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By: Mike Navallo

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By Ted Cordero

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[\[OPINION\] Nuclear Energy Regulation](#)

By Senator Francis Tolentino

Last Tuesday, Aug. 16, 2022, I filed my bill on The Philippine Nuclear Regulation Act of 2022.

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[‘Much still has to be done’ to mitigate, adapt to climate change — Legarda](#)

By: Maila Ager

Unlike the United States, the Philippines still has a “long way to go” to mitigate and adapt to climate change, according to Senate President Pro Tempore Loren Legarda.

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By: Leonel Abasola

Urban planner Felino “Jun” Palafox Jr. supported a proposal of Senator Robin Padilla to use cable cars in urban centers to help alleviate traffic congestion.

[PBBM seeks enhanced PH-US ties on economics, energy, agriculture](#)

By Ruth Abbey Gita-Carlos

MANILA – President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. on Thursday expressed hope for an improved cooperation between the Philippines and the United States (US) in the fields of economics, energy and agriculture.

SUNSTAR

[Mideast's Jordan River: Rich in holiness, poor in water](#)

Along the Jordan River — Kristen Burckhardt felt overwhelmed. She needed time to reflect, to let it sink in that she had just briefly soaked her feet in the water where Jesus is said to have been baptized, in the Jordan River.

THE MANILA TIMES

[DoE boosts utilization of electric vehicles](#)

By Eireene Jairee Gomez

The Department of Energy (DoE) is conducting a series of public consultations to formulate a comprehensive and coordinated policy direction among national agencies to

accelerate the development, commercialization and utilization of electric vehicles (EVs) in the country.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

[ACEN's Australian unit gets A\\$100 million green financing](#)

By: Richmond Mercurio

ACEN Corp. subsidiary ACEN Australia and DBS Bank Australia have executed a facility agreement for a A\$100 million green long-term revolving loan facility.

[OPINION] [Medalla's battles](#)

By: Iris Gonzales

I imagined La Serenissima or Venice, the Floating City but minus the gondoliers and their gondolas, when Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) Governor Felipe Medalla talked about how the BSP compound in Manila became “a small island surrounded by water” not too long ago. Perhaps it was one of those rainy days of August.

Information and Knowledge Management Division

ABS CBN NEWS

[Church-based org RMP slams terrorism financing charges vs nuns](#)

By: Mike Navallo

A church-based national NGO has hit back against the terrorism financing charges filed against some of its members, claiming that one of the accusers was only forced to testify in exchange for the freedom of her arrested mother.

The Department of Justice's charges "are based on the testimonies of 2 so-called surrenderees," and one of them "has been presented as a former NPA (New People's Army) member after authorities arrested her mother," the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP) said on Thursday, 3 days after the DOJ announced the filing of charges.

"In exchange for her mother's release, she executed a spurious statement accusing RMP members of channeling funds to the CPP-NPA," the group said in a press statement, citing "information obtained by RMP." Some of RMP's members, including 4 nuns, were charged with violating section 8(ii) of Republic Act 10168 or the The Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act of 2012.

The provision punishes anyone who "makes available any property or funds, or financial services" to persons or groups identified or designated as terrorists with 12 years to 40 years in jail and a fine of between P500,000 to P1 million.

An alleged former finance officer of RMP and its Northern Mindanao Region chapter supposedly claimed 60 percent of RMP's funds for its project goes to the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the NPA, which were designated by the Anti-Terrorism Council as terrorist groups in December 2020. But for RMP, the accusations are part of a government strategy of using people who allegedly surrendered to testify against groups like RMP.

"As part of government's counter-insurgency program, 'surrenderees' have been used to link legal democratic organizations to the CPP-NPA while lining the pockets of corrupt officials in the process," it alleged.

No additional details were given as to when, where or how this happened or who were involved in the supposed arrest. RMP has yet to respond to requests for interviews from ABS-CBN News.

In the same statement, RMP refuted allegations the group provided funds to rebel groups.

“As consistently stated by Sr. Elenita Belardo, 83, former RMP national coordinator and herself at the receiving end of an ongoing perjury case filed by former National Security Adviser (NSA) Hermogens Esperon Jr., all RMP projects are well-documented, reported and accounted for. It has complied with requirements in securing funds for their projects, including audits,” the group said.

RMP has provided service to the rural poor for 53 years. It claimed the "demonization" of RMP's work negatively affected its various ministries which include sustainable agriculture, rural schools, disaster risk reduction, climate change mitigation, health services, defense of human rights, and organic farming.

The group also expressed concern over the safety of those charged.

Two have already been jailed supposedly on trumped-up charges. The group said that even before the passage of the Anti-Terrorism law in 2020, RMP has been red-tagged and vilified, citing several instances.

A former anti-insurgency task force NTF-ELCAC spokesperson campaigned against RMP before European funders.

In 2019, the Anti-Money Laundering Council froze 3 of RMP's bank accounts, eventually expanding the freeze order to other accounts.

Its website was also among those ordered blocked in June this year by Esperon and the National Telecommunications Commission, just before former President Rodrigo Duterte stepped down.

