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# DENR

IN THE NEWS

Strategic Communication and Initiative Service



## 'REDUCING DEMAND FOR PANGOLINS

### NIPS TRADE IN THE BUD'

**T**HE Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) commended the rescue of pangolins, and other threatened species, in Palawan and South Cotabato in the Philippines, citing the role of communities in combatting wildlife trafficking.

"The recent rescue of wild animals demonstrates the seriousness of the Philippine government, with the help of community organizations, in enforcing its wildlife trafficking law and its commitment to strengthening cooperation with fellow Asean member-states in campaigns to end wildlife trafficking," said ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita Lim.

Twenty live pangolins (*Manis culionensis*) were reportedly recovered from a wildlife trafficker over the weekend in El Nido, Palawan.

According to reports, the joint operation was conducted by the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development, Bantay Palawan Task Force, Naval Forces West, Joint Task Force Malampaya, third Marine Co. of Marine Battalion Landing Team 3, local environment office, and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.



PHILIPPINE pangolins GREGG YAN

Pangolins, which are found throughout Southeast Asia, are considered one of the world's most trafficked mammals.

"Stopping the poaching of pangolins, which is an Asean-wide problem, entails the reduction of the demand for it. There is no scientific evidence that shows pangolin scales have high medicinal value," Lim said.

Lim stressed the need to raise public awareness on the important roles of pangolins, which provide pest control and improve soil quality in ecosystems.

In a separate incident, an adult male tarsier that found its way into the hands of children in Koronadal City, South Cotabato, was rescued by a villager.

The Philippines is enforcing the Republic Act 9147, or the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act, which provides for the conservation and protection of wildlife, and their habitats and prohibits trade, and transportation, of wildlife species.

"On several occasions, members of communities have become first responders in the rescue of wild animals. The success of wildlife conservation greatly depends on the people's awareness of and attitudes toward wildlife conservation," Lim, former chairman of the Asean Wildlife Enforcement Network, and former director of the Philippines's Biodiversity Management Bureau under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, said.

The Philippines, and the rest of the Asean member-states, are parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, an international agreement among governments, aimed at ensuring that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.



## 8.9K waterbirds in S. Kudarat wetland documented

**C**OTABATO CITY—Environment officials have monitored thousands of waterbirds freely moving around the wetlands of Sultan Kudarat province.

Dr. Sabdullah C. Abubacar, executive director of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) 12 (Soccsksargen), said the big number of waterbirds were found in the marshland and inland waters of Sultan Kudarat during the census of waterbirds in the region that began on January 23.

The birds were monitored and sighted in the 6,300-hectare Lake Buluan in Lutayan, Sultan Kudarat, Abubacar said in a statement last week.

During the conduct of the annual Asian Waterbird Census (AWC), personnel of the environment offices of Tacurong City and Sultan Kudarat documented some 8,928 species in the lake and its environs.

Among the documented waterbird species, also known as "aquatic birds," were the great bittern, cinnamon bittern, black-crown night heron, Rufous Nh, cattle egret, little egret, intermediate egret, great egret, purple heron, grey heron, javan pond heron, white-breasted waterhen, barred rail, banded rail, water rail, common crane, Philippine duck, lesser whistling duck, serpent eagle, Brahminy kite and wandering duck.

The census was conducted by

personnel of Tacurong's Community Environment and Natural Resources Office (Cenro), Sultan Kudarat's Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office (Penro), Tacurong City's Protected Area and Wildlife Section (PAWS), and the local government of Lutayan.

"We are conducting this activity every year so that we can compare the current condition and population of various waterbirds to our data in the previous years," said Mama Mulimpay, chief of Tacurong's Cenro-PAWS.

Forester Sainoding Hadjimanan of Penro-Sultan Kudarat said that besides bird counting, the AWC also helps the DENR in monitoring possible illegal activities, such as bird hunting, in the marshland.

"The DENR, in cooperation with the local government units of Lutayan and Buluan, Maguindanao, conducts regular monitoring in the area not only during the celebration of AWC. We are doing this to protect and preserve the various species of waterbirds in the lake," Hadjimanan said.

Mulimpay said the DENR has

embarked on massive information dissemination around Lake Buluan to increase public awareness of the importance of the waterbirds.

Abubacar again reminded the public and the local residents living near the wetlands not to harm and capture the birds "because they contribute a lot to a balanced ecosystem."

Soccsksargen comprises the provinces of South Cotabato, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, and Sarangani, and the cities of Cotabato, Kidapawan, Tacurong, Koronadal and General Santos. *PNA*



A RARE purple heron was seen by personnel of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources 12 (Soccsksargen) at Buluan Lake in Lutayan, Sultan Kudarat. The DENR-12 said thousands of waterbirds were monitored roaming freely in the adjoining wetlands of Sultan Kudarat and Maguindanao provinces since January 23 following the conduct of a census. DENR-12



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# BusinessMirror

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**MIGRATORY BIRDS** A flock of egrets congregate on a newly plowed rice field in Solano, Nueva Vizcaya. The migratory freshwater birds feed on aquatic organisms like fish or worms. **CEASAR M. FERANTE**



# Marikina River dam readied

## World Bank lending \$400M for 81-meter high, 350-meter long project

By Ben O. de Vera  
@bendeveraINQ

To avoid a repeat of the massive flooding in eastern Metro Manila similar to that caused by Tropical Storm "Ondoy" in 2009, the government will build a massive dam in Marikina River with the help of the World Bank.

The Washington-based multilateral lender will extend by next year a \$400-million loan for the \$700-million Pasig-Marikina River Basin Flood Management Project, documents showed.

Besides the World Bank's investment project financing, the Philippine government will shell out \$35 million, which

will still leave a financing gap of \$265 million for the project to be implemented by the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) over a 6.5-year period.

The World Bank noted that the World Risk Index report for 2019 showed that the Philippines was the third-riskiest natural hazard-prone country

in the world, with 74 percent of Filipinos seen vulnerable to natural disasters.

