

the **m**indanao report

A Publication of the Mindanao Economic Development Council Secretariat

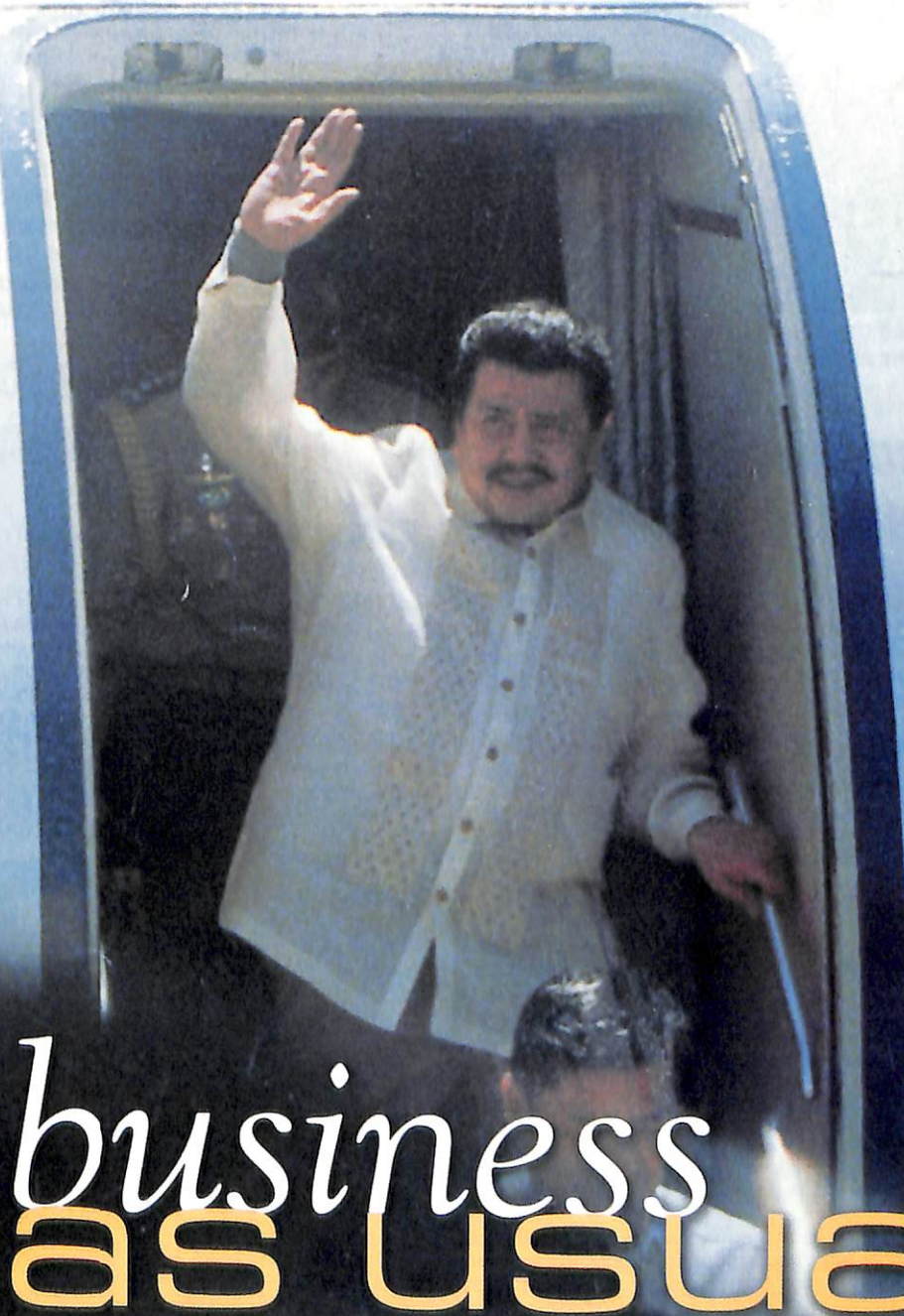
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For the last six (6) years, July to September were the busiest months in Mindanao. Call it the "third quarter blast"--a time when business deals are sealed, joint venture projects are launched and policy reforms are lobbied--a crucial time before organizations and enterprises begin their year-end planning for the year ahead.



1998, however, began with a severe Asian financial crisis and an El Niño phenomenon that brought even the strongest economies to their knees. In the Philippines, the La Niña phenomenon began to submerge agricultural production, not even giving time for recovery from the El Niño. Industrial unrest and the debilitating peso devaluation crippled business firms including the very crucial linkages served by the country's flag carrier, Philippine Airlines. In Mindanao, it was not only a question of how to protect the island's economic gains for the last six years, but likewise how to plot its order of battle to be able to survive.

business
as usual



Malalag, Sarangani drive ahead in coastal management



A seaweed farmer in Malalag checks his plantation.

The effort to conserve vital fishing grounds are paying off in the coastal towns of the provinces of Davao del Sur and Sarangani as learned during an area visit by the MEDCo Secretariat to the USAID-funded Coastal Resources Management Project (CRMP).

The project covers the areas of Malalag Bay and Sarangani Bay and has revealed huge potential in seaweed production if properly managed.

An information drive has already covered 24 barangays along Malalag Bay with the support of the local government units. Barangay Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Councils (BFARMCs) have also been put in place for the formulation of Integrated Coastal Management Plans (ICMPs) which will later be integrated at the municipal and provincial levels. More than 10 hectares of municipal waters at Barangay Badyang in Digos have also been planted with seaweed (eucheuma) with the financial assistance of Cooperative Bank of Davao and is expected to be harvested in November this year.

The CRMP and the local government, however, have yet to address the problems of market accessibility for seaweed producers and diminishing supply in the Malalag Bay area. A study by the CRMP Enterprise Development Team during the first semester this year, revealed that the carrying capacity of mariculture activities in the area is already over 50 percent, not giving sufficient time for the marine ecosystem to regenerate.

Seaweed production has also been introduced in the barangays along Sarangani Bay as an alternative source of livelihood but production still has not reached full scale. Seaweed test planting in Barangay Tinuto in Maasim, Sarangani was just introduced last June with the experiment being managed by the local community. Around five (5) hectares of mangrove area, on the other hand, have been rehabilitated. Of the 43 barangays covered, 24 have already drafted their ICMPs as a result of the ICM workshops conducted in the municipalities covered by the CRMP.[]

Mindanao to curb influx of banned pesticides

In an effort to stop the reported smuggling of banned pesticides into Mindanao, the Fertilizers and Pesticides Authority (FPA) together with MEDCo and Crop Protection Association of the Philippines, has formed the Task Force Against the Smuggling of Pesticides to curb its growing threat to people's health and the environment.

Included in the task force are the Department of Agriculture (DA), Philippine National Police (PNP), Bureau of Customs (BOC), Economic Intelligence and Investigation Bureau (EIIB), National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Davao City Fertilizers and Pesticides Distributors and Dealers Association (DACIFPEDDA).

The banned pesticides allegedly enter the ports of Zamboanga, Pagadian, Cotabato, General Santos and Davao through barter trade vessels plying existing sea routes. Sales and distribution are allegedly being done by the barter traders/peddlers/smugglers to unsuspecting farmers. Already apprehended were smuggled boxes of thiodan in Cotabato City by the FPA and the EIIB. Unregistered pesticides range from weed control, fungicides, insecticides, nematicides to bonds as well as activators. The FPA has come up with a complete list of the banned chemicals for public information.

