

DATE : 25 AUG 2019
DAY : Sunday

DENR

IN THE NEWS

Strategic Communication and Initiative Service

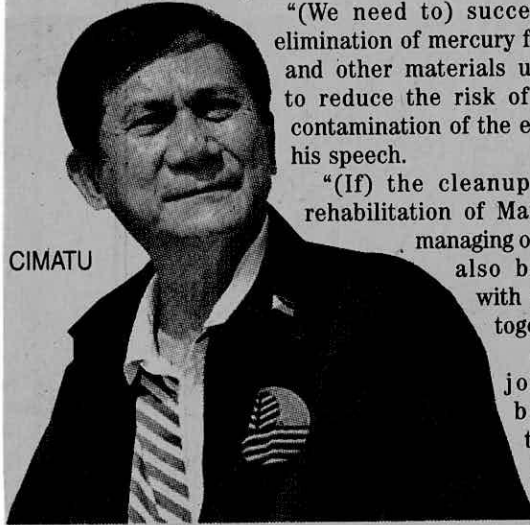


DENR chief bats for a mercury-free Phl

Mercury exposure can pose serious harm to a person's nervous, immune and digestive system

Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Roy Cimatu has made an appeal to both the government and the general public to manage mercury wastes and "an environmentally sound manner."

At the launch of the country's National Action Plan (NAP), the DENR chief for the phase-out of mercury-containing products and wastes, Cimatu stressed that making the country a mercury-free country should be a "shared responsibility."



CIMATU

"(We need to) successfully carry out the elimination of mercury from consumer products and other materials utilized in the industry to reduce the risk of human exposure and contamination of the environment," he said in his speech.

"(If) the cleanup of Boracay and the rehabilitation of Manila Bay was possible, managing our mercury waste (would also be) certainly possible with every one of us working together."

Crafted under a project jointly implemented by the DENR and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), NAP provides a

detailed five-year full implementation document of the activities and actions that the government needs to undertake.

The projects financed by the Swiss government is supported by the Philippine government in managing and controlling mercury-containing products with a life cycle approach in accordance with the Minamata and Basel Conventions.

NAP is also a product of collaboration among 10 government agencies.

"The completion of the NAP likewise increases confidence in the country's readiness for the implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury," Cimatu noted.

A copy of the NAP was already turned over to the DENR and it was received by the agency's Foreign Assisted and Special Projects Service Director Lourdes Wagan on behalf of Cimatu last 30 July 2019 in Mandaluyong City.

Earlier in March, DENR identified five bodies of water in Luzon and Mindanao that have high levels of mercury, among which are Manila Bay in Metro Manila and Meycauyan River in Bulacan.

The Minamata Convention is the world's first legally binding treaty to phase out mercury. It was in 2013 when the Philippines along with 127 other countries signed the convention regulating the use and trade of mercury.

The Philippine Senate has yet to ratify the convention, which entered into force in August 2017, but Cimatu said the DENR has already "spearheaded the ratification process in consultation with the relevant government agencies and stakeholders."

Further, the DENR chief revealed that the ratification document has already been endorsed by the Department of Foreign Affairs to the Office of the President.

Maria Romero



National action plan against mercury launched

ACHIEVING a mercury-free Philippines is not a job for a single person or official but a shared responsibility of the government, private sector and civil society to include the general public.

This was what Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu emphasized during the launching of the country's National Action Plan (NAP) for the total phase-out of mercury-containing products and

wastes.

"Each of us has a role to play, and with the Philippines' upcoming ratification of the Minamata Convention, it is incumbent upon us to properly manage mercury and its wastes in an environmentally sound manner," Cimatu said.

The Minamata Convention is the world's first legally binding treaty to phase out mercury, a highly toxic substance that poses threats to the environment

and human health.

NAP was crafted under a project jointly implemented by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

The project also assisted the Philippine government in the management of mercury-containing products with a life cycle approach in accordance with the Minamata and Basel Conventions.

NAP is a product of collaboration among 10 government agencies, and provides a detailed 5-year full implementation document of the activities and actions that the government will undertake.

According to Cimatu, NAP is a crucial and important document that will enable Philippines to successfully carry out the elimination of mercury from consumer products and other materials used in industries that greatly

reduce the risk to human exposure and contamination of the environment.

"The completion of the NAP likewise increases confidence in the country's readiness for the implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury," Cimatu pointed out.

In 2013, the Philippines was one of the 128 countries that signed the Minamata convention, which regulates the use and trade of mercury.

Joel dela Torre



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Solid waste management ng Antipolo sinaluduhan ng DENR

Tumanggap ng dalawang Plaque of Recognition ang Antipolo City Government para sa Best Available Practices at Best Environmental Technology.

Sa ginanap na 4th Annual Environmental Summit kamakailan sa Taal Vista Hotel, Tagaytay City ay pinaboran at kinilala ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) IV-A ang solid waste management ng pamahalaang local kung saan kabilang ang Antipolo sa mga piling-piling LGUs na kinilala ng DENR ngayong taon.

“Ang lungsod ng Antipolo ay ang ating tahanan na dapat

nating panatiliing malinis, maayos, at maganda. Mahigpit po nating ipinapatupad ang mga ordinansa at programa sa wastong pamamahala ng basura para tugunan ang kalinisan ng ating siyudad. Nakakataba po ng puso ang pagkilala ng pamahalaang nasyunal dahil patunay ito na epektibo at tama ang ating ipinaglalabang pangarap para sa Antipolo,” pahayag ni Mayor Andeng Ynares.

Sa pangunguna ng City Environment and Waste Management Office (CEWMO), kabilang sa award winning practices ng Antipolo City ang paggamit ng bri-

quetting machine at composting bin sa pagreresiklo ng mga basura. Best practice din ng lungsod ang paggamit ng Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) sa pamamahala ng mga basura at ang walang tigil na information campaign sa 16 na barangay.

Pinarangalan at kinilala ng Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) noong 2018 ang lungsod bilang Hall of Fame Awardee sa Environmental Compliance Audit (ECA). Kasama rin sa mga prestihiyosong parangal na nakamit ng pamahalaang lokal ang Manila Bayani Award at Top Performer Award.



Gina Lopez: Breaking the norm, she made friends and foes

By **Mariejo S. Ramos,**
Jhesset O. Enano
and **Maricar Cinco**
@Team_Inquirer

Close to her last day on earth, Gina Lopez was still giving encouraging words to friends and coworkers to push on with their projects to protect the environment and help impoverished communities even as she was losing her own battle with cancer.

Jen Santos, director of Bantay Kalikasan, ABS-CBN Foundation's environmental arm, had gotten in touch with Lopez at the hospital more than a week before she died to give her some good news—the establishment of two new project sites for poor and indigenous communities in Samar province.

"She replied that she was proud of what the organization has achieved," Santos said. "She really believed in area development, 'completos recados,' with projects for the upliftment of the child, the family and the environment."

The two sites in Samar are covered by Lopez's Investment in Loving Organizations for Village Economies, or iLOVE, a development project.

Lopez died on Aug. 19. She was 65.

Her brother, Ernie Lopez, said she had loved people and the environment intensely—"todo, todo, walang preno."

"I can summarize her earth warrior creed into this: love of God and of country," he said in his eulogy for her on Wednesday.

Finding purpose

Outspoken in her passion to save the planet, Lopez was unabashedly eccentric, breaking the unspoken norm of prim and proper behavior often expected of members of the Philippine elite. She was the second of seven children of the late ABS-CBN chair Eugenio Lopez Sr.

She earned admiration not for the Lopez name but for the way she had refused to rely on that early on as a teen to seek her purpose and meaning in this world.

At 18, she turned away from the comfort and privilege of her wealthy family to become a yoga missionary with Ananda Marga, a global spiritual and social service movement. She served in Europe, India and Africa over two decades.

Writing for Rogue magazine in 2016, Lopez said she learned how to treasure the little things the poor have when she lived in the slums in Kenya for six years. "I lived as the poor lived, so I

learned how not to be wasteful—a trait I carry to this day where I use every bit of everything," she wrote.

Returning home in the early 1990s, Lopez was appointed head of ABS-CBN Foundation, her family corporation's charitable arm, and then she plunged into her lifelong advocacies.

She spearheaded Bantay Bata 163, the country's first hotline for abused children, and oversaw educational TV shows, such as Sineskwela, a science program that became a staple for kids in the '90s.

But it was her love for the environment that she became most vocal and known for.

She initiated the rehabilitation of Pasig River through the Kapit Bisig para sa Ilog Pasig. In 2010, she was appointed by then President Benigno Aquino III as chair of the Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission until 2016.

She emerged as an environmental firebrand who was unafraid to immerse in communities or verbally spar with big businesses that befouled waterways, and destroyed forests and mountains. Friends and colleagues said she was staunch, uncompromising, steadfast and passionate.

"It is so rare for environ-

mental activists to work with the so-called elite, but she [was] different," said Rodne Galicha, who leads the Climate Action for Sustainability Initiative.

Climbing mountains

"At first, her presence [was] intimidating, but she [believed] in the capabilities of the people she [worked] with," he said. "She climbed mountains, ate with the grassroots [community]."

Galicha said he introduced Sibuyan Island, tagged as the "Galapagos of Asia," to Lopez in 2011. At the time, a mining company was threatening to extract nickel at the foot of the island's

famous Mt. Guiting-Guiting.

"[Lopez] encouraged us to see and act on opportunities to benefit from and coexist with nature [and] its beauty, within its carrying capacity," Galicha said.

Lopez also helped establish and promote ecotourism sites around the country, including the Cantingas River in Romblon, and started programs to preserve the mangrove forests for community-based activities like kayaking and other tours in Lobo, Batangas.

During a courtesy call on then newly elected President Duterte in Davao City, she reportedly lectured him on the



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Gina Lopez: Breaking the norm, she make friends and foes



As long as you think it's hard, it will be hard. We can't think so. We have to think big. Let the others take the easy task, we need to take on the most difficult

Susan Afan, quoting Gina Lopez
ABS-CBN Foundation managing director

country's environmental problems and the need for a firm policy to care for it. He then asked her to head the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), which she accepted days later.

Wasting no time, she stripped the environmental certificates of mine operators that allegedly violated mining laws. As a result, over 20 mines were shut down and five others were suspended, stunning the mining industry.