In Metro Manila alone, "migrants who typically have low-paying jobs are unable to afford decent housing and often end up as informal-settler families living in hazardous-prone zones," the World Bank said.

**B4**

## MARIKINA RIVER DAM READIED

**FROM B1**

Citing the experience when "Ondoy" hit the country 11 years ago, the World Bank pointed out that "there were over 700 fatalities, many in the Pasig-Marikina River Basin due to severe flash floods, and it caused substantial damage and losses, equivalent to about 2.7 percent of GDP (gross domestic product)."

Post-"Ondoy," the World Bank supported the crafting of a flood management master plan for Metro Manila and surrounding areas, whose implementation over a 25-year period has been estimated to cost P352 billion.

The World Bank and the Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

(AIIB) already jointly funded the master plan's ongoing urban drainage improvement component.

Specifically for the Pasig-Marikina River Basin, the DPWH plans to build an 81-meter high, 350-meter long Marikina MultiPurpose Dam across a Marikina River gorge.

"The spillway capacity of the dam is designed for the probable maximum flood of around 6,300 cubic meters per second. The dam would be constructed within the Valley Fault System containing two active faults close to the dam—West Valley Fault and East Valley Fault with distance of 5.4 kilometers and 9.5 kilometers, respectively, to the dam site with the estimated

earthquake magnitude of 6.2 to 7.2. The design has considered the required strength and stability of the maximum earthquake as the consequences of a dam failure would be extreme due to the large population and infrastructure value concentrated downstream," the World Bank said.

Besides floodwater management, the project will also develop early warning and flood forecasting systems as well as emergency-response planning and inundation mapping.

The World Bank said the indigenous peoples and small farmers to be displaced by the project would be provided not only with new housing but also sustainable livelihood. INQ





# Rody urged to compel water firms to pay P2-B fine

An independent lawmaker yesterday called on President Duterte to compel the country's largest water concessionaires to pay the P2-billion fine the Supreme Court slapped on them for violating the Clean Water Law.

"The two water suppliers should first acknowledge their violations of the Clean Water Act and pay the fines they owe the government. This is not just about the money. This is also about enforcing penalties to strengthen their deterrent function against potential future violators of the law," Rep. Lito Atienza of Buhay party-list said in reference to Manila Water Co. and Maynilad Water Services Inc.

Atienza, a former Manila mayor, insisted that this should be made a pre-requisite before

the government begins renegotiations for new concession agreements.

"We've had enough of big businesses flaunting the law simply because they have the wherewithal to drag cases out in court," he said.

The SC fined the two firms P2 billion in August 2019.

"The government has to send across the harsh message that all businesses are expected to live up to certain standards of conduct and ethics that include voluntary compliance with our environmental protection laws," he said. "We cannot imagine the government discussing new concession pacts without some form of settlement or resolution of the two water firms' continuing violations of the Clean Water Act."

Justice Secretary Menardo

Guevarra revealed last week that the government might begin the renegotiations for a revised concession agreement with the water providers next month.

Meantime, efforts exerted by the Asian Development Bank to help the Duterte administration craft a new concession agreement for Maynilad and Manila Water have been lauded by the Chief Executive's allies in the House of Representatives.

"This is brilliant and gives credence to the social, financial and legal considerations given ADB's experience and credibility. No one can claim that they were bullied in accepting the necessary changes," Rep. Mike Defensor of party-list Anakalusugan said.

"I am positive that the amendments that President

Duterte wants will be accomplished since both were amenable to amend the provisions such as doing away with charging consumers with corporate income tax, the non-intervention of government," Defensor, who heads the House committee on public accounts, added.

Guevarra disclosed that Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III told him that ADB consultants will be helping out in the water concessionaire issue, more particularly on the alleged "onerous and disadvantageous provisions" in the contract.

"I think we can come up with better arrangements, as this process will also serve as some sort of audit of the current deal," Albay Rep. Joey Salceda, chairman of the powerful

House committee on ways and means, said. "We expect that the involvement of a professional and dependable partner like the ADB would enable both the government and the concessionaires to arrive at a deal that is both equitable and efficient in delivering the intended public welfare outcomes."

He pointed out this will redound to the benefit of the combined 16 million consumers of the two water firms.

Salceda, who chairs the House committee on ways and means, said the ADB is also a good-faith partner of the government in ensuring that the terms of agreement are equitable and efficient, as it has always been a steady supporter of addressing Metro Manila's water woes.

The Bicolano lawmaker said

the ADB "already supported the government with value-adding projects like the Angat Water Supply Optimization Project, the Manila South Water Distribution Project and the Umiray-Angat Transbasin Project."

For her part, Rep. Precious Hipolito-Castelo said "everything is worth a try," explaining that ADB is "a reputable international bank extending development loans to developing countries so they deserve the benefit of doubt."

"No harm in exploring anything. We just hope the final recommendation will be reflective on the interest of the people - no pass on taxes and increase of tariff to consumers. All recommendations are subject to review," the neophyte lawmaker added.

- Delon Porcalla



# Leftist solons seek to stop P12.2B Kaliwa Dam project

BY WENDELL VIGILIA

A LEFT-leaning lawmaker yesterday urged the government to suspend negotiations for the China-funded Kaliwa Dam project until supposed onerous provisions included in the deal which are allegedly “clearly detrimental to Filipinos” are corrected.

Bayan Muna party-list Rep. Carlos Zarate said the P12.20 billion loan agreement that it forged with China for the construction of the Kaliwa Dam and the Chico River Pump irrigation violates the Constitution and will put taxpayers at the losing end.

The project will run from Quezon to Tanay, Rizal.

