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AG

OFFER
POWER

FAGE 1
STORY

RADDER
STORY

EDITORIAL

CARTOON

01-12-20

FILE

PAGE 17

DATE

POTENTIAL TARGETS

CIMATU TELLS OFWS IN QATAR: STAY AWAY FROM US BASES

By Jerome Aning
@JeromeAningINQ

Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu, who was tasked by President Duterte to coordinate the evacuation of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) from the Middle East amid US-Iran tensions, has told Filipinos in Qatar to stay away from US bases that he said were potential targets of an attack.

"The presence of the American bases here—the Americans know they will be possible targets," Cimatu was quoted as saying by local media in a meeting with Filipino community leaders at the Philippine Embassy in Doha.

He clarified, however, that there was no mandatory evacuation of OFWs from Qatar

but added that they should stay away from the US bases.

"What could happen here, it's not an invasion, [but] explosion. If you get out of the explosion area, there won't be problem," he said.

'Always be prepared'

The US Army maintains the As Sayliyah Army Base in a suburb outside Doha, while several US Air Force units are headquartered in Qatar's Al Udeid Air Base, southwest of Doha.

The two bases are being used by the US Central Command as forward headquarters and to preposition military assets for operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf area.

The bases took part in the Operation Inherent Resolve,

the US-led military intervention against the Islamic State jihadist group in Iraq and Syria.

Despite the apparent deescalation of the tension, Cimatu said OFWs should be aware of and heed the advice of Philippine Embassy officials.

"I want you to be always prepared in whatever contingency [measure] that we will be doing," he said.

Avoid Iraq, Iran

Philippine Ambassador Alan Timbayan earlier advised Filipinos to avoid traveling to Iraq and Iran for the meantime.

Those who needed assistance may contact the embassy's hotline or social media accounts, he added.

In Manila, Foreign Secre-

tary Teodoro Locsin Jr. said the government would be sending teams to Iraq, Iran, Libya and Lebanon to speed up the repatriation and guarantee the safety of the Filipinos who want to return home.

"President Duterte already made an order because he cares. He calls them 'my OFWs.' The DFA is responding as efficiently and effectively. Such is the nature of our work with regards to assistance to nationals. We go there. We go in harm's way so our *kababayan* like you are out of harm's way," Locsin said on the sidelines of a thanksgiving lunch with Filipino seamen recently released by Iranian authorities after their ship was accused of smuggling fuel last September. *INQ*



FACES OF THE NEWS

Leni Robredo

Vice President Leni Robredo was once again in the news, after she released her 40-page report as former cochair of the Inter-Agency Committee on Anti-Illegal Drugs. The report described the government's war on drugs as "a massive failure," with police managing to seize only 1 percent of drugs being sold on the streets. If she were to mark the whole effort, Robredo said, she'd give it a 1/100 rating. Predictably, administration officials dismissed the report, throwing shade on the figures that, as it turned out, came from official sources. As for the Palace huffing there was nothing new in the report, that's actually right. In April 2019, the President himself admitted his frustrations over the drug war, his centerpiece agenda. The drug campaign, he said, had failed dismally.

Australian wildlife

Think Australia and immediately, images of koalas and kangaroos come to mind, as these animals are unique to the island-continent. But if Australia's devastating bushfires keep burning, these creatures might soon become endangered. Like most animals fleeing the fires, koalas and kangaroos have been either incinerated or choked by smoke. At least 25,000 koalas are said to have died in the fires that have razed nearly 18 million acres of land. The fire on Kangaroo Island, home to 50,000 kangaroos, has also been "virtually unstoppable." While Australia's government has allocated AU\$6 million to establish habitat corridors for animals released from hospitals, nature experts say a more decisive long-term action on climate change is needed to save the country's wildlife.

Roy Cimatu

Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu, a former military general, found himself in more familiar waters last week after President Duterte ordered him to lead the repatriation efforts in Iraq and other conflict areas in the Middle East. Cimatu flew to Doha, Qatar, on Thursday to oversee the forced evacuation of overseas Filipino workers from Baghdad, even as the United States and Iran appeared to stand down from the escalating conflict. Overseeing such efforts is nothing new for Cimatu who was formerly special envoy to the Middle East under the Duterte administration, before he was appointed environment secretary. He also served in the same post under President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, where he led the rescue of a kidnapped Filipino from Iraqi insurgents in 2004.



Qassem Soleimani

A terrorist to Americans but a hero to fellow Iranians, Qassem Soleimani still managed to influence events in the Middle East after his death. The supposed brains behind attacks on the United States and other Western forces, Tehran's top general was killed on Jan. 3 in a drone strike ordered by US President Donald Trump. Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force—the foreign legion of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards—died just outside Baghdad airport in Iraq where, according to Trump, he was planning attacks on American embassies. While the United States says his death has stopped threats against America and its allies, Soleimani's killing has instead taken Washington into unknown territory in its struggle against Iran, which launched a retaliation.



Donald Trump

US President Donald Trump dialed down his rhetoric against Iran, which had threatened hard revenge for the United States' drone strike that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani early this month. Instead, Trump approved new sanctions on Iran's textile, construction, manufacturing and mining sectors. His restraint in the conflict, however, did not stop the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives from curbing Trump's war powers in a resolution that will likely worsen his global image. Already, 64 percent of respondents in a survey in 32 countries by the nonpartisan Pew Research Center said they did not have confidence that Trump would do the right thing. Only 29 percent—the Philippines included—said they be-



1/2

1st batch of 14 OFWs from Iraq headed home

By JAIME LAUDE

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana disclosed yesterday that the first batch of 14 overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) are now at the Philippine embassy in Baghdad, Iraq and would be processed as part of the government's ongoing mandatory repatriation operations.

Lorenzana, the designated inter-agency repatriation

1st batch From Page 1

committee chair for OFWs in the Middle East, said the group will be transported to Doha, Qatar where the workers would take a commercial flight to Manila today.

He added that the number of Filipino workers who would avail of the repatriation is likely to increase as the situation between the United States and Iran is still unstable.

"The situation in the area in the Middle East (particularly in Iraq) is still unstable and our contingencies for massive repatriation are still in place," Lorenzana said.

He said Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Roy Cimatu, the designated Special Envoy to the Middle East, is now in Qatar implementing the government mandatory repatriation.

Aside from repatriation, Cimatu has been tasked to assess the security situation in Iran, Iraq, Libya and other neighboring states.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) report in 2018 showed that an estimated 2.3 million OFWs are currently based in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Qatar.

These Middle Eastern coun-

tries are still the prime destinations of Filipinos who seek jobs abroad.

The rest of the OFWs are spread across the globe.

President Duterte assured the public on Friday that the government has enough funds to cover the repatriation of the OFWs in Iraq and other countries in the Middle East.

Duterte said he had directed Lorenzana and Cimatu - both former military generals - to coordinate the efforts to ensure the safety of Filipinos in the affected areas.

The President expressed confidence in the former military officials as he counted on them to get the OFWs out of harm's way.

Duterte has ordered the defense department to use all available resources to coordinate efforts.

"I requested Secretary Lorenzana to take stock of what we have, what are the equipment that can be sent immediately, ships and airplanes and of course provisioning, the evacuees if needed to be quartered in a certain place outside harm's way and that would be Iraq and Iran," he said.

Lorenzana said the committee is also monitoring the

security situation in Kuwait where the government raised its security level to maximum on Thursday.

"The alert level within the area covering a 100-kilometer radius from and including Tripoli, Libya was raised to Level 4 (mandatory evacuation). Outside the said 100-kilometer radius, it remains at Alert Level 2," Lorenzana said.

Once the security situation calls for it, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is ready to send in two Marine and Army battalions as well as its air and naval assets to the Middle East to assist in the repatriation of OFWs.

Currently, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) vessel *BRP Gabriela Silang* is on standby in Malta from France and ready to sail to the Middle East to evacuate OFWs.

Defense spokesman Arsenio Andolong said that aside from Iraq, the inter-agency committee expects more OFWs from Iran and Libya to request repatriation.

"We advise our *kababayans* in Iraq and in Tripoli, Libya to contact the nearest Philippine mission to facilitate their mandatory repatriation," Andolong said.

Emergency loans

The Department of Agricul-



1st batch of 14 OFWs from Iraq
headed home

2/2

ture (DA) is ready to provide loans to returning OFWs displaced by the conflict in the Middle East.

Agriculture Secretary William Dar said returning OFWs could avail of an emergency loan to allow them and their families to engage in agriculture, fishery or any agribusiness enterprise.

"The DA through the Agricultural Credit and Policy Council (ACPC) will provide an emergency loan assistance, at zero interest, worth P25,000 to each returning OFW from Iran and elsewhere in the Middle East," Dar said.