"I have a bias. I do. I have a bias for social justice and common good," she said then.

Her assault against a powerful industry cost her her job. In May 2017, just 10 months as environment secretary, the Commission on Appointments rejected her.

Political will

The green group Kalikasan said she proved that meaningful change could be achieved through "unabashed political will."

"We may never see someone who can unite the entire country in a rallying cry to save the environment the way Gina did," it said.

People who made a living on the ecotourism projects that she helped develop, worried

whether their livelihood and the campaign against mining that threatened them could be sustained after her death.

She was the "inay" (mother) of the people in Batangas, according to Catholic priest Dakila Ramos of the Archdiocese of Lipa.

With Lopez gone, so was the "push" that drove communities to choose sustainable livelihood over mining, Ramos said.

"We worry who will take her place," he said.

Lopez also was the "adopted daughter" of Romblon, leading the fight against mining companies that threatened the densest forest on the island.

Iglesia Filipina Independiente bishop for Romblon and Mindoro, Ronelio Fabriquier, said Lopez also helped in their "crusade" that eventually forced a Canadian mining company to stop its exploration plans on Tablas, another island in Romblon province.

Keeping pace

After she left the Duterte Cabinet, Lopez continued her work on the environment and other projects, but coworkers said it wasn't always easy to keep pace with her energy.

Susan Afan, managing director of ABS-CBN Foundation, recalled one time when Lopez was "having one of her days."

The foundation was planning to build its 18th ecotourism project then, but Lopez wanted to add five more sites, including her "Yolanda legacy project," despite their limited resources.

"It just so happened that I was also having one of [my days]. I shut the door and told her: We needed to talk. It was too much. We needed to streamline our operations, we needed to focus, we were re-opening our children's village again," Afan said she told Lopez.

And then, she got a dose of Lopez's can-do spirit.

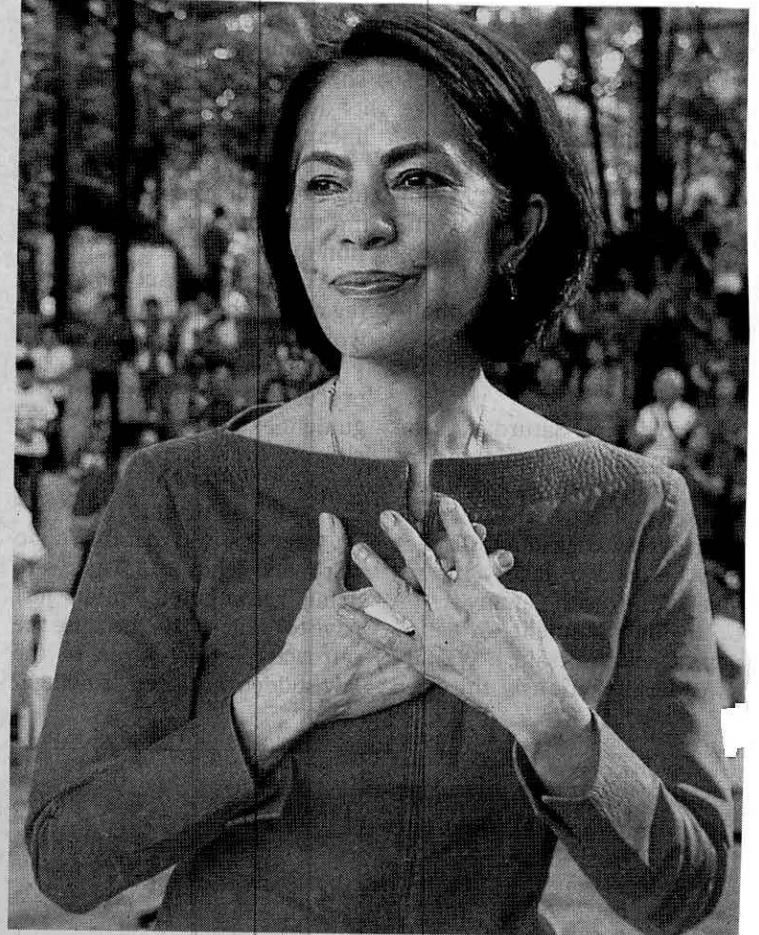
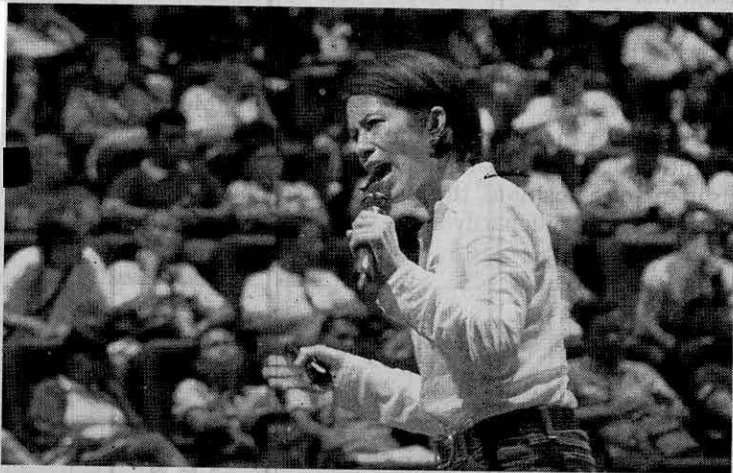
"In Gina fashion," Afan said, "she took a deep breath, she closed her eyes, made me wait and anticipate, then opened her eyes and said to me: 'Susan, as long as you think it's hard, it will be hard. We can't think so. We have to think big. Let the others take the easy task, we need to take on the most difficult.'"

It was like Lopez wanted Afan and everyone else to live the words of her favorite song:

"If I can see it, then I can do it/If I just believe it, there's nothing to it/I believe I can fly/I believe I can touch the sky."
INQ

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Gina Lopez: Breaking the norm, she made friends and foes



PASSION AND COMPASSION Former Environment Secretary Gina Lopez journeyed through life as a yoga missionary and later as protector of the environment and champion of child rights and poor communities, winning respect from both supporters and detractors. She died of cancer on Aug. 19 at 65. —INQUIRER/CDN PHOTOS



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Gina Lopez: 'She was a dynamo of love and compassion'

The earth warrior's younger brother talks about his sister, to whom nothing was impossible, didn't take 'no' for an answer, and wanted to change the whole world

By **Alya B. Honasan**
@Inq_Lifestyle

It was a common observation of visitors to the wake of ABS-CBN Foundation chair Gina Lopez, who passed away on Aug. 19 at age 65: She looked absolutely beautiful and peaceful lying in state in a scarlet dress, woven flowers in her hands.

Friends and relatives came in droves to pay tribute—but the most heartfelt tributes came from her own siblings. Last Aug. 21, during Gina's necrological rites at ABS-CBN's Studio 10, Ernie Lopez, president of ABS-CBN Publishing and Creative Programs Inc., talked about how his older sister, the second among the late Geny and Chita La'O Lopez's seven children, "loved people so much, and loved the country so much that she left our family."

"Gina had an energy, a passion, and a vision; I don't know anyone else like that," says Ernie. "It's passion and compassion."

He cites the most recent example: In 2017, Gina received a \$10,000 award as part of her Seacology Prize, given by the renowned nonprofit organization based in Berkeley, California, that works to preserve island ecosystems and cultures around the world. Gina was chosen "in recognition of her untiring environmental advocacy in the face of powerful opposition."

That was about the time a friend approached Gina to tell her about the plight of Kinatarkan, a community in Cebu where fishermen made less than P200 a day. "She poured that money into Kinatarkan. She doesn't use it for herself; she teaches them how to pass it forward, not just receive it."

One organization will learn how to earn money, Ernie recounts, then will move on to train the next organization in a nearby community. "I'm praying that even now that she's gone, we can continue that same spirit of helping each other, inculcating a spirit of passing it on to help them see that we are also responsible for other people."

No limits

Ernie remembers his sister as "a nonstop dynamo of energy and love and compassion," a woman "with no limits. Nothing

was impossible, and she didn't take 'no' for an answer. She wanted to change the whole world, and she wanted to start with her country."

There are many visionaries with great ideas, but "Gina was

a doer," Ernie says. "She would focus on a small part of the problem, then get results, then go out and convince people that she could do it again. That was her style—not just platitudes, but getting communities and parties together.

"Even the NPA liked her; she could talk to the military, local government, businessmen, and she could give anybody a dressing down."

He shares how he and sister Berta Lopez Feliciano had the same strategy when they spoke to Gina, who was "ADHD on steroids—her eyes were always looking everywhere! We would hold her face in both hands, and say, 'Gina, I'm talking to you, focus, look at me!' But that was still no guarantee that she'd listen to you."

Ernie liked going on vacations with his oldest sister, as they traveled at the same fast, frenetic pace, filling every second with something to do. "I like to make the most of it, and she was exactly like that. In fact, she was the first person I ever met who tired me out."

Gina had her quiet moments, as well, however. "She would wake up at 3 or 4 a.m. to meditate. In the car, on long trips, she was knocked out."

She also had an uncanny ability to read her siblings' feelings. Younger brother Monmon, who is based in San Francisco, California, says he will miss Gina because "she gave the best hugs. That's how I always knew she loved me, even if we saw each other only four times a year."

A few years ago, because of some personal challenges, Ernie recalls through tears how he was so down. "I didn't have money for a birthday party for myself. You know what she did? She threw a birthday party for me. She invited me and my friends to go mountain biking in La Mesa Ecopark, then got a caterer and fed us in her house.

