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DENR

IN THE NEWS

Strategic Communication and Initiative Service



Nakamit ng DENR 2019 BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION TARGET

KAHIT na abala sa isinasagawang rehabilitasyon ng Manila Bay at Boracay Island, naabot pa rin ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) ang target nito para mabigyan ng proteksiyon ang mayamang biological diversity ng bansa.

Sa kaniyang yearend report, sinabi ni Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Roy Cimatu, nakapagpasuri ang ahensiya ng 52 kuweba o mas mataas ng 137 porsiyento

sa taunang target na 38.

Gayundin, ang Philippine Operation Group on Ivory and Illegal Wildlife ay nakakumpiska ang ahensiya ng 72 na iba't ibang uri ng wildlife species at 15.6 kilograms ng agarwood.

Nabatid pa, ang Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) ay nakapag-isyu ng kabuuang 7,926 wildlife permits na lampas ng 197 porsiyento sa target nitong 4,026.

Kabilang sa mga permit na nailabas ng ahensiya ay

ang wildlife farm, wildlife local transport, wildlife collector, import, export at re-export permits at ang certificates of wildlife registration.

Ayon sa BMB, ang mataas na accomplishment ay dahil sa ang pag-isyu ng permit ay demand-driven.

Nitong 2019, ang BMB ay nakapagmintini ng 42 wildlife rescue centers at 384 ecotourism facilities sa buong bansa na kumakatawan sa 89 at 98 porsiyento na accomplishment.



2019 biodiversity conservation targets ng DENR naabot

SA kabila ng pagiging abala sa isinasagawang rehabilitasyon ng Manila Bay at Boracay Island nagampanan pa rin ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources ang trabaho nito para mabigyan ng proteksyon ang mayamang biological diversity ng bansa.

Ito ang sinabi ni Environment Secretary Roy A. Cimatu na sa pamamagitan ng Biodiversity Management Bureau ay naabot pa rin ng DENR ang layunin nito sa 2019 partikular na sa biodiversity conservation at nalampasan pa nito ang target sa larangan ng "cave assessment" at pagpapalabas ng wildlife permit sa buwan pa lang ng Oktubre.

Ayon sa kalihim, hindi tumitigil ang DENR sa pagpapatupad ng Republic Act 9147 o ang Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act of 2001.

Layunin ng batas na ito na mapangalagaan at maprotektahan ang wildlife species at ang kanilang tirahan para magkaroon ng "ecological balance" at mapalakas ang biological diversity.

Nitong nakalipas na Oktubre, ang BMB ay nakapagsuri ng 52 kuweba o mas mataas ng 137% sa taunang target na 38.

Sa pamamagitan naman ng Philippine Operation Group on Ivory and Illegal Wildlife o Task Force POGI ay nakakumpiska ang ahensya ng 72 na iba't-ibang uri ng wildlife species at 15.6 kilograms ng agarwood (Aquilaria spp.) sa magkakahiwalay na operasyon sa bansa.

Ang Task Force POGI ay binubuo ng wildlife enforcers na nagmula sa Biodiversity Management Bureau, National Bureau of Investigation at Philippine National Police.

Ang BMB ay nakapag-isyu ng kabuuang 7,926 wildlife permits na lampas ng 197 porsiyento sa target nitong 4,026. Kabilang sa mga permit na nailabas ng ahensya ay ang wildlife farm, wildlife local transport, wildlife collector, import, export at re-export permits at ang certificates of wildlife registration.

Nitong 2019, ang BMB ay nagpanatili ng 42 wildlife rescue centers at 384 ecotourism facilities sa buong bansa na kumakatawan sa 89% at 98% na accomplishment, ayon sa pagkakabanggit.

SANTI CELARIO



Tarsier sanctuary visits limited

GENERAL SANTOS CITY — In a bid to protect tarsiers and their habitat, environment personnel have limited the entry of visitors to a declared sanctuary of the critical primate on Mt. Matutum in South Cotabato.

Forester Gabriel Baute, area superintendent of the Mt. Matutum Protected Landscape, said Thursday they stopped accommodating walk-in visitors at the sanctuary in Barangay Linan, Tupi starting this holiday season as part of their enhanced conservation and protection program.

