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PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF DENR

Dredging of Tullahan-Tinajeros river system Environment Secretary Roy A. Cimatu (right) and DENR Undersecretary Jonas Leones (left) turnover to San Miguel Corporation president Ramon Ang (center), the map for the dredging of the Tullahan- Tinajeros River System during the groundbreaking ceremony held at the Navotas Centennial Park.



La Trinidad conducts forest clearing ops

LA TRINIDAD, Benguet – In its vow to shield one of its remaining forest covers, the Municipal Government of La Trinidad, together with personnel of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Cordillera demolished illegal structures inside the Puguis Communal Forest.

The joint forces of the local government and the DENR dismantled the structures built by the illegal claimants and even tombs that were put by

the informal settlers in the area. The said illegal claimants over a land located inside the forest serving as watershed of La Trinidad Valley were identified as Tiotioen and Isican families.

La Trinidad Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Officer Arthur Pedro said they implemented the demolition basing from the decision and directive of the court against the illegal settlements inside the communal forest. A

demolition was earlier scheduled in 2019 but was delayed because the affected families applied for a temporary restraining order and injunction case against the municipal government.

Recently, Judge Danilo Camacho of the La Trinidad Regional Trial Court Branch 62 ruled that the claim of the heirs of Tiotioen appears unfounded and without basis. Camacho rejected the petition of the heirs to prohibit the municipal government from stopping construction

activities and confiscating related materials within the 180,504 square meter land.

The court stated that the land was never declared as alienable and disposable and this never ceased to be part of the property of the government. The court also added it sustained the local government memorandum's enforcement, "it being for the protection and preservation of existing government property and public domain."

A. QUITASOL



Pastoral statement on the Kaliwa Dam

Our Best Kept Secret



BRO. CLIFFORD T. SORITA
CBCP President Most Rev. Romulo G. Valles, D.D. (concurrent Archbishop of Davao) in solidarity with the Prelature of Infanta and the Diocese of Antipolo has issued a pastoral statement which echoes the collective sentiment of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) to call on the concerned government agencies and other proponents of the Kaliwa Dam project to stop the implementation unless proper review is done to correct its flawed procedures.
Issued last Ash Wednes-

day (February 26), the CBCP raises such pastoral concern due to the following reasons:

First, almost 300 hectares of forest eco-systems in the Sierra Madre will be submerged in water, endangering 126 endemic and endangered species of plants and wildlife, thus destroying the biodiversity of that mountain range. Furthermore, the area that is affected by the dam has been declared as protected biodiversity area under the National Integrated Protected Area System (NIPAS) Act of 1992 and extended NIPAS of 2018 within Kaliwa Watershed Forest Reserve (Proclamation No. 573, June 22, 1968) and portion of this watershed declared as National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary (Proclamation 1636, April 18, 1977).

Secondly, the peaceful Dumagat-Remontados in-

igenous peoples will be displaced by this project. Their way of life and culture are bound to the forests and rivers of the Sierra Madre. They are also the guardians of these mountains. They have a right to this forest as it is their ancestral domain as recognized by Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA) since they have lived in this area for centuries. They should not be sacrificed on the altar of development aggression, which would just benefit big businesses and Chinese investors.

Thirdly, the contract with the Chinese investors is onerous to the Filipino people because the contract is not transparent at all.[1] First, the project is debt-creating with a sovereign guarantee and the country's territory and properties as collateral.[2] The loan from China for this project will be paid by

all Filipinos, not only those living in Metro Manila. There is even a provision that should any disagreement happen between the Chinese investors and the Philippine government, the case shall be settled in Chinese courts applying Chinese laws.[3] Besides, the President had even publicly threatened judges who would issue any Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) on the project,[4] thus blurring the independence of the judiciary.