"She didn't know what was happening with me—but she knew. God told her I needed her. Wow, if we all listened to God the way Gina did, *tapos na ang problema*. It would be heaven on earth. Nobody can take her place." INQ

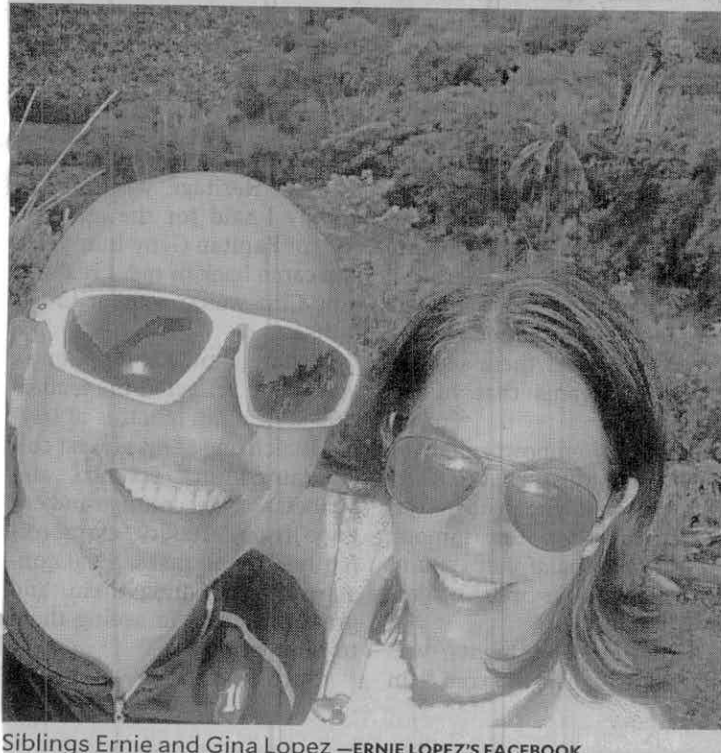


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Gina Lopez : she was a dynamo of love and compassion



"Inculcating a spirit of passing it on." —GINA LOPEZ'S INSTAGRAM



Siblings Ernie and Gina Lopez —ERNIE LOPEZ'S FACEBOOK



G IS FOR GENUINE

A close encounter with Gina Lopez

By **REDGE TOLENTINO**

illustration by **OTEPH ANTIPOLO**

I first heard about Gina Lopez the same way many Filipinos probably did—with her appointment as secretary for the Department of Energy and Natural Resources (DENR). Being a journalist, I was probably at my desk, writing. I heard the name “Lopez” and “government posting” and thought, “same-old, same-old.” Rent-seeking families. Done deal.

But then she got rejected. Over mining closures. And I’ve been working in the industry long enough to know that nothing in politics is ever truly a coincidence. So I dug.

Basic research revealed that she was indeed a Lopez scion, second of seven kids, and a runaway. In a country where millions are living in poverty, Ms. G chose to run away from a life of easy comfort to live in Portugal, India, and then Africa, almost as a refugee. She spent years lining up for water, eating sparsely, meditating... Her life read like *Eat. Pray. Love.*, if that lasted for two decades.

When she came back in 1993, Ms. G started Bantay Bata 163, as well as several TV shows. I now realize that I and many other “*batang* ’90s” kids owe her our formative years. It was her who started *Bayani*, *Hiraya Marawari*, *Math Tinik*, and *Sineskwela*—educational daytime TV shows that are now cancelled, probably because they didn’t make a lot of money, though they damn well made a difference.

At her eulogy on Wednesday, Susan Adam recounted a time when Ms. G, who constantly insisted on national-level changes almost weekly, asked her: “Susan, am I ‘*topak*’ (crazy/mental)?”

At which point Susan raised her hands to sky and put on an expression that said: “You realize this *now*?” So she said yes. Confirmed. *Topak*. But then Ms. G retorted, calmly, “But

you’re *topak* too, right?”

This anecdote struck me for three reasons. One, because it was funny. Two, because it wasn’t the first time I’ve heard someone call her “*topak*.” A friend mentioned that she once called for a meeting of CEOs from all of the country’s top mining corporations. All these businessmen with their entourages—big money people—shifted their schedules just to accommodate the request of a maverick government secretary threatening to close down their mines. They showed up, each probably prepared to discuss extensive workarounds. Instead, they walk into a prayer meeting. Ms. G had (allegedly) arranged for nuns to place their hands over the CEOs, praying that God descend and make them feel genuine love for country.

Hilarious. One just can’t make that stuff up.

Which brings me to the third reason why Susan’s “*topak*” anecdote was so remarkable: Because nowadays, having the same almost child-like wonder and naivety that Ms. G showed every single day qualifies as insane. In asking “but you’re *topak* too, right?” Ms. G was asking: “But we believe the same things, right? We can change the world, right?”

Now up to this point, everything is from something I’ve only read about or heard. So let me tell you about the time I met Ms. G.

My Gina Lopez moment, which happened earlier this year, was five minutes off her hectic schedule one afternoon in her office. At the behest of my mom, I was called in for a possible assignment.

I was somewhat apprehensive. I tried to walk in as quietly as I could. Even the air-conditioner was making more noise. But my mom introduced me and Ms. G beamed: “Ah, so you’re Trina’s son! Do you sing? Do you dance?” she asked as we shook hands.

“I—”

“He’s cute! Trina, he should sing and dance!”

My mom smiled. Ms. G turned back to me.

“You should sing and dance. How old are you? Do you have a girlfriend? Boyfriend?”

Deer-in-headlights moment. I was nailed to the chair. I felt the effects of sudden global warming. But Ms. G sat next to me, looked me right in the eye as if saying: “People? What other people? It’s just you and me, *ih*o.”

But what she said was “So come on, tell me about your love life.”

Now, I’m used to interviewing people. I know when they’re nervous. I know when they’re defensive. I ask friendly questions, I smile, I joke. I prod. Everything to get at the story. And now with me on the receiving end of questions, the *last* thing I wanted to broadcast to an entire office of strangers was my *entire love story*.

So I don’t know how she got it out of me. Something about her just felt...*real*.

I told. Oh did I tell. She even managed to get pictures. Pictures! *Geezas*. I don’t have a single couple pic online and there I was. Scrolling. Ugh.

But it was worth it. Ms. G dispensed a tender measure of advice on life and relationships, before tapping my hand to say, “You should sing and dance” one last time, before heading to another meeting.

It was the last time I would see her.

What I finally took away from those five minutes crystallized everything I’ve read or heard about her, and gave me a realization.

In an era of fake news and puppet politicians, true public servants exist, and Ms. G was one of them. She was an environmentalist in show business who wasn’t doing it for show, a personality who cared about persons, and a philanthropist who gave at least one writer something that felt a lot like hope.

Thank you, Ms. G.



STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
INITIATIVES
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THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
SINCE 1900
MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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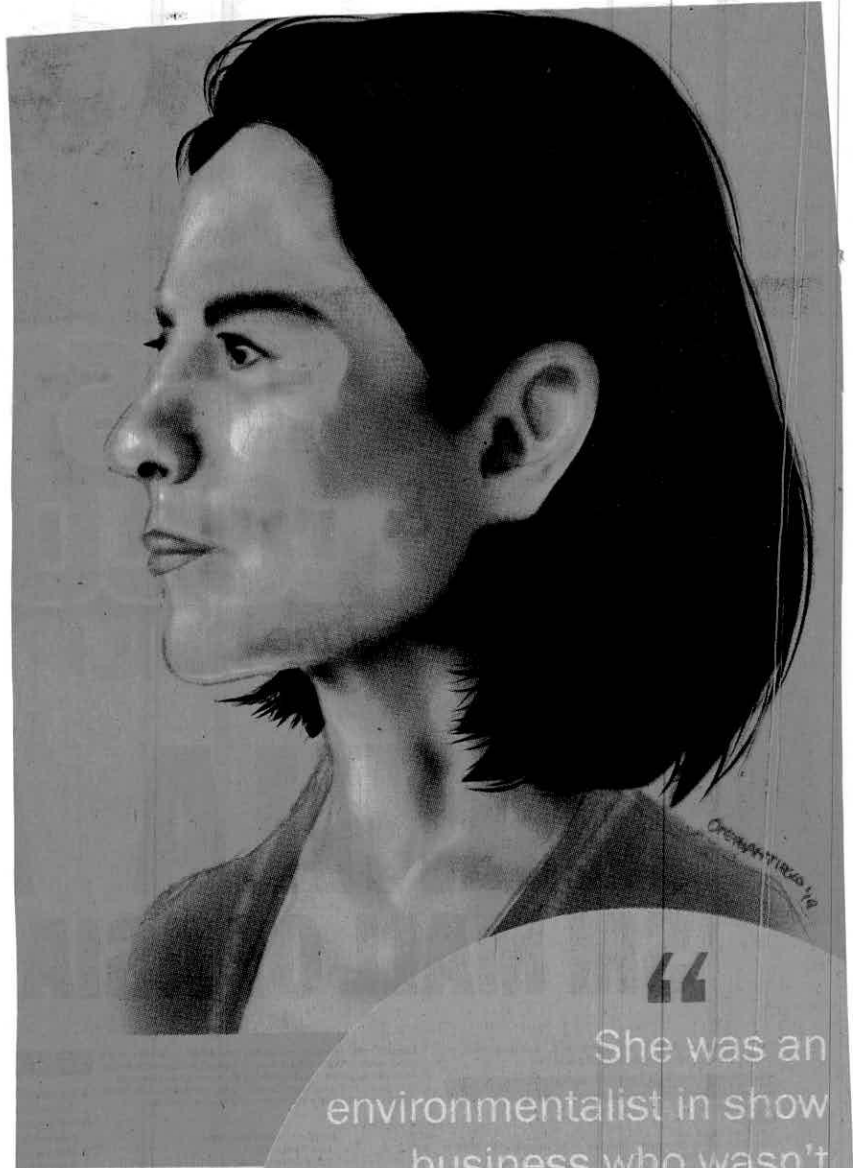
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G 15 For Genuine



“
She was an environmentalist in show business who wasn't doing it for show, a personality who cared about persons, and a philanthropist who gave at least one writer something that felt a lot like hope.
”

Reginald C. Tolentino writes freelance. He gravitates toward sci-fi, fantasy, and creative non-fiction. He is now seriously considering a career in singing and dancing.



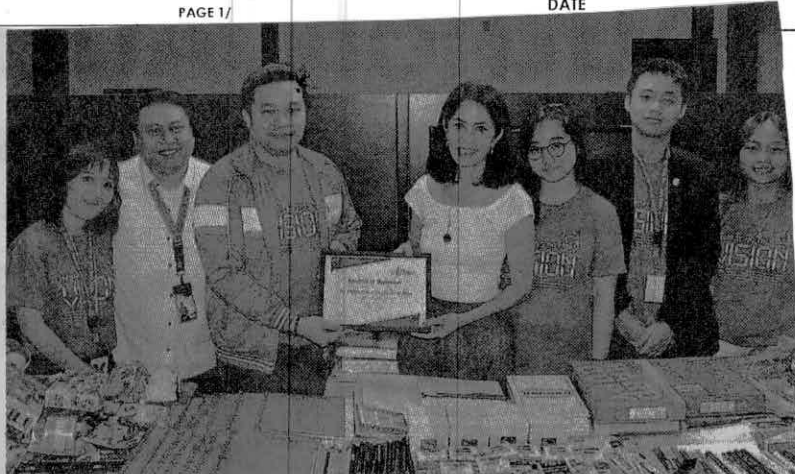
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In Tublay, Benguet, which is an emerging ecotourism destination.



