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DENR

IN THE NEWS

Strategic Communication and Initiative Service



President zooms in on bay pollution problem

Shortly after he was handed the job of cleaning up Manila Bay, Secretary Roy Cimatu of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said it would take at least ten years to do it. He had just accomplished the cleaning up of Boracay after six months, but he saw the problem in Manila Bay a hundred times bigger than Boracay. It was a hundred times more polluted.

Last Thursday, President Duterte himself went straight to the root of the problem. All these years, he said, wastewater in Metro Manila and all the towns around the bay have flown directly into the bay. In earlier times, nature may have been able to absorb the man-made pollution, but in the last century, Metro Manila and all the towns around the bay grew and their wastes multiplied, so that today Manila Bay's waters are no longer safe for swimming or any other water-contact sports.

In 2008, the Supreme Court, acting on a petition, called for the rehabilitation of Manila Bay, telling 13 government agencies led by the DENR what they had to do under the law. The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA), the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS), the Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA), the Department of Health (DOH) all had their responsibilities. The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) was directed to get all the local governments around the bay to do their part. The Philippine National Police and the Philippine Coast Guard were to

carry out the enforcement.

Somehow, the Supreme Court order in 2008 was never carried out. Eight years later, when President Duterte was elected, he first acted on Boracay, then turned his attention to Manila Bay. Secretary Cimatu saw the magnitude of the problem and said it would take at least ten years.

All these years, former Manila mayor and former DENR secretary, now Buhay party-list Rep. Lito Atienza has been pointing out that the contracts of the two water concessionaires of the MWSS included their setting up of sewage plants, and they were collecting environmental fees from the public for decades. But their efforts have not been up to the massive need.

President Duterte has now zoomed in on the reason the problem of pollution has reached this critical point. "All we can do is to reduce the contamination," he said. "Why? Because there is no water treatment." He blamed the "onerous" contracts with the two water concessionaires which he now seeks to revise.

There are other issues in the contracts and it may take time to resolve them all. There are claims for damages won in a court of arbitration in Singapore, although the two concessionaires said they will no longer claim them. There is also need to develop new water sources for Metro Manila's growing population. But we hope that primary attention will be given to the national shame that is the big problem pollution of Manila Bay.



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Roni S. Sison
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MANILA BULLETIN
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Ang ugat ng problema ng polusyon sa Manila Bay

MATAPOS ibigay ang tungkulin para sa paglilinis ng Manila Bay, sinabi ni Secretary Roy Cimatu ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) na aabutin ng hanggang 10 taon bago ito magawa. Matagumpay niyang nalinis ang isla ng Boracay makalipas ng anim na buwan, ngunit nakikita niyang higit na malala ng daang beses ang problema ng Manila Bay. Isang daan beses na mas matindi ang polusyon nito.

Nitong Huwebes, inilantad mismo ni Pangulong Duterte ang ugat ng problemang ito. Sa mga nakalipas na taon, aniya, direktang napupunta sa Manila Bay ang mga duming tubig ng Metro Manila at mga kalapit nitong bayan. Noong unang panahon, kinakaya pang tanggapin ng kalikasan ang polusyon na gawa ng tao, ngunit sa nakalipas na siglo, lumago ang Metro Manila at ang mga kalapit na bayan at nadoble o triple rin ang kanilang dumi na nalilikha, dahilan kaya't sa kasalukuyan, hindi na ligtas na paglanguyan o pagdausan ng anumang aktibidad ang tubig ng Manila Bay.

Noong 2008, bilang pagtugon sa petisyon, ipinag-utos ng Korte Suprema ang rehabilitasyon ng Manila Bay, kung saan sinabihan ang 13 ahensiya ng pamahalaan sa pangunguna ng DENR, kung ano ang dapat nilang gawin sa ilalim ng batas. Ang Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA), Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS), Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA), Department of Health (DoH) lahat ay may responsibilidad din dito. Ipinag-utos naman sa Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) na pakilusin ang lahat ng mga lokal na pamahalaan na nasa paligid ng look at gawin ang kanilang bahagi. Habang ang Philippine National Police at Coast Guard ang nakatalaga sa enforcement.

Gayunman, hindi naipatupad kailanman ang kautusan ng Korte Suprema noong 2008. Makalipas ang walong taon, sa pagkahalal ni Pangulong Duterte, una niyang inaksyunan ang Boracay, saka ibinaling ang kanyang atensiyon sa Manila Bay. Nakita ni Secretary Cimatu ang lala ng problema at sinabing aabutin ito ng sampung taon.

Binigyang-diin naman ni dating Manila Mayor at dating DENR secretary, na ngayo'y kinatawan ng Buhay party-list, Rep. Lito Atienza, na bahagi ng kontrata ng dalawang water concessionaires ng MWSS ang pagtatayo ng sewage plant, at sa mga nakalipas na dekada naniningil ang dalawang kumpanya ng environmental fees sa publiko. Sa kabila nito, hindi tumutugon ang kanilang aksiyon sa malaking pangangailangan.

Ngayon, inihayag na mismo ng Pangulo ang rason kung bakit umabot sa kritikal na lebel ang problema ng polusyon sa look. "All we can do is reduce the contamination," aniya. "Why? Because there is no water treatment." Sinisi niya ang "onerous" na kontrata ng dalawang water concessionaires na kailangan, aniyang irebisa.

May iba pang isyu sa kontrata at maaaring mangailangan ito ng panahon para maresolba. Nariyan din ang iginigiit na pinsala na napagwagian sa court of arbitration sa Singapore, bagamat sinabi na ng dalawang concessionaires na hindi na nila igigiit ang naging desisyon. May pangangailangan din sa pagbuo ng bagong pagkukunan ng tubig ng Metro Manila. Ngunit umaasa tayong unang mabibigyan ng pansin ang kahihiyang malaking problema ng polusyon sa Manila Bay.