FPA Administrator Alejo Villanueva Jr., cited the lack of information, problems in apprehension and monitoring as the major causes of their continued use by farmers. Although the origin of these banned chemicals has not been pinpointed, Adm. Villanueva said that they are going to raise the issue to the level of the BIMPE-EAGA so as to caution the other member countries.

The Task Force is eyeing the inclusion of vital agencies such as the Prosecution Offices, Philippine Information Agency and the Land Transportation Office to help speed up their efforts. It is also eyeing

membership in the Regional Law Enforcement Committee (RLEC) to create a wider intelligence network.

The Task Force is working on a set of recommendations involving regulatory and advocacy activities, as well as policy interventions. These include proposals to hold fora and symposia during EAGA-related agro-fisheries roadshows as well as raising the issue during Joint Border Crossing Meetings (RP-Malaysia/RP-Indonesia) through the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA). []

FPA Administrator Alejo Villanueva (middle) with Agriculture Undersecretary Cristino Collado brief the press on pesticide smuggling in Mindanao.



Angliongto is new MEDCo Chairman

President Joseph Estrada appointed last August 13, businessman Sebastian Angliongto as the new Mindanao Economic Development Council (MEDCo) Chairman, replacing former Presidential Assistant for Mindanao Jesus G. Dureza. The President separated the chairmanship of MEDCo from the Office of the President in Mindanao through Executive Order (E.O.) No. 10, amending E.O. 512 which created MEDCo last March 1992.

"This is a new call I have to heed," Mr. Angliongto said during his last speech as Mindanao Business Council (MBC) Chairman at the Mindanao Business Conference. "As I enter a new phase in my life as a public servant, I would like to look back at the many fulfilling years of working with the Philippine Chambers of Commerce (PCCI) and its many allies in the private sector as I look forward to

building similar relationships in working for the government with the end objective of bringing rapid and sustainable development to Mindanao."

Mr. Angliongto chaired the MBC since its creation in 1994 before he joined the government. He was also the East ASEAN Business Council (EABC) Country Director for the Philippines since 1994 as well as the PCCI National Director and Vice President for Mindanao from 1996-97 and 1998-99.

Replacing him as MBC Chairman is Ms. Joji Ilagan-Bian, former MBC Trustee and PCCI Regional Governor for Southeastern Mindanao. Former Presidential Assistant for Mindanao and MEDCo Chairman Paul G. Dominguez was appointed MBC's Honorary Chairman. []



MEDCo Chairman Hon. Sebastian L. Angliongto

Irrigation projects to water 32,792 hectares in Mindanao

Four (4) major on-going irrigation projects in Mindanao are seen to water 32,792 hectares when completed in the island's major food basins. These are the Kabulnan Irrigation and Area Development Project (KIADP) in Maguindanao, the Malitubog-Maridagao Irrigation Project (MalMar) in Cotabato Province and Maguindanao, the Lower Agusan Development Project (LADP) in Butuan, and the Bubunawan Irrigation Project (BIP) in Bukidnon.

KIADP, which is seen to irrigate 12,030 hectares of rice land in

Ampatuan, Maganoy, and Datu Piang in Maguindanao is now 70.92 percent complete and currently irrigating more than 2,450 hectares. The MalMar project, on the other hand, posted a 20.23 accomplishment, which can be attributed to the small contractors. Construction on the main component which was stopped last 1995 due to peace and order problems, however, has still not resumed. The project is expected to irrigate 10,840 hectares in the municipalities of Carmen and Pikit in Cotabato Province and Pagalungan in Maguindanao.



The LADP Irrigation Component in Butuan City, meanwhile, is ahead of schedule with its 11.84 percent accomplishment. It is targeted to irrigate around 7,922 hectares benefitting 14,445 farmer beneficiaries. Around 920 farmers in Libuna and Baungon in Bukidnon are also expected to benefit from the Bubunawan project which is seen to supply water to 2,000 hectares of land.

"The agriculture sector which is a top priority of the Estrada Administration, will greatly benefit from these projects," says MEDCo Chairman Sebastian Angliongto. "We should see to it that these are completed to support our aim for food security."[]

Mindanao's fertile agricultural lands stand to gain with the completion of agricultural infrastructure.

FVR observes MNLF peace accord anniversary in Cotabato

Keeping the faith, former President Fidel V. Ramos celebrated the second anniversary of the signing of the peace accord between the government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) during his visit to Kidapawan, Cotabato Province last September 1. It was the former President's first visit to Mindanao as a private citizen.

"Peace has always been the precondition to progress for any people. And our agreement certainly improved civil order here as it did in other areas in Mindanao and Sulu," Mr. Ramos said in a statement. "Thousands of former rebels have reentered civil society and hundreds have joined the Armed Forces (AFP) and the National Police (PNP)."

Mr. Ramos was joined by former MNLF chair now ARMM Governor Nur Misuari and Cotabato Governor Emmanuel Piñol in Kidapawan. It was also the 84th Foundation anniversary of Cotabato Province.

The former President and Governor Misuari received the 1997 Felix Houphouet Boigny Peace Prize in Dakar, Senegal last June 17, earning for Filipinos international recognition.

"There is of course, no greater prize than the dawning of peace itself and the consequent flowering of development," Mr. Ramos said. "Peace must be won by uplifting the lives of the people involved, not only the MILF and MNLF but also the civilians who were caught in the crossfire."

Mr. Ramos visited Davao City and M'lang, Cotabato Province during his trip. He was given a replica of the Davao Centennial Monument by the Davao Centennial Commission. In M'lang, he inaugurated the rural electrification and water supply system

in Tawan-Tawan, projects during his administration.

"I continue to have a responsibility to you. I have to go back and see Mindanao before I go out abroad to market our country," the former President said.[]

Former Cotabato Province Governor Rosario Diaz, ARMM Governor Nur Misuari and Former President Fidel V. Ramos celebrate the province's Foundation Day as well as the 2nd Anniversary of the MNLF-GRP peace pact with Gov. Piñol in Cotabato.



World Bank preps rural development program in Sultan Kudarat, Cotabato Province

Cotabato Province and Sultan Kudarat stand to benefit from the rural development projects to be rolled out by the World Bank under the Mindanao Rural Development Program (MRDP). The two (2) provinces were identified for project initiation by a World Bank Mission sent here last April as well as by the Rural Development Steering Committee led by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) because of the rural poverty incidence pegged at over 50 percent in both provinces in 1994.

The mission's Aide Memoire states that the MRDP would be "designed as a targeted poverty reduction program for the rural poor and indigenous communities of Mindanao, aimed specifically at increasing agricultural production and improvements in agricultural productivity, as well as the diversification of rural economic activities, with a view of improving smallholder food security and increased rural incomes in a sustainable manner."

The program will focus on 4th-6th class municipalities which have agricultural potential, particularly agrarian reform and indigenous communities. In Cotabato Province, the municipalities of Aleosan, Antipas, Arakan, Banisilan and Libungan were identified with the municipalities of Lutayan, Pres. Quirino, Sen. Aquino, Columbio and Palimbang of Sultan Kudarat.

Preparatory mechanisms have already been put in place. A social assessment survey has been conducted by the University of Southern Mindanao (USM) in both provinces, the results of which will be used in poverty mapping. Further analyses on the community, local government capability, agricultural potential and funding are expected to be made soon. Secretary William Dar of Agriculture will be heading the Project Management Board of the MRDP and has appointed Mr. Eutiquio Lumayag as Project Director.

