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# DENR

## IN THE NEWS

Strategic Communication and Initiative Service



## Puyat, Año, Cimatú binati ni Duterte sa Boracay rehab

PINURI at binati ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte ang tatlong miyembro ng gabinete nito na tumutok at nangasiwa sa rehabilitasyon ng Boracay Island matapos mahirang na 'Best Island in Asia'.

Sa ika-42 Cabinet meeting sa Malacañang nitong Biyernes nang gabi, sinabi ni Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo na binati ng Pangulo sina Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat, Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año

at Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Roy Cimatú dahil naibalik nila ang ganda ng Boracay Island.

Matatandaang isinalim sa ilang buwang rehabilitasyon ang Boracay at isinara sa mga turista matapos matuklasang itinatapon sa dagat ang mga dumi at ihi ng mga hotel at iba pang establisimyento sa isla.

Kinilala ng Pangulo ang ginawang pagsisikap ng tatlong kalihim kaya matapos buksan ang isla sa mga turista ay umani ito ng pag-

kilala sa ibang bansa.

"The Chief Executive congratulated Tourism Secretary Puyat, DILG Secretary Año and DENR Secretary Cimatú for their efforts to rehabilitate Boracay which was recently recognized as the Best Island in Asia," ani Panelo.

Matapos magbukas muli ang isla ng Boracay ay nagpatupad ng mahigpit na mga polisiya para sa mga turista para hindi muling masalaula at masira ang kagandahan ng Boracay. **(Aileen Taliping)**



# Group seeks probe of Manila Bay fishk

By ELIZABETH MARCELO

Fisherfolk group Pam-bansang Lakas ng Kilu-sang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) yesterday called for a more "in-depth" investigation of the recent fishkill in Las Piñas and Parañaque, saying that the incident might have been caused by industrial factories operating nearby.

"The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources

(BFAR) should conduct an in-depth investigation on the cause of massive fishkill that hit the south side of Manila Bay and affects the livelihood of fisherfolk," the Pamalakaya said in press statement.

"We strongly suspect that this was due to ecological pollution, and whoever is responsible should be held accountable," it added.

At least 30 tubs of dead fish valued at P700,000 to P1 million were found floating in the Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat Ecotourism Area (LPPCHEA) Thursday

morning.

The BFAR, an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture, on Friday said the initial results of water sample testing showed that the fishkill was caused by poor levels of dissolved oxygen and high levels of ammonia and phosphates due to "excessive wastes" that might have come from agricultural, domestic and industrial sources.

The Pamalakaya said the recent incident casts doubt on the efficiency of the Duterte administration's

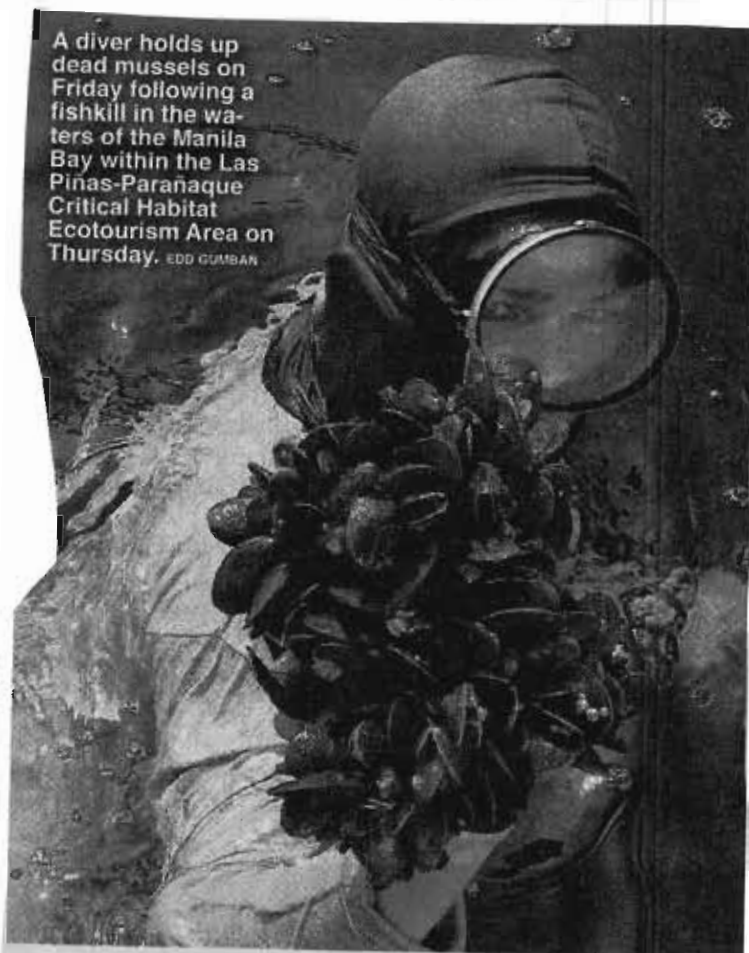
ongoing Manila Bay rehabilitation drive.

Pamalakaya also demanded that the BFAR and local officials in Las Piñas and Parañaque extend aid and livelihood support to the fisherfolk affected by the fish kill.

