

By Lilia C. Galang

### Second of a series on the regions

Although Region II is almost invariably referred to as Cagayan Valley, there are other components of the region quite apart from the Valley itself. There are, for instance, the scattered islands on the northernmost tip of the archipelago, collectively named the Batanes-Babuyan group. These islets, along with Isabela, Kalinga-Apayao, Ifugao, Nueva Vizcaya, Quinino, and of course Cagayan itself, make up Region II.

The Cagayan Valley, bounded on all sides except the north by continuous mountain ranges, the volcanic islands of Batanes and the coral atolls of Babuyan, have a total land area of 26,838 square kilometers, making Region II the second largest of the 12 regions throughout the country. Region IV, which includes Metro Manila, is the largest.

Ironically, though one of the largest, Region II is the least populated, having only some 1,462,723 people as of the latest census, or an average density of 54 persons per square kilometer. In recent years, however, the growth rate has perceptibly risen, a fact attributable in part to migrations into the region from neighboring provinces. This explains why there are today more Tagalog- and Ilocano-speaking residents of the region than the original inhabitants who belong to the ethnic tribes of the Ibanags, Gaddangs, Itawis, Yogods and Isnegs.

#### Way of life

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood, and the region ranks first in log production within the Luzon area. The region also boasts of being the second "rice bowl" of the Philippines, sometimes surpassing Central Luzon in rice production. Aside from rice, the people of the Valley produce corn, vegetables, fruits, legumes, coconut, sugarcane and tobacco. The rich resources of the region, however, have yet to be fully exploited. Large tracts of arable land remain uncultivated and a vast area of timberland remains unexplored.

The region is also rich in mineral resources like copper, nickel, manganese and iron ore, mostly found in Isabela and Cagayan. Aside from its dependence on agriculture and forestry products, the region has 16,185 hectares of lakes and swamps, some of which have been converted into fishponds.

#### Transportation lack

The relatively slow development of the region is chiefly attributable to the lack of transportation facilities. Many places within the region are inaccessible by motor transport. Where roads are available, maintenance has not been up to par. The chief agricultural crops of the region, like rice, corn and tobacco, have difficulty reaching their markets. The forest regions are estimated to contain a million cubic meters of timber, a rich resource indeed if roads could only make all timberland areas accessible. This fact, nevertheless, has not prevented denudation of the western side of the Sierra Madre mountains.



With the construction of roads and bridges, agro products will reach their markets.

## Cagayan: Lush valley

The only overland connection between the Cagayan Valley and Central Luzon is Highway 5, a gravel road 322 kilometers in length, extending from a point south of Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya, to Aparri in Cagayan. The Philippine-Japan Friendship Highway, which was constructed as a Philippine-Japan highway loan project, will, of course, eventually extend the mobility of the people from this region to the next.

Travel via the Cagayan River; on the other hand, is limited to small bancas, thus cancelling out bulk shipments of commodities via the river. Five national ports, six municipal ports and one private port provide water transport facilities but in a limited capacity. Air transportation is also available, the region having six national airports and two private airports. Major urban centers are Tuguegarao, the region's capital, Basco in Batanes, Aparri in Cagayan, Ilagan in Isabela and Solano in Nueva Vizcaya—in short, the capital towns of the provinces.

#### Power projects and infrastructure

Increase in agricultural output of the region will be dependent to a large extent on the harnessing of the region's river basins—the Cagayan, Magat and Chico

river basins. The Magat and Chico river irrigation projects, due for completion in 1984 and 1983, respectively, are expected to increase the irrigated hectareage to 150,813 by 1982 and 208,895 by 1987. Ranking next in priority are other proposed power plants at Upper and Lower Abulug and the Sifflu River.

An on-going project which will expand the Cagayan region's development is the construction of the Magapit suspension bridge in Lal-Lo, Cagayan, which is expected to be completed and inaugurated later this year. It will be the first bridge of its kind in the country, patterned after the famous Golden Gate bridge of San Francisco. It will link regions I and II.

With the near completion of the Northern Luzon portion of the Pan Philippine Highway, prospects of the region being a principal supplier of farm produce to the Metro Manila area and nearby regions will be enhanced.

Meantime, the petroleum potential of the region is also being exploited. The five-year development program being jointly implemented by the Philippine National Oil Company and the National Economic and Development Authority is aimed at drilling 21 exploratory wells in the region.

## Typhoon Islands



Batanes woman feeds her hens: small poultry farms are an important source of income.

To many Filipinos the Batanes Islands are synonymous with storms and typhoons. Little wonder, for Batanes—a group of ten islands at the northernmost tip of the archipelago—lies directly in the path of Pacific howlers: approximately 90 percent of the storms that enter the Philippines exit through this area.

Batanes is the country's smallest province

(20,928 hectares) and also its least populated (11,360). In addition to these diminutive distinctions, Batanes is the only province in the country where rice or corn is not the staple product. The reason for this is obvious: both crops are vulnerable to Batanes' tempestuous weather.

Batanes folk depend mainly on small-scale farm-

ing—root crops, vegetables and fruit trees—and fishing for their livelihood. Income is supplemented by raising dairy animals, hogs and poultry.

The people of Batanes are heavily dependent on water transport. The province has several ports that serve passenger and fishing boats, but the island group remains relatively isolated from the rest of the country. Because of this and because it is virtually inaccessible for the four months of the rainy season, Batanes has sometimes been referred to as the Philippines' "Forgotten Islands."

During the early Spanish era, an isolated Batanes enjoyed freedom from colonial control. Dominican missionaries reached the islands in 1685 and colonized the native Ibatans. It wasn't until 1791, when then Governor-General Jose Basco sent an expedition to the islands to explore the tobacco-growing possibilities, that Batanes felt the benefits and the burdens of colonial rule. Basco is well remembered until now. The provincial capital of Batanes, located on Batan Island, one of the largest and most economically important of the ten islands, is named after him.

Toward the end of Spanish rule, Batanes was made part of Cagayan but in 1909, after the Americans came, the island group was organized into an independent province. Because of its strategic location, the Batanes group was one of the first points occupied by the invading Japanese forces at the outbreak of the Pacific war in 1942.

Untouched by urbanization, Batanes remains completely rural. Waters surrounding the island group are ideal for deep sea fishing, making this an important industry—and a tourist attraction—of the province.