Department of Agriculture (DA) Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban emphasized the role of the LGUs in the planning and implementation of the MRDP saying that the organizational involvement of the local community is vital to the program's success. World Bank Senior Economist and MRDP pronoment Dr. Rahul Raturi likewise stressed the importance of team work among the Project Monitoring Office, consultants and the LGUs in the project, further emphasizing that consultants should come from Mindanao. []

S. Mindanao gets 9 JICA bridges

Nine (9) bridges in Region XI, funded through a grant from the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), were completed since April this year. These are the Tawas and Licop bridges in Mati, Mahan-ub in Manay and Dao-an in Caraga, all in Davao Oriental. Also completed were the Piedad bridge in Toril and Los Amigos in Tugbok District, Davao City; Baliton and Pangyan bridges in Glan, Sarangani, and Lais I and II in Malita, Davao del Sur.

The completed bridges belong to the first group constructed under the fifth phase of JICA's "Bridges along Rural Roads in Mindanao" project which cost an estimated P94 million covering a total of 360 linear meters. Implemented by the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), the bridges were built starting late 1996 and early 1997. The project also involves the construction of bridges in Regions X and Caraga.

The project aims to provide critical linkages between the rural areas and the growth centers to facilitate the speedy delivery of agricultural products to the markets. Linking key production areas to the thriving growth centers is in line with Mindanao's efforts to achieve physical integration throughout the island.[]

Zamboecozone and Freeport call on investors

Envisioned to be the springboard for the promotion of trade, investments and eco-tourism in Western Mindanao, the Zamboanga City Special Economic Zone and Freeport Authority (ZAMBOECOZONE) is calling on investors to take advantage of the opportunities offered in the preferred areas of investment which include resource-based manufacturing, industrial firms and eco-tourism facilities.

Domestic and foreign investors can set up shop at the ZAMBOECOZONE free from customs tax, duties and other tariff obligations, as well as take advantage of numerous fiscal incentives being offered.

For instance, only a minimal five (5) percent is taxed on an investor's gross income for the year, two (2) percent of which is remitted to the national government, another two (2) percent to the city government and one (1) percent to the Barangay Special Development Fund.

A permanent resident status within the ZAMBOECOZONE shall also be granted to any foreign investor who establishes a business enterprise within the area and who maintains a capital investment of



The Western Mindanao Power Corporation



The Zamboanga City Port

not less than US\$150,000.00. This includes his family and dependents. Working visas, renewable every two years, are likewise issued to foreign executives and technicians with highly specialized skills.

Furthermore, investors only pay a P1.00 lease payment for every square meter of land on a per month basis.



The Mabuhay Philippines Satellite Corporation

Since its operation in 1995, the ZAMBOECOZONE has seen the establishment of two major locators, the Faberco Holdings, Inc. and Mabuhay Philippines Satellite Corporation (MPSC). Faberco Holdings, Inc. is a joint Filipino-Indian venture with three subsidiary companies that deal with equipment reconditioning and a multi-products distribution system. It has set up a huge warehouse for a duty-free shop. MPSC, meanwhile, built a back-up tracking, telemetry and control (TT & C) satellite station in the zone for the first Filipino satellite (Aguila II) it launched last year.

The zone likewise actively participated in the prestigious Hannover Industrial Fair in Germany last April, signalling its readiness to welcome international investors to Zamboanga City. It currently eyes the establishment of a 12-hectare reclamation project along R.T. Lim Boulevard Extension in Zamboanga City as well as 50 hectares of the Cawit seashore bordering the shore area of the Varadero de Recodo shipyard in the west coast. []

The President's 10-point Agenda

- P** : Peace and Order
- A** : Alleviation of the Poor
- R** : Responsive Government/Reforms in Governance
- A** : Agricultural Productivity and Development to Achieve Food Security
- S** : Social Services and Safety Nets
- A** : Adoption of Science and Technology Thrusts
- M** : Management of Budget Deficit thru Fiscal and Financial Reforms
- A** : Appropriate Exports and Investments Policies
- S** : Sustainable Development
- A** : Alliance Building and Partnership among Government, Business and Civil Society

Apa Khabar, EAGA?

by S.F. Banzuela

After a seemingly quiet nine months, how is EAGA? Just recently, the Board of the East ASEAN Business Council (EABC) met in Davao City during the 7th Mindanao Business Conference to update its programs. The forestry and telecommunications sectors also held working group meetings to follow-up on the status of projects. The Philippine-EAGA agro-industry sector, meanwhile, conducted its series of roadshows and roundtable discussions around Mindanao and Palawan. And although travel within the growth area has been experiencing a slump this did not discourage the opening of a new Zamboanga-Sandakan ferry connection. The slowdown in the conduct of big marketing events for the growth area never meant that the sectors are leaving the EAGA in the hands of fate as the Asian economic crisis continues. The different sectors have each in their own way sought means to seize new opportunities.

The EABC endorsed to the Working Group on Construction and Construction Materials a project proposal on a Trans Borneo Railway by the DE-Consult, a German company. The company is set to present its proposal to the working group meeting of the construction sector in November. The proposed railway is seen to connect the Kalimantan provinces of Indonesia, Sarawak, Brunei Darussalam and Sabah. This project will be of great contribution to the construction sector's flagship project, the Pan-Borneo Multi-Modal Transport System.

To help the focus areas of Indonesia in the currency turmoil, the EABC is also eyeing East Indonesia as the venue for the second BIMP-EAGA Business Forum. The EABC has also endorsed the conduct of the BIMP-EAGA Hotel and Catering '99 to be held in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah on March next year.

A new ferry service is plying the Zamboanga-Sandakan route. The fastcraft, Kawan Express I, made its maiden voyage last August 29. It has a capacity of 300 passengers and cuts the regular travel time of 18 hours to eight (8). It is the first Malaysian investment in sea

transport in support to the BIMP-EAGA.

Travel trends within the growth area continue to fluctuate with the economic slump. While Bouraq Airlines experienced a rise in passenger traffic (43%-incoming, 62%-outgoing), its volume of incoming cargo on the other hand, slipped by 34 percent. Silk Air's Davao-Singapore route, meanwhile, experienced its all-time lows in passenger volume, with incoming passenger traffic going down by 13.6 percent and outgoing by 7.86 percent.

In shipping, Fajar lines servicing the General Santos-Bitung route posted a huge 70 percent slump in passenger cargo in the first quarter compared to the same period last year. A new Indonesian vessel is now plying the same route posting incoming passenger seat occupancy at more than 50 percent. Aleson and Sampaguita shipping plying the Zamboanga-Sandakan route both experienced a rise in outgoing passenger volume at 53.87 and 15 percent, respectively, during the first quarter.

The Philippine-EAGA agro-industry and fisheries sectors concluded its series of roadshow presentations around Mindanao and Palawan with the following common and immediate concerns identified: lack of funding assistance, absence of necessary infrastructure facilities, and lack of technical expertise on production and processing technologies and management skills. The Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) are working on the conduct of roundtable discussions in Mindanao and Palawan to facilitate information exchange on available assistance to Small and Medium Enterprises of these sectors relative to the identified problems.

The Working Group on telecommunications recently identified the following projects as doable within the next two years: Trans-Borneo Land-Based Fiber Optic Cable System Project, second phase of tariff reductions within BIMP-EAGA, EAGA Regional System using satellite and cable facilities, and the BIMP-EAGA Network of Information.

The Philippines' Globe Telecom, together with DST Communications Sdn Bhd (Brunei Darussalam), Telkomsel and PT Satelindo (Indonesia) and Maxis (Malaysia), have successfully put in place the Global Satellite for Mobile (GSM) communications roaming in the BIMP-EAGA. Seven (7) GSM operators now cover more than 50 cities and towns within the growth area.