## Oysters, mussels affected

Aside from fish and mussels, the fishkill also affected oysters, Parañaque agriculture chief Nilo Germedia said yesterday.

He said in a radio *dzBB* interview that almost all ar-



A diver holds up dead mussels on Friday following a fishkill in the waters of the Manila Bay within the Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat Ecotourism Area on Thursday. EDD GUMBAN

eas in the city where mussels and oysters are commonly harvested have been affected.

"The shells of mussels are mostly empty. They melted," Germedia said.

He said the local government is looking into the possibility that dynamite fishing may have caused the fishkill. - With Ralph Edwin Villanueva



## Mussels, oysters also turn up dead in Las Piñas and Parañaque

By JOSEPH ALMER PEDRAJAS

More mussels and oysters turned up dead in some farms in Las Piñas and Parañaque following a fish-kill that killed about 30 tubs of fish Thursday and local officials fear losses of farmers and vendors could reach P2 million.

Nilo Germedia, Parañaque City Agriculture office officer-in-charge (OIC) in an interview over DZBB said that they discovered the dead mussels after visiting some mussel and oyster farms along with representatives of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) Friday.

"Nakakalungkot so-brang daming nakamatay..

4

## Mussels, oysters also...

◀ 1

Isang ektarya, lahat ng tahong bumagsak. Halos buong tahongan ng Parañaque ay apektado, maging ang ating talabahan (It is very sad. The affected area is almost a hectare. The mussel and oyster industry in Parañaque are affected)," he added.

About 500 kilos of mussels were wasted.

Germedia expressed concern that mussels are dying since they are reportedly resilient and "the last specie to die" when there is a problem at sea.

"Namumuhan po [yung mga farmers natin] ng P300,000 to P500,000. During bad harvest, kumikita sila ng halos P1M. But, in a good harvest, umaabot P1.5 to P2M (The farmers invest from P300,000 to P500,000 in the mussel business. They earn about a P1 million during bad

harvest and earn as much as P2 million when the harvest is good)," Germedia noted.

"So, napalaking industriya po ng tahong (the mussel industry is big)," he added.

In Las Pinas, about 150 kilos of mussels have died and according to Cesar Canoy, Las Pinas city fishery technologist this is the first time it occurred. There are no oyster farms in Las Pinas.

The recovery of dead shellfish started a day after nearly two tons of various species of dead fish - sapsap, salaysalay, bagaong, asuhos, banak, tilapia, salinyase - were discovered floating on the coast of the Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area's (LPPCHEA) Freedom and Long islands

### Thursday

Germedia said the phenomenon might be caused by "alig" - when saltwater mixes with rainwater during the rainy season.

Joey Petra, farm worker at LPPCHEA, said they immediately sought the help of BFAR and other agencies after seeing a blanket of floating fish.

"Sa walong taon ko dito, ngayon lang po nangyari 'yan na masama ang tubig, na namatay ang mga isda [In my eight years working here, this is the first time this happened]," he said.

P/Col. Jason Cipriano, Philippine National Police regional maritime group

chief, likewise said this is the first time the maritime police encountered such incident in six years.

"Kaya nagtataka kami bakit nagkaroon ng fish kill (We were wondering why there was a fish kill)," he said.

Initial investigation conducted by the Parañaque City Agriculture and Fisheries Office Extension showed dynamite fishing as the possible cause of the fish kill.

"May mga isda na dumaaan ng traumatic experience [some fish specie apparently underwent traumatic experience], which is probably caused by dynamite fishing," Germedia said.

But results of a test conducted by BFAR on the water quality showed "poor levels of dissolved oxygen and higher levels of Ammonia and Phosphates than the standard level" as the cause of the fish kill.

The BFAR said ammonia might have come from decaying organic waste and other agricultural, domestic and industrial waste; while the phosphate might have come from domestic sewage or from agricultural and urban areas.

Germedia advised residents in the area to be cautious in eating shellfish.

They are still awaiting the result of lab exam as to the cause of the shellfish kill.



## Fish kill harmed oysters, mussels

By Elmer N. Manuel

The Parañaque City Agricultural Office (PCAO) yesterday revealed that the fish kill in the city has affected not just fish and mussels, but oysters as well.

In a radio interview, PCAO officer-in-charge Nilo Germedia said oysters are now also affected.

"We went to the area with the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and we discovered that the mussels are also dying," Germedia said, adding that almost all areas in the city where mussels are harvested have been affected by the fish kill.

Local authorities are awaiting the results of the examination being conducted by BFAR on the samples taken on Friday.

To recall, thousands of dead fish wound up on the shores of Long Island, Las Piñas and Freedom Island, Parañaque on Thursday morning in an apparent case of fish kill. Among the species found to have washed ashore were *asohos*, *kanduli*, *butete*, *sapsap*, tilapia and barracuda.

Agriculture Secretary William Dar had instructed BFAR to do everything needed to respond to the incident.

The BFAR, meantime, revealed on Friday ammonia and phosphate levels at the Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area, which was affected by the fish kill, far exceeded standard levels, even as dissolved oxygen had dropped below normal.

Germedia said they are also not discounting the possibility that dynamite fishing may have affected the level of ammonia in the water.