Zarate enumerated the alleged illegal provisions in the contract, among them, Article 5.7 stating that the “Philippines or any of its assets, unless prohibited by the laws and public policies, are not entitled to any right of immunity on the grounds of sovereign or any legal process; Article 8.1, which states that the “Philippines irrevocably waives any immunity on grounds of sovereignty; Article

8.4, “agreement shall be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of China; Article 8.5 which stipulates that the Hong Kong International Arbitration Center will be the arbiter in case of a dispute; and Article 8.9, which states that the terms, conditions and standard fees of the loan agreement are confidential.

“These loans may just be two of the many secret loan agreements between the Philippines and China which could run in the billions. Why proceed when badges of irregularities attended the project?” Zarate said in a statement.

Rep. Eufemia Cullamat, also of Bayan Muna party-list, said the construction of the Kaliwa Dam “is a clear discrimination against indigenous people.”

Cullamat said most families who will be displaced by the undertaking are members of the Dumagat tribe which the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) should be protecting and defending.

The Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System’s (MWSS) website shows that the acquisition of land where the Tunnel Outlet Portal

will pass through is ongoing and that it is coordinating with the LGUs of Infanta, Real, General Nakar, Quezon Province, Tanay, Morong, Baras, Rizal Province and DENR.

Bayan Muna party-list chairman Neri Colmenares also slammed the confidentiality clause of the Kaliwa Dam project, saying access to the loan agreement will be restricted due to its confidentiality clause.

Colmenares pointed to a Commission on Audit (COA) report revealing that the bidding for the Official Development Assistance (ODA)-funded project was done “in the guise of being a competitive procurement process.”

COA cited the alleged intentional non-compliance to qualification requirements of two of the three Chinese contractors that joined the bidding.

“As a result, only the China Energy Engineering Corporation Limited (CEEC) qualified which is questionable considering that the two bidders were disqualified in the 1st and 2nd stages of the procurement process due to seemingly intentional purpose of the bidders not to comply with the TWG requirements,” state audi-

tors said in their Audit Observation Memorandum (AOM) last June 10.

The AOM was addressed to then MWSS Administrator Reynaldo Velasco and deputy administrator for Engineering and Technical Operations Leonor Cleofas and signed by OIC Audit team Leader Rency Meryl P. Marquez and OIC Supervising Auditor Ma. Nancy J. Uy.

“In summary, it can be deduced that the two bidders/contractors were included merely to comply with the ‘at least three bidders requirement’ as stated under the Procurement law,” the report said.

At the same time, Zarate opposed the MWSS claim that the construction of the Kaliwa Dam will help prevent another water crisis and will augment Angat Dam’s lack of capacity which is the primary water source of Metro Manila.

Zarate said the water crisis can be solved without resorting to building a dam which, aside from being near a fault line, “will displace indigenous people and plunge the country into another debt considering that the loan from China has a two percent interest rate.”



## Where's the money?

**S**ince he assumed office more than three years ago, President Duterte has been all praises for China as an economic ally. He has described the world's second biggest economy as a better partner than the country's long-time friend, the United States. He sold his administration's foreign-policy pivot to China as good for the country economically—that the giant neighbor eager to be on good terms with a more friendly administration in Malacañang could help provide the funds needed to fuel the Philippines' economic growth, especially for vital infrastructure projects.

The timing was fortuitous, as China had just launched in 2013 its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a campaign designed to improve trade and travel links, and also boost its influence, not only in the Asia-Pacific region but also in Africa, the Middle East and Europe by spearheading infrastructure financing through its Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which was launched in Beijing in October 2014. Twenty-one countries, including the Philippines, were founding members of the AIIB, whose main objective is to finance infrastructure projects needed to prop up economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region. The AIIB is seen to help fund projects in the region and complement traditional funding from established multilateral lenders such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

Fast-forward three years later, and the country's chief economist is now expressing disappointment in China for the lackluster flow of financial support for the Philippine infrastructure program dubbed "Build, build, build," which seeks to complete or start a hundred flagship projects—roads, airports, bridges and seaports—until the end of the Duterte administration in 2022.

Asked last Friday why the much-ballyhooed China funding for big-ticket infrastructure projects has been slow in coming, Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto M. Pernia placed the blame squarely on China's lap: "They [the Chinese government] are the ones slow, the processes from their part," he said. In fact, Pernia noted that Japan was beating China in providing financial assistance to the Duterte administration's infrastructure program; Tokyo's aid arm, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, has been disbursing official development assistance loans much faster than Beijing is doing, such that many infrastructure projects funded by Japan are ongoing.

"The only ongoing China-funded project, on the other hand, is the Chico River irrigation project in Cagayan. Another project, the Kaliwa Dam, which is projected to supply Metro Manila with an additional 600 million liters of water a day, has just barely started.

A reason given for the slow pace of funding approval is the lack of a mechanism that would allow officials from the two countries to meet regularly. It was only last December that China proposed to institutionalize meetings between the two countries to resolve issues related to projects proposed by the Duterte administration for Chinese funding. In contrast, there already exists the Philippines-Japan Joint Committee on Infrastructure Development and Economic Cooperation, which has held nine meetings since 2017, with another one scheduled in Bohol in the first half of 2020.

China's BRI has two major components: the Silk Road Economic Belt, with six overland corridors mainly in central and north Asia and Europe, and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, where the Philippines is linked as part of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. However, the Philippines may not play that significant a role in this component, as China views the maritime trade route as a relatively small economic market. This could explain in part the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the Chinese government to prioritize Philippine projects submitted to it for funding support—despite the Duterte administration having bent over backwards these last three years to appease China on many issues, especially those related to the Philippines' territorial sovereignty over the West Philippine Sea which China has repeatedly violated.

Pernia's admission that Beijing is not living up to its part of the bargain should make the Duterte administration sit up and rethink its course. It has only less than three years left, and with Beijing's attention and resources focused in the near-term on containing the spread of the novel coronavirus outbreak and its impact on China's economy and society, it is unlikely that China's dismal record in official financing flows to the Philippines will turn for the better anytime soon.





