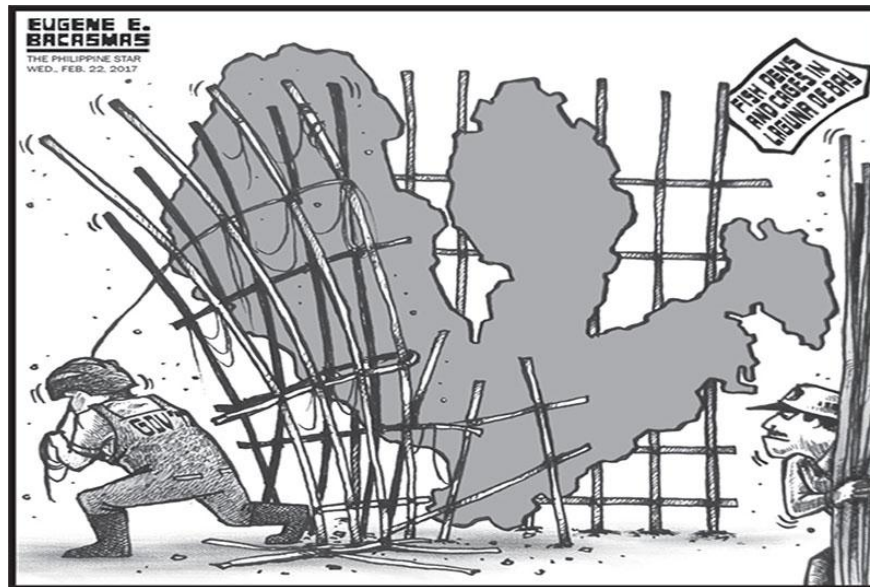


EDITORIAL - Lake rescue

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The long overdue rehabilitation of Laguna de Bay has started, with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources imposing a one-year moratorium on the issuance of permits to operate fish pens and cages. The Laguna Lake Development Authority, backed by the DENR, has started dismantling fish pens and cages in the heavily silted lake.

Once the clearing activities are over, the DENR and LLDA must ensure that the operators do not quickly resume their business. Many of the operators are politicians and other influential individuals based around Laguna de Bay, who have the power to sidestep efforts to give the lake breathing space to recover.

The lakeshore area is supposed to serve as a natural floodplain, but indiscriminate development and encroachments on the lake have destroyed this natural function. The result, as in the filling of the natural water catchment in Dagat-Dagatan in Malabon and Navotas, is serious flooding during monsoons and typhoons. Because the natural drainage is blocked, it took floodwaters about three months to subside after a powerful typhoon that struck during the long Christmas season a few years ago.

After Laguna de Bay, the DENR should also look into fish pens and cages that are now proliferating in scenic Taal Lake. The lake around Taal Volcano has a fragile aquatic ecosystem that is one of the most unique in the world. The black volcanic lakebed traps sunlight that provides nourishment to algae on which fish feed.

The unique ecosystem makes fish caught in the lake particularly succulent. But today fish found only in the lake such as maliputo and tawilis are endangered, with the threat made worse by the proliferation of pens for the predatory tilapia. With the same political will applied in Laguna de Bay, Taal Lake can be saved.