“Why is the government – especially from Duterte to Marcos II — hellbent in using all resources at its disposal to shut down the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines for good?,” it asked.

“The Marcos II government is using the same playbook by predecessor Duterte by demonizing legal democratic organizations such as RMP which provide much-needed services to the people and putting its members in direct harm’s way. Rabid and lethal red-tagging, weaponization of the law, and impunity for human rights violations continue to be state policies that must be vigorously opposed,” it added. Lawyers groups have previously expressed solidarity with the group, refuting allegations of funding terrorism.

BUSINESS WORLD

[Can Indonesia's Muslim leaders help combat climate change?](#)

Kuala Lumpur — From packed mosques during Friday prayers to the classrooms of thousands of Islamic boarding schools, Indonesia's Muslim leaders have been urged to use their sermons and influence to boost conservation efforts and win over climate change sceptics.

The country's top Muslim representatives met last month at Southeast Asia's biggest mosque, the Istiqlal in the capital Jakarta, to discuss ways to raise awareness about global warming and develop climate solutions linked to Islamic teachings.

The leaders also established a forum — the Muslim Congress for a Sustainable Indonesia — and called for community donations, including alms, to be used to help fund such efforts.

Green campaigners say Muslim leaders and imams can play a key role in fostering greater understanding and action on climate change — and also work with governments to focus on sustainability, not just economic development, in policy.

“Imams or religious leaders are really respected and highly listened to in Indonesia — they can have a big impact on both government policy and citizen action,” said Jeri Asmoro, Indonesia digital campaigner at climate activist group 350.org. “Imams could affect a lot of social change ... seeding awareness of environmentally-friendly life and propelling the climate movement at the grassroots level,” he added.

Under the 2015 Paris Agreement to tackle global warming, Indonesia — the world's eighth-biggest carbon polluter — has committed to cut its emissions by 29% by 2030 versus business-as-usual levels and hopes to reach net-zero by 2060 or sooner.

Almost 85% of electricity in the world's largest Muslim-majority nation is generated from fossil fuels, and it is the planet's top thermal coal exporter.

Also home to a third of the world's rainforests, Indonesia is the top producer of palm oil and a major source of timber, which green groups blame for forest clearing for plantations.

Cutting down forests has major implications for global goals to curb climate change, as trees absorb about a third of the planet-warming emissions produced worldwide, but release carbon back into the air when they rot or are burned.

Indonesia is already suffering the impacts of global warming, with cities and coastal areas hit by regular flooding and rising sea levels, while rural regions often struggle to cope with forest fires and drought. Zulfira Warta, a climate project leader at WWF-Indonesia, said there was a need for more leadership from Muslim clerics on environmental change among their congregations and communities.

About 90% of Indonesia's 270 million people are Muslim, while the nation has 800,000 mosques, 37,000 Islamic boarding schools, and more than 170 Islamic-led universities — offering a platform for education and action on a huge scale, he said.

“Imams can contribute a moral and spiritual energy that the climate and environmental movements urgently need,” he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

CLIMATE CHANGE DENIERS

Yet green groups say there is a long way to go on climate change, especially in the country's rural and poorest regions. A YouGov global poll in 2019 showed Indonesia had the highest proportion of climate change deniers at 18%.

Conservationists say this is largely due to a lack of teaching about climate issues at many schools.

Stigmatization of climate activists by the government and the fossil fuel industry has also influenced mindsets and pushed the narrative that green advocates are against economic growth, said Eji Anugrah Romadhon, a campaigner at Greenpeace Indonesia.

David Gaveau, an ecologist who has researched deforestation in Indonesia, said that economic development was a top priority for the government while climate change was not.

However, there is growing awareness about climate change among Indonesia's youth and civil society, while the government has made some headway in tackling deforestation in recent years.

It has also banned new conversion permits for old-growth forest and carbon-rich peatlands, temporarily stopped issuing new permits for palm plantations, created an agency to restore damaged peat, and promoted the electric vehicle industry.

Meanwhile, young Indonesians have spearheaded a mass tree-planting drive, established conservation groups, and taken part in weekly climate school strikes.

“Within the youth and the civil society, there is growing awareness and movement on climate,” said Mr. Asmoro of 350.org. “Mostly it emerges at the urban and educated levels of society.”

ECO-MOSQUES AND FATWAS

Many Indonesians believe God plays a role in disasters and climate change, according to Mr. Romadhon of Greenpeace Indonesia, while Muslim leaders are also still the main source for most people when making decisions about their way of life.

Religious leaders should dig “more into Islamic teachings about the earth and repairing it,” he added.

Some progress has been made already.

In a world first, Indonesia’s highest Muslim clerical council issued a non-legally binding fatwa against killing endangered animals in 2014, followed by a similar edict to stop the burning of land and forests two years later.

Five years ago, worshippers in Indonesia launched a new initiative that aimed to establish 1,000 eco-mosques.

And in 2018, Islamic organizations partnered with the government in a bid to cut plastic waste.

