

08 September 2023 Friday



DENR

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



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GOTCHA JARIUS BONDOC



30 claimants occupy watershed; their structures cause Metro floods

At least 30 individuals and groups claim ownership of swathes of Upper Marikina Watershed. Their claims contravene two laws that declare the area off limits.

The 30 have no land titles. Claims hang only on lot surveys issued by Department of Environment and Natural Resources officers.

The claims cover 1,774.71 hectares – 40,682 basketball courts. Nearly half of Manila.

Using the surveys, claimants sell or lease out plots. Two mansions have been erected, plus a dozen picnic resorts that divert river flow into swimming pools. All have no building or occupancy permits.

Forests were despoiled, roads illegally paved, decades-old trees chainsawed for construction materials, saplings slashed and burnt for charcoal.

Killer floods result from watershed denudation. Every year heavy rains and mud cascade down to Antipolo, Marikina, San Mateo, Cainta, Taytay, San Juan, Mandaluyong, Pasig, Pateros, Taguig and Quezon City.

Deluges collapse bridges and powerlines; submerge homes, shops, schools, hospitals, churches; destroy vehicles, furniture, appliances, clothing, personal memorabilia. Dozens drowned during 2009's Superstorm Yolanda and 2020's Typhoon Ulysses.

Certain DENR geodetic engineers, cartographers, technicians and lawyers issued lot surveys to the claimants between 1997 and 2004. Some are presently being updated. For how much, only they know.

Purported legality is Ferdinand E. Marcos' Presidential Decree 324, October 1973. The edict excluded from Marikina Watershed mountainside portions of Barrios Pinugay and Kayumbay of Teresa and Baras towns, Rizal province.

P.D. 324 is defective. It spelled out the coverage: 17,287,460 square meters. Then it said in figures, "or 1,728,746 hectares" (Official Gazette). Wrongly the P.D. converted one hectare into ten square meters.

But a hectare equals 10,000 square meters. The stated coverage should thus be 1,728.746 hectares.

Two subsequent decrees repeal P.D. 324, moreover. The Forestry Code, P.D. 705, May 1975, declared:

"No land of the public domain 18 percent [10.2 degrees] in slope or over shall be classified as alienable and disposable, nor any forest land 50 percent [26.57 degrees] in slope or over, as grazing land.

"Lands 18 percent in slope or over which have already been declared as alienable and disposable shall be reverted to the classification of forest lands by the

Department Head, to form part of the forest reserves, unless they are already covered by existing titles or approved public land application, or actually occupied openly, continuously, adversely and publicly for a period of not less than 30 years as of the effectivity of this Code."

The Forestry Code invalidates P.D. 324 due to: (1) 18-percent topographic limit, and (2) reversion as forest land. The 1,728.746 hectares are on steep slopes. No title, approved public land application or occupant existed for more than 30 years because P.D. 324 was only a year and a half prior.

There's also Presidential Proclamation 1636, April 1977. It declared as "National Park, Wildlife Sanctuary and Game Preserve" 146,310 hectares of mountains in Rizal, Bulacan, Laguna and Quezon. No hunting, tree cutting, commercial development allowed.

P.P. 1636 includes Marikina Watershed: "Destruction of any vegetation or any act causing disturbances to the habitat of the wildlife herein protected [is] hereby prohibited."

Masungi Georeserve Foundation brought these up at the Jan. 27 hearing of the House of Representatives committee on natural resources. But some congressmen cut off MGF founder Ben Dumaliang, telling him to just submit a position paper. Rizal congressmen initiated the hearing.

Then DENR Sec. Gina Lopez had assigned Masungi in 2017 to rewild 3,000 of the watershed's 26,126 hectares. It has completed 2,000 hectares.

Goons of the claimants, including two police generals, harass Masungi park rangers. Thugs maul and fire at the unarmed reforesters. Latest was on Aug. 26 and 27.

Four-fifths of watershed is bald. But in Masungi Geopark Project monkeys, wild boar, reptiles, rare birds and insects have returned. Over a hundred thousand native trees were planted. Experts recorded more than 500 species of flora and fauna.

Masungi has reaped global and national awards for environment protection. Officers Ann and Billie Dumaliang frequently are invited to address international forums on protecting limestone karst. Dumagat tribesmen in adjoining Kaliwa Watershed Forest hail their work.

But the 30 claimants, backed by politicians, want Masungi out. DENR offers no help to the earth savers, nor care for the yearly ruinous floods.

* * *

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Editorial

Dredging up the threat of sand mining

SAND is as plentiful as the stars, one popular adage goes. The world will never run out of it.

Scientists today beg to disagree. Next to water, sand and gravel are the second largest resource extracted and traded by volume.

Our supply of sand is limited. And we are not replenishing the sand we use.

Because regulations covering sand mining vary from country to country, it is difficult to curb the illegal extraction of sand around the world.

The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) recently developed a global data platform on sand and other sediment extraction. UNEP's Marine Sand Watch tracks sand-dredging activities through a dredging vessel's automatic identification system.

Data gathered by the Marine Sand Watch reveals that the sand-extracting industry is digging up 6 billion tons of sand and other sediment annually, the equivalent of more than 1 million dump trucks a day, the UNEP said.