## Polusyon sanhi ng Manila Bay fish kill

ANG polusyon sa Manila Bay ang sanhi ng fish kill sa Las Piñas at Parañaque, ayon sa isang opisyal ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resource (BFAR) nitong Sabado.

Ayon kay BFAR Calabarzon Regional Director Sammy Malvas, sa ginawang pagsusuri ng kalidad ng tubig sa naturang lugar ay mababa ang lebel ng dissolved oxygen at mataas naman ang lebel ng ammonia at phosphates.

Ang ammonia ay kemikal na nalilikha sa pagkabulok ng mga bagay tulad ng halaman, hayop at dumi ng hayop. Ang phosphate ay maaaring nanggaling naman sa domestic sewage.

Subalit ang ammonia na nakita

nila sa sample ay maaaring galing sa "agricultural, domestic and industrial wastes".

"Kailangan lang sigurong tukuyin kung saan nanggaling ang pollution. Palagi nga naming sinasabi na dapat panatilihin ang tubig para ma-sustain ang life sa dagat," ayon kay Malvas.

Nauna nang itinanggi ng BFAR na ang higit isang toneladang isdang namatay ay dahil sa paggamit ng dinamita sa Manila Bay.

Nakikipag-ugnayan na ang BFAR sa Pamahalaang Lokal ng Las Piñas at Parañaque para sa maaayos na paglilibing ng mga patay na isda upang masigurong hindi ito ibebenta sa palengke.



STRATEGIC  
COMMUNICATION  
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SERVICE

**Abante**  
UNA SA BALITA

4  
PAGE

UPPER  
 LOWER

PAGE 1  
STORY

BANNER  
STORY

EDITORIAL

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10-13-19

TITLE:

PAGE 1/

DATE





# Illegal tarantula trader nabbed

The illicit sale of spiders can upset the local wildlife population

By Maria Romero

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) over the weekend said an information technology specialist was nabbed for illegal possession and sale of P106,000 worth of live tarantulas and pythons in Marikina City.

Rommel de la Cruz, 38, who is scheduled to leave for Canada next month, was charged last 9 October following a raid at his residence in Barangay Tumana by operatives of the Philippine Operations Group on Ivory and Illegal Wildlife Trade (Task Force POGI) under the DENR.

Task Force POGI is a team of wildlife law enforcers from various agencies, including the DENR's Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) and the National Bureau of Investigation-Environmental Crime Division (NBI-ECD).

De la Cruz was arrested after receiving marked money from NBI-ECD agents who posed as buyers of a pair of tarantulas he was selling.

After searching the residence, the task force found in De la Cruz's possession 11 more tarantulas of different breeds.

Seized were Brazilian Whiteknee (*Acanthoscurria geniculata*), Mexican Golden Redrump (*Brachypelma albiceps*), Mexican Pink (*Brachypelma klaasi*), Mexican Redleg (*Brachypelma emilia*), Chilean Rose (*Grammostola rosea*) and Bolivian Redrump (*Acanthoscurria chacoana*).

BMB senior ecosystems management specialist Rogelio Demellentes Jr. said De la Cruz was already set to leave for Canada to start a job.

"He was selling off all the tarantulas at a discounted price of P20,000 so he could buy his plane ticket," Demellentes said, adding that each tarantula could sell at P1,500 in the black market.

The task force also recovered from De la Cruz five ball pythons (*Python regius*), which he was selling at a wholesale price of P86,000.

The ball python, also known as the royal python, is named for its habit of curling itself up into a tight ball.

NBI-ECD chief Czar Eric Nuqui said De la Cruz was unable to present any permit or document proving that he was authorized to possess and trade wildlife species.

He said De la Cruz could be held liable for violating the Wildlife Conservation and Protection Act. Under the law, violators could face a jail term of up to 12 years and a fine of not more than P1 million.





# TARANTULAS IN MARIKINA

## IT specialist's house yields a wide variety of wildlife

**By Joel dela Torre**

A Canada-bound information specialist who was arrested for selling a pair of tarantulas and pythons yielded 11 more tarantulas of different breeds, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) reported yesterday.

Operatives of the Philippine Operations Group on Ivory and Illegal Wildlife Trade or Task Force POGI nabbed Rommel dela Cruz, 38, in a buy-bust last Wednesday.

Dela Cruz was caught red-handed while receiving marked money as payment for a pair of live tarantulas and pythons he sold at P106,000.

Also confiscated during a follow-up search at his residence in Brgy. Tumana, Marikina City were tarantulas of different breeds which the DENR identified as Brazilian Whiteknee, Mexican Golden Redrump, Mexican Pink, Mexican Redleg, Chilean Rose and Bolivian Redrump.

BMB senior ecosystems management specialist Rogelio Demellentes Jr., said that Dela Cruz was already set to leave for Canada to start a job with a monthly salary of P170,000.

"He was selling off all the tarantulas at a discounted price of P20,000 so he could buy his plane ticket," Demellentes said, adding that each tarantula could sell at P1,500 on the black market.

The task force also recovered from Dela Cruz five

ball pythons (*Python reguis*), which he was selling at a wholesale price of P86,000.

Ball python, also known as the royal python, is named for its habit of curling itself up into a tight ball.

It is listed under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, or simply CITES, in an effort to regulate trade in the species to protect them from becoming threatened or extinct.