“Such fatwas can support and bolster government regulations and give more impetus and inspiration for pro-environment behaviors,” said WWF’s Mr. Warta.

Annisa Rahmawati, head of Indonesian conservation group Satya Bumi, urged civil society, religious leaders and citizens to unite to pressure the government and business to declare a climate and nature emergency — and respond accordingly.

Many principles about protecting nature are embedded in Islamic practices, she added, urging religious leaders to help people understand how their behavior impacts the environment.

“We have the solutions — we (just) need all actors to play their part and our Muslim faith can underpin all of this,” Ms. Rahmawati said.

GMA NEWS ONLINE

Philippines, Japan bolster ties for infra projects —DPWH

By Ted Cordero

The Japanese government has committed to continue its support to the Philippine government's infrastructure initiatives under the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) said Thursday.

In a statement, the DPWH said Japanese Ambassador Kazuhiko Koshikawa paid a courtesy visit to Public Works Secretary Manuel Bonoan on August 17, during which the two leaders talked on coordinating bilaterally and to push forward the fruition of more infrastructure projects.

“Hearing about all the exciting new plans, I truly value the kind visit and am grateful for the time spent despite the busy schedule of the Japanese Ambassador,” said Bonoan.

The DPWH said Japan has been, and continues to be, the largest source of Official Development Assistance (ODA) for the Philippines, with grants, loans and technical assistance provided since 1966.

It said that the Japanese government through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) currently supports 13 DPWH big-ticket infrastructure projects, such as the following:

- Widening of 23-kilometer Arterial Road (Plaridel) Bypass Project Phase 3 in the Province of Bulacan
- Improvement and maintenance of about 1,184-kilometer of arterial national roads under Road Upgrading and Preservation Project (RUPP) funded by JICA
- The 30-kilometer Central Luzon Link Expressway (CLLEX) Project from the connection of Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway (SCTEX) and Tarlac-Pangasinan-La Union Expressway (TPLEX) in Balingcanaway, Tarlac City and ends at the Daang Maharlika Highway in Cabanatuan City
- Construction of a four lane – 45.5-kilometer Davao City Bypass Construction Project

The DPWH said the Islamic City of Marawi has benefited from a ¥2-billion grant for the design and build of 18.97-kilometer Marawi Transcentral Road Phase 1 under the Programme for the Support to Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Marawi City.

In support of the government's peace-building initiatives, JICA is also financing the Road Network Development Project in Conflict-Affected Areas in Mindanao (RNDP-CAAM) involving the development, construction, and improvement of about 174.50-kilometer access roads connecting Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

(BARMM) and other regions in Mindanao including another 18.78-kilometer Marawi Transcentral Road Phase 3, according to the DPWH.

The agency said Japan has also committed to support the construction of Cebu-Mactan Bridge and Coastal Road Construction Project, which is now under detailed engineering design stage.

To protect flood-prone areas and strengthen the resilience to climate change, four sub-projects were completed under the Flood Risk Management Project for Cagayan River, Tagoloan River, and Imus River financed by JICA, it said.

On-going Japan-funded flood control projects are the channel improvement works for Middle Marikina River including the construction of Manggahan Control Gate Structure and construction of Cainta Floodgate and Taytay Sluiceway at the joining sections of Cainta and Taytay rivers to Manggahan Floodway under the Pasig-Marikina River Channel Improvement Project Phase IV; Flood Risk Management Project for Cagayan De Oro River; and Cavite Industrial Area Flood Management Project, according to the DPWH.

The agency said that the Japanese government also extended financing support for the construction of interchanges on major intersection in Quezon City under the Metro Manila Interchange Construction Project, Phase VI (MMICP-VI) and the Metro Manila Priority Bridges Seismic Improvement Project to strengthen the resiliency of transport network in Metro Manila by improving the durability and safety of Guadalupe and Lambingan Bridges against large scale earthquake.

Meanwhile, projects with feasibility studies completed and on-going under JICA grant include the following:

- Parañaque Spillway/Tunnel Project
- Dalton Pass East Alignment Road Project (East Dalton Bypass Project)
- Central Mindanao Highway Project (Cagayan De Oro-Malaybalay Section)
- Davao City Flood Control and Drainage Project

“The proposal to conduct feasibility studies for Liloan Bridge and Butuan Bridge to comprise the Phase II of Urgent Bridges Construction Program for Rural Development (UBCPRD II) has also been submitted for JICA’s consideration,” the DPWH said.

MANILA BULLETIN

[Nuclear Energy Regulation](#)

By Senator Francis Tolentino

Last Tuesday, Aug. 16, 2022, I filed my bill on The Philippine Nuclear Regulation Act of 2022.

It aims to regulate and promote the nuclear energy industry in the Philippines by providing for a regulatory framework on its control, use, and application. This piece of legislation will maximize the benefits of nuclear energy while ensuring compliance with nuclear security standards in order to safeguard public health and safety and protect the environment.

