

DATE : 01-07-20

DAY : Tuesday

DENR

IN THE NEWS

Strategic Communication and Initiative Service



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IBINIGAY ni Sen. Bong Go ang suot niyang sapatos sa isang lalaking kabilang sa mga nasunugan ng tirahan sa Brgy. Vasra, Quezon City noong Dec. 31, 2019. Inasistehan siya sa pamimigay ng tulong ng kanyang mga kaibigan na sina action star Philip Salvador at DENR Undersecretary Benny Antiporda (naka-sombbrero sa likod).



Gov't to ensure Pinoys' security amid tensions in the ME – Go

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte met with top officials of the Department of National Defense (DND) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to assess the likely impact of the increasing tensions in the Middle East on the country, especially on Filipinos overseas.

"Nagpatawagnasi Pangulong Duterte ng meeting kasama ang chief of staff ng AFP kung ano ang magiging epekto nito sa ating bansa at sa ating seguridad," Senator Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go said.

According to Go, who was present during the meeting on Sunday, President Duterte ordered the AFP to be prepared to deploy military assets to repatriate overseas Filipinos in the Middle East, particularly from Iran and Iraq, at any moment's notice, in coordination with the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and other concerned agencies.

"Hindi na makaantay ang Pangulo na sa Martes pa pag-usapan sa Command Conference ang sitwasyon sa Middle East kung kaya siya nagpatawag ng emergency meeting ngayon. Mabuti na



SENATOR Bong Go gives his shoes to a man who was among those who lost their homes in a fire in Bgy. Vasra, Quezon City on Dec. 31, 2019. Go was assisted in giving aid by his friends action star Philip Salvador and DENR Undersecretary Benny Antiporda (wearing cap in background).

prepared tayo mag-repatriate ng ating mga kababayan if necessary, iyan ang prayoridad ng Pangulo," Go explained.

Go added that concerned agencies were also

instructed to prepare contingency measures and identify nearby safe countries where affected overseas Filipinos can be repatriated and all other contingencies in case it will be top

difficult to bring them back to the Philippines.

The senator assured the public that the government will take all steps possible to ensure the security of Filipinos in the country and overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), especially in the Middle East.

"Patuloy nating mananman ang sitwasyon sa Middle East, lalo na sa Iran. Nasa interes ng Pilipinas na panatilihin ang peace and stability in the region. Our concern clearly is on the safety and security of Filipinos in that country and the region," Go said.

According to Go, the President considers the situation with utmost concern and hopes that things will stabilize, with the support of all regional and global stakeholders.

"The President has directed relevant agencies to prepare for any eventuality and possible impact on the country. As your Senator, I will support all efforts of PRRD to safeguard and protect our national interests in the Middle East," Go said.

Very recently, relevant government agencies, including the DFA, were instructed to closely monitor and report developments in Iraq, Iran and other parts of the Middle East.

The senator was at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Covered Court in Visayas Avenue, Quezon City to provide aid to 161 families affected by a fire that occurred at Brgy. Vasra on December 31.

Go distributed foods,

grocery packs and cash assistance. Around 700 individuals lost their homes in the incident. He also told students affected in the fire incident that he will provide them a new set of uniforms and school supplies to enable them to resume their studies immediately.

"Narito po akoparadingin ang inyong mga hinanang," Go told fire victims.

He added that his priority has always been the Filipinos in vulnerable situations and that wherever he is needed, he will immediately respond to the distress calls of the people.

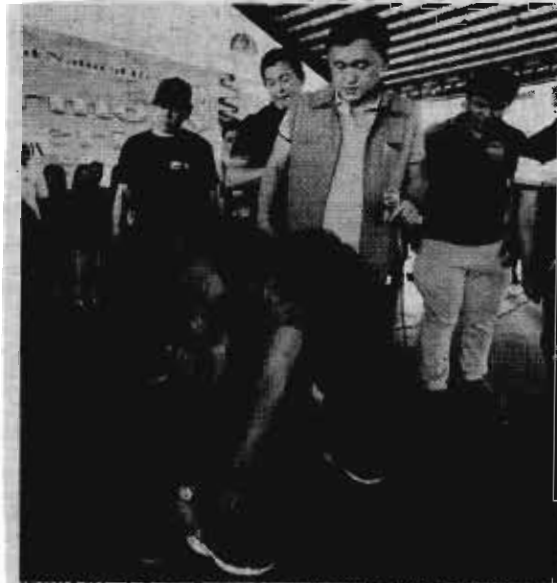


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Similar red flags

In waging war against the two major water concessionaires, President Duterte railed against what he said were onerous provisions in their contracts amounting to a surrender of the country's sovereignty.

"In that contract, *'pag mabasa mo* (if you read it), our country surrendered everything to Manila Water and to Maynilad—everything, including the sovereignty," the President said in a visit to typhoon victims in Legazpi City, Albay, in early December. "*Hindi ko ito masikmura* (I cannot take it) ... We have lost the sovereignty, we bargained it away," he added.

In the same month, during a visit to earthquake victims in M'lang, North Cotabato, Mr. Duterte said the 1997 water concession agreement considered water as a commodity and not a natural resource, which he added was a "really crooked way of interpreting the Constitution." The concession agreement, the President fumed, contained a "prohibition against government interference in rate-setting" as well as a provision on indemnity for possible losses in the event the government interfered in setting the water rates.

It is certainly well within the President's responsibilities to make sure that government contracts are above board and do not contain provisions unfair to the public, especially over a critical resource such as water for the residents of Metro Manila, Cavite and Rizal. But, at about the same time that the President was invoking the issue of sovereignty in lashing out at the two local water companies, the issue was strangely absent in his cheer-leading for another water deal—the P18.7-billion New Centennial Water Source-Kaliwa Dam Project awarded by his administration to the Chinese.

Red flags eerily similar to what Mr. Duterte has been denouncing in the Manila Water-Maynilad case have been raised about the Kaliwa Dam deal by many observers. For one, according to Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Zarate, the deal provides that any dispute or default in payments will be decided in a court in Beijing using Chinese laws. The contract, Zarate said, imposes an admission on the part of the Philippines that the agreement does not violate any of its laws. "Worse, it provides that any dispute such as a delay or default in payment shall be resolved by the China International Economic and Trade Arbitration Commission and shall be governed by the laws of China. It even imposes that the venue shall be in Beijing."

Similarly, human rights lawyer Neri Colmenares, in filing a suit at the Supreme Court against the Kaliwa Dam project, charged that the deal was laden with onerous provisions detrimental to the people: "The conditions have been dictated by China, from the interest rates, choice of contractor and workers, an affirmation by the (Department of Justice) secretary on the legality of the loan, confidentiality of the terms of the agreement, and in case of default, China can take over a property of the Philippines in exchange."

The lopsided framework is not limited to Kaliwa. Retired Supreme Court senior associate justice Antonio Carpio has warned against other infrastructure projects funded through Chinese loans such as the \$62-million Chico River project. "In case of default by the Philippines in repayment of the loan, China can seize, to satisfy any arbitral award in favor of China, 'patrimonial assets and assets dedicated to commercial use' of the Philippine government," Carpio said in a forum in March 2019. The Chico River deal, signed several months before Kaliwa Dam, is expected to be the template for all other Chinese loans to the Philippines, he said.

Aside from its questionable provisions, the Kaliwa Dam project would also displace the indigenous peoples living in the areas to be inundated by the dam. Yet, despite these concerns, the President has forcefully pushed for the project, even warning the courts not to dare issue any temporary restraining orders.

When details of the secret Kaliwa deal were first bared in April last year, a piqued Mr. Duterte ordered a sweeping review of all government contracts to "determine whether there are onerous provisions... that would put the Filipino people in disadvantage or in violation of the Constitution," said his spokesperson. That was the first and last time the public heard about the order; no other information would come from Malacañang as to how many and which contracts were given a second look, and what the results of the review were.

Apparently, the problematic Kaliwa Dam deal has emerged unscathed from that supposed dragnet, because now it's all systems go—and damn any questions about sovereignty. But shouldn't it be that what's sauce for local "oligarchs" is sauce, too, for foreign "friends"?