He said the influx of visitors might disturb the tarsiers, dubbed the world's smallest primate and threaten their natural habitat.

Baute cited that tarsiers are nocturnal animals, normally sleeping during the day and active only during the night, like owls.

"Hence, visitors are enjoined to avoid disturbing these animals in their natural habitat or when visiting the tarsier sanctuary," he said in a statement.

Baute said like other wildlife species, tarsiers are best left in their natural habitat rather than being captured and caged as pets.

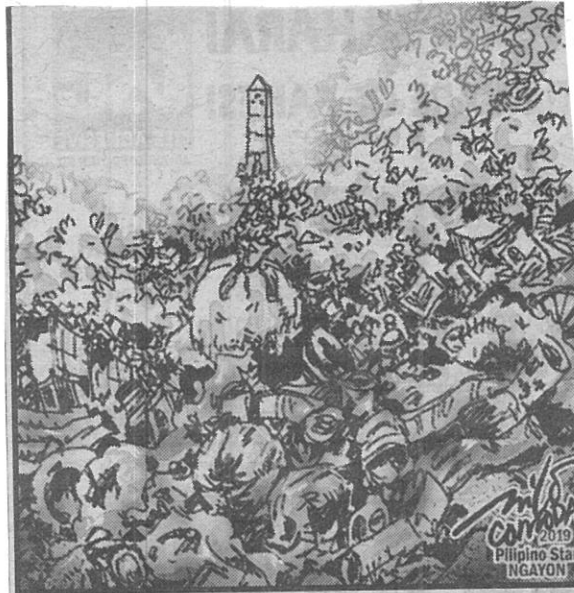
Tarsiers are known to commit suicide when in captivity and exposed to stressors like camera flash, human touch, and other forms of disturbance, he said.

It is listed under "near threatened species" by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.



Off limits

The iconic tarsier has to be protected in its natural habitat, according to conservationists.



Editorial

Basura sa Rizal Park

TAUN-TAON, pagkatapos ng Pasko at Bagong Taon, toneladang basura ang nakukulekta sa Rizal Park. Mistulang basurahan ang parke ng mga namasyal at nagpalipas ng gabi roon. Kahit paulit-ulit ang paalala na huwag iiwan ang kanilang basura, marami pa rin ang hindi sumusunod at patuloy na dinudumihan ang parke. Kahit na mayroong mga basurahan sa paligid, hindi ginagamit at mas gusto pang iiwan sa damuhan, upuan at mga ilalim ng puno at halaman.

Noong Disyembre 26, 60 tonelada ng basura ang nakolekta sa Rizal Park. Iba't ibang klase ng basura na karamihan ay mga plastic at styro na hindi natutunaw. May mga wrapper ng litson, sachet ng 3-in-1 coffee, aluminum foil na pinagbalutan ng embutido at bangus, cup ng instant noodles at mga plastic bags na pinaglagyan ng kung anu-ano pang mga baon. Halatang mga pamilya na nagelebreyt ng Pasko ang nag-iwan ng basura. Dumayo pa sila sa parke para lamang doon magkalat.

Halos taun-taon ay ganito ang tanawin sa Rizal Park --- dagat ng basura. Pinipilit pagandahin ang parke para maging kaaya-aya pero dinudumihan lamang ng mga irresponsableng namamasyal kapag Pasko at Bagong Taon. Wala na silang pakialam kung ang iniwang basura ay maging dahilan nang pagbabara sa mga drainage at iba pang daanan ng tubig na nagiging sanhi ng pagbaha. Ang mga plastic na basura ay hindi natutunaw kaya walang katapusan ang pagbaha.

Sa bisperas ng Bagong Taon, tiyak na namang marami ang daragsa sa Rizal Park para salubungin doon ang 2020. At gaya nang dati, magdadala na naman sila ng mga pagkain at ang pinagkainan at pinagbalutan ay doon na naman iiwan. Trak-trak na naman ng basura ang kukolektahin.

Magkaroon na sana ng disiplina ang mga nageselebreyt sa Rizal Park. Huwag ikalat at iiwan ang basura. Magdala ng sariling garbage bag at doon ilagay ang mga basura. Pangalagaan ang kalinisan ng parke para mapanatili ang kagandahan nito at mapasyalan pa nang mga susunod na henerasyon.