NBI-ECD chief Czar Eric Nuqui said Dela Cruz was unable to present any permit or document proving that he was authorized to possess and trade wildlife species.

He said Dela Cruz could be held liable for violating Republic Act 9147 or the Wildlife Conservation and Protection Act, which defines and penalizes illegal possession and trading of wildlife species.

Under the law, violators could face a jail term of up to 12 years and a fine of not more than P1 million.

Meanwhile, NBI-ECD senior agent Abner Tecson revealed that the smuggling of tarantulas happens when these highly-regulated species are shipped from other countries through courier delivery service as spiderlings, which are then fed "until they are matured enough to be sold in the black market."

"Detection and apprehension of people engaged in this illicit trade is really challenging and the arrests are done when perpetrators are already active in the black market," Tecson said.



## Live tarantulas, pythons seized

An Information Technology specialist has been arrested for alleged illegal possession and sale of live tarantulas and pythons worth at least ₱106,000 in Marikina City.

Thirty-eight-year-old Rommel dela Cruz was allegedly selling the species to fund his travel as he starts a new job in Canada next month.

He was apprehended last Oct. 9 following a raid at his residence in Barangay Tumana by operatives of the Philippine Operations Group on Ivory and Illegal Wildlife Trade under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

It is a composite team of wildlife law enforcers from various agencies, including the DENR Biodiversity Management Bureau

and the National Bureau of Investigation-Environmental Crime Division.

Dela Cruz was arrested after receiving the marked money from NBI-ECD agents who posed as buyers of a pair of tarantulas he was selling.

After searching the residence, the task force found in Dela Cruz's possession 11 more tarantulas of different breeds – Brazilian Whiteknee (*Acanthoscurria geniculata*), Mexican Golden Redrump (*Brachypelma albiceps*), Mexican Pink (*Brachypelma klaasi*), Mexican Redleg (*Brachypelma emilia*), Chilean Rose (*Grammostola rosea*), and Bolivian Redrump (*Acanthoscurria chacoana*).

According to BMB senior ecosystems management specialist

Rogelio Demellentes Jr., Dela Cruz "was selling off all the tarantulas at a discounted price of ₱20,000 so he could buy his plane ticket."

Demellentes said each tarantula could sell at ₱1,500 in the black market.

The task force also recovered from Dela Cruz five ball pythons (*Python reguis*), which he was selling at a wholesale price of ₱86,000.

Ball python, also known as the royal python, is named for its habit of curling itself up into a tight ball.

It is listed under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora to regulate trade in the species to protect them from becoming threatened or extinct. **(Ellalyn Ruiz)**



# Cebu council halts DPWH tree-cutting

One of these schools is the current Holy Cross of Digos, Davao del Sur, which was put up by the Canadian missionaries