Palace: Manila Water, Maynilad deals void

By Francis T. Wakefield

@tribunephil_FTW

The President has stated that all contracts that will be found with onerous provisions, that go against the law and the interest of the nation, will be reviewed and will be scrapped

What contracts?

As far as Malacañang is concerned, there are no existing contracts between the government and water concessionaires Manila Water Company Services and Maynilad Water Services Inc.

Pointing out the non-validity of the deals flaunted by the water firms, Chief presidential Legal Counsel and spokesman Salvador Panelo on Monday disclosed that the contracts were void from the start.

"As the President said, there is

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Short-term and long-term approaches, such as regular cloud seeding operations, water treatment of existing bodies of water, and construction of new water sources, among others, are being employed in order to secure enough supply of water to reach each and every household in Metro Manila

From page A1

not even a contract to speak of, it's null and void at its inception," Panelo stressed.

"So, you cannot even say that there is a contract. What contract? What they entered were null and void, that's why we will not respect them from the very beginning," he added.

So, they are already forewarned that contracts that are against the law, the Constitution and the general welfare of the Filipinos will not be allowed.

At the same time, Panelo downplayed the supposed negative effect of the administration's stand on the two companies compared to the other businesses and potential investors.

He assured investors that the Duterte administration is all-out for contracts that will protect the interests of the Filipino people.

"They (investors) should be happy because the government will not allow contracts that are against the interest of the Filipino people. So, they are already forewarned that contracts that are against the law, the Constitution and the general welfare of the Filipinos will not be allowed," Panelo said.

"So, they will become cautious. When they invest, they know the

right terms," he added.

The Palace spokesman maintained that the Duterte administration is not zeroing on the Manila Water and Maynilad.

In fact, Panelo said that the President is open to review all existing government contracts to ensure their integrity.

"The President has stated that all contracts that will be found with onerous provisions, that go against the law and the interest of the nation, will be reviewed and will be scrapped," he pointed out.

Panelo cited the *Daily Tribune* banner story on Monday which revealed that both Manila Water and Maynilad have been raking profits since being granted with 15-year extensions to their contracts in 2009.

Bloomberg records also showed Manila Water as having earned more than P6.5 billion in net income from a total P19,836.29 billion in revenue with a 32.89 percent profit margin in 2018 alone.

It was no different with Maynilad, which registered big numbers before it filed a case before the Singapore Court.

Maynilad also figured consistently in 2016 and 2017. Its net income for 2016 was at P6.75 billion on P20.22-billion revenue while in 2017, it had a P6.85-billion net income from a P20.77-billion profit.

"Have you read the *Tribune's* headline today? How many billions are being raked in by the

concessionaires because of these contracts," Panelo shared.

State of emergency

For his part, Presidential Communications Operations Office chief Secretary Martin Andanar said that the option to declare a state of emergency to address the water issue is the prerogative of the President and is relative to the severity of the problem.

Investors should be happy because the government will not allow contracts that are against the interest of the Filipino people.

In a statement, Andanar said it is the discretion of the President and his team of experts — as they assess the situation — if declaring a state of national emergency is needed to address the issue of water supply in Metro Manila.

"We concur with the administration's assessments and recommendations of exhausting every option in order to resolve the water supply problem in Metro Manila and uphold actions in support of our national security on this matter," Andanar told *Daily Tribune*.

He said that given the threats posed by climate change and the ballooning population of Metro Manila which affect the usage and consumption of available water supply from limited water sources,

water security plans have been put in place.

"Short-term and long-term approaches, such as regular cloud seeding operations, water treatment of existing bodies of water, and construction of new water sources, among others, are being employed in order to secure enough supply of water to reach each and every household in Metro Manila," he added.

To alleviate this national security issue, the building of Kaliwa and Wawa dams is also set to be undertaken, he shared.

"While this will unfortunately greatly affect our indigenous peoples (IP), it is deemed necessary and considered to be our last resort," Andanar said.

"We have the utmost respect for our IP, and once this option is acted upon, everyone can be assured that all the affected members of our IP will be relocated and given needed assistance by the government," he added.

National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr. previously acknowledged the likelihood of a crisis in the country's metropolis when water concessionaires fail to develop other sources of water.

Environment experts interviewed by the *Daily Tribune* said the situation in Metro Manila had worsened to the point of the government needing to declare a state of emergency to assure that water flows to each household.

The President has indicated that to address the worsening water problem in Metro Manila, the government will push the construction of the Wawa and Kaliwa dams.



Calamitous shortage in 5 years

SPECIAL REPORT

By Maria Romero
@tribunephil_mbr

The Philippines is likely to face a "catastrophic" water problem in five to 10 years if no "fast and massive" measures are taken not only by the government but all stakeholders.

In a study dubbed as the Asian Water Development Outlook conducted by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), researchers found out that the Philippines is likely to face serious water shortages with adverse consequences to the population, the economy and the ecosystem soon.

This was seconded by an urban planning expert and strategic planner contacted by the *Daily Tribune* to analyze the ongoing water crisis.

"It's a clear and present danger that will continuously affect Metro Manila for years to come," the strategic planner pointed out. "All stakeholders, not only the government, should act now before the problem reaches catastrophic scale. You can't imagine the effects but what is clear is that we need to act as one because the problem is right in front of us. We need fast and massive measures to address the issue."

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Calamitous shortage in 5 years

Government agencies from past administrations were kicking the can down the road. They all knew that water demand will outstrip supply

From page A1

He explained that in the next 10 years, water demand in Metro Manila will definitely increase, estimated to double, citing the "amazing" economic growth of the Philippines.

He stressed that the solutions to the water problem are readily available and President Rodrigo Duterte's strong political will is a definite boost.

"The President's announcements in the past couple of weeks that centered on connecting Wawa and Kaliwa rivers to replenish the La Mesa Dam water level is, to say the least, brilliant," the strategic planner said.

The President has branded the operationalization of Kaliwa Dam and Wawa Dam as the "last resort" to sustain water demand of Metro Manila which is populated by more or less 20 million people.

"There is really no solution because you have to maintain the socio-economic growth, the social fabric will stabilize by ample supply of water... everybody has to work together," he added.

He cited the lack of synchronized planning by the various agencies and local government units as contributory factor to the problem.

"The planning, the zoning of each local government unit... infrastructure did not increase, suddenly you build high rise buildings but our roads did not increase, the utilities have not increased. That started to choke the whole city," he explained.

"Waste water management is non-existent," he added.

Both experts, however, maintained that there are solutions readily available to address the water woes. (These will be discussed in the next *Tribune* articles)

The latest ADB report showed that on a scale of 0 to 100 in terms of national water security, the Philippines scored 35 in 2013. In three years, it improved to 40.4.

The ADB said it was largely on the back of "somewhat better enforcement of environmental laws and the growth of water supply systems serving communities."

Industrialization and economic transformation require more power and a shift to more water-intensive diets, thus increasing competition between water users like industry and agriculture.

However, this 2020, the region remains "a global hotspot for water insecurity" despite improvements in managing water resources.

The research team of the multi-national lending bank noted that the country, despite significant gains, still faces a challenging future.

"Industrialization and economic transformation require more power and a shift to more water-intensive diets, thus increasing competition between water users like industry and agriculture," the ADB report warned.

"The region's water demand is projected to increase by about 55 percent, due to the growing needs for domestic water, manufacturing and thermal electricity generation," it added.

Thus, the agriculture sector will need to produce 60 percent more food globally by 2050, and 100 percent more in developing countries, using diminishing water resources.

Economic impact

In a previous interview, National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Ernesto Pernia said a "possible water shortage in the summer of 2020" is forecasted as the tail-end effects of El Niño are seen to put pressure on water security in the country.

Pernia said this concern may be aggravated by the prevailing uncertain climate of the future of the water contracts of concessionaires Maynilad Water Services Inc. and Manila Water Company Services after the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) canceled the 15-year extension of their agreements.



FILE:

"Calamitous shortage in 5 years"

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Maybe they will be pushed forward, they will be pressured to deliver better service in 2020.

"There is a possible water shortage in the summer months especially given that the concessionaires are now set back in their plans," Pernia was quoted as saying.

"Or maybe they will be pushed forward, they will be pressured to deliver better service in 2020," he added.