Angat Dam back to minimum operating level

By RAMON EFREN LAZARO

MALOLOS – The water level in Angat Dam has continued to rise due to rains spawned by Typhoon Ursula.

As of yesterday morning, the dam's water elevation was monitored at 200.68 meters or 20.68 meters above its minimum operating level of 180 meters, according to the Bulacan provincial risk reduction and management council.

On Thursday, the water level in the dam was recorded at 199.72 meters.

Yesterday's water level is

only 11.32 meters below its ideal end-of-the-year mark of 212 meters.

The allocation for Metro Manila's water supply will return to 46 cubic meters per second if the dam's water level will reach 212 meters, Sevillo David Jr., executive director of the National Water Resources Board (NWRB), told **The STAR**.

David said irrigation of Bulacan and Pampanga's farmlands would also revert to 30 cms if the water level would continue to rise.

The current allocation for Metro Manila's water supply is 40 cms and 10 cms for irrigation of Bulacan and Pampanga rice fields.

Heavy rains brought by recent typhoons failed to fill Angat Dam, prompting the NWRB to cut down the allocation for Metro Manila's domestic consumption. The move resulted in rotational

water service interruptions.

Angat Dam supplies 97 percent of Metro Manila's water needs.

Meanwhile, the water level in Ipo Dam was .07 meters above its spilling level of 101 meters yesterday.

The water level in Bustos Dam was .44 meters below its spilling level of 17.34 meters.

Bustos Dam supplies irrigation water to 12,000 hectares of rice fields in Bulacan and 9,000 hectares in Pampanga. The bulk of the allocation comes from Angat Dam.



Angat's water level up, but it's still not enough

TYPHOON "Ursula's" (international name: "Phanfone") rains replenished the Angat Dam reservoir, but it was still not enough to bring the water supply for Metro Manila back to normal.

Angat's level rose by 92 centimeters following the downpour, bringing it to 199.72 meters.

The National Water Resources Board (NWRB) said the level fell short of its target of 210 to 212 meters for this year.

NWRB Executive Director Sevilla David Jr. said if the target is not reached by the end of the year, water would continue to be rationed in Metro Manila until the summer of 2020.

In a television report, Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration hydrologist Elmer Caringal cited the insufficient rains as the reason the dam did not reach the target level.

The rains from Ursula also raised the water level at La Mesa Dam by 3 centimeters (cm) to 77.60 meters (m).

But, like Angat, La Mesa was still short of the target level of 79 m.

Ipo Dam's level rose by 8 cm, to 101.09 m.

Authorities informed the farmers who depend on Angat for irrigation their share of water will be reduced until the level reaches 200 m.

FRANZ LEWIN EMBUDO



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Green open parking spaces for Cebu

By Rico M. Osmeña
@tribunephil_rico

The Cebu City Council in its last regular session for the year has approved on first reading a proposed city ordinance for commercial and industrial establishments to put up "Green Open Parking Spaces" to protect and advance the right of the people to a balanced and healthy ecology in accord with the rhythm and harmony of nature.

North District City Councilor Jerry Guardo explained that the proposed ordinance would establish and maintain green parking standard that adheres to mitigate impacts on environmental degradation and it emphasizes that the impact of greenhouse gas emissions knows no boundaries and should be the utmost priority of every person and government.

He added that developers and contractors will be required to plan and integrate green environmental spaces prior to any development parking space and the installation of eco-friendly materials such as bricks, recycled woods and metals and planting trees, ornamental plants and flora, gardens and landscaping.

Violations to the ordinance will be penalized with imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year or a fine not exceeding P5,000.

Requirements set for a green open parking space are: 1.) The applicant shall endeavor, make and lay out his designs and construction of the parking space or lot to protect and preserve the existing tree or trees and 2) should the intended parking space or lot has few or no existing trees, the applicant shall plant fruit bearing trees in between the parking space of the vehicles, taking into account the distance between each tree.

