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WILDLIFE TRAFFICKERS KEEP ELUDING JUSTICE

SPECIAL REPORT BY JHESSET O. ENANO

Despite major confiscations of trafficked animals in recent years, convicting wildlife criminals in the Philippines remains a challenge. With weak prosecution, kingpins remain untouched while small fry dodge jail time.

(Last of three parts)

An unassuming house with high walls in Pasay City has been a longtime target of environmental law enforcers.

Last year, a raid that followed an entrapment operation revealed the house's secrets: hundreds of birds, from black palm cockatoos and rainbow lorries to young emus and even a baby ostrich, in cages that lined the walls, and, in other enclosures, more than 100 sugar gliders, small marsupials similar to flying squirrels, and two small wallabies, members of the kangaroo family.

Most of the animals were believed to have been smuggled from Indonesia through Mindanao. They were collectively valued at P10 million and were reportedly to be sold online, through social networking sites like Facebook.

For many enforcers, raiding the house offered a sense of déjà vu. It was the subject of their search once in 2014, and again in the following year. In those three raids in the past five years, authorities were greeted by familiar sights: all sorts of endangered mammals, birds and reptiles from Palawan province and other countries, crammed in metal cages all over the house.

At the center of it is the homeowner himself, who authorities identified as Abraham Bernales. Since 2011, wildlife law enforcers from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and agents from the National Bureau of Investigation and the Philippine National Police had been repeatedly arresting and charging Bernales with violations of the wildlife law.

Yet records show that in the four times he was collared for illegally transporting, possessing and trading wildlife, there had been only one conviction, for which he had to cough up a P5,000 fine.

Poor conviction rate

Bernales' repeated evasion of the law shows the weaker link in the government's pursuit of wildlife traffickers. Despite numerous seizures and apprehensions through the years, prosecuting wildlife criminals remains a daunting challenge, allowing kingpins to go scot-free and the illegal trade to persist.

Since the passage in 2011 of Republic Act No. 9147, or the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act, authorities have been doggedly going after wildlife traffickers and illegal traders. Major confiscations had since been recorded, resulting in the seizure of over

3,000 pangolins, the most trafficked mammal in the world; more than 5,000 freshwater and sea turtles, including some 4,000 critically endangered Philippine pond turtles; and hundreds of birds, including those endemic to Palawan, and others poached and trafficked from other countries like Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

From 2013 to 2018, at least 123 enforcement operations had been conducted by authorities, leading to more than 26,700 confiscated wildlife, records from the DENR's Biodiversity Management Bureau showed.

But in that six-year span, only 70 cases against wildlife criminals had been filed, with only 18 convictions during the period. Of 228 identified violators, only 30—a mere 13 percent—had been penalized.

Whether any of them had actually spent time in jail is another question, since the sentences that were meted out varied significantly from case to case, records showed. Some were merely ordered to pay fines ranging from P250 to P50,000. Others were jailed for five days, some for six months to a year.

But both enforcers and

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wildlife experts said most of the offenders did not actually do jail time because they would post bail as soon as they were charged. First-time offenders would apply for probation upon indictment because the penalties for illegal trading and trafficking all fall below imprisonment of six years.

"We have paper convictions," said Emerson Sy of the Philippine Center for Terrestrial and Aquatic Research. "Some traffickers also know the ins and outs of the judicial system ... [For big-time criminals], bail is just spare change. Once they are out, they just continue with their illegal activity."

In Bernales' case, he sought probation in an earlier charge, authorities said. In succeeding arrests, he skipped jail time by using another loophole: Being elderly, he could cite humanitarian grounds.

Bernales has repeatedly denied the charges filed against him through the years. In all his arrests, he insisted that he was a mere caretaker of the hundreds of wild animals caged in his home.

He owns a pet shop at Cartimar Market in Pasay.

Familiar issues

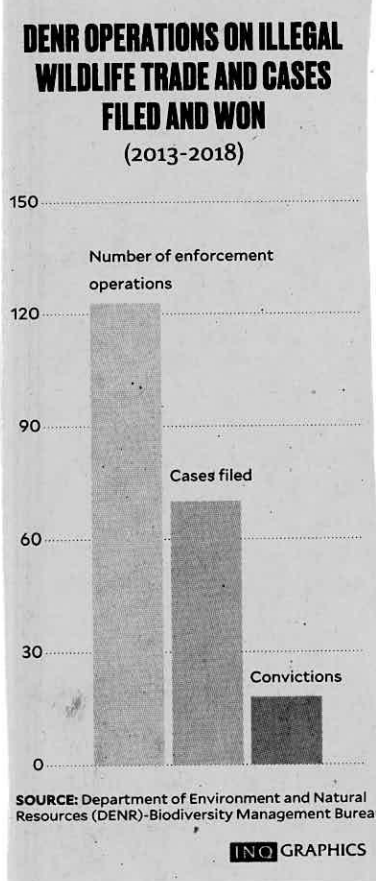
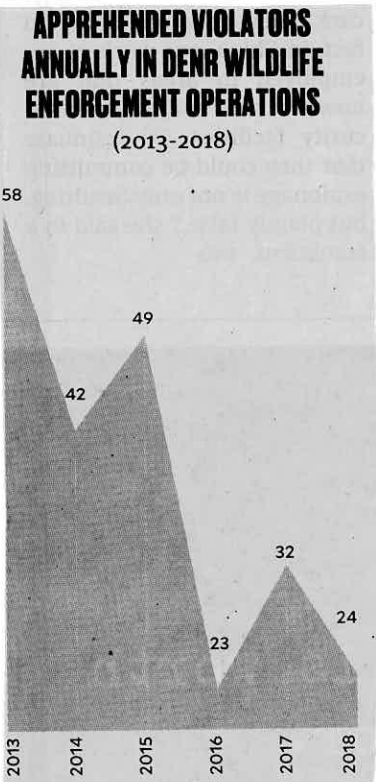
The issues that plague environment cases are the same ones that beset the judicial system: overloaded courts, slow-paced trials and technicalities.

Still, significant efforts have been made through the years to address the prosecution of environment crimes, including illegal trading in wildlife. In 2010, the Supreme Court issued the rules of procedure for civil, criminal and special civil actions involving violations of environmental laws and related legislation.

"The whole goal was to hasten the process of filing cases and for the courts to make their decisions the soonest possible time," said lawyer Edward Lorenzo, who serves as wildlife crime prevention adviser for USAID Protect Wildlife. "It came about from the experience of groups, prosecutors and enforcers that some violators escape after bail is filed, then their cases are archived."

Dragging cases also take their toll on enforcers who may be reassigned elsewhere and thus fail to continue attending trial as witnesses.

The provision for continuous trial has speeded up most of the cases. But many still take a long time to be resolved because regional and municipal



courts are overburdened with other cases, Lorenzo said.

In 2008, the Supreme Court approved the creation of 117 environment courts. Yet these "green courts" do not hear environment cases exclusively; often these cases are lumped together with other criminal cases, such as homicide and robbery.

Despite existing legislation, the zeal to prosecute environmental offenders may be less compared to prosecuting a person who has committed a crime

against another.

"Even without a law, when you punch someone, you feel bad because [the laws that govern the act] are based on moral law," said lawyer Asis Perez, senior adviser of Tanggol Kalikasan.

"In terms of wildlife, there is none," Perez said. "Our basis is our deep apprehension now that these animals are becoming extinct. That takes some time to be ingrained in our consciousness ... There is still some convincing that needs to be done."

No appreciation

According to environment lawyers and groups, a crucial step toward better prosecution is training prosecutors and judges in handling environment cases, especially those involving wildlife. In most law schools in the country, environmental law has yet to be integrated in the program, and professional training courses are few and far between.

"Sometimes, one of the issues with prosecutors is that there is no appreciation of wildlife cases. Some would think it's just a bird or a pet," Lorenzo said. "But with training, they [will] see what is at stake, that there are far-reaching complications."

This may also help deal with a lingering challenge in prosecuting illegal wildlife cases: determining the value of the confiscated animals, which sets the gravity of the fines and penalty for the accused.

Often, the prosecution only relies on the market value of the poached wildlife, without factoring in what humans and the environment may lose once these animals are removed from their habitats.

"It is difficult to peg a value, thus it is difficult to peg the punishment," said lawyer Mary Kristie Baleva, external rela-



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Wildlife Traffickers Keep eluding Justice

STOP WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING

Report wildlife crime by calling the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Biodiversity Management Bureau at (02) 925-8952 or (02) 925-8953, or reach them via Facebook at facebook.com/denrbiodiversity. The Environmental Crime Division of the National Bureau of Investigation can also receive reports of illicit activity against wildlife.