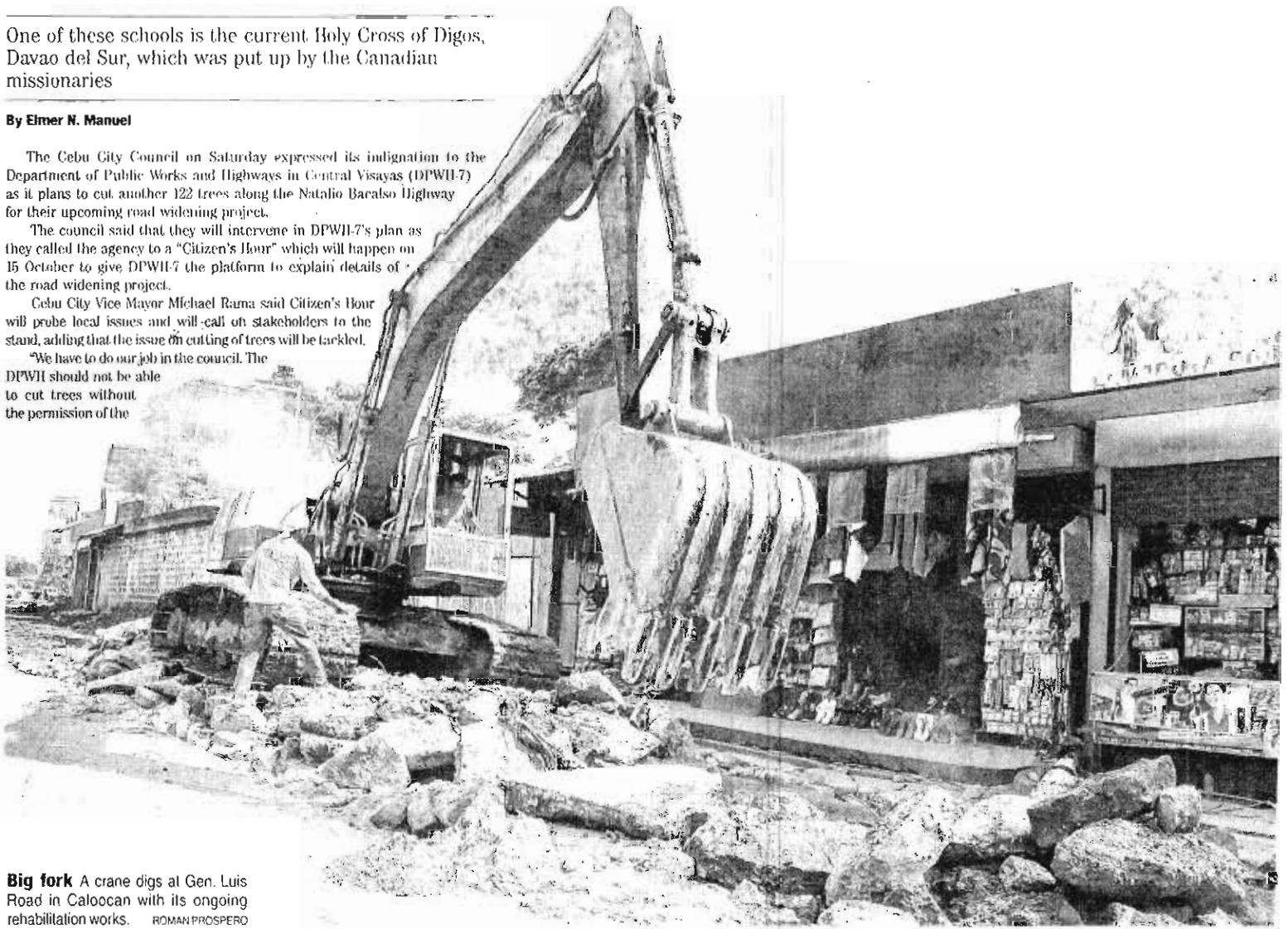
By Elmer N. Manuel

The Cebu City Council on Saturday expressed its indignation to the Department of Public Works and Highways in Central Visayas (DPWH-7) as it plans to cut another 122 trees along the Natalio Bacalso Highway for their upcoming road widening project.

The council said that they will intervene in DPWH-7's plan as they called the agency to a "Citizen's Hour" which will happen on 15 October to give DPWH-7 the platform to explain details of the road widening project.

Cebu City Vice Mayor Michael Rama said Citizen's Hour will probe local issues and will call on stakeholders to the stand, adding that the issue on cutting of trees will be tackled.

"We have to do our job in the council. The DPWH should not be able to cut trees without the permission of the



**Big fork** A crane digs at Gen. Luis Road in Caloocan with its ongoing rehabilitation works. ROMAN PROSPERO

city," said Rama.

He said there is a need to assess the move to cut the trees.

Rama said it has to be clear if the action is the best move and if it is beneficial to the city and its constituents.

To recall, Engineer Edgar Tabacon, director of DPWH-7, sent a letter dated 3 October 2019 to the City Council and the City Environment and Natural Resources Office (Cenro) asking permission to cut the trees.

This is the second time that the DPWH attempted to cut the trees on Cebu City's main road.

On 23 June 2017, the DPWH-7 was given a Tree Cutting and Earthballing Permit (TCEP) by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in Central Visayas

(DENR-7) to cut the trees along Natalio Bacalso Highway.

Because of right of way issues, it was not able to cut the trees within the given 50-day period.

Tabacon, in his letter, said they are seeking the permission of the Cebu City Government to reapply for the TCEP permit on the 122 trees.

Mayor Edgardo Labella said in previous statements that he will not allow the cutting of the trees because it goes against the goal of growing three million trees within three years.

John Jigo Dacua, head of Cebu City's Cenro, said the office has not received the letter from DPWH-7 but he assured the public that the Cenro will follow the mayor's directive concerning the trees on N. Bacalso Highway.

## Pagputol sa matatandang puno sa Cebu, pinalagan ng mga residente

NATAPOS na ang road widening sa Cebu. Pero ang akala natin, naputol nila ang mga punong nais nilang putulin dahil heto at may gusto na silang putulin, ang natitirang 30 matatandang puno sa Naga, Cebu.

Ayon sa ulat, nakakuha ng permit sa Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) si Mayor Valdemar Chiong at ang mga opisyal ng Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH). Ang pumuputol ng mga puno ay ang Visayan Electric Company at DBB Contractors.

Sa kabila nito, malinaw na walang nangyaring konsultasyon sa taumbayan dahil bigla na lang nag-simula ang pagpuputol ng mga puno. Walong puno ang kasalukuyang pinuputol at nababahala rito ang ilang mamamayan ng Cebu.

Tila nauulit ang nangyari noon kung saan basta na lang pinagpuputol ng DPWH ang matatandang puno ng acacia sa Naga at Carcar. Mabilis kumilos ang mga mamamayan at sinusupportahan natin sila upang pigilan ang 'masaker' ng mga puno sa Cebu.

Nakalulungkot na ganu'n na lang magbigay ng permit ang DENR sa mga gawain na tahasang sumisira at pumapatay sa kalikasan.

Pumanaw na si Fr. Kim Suela OFM, isang kaibi-



gang Pransiskano. Inilibing siya noong Huwebes pagkatapos ng mahabang paglilingkod sa Diyos, bayan at kalikasan. At noong Martes, kalilibing lang din ng isang kasama rin nating pari sa Diocese ng Cubao na si Msgr. Benjamin Razon.