Fourthly, Philippine laws are now being violated in the rush to start the project: (a) The access road to the dam that is now being built has no Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC), no Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC), and no clearance from the Protected Area Management Bureau (PAMB) as required by Republic Act (RA) 11038, Sec-

tion 11; (b) The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) requirement is deficient[5] and hence the issuance of the ECC from Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) is very suspect; and (c) FPIC procedures are highly irregular. Sadly, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP)-Provincial FPIC Team failed to protect and uphold the Human and Indigenous Rights of the Dumagat-Remontados.

Finally, there are other alternatives that are less destructive to nature and even less expensive to the government to provide water to Metro Manila, as listed in "No to Kaliwa Dam, Yes to Alternative Sources of Water". More than 100,000 people downstream will be adversely affected by possible flooding due to earthquakes and other effects of the dam, which is near to six (6) earthquake faults, (7) and these

were not adequately considered in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) presented.

The church believes in Jesus who came that we may have life, and have it abundantly (cf. John 10:10). Because of this, the church is not against development as long as it does not sacrifice the common good in the name of progress. The on-going Kaliwa Dam project of the government, in the guise of providing water to Metro Manila, is to the CBCP against inclusive development. Together with the majority of the Dumagat-Remontados indigenous communities of the Sierra Madre mountain range in the areas of Quezon and Rizal provinces, the people of the towns of Real, Infanta, General Nakar and Tanay will be affected by said project according to this pastoral

statement.

In conclusion the pastoral statement says, "We invoke the God of Sacred Scriptures who said: 'Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked' (Psalm 82:3-4). The coming celebration of 500 years of Christianity in the country would be meaningless if we remain deaf to the cry of our poor indigenous people and if we remain indifferent to the destruction of our forests and their biodiversity. Let us look up to the Mountains to see the life-situation of our indigenous brothers and sisters, and listen to their cry and to the call of our Lord Jesus. May God bless us."

For any personal comments or suggestions you may call 0917-4805585 or email me at csorita@yahoo.com.



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Maynilad steps up mitigating measures for summer 2020

WEST Zone concessionaire Maynilad Water Services, Inc. is intensifying efforts to mitigate the effects of the reduced raw water allocation from Angat Dam in preparation for summer 2020.

These mitigating measures include the optimization of its two water treatment facilities in Muntinlupa that now produce 300 million liters per day of water drawn from Laguna Lake, reactivation of several deep wells, continued reduction of water losses through sustained pipe replacement and repair activities, cloud-seeding operations, and deployment of modular water treatment plants that will draw water from small rivers in Cavite.

The above measures will enable Maynilad to get additional water supply for distribution, thus easing the current deficit from Angat Dam.

"We expect water consumption to increase this summer, so we have laid out this mitigation plan since last year so we can cushion the impact of the reduced raw water allocation on our customers," said Maynilad Chief Operating Officer Randolph T. Estrellado.

The National Water Resources Board (NWRB) has opted to maintain reduced raw water allocation for Metro Manila and nearby provinces in an effort to preserve the remaining supply in Angat Dam. Current allocation is at 42 cubic meters per second (CMS) versus the normal 48 CMS.



CHR: Safeguard rights of environmental defenders

By CZARINA NICOLE ONG KI

As the world commemorates the United Nations World Wildlife Day this week, the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) has called attention to the rights of the Philippines' environmental defenders.

CHR spokesperson Atty. Jacqueline Ann de Guia said that it is vital to safeguard the rights of environmental defenders, especially since they risk their lives every time they go out in the field to do scientific research.

But even though they are peacefully carrying out their professions and responsibly exercising their rights to freedom of speech and assembly, these environmental defenders face constant opposition.

"Despite their genuine in-

terest to protect ecosystems and empower communities, environmental defenders experience unjust labeling as dangerous threats to national security and are subjected to various forms of harassment and attacks," she said.

Back in 2010, the country's topmost botanist, Dr. Leonard Co and his two aides, were killed by the military who mistook them as rebels during a combat operation in Kananga, Leyte.

De Guia said this incident sadly illustrates the precarious situation of environmentalists in rural areas, where armed conflicts occur. What's worse, she said, is that almost a decade has passed and their deaths have not been given justice yet and the government has even downgraded

the criminal charges against the soldiers responsible from murder to homicide, which is a lesser charge.