For cases in Palawan province, the public can reach out to the enforcement team of the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development via mobile, at 0935-1162336 (Globe/TM) or at 0948-9372200 (Smart/Talk and Text).

Anonymous tips, including screenshots showing illegal online activity, can also be sent to several wildlife monitoring groups on Facebook, such as the Marine Wildlife Watch of the Philippines, Pinoy Naturalist and the Philippine Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network.

tions and policy specialist at the Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB). "You may have monetary value for one, but the value in terms of biodiversity is difficult to determine."

In most cases, even if hundreds of animals of different species are seized from a smuggler or trafficker, the offense is still counted as a single violation of the wildlife law, potentially leading to convictions that undermine the value of what was taken from the wild.

For instance, a municipal trial court judge in Mati City, Davao Oriental province, recently convicted two men of illegally possessing and trading wildlife. When they were arrested in April, authorities seized 450 different species of animals poached from Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, including the critically endangered western long-beaked echidna, a rarely spotted egg-laying mammal. The value of the wildlife was estimated at P50 million.

Despite the eye-popping number of confiscated animals, the two men were meted a jail term of up to four years and a fine of P30,000 each.

Said Baleva: "For example, you placed the value of a seahorse at P10. If you look at its biodiversity value, it's difficult to determine the breadth and depth ... of the damage to biodiversity and ecosystem services because of the trafficking of even one single animal."

"It's possible that you have only three remaining individuals of a certain species," she said.

The threat of extinction of certain species, however, still appears lost to the prosecution. Just last month, three men who smuggled 10 Philippine pangolins and who were arrested in Tagaytay City were sentenced to

jail time of only three months and told to pay a P20,000 fine each. Freed on bail, they have since sought probation.

But the true value of the endemic pangolins remains to be seen, even as their population is dwindling fast amid little knowledge about them.

Stiffer fines

To further strengthen the prosecution, experts and advocates said, the wildlife law must be amended to further stiffen penalties and also train environmental law enforcers to go after traffickers and illegal traders.

In the imposition of penalties, the law takes into consideration both the act and the conservation status of the animals. For example, illegal trading can lead to a jail term of up to four years and a fine of P5,000 to P300,000, if the species are listed as critical.

"[But] the fines are not clear: Does the fine correspond to one animal or to many individuals?" said ACB executive director Theresa Mundita Lim. "The services that the animals provide must also be taken into account."

A draft amendment pending in the House of Representatives aims to raise the penalties, both fine and imprisonment, for different illegal activities concerning wildlife, including killing, trade, collection and transport. Under the proposed amendment, trading critical species can now lead to jail time of up to six years and fines ranging from P50,000 to P600,000.

Along with consistent confiscations, these stiffer penalties and longer jail terms can serve as deterrent to criminals, Lim said.

Despite the challenges in prosecution, the Philippines is moving toward the right direction in curbing the illegal wildlife trade.

"We have come a long way since 20 years ago. We just need to be vigilant and include the consumers in the equation so they do not patronize illegally traded species," Lim said.

But with criminals taking advantage of both new technologies and shortcomings in the prosecution, the pressure remains for the government to work much faster.

Said Lorenzo: "Usually, all governments play catch up with the 'ilgalista' (wildlife trader) because they are the ones innovating. When they change their strategy, the government should also do so. But the question is, how fast do we work to catch up?" INQ



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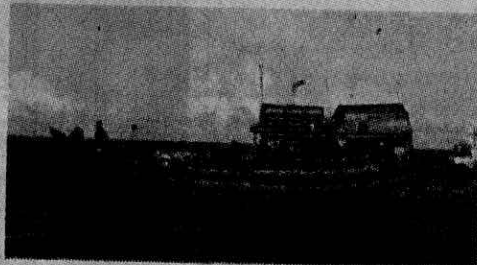
Prosecuting wildlife criminals still daunting challenge to gov't

BIRD RESCUE In 2014, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) personnel recovered three endangered Philippine eagles, six cockatoos and an amethyst brown dove from wildlife traders in Talisay City, Cebu province. Birds, according to records of the DENR's Biodiversity Management Bureau from 2013 to 2018, comprised the fourth largest seizure from illegal traders in the country after reptiles, mammals and anthropods. —TONEE DESPOJO/CEBU DAILY NEWS



**BANGSAMORO AUTONOMOUS REGION
IN MUSLIM MINDANAO: TURTLE ISLANDS, TAWI-TAWI
Vietnamese-manned vessel apprehended for
illegal fishing around Turtle Islands**

A FISHING vessel, with four Vietnamese crew members on board, was apprehended and been impounded by Philippine authorities for operating illegally in waters around the Turtle Islands in Tawi-Tawi. In a statement released Tuesday, the Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom) said the boat, marked SSEN but with no flag, was caught last Aug. 15 by a joint team of the Philippine Coast Guard's Sub-Station Great Bakkungan and the Turtle Islands Municipal Police Station. The maritime patrol team pursued the vessel following reports from civilians. The four crew members did not have legal documents, according to WestMinCom. The vessel, which was loaded with sea cucumber catch, is currently impounded in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi while authorities prepare the filing of charges. "We encourage each and every Filipino citizen to immediately report to the proper authorities any illegal fishing activity in their area... Let us be more vigilant and contribute in the conservation and protection of our natural resources," said Lt. Gen. Cirilito E. Sobejana, WestMinCom commander. The Turtle Islands is a cluster of six islets — Boan, Lihiman, Langaan, Great Bakkungan, Taganak, and Baguan — comprising one municipality with about 5,000 residents as of 2015. It is home to the Turtle Islands Wildlife Sanctuary, a declared protected area and been submitted in the tentative list for consideration as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



WESTMINCOM



MWSS says Kaliwa dam project lacking only environmental clearance from DENR

THE Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) said Tuesday that it submitted all but one of the required documents for its loan agreement with China to build Kaliwa dam.

The missing document for the Philippine capital's proposed new water source, it said, was the environmental compliance certificate.

In a statement, the state water agency said government approvals for the loan agreement have been secured "in full coordination with all concerned agencies" to implement its flagship project that will ensure water security.

"The only remaining precondition to loan effectiveness that has yet to be submitted is the Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC)," it said.

MWSS was reacting to reports from the Commission on Audit

(CoA) that called for, among others, an explanation of the criteria for competitiveness on the vetting of the three nominated Chinese contractors for the project.

The government auditor also reminded the water agency that the winning contractor, China Energy Engineering Corp., should comply with the contract agreements before conducting preliminary project activities.

MWSS said it had submitted a detailed explanation from its technical working group to the auditor.

Kaliwa dam is meant to be a medium-term water source for Metro Manila, complementing the main water source, Angat dam, which supplies about 96% of the requirement. Kaliwa is expected to add 600 million liters per day (MLD) to augment the 4,000 MLD from Angat.

In November, the MWSS estimated the cost of the project at P12.1 billion, of which 85% will be funded by official development assistance from China amounting to P10.2 billion, while 15% will be shouldered by the agency.

In its statement, the agency said an environmental impact statement report is going through a second stage screening by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' Environmental Management Bureau (DENR-EMB).

It said public hearings have been scheduled jointly by the MWSS and DENR, which issues the certificate, on Aug. 23, 27 and 28 in Quezon and Rizal, the provinces where Kaliwa dam will be built.

"Although proceedings take time, MWSS is committed to comply with all the requirements

for ECC issuance in order to ensure that the environmental and indigenous peoples' groups will be heard and that all concerns regarding the project will be addressed," the MWSS said.

It said all legal, financial, environmental and technical issues had been addressed in strict compliance with Philippine laws, rules and regulations, as well as the guidelines for official development assistance projects.

MWSS said the documents it has submitted include the Monetary Board approval of the loan between MWSS and Export-Import Bank of China; Department of Finance (DoF) approval-in-principle and willingness to guarantee; and DoF certification that all internal government approvals required to deliver or execute the loan agreement have been obtained. — **Victor V. Saulon**



MWSS defends Kaliwa Dam deal

By **LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON**

The Chinese firm that bagged the controversial Kaliwa Dam project has complied with all requirements for the contract, the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) said, amid reports that bidding for the project may have been rigged.

"All legal, financial, environmental and technical issues have been addressed in strict compliance with Philippine laws, rules and regulations, as well as the guidelines for official development assistance projects," the MWSS said in defending China Energy Engineering Corp.

The company will build the P12.2-billion dam in Quezon to supply an additional 600 million liters of water per day to Metro

Manila.

The MWSS issued its statement after the Commission on Audit (COA) accused it of failing to observe proper bidding and vetting procedures before it awarded the project to CEEC in December 2018.