INTROSPECTIVE

TONY F. KATIGBAK

Baguio of my youth

Amidst the problems we are now currently facing with Mother Nature, I am glad to know that the government is seriously looking into conservation and sustainability when it comes to other cities and places in the Philippines. After all, as we struggle to navigate what happened with Taal and what it means for the future of Tagaytay, it's time we stop ignoring that there are other areas in the Philippines that are desperately in need of help too.



One of our biggest problems is that, on the whole, we are far more reactionary than we are preventive. We always have to wait for something major to happen or something bad to happen before we take action. And sometimes, like this time, it's just too late. We end up trying to salvage what's left instead of working on preserving what's there.

So I'm glad to learn that the government is taking a proactive approach in conserving another beautiful city in the country – Baguio. Baguio is the summer capital and one of the favorite tourist destinations of so many and over the years we have seen it grow and change quite rapidly. More and more people are flocking to the City of Pines and the city is being made to groan under the pressure of so many people and not enough infrastructure. At least we are taking notice before it's too late.

Similar things happened to Boracay. The more popular the island became, the more and more things opened up, tourists arrived, pollution mounted, and then it passed a point that the government felt the need to shut down the entire island just to be able to help rehabilitate it and bring it back to life. We tend to do that, in general. When something is going good Filipinos tend to push it to the limit until it snaps.

We've all seen how Baguio has changed throughout the years. What started as a simple summer destination has grown immensely. It now houses big businesses, large resorts, big chain malls, and so much more. So many trees have been cut down to make way for all of this urbanization and a lot of the old Baguio charm has been lost to make way for new and modern things.

While creating new things and boosting tourism isn't necessarily a bad thing, this must be tempered with sound judgment and not going too far. It's good that Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat announced the rehabilitation of Baguio with the concerned stakeholders. This is attuned to the government's thrust on sustainable tourism and is an important step forward in making sure that Baguio can be enjoyed for generations to come.

This statement comes on the heels of the committed P480-million Burnham Park improvement project of the Department of Tourism (DOT). This is most likely going to be the first step in a longer sustainability campaign as it is the most doable and easy to achieve. The next steps would take place over the next 15 years and would be carefully mapped out by Baguio stakeholders. The national government's backing rehabilitation efforts will focus on promoting people's interests, promoting sustainability, creating necessary and enforceable environmental laws, and never violating human rights.

I look forward to seeing how they are going to preserve what's left of Baguio's beautiful history. It's not without history of major natural disasters so hopefully that is also taken into consideration. I still remember going there with my parents and my family in my youth and even with my own family as an adult. I know that we are never going to be able to go back to how Baguio was then, but hopefully, we can preserve it better for future generations.

* * *

Relief efforts are still ongoing for Taal victims and the evacuees from nearby areas and cities. Rehabilitation is still a far-flung thought because as of now we still don't know what is going to happen. Taal remains at Alert Level 4 and I hope that people aren't thinking of going back to their homes despite what the local government might say. The volcano is still very active and we have to think of safety first.

So now we focus on helping those displaced by this natural disaster and help them look for a way forward. This means people, animals, and businesses. There are so many ways to help – you can make monetary donations to several organizations or you can collect donations and drop them off at various drop-off points throughout the city.

Immediate needs include blankets, face masks, clothes, easy-to-eat food like canned goods and biscuits, clean drinking water, medication, and basic toiletries like toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, and sanitary products, among others. It warms my heart to see so many stepping up to help. We're all in this together and we should try to help as best we can.

If you want to help there are so many ways to do so. Stores like Landers and SM have offered their shops as drop off points to consolidate donations, Red Cross, major corporations, and organizations like the Philippine Animal Welfare Society have ongoing operations that need your help. You can also follow #ReliefPH for a list of organizations you might want to partner up with.



Released into the waters

TILL WE MEET AGAIN. A total of 66 Olive Ridley turtle hatchlings venture into the ocean after they were hatched in the nest on the beachfront of a premier resort in Boracay. (Photo from Mövenpick Resort and Spa Boracay)

By Monica Sanchez

THE new year begins swimmingly well for some of our marine ecosystem as sea turtle hatchlings were released into the waters this January.

Following the laying of eggs of an Olive Ridley Sea Turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) on Nov. 5 last year on the beachfront of premier Mövenpick Resort and Spa in Boracay, a total of 66 hatchlings have finally emerged from their nest on Jan. 9 and were released into the ocean.

The resort's staff, with the help of municipal biologist Haron Deo Vargas, worked together to ensure the approximately 106 eggs the mother laid remained safe during the 65-day incubation period. Mövenpick and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources put up fences around the nesting area to protect it.

It was indeed a welcome—strange, even—occurrence as authorities last year cited the laying of eggs on Boracay's shore a sign that the animal, which are known to be solitary and lay eggs in hidden areas, trusted the beach despite the many people who flock to it.

An Olive Ridley can grow only about

2 feet and weigh up to 100 lbs., making it the smallest of the sea turtles—along with Kemp Ridley.

According to the National Geographic, these omnivorous turtles got their name from the greenish color of their skin and shell. They can live up to 50 years.

“Olive Ridleys have nesting sites all over the world, on tropical and subtropical beaches. Females lay about a hundred eggs, but may nest up to three times a year. The nesting season is from June to December,” says the National Geographic.

Though widely considered the “most abundant of the marine turtles,” the Nat-Geo says they are in trouble due predators and other threats. Sadly, some are preyed on by crabs, raccoons, snakes, and sharks. Fishing nets also pose harm as they frequently snag and drown these turtles.

Meanwhile, in Noveleta, Cavite,



about 44 Leatherback Sea Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) hatchlings were released on Jan. 13 in a bid to ensure the conservation of marine turtle species.