Guardo cited the Cebu City Government program implementation of "KAKAHUYAN ALANG SA KAUGMAON" (Trees for the Future) under the Mayor Edgardo Labella administration which aims to plant three million trees in three years as its way of battling the effects of climate change, and thus promote and protect the ecosystem for a sustainable development.

"The rapid development of real estates and land

development projects have brought the Cebu City government to adopt measures of conservation, environmental protection and planning strategies to protect and conserve nature," he reiterated.

The rapid development of real estates and land development projects have brought the Cebu City government to adopt measures of conservation, environmental protection and planning strategies to protect and conserve nature.

The procedures for inspection and inspection were: 1.) Apply with the Office of the Building Official (OBO), City Planning and Development Office (CPDO), Cebu City Engineering Office and the Cebu City Environment and Natural Resource Office (CCENRO) for preliminary certification and shall state in writing in a form provided which shall contain: a. A statement that the applicant plans to construct a green open parking space. b. A detailed description of the proposed green open parking space, detailed eco-friendly materials, estimated number of fruit bearing trees, proposed landscaping and estimated number of vehicles to be parked therein. c. The estimated start and finish date of the construction of the green open parking space. d. Any other information and recommendation of the Office of the Building Official, City Planning Development Office, Cebu City Engineering Office and Cebu City Environment and Natural Resources prior to the issuance of a preliminary certification. e. Should the Office of the Building Official, City Planning Development Office, Cebu City Engineering Office and Cebu City Environment and Natural Resources deny the application for it will violate or does not comply with the provisions of this Ordinance, it will forthwith issue a Certificate of Denial and shall recommend to change the proposed green open parking space to meet the requirements under Section 4 of this Ordinance. and

2.) For existing open parking spaces, the applicant must state the following: a. A statement that the applicant plans to install eco-friendly materials and plant fruit bearing trees in between parking spaces to meet the requirements under Section 4 of this Ordinance. b. A detailed description of the proposed green open parking space and information showing the eco-friendly materials to be used therein. c. The estimated

start and finish date of the construction of the green open space parking. d. Any other information and recommendation of the Office of the Building Official, City Planning Development Office, Cebu City Engineering Office and Cebu City Environment and Natural Resources prior to the issuance of a preliminary certification and e. Should the Office of the Building Official, City Planning Development Office, Cebu City Engineering Office and Cebu City Environment and Natural Resources deny the application for it will violate or does not comply with the provisions of this Ordinance, it will forthwith issue a Certificate of Denial and shall recommend to change the proposed green open parking space to meet the requirements under this Ordinance.

Violations to the ordinance will be penalized with imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year or a fine not exceeding P5,000 or both at the discretion of the Court. This is without prejudice to any criminal and administrative liability that may be imposed by the prevailing laws and rules and regulations.



Semirara allowed to resume operations in Antique coal mine

By **Ronnel W. Domingo**
@RonWDomingoINQ

The Department of Energy (DOE) has given Semirara Mining and Power Corp. (SMPC) the green light to resume coal mining operations in Antique, following a suspension order that was issued in the aftermath of a fatal accident last October.

Semirara said in a regulatory filing that the DOE lifted the suspension order issued in November, but this did not cover the area adjacent of the former Casay Lake until it has removed all

liquefiable materials in the area.

"[The] DOE stated that the company substantially complied with all the conditions of its directives as specified in the DOE order dated Nov. 14, 2019," Semirara said.

In November, coal mining activities were stopped following a mudslide that killed a worker.

Prior to the incident, Semirara already received an Oct. 15 resolution from the DOE, which found the company in violation of a circular that governs the accreditation of coal traders and

registration of coal end-users.

The resolution ordered the suspension of SMPC's coal transaction with Gold Anchorage, which the DOE alleged was an unaccredited trader. Coal deliveries to SMPC-owned power plants and other local power plants with existing coal supply agreements were spared.

The company had said the DOE orders would result in production losses of 40,000-45,000 tons per day. "The financial impact, however, shall depend on the prevailing price of coal," the company added. INQ

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Expansion woes hurting tourist spots, says DOT

Favorite destinations urged to measure carrying capacity to solve garbage, traffic mess

By Vincent Cabreza
@InqNational

BAGUIO CITY—Towns that are frequented by tourists must determine their carrying capacities to address traffic jams and overcrowding at any given time, Tourism Undersecretary Arturo Boncato said here.