The Working Group on Forestry, meanwhile, is set to incorporate the compilation of BIMP-EAGA's ecotourism destinations in the BIMP-EAGA Homepage. Dubbed as ECOPARKS, the working group will be presenting the project during the 8th Senior Officials Meeting next year.[]

business as usual

by S.F. Banzuela

It was therefore surprising that the third quarter began with a boom—a 21-gun salute that heralded President Joseph Estrada's first visit to Mindanao to address the Mindanao Food Congress. It was immediately followed by the 2nd Mindanao Trade Expo and the 7th Mindanao Business Conference, all private sector-led events. Mindanao needed to give the world a sign—it is alive and kicking and business is as brisk as usual.

Bidding for the Lead Role

Former Agriculture Secretary Roberto Sebastian stressed his point: Mindanao must be fully supported in its bid for the role as the country's food basket because it is the most qualified to be so. Mr. Sebastian, now Chairman of the Mindanao Agriculture and Fisheries Council (MAFC) presented MAFC's recommendations for the enhancement of Mindanao's agriculture sector to President Estrada during the Mindanao Food Congress held in Davao City last August.

MAFC's position paper outlined an agricultural development agenda that would answer agriculture's infrastructure, technical and financial requirements. Among those proposed was the utilization of the Key Production Area (KPA) approach in the delivery of vital support systems. The approach emphasizes planting the right crop at the right time, at the right place with the appropriate facilities or infrastructure. MAFC likewise called for a review of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), stressing that it must be revised into something that is "fair, realistic and implementable, progressive and not retrogressive in terms of productivity". Stronger coastal management measures for the island's fisheries sector were likewise sought. MAFC prescribed the regulation of fish harvests within sustainable levels and the strict enforcement of existing laws and programs for the protection of reefs and mangroves.

Adding strength to MAFC's proposals were the resolutions presented by the Mindanao Business Council (MBC). These include fasttracking the implementation of the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (AFMA) with Mindanao as best suited for the test-case phase. Strict financing schemes for the island's agricultural development were likewise lobbied including strengthening the government's budget process in support of the Departments of



Here's to Mindanao's Fishermen. President Estrada inaugurates the new freezing and storage facilities at the Davao Fishing Port during his first visit.

Agriculture (DA), Agrarian Reform (DAR), and Science and Technology (DOST). This includes the exemption of these departments from the 25 percent mandatory reserves and allocation of at least 10 percent of the reserves of the DOST for research and development.

In his response to these calls, President Estrada emphasized that the agricultural program under his administration will not only ensure food security but will also prevent urban migration. Besides supporting the resolutions covering the implementation of the AFMA and CARP, the President likewise announced the establishment of his Centennial College Scholarship Program for Mindanao Muslims. He also assured the congress participants that the Task Force formed to address mining issues on Mt. Diwata is due to submit an integrated action plan to resolve issues as well as a master plan for the sustainable development of the mining industry.

The President likewise assured that the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) is working on "Oplan Bangon Mindanao" to help the regions severely affected by the El Niño to



President Estrada with the newly sworn-in officers of PhilExport, Inc. during the Mindanao Food Congress.

recover. Continuing food subsidies as well as sustainable livelihood projects for affected upland farm households in Southern and Central Mindanao had been urged by both MAFC and the MBC.

Mindanao currently accounts for 23 percent of the country's rice production. According to analysts, if its major river basins in Cotabato and Agusan are properly irrigated, the island has the potential of feeding not only the entire country but Malaysia as well. In the first quarter this year, the El Niño forced agricultural production in the entire country to drop by as much as 3.6 percent with palay production falling by 13.4 percent and corn by as much as 23.5 percent.

A Surprise Turnout

Despite the economic slump, the 3rd Mindanao Trade Expo held in Davao City at the onset of the Kadayawan Festival gathered more than 150 Small and Medium Entrepreneurs (SMEs) from all over Mindanao to showcase a fantastic array of Mindanao's handicrafts. The Expo, organized by the Philippine Chamber of Handicraft Industries (PCHI) and opened by First Lady Dr. Loi Ejercito, was also participated in by exhibitors from Indonesia and Sarawak, Malaysia.

An estimated P60 million in actual and negotiated sales was earned during the five-day event. For PCHI Chairman Ann Pamintuan, this was already a "resounding success" considering the economic crisis.

Although lower than last year's P115-million, this year's sales

indicated that each participating product sector generated increased sales over last year. The gifts-toys-houseware sector, for instance, earned more than P46 million compared to P7-million in 1997. The furniture and furnishing sector, meanwhile, captured almost P9 million, a P4-million increase over last year's sales.

The Expo started out in 1996 as an event with the primary purpose of bringing together buyers, exporters and producers at one place. Taking on a bolder thrust, the Expo this year, featured an SME Forum where prospects for the product sector in the light of the current economic situation were discussed. The Forum drew up a resolution detailing proposed policy reforms and programs of action for SMEs in Mindanao.

Exhibitors from Indonesia and Malaysia were interested in learning about the mass production techniques of local handicraft makers. Sarawak Handicraft Council Chairman and Assistant Minister for Rural and Land Development Datuk Gramong Juna said that the 20-man delegation he headed wanted to learn about the production line and technology of Mindanao's handicraft industry to help them improve their own. Sarawak's handicrafts, known for their intricateness, were produced more as cultural or religious objects rather than as profit-making tourist souvenirs.

This year's expo also aimed to expose participants to the arena of global trade. Strategic alliances with their counterparts in the Brunei Darussalam Indonesia Malaysia the Philippines-East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) were discussed. The Provincial Agro-Industrial Centers (PAICs) under the Local Government Support Program (LGSP) of the Canadian International Development Assistance (CIDA) were also launched during the Expo.

The 7th MBC, the first to be held under the Estrada administration, sought to advocate policy strategies in support of the President's vision towards poverty alleviation, food security and peace especially in Mindanao.

Unity in Adversity

Despite the grim background painted by the Philippine Airlines announcement of closure and the typhoons causing devastating floods and sea tragedies, the 7th Mindanao Business Conference (MBC) opened with the determination to unite the business community in an effort to highlight the role of Mindanao in weathering the country's economic crisis.

The 7th MBC, the first to be held under the Estrada administration, sought to advocate policy strategies in support of the President's vision towards poverty alleviation, food security and peace especially in Mindanao. Based on the 11 resolutions submitted to the President, the MBC called for stronger government-private sector teamwork in the implementation of development programs and projects for the entire island.

An accord by the private sector with the government, for instance, declares the intent of the various Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Mindanao and the Mindanao Business Council to help the national government in achieving economic recovery through programs such as the implementation of the AFMA in Mindanao, and strengthening cooperation with neighboring economies like the Pacific Island Nations and the Northern Territory of Australia.

The MBC also called on the national government to strengthen its commitment to the participation of Mindanao in the BIMP-EAGA. Sabah Chief Minister Yb Tan Sri Bernard Dompok has already reaffirmed Malaysia's commitment. Addressing the MBC, the Chief Minister said that he believes that it would be "a mistake for countries to retreat and become inward-looking" when things do not look good. "The country may be worse off as a result of limiting both its opportunities and choices. Our commitment to free trade and globalization must not waiver at this difficult times," the Chief Minister said. He further stressed that strategic partnership is the key for the member countries to enhance external trade and investments, which is seen to provide local corporate and businesses with wider opportunities. The Chief Minister led a 30-man delegation from Sabah to join the conference.