Considering the rising prices of commodities, which includes the price of electricity, the passage of this bill is very timely. The need to identify a new source of energy is critical for the country's plan to provide for additional power generation. Nuclear energy, being a safer and cleaner alternative to fossil fuel, would address the alarming climate change issues of today, as well as ease the rising prices of commodities.

Nuclear energy is the source that can make it all work — it brings forth electricity production, job creation, economic revitalization, and decarbonization.

According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's (UNECE), nuclear power is an important source of low-carbon electricity and heat that contributes to attaining carbon neutrality. The UNECE's Technology Brief states that decarbonizing energy is a significant undertaking that requires the use of all available low-carbon technologies. Analyses indicate that the world's climate objectives will not be met if nuclear technologies are excluded.

Notably, countries like the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Finland, France, and Russia, among others, have explicitly stated from their studies that nuclear power will play an important role in reducing their national emissions in the future.

Lastly, nuclear energy is a very reliable energy source with a high power output. According to the International Energy Forum, the world's largest international organization of ministers from 71 countries including the Philippines, "the high reliability of nuclear energy means that in terms of production, one nuclear plant could have an equivalent output to two coal power stations — or three to four renewable plants, which are able to generate the same amount of power (1 GW) but in a less consistent way."

Nuclear power has already benefited several countries for several years and it is time for our country to provide regulation to promote its commercial use. In addition, this will for sure greatly contribute to the country's energy security.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

['Much still has to be done' to mitigate, adapt to climate change — Legarda](#)

By: Maila Ager

Unlike the United States, the Philippines still has a “long way to go” to mitigate and adapt to climate change, according to Senate President Pro Tempore Loren Legarda.

Legarda, a known staunch environment advocate, pointed this out after U.S. President Joe Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act, which is seen to cut greenhouse gas emissions and lower prescription drug prices and high inflation.

“I commend U.S. President Joe Biden for signing into law legislation addressing climate change,” she said in a statement Wednesday.

In the Philippines, Legarda pointed out that there are already laws for climate change mitigation and adaptation like the Climate Change Act and its amendatory law or the People’s Survival Fund (PSF).

With a P1 billion annual allocation, the PSF could be used to help communities and ecosystems cope with the impacts of climate change, the senator explained.

Despite this, Legarda lamented that “much still has to be done.”

“We still have a long way to go in climate mitigation, and adaptation. [So] much still has to be done,” said the senator.

Legarda, though, noted that other measures have also been passed “in pursuit of climate change mitigation and adaptation.”

Among these are the Philippine Environmental Impact Statement System, Marine Pollution Control law, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Ecological Solid Waste Management Act, Renewable Energy Act, and Environmental Awareness and Education Act.

“The effective implementation of these [is] vital to the country’s sustainable growth and development,” she stressed.

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

Cable cars to alleviate traffic, benefit environment: Palafox

By: Leonel Abasola

Urban planner Felino “Jun” Palafox Jr. supported a proposal of Senator Robin Padilla to use cable cars in urban centers to help alleviate traffic congestion.

“An aerial cable car system will not only help alleviate the traffic situation in Metro Manila and other urban centers in the Philippines - it will also boost security and benefit the environment,” Palafox said in a news release issued by Padilla’s office on Thursday.

Palafox said establishing such a system, which he noted is becoming a "global trend," would be tantamount to "future-proofing" of the country’s big cities from the perennial problem of traffic.

"The cable car is environment-friendly, and will future-proof our cities," Palafox said in a radio interview.

He noted there has been a proposal to use cable cars in Metro Manila, while tourism plans have been drawn up to use cable cars to link tourist spots such as Boracay and Caticlan; Davao City and Samal; and Ilocos and Cordillera.

Palafox added that cable cars have the added benefit of lowering criminality as shown in areas where they are used - such as Medellin in Colombia.

He noted that in Medellin, residents near the facilities got livelihood opportunities.

On the other hand, he said very few criminals would do their thing in facilities where there are many people.

Another benefit of the cable car system is that the view from the air can lead to faster response to disasters such as fires, or violations of the law such as illegal logging.

But most importantly, Palafox said, is that employees will save time that would otherwise be spent commuting - citing studies that show employees in Metro Manila spend six to eight hours a day just to commute.

He added the towers for the cable car system can become landmarks if they are built along Edsa - and if the project is approved, it can be completed in as little as 18 months.

Last week, Padilla suggested the use of an aerial cable car system to address the problem of traffic in Metro Manila, saying it had undergone a study and was approved by the past administration.

In 2016, former Department of Transportation (DOTr) Secretary Arthur Tugade proposed the use of cable cars to solve the traffic problem.

The DOTr's proposal involved a 4.5-km cable car system that will link Marikina and Pasig Cities, with stops in Quezon and Pasig Cities.

[PBBM seeks enhanced PH-US ties on economics, energy, agriculture](#)

By Ruth Abbey Gita-Carlos

MANILA – President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. on Thursday expressed hope for an improved cooperation between the Philippines and the United States (US) in the fields of economics, energy and agriculture.

Marcos bared his intent to strengthen Manila's cooperation with Washington after his meeting with the US Congressional Delegation headed by Senator Edward Markey at Malacañan Palace in Manila.