Turning over donations to the St. Dominic College of Asia in Cavite.

Gina Lopez: The heart of a warrior



this week on
peopleasia

**BABE
ROMUALDEZ**

children especially the abused and marginalized. I know it because we met many times for lunch and *merienda*, sharing with her my personal advocacy — cleaning the air of pollution — because of my allergic rhinitis triggered by polluted air, giving many who suffer from it countless sleepless nights.

I was extremely pleased when the Clean Air Act was passed, with Gina and former senator now Antique Rep. **Loren Legarda** both working hard for the passage of the bill, gathering over five million signatures to support the initiative.

I remember well when Gina and her staff would send me updates about the work they were doing to clean up the Pasig River and rehabilitate the Estero de Paco, one of the creeks connected to the river. Estero de Paco was totally polluted,

Passionate. This was the impression that people got when they met **Gina Lopez** — the heart behind ABS-CBN Foundation, the public service arm of the ABS-CBN network that champions the welfare of children, the poor and the disadvantaged, and the environment.

I have always admired Gina for her zeal and passion, and most of all, her sincerity in protecting the environment and upholding the welfare of

with both sides lined by squatter shanties, filled to the brim with garbage and all kinds of human refuse whose stench would be enough to make one gag and trigger a coughing fit for those with weak lungs and olfactory senses.

It took years of hard work and determination, but the informal settlers were eventually relocated, with the *estero* dredged and rid of garbage. The nearby Paco Market was also refurbished and rehabilitated with an activity center added as a venue for promoting livelihood as well as music and arts.

Today, the Estero de Paco serves as a model of success for environmental preservation, highlighting that the right kind of strategies coupled with passion and determination can transform any polluted waterway.

Gina was one example of someone coming from a privileged background who felt true compassion for those who have less in life, using the Lopez power and wealth to do good for the country. She was a big asset to her family and this nation, an angel to the poor and marginalized, but most of all — she was a warrior for Mother Earth. She will be greatly missed. ✨



With Gina during
PeopleAsia's 'People of
the Year' awards 2006.

Photos courtesy of the
official Facebook page
of Gina Lopez



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Trees in lieu of flowers for Gina

As heavy rains poured on Saturday, the collective tears of kin, friends and colleagues of former Environment secretary and ABS-CBN Foundation chief Gina Lopez also fell as her remains were brought out of the ABS-CBN compound for her interment.

Prior to the former Environment secretary's interment, members of Bantay Kalikasan Foundation — which Lopez established in 1999 — held saplings of different trees as the environmentalist's hearse left the ABS-CBN compound in Quezon City.

According to Jo Pascual, one of Bantay Kalikasan's supervisors, instead of offering flowers, the group decided to bid her goodbye by planting 130 saplings of yakal, ipil, white lawaan, and malaruhat trees at the La Mesa Eco Park, the reforestation of which was one of Lopez's projects.

"Ma'am Gina's legacy is in the environment especially trees," said Pascual. "This is what we donated so that even when she's gone, she will still be remembered."

Lopez, President Rodrigo Duterte's first environment secretary, led a crackdown on mining firms during her stint at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), where she ordered 23 of the Philippines' 41 mining companies to be closed and revoked operation permits of five other firms. **Elmer N. Manuel**



Nuggets of wisdom from Gina Lopez

By Patricia Mirasol

Regina Paz Lopez, Gina Lopez to most, was an industrialist's daughter who could've chosen to live her entire life in privilege. She eschewed that path and instead became a yoga missionary at the age of 18, "living as the poor lived" and serving in Portugal, India and Africa. Upon her return, she headed the charitable arm of the family conglomerate, ABS-CBN Foundation, and helmed pioneering programs such as Bantay Bata 163.

It is her work as a staunch environmental activist, however, that gained her national prominence. Championing such causes as the rehabilitation of the La Mesa Watershed and Pasig River, her passion for environmental causes eventually earned her the cabinet post of Environment Secretary in 2016. Although her appointment was not confirmed by the Commission on Appointments, her infectious spirit and principled stand caught the attention of the general public. Ms. Lopez's unwavering faith in the country — coupled with her ebullient nature — encouraged a lot of Filipinos to spread kindness and do their share in caring for mother earth.

Here are some of her most notable quotes culled from her official Facebook page as well as from posts by ABS-CBN, GMA and *Esquire Philippines*:

On values

"It is much better to live according to principle than according to rules, because situations in life change."

"Paradise is not made of buildings. Paradise is made of people loving each other and living with values."

On governance

"I'm going to do the right thing and let the dice fall where it may. And I am going to hope that maybe these politicians,





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Nuggets of wisdom from Gina Lopez

even if they're funded by mining money, must have love for God and country in their hearts."

"Who suffers if you kill the environment? It's the poor. And whose duty is it to protect our people? It's the government. And when you make decisions based on business interests, you have shirked your responsibility. You have lost the moral ascendancy to rule the government because, to you, business and money are more important than the welfare of our people."

On service

"We have this life to live. We do service for the common good. We make a difference for ourselves and others. It's a very good way to go."

On the environment

"Our right, the Filipino right to water, to life, to agriculture, is not only constitutional. That's God-given."

"I really don't see how the country will move forward and realize its potential if we don't commit to the nurturance of these resources."

"It is my determination that the resources of the Philippines be enjoyed by the Filipino people."

"I refuse to allow the paradise that is the Philippines become a hell so that future generations would grow up and say '*ganyan talaga*, that's all we know.'"

"I am only here for a split second of eternity. Let the future generations enjoy their constitutional right to a healthy ecology."

On nation building

"If we, in this country, dream and hope for the common good and commitment to integrity, I have no doubt in my heart and in my mind that our country will see the light of day."

"As long as people care enough, love enough and work together, our country will have the future we aspire for. The future belongs to those who believe enough to do."

On love

"Love is courage. You can't say you love if you're not courageous enough to stand for it."

On spirituality

"One of the biggest mistakes of humanity is to foolishly think we are these physical bodies and life ends when this physical body deteriorates. The truth is that we are spirit. Living now gives us the opportunity to 'hone' our spirit so that it is more aligned with higher forces of truth and light."

"God exists, He does, whether you believe it or not... And if you can go into the quiet of your heart you will feel that love is with you every single micro-second of the day... It's there for you unconditionally. And may it continue to hold us, and may it continue to nurture us and propel us into creating a piece of heaven in this country."

We don't have to found organizations or become yoga missionaries to make a difference. We can all learn from the lessons of this earth warrior's life by practicing kindness, protecting the environment, and promoting meaningful change in our own personal ways.

IT was a life well-lived for the former Environment Secretary, Gina Lopez.



FACES OF THE NEWS

Gina Lopez

Stories of Gina Lopez's lifelong advocacies—from saving the biologically dead Pasig River to founding the country's first hotline to rescue abused children—came to the fore last week after news broke of her death from cancer. Lopez, 65, was a longtime champion of environmental causes, in whom activists found an unlikely ally, she being a scion of one of the country's most powerful and richest families. Turning away from her affluent background, however, was nothing new for Lopez who left the comforts of home at 18 to pursue life's deeper meaning as an Ananda Marga missionary in Europe, India and Africa. Upon her return to her family in the '90s, she led the Lopezes' charity arm, ABS-CBN Foundation. But she made more headlines when she was chosen by President Duterte to lead the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), reportedly after she gave him a lecture on environmental policy. Wasting no time, Lopez shut down big mining firms found to have violated the country's environment laws. Her uncompromising stance, particularly against the mining industry, was seen by many as the main reason behind the Commission on Appointments' rejection of her as DENR chief.



EDITORIAL

Out-of-the-box warrior

Encomiums flowed freely from top government officials and sundry politicians in the wake of the passing of former environment secretary Gina Lopez. Among those who paid tribute were members of the very institutions that made sure her forthright, take-no-prisoners brand of environmentalism would not prosper or become official policy, by soundly rejecting her appointment to the DENR post in May 2017.

Lopez faced an uphill battle at the powerful Commission on Appointments (CA) from the outset, with her controversial orders to close down 23 mines and suspend five others, and to cancel 75 contracts for mining projects in watersheds. Despite being reappointed by President Duterte twice, the CA nixed her appointment after only three hearings.

Much has been said about Lopez's storied life. At 18, she turned her back on privilege as the daughter of one of the country's wealthiest families, to become a full-fledged yoga missionary. She would spend the next two decades living among the poor in Portugal, India and Africa, where she said she learned the quality of persistence and the value of hardship. "When one doesn't have much, one treasures every little bit. I lived as the poor lived, so I learned how not to be wasteful," she wrote in *Rogue* magazine in 2016.

This life-changing experience would help her find her calling. She took over ABS-CBN Foundation Inc. (now ABS-CBN Lingkod Kapamilya Foundation Inc.) in 1994 shortly after she returned to the Philippines. She then established Bantay Bata 163, a hotline to protect disadvantaged and at-risk children, which in 1997 bested 187 countries from around the world to receive the United Nations Grand Awardee for Excellence.

In 1999, Lopez established Bantay Kalikasan as the foundation's environmental arm to extend aid to victims of natural calamities. It was through her work in Bantay Kalikasan that Lopez led the rehabilitation of the 2,700-hectare La Mesa Watershed and the development of the La Mesa Ecopark. In 2010, she was appointed head of the Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission (PRRC). Under her leadership, PRRC relocated informal settlers and cleaned up the tributaries of the Pasig River, paving the way for the revival of the Pasig River ferry service. She also launched the antimining Save Palawan Island movement, gathering 10 million signatures over four years to support the campaign. For these environment-related works, Lopez was awarded \$10,000 as part of the 2017 Seacology Prize.