"The world is approaching the natural replenishment rate of 10 to 16 billion tons per year, which is needed by rivers to maintain coastal and marine ecosystem structure and function," it said.

"We are spending our sand 'budget' faster than we can produce it responsibly," one UNEP official warned in 2019. The data presented by Marine Sand Watch indicates that the warning has gone largely unheeded.

Sand is the primary raw material for construction and land reclamation, but it has myriad other uses, including as the basic ingredient in making glass, paint and even microchips.

The rising demand for sand in construction has spawned a billion-dollar international trade that grows at a projected rate of 5.5 percent a year. Monitoring the shipments of mined sand is the first step in the UNEP's efforts to initiate a productive global conversation on sand extraction.

Because of the wide disparity in rules and practices governing sand mining, the sand industry has managed to skirt legal roadblocks that could otherwise undermine its operation. Some large-scale sand-extracting operations have become powerful enough to challenge local authorities.

In India, a "sand mafia" is said to have been illegally harvesting sand from a village. Those who resist are killed.

In Indonesia, sand from 24 islands have been dug up since 2005 and exported to Singapore to feed that country's construction frenzy.

In the Philippines, a special kind of sand has stirred a controversy that continues to hound communities facing the Lingayen Gulf in Pangasinan.

Magnetite is an iron ore that is a key component in manufacturing steel. It is also a catalyst in the process for making ammonia. It has properties that act as micromagnets for high-tech industrial applications.

It is magnetite that makes some beaches along the Lingayen Gulf black. In 2020, Malacañang was reported to have issued a permit to the Iron Ore, Gold and Vanadium Resources (Phils.) Inc. to dredge 10,000 hectares of the gulf for magnetite. The project allows the company to extract 25 million metric tons of black sand yearly from the gulf.

The sand extractor was given 25 years to haul away a total of 625 million MT of black sand.

Local communities and environmental watchdogs opposed the project, saying the disturbed seabed will stir up sediment that will eventually kill marine life and devastate Lingayen's fishing industry.

The project's critics also claim that it ignores the fact that Lingayen Gulf had been classified as an environmentally critical area (ECA) in 1993 by then-president Fidel Ramos.

As the debate rages over the Lingayen dredging project, massive sand mining continues along the Luzon coastline and as far south as Leyte.

There were reports the Chinese dredgers were "stealing" black sand in the Ilocos region and loading it onto barges bound for China.

Dredging sand to reclaim land from the sea also threatens several towns in Cavite, as Manila Bay, their fishing ground, continues to shrink.

The UNEP has proposed the creation of legal frameworks for sand extraction. More importantly, however, there should be a vigorous campaign to give sand the same prominence as clean air and clean water as a major resource that needs to be sustainable.



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DAVID KATZ Founder and Chairman Plastic Bank



Plastic man saves the world

Entrepreneur uses social recycling to stop the proliferation of plastic waste, and at the same time help alleviate poverty

BY LEAH C. SALTERIO

DAVID Katz has been campaigning to get rid of plastics since he was in his teens in the 1980s.

The sight of plastic rubbish has become a disturbance for him which led him to establish the Plastic Bank and become the "ambassador of social recycling."

Katz was recently in Manila — his sixth time in the country — to further push his advocacy.

"Manila has a very strong part in the story of the foundation of Plastic Bank," Katz said.

"I've always been inspired as an entrepreneur to seek solutions. I've always been looking for an answer for every opportunity.

"Somehow, through all the occurrences in my life, I've been able to train myself to look, to see and find the good in things. What's beautiful [about] that? Even when others may see tragedy or injustice, I can train myself to look for what may be good, what may be the opportunity in it.

"As our life is a gift, everything that occurs inside of it then is as well a gift. So, I've been trained to look, to look and to look."

Katz grew up in Victoria on Vancouver Island, West Coast of Canada and surrounded by the Pacific Ocean.

"At that time, 35 years ago, I already witnessed garbage washing up on the beach where I walk every day on my way to school," he shared.

"I would ride my bike or play on the beach, witnessing trash from the ocean piling up on the beach. So, it has always been in my space. I would see plastic piling up more, and more and more."

Years later, when he became an entrepreneur, Katz became more impassioned on not seeing plastics around him. Plastic Bank is an internationally recognized solution to arrest ocean plastic.

"In April 2013, an organization I belong to, the Entrepreneurs Organization, had an event here in Manila. We all met at [the] Fairmont Hotel in Makati. That was my first time in Manila, 10 years ago.

"One of the special events that we did was do a little bit of a dive at Manila Ocean Park. We did a dive with the sharks. In the scene of the blue water of Manila, I saw what was lying on top of the sea but also what was in the bottom.

"There was so much [more] material in the bottom than what we saw floating at the top. I came to learn that most materials were negatively buoyant. Most plastics sink, so what we see washing up on the shore, what we see floating is only a fraction of what lies in the bottom of the sea."

Katz was so inspired and so moved knowing that something needed to be done. "Before people were talking about the ocean, before they recognized that there was a solution.

"When I first started, people didn't believe me that there were plastics in the ocean. Preventing ocean plastic could be humanity's richest opportunity. We can all be a part of the solution and not the pollution."