"Civilians' rights to security of person are under constant threat of violation as reckless tagging results in killing of innocent and defenseless people," said De Guia. "The lack of awareness and complete disregard for human rights and humanitarian law by both state and non-state armed elements hinder full advancement of our national interest and comprise our constitutional right to a safe and healthy environment."

Despite this fact, the CHR said it is continuously monitoring the case of Co and his aides. The Commission likewise vowed to denounce the attacks, intimidation, and murders of environmental defenders and continue calling for better protection of environmental rights and the people standing up for these rights.



Guterres urges more caring relationship with nature

People everywhere need to remember that we depend on Mother Earth to survive, the United Nations (UN) chief said in his message for World Wildlife Day marked on 3 March, advocating for "a more caring, thoughtful and sustainable relationship with nature."

Humanity is weaved into "the rich tapestry of life that makes up our world's biological diversity," said Secretary-General António Guterres. "All human civilizations have been, and continue to be, built on the use of wild and cultivated species of flora and fauna, from the food we eat, to the air we breathe."

And yet, today, close to a quarter of all species on the planet are in danger of becoming extinct in the next few decades.

"It seems that humanity has forgotten just how much we need nature for our survival and well-being," said Guterres.

As the world population and its needs continue to grow, people insist on exploiting natural resources — including wild plants and animals and their habitats — "in an unsustainable manner," he added.

The UN chief pointed out that in its 2019 Global Assessment, the Intergovernmental Panel for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services highlighted how the current global rate of species extinction is not only rampant, but accelerating at a rate

that is "tens to hundreds of times higher" than before human beings walked the earth.

"By overexploiting wildlife, habitats and ecosystems, humanity is endangering both itself and the survival of countless species of wild plants and animals," said Guterres.

On the World Wildlife Day, Guterres urged everyone to "remind ourselves of our duty to preserve and sustainably use the vast variety of life on the planet."

"A world of thriving biodiversity provides the foundation we need to achieve our Sustainable Development Goals of a world of dignity and opportunity for all people on a healthy planet," concluded the Secretary-General.



Rody plans visiting Boracay

The President only wants to show local and foreign travelers alike that it is safe to visit the country

Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat said President Rodrigo Duterte is expected to visit Boracay Island next week, 12 March, as part of the broad government effort to boost domestic tourism amid the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) scare.

In a text message to the *Daily Tribune*, Puyat said other Cabinet secretaries expected to join the Chief Executive in the trip include not just herself but Departments of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Eduardo Año, Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Roy Cimatu and Chief presidential Legal Counsel and spokesman Salvador Panelo.

"Yes (he will be travelling next week)," Romulo-Puyat said.

For his part, Panelo said the President is scheduled to go to Boracay Island unless he says otherwise.

"Oh, he said so, did he not? He did mention that, right? He never said that he won't (visit)," Panelo said.

"But there is no confirmation on it yet. Thus far it is only Secretary Puyat who said so although I seem to remember the President mentioned something about going to Boracay."

According to Panelo, the President said at the Cabinet meeting that he was going to Boracay "unless he has other events" to attend to, he added.

Panelo also did not discount the likelihood that the President will also visit nearby provinces.

Puyat earlier said that after visiting Boracay Island, the President also intended to visit Bohol then Cebu after that.

She said as the country's number 1 tourist endorser, the President only wants to show local and foreign travelers alike that it is safe to visit the country.

"The fact that the President of the Philippines is travelling around the country show that it is safe," she said of the Chief Executive.

"He has a large impact because he is actually the one who travels. He is the (country's) biggest endorser," Puyat said.

Like a magnet

Panelo earlier said the presence of President Duterte in tourist areas help encourage local tourists also to visit.

"I think so, yes. He is a magnet eh. He is always a magnet. His presence attracts people to attend an event," Panelo said.

However, Panelo would not discuss the activities the President will engage in should the planned visit pushes through.