Meanwhile, NEDA Undersecretary Adoracion Navarro confirmed that in the event of supply shortage from the Angat Dam, which currently supplies the majority of Metro Manila's water needs, irrigation supply would be the first to be cut to give priority to the supply of potable water to the megacity's households.

Lack of infrastructure

Meanwhile, Director of Institute for Water Policy at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy Eduardo Aralar said the expected water crisis stemmed from the lack of foresight, planning and political will of the government

"Government agencies from past administrations were kicking the can down the road. They all knew that (water) demand will outstrip supply," Aralar was quoted as saying.

In a separate study, ADB said the local government should work to narrow its spending gap as it will yield multiple dividends, especially when investments have development benefits aside from reducing disaster risk.

"Examples include (investments in) stable water resource management that integrates flood risk considerations, (to name a few)," the ADB said.

Anton Alifandi, associate director at IHS Markit, said the uncertain climate of the water sector may not bode well to investors, worsening the current situation further.

Alifandi said risks could particularly impact investor appetite on the revised "Build, Build, Build" infrastructure program.

He said swaying investors away will not help the country build more water infrastructures to augment supply.

Based on the MWSS study, Metro Manila's water demand will outstrip supply by as much as 13 percent during peak days from 2019 to 2020.

Both experts admitted that Manila Water Company Services and Maynilad Water Services Inc. are partly to be blamed for their failure to put up treatment plants and improve the sewage system in the metropolis.



All taken for a ride

“Some 20 percent of the water bill of customers of Maynilad and Manila Water classified as ‘environmental fee’ should cover the cleaning of septic vaults of each paying household once every five years.

Allies of the besieged oligarchs, amid the demand of accountability by President Rody Duterte on the two water concessionaires, are now harping on rules being changed in midstream that they say affect investors' confidence.

Being cited now are past instances when government actions led to the breaking off of contracts, such as what happened to Fraport AG during the Arroyo administration and the Suez SA deal in the term of former President Noyonoy Aquino.

Critics underlined that Rody's efforts against Maynilad Water Services Inc. and Manila Water Corp. are undermining efforts to woo investors.

“It also comes as the country, competing with its Southeast Asian neighbors for foreign investment, is seeking to lure companies to join an P8 trillion infrastructure program,” according to a report, citing local businessmen who are likely sympathetic with big business interests.

Except for the self-serving statements, there are no such adverse views from the institutions that matter.

Moody's Investors Service for instance reported that any regulatory risk from the water dispute won't likely affect the Philippines' overall investment-grade rating.

“We are watching the situation, but there also are more material developments that we are looking at that could affect the Philippines' credit profile,” Moody's senior vice president Christian de Guzman said.

The more critical issues are the reform measures which should include the demand to review the terms of the concession agreements that are onerous for the government.

An official of the American Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines said the term “onerous” is subjective and depends on who defines it, which he indicated is a turn off for those looking at investing in the country.

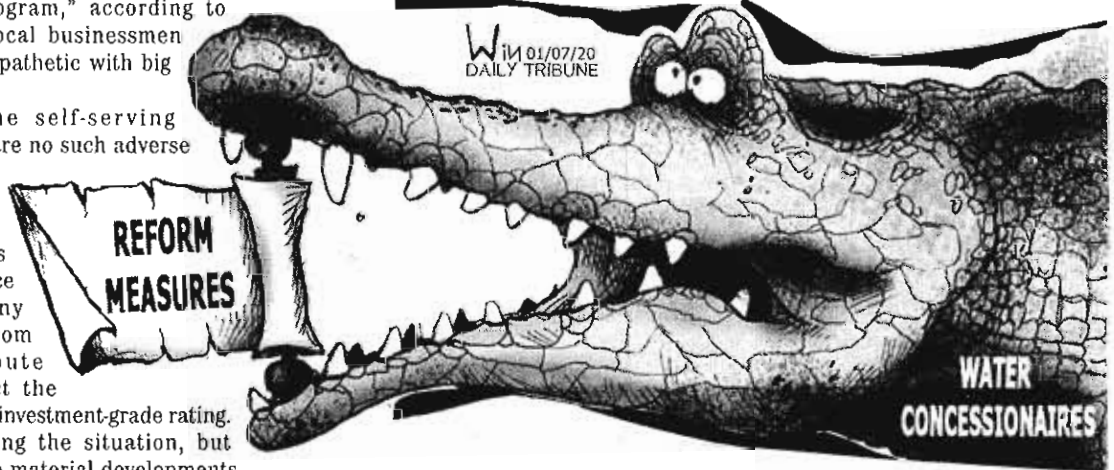
Clearly, the apologists commissioned by the Ayalas and Manuel V. Pangilinan, whom Rody said are both destined to the New Bilibid Prison, are making noises to put outside pressure on the administration's campaign to end corporate abuses of the government.

“Moody's Investors Service for instance reported that any regulatory risk from the water dispute won't likely affect the Philippines' overall investment-grade rating.

The most basic service that the public deserves from the concessionaires has not been rendered them.

Aside from revenue-earning water distribution, the agreement with government was that both would set up an efficient sewerage system, a service where they do not earn anything.

Both water firms, however, have collected fees for that purpose without providing this mandated service.



Maynilad and Manila Water were also required to clean septic vaults of their consumers in the absence of a sewerage network where refuse is treated.

Some 20 percent of the water bill of customers of Maynilad and Manila Water classified as “environmental fee” should cover the cleaning of septic vaults of each paying household once every five years.

The water firms, however, lack efforts to inform the public about their responsibility and even put out advertisements as if the service is being provided out of their good hearts.

Many households, particularly in Metro Manila, tap private firms such as the famed Malabanan trucks to clean their septic tanks not knowing that they can demand such service that they pay for in their monthly bills.

Since 1997 when the concession agreement started, the water firms completed only about 15 percent of their committed sewerage projects, while conveniently stating that a network would be completed only by 2037.

The implication was that the water firms needed the extended contract to complete what they have committed to do in 1997 when they sealed the contract with government.

The public, meanwhile, have to continue to foot the bill for the concessionaires' transgressions.

Such deception should not be allowed to continue.



Govt to push for reforms to achieve inclusive growth

THE Philippines continues to be one of the fastest growing economies in the region despite the initial slowdown in the first two quarters of the year due to the delayed passage of the 2019 budget.

"The economy has continued to grow this year despite its initial slowdown in the first two quarters and the obstacles that were thrown its way — from the El Niño phenomenon that resulted in water shortages, the delay in the passage of the 2019 budget, to the US-China trade war, among other things," said Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto Pernia.

The Philippine economy grew by 6.2 percent in the third quarter of the year, the second fastest growing economy after Vietnam.

It was also ahead of China, India, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand.

Pernia attributed the acceleration

of growth to the robust public spending, consumption spending and the easing inflation rate, which as of November was at 1.3 percent, significantly lower than the 6.0 percent last year.

"Prices, which are a major concern of ordinary Filipinos, have remained stable. Year-to-date headline inflation for 2019 stands at 2.5 percent, mainly driven by lower prices of food, primarily for and com, relative to the previous year's level. In the case of non-food items, the decline in global oil prices resulted in price rollbacks for domestic petroleum products," he said.

Pernia added that one of the achievements of the government is also the "more inclusive growth."

"More importantly, growth has been more inclusive, as we were able to lift more Filipinos out of poverty

THE BEST OF TIMES IN 2019

in 2018 when population poverty incidence dropped to 16.6 percent of the population from 23.3 percent in 2015," he said.

"The number of poor Filipinos — or the magnitude of poverty — went down from 23.5 million Filipinos in 2015 to 17.6 million Filipinos in 2018. This means that we have lifted 5.9 million Filipinos from poverty between 2015 and 2018," Pernia further said.

Improving employment figures

Employment rate in the country likewise improved this year.

Data from the October 2019 Labor Force Survey of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed that the country's employment rate rose to 95.5 percent, the highest in

all previous October rounds of the survey in the last ten years.

"Our unemployment rate dropped from 5.1 percent in 2018 to 4.5 percent this year, the lowest in the last ten years. Even our underemployment rate eased to 13.0 percent from 13.3 percent in 2018," Pernia said.