Speaking at a tourism forum here recently, Boncato cited as an example the tourist town of Sagada in Mountain Province which had been suffering from traffic gridlocks along narrow municipal roads leading to its popular caves.

Boncato said "overtourism" was affecting Sagada and many other towns that host popular tourism destinations. He said local officials should measure how many people could be served by their infrastructures and natural resources.

Estimating the carrying capacity of cities or towns would take time and money but local governments could do "pocket carrying capacity studies" to determine the impact of people on tourist spots.

Such studies would tell officials, for instance, how many should Burnham Park or Mines View Park, both popular tourist destinations here, accommodate at any given time, Boncato told the forum attended by local officials, hotel operators



TRASH HAUL Personnel of Baguio City's waste management office haul trash that starts piling up at a collection point on Session Road on Friday. The volume of garbage in the city grows due to the influx of visitors. —VINCENT CABREZA

and travel agencies.

"If a destination or attraction is packed, we bring tourists to another spot in the town," he said.

Traffic woes

Just like Sagada, Baguio suffers traffic jams now that its peak tourism season has started with the Christmas holidays.

This city has a road system that serves 145,416 people or half of its 350,000 population, according to a Baguio urban carrying capacity report prepared

for the National Economic and Development Authority.

The report said the daytime population had ballooned to over 700,000 people because of transient workers and seasonal tourists, putting more stress on these roads as well as parks and remaining-forestland.

City officials have implemented rerouting schemes to ease traffic jams in tourist haunts like Lourdes Grotto and Mines View Park. But these have apparently failed, with thousands of tourists

and commuters opting to walk rather than wait for hours for jeepneys and taxis that have become scarce.

From Dec. 21 to Dec. 26, more than 70,000 vehicles used the three major routes to Baguio (Kennon Road, Marcos Highway and Naguilian Road), according to the Department of Public Works and Highways.

Benchmark

Boracay is the government's benchmark for sustainable tourism after it learned how many people it can accommodate when the popular island destination in Aklan province was shut down for six months last year to undergo massive rehabilitation, Boncato said.

Assisted by the University of the Philippines Los Baños, government agencies like the Department of Tourism (DOT) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources have regulated the number of tourists on the island, particularly its white beaches.

It is estimated that Boracay can serve up to 19,250 people, Boncato said. The island has 35,000 residents, based on the 2015 census.

According to Boncato, the estimate brought attention to the island's 70,000 transient workers who were employed by resorts and hotels.

"The current direction is to build accommodations for workers outside Boracay. So they come in the morning and leave in the evening," he said.

Boracay reopened on Oct. 26, 2018, and had since been serving 5,600 guests a day, DOT reports said.

El Nido, Coron

Several destinations like the towns of El Nido and Coron in Palawan province are undertaking their own carrying capacity studies, Boncato said.

El Nido imposes restrictions over the number of boats visiting its scenic spots.

Boncato said the pocket carrying capacity studies would also help the DOT finance the repairs or the modernization of drains and sewers to make these destinations handle more tourists.

The DOT has tapped the World Bank to finance the drain and sewage upgrade of Siargao Island in Surigao del Norte province and Siquijor Island, Boncato said.

He said loans from the Asian Development Bank would be used to rehabilitate Coron and El Nido, which are undergoing a household inventory to enable the local government to replace "bottomless sewage tanks." INQ



FIRST PERSON

ALEX MAGNO

Decade

It is not just a year we are bringing to a close. It is a decade.

A hundred years ago, the second decade of the 20th century was marred by war. That war extinguished the Ottoman Empire, making the world safe for the western powers to rule. But it did not permanently incapacitate Germany that, barely two decades later, embarked on another attempt at conquest.



At the end of many years of brutal war, humanity was treated to stirring visions of world peace under the aegis of the League of Nations. That first venture at global governance failed and the world endured a second world war. The Great Depression of the 1920s indicated that what the world needed was global economic governance – although that goal was constantly impaired by the strong force of nationalism.

