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IN THE NEWS

Strategic Communication and Initiative Service



Eco-friendly alternatives urged for New Year

By Maria Romero
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Instead of using pyrotechnics and firecrackers, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) urged the public to switch to eco-friendly alternatives to ring in 2020.

In a statement on Sunday, Environment Secretary Roy A. Cimatu appealed to Filipinos to help build a fresh tradition of welcoming the New Year without the pollution and danger from firecrackers and fireworks.

"Let the culture change we seek to create in the Boracay and Manila Bay rehabilitations likewise give birth to a New Year celebration that

is safe and environment-friendly," Cimatu said.

"There are some good alternatives to usher in the New Year with a bang, such as street parties, musical concerts, playing loud music, blowing horns and banging pots," he said.

To make this possible, the environment chief said the public must shun firecrackers and fireworks as these traditional ways of welcoming the change of the calendar "cause pollution pose serious safety and health risks."

"I believe that every single one of us can contribute to fighting air pollution by simply not using firecrackers and pyrotechnics that can cause immediate and extensive air pollution," he said.



Meralco urged to push clean energy initiative

By DANESSA RIVERA

A green energy group is pushing for clean energy sources in the latest competitive selection process of Manila Electric Co. (Meralco).

The Power for People Coalition (P4P) said Meralco should take the 1,200-megawatt (MW) CSP as an opportunity to expand its renewable energy portfolio.

"We welcome the changes that Meralco made in their terms of reference for this second bidding after the Department of Energy's prod, but we have not forgotten how intent Meralco is on making sure their customers are burdened by costly and dirty electricity from coal," P4P convenor Gerry Arances said.

This as the group cited Meralco's plans – announced in October – to develop at least 1,000 MW of renewable energy in five to seven years, even creating its own renewable energy subsidiary, MGen Renewable Energy Inc. (MGreen).

"We challenge Meralco to take on a new year's resolution of securing clean and affordable electricity for its power requirements. This is how Meralco can prove that they have the consumers' interest, not their own, at heart," Arances said.

"As a private company responsible for crafting and executing its own bidding rules, Meralco has all the means to make the playing field level for renewable energy sources whose costs have been rapidly decreasing in the past decade," he said.

The 1,200 MW bid is the third that Meralco is conducting following the Supreme Court's decision to require all power contracts to undergo the CSP.

Last September, Meralco conducted the CSP for the 1,200-MW greenfield capacity, but was declared a failed bidding after only Atimonan One Energy Inc., a unit of Meralco Powergen Corp. (MGen), submitted its offer.

For the second round of the 1,200-MW CSP, Meralco first vice president and head of regulatory management Jose Ronald Valles said the power distributor "continues to work with

the Department of Energy (DOE) and the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) to ensure the completion of the succeeding biddings."

"Meralco is confident that the next round of bidding will be successful once again, as this will contribute to adding much-needed capacity to the Luzon grid, as well as bring power rates further down for the benefit of our consumers," he said.

Meralco has relaxed the rules in the second round of CSP. For one, power players can offer contract capacity at 600 MW blocks, and can bid using multiple units with a minimum capacity of 150 MW per unit and the same fuel type.

Also, bidders can offer fuel source "from a technology that complies with the prevailing emission standards under pertinent (Department of Environment and Natural Resources) DENR issuances on emission and other environmental standards for power plants."

The first round called for bidders to contract the whole capacity of 1,200 MW and power plants should utilize high efficiency, low emission (HELE) technology.

"We assure the public that Meralco's Terms of Reference (TOR) for the second invitation to bid are pro-consumer, transparent, and will result in least cost, as prescribed in the Electric Power Industry Reform Act (EPIRA).

We wish to thank the DOE and DOE Secretary Cusi for the leadership and guidance in the conduct of the recent successful, historic CSP last September, and we hope to successfully complete the succeeding CSPs for 2020," Valles said.

Meralco remains committed to signing partnerships that can deliver competitive electricity for its customers.

Similar to the first 1,200 MW and 500 MW CSPs, the upcoming CSP bidding will be done in accordance with the DOE Circular requiring distribution utilities to procure power through a CSP.

The CSP will be administered by the Third-Party Bids and Awards Committee (TPBAC) that was constituted pursuant to the DOE Circular.