While her work in these fields is much lauded and well-remembered, only a few now recall that Lopez was also a trailblazer in championing local children's television. She pioneered Educational Television (ETV), which aired 16 educational television programs over 15 years, and put in place video libraries in 10,000 public schools. Children who grew up in the 1990s would remember these educational shows under the ETV program: "Sineskwela" (science), "Math Tinik" (math), "Hirayamanawari" (values), "Bayani" (history) and "Epol/Apple" (English)—virtually a now-bygone golden era of kids' TV programming that benefited millions of Filipino children, and a thrust that deserves to be revived. (A study by the National Council for Children's Television in 2015 showed that 48.7 percent of 4,395 children surveyed have access to TV and watch an average of three hours per day, particularly from 5-10 p.m.) Lopez was the first Southeast Asian to be honored the Unesco Kalinga Award for her work in "Sineskwela."

Lopez took on advocacies that broke down the walls of her comfortable upbringing to the extent that it made many people uncomfortable and, at crunch time, cost her a Cabinet job. But "[I] decided to be true to myself," she said when she accepted her appointment as environment secretary. "If I had calculated and maneuvered, I would never have forgiven myself."

In her confirmation hearing before the CA, Lopez was asked what made her "extreme." She replied: "I'm a very out-of-the-box person... so I can do anything and everything, but my non-negotiable commitment is to our people and the principles of integrity. I'm never gonna budge there because something in me will die."

From the environment to social causes to children's TV, the fearless, out-of-the-box spirit of Gina Lopez made the nation's life considerably richer, even if many times it didn't know it or was slow to recognize the value of such causes. The Philippines, now among the world's environmental hotspots, has just lost perhaps its fiercest eco-warrior—at a time when it needs her kind the most.

Like Gina Lopez, let us enter the narrow gate

Someone asked him (Jesus), "Lord, will only a few be saved?" He answered them, "Strive to enter by the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough."

— Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Luke, 13:23-24



**FAITH
HEALER**

**RICARDO
SALUDO**

BEFORE anything else, a plug for the "Genuine Love" documentary on the late Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Gina Lopez at 10.45 a.m. and 9 p.m. today on ABS-CBN. Don't miss it.

Amid the outrage over the possibility of rapist-murderer Antonio Sanchez being paroled, the widespread adulation for Lopez seems providential, with both lives exemplifying in media our Lord's Gospel message at Sunday Mass today: To be saved, enter by the narrow gate.

No prizes for guessing which of these two personages followed

Jesus's teaching. Yet, despite the widespread anger over Sanchez's fearful crimes and feared release, in fact, most people probably follow the wider entrance of pleasure-seeking, power-grabbing and getting ahead taken by the once-entrenched Calauan, Laguna mayor.

Sure, people do not go around committing abduction, gang rape and murder, then trafficking narcotics and even smuggling a kilo of shabu into prison, hidden in a statue of the Blessed Virgin. But one must admit: while avoiding Sanchez's heinous extremes, most people are drawn to pleasure, power and prestige, and spend much of their waking moments seeking and

savoring those earthly lures.

The pains of mission

By contrast, how many choose the narrow gate of Lopez: expending two decades of her youth on missionary work in poor foreign lands, then advancing social causes and locking horns with the rich and powerful to protect abused, defenseless nature and poor communities?

In her struggle for the planet and the underprivileged, Lopez braved even vested interests in Congress in her avowed crackdown on destructive mining, leading to her ouster from the Cabinet, despite President Rodrigo Duterte's staunch support. But her hardest trials may have been in the obscurity of her missionary years, rather than the televised prominence of her *Bantay Bata* and *Bantay Kalikasan* advocacies. In his homily at the wake Mass last Tuesday, the day

after Lopez died, Fr. Nono Alfonso, head of Jesuit Communications, quoted her article of two years ago:

"What was my life like in Africa? I lived for six years in Kenya. Two of those years were in a slum area, where we had to stand in line for water and the toilet system was pathetic. It was there that I learned to value water. I had one pail and that was it: for bathing myself and using the last bit for washing my underwear. When one doesn't have much, one treasures every little bit. I lived as the poor lived, so I learned how not to be wasteful — a trait I carry to this day where I use every bit of everything."

Such a life was, of course, so far removed from her upbringing in the wealthy Lopez family till at age 18, she left home to don the orange yoga missionary habit. But her regimen would not be unfamiliar to the disciples of Jesus Christ. When he called his

► Faith Healer **A5**

Apostles, he instructed the 12: "Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff" (Gospel of Matthew, 10:9-10).

Besides eschewing comforts, a disciple must also face conflict, if not martyrdom. Take St. Bartholomew, also called Nathanael, whose feast was celebrated yesterday. Early Christian tradition has it that he preached in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Persia, India and Armenia. In Abanopolis on the Caspian Sea's western shore, St. Bartholomew was beheaded and flayed alive.

Lopez, too, had her flaying. Like this writer, she was one of the rare Cabinet appointees rejected by the Commission on Appointments (CA). She stood up for the environment, just as one defended the independence of the Civil Service Commission against political meddling, paying the price of CA rejection in September 2009. In upholding truth, justice and righteousness, be ready for pain.



'Namaste,' Gina

**“
I am
thankful
that Gina
welcomed
me with
open arms
when I
expressed
immense
interest
in helping
her at
Bantay
Kalikasan.**

The morning Gina Lopez passed away, I wanted to dismiss it as fake news. I so hoped that it was not true. Refusing to accept that we had all lost such a good person, I messaged some friends of mine at ABS-CBN and they confirmed the sad news.

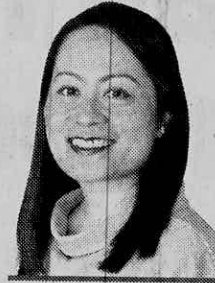
How do I begin to describe such an amazing spirit? So grounded, so humble, so true! A “good soul” as her brother Ernie aptly expressed in his moving tribute at the necrological service for Gina.

She is best known for being the driving force and mother of ABS-CBN Foundation. I began my television broadcast journalism career co-anchoring with David Celdran on the first-ever Philippine cable news channel Sky Cable News via the “Midday Report” newscast. I have been fortunate to always be at arms’ reach of ABS-CBN Foundation. I

am thankful that Gina welcomed me with open arms when I expressed immense interest in helping her at Bantay Kalikasan. She, in fact, reached out to me to co-host the “Bantay Kalikasan” show.

I remember being one of the emcees at the gathering in Congress when we pushed for the passage of the Clean Air Act. Walking and working the hallowed halls of Congress, she determinedly and passionately ensured so that she would gather enough support and signatures needed to turn the act into law. And with Gina’s dogged determination, it indeed became law. But that was just the beginning. The work, Gina’s passion to enhance stewardship of and care for the environment so that indigenous and all peoples’ lives would be uplifted, would set her on course to do things that many thought to be too difficult or even impossible.

Watching the video clips and photos shown at the memorial



HALF FULL
Lia Andanar Yu

service held in her honor and listening to anecdotes and stories of those who knew her best, there is little doubt that Gina was indefatigable and determined.

I will remember her best for being humble, compassionate and loving.

Gina, yours was a road less traveled and, my, you blazed that difficult trail!

At a time when I had personally felt that I was close to a sustainable work-life balance, I knew in my soul that doing work with you was what would strike that much sought-after balance.

I will remember your life’s work and hope to continue doing my share together with all those whose lives you have touched. You have been that kind of spirit after all – inspiring us to do what’s best for others, most especially the least, the lost and the last.

*Namaste, Ninang.
Rest in peace now.*

**“
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COMMENTARY

Tribute to Gina Lopez

BY PHILIP CAMARA

FIRST met Gina Lopez in Iba, Zambales in 1992. She had just recently returned from her Ananda Marga phase. As the new head of ABS-CBN Foundation, she immediately went to the Mt. Pinatubo areas that had been affected by the eruption to establish a resettlement site for victims.

She came to our house in Iba with her son Babu, who was not even one year old yet. Gina took care of this resettlement project very well, and we would see each other occasionally when she and Sona would visit our beach farm, which was just about 6 kilometers from the project site.

The ABS-CBN Foundation slogan of "in the service of the Filipino people" was not something Gina would take as mere words — fortunately for the foundation.

Gina was so good with words. Her columns at the *Philippine Star* are a testament to that. Her choice of words, her persona and her good looks melded so well together. But the last thing Gina wanted was to be satisfied with words alone, whether it came from a nice mouth or a fancy report. She wanted "action in the service of the Filipino People."

Gina, in seeking action with results, with her big heart and very sharp mind, and her connections, whipped up program after program after program under the foundation and in collaboration with other nongovernment organizations and advocates. She accomplished within her lifetime what would take others several lifetimes to accomplish.

Gina did not issue words to create the action, or "*para utos lang*." Gina herself was the action. The center of it, the mover of it, the cheerleader of it, the heart behind it; and never ever forgetting that it was in the service of the Filipino people.

For Gina, who were the people? The people were the powerless against rapacious greed that saw communities in mineralized or forested lands as a nuisance and something to get rid of.

The poor farmer, already abused by traders and financiers, now condemned to an eternal life of urban poorness from the poisoning of their land had *no effective defenders* though many tried and even died in defense of the poor and their livelihoods, now and in the future.

This not only made Gina act; the grievousness of what she saw, site after site, which she ably documented, researched, visited and directly felt the pain of victims, made her angry and determined.

This firing up of Gina, in the service of the Filipino people, set her on a path that would be her most difficult as it pitted her most directly with the causes of the suffering of so many Filipinos that *no one*, most especially those living off our taxes, did anything effective about.

Most of those in a position to do something were merely content to issue weightless and hypocritical words by saying one thing and

doing the exact opposite, to block her from her mission.

Thus, in President Duterte, Gina saw a man of action and not just words. And together they reformed one of the pillars of an industry that consisted largely in the mindless, thoughtless shipping of Philippine soil to China at tremendous social and environmental costs, costs borne by the poor and powerless.

But it was Gina who took the bull by the horns. She would never kill the bull; she just wanted it to become "grass-fed beef and have a role in making healthy grass-fed butter..." You know, something healthy! Ah, but the bull had many friends and they conspired to remove her from the center of the action as secretary of Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

While at the DENR she did many things but in working with her there, my keenest memory is of Gina's not minding the European ambassadors waiting for their turn in her office at their appointed time, so that she could first meet with

the farmers affected by dirty mining who had no prior appointment, because she cared. Why did this strike me?