When Katz attended an event at Silicon Valley, Singularity University, held by famous futurist of Google, Ray Kurzweil, with Peter Diamandis, a very prominent scientific thinker, they prompted the people who attended into thinking what's called the global grand challenges, things facing humanity.

"They brought in thought leaders for a week, maybe 50 different thinkers from around the world, futurists bringing technology and science to business so we can solve the problems of the world," Katz recalled.

"What you think is what you see. So, I went into thinking powerfully looking for solutions in this global grand challenge. Everything that I was looking at there, does that solve the problem about marine debris?"

"Maybe it's not just changing the shape of the bottle but the way I look at the bottle. How might I then change the way we look at the material? That is the work of Plastic Bank.

"How might I have society look at it differently? How might it now not look like a bottle but access to education? What might have look[ed] like insurance. What might have look[ed] like money?"

"How might [it] look like banking? What might have look[ed] like hope. Inside of all that lies a solution. How might it change the thinking of the material itself?"

Since Katz started Plastic Bank on May 9, 2013, it has been 10 years since he had that realization.

"Plastic is money for the world. If I can reveal it as a currency, that can change society's thinking. That can be something that I gave myself into that thinking, and it began using me.

"I tried to create currency out of plastic. It was a kind of quiet awareness, yet it was a journey. I didn't need to be anything, but I could become it.

"The journey of Plastic Bank has changed the way we perceive the material. If every sachet, bottle or every piece of packaging we saw is easily exchangeable for P100, how many pieces of packaging do we see flowing in the ocean or littered in the environment? None."

Middle of August this year, Plastic Bank crossed the 1 billion mark for plastic bottles in the Philippines alone.

"The equivalent of 1 billion bottles collected, translated, the value transferred into the hands of humble Filipinos providing a space for people to have resilience and hope," Katz said. "Around the world, we collected over 5 billion bottles.

"We started in Haiti, then we came to the Philippines, and we opened in Brazil. We went to Indonesia, opened in Cameroon (Africa), Egypt and Thailand. We continue to grow as a multinational today. We are in seven countries at the moment, continuing to expand and grow.

"Billions of bottles, tens of thousands of people are registered in the collection ecosystem, perhaps affecting hundreds of thousands of the humble [people] around the world."

Last year, the Philippine government enacted an extended producer responsibility law administered through the National Ecology Center. "There is now a law for companies with assets over P100 million to be accountable for their production," Katz granted.

"What we are doing and who we are in the world is the technology to administer the EPR (Extended Producer's Responsibility) Law globally. We provide a space to administer EPR schemes. That's how governments around the world help us by enacting laws to benefit society."

Plastic Bank, which started in the Philippines in 2016, is a gig economy model, where everyone gets an ability to create an extra source of income. "It can be a side gig or a full-time gig," Katz informed.

"That's really what we are. It's a gig economy model.

When I first started, people didn't believe me that there were plastics in the ocean. Preventing ocean plastic could be humanity's richest opportunity. We can all be a part of the solution and not the pollution."

It doesn't have to be your full-time life. Some people live off gig[s], right?

"Every household can look at all the materials inside their house like it's money and realize they can hold the materials and segregate [them]. Every household can join. Everybody has an opportunity to lift. Everyone can look at their material like it's money. That's where we're going."

Katz has three children from a previous marriage. Noah, who's 25, Eliana who's 17 and Ella would have been 23 this September, but they lost her five years ago.

End of August, Plastic Bank launched its credit worthiness. The ambition is to give zero interest loans to the world's poor.

In his recent visit to the Philippines, Katz and his wife, Taylor, who is also an executive of Plastic Bank, awarded one of their collectors from Basco, Tondo, Manila a fish ball cart so he can start his own business.



WAR ON WASTE

David Katz's business model allows people living in poverty to collect plastic and trade it in for material goods such as school tuition, medical insurance, medicine, internet access or cooking fuel. CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

QUICK QUESTIONS

- WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST FEAR?**
There's actually nothing to fear. I'm not fearing what is not yet occurring. But even if something occurs, I can be with it.
- WHAT REALLY MAKES YOU ANGRY?**
My own trauma. When something from my past is back.
- WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO WORK HARD?**
The gift of transformation in people. To witness lives change.
- WHAT MAKES YOU LAUGH THE MOST?**
Liklok. Dad jokes. I love laughing so much.
- WHAT WAS THE LAST BOOK YOU READ?**
Right now, I'm finishing "One Click: Jeff Bezos and the Rise of Amazon.com," by Richard Brandt. I've read more than 600 books so far.
- WHAT CELEBRITY WOULD YOU LIKE TO MEET FOR A CUP OF COFFEE?**
I'm not inspired by a celebrity. I'm inspired by the humble people doing beautiful work. I think I'm more inspired by people. I don't yet know who have done such remarkable things in the world.
- WHAT IS THE MOST DARING THING YOU HAVE EVER DONE?**
The most courageous thing was I became an amateur boxer and fighter when I turned 40. Being inside a ring with hundreds of people watching. It's very vulnerable to go and say I might lose. But I won. It was my effort and triumph that I was proud of.
- WHAT IS THE ONE THING YOU WILL NEVER DO AGAIN?**
Doubt myself.

"What we're doing is to teach people how to fish so they can take care of themselves and eventually, take care of the community around them," Katz said.