Basura, usok-lason, iligal na pagputol ng puno, atbp

MATATAPOS na ang taong 2019 at papasok na ang bagong dekada ng 2020 sa ilang raw lamang mula ngayon.

Katulad din ng mga nakaraang taon at dekada, nanatili ang problema ng basura mula sa mga komunidad at establisimento na nagpupunta sa mga sapa, ilog, at karagatan.

Naglabas na ng guideline kama-kailan ang Department of Environment and Natural Resources hinggil sa pagsusunog ng mga basura sa pamamagitan ng mga "haimbentong waste-to-energy" na teknolohiya. Sa maikling salita, ito ay "incinerator." Sunugin ang lahat ng basura dahil may krisis daw sa basura. Paano ngayon magiging enerhiya ang sunog na bagay?

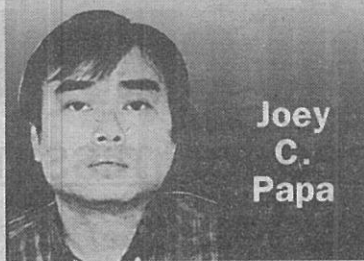
Ang usok-lason nito, ang abo na ibubuga ng makina sa ibabaw at ilalim nito ay saan dadalhin? Sa mga tinatawag nilang "landfill" o tambakan pa rin ng basura?

Lason ang mga sinunog na magkakahalong tira-tirang bagay na naging basura. Kung susunugin, carbon ang ibubuga nito sa hangin na magdudulot ng sakit sa lahat ng buhay sa planetang mundo.

Lalong titindi ang init ng mundo at parang sira ulong papalit-palit na klima na nararamdaman ngayon. Ngayon ay mainit, mamaya ay malamig na klima ang umiiral ngayon.

Sa ganitong kalagayan pa lang ay marami nang nagkakasakit ng ubo, hika, sipon at mataas na lagnat. Kung gagamitin ang "incinerator" o makinang pansunog ng lahat ng uri ng basura, lalo nang malilintikan ang

BANGON KALIKASAN



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kalusugan ng mga tao at lahat ng may buhay sa kalupaan hanggang karagatan.

Isa kaya ito sa sasalubong sa atin sa taong 2020? Ang ibang pagsalanta sa Inang Kalikasan ay ang patuloy na pagputol ng mga puno, pagbabago ng mga lupaing agrikultural o land conversion upang tayuan mga gusaling bato ang mga lupain na karamihan ngayon ay mga dayuhang kapitalista kasosyo ang mga lokal na kapitalista. Huwag na lang intindihin ang mga magsasakang Pilipino? Hayaan na lang silang patuloy na maghirap at magutom! Ito ang nakaririmarim na sasalubong sa atin sa 2020? Ang kabundukan ay bina-bagabag pa rin ng mga pagpuputol ng mga puno, pagbabasag ng mga bundok upang kunin ang mga likas-yaman natin. Ilang buhay na ang nasawi sa pagkalaban sa mga iligal na mamumutol kahit na sila'y kawani ng pamahalaan o forest rangers o mga volunteer forest workers.

May nakausap akong isang mataas na opisyal ng pamahalaan noon at sinabi sa akin na nakapapa-god at nakadidismaya na ang gina-

gawa nilang paghahabol sa mga nagpuputol ng mga puno sa kabundukan. Pagkatakbo, pagkatakas ay muli silang babalik. Ang malungkot, ginagamit na ng mga kapitalista ng iligal na pagtotroso ang mga mahihirap na Pilipino upang gawin ang mga iligal na gawaing ito. Kahit sa pagkakaingin, ginagawa na lang ng mga mahihirap ang pagsunog sa mga punong-kahoy s mismong lugar kung saan nila pinutol ang puno.

Matatapos ang dekada ng taong ito na malungkot dahil sa maraming mga kababayan natin ang namatay dulot ng malakihang pagbaha at lindol. Natatandaan kong sa tuwing matatapos ang taon ay may malaking delubyo ang nagaganap sa bansa. Kadalasan ay pagbaha, pagguho ng mga lupa at landslide. Hindi na maikakaila ang paglubha ng global warming at climate change.