In a Facebook post, Marcos said it was a “pleasure” meeting the US lawmakers.

Marcos said he and the US Congressional Delegation also sought improved cooperation between the two countries to combat illegal drugs.

“We look forward to continuing our partnership with the US in the areas of renewable energy use, agricultural development, economic reform, and mitigation of drug problem,” he said.

Photos of Marcos’ meeting with Markey and the US Congressional Delegation were shared on the President’s official Facebook page.

The US government has been among the Philippine government’s strong partners in terms of aid and support.

The Philippines’ bid to increase the share of renewable energy among its sources got a boost following the Aug. 6 awarding of the US government’s grant to a local firm to develop up to three-gigawatt wind power capacity.

The grant, which was extended through the US Trade and Development Agency (USTDA), was given to Aboitiz Renewable Inc. to allow the latter to conduct a feasibility study to develop up to three gigawatts of the offshore wind project.

The USTDA has provided funding for several projects involving smart grids, renewable power generation, distributed energy, and energy storage systems, according to the data from the US Department of State.

Also on Aug. 6, the US and the Philippines agreed to continue talks on ensuring food security for the Southeast Asian nations amid global supply disruptions driven by climate crisis, the prevailing coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic, and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo said.

The two countries also acknowledged the importance of human rights and democracy under the watch of Marcos, Manalo said.

Malacañang on Aug. 11 vowed that the Marcos administration will adhere to the rule of law while sustaining the fight against illegal drugs. (PNA)

SUNSTAR

[Mideast's Jordan River: Rich in holiness, poor in water](#)

Along the Jordan River — Kristen Burckhardt felt overwhelmed. She needed time to reflect, to let it sink in that she had just briefly soaked her feet in the water where Jesus is said to have been baptized, in the Jordan River.

“It’s very profound,” said the 53-year-old visitor from Indiana. “I have not ever walked where Jesus walked, for one thing.” Tourists and pilgrims come to the site from near and far, many driven by faith, to follow in Christ’s footsteps, to touch the river’s water, to connect with biblical events.

Symbolically and spiritually, the river is of mighty significance to many. Physically, the Lower Jordan River of today is a lot more meager than mighty.

By the time it reaches the baptismal site, its dwindling water looks sluggish, a dull brownish green shade. Its decline, due to a confluence of factors, is intertwined with the entanglements of the decades-old Arab-Israeli conflict and rivalry over precious water in a valley where so much is contested. Championing the transboundary Jordan’s revival without wading into the thicket of the disputes that have fueled its deterioration can be a challenge.

A stretch of the river, for instance, was a hostile frontier between once-warring Israel and Jordan; river water also separates Jordan on its eastern bank from the Israeli-occupied West Bank, seized by Israel in a 1967 war and sought by the Palestinians for a state.

“It’s a victim of the conflict, definitely. It’s a victim of people, because it’s what we did as people to the river, basically, and now adding to all this it’s a victim of climate change,” said Yana Abu Taleb, the Jordanian director of EcoPeace Middle East, which brings together Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli environmentalists and lobbies for regional collaboration on saving the river. “So it’s a victim in every way.”

EcoPeace has said for years that the Lower Jordan River, which runs south from the Sea of Galilee, is particularly threatened by decades of water diversions for agriculture and domestic use and by pollution. Only a tiny fraction of its historical water flow now reaches its terminus in the Dead Sea, not far south from the baptismal site that Burckhardt visited.

That’s one reason the Dead Sea has been shrinking.

Standing at the Jordanian baptismal site Bethany Beyond the Jordan, Burckhardt, a Presbyterian, said the river’s water felt cold on her skin, offering a respite from the sweltering heat around her. In the jumble of emotions, she grappled with, she could also feel sadness for the river’s dwindling.

“I am sure God above is also sad.”

The Bible says Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

The river's eastern bank, modern-day Jordan, and its western one both house baptismal sites, where rituals of faith unfold, a reflection of the river's enduring religious, historical and cultural allure. The river holds further significance as the scene of miracles in the Old Testament; after years of wandering the desert, the ancient Israelites are said to have crossed the Jordan on dry ground after the water was stopped for them to pass.

At the Jordanian baptismal site on the eastern bank recently, a woman dipped her feet in the waters and then cupped some with her hands, rubbing it on her face and over her head. Others touched the river and crossed themselves or bent over to fill empty bottles.

Charlie Watts, a tourist from England, submerged a wooden cross -- a gift and a blessing for his Christian mother back home. "I took a video ... so I can show her that it was true," Watts said.

While he is not as religious as his mother, the 24-year-old still considered his visit to the Jordanian site special: "What made it surreal is to think that this is what started the world movement of Christianity."

In an interview, Rustom Mkhjian, director general of the Baptism Site Commission in Jordan, spoke passionately about the Jordanian site's claim to authenticity and its preservation as it was in the time of Christ and John the Baptist. UNESCO has declared it a World Heritage Site "of immense religious significance to the majority of denominations of Christian faith, who have accepted this site as the location where Jesus" was baptized.