"We empower them slowly, so they can help solve the poverty around them."

"It has been said, 'A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.' I can't argue with anyone about anything. I can't try to convince you that plastic is good. I can't tell you that you should recycle.

"But if I give you a transformative learning moment, I can have a bank account, I can have money, I can transcend poverty. Hold on, then you will get plastic. It's so beautiful. It's crazy.

"So, continue to advocate for recyclable materials, regenerative materials. Look for those products that are making the world better. Even if you can't find them, ask the retailers for them who will ask the brands. The consumer is very powerful. That's super important to recognize."

When he was younger, Katz wanted to become a psychologist since he was fascinated by thinking. In college, however, he didn't pursue a medical course.

Katz had a very solid high school education, and both his parents were hoteliers. So, he learned hospitality business earlier on, and went all the way to college. He attended the British Columbia Institute of Technology.

"Business is my creativity. I'm so creative. I learned business with an element of service, what it was to serve, see people and care for people. I am a continuous learner. I have like 600 books in my library. For a long period in my life, I was going through at least a book a week.

"I never stopped learning. So, I don't think having a formal education, but the desire to learn, is important. Continuous learning, continuous learning, continuous learning."



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Plastic is not fantastic

Two decades ago, a popular tune proclaimed that “plastic is fantastic.” Today, we find ourselves facing a very different reality. The plastic crisis looms large, often silent but ever-present, and it’s high time we recognize its urgent threat.

Nearly a year after the gradual easing of pandemic restrictions, our authorities seem to be (quietly) grappling with a monumental challenge — how to address the staggering amount of waste that accumulated during the long pandemic, especially single-use plastics. These plastics, once our protectors against an invisible virus, are now hurting our environment.

Personal protective equipment (PPE), goggles, face shields, gloves, coveralls, head covers, shoe covers, etc. are all made of plastic. These items were vital in stopping the virus's spread and safe-guarding our medical frontliners. Additionally, during the pandemic, plastic usage skyrocketed as nearly every item, from online deliveries to fast-food orders, came wrapped in plastic packaging. The question now is: “Where did all this plastic ultimately end up?”

Environmental advocates I recently spoke to acknowledge that a complete eradication of plastics, specifically single-use ones, may be too radical given our reliance on them. But this crisis is not a hopeless situation as long as we act now before it’s too late.

According to a report from the United Nations Environment Programme, we can address plastic pollution using existing technologies and solutions. The report suggests that we can reduce plastic pollution by a staggering 80 percent by 2040 through a systems change scenario focused on “Re-use, Recycle, and Reorient and Diversify.”

Local environment group, Climate Reality Project Philippines, emphasizes the need to reduce waste at the source, eliminating single-use plastics and adopting reuse schemes. This approach, complemented by pricing policies like levies and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes, is key to turning the tide.

Re-use schemes, such as refillable bottles, bulk dispensers, and packaging take-back programs, hold promise in reducing plastic waste. Governments and industries must collaborate on establishing design standards that facilitate recycling while improving waste collection and sorting systems in communities.

Removing subsidies for fossil fuels that make virgin plastics cheaper than recycled materials would level the playing field for recycling. Plastic wrappers, sachets, and takeaway items must also be replaced with alternative materials like paper, compostables, and recycled plastics.

Yet, even with these measures in place, we will still need to contend with an estimated 100 million metric tons of plastics from short-lived products. To manage this crisis, the UN Environment has further recommendations, which are supported by the Climate Reality Project.

The report suggests that we can reduce plastic pollution by a staggering 80 percent by 2040 through a systems change scenario focused on ‘Re-use, Recycle, and Reorient and Diversify.’

First, we need to prevent microplastics at their source. Private businesses must improve the design of garments, ban the use of intentionally added microplastics to personal care products, among others.

Second, governments need to ensure safe collection and disposal of non-circular plastics. This includes assessing disposal facilities and identifying new capacity needs.

Third, plastic waste exports must be eliminated. Disposal of waste in the country where waste is generated is always preferred, except for cases where the better option is exporting to neighboring countries with better capacity.

Last, we have to deal with ex-

isting plastic pollution. Financing instruments are needed to improve waste management systems. Plastic credit systems must be implemented with environmental and social safeguard systems.

Considering all these recommendations, it is worthy to note that the government has taken initial steps to address the plastic crisis. For one, there is already House Bill 9147, which passed in July 2021, aiming to regulate and eventually phase out single-use plastics in the country. A counterpart bill was already filed in the Senate; last I checked, it was still pending at a committee level. Let’s see what will happen soon.

What’s also encouraging while I was doing research for this piece is the fact that there are a lot of local government units (LGUs) who have enacted their own ordinances to reduce reliance on single-use plastics. But, it is not enough to just rely on the national government or the LGUs. Each one of us has to do our role for the planet.

As responsible citizens, we have a duty to ask the tough questions — Do our local groceries or markets encourage us to use ecobags? Is there a community recycling or up-cycling facility in our neighborhood? How about consumer incentives programs, such as trash-to-cash or plastic waste in exchange for incentives? After the questions, there should be an appropriate action.

We have to always remember that information is power. And we have all the data and information pointing to the reality that single-use plastic can become the next tragic crisis that we may face. There is nothing fantastic about all this plastic trash now clogging our waterways or destroying our marine environment. It’s not too late to change, but change has to start with us, within our own households.