"They may opt to avail of a bigger amount under the recently-approved DA-ACPC Micro and Small Agribusiness Loan Program (MSALP), where they can borrow from P300,000 up to P15 million, at zero interest, payable in five years," he added.

The MSALP is one of the two new lending programs of the DA aimed at encouraging more people to venture into the farm sector.

The program has an initial P1-billion budget with formal launching of the loan fund set before the end of the month.

Under the MSALP, agripreneurs can borrow for working capital or for fixed asset acquisition, from P300,000

up to P15 million, for micro and small enterprises.

The program will be implemented by the ACPC through the Land Bank of the Philippines, ACPC-accredited cooperative banks, rural banks, cooperatives and viable non-government organizations.

Senate President Vicente Sotto III said yesterday that with tensions between the US and Iran apparently deescalating and Congress resuming session next week, there may be no longer any need for lawmakers to convene a special session to tackle a new budget to fund any government contingency for the Middle East.

Sotto said there is still no formal request from Malacañang for Congress to hold a special session – as President Duterte stated last week – to authorize a new budget to finance the cost of repatriating Filipinos from the Middle East.

"I think they (Malacañang) already found enough funds for the purpose," Sotto told radio *dwiZ*. "Even if they will call for a special session, the proceedings will take time and by the time the funds are to be approved, Congress will already be in session."

He said the President's Social Fund as well as other discretionary and contingent funds in other agencies would

total at least around P5 billion.

Sen. Joel Villanueva said the government's emergency repatriation fund lodged in the Overseas Workers' Welfare Administration (OWWA) amounting to P65 million should be tapped to finance the mandatory evacuation of Filipino workers and migrants in the Middle East.

Villanueva, chairman of the Senate committee on labor and employment, earlier said the fund, which was included in the 2020 General Appropriations Act that President Duterte signed earlier this week, would be enough to jumpstart the government's order to Filipino workers to leave Iraq.

Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian meanwhile urged the government and oil companies to study the possibility of permanently increasing the country's fuel stockpiles beyond the 45-day reserve to help meet fuel needs in the event of full-blown conflict in the Middle East.

Gatchalian also reiterated his call for the Department of Trade and Industry to monitor businesses that may take advantage of tensions in the Middle East to increase prices. – **With Christina Mendez, Louise Maureen Simeon, Paolo Romero**



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PAGE 1
STORY



UPPER
LOWER



BANNER
STORY



EDITORIAL



CARTOON

01-12-20

DATE

TITLE:

PAGE 1/

P.1

ANOTHER MIDEAST EXTRACTION PLAN

Seventeen years since its Middle East-wide mission to shuffle within the region or totally move out thousands of Filipinos just before the invasion of Iraq, the Philippines rushes to evacuate workers in at least three countries amid another unfolding desert drama. At its center is the same man, retired general Roy A. Cimatu.

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

AS the safety of Filipinos hangs in the balance in the current Middle East drama prompted by the targeted US killing of a top Iranian general near the Baghdad airport early this month, the Philippines is racing to execute a Level 4 alert which mandates, among others, forced or mandatory evacuation of Filipinos.

At the center of the interagency effort is Environment Secretary and Philippine Special Envoy to the Middle East Roy A. Cimatu, who was assigned a similar mission in late 2002, months before the United States invaded Iraq on supposed information that Saddam Hussein kept weapons of mass destruction.

This time, Cimatu flew from Manila to Doha, Qatar, via Philippine Airlines at exactly 1 p.m. on Thursday (Philippine time) to set up a command center there with the intention of convening Philippine Embassy officials immediately upon his arrival.

Over the past three days, Cimatu gave his thoughts about the situation, revealing in hindsight some details of how the Philippine government plans to execute the mission to move Filipinos out of harm's way and, if war breaks out, safely bring them home.

Anything can happen

THE unpredictability of the situation in the Middle East, the former Armed Forces chief of staff reiterated, calls for the forced, or mandatory, evacuation to other countries of the overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon

to safer places.

Tasked by President Duterte to lead the Philippines' crisis management committee, Cimatu said evacuating Filipinos who may be in imminent danger, particularly those in Baghdad, will continue as planned, even as both Washington and Tehran on Thursday gave indications of easing up. In the trained eye of the retired Armed Forces chief—and his knowledge of geopolitics and precious wisdom drawn from his 2002-2003 mission, Cimatu believes the situation remains highly volatile despite recent developments where both Iran

and the United States promise to exercise restraint.

"It is better to err on the side of safety," he said before flying to Doha, insisting that evacuating Filipinos out of Iraq should begin as soon as possible while the Baghdad International Airport remains operational.

The official noted that private airlines, in case the situation deteriorates, may eventually cancel flights going in and out of Baghdad.

The same may eventually happen in other airports inside and outside Iraq, which will leave them

CONTINUED ON A2

with the narrow option of risky long travel by land to any country where Filipinos will be allowed entry and can find safe haven while waiting for repatriation back to the Philippines.

Talking from experience

CITING his experience in 2002 when he led the Arroyo administration's crisis management team that led the repatriation of thousands of Filipinos out of Iraq, Cimatu said the best time to move Filipinos out of the Middle East country—caught in the US-Iran conflict because it hosts thousands of US forces—is "now." Why? Because the possibility of another retaliatory attack by either Tehran or Washington may lead to a full

blown war, and the certainty of flight cancellations or military operations that will include putting up of road blockades. These will make the movement of Filipinos out of conflict areas highly risky and even more difficult. What's more, he said at his predeparture briefing, most countries in the largely desert region have their own set of missiles for defense purposes, so attacks on perceived US facilities or US-friendly zones in other countries besides Iraq, Iran and Lebanon are possible.

When he meets with Philippine embassy officials in the Middle East, Cimatu said he will immediately call for a logistics inventory—first and foremost—



Another Mideast Extraction Plan

fuel, while identifying the best mode of transportation available.

Master plan

CIMATU said the Philippines has a master plan to get all Filipinos out of harm's way but said there's no one size fits all, adding that a plan unique for each country is needed. He said the mode of transportation would still be identified in the next few days, and would have to be, from experience, multi-modal.

That strategy may be seen in the fact that "all hands on deck" is the approach taken, logistics-wise. Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana has made sure Philippine military and Coast Guard assets are available to ferry OFWs from safe havens where they may be brought after extraction from hot zones.

The Philippine embassies in Iraq, Iran and Lebanon where Level 4 Alert was raised simultaneously this week are compliant and have in fact started executing exit plans for Filipinos. In Iraq, more than 1,600 have been registered and ready for evacuation. The same is happening in Iran and Lebanon, Cimatu said.

The plan, he said, eventually is to repatriate all Filipinos out of countries facing serious threats of attacks, insisting that it will be done even if Filipinos insist on staying.

"We will insist that they be evacuated to safety," he said.

Safe havens

THOSE in Iraq, he said, may find safe haven at the Philippine em-

bassy in Baghdad while awaiting repatriation.

Cimatu said he thought of finding safe havens for those outside of Baghdad, which, he said, is a "hot spot" because of the presence of the United States embassy and American facilities which are potential targets by Tehran.

Finding temporary shelter for Filipinos who are ready to leave Iraq, he said, may compel the Philippines to book them in hotels while waiting for their flights, which can be done in batches.

By batches also means the government booking the available commercial flights back to the Philippines. Travel by land onboard buses using the most possible safe routes declared as "peace corridors" will be used to get to the nearest airport.

Proper coordination

PROPER coordination by Philippine embassy officials in each country where Filipinos may travel to for their safety is crucial to every plan.

Cimatu noted that in 2002, it became known to him that some countries are very strict and would only allow Filipinos a certain number of days to stay in their country.

"Some countries will allow up to three days," he said, adding that during that short window, the flight must be scheduled.

Undocumented Filipinos

CIMATU—and Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III—expressed concern in the case of undocumented Filipinos, the number of

whom remains unknown until now. According to the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), around 2.1 million overseas Filipino workers are working in the Middle East. Apparently, however, citing his experience in repatriating Filipinos in Iraq more than 15 years ago, the number of Filipinos may swell as the situation worsens.

Another problem in repatriating undocumented Filipinos is the fact that they have been staying in unknown locations in the Middle East.

The solution to that, he said, is by appealing to the relatives of undocumented OFWs back home to communicate the identity, location and, if possible, coordinate with the Philippine embassy in Manila to facilitate the repatriation of the undocumented Filipinos.

Cimatu, however, said that undocumented Filipinos need not fear being prosecuted, as the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) has agreed to provide necessary travel documents for them to be able to leave the Middle East without hassle.

Filipinos with foreign spouses

ANOTHER concern, said Cimatu, is dealing with Filipinos who married foreigners, had children and have settled in Middle East countries.