"Every year we celebrate interfaith harmony, and among my happiest days in my life is days when I see Jews, Christians and Muslims visit the site and the three of them cry," Mkhjian said. "The present spot where we are is a site with a great message needed: Let us build human bridges of love and peace."

The Jordanian and West Bank sites both give visitors access to the river, where they come face to face, a narrow stretch of the waterbody between them. An Israel flag at the West Bank's Qasr al-Yahud serves as a reminder to those in Jordan that the river is a frontier separating the two worlds.

That site is also billed as where, according to tradition, Jesus was baptized. Jordan and Israel compete for these people's tourism dollars. Several people in flowing white robes waded in from the West Bank recently, posing in a semicircle for photos. Visitors in another group stood on riverbank steps or in the water itself as two men in black, apparently clerical attire poured river water over their heads.

In the background some sang, their voices heard back on the Jordanian side:

“Oh, Brothers, let’s go down. ... Down in the river to pray.”

Such serene moments contrast with the military hostilities that have played out on the river’s banks as part of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The river’s history and its water have been as politically fraught as holy, and for decades land mines have lurked menacingly on banks that were once a war zone.

On the eastern bank, demining of the area where the Jordanian baptismal site now sits began after a 1994 peace treaty between Jordan and Israel.

On the West Bank, a team from The HALO Trust, a British-American charity, has cleared mines from areas housing churches in the vicinity of the Qasr al-Yahud site as recently as 2020. The site itself had opened for the public years earlier after Israel cleared a narrow road to the river, while the churches area remained off-limits and frozen in time for decades.

Work began to clear those mines in 2018, but only after three years of building trust and getting onboard all involved, from Israeli and Palestinian authorities to several Christian denominations that own the churches and lands, said Ronen Shimoni, who was part of the HALO effort. “Nothing is simple here in the West Bank,” Shimoni said.

It’s against that turbulent backdrop that EcoPeace Middle East has been urging regional collaboration on the Jordan between rivals who have long had every motivation to squeeze as much water as possible out of the river or its tributaries.

“Any fresh water left in the river would have in the past been seen as empowering the enemy. ... You take everything that you can,” said Gidon Bromberg, the group’s Israeli director.

“There’s legitimate need for the water. ... Water is scarce,” he said. “But the conflict creates an incentive to take everything.”

The result is that the Lower Jordan’s annual discharge into the Dead Sea was estimated at 20 million to 200 million cubic meters compared to a historic amount of 1.3 billion cubic meters, according to a report published in 2013 by a U.N. commission and a German federal institute. Bromberg puts the current figure at no more than 70 million cubic meters.

“Israel, from a historical perspective, has taken about half the water, and Syria and Jordan have taken the other half,” Bromberg said. “The pollution that’s coming into the river is coming from Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli sides and a little bit also from Syria.”

Water use in the Jordan River basin is unevenly developed, the U.N.-German report said, adding that the Palestinians can no longer access or use water from the Jordan River itself. Syria doesn’t have access to the river but has built dams in the Yarmouk River sub-basin, which is part of the Jordan River basin, it said.

For Palestinians in the West Bank, the only way to see the Jordan River is to visit the Israeli-run baptismal site there, said Nada Majdalani, EcoPeace's Palestinian director.

"The Jordan River in the past, for Palestinians, meant livelihoods and economic stability and growth," she said. Now, she added, it has been reduced to an "ambition of statehood and sovereignty over water resources."

The river's decline, she said, is especially disappointing to elderly Palestinians "who remember how the river looked ... and how they used to go fishing, how they used to have a dip in the river."

Bromberg said EcoPeace has been documenting the "lose-lose" nature of the river's deterioration for all parties.

"From a Jewish tradition, you know, the river and its banks are a place of miracles," he said. "Well, it doesn't reflect a place of miracles in its current depleted state."

In late July the Israeli government approved plans to rehabilitate a stretch of the Lower Jordan, a decision described by Environmental Protection Minister Tamar Zandberg as "historic" and the beginning of a correction.

"For decades it was neglected and most of its waters were taken, and it effectively turned into a sewage canal," Zandberg said in a statement. "In an era of climate crisis and a serious ecological crisis, there is double significance to rehabilitating the River Jordan and returning it to nature, the public, and hikers."

Speaking by phone, Zandberg said the plan focuses on a stretch that runs in Israeli territory and reflects Israel's improved water situation given its desalination program, which has left it much less reliant on water it has been using from the Sea of Galilee.

"Now, we're actually more equipped to do it," she said. "We have water."

She added she hopes the decision would showcase the river's potential and pave the way for broader collaboration on the rest of the Lower Jordan as well as send a signal to Jordan that "we are committed ... to our mutual assets," including the river.

"It can provide a success story on that segment, and then it will enable more successful partnerships in the future."

That's something that hasn't always come easily.

"Politics, sometimes, interferes and also budget issues and the trust... between the parties," Zandberg said.