Marahil, hindi na kailangang ipaliwanag nina Msgr. Ben at Fr. Kim ang katotohanan na mayroong espiritu ang Inang Kalikasan, kaya naman, maaari ba tayong manalangin na sana, maliwanagan ang isipan ng mga walang paggalang at pagmamahal sa Inang Kalikasan?

May buhay ang Inang Kalikasan, gayundin ang iba't ibang sangkap na bumubuo sa kanya.

Malinaw ang kaugnayan ng puno sa bundok, hangin, tubig, lupa, mga hayop at maging sa tao. Kaya trahedyang maituturing ang kawalan ng kaka-yahang tumingin at kilalanin ang malalim na kaugnayan ng mga ito.

Gamit na gamit ng mga negosyante ang makina na siyang haligi ng industriyalisasyon. Sa pinalawak na teknolohiya, bumibilis ang transaksyon.

Pero ang nakadidis-

maya, tila wala na silang pakialam sa anumang magsagaan nito dahil ang mahalaga sa kanila ay kumita ng malaking halaga.

At tila nakasagabal sa kanila ang mga puno kaya ganu'n na lang kung putulin nila ang mga ito, gayundin kapag sagabal ang mga tao, magsasaka at katutubo, malamang ay palalayasin ang mga ito. Kapag sagabal ang institusyon, Simbahan at iba pa, susupilin nila ang mga ito.

Panawagan natin sa DENR, DPWH, DBB Contractors, gayundin kay Mayor Valdemar Chiong, maaari ba kayong maghinay-hinya sa pagputol ng mga matatandang puno sa Naga, Cebu?

Maaari ba ninyong tingnan nang may paggalang ang mga punong pinuputol at pinapatay ninyo? Maaari ba ninyong damhin ang mga puno na tila walang imik, pero kung pakikinggan ninyo nang mabuti ay humihikbi?

Kapag pinuputol o pinapatay ninyo sila, merong bahagi ng buhay ninyo ang napuputol at namamatay din dahil lahat tayo ay mayroong kaugnayan sa bawat isa, tao man ito o sangkap ng kalikasan.



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C4  
PAGE

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PAGE 1  
STORY

BANNER  
STORY

EDITORIAL

CARTOON

10-13-19

TITLE:

PAGE 17

DATE

## Coastal cleanup

PERSONNEL from the Environment Protection and Waste Management Department Riverways Cleaning Operations Group haul trash collected from a nearby creek in Barangay Batasan Hills during the 2019 International Coastal Cleanup on September 21.





# Environmentalists see worsening plastics crisis

PENANG, Malaysia – Citing an increasing trend in global plastic production, environmentalists have warned that the problem on proper plastic disposal will worsen.

“Flexible plastic will see growth due to its affordability and convenience in food packaging,” the Break Free From Plastic Asia Pacific said over the weekend.

Beau Bacongus, coordinator of Break Free, said the trend covering 2015 to 2020 can be observed in Western Europe, Middle East and Africa.

Citing data from the Bren School of Environmental Science and Management based at the University of California, Bacongus said that by 2050 the global plastic production is projected at 34 billion metric tons (MT) and total plastic waste at 12 billion MT.

“This flexible plastic can fit into whatever is the requirement for its use. Normally, it is required that plastic is sturdy and can provide convenient packaging,”

Bacongus said during a forum on plastic pollution at the Rainbow Paradise Hotel here.

“Those engaged in plastic manufacturing business claim they are merely addressing the need of the poor or low-income communities, giving them a product that they can afford,” she said.

Bacongus said the main market of these companies is Southeast Asia, including the Philippines.

Jack Mcquibban, program coordinator of Zero Waste Europe, reiterated Bacongus’ statement.

“Plastic production is still on the rise. Most solutions being prepared by the industry today do not address or prevent the problem. It simply turns one form of waste to another,” Mcquibban said.

He said plastic packaging accounts for the largest share of global plastic production. It is also the largest source of waste as packaging is intended for single usage only.

– Rhodina Villanueva



## Eco-friendly hotel toiletries pushed

By Rico M. Osmeña

The Cebu City Council passed a resolution en masse to enjoin hotels and pension houses in ditching single-use toiletries and switching to bulk-size counterparts in order to reduce plastic waste and save the environment.

North District City Councilor Alvin Dizon, who sponsored the resolution, said hotels and pension houses are a huge source of single-use travel-sized miniature toiletry bottles for their shampoos, conditioners and shower gels which end up being thrown away.

"These mini bottles find their way into our landfills or clogging our drainage as they are not oftentimes recycled," he added, further encouraging the establishments to embark on better sustainability practices.

This move, however, was disputed by the Hotels, Resorts and Restaurants

Association of Cebu (HRACC), citing that this entails a larger cost from the establishments' end.

"We support sustainable tourism, but our main challenge are the suppliers (are limited) and that it is very expensive. Once we have plenty of suppliers then it will be now affordable to go into that direction," HRACC president Carlo Suarez said.

He did not say it couldn't be done. "Starting green business is tough, costly and risky, but we must be prepared to make that journey, for our planet's sake and for the sake of our future generation," he added.

Based on World Economic Forum, at least eight million metric tons of plastic end up in the world's ocean every year which is the same as dumping the contents of one garbage truck into the ocean every minute, and which by 2050 is expected to increase to four garbage trucks every minute.