(Johannes L. Chua is the editor of the Environment & Sustainability section.)



EDITORS DESK

JOHANNES L. CHUA



Toxic mercury products sold online despite ban—groups

THE toxics watchdog EcoWaste Coalition on Thursday appealed to online shopping giants Shopee and Lazada to ensure a mercury-free “9.9 mega sale” this coming September 9.

The group made the call after the group monitored listings for banned mercury-added cosmetics and medical devices, as well as posting for mercury for dental use and gold refining.

According to the monitoring conducted by the EcoWaste Coalition on September 7 ahead of the 9.9 sale event, skin-lightening products banned by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for containing mercury above the trace amount limit of one part per million (ppm) continue to proliferate in online shopping platforms.

Among those illegally sold online are cosmetics covered by FDA Advisory Nos. 2022-1347 and 2018-106 (Temulawak Day & Night Cream), 2021-3060 (Golden Pearl Beauty Cream), 2021-3043 (Parley Goldie Advance Beauty Cream), 2021-1187 (88 Total White Underarm Cream), 2021-0646 and 2017-314 (Collagen Plus Vit E Day & Night Cream), 2017-289 (Goree Beauty Cream with Lycopene and Goree Day & Night Beauty Cream), 2015-025 (S’Zitang 7 Days Specific Whitening & Spot AB Set and S’Zitang 10-Day Whitening & Spot Day Night Set), 2013-053-A (Feique Herbal Extract Chinese Herbal Formula Whitening Anti-Freckle Set), 2010-004 (Jiaoli 7-Day Eliminating Freckle AB Set), and 2010-02 (Jiaoli Miraculous Cream).

Also sold online are other skincare cosmetics reported to the FDA by the EcoWaste Coalition for containing high levels of mercury, including Armena Gold Beauty Cream, 4K Plus Whitening Night Cream, 88 Whitening Cream, Lady Gold Seaweed Gluta/Super Gluta Brightening, Meyyong Seaweeds Super Whitening, Polla Gold Super White, and several variants of Dr. Yanhee, Dr. Wittisak, and Feique facial creams.

The group’s monitoring also revealed the continuing trade in mercury-containing medical devices, such as mercurial sphygmomanometers and thermometers, which the Department of Health (DOH) phased out in 2010 in accordance with DOH Administrative Order No. 2008-0021.

The group also spotted several postings for mercury products used to repair broken or decayed teeth: FDA Circular No. 2022-003 banned the importation, distribution, and sale of liquid mercury and dental amalgam capsules for use in dental restorative purposes.

The group also saw listings for “Hg for gold refining” (Hg is the chemical symbol for mercury). Executive Order No. 79 issued in 2012 banned the use of mercury in small-scale mining and mineral processing.

“We again appeal to Shopee, Lazada and other e-commerce sites to keep their customers safe from health-damaging mercury and mercury-containing products as the 9.9 online shopping promos begin,” Aileen Lucero, National Coordinator, EcoWaste Coalition said.

“To make online shopping mercury-free, they should direct their compliance staff to quickly take down postings for sale of banned mercury-added products such as mercury-containing cosmetics and medical devices, as well as the sale of mercury for dental use and for gold refining.”

Lee Bell, Mercury Policy Advisor to the International Pollutants Elimination Network (IPEN) said: “Online sales of mercury and mercury products need to be eliminated. Illegal mercury-based cosmetics sold online are causing unnecessary and harmful exposure to mercury compounds, especially among women of childbearing age who are highly vulnerable to the neurotoxic effects of mercury, as are their unborn children.”

The Minamata Convention has now phased out nearly all industrial processes and products containing mercury so there is no excuse for online sales of elemental mercury to continue.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), “Mercury is a toxic element. Although mercury occurs naturally, the levels in our air, water, land, food, and bodies have increased, due in part, to use and releases from mercury-containing products. Once released into the environment, mercury and its compounds can build up in fish, wildlife, and humans. Even small amounts of mercury and its compounds can impact human health and the environment.”

Jonathan L. Mayuga



Marcos pushes 'loss and damage' fund for climate action

JAKARTA – President Marcos has pushed for a loss and damage fund to support measures aimed at mitigating the impact of climate change, which he described as one of the “complex challenges” confronting the international landscape.

Speaking during the 18th East Asia Summit yesterday, Marcos pointed out that countries with the smallest carbon footprints disproportionately bear the heaviest burden of climate change.

“We need to urgently realize the loss and damage fund to catalyze assistance to address climate change,” the President said.

“Climate financing, complemented by viable and effective technology transfer and country specific capacity-building, is needed to expedite a just transition to a climate-resilient economy,” he added.

Marcos also urged his fellow leaders to back the development of strategic minerals supply and value chains that would strengthen efforts to ensure a resilient and sustainable future for the region.

He also emphasized the need to work together on climate action during the 26th ASEAN Plus Three Summit and the 20th ASEAN-India Summit.

He said global challenges, such as cli-

mate change, ocean waste and pollution, shift to clean energy, creation of smart cities, and urban sustainability require the partnership of governments and the private sector to ensure that they are effectively addressed in a sustainable and resilient way.