This situation, he said, calls for further coordination with the government of the Filipinos' spouses, such as in Iran, where he was told that many, if not more than half of Filipinos, are with Iranian husbands and children.

The lingering question is whether the married couple will be allowed to go together—or be separated—which will be devastating to the family, particularly the children.

"If the government will allow their nationals to leave their country and join their spouses going to the Philippines, that's good. If not, it will be a problem," he said.

Worst-case scenario

WHILE hoping and praying for the best, Cimatu said he also expects the worst and hence, the Philippines must plan and prepare to execute such plan drawn with the worst-case scenario in mind.

"Over-preparation is better than under-preparation," he told reporters at a press briefing at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 1 before boarding.

A worst case scenario for Cimatu means airports are closed and military operations have started in case of a full-blown war. This means a greater risk for Filipinos traveling distant lands to the nearest airport in another nearby country.

Cimatu said they are looking at requesting host countries to allow flights using private airstrips, or travel by boat or seacraft of Philippine Coast Guard or Navy, which will be costly as it requires the use of a lot of fuel.

Another worst-case scenario, he said, is when Filipinos become targets. Cimata feared that in such case, as the threats become even grave and the risk of traveling rises further, the best time for Filipinos to leave would be "as soon as possible" before the tension and threat escalate and develop into a full-blown war between the US and Iran, and possibly, involving other forces sympathetic to either of the



P-2

Another Mideast Extraction Plan



PRESIDENT Duterte talks with security officials at Malacañang on January 5, 2020. Duterte has ordered the military to prepare to deploy its aircraft and ships "at any moment's notice" to evacuate thousands of Filipino workers in Iraq and Iran should hostilities erupt there. ALFRED FRIAS/MALACAÑANG PRESIDENTIAL PHOTOGRAPHY DIVISION VIA AP



OFW evac plans still in place

"The situation in the area is still unstable and our contingencies for massive repatriation are still in place

MidEast situation unstable after shooting down of passenger jet

By Kristina Maralit
@tribuneph_tina

Contingencies for a massive repatriation of Filipino migrant workers affected by the Middle East crisis are still in place following reports that

Iran "unintentionally" shot down a Ukrainian passenger jet that crashed after taking off from Tehran, killing all 176 people aboard.

Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu, tasked by President Rodrigo Duterte to oversee evacuation efforts for Pinoys affected by the tension in the Middle East, is now in Qatar to kickstart the

repatriation process, the Department of National Defense (DND) said Saturday.

Cimatu, the government's Special Envoy to the Middle East, is also closely monitoring and assessing the situation in Iran, Iraq, Libya, and other neighboring states.

"The situation in the area is still
Turn to page A2

From page A1

unstable and our contingencies for massive repatriation are still in place," DND spokesman, Dir. Arsenio Andolong, said in a statement.

Iran President Hassan Rouhani said a military investigation had found "missiles fired due to human error" brought down the Boeing 737 on Wednesday, calling it an "unforgivable mistake."

The about-turn came after officials in Iran had categorically denied Western claims that the Ukraine International Airlines (UIA) airliner had been struck by a missile in a catastrophic error.

The plane, which had been bound for Kiev, slammed into a field shortly after taking off from Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport before dawn on Wednesday.

It came only hours after Iran's armed forces launched a wave of missiles at bases hosting American forces in Iraq in response to the killing of Qasem Soleimani, one of Iran's top generals, in a US drone strike.

According to Andolong, the first batch of evacuees are now at 14 and is temporarily housed at the Philippine Embassy in Baghdad, Iraq pending their flight back to the Philippines. They are expected to be flown to Manila via Doha, Qatar via commercial flight as the Philippine government

is still "coordinating with other countries" regarding the diplomatic clearances for the Armed Forces' assets.

Andolong also noted that the DND is anticipating requests from more Filipinos based as alert levels in Kuwait and Libya were raised anew.

The Kuwaiti government raised its security level to "maximum" on 9 January, while the area within a 100-km radius from and including Tripoli, Libya was raised to Level 4 which merits mandatory evacuation.

"We advise our *kabayans* in Iraq and in Tripoli, Libya to contact the nearest Philippine mission to facilitate their mandatory evacuation," Andolong said.

Naval assets ready

The Philippine Coast Guard's (PCG) newest and biggest asset, the *BRP Gabriel Silang*, is currently docked in Malta and is "ready to sail anytime to nearby countries where Filipinos are in danger to ferry them to safer areas."

It is the PCG's offshore patrol vessel and was actually on its maiden voyage back to the Philippines from France but was diverted to Malta and will be ordered to sail towards Oman or Dubai to aid in the evacuation efforts.

Originally scheduled to arrive in the country on 10 February after its commissioning last year in France, and once given clearance, the *BRP Gabriela*

Silang and its 35 crew members, was instructed to change its route and bring Filipinos, mostly migrant workers, to safer ports before they are put on a flight back to Manila.



REVENUE BILLS TOP PRIORITY WHEN HOUSE SESSION RESUMES

By Maricel V. Cruz

THE House of Representatives will prioritize the passage of revenue measures and bills creating three departments when Congress reconvenes next week after its Christmas recess, Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano said during the weekend.

"We already have good laws like those that provide for universal health care or free PhilHealth insurance coverage for all Filipinos and free college education. We also have the massive Build, Build, Build infrastructure program. We have to fund these with taxes," Cayetano said.

The House committee on ways and means earlier endorsed the approval of at least four revenue measures, including imposing a five-percent license fee on Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators or POGOs and an income tax on their foreign workers.

Cayetano said President Rodrigo Duterte's order for the repatriation of Filipinos in Iraq highlighted the need for the creation of the proposed Department of Overseas Filipino Workers.

He said the long-term solution to problems affecting millions of OFWs and

Turn to A2

REVENUE... From A1

Filipinos abroad was the formation of the proposed new agency.

"Even if we have a hardworking secretary of foreign affairs and an equally hardworking secretary of labor, they have other tasks. Secretary Roy Cimatu (of Environment and Natural Resources) may be an expert on Middle East, but he, too has other jobs. So what is important is for the nation to have a full-time secretary whose only job is to attend to the welfare and concern of OFWs," he added.

As for the problem of water distribution in Metro Manila and neighboring areas, Cayetano said he supports the President's decision for the government to have a new contract with water distributors Maynilad Water Services and Manila Water.

"I am thankful that the two water concessionaires have already declared they are willing to talk, they are willing to look at it. So we hope the new contract could come out in the first quarter of this year. The earlier we can resolve it, the better for consumers," he said.

The President wants "onerous" provisions in the existing agreements with Maynilad and Manila Water to be taken out.

Cayetano said he does not think Duterte's order for the scrapping of those provisions would affect the investment climate in the country.

He said the planned creation of a Department of Water Resources could be the long-term solution to the water supply-distribution crisis.

In a related development, Bagong Henerasyon Party-list Rep. Bernadette Herrera echoed the House leadership's position when it lauded President Duterte for demonstrating the political will to correct the onerous provisions of the agreements.

"As the President has stated, the time of reckoning has come for the two water concessionaires. We have been saying all along that the agreements are disadvantageous to the Filipino consumers," Herrera said.



A1/A2

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01-12-20

REPATRIATES START TREK BACK HOME

THE first batch of Filipinos—14 total—to be repatriated from Iraq is already at the Philippine Embassy in Baghdad and will be brought to Doha, Qatar before being flown to Manila today, the Department of National Defense spokesperson said on Saturday.

"This number may increase, however, as the Embassy continues to call on other OFWs who wish to come home," DND spokesperson Arsenio Andolong said in a statement.

There are an estimated 4,000 Filipinos in Iraq, according to data from the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Andolong also said on Dohol B sa News TV, beamed nationwide, that there were logistical concerns, reason why Filipinos to be repatriated from Iraq could not be brought directly to Manila.

He said Special Envoy to the Middle East and concurrent Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu was in Qatar to implement the repatriation of OFWs. Filipinos married to Iraqi nationals are not covered by the repatriation order imposed by the Philippine government in Iraq.

President Rodrigo Duterte clarified that those in Iraq would be forcibly evacuated, "But on those who are married already, whose husbands are Iraqi nationals, we cannot do anything," he added.

REPATRIATES...

From A1

Mandatory repatriation in Iraq is still enforced and the deployment of Filipino workers to the Gulf state remains prohibited, Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III said on Thursday.

Alert Level 4, which calls for mandatory repatriation of Filipinos in crisis-stricken areas, was raised in Iraq following the US airstrike in Baghdad that led to the death of top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani.

Filipinos working and living in Iran and Lebanon are no longer covered by the mandatory repatriation order after alert levels in the two countries have been downgraded.

On Friday, Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles called on Filipinos in Iraq to heed the Philippine government's desire to repatriate them.

Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo, however, said on Wednesday that the Duterte administration would respect any Filipinos who want to stay in Iraq despite the tensions between the US and Iraq.

Duterte has formed a special working committee that will oversee the evacuation and repatriation of Filipinos from the Middle East.

The panel is chaired by Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and vice chaired by National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr. Members are Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu, Foreign Affairs

Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr., Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III, Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año, and Transportation Secretary Arthur Tugade.

Duterte said he has been receiving updates from the special working panel.

"I requested Secretary Lorenzana to take stock of what we have, what equipment can be sent immediately, ships and airplane, and of course the provisioning of the evacuate ships to be quartered in the certain place outside of the harms and that would be Iraq and Iran," he said.

"I (also) sent (retired) General Cimatu, Secretary Cimatu of the DENR. He used to be the special emissary of President (Gloria Macapagal) Arroyo (to the Middle East). And he has had a vast experience how to handle this kind of situation. He's there already. He has been communicating with us," he added.

Around P1.8 billion in government funds have been readied for the repatriation of Filipinos in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, contingency plans on the repatriation of overseas Filipino workers remain in place as the situation in the Middle East is still unstable, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said on Saturday.

"The situation in the area is still unstable and our contingencies for massive repatriation are still in place," Lorenzana said in a media statement.

Lorenzana also said the Philippine Coast Guard ship, BRP Gabriela Silang, was in Malta and ready to sail anytime to nearby countries where Filipinos are in danger to ferry them to safer areas.

"We are closely monitoring Kuwait which just raised its security level to maximum on Jan. 9, 2020," he added.

The DND chief was earlier named chairperson of the special working panel that will oversee the evacuation and possible repatriation of OFWs in the Middle East amid tensions between the United States and Iran.

"The Alert Level within an area covering a 100-km radius from and including Tripoli, Libya was raised to Level 4 (mandatory evacuation). Outside the said 100-km radius, it remains at Alert Level 2," Lorenzana said.

Lorenzana also advised Filipinos in Iraq and in Tripoli, Libya to contact the nearest Philippine mission to facilitate their mandatory evacuation. **PNA**



14 OFWs coming home from Iraq

By Zaida Delos Reyes

FOURTEEN overseas Filipino workers (OFW's) will come home from Iraq on Sunday.

This was according to Department of National Defense (DND) spokesperson Arsenio Andolong.

He said the first batch of Filipinos to be repatriated from Iraq went to the Philippine Embassy in Baghdad on Saturday and will be brought to Doha, Qatar before flying to Manila on Sunday.

"This number may increase, however, as the Embassy continues to call on other OFWs who wish to come home," he said.

Andolong also said on Dohol B sa News TV that there were logistical concerns that is why the Filipinos to be repatriated from Iraq could not be brought directly to Manila.

"The first batch of evacuees numbering 14 is now at the Philippine embassy in Baghdad, Iraq. They will be transported to Doha, Qatar from where they will be flown to Manila on Sunday 12 January 2020," Andolong said.

He said the number may increase as the Philippine embassy in affected countries continues to call on other OFWs who wish to return home.

He said DENR Secretary Roy Cimatu, Special Envoy to the Middle East,

went to Qatar on Saturday to implement the repatriation and assess the situation in Iran, Iraq, Libya and other neighboring states.

"The situation in the area is still unstable and our contingencies for massive repatriation are still in place," Andolong said.

Right now, the BRP Gabriela Silang, the newly acquired ship of the Philippine Coast Guard, is in Malta and ready to sail anywhere to countries where Filipinos are in danger to ferry them to safer areas.

Andolong said the government is also monitoring Kuwait which just raised its security level to maximum on January 9, 2020.



UNANG BATCH NG OFWs MULA IRAQ PAUWI NA

INAASAHANG darating ngayong Linggo ang unang batch ng mga overseas Filipino worker (OFW) mula sa Iraq na ire-repatriate dahil pa rin sa nagpapatuloy na iringan ng bansang Iran at Estados Unidos.

Ayon kay Defense Spokesman Director Arsenio Andolong nananatiling nakaalerto sila dahil sa nakaamba pa ring panganib sa buhay ng libo-libong OFWs matapos na itaas sa maximum ang security level sa bansang Kuwait simula Enero 9, 2020.

"We are closely monitoring Kuwait which just raised its security level to maximum on January 9, 2020. The Alert Level within an area covering a 100-km radius from and including Tripoli, Libya was raised to Level 4 (mandatory evacuation). Outside

the said 100-km radius, it remains at Alert Level 2," paliwanag pa ni Andolong kahapon.

Nabatid na ang unang batch na mare-repatriate ay nasa Philippine Embassy sa Baghdad na dadalhin muna sa Doha sa Qatar bago tutulak ng Maynila at sakay ng commercial flight.

Ayon pa kay Andolong, asahang madadagdagan pa ang bilang ng mga OFW na paparating sa bansa sa mga susunod na araw dahil sa patuloy na panawagan sa kanila na lumikas na hanggang hindi pa peligroso ang sitwasyon.

Patuloy rin umano ang panawagan ng embahada ng Filipinas sa naturang bansa sa mga OFW na nais nang umuwi rito sa Filipi-

nas na makipag-ugnayan sa kanila.

Personal na pinangangasiwaan ni Special Envoy to the Middle East at kasalukuy-



ang Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu na ngayon ay nasa Qatar para ipatupad ang repatriation ng mga OFW.

Patuloy rin umano ang ina-assess ni Cimatu ang sitwasyon ngayon sa Iran, Iraq at Libya at mga karatig na bansa sa Gitnang Silangan.

VERLIN RUIZ



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The Manila Times

A2
PAGE

UPPER
 LOWER

PAGE 1
STORY

BANNER
STORY

EDITORIAL

CARTOON

01-12-20

TITLE:

PAGE 17

DATE



WASTE-FREE MANILA BAY Construction workers along Roxas Boulevard work over the weekend to finish a drainage system to prevent waste from polluting Manila Bay. PHOTO BY ENRIQUE AGCAOILI



Sunday, January 12, 2020

LGU told to stop charging fees for use of Boracay's walkways

By TARA YAP

ILOILO CITY – The local government unit (LGU) of Malay town, Aklan province has been told to stop charging each tourist a fee for using pontoons (floating walkways) at the world-famous Boracay Island.

Natividad Bernardino, general manager of the Boracay Inter-Agency Rehabilitation Management Group (BIARMG), wrote a letter to Mayor Frolibar Bautista that ordered the Malay LGU to stop collecting the ₱30 fee.

Complaints have reached BIARMG of the fee that Malay LGU has been collecting since December 5, 2019 as per an executive order issued by Bautista.

Bernardino pointed out that BIARMG has not approved of Malay LGU's proposal to collect fee when it presented it during a November 2019 meeting.

The Malay LGU's move is supposed to be a step in regulating water sports and other activities in the country's most popular beach destination that has been undergoing massive rehabilitation since April 2018.

There are pontoons along Stations 1 and 3. It is required for tourists who want to go for jet skiing, scuba diving, parasailing, banana boat rides, or island hopping.



BAGUIO UP FOR REHAB

By Cesar Reyes

BAGUIO CITY — Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat on Friday arrived in Baguio City to oversee the developments in the City of Pines' long-planned rehabilitation.

The inter-agency taskforce composed of the DOT, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) met to discuss the updates on Baguio City's rehabilitation program.

The inter-agency collaboration was after the success of the Boracay and Manila Bay rehab initiatives.

Romulo-Puyat signed a Memorandum of Agreement with Baguio City Mayor Benjamin Magalong and Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA) CEO Pocholo Paragas to formalize the DOT's investment of P480 million for the rehabilitation of Baguio City's Burnham Park.

The budget will be earmarked for the beautification of the park, including the landscaping, lighting, and electrical works; hardscape and softscape; construction of view deck and boat docking; installation of terrace planters; view deck renovation; and plant box improvement for the Burnham Lake.

One of the main issues

to be addressed is the carrying capacity of the city, which means establishing the ideal number of visitors that can be accommodated without harming or affecting the environment while meeting the expectations of the visitors and respecting the needs and preserving the culture of the locals.



PINASINAYAAN ang ferry na maaaring magsakay ng 150 katao. MMDA/RADYO INQUIRER

150-seater ferry bibiyahe sa Pasig

MADADAGDAGAN pa ang mga ferry na bumibiyahе sa Pasig River.

Ayon sa Metropolitan Manila Development Authority, nakatakda nang pumasada ang 150-seater na ferry.

Noong Biyernes ay pi-

nasinayaan ito ng mga opisyal ng ahensya at iba pang sangay ng pamahalaan.

Dahil dito ay inaasahang mas marami pang mga pasahero ang maseserbisuhan ng Pasig River Ferry.