Challenges and priorities

"Looking at these milestones in our journey, we see a stable economic performance for 2019, even as we remain vigilant and prepared to face risks such as possible water shortages in 2020, weak global growth and stagnating world trade, disruptive technologies, and the volatility of oil prices," Pernia said.

He said that the country's economic growth is projected to be

between 6.0 to 6.5 percent for 2019 and 6.5 to 7.5 percent in 2020 to 2022.

"As Filipinos, there is much that we can look forward to in 2020, as we will continue to invest in the people's future while addressing immediate and medium-term challenges," he said.

One of the government's priorities is the improvement of infrastructure in the country.

A joint committee of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) recently approved P626.11 billion worth of infrastructure and transportation projects.

Among those approved by NEDA's Investment Coordination Committee-Cabinet Committee were the unsolicited operate-add-transfer proposals for the Davao International Airport and Laguind-

►Growth B4



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inclusive growth"

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■ GROWTH FROM B1

Govt

ingan Airport; the Metro Rail Transit 4 and EDSA Greenways projects; the Maritime Safety Enhancement Program; and the Bataan-Cavite Interlink Bridge Project.

Also approved were the Cebu-Mactan Bridge (fourth bridge) and Coastal Road Construction Project (New Mactan Bridge Construction Project); the Davao City Coastal Bypass Road, including the Bucana Bridge Project; the Capas-Botolan Road Project; Panay-Guimaras-Negros Island Bridges Project; Davao City Bypass Construction Project-Second Change in Scope and Cost and Supplemental Loan; and the Samar-Pacific Coastal Road Project-Loan Validity and Implementation Extension and Increase in Cost.

"The approval of these projects is a pivotal step in fulfilling our thrust of fostering growth centers in the regions and expanding access to development opportunities throughout the country," Pernia said.

"These are in line with the National Spatial Strategy to make cities like Metro Manila efficient and to improve connectivity between areas," he added.

On the external front, Pernia said there is also a need to establish new trade relations to withstand the effects of a projected global slowdown.

"To withstand external shocks and promote growth over the medium term, our country must diversify products and markets through the establishment or improvement of new and existing trade relations with strategic partners," he said.

Pernia said that moving forward, some of the priority bills that they are pushing for include the amendments to the Public Service Act, the Retail Trade Liberalization Act, and the Foreign Investment Act. These priority bills will support the

expansion of foreign direct investment and trade opportunities in the Philippines.

Pernia said the bill that should be prioritized is the National Land Use Act as this will help better utilize, manage and develop the country's land resources.

He said key policy reforms that should be pursued over the next three years include the remaining tax reform packages; Budget Reform Bill; Strengthening the Culture of Planning in Government; Amendments to the BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) Law; Department of Water and Water Regulatory Commission; Disaster Resiliency Bill; and the National Quality Infrastructure.

To help improve the agriculture sector, Pernia also called on the Department of Agriculture other concerned agencies to swiftly implement the programs and projects under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund.

"Perhaps, among the priority projects should be the provision of mechanical dryers, particularly in areas where we lack 'solar drying' facilities. As the harvest season is ongoing, the government should continue to directly buy *palay* (unmilled rice) from local producers affected by the unprecedented decline in farm gate prices to help curb their losses," he said.

To counter the risk of the spread of African swine fever, Pernia said the government must continue to enforce its biosecurity measures by putting in place stringent quarantine checkpoints, provision of disinfection facilities, and intensified anti-smuggling and meat inspection efforts.

"We in the government remain committed to pass reforms and implement programs and projects, not solely for economic growth, but most especially for realizing the vision of providing every Filipino of a *matatag, maginhawa at panatag na buhay*," Pernia said.

ANNA LEAH E. GONZALES

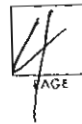


SIARGAO'S SUGBA LAGOON TO BE CLOSED FOR REHAB

One of Siargao Island's popular tourist spots, Sugba Lagoon, is set to be closed to the public from Jan. 10 to Feb. 10, 2020. According to an announcement posted on

BE Siargao, the island's community magazine, the lagoon's temporary closure was ordered by the Mangrove Protection and Information Center of Del Carmen as it will undergo its annual "environmental recovery and rehabilitation." No boats or visits would be allowed in the area for the time being. Meanwhile, other tourist destinations in the area — like the Mangrove Forest, Kawhagan Sand Bar and Pamomoan Beach — will still be accessible to the public. Sugba Lagoon is popular among tourists for diving, kayaking and paddleboarding. It is half an hour away from Del Carmen town proper.

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CASIRO

Sulat kay Editor

Problemang pangkalikasan agad solusyunan

Dear **Abante Tonite**:

Isang taon na naman ang nakalipas, pero hindi pa man umaarangkada ang taon, napakarami na agad suliranin ang kinahaharap hindi lang ng ating bansa, ngunit ng mundo, at pinakarami rito ay hinggil sa kalikasan.

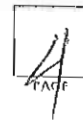
Noong 2019 pa lang, malalaking wildfire na ang naranasan sa California, Amazon at hanggang ngayon ay nagpapatuloy pa sa Australia. Sa India suliranin pa rin ang polusyon sa hangin matapos ilang beses nang makaranas ng smog.

Wag na tayong lumayo pa, dito lang sa Pilipinas, ilang beses na bang nagbabala ang ilang eco group at maging environment department hinggil sa lumalalang problema sa basura. Isama na rin ang pagkakalbo ng mga kagubatan dahil sa mga proyektong ginagawa sa mga lalawigan, tulad ng mga pabahay na kabuhol naman ng lumulobong populasyon.

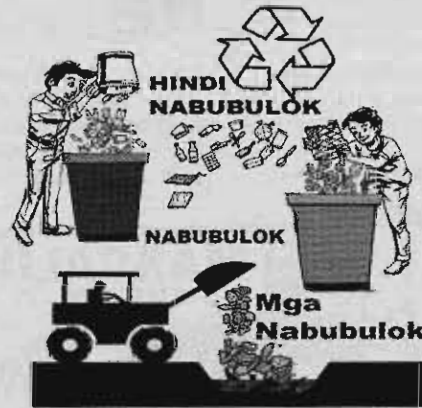
Hays, napakaraming suliranin, pero wala pang nakikitang epektibong solusyon.

Buhol-buhol ang mga problemang ito, kaya tingin ko hindi lang dapat iisa ang umaksyon, kasi dapat lahat sabay-sabay na kumilos.

Erlinda Rose



Ang aming pananaw...



Art: Rod C. Aquino
Jan 6, 2020

MAHIGPIT NA PAGPAPATUPAD NG WASTE SEGREGATION

MAKIKITA ngayon ang malaking pagbabago sa Maynila magmula nang istriktong ipatupad ang paglilinis dito.

Pinaalis ang mga vendor na nakaharang sa mga pangunahing kalsada kung saan makikita rin ang gabundok na basura na iniwan ng mga ito na isa sa nagiging sanhi ng pagsisikip ng daloy ng trapiko.

Mahigpit din ang pagpapatupad sa mga establisimiyento ng tamang pagbubukod ng kanilang mga basura mula sa recyclable at hindi na. Ang paghihiwalay ng nabubulok na basura sa hindi at ang tuyo sa basa. Maging sa mga kabahayan ay istriktong ipinatutupad ang waste segregation scheme para na rin sa kalinisan at pag-iwas sa sakit.

Sa pagsasagawa nito, hindi lamang natin natutulungan ang ating mga sarili at kapaligiran kundi maging ang mga taong ang hanapbuhay ay ang pangongolekta ng basura. Maiiwasan na ng mga ito ang labis na pagkalkal sa mga basura kung saan dati ay pagkatapos na ikalat ay iiwan lamang din ang mga basurang hindi kapaki-pakinabang sa kanila na dagdag pa sa dapat na linisin.

Tularan sana ang ganitong gawain hindi lamang sa Kamaynilaan kundi maging sa buong bansa upang makatulong sa ikagaganda at ikalilinis ng ating kapaligiran at makaakit ng turismo sa ating mga kabayanan.



B'gay kagawad' held for illegal logging

TUGUEGARAO CITY, Cagayan – Four persons, including a barangay *kagawad*, were arrested for illegal logging in Cagayan on Sunday.