Northern Territory Minister for Asian Relations, Trade and Industry Daryl Manzie supported the Sabah Chief Ministers' stand. "Maintain the faith in BIMP-EAGA," he said during his address to the MBC. "I strongly believe that it must be recognized that the local circumstances and parameters which led to the BIMP-EAGA continue to apply even in the face of economic hardship...the more

Exhibits of various food products at the Mindanao Food Congress.



First Lady Loi Ejercito Estrada views the exhibits at the 3rd Mindanao Trade Expo.

difficult the circumstances, the more essential it is to develop strategies at a regional level to overcome these problems and increase economic activity." The Northern Territory participates as observer in the BIMP-EAGA. It exports live cattle to the member countries.

The national government was likewise urged to increase credit access for Micro-Cottage and Small-Scale Enterprises (MSMEs), possibly earmarking for Mindanao US\$100 million of the US\$300 million credit facility the President approved for small borrowers. This is seen to support the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) Developing Rural Industries and Village Enterprises (DRIVE) program which, the MBC bats, should be pilot-tested in Mindanao.

In anticipation of the economic recession, the MBC also called for the immediate conduct of a Mindanao Poverty Summit which is seen to come up with a Poverty Alleviation and Human Development Action Plan supporting the President's poverty agenda.

Mindanao Business Council turned MEDCo Chairman Sebastian Angliongto in his closing address said that "the Mindanao business community should continuously assume an important role in reshaping the island's development by closely working with the government and serving as the engine of growth to the local economy."

Chairman Angliongto welcomes Sabah Chief Minister Yb Tan Sri Bernard Dompok during the latter's arrival for the 7th MBC. Looking on is Davao City Vice Mayor Luis Bonguyan.



MBC-turned-MEDCo Chairman Sebastian Angliongto with PCCI President Alberto Fenix during the 7th Mindanao Business Conference. With them is PCCI Regional Governor for Southeastern Mindanao Protacio Tacandong.

No Stopping Mindanao

There is absolutely no stopping Mindanao in its efforts to sustain and revitalize the economic momentum it worked so hard to achieve over the past six years. Former Presidential Assistant for Mindanao and MEDCo Chairman Paul G. Dominguez, now honorary Chairman of the MBC, while addressing the Conference, said that over the last five years, Mindanao saw a significant increase in investments because of the private sector responding enthusiastically to the government's clear signals. These signals were embodied not only in plans but of actual policies and programs.

"The objective of this enabling environment is greater confidence of investors...to show that Mindanao is different from the rest of the Philippines, will respond differently, and has greater chance of profiting from this new economic environment," Dominguez said.

Indeed, Mindanao has developed such a strong sense of identity that every issue and concern is addressed by a united force led by a strong private sector. Mindanao stays united to be able to exist. Evidence of this have been the numerous island-wide conferences and fora that never stopped to let the crises take the best out of Mindanao. Mindanao's private sector is truly proving itself as the island's worthy voice. And it's telling the rest of the world that in Mindanao, business is as usual. []



Mindanao battles air industry crash

Passenger and cargo traffic which had been enjoying annual average increases of 12.87 and 5.51 percent, respectively, suffered heavily due to the sharp decline in air service.

by S.F. Banzuela

Air connections have been turbulent for Mindanao for the past nine months. A Cebu Pacific crash in Misamis Oriental last February 2, temporarily shut down operations for a month. It was followed by Malaysia Airlines retracting its Davao-Kota Kinabalu connection beginning late February. By a streak of good fortune, Bouraq Airlines upgraded its planes servicing the Davao-Manado route to Boeing 737-200s. But it was followed by the suspension of Air Philippines operations by the Air Transportation Office (ATO) for not passing maintenance standards. Grand Air then cancelled its operations because it could not pay its creditors. Finally, because of an unsettled labor dispute and critical financial losses, Philippine Airlines (PAL) shut down operations for 13 days. Philippine Airlines may be flying again, but for Mindanao the end to the airline nightmare is still unknown. Lessons were learned and the island must be prepared to face emergencies such as these.

The inadequate facilities of other domestic airline carriers could not shoulder the huge gap left by PAL during its shut down. Vegetables bound for Manila and other metropolitan centers began to rot. A farmer from Tupi, South Cotabato complained that he had to give away his cabbages for fifty pesos a sack because there was no flight from General Santos. Lanzones flooded the cities at the peak of harvest. Public markets were swamped with unsold tuna which was even sold at prices as low as P60 a kilo.

Passenger and cargo traffic which had been enjoying annual average increases of 12.87 and 5.51 percent, respectively, suffered heavily due to the sharp decline in air service. In Mindanao, the airports severely affected were Camiguin, Dipolog, Pagadian, Jolo and Butuan. Manila-bound flights from key cities totalling 1,875 before the PAL labor strike, were significantly reduced to 1,424. The cities of Cotabato and Cagayan de Oro suffered the most, from 448 flights each to 56 and 368, respectively. Intra Mindanao flights were the heavy sufferers. Passengers from Davao had to go to Manila to get to Zamboanga.

Seeking immediate solutions to these problems, the Mindanao Economic Development Council (MEDCo) convened the business sector, key government agencies and representatives from the airline industry last September 18 to seek recommendations for lobbying to the national government.

The business sector, represented by the Chambers of Commerce from all over Mindanao, expressed concern over the suspension of PAL flights since the current services and plans of Cebu Pacific Air and Mindanao Express are found inadequate to satisfy the current demand. They suggested that both airlines also serve missionary routes to Zamboanga, Cotabato, and Butuan (for Cebu Pacific); and Bislig, Dipolog and Pagadian (for Mindanao Express).

"The market is here, the riding public is here...we believe that the Mindanao economy is the least affected by the economic slowdown in the areas of manufacturing," said MBC Honorary Chairman Paul G. Dominguez. "We hope that this situation is recognized by the

airlines so that we can see an improvement in the delivery of services."

Cebu Pacific currently serves three (3) routes to Mindanao linking Davao, Cagayan de Oro, Cebu and Manila. It is studying the viability of Manila-Zamboanga and Manila-GSC-Cebu-Manila routes. It has been eyeing the lease of wide-bodied aircraft from foreign airlines but the June-September peak season in the U.S. and Europe have made aircrafts unavailable. The airline has also been designated as the country's second official flag carrier to serve Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

Mindanao Express, on the other hand, currently serves Davao, Tandag, General Santos, Cotabato, Zamboanga, Jolo, and Tawi-Tawi routes. It is eyeing to serve Brunei, Sandakan and Manado and other Mindanao routes but its expansion program is dependent on the availability of navigational aids in the airports.

A possible declaration of Open Sky Policy allowing the entry of foreign airlines to serve both domestic and international routes was also examined. Tourism Undersecretary Orestes Ricaforte reported that Secretary Gemma Cruz-Araneta is pushing for its implementation. Cebu Pacific General Manager for Business Development Diego Garrido says they do not object to the suggestion and are very much willing to accept the challenge.

Not all airline carriers though, are agreeable to the proposal, saying that the country must protect its own companies. Says Atty. Domingo Duerme, PAL Senior Assistant Vice President for Mindanao, "The policy is only good at the beginning, but when worse comes to worst, it will be the foreign airlines who will be the first one to get out. They would not enter the country for charity but for profits. Besides, they will only kill the local airlines."

Ironically, it was Hong-Kong based Cathay Pacific Airways that responded to the national emergency, cushioning the PAL blow by flying major domestic routes for thirteen (days), logging a total of 60 domestic flights from September 24 to October 6, including the Manila-Davao route.