“Looking ahead, we hope to see more ASEAN-India cooperation in protecting the environment, addressing climate change, and promoting biodiversity through the ASEAN-India Green Fund,” the President said during the regional bloc’s summit with India.

– Alexis Romero



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DPWH justifies P216-B fund for flood management in '24

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ @joveemarie

THE Department of Public Works and Highways on Thursday defended the agency's huge allocation for the Flood Management Program worth P215.6 billion next year, as the Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department (CPBRD) and lawmakers observed that this program is even bigger compared to the budgets of the four departments: Transportation, Social Welfare and Development, Health, and Agriculture.

At a briefing on DPWH's 2024 budget, Public Works and Highways Secretary Manuel Bonoan said the agency is only implementing President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s commitment to address flooding in different parts of the country while studying the possible construction of water impounding facilities and water reservoirs to help mitigate the impact of climate change, including El Niño.

In April, Marcos ordered the creation of a government team to focus on mitigating the impact of the looming El Niño phenomenon, expected to hit from July to September this year and to last until 2024.

"One of the areas we are looking at is the implementation of flood control programs, particularly in 18 major river basins. We assure you that we are looking for a perma-

nent and sustainable river basins program," Bonoan told lawmakers.

"The President wants to emphasize that this is not only for flood control that we are looking at. We have to coordinate with other agencies so it will be water management resources. That is our priority program," he said.

The country has more than 4,000 river basins.

"The President himself gave the specific instruction for the department to look into the flooding problems in many areas of the country because of the climate change phenomenon. We are looking for immediate action to address flooding at the same time we are looking at the long-term solution to this problem," Bonoan said.

Marcos, he added, tasked them to consider the possibility of constructing water impounding facilities, impounding areas near river basins, and water reservoirs for water management, not only for flood control, irrigation, and other purposes.

The DPWH's expenditure program is pegged at P822.2 billion in 2024, 8 percent lower compared to P894.2 billion in 2023. The capital outlay will suffer a 10.40 percent decrease to P783.5 billion in 2024.

The Flood Management Program has a budget of P215.6 billion for 965 projects aimed at flood mitigation.

According to the CPBRD, the P215.6-billion budget for the Flood Management Program is the biggest allocation of the DPWH operations budget at 29.8 percent.

"This is even bigger compared to the budgets of the Department of Transportation (P214.3 billion), Department of Social Welfare and Development (P209.9 billion), Department of Health (P204.6 billion), and Department of Agriculture (P108.5 billion). The DPWH should build good-quality and climate-resilient flood control projects and facilities so that this program truly serves its purpose of protecting lives and properties, especially during disasters and calamities," said the CPBRD.

"Proper monitoring of these funds is also very critical because once these flood control projects are washed out, evidence of improprieties and wastefulness also dissipates," he said.

By major programs, the CPBRD said the DPWH's Flood Management Program is part of new appropriations for next year.

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DPWH justifies P216-B fund for flood management in '24 Continued from A22

Other DPWH major programs include the Convergence and Special Support Program (P174.1 billion), the Network Development Program (P148.1 billion), the Asset Preservation Program (P115.6 billion), the Bridge Program (P45.8 billion), and the Local Program (P25.2 billion).

According to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), El Niño increases the likelihood of below-normal rainfall conditions, which could have negative impacts (such as dry spells and droughts) in some areas of the country. However, in the western part of the country, above-normal rainfall conditions during the Southwest monsoon season (Habagat) may also be expected.

The warmer-than-average sea surface temperature anomalies across most of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific signified that a weak El Niño is present and may strengthen into moderate to strong towards the latter part of the year. Most

climate models predict that this El Niño will likely persist until at least the first quarter of 2024.

PAGASA said the specific impact of El Niño on rainfall patterns depends on the geographical location.

In some regions, such as the western coast of South America, El Niño typically causes decreased rainfall and drought-like conditions. This is because the warm waters of the central and eastern Pacific shift westward, reducing the availability of moisture for rainfall along the coast.

However, in other parts of the world, such as the Philippines, the rest of Southeast Asia, and parts of the southern United States, the El Niño phenomenon can result in increased rainfall.

In its August 23 outlook release, PAGASA said a potential drought is possible in several provinces by the end of February 2024.

These provinces include: Abra, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, Apayao, Mountain Province,

Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan, Cagayan, Isabela, Nueva Viscaya, Quirino, Bataan, Bulacan, Zambales, Aurora, Metro Manila, Batangas, Cavite, Laguna, Rizal, Quezon, Marinduque, Occidental Mindoro, Oriental Mindoro, Romblon, Palawan, Spratly Islands, Albay, Camarines Sur, Catanduanes, Masbate, Sorsogon, Northern Samar, and Sarangani.

Earlier, PAGASA reported several provinces were already experiencing dry conditions due to El Niño.

It said there have been seven severe El Niño events since 1980, with the last one lasting from 2015 to 2016, inflicting \$327 million in agricultural losses.

When the Philippines last endured a full-blown El Niño event in 2019, vast parts of the country, including Metro Manila, reeled from a drought that caused widespread water shortages and farm losses after dams and lakes that supply potable and irrigation water experienced a massive decline in rainfall.