Col. Ariel Quilang, Cagayan police director, said at least 500 board feet of narra and *kamagong* were seized from Michael Pascual, 39, of Barangay Margarita in Baggao.

In Buguey, furniture makers Romeo Cusit, 65, and Cesar Villasin, 64, as well as their driver Michael Buenafior, 26, were

nabbed for trying to smuggle illegally cut lumber from Barangay Sta. Teresita to a shop in Barangay Maddalero.
- Raymund Catindig



Investment priority eyed for nickel processing plants

DAVAO CITY — The Philippine Nickel Industry Association (PNIA) is undertaking preparations to gain investment priority status for domestic processing plants, which will allow miners to capture more value-added than the current practice of exporting ore.

PNIA Executive Director Charmaine Olea-Capili, speaking to media Friday, said the process is underway with stakeholders working on setting up a technical working group to finalize the Nickel Industry Road Map, a stepping stone in making processing plants eligible for priority status, with attendant incentives for parties establishing such facilities.

The TWG which will be led by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Department of Environmental and Natural Resources (DENR), with participation from the business sector, non-government organizations, and universities, she said.

"We have spoken to (Trade) Undersecretary (for Competitiveness and Innovation) Rafaelita (M.) Aldaba, and she is very happy that the nickel industry is coming up with a road map because, she said, it will enable her to put the nickel industry... in the national investment priority plan," Ms. Capili said.

The Philippines is the world's second-biggest nickel producer with an output of



LINSON ASH/STANLEY MCLENDON

340,000 tons of ore in 2018, after Indonesia with 560,000 tons, according to the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB).

In the first three quarters of 2019, nickel accounted for 48% of the country's P99.58 billion metallic production value. These are mainly exported, with China as the main market.

"Despite the 1.24% slip in the average nickel price, nickel direct shipping ore with the aid of its other products (mixed nickel-cobalt sulfide and scandium oxalate) again took the spotlight accounting for 48% or P47.36 billion of the total value during the period," MGB

said in its third quarter mines report released Dec. 18, 2019.

The PNIA estimates that about two million jobs could be generated, mostly in Mindanao where the majority of the nickel mining operations are located, once plants that will process raw minerals into finished product are established.

"If you talk about regional economic growth, we are projecting right now... two million jobs. Imagine if you talk about velocity of money and how the ripple effect of coming up with jobs. You don't just create jobs, you create businesses, create more global competitive advantage, and put the Philippines in the global sphere," Ms. Capili said.

She said electric vehicles are one of the most promising potential customers for processed nickel.

In Mindanao, most of the nickel mines are in provinces within the Caraga Region, as well as the island province of Tawi-Tawi.

The PNIA members operating in these areas are: Agata Mining Ventures, Inc. in Agusan del Norte; Platinum Group Metals Corp. in Surigao de Norte; and CTP Construction and Mining Corp., Marcventures Mining and Development Corp., and Carascal Nickel Corp. in Surigao del Sur. — **Maya M. Padillo**



Nickel industry roadmap completed this year

An industry road map that will support the growth of sustainable mining in the Philippines is expected to be completed this year, the Philippine Nickel Industry Association (PNIA) said.

"We have taken steps in engaging the Department of Environment and Natural Disaster (DENR) hopefully to have the national nickel industry roadmap this year to become legislation," PNIA chairman Isidro Alcantara told reporters in a recent news conference.

Alcantara said the roadmap will further develop the growing nickel industry of the Philippines, saying the organization already plans the creation of a technical working group (TWG) that will be tasked to consolidate inputs from various

stakeholders.

Bravo said they will continuously seek sustainable mining policies so that the industry is developed in full and contribute to the economy.

The proposed TWG will be headed by representatives from the DENR and the Department of Trade and Industry. Representatives from the PNIA and other business groups, including the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, will also be part of the group.

According to Alcantara, the roadmap will be necessary to incorporate the development of the nickel industry in the National

Investment Priority Plan of the government.

On top of the nickel roadmap, PNIA president Dante Bravo said 2020 is the year the nickel association becomes an active partner of the government and help it achieve the Sustainable Development Goals covenant with the United Nations.

"Right now, the industry contributes 1.2 million jobs and it can add two million more if we can develop mining further. We want the people to understand the industry more," Bravo said.

"There's more information campaign to help us educate and collaborate on what we can do to promote mining more. We can tell more human stories on how we

help uplift human lives," he added.

Bravo said they will continuously seek sustainable mining policies so that the industry is developed in full and contribute to the economy.

Data from PNIA show the Philippines as one of the biggest producers of nickel in the world, with an estimated volume of 30 million metric tons in 2019 alone.

Around 90 percent of that were exported to China and the remaining 10 percent sent to Japan, Australia and the European Union.

For 2020, the industry leaders forecast stronger nickel production and outbound shipments on the back of higher prices resulting from the nickel export ban imposed by Indonesia.

Marla Romero @tribunephil_mbr



On thorium



CHAMBER LANE
Jess Varela

COMMENTARY

“
Apart from bringing down the cost of power to 10 percent to 15 percent of the prevailing rates... nuclear energy is the single biggest source of low carbon electricity and recognized in many of the scenarios assessed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the International Energy Agency.

The utilization of energy by economies is somehow proportional to their developmental trajectory. The appetite for power increases as more countries develop. Notwithstanding the efforts of renewable energy advocates and global program directions pursued, the dependence on fossil fuel remains to be the more viable option, it seems.

A number of economies like the Philippines continue to be dependent on fossil fuel, being more accessible and comparatively inexpensive. In 2018, the Philippines consumed a total of 99,765 gigawatts per hour of electricity with coal accounting for 51,932 gigawatts per hour and oil at 3,173 gigawatts per hour. The construction of coal-fired plants in 2019 coupled with the infrastructure flagship programs of government will definitely increase the country's carbon emissions making our commitment to the Paris accord more challenging.

However, government's resolve for nuclear energy should be firm and unwavering for a number of detractors will emerge. Aside from some NGO, expect a few lawyers who will argue on its constitutionality.

How does government balance its continued desire for growth and development and sustain a healthy ecology? It may now be the right opportunity for government to seriously accept the offers of building nuclear power plants.

Apart from bringing down the cost of power to 10 percent to 15 percent of the prevailing rates (thereby drastically lowering the cost of doing business), nuclear energy is the single biggest source of low carbon electricity and recognized in many of the scenarios assessed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the International Energy Agency, among others, as having a critical role to play in responding to the climate emergency. It is, indubitably, an environmentally sustainable activity.

Opposition to nuclear plants often refer to the Fukushima incident where the plant was shut down due to an earthquake. Said nuclear plant in Fukushima is vintage '60s, yet, all of the modern retrofit systems

Turn to page B10

On thorium

From page B9

and designs prevented a meltdown. Today's technology has made nuclear plants a lot more safe to the public. Our country is surrounded by neighbors that host nuclear power plants such as Taiwan, China, Korea and Japan, to name a few. All these economies, incidentally are way advanced than ours.

Moreover, the fear of uranium is likewise raised by detractors. The notion of uranium as the main ingredient of nuclear arms and the mishandling of its toxic waste scare the public. But today's modern systems and designs can remove the radioactive elements in uranium and instead be substituted by thorium. It may be of interest to note that thorium is radon-free and three times more abundant than uranium. Radons are released whenever uranium is extracted. Moreover, the liquid thorium fed to the generators acts as both fuel and coolant, allowing the reactor to self-regulate, making the occurrence of a meltdown almost impossible.

While their opposition may be unobtrusive, intense lobbying at all fronts is expected as their businesses will definitely be affected.

Thorium poses as a better alternative than uranium. While the Earth's crust has three times more thorium than uranium, it is also less messy to excavate. One tonne of thorium is equivalent to 35 tonnes of uranium or four million tonnes of coal. More importantly, *thorium cannot be developed as a weapon.* As such, it certainly will be well received and accepted by the public. I can only guess that uranium continues to be the choice as stockpiling it provides the necessary leverage and understandable alternative for military defense, global posturing, power and dominance.