## EDITORIAL

### Environmental problems

THERE'S a rising sentiment that it is certainly high time to restore Baguio City, the "Summer Capital" of the Philippines, and bring it back to its reputation as a "Mountain Paradise."

In fact, concerned national and local government officials are up against one of their "greatest challenges," which is to address the many environmental problems confronting the city.

They include air quality, polluted rivers, garbage woes, dwindling forest cover, traffic congestion and proliferation of squatters, according to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

"We are looking to improve these areas, which have deteriorated drastically during the past few decades," said Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Roy Cimatu, a retired military general.

Citing a study by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), Cimatu listed the most critical urban carrying capacity indicators that need to be considered in rehabilitating Baguio.

The indicators include road length and area, solid waste collection, water supply, liquid waste treatment capacity and urban land for construction and development, the DENR top honcho added.

Urban carrying capacity is the maximum level of human activities, population growth, land use and physical development that can be sustained by urban environment without causing its serious degradation and irreversible damage.

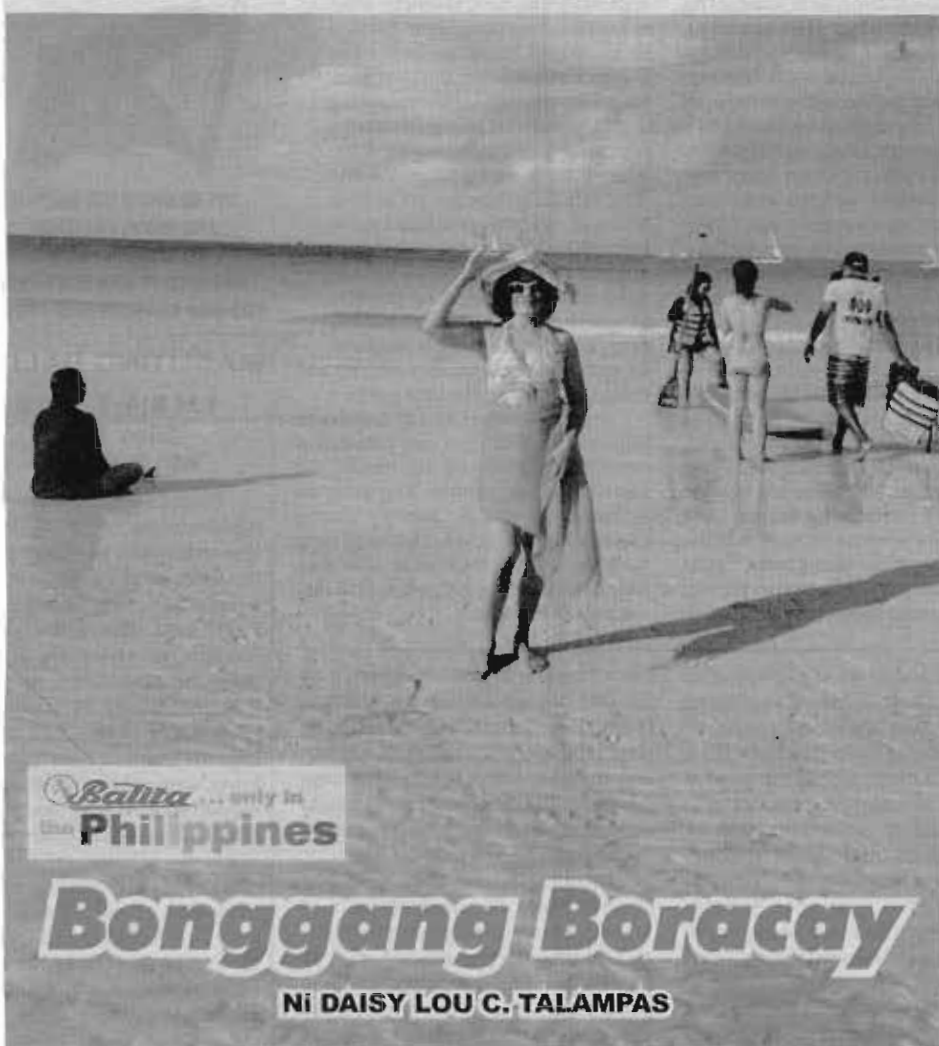
On the other hand, local government authorities, led by Mayor Benjie Magalong, himself a retired police general, are doing a great job in their gigantic task of rehabilitating Baguio.

Magalong and other city officials continue to come up with highly-effective programs and projects aimed at speeding up the socio-economic development of the "City of Flowers."



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Balita ... only in  
the Philippines

## Bonggang Boracay

NI DAISY LOU C. TALAMPAS



**M**AKARAAN ang anim na buwang Rehabilitasyon (April - October 2018) ng isa sa pinakasikat na beaches sa mundo, ang BORACAY island resort na ipinagmamalaki ng PILIPINAS ay muling binuksan sa publiko. Naging tanyag sa buong mundo ang Boracay dahil sa taglay nitong white powdery sand na hindi matatagpuan sa ibang beach resorts. Anupat kung wawariin ay sadyang pinagkalooban ang isla ng Boracay na napakapino at maputing buhangin na masarap lakaran. "Di nga bat tinagurian itong "Paradise Island".

Mga Pagbabago sa Boracay

Upang mapanatili ang kaayusan ng Boracay sa pangunguna ng Department of Tourism ay nagkaroon ng mga pagbabago :

### PARTY ISLAND NO MORE

Limang beses na ako at aking pamilya na bumisita sa Boracay at nakapaninibago ang katahimikan lalo sa gabi. Wala na ang fire dance, sayawan, kantahan, halakhakan sa beach front.

### LESS BUSINESS AT BEACHFRONT

Wala na ang marami at nagsisiksikang souvenir, massage sevice, hair styling, braids sa daan ng mga turista kayat, maluwa ng nakaka parou't parito ang mga tao.