— *Radyo Inquirer*



STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
INITIATIVES
SERVICE



A2

OFFER
FLOWER

PAGE 1
STORY

BARBER
STORY

EDITORIAL

CARTOON

01-12-20

DATE

FILE

PAGE 11

'PH WILL NOT BE DUMPING GROUND'

TRASH TO BE SENT BACK FROM MISAMIS ORIENTAL TO SOKOR

By **Jhesset O. Enano**
@JhessetEnanoINQ

After being stored in Misamis Oriental province for more than a year, the remaining 5,100 metric tons of illegal wastes that entered the country in 2018 will finally be returned to South Korea.

Environment and health watchdog Ecowaste Coalition on Saturday quoted Port Collector John Simon of the regional Bureau of Customs as confirming the reexportation of 60 shipping containers of the illegal trash this month and in February.

Vessels from Maersk International Shipping Lines will carry the wastes out of the country on Jan. 19 and Feb. 9.

Environment groups welcomed the development as a clear message that the Philippines will not be a dumping ground for developed countries.

"The complete removal of the remaining South Korean wastes in Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, the cleanup of the storage site, and the prosecution of the offenders will help in correcting the grave environmental injustice inflicted on Mindanaoans in particular, and the Filipino people in general," said Aileen Lucero, Ecowaste's national coordinator.

'Partial victory'

Chinkie Peliño-Golle, executive director of the Davao-based Interfacing Development Interventions for Sustainability, said the reexportation was a "partial victory," as those behind the toxic mess still needed to be held accountable.

Controversies surrounding illegal waste shipments have long hounded the country, with government officials and environmentalists decrying how

rich nations have turned the country into a dumpsite.

Last year, the Philippines and Canada got embroiled in a diplomatic spat after President Duterte blasted Ottawa for the illegally exported Canadian wastes which stayed in the country for six years.

The 6,500-metric ton of illegal waste shipments from South Korea arrived at the Mindanao International Container Terminal in July and October 2018. Their consignee, Verde Soko Philippines Industrial Corp., said the shipments contained reusable plastic for recycling.

Falsely declared as plastic synthetic flakes, the shipments were later discovered to contain mixed plastic waste, that the local Department of Environment and Natural Resources office declared as hazardous and a major health risk to the community. INQ



Last of waste dumped in PH returning to South Korea

Last 60 container vans of illegal waste returning to South Korea

By Cory Martinez

THE remaining 60 container vans of illegal waste imports from South Korea will finally be returned on January 19 and February 9 to the country of origin.

This was disclosed yesterday by environment-advocate group EcoWaste Coalition which received a text message from Port Collector John Simon of the Bureau of Customs-Region 10 informing them of the impending re-exportation of the imported illegal wastes.

The EcoWaste Coalition

together with the Davao City-based Interfacing Development Interventions for Sustainability (IDIS) hailed the planned repatriation of over 5,000 tons of South Korean waste saying that it will help in rectifying the environmental injustice committed against Mindanao and the entire Filipino nation.

The illegal waste imports by Verde Soko Philippines Industrial Corporation will be re-exported with vessels from Maersk International Shipping Lines as the official carrier.

The imported illegal wastes have been stranded since July 2018 at the

PHIVIDEDEC Industrial Estate in Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental as confirmed by customs authorities.

"The long wait will soon be over. In line with President Rodrigo Duterte's directive banning waste imports and in cooperation with the South Korean government, we are shipping back the remaining wastes to their origin on Jan. 19 and Feb. 9. The re-exportation of the misdeclared plastic wastes to where they come from should send a clear signal to all parties that our beloved country is not a global dump and that waste traffickers will be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law," Simon informed the group.

Chinkie Peliño-Golle, Executive Director, IDIS, said it is good news for the people of Mindanao as they assert their unwillingness to be an entry point of hazardous waste from overseas.

"The re-shipment of the South Korean waste to its source is a historic win for our people and the environment," said Peliño-Golle adding that "this is only a partial victory as the culprits behind this toxic mess have yet to account for their misdeeds."

Meanwhile, Aileen Lucero, National Coordinator, EcoWaste Coalition, said that

the complete removal of the remaining South Korean waste in Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, the clean-up of the storage site and the prosecution of the offenders will help in correcting the grave environmental injustice inflicted on Mindanaoans in particular and the Filipino people in general.

"We commend Port Collector Simon and his team, as well as other customs, environmental and local government officials in the region, for taking a brave and solid position against foreign waste dumping and for finding ways to overcome logistical challenges, especially

with the complicated repacking of the bulk waste," she said.

Illegal waste shipments from South Korea, falsely declared as "plastic synthetic flakes," with a total combined weight of 6,500 tons arrived at the Mindanao International Container Terminal (MICT) in July and October 2018.

BOC-10 issued three warrants of seizure and detention against the illegal waste cargoes followed by a re-exportation order citing violations of DENR Administrative Order 2013-22 and the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act.

Following the agreement reached by the governments of the Philippines and South Korea in December 2018, some 1,400 tons of illegal waste shipments were sent back to South Korea on January 13, 2019, which was witnessed by representatives from the EcoWaste Coalition, Greenpeace, IDIS and other civil society groups from Davao City.

The repatriation of the remaining wastes from South Korea was delayed due to financial and logistical issues related to their re-bagging and transfer from the PHIVIDEDEC site to the MICT.



PAGE



UPPER

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PAGE

STORY



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PAGE 17

60 container vans of illegal wastes to be returned to S. Korea

BY CORY MARTINEZ

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It will be recalled that illegal waste shipments from South Korea, falsely declared as "plastic synthetic flakes," with a total



5K toneladang basura ng Verde Soko ibabalik sa SoKor

Ikinatuwa ng mga environment watchdog ang pahayag ng Bureau of Customs (BOC) na ibabalik na sa South Korea ang mga basurang nakaimbak sa isang pasilidad sa Misamis Oriental sa darating na Enero 19 at Pebrero 19 ngayong taon.

Nasa 5,177 tonelada ang mga basurang galing sa South Korea na ni-repack at inimbak sa Phividec Industrial Authority compound sa Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental. Kabilang ito sa kabuuang 6,500 tonelada ng mga plastic waste na inangkat ng Verde Soko noong 2018 para i-recycle umano upang magamit sa paggawa ng mga plastic product.

Kinumpiska ng BOC ang mga basura dahil sa kawalan ng import permit ng Verde Soko mula sa Department of Environment and Natural Resources. **(PNA)**



Postponing the inevitable

A problem which our government kept on pushing to the back burner has finally reared its ugly head.

With the 60-year-old Angat Dam in Norzagaray, Bulacan supplying 97 percent of the water needs of Mega Manila's consumers numbering about 16.5 million, a government plan to find an alternative source to meet the demands of an ever burgeoning population has been on the drawing boards as far back as a half-century ago during the Marcos administration.

And as the number of water users has increased exponentially since then, aggravated by erratic weather patterns resulting in unpredictable rainfall, this worst-case scenario of insufficient supply was bound to surface much sooner than later.

HIDDEN AGENDA



MARY ANN
LL. REYES

Efforts to conserve or optimize the use of available supply cannot prevent a repeat of the pre-1997 water crisis and hide the fact that it was government's job to build alternative sources to ensure adequate supply for Metro Manila in the long haul, and government failed.

Angat Dam's maximum supply capacity is 4,000 million liters per day. Metro Manila's private water distributors both rely on whatever water volume from the

dam can be supplied to them by the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS), which, in turn, is dependent on the volume released to it on a daily basis by the National Water Resources Board (NWRB).

Both concessionaires also source water from Laguna de Bay and, during emergencies, are allowed by the NWRB to extract water from deep wells.

Aside from these sources, Manila Water gets its supply from the La Mesa Dam in Novaliches, Quezon City that can hold up to 50.5 million cubic meters. Manila Water has described La Mesa as a buffer or reliability dam that provides it with water during the dry months at a volume good for 19 days of this firm's supply requirements.

But the combined volume obtained from all of these extra sources is minimal and could not offset any major supply deficit from Angat Dam.

Maynilad and Manila Water now serve some 16.5 million consumers combined in the east and west zones of Metro Manila and some parts of Rizal, Laguna, Cavite and Bulacan. Several areas have been experiencing water service disruptions since October as a result of Angat Dam's below-normal water level.

Even before the latest warnings of a likely shortage this year, MWSS chief regulator Patrick Ty admitted in 2019 that the government was partly to blame for last summer's water shortage because of its failure to do what had been planned as early as the 1970s, and that is to build an alternative reservoir to augment Angat Dam's supply.

Good that President Duterte has finally pursued with the help of official development assistance (ODA) from China what his predecessors had forever put on the back burner, which is to build the Kaliwa Dam as the capital's alternate water supply reservoir.