Should the Philippines engage the new technologies for nuclear energy? I believe that we should have had entertained this since yesterday. I have always pushed for the small modular reactors (SMR) to power the three island provinces of Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Basilan. The confidence level on SMR has been undisputed as it powers submarines, where it is exposed to all kinds of danger, yet, no incident, not even issues on toxic waste occurred. Its technology today has further matured to be efficient and safe. Providing efficient and inexpensive power to these islands can trigger peace and development in the area, especially now that a part of Tawi-Tawi is being proposed for inclusion in the economic zone.



01-07-20

TIME:

PAGE 17

DATE

Warriors gain outright semis

Games Sunday (Paco Arena)
3:30 p.m. - PFTC vs Judiciary
5 p.m. - DENR vs AFP

Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) clinched the second outright semis berth with a 110-93 win over PhilHealth in the 8th UNTV Cup held over the weekend at the Paco Arena in Manila.

Ed Rivera and Melvin Bangal came through with big shots in a decisive second-quarter attack as the DENR Warriors turned what started as a tight contest into a rout.

Rivera tallied 25 points and eight boards while Bangal was two assists shy from completing a double-double after posting 18 points, nine assists and three boards for the Warriors, who trailed, 31-28, at the end of the first quarter.

Apart from securing an automatic semis slot in the annual tournament for public servants, and offering P4 million to the chosen charity of the champion team, the Warriors tied idle and defending champion Armed Forces of the Philippines for the lead at 7-1.

That set a fitting climax to the second round of elims as the Warriors and Cavaliers dispute the top seeding on Sunday in the tournament organized by UNTV president and CEO Dr. Daniel Razon.

Department of Agriculture kept its quarterfinal bid alive by downing Malacañang-Philippine Sports Commission, 78-68, behind the 26-point performance of former UST hotshot Emerson Oreta.

With the win, the Food Masters finished the second round with a 5-4 mark, tying the Kamao for sixth to seventh places.



UNTV: DENR clinches 2nd outright semis berth

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Apart from securing an automatic semis slot, the Warriors likewise tied idle and defending champion Armed Forces of the Philippines for the lead at 7-1.

Meantime, Department of Agriculture kept its quarterfinal bid alive by downing Malacañang-Philippine Sports Commission 78-68 – thanks to the 26-point performance of former UST hotshot Emerson Oreta.



TITLE:

PAGE 1/



Emerson Oreta (center) led the Department of Agriculture Food Masters to a 78-68 win over Malacañang-PSC to stay in hunt for a quarterfinal berth in the UNTV Cup.

UNTV Cup: DENR nails outright semis slot

Games Sunday
(Paco Arena)

3:30 p.m. - PITC vs Judiciary
5 p.m. - DENR vs AFP

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First Game

DENR 110 - Rivera 25, Parreno 20, Bangal 18, Ayson 14, Abanes 14, Mamac 6, Atablanca 5, Gamboa 4, Calungcagin 4.

PHILHEALTH 93 - Aldaye 36, Emata 23, Mazo 19, Pacheco 7, Hernandez 6, Malana 2.

Quarters: 28-31, 56-48, 86-70, 110-93.

Second Game

AGRICULTURE 78 - Oreta 26, Silva 17, Fernandez 14, Comercias 6, Dematera 6, Casaysayan 5, Mastelero 4.

MALACAÑANG 68 - Garrido 18, Ignario 11, Punzalan 10, Jimenez 8, Dela Cuesta 6, Javier 6, Gadong 4, Besa 4, Roque 1.

Quarters: 12-14, 29-34, 47-49, 78-68.



INTROSPECTIVE

TONY F. KATIGBAK

Earth-friendly changes in 2020

One of my favorite songs, when I was younger, was a piece by British singing duo Chad and Jeremy. This group, who boasted of contemporaries like the Beatles, Elvis Presley, Pat Boone, and Ricky Nelson, had several beautiful songs with calm and relaxing lyrics, and one of them was "A Summer Song" which started with the lyrics "trees swaying in the summer breeze."



Ever since I heard it and generally as a child, I have always had a fascination with trees. It's a natural resource I believe we take for granted and we have wasted in the past several decades. I still remember when we had blankets of green in the country (and the world for that matter) and we have carelessly and thoughtlessly cut them down in favor of more shopping malls, parking lots, and the like.

I wish our leaders thought more long-term instead of about making a quick buck in the present. Development is necessary, yes, but so is preservation and sustainability. This is true globally and especially for the Philippines. We have such a rich store of natural resources we could have been a leading supplier of these if we only thought about sustainability instead of just using up what already exists.

Trees are a good example. Cutting down trees would not have been so bad if we had invested in proper tree farming instead of just cutting down the forests we already have. If we had found a way to make this sustainable the country could have already been a leader in wood. But this can't happen without the proper foresight and laws in place to ensure sustainability. As is, we are losing forests at an alarming rate and we are seeing the effects of losing this greenery - decline in oxygen quality, floods, landslides.

The time for pretending that what we do in nature doesn't matter has passed. We can no longer pretend that our blatant disregard for the world doesn't have consequences. We are seeing the effects in so many devastating ways. In the country alone we have witnessed super typhoons, flash floods, landslides, and an unprecedented amount of earthquakes. Do we need more warning signs that climate change is rearing its ugly head? Do we have to wait for things to get even more catastrophic?

In Australia, uncontrollable brushfires have decimated roughly 14 million acres of land, killed almost 500,000 animals, and left hundreds of thousands displaced. It's heartbreaking to see the news of how the fires just can't be controlled. The drought has made water scarce and the firefighters are left to do the best they can with what they have. Although they say the fires started naturally, scientists add that climate change has no doubt added to the disaster as exacerbated hot arid conditions easily fuel the growth of such blazes. Not to mention the lack of water to help combat the blazes.

We can no longer look the other way. While we are not currently affected, the tragedy in Australia could happen anywhere and to anyone. At present, the ways that we can help those in Australia are limited to making donations to reputable organizations helping combat the blaze, provide relief for displaced citizens, or provide care and shelter for animals. And of course, pray for rains to help combat the flames. Other countries have also sent firefighting contingents to help beleaguered Aussie firefighters.

But just helping Australia isn't enough. This 2020 we all need to do is commit to making important changes in the way we live. Reducing our carbon footprint has never been more important and we can't feel daunted by the enormity of the damage we have to undo. As someone wise once said, we don't need a few people making perfect changes we need everyone making imperfect changes.

We don't all need to change the way we live overnight. We just need everyone to start and to make a commitment to doing better. If we can reduce our single-use plastics that already helps. Cut down on straws when possible, bring an eco-bag. Little changes at home help too. Save electricity, water, and more by being more aware of your usage. Carpool whenever possible and save gas. Walk if you can and get some exercise too.

These things may seem like small steps but they all add up. Imagine how much we could change if the billions of the people on the planet started making changes? Our house is literally on fire and it's the 11th hour. This 2020 we all need to make some positive changes for Mother Earth.

* * *

It's a sad reality that despite all the harmful effects of tobacco so many Filipinos are still smoking. Roughly 16 million Filipinos to be exact according to estimates made by the Philippine Statistics Authority and the Department of Health. It seems that widely sharing the harmful effects of smoking on the lungs as well as making it difficult to smoke in public places isn't enough to help people kick the habit.

I can understand the addiction. I used to smoke when I was young. But the more I learned about how harmful it was I decided to quit and made a commitment not to fall off the wagon. It can be done, but it requires discipline and commitment. I hope that others will be more aware of the harm they are doing to their bodies and make a change.

According to the World Health Organization, smoking cigarettes is the "number one preventable cause of death in the world today". People must understand that they can really help themselves if they commit to breaking the habit.

In the country, lawmakers are looking for more ways to crack down on tobacco and regulate e-cigarettes and vaping, which have also been shown to cause significant damage to the body as well - some say even more than their traditional cigarette counterparts.

★



Reflections for a new year

BY ROBERTO SAVIO

ROME: In a world shaken by so many problems, it is difficult to look at 2020 and not make some kind of holistic analysis. While enormous progress has been made on many fronts, it is clear that the tide has turned, and we are now entering — or have already entered — a new low point in the history of humankind.

