

**Opinion****Rivers**

FIRST PERSON By Alex Magno (The Philippine Star) Updated August 25, 2011 12:00 AM

Comments (14)

We have some of the most polluted rivers in the world. The effort to clean them up, as we see in the case of Bulacan, is stymied by local politics and [corporate](#) greed.

The Marilao, Meycauayan and Obando River System (MMORS) is cited by the New York-based Blacksmith Institute as one of the 30 dirtiest rivers in the world. As part of the larger effort to clean up Manila Bay, the Supreme Court issued a Writ of Kalikasan mandating the rehabilitation of this river system.

The MMORS produces a cycle of pollution for both the bay and the province. Deadly pollutants flow from the river to the bay, making sea life untenable over a large area. During high tides, backflow from the bay into the river system carries trash to the riverine communities deep inland.

To his credit, Bulacan governor Wilhelmino C. Alvarado has put the clean-up high on the agenda of the provincial government.

Since Alvarado took office, 200,000 mangrove trees have been planted along the river [banks](#). Mangroves help as natural filters for pollutants, fish sanctuaries and protective barriers for the river communities during storms.

Perhaps a million more trees need to be planted to have visible effect. The provincial government seems committed to the task, committing itself to planting a million trees by yearend.

In addition, the river system has been heavily silted over the past few decades of abuse. The heavy siltation constricts [water flow](#). The trapped water is the cause of serious flooding in the province during the monsoon months.

To support the dredging operation, the provincial government set aside a 44-hectare former fishpond in Barangay Salambao, Marilao to be engineered as a sanitary landfill. The sanitary landfill will receive the trash and contaminated mud from the dredging operation.

That seems to be a workable engineering solution. It is supplemented by the provincial government's organization of a River Patrol that will enforce regulations against dumping refuse and chemicals into the river system.

The sanitary landfill will be undertaken by the Ecoshield Development Corporation. The project was given an [environmental](#) clearance certificate by the DENR and was approved by the municipality of Obando. A separate agreement, working in the framework of the public-private partnership [program](#), was sealed between Ecoshield and the municipality of Meycauayan to establish a waste-[water treatment](#) facility that will address the problem of coliform contamination, presently posing a health risk for Bulacan residents.

The rehabilitation of the MMORS is being opposed by a number of local politicians and some corporate interests. Rep. Joselito Mendoza appears to be opposing the program entirely out of political spite. A cabal of local politicians who lost in the previous elections are likewise attempting to block the rehabilitation program.

The opposition to the program, according to the Bulacan provincial government, is animated by corporate interests. Specifically, they are blaming all the blocking efforts on investors in a nearby sanitary landfill who seem to fear the proposed landfill project will cut into their profitability.

Someone should remind them there is enough waste in our river systems to make all landfill projects on the drawing boards worthwhile investments. The more sanitary landfills there are, the better off our communities will be and the healthier our rivers will become.

Superprovince

Our legislators must have been sleeping on the job.

House Bill 4820, proposing a new province called Nueva Camarines, assigns to the envisioned provincial entity [powers](#) the Local Government Code delegates to city and municipal governments. These include, among others, licensing of funeral parlors, cockpits and gamecock breeding, liquor [shops](#), public transport, public markets and slaughterhouses, fish pens, gyms and health spas.

In total, opponents of the gerrymandering bill list 29 legal infirmities in the bill. These infirmities will produce administrative chaos and saddle citizens with double taxation. They are confident the bill will fail judicial scrutiny.

House Bill 4820 must have really been passed in great hurry. The provisions contained in this bill will produce what its critics call a "superprovince" with powers and prerogatives that grossly exceed those normally devolved to provincial governments. To begin with, the envisioned province creates more positions than other provincial governments have, including an expanded Sangguniang Panlalawigan.

In addition to the increased powers defined for the envisioned province, whoever rules the proposed entity will benefit from a "super-corporation" earlier created by law to cover exactly the area of "Nueva Camarines." This public corporation is called the Partido Development Administration (PDA) created by RA 7820 to facilitate economic development in what is locally known as the "Partido" area covering what is currently Camarines Sur's 4th congressional district.

A single political clan controlled this locality for the past 100 years. Critics believe the carving out of a new province will further entrench clan rule.

Recently, the PDA was able to secure a MOA with the DENR empowering the public corporation to oversee mining activities in the locality. This MOA diminishes the capacity of the DENR to regulate mining nationwide and transfers advisory powers to a public corporation. Here, too, critics point out, there are legal infirmities, including violations of existing mining laws and the Local Government Code.

To be sure, the proposed creation of Nueva Camarines will run into serious judicial issues. Those issues will help us all clarify political and administrative parameters for the devolution of power to local government [units](#). This will also be a debate over political dynasties.