Unfortunately, it will take four to five years to complete the Kaliwa Dam, which the Duterte administration is building to the tune of P12.2 billion, meaning Mega Manila's water woes would get worse in the next half-decade before it could get any better.

The most disturbing news about the imminent water crisis redux in Mega Manila is the Jan. 8 revelation by MWSS that Angat Dam's water supply, on the basis of its maximum capacity

and those of other smaller sources, can no longer meet the demand of the metropolis between 2020 and 2025. Hence, the need to build the New Centennial Water Source-Kaliwa Dam Project.

MWSS said the construction of the Kaliwa Dam in Quezon and Rizal is being fast-tracked by the Duterte administration to prevent another water crisis in Metro Manila.

It explained that the water demand analysis used for the planning of Kaliwa Dam showed that the water supply capacity from Angat reservoir and some other smaller sources will not be sufficient to satisfy the water demand of Metro Manila between 2020 and 2025. Taking into account a supply buffer of 15 percent, the Angat supply capacity will be insufficient before 2020. These numbers illustrate the need for a large water supply source. The events since March 2019 have only confirmed said projections, it added.

No less than Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto Perina has expressed concern about a looming water shortage this summer, posing a downside risk to economic growth.

NEDA Undersecretary Adoracion Navarro revealed that a special meeting has been held between NEDA and NWRB officials to take up the water shortage in Angat Dam, given the tail end effects of the El Niño phenomenon.

Navarro said that they will engage agencies to come up with interventions, including possibly curtailing water supply to irrigation activities and to the household sector, adding that it is because of the Angat Dam water level that the expected water level was not reached, not because of the water concessionaires.

NWRB executive director Seville David Jr. himself had already raised the possibility of continued water supply interruptions until the summer months because of the below-desirable water level at Angat Dam.

Angat Dam's water level peaked at 201.71 meters this week, or far below the ideal yearend level target of 212 meters. And due to the lower-than-expected water volume, David said NWRB would continue managing water releases by not giving the normal allocation.

As a result, NWRB continued to allocate 40 cubic meters per second or 3,450 million liters per day of raw water to MWSS for distribution to Manila Water and Maynilad this January. This is below its normal allocation of 46-48 cms. for domestic use. MWSS has been allocated 40 cms of raw water since Sept. 1, 2019.

David earlier revealed that the water supply interruptions for domestic use coming from Angat Dam are likely to continue to make sure there will be enough water until the next rainy season in June.

In the meantime, Maynilad has come up with measures to mitigate the supply reduction by NWRB and MWSS. Last year, it completed its Putatan 2 Water Treatment Plant as well as the upgrade of its Putatan WTP 1 in Muntinlupa City, both of which will contribute a combined 60 MLD of water. The company is also due to complete next month its non-revenue water or leakage reduction program, which will add another 94 MLD.

Last December, Maynilad finished reactivating deep wells to supply another 94 MLD. It has also sought the assistance of MWSS to speed up the issuance of water permits, so it can finish by April its Cavite MTP dam, which will provide another 27 MLD. All these will enable Maynilad to supply its customers with an extra 223 MLD ahead of summer.

On top of these, Maynilad is pursuing more mitigation steps, like deploying 50 mobile water tankers and putting up 14 SWT tanks, along with other activities like cloud seeding and rain-water harvesting.

With its NRW management program, Maynilad has managed to recover 979 MLD daily, a volume large enough to fill 390 Olympic-size pools per day, that can supply potable water to 1.7 million households in the metropolis.

For comments, e-mail at mareyes@philstarmedia.com

₱200M inilaan para sa mga water facility sa Bicol region

MAKAKAKUHA ang Bicol region ng P200 milyon para magamit sa pagpapagawa ng mga water facility sa 1,800 liblib na barangay sa ilalim ng 2020 General Appropriations Act (GAA), ayon sa Ako Bicol Party-list.

Sa isang interview, sinabi ni Ako Bicol Party-list Representative Elizaldy Co, na ang pondo ay gagamitin sa pagpapagawa ng Level 1 at Level 2 water facility sa buong kabikulan, partikular sa mga lugar na hindi inaabot ng serbisyo ng local water district.

Binanggit pa ni Co na sa isang pag-aaral, kalahati lamang ng higit sa 3,000 barangay ng rehiyon ang may sapat na water system, habang 2,000 naman

ang walang makuhan ng malinis na inuming tubig.

"So, our vision for this year is to address these social and health deficiency issue," ayon sa mambabatas.

"By these facilities, we would be able to address the problem on the insufficiency of water in rural communities," dagdag pa niya.

Ang konstruksyon ng water system ay nangangailangan ng water drilling, paglalagay ng filtration at solar panel para tumakbo sa water pump na siyang magbibigay ng tubig sa mga kabahayan ng isang komunidad.

Tinatayang P100,000 ang gagastusin sa pagpapagawa ng isang water facility. (PNA)



Reckoning day

“Rody’s continued frustration over governance is founded on greed in the collusion between government officials and opportunistic business interests that cause huge sufferings to ordinary Filipinos.

The battle against the hypocrisy and the exploitative practices of oligarchs continues with President Rody Duterte training his guns on billionaire developer Isidro Consunji.

In a speech in Cotabato City, the President threatened to block Consunji’s DMCI Holdings Inc. from obtaining permits to construct projects if it fails to settle its obligation with the tenants of one of its condominiums in Davao City that collapsed during an earthquake last October.

In another television interview, Rody noted that Consunji “arrogantly” dealt with the tenants during a meeting regarding the damaged condominium.

“Do not do that. You will not only lose your funds but your business. Believe me. I will question everything. I will order the audit of all the buildings and all the violations that you have committed,” the President warned.

Portions of Ecoland 4000 tower, which was built by DMCI subsidiary DMC Urban Property Developers Inc., collapsed, causing injuries to several residents and temporarily trapping some inside the complex after the recent earthquake that hit Davao City.

“Of his four condominiums, one collapsed. Out of all the buildings in Davao, only his property suffered major damage,” Rody noted.

Consunji’s company is also a partner of tycoon Manuel V. Pangilinan in running Maynilad, which has

a concession agreement with the government for water services that Rody assessed as containing onerous terms.

Consunji also runs coal mines under Semirara Mining and Power Corp.

What initially triggered the displeasure of the President was the operations of the logging subsidiary of Consunji that was believed to have triggered a disaster in the Zamboanga Peninsula during the onslaught of typhoon “Vinta” during Christmas eve in 2017 that killed 200 people.

“What initially triggered the displeasure of the President was the operations of the logging subsidiary of Consunji that was believed to have triggered a disaster in the Zamboanga Peninsula.

In January 2018, Rody ordered Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Roy Cimatu to padlock Consunji’s Sodaco Agricultural Co.

The President was presented a footage of the massive flooding in the province due to Sodaco’s logging operations.

The film clip had not ended when the President angrily directed Cimatu: “Close that company. Consunji will not suffer from its closure since he is an oligarch.”

The Consunji firm operates a 60,000-hectare logging concession under the DENR’s Integrated Social Forestry program for more than a decade. Then Agriculture Secretary Manny Piñol claimed that the Consunji firm had cleared the area of trees because he planned to convert it into a plantation under Dacon Palm Oil.

Rody then ordered the suspension of logging activities in the entire Zamboanga Peninsula.

Piñol said in areas near Dacon’s operations, more than 100 people died during the wrath of typhoon “Vinta.”

Dacon had been clearing massive areas in Western Mindanao, mostly in the mountains of Zamboanga, upstream of Sirawai, Sibuco and Siocon towns.

Rody’s continued frustration over governance is founded on greed in the collusion between government officials and opportunistic business interests that cause huge sufferings to ordinary Filipinos.

With his vow for a comfortable life for his countrymen and his term ending in more than two years, Rody had been explicit in his impatience.



FOCUS

Climate at mercy of politics in 2020, experts warn

PARIS: 2020 is the most crucial year yet for humanity's plan to dodge the bullet of catastrophic global warming, experts said Saturday, warning that the narrow path to safety was riddled with pitfalls, from the United States election to Brexit.

When nations struck the 2015 Paris agreement, which aims to limit temperature rises under 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit), they agreed on five-year periods in which climate action could be implemented, assessed and boosted.

2020 is the year the landmark deal goes into effect, yet almost three decades of diplomatic wrangling has fallen far short of what science says is needed to avert disastrous climate change.

A crucial United Nations summit at which leaders will finalize their action plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is set to open in Glasgow on November 9 — just six days after a US general election that could see President Donald Trump win a second term.

Trump shocked the world in 2017 when he said the US — history's largest emitter — was withdrawing from the Paris agreement. It is due to leave the deal on November 4.