The MWSS has already submitted its response to the COA on the selection process for the winning contractor of the project, as well as the documents required to access the loan.

"Clearly, the government approvals to the loan agreement were secured in full coordination with all concerned agencies to implement this government flagship project which

is a part of the MWSS' water security program," it said.

Based on the audit team's investigation, the technical working group of the MWSS short-listed and eventually accepted the bid applications of three Chinese firms - CEEC, Consortium of Guangdong Foreign Construction and Power China Ltd. - even if two of them failed to meet the pre-qualification requirements set earlier by the MWSS for the project.

The state audit body said CEEC and Consortium of Guangdong specifically failed to show that they have met the required years of experience in design, engineering and

construction works.

Under the MWSS's guidelines, only firms that have successfully completed design, engineering and construction works for a dam and conveyance structure of similar complexity as the proposed Kaliwa Dam project in the last 20 years shall qualify for the bidding.

Civil society and non-government organizations have been supporting the call of the Agta-Dumagat-Remontado tribes in Quezon and Rizal demanding the cancellation of the Kaliwa Dam project.

The project reportedly threatens to displace the indigenous communities and harm their livelihood and environment.



MWSS rebutts but probe on

By Angelica Ballesteros

No shortcut has been made in the New Centennial Kaliwa Dam project as the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System

Clearly, the government approvals to the loan agreement were secured in full coordination with all concerned agencies

(MWSS) assured yesterday the bidding process for the P12-billion project met all requirements including a "special authority from the President."

Despite the MWSS assurance, however, Malacañang said it will review the Commission on Audit's (CoA) report questioning the selection of the contractor for the deal.

In an Audit Observation Memorandum sent to MWSS, CoA reported that the China Energy Engineering Corp. Ltd (CEEC) already conducted preliminary activities even without government's approval and two out of three shortlisted Chinese contractors were approved by the technical working group despite their non-compliance with MWSS minimum requirements.

MWSS said in a statement that among the documents it had obtained were the Monetary Board approval of the loan between MWSS and Export-Import Bank of China; Department of Finance (DoF) approval-in-principle and willingness to guarantee paper; DoF certification of internal government approval required

to deliver and execute the loan agreement; Bureau of Treasury certification; signed preferential buyer's credit loan agreement; and signed letter of guarantee.

"Clearly, the government approvals to the loan agreement were secured in full coordination with all concerned agencies to implement this flagship project which is part of MWSS Water Security Program," according to the statement.

Duterte provides kick

MWSS noted that the project was conceptualized in 1967 but "it is only the administration of President Duterte that has taken bold and decisive action" in ensuring its swift implementation.

It said the project will benefit Metro Manila residents who are reeling from yearly water shortages at the height of the dry season.

The water service regulator ceded that a pre-condition to loan effectivity has yet to be submitted which is the environmental compliance certificate (ECC). The Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Environmental Management Bureau has been holding hearings with the MWSS

for the ECC, according to MWSS.

The MWSS assurance will not preclude an investigation, according to the Palace which promised to go through the report of the CoA "and then look at the contract."

The flagship project is part of MWSS Water Security Program

President Duterte's spokesman Salvador Panelo said, however, the final say on the long-delayed project will be from President Rodrigo Duterte.

In December 2018, the contract for the dam project was awarded to CEEC Ltd.

The China-funded project in Quezon province is expected to provide an additional 600 million liters a day of water to Metro Manila and nearby provinces.

The multi-billion water project was first approved by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) on 29 May 2014 and on 27 June 2017 the

project's financing scheme shifted from Public, Private Partnership (PPP) scheme which was hard to obtain to securing Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) funds.

Some groups have rejected the construction of the Kaliwa Dam, saying it would displace indigenous peoples.

No debt trap

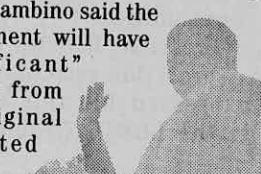
Instead of allegations of being buried in debt as a result of the project, the government will save as much as P4.2 billion in the construction of the dam through an ODA loan from China compared to financing through commercial debts.

DoF Assistant Secretary and spokesman Tony Lambino explained that the construction of the Kaliwa Dam has been a government proposal

since 1970s but it somehow never materialized.

He said several proposals were made on the manner of financing for the project that included an unsolicited PPP (public-private partnership) scheme which were all thumbed down by authorities.

With the shift in the financing mode, Lambino said the government will have "significant" savings from the original estimated cost.





Kaliwa bid above board: MWSS

THE Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) said government approvals of its loan agreement as well as the bidding for the development of the Kaliwa Dam were all above board.

The agency's comments came after the Commission on Audit (COA) questioned several procedural issues on the bidding of the P12.19-billion project that involved three Chinese contractors.

MWSS said it is awaiting for the issuance of the environmental compliance certificate (ECC) but has secured seven other requirements for the project.

These include the Monetary Board approval of the loan between MWSS and Export-

Import Bank of China; Department of Finance (DOF) approval-in-principle and willingness to guarantee apart from DOF certification that all internal government approval required to deliver the loan agreement have already been obtained.

The agency said it has secured certification from the Bureau of Treasury this qualifies with Republic Act 4860 which allows the president to obtain foreign loans; special authority from the president; signed preferential buyer's credit loan agreement; and a signed letter of guarantee.

"The only remaining precondition to loan effectiveness that has yet to be submitted is the ECC. To date, the

Environmental Impact Statement Report is undergoing second stage screening by the DENR-EMB (Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Environmental Management Bureau). Public hearings have also been scheduled... on August 23, 27 and 28 in the provinces of Quezon and Rizal," the MWSS said in a statement.

"MWSS wishes to assure interested parties that all legal, financial, environmental and technical issues have been addressed in strict compliance with Philippine Laws, rules and regulations, as well as the guidelines for official development assistance projects. MWSS is resolved to provide all necessary resources for the completion of

the Kaliwa dam project keeping in view the growing water scarcity in Metro Manila," it added.

COA recently flagged the project citing that while three Chinese firms joined the bidding, two of the companies failed to comply with the requirements.

It said one firm did not have a Philippine Contractors Accreditation Board license, a Philippine Government Electronic Procurement System platinum certificate and a valid Single Largest Completed Contract.

It added the other submitted a bid of P13.043 billion which was 6.91 percent above the approved budget for the contract, leaving only one qualified bidder.



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Labis na natuwa si Antipolo City Mayor Andeng Ynares gayundin ang mga kawani ng City Environment and Waste Management Office (CEWMO) nang kilalanin at bigyan ng dalawang Plaque of Recognition ng DENR IV-A ang Antipolo City para sa Best Environmental Technology at Best Available Practices. Bukod dito, pinarangalan din ng DILG ang Antipolo bilang Hall of Fame Awardee noong 2018 dahil sa magaling na pagpapatupad ng environmental practices. Thumbs up naman sa greening programs ni Mayor Ynares para sa Antipolo City si DENR-Usec Benny Antiporda na magkasama sa ginanap na 4th Annual Environmental Summit kamakailan sa Taal Vista Hotel, Tagaytay City.



GO RECALLS LOPEZ APPOINTMENT

Rody didn't think twice on Gina

The President asked, why are you just giving me suggestions, why not help me? And the rest is history

By Trina Ibarle Orquiza

It all started with a simple conversation with President Rodrigo Duterte when Gina Lopez was chosen to become Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) secretary.

The President did not think twice about appointing her as member of his Cabinet after hearing Lopez's discourse on a better national environmental policy during an environmental forum which Lopez herself initiated.

"She had a lot of suggestions about the environment. The President asked, why are you just giving me suggestions, why not help me? And

the rest is history," Sen. Bong Go said, reminiscing the experience in Davao when Lopez's fate had already been decided by Mr. Duterte.

Doing job too well

Lopez then served as DENR secretary only for a few months as her stint was cut short by the Commission on Appointment's (CA) rejection of her appointment but Mr. Duterte appealed to the CA to reconsider specially as he considered Lopez to be merely doing her job and doing it well.

Nonetheless, she extended her service to environmental causes outside of the department through television network ABS-CBN's programs,

and lately with *G-Diaries* with her brother Ernie Lopez which promoted ecotourism.

Lopez passed away at 65 after succumbing to brain cancer last Monday.

Employees paid tribute to Lopez during the arrival of her remains at the ABS-CBN Broadcasting Center yesterday. Lopez served as chairman of the ABS-CBN Foundation.

Passionate Cabinet member

Go related how Lopez's ethos was prominent in her role as an advocate of the environment. "I had the honor of working with her when she was the environment secretary of the Duterte administration. As a former colleague in the government, I know

how passionate, dedicated and humble she was as a public servant and as an earth warrior," said Go in a statement.