Because this showed me Gina's unconditional love for the Filipino people, especially the less fortunate, even if it meant breaking cultural and state protocol boundaries. Gina did not know the definition of boundaries if it meant crossing it to get something done and done well with honesty and integrity.

I thought anyone else, yes anyone, would have the farmers rallying in anger maybe inside the building at some safe hall, but no, Gina wanted them, with seats in her office to the chagrin of the security officers. The ambassador would be fuming mad silently, but Gina's priorities and giving importance to the less fortunate was paramount.

Gina demanded that love be turned from words into action in the service of the poor, who need well-functioning ecosystems and thoughtful development of an area to build sustainable, equitable local economies. Gina was not just a ferocious eco warrior, she also spelt out what equitable area development based on love meant. She did this in her own gentle and charming manner.

Gina, rest in peace. You have fired up countless Filipinos to join you in your spirit of truly caring. You have always said that to be a lover we must cross boundaries. And you have said that most of these boundaries are our own internal fears. We must reach out effectively and make people genuinely happy, especially the less fortunate.

We Filipinos are fortunate that God chose the Philippines and a Filipino to be a channel to remind us of the power of unconditional love when it acts.

The author is a trustee of the Haribon Foundation.



Editorial

Taga-protékta ng kapaligiran

NOON pa, ipinakita na ng environmentalist na si Gina Lopez ang matinding pagmamahal sa kapaligiran at kalikasan. Bago pa siya hirangang DENR Secretary noong 2016, marami na siyang nalinis na ilog at estero at tinulungan ang mga nakatira sa pampang na ma-relocate sa Calauan, Laguna. Kahit nailipat na ang mga tao, sinundan pa rin niya at sinigurong may pinagkukunan ng ikabubuhay.

Nang maupong Environment secretary, ipinahayag agad niya ang pagtutol sa pagmimina. Galit siya sa mga nagmimina. Ayon sa kanya, ang pagmimina ang pumapatay sa mga magsasaka at mangingisda. Walang ibang nakikinabang sa pagmimina kundi ang mga dayuhan at mayayaman.

Tinotoo niya ang pag-ayaw sa pagmimina. Umabot sa 22 mining companies ang kanyang naipasara at 12 contracts sa pagmimina ang kanyang kinansela sa



panahon ng kanyang panunungkulan sa Duterte administration. Ang 22 mining companies ay napatunayang lumabag sa mga itinatakdang batas. Ang pagmimina ang dahilan ng siltation, soil erosion at dust emission.

Hindi naipagpatuloy ni Lopez ang kanyang adbokasiya na mailigtas ang kalikasan laban sa mga mapang-abusong mining companies sapagkat ni-reject siya ng Commission on Appointment (CA) noong 2017. Labing-anim na senador ang bumoto para maalis siya sa puwesto at walo ang pumanig sa kanya. May pait sa tinig ni Lopez makaraang ma-reject, sabi niya, ang interes sa negosyo ang nangibabaw.

Bukod sa paglaban sa iresponsableng mining companies, adbokasiya rin niya ang pagtatanim ng mga punong kahoy. Siya ang nagpasimuno sa reforestation ng La Mesa Watershed at sa malawakang pagtatanim ng bakawan sa Palawan.

Noong Lunes (Agosto 19, 2019), pumanaw si Lopez sa edad na 65. Ganunman, pumanaw siya na may naiwang magandang alaala sa mamamayan. Alam niya na may karapatan ang bawat Pilipino sa isang malinis at malusog na kapaligiran. Hangarin niyang mawala ang mga tumatampalasan sa mga bundok at kumakalbo sa kagubatan. Hindi malilimutan ang kanyang mga ginawa bilang taga-protékta ng kapaligiran at kalikasan.



PH, South Korea asked to act quickly on waste imports

By **CHITO A. CHAVEZ**

Protesting environmental groups on Saturday demanded for quicker and more urgent action from the Philippine and South Korean governments on the issue of waste imports.

The call has snowballed as they asked for the immediate and permanent ban on all wastes imported into the Philippines, as well as the immediate return of the remaining garbage from South Korea.

To recall, the provincial government of Misamis Oriental held a hearing on the illegal waste shipment that has been languishing in the municipality of Tagoloan of the said province.

The garbage, which has made a portion of the Phividec Industrial Zone seem like an open dumpsite, caught fire on August 15.

Reports revealed this was probably caused by the presence of methane produced by the trash while toxic smoke had threatened the residents and workers in the area.

It took 11 hours before the fire was put out.

"The pollution from the fire is a

wake-up call to speed up the removal of the garbage. We can no longer allow another incident, accidental or deliberate, to occur and put the health and safety of the people at grave risk. The President should now intervene to hasten his country's re-importation of their own trash," said Aileen Lucero, national coordinator of Quezon City based EcoWaste Coalition.

Following the spate of controversies on waste importation, an administrative order is expected to come out this month from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), which imposes a three-month moratorium on all waste-related imports.

It also stipulated a ₱3-million security bond for every permit issued to importers, which is intended to cover potential export costs should violations be found.

However, environmentalists insisted the measure was very temporary, and could fail to address long-standing threats from waste imports.

"We need urgent action on long-term solutions. If the Philippine and South Korean governments are serious in solving this crisis, they should act now to legislate a policy permanently

banning waste imports. This should include prosecuting and penalizing parties involved," said Abigail Aguilar, regional campaign coordinator of Greenpeace Southeast Asia.

The South Korean garbage, which arrived in the Philippines in July and October last year, was misdeclared as "plastic synthetic flakes".

It was later discovered it contained contaminated mixed plastics, discarded batteries and other electronic wastes, soiled diapers, used dextrose tubes, and other hospital and hazardous wastes.

The consignee, Verde Soko Philippines Industrial Corporation, also failed to secure an import permit from the DENR.

An initial batch of garbage-filled containers, weighing 1,400 tons, was sent back to South Korea in January, but the return of the remaining 5,177 metric tons has been undergoing several delays.

This last shipment has turned portions of a government property, which is surrounded by residential communities, into an open dumpsite, but without the stringent measures required to control the environmental and health risks that such a site poses.



CWA should be a concerted effort

Just recently, the Supreme Court ordered water concessionaires Maynilad Water Services and Manila Water Co. to pay P921 million each for violating the Clean Water Act (CWA) and over P300,000 for each day of their supposed failure to connect the sewer lines of homes and commercial establishments to the existing sewage line in the metropolis.

In their separate petitions for review, however, Maynilad and MWC said while they have done their part and have in fact invested billions of pesos yearly

HIDDEN AGENDA



**MARY ANN
LL. REYES**

in modernizing water distribution and sewerage systems, there are others who had been remiss in their duties under this law.

So the question is, whether these two should be meted such huge penalties when in fact, this job requires multi-sectoral action and there are factors beyond these concessionaires' control that prevent the faster construction of sewage treatment plants (STPs) or facilities.

MWC pointed out in its petition that the DENR is tasked by law to compel citizens to connect existing

sewer lines and those yet to be established by MWC and Maynilad.

It may also be worth noting that the DENR, as lead agency responsible for implementing the CWA, has not completed drawing up a Water Quality Management Area Action Plan, which includes setting the goals and targets for a sewerage or septage program.

Also under the law, the Department of the Interior and Local Government is mandated to order all Metro Manila mayors and governors of affected provinces to inspect and determine if wastewater treatment facilities like septic tanks are in place in their respective communities.

The DILG was also required by the SC in its ruling in the 2011 case of MMDA vs Concerned Residents of Mahila Bay to submit a five-year plan of action that will contain measures intended to ensure compliance of all non-complying factories, commercial establishments and private homes to the CWA.

The DILG and LGUs are likewise required to consider providing land for the wastewater treatment facilities of the two concessionaires or their regulator, the MWSS.

Meanwhile, the DPWH, in coordination with LGUs, was also tasked under the CWA to prepare a national program on sewage and septage management. The DPWH has not implemented this program.

Thus, the responsibility for linking the sewer lines of private homes and commercial establishments to the existing sewerage system in Metro Manila, Rizal and Cavite is not the sole responsibility of the water concessionaires but rather requires collective action from several government agencies, many of who have not done what is required of them.

Other factors that hinder the success of the CWA is the presence of informal settlers who dump their wastes into rivers, lakes and esteros, and the fact that simultaneous construction of STPs will only add to traffic congestion.

It should also be noted that in the same 2011 Manila Bay case, the SC gave the MWSS and the concessionaires until 2037 to complete the setting up of wastewater management facilities. This judicial interpretation of the CWA in effect nullified an order of the Pollution Adjudication Board in 2009 which states that the task of setting up wastewater treatment facilities should be completed five years after the enactment of the CWA in 2004.

Meanwhile, LGUs, though required under the CWA, have not appropriated lands, including the required right-of-way (ROW) and road access, for the construction of the STPs. Because of red tape, there have also been delays in the issuance by LGUs of the necessary permits for the two concessionaires to go ahead on their STP works.

It may therefore be unfair for some quarters to accuse the concessionaires of tucking sewerage fees in their monthly bills while not building such STPs.

While Maynilad has collected environment and sewerage charges of P38.07 billion since 1997, it has spent P46.7 billion on these items from 1997 to date. It is targeting a 100 percent completion rate by 2036. Maynilad, as of April 2017, is already operating 20 wastewater treatment facilities and is in fact building more.

It would be unfair to put all the blame on these two concessionaires who are in fact relying on the 2037 deadline given by the SC earlier to finish their work under the CWA.

Gov't rescue efforts

Last January, the Department of Trade and Industry imposed provisional safeguard duties on imported cement amounting to P8.40 per bag after determining a huge surge in imports was causing serious injury to local cement manufacturers.

Unfortunately, the P8.40 per bag provisional safeguard duty by the DTI proved vastly insufficient as imports even surged by 48.2 percent in the first half of 2019 to 3.4 million metric tons compared to the 2.29 million tons imported in the same period last year.

The Tariff Commission, after conducting formal investigations, has just recommended to the DTI the imposition of permanent safeguard duties of P12 per bag of cement.

The TC in its report noted that Type I and Type IP cement were imported into the country in increased quantities starting in 2016, and that the domestic cement industry's market share, sales, profits, production and capacity utilization deteriorated from 2013 to 2018.