### BAWAL ANG PLASTIC!

Bumili kami ng aking husband ng 8 glasses of fruit juices at napilitan kaming bitbitin ang mga ito hanggang sa Hennan Regency Hotel na aming tinuluyan na nakalagay lamang sa papel na supot at halos mabitiwan namin dahil sa lamig ng mga inumin na tumagos sa papel na supot!

### MAS MALAKING AIRPORT

Ang dati ay siksikang Caticlan airport ay mas malawak at mas maayos na ngayon. Pati na rin ang Jetty port ay mas protektado ang mga pasahero .

Bagamat maraming Bawal ngayon sa Boracay at sa kasalukuyan ay may problemang pangkalusugan na appektado di lamang ang Pilipinas kundi maging ibang bansa ay kaisa ang may akda na naniniwala at nananaig ang tiwala sa ating Diyos na lilipas din ang lahat na sanay may aral tayong lahat na natutunan. Ramdam ko ang pananabik di lamang ng mga foreign but local tourists as well to come and re visit the Beautiful, Better and Bonggang Boracay!



## #nationataglance

### CENTRAL VISAYAS: BOHOL

#### Bohol is latest stop for Cebu Pacific's sustainable tourism campaign

THE ECONOMY of Bohol — home to the Chocolate Hills, tarsier, white-sand beaches, and various cultural and heritage sites — has been driven largely by tourism. And that comes with the strains to the island province's environment. "Tourism is the number one source of revenue in the province... In fact, the impressive drop of poverty incidence of 50.2% in 2000 to 15.2% this year is primarily attributed to the growth of our tourism industry," said Provincial Administrator Kathyryn D. Piquinto in an interview Friday during the launch of Cebu Pacific's campaign on sustainable tourism.

Ms. Piquinto said Bohol is fortunate to have various and unique natural attractions, but it must also continuously take measures to ensure their protection and avoid the pitfalls of overtourism. "Bohol is one of the best island-destinations in the world, and one of CEB's (Cebu Pacific) most popular destinations. There is still time to preserve its beauty by flying in tourists who are aware of the impact they create when they travel," said Candice Alyog, the budget airline's vice president for marketing and customer experience.



BW/MAYA M. PADILLO

**A BUNCH of trash — including a tin can, cigarette butts, plastic straws, food wrappers, and a glass jar — along Panglao beach in this November 2019 photo. Cebu Pacific's 'Juan Effect' sustainable tourism campaign was launched Feb. 7, 2020 in Bohol with the installation of signages at the province's most visited spots.**



#### BALANCE

The company's "Juan Effect" campaign, introduced earlier in Siargao and Boracay, engages the local community, local government, and tourism stakeholders in educating travelers about their responsibilities as tourists. In Bohol, the program was started with the installation of signages at the most visited spots to remind visitors to take care of the island's natural beauty. The signs, made in part using wood from old boats left as trash along Panglao's beaches, are in English, Korean, Japanese, Chinese. "We acknowledge that tourism can be a great economic driver creating jobs and opportunities for people across all demographics. But we also recognize that this can have unintended consequences like pollution, environmental degradation, disregard local cultures, among others," Ms. Alyog said. Tourism Undersecretary Arturo P. Boncato Jr. said the Department of Tourism's goal is finding the balance between increased arrivals and sustainable tourism. He said, "We are now faced with this challenge of a balance of increasing tourists while we are protecting the environment... We would like to increase that (arrivals) but we would like to bring you to destinations that are ready for you." — **Maya M. Padillo**





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**BIZ BUZZ**



**Y**oung tycoon **Edgar Sia II**, who is aspiring to bring his family's retailing arm MerryMart Consumer Corp. to public hands this year, recently opened at AyalaMalls Manila Bay a small store prototype that could scale up to a thousand outlets by 2030.

This format, called the MerryMart Store, caters to household essentials. It houses a mini-grocery, pharmacy and health/beauty lines in a single store with an average footprint of about 250 to 300 square meters. The three-in-one concept is seen to result in operational cost efficiencies.

This is the format that will form the backbone of Sia's goal to roll out 1,200 branches nationwide and generate P120 billion in system-wide revenues by 2030. Of this targeted store network, MerryMart will account for 1,000 stores.

Franchising of the format is also seen to create business opportunities for many budding entrepreneurs. Estimated investment to franchise a MerryMart Store is P15 million.

For now, Sia said the small store format was the only package available for franchising. "We may begin the big format conversion franchising model for existing local traditional supermarkets by the second half of this year," Sia added.

The MerryMart Store format is targeted to be 90-percent franchised and 10-percent company owned, similar to the model of Mang Inasal, a business that made Sia a multibillionaire when he sold the business to fastfood giant Jollibee Foods Corp. But for full-sized MerryMart Grocery and mid-sized MerryMart Market, Sia said majority would be company-owned.

MerryMart plans to raise as much as P1.6 billion by selling 1.59 billion primary common shares at a maximum price of P1 each by March this year, with the target listing date under the ticker "MM" in early April.

MerryMart expects to operate a total of 27 branches by the second quarter this year, reach 100 branches by the fourth quarter of 2021 and 600 branches by 2025.

"This is going back to our basics. My grandfather started his grocery store in the 1950s in our hometown. My parents as well opened their own grocery business way back in 1989 and have been operating successfully for 30 years and counting. This background gives our family extensive experience in the retail business," said Sia.

— **DORIS DUMLAO-ABADILLA**

**Reasons**

Before top officials at the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) reconciled, we learned of a few other reasons why Undersecretary **Eliseo Rio Jr.** was forced to send his resignation letter to **President Duterte**.

It's fairly accurate to say the resignation had personal roots—Rio said he was being kept out of the loop by new appointees for many months now, a behavior that Information and Communications Technology Secretary **Gregorio Honasan II** apparently tolerated.

But these actions and the existence of confidential funds had started to prevent Rio from doing his job as head of DICT's operations. Apparently, the leadership at the DICT (minus Rio) had prioritized the disbursement of confidential funds at the expense of regular obligations.