In the second decade of this new century, the challenges are only slightly different. Instead of rogue powers, humanity confronts of specter of borderless terrorism. More important, the entire planet is threatened by human activity. The comprehensive challenges posed by climate change threaten the very premise not only of human civilization but of life itself. There is a real possibility the planet may not outlive humanity.

With our powerful astronomical instruments, we observe stars being born and dying millions of light years away. We have tracked gravitational waves that travelled billions of years. We know, although not fully, about black holes thousands of times larger than our sun and observe them as they gobble up stars. We know the universe is in constant flux and is definitely finite.

But it is beyond our powers to intervene with the large forces that cause galaxies to collide and solar systems to disappear. We are not helpless, however, to save our planet from premature extinction. The sun is calculated to be capable of keeping us warm and holding us in place for another two billion years. But we might kill the earth way ahead of that.

To date, however, we seem utterly incapable of saving the planet. Our atmosphere has warmed 1.5 degrees since the industrial revolution, when we began throwing up millions of tons of carbon up in the air. Scientists argue that beyond this point, there can be no return. Already we witness the effects of climate change in severe weather phenomenon and the rapid melting of the ice caps. The rise in sea levels is a certainty.

Greta Thunberg, bless her, thrived rather than wallowed in her Asperger's syndrome. She has become the voice for a global movement of young people demanding the earth be spared from the effects of our unsustainable lifestyles. This movement condemned politicians in all nations for substituting talk for real action.

In the last global climate conference concluded early this month, no meaningful initiative to reverse climate change has been agreed upon. A moron who insists the cold winter disproves global warming governs the world's largest economy.

A century ago, we tried to build global institutions of governance to end all wars. We failed at that. In the intervening years, humanity continued to slaughter in large scale and, in addition, condemned thousands of species to extinction.

Ending wars is vastly more achievable than reversing global warming. There is little basis for hope we might succeed in this more challenging task.

Over the last decade, our world saw the most breathtaking technological advances in human history. It also saw the worst devastation of the planet we live in.

In our pockets, we carry devices that have thousands of times the computing power assembled to send a man to the moon. Yet we fail to reverse by a fraction of a degree the warming of our own planet. That has to be the central irony of our time.

Somewhere in the northern Pacific, the ocean vortex has brought together a floating garbage patch the size of France. We have yet to figure out a way to clean up that mess.

The Philippines has the dubious distinction of being the third worst polluter of the oceans. More urgent that pulling up our ranking in the Ease of Doing Business Index, we should try and lower our ranking in the world's worst polluter index. China and the countries of Southeast Asia are the worst polluters of the ocean.

There is no technological antidote to killing the planet, unfortunately. In the past decade, all the technological advancement did not result in reversing climate change.

Rapid urbanization has magnified rather than diminished the propensity to pollute the planet. Urbanization is the trend in the foreseeable future. Pollution must be reversed.

That challenge of saving the planet, since it cannot be met by technological achievement, leaves us with the traditional tool humanity developed to spur progress: governance.

We tried to end war and win peace by building institutions for global governance. Although that earlier effort failed, we need to design more effective global institutions for fighting climate change. The COP framework has just failed. We have to try again. We have no other tool except governance.

The most encompassing global crusades are ultimately dependent on effectively action at the locality. Climate change is ultimately a lifestyle issue. It is addressed within families, within communities and within nations.

Our contribution to the fight against climate change is ultimately measured by how the problem is addressed by our local institutions of governance. If our local institutions fail, everything else unravels. In the next decade, we should choose our leaders according to the programs of sustainability they embrace.



My Filipinos of the Year 2019

I have a rather long list of greats who brought profound feelings for us this 2019 – Movie icon Eddie Garcia, environment champion Gina Lopez, and *all* Philippine athletes of the 30th Southeast Asian Games led by Carlos Yulo, EJ Obiena, Roger Casugay, and Hidilyn Diaz.

They, to me, qualify to be called Filipinos of the Year for 2019 for their accomplishments that inspire millions and open our eyes to the paths forward.

The sudden passing of the much-loved Garcia in a workplace incident shocked and saddened us, because if it could happen to such an icon, how much more to ordinary workers who work quietly and without much fanfare?

