like resorts, hotels, restaurants, travel operators, spa, and tour operations. All these should also be regulated and not allowed to mushroom."

While complaints have been raised against illegal Chinese workers in Chinese-owned restaurants, he noted that there were also quite a number of Korean workers in Korean restaurants. "The problem is, [authorities] issue them Special Work Permits, instead of a Working Permit. A Special Work Permit allows them to work only two

times, but they are not required to apply for a tax identification number. It's not fair because they don't pay taxes, and especially to those who actually secure a work permit."

Tay pointed out that "commissioners" offering tours on the beach continue to abound. The BIATF earlier had vowed to remove these "commissioners" so tourists will book their tours through accredited tour operators only.

Clemente has always asserted that the closure and rehabilitation of Boracay could have been carried out better, in consultation with tourism stakeholders and others that would be hugely impacted by the action, i.e., the workers. "A comprehensive master plan on how the rehabilitation would proceed could have made things better.... There was a sense of haphazardness as far as how the rehabilitation was to be carried out."

He underscored that the government should have been more focused on the plight of the workers who would be displaced by the closure. The promised financial aid had been sparse, or was not received at all, despite claims by the

government to the contrary.

"At the end of the day, we are all after the balance of what is good for the island, the government, and the stakeholders. While some of that balance may have been reached, there is still much work that needs to be done," Clemente said.

Completing the work

GOVERNMENT authorities have said they are looking to complete that work. At Thursday's news conference on the island, DENR's Cimatu said the construction of the circumferential road will continue. The BIATF also is pinning its hopes that Bulabog beach, on the east coast of Boracay, will finally become a "swimmable area" after drainage work is completed by the end of the year. At present, Bulabog beach is still categorized a water sports area.

"We are also making the Cagban port an all-year-round port," he said. During the monsoon season, pump boats usually transfer to the Tambisaan jetty port to protect transportation and visitors from the weather.

Cimatu said the restoration of the island's biodiversity will continue starting with seeding Puka Beach with more puka shells and investigating why the number of flying foxes and bats has decreased on the island. The DENR also plans to "restore the three rock formations used as platforms by West Cove Boracay to their natural form."

To celebrate the second phase reopening of Boracay, pockets of festivities will be held dubbed "Love Boracay," replacing the Laboracay parties that used to be held on the main beachfront leading up to May 1, Labor Day.

DOT Undersecretary for Tourism Regulation Coordination and Resource Generation Arturo P. Boncato Jr. told reporters on Thursday, "The difference is, 'Laboracay' was a concerted effort to bring everybody to the beach. As you know, in the past, this brought about 100,000 tourists to white beach. In 'Love Boracay,' the activities will be held on individual properties, small properties; there are no huge events along the white beach. 'Love Boracay' will be meaningful, but there will be no gathering of large crowds."

Love Boracay began on Friday with Ati-Atihan dancers and drummers performing along Station 2, followed by paraw regatta and sail painting, with forums on environmental management and sustainable tourism scheduled in the next few days. There is also a scheduled beach cleanup on Sunday, a variety show for law enforcers, a film festival featuring videos taken by drones, and a Boracay Food Fest from April 26 to May 1 at the Laketown Main Road.



BORACAY REDUX



FRIDAY'S Love Boracay activities included paraw painting and sailing. "It was wonderful to see such an amazing turnout from all the paraw operators, and their sailing teams were so proud of their sails," says island resident Trudy Allen. PHOTO COURTESY RUDY ALLEN



PETER TAY, president of Boracay Adventures Travel and Tours



EDD FUENTES, owner of Sun Villa Resorts Group



JOSE CLEMENTE III, president of the Tourism Congress of the Philippines



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27 APR 2019

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FOREST RANGER SHOT DEAD IN NEGROS ORIENTAL

BACOLOD CITY: A forest ranger of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) engaged in money lending was shot dead in Barangay Panalaan, Bais City in Negros Oriental. The Negros Oriental Provincial Police Office (NOorPPO) identified the victim as Rodrigo Reyes, 59, of Sitio Lighi, Barangay Mabunao in Bais City. Reyes was having lunch with friends at the JEZIL store at Sitio checkpoint in Barangay Panalaan when two unidentified suspects with covered faces appeared, and shot Reyes in the neck, killing him instantly, while the other stood as look out. One of the suspects then grabbed the victim's sling bag then fired another shot and fled. The victim's daughter told the police her father usually carries a sling bag containing a huge amount of money for his lending business. The victim's bag allegedly contained about P100,000 in cash, a Vivo mobile phone, a Samsung tablet, receipts and documents of pawned items.

EUGENE Y. ADIONG



Implementasyon sa environmental laws madaliin

PINAMAMADALI ni Senadora Loren Legarda sa local government units (LGUs) ang pag-implementa ng iba't ibang environmental laws.

Ito'y matapos i-dismiss ng Office of the Ombudsman ang mga administrative complaint laban kina Malay town Mayor Ceciron Cawaling at Licensing Officer Jen Salsona dahil sa kapabayaan umano sa pagma-manage ng Boracay Island.