Among these, payments to the telcos for bandwidth charges for the free Wi-Fi Program and crucial software license fees. This would have a direct impact on a number of important online public services, not to mention sites hosted on the DICT's government cloud service.

Drawing down government funds is, understandably, a meticulous process. It gets messy when money is advanced in a defective manner, such as the way they were done for the confidential fund, at least in the view of the Commission on Audit.

But the rift can be put to rest and Rio said he would stay in the DICT, for now, even if the issue on spending remains murky.

BizBuzz obtained a DICT department order dated Feb. 7—the same day Rio and Honasan's joint statement was released—showing that Rio was designated as undersecretary for operations on the national broadband backbone and the free Wi-Fi program.

The responsibilities mentioned are more specific than Rio's initial designation document when Honasan formally joined the DICT last year. The new order should soon be made public and eagle-eyed observers would take note of what responsibility was removed. This would give some insight on the backroom dealing that took place to achieve this recent truce at the DICT. — **MIGUEL R. CAMUS**

**Double talk**

In the recent past, some serious environment issues that hogged the headlines caught the eye—and the ire—of the President ... with predictable explosive results.

So one wonders why some usually noisy and rowdy groups professing as environment and pro-poor advocates such as Pamalakaya have been mum of late. Case in point is the controversy over the allegedly anomalous contracts of water concessionaires accused of enjoying unheard-of profits at the expense of the public and exacerbating the pollution in Manila Bay.

To put this in proper perspective, it could be recalled that following the four to 18 hours of water service interruptions in Metro Manila last year, Mr. Duterte ordered a review of the 1997 concession agreements and declared them to be highly onerous.

**Warning of a government**

takeover, the President offered the water firms a new contract drafted by the government sans the questionable terms.

Going back to the issue, why should we expect Pamalakaya to join the fray in demanding performance and accountability from the individuals and companies supposedly abusing the environment and the poor they say they champion?

Well, because at the heart of the controversy is the nonfulfillment of the water concessionaires of their obligation to put up centralized sewage lines and treatment facilities, which the Department of Environment and Natural Resources said "resulted in continuing, unmitigated environmental pollution" arising from the release and discharge of untreated water into various water channels and Manila Bay.

So it follows that any adverse effect on pollution levels in Manila Bay will impact on the livelihood of poor fishermen, whose rights Pamalakaya promotes. But nothing was heard from the group. Or, at least, nothing yet.

This is not lost on Sen. Bong Go who, while assisting fire victims in Pasig City last December, called out the silence of these groups with regard to these supposedly onerous water deals.

"I'm calling on you. Now is the time to speak up," he said in Filipino in an interview. "Let's put the interests of the people first."

Naturally, the left-leaning Pamalakaya is a known critic of Mr. Duterte and his policies, and even the administration's "Build, Build, Build" economic plan was not spared this group's criticism. But they've been silent, so far, on the water issue. (Well, Big Business certainly doesn't mind their silence.)

Another such organization is Ecowaste—a group that regularly raises issues over tree-cutting or the chemical content of toys and, more recently, the garbage left by devotees during the procession of the Black Nazarene in Manila.

Ecowaste's silence on the water issue has also been noticed by its critics on the other side of the fence.

At the height of the water controversy, Ecowaste's response was restricted to a call for water conservation, saying nothing about the failure to put up water treatment and sewage facilities.

While these groups say they're pro-environment and pro-poor, their silence on some key issues raises questions in the public's mind.

Indeed, credibility suffers when advocates like them sing a different tune depending on the wind direction. And in this case, it appears the direction does not favor their interests. But then again, what's new? — **DAXIM L. LUCAS** INQ



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## Bringing our esteros back to life



Thomas M. Orbos

### STREET TALK

**M**ANILA, not Bangkok in Thailand nor the village of Zhujiajiao in China, was in the past called the "Venice of the East." This was less than a century ago when most of the more than 50 esteros and estuaries in Metro Manila were the main thoroughfare carrying passengers and cargo up to the plains of what is now Quezon City and Rizal province. As these were connected to the bay, the esteros would bring in tidal salt water, bringing with them an abundance of sea life that fishing nets would capture at that time.

Mansions side by side with commercial houses lined up these waterways, like those along Estero de Reina, Estero de Bilibid, Estero de Aviles, Estero de Binondo, Estero de Magdalena, some of which we could still see today. For the Filipinos at that time, the esteros provided much of life's needs—transport, food and flood control. People near esteros would do laundry in these waterways, and teach children how to swim.

Those esteros are a far cry from today's esteros. Polluted and filthy, our esteros and waterways today contribute to the blight of our cities. Along their easements are informal settlers, mostly migrants into the big city who have nowhere else to go. These communities are virtually no man's land to authorities and bill collectors. In some areas, unscrupulous businessmen, in connivance with local authorities, managed to put up structures that practically reclaimed these esteros. All these, plus the shallowing of the waterways due to unmonitored dumping of waste materials, have contributed to the worsening floods in Metro Manila in recent years. In 2019 alone, the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) collected almost 4,000 tons of garbage from our esteros and waterways. And for a many of us, we turn a blind eye to their existence, quickly holding our breath when crossing them because of their stench.

However, bringing back life to these waterways is a necessity that is primordial to all Metro Manilans. And for many reasons, aside from our historical responsibility to preserve our heritage that is intertwined with these waterways. These esteros are our natural floodways, carrying excess water to Manila Bay. They can provide a viable alternative transport system similar to what we see in other countries. Transport of passengers and cargoes may be accomplished more efficiently in some areas given the congestion we have right now. Our tourism industry will benefit from this, as well. Imagine, other countries create similar waterways as a tourist attraction while we already have them here, complete with their unique and rich history.