"Another four years of Trump in the White House would mean

that the world's key country in terms of providing global leadership will be sitting the problem out," Michael Oppenheimer, professor of Geosciences and International Affairs at Princeton University, told the Agence France-Presse (AFP).

"So, that's four years of having a millstone around the neck of the world's efforts to deal with climate change."

After a year of climate-related disasters, from cyclones and flooding in Africa and Southeast Asia, to devastating wildfires in Australia and California, nations in December failed to make progress during the annual UN Climate Change Conference COP25.

More than 100 countries have pledged to redouble their efforts to reduce domestic emissions, but the biggest polluters — China, India, the US and the European Union — have yet to unveil new plans.

Brexit 'risk'

The Paris deal was dragged partly over the line thanks to more than a year of shuttle diplomacy by host France.

Climate negotiations are multilateral and emissions cuts voluntary, so much depends on the skill and tactics of the

country in charge of annual COP negotiating sessions.

COP26 President Claire O'Neill told AFP last month that climate would be the British government's "No. 1 global priority" this year leading up to the Glasgow summit.

But there are fears that Brexit trade negotiations with Brussels, which will last until around the same time as COP26, will drain much-needed diplomatic bandwidth.

"There is a Brexit scenario in which the [United Kingdom] is distracted at the highest level and the relationship with the EU has soured," said Nick Mabey, chief executive officer of the green think tank E3G.

"It's a risk. Brexit is the government's number one defensive diplomatic priority and I would say COP needs to be its number one offensive diplomatic priority.

"COP requires a huge, proactive campaigning, full-functioning diplomatic machine," he told AFP.

Mabey said Britain already had more than 100 diplomats focusing solely on climate ahead of Glasgow.

EU-China summit

But perhaps the biggest moment for the climate in 2020 will come before both the US

election or the COP.

In September, the EU-China summit in Leipzig is likely to see the world's largest single market push the world's biggest carbon polluter for greater emissions-cutting commitments.

Li Shuo, senior global policy advisor for Greenpeace East Asia, said this year presented a massive opportunity for China to show global leadership over climate.

"The US, China, EU climate tricycle has had a wheel pulled off by Trump," said Li Shuo, senior global policy advisor for Greenpeace East Asia.

"Going into 2020 it is critical for the two remaining wheels to roll in sync.

"The decision taken by Chinese leaders over the next year... matters to how the world views China under increasingly turbulent geopolitics," Shuo said.

China and fellow emitter India were accused of stymying greater ambition at COP25 in Madrid by insisting they had already done their fair share in cutting carbon pollution.

Even if nations can agree in Glasgow to boost action during the next five years, their voluntary pledges are likely to be worlds apart from the drastic emissions cuts that Earth needs.

"Something called success is probably off the table for the moment," said Mabey. **AFP**



'CLIMATE CHANGE SAFETY RIDDLED WITH PITFALLS'

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Trump shocked the world in 2017 when he said the United States—history's largest emitter—

was withdrawing from the Paris agreement. It is due to leave the deal on Nov. 4.

"Another four years of Trump in the White House would mean that the world's key country in terms of providing global leadership will be sitting the problem out," Michael Oppenheimer, professor of

Geosciences and International Affairs at Princeton University, told AFP.

"So that's four years of having a millstone around the neck of the world's efforts to deal with climate change."

After a year of climate-related disasters, from cyclones and flooding in Africa and southeast Asia to devastating wildfires in Australia and California, nations in December failed to make progress during the annual UN Climate Change Conference COP 25.

More than 100 countries have

pledged to redouble their efforts to reduce domestic emissions, but the biggest polluters—China, India, the US and the European Union—have yet to unveil new plans.

Brexit 'risk'

The Paris deal was dragged partly over the line, thanks to more than a year of shuttle diplomacy by host France.

Climate negotiations are multilateral and emissions cuts voluntary, so much depends on the skill and tactics of the country in charge of annual COP negotiating sessions.

COP26 president Claire O'Neill told AFP last month that climate would be the British government's "number one global priority" this year leading up to the Glasgow summit.

But there are fears that Brexit trade negotiations with Brussels, which will last until around the same time as COP26, will drain much-needed diplomatic bandwidth.

"There is a Brexit scenario in which the UK is distracted at the highest level and the relationship with the EU has soured," said Nick Mabey, CEO of the green think tank E3G.

"It's a risk. Brexit is the government's number one defensive diplomatic priority and I would say COP needs to be its number one offensive

diplomatic priority.

"COP requires a huge, proactive campaigning, full-functioning diplomatic machine," he told AFP.

Mabey said Britain already has more than 100 diplomats focused solely on climate ahead of Glasgow

EU-China summit

But perhaps the biggest moment for the climate in 2020 will come before both the US election or the COP.

In September, the EU-China summit in Leipzig is likely to see the world's largest single market push the world's biggest carbon polluter for greater emissions-cutting commitments.

Li Shuo, senior global policy advisor for Greenpeace East Asia, said this year presented a massive opportunity for China to show global leadership over climate.

"The US, China, EU climate tricycle has had a wheel pulled off by Trump," said Li Shuo, senior global policy advisor for Greenpeace East Asia.

"Going into 2020 it is critical for the two remaining wheels to roll in sync."

"The decision taken by Chinese leaders over the next year... matters to how the world views China under increasingly turbulent geopolitical conditions," Shuo said. **AFP**



TITLE: **OFW evac plans still in place**

PAGE **2/2**

01-12-20
DATE

It can accommodate approximately 500 people at a time and is more than capable to perform beyond its contractual specification of 20 knots of speed.

Meanwhile, two of the Philippine Navy's biggest ships, the *BRP Tarlac* and *BRP Davao del Sur*, are also on standby for deployment.

Iran had come under mounting pressure to allow a "credible" investigation after video footage emerged appearing to show the plane being hit by a fast-moving object before a flash appears.

The Ukrainian and Canadian leaders called for accountability after Iran's admission.

The armed forces were first to acknowledge the error, saying the Boeing 737 had been mistaken for a "hostile plane" at a time when enemy threats were at the highest level.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran deeply regrets this disastrous mistake," Rouhani said on Twitter.

"Armed Forces' internal investigation has concluded that regrettably missiles fired due to human error caused the horrific crash of the Ukrainian plane & death of 176 innocent people."

Iran 'saddened'

In a statement posted on the government's website, Rouhani said Iran's armed forces had been on alert for possible attacks by the Americans after the "martyrdom" of Soleimani.

"Iran is very much saddened by this catastrophic mistake and I, on behalf of the Islamic Republic of Iran, express my deep condolences to the families of victims of this painful catastrophe," he said.

Invitation to probe

Iran has invited the United States, Ukraine, Canada and others to join the crash investigation.

It is Iran's worst civil aviation disaster since 1988 when the US military said it shot down an Iran Air plane over the Gulf by mistake, killing all 290 people on board.

Video footage of the UTA 737, which *The New York Times* said it had verified, emerged and appeared to show the moment the airliner was hit.

A fast-moving object is seen rising at an angle into the sky before a bright flash appears, which dims and then continues moving forward. Several seconds later, an explosion is heard and the sky lights up.

Many airlines from around the world cancelled flights to and from Iran in the wake of the crash, or rerouted flights away from Iranian airspace.

Nations around the world have called for restraint and de-escalation, and fears of a full-blown conflict have subsided after US President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that Iran appeared to be standing down after targeting the US bases in Iraq.

with AFP



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c4
PAGE

UPPER
 LOWER

PAGE 1
STORY

BANNER
STORY

EDITORIAL

CARTOON

01-12-20

DATE

Asian scientist diplomat clinches Tofil Awards

PART of the awards committee under the prestigious and successful "Asia Leaders Awards" is Asian Science Diplomat and Climate Scientist Glenn Banaguas who is the honoree of the most distinguished The Outstanding Filipino (TOFIL) Award for Environment Conservation and Science Diplomacy.

He was recognized along with five other awardees: San Miguel Corp. President and CEO Ramon Ang (Business and Entrepreneurship), Legazpi City Mayor Noel Rosal (Government and Public Service), Dr. Joselito Chavez (Medicine), Dr. Virgilio Malang (Science and Technology) and Dr. Nelly Siababa-Aggangan (Agriculture).

Banaguas was chosen because of his "Climate Smart and Disaster Resilient Philippines" program, which has been extended into the entire Asean region, whereby he physically travels into areas with "the poorest of the poor" and teaches the indigenous peoples (IPs) and local officials throughout the many areas

and islands of the Philippines how to be resilient and adapt to climate change through sustainable practices and adaptation measures. He does this free of charge and works together with all of the local governments in the country to aid one of the top three countries hardest hit by climate change. He empowers people ranging from the fishermen and agriculturalists up to climate and sustainability leaders at the national level.