The hatchlings went into the waters from Long Beach Resort in Barangay San Rafael IV.

According to Ed Chavez, head of Noveleta Municipal Environment and Natural Resources, the eggs were buried in the sand of the resort where they eventually hatched and set out to the sea.

Prior to the release, authorities led a short meeting with village folks, presenting brief information about the marine sea turtles and their importance in the marine biodiversity.

Mayor Dino Reyes Chua and Cavite City Councilor Edmund Tirona, a Cavite Wildlife Enforcement Officer of the Cavite Province, led the release of

hatchlings, which hopefully survive until their expected life span of 45 years.

"Ito po isang patunay na ang dalampasigan dito sa Long Beach ay malinis sa pagtutulongan ng local government unit and Barangay San Rafael. Unti-unti nang bumabalik ang sigla, umaasa po ang inyong lingkod na darami pa ang mga pawikan na mangingitlog sa pampang ng Noveleta para maging marine sanctuary ang Bayan ng Noveleta."

(This is proof that the water in Long Beach is clean, thanks to the cooperation between the local government unit and Barangay San Rafael. With this development, I hope that more turtles will lay eggs in Noveleta so that hopefully we become a marine sanctuary), Chua said in an interview.

Leatherbacks are the largest turtle on Earth, growing up to 7 feet long and weighing up to 2,000 pounds.

They are carnivores.

The locality also follows the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office's information campaign to save the sea turtles which are now in its vulnerable stage due to irresponsible killing for meat and illegal trade of its shell and other body parts, according to Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act. RA 9147.

In addition to human activity, Leatherbacks fall victim to fishing lines and nets, struck by boats, or die when they ingest floating plastic debris mistaken for jellyfish.

"We are hoping that all of them survive and we are looking forward to see them again soon when these sea turtles go back where they hatched to lay their eggs in same area here," Tirona said hopefully during an interview. **With Dennis Abrina**



Olive Ridley is the smallest sea turtle, growing only about 2 feet and weighing up to 100 lbs.



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Residents, young and old, of Barangay San Rafael IV in Noveleta, Cavite help the Leatherback Sea Turtle hatchlings go to their natural habitat. (Photo by Dennis Abrina)



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Phl targets more visitors for dive tourism offerings

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

The Philippines is eyeing to attract more foreign tourists with its dive offerings as the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) participates in an international indoor water sports trade show in Germany.

In a Facebook post, TPB said it is participating at the International Boat Show Düsseldorf, also known as BOOT Düsseldorf in Germany.

"The delegation, coming from the Philippines' growing dive industry, encourages more German dive enthusiasts, including marine photographers and videographers, to explore the impressive underwater world of the country," TPB said.

"The event also provides opportunity to widen network and

strengthen business connections with European dive tour operators and media," it added.

The TPB added that Philippine booth at the trade expo highlights the country's abundant marine biodiversity, emphasizing its potential for the diving tourism market.

In 2019, the Philippines was named as the world's leading dive destination by World Travel Awards.

The Philippines bested eight other global dive destinations also nominated under the same category, namely Azores Islands, Bora Bora in French Polynesia, Cayman Islands, Fiji, Galapagos Islands, Great Barrier Reef in Australia, Maldives and Mexico.

"Dubbed by marine experts and scientists as the heart of

marine biodiversity in the world, our country is home to the highest concentration of coral reef life and astounding variety of marine species. This latest recognition is a validation that the Philippines is truly a premier dive destination," Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat said earlier.

In October, the Philippines earned its first Asia's Leading Dive Destination award at the WTA's gala event for Asia and Oceania in Vietnam after multiple nominations since 2006.

Dive tourism is identified by the DOT as one of the key areas in the National Tourism Development Plan that can positively affect industry growth in terms of increased visitor count, extended length of stay, and higher tourism revenue, among others.



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House to hold session in Batangas City

By DELON PORCALLA

The House of Representatives approved yesterday a proposal of Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano to hold their session tomorrow in Batangas City.

"Basically, what we want to achieve is that Congress' nature is not reactionary. We want to show that from the very start, this institution has become the 'House of the People' or Hope. So, we want the people to know that we are dependable, that we will try to be a reliable, responsive and relevant Congress," Cayetano said after 232 members of the 300-member chamber voted in favor of his proposal.

The session – to be held at the Batangas City Convention Center – will tackle disaster-related bills, including the creation of the Department of Disaster Resilience (DDR).

"What we envision is that our help or assistance should become institutional and should be permanent because we are not here all the time. We want to have a permanent mechanism that will be put into place every time we have disasters," Cayetano said.

Majority Leader Martin Romualdez said the House leadership would expedite the passage of the DDR bill, among others, in the wake of the Taal Volcano eruption that has displaced thousands of victims.

Other priority bills in the pipeline include the creation of the Department of Filipinos Overseas and the Department of Water Resources, which are expected to be passed before Congress adjourns in March.

Deputy Speaker LRay Villafuerte also em-

phasized the need for "permanent evacuation centers" in all local government units (LGUs) in the country as he discouraged the use of public schools and covered courts or gymnasiums as temporary shelters when disaster strikes.

Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri said the creation of DDR would ensure a more efficient, coordinated and complete system of disaster management during calamity situations, like the Taal eruption.

"By having this Department of Disaster Resilience, our people will easily know where to go in times of calamities and which agency is responsible for providing assistance and guidance to them," he said in his privilege speech during the resumption of session yesterday.

The DDR, he added, would take on the functions of the Office of Civil Defense, Climate Change Office of the Climate Change Commission, Geo-Hazard Assessment and Engineering Geology Section of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau, Health Emergency Management Bureau of the Department of Health, Disaster Response Assistance and Management Bureau of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Bureau of Fire Protection and the Program Management Office for Earthquake Resiliency of the Greater Metro Manila Area.