"We were friends for more than 10 years. She was a fearless advocate and a tireless philanthropist, dedicating most of her life for the betterment of her fellow Filipinos. Her exceptional dedication in protecting our environment has no equal today," he added.

Go lauds Lopez for being a model for public service and of compassion to her fellowmen, and hopes her legacy continues in the generations to come.

"Thank you for your service to the Filipinos, to all the causes you fought, especially for the environment," he said.



Editorial

Kampeon ng kalikasan

HINDI mallimutan ang mga sinabi ni Gina Lopez noong Hunyo 2016 nang hirangin siya ni President Rodrigo Duterte na Environment secretary, *"I don't like mining, the foreigners and the rich are the only ones benefitting from it but the farmers and the fishermen suffer."*

Hindi nga niya gusto ang pagmimina sapagkat bukod sa sinisira ang kapaligiran, sinisira rin ang pinagkukunan ng ikabubuhay ng mga magsasaka at mangingisda.

Tinotoo niya ang pag-ayaw sa mining companies. Umabot sa 22 mining companies ang kanyang napasara at 12 contracts sa pagmimina ang kanyang kinansela sa panahon ng kanyang panunungkulan sa Duterte administration. Ang 22 mining companies ay napatunayang lumabag sa mga itinatakdang batas at bumagsak din sa siltation, soil erosion, dust emission at kawalan ng social at development projects. Napatunayan din na sinisira ng mga ito ang kagubatan.

Hindi naipagpatuloy ni Lopez ang kanyang adbokasiya na mailigtas ang kalikasan laban sa mga mapang-abusong mining companies sapagkat ni-reject siya ng Commission on Appointment (CA) noong 2017. Labing-anim na senador ang bumoto para malis siya sa puwesto at walo ang pumanig sa kanya. May pait sa tinig ni Lopez makaraang ma-reject, sabi niya, ang interes sa negosyo ang nangibabaw.

Bukod sa paglaban sa iresponsableng mining companies, adbokasiya rin niya ang paglilinis sa maruming Ilog Pasig at mga estero sa Metro Manila. Siya rin ang nagpasimuno sa reforestation ng La Mesa Watershed at sa malawakang pagtatanim ng bakawan sa Palawan.

Noong Lunes, pumanaw na si Lopez sa edad na 65 dahil sa brain cancer. Ganunman, pumanaw siya na mayroong naiwang magandang alaala sa mamamayan --- ang pagmamahal sa kalikasan. Hindi malilimutan ang kanyang pagtatanggol para mailigtas ang kapaligiran laban sa mga gahaman. Alam niya na may karapatan ang bawat Pilipino sa isang malinis at malusog na kapaligiran. Hangarin niyang mawala ang mga humuhukay sa mga bundok at kumakalbo sa kagubatan. Pangarap niyang hindi na magbaha sa darating na panahon.

Hindi malilimutan ang mga ginawa ni Gina Lopez - ang kampeon ng kalikasan.



OK KA HARRY



Harry Roque

TWITTER @HarryRoque

Nitong Lunes, naging ako sa isang masamang balita na ang dating Kalihim ng Kagawaran ng Kapaligiran at Likas na Kayamanan (DENR) na si

Magpahinga ka nang mabuti, Gina

Gina Lopez ay pumanaw na dahil sa komplikasyon dulot ng kanyang sakit na brain cancer. Si Gina at ako ay hindi nagkatagpo bilang mga kawani sa gabinete ni President Rodrigo Duterte. Ngunit alam ko na isa siyang mabuting lingkod-bayan, higit pa kanino man.

Kung mayroon mang isang katangian si Gina na alam ng lahat ito ay ang kanyang pagmamahal sa kanyang trabaho kagaya ng pagmamahal niya sa ating kalikasan. Siguro nga ito ay isa sa mga trademark na ng isang Gina Lopez, na kahit na maraming tao ang hindi siya nakasamang

magtrabaho ay masasabi pa rin nila kung gaano kabuti ang puso ng isang Gina Lopez.

Makikita mo sa mga mata ni Gina Lopez ang sigla at alab ng pagsisilbi. Ang kanyang kritiko—lalo na noong nagpasya siyang kalabanin ang mga taong nasa likod ng mga higanteng mining firms sa bansa noong siya ay kalihim pa ng DENR—ay marahil sasabihing lubos-lubos ang kanyang pagmamahal sa kanyang trabaho na minsan ay sumusobra na. Katulad ni Gina, ganoon din ang pagmamahal ko sa aking trabaho.

Isang maliit na

papuri na tawaging environmental warrior ang isang Gina Lopez. Sa loob ng maraming dekada, isa siya sa mga taong may tunay na malasakit sa kapaligiran. Marami na ang nagawa ni Gina Lopez. Dahil sa kanyang kasigasigan, nanumbalik muli ang sigla ng Pasig River at ng La Mesa Watershed. Ngunit kung siya ang tatanungin, marami pa ang dapat gawin para sa kalikasan.

Isa rin si Gina Lopez sa mga dahilan kung bakit mayroong Bantay Bata 163. Isa ito sa mga naunang organisasyong naglalayong mapabuti

ang kapakanan ng mga bata. Sigurado ako na marami ang makakapagpatotoo kung gaano karami ang natulungan ng organisasyong ito. Sa katunayan, ang kanyang adbokasiya para sa mga bata ay makapagsabi kung anong klaseng tao at karakter mayroon siya.

Nawa'y pagpalain ng Diyos ang kaluluwa ni Gina Lopez. Ang kanyang buhay, higit kailanma'y, ay marapat lamang na ipagdiwang at alalahanin hanggang sa susunod na mga henerasyon. Maraming salamat at magpahinga ka na, aking kaibigan!

300,000 HECTARES UP FOR RECLASSIFICATION

DENR EYES LAND STATUS CHANGE AS FARMS EXPAND IN CORDILLERA FORESTS

BAGUIO CITY—Communities and farmlands now occupy 300,000 hectares of Cordillera forests, indicating that 16 percent of the region's forest reservations need to be reclassified as agriculture lands that can be titled, according to the Department of Environment and Natu-

ral Resources (DENR). Only 15 percent (282,543 ha) of the region's 1.8 million-ha area is alienable and disposable because the forestry code prohibits lands with 18-percent slopes from being inhabited and developed.

"We need to improve [Cor-

dillera] land tenure because these areas have been occupied for many years but are still classified as forestlands," said Ralph Pablo, DENR director in the Cordillera.

Land patents

Pablo said the proposed reclassification had been trans-

mitted to Congress.

In spite of the forest law, government agencies have issued 146,951 land patents since 2010, 63,861 of which have been granted for forest dwellers. The rest are agricultural patents for farmlands within the forests.

In 2018, 3,093 more residen-

tial free patents were issued over 93.36 ha of settlements, while 109 certificates of land ownership award for 196.35 ha of farmlands inside the forests were released through the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program.