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CITIZEN BAROK

LOUIS BAROK
BIRAOGO

Did NIA's Antiporda ignore the expected water crisis?

EARLIER in July, the Philippines was facing a very serious water supply problem.

Water concessionaires in Metropolitan Manila, the region which apparently uses the largest volume of water in the country, announced plans to cut water distribution to keep the water supply viable until the situation improves.

Those plans, however, were changed by the many typhoons that suddenly came to the country.

The water levels in the country's dams rose to levels high enough to secure the nation's water security for the meantime, estimated to last for only about three months.

Then there is the anticipated El Niño phenomenon, which means a protracted period of intense dryness, as well the unmitigated effects of global warming.

So far, the prognosis on the water supply situation in the Philippines is not very encouraging, particularly for the agricultural industry that depends on irrigation.

The National Irrigation Administration is the government agency tasked to, among others, monitor and develop available water

resources for irrigation purposes, and to address all concerns regarding the supply of water for nationwide irrigation throughout the year.

A certain Benny Antiporda was the Acting NIA administrator for the substantial part of 2022.

News reports available online reveal that Antiporda has been at the center of a number of alleged irregularities in government service.

It appears that back in September 2020, Antiporda, who was then an undersecretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, was questioned about the costly dolomite beach constructed by the DENR along a segment of the coast of Manila Bay.

The dolomite was shipped in from Cebu.

According to the news reports, ex-Kabataan partylist representative Terry Ridon publicly asked Antiporda to explain why the dolomite beach was overpriced at P389-million, with P360-million remaining unaccounted for.

Scientists from the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute and an official of the Archdiocese of Manila also questioned Antiporda about the beach project.

The scientists maintained the project staunchly defended by Antiporda is bad for the environment.

Observers say Antiporda did nothing concrete while he was at NIA to prepare the country's agricultural sector for the anticipated long dry spell

In response, Antiporda insisted at P389-million the dolomite beach project was not overpriced.

For reasons unknown, Antiporda eventually deviated from the issue and criticized Ridon for the latter's past travel expenses.

Sarcastically, Antiporda offered to give Ridon a lecture on basic mathematics.

Impertinently, Antiporda branded the UPMSI scientists "paid hacks" of undisclosed interests groups, and, as such, the scientists

have no right to criticize the dolomite beach project.

Ridon replied he did not need any math lecture from Antiporda because he (Ridon) took up finance and economics at the University of the Philippines and at Harvard University in the United States.

Thereafter, a group of Filipino scientists demanded Antiporda's resignation from the DENR for his rude remarks about the UPMSI scientists.

Actually, Antiporda's statement that the UPMSI scientists have no right to question the dolomite beach project is baseless, patently mistaken and legally untenable because P389-million in taxpayers' money was involved in Antiporda's project.

Being so, the public at large had, undoubtedly, the right to question the cost of the project.

In June 2022, a columnist from another publication revealed that Antiporda made a pseudoscientific attempt to justify the dolomite beach project through a supposed aquarium experiment.

The columnist said Antiporda's experiment was criticized by many for its lack of scientific parameters.

Later in November 2022, when Antiporda was already with the NIA, the Office of the

Ombudsman put Antiporda under preventive suspension for six months without pay, pending the investigation of complaints filed against him by NIA employees.

The complaints accused Antiporda of grave misconduct, harassment and oppression.

According to the complaints, Antiporda threatened NIA employees, bullied them during the weekly flag-raising ceremony, maligned them through the media, misled President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. about certain public-private partnership deals, and required NIA technicians to repair the air-conditioners at the Antiporda residence.

It was also alleged that when Antiporda was still acting NIA administrator, he repeatedly demanded that the word "acting" be dropped from his official title.

In December 2022, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. finally fired Antiporda.

When he was still the acting chief of the NIA, what did Antiporda do to prepare for the dry times predicted for agricultural irrigation nationwide?

Observers say Antiporda did nothing concrete while he was at NIA to prepare the country's agricultural sector for the anticipated long dry spell.

That's bad news for the agricultural sector and the general public as well.



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MPIF aids Batangas town in marine conservation program

Metro Pacific Investments Foundation Inc. (MPIF) and the local government unit of Mabini, Batangas recently signed a memorandum of agreement solidifying their commitment to the conservation and protection of the coastal and marine environment in the coastal town.

MPIF, as the corporate social responsibility arm of Metro Pacific Investments Corp., has always been at the forefront of environmental initiatives. One of its flagship programs is the Marine Protection, Inspection, and Conservation Guardians, an undertaking aimed at preserving the country's coastal and marine biodiversity. Through this agreement, MPIF commits to allocate P1.5 million over three years to cover training, allowances, uniforms, equipment, and logistical support to implement the MPIC Guardians program in Mabini.

Partnering with MPIF, the municipality of Mabini will play an essential role in ensuring the success of the project. They will provide management and monitoring support, collaborate with aligned national government agencies, and institutionalize the project through council resolutions and ordinances.

Beyond the marine conservation efforts, both parties expressed their desire to promote and support other programs initiated by MPIF. These include the Shore It Up Weekend which seeks to raise awareness and encourage participation in environmental protection initiatives not only in Mabini but also in other local government units and national government agencies.