Under his proposal, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration and the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology will also be attached to the agency.

P3.215-B damage to agriculture

The National Disaster Risk Reduction Man-

agement Council (NDRRMC) reported yesterday that Taal Volcano's damage to agriculture in the provinces of Batangas, Laguna and Cavite has reached P3.215 billion in just a week.

High-value crops like coffee are the most affected at P1.394 billion while fisheries losses ballooned to P1.6 billion. Damage to livestock was at P126.3 million, corn at P88.9 million and rice at P5.6 million.

The NDRRMC also said that as of yesterday, the official tally of the number of evacuees is at 112,757 persons representing 29,424 families in 416 different evacuation centers.

Taal Volcano, though showing less smoke in the last few days, remains at Alert Level 4 considering the numerous earthquakes that continue to shake Batangas and neighboring provinces.

Meanwhile, the Department of Agriculture maintained that fish in Taal Lake remain safe for human consumption for as long as these are caught alive.

Agriculture Secretary William Dar said the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources conducted laboratory analyses for water and fish samples in Taal Lake.

These revealed that the consumption of fish from the lake is safe for as long as these are fresh and caught alive. The fish must be washed thoroughly, its internal organs removed and cooked properly.

"The BFAR advisory indicates that yes [it is safe] as long as tilapia is still fresh and alive. But those that are dead already, do not eat them for food safety reasons," Dar said.

Fishers around Taal Lake said the recent findings would help allay fears of fellow fisherfolk, evacuees around Taal and consumers from Metro Manila.

The Taal Lake Aquaculture Alliance Inc. (TL-LAI), composed of almost 6,000 fish cage owners, also appealed to authorities, particularly disaster coordinating agencies, to allow them to harvest the huge volume of fish that remains in floating cages scattered throughout the lake.

BFAR data showed there are over 6,000 fish cages with 15,000 metric tons of fish each that are threatened by Taal's eruption.

"Aside from being our main source of livelihood, the fish feeds our families and is a rich source of protein for thousands of Filipinos. We harvest an estimated 300 MT of fish from our fish cages in Taal Lake every day. We appeal to the government to allow us to harvest our remaining fish so it can ease our suffering while at the same time help feed thousands of evacuees scattered throughout Batangas," TLLAI said in a statement.

The group noted they are ready and willing to coordinate with appropriate government agencies for orderly and safe harvesting. – With Cecille Suerte Felipe, Michael Punongbayan, Louise Maureen Simeon, Elizabeth Marcelo



Disaster resilience



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YOU can't stop natural disasters such as typhoons, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions from taking place, but certainly you can do something that would reduce their adverse effects on lives and property.

The Taal Volcano eruption last week, after four decades of dormancy, underscores once again the urgent need for Congress to fast-track the passage of a bill creating the Department of Disaster Resilience (DDR), which will be the primary agency responsible for disaster preparedness, prevention, mitigation, response, recovery and rehabilitation.

Once the DDR is up and running, it can facilitate the creation of permanent evacuation centers and the formulation of disaster management plans at the local levels to meet the ideal goal of zero-casualty in times of disaster.

It is estimated that the national gov-

ernment will have to spend between to P60 billion to as much as P100 billion to rehabilitate areas affected by the Taal Volcano eruption. But the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council that now oversees the government's disaster response efforts has been allotted a measly P16-billion calamity fund for this year.

The NDRRMC is a multi-sectoral, multi-organizational structure but it is a mere task force or an ad hoc body. It convenes only when a disaster strikes, making it ineffective and inefficient amid a time of climate change and global warming.

The creation of the DDR would ensure a more efficient, coordinated, and complete system of disaster management—from risk assessment to emergency response right down to reintegration assistance and rehabilitation.

The proposed department would take on the powers and functions of the Office of Civil Defense, the Climate Change Office of the Climate Change Commission, the Geo-Hazard Assessment and Engineering Geology Section of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau, and other agencies now performing disaster response and management functions.

There are in fact at least 12 bills proposing the creation of the DDR, but not one of these has been passed by Congress.

So shall we wait for the next major disaster to hit the country before our lawmakers act on this measure?

We know that the Philippines is among the most disaster-prone countries in the world. We lie in the path of destructive typhoons from the Pacific Ocean that cause flooding and landslides that lead to loss of lives and property.

We are also part of the so-called 'Pacific ring of fire' consisting of active volcanoes that can cause massive destruction once they erupt.

We likewise know that here in our country there are geographic faults that

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trigger earthquakes and cause death and destruction in our communities.

And we have our fair share every year of man-made disasters, such as fires that exact a heavy toll on lives and property and even on the economy as a whole, and armed conflict in some parts of the country that lead to displacement of people from their homes.

The Philippines ranks fourth in the world among countries hit by the highest number of weather-related disasters over the past 20 years, according to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR). We've known this from our own direct experience, but the UN keeps the records, so we are now aware that a total of 274 disasters were recorded in the Philippines from 1995 to 2015 alone. The Philippines is also among the top 10 countries with the highest absolute number of affected people, with 130 million.

No matter how hard we try, the economy will suffer setbacks every year. That's because natural disasters exact a heavy toll on the Philippine economy annually, amounting to as much as P130 billion in damages, according to the Department of Finance. This is equivalent to about 1.1 percent of the country's gross domestic product, according to Department of Finance estimates.

The sad reality is that developing countries such as the Philippines are the most vulnerable to the adverse impact of natural disasters. In other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the annual economic loss due to natural disasters is around 0.6 percent to 0.7 percent of the

country's GDP.

The losses incurred from natural disasters prevent the government from concentrating on poverty reduction efforts, as the funds that should be used for programs aimed at alleviating poverty are instead channeled to disaster response and relief assistance.