Pablo said patents were also being released to protect gov-

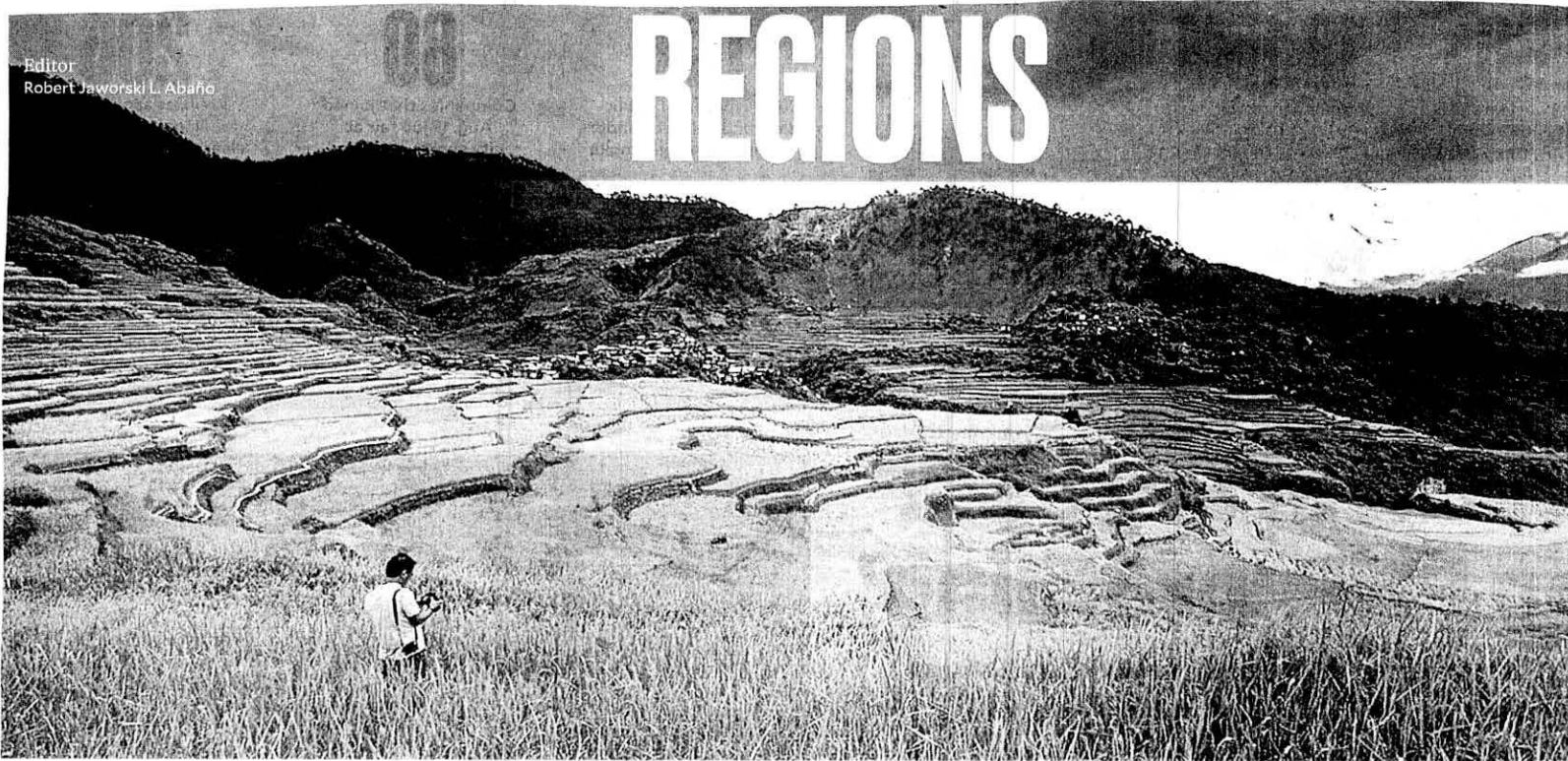
ernment reservations, most of which were located in Baguio City, from informal settlers.

In 2015, 158 patents were issued to reservations controlled by the police, the Supreme Court and the Department of Public Works and Highways.

—KARLSTON LAPNITEN INQ

Editor Robert Jaworski L. Abaño

REGIONS



MOUNTAIN FARMS Rice lands and vegetable farms in the Cordillera have been carved out of mountainsides, with many of these slowly expanding and encroaching on forests. —RICHARD



THE LEGAL FRONT

Two leaders and the people they lead (Part III)



By JUSTICE ART D. BRION (RET.)

IN Part II of this series, I speculated – after looking at President Duterte's initiatives and accomplishments and the promise that Mayor Isko holds – that our people may simply be waiting for signals from their leaders on where to go and what to do so they can follow.

If nothing has happened so far, people might not have been looking and listening closely and might not have fully discerned the signals sent. Many factors can likewise affect the signals, among them, the leaders' own imperfections, as well as the success of critics and naysayers.

President Duterte, despite active opposition, has not been lacking in courage in meeting challenges head-on. His first major battle was against illegal drugs. He met the challenge in the usual law-enforcement way, fire against fire, and expectedly met opposition from critics and naysayers who want a dirty, pervasive and corrosive national problem immediately solved without getting hands muddled.

To some extent, the naysayers succeeded but they still failed to fully stop the President's campaign. True to his style when blocked in one approach, the President simply shifts to another. Any change, though, carries with it some costs: in the drug campaign, the tactical change lowered the campaign's public profile and muddled the lessons it should have left in the people's mind.

Mayor Isko inherited the same drug problem in Manila, and has no choice but to grapple with it. Early on, he saw that violence and deaths could happen and could taint even the most well-meaning executive when charges of extrajudicial killings are aired.

What tactics the mayor would now use remain to be seen, but he faces a difficult situation if his intent is to avoid the negative public image that the naysayers have pinned to deaths that accompany drug operations.

Another initiative the President took on was his "Build, Build, Build" program, a bid for a legacy of infrastructures spanning the country. Construction activities are still in full swing and their impact has not really entered the public's mind or left lessons the public can remember.

Lessons from these program, however, will have to be actively projected and stressed. As former President Arroyo painfully learned, even useful and noteworthy projects such as the "RoRo" interisland travel system may remain unappreciated except by those directly benefiting from the service.

We have not yet fully seen what projects Mayor Isko will undertake as his intended legacies, but he has a wide array of choices that can both be meaningful to the city and significant in terms of affecting people, their mindset, habits, and ways of doing things.

One notable project that the mayor can undertake – side by side with his current efforts to clean his city, and in tandem with the President's larger Manila Bay clean-up – is the restoration and clean up of the disappearing or disappeared esteros. These are the traditional Manila waterways that drain the city's rain water into the Pasig River as a means of flood control, and from there to Manila Bay.

The mayor cannot miss that these esteros cannot be cleaned and unclogged without moving the squatters illegally inhabiting their banks and the

surrounding public areas. Moving and resettling people are risky propositions for politicians; resettlement creates resentments and can affect the voters the politicians count on for support.

Estero squatters, too, are not confined to the poor. Among current squatters are big businesses and influential residents who have taken over these esteros by narrowing or covering them up. Unlike the poor who can only vote, these entities can use funds and influence to waylay even the most laudable projects.

But the mayor should not also forget that leadership does not only connote the readiness to fight; how leaders calculate their moves and boldly take risks also determine the stuff they are made of.

If only the mayor will closely examine the significance of clearing the esteros as a component of cleaning up Manila Bay, he will find out that unclogging these waterways is a "must" to clean up the Pasig River and the bay. Properly used and freed of garbage, they are also important components of Manila's flood control efforts.

To state the obvious, a flood-controlled Manila is a blessing that Manilans will highly appreciate and remember. Unclogged esteros do not only mean freer flow of water but also cleaner waters ultimately draining into Manila Bay.

We should also realize that the Manila Bay clean up carries implications beyond environmental protection; an unclean Manila Bay represents what Manila and even the country have become – a cesspool of the worst and the unwanted.

For these reasons, the clean up of Manila Bay has received almost universal support from the usually contending parties within the country – an unheard of characteristic unique to this Duterte initiative. It is proof, when it succeeds, that Filipinos can pull together towards the same goal if they would only set aside ruinous crab mentality and political bickering.

Mayor Isko can be a significant part of this Filipino victory if he can effectively handle the estero-component of the Manila Bay clean up, and at the same time permanently free up the Luneta and the Bay promenade areas of obstructing structures, traffic, and misplaced vendors. These tasks, after all, are areas of concern that the city mayor should be able to decisively manage through ordinances, regulations, and conscientious implementation.

A successful Manila Bay clean up will give our people, used to squalor and frustration, the sweet taste of triumph over adversity – a victory over what had practically been given up for lost.

This is a victory that shall make them proud – of themselves, of their city, and of the nation, its leaders, and people. It can further drive them to higher standards of order, cleanliness and community-belonging in order to maintain and protect what they have achieved.

More than the sense of triumph, the project will restore people's hopes. After the quick environmental triumph in Boracay, the continuing and accumulating success in environmentally maintaining a clean Manila Bay will fire up hopes that things can look up and still improve in this country.

In these senses, everyone – our leaders, the people, and the nation – wins.

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House gets proposed ₱4.1-T budget

By **ELLSON QUISMORIO**

Now the real work starts at the House of Representatives.

Top officials of the Lower Chamber on Tuesday officially received the ₱4.1-trillion National Expenditure Program (NEP) for 2020 from the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), paving the way for the legislators' scrutiny of the proposed budget.

The NEP serves as the basis for the General Appropriations Bill (GAB), which will become the General Appropriations Act (GAA) once signed by President Rodrigo Duterte.

The proposed 2020 NEP represents a 12-percent (₱438 billion) increase from the 2019 GAA of ₱3.662 trillion.

Among those present during the ceremonial turnover of the NEP were Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano (Taguig-Pateros), Deputy Speaker LRay Villafuerte (Camarines Sur 2nd district), Majority Leader Martin Romualdez (Leyte 1st district), Minority Leader Benny Abante (Manila 6th district), Rep. Isidro Ungab (Davao City 3rd district), and DBM Acting Secretary Wendel Avisado.

The Committee on Appropriations chaired by Ungab will lead the perusal of the proposed budget which aims to "continue the Philippines's journey to a more peaceful and progressive nation," according to Avisado.