A regional rehabilitation and development master plan announced in 2015 by EcoPeace and others was adopted by the Jordanian government but not by the Israelis or

Palestinians due to outstanding “final-status” peace process issues, according to the group.

That plan said the lower part of the Jordan River will require at least 400 million cubic meters of freshwater per year to reach “an acceptable rehabilitation level.”

Creation of a trust fund to finance de-pollution projects -- an effort that EcoPeace had viewed as less politically controversial -- stalled after a 2017 diplomatic crisis between Israel and Jordan and amid years of strained ties under the government of former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. There have been signs of improved ties since.

Not everyone in the region welcomes, or trusts, EcoPeace’s calls for cooperation.

“Our job is tough. Our messages are challenged,” said Abu Taleb, the group’s Jordanian director.

“Because of having that, you know, Israeli chapter, we’re always accused of being ‘normalizers,’” or having normal relations with Israel, Abu Taleb said. That is a contentious topic, unpopular among many ordinary Arabs, citing factors such as Israel’s open-ended occupation of lands it captured in 1967 and a lack of a resolution to the Palestinian issue. “The water knows no borders,” Abu Taleb said.

Bromberg said he, too, has run into criticism from what he said was a vocal minority in Israel “inappropriately” branding their work as benefiting Jordanians and Palestinians at the expense of Israeli interests. “Sadly, there are people who think that if you’re working with the other side, you must be working for the other side exclusively,” he said.

Politics aside, the strain on some governments to meet water needs complicates calls to add water to the river.

Jordan, for instance, is one of the world’s most water-scarce nations, and its challenges are compounded by a growing population swelled by waves of refugees.

“We are under stress, so we don’t have a surplus to add to the Jordan River and to revive it despite the great importance of this to the Jordanians,” said Khalil Al-Absi, an official with the Jordan Valley Authority.

“Solutions require concerted (regional) effort and the international community’s” help, the Jordanian official said.

“We have many beautiful ideas for the Jordan River but there are limitations.”

Climate change threatens to exacerbate such problems. “The impact of the climate change is seriously influencing the water resources,” Al-Absi said.

According to the World Bank, the Middle East and North Africa region faces the greatest expected economic losses from climate-related water scarcity, estimated at 6% to 14% of GDP by 2050.

Advocates, like Bromberg, acknowledge that climate change makes a Jordan revival harder-- but argue that restoring the river and its banks offers economic incentives.

“The climate crisis brings home the issue of urgency that rehabilitating the river is perhaps the only way to prevent further instability in the valley,” Bromberg said, “because it can create alternative revenues through tourism.”

For all the river’s challenges, Al-Absi, the Jordanian official, said he remained optimistic. The alternative could be grim.

“If there is no water, people won’t come despite (the presence) of religious sites,” he said. “Water is life. Without water, there is no life.”

THE MANILA TIMES

[DoE boosts utilization of electric vehicles](#)

By Eireene Jairee Gomez

The Department of Energy (DoE) is conducting a series of public consultations to formulate a comprehensive and coordinated policy direction among national agencies to accelerate the development, commercialization and utilization of electric vehicles (EVs) in the country.

This initiative is aligned with the government's policy to enhance energy security through fuel diversification.

The enactment of Republic Act 11697, also known as the "Electric Vehicle Industry Development Act" (EVIDA), provides a national policy framework to develop the electric vehicle industry in the Philippines.

Under Section 30 of the EVIDA, the DoE, together with the Department of Transportation and other relevant national government agencies, are mandated to develop the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of the said act.

The Energy department said the series of public consultations on the development of the EVIDA-IRR are scheduled to be conducted starting today, August 19, until the end of the month.

EVIDA seeks to incentivize the adoption of electric vehicles and charging stations in the country. It mandates a 5-percent EV share in corporate and government fleets, provision of dedicated parking slots, installation of charging stations in parking lots and gasoline stations, green routes and provision of fiscal and non-fiscal incentives for EV manufacturing, and importation of charging stations.

"As we transition to a sustainable low-carbon future, this is the right time to sit down together and gather our thoughts and ideas to help the transportation sector reduce its dependence on imported oil, especially amid the volatility of fuel prices," said Energy Utilization Management Bureau Director Patrick Aquino.

"It is also expected that with the mass adoption of EVs, a new industry will blossom, high-value jobs will be generated and more investments will come in," Aquino added.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

By: Richmond Mercurio

[ACEN's Australian unit gets A\\$100 million green financing](#)

ACEN Corp. subsidiary ACEN Australia and DBS Bank Australia have executed a facility agreement for a A\$100 million green long-term revolving loan facility.

The loan will provide capital financing for ACEN's eligible green assets in Australia.

The green long-term revolving loan facility is part of ACEN's aim to raise over A\$600 million to support the development of ACEN's projects in Australia, which was announced earlier this year.

"The initial green loan facility with DBS will help advance our fund-raising capacity of over A\$600 million in Australia to develop and construct existing and additional pipeline of renewable energy projects in Australia," ACEN Australia CEO Anton Rohner said.