Kung hindi lang sana pinuputol ang mga puno sa kabundukan ay malakas ang kalasag natin laban sa mapangwasak na bagyo na nangyayari sa ating bayan. Habang nangangaunti ang mga puno sa kabundukan, lalong nanganganib ang ating mga buhay mula sa mga "mamamatay-taong" bagyo.

Habang binabasag natin ang mga bundok upang kunin ang likas na yaman natin ay lalong humihina ang panangga natin sa hagupit ng mga bagyo. Malaking proteksyon sa atin ang kapal ng mga puno sa kagubatan at lakas at tibay ng ating mga bundok laban sa kahit anong lakas ng pagbaya, paghagupit ng anumang bagyo.

Kailan titigil ang mga pagsasamantalang ito?

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Local concerns stall SMC's Boracay bridge project

By RICHMOND MERCURIO

San Miguel Corp. (SMC)'s P5.48-billion plan to construct a bridge connecting Malay, Aklan to Boracay island is still facing issues with local stakeholders, preventing the project from moving forward.

Public Works and Highways Secretary Mark Villar said SMC's unsolicited proposal remains pending with the agency due to concerns from the locals as well as the local government.

"All the concerns of the locals must be addressed first. They have concerns about the environment and how the vehicles that will go to Boracay will be managed," Villar said. Villar, who last June said that SMC

Turn to B2

Local... From B1

may soon receive the original proponent status (OPS), said he cannot provide at this point an estimate as to when the project would likely be cleared by the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH).

"For us, we continue with the project vetting. We can't give a set timeline because it will really depend on when the local government and the locals feel that their (SMC) proposal is already acceptable," he said.

"But we are still open to it. But of course, we need to talk with the stakeholders, they can't be taken for granted," Villar said.

The DPWH earlier affirmed that SMC submitted the complete proposal of the Boracay bridge project in January.

Once DPWH clears the project and awards the OPS to SMC, the unsolicited proposal will then be forwarded to the National Economic and Development Authority for evaluation before proceeding with a Swiss challenge.

SMC president and chief operating officer Ramon Ang earlier said the bridge infrastructure proposal is "the most important project" for the country's flagship tourist destination.

Turn to B6

Local... From B2

"That Boracay bridge project is the most important component to save Boracay. It needs to be pushed to be approved by the government," he said.

Plagued by environmental issues, Boracay island was closed to tourists for six months last year for a rehabilitation of vital infrastructure projects.

It reopened on Oct. 26 and now follows a carrying capacity to ensure the sustainability of the island.

SMC said the Boracay bridge project is not envisioned to cater to vehicular through-traffic so as not to congest the island, but will be provided with loading and unloading areas on both ends to process the movement of commuters, solid waste, goods and supplies.

The project aims to facilitate provision of a public transport access system, transport of solid waste and cargo through authorized trucks, as well as carriage of power, telecommunication, water supply and sewer utility lines.



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SMC must address Boracay bridge issues—Villar

By LORENZ S. MARASIGAN
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DIVERSIFIED conglomerate San Miguel Corp. has to address all of the concerns of locals—including environmental issues—before its unsolicited proposal to develop a bridge to Boracay advances.

Public Works Secretary Mark A. Villar said the proposal is “still pending”

as concerns from locals continue to pile up, now including environmental ones.

“There are environmental concerns as to how the vehicles will travel to Boracay,” he said.

Through San Miguel Holdings Corp. (SMHC), the company proposed to build a 1.2-kilometer limited-access bridge between Boracay Island and Panay. When completed, the facility will

serve as all-weather access for vehicles and pedestrians going to and from the premier tourist destination.

Currently, boat services connect Boracay and Panay. The bridge, however, will not cater to vehicular through traffic, but will provide loading/unloading areas to facilitate the movement of commuters, solid waste, goods and supplies.

SEE “SMC,” A2

SMC...

CONTINUED FROM A1

Villar said this development puts Boracay bridge down the non-priority list, especially since the department is gunning to help address traffic congestion in different parts of the Philippines through new roads.

“There’s no definite time [as to when it will be prioritized], but we continue to bet on the project,” he said.

The diversified conglomerate, Villar said, has to convince the locals that the bridge is a necessary addition to further develop the island. “It will really depend on the locals [whether] this proposal will be acceptable to them. But we are still open to it,” he said.