It said there exists an imminent threat of serious injury in the future, with imports likely to substantially increase due to, among others, the substantial freely disposable production capacities of exporters and the importance of the Philippines as an export market by top suppliers Vietnam and China.

The TC, through its chairperson Marilou Mendoza, said serious injury to the domestic cement industry would occur imminently if a definitive safeguard measure against importations of cement is not applied.

It recommended to the DTI that such measure be applied for a period of three years starting from the date the provisional measure took effect.

For his part, Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez said he would review the amount proposed by the TC, including industry proposals for a higher duty of from P18 to P22 per bag.

The local industry maintains that their 28 million metric ton annual manufacturing capacity is more than enough to meet domestic demand which is buoyed by the government's Build Build Build infrastructure program.

Kudos to the DTI and the TC for doing what needs to be done, although the DTI may have to impose a higher duty than what the TC has recommended to really protect the local cement industry.

For comments, e-mail at mareyes@philstarmedia.com



Maynilad steps up reforestation

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

West zone concessionaire Maynilad Water Services Inc. pledged to plant 34,000 trees and mangroves as part of its annual "Plant for Life" program.

The move is part of continuing efforts to reforest the Ipo Watershed and other watersheds within the West Zone.

It also aims to prevent calamities such as land erosion and flooding, as well protect water quality in the dams that supply the water needs of Metro Manila.

This year, Maynilad adopted 30 hectares in Mt. Balagbag in Rizal, one of the most heavily deforested areas of the Ipo watershed.

"One way to ensure the sustainability of our limited water resources is to plant trees in vital watersheds. Planting trees prevents the soil erosion that could affect the quality of raw water, and also offers a long-term solution to the cycle of flooding during the rainy season," Maynilad president and chief executive officer Ramoncito Fernandez said.

Since the program's inception in 2007, Maynilad has planted almost 800,000 trees in the Ipo watershed covering an area of 341 hectares.

It has expanded reforestation activities to include watersheds in Malabon and Muntinlupa, and the planting of mangroves in Laguna Lake and the coastal areas of Manila Bay.

The Metropolitan Waterworks Sewerage System (MWSS) has long been urging the concessionaires to come up with an integrated approach towards sustainable management and protection of the watersheds to ensure stable water supply in the metro and nearby provinces.

Over the long-term, MWSS targets to implement a Corporate Forestry Watershed Legacy Program to encourage the adoption by various corporations and other entities of

thousands of hectares of denuded portions of the Ipo Dam.

Trees in the watersheds absorb rainwater which channels it into streams, rivers, and eventually dams where fresh water is sourced.

The reforestation project, which focuses on the watersheds of Umiray, Angat, Ipo, La Mesa, Marikina and Laguna, aims to plant one million trees yearly for the next five years as part of the government's campaign to reforest the country.

Maynilad is the largest private water concessionaire in the country in terms of customer base. It serves the areas of Caloocan, Pasay, Parañaque, Las Piñas, Muntinlupa, Valenzuela, Navotas, Malabon, and certain portions of Manila, Quezon City, Makati and Cavite.

The company is owned and managed by Maynilad Water Holdings Co. Inc., a joint venture among Metro Pacific Investments Corp., DMCI Holdings Inc. and Marubeni Corp.



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PROJECT OFFERING TO SAVE LAKES AND RIVERS

Eco-Sep to help mitigate water pollution

STORY & PHOTOS BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

POLLUTION, brought by poor solid waste management, and inadequate or lack of sewerage and sewage treatment plants (STPs) in the country's ecotourism sites, pose serious problems on the environment and the health and well-being of the communities.

One such tourism site threatened by the booming ecotourism industry in Mindanao is Lake Mainit, the country's fourth largest lake and the deepest in the country.

Located in the northeastern section of Mindanao and shared between the provinces of Surigao del Norte and Agusan del Norte, it has a surface area of 173.40 square kilometers and depth reaching 223 meters.

It is bordered by the towns of Mainit and Alegria in Surigao del Norte and the towns of Jabona and Kitcharao in Agusan del Norte.

Key biodiversity area

THE lake and its surrounding watershed are considered key biodiversity areas. Lake Mainit's watershed is the habitat of rare fish species, including *puyo*, or climbing perch, and *gabot*, a riverine fish that is said to be on the brink of extinction because of, among others, predation by introduced species.

The forests around the lake are home to rare and threatened wildlife, as well, giving the lake and its surrounding area a high ecological value.

It has been proposed to declare the Lake Mainit watershed as a protected area under the National Integrated Protected Area System.

Economically important

BESIDES being the source of livelihood of hundreds of families living around it, Lake Mainit is also a source of water essential for household use, as well as irrigation.

It is known in the region for its rich fish resources. More than 30 barangays in the four towns bordering the lake are dependent on it's bounty for food and livelihood.

With its attractions, Lake Mainit is fast-becoming a popular ecotourism site in the Caraga region, posing serious challenges in promoting sustainable tourism while protecting and conserving the lake's environment and natural resources at the same time.

DOST solution

IN response to the challenge, the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) has developed a technology that will mitigate water pollution that could protect and save important bodies of water, such as Lake Mainit, from human pressure.

Dr. Merlinda A. Palencia, a professor at Adamson University, invented the Eco-Sep technology through funding from Philippine Council for Industry, Energy and Emerging Technology Research and Development (PCIEERD) of the DOST.

The project, "Eco-friendly Septic System for Tourism and Environmentally Compromised Areas," may yet solve the environmental problems brought about by the direct discharge of untreated wastewater that leaks into the freshwater resources, like lakes and rivers.

Last July 24, the DOST inaugurated the Eco-Sep in Kitcharao, Agusan del Norte, at the town's newly constructed convention center near Lake Mainit, in its bid to mitigate water pollution.

The convention center is one of several facilities constructed in what will soon be the town's eco-park to promote Lake Mainit as a tourism site, and to help protect and conserve the lake and the various wildlife that thrive within the surrounding watershed.

Eco-Sep Technology

ECO-SEP will help address

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Eco-sep to help mitigate water pollution



MERLINDA PALENCIA (second from left) shows an Eco-Sep tank to officials of the DOST during the inauguration of the Eco-Sep installation at Kitcharao Convention Center in Lake Mainit. With her are Undersecretary for Regional Operations Brenda L. Nazareth-Manzano (left) and PCIEERD Executive Director Enrico Paringit.



PALENCIA explains the Eco-Sep technology during the inauguration of the Eco-Sep installation in Lake Mainit in Kitcharao, Agusan del Norte, on July 24.

the treatment of sewerage and wastewater from households, resorts, hotels and public establishments.

It is a water-treatment system consisting of a plastic septic tank, organomineral and drain field.

The system makes use of filtration and bioremediation

which can remove total suspended solids, biochemical oxygen demand and some pathogens.

Natural water treatment

SHE said Eco-Sep is boosted by the use of vigormin natural water treatment minerals, which she developed. It is natural, odor-free,

safe and effective. It neutralizes strong odor, is nontoxic or has no health hazards.

The combination of Eco-Sep and Vigormin can effectively reduce odor in septic tanks and improve septic water quality.

Vigormin, a powder-like substance, is mixed and dissolved in water, which will be poured inside the Eco-Sep tank. It has a resealable outlet that leads to the four-chambered plastic septic tank, allowing the natural water-treatment minerals to do its thing.

So far Eco-Sep has been used in General Luna Public Market, the Traveller's Beach Resort and General Luna National High School, all on Siargao Island in Surigao del Norte.

Other applications

VIGORMIN can also be used as an odor neutralizer for decaying organic waste, materials-recovery facilities and landfills.

According to Palencia, the discharge from the system has been found to pass the water-quality standards under the Philippine Water Act. This means the discharge water is safe and can be reused for watering plants or vegetable gardens.



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Eco-sep to help mitigate water pollution

"It will help improve and sustain ecotourism in the country. We all know that the Philippines is one of the top ecotourism destinations all over the world. Caraga is blessed with beautiful islands and white-sand beaches. But pollution is a problem. In Manila, the government launched the Manila Bay rehabilitation program because of pollution," she said.

According to Palencia, the use of Eco-Sep in Lake Mainit can prevent future problems—mainly water pollution that can undermine the productivity of precious economic resources—whether as water for domestic use, for agriculture or livestock, including ecotourism value.

She said the technology can be used to save lake and rivers, especially in tourism sites where people flock.

"Without a septic tank, the household wastewater goes directly into the lakes or rivers. So does the water from restaurants and resorts near it," she said.

This, Palencia said, spells problems, as water pollution can compromise valuable freshwater resource which is now being experienced in various parts of the country.

"In 2025, we will have a severe freshwater shortage. Because we have limited freshwater resources and we are polluting and abusing our pristine water resources. Deep wells can no longer be used in Metro Manila, Central Visayas and Southern Tagalog Region. [Because] there are too many people [and because of] improper solid waste management and poor sewerage system. Wastewater? Eighty-five percent are domestic from households and small-scale industries," she said.

Most water treatment technologies, she said, are capital intensive, because of the design and the technology used.

"The Eco-Sep technology is a low-cost, easily deployable method and mitigates water pollution. You will not spend more than P200 a month for a small household," she said.

According to Palencia, the Eco-Sep can be modified to enhance its capacity and lengthen its life span from 10 years to 50 years, depending on the materials used. But the magic lies on the special minerals, which she discovered and developed as a natural water treatment mineral to neutralize odor in water.



FISH PEN, CAGE PERMITS

COA FLAGS LLDA FOR FAILURE TO COLLECT P29.46M IN FEES

By Patricia Denise M. Chiu
@PDMChiuINQ

The Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) has failed to collect some P29.46 million in required fees in 2018 from operators of fish pens and fish cages in Laguna Lake, according to the Commission on Audit (COA).

In its annual audit report, the COA said that of the 3,308 fish cage and fish pen owners, only 110 or 3.3 percent paid their dues.

Under existing rules, the LL-

DA is required to collect P6,000 per hectare covered by fish pens, and P4,200 per hectare occupied by fish cages.

If the fees are uncollected, the agency withholds the issuance of annual permits.

"In 2018, it appears that the delinquent operators are continuously operating even without valid Fish Pen Permit and Fish Cage Permit. LLDA has no available list of Delinquent Fish Pen/Fish Cage Operators," the report said.