Thankfully, our government has, in recent years, started to give needed

**There is more work to be done. And, this can be accomplished successfully with a participative private sector, ever conscious of preserving not just our heritage but to restore them for future generations. We cannot anymore afford to turn a blind eye to the state of our waterways.**

attention to these esteros. The late Gina Lopez initiated the waterway renewal and brought it back to our consciousness some years ago. Recently, the World Bank granted a \$200 million loan package to the MMDA and the Department of Public Works and Highways for flood control management, of which a portion of the funds will be for the cleanup of the waterways, as well as the rehabilitation of our decades old floodgates. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources on its own has been giving due notice and penalties to pollutant establishments along the riverbanks. The National Housing Authority, together with the concerned local government units, has been resettling a good number of the informal settlers along esteros. And the Department of the Interior and Local Government together with the Metro Manila mayors have started clearing the waterways more aggressively than in the past.

There is more work to be done. And, this can be accomplished successfully with a participative private sector, ever conscious of preserving not just our heritage but to restore them for future generations. We cannot anymore afford to turn a blind eye to the state of our waterways every time we pass by them even in our air-conditioned cars. The private sector must do its part and not just demand that government will do this alone. Generations will come after us to benefit from the work that we do now for our waterways. These waterways are our city's lifeblood, and it is our responsibility to bring them back to life.

*Thomas "Tim" Orbos was former DOTr under-secretary for roads and general manager of the MMDA. He is currently undertaking further studies at the McCourt School of Public Policy of Georgetown University. He can be reached via e-mail at thomas\_orbos@sloan.mit.edu*





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SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

# SEC NOTES LEAP IN PH 'GREEN' BOND MARKET

More Philippine companies are devoting resources for environment-friendly and sustainability initiatives, bringing to the local and offshore markets 15 green and sustainability bond issuances worth \$3.04 billion to date, a Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) official said.

This makes the Philippines one of the most dominant in Southeast Asia when it comes to the green and sustainability bond market, SEC Commissioner Ephyro Luis B. Amatong said in a keynote speech at the recent Asean+3 Bond Market Forum Meeting at the ADB Headquarters in Manila.

Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand are also among those that dominate the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) green and sustainability bond market.

Amatong noted that Philippine banks have had notable success in this market, noting Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., which has issued two sustainability bonds and one green bond totaling \$742 million, of which \$442 million was peso-denominated.

Ayala-led Bank of the Philippine Islands also issued green bonds under the Asean standards to raise \$300 million and 100 million Swiss francs, with the latter even achieving a negative yield, which means that investors even pay the issuer for accepting their money.

State-owned Development

Bank of the Philippines, for its part, raised \$352 million from the issuance of peso-denominated green bonds in late 2019.

Amatong noted that in 2016, there were only three green bonds outstanding in the whole of Asean totaling \$252 million. To date, there are at least 57 issues under the Asean Standards for green, social and sustainability bonds for a total of \$4 billion.

In the Philippines, the private sector-led foray into the green and sustainability capital markets first relied on strategic support from development partners, particularly in the case of renewable energy producers, Amatong said.

Overall, seven of the Philippines' 15 sustainability transactions have received some form of support from or engagement by multilateral development finance institutions, namely the ADB and International Finance Corp.

In 2019 alone, Amatong noted that there were over \$3.8 billion worth of bond issuances in Asean, six times more than the \$639 million issued in 2018. Sustainability bonds accounted for \$1.4 billion, or 36 percent, of last year's bond market.

"While Asean may still be a relatively small player in the global green/sustainability debt market—with \$330 billion raised in 2019—the rate of growth in Asean appears to show the necessary foundations for the development of

**B2-2**

# SEC NOTES LEAP IN PH 'GREEN' BOND MARKET

**FROM B2-1** such a green/sustainability debt market have indeed been laid, including the issuance of a clear set of guidelines for issuers to follow and which investors, both international and domestic, recognize as holistic and reliable," Amatong said.

Amatong said Asean countries, many of which have significant infrastructure development programs, thus have an opportunity to access much-needed financing. "Resil-

ient and adaptable infrastructure is particularly important to those of us in Asean since we are particularly at risk to the impact of climate change," he said.

The Asean Green Bond Standards was developed in 2017, in line with the Green Bond Principles formulated by the International Capital Market Association. Fundamentally, the standards provide a framework to ensure transparency and allow investors to make informed judgments regarding an offering's "green-

ness" and sustainability.

The Philippines adopted the framework in August 2018 when the SEC issued the guidelines on the issuance of bonds for the financing or refinancing of new or existing projects that must provide clear environmental benefits, such as those relating to renewable energy, energy efficiency, pollution prevention and control, environmentally sustainable management of living natural resources and land use, clean transportation, climate change

adaptation and green buildings.

The Philippines likewise adopted the Asean Social Bonds Standards and Asean Sustainability Bonds Standards. In April 2019, the SEC issued the guidelines on the issuance of bonds for social projects aimed at providing or promoting affordable basic infrastructure, access to health care and education and food security, among others, as well as those for social projects with environmental cobenefits.

—DORIS DUMLAO-ABADILLA INQ



**PORMAL** nang nagpahayag ng suporta ang nakararaming past district governors, iba pang district officials at mga club mula sa Lions Clubs International District 301-A2 makaraang maghain ng kanilang kandidatura sina FVDG Usec. Benny Antiporda, SVDG Ma. Jesusa Antiporda at RC 3 Chair Ret. Commodore Amado Sanglay sa pagka-district governor, FVDG at SVDG, ayon sa pagkaka-sunod, kamakailan sa East Ocean Palace, Parañaque City.



TITLE:

HINDI na talaga biro-biro ang novel corona virus. Malayo na ang agwat ng bilang ng mga patay sa pagitan ng NCOV at Serious Acute Respiratory Syndrome.

Sa NCOV, mahigit nang 800 ang patay samantalang sa SARS, hanggang 722 lamang.