Apart from the loss of lives, natural disasters cause widespread destruction of public infrastructure and private property and negate the gains made in our efforts to accelerate socio-economic development and reduce poverty.

Thus, poor countries should invest in disaster risk mitigation measures to prevent severe economic losses that could drive them deeper into poverty.

What's worse is that just one powerful typhoon could wreak havoc on a massive scale, destroy the homes of the poor and their sources of livelihood, and thus wipe out the gains made in economic development. The higher we try to climb up the economic ladder, we find ourselves falling every time a disaster strikes. This should not be our inescapable fate at all, if only we are fully prepared to cope with natural disasters.

Being prepared can reduce fear, anxiety, and losses that accompany both natural and man-made disasters. Communities, families, and individuals should know what to do in the event of typhoons, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions other natural disaster. They should also be ready to evacuate their homes and take refuge in shelters and evacuation centers where they can avail the themselves of adequate food and medical help as needed.

So what's Congress waiting for?

ernhil@yahoo.com



FOR MINING. About 1,000 mine workers, their families and supporters from Nueva Vizcaya and Quirino province, including the indigenous people groups Tuwali and Bugkalot (inset), staged a protest rally on Friday along Mendlola Peaceful Arch, asking the help of President Rodrigo Duterte in avoiding loss of livelihood of thousands of IPs — 1,500 direct jobs, 2,000 indirect jobs and 17,000 IP residents benefitting from the gold-copper mine in Didipio — through the immediate approval and signing of OceanaGold Philippines' FTAA renewal. **Norman Cruz**



Neda: Defined territory will help PH optimize P1-T 'blue economy'

By Ben O. de Vera
@bendeveraINQ

The state planning agency National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) is pushing for the passage of the Philippine maritime zones and archipelagic sea lanes bills pending in Congress to be able to dip into P1 trillion worth of opportunities presented by the "blue" economy.

Neda Undersecretary Rosemarie Edillon told a press conference on Monday the said measures must be passed to "define our territory."

"We might not be optimiz-

ing at present our access to maritime resources—in fact, these are not clearly defined under our laws. That's why we are also including these [bills] in the legislative agenda to give our fisherfolk and commercial investors clearer guidelines on how to optimize the use of our resources," Neda Undersecretary Adoracion Navarro added. The prospect of oil discovery in our shores would also be covered by these bills, Neda officials said.

The World Bank defines blue economy as the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth.

Edillon said the Philippine maritime zones and archipelagic sea lanes bills would prevent some of the country's neighbors from encroaching in our West Philippine Sea territories. However, Edillon said the bills did not cover territories still subject to competing claims.

"Our problem is that because there's no general declaration of what our territories are ... we have some encroachment being done by our neighbors. So we claim that [an issue is a case of] encroachment, but actually we don't have it in writing. We don't have any

document that says this is actually ours," Edillon explained.

"There's a lot of interest now in the so-called blue economy. In fact, we need to pay more attention to the blue economy. We have really undertapped, underexploited and underused the value of the blue economy," Socio-economic Planning Secretary and Neda chief Ernesto Pernia said.

Citing a University of the Philippines School of Economics paper, the Neda chief said "over P1 trillion could be reaped from tapping the blue economy, and that's even a very conservative estimate." INQ



BOOST TO INVESTMENTS

NEDA PUSHES PASSAGE OF PRIORITY ECONOMIC BILLS IN 2020

The state planning agency National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) is seeking Congress' approval this year of pending bills aimed at bringing down the capital requirement for foreign retailers and granting wider participation among foreign investors, among other priority economic measures.

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary and Neda chief Ernesto M. Pernia told a press conference on Monday that so far during the current 18th Congress, the Duterte administration's priority economic bills were advancing quite well as some of them reached various stages of approval in the two houses of Congress.

But Neda Undersecretary Rosemarie G. Edillon said there remained a number of bills they wanted passed within the year before legislators get busy in 2021 as many of them would campaign for reelection ahead of the 2022 national elections.

For Edillon, the top priority bills included the proposed Neda

Charter, which would strengthen the culture of planning in the government; amendments to the Retail Trade Liberalization Law to bring down the investment threshold for foreign retailers that wanted to do business in the country; amendments to the Foreign Investment Act; creation of the Department of Water and the Water Regulatory Commission; the Disaster Resiliency Bill, and the National Land Use Act (Nalua).

The other bills that Neda wanted passed within the next 12 months included the creation of a unified penology system; the modernization of the national library; the Philippine Maritime Zones and Archipelagic Sea Lanes bills; the Budget Reform Bill; the National Competition Policy; amendment to the Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) Law; Evacuation Center Act; E-Vehicle Act; Local Population Development Act, and the remaining packages of the Duterte administration's comprehensive tax reform program, Edillon said.

Neda is also pushing for the

amendment of the Consumer Act to include e-commerce given the surge in online sales transactions, Edillon added.

With the entry of the third telco player happening by the second half of 2020, Edillon said it was also important to pass the Open Access in Data Transmission bill.

"In cooperation with the legislative branch, the government has introduced and implemented several important reforms that have short- to long-term high beneficial impacts. Some of these reforms have already begun producing results and more positive outcomes are expected over the long term," Pernia said, citing the recent passage of the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act, the Seal of Good Governance Act, the Philippine Identification System, the Rice Tariffication Law, the Philippine Innovation Act and the Universal Health Care Act.

—BEN O. DE VERA INQ

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DYING IN RIVERS

AUSTRALIA'S PLATYPUS FIGHTS FOR SURVIVAL AMID PROLONGED DROUGHT



LOST Two dead platypuses (center and right) are seen in this image released on Monday by Aussie Ark. —REUTERS

SYDNEY—Australia's platypus is under severe stress as the continent's prolonged drought dries up river beds, leaving one of the world's most peculiar animals fighting for its existence, scientists say.