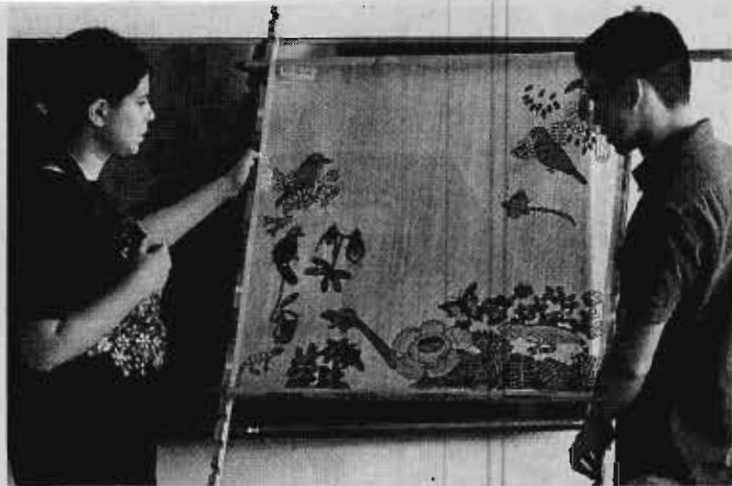
# Artist with autism captures colors of PH biodiversity

By Jhesset O. Enano  
@JhessetEnanoINQ

Hunched over a stretch of delicate “piña-seda,” Samantha Kaspar carefully moves her tiny brush over the silk, painting greens and browns while humming “Somewhere Over the Rainbow.”

Lining the walls of the Kaspar home are the numerous creations of the young Swiss-Filipino artist, who uses watercolor on paper, acrylic on cloth and silk paint on pineapple silk. Her works show a wide range of her interests through the years: from a cartoon-like depiction of a mother and child, to intricate landscapes and visuals of plants and animals.

For the 22-year-old Kaspar, who was diagnosed with severe autism, art has been her way to reach out to the world. In a society where verbal language appears to eclipse all other means of expression, Kaspar, who is semiverbal, takes firm hold of her paintbrush and tells her stories through her own distinctive lens.



**DIFFERENTLY ABLED** Samantha Kaspar finds comfort in creating her own art and encouragement from friends like her art coach Kenneth Sioson. —PHOTOS BY LYN RILLON

Drawing inspiration from nature, she recently began portraying the country’s rich biodiversity through her unique vision.

On Thursday, 40 of Kaspar’s paintings will be on display in a benefit exhibit in Enderun Colleges in Taguig City, in partnership with the Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) and the Cen-

ter for Possibilities Foundation.

## ‘Something different’

Her works, which will showcase the endemic and endangered fauna and flora of the Philippines, will celebrate the union between biodiversity and art, while raising awareness on autism and people with special needs.



**Samantha Kaspar’s works will showcase the country’s endemic and endangered fauna and flora, while raising awareness on autism and people with special needs**

Early on, Kaspar’s parents Martin and Michelle knew that there was “something different” about their eldest child. She did not speak a lot. She was not very sociable. In the Philippines, in the late ‘90s, no one could tell them what exactly was happening to their daughter.

When she was nearly 3 years





TITLE: Artist with autism captures colors... PAGE 1/



old, doctors in Switzerland finally identified that she had autism—a dreaded diagnosis for the couple.

But while Kaspar shied away

from normal conversations and social situations, she found her voice by communicating through pictures. She strung thoughts together through images. She also found comfort in creating her own art, even as a young child.

**Early works**

“Our apartment then had so much paper lying around and she would draw with these colorful markers,” Michelle said. “She would copy a character she sees on television and incorporate it with another character from another show, then create stories about them.”

To this day, Michelle keeps her daughter’s early works: a voluminous stack of artwork on paper that showed her love for colorful and lively characters, rich with facial expressions that conveyed her very own emotions.

After living in Switzerland and Australia for over a decade, Kaspar’s family returned to the Philippines, where she attended school.

“Until one day, she folded all her

A8

# ARTIST WITH AUTISM CAPTURES COLORS OF PH BIODIVERSITY

## FROM A4

forms, handed them to me and said, ‘No more school,’” Michelle said. Seeing her varied interests, however, Kaspar’s parents decided to encourage the activities that made their child happy: singing, playing the violin, ice skating, and, of course, painting.

Kenneth Sioson, who has been Kaspar’s art coach since

2015, said she had an affinity for repetition, patterns and fixed forms, which was evident in many of her works.

### ‘Way of communicating’

“It is important that we don’t see them as merely people with disabilities, but as differently abled,” Sioson said. “Their way of communicating may be different, but it’s just as effective.”

In 2017, Kaspar was among the artists with autism invited to show their works in the Fashion and Arts Autism Benefit in

New York City. Her work on pineapple cloth, which was inspired by Filipino modernist Anita Magsaysay-Ho, was translated into a dress worn during the show.

That same year, she won second place in the visual arts category in the Naturally Autistic People Awards in the ANCA World Autism Festival in Vancouver, Canada.

A “baro” featuring some of the country’s endemic species

as painted by Kaspar was worn by ACB executive director Theresa Mundita Lim in President Duterte’s State of the Nation Address in 2018. The delicate piece included illustrations of the Philippine eagle, red-vented cockatoo, turquoise jade vine and “waling-waling.”