Other efforts to prevent similar crises in industries other than airlines include that of Congress where a bill is suggesting the prohibition of strikes and lockouts in vital public utilities in times of economic crises. "That is okay but just for a short-term," Duerme said. "A better proposal would be to amend the executive order on the liberalization of the air industry and let the government subsidize part of it especially the national flag carriers."

At present PAL has resumed its normal operations for routes bound for Manila. It has upgraded its planes for Davao with Airbus 330s which have 25 tons more of cargo capacity 32 seats more than the Airbus 300s. Interregional flights however, still have to be studied for their viability.

With the continuing Asean financial crisis, the future, still remains to be seen. Businessmen remain worried that there is always no definite assurance especially in these turbulent times. []

Education and Health Diagnosed

by V. dela Cruz

Mindanao has always been lagging behind in terms of literacy rate and the availability of quality health services. A recent education and mass media survey showed that in terms of the proportion of the population 10 years old and above who can read, write and understand a simple message, Mindanao tailed behind at 88.95 percent compared to Luzon and Visayas (96 and 94 percent, respectively). As if this was not enough, Mindanao also faces a serious problem in terms of people's access to medical and health services. Dr. Romeo Custodio of the Davao Medical Foundation said that for quite some time, every physician in Mindanao serves almost 5,200 patients--an alarming proportion.

But Mindanaoans did what they had to do to provide the necessary social services. These are some inspiring stories on the efforts of Mindanaoans and the government's concern to make quite high aims come true.

Albert Einstein School of Cotabato: On Time

Mr. Edison Morales' dream was basic. Like all parents, all he wanted was to give quality education to his children. He was frustrated, however, when he found out that existing pre-schools in their area were not good enough to meet the standards he set for his 4-year old eldest son, Pilgrim.

To meet the requirements for his son, Mr. Morales and his wife, Angela, embarked on a very bold and ambitious project--put up their own school. After all, Mr. Morales had been a teacher for more than two decades and has carved his own niche in the academe. In 1982, a primary school named Albert Einstein was built.

"I wanted excellence in science and math and Albert Einstein was to be an embodiment of excellence in those fields," Mr. Morales quipped. He wanted their school to give total quality education by giving the best in all fields of learning. He wanted more than just $E=mc^2$ and worked hard for it.

The school started with 21 promising pre-schoolers which included Pilgrim. But Mr. Morales was not sure where his son would proceed after pre-school. Finding out that his son was just repeating his lessons in another school, he decided to follow his son's grade level by establishing an elementary school. By 1988, Albert Einstein had its first batch of academically and emotionally-equipped elementary graduates. In 1989, the school opened its high school department.



Molding at an early age. Students of the Albert Einstein School of Cotabato.

The school easily gained the community's confidence when it started to reap most of the major awards in various local, regional and even national academic and literary competitions. Its graduates likewise fared well in entrance examinations to the country's premiere high schools and universities. For the first time, Cotabato City had an oblation scholar at the University of the Philippines in 1993.

With the kind of education it offers, Mr. Morales readily admits that the school charges higher tuition compared to other schools. But parents are assured that they get their money's worth with the kind of training and teachers their children get. Albert Einstein maintains a maximum of 40 students per grade level, giving teachers a higher degree of accountability. The school institutes computer education starting grade one. The school's intensive mathematics program is updated with the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics in the United States. It also banks on its science laboratory which is home to the students' scientific awakenings. Highly competent teachers had been chosen from a pool of honor graduates from various universities in the country.

An enterprise, however, cannot thrive without the government setting a good environment. Mr. Morales recommends for the government to "identify and subsidize schools that are producing good results." He laments over tax increases imposed by the Department of Education, Culture & Sports (DECS) and its too tight policies on approving tuition increases. He is also disappointed over the lack of support given by the local government to students who excel in academic competitions. He is also concerned over what he describes as "a very traditional requirement imposed by DECS to hire elementary and high school instructors who are professional board exam passers." Such a requirement, he says, should not be imposed. "A board exam passer is not a guarantee that one can effectively teach." While respecting the need to professionalize teaching, Mr. Morales urges the government to give consideration to schools which hire teachers for their expertise and competence.

Morales, now 50, disappointed his parents when he decided to teach. "To me, it was really a choice. I've been teaching since I was 19 and I guess this is my mission. It's a very big responsibility, but as long as there are parents who see the importance of a good education, Albert Einstein is here to stay."



Now home to Mindanao's medicine men: the Davao Medical School Foundation.

The Best Pill

Gone were the days when parents from Mindanao automatically send their children to Manila to study medicine. For decades, sending Mindanaoans to medical schools entail a lot of money. The set-up resulted to a domino effect that has resulted in giving Mindanao the lowest number of medical practitioners. Recent statistics showed that every doctor in Mindanao served more than 5,000 patients--clearly spelling the great need for doctors.

The pioneering initiative of concerned Mindanaoans in 1976 paved the way to the establishment of the island's first medical school, the Davao Medical School Foundation (DMSF). "The school started with a core of individuals fired with a vision and volunteerism that brought DMSF to what it is today--an institution that aims to produce doctors that are truly men and women for others," says DMSF Center for Education Research and Development in Health Director Dr. Warlito Vicente. DMSF was started to address a local need to have more doctors not only in Davao but throughout Mindanao.

Over the years, the school has made its mark in medical education, producing top medical board passers and classified among the top ten medical schools in the country, also ranking fourth among the country's top 19 dental schools. It also belongs to the elite seven Centers of Excellence in Research. Its greatest accomplishment perhaps is the fact that 70 to 80 percent of doctors in government hospitals in rural areas in Mindanao are products of DMSF, proof that the school is fulfilling its mission to serve the underprivileged. "The establishment of DMSF has also encouraged doctors to consider the region as one of the best places to settle in," says Dr. Vicente.

The school's mission which is to provide the entire Mindanao with doctors continues. And as its goal requires lifelong development beginning with an unflinching quest for knowledge, DMSF continues to be a better pill.

While medical education in Mindanao continues to flourish, medical centers are likewise gearing towards expansion and modernization to be able to give the best health care services.

For one, the Davao Doctors Hospital (DDH) is embarking on a P200-million expansion scheme to deliver services previously unavailable in Davao and Mindanao such as cancer and cardiac treatment facilities. Government policy reforms also expanded the hospital's services as it is one of the accredited hospitals in Mindanao which offer free medical certification to Mindanao-based Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) working within the BIMP-EAGA.

The Davao Medical Center (DMC), on the other hand, has likewise completed its new wing. With grants from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), construction work for the P391-million patient wing will start early next year. Construction of the P100-million Heart Center is also going on.

As it leads in serving the health care requirements of Mindanao, the management of Davao Doctors Hospital expressed concern over the insurmountable legislative regulations mandating private hospitals to accommodate patients who cannot afford the services. They are asking for tax incentives and financial subsidy from the government. They are asking management, meanwhile, is urging the government to strengthen the Philippine Health Insurance (PHI) system to cater to the financial needs of the patients particularly those from the low-income level. LGUs have also been requested to improve hospitals in towns and provinces to lessen the influx of patients in urban centers.

The Mindanao Oblation

As early as the mid-50's, Mindanaoans were already clamoring for the U.P. presence in the region. Through the years, repeated attempts were made for Mindanao to have a U.P. of its own. After all, a large part of the country's population is in Mindanao. Until February 20, 1995. The establishment of the University of the Philippines in Mindanao through Republic Act 7889 was the culmination of a long-cherished dream of concerned U.P. alumni, parents, political and civic leaders.