Today, we face an unprecedented existential threat brought about by the climate crisis. According to scientists, we have until 2030 to stop climate change, after which human conditions will be under several threats. Yet, we have just had a world conference in Madrid on climate change, which ended in nothing. Not only that, but since the beginning of the last decade, there has been a singular change

of the relations of politicians with climate. Climate has become not a scientific but a political issue, with a number of politicians of not minor weight, like Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Viktor Orban, Matteo Salvini and Vladimir Putin, arguing that there is no climate crisis. Some of them, like Australia Prime Minister Scott Morrison, take holidays in Hawaii even as fires have destroyed an area as large as Belgium.

Since the end of the last decade, we have seen also another change in a vital environment: democracy. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, everyone was told that the threat of communism had now gone. As Francis Fukuyama famously wrote, it was the end of history. Capitalism and the market would unify the world, and lift all boats, it was said at the time.

Then came the big financial crisis of 2008-

2009, which cost governments (and therefore people) \$12 trillion and it became clear that only some boats were being lifted. Budget trimming affected especially welfare, education and health, while at the same time some people were becoming fabulously rich. World debt doubled, (it now stands at \$325 trillion), and suddenly nationalistic, xenophobic and right-wing parties sprouted everywhere. Before the crisis of 2009, there was only one, in France. Even Nordic countries, the longtime symbol of civism and tolerance saw the arrival of extreme right-wing governments.

Greed and fear

The 30 years between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the financial crisis, left a culture of competition, individualism and loss of values — a culture of greed. And the 10 years

between that crisis and our incoming decade saw the rise of a culture of fear. Immigration became the catalyst. We were being invaded, Islam was not compatible with our society, our jobs were being stolen, crime and drugs were coming in and the same leaders who do not believe in climate change became the guardians of Christianity, enacting restrictive laws to applause from citizens, regardless of human rights. In the past two decades, trade unions have become irrelevant, and laws have been introduced that support making jobs precarious and reductions in social protection. People started being afraid, looking at the uncertain future of their children.

Historians affirm that the two main engines of change in history are greed and fear. We enter the decade of the 2020s with both. Worse, many analysts believe we do so with hate.

The fact is that two flags that we thought had been discarded by history are making a comeback.

One is the flag "in the name of God." We think of Islamic State and al-Qaida, but this is the basis of the image of Putin, Orban, Trump, Bolsonaro and Salvini. The use of religion by the right wing enabled leaders to rally the poor. Theologian Juan José Tamayo has called politicians with bible in hand the Christo-neo-fascist alliance. In the last elections in Costa Rica, evangelical pastor Fabricio Alvarado won with a campaign based on the defense of Christian values and neoliberalism, against abortion and the paganism coming from Europe. This is precisely the electoral theme of Orban in Hungary, Kaczynsky in Poland and Putin in Russia.

In Brazil, the evangelical church was

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NEW YEAR FROM A5

Reflections for a new year

vital in getting Bolsonaro elected. In El Salvador, the new president Nayib Bukele asked an extreme right-wing evangelical pastor to offer a prayer during his inaugural ceremony, and there is a draft law that would make the Bible compulsory reading in all schools. You will all remember how, after the overthrow of Eva Morales by the army, the new president of Bolivia Jeanine Áñez and her supporters went around with a bible in their hands at all ceremonies.

And let us not forget that Trump was elected because of the support of the evangelical church, which has 40 million faithful. He moved the United States embassy to Jerusalem to get their support. Evangelicals believe that when Israel will recover all the territory of biblical times, Christ will come to earth for a second time, and they will be the only ones that will be rewarded. The other country that moved its embassy to Jerusalem, Guatemala, was also the result of the move of an evangelical president.

International movement of hate

Theologian Tamayo speaks of an International of hate: hate against gender equality; against lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders (LGBTs); against abortion; against immigrants. Those who propagate hate defend the reinforcement of the patriarchal family, the submission of women; they despise what is not traditional; they mistrust science and statistics; they deny climate change; and they hate Muslims, Jews and blacks. What is being totally ignored in all this is the problem of social inequalities, the growing economic gap for reasons of ethnicity, culture, gender, social class, sexual identity, and so on.

Tamayo observes that this is becoming a new international movement, which is now coming to Europe, as the recent Spanish elections show. Vox, the extreme right-wing party, created just four years ago, now has 52 seats in the Parliament, and is the third largest party, like the Alternative for Germany. The party of Italy's Salvini, with his rosary beads, has become the number one party, and he could become prime minister at any moment. And we know well of the very large conservative front against the Pope in the Catholic Church which also wants to save traditions, is against LGBTs, is for a patriarchal family, etc., etc. All this is about using religion, fear and hate for political gain.

In the name of God, nation and money

And what about the flag "in the name of the nation"? Well, the best example is Benjamin Netanyahu who has passed a law that makes being a Jew the requisite for Israeli citizenship. This is how Narendra Modi in India is trying to deprive Muslims (170 million) of Indian citizenship; it is how the government in Myanmar is treating over 1 million Rohingyas. Those cases join religion with the fight against minorities and different religions in the name of the nation. China has now launched a campaign for a Chinese dream (also persecuting Uighur Muslim minorities). This is exactly the same strategy as that of Trump, who calls for the American dream: this is for him his alliance, and anybody who makes money in trade with the US is an adversary, be it Canada or Germany. "America First," which in fact means "America Alone."

So, the flags "in the name of God" and "in the name of the nation" frequently overlap. Italian political scientist and economist Riccardo Petrella observes

that in recent decades, a third flag has appeared with a large audience: "in the name of money," and also that in the last two decades corruption has become another universal counter-value.

In its last report, Transparency International, the organization that fights and denounces corruption, analyzes how corruption is weakening democracy. Freedom House, a conservative US foundation, found that since 2006, 113 countries have seen a net decline in their freedom score, while only 62 have seen some improvement. The *Economist* says that democracy was stagnating in 2018, after three consecutive years of deterioration. Of the 62 countries that transitioned from authoritarian rule to some form of democracy, in the last quarter of the 20th century, half have seen their level of democracy stagnate or even falter.

Corruption

Transparency International highlights that while fight against corruption is high on the populists' platform, when in power they tend to weaken democratic institutions, and engage in corruption like their predecessors. It cites the cases of various country, from Guatemala to Turkey, from the US to Poland and Hungary. When corruption seeps into the democratic system it corrupts leaders. Economic corruption has increased in the last 40 years, after the "greed is good" campaign, as the market has substituted man as the center of society. It reaches the entire public sector, besides obviously the private sector.

Two-thirds of humankind now has no trust in police and other public services, because they are considered corrupt, and they believe that corruption is so diffuse that it cannot be eliminated.

We have become accustomed to hearing about corruption in the last two decades, because it is in the news every day. We have slowly become trained to regard as natural things that are not at all natural: a good sign of the extent to which we have lost our moral compass.

If you ask children today if wars and poverty are natural, they will probably answer yes. And, as adolescents, they will also probably consider corruption as natural.

It is therefore evident that two fundamental environments for humankind are in danger. One in the short term is the natural environment. The conditions of life on the planet can worsen dramatically, and we have all the forecasts. We have only the coming decade to try to reverse the trend of climate change, be it natural (some say) or man-made (all scientists). But then the question is: how long do we have to protect our political environment, which runs our economic, social and cultural life, before that also goes into an irreversible decline?

Of course, a bloody dictatorship is less dramatic than seas rising 7 meters, temperatures 3 degrees, or losing all our glaciers, and many rivers and water sources. Now that we have all the data, why do citizens not act for the survival of their environment?

On the other hand, 2019 will remain in history the year of mass demonstrations. In 21 countries, in Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe, millions of people went out on the street to protest against corruption, social injustice, the gap between political institutions and citizens, the fear and decline of social welfare as a political priority. Young people, who have deserted political parties and elections, have been frequently at the forefront. They are at the head of the campaign for a sustainable world, where an adolescent, Greta Thunberg,

has brought together young people from all over the world. But the system does not appear to be really listening to them, unless they become violent as in Chile, Paris, Baghdad or Hong Kong.

These reflections bring us to three conclusions.