The intensity of Australia's three-year drought on top of other factors such as land clearing, dam construction and climate change is worsening the survival prospects of the semiaquatic animal, Gilad Bino, an academic from the University of New South

Wales, told Reuters on Monday.

"The platypuses are dying in many rivers and the situation seems to be getting worse," Bino said.

"These are evolutionary relics unique to Australia, and factors such as the increasing frequency and duration of droughts are definitely going to drive many populations to extinction."

Platypuses are elusive, strange-looking duck-billed animals with web feet that spend most of their time under water.

According to their gene map, they are part bird, part reptile and part mammal.

The species is endemic to the eastern Australian region, much of which is tinder dry after years of drought and has faced months of intense bushfires. It is classified as "near threatened" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

"The ash in the water and the lack of oxygen would have a severe impact on some areas that coincide with platypus pop-

ulations," said Bino, who said in a recently published research paper that action must be taken to prevent the platypus from disappearing from Australia's waterways.

The prolonged drought, intense heat and raging fires have created an ecological disaster in Australia that is threatening several species, including koalas and rock wallabies.

In recent months, academics, rescuers and conservation groups have been fielding calls from people urgently seeking help for ani-

mals dying in drying rivers.

Video footage taken by conservation group Aussie Ark show river animals, including platypuses, getting stranded and dying as their habitats dry out.

Aussie Ark president Tim Faulkner said the group was struggling to save platypuses stranded in drying rivers in New South Wales.

"In our region, they are all dead, they are gone," he told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. —REUTERS



'Adopt-a-Watershed' sa Caraga region

Ni Mike U. Crismundo

BUTUAN CITY- Bilang bahagi ng patuloy na implementasyon ng global warming and climate change mitigation program ng pamahalaan, isang Memorandum of Partnership (MOP) sa "Adopt-a-Watershed" ang nilagdaan kamakailan sa pagitan ng ahensiya ng pamahalaan,

local government unit (LGU) at pribadong kumpanya sa agricultural-rich landlocked province ng Agusan del Sur sa Caraga region, ayon sa opisyal ng forestry sa rehiyon, kahapon.

Una rito, nakipagtulungan ang mga opisyal ng Provincial and Community Environment and Natural Resources Office (PENRO, CENRO) ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) sa LGU at pribadong kumpanya para sa paunang 20-hectare tree planting site ng "Adopt-a-Watershed" sa Maputi Watershed na matatagpuan sa Barangay Sta. Cruz, Rosario, sa nasabing probinsiya.

Sumang-ayon din ang mga opisyal ng DENR-Agusan del Sur sa pangunguna nina PENR Officer Jose Flaviano V. Concha at Bunawan CENR Officer Jerome H. Albia, kasama ang LGU officials sa pangunguna nu Rosario Mayor Jupiter Abulog at ABC President Felicidad A. Ocite, gayundin ang barangay chairman ng Sta. Cruz, at mga pangunahing opisyal ng Mindanao Mineral Processing and Refining Corporation (MMPRC)/Philsaga Mining Corporation (PMC) sa pangunguna ni President Atty. Raul C. Villanueva at Resident Manager Engr. Ferdinand A. Cortes, na magkaroon ng isang paglagda sa susunod na buwan para sa higit 100-hectare

continuing tree planting at pamamahala sa programa.

Sa ilalim ng MOP, nagkasundo ang DENR, LGU at PMC/MMPRC "to go hand-in-hand" para sa operationalization ng MOP kabilang ang strip brushing, ring weeding, staking, hole digging, planting, fertilizer application at supervision.

Kasama ang lokal na pamahalaan ng Rosario, pinasimulan noon pang 2012 ang reforestation project na binubuo ng pagtatayo ng plantation at forest plantation maintenance and protection.

Ayon sa datos, nakapagpalaki na ang reforestation program ng PMC/MMPRC ng halos 2 milyong puno sa nakalipas na 10 taon.

Bukod naman sa malawak na plantation areas (kasama ang giant bamboo plantation), ginamit na rin ng kumpanya ang "Barangay and Sitio", "Adopt-a-Forest", "Adopt-a-Mangrove" at sinuportahan ang mga matataas na komunidad para sa kanilang educational and other livelihood program, DENR-Bunawan CENR Officer Albia.

"Actually, no let up in Agusan del Sur tree

planting activity, in full support to our continuing climate change mitigation program," pahayag ni Bunawan CENRO official.

"The continuous reforestation efforts of PMC/MMPRC covers not only within its tenements, but encompass areas outside its operation, and we commend their effort which is a big plus factor in our climate change mitigation program," pahayag naman ni DENR 13 Regional Executive Director (RED) Atty. Felix S. Alicer.

"The initiative also of the company to share its resources in E-NGP is considered beneficial and good to the community, not only for this generation but also to the next generation," ayon pa rito.

Pinamumunuan ng regional office DENR 13 ang pagpapatupad ng tree planting program sa kanilang their Expanded National Greening Program (E-NGP). Pagtutunan din ng ahensiya ang

rehabilitaon and protection efforts sa Peoples Organization (PO)-contracted plantation sites na itinatag noong 2019.



AS PART of its commitment to aid in mitigating plastic wastes, leading consumer goods company Procter & Gamble Philippines, together with World Vision Development Foundation Inc., has successfully implemented the school-based Pag-asa sa Basura program.

The environmental sustainability program aims to collect and upcycle plastic sachets into school chairs, trash bins, and other useful products.

For its pilot run, Pag-asa sa Basura has partnered with 26 public schools in Malabon and Quezon City for the collection of used plastic sachets and plastic bottles in their respective communities.