The House actually released an initial schedule of the per-agency budget deliberations last week to show its readiness for the task at hand, but it's only now that the solons have laid their hands on the voluminous document. The marathon hearings will begin on Thursday.

"We will work day and night. I ►5

promised a speedy and record breaking budget process...we're raring to get to work," Cayetano said.

Cayetano said he expects a "less-tedious" budget process since less parochial or local concerns will be raised by congressmen during the hearings.

"This budget already contains answers to many of the parochial concerns," the speaker noted.

Social and economic services make up the lion's share of the 2020 NEP, with allocations of ₱1.525.2 billion and ₱1.183.7 billion, respectively. General public services were allocated ₱734.5 billion; debt burden, ₱451 billion; and defense, ₱195.6 billion.

No fund 'parking'

Cayetano said the House won't allow the "parking" of dubious funds in the national budget.

"The parking of funds, the way I understand it, it's a form of corruption," Cayetano said at the ceremonial submission of the proposed 2020 national budget.

Cayetano, who is on his first term in the House, distanced himself from past budgets smeared with the fund parking controversy.

"I cannot speak about the past budgets, wala akong personal knowledge doon (I have no personal knowledge about those)."

The previous DBM leadership had been accused of "parking" or inserting billions worth of public funds in various areas of the budget, with the purpose of such funds being unclear at best.

These included insertions worth ₱54 billion under flood mitigation projects in the 2018 budget and ₱75 billion under the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) allocation in the 2019 budget.

The parked funds have been likened by critics to "pork barrel," the discretionary nature of which makes them prone to corruption and misuse. Lawmakers' discretionary funds were declared illegal by the Supreme Court (SC) in 2014.

"Pork barrel is a thing of the past," Cayetano said.

"We also commend the President's

commitment through acting Budget Sec. [Wendel] Avisado to ensure an equitable and corruption-free distribution of government resources to further propel the economy," Romualdez added.

Avisado, who was also present at the ceremony, guaranteed that there were no parked funds in the 2020 NEP and that every centavo has an identified purpose.

"Yung sinasabing naka-park, naka-park in the sense na ginagamit kung saan, hindi po. Dito po sa budget na ito, identified po lahat yan. Maliwanag po kung saan mapupunta yung ₱4.1 trillion (The alleged parking of funds that are used for whatever purpose, we don't have that. We've identified all the projects in this budget. It's clear where the ₱4.1 trillion will go)," he said, responding to a reporter's query.

Top 10 agencies

The national budget is traditionally the first major measure that the House approves during a given year. During the conduct of budget deliberations, other

measures are usually placed on the backburner.

For this year, House members are out to erase the embarrassment from the delayed passage of the 2019 GAA. The delayed GAA—the first under the Duterte administration—forced the government to run on a reenacted budget for the first quarter of the year.

The agencies with the top 10 budget appropriations are as follows: Department of Education (DepEd), ₱673 billion; Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), ₱534.3 billion; Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), ₱238 billion; Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), ₱195 billion; and Department of National Defense (DND), ₱189 billion.

Rounding up the top 10 are the Department of Health (DOH), ₱166.5 billion; Department of Transportation (DOTr), ₱147 billion; Department of Agriculture (DA), ₱56.8 billion; the Judiciary, ₱38.7 billion; and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), ₱26.4 billion.



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House gets proposed ₱ 4.1-T budget

Some ₱70.6 billion will also be allocated for the newly-created Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao or BARMM.

A ₱10-billion Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) for local farmers—one of the key provisions of the contentious Rice Tariffication Act—has also been incorporated in the proposed budget for next year.

"This budget will renew our push for real change by sustaining our investments in public infrastructure and health capital development, namely health care, education and poverty alleviation," Avisado said.

Some ₱34 billion has been set aside for the new Salary Standardization Law that would raise the pay of public school teachers.

"It is our hope and prayer that after due and extensive deliberation, the 2020 NEP will be passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate in due time," the DBM chief added.

Cayetano expressed confidence for the smooth sailing of the budget in the

House since two of its top stewards in Ungab and Avisado are known to be close to President Duterte, having worked with him at the local level during his time as Davao City mayor.

Ungab, for his part, described the 2020 NEP as "pro-poor."

"Reducing poverty incidence is the best legacy that the executive and legislative can leave," the Mindanao lawmaker said.

Meanwhile, Malacañang is hopeful for the timely passage of the proposed 2020 national budget to ensure uninterrupted funding for key government programs.

"We can always hope that it will pass on time. Any delay will affect our economy. I'm sure the members of Congress know that," Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo said during a Palace press briefing.

"We are always hopeful whether Congress is dominated by allies of the President or not, because after all, as we said repeatedly, members of Congress should know what is good for the Filipino people being representatives of them," he added. (with a report from Genalyn D. Kabiling)



2020 BUDGET UP FOR SCRUTINY

By Jester P. Manalastas

THE 2020 national budget will have no pork and no "parking" of funds.

This was the assurance of Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano as he led the House of Representatives in accepting the proposed national budget which will be scrutinized in the next few weeks and passed on time to avoid reenacted budget.

Majority Leader Martin Romualdez said the House leadership under Speaker Cayetano is committed to pass a constitutionally compliant national budget for year 2020.

Romualdez said the House will comply with the Supreme Court ruling that outlawed any form of pork barrel. "Definitely, the pork barrel system is a thing of the past," he said.

"Line item budgeting system will be strictly observed to ensure transparency and accountability in the disbursement of public funds," Romualdez said.

"We also commend the President's commitment through acting Budget Secretary Avisado to ensure an equitable and corruption-free distribution of government resources to further propel the economy," he added.

Yesterday, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) formally submitted to the House the proposed P4.1 trillion budget for the next fiscal year.

The budget is 12 percent higher than 2019 budget of P3.662 trillion and is expected to fund programs and projects that will continue the journey towards a more peaceful and progressive Philippines.

"It will continue to support our inclusive growth strategies, aimed at accelerating investments in public infrastructure, improving anti-poverty programs and intensifying employment generation," DBM Sec. Wendel Avisado said.

According to Cayetano, there will be no more pork barrel for the lawmakers on the proposed budget because equitable distribution of funds will be implemented.

"Pork barrel is a thing of the past. This budget will have a development funds. No need for the pork because the budget is equitable," Cayetano said.

He added that each lawmaker will get at least P400

million to P500 million from the Department of Public Works and Highways for their proposed infrastructure projects.

Cayetano assured that there will be no "parking" of funds in the national budget or the listing of huge budgetary items under the national budget for a certain congressional district.

He stressed that the budget will focus on good governance and fight against corruption, which is the flagship program of the Duterte administration.

Included on the 2020 budget are the critical programs, namely, Universal Healthcare (P166.5 billion); National Health Insurance Program (NHIP) of the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PHIC) (P92.2 billion); Department of Health Human Resources for Health Deployment (P7 billion); Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (P108.8 billion); Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (P70.6 billion); Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (P10 billion); Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (P641.6 million) and National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (P622.3 million).

The top ten departments that will be getting a lion's shares are the Department of Education (DepEd), P673 billion; Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), P534.3 billion; Department of Interior and Local Govt. (DILG), P238 billion; Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), P195 billion; Department of National Defense (DND), P189 billion; Department of Health (DoH), P166.5 billion; Department of Transportation (DoTr), P147 billion; Department of Agriculture (DA), P56.8 billion; The Judiciary, P38.7 billion and Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), P26.4 billion.

The budget hearings will kick off on Thursday, August 22, at 9 am with a briefing by the Development Budget Coordination Committee (DBCC), the inter-agency body that determines the overall economic targets, expenditure levels and budget of the government. The DBCC is composed of the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), Department of Finance (DOF), and Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP).



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P4.1-T nat'l budget sa 2020 isinumite na sa Kamara

Isinumite na kahapon ng Department of Budget and Management (DBM) sa Kamara ang panukalang P4.1 Trilyon 2020 national budget.

Nakasaad sa 2020 National Expenditure Program (NEP) na inihanda ng Malakanyang, na malaking bahagi nito ay inilaan sa sektor ng social services o 37.2%; 28.9% ang para sa economic services at 18% ang inilaan sa general public services.

Habang mayroong alokasyon na 11% o P451 bilyon para sa pagbabayad ng utang at 4.8% para sa defense o P195.6 bilyon.

Kabilang naman sa top 10 departments na popondohan ng malaki ay ang Department of Education (kasama na ang SUCs, CHED at TESDA) na may P673-B; DPWH (P534.3B); DILG (P238B); DSWD (P195B); DND (P189B); DOH (P166.5B); DOTR (P147B); DA (P56.8B); Hudikatura (P38.7B) at DENR (P26.4B).