Democracy in danger

The first is that, not by accident, the enemies of the fight to defend our natural environment are also the enemies of our political environment. They do not care if the first is destroyed, because they are intertwined with corporations, gas and oil companies, farmers who want to take over land (like the case of Brazil and Amazonia), or coal companies, like in Poland and Australia. But they want to twist the political environment in their favor, for their power. Orban of Hungary has campaigned for an illiberal democracy. Bolsonaro has gone further, talking about the good old days of the military dictatorship. And all of them, from Trump to Salvini, look on international cooperation, multilateral agreements and any initiative that reduces the freedom of a country for peace and justice (like the United Nations or the European Union) as enemies. They are all in favor of building walls, forgetting that the Second World War taught us to abolish them.

The second is that democracy is in danger, for the same reasons that the environment is also in danger. There is no ability and will among populists to reach any internal agreement. Would it be possible today to create the UN, or sign the Universal Declaration on Human Rights? Certainly not, just as there is no will to fight climate change.

The third, therefore, is what is going to happen in the new decade we are now entering. It looks like it will be a decisive decade. In just a few years, we must take action on how we will deal with two existential issues: how to remain in our present environment, and how we will live together.

All this will be decided by voters. And this raises an issue: Is it legitimate to believe that fascism, xenophobia and nationalism are the answer to our problems? Humans should learn from their mistakes (like all other animals do). And we should have learned from the two world wars that those beliefs are not an answer but the roots of war and confrontation.

So, here a final reflection. According to Steven Pinker, the Canadian cognitive scientist, writing in the *Economist*, in the last seven years humans have become healthier, live longer, are more secure, richer, freer, more intelligent and educated. This trend should continue. But humans have evolved, because they have dedicated themselves mainly to the advantages of reproduction, survival and material growth not because of wisdom or happiness.

The first urgent step is to reconcile progress with human nature. We have cognitive abilities, and also the ability to cooperate and be empathetic, unlike other animals. Between the Age of Enlightenment and the Second World War, we made important progress in science, democracy, human rights, free information, market rules and the creation of institutions for international cooperation. This trend cannot be stopped, argues Pinker; it is now in our genes.

Well, in 10 years we will know if all this is in the human genes or is just one of the many passages of history. Ah, because in 2027, Bolsonaro and Orban should leave office; Erdogan in 2023; Netanyahu, Modi, Putin and Trump in 2024. So, in just four years (a microsecond in human history), we will know how the world is, and what damages are irreversible or not, and if we have made any progress in halting the climate crisis. But Trump, etc, have been elected. ...



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Handicrafts made of bamboo and other indigenous materials are displayed at the Culture and Arts exhibit as part of the celebration of the 52nd anniversary of Camiguin in Mambajao yesterday.

GERRY LEE QORIT



TITLE:

PINIRMAHAN na kapon ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte ang P4.1 trilyong pambansang badyet para sa taong 2020.

Matik nang hindi gamitin ang pambansang badyet sa 2019 na pinirmahang mapalawig sakaling hindi maprubahan sa oras o mabi-veto ang panukalang 2020 budget.

Magbubunga ang napapanahong badyet ng magandang daloy ng paggastos ng pondo ng pamahalaan at inaasahang sasabay rito ang magandang bunga ng paggamitan ng pondo.

TITSER AT NARS

Ang pagkakaalam natin, mga Bro, may 900,000 guro sa mga public school mula sa kindergarten hanggang kolehiyo habang may ilang libong nars ng pamahalaan.

Kung matutuloy ang mga pagpaparami ng mga guro at nars, bakaaabot ang bilang ng mga sa isang milyon.

Sina Mam at Bb. Nars ang kabilang sa mga makikinabang sa aprubadong pambansang badyet.

Sila kasi ay kasali sa mga pinondohan ng pondo ng pamahalaan na magkaroon ng taas-sahod.

Retroactive kung tawagin ang bigayan ng taas-sahod at magsisimula ito sa Enero 1, 2020.

Kahit papaano, ang hakbang-hakbang na pagtataas-sahod sa mga ito hanggang makumpleto ang kabuuang halaga ay magbubunga ng gaan ng buhay para sa ating mga mahal na tisser at nars.

Malaking bagay sa buong lipunan natin ang paginhawa ng buhay ng mga tisser at nars dahil lalong sisipagin sa pagtuturo at pangangalaga sa ating mga kabataan ang una habang lalong mapangangalagaan naman ng mga nars ang kalusugan natin.

EDUCATION SOCIAL SERVICES

Sinasabing mahigit sa 36 porsyento ng pambansang badyet ang inilaan para sa edukasyon, pabahay, kalusugan at kagalangang panlipunan.

Nasa 29 porsyento naman ang para sa imprastraktura, turismo, kalakalan, paglikha ng trabaho at pagpapaulad ng agrikultura.

Nasa 11 porsyento naman ang para sa pam-



ULTIMATUM NI BENNY ANTIPORDA

MAAGANG BADYET AT KAPALPAKAN NI VP LENI

bayad ng utang.

Ang iba ay para sa pagkamit ng kapayapaan at kaayusan o kontra terorismo at kriminalidad at iba pa.

Ngayon maagang mapopondohan ang lahat ng proyekto at programa ng pamahalaan, sana makakamit natin ang mga layunin ng ating lipunan.

Kabilang sa mga target ng pamahalaan na pinakahalaga ay bawasan ang bilang ng mga mahihirap na Filipino hanggang sa 14 porsyento, lalo na sa pagtatapos ng pamahalaang Duterte sa 2022.

EMERGENCY FUND

Kakabit ng mga pahayag ni Pangulong Duterte ukol sa badyet ang naging kahilingan nito sa Kongreso na kumilos at aprubahan agad ang sapat na pondo para sa pagliligtas ng mga overseas Filipino worker na maaaring maapektuhan ng giyera sa pagitan ng Amerika at Iran.

Ganito kahalaga para kay Pang. Digong ang mga overseas Filipino worker.

Tinatayang nasa 2,500-3,000 ang Filipino sa Iraq habang ang iba ay nasa Iran.

Sila ang pangunahing maaaring likas ng pamahalaan gamit ang mga eroplano at barko kung sakali.

Maganda ang usaping ito para hindi matulad ang kalagayan ng mga Pinoy sa ibang mga giyera na sila ang naiwan sa mga bansang may kaguluhan samantalang halos lahat ng dayuhan ay nakaalis na sa pagsiklab ng mga labanan.

Sa Iraq lang, lahat na ng mga may ID na pang-Amerikano ay nagsisilikas at lumilipad na palabas ng Iraq kahit saan sila nagtatrabaho.

Nakaaamoy sila ng mga pulbura at alam nilang susunod na silang gagambalain ng mga patayan.

PANINIRA LANG

Bagsak daw ang grado ng administrasyong Duterte sa kampanya sa droga?

Ayon ito kay Vice President, 1 porsyento lang ng shabu at perang umi-

iral sa droga ang nalutas ng administrasyong Duterte.

Ang kasagutan dito ay nasa mga mamamayan at maaaring bukod ito sa mga rekord ng mga ahensyang may hawak sa giyera sa droga gaya ng Philippine National Police at Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency.

Kung bakit mahalaga ang mamamayan na magsalita ay dahil nasa kanilang mga komunidad ang tunay na kasagutan kung bagsak nga ba o hindi ang giyera sa droga.

Kamustahin nila ang mga naglipanang kabataan na adik at tulak at ang mga kilalang druglord sa kanilang lugar.

Kung nabawasan ang mga krimen na gawa ng mga adik, tulak at druglord gaya ng rape, pagnanakaw, pangholdap, karnaping at iba pa.

Kung naglipana pa ang mga adik at tulak na pulis, mga nanghuhulidap, protektor ng mga nahuhuling sangkot sa droga, nangongotong sa mga nahuhuli at iba pa.

Kung nakararamdam ng kaligtasan ang mga mamamayan mula sa mga kademonyohan ng mga adik, tulak at druglord.

Silang mga mamamayan talaga ang dapat na humusga kung ano ang tunay na estado ng giyera, kung tagumpay o bigo.

TANONG KAY LENI

May mahalagang tanong pala tayo kay VP Leni.

Nakatulong ba siya sa paghahanap at pagpapakulong man lang ng isang druglord, ng isang narco-cop, ng isang narco-politician?

Kung wala siyang nagawa rito sa mahigit tatlong taon na niyang panunungkulan, ano sa palagay ninyo ang kanyang mga pinagsasabi?

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