Within the first three months of the program, the schools were able to recover over 2.3 million plastic sachets and more than 700,000 hard plastic bottles. In return, each student received incentives for every sachet and bottle collected.

The program, aside from enabling plastic recovery and recycling, aims to promote the importance of proper solid waste management. P&G and World Vision rehabilitated the schools' materials recovery facilities, and trained teachers and students on proper waste segregation, upcycling, and circular economy.

"As we continue to take progressive action to mitigate plastic wastes, we aim to champion sustainable innovations through our brands and manufacturing, and empower Filipino communities to be part of the solution through recycling, upcycling, and other waste diversion initiatives," said P&G communications head Anna Legarda-Locsin.

"The Pag-asa sa Basura program is one of the ways we collaborate with stakeholders and consumers for environmental sustainability," she added.

P&G and World Vision's program was able to orient over 3,000 students and teachers in Malabon and Quezon City on RA 9003 or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Law.

Alongside the workshop, Pag-asa sa Basura helped establish 21 Solid Waste Management Committees in Malabon and five committees in Quezon City, equipping students and faculty members knowledge on practicing waste



Pag-asa sa Basura is a school-based environmental sustainability program that aims to collect and upcycle plastic waste into school chairs and other useful products.



Procter and Gamble and World Vision provided schools in Malabon and Quezon City with materials recovery facilities and training on proper waste management. (Photos from P&G)

management more effectively inside their campuses and homes.

"P&G and World Vision helped significantly reduce the amount of plastic

wastes in our community through recycling and upcycling. More importantly, this program motivated our students to practice proper waste segregation in

their homes as well," shared Catmon Integrated School Malabon YES-O coordinator Genmart Alejandro.

P&G and World Vision are expecting

to recover more used sachets in the coming months plastic wastes from ending up in landfills.



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Malaysia returns waste shipment

BUTTERWORTH, Malaysia: Malaysia has sent back 150 shipping containers of plastic waste to mostly wealthier nations, with the Southeast Asian country saying Monday it would not be the world's "garbage dump."

The region has been flooded with plastic from more developed economies such as the United States and Britain since 2018, after China — which previously boasted a massive recycling industry — ordered a halt to most imports.

Many Chinese recycling businesses moved to Malaysia after the ban took effect, leading to huge quantities of plastic being shipped in without permits and flooding small communities.

Governments across the region are now sending back illegally imported plastic, and Environment Minister Yeo Bee Yin said Malaysia had returned 150 shipping containers carrying 3,737 metric tons to places including France, Britain and the United States.

Officials hope to send back another 110 containers in the near future, 60 of which came from the US, Yeo said.

Authorities "will take the necessary steps to ensure that Malaysia does not become the garbage dump of the world," she added.

The environment ministry "will continue to wage war against pollution, including plastic waste," she told reporters in the northern city of Butterworth, home to a major port from where some containers

were sent back.

The exporting countries and shipping lines covered the cost of returning the containers.

"We don't want to pay a single cent," the minister said.

"People dump their rubbish into your country, we are not supposed to pay them to send it back."

The containers were sent to 13 countries, with 43 returned to France, 42 to Britain, 17 to the US and 11 to Canada.

Several Southeast Asian countries have sent back unwanted waste in recent months. Indonesia has returned hundreds of containers to their countries of origin and the Philippines returned a huge shipment of garbage to Canada. **AFP**

PCOO rolls out legacy campaign highlighting real faces of change

THE government's successful delivery of game-changing reforms to realize its promise of a comfortable life for all was highlighted during the launch of the Duterte Legacy Campaign at the Philippine International Convention Center (PICC) on January 17.

"Leadership, indeed, draws its strength from the people. Through progressive timelines, we have witnessed how the people have continuously supported and accepted the leadership and guidance of Mayor-President Rodrigo Roa Duterte," Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) Secretary Martin Andanar said during his speech.

Spearheaded by the PCOO, the Duterte Legacy is a communications campaign that emphasizes how the lives of various Filipinos were impacted by the Duterte administration's programs and projects.

Secretary Andanar thanked the beneficiaries from various regions who delivered their testimonies on

government programs, as well as partner agencies for their participation in the event.

The campaign centers on the accomplishments of the three key pillars of the President's legacy, which are peace and order, infrastructure development, and poverty alleviation.

During the launch, the PCOO chief unveiled new projects under the Duterte Legacy Campaign, such as the magazine, podcast, and documentary.

"I take pride in that our Communications and Operations Office chronicles for publication and dissemination, the real magnitude of the three fruitful years that have passed. These accomplishments are indicative of a continuing legacy that shall persist in the next nine hundred days," he said.

The campaign also features the Duterte Legacy Caravan, a series of dialogues between the government and local communities across the country. It will feature a film show-

ing program on the Duterte Legacy documentary, and a one-stop-shop for social services.

The PCOO will also conduct a local and international Truth Caravan, to promote priority policy messages, and counter disinformation about the Philippine government.

Moreover, Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea said that the real change Filipinos have yearned for so long is now happening.

"We have made significant strides and accomplished pioneering milestones as a nation during the first half of the Duterte administration," he added.

Cabinet members who presented during the event were Department of Education (DepEd) Secretary Leonor Briones; Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) Secretary Mark Villar; Department of Health (DoH) Secretary Francisco Duque III; National Security Adviser Secretary Hermogenes Esperon Jr.; Department of Environment

and Natural Resources (DENR) Undersecretary Benny Antiporda; Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Chairperson Prospero De Vera III, DPA; Presidential Task Force on Media Security (PTFoMS) Executive Director, Undersecretary Joel Sy Egco; Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) Deputy Administrator Josefino Torres; Freedom of Information-Project Management Office (FOI-PMO) Program Director, Assistant Secretary Michel Kristian Ablan; Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPPAP) Assistant Secretary Wilben Mayor; and Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) Director Derrick Arnold Carreon.