Kabilang sa mga prayoridad na pagkagastusan sa susunod na taon ay ang Build, Build, Build Program; Universal Health Care Act na may alokasyong P166.5B at Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) na P108.B. (*Gemma Garcia*)



#nationataglance

CENTRAL LUZON: PANTABANGAN, NUEVA ECIIJA

Improved farm-to-market road in Pantabangan to boost agri, forest management

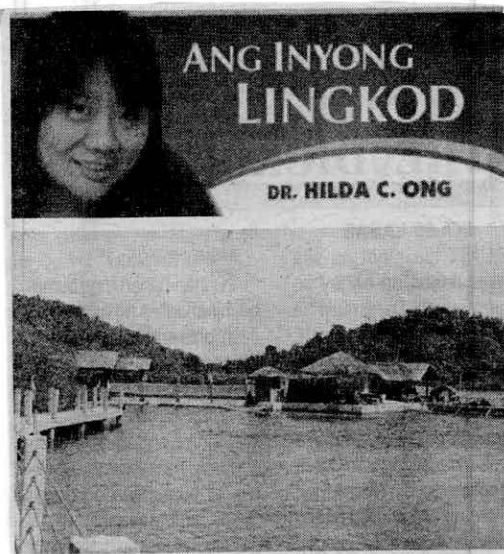
A REHABILITATED 3.7-kilometer farm-to-market road in Pantabangan, Nueva Ecija has recently been completed and is seen to improve market access for upland farmers as well as support reforestation activities in the Pantabangan-

DENR



Carranglan Watershed Forest Reserve. The project was funded as part of the 9.2-billion yen (about P4.5 billion) loan agreement between the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for the Forestland Management Project (FMP). "The road is vital in helping the communities and people's organizations in reforestation activities of the denuded portions of the watershed, including reducing costs and travel time in hauling the seedlings to the planting site," JICA Senior Representative Yo Ebisawa said in a statement. FMP is a community-based reforestation and forestland management

initiative in three of the country's river basins, namely: Upper Magat and Cagayan in Pampanga, and Jalaur in Iloilo Province. The program covers infrastructure development, and conservation and development activities such as capacity building of communities for the rehabilitation of watershed.



pesos (Php 10 Million) na pondo na inilaan ng Committee on Tourism ng Senado ay nakapagtayo at nakumpleto ang board walk, orientation center, at nakabili ng karagdang kayak.

Mayroon ding mountain trail at view deck sa katabi nitong Kaluyahan Mountain.

Tinitiyak ng mga local tourism officer na magugustuhan ng mga turista ang malawak na bakawan, samu't saring mga isda, magandang kabundukan, naglipanang mga unggoy at mga paniki.

Malaki ang potensiyal ng Lalaguna Mangrove Eco Park na mapansin lalo pa't 'jump off point' ang lugar ng mga nagtutungo sa kilalang Biri Rock Formation.

Naniniwala ang pamahalaang panlalawigan na malaki ang maitutulong ng pagdagsa ng mga turista sa paglikha ng trabaho sa mga residente.

"LAGUNA MANGROVE ECO PARK' BUKAS NA SA PUBLIKO

Inanunsiyo ng Provincial Tourism Office ng Province of Northern Samar na puwede nang puntahan ng mga lokal at dayuhang turista ang ipinagmamalaking Lalaguna Mangrove Eco Park na matatagpuan sa Barangay San Isidro, Lavezares, ng nabanggit na lalawigan.

Ang mangrove forest and marine protected area ay magandang lugar para sa bird watching activity dahil sa dumarayo ritong sari-saring migratory birds.

Sa tulong ng ten million



Villar hails new law declaring Balanga wetland as ecotourism site

By **VANNE ELAINE P. TERRAZOLA**

Senator Cynthia Villar on Tuesday lauded the signing of the law, declaring as an ecotourism site the coastal sanctuary in Balanga City, Bataan.

President Duterte signed last August 8 the Republic Act 11365, or the Balanga Wetland and Nature Park Responsible Ecotourism Act.

"The benefits of the enactment of the [law] will redound significantly to the economic growth of the people of the City of Balanga and the Province of Bataan and to the tourism development in the area. It will also further promote environmental sustainability considering that BWNP is a known sanctuary of birds and fish," Villar, chair of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources and principal sponsor of RA 11365 in Senate, said.

The new law declares the Bal-

anga Wetland and Nature Park as a "responsible, community-based ecotourism zone."

The park covers 153,578 square meters of mangrove forest and 187,500 squaremeters of foreshore land in Barangay Tortugas.

As a special ecotourism zone, the park shall be accorded priority development by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the Department of Tourism (DOT), Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and the Tourism Infrastructure & Enterprise Zone Authority. It shall also be subject to the government rules and regulations in developing ecotourism zones.

RA 11365 also mandates the creation of the Balanga Wetland and Nature Park Development Council, which, with the guidance of the said agencies, will be responsible for the

formulation and the implementation of the development and management plans for the ecotourism zone, in consultation with local residents, businesses and other stakeholders.

The Balanga Wetland and Nature Park is popular as a bird watching site where the annual "Ibong Dayo" Festival is held.

Citing a report of the Wild Bird Club of the Philippines, Villar said the area is home to some 9,500 resident and migratory birds.

"Sustainable tourism is the only option especially nowadays, where there are many well-documented incidents of damage to the environment or natural resources, including marine and aquatic resources in various tourism sites here and abroad. Tourism, without environment preservation and protection, is usually the cause of such," Villar said.



Balanga Wetland to boost economic growth, tourism

By Macon Ramos-Araneta

THE people of Balanga City in Bataan can look forward to a boost in their tourism industry with the signing into law of a bill declaring their coastal sanctuary as a responsible, community-based ecotourism site.

“The enactment of this bill will rebound significantly to the economic growth of the people of the City of Balanga and the Province of Bataan and to the tourism development in the area,” said Senator Cynthia Villar, chairperson of the Committee on Environment and principal sponsor of Republic Act No. 11365 or the Balanga Wetland and Nature Park Responsible Ecotourism Act.

“It will also further promote environmental sustainability considering that BWNP is a known sanctuary of birds and fish,” she added.

The park covers 153,578 sq.m. of mangrove forest and 187,500 sq.m. of foreshore land in Barangay Tortugas.

According to a report of the Wild Bird Club of the Philippines, the area is home to some 9,500 resident and migratory birds.

Bataan 2nd District Rep. Jose Enrique Garcia said the park is a popular bird watching site where the annual Ibong Dayo Festival is held.

As a special ecotourism zone, BWNP will be accorded priority development by the departments of environment, tourism, and public works and the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority.

The law will pave the way for the creation of the Balanga Wetland and Natural Park Development Council headed by the city mayor. It will be responsible for the formulation and the implementation of an ecotourism development and management plan in consultation with local residents, businesses and other stakeholders.

“Sustainable tourism is the only option especially nowadays, where there are many well-documented incidents of damage to the environment or natural resources, including marine and aquatic resources in various tourism sites here and abroad. Tourism, without environment preservation and protection, is usually the cause of such,” Villar said.



Balanga City coast declared sanctuary

SEN. Cynthia Villar, chairman of the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee, welcomed on Tuesday the signing into law declaring as a responsible, community-based ecotourism site the coastal sanctuary in Balanga City, Bataan, saying the enactment stresses the importance of legislation which promotes environmental stewardship.

"The benefits of the enactment of the bill will redound significantly to the economic growth of the people of the City of Balanga and the Province of Bataan and to the tourism development in the area. It will also further promote environmental sustainability considering that the area is a known sanctuary of birds and fish," said Villar, principal sponsor of Republic Act 11365 or the Balanga Wetland and Nature Park (BWNP) Responsible Ecotourism Act."

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As a special ecotourism zone, BWNP will be accorded priority development by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Department of Tourism (DoT), Department of Public Works and Highways and the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority.

Villar also said with the enactment of the law, the momentum will keep going as far as tourism development in Region 3 is concerned.

According to DoT-Central Luzon, ecotourism is a fast-growing segments of the region's tourism market. Moreover, Bataan is among the thriving areas in the region with a record of 480,917 travelers in 2017.

JAVIER JOE ISMAEL



Balanga sanctuary is ecotourism site

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The park covers 153,578 square meters of mangrove forest and 187,500 square meters of foreshore land in Barangay Tortugas.

As a special ecotourism zone, the park shall be accorded priority development by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the Department of Tourism (DoT), Department of Public Works and Highways and the Tourism Infrastructure & Enterprise Zone Authority. It shall also be subject to the government rules and regulations in developing ecotourism zones.