DBS is the sole arranger and sustainability advisor for the green long-term revolving loan facility. "As a leading bank in sustainable financing, we are excited to support ACEN's continued efforts to expand their renewables infrastructure to accelerate the transition of the energy industry towards a climate-aligned future," said Kelvin Wong, managing director and deputy head of energy, renewables and infrastructure at DBS.

"Having pledged to achieve net zero financed emissions by 2050, DBS is also committed in supporting like-minded clients like ACEN in the long haul to enhance Asia's renewable energy mix to realize a low-carbon economy," Wong said.

ACEN is seeking to grow its renewables capacity to 20 gigawatts (GW) by 2030.

The company currently has 18 GW of pipeline across the region, which will help achieve the company's 2030 goals.

"We are committed to growing ACEN's renewables platform backed by our vision to reach 20 GW of renewables by 2030. ACEN is leading the charge with the decarbonization opportunities across Asia and the Pacific. We aim to make a significant impact in this space, and create long term value for our stakeholders," ACEN International COO Patrice Clause said.

[OPINION] [Medalla's battles](#)

By: Iris Gonzales

I imagined La Serenissima or Venice, the Floating City but minus the gondoliers and their gondolas, when Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) Governor Felipe Medalla talked about how the BSP compound in Manila became “a small island surrounded by water” not too long ago. Perhaps it was one of those rainy days of August.

He was talking about climate change and its chaotic impact on all of us. The indefatigable Assistant Governor Edna Villa or EV, got stuck in the compound, says Gov. Medalla, because of rising floodwaters.

It must have been the same night when, a short distance from the building, somewhere in Malate, a bunch of drunks and dreamers also could not leave a pub because Manila was submerged. It's climate chaos all over and yet, this is just one of the clear effects of climate change on us. There's no one way to measure it. We only need to remember Super Typhoon Haiyan; the crazy weather we've been experiencing in recent years; all that increasing liquefaction; heavy rains in summer and our summers that are hotter than ever.

Which is why it's a welcome move when the country's central bank chief talks about climate change, urging banks to continue pricing the negative impact of climate change on their risks. One cannot overemphasize this unfolding climate chaos.

“We are telling the banks: include climate change in your calculation of risks. I used to think this was not important until EV told me she was not able to leave the BSP and she had to wait there for a few hours because the BSP became a little island surrounded by water,” says Gov. Medalla during the economic forum organized by the Economic Journalists Association of the Philippines, together with San Miguel Corp.

He also reiterated climate change-related disclosures among banks and other local firms in order to help the government move forward as it leads the fight against global warming.

As I said, this is a step in the right direction. Central bankers across the globe have already been adding climate change to their worries. Christine Lagarde has been warning about droughts, famines, rising sea levels, etc.

Inflation

But Gov. Medalla is facing several other huge battles on many fronts. Climate change is just one. There's also scorching inflation, consumer prices, the foreign exchange rate, etc. etc.

It's certainly one of the most challenging times to be the country's chief monetary official; in fact an ex-central bank governor even says something like it's a good time to be a BSP governor because to be able to steer the country through today's headwinds would be a big service to the public.

The funny and pragmatic Gov. Medalla seems up for the challenge. He already hit the ground running, surprising the market with that off-cycle 75 basis points rate hike.

During the EJAP forum, he said the BSP is not ruling out further tightening. The BSP raised rates by 50 bps on Thursday.

“I already said that – not zero, not 75 (basis points). So it’s probably more than a coin toss, but I will not say which side of the coin is heavier,” Medalla said.

After the back-to-back 25-basis-point rate hikes last May 19 and June 23, the BSP delivered a huge 75-basis-point increase during a surprise off-cycle meeting last July 14 to temper mounting risks and manage spillovers from other countries that could potentially disanchor inflation expectations. (Philippine STAR, Aug. 18).

Calling the shots

Against this backdrop, Gov. Medalla, indeed, is in for some big battles. It’s fitting of course that the BSP sits in what used to be a fortification during the Spanish colonial period.

The Spaniards used Fort San Antonio Abad as a little fortress and later on, it became a gunpowder storage facility.

Today, there are no more guns or gunpowder for war stored in the compound, but the country faces different kinds of wars – against inflation, climate change, unscrupulous bankers, etc.

The BSP remains the country’s defensive wall against these problems. It has in its power a suite of monetary tools – all at the ready. It just depends on the sitting governor to call the shots.

It’s good that Gov. Medalla, a longtime Monetary Board member, is prepared for his battles.

Room 501

He even made sure that only the good energy flows into the widely-talked about Room 501, the Office of the Governor.

During a recent dinner, we talked about endless tales surrounding the room; of how the most important office in the BSP also seems to be the most bizarre. Its past occupants saw their stress levels skyrocket. Some blame the room itself; the pragmatic ones, however, would look beyond the urban legends and the Old Wives’ Tales. It’s really the rigors of the job, they say. In any case, Gov. Medalla and his lovely wife and lucky charm Cynthia “Pinky” Medalla, had the room blessed, warding off whatever there is, so that it disappears into the ether. For good.

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