To date, he has capacitated more than 500 Local Government Units (LGUs); 200 universities and colleges; 200 CSOs, NGOs, and People's Organizations (e.g. farmers, fishermen, indigenous people, church leaders, youth, and women); and more than a 100 members of the private sector and service providers.

He is also the founder and chairman of the Asean Science Diplomats Assembly (Science Diplomacy Program), where he trains the outstanding scientists and engineers of South East Asia on how science will be communicated to the public and on how it will be



■ Asian Science Diplomat and Climate Scientist Glenn Banaguas

integrated to policies.

He believes that "A service to the people and environment is a service to God."

Glenn studied climate change and energy from the Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University and took Sustainability Leadership

from Yale University.

The Tofil award is a public recognition of men and women, 41 years of age and above, whose exemplary achievements are worthy of emulation. It was institutionalized by the Junior Chamber International.



JOB MARKET

"MA'AM CER": MOST INFLUENTIAL FEMALE MINER

THE year 2019 has seen many "women movements" on various issues ranging from equal pay and gender respect, to anti-teenage brides and climate change, and what with the #MeToo movement.

And so, when Engineer Cynthia E. Rosero of Rio Tuba Nickel Mining Corp. (RTN), a subsidiary of Nickel Asia Corp. (NAC), was conferred the title of "the most empowered woman in mining", she considered the award more as a 'memo' directed to various audiences.

"I cannot take the title all to myself because there are many empowered women in the industry, so please consider it as a message to all – that women in mining are rising to positions of influence and responsibility where they can ensure that responsible mining in the country is strictly executed," says Eng. Rosero, who goes by the initials CER.

Recently, the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB), the agency of the Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in charge of the "administration and disposition" of mineral lands and mineral resources in the country, recognized Cynthia being the first-ever woman Resident Mine Manager in the Philippines, the highest position in an operating mine that, since time immemorial, has been held, as if exclusively, by men.

"There is no shortage of women in the mine sites; we

even have a lady driver who won in a Volvo international truck driving competition a few years back and there was a lady skipper. We have many lady engineers, women environment activists, and lady economic and business leaders, holding critical roles in various mining operations at NAC, I just happen to represent all of them in this award," CER shares.

CER's life is the stuff of stories a mother tells a daughter. She took up mining engineering because she thought it would be easier to find a job after she graduated with the degree. Never for a moment did she doubt that she would not become one, determined as she was determined to become an engineer.

"It was mind conditioning, a mindset" she says.

Engineer Rosero, or "Maam CER" as she is now fondly called, is determined to help promote the good face of mining and confessed that she thinks it would be easier to do this because she is a woman. She is taking advantage of the fact that a woman is traditionally the symbol of responsible guardianship and of nurturing, which could be used to help improve further the image of mining in the Philippines.

"People who have doubts about the existence and the viability of responsible mining are usually uninformed or misinformed and we should use the woman's charm and our dedica-



PHOTO: Rio Tuba Nickel Mining (RTN) Resident Mine Manager, Engr. Cynthia E. Rosero – an influential lady miner.

tion and honesty to tell better stories and send out stronger messages about mining in the Philippines," Rosero promises.

The lady RMM shares that her inspiration is mining itself, with its complex challenges that can be solved not only by science but by the workings of the human heart. It is after all an industry with a social purpose.

She says: "Nickel Asia does not only provide me a job, the

company reminds me every day that a society where gender equality (or equality in general) is taken seriously, is a just society, a responsible society".

"Whatever influence I have, I will maximize to help showcase the industry so that young girls out there who love math and the environment may know that there are great opportunities waiting for them at the mine sites."



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C10
PAGE

UTILITY
TOWER

PAGE 1
STORY

BANNER
STORY

EDITORIAL

CARICON

01-12-20

DAU

PAGE 12

■ Plastic-free 'Sinulog'

CEBU CITY — The Metro Cebu Water District (MCWD) is campaigning for a plastic-free Sinulog through its #BYOB or Bring Your Own Bottle campaign by setting up nine drinking water stations in Cebu City for the Sinulog festivities. Six of these stations will be serving cold water to all devotees, guests and participants in partnership with Kooler Industries, Inc. which will provide the water dispensers. MCWD advised devotees to bring their own water bottles or tumblers, and make Sinulog 2020 environment-friendly, especially during the solemn procession and grand parade on January 19. MCWD's #BYOB or Bring Your Own Bottle campaign will be providing free water to help reduce plastic use and keep Cebu clean by keeping garbage at a minimum. MCWD's #BYOB campaign will help the environment. (Minerva BC Newman)



Running on grassoline

NAMING nudges the named to come into being. And we have been too careless, too indifferent in naming names.

When God said 'Let there be light,' He had named the thing before it came to be—the naming, indeed, stands out as sure step to creation. Language will not be in accordance with the truth of things, as Confucius wrote, 'if names are not correct.'

Islas de los ladrones was the not-too-savory name the nation was lashed with after natives of yore, likely the ancestors of the unscrupulous whether or not in government, filched provisions from Magellan's fleet. It took a few more ages before the Spanish conquerors settled for a name that ascribes affinity to and dominion of their king over inhabitants of the archipelago.

After King Felipe II de Habsburg who once ruled Spain, Naples, Sicily, Portugal, England and Ireland, Philippines thus came to be.

Felipe literally translates to "love of horses." Pump irony: the nation isn't exactly enamored with nags, ponies, foals, stallions, studs and such—maybe mares, more likely, nightmares.

A likeness in bronze of Felipe II stands in a fringe park of Intramuros that has become an intransigent hold-out for the horse-drawn carriage. Horses can still take tourists on a ride through the remnants of a fortified city. In the nearby precincts of Binondo and Sta. Cruz, only elderly Chinese and a smattering of comely Chinese mestizas have taken a liking to short commutes on such a carriage, guaranteed one horse power—spare stark nostalgias for the carretela on a fade

MANGKOKOLUM *Kulamnista.blogspot.com*



away or pretty soon we'll be beating dead workhorses to life.

Maybe, it has dawned on the elderly and the comely that workhorses are a lot earth-friendlier than, say, tricycles that spew noxious noise and lethal fumes. Maybe, tricycles are an option to be tied down to imported fossil fuels and spare parts—yeah, we have

ample foreign reserves to fritter away for such show of yoked subservience.

Horses come dirt-cheap. They run on homegrown grassoline—malit, barit, zacate, kugon, talahib, mutha, kumpay. Even ipil-ipil or akasya foliage, banana peels, palm fronds, hay, and darak or rice bran are fair fodder for the equine ruminant. Most of these all-organic fuels can be had for free at a pasture or grazing land.

For ages, equine exhaust has been compliant with Clean Air Act and solid waste management statutes. Fact is, horse dung is an excellent soil conditioner for organic crops.

For sure, the metal parts of any imported motorcycle are rich in iron but aren't exactly edible. Horse beef, on the other hand, has been the mainstay in the now famous breakfast fare, tapsilog—horse beef jerky, fried rice,

sunny-side up fried egg—which originated in food stalls near the now-defunct San Lázaro Hippodrome. Even workhorses that have outlived their usefulness or suffered fractured limbs, they had to be put out of their suffering. Even in death, they serve and are, thus, served.

When the Messiah plied the Third Beatitude, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth," the equine trait for meekness was lost in translation. He was referring to a quaint quality of war steeds—praus, or reined power that can be unleashed. The character quality that Greeks called praus points up a taking charge of one's life—the choices to be made are grasped fully and made with integrity.

The Year of the Rat is now on a full gallop, but 2020 remains anno domini.



1 patay sa bumaligtad na bus

PANTABANGAN, Nueva Ecija - Patay ang isang empleyado ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) habang 11 katao ang nasugatan matapos mawalan ng preno ang sinasakyang nilang pampasaherong bus sa Km. 10, Barangay Cadaclan ng nasabing bayan, kamakailan.

Kinilala ng pulisya ang nasawi na si Juanito Dela Cruz, 60, may-asawa, taga-Bgy. Napon-Napon, Pantabangan, Nueva Ecija.

Isinugod naman sa pinakamalapit na ospital ang mga nasugatang pasahero.

Hawak na ng pulisya ang driver

ng bus na si Eric Benitez, 33, na sumuko matapos ang aksidente.

Naiulat na binabagtas ng pampasaherong bus ang nasabing kalsada sakay 40 pasahero nang maganap ang aksidente.

Sa pahayag ni Benitez, nawalan umano ng preno ang bus kaya iniwasan nito ang dalawang kasalubong na sasakyan na nagresulta sa pagkakabangga nito sa burol hanggang sa ito ay bumaligtad.

Agad na nasawi si dela Cruz dahil sa matinding sugat sa ulo at katawan.

Light A. Nolasco