He said the Appointments Office in coordination with Protocol and the Presidential Security Group are in charge of the President's schedule.

"It will depend on his schedule," he said.



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Calamities and democracies

No famine has ever taken place in the history of the world in a functioning democracy." Amartya Sen's comment and the criticism it received from some academics apparently made little impact on the panel that awarded him the Nobel Prize in Economic Science in 1998 for his work on poverty, gender inequality, and the UN's Human Development Index. But it was this observation that caught the attention and assent of public intellectuals and the general public.

Famines do not suddenly strike without warning, and experience has established measures to address their occurrence. In democracies, access to opposition leaders and a free press make it difficult to conceal emerging problems. Free and regular elections hold ruling governments accountable and pressure leaders to respond or risk rejection by angry voters at the polls. Unencumbered by such restraints, Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward, the grand project to place agriculture under a collective system, left an estimated 30 million peasants dead from famine.

A democratic system obviously does not provide a country the same kind of protection against other calamities, like epidemics. A new virus can suddenly appear and spread at a speed that challenges the scientific, bureaucratic, and financial resources of even highly developed, wealthy democracies, as demonstrated by the quick migration of COVID-19 from Wuhan in China to Japan, South Korea, and Italy. Unlike famines, the cure for stricken patients needing immediate care is not clear and preventive vaccines must undergo time-consuming tests. An authoritarian, centralized system can mobilize with impressive speed. China built two hospitals in 10 days, set up 500 quarantine hotels, and sealed off 50 million res-

BUSINESS MATTERS

EDILBERTO C. DE JESUS

idents in their cities, if not in their homes. Such draconian measures democracies would find difficult to implement quickly.

But the authoritarian system that enabled the efficient deployment of the state's coercive powers also permitted the punishment of Wuhan doctors who had sounded the alert about the new virus without government authorization. As had happened with SARS in 2003, censorship delayed countermeasures against the spread of COVID-19. Knowing the aversion of authoritarian leaders to public exposure of government failings, equally authoritarian local officials instinctively protect themselves by suppressing bad news, and thus blindsided Beijing on the scale of the problem.

Tight, top-down management also restrains remedial action at lower levels. In the Philippines, greater autonomy from the center arguably helped contain COVID-19. The presidential ban on travelers from Hubei, the province of Wuhan, came on Jan. 31. On Jan. 23, presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo had dismissed any need to ban travelers from Wuhan. Notwithstanding this opinion, Carmelo Arcilla, executive director of the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB), ordered on the same day the immediate suspension of the six weekly direct flights between Wuhan and Kalibo provided by Pan Pacific Air and Royal Air Charter Services. The CAB initiative, supported by Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo Puyat, was implemented even before the World Health Organization announced on Jan. 26 that

COVID-19 posed a high global risk. On Jan. 28, the Bureau of Immigration officially stopped issuing visa-on-arrival to Chinese nationals (although the policy was unfortunately undermined by corrupt officials through the "pastillas" bribery arrangements).

Local government units also exercised their authority to avoid the risk of infection in the case of the cruise ship World Dream. Cleared by the Board of Quarantine as "safe and clear" from COVID-19, World Dream, sailing from Hong Kong with 778 passengers "authorized to travel," docked at the Port of Manila on Jan. 28. Its itinerary called for a tour of Subic Bay the following day. Protests from their constituencies enabled Olongapo Mayor Rolen Paulino Jr. and Subic Mayor John Khonghun to press successfully for the cancellation of this tour and World Dream's return to Hong Kong. In Cebu, Gov. Gwendolyn Garcia on Jan. 31 ordered a 14-day quarantine for arrivals from China.

Epidemics may require drastic control measures at which authoritarian governments are adept. But the public backlash provoked by China's action to discipline COVID-19 whistle-blowers recalls Sen's insight that public health experts applaud: Democracies recognize their accountability to their citizens, whose access to information and ability to act on their own enhance the acceptance and effectiveness of coercive precautions.

Edilberto C. de Jesus is professor emeritus at the Asian Institute of Management.

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