The audit body said in its re-

port that the low turnout of payment of fees could be attributed to the lapses and deficiencies in collection procedures after the LLDA lifted a 2017 moratorium on aquaculture operations.

One-year moratorium

The COA explained that in February 2017, the government issued a one-year moratorium on fish culture operations in Laguna Lake.

Under that moratorium, all existing operators were or-

dered to harvest their fish stocks by March 2017, and no new stocking of fingerlings would be allowed.

However, four months into the moratorium, on June 7, 2017, the moratorium was lifted, with the LLDA Board amending the previous resolution, limiting the operating permit only to compliant fish structure owners.

The amendment also put in place a policy that limits fish cage or fish pen structures to 25 hectares. INQ



China's online gambling problem

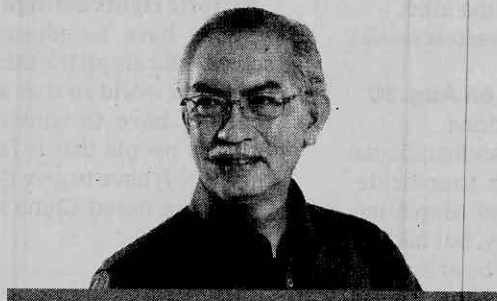
With rapid economic prosperity has come the epidemic of online gambling addiction that defies national borders. Recently, a spokesperson from the Chinese foreign ministry described this malady as "the most dangerous tumor in modern society." China has appealed to two of its trusted allies in the Asean—Cambodia under Hun Sen and the Philippines under Rodrigo Duterte—to ban all online casinos. Cambodia promptly obliged. The Philippines, having earlier suspended the issuance of new licenses, promised to study the matter.

Given our problems with China, it would be easy to play deaf to its concerns about the proliferation of Philippine-based online casinos. The state-run Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp. or Pagcor, which issues licenses to Philippine offshore gaming operators (Pogos), can say that these online casinos cater to all nationalities, and do not explicitly target Chinese citizens.

This is technically true. Casino operators accept all internationally tradable currencies. So long as money is deposited into a casino account, betting can instantly proceed. The operators don't care where the money comes from or what passports the bettors carry. Money has no memory, and nowhere is this more true than in a casino.

But, anyone who is not playing deaf or blind would at once know what China has long known: that at least half of all online casino patrons are Chinese citizens. China, however, has no way of proving this. More importantly, it cannot dictate to another country what its policies on gambling should be.

Long before Pagcor began issuing offshore gaming licenses, online casinos have operated as locators in export-processing zones, taking advantage of the minimal regulatory environment found in these places. One of the early ones that hosted online casino operations was the Cagayan Economic Zone Authority. This picture changed almost overnight after President Duterte reversed his earlier pronouncement against online gaming, by designating Pagcor as the sole authority that would be responsible for issuing



PUBLIC LIVES

RANDY DAVID

licenses to offshore gaming operators.

This opening led to the deluge of Mandarin-speaking young Chinese people who are recruited to work as online casino dealers or customer relations assistants. Initially entering the country on tourist visas, usually given upon arrival, they later obtain special working permits. The identities of operators, mostly from China, are protected by layers of proxy owners. They will be the first to say that their Chinese clients come from all over the world, and that possibly only a handful are from the mainland.

The increase in the number of Pogos from December 2016, when the new policy was announced, has been exponential. The rent on office buildings and condominium units shot up overnight, a lifesaver for a sector that was beginning to reel from the slowdown of the business process outsourcing industry. Today, there are at least 58 licensed Pogos. That figure does not include fly-by-night operators.

For a while, the government was content to charge only for the license to operate. Then, the Bureau of Internal Revenue decided it should collect taxes on the earnings of the tens of thousands of mostly Chinese employees in Philippine online casinos.

In 2018, Pogos paid P579 million in taxes. In the first half of 2019, they turned over P789 million to public coffers. Pogos have become a cash cow for a government that is hard-pressed to find new revenue sources to fund the salary increases of its soldiers and teach-

ers, and the full subsidy for college education.

In the meantime, the ubiquitous presence of Chinese Pogo workers in our neighborhoods has fueled racial antagonism among long-time residents. They demand answers to questions like: Who are these people, and what type of work do they actually do? How do we know that they were not sent here to spy? They note the routines they keep: These Pogo workers descend on the local convenience stores every morning and leave behind them a trail of trash. They smoke and spit everywhere.

These suspicions, and the highlighting of cultural differences that undergird them, only exacerbate old racial prejudices. They take away the public's focus on the more important issues of sovereignty and national self-respect.

I see these young Chinese workers as victims virtually chained to computers like modern slaves in galley ships. They cannot be very different from our own young people in aspiration. They all seek a way out of their stifling home environment.

We have many valid issues against China. In our anger, we may often wish the worst for the Chinese people. But profiting from the vices of other nations should never be a national policy. By all means, we should ban online gambling. In so doing, we may also earn the right to ask for help in stemming the flow of shabu from China to the Philippines.

In the mid-19th century, China was severely emasculated by the infamous opium trade from which British and American merchants built a fabulous fortune in silver. Smuggled into China mainly from colonial India where poppies were grown, opium reduced a large segment of the Chinese population to stupor. When the Qing dynasty viceroy Lin Zexu, in an act of self-defense, raided the foreign warehouses, confiscating opium chests laden with more than a thousand tons of the substance, the British took this as a provocation. The ensuing three-year Opium War led to China's humiliating defeat, and to a historic settlement that, among other things, ceded Hong Kong to the British.

EDITORIAL

ENVIRONMENTAL CANCER

THE frame of raging fires in Brazil's Amazon rainforest is a stirring scene. This has prompted scientists to warn that the fires could thrust a death-dealing blast to the worldwide fight against climate change.

Brazil's space research center, the National Institute for Space Research, known by the wordplay INPE, has recorded more than 4,000 fires so far this year, more than half in the Amazon region—an 84 percent increase in the comparative period in 2018, the highest number since records began in 2013.

The Amazon, often referred to as the planet's lungs for producing

20 percent of the oxygen in the Earth's atmosphere, is considered important in the fight against global warming due to its ability to absorb carbon from the air.

Brazil, the largest country in both South America and Latin America with 8.5 million square kilometers and over 208 million people, is the world's fifth largest country by area and the fifth most populous.

It has the biggest share of the

670 million hectares of forest—60 percent—and is home to more species than anywhere in the world.

Images and videos on social media, seen here in the Philippines, have shown monstrous pinions of smoke darting out from the greenery and winds-whipped lines of fire leaving blackened waste below.

The smoke has gone as far as Sao Paulo, 2,736 kilometers away. Images from the city, which honors the Apostle, Saint Paul of Tarsus, showing the skyline in pitch darkness in mid afternoon, the sun eclipsed by smoke and ash.

Whether the fires seen worldwide are wildfires or those directly related to deforestation, we stand behind environmentalists who are

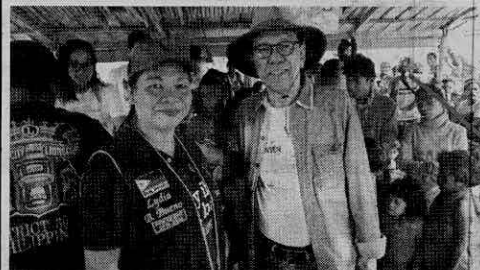
in full throttle in their campaign to save the Amazon.

The Amsterdam-headquartered Greenpeace, which is operational in 55 countries, has warned the Brazil government against slithering to what it called a "threat to the climate equilibrium." The Gland, Switzerland-based World Wildlife Fund itself has also warned that if the Amazon burns to that legend of no return, the rainforest could become a dry grassland, no longer livable by majority of its wildlife.

"If this happens, instead of being a source of oxygen, it could start emitting carbon—the major driver of climate change," according to WWF. This would raise the probability of what might well be an environmental lung cancer.



AMAZON FOREST



SINA PCHLC President Lydia Bueno at FISPC chair Popoy Pagayon sa kasagsagan ng Social Responsibility Program 2019 sa Punduhan ng mga Dumagat, Sitio Suha, Norzagaray, Bulacan.

PCHLC NAGTANIM, NAMIGAY NG TULONG SA MGA DUMAGAT

MULING tinahak ng mga opisyal at miyembro ng Pasay City Host Lions Club ang madulas, bako-bako, maputik at mataas na bundok ng Sierra Madre sa Norzagaray, Bulacan para maghatid ng tulong sa mga Katutubong Dumagat.

Sa pangunguna ni PCHLC President Lydia Bueno, naghandog ng bigas, sardinas, noodles, hopia at iba pa ang mga lion bilang pakikiisa sa 4th Filipino Inventors Society Producers Cooperative Outreach Program at kaarawan ni Mr. Popoy Pagayon ng FISPC.

Kasama ni Pres. Bueno sa naturang mga gawain ang iba pang miyembro ng PCHLC na sina Fred Cabalbag, Rico Navarro, Jean Fernando, Rolando Gonzalo at Joy Mirador.

Maliban sa PCHLC at FISPC, kabilang din sa mga grupong naghandog ng kanilang tulong sa mga Dumagat ang National Press Club of the Philippines, Publishers Association of the Philippines, Inc., Sagip Kagutan, 8th IB ng Philippine Army, Reyes Haircutters at ilang indibidwal na sina Mico Abella, David Pagayos at Bimbo Duran.

Nagpadala rin ng iba't ibang item si DOST Sec. Boy dela Peña, DOST RD Sancho Maborang, Armand Ganai, Jojo Patalinjug, Ma'am Dinky ng Plantex, Dr. RBH ng Prime Global, Mike Hortaleza ng Splash, Healing Galing at iba pa.

Nagbigay rin ng may 300 piraso ng Soya Milk at Soya Ice Candy ang magsasakang reporter na si G. Mer Layson at 250 piraso ng tinapay naman mula sa Tinapayan ni Lucito Chavez.

Matapos ang palatuntunan, sama-samang nagtanim ng iba't ibang uri ng punongkahoy ang mga dumalo sa naturang programa.

Matatandaang nagsagawa noong nakaraang Linggo ng tree planting at gift giving sa mga Dumagat ang PCHLC sa pakikipagtulungan ng DENR, REMATE Riders at Bantay Gubat sa Ipo Dam, Norzagaray, Bulacan.