"U.P. is never too late in Mindanao," says Chancellor Rogelio Cuyno. "But the school has to do some catching up to be at par with the other five U.P. systems in the country. Nevertheless, we should be very happy that Mindanao's wish is finally granted." Indeed the best thing to do now is to make the U.P. mission a reality--to bring to the people of Mindanao the U.P. standard of academic excellence and commitment to academic freedom, social responsibility and nationalism.

U.P. Mindanao is envisioned to grow into a comprehensive multi-functional university of higher learning committed to instruction, research and extension. As provided in RA 7889, its academic programs shall put emphasis on science and technology, the medical and health sciences and agriculture so that it can assist the region in improving the higher education sector.

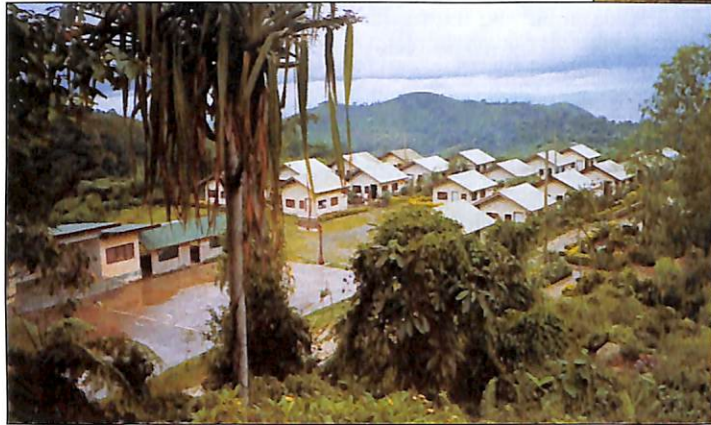
This year, 60 percent of its students come from Davao City, a figure that is unbecoming of a state university which promotes interregional unity. The administration does not keep mum about it. Chancellor Cuyno noted that the school is attracting students from other parts of the country, especially the cultural minorities and poor but deserving students. The block in promoting the school as a university of the people, Chancellor Cuyno admits, has been its entrance exams to students. "If the school follows the UP College Entrance Test results, almost all the passers are students from urban areas, leaving behind promising students from rural areas who may have the intelligence but lacked proper training from the schools they come from."

While all surveys point to Mindanao as trailing behind other regions in terms of literacy and other educational advancement indicators, U.P. Mindanao is bent on establishing itself as center of expertise and excellence. The school has been getting excellent support from the local government. It maintains two campuses: the undergraduate base in Bago Oshiro, Mintal and the graduate school in Buhangin, both in Davao City.

U.P. Mindanao may still be in its infancy and some people from other regions may still consider the island unstable in terms of its peace and order condition, but with U.P. upholding its vision and mission, the oblation, which embodies academic excellence and freedom, will continue to stand bold and strong in Mindanao.

Infrastructure with a Heart

by S.F. Banzuela



PNOC's relocation village boasts of a lifetime subsidy for power and water.



The Mindanao Geothermal Power Project on top of Mt. Apo.

Just an eight-hour trek away (approximately 900 meters) from the peak of the 10,311-foot Mt. Apo, lies nestled the only geothermal power project in Mindanao by the Philippine National Oil Company-Energy Development Corporation (PNOC-EDC). Where workers are used to the near-freezing temperatures, it oftentimes a nice surprise to know that this power project comes with a warm heart for its surrounding communities.

Before its construction in late 1995, the project was met by strong opposition from environmentalists, lobbyists for indigenous peoples and even communists. Some people feared that the drills would cause the dormant Mt. Apo to erupt, which, of course, was not true. PNOC had to win over ignorance and an unstable peace and order situation to be able to get through. Today, about 19 months since it started its commercial operations, PNOC not only generates 52 Megawatts of power for the Mindanao grid, it is also contributing to a better quality of life to tribal communities.

Within the 10-kilometer radius of Barangay Ilomavis, a hill community in the outskirts of Kidapawan City, PNOC reaches out to uplift the standard of living of around 30 barangays through its community support projects. Initially allocating P3 million last 1992, PNOC continues to allocate funds for the projects covering health and sanitation, education, alternative livelihood training and infrastructure.

Around 21,000 residents have benefitted from their medical outreach programs since 1992. Three (3) barangays have also been the recipients of their chlorination program and 14 barangays given around 482 concrete sanitary bowls. Several residents have also received tuberculosis treatment and over a hundred families given sustainable feeding.

PNOC also provides basic education to the barangays ranging from day care centers, vocational trainings, scholarships, and adult lit-

eracy classes. Vocational trainings include welding, practical electricity and softbroom-making. PNOC is proud to have 60 out-of-school youth complete the practical electricity training in December last year. Alternative livelihood training programs in goat-fattening and piglet dispersal have also been initiated for approximately 30 families. Its loom-weaving program is also on-going production under the supervision of MAFI.

Under its infrastructure program, PNOC takes care that roads are rehabilitated and maintained. PNOC also gathered 15 barangays to form an association to operate and manage a spring development project. Dislocated families affected by the PNOC concession were relocated to a 21-house village with a lifetime subsidy for power and water.

"We plant a hundred trees for every tree cut," is the immediate answer of PNOC employees to questions on forest denudation. PNOC's environmental management projects cover an area of 646 hectares. At present, it maintains 162 hectares of rattan plantations thru associations as a livelihood project, 475 hectares for the reforestation of the areas around Lake Macadac (also through associations), as well as a 10-hectare demo farm.

At present, the National Power Corporation (NPC) is busy working on the expansion of its Kidapawan sub-station under Phase 1 while simultaneously working on Phase 2. Phase 2 is undergoing drilling and tests as well as the construction of a power plant and fluid collection and disposal system. Expected to be completed by May 1999, the second phase will add 48 Megawatts more of power generated for the Mindanao grid. The whole project is being implemented through a Build-Operate-Transfer scheme between PNOC-EDC and the American-Japanese joint venture, Oxbow-Marubeni.

The Mindanao Geothermal Power Project steams on, and behind is an implementor that not only generates power but empowers communities as well. []

Gov. Carlos O. Fortich: Zorro, Plato, the Highlander

by S. F. Banzuela

"You have a hybrid rebel here." Minus his cowboy hat, his long, white hair in a pony tail, the Governor, with his towering presence, looks as formidable as his booming voice sounds. "I come from a generation of two rebel Spanish ethnic groups -- the Catalans and the Basques. My maternal great, great grandfather was a Catalan and my mother was a Basque." Fortich, however, is Austrian. "My paternal grandfather was a U.S. military man who came to the Philippines and became military governor in 1901." Despite his lineage, the Governor is a pure-bred Mindanaoan, speaking only Visayan and English, never tagalog. Politics is in his blood.

One is reminded of Anthony Hopkins as Zorro, a rebel leader in a popular movie, not just by how the Governor looks but also by his pursuit of local autonomy. One is also rendered speechless when he launches into a philosophical political debate, political science being a favorite hobby. And one wonders, what it is in Governor Carlos O. Fortich that has made him govern Bukidnon unchallenged for 28 years. How does one sketch a man who mirrors Zorro, Plato and the Highlander rolled into one?

He scoffs at the common biographical type of interview questions and launches into a talk of how Mindanao has always been independent. "All Filipino heroes come from Luzon," he says, "Mindanaoans didn't have to fight for their freedom because they've always been free." These were apparently his reflections on the centennial celebration. His statements perhaps best describe the life-long pursuit of his political career: local autonomy.