Meanwhile, Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles delivered the closing remarks, saying that the government will continue to work harder so that more poor Filipinos are lifted out of poverty in the remaining two and a half years of President Duterte's term.



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SA WAKAS, unti-unting may lumalabas na good news mula mismo sa Batangas kahit pa may mga bad news pa rin.

GOOD NEWS SA ISDA

Sa kabila ng mga babala ng Department of Health na delikado ang mga lamang-dagat ng Taal Lake dahil sa asupre at iba pang nakalalasang bagay na ibinubuga ng Bulkang Taal, inihayag ng Bureau of Aquatic Fisheries na malinis ang mga tilapia na inaani.

Good news ito dahil may mauulam na ang mga Batangueño, may maititinda pa sila para kumita.

May iba pang mga lamang-dagat gaya ng bangus, tawilis at shell at nais nating marinig kung malinis din ang mga ito at pupwedeng hulihin para maging ulam at pagkakitaan.

Sana, okey na rin ang mga ito.

GOOD NEWS DIN SA HAYOP

Isa pang magandang balita ang pag-rescue at pagbibigay rin ng evacuation center sa mga hayop gaya ng mga baka, kabayo, baboy, aso at iba pa.

Pukpukan ang pagbibigay ng pamahalaan ng mga permiso sa mga kinaauukulang ahensya ng pamahalaan, mamamayan at non-government organization para sa pag-rescue sa mga hayop.

Malaki ang maitutulong nito sa mga may-ari na gustong magbenta o magpanatili bilang panghanapbuhay ang mga nasabing hayop.

May mga nakahawla ring ibon na nare-rescue at meron na nga ring mga ibon gaya ng calao na inilagay sa pangangalaga ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Naiwan ang lahat ng ito nang tumakas ang mga mamamayan sa ngitingit ng bulkan at inuria muna nila ang kanilang sarili na iligtas kaysa sa mga hayop, kayamanan at iba pang mahahalaga sa kanila.

GOOD NEWS SA AYUDA

Sa kabila rin ng mga pangamba na maaring magtagal ang pagputok ng bulkan, si-



GOOD NEWS AT BAD NEWS SA BULKANG TAAL

nasabi ng pamahalaan, partikular ang Department of Social Welfare and Development at mga lokal na pamahalaan, na sapat pa rin ang ayuda nila sa mga biktima.

Iba pa ang mga dumarating na tulong ng mga lokal na pamahalaan mula sa malalayong lugar sa Davao City at iba pa sa Mindanao, Kabisayaan at Northern Luzon.

Kasama siyempre sa mga tulong ng mga LGU ang mga kontribusyon ng kanilang mga mamamayan.

Nariryan din ang mga non-government organization at civic organizations gaya ng mga Lions Clubs.

Araw-araw na gumagala sa mga evacuation center upang mamahagi ng tulong ang Lions Clubs International District 301-A2 na pinamumunuan ni District Governor Wennie Bico kasama ang inyong lingkod bilang first vice district governor, SVDG Ma. Jesusa Antiporda, past district governors, cabinet officers, clubs presidents at mga miyembro nito.

Nagdonasyon din ang gobyerno ng South Korea at ipinadaraan ang ilan dito sa Philippine Red Cross na pinamumunuan ni Sen. Richard Gordon, iba pa ang mga tulong ng mga mambabatas mula sa Senado at Kongreso.

At marami pa ang tumutulong bilang mga indibidwal o grupo o asosasyon.

MGA HINDI PAGKAKAINTINDIHAN

Mayroon nga lang mga hindi pagkaka-intindihan ng ilang ahensya ng pamahalaan ngayon na dapat na mabigyan ng pansin ng mga kinaauukulan.

Halimbawa ang pagpapanatili ng Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology ng Alert Level 4 at kagustuhan nitong manatili rin ang lockdown sa maraming lugar, partikular ang itinuturing nitong danger zones.

Kasama sa mga

danger zones ang 14 na kilometro mula sa gitna ng bulkan at paikot ito sa bulkan na tumatama sa maraming bayan.

Kinokontra naman ito ngayon ng ilang lokal na pamahalaan at mamamayan na naniniwalang tapos na ang pinakamalakas na pagputok ng bulkan at dapat ibaba na ang alerto upang makabalik na sa kani-kanilang bayan ang mga mamamayan.

Gusto na ring magbukas ng mga city at municipal hall ang ilang lokal na pamahalaan at kasama na rito ang pagpayag ding na magbukas ang mga negosyo na isinara noon.

Halos normal na rin umano ang malaking bahagi, lalo na ang pagkakaroon ng kuryente.

Nariryan naman ang kontra aksyon mismo ng Department of Interior and Local Government na ang pinagbabatayan ng aksyon ay ang mga babala ng Phivolcs.

KALIGTASAN UNA SA LAHAT

Para naman sa ULTIMATUM, mga Bro, ang kaligtasan ng mga mamamayan ang number one natin sa listahan sa lahat ng dapat na pagtuunan ng pansin ng lahat.

Saan ba ang mga ligtas na lugar at kung totoo ang sinasabi ng Phivolcs na maaaring may pagputok pang malakas batay sa galaw ng magma at mga paggalaw ng lupa sa ilalim at paligid ng bulkan, paano iligtas at itaklas ng mga mamamayan nang wala ni sino-mang mapinsala o marmatay?

Pinakamaganda sa lahat ang mahigpit at tuloy-tuloy na pag-aaral sa ikabuuang sitwasyon ng mga ahensya ng pamahalaan, gumawa ng mga kaukulang desisyon, ipepatupad ang mga ito at maging handa sa anomang emergency na pagbabago, para pa rin sa kaligtasan ng lahat.



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