Sa naging positibo, mahigit 8,000 lang ang sa SARS habang pumapatak na sa 35,000 hanggang 100,000 ang sa NCOV, depende sa mga lumalabas na ulat.

### SA PILIPINAS

Lumulundag naman sa 284 ang bilang ng Persons Under Investigation mula lang sa iilan nitong kalagitnaan ng Enero.

Mayroon na ring dalawang patay dahil umano sa human immuno virus at pneumonia pero isa rito ang nakumpirmang patay sa NCOV at ituring na nating kabilang ng mga PUI noon.

Mayroon na umang pinalabas sa ospital sa mga buhay ng PUI pero hindi tayo nakasisiguro na talagang wala silang dala-dalang sakit na may kaugnayan sa NCOV at tiyak na gumagala na ang mga ito.

Isang mahalagang tanong: Gaano kaya karami sa mga PUI ang magiging positibo?

Isang pang mahalagang tanong: Gaano kaya karami ang posibleng magkakapositibo sa NCOV sa mga naugnayan ng magdyawang positibo sa NCOV (ang lalaki ang namatay), na bumiyahé mula Hong Kong patungong Cebu, mula Cebu hanggang Dumaguete at mula Dumaguete hanggang Maynila.

Mahalagang tanong pa: Ilaan kaya ang maaaring magpositibo riaman sa babaeng Tsino na sinasabi ng China ngayon na positibo sa NCOV iyon?

Bumiyahé ang 50-year old Chinese mula sa Hong Kong patungong Cebu at pumunta rin sa Bohol hanggang sa lumipad ito pabalik ng China.

At ngayon nga, 267 na ang PUI na matatagpuan sa iba't ibang rehiyon ng rnahal kong Pilinas.

### MGA REHIYON

Mayroon nang 3 PUI sa Ilocos; 13 sa Cagayan, 4 sa Cordillera, 25 sa Central Luzon; 98 sa NCR, 25 sa Calabarzon, 4 sa Mimaropa, 18 sa Western Visayas, 14 sa



## ULTIMATUM Ni BENNY ANTIPORDA

### MAG-INGAT, MAGTULUNGAN LAHAT LABAN SA NCOV

Central Visayas, 10 sa Eastern Visayas, 8 sa Northern Mindanao, 1 sa Caraga, 16 sa Davao at 1 sa Soccsksargen.

Bukas, malamang na may bago o dagdag na namang PUI at maaaring magkakaroon na rin mula sa mga dumating mula sa lalawigan ng Hubei sa China at capital nitong Wuhan City.

Sa pag-aaral ng mga doktor sa China, mga Suki, hindi lang 2.2 katao ang nahahawaan ng positibo sa NCOV kundi 10 tao.

Ngunit nagaganap ang maramihang hawaan sa loob mismo ng mga ospital

Kaya lang, paano kung sa kalaunan ay pareho na rin ang bilang ng mga nahahawaan sa loob at labas ng ospital sa Pilipinas.

Eh pareho ang ugali nating mga Pinoy ng ugali ng mga Chinese na masikaso sa mga nagkakasakit bago pa dalhin ang mga ito sa ospital?

Kaya naman, hindi masamang sabihin nating posibleng may 10 na mahahawa sa bawat isang magpositibo ng NCOV sa Pinas.

Ngayon, paano kung marami sa mga PUI ang magpositibo?

Sabi nga ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte, gaya ng ginagawa sa Tsina, worst case scenario ang pupwedeng ikorisidera.

Kung may 284 ngayong PUI at ituring silang positibo sa worst case scenario, mayroon nang 2,840 sa buong Pilipinas na nahahawaan ng NCOV.

Maliban sa 284, gumagala ang 2,556 sa iba't ibang rehiyon sa Pinas.

Paano ngayon ang sitwasyong ito, mga Bro?

### MULA PAMILYA HANGGANG SA IBA

Sa mga hindi nahahararig ng pamahalaan na dumraring sa Pinas mula sa nasa 27 bansang may NCOV, kabilang na ang China, siyempre, sa mga pamilya sila dumidiretso pag-uwi.

Ang mga nahahararig kasi ay idinidiretso sa mga quarantine area, kung may mga palatandaan silang may dala-dala

lang NCOV gaya ng pagkakaroon ng ubo, lagnat, pamamatat, paninikip ng dibdib at iba pa.

Kaya naman, kabilang sa mga unang nahahawa ay mga miyembro ng pamilya.

Susunod na ang mga kapitbahay, ang eskwelang pinapasukan ng mga bata, ang mga palengke at mall, simbahan at kung saan-saan at maaaring mahawa rin ang mga tsuper at kapwa nila pasahero sa kanilang mga sinasakyan.

Paano kung pauwiin ng mga bansang Uni-ted Arab Emirates (1 positibo), Japan (10 positibo), Hong Kong (2 positibo na nagnegatibo raw) at iba pa ang mga Pinoy na ito?

Sasama sila sa mahigit 2,403 (sa worst case scenario) na gumagala sa buong Pilipinas na PUI, mga naka-quarantine mula China at na-discharge ng mga ospital natin.

### MAGKAISA, MAGTULUNGAN

Sa worst case scenario, mga Bro, dapat tayong magkaisa at magtulungan lahat laban sa NCOV.

Ang habilin ng mga awtoridad, isa sa mga pagkakaisahan at pagtutulong-tulungan natin ang pagdiskubre sa mga nahahawaan ng deadly na sakit.

Heto ang ilang katanungan na isaisip natin: galing ba sila sa mga bansang may NCOV, nakaugnay ba sila sa mga PUI, na-quarantine ba sila dahil sa NCOV at may sintomas ba sila ng NCOV.

Aba, magkaisa at magtulungan na tayong kumontak na tayo kina kapitan, mayor, hepe ng pulis at isangguni na natin sila para sa agarang pagkilos ng mga awtoridad.

Pariginoong Diyos, kaawaan mo kami lahat at iligtas sa NCOV.

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