

SC spearheads forum to protect environment

by TETCH TORRES
Inquirer.net

BAGUIO CITY—The Supreme Court will hold its first Forum on Environmental Justice to determine ways on how the court can help protect the environment.

Officials from the executive and legislative branches of government as well as those from civil society will participate in the forum where they will sign a memorandum of commitment with the judiciary to protect and preserve the environment and help the courts in promoting environmental justice.

A draft Rule of Procedure for Environmental Cases will also be presented which will be subject for validation through a workshop of all participants.

Senator Maria Ana Consuelo "Jamby" Madrigal, chair of the Senate Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources; Negros Occidental Representative Ignacio "Iggy" Arroyo, her counterpart in the House, and Environment Secretary Lito Atienza will participate in the forum that will be opened by Chief Justice Reynato Puno.

US Ambassador Kristie Kenney will also speak of the current US initiatives to promote environmental awareness.

Other officials attending include Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr., Public Works Secretary Hermogenes Ebdane Jr., Commission on Human Rights Chair Leila de Lima, Philippine National Police Chief Director General Jesus Versoza, National Commission on Indigenous Peoples Chair Eugenio Insigne, Agriculture Undersecretary Bernie Fondevilla, Interior Undersecretary Austere Panadero, Tourism Undersecretary Oscar Palabyab, Energy Undersecretary Loreta Ayson, Education Assistant Secretary Emilio Abelita III, DENR Undersecretary Mary Ann Lucille L. Sering and Assistant Chief State Prosecutor Richard Anthony Fadullon.

Also joining the forum Supreme Court Administrator Jose P. Perez and retired Court of Appeals Justice Oswaldo D. Agcaoili and local government officials Isabela Governor Ma. Grace Cielo Padaca, Bohol Governor Erico Aumentado, and Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte.

From the private sector and academe are University of the Philippines College of Law Dean Marvic M.V. Leonen and Ayala Foundation executive vice president Guillermo Luz, Environmental Legal Assistance Center Inc., Palawan Office area manager Grizelda Mayo-Anda and NDC-Guthrie Estates Inc. Multi-Purpose Cooperative board member Pablo Naldoza. ■

Church says no to summer wear

MANILA—An official of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) last April 15 stressed that the summer heat is no excuse for the faithful to wear skimpy shorts or outfits when going to Church.

CBCP-Episcopal Commission on Canon Law and Tagbilaran, Bohol Bishop Leonardo Medroso's reminder to the public on

the dress code comes at a time when many churchgoers have been spotted wearing summer attire, usually consisting of shorts or skimpy skirts or spaghetti-strapped tops, to beat the heat.

Medroso said that while such clothing is comfortable to wear these days, it is not the appropriate outfit to wear when attending Mass. (Philstar.com)

Rare bird found in Candaba marsh

A JOINT Filipino-British team of ornithologists found a rare streaked reed-warbler (Acrocephalus sorghophilus) during a recently concluded survey of the Candaba Marsh in Pampanga province, according to the Wild Bird Club of the Philippines (WBCP).

Michael Lu, WBCP president, said the streaked reed-warbler "is globally threatened" and was last seen at the Candaba Swamp eight years ago.

The small and inconspicuous species is a migrant from northeast Asia whose breeding grounds remain unknown to this day, according to Lu. It spends the winters exclusively in the Philippines.

Last year, a team from WBCP and the UK-based Wetland Trust surveyed the same area but did not find any streaked reed-warblers. The search, however, led to the discovery of the black-browed reed warbler (Acrocephalus bistrigiceps), which turned out to be the

first on Philippine record.

This year's team, led by Briton Philip Round, a warbler expert based in Thailand, included WBCP researchers Carmela Espanola, Jonathan Villasper and Desmond Allen.

They surveyed reed beds in six sites in central and southern Luzon, using fine nylon mist nets. Despite catching and releasing a total of 235 birds, only one streaked reed-warbler was found—in a stand of reeds in Candaba.

In the early 1980s, the streaked reed-warbler was a common sight in Candaba in its preferred habitat of tall reeds by open water. In recent years, Lu said "its population declined almost to extinction due to habitat loss."

In spite of having been nominated as an internationally important wetland site under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, less than 1 percent of Candaba's original 32,000 hectares of mainly reed bed habitat remains.

The rest have been converted to rice fields.

Indeed, the survey team experienced difficulty locating areas of extensive reed beds anywhere in Central Luzon.

Other birds caught, tagged and released included 84 resident clamorous reed-warblers (Acrocephalus stentoreus) and 57 other migrant warblers consisting of 48 oriental reed-warblers (Acrocephalus orientalis) and 9 Middendorf's grasshopper-warbler (Locustella ochotensis).

Captured birds were fitted with an alloy band on one leg. Each band was stamped "DENR Manila" and had a unique identifying number. This was the first time that bands specifically made for the Philippines were used. All data of the species, dates and locations of the birds are lodged with DENR. This way, band numbers of birds later captured or found dead, if communicated to the DENR, will help plot the movements and life history of Philippine birds. (Inquirer.net)

Palace chopper engulfed in cloud, hit trees before crash

INITIAL investigation showed that the ill-fated Presidential chopper was entangled by trees in thick cloud before it plunged from 6,900 feet above sea level in a mountainous part of Ifugao province earlier this month and killed all people on board, including senior aids to President Arroyo, the military said today.

Citing initial findings of the PAF Board, Air Forces spokesman Aircraft Accident Investigation Maj. Gerardo Zamudio said the

Bell-412 helicopter was flying in cloudy weather on April 7 and crashed after trying to hurdle a much lower mountain pass and duck the gathering clouds above the mountain range.

Zamudio said that evidence retrieved from the crash site indicated that the engines were on normal operating conditions during the impact, indicating no engine malfunction.

Eight died in the crash, including Press Undersecretary Jose Capadocia, Presidential Management Staff undersec-

tary Marilou Frostrum and Mrs. Arroyo's Senior Military Aide, Brig. Gen. Carlos Clet.

Zamudio said the helicopter's GPS was also found but its stored data have yet to be analyzed.

All the flight procedures related to the mission were followed prior to take off, he said, adding that the Air Force is now awaiting the availability of GPS experts to complete the investigation especially the retrieval of data from the GPS equipment. ■



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