“Samantha’s work tells us the value of nature in art and well-being,” Lim said. “It shows that biodiversity can inspire artists ... We hope the exhibit will allow us to reach out

and create more champions for biodiversity.”

### New plant species

This week’s exhibit will also unveil Kaspar’s painting of *Medinilla theresae*, a newly discovered plant species that only grows in Mindanao.

This rare plant was named after Lim, who also served as the director of the Biodiversity Management Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Lim said the exhibit will also honor the late Perry Ong, a biologist and conservationist who was among those who discovered the new species.

While it remained uncertain what the future may bring for Kaspar, her father Martin said her story is a reminder that people with special needs have a voice, too.

“[Through her paintings,] she invites people to her world,” he said. “She lets them in.” -INQ



# Sandigan convicts ex-DENR director

By Keith Calayag

The anti-graft court has convicted a former official of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for failing to settle his cash advances amounting to P874,000.

The Sandiganbayan Second Division in its decision dated 27 September has found former DENR Director III Juan Catral Raña guilty of violating Article 218 of the Revised Penal Code.

The said law penalizes officials who fail to render accounts to the Commission on Audit (CoA) two months after such accounts should have been rendered.

The Court ordered Raña to pay a fine of P1,000 with subsidiary imprisonment in case of insolvency and orders him to return to the National Resources Development Corporation (NRDC) the amount of P874,000 representing the cash

advances he had failed to liquidate.

The cash advances, given in six instances were intended for the recovery, processing and distribution of fallen trees and in typhoon-stricken provinces and the official travel to China with NRDC chairman Victor Corpus.

In his failure to settle the cash advances, Raña invoked difficulty and impracticability of securing official receipts in the midst of an emergency situation and while in the hinterlands of Aurora, Quezon and Mount Diwalwal.

He also pointed out to the sudden resignation of Corpus prevented him from having access to the documents that he needed in order to render an accounting of his cash advances.

But the Sandiganbayan, in its decision, said Raña cannot seek shelter under a claim of abrupt resignation of Corpus

because "the responsibility to timely render an account fell squarely on him."

The Court also said the cash advance for the official travel which was authorized from 26 to 29 January for the travel tickets should have been liquidated by 29 March 2005 while the advances intended to fund expenses of the Office of the Chairman for log retrieval operations and for the Diwalwal take over ought to have been liquidated by 20 January 2006.

"The failure of an accountable officer to render accounts two months after such accounts should have been rendered clinches the violation of Article 218 of the Revised Penal Code."

The decision was penned by Associate Justice Oscar Herrera Jr. with the concurrence of Michael Frederick Musngi and Lorifel Lacap Pahimna concurred with the decision of Herrera.



TITLE:

PAGE 17

DATE

## Fonda arrested protesting climate change in Washington

NEW YORK (AP) —  
Jane Fonda was arrested at  
the US Capitol on Friday  
while peacefully protesting  
climate change.

The actress was hand-  
cuffed on the east side  
steps and escorted into a  
police vehicle.

Video of the arrest cir-  
culated online. Fonda was  
one of 16 people arrested  
for unlawfully protest-  
ing and was charged with

"crowding, obstructing or incommoding." She was  
released hours later.

On Thursday, the actress vowed to join Friday pro-  
tests at the Capitol "inspired and emboldened by the  
incredible movement our youth have created."



Fonda



# IVORY, ANTLERS SEIZED IN BORNEO RAID

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Almost 800 animal parts, including a huge stash of hornbill "ivory," pangolin scales and deer's antlers, have been seized in a raid on Borneo island, officials in Malaysia said on Thursday.

Borneo's vast jungles are home to a kaleidoscope of rare creatures, but they are frequently targeted by poachers who sell their parts to collectors and for use in traditional medicine, particularly in China.

The island is shared between Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei.

Officials uncovered the huge

haul on Saturday in a raid on a house in Kapit in Malaysia's Sarawak state, and a 56-year-old man was arrested, senior forestry official Zolkipli Mohamad Aton told the Agence France-Presse (AFP)

It included 148 helmet-like blocks of reddish keratin that is found on the front of the skulls of colourful hornbill birds.

Although it is different to ivory from elephant tusks, the material is commonly known as hornbill "ivory" and is in growing demand

in China, where it is carved into luxury ornaments, statues and jewellery.

The rest of the stash included hornbill feathers, scales from pangolins — known as "scaly anteaters" — peacock feathers, porcupine quills, and deer antlers, Zolkipli said, adding it was the biggest such seizure in Sarawak for 16 years.

He said the suspect could be a supplier of animal parts to syndicates exporting them to markets such as China, Hong Kong and Vietnam, and was facing jail for

breaking wildlife protection laws.

Elizabeth John, a spokesman for the wildlife trade watchdog Traffic, said the hornbill ivory seizure was "very significant" given the rise in poaching.

"Seizure data shows China to be a major destination for hornbill ivory and it is seen as a substitute for elephant ivory," she told AFP.

Malaysia's proximity to major markets and its well-developed port network have made the country a regional hub for wildlife smuggling. **AFP**