RA 11365 also mandates the creation of the Balanga Wetland and Nature Park Development Council. **(Vanne Terrazola)**



Ombudsman suspends PCSO, DENR employees

Ordered suspended according to the 15 August decision of the Office of the Ombudsman is PCSO Officer in Charge Branch Manager for Pangasinan Editha Romero

By Keith Calayag

The Office of the Ombudsman has ordered the 90-day preventive suspension of a Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO) official over her alleged inaction to an order of former General Manager Alexander Balutan seeking to stop the supposed illegal operation of Small Town Lottery (STL) in Pangasinan.

Ordered suspended according to the 15 August decision of the Office of the Ombudsman is PCSO Officer in Charge Branch Manager for Pangasinan Editha Romero.

The other respondents in the complaint filed by Speedgame President David Diciano: Assistant General Manager Remeliza Gabuyo, Legal Department Officer Anna Liza Inciong and Manager Leila Galang however were not meted with the same penalty.

The complaint filed by Diciano alleges that Romero, including the other respondents committed Gross Misconduct and Gross Neglect of Duty for their alleged failure to act on the order of Balutan to put a stop to the STL operation of former Speedgame President Edward Aguilar.

Aguilar was replaced by Diciano as Speedgame president on 27 August.

Balutan on February 1 directed Aguilar to immediately stop from further operating Speedgame in connection with the STL. All concerned PCSO personnel were also directed to implement the directive.

The PCSO's order was not followed by Aguilar's group as it continued to operate STL through Facebook Live.

"After an initial evaluation of the administrative complaint and its supporting documents, this Office finds sufficient basis to warrant preventive suspension of respondent Romero only, pending investigation of this case," the decision read.

The requisites of the Ombudsman to issue a preventive suspension order are provided in Section 24 of Republic Act 6770 or the Ombudsman Act of 1989 and Section 9 Rule III of Administrative Order 7.

The Office of the Ombudsman has also ordered the 90-day preventive suspension of three employees from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

Subject of the order were Community Environment and Natural Resources Officer Bernabe Garnace, Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Officer Fransisco Gallego Jr., Community Environment and Natural Resources Officer Salvador Manglinong Jr.

The charges against the employees for alleged grave misconduct, gross neglect of duty and conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service stemmed from the filing

of Reclaimed Land Leases Application covering three lots measuring 22,445 square meters of Auxilliary Missionaries of the Assumption Inc. (AMA) — a non-stock and non-profit corporation.

In 2011 Garnace denied AMA's request to renew its lease, which expired in 1994 for another 25 years. AMA was informed that that its request has not been acted upon because of lacking requirements.

Following the denial of AMA's bid, Gallego

approved an Investigation Report of the subdivision survey that subdivided the lot occupied by AMA into four sub-lots which resulted to the reduction of the area being occupied by AMA.

The complainant said Garnace conceived the idea of subdividing the lot being leased by AMA without legal justification and without consultation with other DENR officials regarding their plan.

The complaint likewise alleges that since Garnace and Maglinong did not consult DENR officials on their move, the said is considered unauthorized.

Maglinong, meanwhile, was accused of unreasonable delay in the disposition of Miscellaneous Lease Application which was filed by the organization in November 2013.

It was only on 24 June 2019 that Manglinong submitted the Complete Staff Work with a recommendation for the conduct of a technical conference to apprise AMA of the reason for the reduction of the area.



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SINUBUKAN nating magtanong-tanong, mga Bro, ukol sa problema sa comfort room ng mga babae.

Kaugnay ito ng problema ng comfort room na naranasan ni Gretchen Diez sa Farmer's Plaza, Cubao, Quezon City.

Alam ba ninyo ang sagot ng halos lahat ng kababaihan?

Ang bading lalaki pa rin kaya sa CR ng lalaki siya pupunta, hindi sa pambabae.

May exception: kung sarili ang banyo at magkakakilala ang lahat ng gumagamit.

Pero kung hindi, ang lalaki ay para sa panlalaki at ang babae, para sa pambabae.

KWENTONG SENADO

Noong una, pinaniniwalaan ng lahat ang kwento ni Gretchen na todo ang pang-aapi sa kanya ng mga janitress at security personnel.

Pati ang pampoposas sa kanya ng mga pulis na dumating para umayuda sa ulat ng kaguluhan sa lugar.

Ngayon naman, sinasabi ni Senate President Tito Sotto na nakakuha siya ng CCTV footage bago nangyari ang facebook live na iniere ni Gretchen.

Lumalabas na may pila sa pambabaeng CR.

Sa isang pagkakataon, may lumabas na babae na nagreklamo ukol sa isang lalaki sa loob.

Sinundan pa ito ng isa pang babae na nagreklamo na may nakalinyang lalaki sa Ladies Room.

Dito na kumilos ang janitress at kinausap ang lalaki na doon na lang sa other toilet o PWD CR siya ngunit dahil may gumagamit, iniwan na niya roon ang lalaki na nakilalang si Diez sa huli.

Nang bumalik ang janitress, doon na niya natagpuan si Diez na nagpe-facebook live na kanilang sinita at doon na nagsimula ang problema at gulo.

Lumalabas na hilaw o hindi buo ang kwento ukol kay Diez dahil pabor lang kay Diez ang lumalabas at itinuwid ito



KAHIT BADING LALAKI PA RIN

ng CCTV ng mall.

SOGIE BILL

Itong Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression o SOGIE bill o Anti-discrimination Bill ay pinamamadali ni Sen. Riza Hontiveros na ipasa na makaraan ang umano'y diskriminasyon kay Diez.

Ngunit pumapalag dito si Sotto sa pagsasabing maraming usapin ang masasagasaan ng SOGIE.

Kabilang sa mga sisi-rain umano nito ang ilang kalayaan sa pananampalataya at akademiko.

Halimbawa umano sa dress code sa eskwela at relihiyon o oras ng pag-sisimba.

Sa atin, pwede bang pagpasok ng isang estudyante sa iskul ay lalaki siya at babae na siya paglabas o kaya'y magpalitpalit ng kasarian sa anomang subject o aktibidad na kinahaharap niya?

Pero sa relihiyon matindi ang reaksyon, lalo na sa mga simbahang ang babae ay babae at ang lalaki ay lalaki, kahit sa oras ng pagsamba.

Kuwestiyunable rin umano ang gustong mangyari ng SOGIE na parurusahan ang mga institusyon na hindi mag-iisyu ng marriage license.

Para sa atin naman, gigibain ng SOGIE ang mga probisyon ng Civil Code of the Philippines at Family Code of the Philippines na nagbabawal ng pag-aasawa ng lalaki at lalaki at babae at babae.

Tanging ang pupwedeng mag-asawa ay lalaki at babae at sila lang ang pupwedeng isyuhan ng marriage license.

BUSISIIN NANG HUSTO

Ang kaso ni Diez ay dapat na busisiin nang husto, gayundin ang SOGIE Bill.

Sa kwentong Diez, dapat na mahimay nang husto batay sa kumpletong datos at hindi lang batay sa iisang panig.

Ang SOGIE Bill ay da-

pat ding busisiin nang husto upang hindi magrabyado ang lahat.

Sa kwentong Diez, iniugnay ang kaso sa bagong ordinansa ng Quezon City laban sa diskriminasyon pero wala pang kaugnay na batas dito.

Ang SOGIE ang inasahang magdadala sa lebel na nasyonal ng local ordinance ng QC.

Kapag may mapasang SOGIE, susunod at susunod dito ang ordinansa.

At marami ang gagawin mula rito gaya ng paggawa ng mga CR para sa mga Lesbian, Gay,

Problema lang kung paano ipatupad ito sa mga relihiyon na may istriktong pag-iiba ng babae at lalaki at hindi gaanong kinikilala ang LGBTQ.

Maraming away pa ang aabutin natin bago mabuo ang SOGIE.

Hindi ito dapat na madaliin at sa halip isalang ito sa masusing pag-aaral upang kung maaaprubahan ay mapasunod ang lahat ng hindi nangangailangan ng giyera sa loob ng CR, tahanan, opisina ng mga pamahalaan, loob ng mga kompanya at pabrika.

Maaari ring magkaroon ng epekto ito sa mga ahensya ng gobyerno gaya ng mga pulis at militar na hindi dapat basta mapasukan ng panibagong anyo ng disiplina.

Armado ang mga pulis at militar at hindi basta pupwedeng paralin dito ang mga bagong patakaran.

Heto nga't magkasunod ang patayan ng mga pulis sa Taguig City at Abra dahil sa mga personal na hindi pagkakaunawaan.

Anomang reaksyon o reklamo, maaaring iparating sa 0922840-3333 o i-email sa bantiporda@yahoo.com.