"I have worked under four (4) administrations and yet the nation has still not been able to define local autonomy in a unitary form of government. During the American Period, the Local Government Code was an eight-page pamphlet that contained a set of administrative laws that began with 'thou shall not.' The rest was given to the free will of the local government. Today, we have a four-volume code which tells what the local government should do. Where is the autonomy there? Decentralization is just the devolution of responsibilities and function. I'm afraid that like the Philippine Eagle, local autonomy is doomed to die."

The governor's statements do not just remain in philosophy. These are translated into governance in the province of Bukidnon where all development programs and decisions come from the barangay level. "All programs of the government should emanate from the people," the governor says. "The government is there just to determine the mechanisms for implementable terms."

Kutang Bato's Hope for Solid Peace

Justice and peace are outlawed. Kidnappings abound. Cleanliness is history. The print and broadcast media may have blown these sordid perceptions of Cotabato City out of proportion, but what has not been made aware is the amount of hard work the city's leaders and people are doing to prove that they are not worth such stigma.

It is not worth going to Cotabato City with fear.

Acting City Mayor Muslimin G. Sema, proudly says that recently, crime rate in the city has been reduced tremendously. "Innocent people being gunned down under the scorching heat of the sun was a thing of the past." Sema, who once served as right hand man to Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) leader Nur Misuari, held to a belief that through time, "subversive elements will come to rectify their actuations and realize that there is wisdom in welcoming unity and peace."

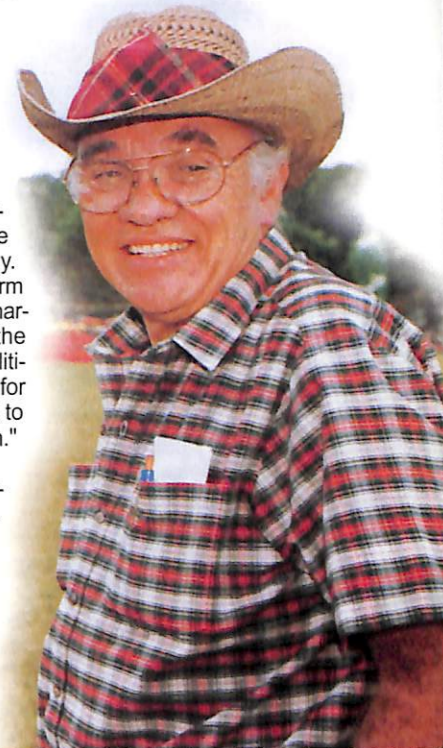
The forging of the peace agreement between the government and the MNLF two years ago, according to Sema, was a historic event that brought to an end decades of bloodshed and terror in the island. He is more than happy to note that former combatants in his area are now keen on sending their children to school instead of

To do this, the provincial government of Bukidnon holds the Integrated Area Development and Management Program, an annual two-day course for barangay officers that aims to rationalize the efficiency of the government bureaucracy. The course is anchored on the philosophy that God created man to be the steward of the world and that man created facilities such as the government to help him in this stewardship. These facilities in turn, must therefore ensure equity for man that is based on justice. "I even participate in my own barangay," says the Governor.

Governor Fortich is noted for his being fearlessly vocal. Lapses of silence are often normal when he presides over a meeting. The governor has obviously given a scolding to laggards when that happens. As Chairman of the Infrastructure Monitoring and Advisory Group (IMAG) for the Davao-Bukidnon road, he closely monitors progress, knowing every nook and cranny of the route. He fires admonitions at errors and with the same emphasis, praises those who have done good.

Thirty (30) years in public service, however, have not been long enough for the Governor in his quest for local autonomy. He is openly opposed to the single-term for the President and is supportive of a charter amendment. "In a single-term, the President automatically becomes a political lame duck. Otherwise, if he can run for another term, he will be looking forward to defend himself at the end of his first term."

At the prime of his life, the very energetic governor never runs out of ideas. His presence spells authority, his brilliance, a source of inspiration. He is the Zorro for local autonomy, the Plato for political governance and like the Highlander, an icon whose passion for people empowerment will be immortalized by those he served.[]



teaching them how to fight and kill.

The drug abuse problem in Cotabato City, he claims, is now effectively being curbed down with the government's effort to educate the youth. He also quips that Cotabato can now claim a night life common to every bustling city. The concept of keeping businesses open after five in the afternoon is now a welcome idea for most of the city's businessmen.

Just recently, the city became a new hive for Jollibee, boosting the confidence of other entrepreneurs on the stability of peace in the area. After all, it does not take a genius to tell that Jollibees sting always signals economic prosperity and a healthy business environment. The city will just have to wait to fully realize this promise.

Having achieved a friendlier business climate, the city, however, Sema says, "still needs sound infrastructure support projects that would sustain its growth and development." He is rallying to give the city its own airport and vows to speed up the construction of farm-to-market roads to give farmers in the hinterlands easy access to urban market. Sema is also hopeful that the city will become a key player in the BIMP-EAGA considering its proximity.

The sluggish economy and the days of terror in Cotabato City are now being erased by economic recovery and peace. What the people of Cotabato are wishing now is for these good signs to continue--to have a foundation of peace and economic development as strong as the Kutang Bato of the ancient times. []

DATE	ACTIVITY	VENUE
October		
5-12	2nd Siargao International Surfing Cup	Siargao Island
6	Ensuring Agricultural Productivity, Producers' Profitability and Food Security in the 21st Century	Davao City
3,9,10	Workshops on Loan Pricing and Character-Based Lending	Cities of Dipolog, Butuan & Cagayan
12	Meeting of the Task Force Against Smuggling of Pesticides in Mindanao	Davao City
14-23	Filipino Youth Invitational Program	Japan
15	4th Joint IMAG Meeting for Davao-Bukidnon and Maramag-Kibawe-Kabacan Road Project	Cagayan de Oro City
20	Organizational Meeting of IMAG-MalMar Irrigation Project	Cotabato Province
20-21	Consultations with LGU Officials of Region XII by the MEDCo Chairman	Cotabato Province, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat and Davao City
23	Joint IMAG-TMAG Meeting	Davao City
27-29	24th Philippine Business Conference	Manila
28-30	Seminar Workshop on Sustainable Agriculture	Davao City
28	Mindanao Water Transport Task Force-TWG on Infra and Policy Meeting	Davao City
November		
9-10	Forum on the "Future of the BIMP-EAGA in the Face of the Asian Economic Crisis"	Davao City
11	Confederation of Mindanao Governors and City Mayors, and Mindanao Municipal Mayors League Reorganizational Meeting	Davao City
12	Meeting of the Mindanao Task Force on Poverty Alleviation	Davao City
14	9th Kusug Mindanaw Roundtable Conference	Davao City
19	Strategic Agriculture and Fisheries Development Zones (SAFDZ) Core Team Meeting	Davao City
24-27/25-26	3rd BIMP-EAGA Construction Show/7th Working Group Meeting on Construction and Construction Materials	Ujung Pandang, Indonesia
24-28	45th Annual Mine Safety and Environment Conference '98	Davao City
December		
1-2	Country Level Symposium on Culture	Cagayan de Oro City
2	2nd Mindanao Highways Summit	Davao City
2-4	7th National Convention on Statistics	Manila
7-9	Return Trade Mission to Sabah, Malaysia	Sabah, Malaysia
7-13	Cotabato Provincial Expo '98	Kidapawan City
8-10	International Conference on Population and Environment Education	Cagayan de Oro City