Ayon kay Legarda, ito na ang tamang hudyat para pagtibayin ang implementasyon ng mga batas na mangangalaga sa kapaligiran upang hindi na aniya maulit ang reklamong

kapabayaan ng LGUs.

"I laud the Ombudsman for siding with the people, who are the victims of environmental degradation due to local governments' non-compliance in the country's environmental laws," aniya.

"It is about time we take the environment seriously and LGUs must heed the call to adopt sustainable management of our natural resources," sabi ni Legarda.

Isa aniya sa pinakamalaking problema ng Boracay Island ay ang mahinang enforcement at hindi pagsunod sa environmental laws ng bansa. **(Lorraine Gamo)**



2018 ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

TYPHOONS PULL DOWN AGRI GROWTH IN CORDILLERA

BAGUIO CITY—The Department of Agriculture (DA) has started asking people what they prefer to eat, side by side with an agency study on climate and soil conditions of every patch of land where farmers grow food.

The profiles of farms and what people tend to consume will help food producers cope with the unpredictable weather, which has been blamed for Cordillera agriculture's poor performance in 2018.

Cordillera's gross regional domestic product, an annual measure of goods and services produced by a region, posted 7.3 percent in 2018 from a 12.2-percent growth in 2017. Farming and mining were among the sectors that performed badly.

Economists were surprised when the Cordillera food economy grew by 5.1 percent in 2017 after years of economic contraction.

Food map

But Typhoons "Ompong" and "Rosita" in 2018 cost the region P18 billion in damaged and lost crops, bringing the sector's growth down to a negative 5.3 percent, said Susan Balanza, DA Cordillera planning officer.

The farming sector had always been vulnerable to climate change, Balanza said. But she said her agency had been gathering information for a national color-coded food map, which would indicate the weather patterns, terrain and soil quality of land used to grow food.

The map would help local government policymakers and farming communities plan for more weather changes, which have been projected through climate models by the government weather bureau.

The map will also suggest what crops are more suited for their respective areas, Balanza said.

The DA also began a survey to determine the dietary preferences in towns and provinces to help farmers decide what crops were marketable, she said.

Benguet farms carved out from the mountainsides have been major sources of salad vegetables like carrots, lettuce, cabbages, potatoes and cauliflower for Metro Manila and other Luzon markets.

Highly priced heirloom rice are also grown on the rice terraces of Ifugao and Mountain Province, and in vast palay farms of Kalinga province.

Mining growth slowdown

Mining and quarrying recorded a negative 15-percent growth in 2018, from a negative 0.2 percent in 2017, slowing down the overall performance of the Cordillera industry sector, which grew by 9.2 percent last year from an 18.8-percent growth rate in 2017, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

It was not clear how the poor growth in quarrying affected a massive construction boom, dominated by private sector investments in 2017, which drew a 23.3-percent growth rate for the construction sector.

Quarrying's poor showing may be due to inadequate information because local governments have not provided data about licensed quarry operators and quarry revenues, said Alfredo Genetiano, Cordillera mine management division chief of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau.

The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) intends to pave 191 kilometers of roads in Cordillera, "to finally complete the concreting of all 2,258 km by the end of this year," Angelita Mabitasan, DPWH Cordillera planning chief, said.

—VINCENT CABREZA INQ



1 M species risk extinction due to humans – draft UN report

PARIS (AFP) – Up to one million species face extinction due to human influence, according to a draft UN report obtained by AFP that painstakingly catalogues how humanity has undermined the natural resources upon which its very survival depends.

The accelerating loss of clean air, drinkable water, CO₂-absorbing forests, pollinating insects, protein-rich fish and storm-blocking mangroves – to name but a few of the dwindling services rendered by Nature – poses no less of a threat than climate change, says the report, set to be unveiled May 6.

Indeed, biodiversity loss and global warming are closely linked, according to the 44-page Summary for Policy Makers, which distills a 1,800-page UN assessment of scientific literature on the state of Nature.

Delegates from 130 nations meeting in Paris from April 29 will vet the executive summary line-by-line. Wording may change, but figures lifted from the underlying report cannot be altered.

“We need to recognise that climate change and loss of Nature are equally important, not just for the environment, but as development and economic issues as well,” Robert Watson, chair of the UN-mandated body that compiled the report, told AFP, without divulging its findings.

“The way we produce our food and energy is undermining the regulating services that we get from Nature,” he said, adding that only “transformative change” can stem the damage.

Deforestation and agriculture, including livestock production, account for about a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions, and have wreaked havoc on natural ecosystems as well.

‘Mass extinction event’

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) report warns of “an imminent rapid acceleration in the global rate of species extinction.”

The pace of loss “is already tens to hundreds of times higher than it has been, on average, over the last 10 million years,” it notes.

“Half-a-million to a million species are projected to be threatened with extinction, many within decades.”

Many experts think a so-called “mass extinction event” – only the sixth in the last half-billion years – is already under way.

The most recent saw the end of the Cretaceous period some 66 million years ago, when a 10-kilometer-wide asteroid strike wiped out most lifeforms.

Scientists estimate that Earth is today home to some eight million distinct species, a majority of them insects.