Garcia's death brought to the fore workers' concerns over workplace safety and occupational health which, quite often, are sacrificed at the altar of capitalist profit.

We know many such incidents from a slipper factory north of Manila, to the in-house dorm of a department store down south. The list is quite long, and whenever we encounter a new "accident" or incident, we pause at the seeming impossibility to enforce even the most basic rules on making sure workers don't die at work.

Garcia has become an icon for workers who loved him, far beyond how he had hoped his fans would remember him. True, he was a great, versatile Filipino artist who was a favorite of our fathers and mothers. We leave it to the Film Academy of the Philippines, the Actors Guild, and the Directors Guild of the Philippines to give him proper honors for his artistry as actor and director.

But in Garcia's passing, he unwittingly personified the Filipino worker in a scene familiar to many of them and their families. It is now up to fellow actors, workers, and their organizations to lead a herculean effort to not let Garcia's death be in vain by making sure we would have a new law named after Garcia that would ensure safety for all at all workplaces.

Gina Lopez, arguably the country's first pro-environment and pro-people secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, this year joined the pantheon of our heroes.

Lopez, who succumbed this year to cancer, showed in her stint at the DENR that it is possible and necessary to have such a leader in the cabinet. Her courageous defense of our environment and natural resources, her tributes to the national minorities as guardians of patrimony, and her belief in responsible stewardship were a sharp contrast to the pro-Big Business, anti-environment norm that came back after the

Commission on Appointments rejected her nomination.

It is worth mentioning that other nominees rejected by the pro-establishment and anti-change CA like social welfare secretary Judy Taguiwalo and agrarian reform secretary Rafael Mariano have since fully rejoined the mass movement, and have reassumed leadership positions in people's organizations fighting tyranny. Liza Maza is now busy with international solidarity work.

And then finally, the Filipino athletes who collectively offered 386 medals in the recent Southeast Asian Games.

Arguably the biggest and brightest among our athletes today, the 19-year-old Carlos Yulo has singlehandedly created millions of new fans for artistic gymnastics. The young boy from Malate has gone places.

Prior to the regional games, Yulo had already become the first-ever Filipino world champion in artistic gymnastics, a historic feat which also gained him a ticket to the Tokyo Olympiad. It was this achievement that turned the nation's attention to the sport, and to him, in the SEA Games. He didn't disappoint, winning gold medals to the delight of his people.

We now look forward to seeing Yulo wear our national colors in the Tokyo Olympiad.

Yulo has since joined his fellow young people on Twitter, and he has been like fish thrown in water. Young Filipinos have never been *this* close to their national athletes, interacting with them real time. And vice versa. Yulo confidently shares snapshots of his stay in Japan, and vacations here at home. His constant advice is to bear the necessary sacrifices in the name of sport and country.

Pole vaulter EJ Obiena earned the country's other ticket to the coming Olympics, and he again showed us in the SEA Games why.

Roger Casugay gave up a gold medal to save an Indonesian rival Arip Nurhidayat from near-certain death, and won the respect of the entire region. The president of Indonesia led everyone in honoring Casugay who, we must contend, also personifies the great Filipino athlete.

Hidilyn Diaz also finally won the weightlifting gold medal which has eluded her in the SEA Games. This courageous Zamboanguena cheered on her team members who clearly looked up to her. To many observers, she also lifted away the hyperpartisanship that sought to waylay a cause we share: greater support and adequate state assistance to all our national athletes.



HOTSPOT
TONYO CRUZ

The national anthem was sung and the Philippine flag raised a total of 149 times during the games, each time signifying a gold medal offering to the people of the Philippines. We have never seen anything like it, a gold rush right before our very eyes.

The politicians who presided over ineptitude, corruption and nepotism leading

to the games mistakenly think that our athletes' stellar achievements would negate demands for accountability. They couldn't be more wrong. We cannot begin to imagine how much more resources could've gone directly to athletes' needs had there been no perfidies in the run-up to the SEA Games. What was stolen or wasted

could've and should've gone to our athletes' training, and that merits the full investigation of authorities.

As we close 2019, join me in honoring Eddie Garcia, Gina Lopez and our national athletes. They're perhaps the greatest inspirations to our country this year, and in my view, the Filipinos of the Year.