Nestled along the pristine shores of Batangas, Mabini boasts a hidden gem that plays a vital role in preserving marine life diversity and its sustainable conserva-

tion. Blessed with a diverse range of marine ecosystems, there are four designated marine protected areas (MPA) acting as sanctuaries that help alleviate human-induced pressures on these habitats and their inhabitants. These MPAs are Batong Buhay in Barangay Ligaya, Cathedral Rock in Barangay Bagalangit, Arthurs Rock and Twin-Rocks, both in Barangay San Teodoro.

The Marine Guardians of MPIF are local fish wardens or "Bantay Dagat" – individuals committed to the conservation of marine biodiversity in Mabini. By actively monitoring the MPAs, these dedicated guardians play a crucial role in ensuring the integrity of these protected areas. Their presence acts as a deterrent to illegal fishing practices, pollution, and other harmful activities that pose a threat to the marine ecosystem.



(From left to right) Mabini, Batangas Vice Mayor Leonido Bantugon, Mayor Nilo Villanueva and MPIF president Melody del Rosario during the MOA signing.



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BUT VOLCANO STILL ON ALERT LEVEL 3

OVER 5K EVACUEES ON WAY HOME AS THREAT OF MAYON BLAST EASES

By Ma. April Mier-Manjares
@MaAprilMierINQ

LEGAZPI CITY—More than 5,000 people, who took shelter in makeshift huts in Sto. Domingo, Albay, after they were forced to leave their communities in June due to Mayon Volcano's unrest, would be sent home on Friday now that the possibility of an explosive eruption had been assessed to be "very low."

But Sto. Domingo Mayor Joseling Aguas Jr. said 1,588 families in the villages of Lidong, Fidel Surtida, Sta. Misericordia and San Fernando, were still advised to refrain from entering the 6-kilometer radius permanent danger zone due to the threats of ashfall, lava flow and pyroclastic density currents (PDCs or ash and debris flow) along the slopes of the volcano.

"Still, residents are advised to always be prepared in case the situation worsens," Aguas said in an advisory.

These residents, who are living inside the 7-km danger zone of the volcano, built huts made of bamboo, nipa leaves and light materials since they were evacuated on June 12 to the villages of Salvacion and San Andres.

Lahar

Edgar Balidoy, head of Sto. Domingo municipal disaster risk reduction and management office, said the families would be given relief goods before they return home while the 80 farmers who were tilling farmlands inside the permanent danger zones of the volcano would still be given livelihood assistance by the Department of Agriculture.

"The village officials will

monitor the residents, especially the farmers, to make sure that no one will enter the danger zones," Balidoy said in a phone interview on Thursday.

More than 300 families were also sent home in the last week of August in the villages of Tandarora and Muladbuca Grande, while at least 533 families from Barangay Maninila would remain in evacuation centers due to threat of lahar flow.

After the decampment in the two towns, only 3,922 families, or 13,872 people, will be left in evacuation centers from 19 villages, records from the Albay Public Safety and Emergency Management Office (Apsemo) showed.

Cedric Daep, Apsemo chief, said families living inside the 6-km permanent danger zone would stay in shelters until the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) downgrades the current alert level 3 on Mayon.

"We will decamp the [residents living inside] the 6-km danger zone once it is lowered to alert level 2," Daep said in a text message on Thursday.

Most of families in the cities of Tabaco and Ligao, and the towns of Sto. Domingo, Guinobatan, Camalig, Malilipot and Daraga were evacuated on June 9, a day after Phivolcs raised Mayon's alert level to 3, meaning there was an "increased tendency toward a hazardous eruption."

Paul Karson Alanis, resident volcanologist of Phivolcs in Legazpi City, said the effusive eruption was still ongoing, where lava flow is observed, but the chance of an explosive eruption would be "very low" based on the parameters monitored since last month. INQ



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The Manila Times



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'ADAPT NOW AS HOTTER HEAT WAVES HIT'

PARIS: Conservationists and the fishing and tourism industries must take pre-emptive measures to protect wildlife and livelihoods as the El Niño phenomenon amplifies marine heat waves already made more intense and frequent by climate change, scientists said on Wednesday.

The naturally occurring weather pattern originates in the Pacific Ocean and drives increased heat worldwide, bringing drought to some areas and heavy rains elsewhere.

The central and eastern Pacific, parts of the western United States, Ecuador, Peru and the Indian Ocean are most likely to be hit hardest by longer and intensified heat waves.

Historical data show these regions to be vulnerable to mass die-offs of marine habitats including coral reefs and kelp forests, nine experts wrote in a comment in the journal "Nature."

Preparing for the heat waves in the months ahead would stave off or soften their consequences,

buying precious time for species, ecosystems and connected industries to adapt, they said.

The extreme events "show us what the long-term future might be like under climate change, when these warm ocean temperatures will be experienced every day," said report co-author Alistair Hobday.

"A combination of climate warming and extreme events will make life difficult for species that are already living close to their maximum tolerance,"

like corals, he told Agence France-Presse.

Authorities should set up warning systems so local communities can act, for instance, by relocating fish species to cooler waters, reducing harvest quotas, or closing fishing areas altogether, the scientists noted.

These can range from ocean weather forecasts reliable a week in advance to long-term climate projections that take into account manmade greenhouse gas emissions. **AFP**