Aside from tourism groups and local boating players, the local government of Aklan has opposed this proposal.

The Boracay bridge aims to “free up Boracay Island from pressures due to overcrowding and overuse of existing facilities, which ultimately produces adverse environmental impact,” proponents had said.



Ways to make New Year revelry safe, pollution-free

By CHITO CHAVEZ

As the New Year's Day celebration nears, an environmental group has pleaded to the public for a safe and pollution-free revelry.

With this, EcoWaste Coalition has identified acts that should be avoided during the New Year's Eve countdown to prevent environmental pollution.

For a nature- and climate-friendly celebration of the upcoming New Year, the Quezon City-based group asked the public and private sectors against lighting firecrackers and fireworks, releasing balloons, setting off sky lanterns, burning trash and used tires, and littering during the revelry.

"We advise all sectors to keep the 2020 countdown activities as ecological as possible. Event organizers should refrain from doing

things that tend to contaminate the air, land and water with wastes and toxins that can harm humans and other living things," said Thony Dizon, chemical safety campaigner of EcoWaste Coalition.

"Local governments, media outfits, shopping malls, hotels, resorts, and households should put the protection of the natural environment a top priority in the many exciting events being planned to ring in the New Year," he added.

Dizon said it should come as a natural act for everyone to ensure "that planned events will cause no harm to the environment and the climate".

He said this is necessary to protect "the right of the people to a balanced and healthful ecology as enshrined in the nation's Constitution".

EcoWaste Coalition also pointed

out that "the ostentatious use of firecrackers and fireworks on New Year's Eve blankets Metro Manila and other highly urbanized places with health-damaging toxic smog and should be totally avoided".

"Money intended for firecrackers and fireworks, which also end up as hazardous litter, should be used instead to support relief and reconstruction efforts in disaster-stricken communities such as those devastated by earthquakes and typhoons Tisoy and Ursula, the group said.

EcoWaste Coalition has also spurned the release of balloons at the stroke of midnight as these will subsequently pop and fall to earth as dangerous marine litter causing harm to aquatic animals that mistakenly eat the balloon pieces or get tangled up in balloon strings.

"Like balloons, sky lanterns can

cause injury and death to animals by the ingestion, entanglement and entrapment in the fallen lantern frames. Sky lanterns may also cause structural fires as well as wildfires, particularly when a lantern lands while the flame is still burning, the group said.

The EcoWaste Coalition also urged revelers not to set rubbish and used tires on fire, warning that open burning creates a toxic cocktail of fine particulates, heavy metals and persistent organic pollutants or POPs like dioxins.

Finally, the group further reminded merrymakers, especially those who plan to greet the New Year in public parks, not to leave food waste and other trash behind.

"Let's keep our parks clean, tidy and safe by not littering, smoking and vaping there at all times," EcoWaste concludes.



Finding opportunity in environmental crisis

FROM climate change to omnipresent plastic waste, 2019 delivered a lot of discouraging environmental news. Several special reports this year from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change documented how global warming is altering the planet's lands, forests, oceans and frozen regions.

Another UN report warned that the Earth is losing species at an alarming rate, with around 1 million animal and plant species facing extinction.

Key causes include changes in land use, such as clearing forests for agriculture; unsustainable fishing rates; climate change; pollution; and the spread of invasive species.

Governments may seem unable or unwilling to confront these challenges, but scholars are proposing innovative solutions. Here are three articles that we published this year that put forth responses to urgent environmental challenges.

Cooling the planet and saving species

CLIMATE-CHANGE and biodiversity loss are interconnected problems that together can seem

overwhelming. But in a study published in April, 18 scientists proposed a "Global Deal for Nature" that can help avert both catastrophic climate change and mass extinction.

The plan identifies about a thousand "eco-regions" on land and sea that each contain unique ensembles of species and ecosystems, and also help curb climate change by storing carbon.

"Our plan would require a budget of some \$100 billion per year. This may sound like a lot, but for comparison, Silicon Valley companies earned nearly \$60 billion in 2017 just from selling apps," Arizona State University conservation scientist Greg Asner, a co-author of the report, wrote for *The Conversation*. "Today, however, our global society is spending less than a tenth of that amount to save Earth's biodiversity."